

# From Inbox to Instinct: The Cognitive Science of Getting Attention

Dr Ali Goode

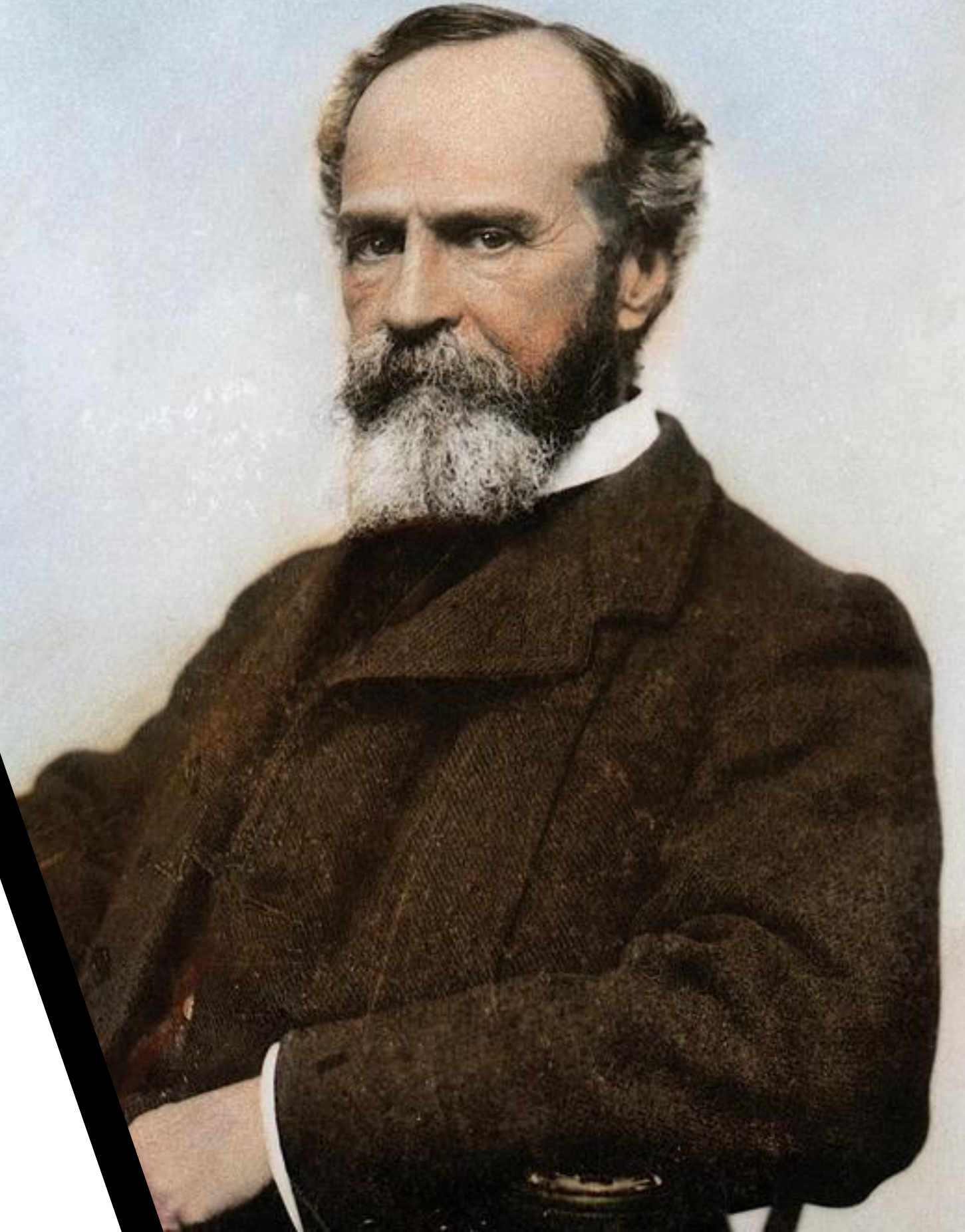
Cognitive Scientist



# What is Attention

William James (1890)

*'Everyone knows what attention is'*



# What is Attention

Prof Bernhard Hommel (2019)

*“In fact, no one knows what attention is.*

*... ‘attention’ is one of the most misleading and misused terms in cognitive sciences.*

*...‘attention’ should be abandoned”*



# Attention is related to two things marketing has to do

- 1) Does it draw a person's initial focus?
- 2) Then (if the initial focus indicates), is it worth a person expending cognitive effort in order to understand it fully



# Brief aside about Eye tracking and attention

Dedicated eye tracking kit can measure attention (reading / visual processing)

Mobile device based Eye trackers (using the internal camera) **ONLY** measure 'Gaze' (not that well)

Gaze **is not** attention (as marketers understand it)



# Brands want to talk (a lot)

We see maybe thousands of ads every day

‘Attention’ is at a premium

You’ve probably got 1.5 seconds max to make a point or capture interest



(1759)

*“Advertisements are now so numerous  
that they are very negligently perused”*



(1759)

*“Advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused*

*It is therefore necessary to gain attention by eloquence, sometimes sublime, sometimes pathetic.”*





# Crea tivity



Spot that clown



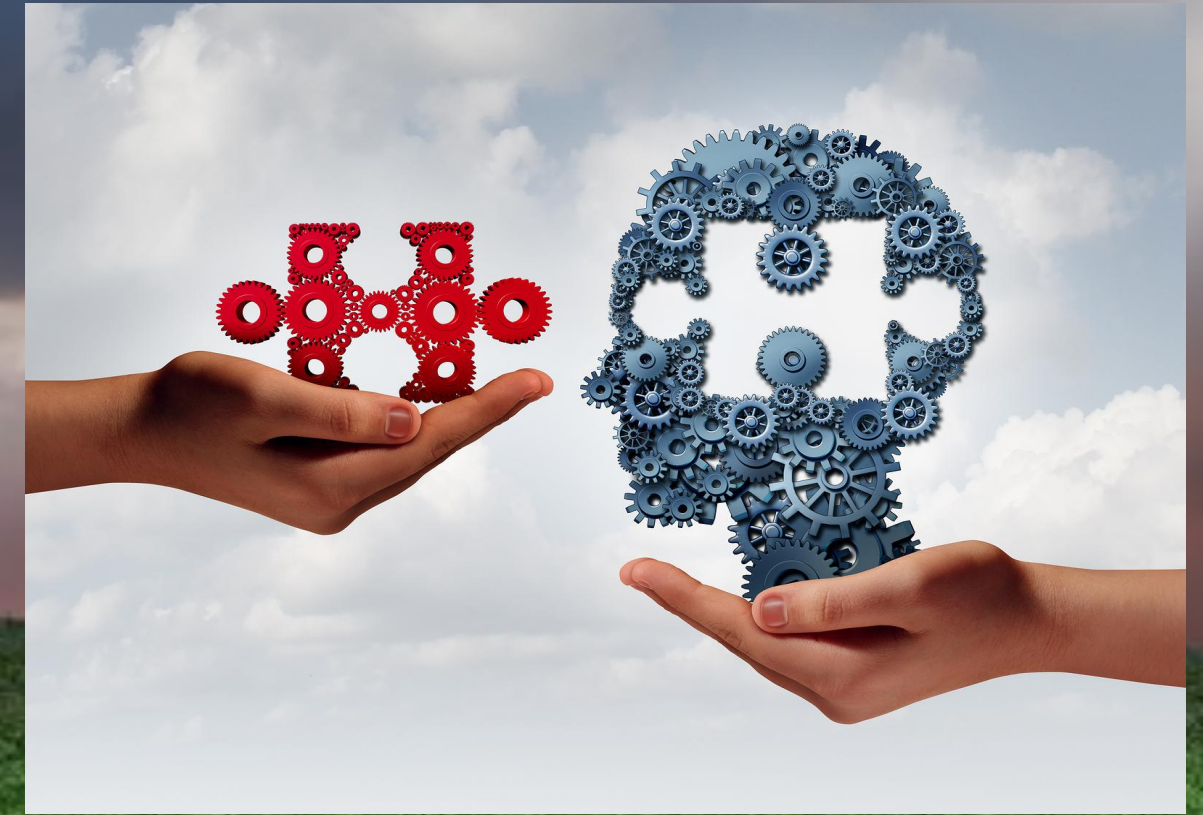




# Attention - Two things to consider



Consideration 1  
Be 'creative' but it's not  
always a silver bullet



Consideration 2  
Design marketing to make most of  
the attention they get (particularly  
the first few moments)

