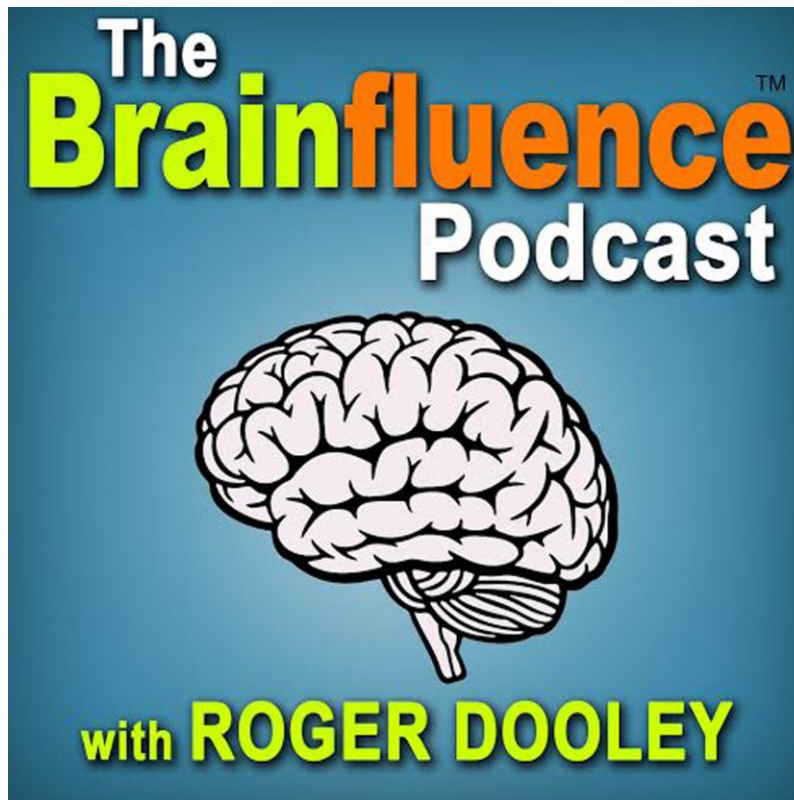


Ep #41: The Psychology of Design with Joe Leech



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**Roger Dooley**

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## Ep #41: The Psychology of Design with Joe Leech

Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. This is Roger Dooley and our guest this week is Joe Leech coming to us from the UK who has a really interesting set of credentials. He has undergrad degrees in Neuroscience and in a master in Human Communication and Computing. He has worked in a variety of user experience and customer experience roles, working with the clients like Disney, Microsoft, Virgin, Marriott and many others. He is currently director of User Experience at CX Partners and is the author of the book, Psychology for Designers. Welcome to the show Joe.

Joe Leech: Hi, Roger.

Roger Dooley: You have such an interesting and relevant background because you already encountered Neuroscience people and digital marketing people, but the intersection between the two it makes a pretty small Venn diagram. Explain a little bit about how you got interested in Psychology and Neuroscience and ultimately more often to more of a digital marketing guy.

Joe Leech: Yes, sure. Well, it was started with a book for me. My mother is a psychologist. I grew up in a house surrounded by psychology books and my dad is an architect and when I was growing up there was psychology book and I remember very well one of the first books reading up my mom was a book of how to read a person like a book and it's about body language.

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Roger Dooley: Yes, I've seen that.

Joe Leech: I was a 16-year-old boy and I was like, "Wow, this is all the secrets to success for me in life." I found this book and I attempted to try out rather I believe I have to admit at the time to the body language experiments with friends and more likely girls about point yes and that really started off my interest in psychology and then from there I ended up studying Neuroscience University which again for me was kind of a more of the science side of psychology and three years after that I graduated with no idea of what to do in terms of the career so this was probably about 1998.

The incident is just about getting started and I just got my very first website. I didn't really know what to do and I ended up being a teacher abroad a few years which I'll come to later on which I too ends up being quite relevant to what I ended up doing and then fell into a master's program about five years later basically into User Experience, the User Experience Master's Program, I fell out of that and admitting to work and being in this ever since.

This brings intersection with me in psychology was that I was always very interested in from that very first book of how to read a person like a book, the part complications with psychology so I always struggle a bit with the kind of a the theory when it was with a tangible and what really struck me about psychology and certainly when I started looking to the digital world slightly more it's how relevant psychology is in terms of interaction design and how important it is for interaction designer like myself to understand psychology and that's really my kind of

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journey briefly from my mother's bookshelf to where we are now.

Roger Dooley: That's really great. The interesting psychology lecture in Neuroscience too because for me that connection is significant. You are really looking at the biology that underlies psychology and now the two fields are kind of merging this some of the brain imaging techniques out there were before they were almost separate fields and now they're coming together.

