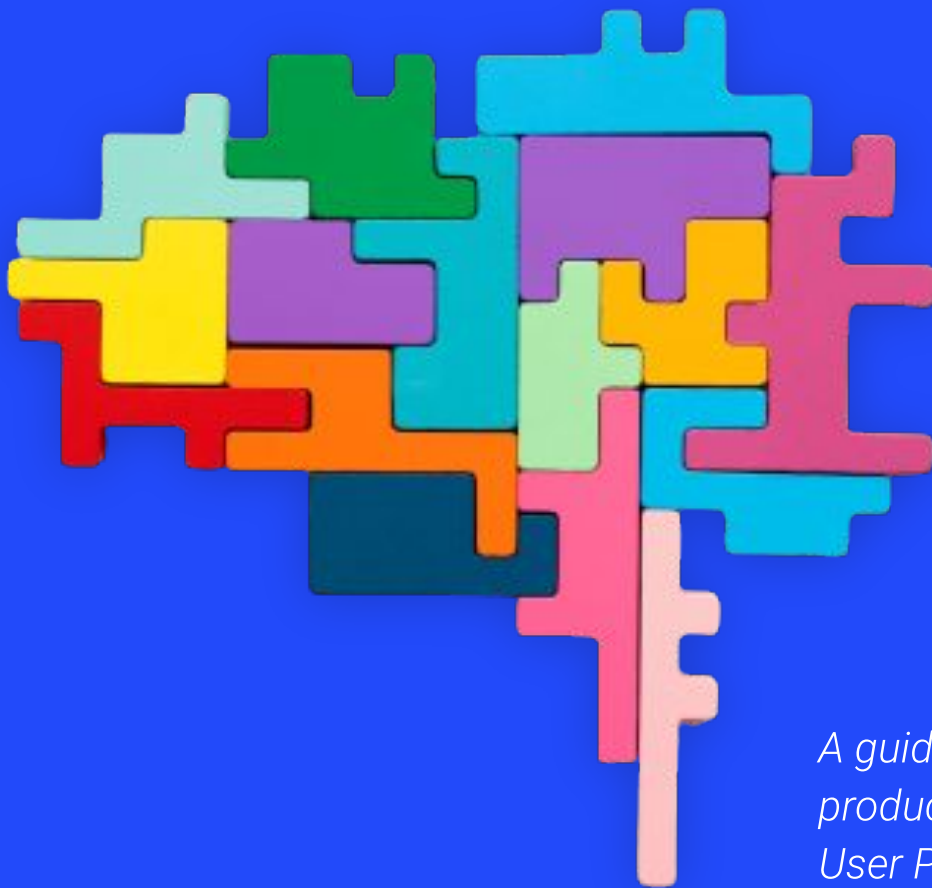


User Psychology Playbook for Product Managers



*A guide to maximizing your
product's growth through
User Psychology*

Authored by:

Moe Ali, Founder & CEO, Product Faculty

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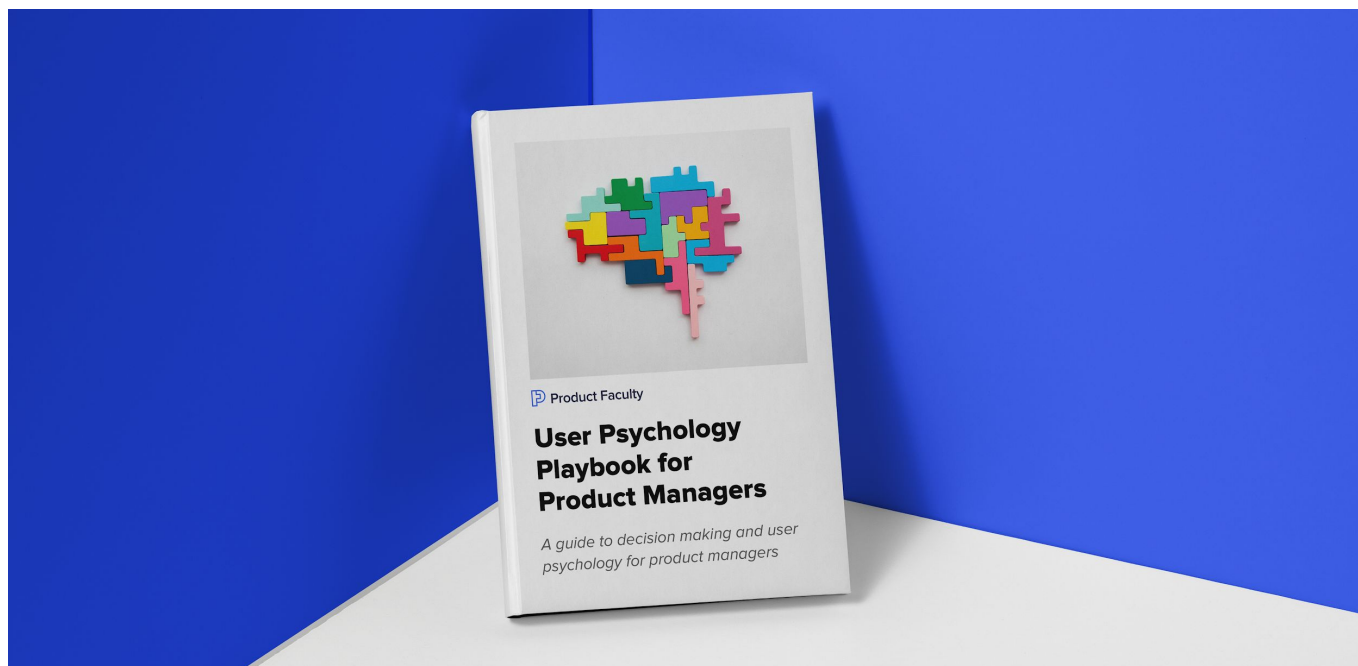
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Introduction:

User Psychology and its importance in Product Management



Product Managers put in a ton of hard work to build products that solve real customer problems, but many of them fail because your customers never even noticed them. As logical as we think we are, studies have shown that humans make decisions emotionally, and justify them logically.