It's not about getting all of the attention and using it, it's  
about using all of the attention you are getting

# What happens when people see marketing



Marketing comms appears

0s

0 to 0.3s

Eyes on. Does something naturally catch the eye to draw focus

No

It does not attract 'attention'

Yes

1s

0.3 to 0.6 - 1.5s

Quick scan. Do the ideas, images indicate it's worth expending cognitive effort to understand

No

Irrelevant or boring

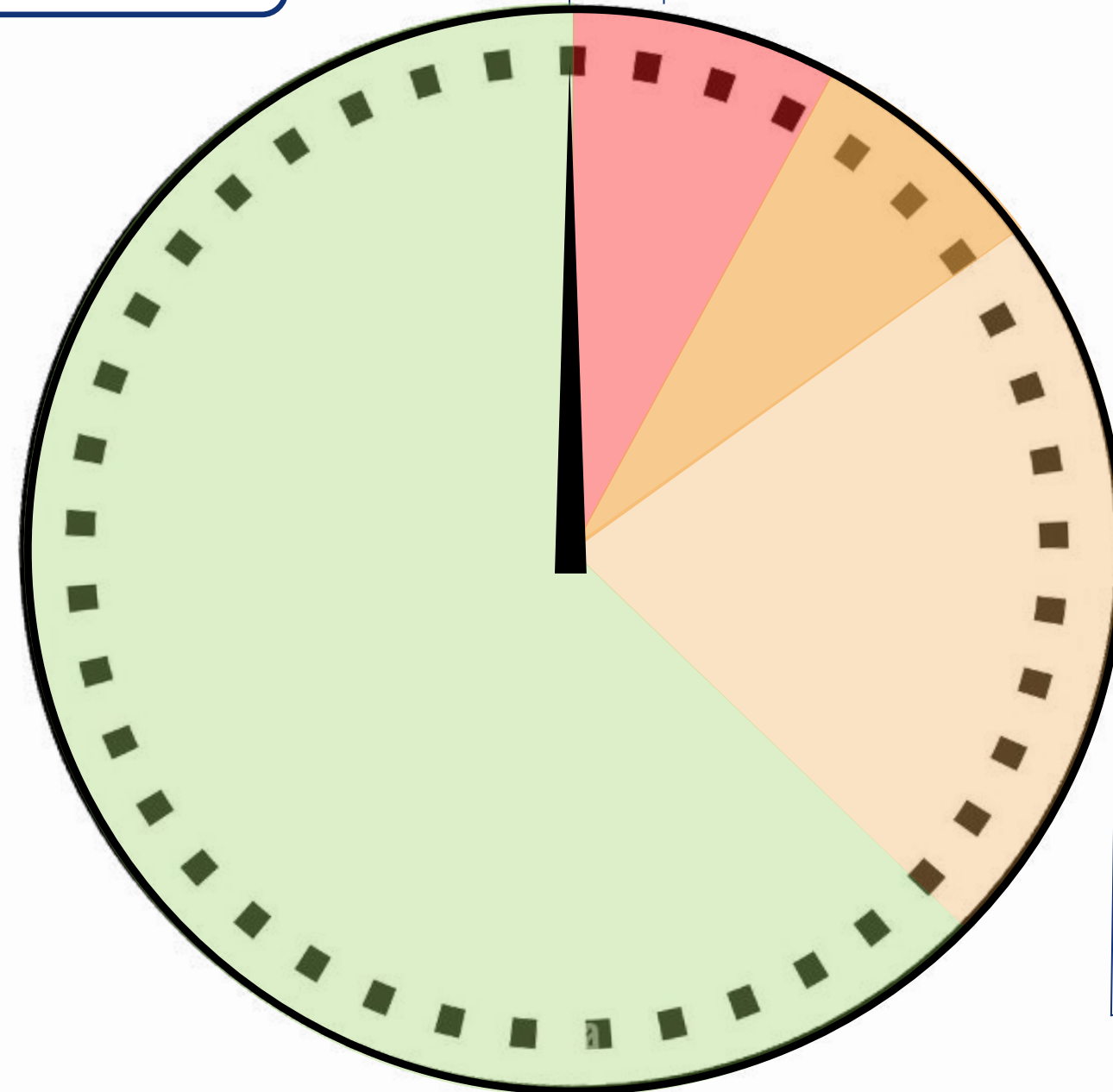
2s

Yes

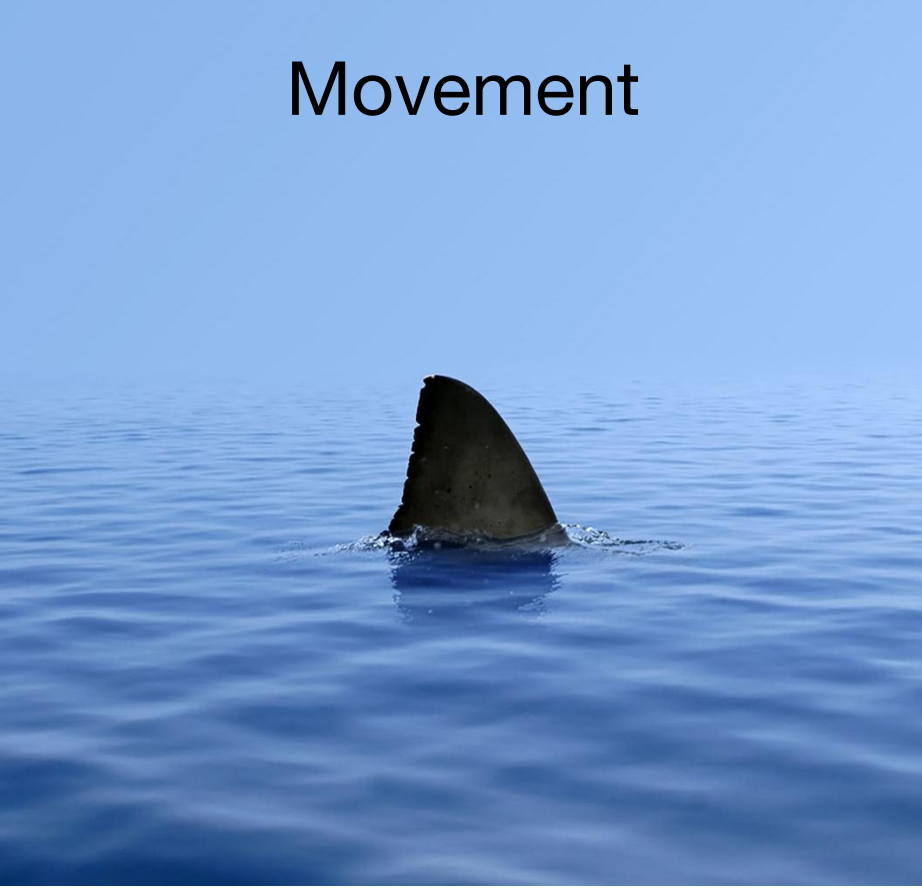
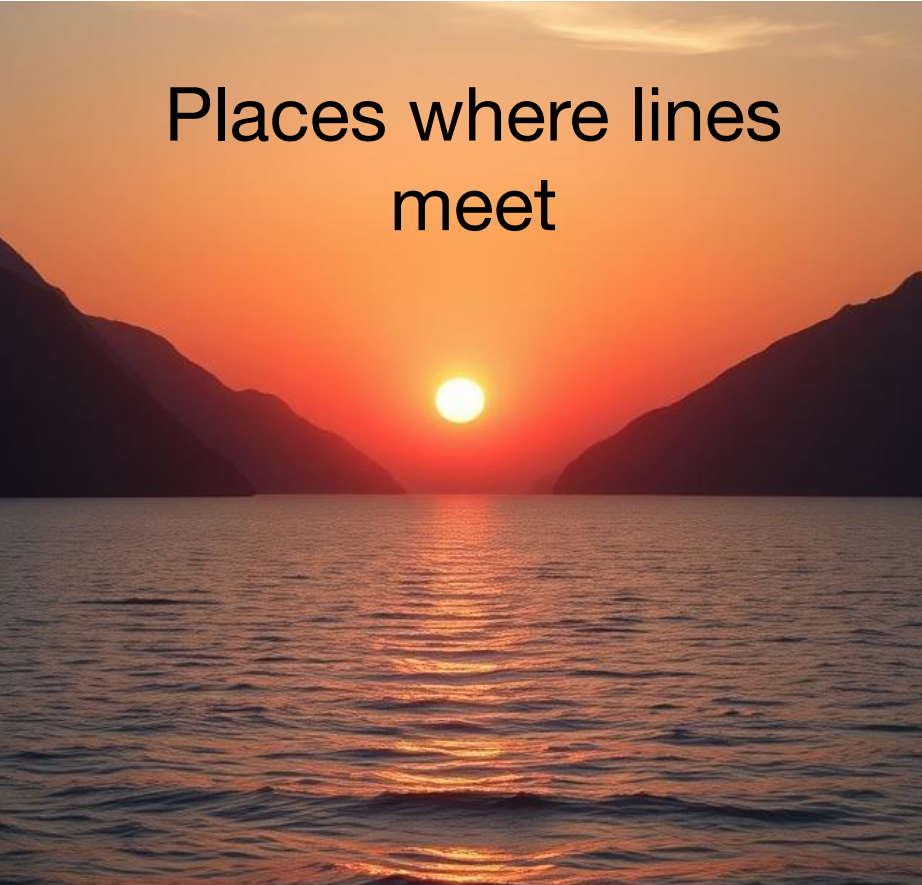
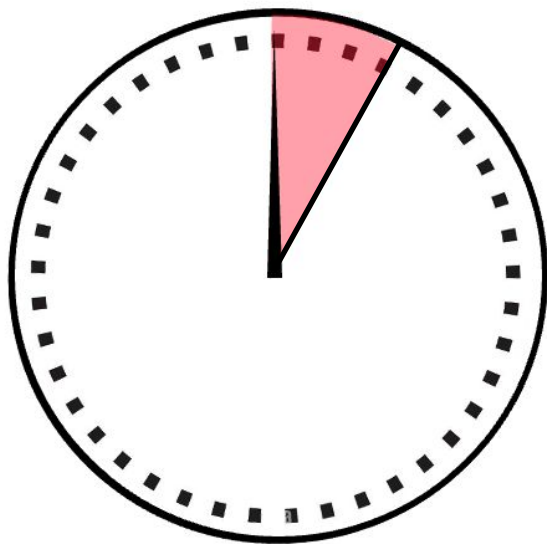
0.6 - 1.5s onwards