Joe Leech: In my book that you mentioned as well, in chapter two of my book, because my mother is a social psychologist neither was kind of struggle to really understand the relevance of the law of the kind of more fluffy side of psychology she technically saying that by the way and I was doing very heavy towards the side of it which was neuroscience at the time it is really is a lot more experimentation and its base on the ideas of cognitive psychology. In my book I'm going to a quick argument that was very popular with me and my mother when I was at the university where she was so defending the more social side of the arts and liberal side of psychology where I was also defending more of the science side of the psychology and it's the kind of argument of how the two sides of psychology often battling against each other and how they overlap and how they are approach psychology from very related places as well.

Roger Dooley: Well, it's kind of funny because sometimes you see some work based on brain imaging come out and psychology field say, "Well, we knew that for years" but now you're seeing sort of the underlying mechanisms you can see happening in the brain.

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Joe Leech: I did more evidence for it as well because that's again at User Experience where I work on the same digital marketing we've got well to data round so we're very strong making design decisions based on actual real data. The experimental psychology all from actual A/B or analytical data so I've always been in the data guy at heart and the psychology part of it that just took a great way of bringing the more human aspect to that inside as well into it too.

Roger Dooley: Well, very good. Let's talk about your book a little bit. It was a really interesting read and when I look at the title I was expecting one of these books of what color charts and what color you want to use to create different psychological effects. Instead what I found out was really how to guide for designers who wanted to dig into psychology research and uncover the underlying truths for themselves which really is great. I like the way you include appropriate cautions about, okay don't just take the first study that you see and run with it, but take a look is there a significant amount of data there and do they have a large number of subjects that is statistically significant, has anybody else replicated the work so I thought that was really a good point because it seem like these days you can see so many blog post.

I mean, of course everybody is doing content marketing these days and trying to build their business by creating content that is interesting and people will share so you'll see a lot of these articles and 10 brain hacks to sell more stuff and in a lot of cases the science underlying that it is really superficial that does grab some little statistic from discussion somewhere so I think that this is precaution.

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Joe Leech: Roger thank you very much and the reason I wrote the book was that there were a lot of great books out there in the cardinal aspect of a hundred of things you can do and hundred ideas you can apply to your design to get there and one of your books, *Brainfluence* is a good one for that, but really what I wanted to do was give people a primer on how to assess the quality of any psychology they are looking for. Again, they might have a design problem they need to solve.

I go through a couple in the book and it's really way of going out there and finding the relevant psychology to solve a problem you've got. Which is really where I was coming from and I wanted people to be able to go look for the psychology experiment that's going to solve for them the problem they've got, and as you said as well, weigh out is that as valid study, is it going to be applicable to the design problem I've got, because you're right there's awful lot of stuff written about psychology in terms of how it influences the design and not all of it is very good quality, I have to say.

Roger Dooley: To push back at your little Joe on this view think that designers really want to dig in that deep or is a moral case that the folks like Nathalie Nahai whom you know, Susan Weinschenk not to mention people like you and me or we just not doing a very good job of translating the research into something that's usable for designers because to me doing the work the way you suggest is it's going to be a lot of work for designer and there would be presumably better to have somebody that you trusted and say okay. One example in your book is the number of items in the navigation menu so instead of doing the research myself what I really like to do is know that okay I can go to author X or write a Y and if they say that six is a

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pretty good number then I can run with that and have reasonable confidence that it's a good starting point and can be all still tested, but the people really want to dig in.

Joe Leech:

I think you're right. My background is I'm going to design first and everybody ... I don't get about your background so much more pertaining with Susan and Nathalie they are content marketers, or that psychologists, or UX Researchers first and I'm a designer first so I'm kinda coming at it from a designers point of view rather more and one of the things that was really important to me that I learned at University was how to find the research that I need to that point when it was there and you're right that all of the books you've mentioned that it was very fantastic for the top 10 or top 50 design problems you're going to face, but any top designer at the moment what harms if there the problem I'm trying to solve for was outside of the space of the studies that you've written about, where do they go to find that particular, how they find research that tells them what color to use for a footer, how they design the footer, there is nothing that's been uncovered by the other writers out there, how did they go and discover research can inform that particular problem they've got and the book that I wanted to write was that and I think you're right.

I don't expect to be doing that every single design problem they've got, but occasionally once every few months or so they're going to get across the design problem they need to solve and what I wanted to be able to do is keep people skills effective to go out and discover that psychology research to inform that problem rather than necessary having a huge to 200 design examples that they can follow every time. It's just more always to keep you for the tools that guarantee that.