It's critical for product managers (especially those working in a growth PM role) to deeply understand user psychology and how users make decisions. While it doesn't replace all the important foundation and discovery work that goes into product management, it's still incredibly powerful. In fact, as you learn more about user psychology, you'll soon notice how shady people use it to manipulate others.

Product Faculty's Decision Scale Framework simplifies and breaks down the levers product managers can use to ethically get their message across, increase adoption and grow faster.

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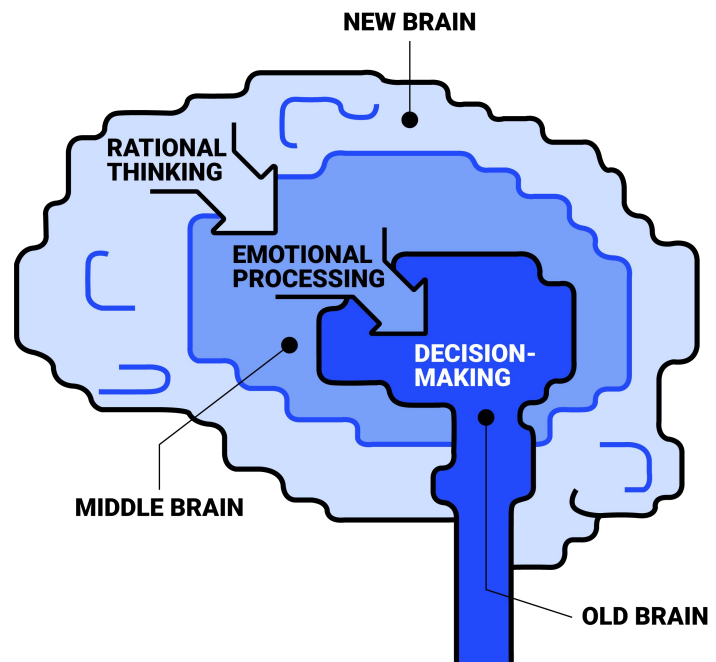
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Chapter 1:

Understanding the brain's role

Human Brain, Similar Patterns for Decisions



To understand user psychology, we first need to understand how our brain makes decisions. As much as we think of the brain as just one organ, it's actually made up of three distinct parts, each with a very different role:

The new brain (rational thinking)

This is the part of your brain that's reading this sentence and evaluating it, comparing it with information you already know.

The middle brain (emotional processing)

How do you feel about what you're learning? Curious? Excited? Surprised? Every time you've cried at the end of a movie, it's down to this part of the brain.

The old brain (decision making)

When it's time for action, whether it's jumping at a sudden noise or buying a new product, your old brain is the one that helps you make decisions.

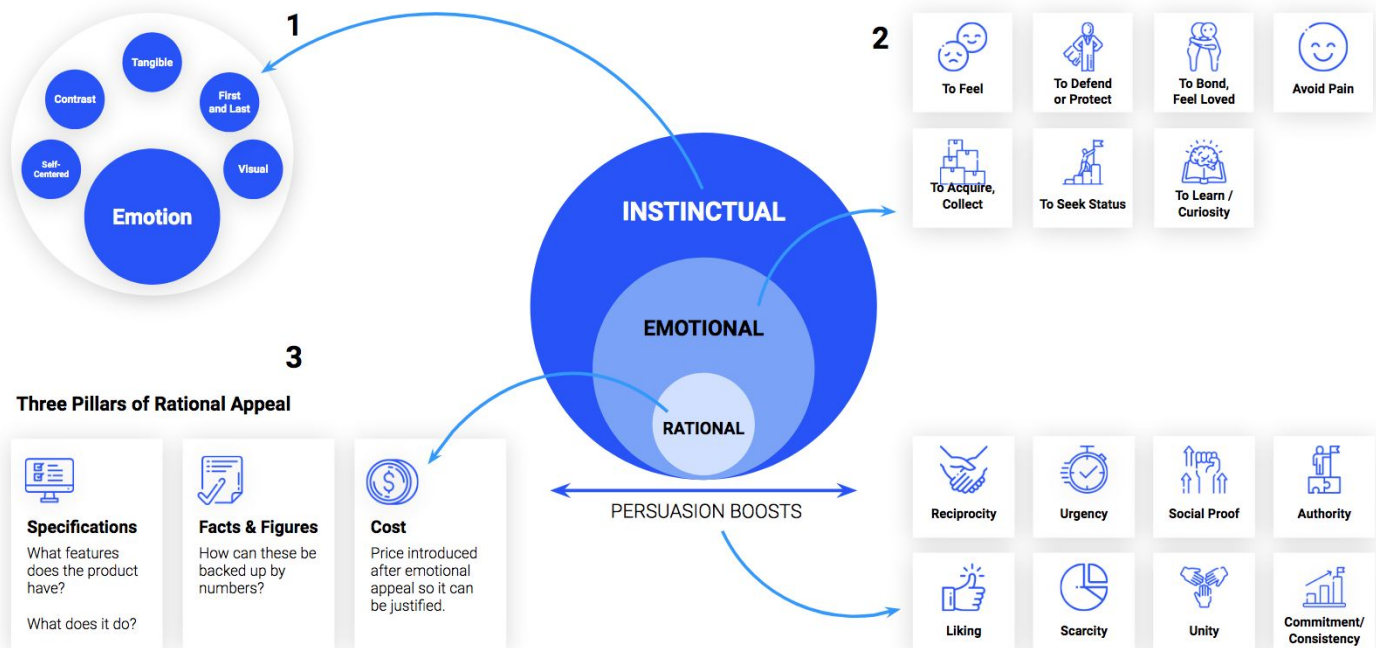
When you compare the old brain with the new brain, you see that not only do they have different roles, but they also act differently.