Will Expend cognitive effort mentally processing

3s



# In the first 0.3 seconds - What naturally captures our visual attention (eyes want information)

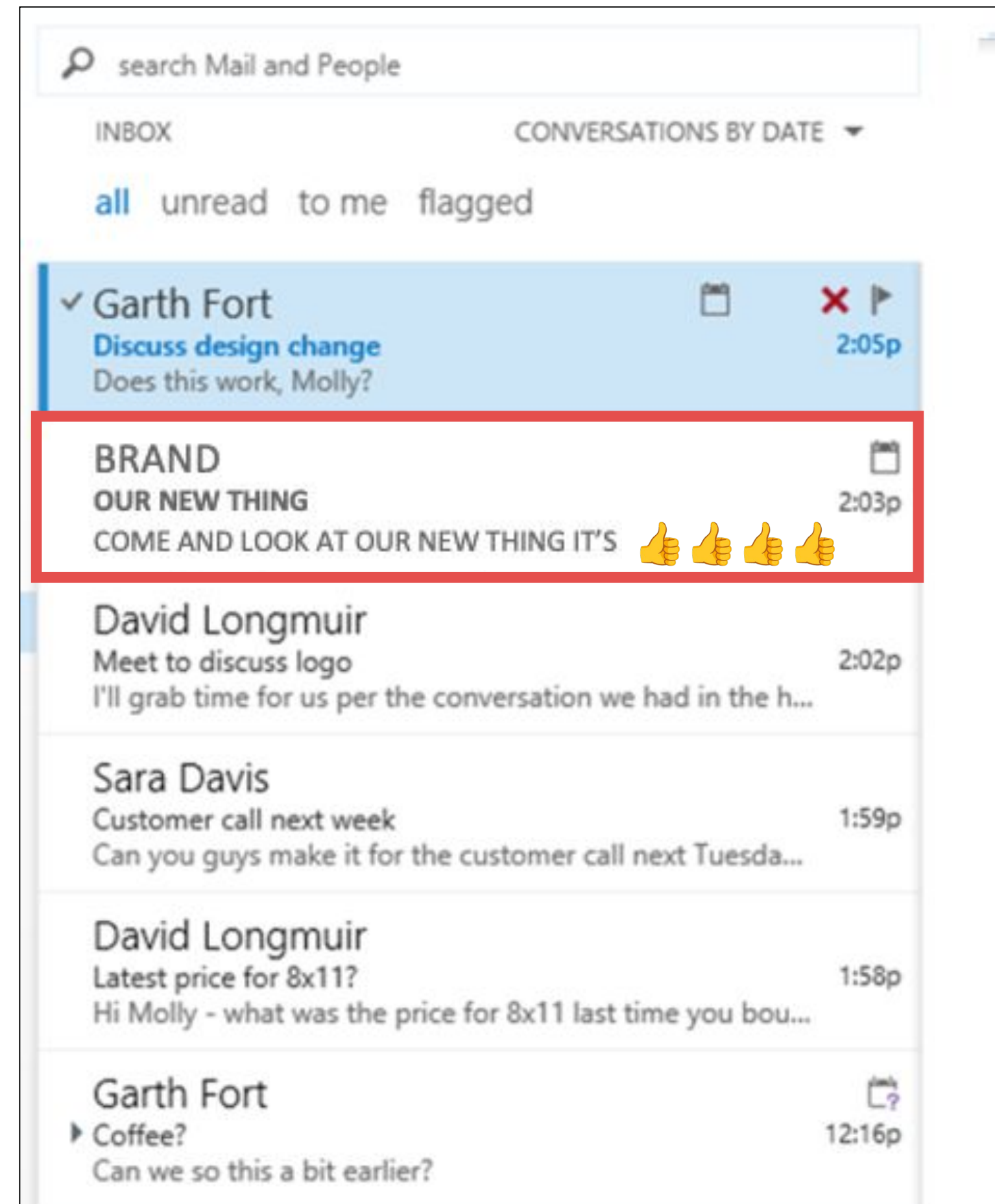


# How we perceive words

- We don't read letters in a word we read the shapes of words

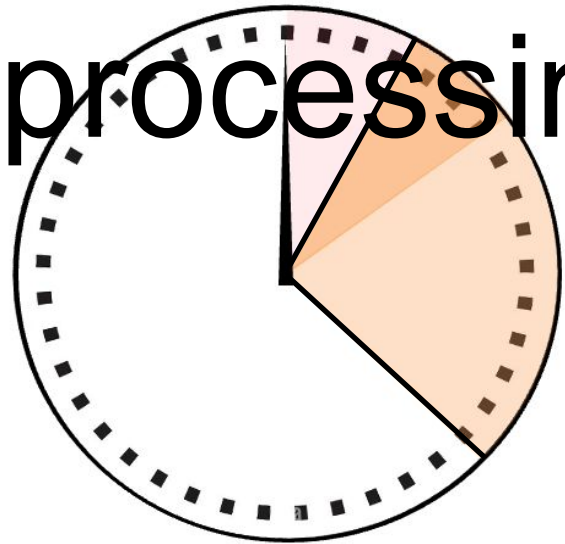
Writing

- Capital case are harder to read
- San serif fonts (Arial Calibri etc.) make word outlines clearer
- Emojis can stand out in the inbox





# Quick scans 0.3 to 0.6-1.5s 'Fluent processing'



Make marketing 'fluent' to process / easy to perceive:

- Perceptually - simple visuals, easy to read text, layout prompting a clear viewing path
- Cognitively – Simple language, clear ideas, intuitively appealing offers

Don't overburden viewers with information overload

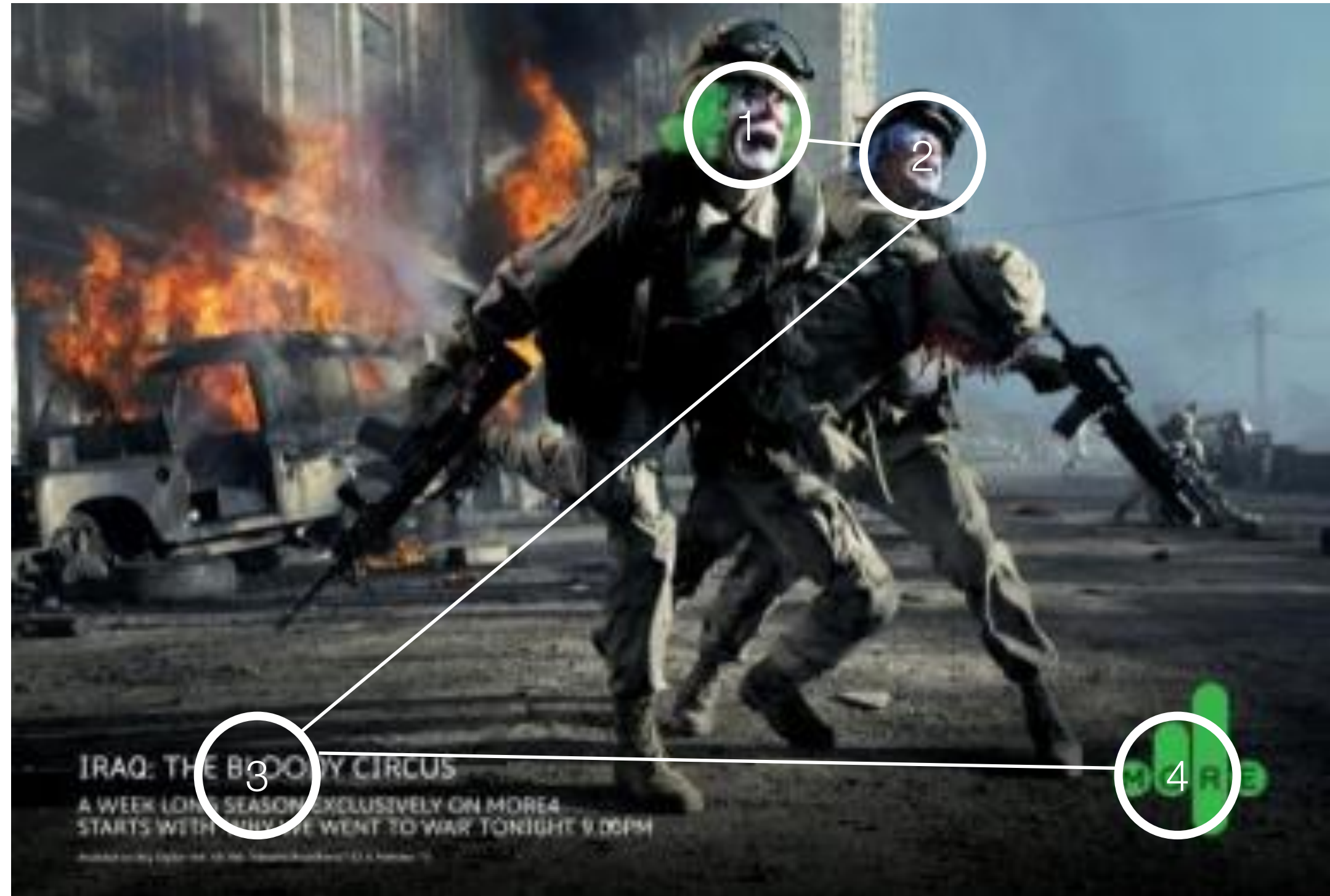


# Examples Good use of visual attention

① & ② 'Pre-cognitive' high contrast attention grabbing faces (also sets up the visual conundrum)

③ Resolves the conundrum

④ Where to find it



(1.5 secs) Complete communication of message. Ad uses attention well

# Bad use of visual attention

- Brand is salient... but