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Roger Dooley: Right. Well, I think actually those tools that you provide are pretty useful for writers too. I mean, if you're a blogger hoping to write an article about design from a psychological standpoint or some other aspect in digital marketing from a psychological standpoint I think that they could apply those that exact same information that you offer to be sure that they do a simply good job of sourcing the information and coming to the conclusion for that article.

Joe Leech: Definitely. I think the big theory certainly of the design community is the way that design is talk about design as well so when they talk about design they often talk about in terms of the creative art they produce and often what that means is making design advocacy decision to advocate designs they've done. Often a bit of science can help back up the design decisions they have made. So also I want to, again with the book, is to give people the ability to advocate design decision and say, these are the reason why I have chosen this many items for the navigation menus based on this study and really what it is a way for designs to better talk about the design issue they've made as well not just made the right decision, but then to be able to justify because again the same thing as well as design. Designers that work in isolation they work in quite complicated organization and so what I would to be able to do is give them some empowerment in terms of being able to advocate the designs that they produce.

Roger Dooley: Right. That's a good point because they're going to have a meeting where the CMO is going to say you've only got six navigation items there and we've got 20 great areas of the website that we want to be sure people find so one we bump that up to all 20 and instead of just saying, "Well, it's not going to look good" or "it will be maybe confusing



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for the user” you’ve got a little bit of science to back up with the way choice is made.

Joe Leech: Definitely because again what often that CMO might mention is they might a little bit of psychology because I’ve written a series of blog post recently about psychology myths within designing UX and one of the big myths is this is what we called monism which is seven plus or minus two which George Miller in the 1950s proposed this being the number of digits that we could recall from our working memory and again this is often banded around as being the number of elements or items that a human can understand or cope in one chunk so often this is incorrect to use as a way of saying or wish any have seven plus or minus two items on navigation.

I mean, the case of that that isn’t the truth and in fact often what that means is that there’s a lot of bad psychology out there and I want again once to keep designers the ability to be able to go and research what seems to be a truth and to uncover the fact that it isn’t the truth and to come up with a reasonable argument for the design they choose they made and be able to challenge a lot of the myths and other psychology that’s kind of cracked into the design practices over the last few years.

Roger Dooley: Joe do you see more designers and marketers in general trying to incorporate psychology into their projects or is this has not changed much over the years?

Joe Leech: No. I think it definitely has changed. I think there’s certainly a lot of organization knowing that they’ve to do it. They feel that they should to be doing this kind of stuff so I went with a number of workshops which is basically introduction psychology for designers where I keep designer and marketers skill which they need to be able

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to do this day to day to get this stuff into their day to day work practices because I think one of the things that I've noticed amongst people to trying to do this is often they read a book like notch which is a fantastic book about how to use persuasive design and elements and ideas in persuasive design to improve the design whether you do.

But what it does give is gives you some ideas and some case studies how it worked before, but it doesn't effective to give you a process to uncover how the process of day to day including psychology and the design whether you do so I lot of what I worked be able to try to do and I've been trying to do in the workshops that I read is ability to add elements of psychology to the design process and that's both for marketers and for designers and do in a way that is much more rigorous in terms of doing it while the game reading something on some of these blog about a design psychology idea in cooperating to the stuff they're doing is being able to go back to first principle was then to look out the ideas behind psychology and apply that to the processes and then the final design so they can reproduce as well.

Roger Dooley: One of the things that I'm seeing is a lot more use of testing largely because the tools are getting better and simpler and really enabling folks to do a lot of their own testing rather than relying on experiments performed by others and other circumstances because one of the common things you see and attend a fair number of conversion conferences and the others always display for what's the best practice for this and usually the answer is there is not a best practice that's going to work in every case. I mean, there certainly some things that if you've got a called action you won't be able to see it.

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I mean, that's probably a best practice that is valued most of the time, but when you get down to details like image placement or the color of the buttoner something like that you really need to test and one conversion that come from since I spoke in San Francisco another keynoter was Steve Krug and he's a huge proponent of very frequent and very simple user testing. I assumed that you would agree with that. I always see companies waiting until way too late in the process to start user testing like, "Hey, we've got a fantastic new website. Now we got to run to buy few users and see what they think" as oppose to using that they ended during the development process.

Joe Leech:

I think you're right. I think Steve is right. I think it is frequent and often to mean I suppose of what my job. 30% of my time I spent researching, 30% designing, 30% advocating to following designs and to that research I end up working on happens throughout the process and I think it doesn't have to be straight lab use ability research it can be a manner of research element. Again, from your experience of conversion conferences and a lot of people listens to podcast would be very familiar with MVT, Multivariate testing and A/B testing which I think is incredible set of tools for marketers and for designers at the moment, but in my experience the best way of doing it is to research early, as early as you possibly can.

