Question 1.

What's an excellent real-world use of behavioural science you've witnessed? Why?

My answer

Airports spend a lot of their budgets on machinery and engineering to solve luggage problems to reduce waiting time for the luggage at the carousel. They sometimes hire more baggage handlers which is usually an expensive problem. When looked from the behavioural science perspective, the real problem is that the passengers take about a minute to walk but spend more time waiting for the baggage. The airport solves this problem by rerouting passengers after passport control so that they have to walk further. This meant that they spent about seven minutes walking and then only one minute of waiting time. The complaints dropped drastically. This is the real-world use of behavioural science that I have witnessed and it's the important one.

This behavioural solution has a combination of concepts-idleness aversion, Operational Transparency and Goal Gradient Effect.

People dread idleness and want to be busy. By walking a lot, they have this perception that they are doing something. Also, It's been found that revealing to passengers what is going on after the arrival in the airport increases the perceived value of the service. If they clearly know on which belt the luggage is coming, there are enough signposts to reach the luggage point and they end up being more understanding and tolerant. Our efforts to complete a task increase as we move closer to our goal. For the passenger, reaching the designated baggage counter is a goal and as they progress towards it, they feel more accomplished.

Nugget

Idleness aversion

People dread idleness and want to be busy.

People spent about seven minutes walking and then only one minute of waiting time at Houston airport. The complaints of queue waiting dropped drastically.

Stone, A. (2012, August 18). Opinion | why waiting is torture. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/why-waiting-in-line-is-torture.html

Question 2

Many behavioural concepts are often misunderstood or conflated. Name one that you've seen commonly confused. Why is this so?
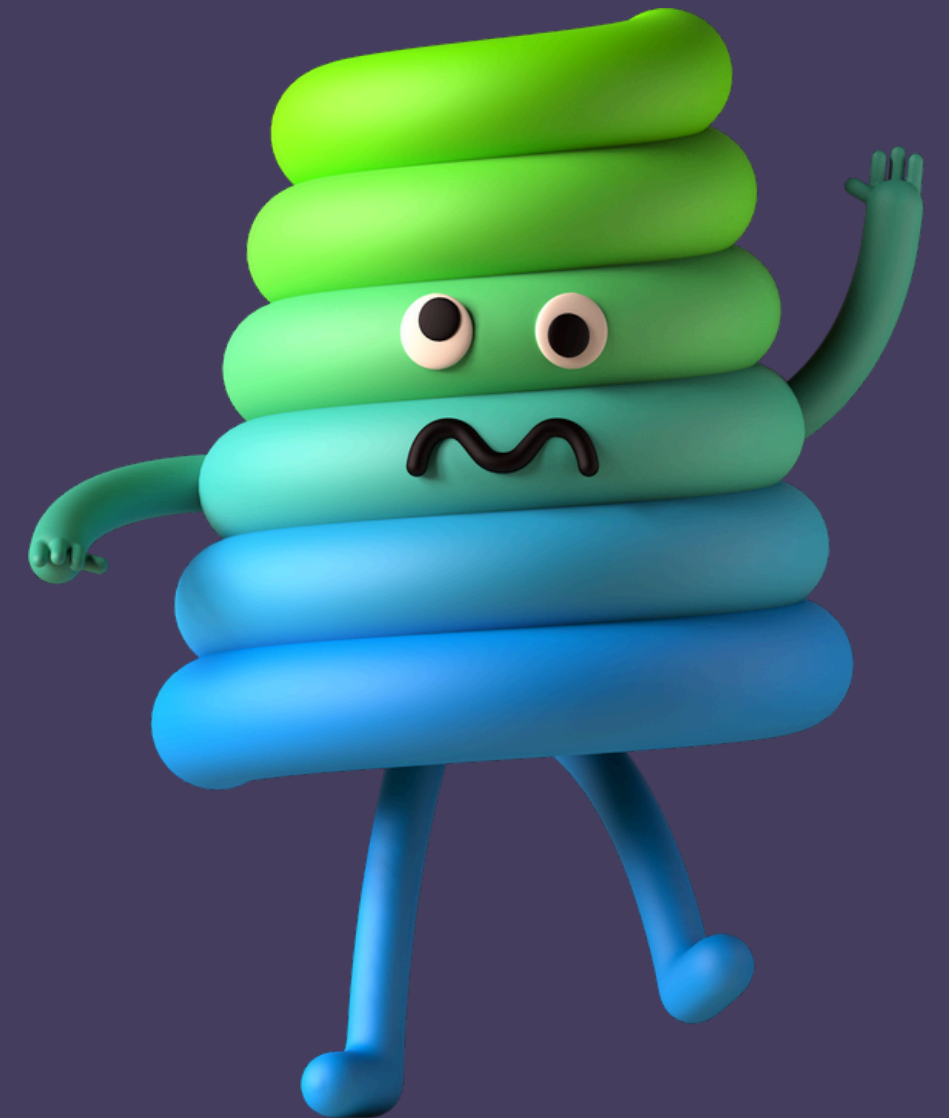
My answer