- Many complex fonts and cases are very hard to read
- Contrast of the text to background is poor
- Overly complex layout give no clear visual path (text is fighting against each other)

Conclusion – Viewer needs to expend significant attentional effort to make sense of this (but probably won't bother)

**Fanta** LIKE A BURST OF SUNSHINE  
through a cool wisp of wind,  
IT'S *sweet* AND TANGY, \**SURPRISING* AND *JUICY*.  
IT TICKLES LIKE A *DELICIOUS* SECRET THAT YOU CANNOT BEAR TO *SHARE*.  
 AND HOW LUSH IT *like an instant whiff of a fresh*  
FEELS AT EVERY SP *bouquet of flowers in spring!*   
With a quick, and a sudden burst of  
sharp jolt of tart and a sudden burst of  
*sugary-citrusy-sweetness*,  
IT LEAVES YOUR *TONGUE TINGLING* PLEASANTLY.  
THEN, IT CURLS DELICIOUSLY AROUND YOUR TASTE BUDS,   
*TANTALIZING* & *ripples happily* DOWN YOUR SPINE.  
YOUR IMAGINATION & *ARE YOU STILL WITH US? GREAT!*  
CAUSE WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO TRY FANTA'S *NEW*  
*TASTE, DELICIOUSLY ORANGE.* *YES, RIGHT NOW!*  
**JUST TEAR OFF A  
PIECE OF THIS PAGE  
POP IN YOUR MOUTH  
& ENJOY A FANTA BY TASTING THIS AD!**

