

Behavioural Hacks

Play book


An experiment in partnership with Selfridges

VISA

MINDWORKS



Visa's Recommerce Behavioural Insights Lab is committed to identifying and testing simple behavioural hacks that could increase customer demand for resale, repair, rental, refill, return and redistribution.



What is this playbook about?

We're committed to helping businesses overcome one of the biggest hurdles in getting consumers to shop circular: the intent-action gap, where 84% of people say they want to shop circular but only 27% actually do it¹.

Having run experiments with some of the world's biggest brands, we're sharing our learnings in a series of playbooks. From growing your Recommerce efforts to adopting a circular business model that revolves around resale, repair, rental, refill, reuse and redistribution, we're here to share strategies that can turn intention into action.

So, how do we increase the number of people shopping circular?

By *understanding* how to create behavioural interventions or 'hacks' that get people to follow their intent with action.

The Recommerce Behavioural Insights Lab is a collaboration between Visa, MindWorks and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF). Visa brings expertise in commerce, MindWorks specialises in behaviour and the EMF focuses on circularity. Together, we're on a mission to make Recommerce more accessible, rewarding and equitable for everyone.

We've partnered with some of the world's biggest brands and leading circular businesses and, through our experiments, we've discovered how they can help people embrace more circular habits. This playbook is an open-source guide to everything we've learned, distilled into easy-to-implement, data-backed hacks for your business – we share the mistakes we made along the way, too. Our goal? To help businesses like yours turn the tide and make our economy more circular.

We hope you find it helpful. We'd love to hear from you, whether it's to tell us about a hack you've used or an idea for a new experiment. Message us [here](#).

Shopping circular¹

84%

of people say they want to

27%

actually do it

1. Karine Trinquetel, Kantar, How to avoid your brand being inadvertently tarred with the 'Greenwashing brush', 31 March 2024

What's inside?

05

Behavioural science 101

Understand how we use behavioural science to create interventions that will influence people's behaviours.

06

Recommerce Behavioural experiments 101

From kick-off to implementation, discover our 6-step process to carrying out Recommerce behavioural experiments.

09

Selfridges hack

Messaging to position refill front of mind.



Behavioural science 101

What is behaviour hacking?

It's about using behavioural science to create interventions within products, services and experiences that will influence people's behaviours.

What do we do in Visa's Recommerce Behavioural Insights Lab?

We're here to help people identify and adopt sustainable habits and implement real-world solutions that support more circular behaviours.

How do we create behaviour hacks to test in our experiments?

Our approach to defining behaviour hacks is based on a **4-step process** that we call the 4B Framework.

1

Behaviour

What is the specific behaviour we want to influence?

2

Blueprint

What is each step that a person is currently taking in pursuit of the target behaviour?

3

Barriers

Which friction points are currently preventing people from completing the behaviour?

4

Benefits

How might we amplify existing benefits or create new ones to increase motivation?

Together, the **4Bs** help us identify optimal behaviours and ideate on interventions that encourage those behaviours. An intervention is any aspect of the design environment that alters people's behaviours in a predictable way.

Behaviour

What is the specific behaviour we want to influence as part of our design?

Blueprint

What is each and every step that a person is currently taking in pursuit of the target behaviour?

Barriers

Which friction points are currently preventing people from successfully completing the target behaviour?

Benefits

How might we amplify existing benefits, or create new benefits to increase motivation?

² <https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/neuroscience/mindspace-framework>

Recommerce behavioural experiments 101

Recommerce behavioural experiments are carried out as short sprints with 6 key stages:



8 principles to run a good Recommence behaviour experiment

1. Describe the target behaviour in detail

Powerful Recommence behavioural experiments are grounded in a vivid description of the target behaviour. The more detailed the target behaviour, the more robust the intervention design.

