



# THE LAWS OF HUMAN NATURE

*JANUARY 2021*

# STAYING RELEVANT WHEN CHANGE SEEMS THE ONLY CONSTANT

**Humans are hardwired to pay attention to the new, different or unusual, so in turbulent times it's tempting to focus on what's changing. But the smart move is to ensure you understand the immutables that are stable – this is the foundation for strong brands & sustained growth**

At Brand Genetics we believe seeing the world 'human-first' is key to solving complex challenges – we look through the lens of human nature because while technologies, businesses and markets change, human nature remains constant

*"Human nature is the set of properties that humans tend to possess as a result of the evolution of their species"<sup>1</sup> and as such advances at the pace of evolution. Our genetic makeup, including the genes that influence the products and services our brains find attractive, has changed very little in the last 80,000 years since we were hunter-gathering on the plains of Africa*

Here we share laws inspired by Robert Greene's 'The Laws of Human Nature' (winner of the International Business Book Award, 2019)<sup>2</sup>, supported from other sources, and brought to life with brand examples and insights

**Understanding these laws – and how human nature shapes our choices and decisions – can help you see through the fog of change, better understand your consumers and ultimately chart a clearer course to business growth**

## THE LAWS OF HUMAN NATURE

# THE CONSISTENT LAWS OF HUMAN NATURE



THE LAW OF  
IRRATIONALITY

THE LAW OF  
NARCISSISM

THE LAW OF  
SHORT-  
SIGHTEDNESS

THE LAW OF  
GENERATIONAL  
MYOPIA

THE LAW OF  
GENDER RIGIDITY

THE LAW OF  
CONFORMITY

# #1 LAW OF IRRATIONALITY

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

As Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman has famously shown, most of our decisions are based on evolved 'adaptive shortcuts'<sup>3</sup>. These heuristics are simple, fast rules for aiding judgment and decision making, in lieu of more accurate but slower thinking. While these generally get us where we need to go – efficiently – they can also lead to mistakes and errors of judgement

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

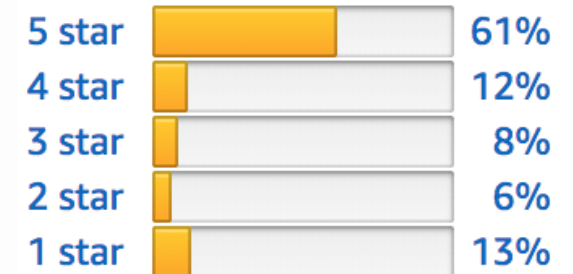
Human decision making is rarely as rational as we would believe – instead heuristics and biases make us (predictably) irrational. In many ways good brands are heuristics in themselves – shortcuts to decision making. But what's clear is that by understanding and adapting to the most relevant heuristics for your category and audience you can build a distinctive advantage over the competition



## Customer Reviews

★★★★☆ 85,060

4.2 out of 5 stars ▾



[See all 85,060 customer reviews ▸](#)

Amazon uses the Social Proof heuristic with its reviews. It prominently displays the rating (stars) each item is given. So when items receive high scores from lots of people, social proof suggests that if they all liked it you will too