# Loyalty email templates (initial views / perceptual

- **influences)** Emotional faces will dominate attention (especially the child's face due to 'gaze cues')
- Capital case and mix of fonts harder to read (especially overly bolded 'just dropped') even though this is the largest texts implying most attention should be given
- Clear visual hierarchy but it will start with the faces



# Loyalty email templates (initial views / perceptual influences)

- Background breaks up the text
- insufficient contrast
- Mix of fonts inhibits reading
- 'Celebrate you' Font is unreadable
- '20% off' will get the most attention

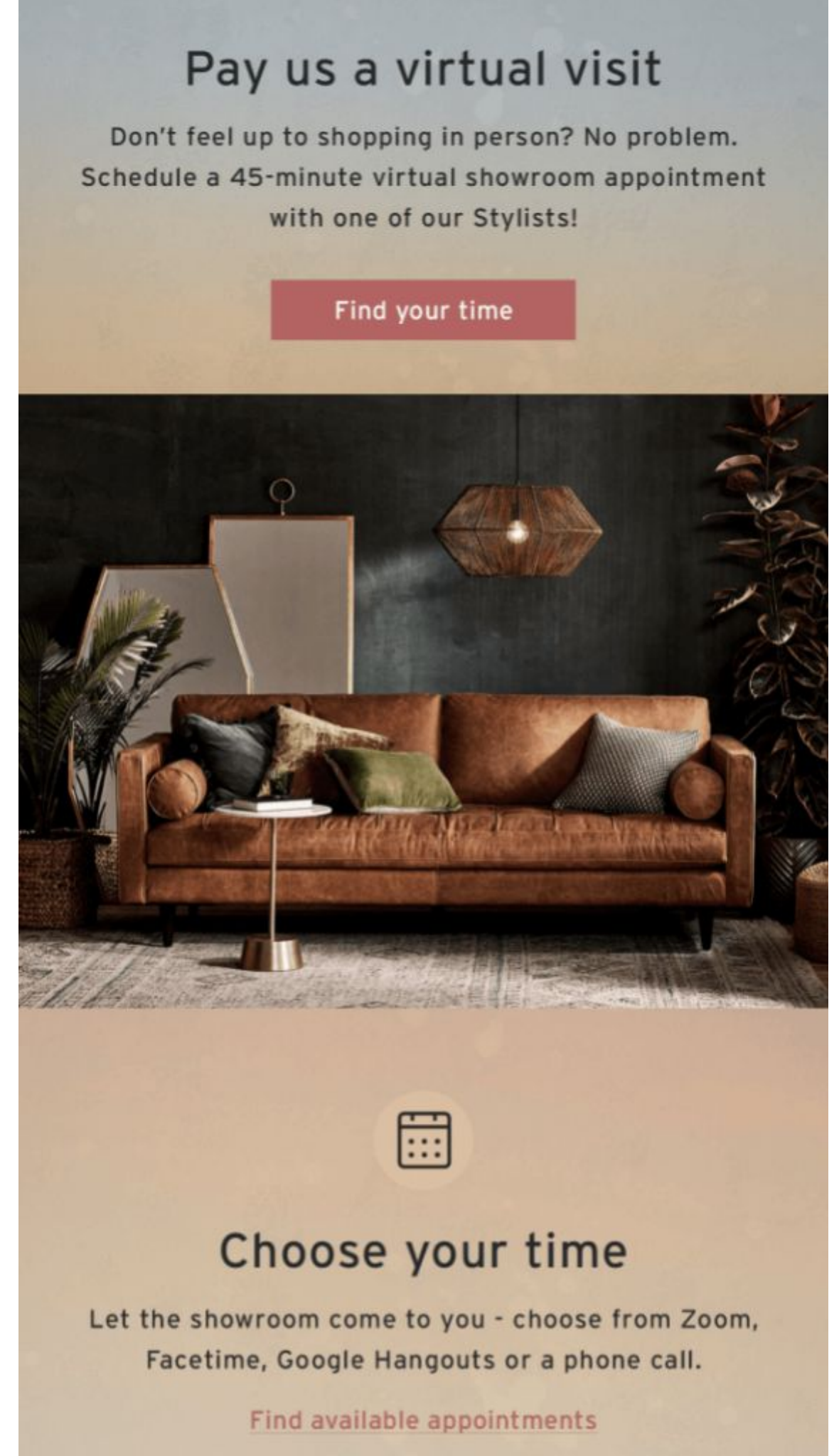
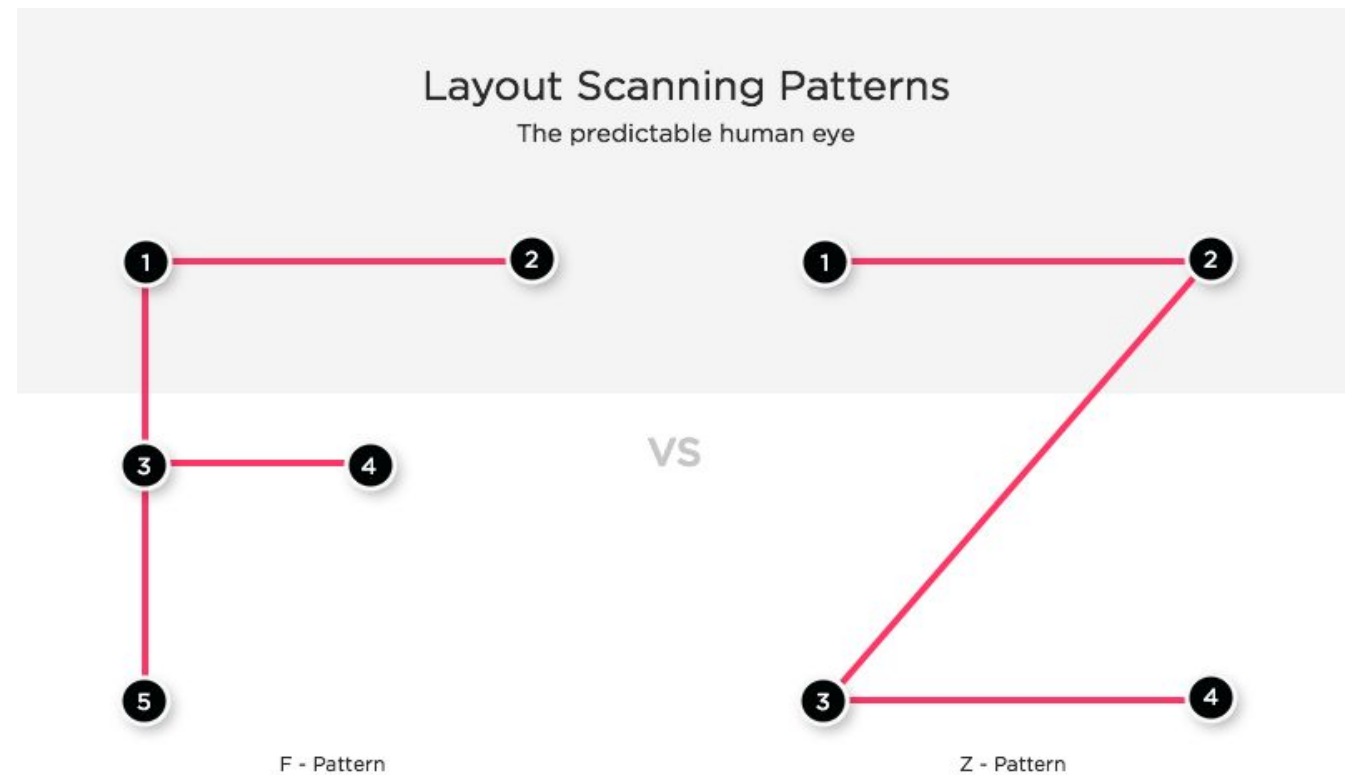
So 20% off.. but off what and why?