The new brain is smart but slow. It takes into account the past while also evaluating potential futures. We can control it, but it takes effort.

The old brain, on the other hand, may not be as clever in the traditional sense, but it makes up for it with its speed. The old brain is why a boxer doesn't have to carefully analyze and evaluate every move his opponent makes before he acts. It's the reason you don't need to work out the speed and trajectory of a ball before you catch it. It's subconscious, always working in the background and making instant decisions based on our senses.

As you can see, the old brain is essential to our survival, making it the strongest part of our thought process. When we recognize the old brain as the part that makes decisions, we can use that knowledge to amplify our message.

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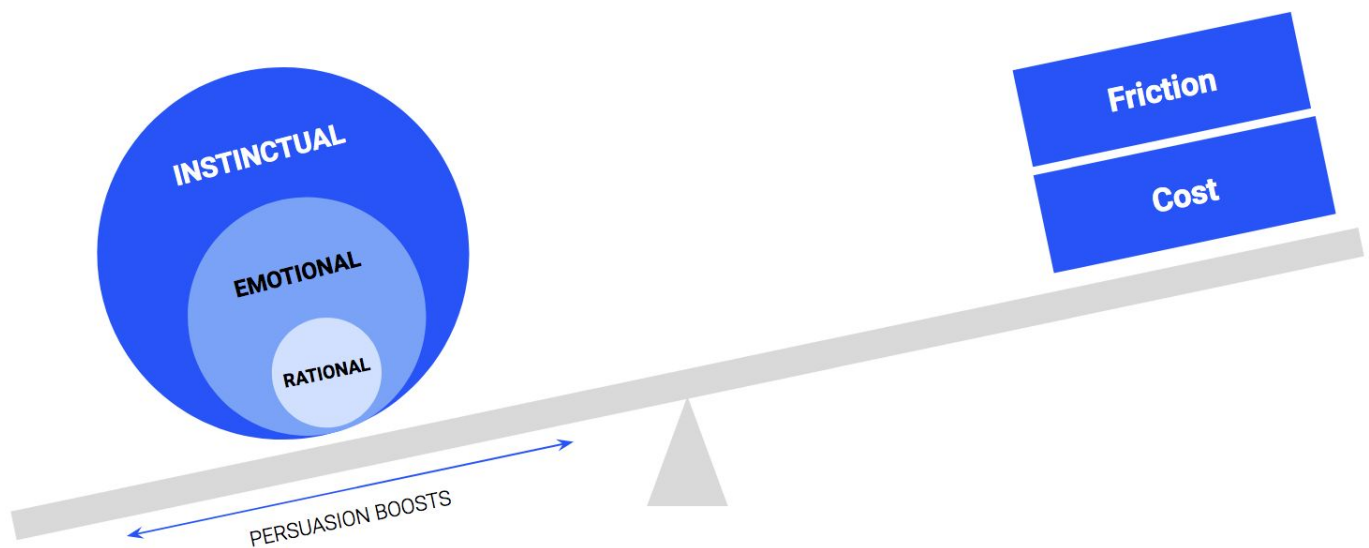


Chapter 2:

The Product Faculty Decision Scale Framework

Taking into account the brain's setup, we can now understand more about how decisions are made.

PRODUCT FACULTY'S DECISION SCALE FRAMEWORK



On one end, we have the reasons for purchasing, correlating to the three parts of the brain.

On the other, we have the obstacles to purchasing: friction and cost.

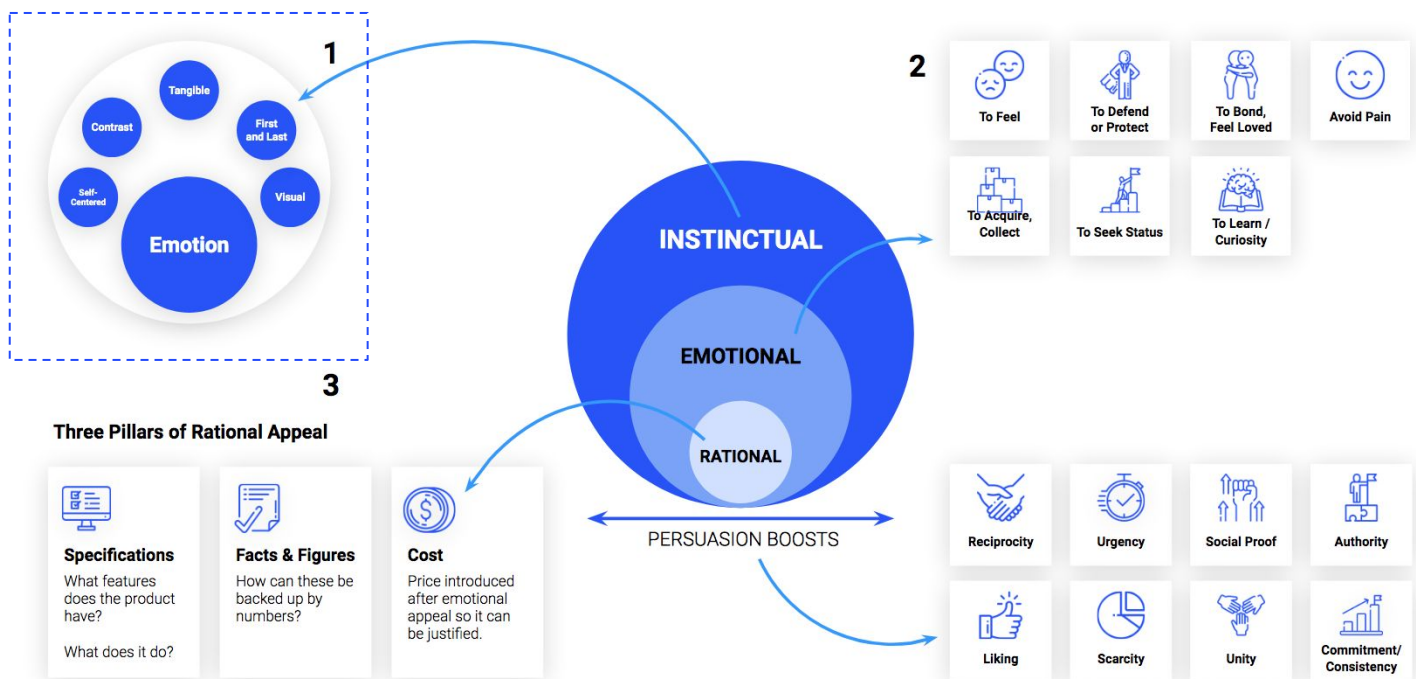
Then, we have persuasion boosters that affect how persuasive the reasoning is.