2. Be deeply rooted in customer psychology

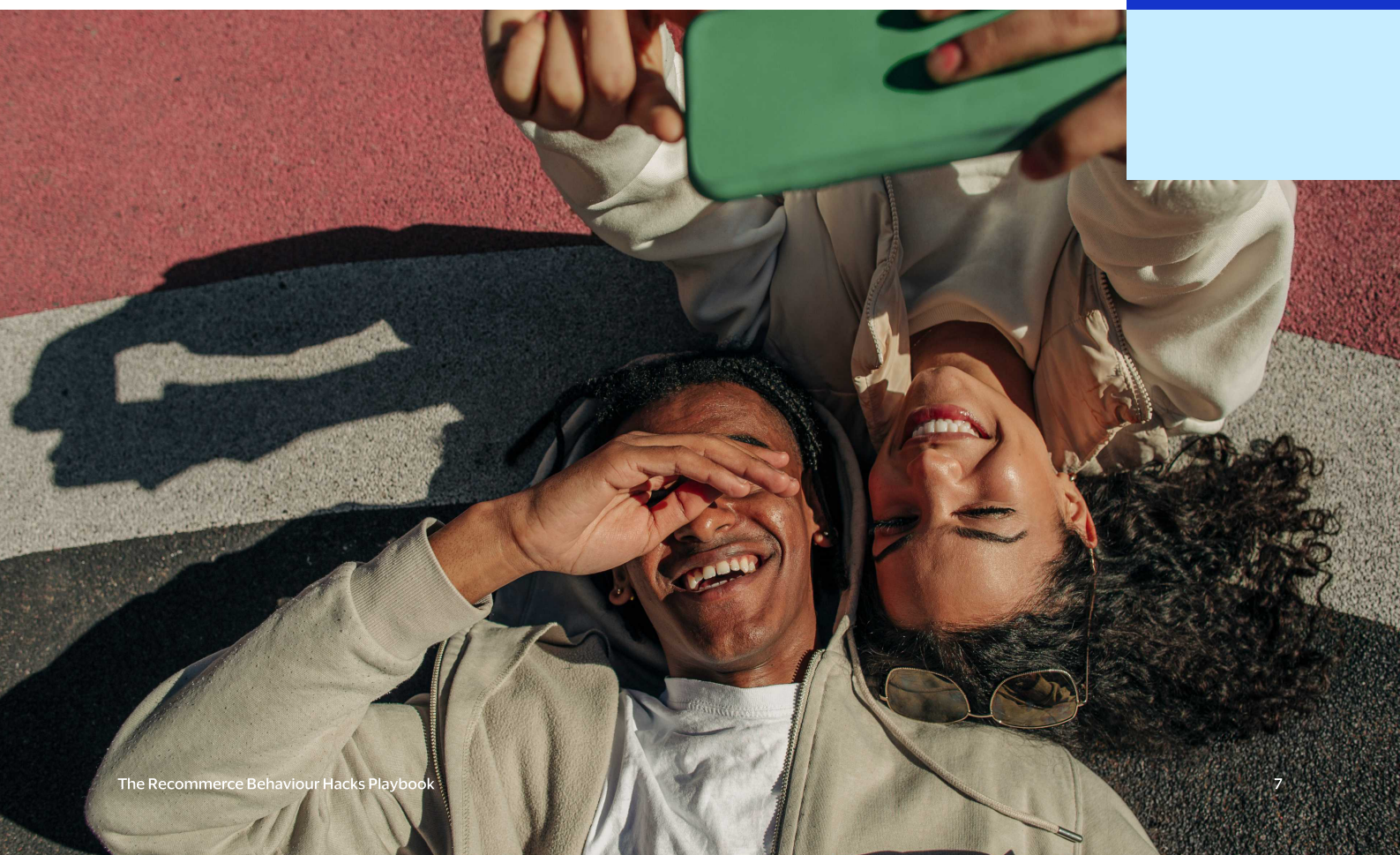
To ensure the intervention resonates with customers, refer to their mindstates. Understanding how customers think and feel adds a layer of insight to an intervention, making them more targeted and relevant.