# Loyalty email templates (initial views / perceptual influences)

Lacking a little contrast but..

- Non serif font easy to read
- Clear visual journey from top to bottom. Prompts F search



Marketing language should be easy to understand  
(cognitive influences)



*Disp-Air's most rewarding frequent flyer scheme*

Oh !! the brand's most rewarding frequent flyer scheme!! Got it!!

- Average reading age of the UK adult is 12-13y. Tabloid newspapers (8 –11y).
- Use simple grammar, common words

7 Audience  
participation





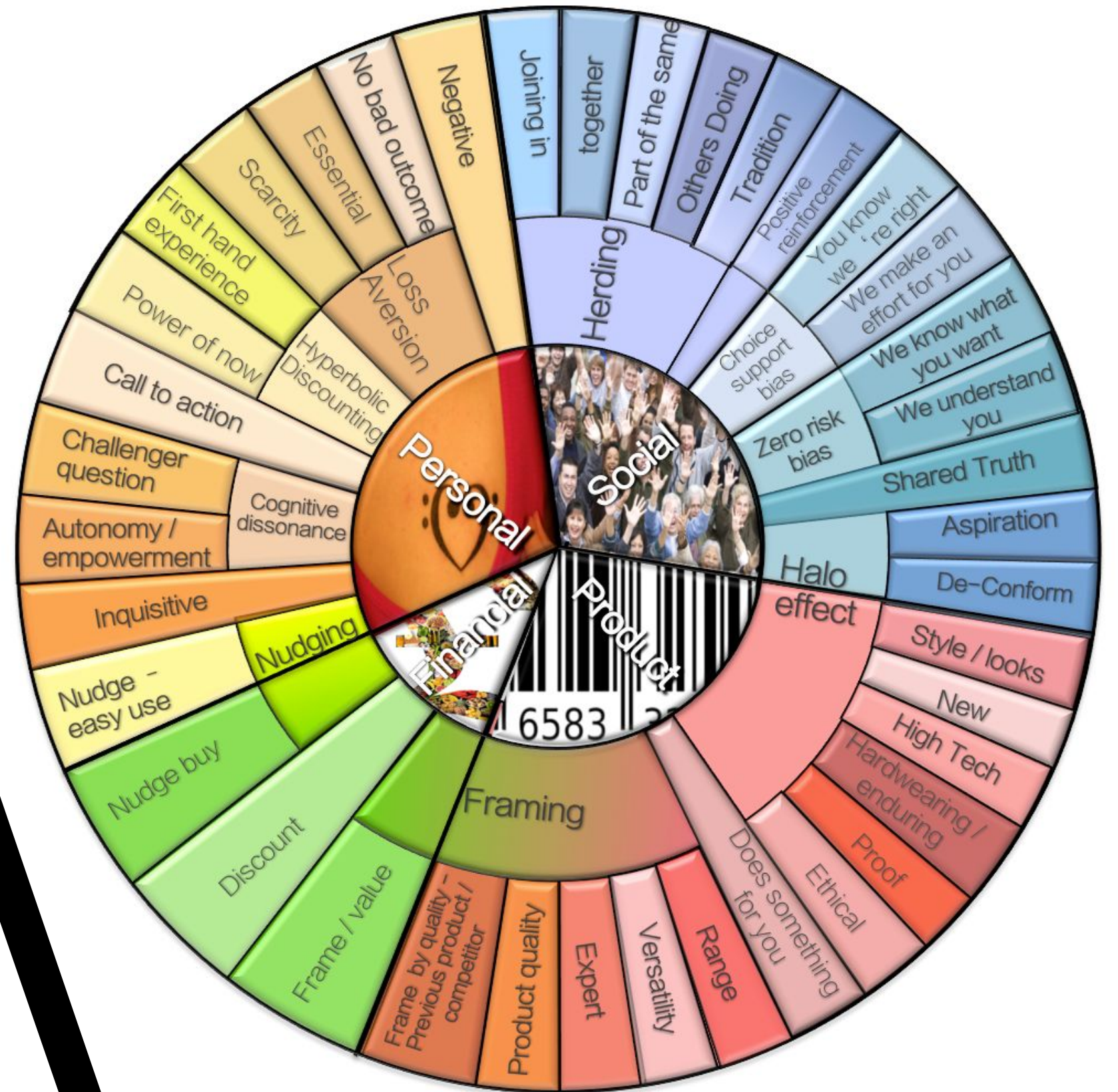
# You're in a privileged position

- Loyalty customers are already invested in the relationship
- They will be more open to anything you say as you are already considered as trusted and knowledgeable
- What connects? (You know your audience)



# Some ideas need less thought (Making cognitive processing easy)

- All brand communications lever System 1 behaviours using 'Heuristic triggers'
- Ads that produce the best ROI are 2.5 times more likely to use certain 'Heuristic triggers'



*(Analysis of 3000+ adverts)*

# loyalty

- There is no right or wrong answer, but most loyalty schemes focus on ‘offers’

*“With the OneASICS loyalty programme you can earn rewards like free shipping, member only discounts and more”*

- There is lots about ‘rewards’ and ‘discounts’ but what else is there?



The psychology of  
loyalty



Status  
(Herding)