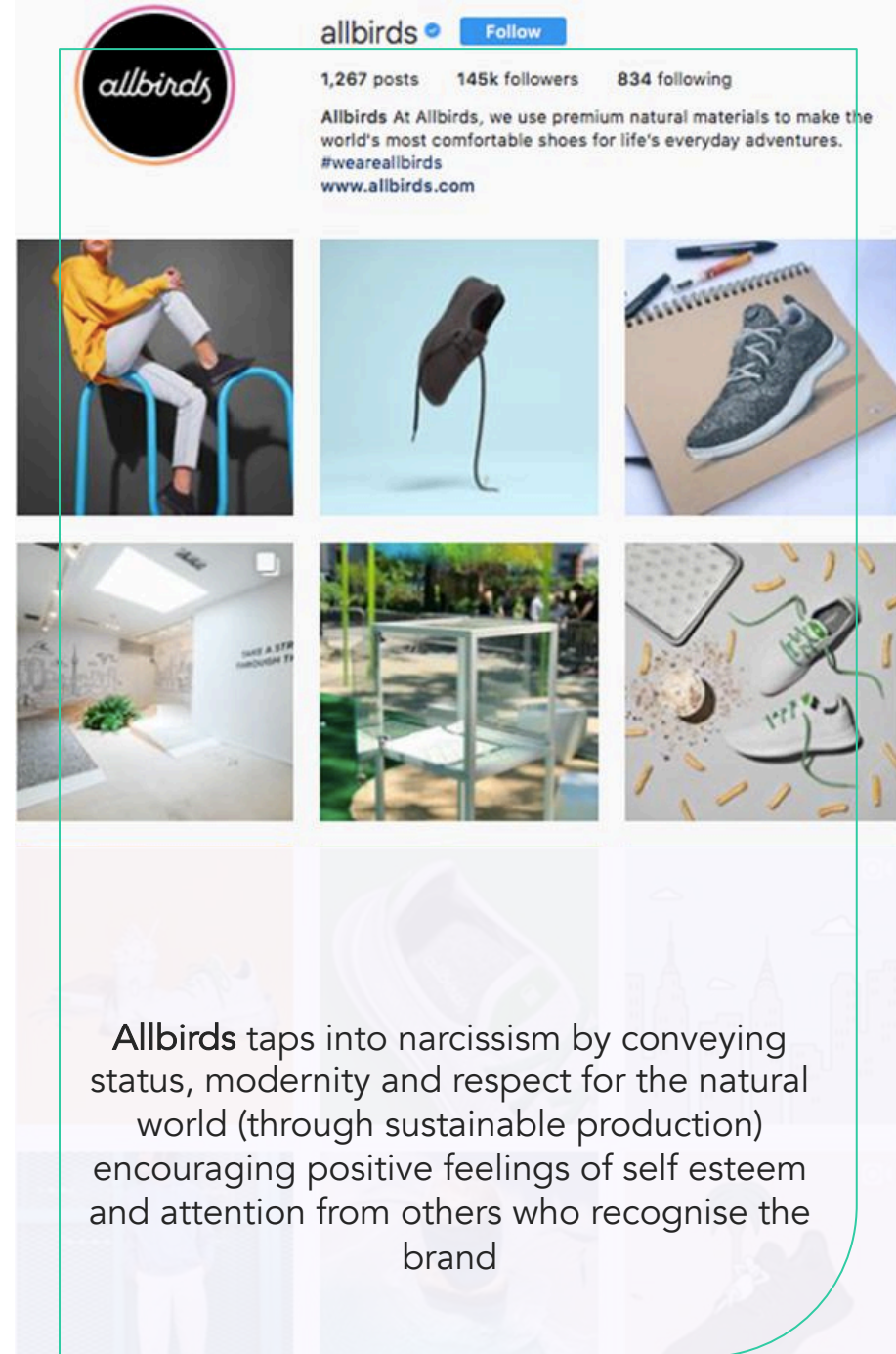
# #2 LAW OF NARCISSISM

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

We're all narcissistic to some degree – our self esteem depends on the way we see ourselves and the quality of attention we receive from others. Studies have shown increasing levels of self-absorption since the 1970s, with a higher spike since 2000 as technology / the internet has meant less time in social interactions, fueling narcissism

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

The desire to feel recognised and appreciated for who we are is a primary motivation behind almost any action. Many brands play a role in how people outwardly express their sense of self: evidence shows consumers buy brands consistent with their beliefs, self-image and self-motives; making purchases that allow them to view themselves (and be viewed by others) as 'competent, endearing, and honourable'<sup>4</sup>. Understanding what this means for your key audience(s) will allow you to better support their need for recognition and expression