3. Leverage scientific principles

Understanding the mental shortcuts and errors humans make allows you to harness their power, either combatting or leveraging them in the intervention design. This will help ensure the intervention is maximised for adoption.

4. Ensure the experiment can be accurately measured

Design a testing methodology and a measurement framework upfront to ensure you can gather and report results more effectively.



5. Benchmark results against a control or BAU

Comparison is key and if you don't have a control (or a business-as-usual use case) to compare intervention performance against, you can't be certain it's been successful.

6. Consider the potential externalities of the intervention

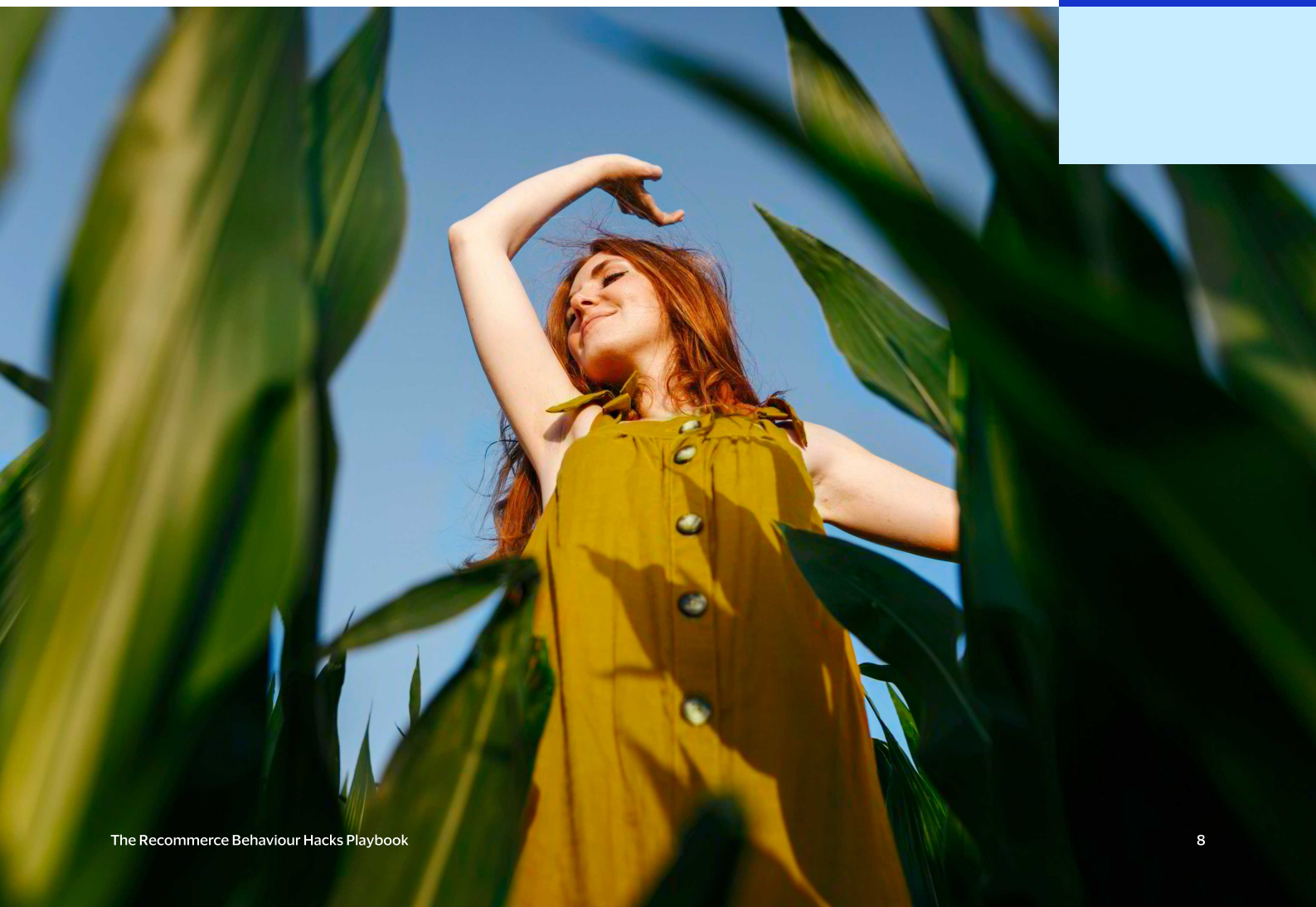
Externalities are unintended side effects or consequences, which can be positive or negative, and might affect customers or other third parties who did not choose to be involved in the intervention.