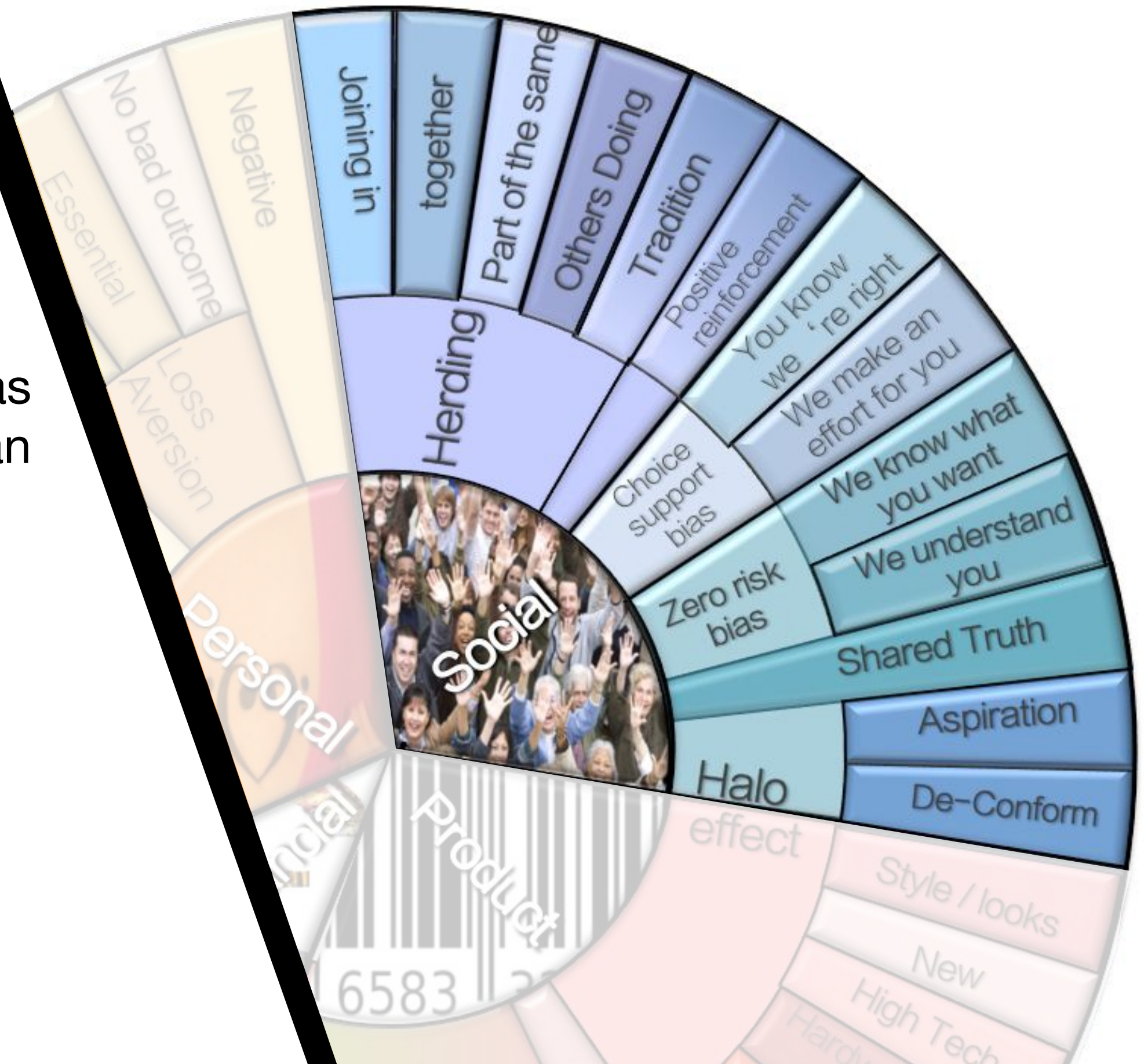
Relationships  
(Herding)



Habit  
(Nudging and the  
cognitive miser)

# loyalty

- Unsurprisingly the emphasis was on social heuristics
- Many schemes portray themselves as 'social groups' that the consumer can join
- NB: Loyalty is not a place to be 'sociable in' but loyalty schemes portray a social identity that is appealing for the consumer to join



What drives status in loyalty?

Status  
(Herding)



# 'Status' created by loyalty

- Loyalty schemes can be an 'In group' the consumers want to join - **Herding**
- Note the brand is a group member too
- The brand's role is to 'renew' & 'refresh' how special membership of the 'In group' is. - **Social identity theory**
- The brand 'talks up' the value of group membership, which infers 'Status'

*"You're part of this 'tribe', it's the best tribe to be in so you're (we're) special"*



# The 'Ikea Family'

***“Welcome to the club that brings your ideas to life”***

- Ikea loyalty scheme is presented as a ‘family’ to join in with
- There is an ‘in group’ to join and you’ll benefit **‘Herding’ heuristic (Joining in)** – (re-enforcing ‘Status’ within a tribe)
- (Other heuristics) ‘bring ideas to life’ levers the **‘Autonomy heuristic’**. We prefer to have a sense of agency over our decisions





# Driving a relationship with the brand using Loyalty

Value the relationships with our  
'In-group' All emphasise the value of  
the relationship (**Herding**)

We automatically respond to messages  
about use belonging to a group



Relationships  
(Herding)

# loyalty

***“Belonging, means enjoying exclusive offers”***

*‘Belonging’*

- **Herding** – Emphasising ‘Belonging’ to our ‘in group’ satisfies our need to be in a relationship

*‘Exclusive’*

- **Scarcity** – a form of **loss aversion**. What you are getting is also a scarce resource.
- Note scarcity will also lever status



# The psychology of loyalty

We are creatures of habit. Thinking takes energy and effort

Repeating behavioural patterns is efficient and change is risky

**“The Status Quo bias”**



Habit  
(Nudging and the cognitive miser)

# Brains are like cats

- Cats can swim but prefer not to
- Brains can think but try and avoid it if possible



# Easy to build habits

*“Say hello to easy ordering, endless choices and—yes, free coffee”*

*“easy ordering”*

- **Nudging** – Membership makes life easier.
- Assists in forming habits by making repeat purchase effortless
- (Other heuristics) *“endless choice”*  
**Framing by range** - Levers our desire for choice

STARBUCKS COFFEE



# Easy to build habits


*“Earn points every day... “Earn points on the things you buy anyway, such as clothes, experiences, and hotel stays” (US)*

- **Nudging** – Again make point earning seem easy
- Join and points ‘just happen’, without any effort on the consumers part