By understanding these factors and how they work together, we can tip the balance in our favor.



Instinctual

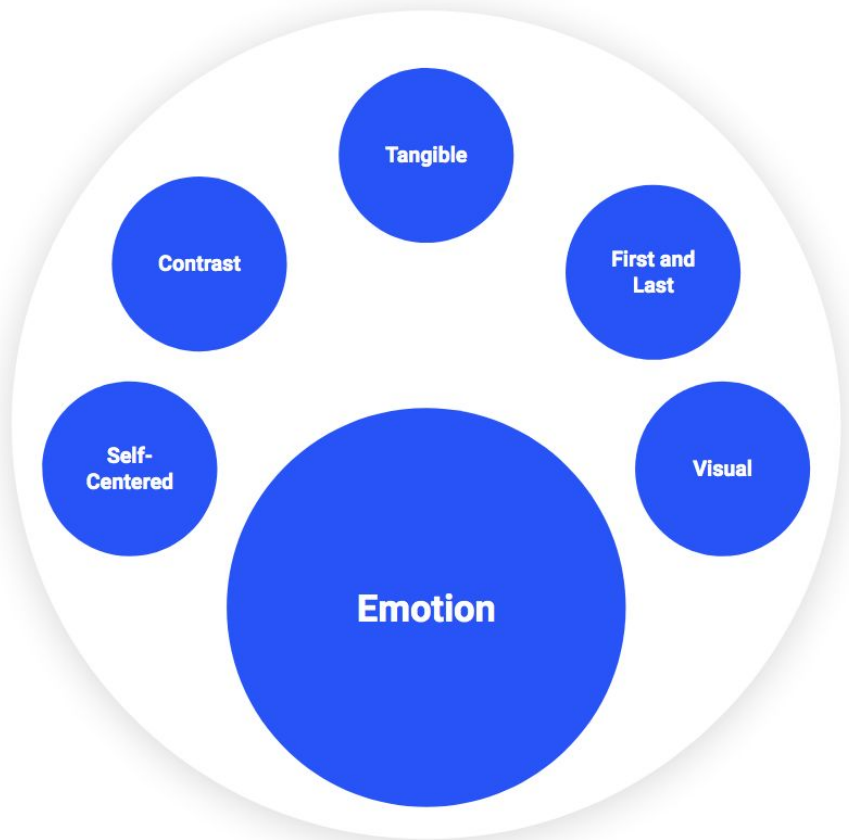
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The old brain is responsible for our instinctive decision-making. It's number one job is to keep you alive—that's all it cares about. It's the biggest circle in our decision scale, as it's the most important one when it comes to user psychology.

6 TRIGGERS AMPLIFY MESSAGES TO OUR OLD BRAIN

Old Brain
Instinctual =
Survival





If you want to reach it, there are six triggers the old brain looks out for that we can use, particularly in our product marketing:

Self-centered.

As far as the old brain's concerned, it's looking out for number one; it's all about you. Your old brain will ignore any messages that it sees as irrelevant. If, however, that message is relevant to you, it'll make sure you know about it. It's why your head turns when you hear your name mentioned, even if rationally you know it's not directed at you. It's also why smart marketers and advertisers will use the word 'you' more in their campaigns, and Coca-Cola decided to put people's names on their cans.

Contrast.

Have you ever wondered why so many weight loss adverts use before and after photos? Trying to evaluate results on their own can be tricky, but when the brain has something to compare, it's great at playing spot the difference. Rather than simply demonstrating how amazing your product is, showing how it differs from the alternatives makes its value much easier to see.

Tangible.

The brain is much happier when it has concrete examples it can grasp, rather than abstract ideas. For example, the next time you watch a charity appeal, notice how they focus on one specific person. They tell you their name, the exact struggles they face, and how they would personally benefit from the charity's work. It's difficult to grasp how thousands of nameless people may be in trouble, but having a specific person as an example is much more tangible. When it comes to products, rather than saying your broadband service offers download speeds of 132mbps, it's more effective to show a family using multiple devices to stream 4k videos and play games, demonstrating a much more tangible benefit.



First and last.

George Lucas once said the secret to a good movie is a “hot opening, a hot close and... just don’t screw up the middle.” Psychology confirms that’s true for everything, not just Star Wars. When given a long list of items to remember, people are more likely to remember the first item (the primacy effect) and the last item (the recency effect). As a result, when thinking about your marketing, make sure your most important messages are first and last.

Visual.