7. Ask ethical questions

Demonstrate a commitment to social good and sustainability by asking ethical questions at every stage of the experiment. For example, during design and implementation, explore how you can safeguard the wellbeing of everyone involved and ensure data collection methods are transparent and respect privacy. The Danish Design Center has developed a useful [tool](#) to help businesses make responsible decisions from an ethical design standpoint.

8. Keep things simple

The most effective interventions are clear, concise and straightforward. They could be as simple as removing an item from the shelf, changing the colour of a button or tweaking a line of copy.



SELFRIDGES & CO

HACK

Messaging to position
refill front of mind

The initiative

Encourage shoppers visiting Selfridges stores to purchase refill products.

The target behaviour

We defined what we wanted to happen...

We want Selfridges shoppers to be more aware of product refills, to choose refillable products over the standard variety and to come back and refill again.

...and made this target behaviour real with a specific scenario, for our imagined customer, called Jenny.

It's 12.30 pm on a weekday afternoon and Jenny is spending her lunch break in the Selfridges Beauty Hall. She's popped in to buy a luxury facial moisturiser and is surprised to find that they offer a refillable version of it. We want Jenny to buy the refill pot and to come back for her next refill when she needs a new one.



What could change behaviour?

The hypotheses

In the luxury and premium retail space, customers are often driven by a sense of community and the desire for status. Shoppers want to feel part of a like-minded community while also standing out. They choose products that help them feel connected to others, but also set them apart as trendsetters^{1,2}.

We identified two key psychological drivers influencing shopper behaviour when it comes to aligning with social or environmental movements in a luxury retail setting:

- **Community:** Many shoppers are motivated by a desire to feel part of something larger than themselves. In the context of a department store like Selfridges, this can manifest as a preference for brands or actions that signal shared values with a wider, like-minded group. Customers motivated by a sense of community seek connections with others who care about the same issues — whether it's sustainability, ethics, or innovation — and want their purchases to reflect that belonging.
- **Status:** A separate but equally powerful motivator is the desire to stand apart. Some shoppers perceive value in being early adopters or tastemakers — they are individuals who want to be seen as ahead of the curve. For them, aligning with a movement or brand isn't just about shared beliefs, but about being recognised for their distinct taste or forward-thinking choices.

Alongside these motivators, we identified several types of social norms likely to influence shopper behaviour, in particular, how they might shape attitudes toward new or unfamiliar behaviours like refilling. These norms act as powerful behavioural cues that can encourage or discourage action based on what people perceive to be typical, acceptable, or aspirational behaviour within a given group or setting.

- **Descriptive** - what most people actually do
- **Injunctive** - what most people think or believe
- **Dynamic** - what people are starting to do
- **Snob effect** - positioning the reader as the trailblazing first-mover

With these behavioural levers in mind, we hypothesised that carefully crafted messaging tapping into these norms, especially when placed in highly visible, decision-making areas of the store, could significantly increase uptake of the refill service.

1. [New Yorker, The Value of Luxury Poseurs, July 2014](#)

2. [Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, Masstige Consumption: A Motivation-Desire-Outcome Framework with Implications for Luxury Brand Management, 2025](#)

The intervention

In behavioural science, social norms are most persuasive when they signal that the majority of a group engages in a specific behaviour. For example, stating “70% of customers choose refill” offers a clear, quantitative social proof to drive action.