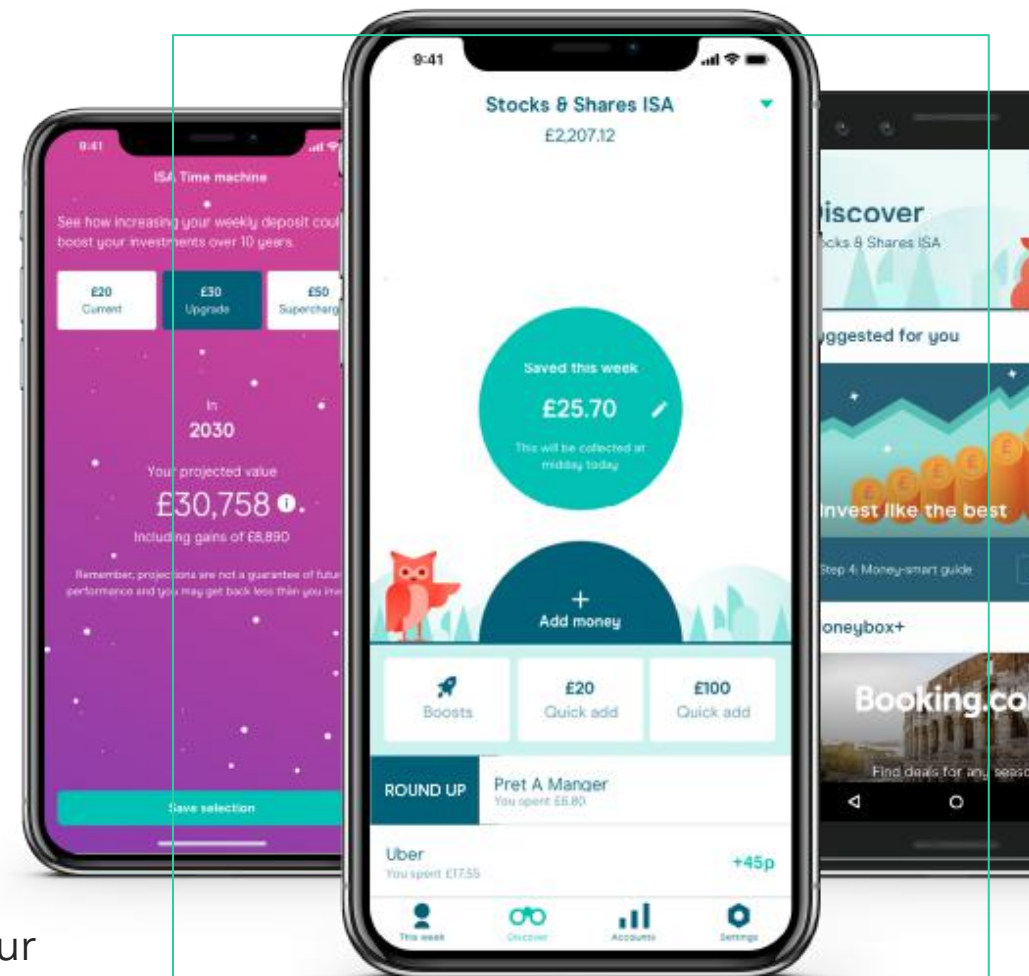
# #3 LAW OF SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

Humans are biased toward instant gratification and we tend to neglect the bigger picture, failing to have a far-sighted view of the impact of our actions. Instead, we hone-in on dramatic features that stimulate our senses and emotions in the moment, rather than examining the whole

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

Humans value short-term rewards significantly more than longer-term benefits (e.g. eating what tastes great rather than what is good for our health, spending now rather than saving for later). So consider how your brand can best address this law via overt, dramatic features that promise instant gratification. Even if the real benefit is more long term, find ways to 'front-load' some benefit in order to incentivise positive behaviours