When we have so many options at hand we feel paralysing and exhausting. It can cause decision fatigue. We make about 35,000 decisions in a day which means that our decision making energy is limited and with every decision we make we end up depleting our willpower which does not make us happier.

Now, this behavioural concept is often misimplemented or exploited by a lot of companies. The introduction of infinite scroll, unlimited swipes and constant new content by OTT platforms adds to the confusion and undesirable results for the users.

This is conflicted by the concept that especially in a social media environment, new content creation and update gives the perception that the content is credible and authentic. It increases their decision confidence. It creates a paradox for the professionals, especially those responsible for designing the social media and OTT platforms.

Nugget

Decision fatigue

When we have so many options at hand we feel paralysing and exhausting.

We make about 35,000 decisions in a day which means that our decision making energy is limited and with every decision we make we end up depleting our willpower which does not make us happier.

Ma, C., Au, N. & Ren, L. Biased minds experience improved decision-making speed and confidence on social media: a heuristic approach. Inf Technol Tourism 22, 593–624 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00184-0

Question 3

Behavioural science is manipulation".

How would you address this common concern?

My answer

Half knowledge is dangerous. Stakeholders in the marketing domain assume that they understand customers and their behaviour. They are more concerned about the application or if it works. This pressure leads them to execute certain decisions within the strict timeline and budget that the result seems manipulative or deceptive.
This can be tackled by employing the experts in the team, having an excellent ethical research team. Behavioural change is an integral part and can't be skipped. To ensure proper implementation, the relevant beliefs must be identified. And they are making a priority list of which behaviour to tackle first and which is secondary.

Also, using the established frameworks like FORGOOD (Fairness, Openness, Respect, Goals, Opinions, Options, Delegation) ethics framework asks questions like 'Is the behavioural policy open or hidden and manipulative? This will ensure that behavioural changes don't feel coercive from an ethical point of view, serving reasonable goals.

Nugget

FORGOOD

Fairness, Openness, Respect, Goals, Opinions, Options, Delegation

Ethics framework which asks questions like 'Is the behavioural policy open or hidden and manipulative?

Lades, L. K., & Delaney, L. (2020). Nudge forgood. Behavioural Public Policy, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.53

Question 3

Behavioural science is no silver bullet".
Despite its potential, why might this quote be a valuable reminder to practitioners?

My answer

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, borrowing concepts from marketing, psychology, and economics. This discipline is viewed differently when combined with different fields. For instance, combined with health, it focuses more on clinical and abnormal psychology aspects. When combined with user experience design, it becomes more of a Behavioural Design where we have to focus on applying the theories like 'Theory of Planned Behaviour', MINDSPACE, COMB models and tackling various cognitive biases.

So when we say behavioural science terms, we should be aware of the domain and the specific problem statement we are solving. In practice, it's sometimes more about management, timelines, tools, team interpersonal communications, company policies and organisational politics terrains (Woods, High Ground, Weeds, Rocks) to influence our decisions and implement to see its impact.

Also, the target population we want to change behaviourally sometimes doesn't act according to our expectations. In poor economics, Abhijeet Banerjee mentioned that people have 'Time Inconsistency' in their minds when adapting to new behavioural changes. They focus more on the present rather than the future. They procrastinate or are hesitant towards the vaccinations thinking it's not affecting their current, so they don't work towards their end. But these social characteristics are not generally in the researcher's hands and may act as totally distorted lab data. So it gives a perception that one behavioural intervention that worked in one setting doesn't work in a different environment.

If we take care of these things and are aware of the domain and constraint, this field has a lot of potentials, and then Behavioural science can become a specific gold bullet.

Nugget

Time Inconsistency

People focus more on the present rather than the future.

The target population which we want to change behaviourally sometimes don't act according to our expectations.

Loewenstein, G.; Prelec, D. (1992). "Anomalies in Intertemporal Choice: Evidence and an Interpretation". The Quarterly Journal of Economics. 107 (2): 573–597. doi:10.2307/2118482