In this instance, because refill is still an emerging offering within Selfridges, comprehensive customer data is limited. Rather than rely on hard statistics, we chose a more creative and transparent approach – drawing on early indicators of customer interest and behavioural science principles. We explored subtle, social norm-based copy to suggest growing participation, while ensuring the messaging felt grounded, authentic, and aligned with the current stage of the refill initiative.

As a result, the Selfridges intervention introduced social norm-based messaging in high-traffic, decision-making areas of the beauty hall – mirrors – aimed at promoting refillable product purchases across select luxury brands.

Instead of using hard statistics, we developed subtle copy variants inspired by well-established social norm frameworks – including descriptive, injunctive, dynamic, and exclusivity – based norms – each designed to resonate with emerging shopper motivations around refill adoption.

An example of how social norms impact people’s perceptions and decisions

People often look to others to guide their decisions, especially in unfamiliar or ambiguous situations. If a shopper understands that most customers in a store are choosing to refill, they’re more likely to do the same.

Even subtle cues — like messaging that highlights the growing popularity of refill — can shift perceptions and nudge behaviour. It’s not just about what’s right or logical; it’s about what feels socially expected or admired.



The experiment

We worked with Selfridges to prioritise brands that were well established in the store and which offered refillable options and tested variations of social norm messaging in high-traffic product locations to cut through the noise of an area brimming with brands and offers.

Each message variation was carefully crafted to test different behavioural cues while remaining fully aligned with Selfridges' tone of voice, physical context and brand identity. This ensured consistency across different conditions while isolating the effects of the behavioural cues alone.

Experiment limitations

While the test was carefully designed and grounded in behavioural science, a few real-world challenges limited how much we could confidently learn from the results. Here's what to keep in mind when reviewing the results:

- **We couldn't track foot traffic**, so we don't know exactly how many people saw each message — or whether the duration of each test phase reached enough shoppers.
- **Customer-staff interactions weren't captured**, meaning we may have missed valuable, informal signals of interest — like questions or comments about the refill messaging.
- **There were no digital follow-ups**, like QR codes or surveys, to help us understand how people felt about the messages or why they did (or didn't) act on them.
- **External factors** — such as wider economic uncertainty, in-store promos and brand-specific marketing — likely influenced shopper behaviour may have skewed or masked the true impact of the messaging interventions.
- **We couldn't run precise A/B tests** because of Selfridges' open-plan layout, which led to potential cross-exposure between messages and limited our ability to isolate test groups.

+16.13%

uplift in Refill sales

(vs. the baseline period preceding the intervention)

+100%

uplift during the
Descriptive message

(i.e. Refill sales doubled during this period compared to the prior baseline phase)

Results overview

None of the tested message variations led to a statistically significant increase in Refill sales. On average, Refill sales dropped across all brands during the test period. However, it is vital to note that total beauty sales also declined YoY across the focus brands.

The drop reflects wider market pressures — suggesting messaging alone couldn't shift behaviour. For context, the personal luxury goods market saw its first decline since 2008, down 2% at the end of 2024, with the trend continuing into 2025¹.

With that being said, differences emerged depending on how results were analysed and which messages were tested:

- Using a weighted average (results adjusted based on relevant sales volume — total beauty, refill, or refillable sales), the Snob effect message, “Be one of the first. Start a trend.” saw **the smallest drop in Refill sales**.

- Using an unweighted average (where each brand counts equally, regardless of how much it sold), the Dynamic (“People are switching to refill”) and Descriptive (“More people are buying refill”) messages **tied for the smallest drop in Refill sales**.
- Two brands showed relative Refill resilience, despite category-wide declines:
 - One beauty brand saw a **+16.13% uplift in Refill sales during the Snob effect message**.
 - Another beauty brand saw a **+100% uplift during the Descriptive message**.
 - Other brands saw no uplift in Refill sales under any variation.