Closely linked to our brain’s preference for the tangible, it also likes what it can see. Apple adverts are a great example of this. As a high-tech product, it would seem sensible to focus on the technical details. What speed is the processor? How much memory does it have? Rather than getting caught up in all the specs though, Apple pours everything into creating a visually stunning video, usually showcasing one simple feature. Show, don’t tell.

Emotions.

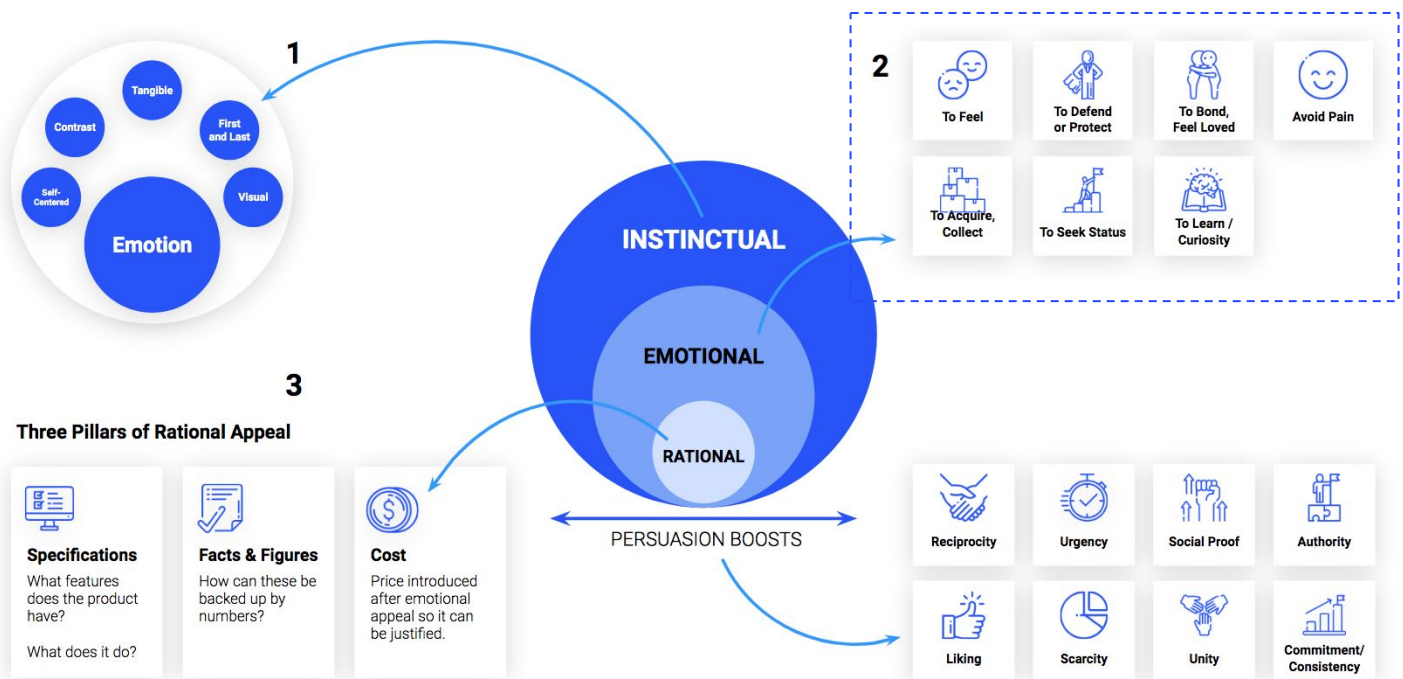
While we’ll focus more on how the middle brain handles emotions shortly, you should keep in mind that the old instinctual brain is also triggered by emotions. When you look at the most popular shows on TV, the most popular posts on social media, or the most memorable advertising, they *always* have an emotional angle.

As we’ll go on to see, our emotions motivate us far more than we realize.



Emotional

PRODUCT FACULTY'S DECISION SCALE FRAMEWORK



When we look at the middle brain, we see it's driven by emotions and feelings. We're drawn to anything that causes positive emotions and avoid anything that makes us feel negative. Importantly, this part of the brain is more powerful at eliciting a response than the new, logical part. As such, people will often make decisions—such as whether to purchase a product or not—based on emotion. By showcasing the positive emotions associated with your product, it will be more appealing.



Trying to work out what emotions your product will trigger might seem overwhelming at first. Fortunately, there are only a limited set of emotions we need to consider as product managers. In fact, we can summarize them under just seven key desires:

EMOTIONAL DESIRES



To Feel



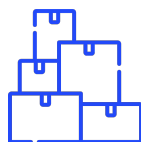
**To Defend
or Protect**



**To Bond,
Feel Loved**



**Avoid
Pain**



**To Acquire,
Collect**



**To Seek
Status**



**To Learn/
Curiosity**



To Feel.

We want to feel something. Anything. Maybe your product makes users feel happy, excited, or proud. Interestingly, we may even hunt out 'negative' emotions such as sadness or fear, hence the popularity of 'tear-jerker' and horror movies. You can use this by showing the negative feeling associated with alternatives, such as when a data backup company highlights the fear of a corrupted hard drive or the sadness of lost memories.



To Defend or Protect.

People develop their own values and beliefs, which become incredibly important to them. When our product reflects those values, this causes a strong emotional response in the user. For example, Patagonia sells outdoor clothing and gear. However, they've become synonymous with environmental activism, as highlighted throughout their website and marketing, which makes them especially appealing to those with similar values.



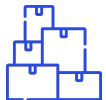
To Bond, Feel Loved.