Money Box's 'look into the future' feature allows savers to see how much they can save in the long term if they make additional upgrades now. By making this future reward more tangible in the present the brand appeals to consumers' short-sightedness and encourages them to make better choices

# #4 LAW OF GENERATIONAL MYOPIA

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

**We are all defined – more than we imagine – by the generation into which we are born. The fundamental attribution error is the tendency to attribute our behaviour to internal states and volition when a lot of it is defined by our external environment. Major events and technological shifts that occur when a generation is young help shape generational traits, which can have a significant impact on how that cohort thinks, acts and reacts throughout their lives**

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

While there is clearly huge diversity within generations, there are certain generational traits that do have robust, evidence-based backing. When we are young we are more likely to embrace new ideas and it's natural for each generation to seek to separate itself from what's gone before. Understanding your audience's generational and life stage traits, values and priorities is key to fitting into the relevant zeitgeist



**WE'RE SORRY**

Honesty has been proven to be a key value for Gen Z. KFC successfully used honesty in an amplified – non-apologetic – way (after supply shortages struck) by focusing on making its communications open and fair to resonate with the priorities of its Gen Z audience

# #5 LAW OF GENDER RIGIDITY

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

We all have masculine and feminine qualities: we each possess hormones and genes of the opposite sex and, when young, absorb traits from both parents<sup>2</sup>. However, one of the simplest ways to define our identity is around gender – and as we grow up we tend to unconsciously overidentify with the role expected of us and adhere to gender stereotypes (which can be positive or harmful)

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

Understanding how your brand plays into (or against) that gender role can help provide clear guidelines and guardrails for communication, innovation and activation. Find ways to fit with positive gender norms or – perhaps more interestingly – challenge those stereotypes and remind consumers of the inherent and positive qualities they possess of the opposite sex



**Durex** found that while many women experience discomfort during sex, few talk about it and less than 50% do something about the problem. Its "Ladies, let's lube" campaign set out to destigmatise lubrication – celebrating women who have pushed against gender norms, before challenging why women "still put up with uncomfortable sex?"