And, while Refillable sales also declined across all brands, we saw:

Control message

(“Shop RESELFridges Refill”) performed best using weighted averages.

Dynamic message

(“People are switching to Refill”) performed best using unweighted averages.

This suggests that while messaging alone did not reverse declining trends, it may slow them down — particularly when aligned to the right shopper mindset or brand context.

1. Forbes, 5 Reasons The Luxury Market Decline In 2024 Won't Recover In 2025, Nov 2024

Key learnings

The experiment offered valuable insights into both customer behaviour and how mindset and social norms impact refill adoption.

‘Starting a trend’ may resonate with status-driven shoppers

The Snob effect message (“Be one of the first. Start a trend.”) showed the best performance in weighted analysis across refill sales. While not statistically significant, its relative success aligns with the status mindset often seen in luxury shoppers.

Descriptive and dynamic messaging showed some promise

These messages resonated best in unweighted results across refill sales, suggesting they may support a behavioural nudge effect across diverse brands — but stronger reinforcement is needed to drive conversion.

Control messaging buffered refillable sales

The neutral message (“Shop RESELFridges Refill”) saw the smallest drop in refillable sales. This may be due to its low cognitive load or greater familiarity, though it lacked the behavioural push seen in social norm messaging.

Brand context matters

Some brands benefited from strong placement and alignment with brand tone, while others saw better engagement when messages were placed closer to product locations.

One message isn’t enough

A single mirror decal is unlikely to shift deep behaviour. Future experiments should layer messaging across multiple touchpoints (e.g., digital, staff engagement, incentives) to reinforce sustainable behaviour.

Category-wide decline may have overshadowed results

All brands saw YoY drops in beauty sales. Refill and refillable sales dropped significantly, pointing to external pressures — like economic caution and category saturation — that likely dulled the impact of messaging.

Looking ahead

While this experiment didn’t lead to a clear boost in Refill sales, it gave us some helpful indicators about what might work in future experiments. Messages that tapped into the idea of starting a trend or joining a movement seemed to land better, especially with shoppers who value being ahead of the curve.

However, messaging alone isn’t enough. Future activations should think bigger: reinforcing the message across different touchpoints like signage, staff conversations, and even digital follow-ups.

It’s also clear that brand context matters. What works for one brand might not work for another. Therefore, messaging should fit each brand’s style and space (and possibly add bespoke incentives or stories that show real impact) for a more consistent and engaging journey. Refill won’t become a habit overnight, but the right mix of nudges and reinforcement, could support uptake.

Once your message is in place, testing it doesn't need to be complicated. One approach is to **rotate your messaging weekly**, using simple in-store signage to trial different behavioural prompts. There's no need for complex A/B testing setups — just monitor changes in customer behaviour, interest or sales after each rotation.

If full sales data isn't available, **use proxy metrics** to assess impact. You can track quick indicators like customer questions, QR code scans or verbal reactions to signage. These behavioural signals offer valuable insight without needing heavy infrastructure.

It's also worth **gathering input from frontline staff**. Equip your team with a few simple prompts so they can share what they're seeing in real time, such as:

- Did any customers comment on the message today?
- Did anyone ask about refills or show interest in sustainable products?

Another effective technique is to **collect customer feedback directly**. Add a QR code to your signage linking to a short online survey and ask questions like:

- What made you choose this product today?
- Is this your first time trying a refill?

These insights can help you understand not only what's working, but why — allowing you to refine your approach and improve outcomes over time.

To help you generate your own messages, here's a [LLM AI tool](#) prompt inspired by the experiment's best-performing behavioural intervention. Simply customise the prompt for your use case, brand and business situation by updating the topic, product or service, number of options you want to generate, and the channel where you want to conduct your experiment. Always check for accuracy and ask follow-up questions based on your specific needs.