People are pack animals, and all of us want to feel like we belong. Whether it's within our family, friends, a book club, or a group of football supporters, we seek out the tribes of people we share something in common with. Those tribes may be based on our strongly held values (see above), or the products we choose; people will happily queue for hours to get their hands on the latest iPhone, or fiercely argue the merits of Canon vs. Nikon cameras. Why? Because of how it contributes to their perceived identity and the community that shares that identity.



To Avoid Pain.

Our brain acts quickly to avoid pain, making us take our hand off a hot stove before we're aware of it. Even when it comes to choosing a product, we're still looking for ways to reduce pain. That might be how the product solves a pain-point, such as accountancy software that takes away the 'pain' of paperwork by doing the work for us. Where the product itself doesn't help prevent pain, risk-free guarantees and positive reviews help reassure potential customers that they won't have a painful reason to regret the purchase.



To Acquire, Collect.

One of the main drivers in human behavior is to collect and acquire. Obvious examples include seeking items of value, such as acquiring money, a flashy car, a nice house and so on. However, we will also collect items for their own sake; people spend vast amounts of time and money building collections of stamps, coins, trading cards and more.



To Seek Status.

Why do people dream of driving Lamborghinis, when they can pick up a Ford for a fraction of the price? It's certainly not about getting from A to B as efficiently as possible. Instead, it's about what the car represents: status. From the latest tech to luxury items, when a product acts as a status signal, its value soars.



To Learn, Curiosity.

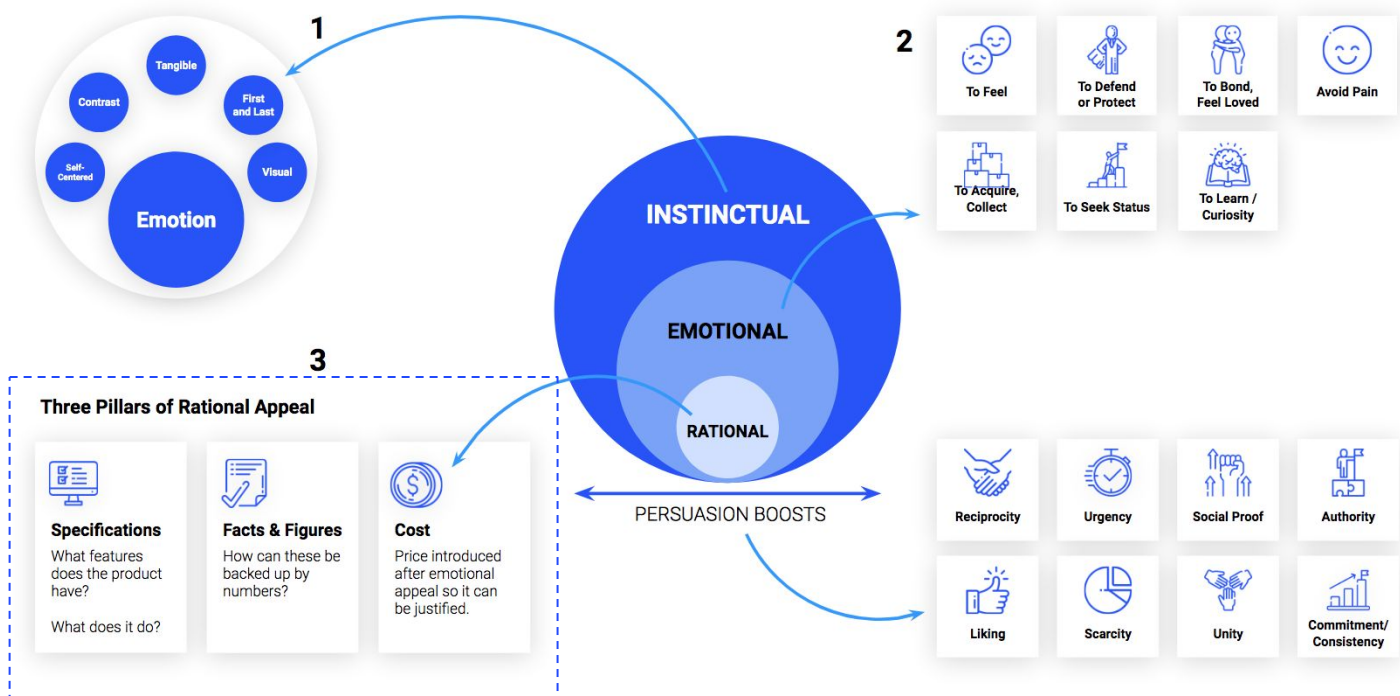
From wondering about life's big mysteries to catching up on the latest celebrity gossip, people are inherently curious. Storytellers use this in your favorite TV shows, finishing on a cliffhanger so you absolutely have to see the next episode to find out what happens next. Products that either evoke curiosity or answer prospective customers' biggest questions will always be popular.

It's likely your product already aligns with several of these emotional desires. By making it clear how your product helps satisfy the emotional needs of the middle brain, you give your prospective customers a strong reason to purchase.



Rational

PRODUCT FACULTY'S DECISION SCALE FRAMEWORK



Finally, we get to the new brain and its desire for logic. Despite our strong belief that we're all logical, rational people who make decisions based on facts, we've now seen how we're largely driven by our instincts and emotions.

However, that doesn't mean there's no place for logic, even if emotion has greater weight. In product management, logic serves the important purpose of justifying our emotional-based decisions.



Think back to your last significant purchase. It's likely that you first looked up some reviews, to see what other people thought. If it was a tech item, you probably checked out the specs.

In reality, you'd already made your decision before you'd read a single review or spec list. You just needed to justify that decision to yourself (and possibly your significant other). You fall in love with the product, then you find the evidence to support that. Thanks to our inherent confirmation bias, we focus on the information that backs up our decisions, while ignoring anything that doesn't.