# Summary

# Making the most of attention



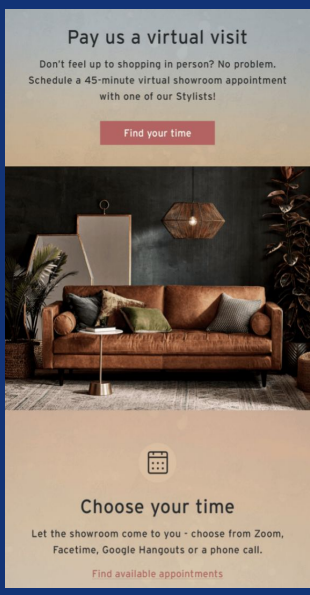
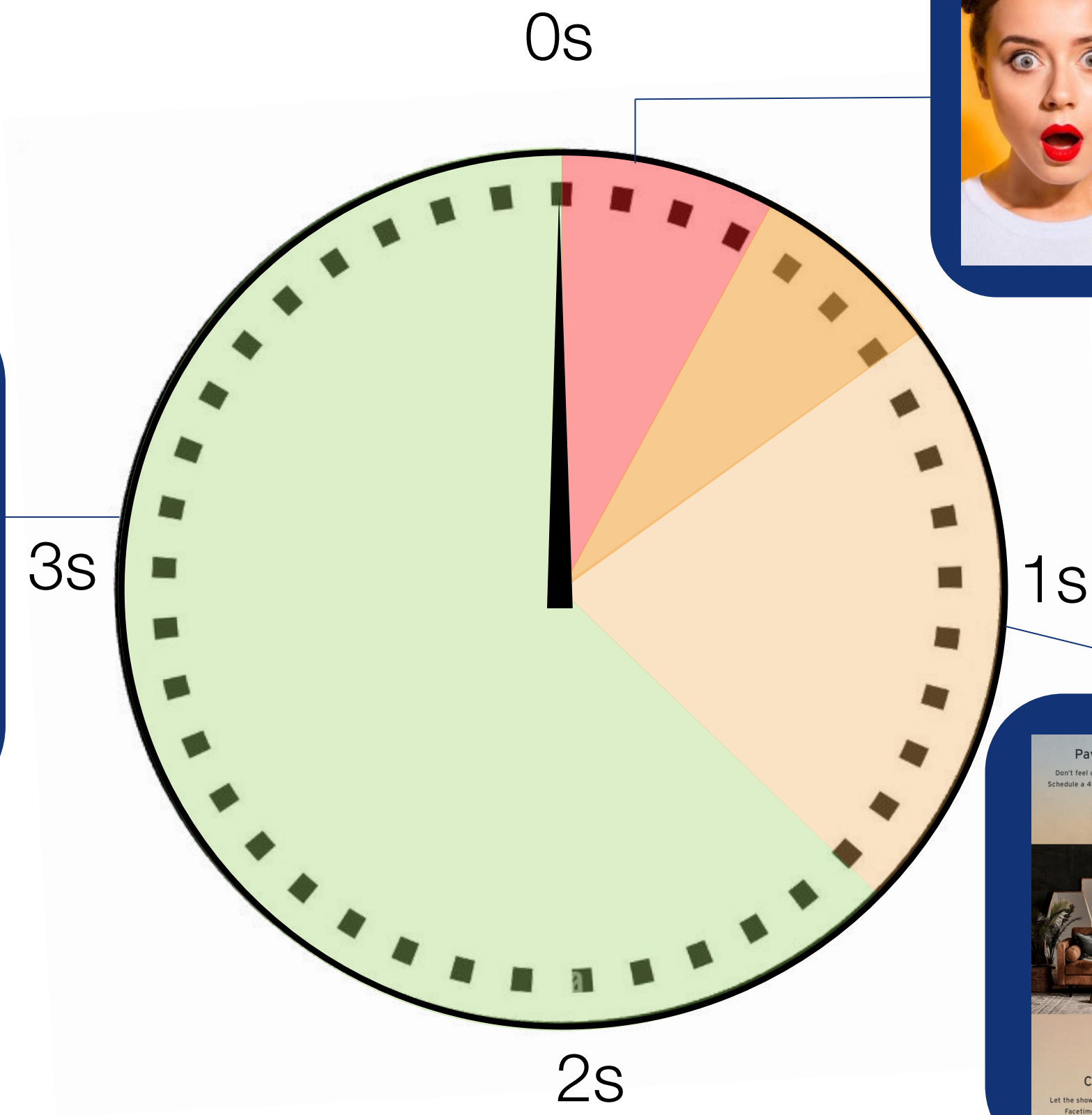
0 to 0.3s

Use what eyes are naturally drawn to pull them in your direction



0.6 – 1.5 onwards

Get it right and people will then make the effort to process what you have communicated and understand what you want them to



0.3s up to 1.5s

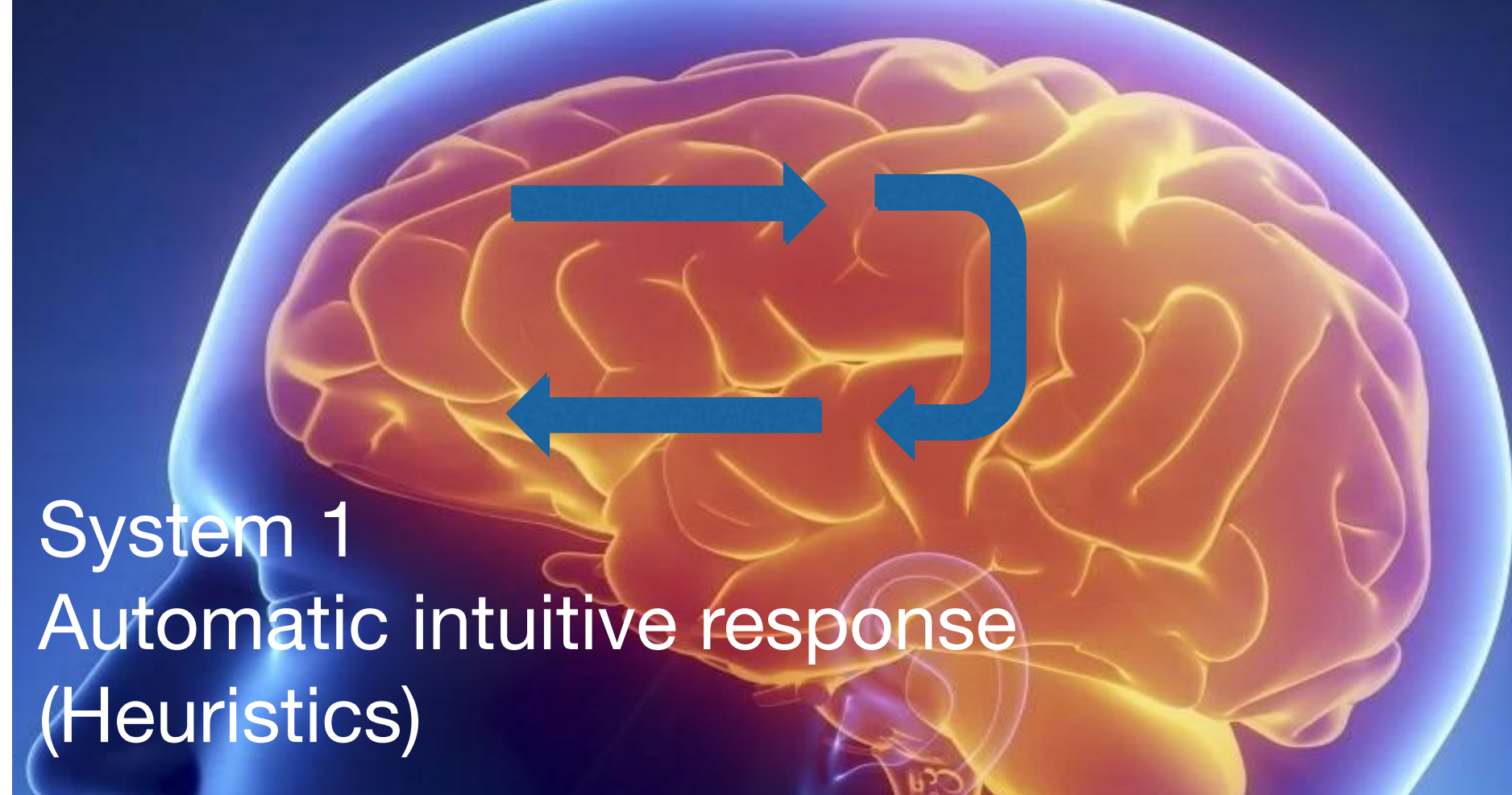
Make it easy to perceive  
Text, imagery and layout  
Make it appealing (be creative) use messages that connect that naturally persuade



Behavioural Economics – All marketing should tell a fast and a slow story

**The intuitive fast ‘System 1’ story (1-2 secs)**

- Quick effortless communication that needs little attention but ‘gets the point across’ aiming to create interest



System 1  
Automatic intuitive response  
(Heuristics)

**The slow (effortful) story**

- Brains avoid thinking. But if the ‘fast story’ appeals they then may bother to expend the cognitive effort to find out



System 2  
Effortful consideration

# Making the most of attention

- There are increasingly more demands on our attention
- Creativity can work but will get harder due to AI
- Making marketing 'fluent' to process is a win win
- Make sure text, layouts & images take little effort to process
- Use intuitively appealing messaging that bypass effortful consideration and minimize cognitive effort



# Thank you

Dr Ali Goode

Cognitive Scientist