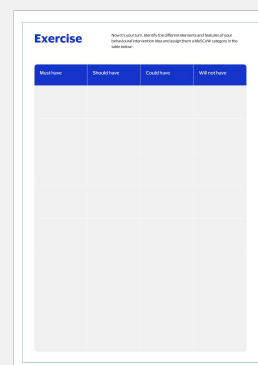
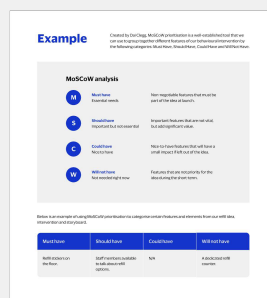
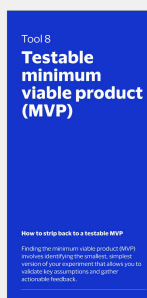


Credit: Image courtesy of Selfridges


Implement the Selfridges hack into your own business

To create an effective in-store campaign or activation, start by identifying the specific behaviour you want to influence — for example, encouraging first-time refill purchases or increasing return visits for refills. Once your target behaviour is clear, craft messaging that aligns with social norms likely to resonate with your audience. Through our experiment, we found descriptive norms can be especially powerful, particularly when the behaviour is new or unfamiliar.

Our Behavioural Hack Toolkit is designed to help you create and track impactful experiments over several weeks.



To support this process, you can draw on behavioural tools that make designing and testing campaigns more structured and effective. Behavioural design cards are a great way to quickly generate ideas based on proven behavioural science techniques. Meanwhile, our experiment canvas allows you to map out key details before launching an initiative — including your business objective, target behaviour, customer motivations and barriers, messaging approach, testing methods, and the stakeholders involved.



Try this out

Dynamic-focused social norm messaging could encourage refill:

'Customers are switching to refill' or 'Every week, more customers are making the switch to refills'

SELFRIDGES & CO **HACK**

Deep Dive

How we designed our experiment

The community and status mindstates were the foundation for developing tailored social norm messaging. People in the community mindstate seek to join or connect with like-minded individuals, choosing products and experiences that signal shared belonging and reinforce group identity. In contrast, those in the status mindstate desire approval from their peers, pursuing social currency — such as exclusive experiences, access, or stories — to gain recognition within their social group.

Writing our messaging variations

To naturally integrate the messaging into Selfridges, we collaborated with their brand and copy teams to align the design and tone of voice with their wider 'ReSelfridges' campaign, which encouraged shoppers to adopt sustainable purchasing habits by shopping pre-owned items. Each variation was crafted to resonate with a social norm.

Credit: Image courtesy of Selfridges



Social norm:

Descriptive

In this instance, we simply state what is currently happening and encourage the consumer to join the community.

- **Variation 1:**
'More people are buying refill.'
-

Social norm:

Injunctive

Here we focus on the effects of what people are doing — what they believe is happening, rather than what they're simply doing. By purchasing refill, they're making a change for the good.

- **Variation 2:**
"People are making a change."
-

Social norm:

Dynamic

This refers to what people are starting to do. We're at the inflection point of a social movement and you're invited to join it.

- **Variation 3:**
"People are switching to refill."

Social norm:

Snob effect

The snob effect is the opposite of the social norm effect — it means some people want a product less when they see too many others buying it. This is particularly relevant across luxury contexts. While the snob effect may seem counterintuitive on the surface, behaviour change experiment results often surprise us and this could serve as an invaluable learning for Selfridges.

- **Variation 4:**
"Be one of the first. Start a trend."
-

Control:

No social norm applied

This variation serves as the neutral control. It does not introduce social norm framing or attempt to influence behaviour through peer cues or status dynamics. Instead, it presents a straightforward product prompt without persuasive context.

- **Variation 5:**
"Shop ReSelfridges Refill."
-

To isolate the effect of messaging alone, the visual design remained consistent across all conditions — only the copy varied. We also tailored the tone of voice to the physical context of each placement, using location-relevant language to subtly enhance engagement. On the mirror decals, we used the line 'You look like one of them' as a playful prompt that taps into identity, self-reflection and the desire to belong, triggered at the exact moment a customer is looking at themselves.