When it comes to rational appeal, there are three pillars you need in place:

THREE PILLARS OF RATIONAL APPEAL



Specifications

What features does the product have?

What does it do?



Facts & Figures

How can these be backed up by numbers?



Cost

Price introduced after emotional appeal so it can be justified.



Specifications.

What features does the product have? Whether it's the top speed of a car or the resolution of your phone camera, these are the indisputable details of your product. This also includes what your product actually does and what makes it unique. For a software product, this would include its main features and uses. PayPal allows you to send/receive money over the internet, Photoshop allows you to edit photos, and so on.



Facts and Figures.

What numbers can you use to back up your claims? Amazon includes stars rating prominently next to every product, so you can see at a glance the average rating as well as how many people have rated it. They know that if we can see lots of other people have enjoyed a product, we'll be more likely to purchase it too.



Cost.

Sooner or later, we need to know the cost. However, for more expensive items, the price should be introduced after there's been enough opportunity to appeal to the emotional triggers. For example, Apple's website is currently promoting its new SE model. As it's being promoted as an option for lower budgets, the price is in the headline. However, when they promote AirPods or the iPad Pro, you have to click through to see the cost.

Rational justification is a key part of the purchasing process, but you need to exercise caution. It takes significantly more brainpower to read and assess a list of specs than it does to process emotions, so don't overdo it. Keep it to three or four facts at the most, otherwise, you risk the brain skipping the logical side completely.

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Chapter 3:

Obstacles to purchasing

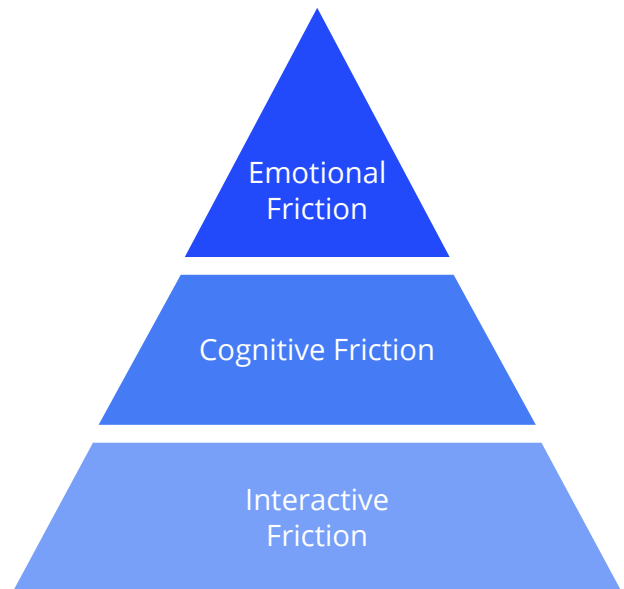
So far we've focused on the brain and how different parts of it drive purchasing decisions. Let's now take a look at the other side of the decision scale framework and consider the two main obstacles: **cost and friction**.

COST & FRICTION

Cost



Friction



Cost

How much does your product cost? What is the dollar value? As you'd expect, a lower cost means a lower obstacle. That's why you typically don't have to read hundreds of reviews before buying a \$0.99 ebook.

On the other hand, if the cost is too high for a person, it won't matter how many five star reviews there are or what emotions it triggers. If they can't afford it, they can't buy it.

Friction

As product managers, we should ensure that our products are easy to use with minimal resistance. There are three types of friction a user might encounter:

- **Interactive friction.** This covers the UI of your product. Is it straightforward to use? Or do users have to go through long complicated processes to do the simplest tasks? Amazon added the '1-click' checkout option, reducing the friction of purchasing. The Google Maps UI makes it easy to reverse your route with a single tap. Wherever you can, make life easier for your users.
 - **Cognitive friction.** How much does your user need to think? By reducing the amount of brainpower needed to use your product, you reduce friction. For example, Shyp takes care of the mundane time-consuming tasks involved in drop-shipping. This makes life easier for their users, reducing their overall cognitive load.
 - **Emotional friction.** We've talked about how emotions can be a powerful driver, but sometimes they can be a source of friction. Tinder revolutionized online dating by reducing the emotional friction involved. Rather than having to pour their hearts out in a message to a stranger, only to be ignored or rejected, now people just had to swipe right.
-

Addressing each of these potential sources of friction, while ensuring your product is appropriately priced, helps keep obstacles to a minimum.