The more you discover from any initial you research you do in the current product doing having to said your version of product of designing is to learn an awful lot about what's broken with what you've got right now and what good quality use of research can give you and some idea is about how to use it while MVT and A/B testing can give you is numbers that back up and advocate the design changes you want to make so you might be able

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to spot that something is wrong in one particular use of research session you can use MVT and A/B or whereby in tips to give you numbers to back up what that problem is costing you in the future.

Yes, I think that advocate are kind of all many different types of research and I constantly fitting different types of research into one another so again the psychology that I do and a lot of what I talked about in my workshop is how to fit psychology into research methods, how to use of research, lab base use of research to understand use and needs, how to apply psychologies of that, how to get ideas from cognitive psychology to fit into multivariate testing and A/B testing. I'm a big proponent of lots and lots of research loads of different techniques throughout the design process to uncover small problems ideally to large problems. I think it's the best way to improve any product you're working on is to go out and research with people.

Roger Dooley: What do you think about these relatively new tool where you can in a matter or probably as little as few hours or most of the day or two get some videos of users interacting with your website, I mean the traditional approach has been to use a lab setting or you can do a lot of instrumentation on the people that you bring in you can video everything, you can examine the mass movements and keystrokes and so on, but that tends to be pretty involved and expensive. Are the super tools like usertesting.com comes to mind and there is some other are those useful do you think?

Joe Leech: Definitely and I think the use of research lab the advantages of that are you can recruit the right people or you might be working between 5 and 10 natural users.

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You can make sure that they are exactly your target market and the right people you should be speaking to that's the advantage I guess of doing face-to-face user research one. You can interrogate and in terms are they exactly the right people you wanted to be talking to, to make sure that the input you are getting from them is relevant to that you took every funded work with.

The other advantage of course of that testing is you can change your technique on a fly. Each individual person you can speak you can slightly softly change the approach you want to take and if they say something interesting you can follow the app so that's the advantages to lab-based testing as well as a lot of people ought to being able to watch which is a great way for advocating change. The benefits of online-based research like testing.com what users do the benefits are it's probably right it's cheaper and it's often a lot quicker than doing lab-based research. Again, but the reason often it's cheaper and quicker is because you can't guarantee that the exact people you're going to speak to are your co-user group so just say you're in Amazon or some like Facebook great fantastic.

If you're more specialized in what you do in terms of your users, then you can quite quickly hit the limiting factors to some of those organizations so that's one of the downside, but you're right you can get feedback fairly cheaply and fairly quickly from these online services as well. Typically, what that means is you can put a quick test up there saying, "Completely sweet tasks and off you go" and you'll get feedback probably within the day or so in terms of more videos of what these people are doing so yes it's great speed, but it's not so great accuracy and you wouldn't want to bet your business on this stuff you're

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learning from one of these sites you're much better off recruiting the right people speaking them into an interview-based session rather than trusting these kind of online site so much a mixture of the two.

Roger Dooley: Yes. I guess you can get a little bit biased too if these are folks that are frequently called out by the organizations to examine west sites they're trying to resort professional website testers which introduces its own kind of biased.

Joe Leech: It does.

Roger Dooley: How do you use A/B testing Joe, I mean certainly in the conversion space you see a lot of A/B testing with what changing minor variables and then measuring leaves or sales or whatever, but how about from a user experience standpoint can you use it in a more qualitative fashion, I mean well maybe some quantitative results to give you qualitative feedback on your design?

Joe Leech: Very much said. I mean, I think what A/B testing is really good for like to say is to get the numbers to back up and like this is decision based on some of the design ideas you generate this earlier on so use a research and both lab by its online stuff can generate ideas for you. I can say use of make enough time commonly about competitors saying a future they like or they want to mention another website it's a space that they like and ideas that they like around that so there's a great ways of gathering ideas for what you should do to fix the particular problem you might have is to speak to real people an you're right the MVT and A/B testing is a wonderful test to prove if a design decision you're going to make are going to be worth at this rate.

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It's a great of saying, "Let me put this idea that we heard about research, that we heard about from psychology theory. We want to try out, let's try with 10% of the audience and see if that 10% does end up by a more from this or not" so I'm a big advocate of using as a kind of way of packing up design decisions. It's another way of necessary generating idea and I would be very nervous about in the organization just only uses A/B and multivariate testing is their ideally research platform and I've come across many organizations that do, but it's a great way of proving if something is going to be successful or not and testing out an idea really.