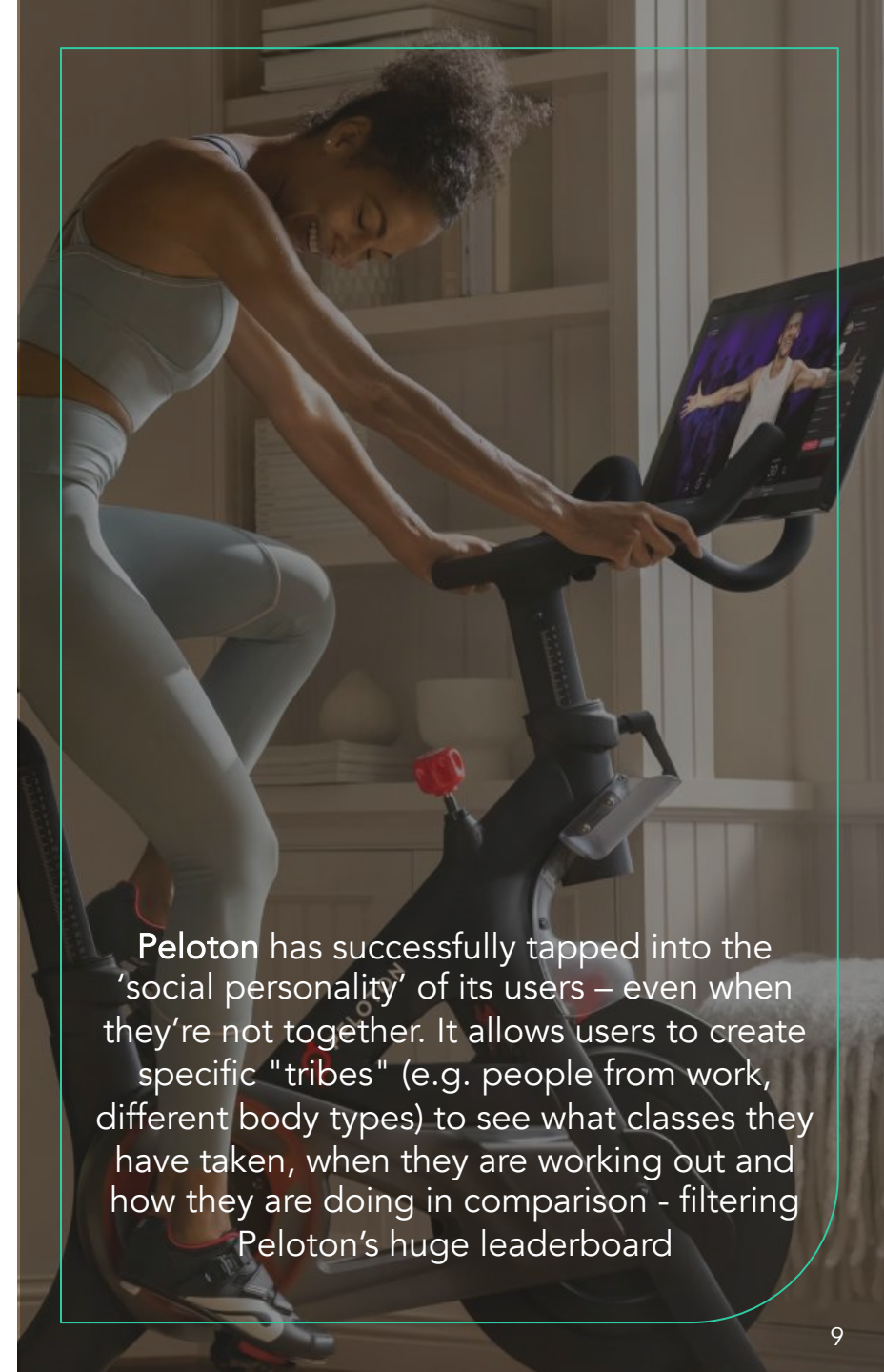
# #6 LAW OF CONFORMITY

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

**We like to think we're unique and independent, but as social animals we are in fact more predisposed to want to fit in and conform than to stand out. In groups our behaviour shifts as our 'social personality' emerges – we unconsciously imitate what others are saying and doing; we think differently and feel different emotions in tune with the group mood**

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

There are two parts to identity: personal identity and social identity<sup>5</sup>. We manage our social identity by seeing ourselves as accepted members of particular social groups (reference groups) and this involves conforming to group norms. Brands that play in inherently more group / social settings need to understand how they play to these norms, whilst brands more focused on personal identity may want to consider how to help consumers stand out in the crowd



Peloton has successfully tapped into the 'social personality' of its users – even when they're not together. It allows users to create specific "tribes" (e.g. people from work, different body types) to see what classes they have taken, when they are working out and how they are doing in comparison - filtering Peloton's huge leaderboard