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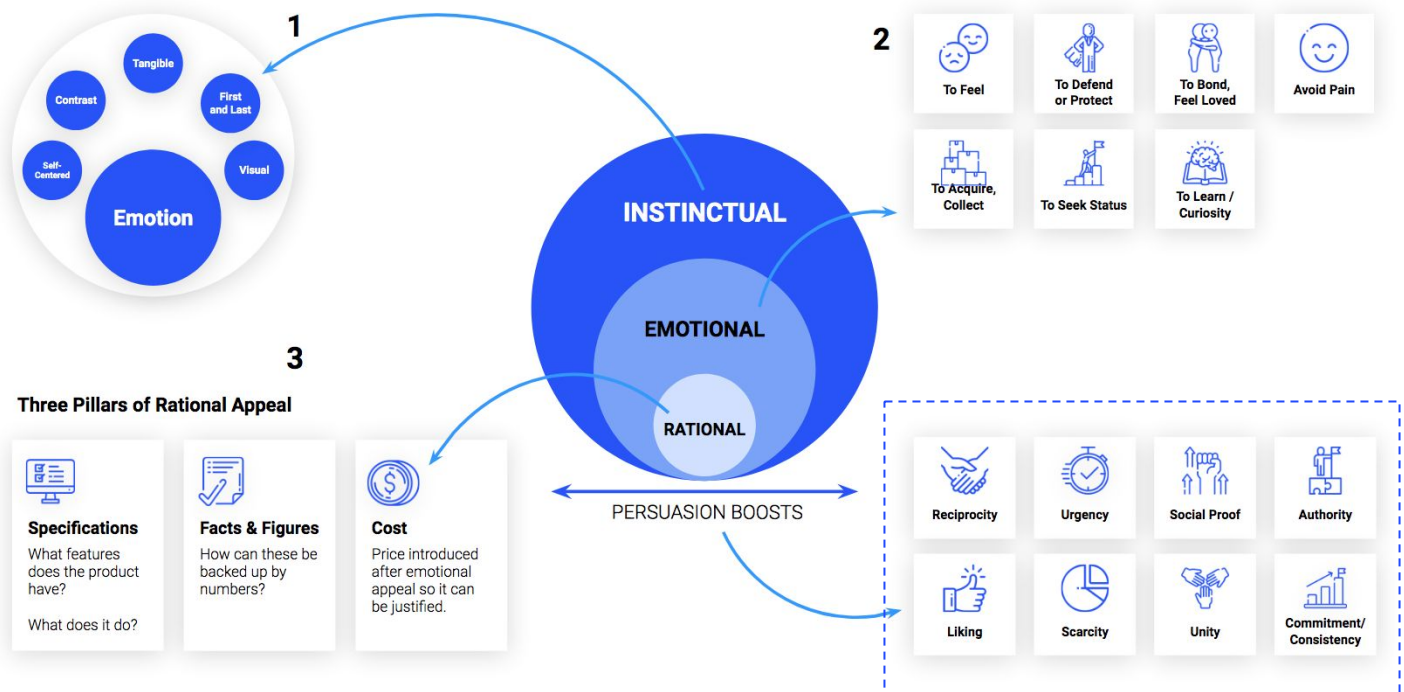
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Finally, we have the tactics that can be used to persuade people, tipping the decision scale further in your favor. However, these should only be used after you've already put the instinctual, emotional and rational drivers in place.

PERSUASION BOOSTS



Reciprocity



Urgency



Social Proof



Authority



Liking



Scarcity



Unity



**Commitment/
Consistency**

Based on Cialdini's [principles of persuasion](#), these boosts are:



Reciprocity.

When we receive something, we're more likely to return the favor. If you've ever received a free calendar from a charity or enjoyed free high-value content from a website, you've seen reciprocity in action.



Urgency.

This persuasion booster is only available for the next six minutes... We're great at putting decisions off. Without any sense of urgency, prospective customers may put off making a purchase indefinitely.



Social proof.

When making a decision, we want to see that others have made the same choice. By using existing customer testimonials and/or logos where possible, you offer proof that your product is a safe bet.



Authority.

Several studies have shown that seeing just the appearance of authority (such as wearing a suit / lab coat) makes people more likely to follow instructions. The more relevant the authority, the better. For example, toothpaste manufacturers will mention how their product has been recommended by dentists.



Liking.

We are more likely to buy from people we like. Cialdini identified that we often like people who are similar to us, people who pay us compliments, and people who work with us toward mutual goals. Where possible, put a human face to your product that prospective customers can identify with.



Scarcity.

The rule of supply and demand means that if a resource (or product) is in short supply, there'll be increased demand. If there's a limited supply of your product, make it clear ("Only four left in stock!") to motivate your customers to take prompt action.



Unity.

Remember, one of the key emotional triggers is to bond. By giving people an opportunity to come together and be united in a common purpose, you can tap into this persuasion booster.



Consistency/commitment.

We like to be consistent with the decisions we make and the values we hold. For example, if your first smartphone was an Android, and you had to explain to all your Apple-owning friends why you chose that, you're more likely to carry on using Android phones in the future. This means that if your customers make even a small commitment, they'll likely stay consistent to that with even bigger commitments.

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User psychology is a fascinating subject, with huge implications for how we create and market our products. The decision scale framework lays out how we can do this: By appealing to the three brains, reducing cost and friction-based obstacles, and smart use of persuasion booster, we can tip the balance in our favor.

Remember though, user psychology is only the tip of the iceberg. Always have a solid foundation in place, by creating great products that solve real problems. With that in place, combined with effective psychological principles, there will always be a market for your product.

If you are interested in learning more, check out [Product Faculty's Advanced Product Management program](#) (APM™) where we go deeper into these principles and practice them so you can ethically get your message across to your users, increase adoption and grow your product faster.

About the Author



Moe Ali

Founder & CEO, Product Faculty

Moharyar (Moe) is the Founder and CEO of Product Faculty, North America's most Advanced Product Management Training institute. Over the last 8 years, Moe has trained and mentored 1,000+ PM's at the world's best companies including Google, Facebook, Amazon and Shopify to name a few.

As a Product Leader, Moe has consulted both B2B and B2C companies including Apple, IBM, Loblaw Digital, McKinsey & Company, among others.

Prior to this, Moe worked at Loblaw Digital, Canada's largest grocery retailer, where he launched and grew sales of the Online Grocery product from \$40M to \$160M (300% growth).

To receive daily product insights, follow Moe at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/productfaculty>.

About Product Faculty



[Product Faculty's Advanced Product Management Masterclass](#) is a top-ranked, 7-week career accelerator designed for experienced Product Managers. This LIVE Online class ensures that each student gets 1:1 support to master key concepts so that they can apply the learnings in their product roles.

Depth is our differentiator. We pride ourselves in going beneath the surface to offer you advanced insights and methodologies. Whether it's product leadership or data science and user psychology, you'll leave with skills you'll feel confident using.

The moment you sign up with Product Faculty, you'll be part of a community of like-minded product professionals. Each Masterclass is hand-picked to ensure that discussions are rich and curated and that you're surrounded by people who care about product as much as you.