Roger Dooley: One of my pet peeves Joe from a user experience standpoint is security and it seems like there were conflicting forces right now and every day we read about these massive hacks where companies are losing data and causing customers grief and at the same time though you've got the security experts who were trying to implement again so-called best practices that can be very user unfriendly super strong passwords that are impossible to remember, automated log out after a short period of use preventing username or password storage you go down a whole list so that basically it makes it very difficult for customers to use this site.

Actually the most successful site the Amazon comes to mind is actually as far as the user experience side of security pretty lacks and probably, but at the same time they've got the backend insecure as prevented issues there what's your take on this split between security experts who want to ... I mean doing to protect site users and customers, but at the same time they could be discouraging people from even using this site?

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Joe Leech: Yes. I mean, definitely it's a real tradeoff. I mean, you're absolutely right. I think the tradeoff between usability and security has been one that we see play over the last 10 years is the pendulum swung when we first started those and often lot of security in terms of the things like online internet banking you have to put three passwords and then use it a bit it's from the other way with the use of ability and a lot of security measures were relaxed slightly in terms of that and there's a lot data breaches and the pendulum swung the other way and we've seen the pendulum more of a security, nervous time, a lot more organizations being a lot stronger with that security measures and it's a balancing act and it really depends what site is you're working on.

If you're working an internet bank, if you are banking your design and security system, then yes by all means make it secure, make it discard at least one password, make that a very difficult password for them to anybody else to guess, give to mean I will send a little security down they have to and into the number from the security down when they're logging on. The same other opposite extreme we've got site seen we were signing up for news for example why should I have to put an incredibly secure password and going through a capture just to sign up for an email and use that and I think part of the problem is being over the years is that the level of securities never been appropriate for the task that's been undertaken.

For internet banking, I'm happily going through security groups because I know that needs to be secure so no one can steal my money. If I'm signing up to send somebody an email or to get in contact with them maybe do a piece of work with them I don't want to have to go through a capture forms. I think really it's about the right level of



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security for the task at hand and I think most users I've spoken to and I have worked on from right through from internet bank and a large UK banks right for you to more marketing sites and it's the level of security most users are happy with the level of security for the task at hand and I think what's happened previously is we've never ... A lot of designers are or a lot of secure techs, but to kind of aid on the side of caution or to the side of usability when they capture they're going the other way.

Roger Dooley: Right. I think one part of the equation too is often the sort of backend coding details are even part of the design process they're done by somebody technical laboring this process and the executives involved don't ever actually go through the process themselves they just assume that somebody is handling that and end up some sort of optimal decisions where you've got maybe just a community site like a form where you've got security that would be appropriate for an online banking transaction or something.

Joe Leech: Definitely, yes and I think it's about since user experience professional that I've been working, any hurdles that are put up by companies or parts that the designer want to be involved with. One of the things that I always do with financial services projects that I work with is that I make sure that the day to day data business, the password entry, getting people through very, very difficult tough hurdles is part of what I do. I mean, as lot of my experiences designing online web forms spending quite like a few conferences about form design and how to get people through a particularly difficult form and I love that kind of stuff and I find that stuff fascinating.

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I think the problem is that many designers, marketers and business professionals find the hope business of data entering forms and security quite doubt. It's not as exciting as the kind of game implication of persuasive design it's not the sexy side of the design she working and it's the kind of boring stuff and actually for me I find that step the most fascinating of always getting people through really difficult process computing the text which is an online or filling out a home insurance form online incredibly difficult very, very secure processes. For me, that's so much more of an interesting design challenge than getting people to buy more things definitely.

Roger Dooley: Right and plus you can achieve measurable results too if you find that 10% more of the people are completing the form that could be huge. I hate Joe we're just about out of time. Let me remind our listeners that we are speaking today with Joe Leech. Joe is the director of user experience at CX Partners and is the author of eBook Psychology for Designers. We'll have links to Joe's book and all of the resources we've talked about on the show notes page [@rogerdooley.com/podcast](http://@rogerdooley.com/podcast). Joe, how can people find your stuff online and connect with you?

Joe Leech: The best place to go to is my website and that's [mrjoe.uk](http://mrjoe.uk) or [@mrjoe](https://twitter.com/mrjoe) on twitter as well just find me there and they go all kind of links to the book lots of resources all the books people should read in terms of psychology for UX Designer everything's [@mrjoe.uk](http://@mrjoe.uk).

Roger Dooley: Awesome. Thank so much for being part of the show Joe.

Joe Leech: No, thank you. It's just been great talking to you.

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Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at [RogerDooley.com](http://RogerDooley.com).