How we ran our experiment

A live sequential test was run in the Selfridges Beauty Hall, testing four social norm messaging variants and a neutral control. Messaging appeared on mirror decals in high-traffic brand areas between February and May 2025. The test was run across six focus brands.

Each two-week phase featured a single messaging variant, displayed via mirror decals near refillable products. This approach allowed us to isolate the impact of each message on shopper behaviour and sales. We tested our four unique messaging variants via mirror decals placed around the participating brand areas.

Campaign type: Live sequential test

Campaign period: 24 February to 5 May 2025

Location: Selfridges Beauty Hall, UK

Objective: Evaluate whether different behavioural messaging variants (and if so, which types) can increase uptake of refill behaviour — with a primary focus on refill sales as the key sustainability outcome, and refillable purchases as a necessary but secondary step.

Campaign type:

Live sequential test

Campaign period:

24 February - 5 May, 2025

Geographies:



Great Britain

Target audience:

Selfridges shoppers

Objective:

Identify which behavioural messaging variants can increase uptake of refill behaviour

Distribution channel:

Selfridges Beauty Hall, UK

How we measured the results

To evaluate the effectiveness of our messaging variations, we received weekly sales data across our focus brands, benchmarking it against the same period in 2024 that our messaging variations were live in 2025.

Primary metric: refill sales

- Reflect sustainability conscious behaviour
- Directly support Selfridges' sustainability targets
- Show habit formation: repeat purchases without new packaging
- Most meaningful indicator of long-term impact

Secondary metric: refillable sales

- Gateway to refill
- Don't directly support Selfridges' sustainability targets
- Can be confused with standard packaging by customers
- Expected to decline over time as refill behaviour increases

Contextualising the results within a shifting market

While our experiment revealed some promising signals, it's essential to interpret these outcomes within the broader market context. The beauty industry is currently facing significant macro-economic headwinds. Many major brands have reported declining revenues, citing economic uncertainty, rising living costs, and shifting consumer priorities.

This creates a challenging environment for driving uptake of refillable products that, despite their long-term value and sustainability credentials, may be perceived by cost-conscious shoppers as less immediately convenient or financially accessible.

In this experiment, we observed an overall category decline across refill and refillable sales — suggesting that broader economic pressures likely diluted the potential impact of messaging alone. However, descriptive messaging indicated a possible buffering effect, while early feedback from participating brands highlighted valuable lessons about experimental design and activation.

In conclusion, while our behavioural interventions offered useful learnings, the experiment underscored the need for deeper integration and multi-touchpoint reinforcement, especially in a retail landscape shaped by economic caution. To encourage wider refill adoption, brands and retailers may need to combine behavioural insight with practical incentives, clearer education, and structural changes that make sustainable choices feel more accessible and worthwhile in the eyes of today's cautious consumer.

Credit: Image courtesy of Selfridges

SHOP
RESEFRIDGES
REFILL

LEARN MORE

Visa's Recommerce Behavioural Insights Lab is open source, sharing practical learnings and solutions from all our experiments so these can be adopted and applied by anyone, anywhere.

Discover more about the Visa Recommerce Insights Lab [here](#).

Case studies, comparisons, statistics, research and recommendations are provided "AS IS" and intended for informational purposes only and should not be relied upon for operational, marketing, legal, technical, tax, financial or other advice. Visa neither makes any warranty or representation as to the completeness or accuracy of the information within this document, nor assumes any liability or responsibility that may result from reliance on such information. The Information contained herein is not intended as investment or legal advice, and readers are encouraged to seek the advice of a competent professional where such advice is required.

All brand names and logos are the property of their respective owners, are used for identification purposes only, and DO NOT imply product endorsement or affiliation with Visa.