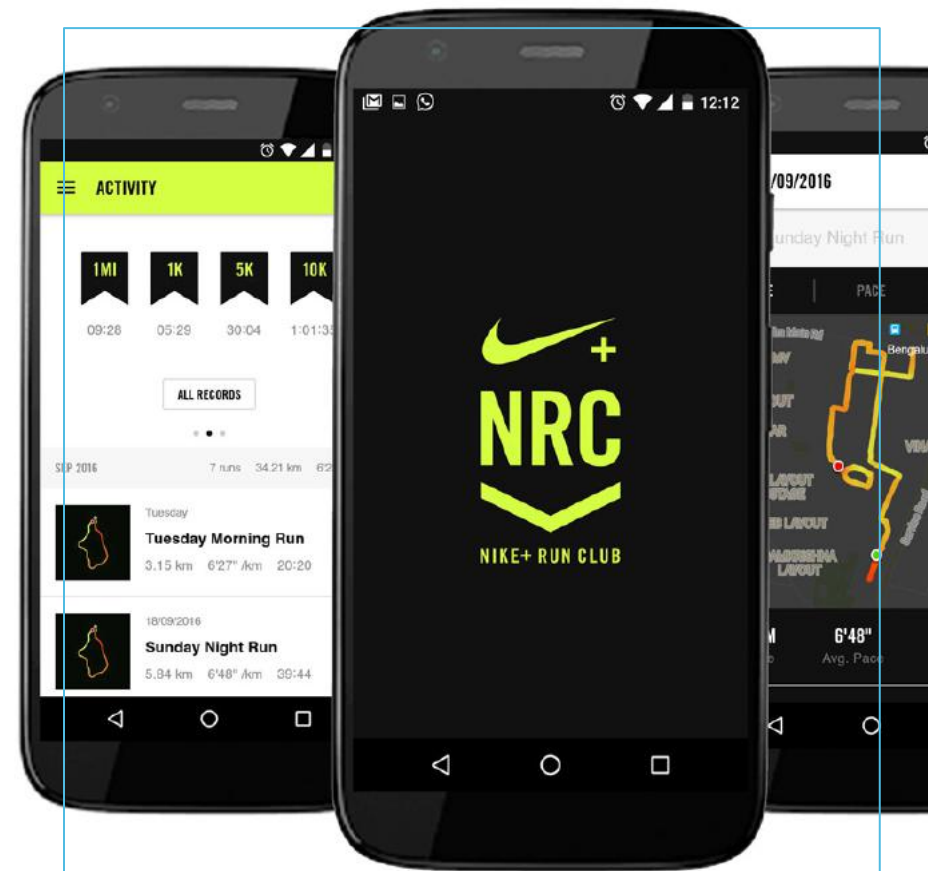
# BONUS LAW OF HAPPINESS

## UNDERSTANDING THE 'LAW'

**Happiness – experiencing and evaluating life positively – is a fundamental human goal. The UN and World Economic Forum have actively sought to promote ‘the happiness and wellbeing of all’<sup>6</sup> as being happy is linked to very positive outcomes: we’re more healthy, creative, productive, resilient, motivated, helpful and live longer. At Brand Genetics we believe this is a critical law for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!**

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

World happiness is at its lowest since records began, despite a backdrop of rising wealth and material progress. Brands can have a positive impact on this unmet need, not by delivering fleeting moments of pleasure, but by using evidence-based insight to support real happiness & wellbeing (e.g. giving people a sense of **Autonomy, Relatedness or Competence**: the psychologically validated **ARC of happiness**). Evidence shows people are willing to pay more for – and remain loyal to – brands that make them happy



Nike Run Club plays into the ARC of happiness – it fosters autonomy by giving you personalized goals and tips, relatedness by connecting you to a like-minded community and competence by tracking and measuring your progress and showing you how you’ve improved

# LAWS SUMMARY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR BRANDS

## THE LAW OF **IRRATIONALITY**

Play to people's emotions  
first and foremost

## THE LAW OF **NARCISSISM**

We all think a lot of ourselves –  
stroke people's ego & empower  
self expression

## THE LAW OF **SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS**

We neglect the big picture,  
emphasise the here and now

## THE LAW OF **GENERATIONAL MYOPIA**

Generations are more  
defining than you think – speak to  
generational values

## THE LAW OF **CONFORMITY**

Our social personalities differ from our  
individual ones – recognize the  
individual while championing  
belonging

## THE LAW OF **GENDER RIGIDITY**

We over-identify with gender roles –  
lean into or challenge to drive  
relevance

## THE LAW OF **HAPPINESS**

Happiness is an unmet need - have a positive impact on people's happiness