Special Session Summary  the Role of Unconscious Processes in Consumer Choice and Decision Making

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Special Session Summary
The Role of Unconscious Processes in Consumer Choice and Decision Making
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Session Overview
Despite the growing evidence of unconscious influences in social cognition research, this new stream of research has only recently been applied in consumer contexts. This session intended to provide an integrative view of the current work in this area and to serve as a catalyst to spark collaborative research among people in consumer behavior and psychology.

The session had two major objectives. The first was to uncover the role of unconscious processes in consumer behavior by investigating the behavioral effects of unconscious processes, assessing the cognitive mechanisms that underlie the unconscious influences, and identifying boundary conditions for the effects. The three papers in this session combined diverse theoretical approaches in an effort to achieve this objective. The second objective was to encourage research on this issue. This session had been developed to appeal to a variety of perspectives and research approaches by examining the issue from different angles. Two of the papers employed conscious priming methods and experiments, while one used subliminal priming and experimental games. Moreover, each paper used different styles of primes such as goals, stereotypes, and traits, and incorporated several moderating factors such as the types of choices (choice for the self vs. for others) and dispositional factors (social value orientation and consistency).

Theoretically, the proposed session should advance the research on consumer choice and decision making by shedding light on the important and substantial role played by unconscious processes in consumer contexts. Moreover, three papers, each of which was collaborated by consumer researchers and psychologists, should benefit to broaden our perspective on unconscious processes in consumer contexts. Furthermore, by incorporating different types of priming and experimental methods, it should make a significant methodological contribution to consumer research on behavior.

“Effects of Nonconscious Goal Priming on Consumer Choice Behavior”
Baba Shiv, University of Iowa
Joel Haber, Duke University
Tanya Chartrand, Ohio State University

What sets goal pursuit into motion? Perhaps the most intuitively appealing and compelling answer is that we do. Reflecting this, most models of self-regulation posit continuous, conscious choice and guidance as a central feature, if not the core foundation, of goal pursuit. However, goal pursuit does not always involve deliberate direction of goal-driven behavior. Sometimes goal pursuit occurs outside of one’s awareness, intent, and even control. In the current research, we explore whether consumers can have goals related to purchasing behavior that are nonconsciously activated, and automatically guide subsequent consumer cognition and behavior. Our results suggest the answer is a clear yes.

“About Prisoner’s and Dictators: The Role of Subliminally Presented Stereotype Primes and Social Value Orientation in Shaping Cooperative Behavior”
Dirk Smeesters, Tilburg University
Luk Warlop, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Vincent Yzerbyt, Université Catholique de Louvain
Olivier Corneille, Université Catholique de Louvain
Eddy Van Avermaet, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

The present research examines the effects of situation (stereotype primes) and person factors (social value orientation and consistency) on cooperative behavior in various experimental games. Results indicated that the main and joint influences of these situation and person factors on cooperative choices depend on the nature of the game (prisoner’s dilemma vs. dictator game). Social value orientation, consistency, and primes only affect cooperative behavior in a dictator game, while these factors also lead to rumination about partner’s personality (and therefore to different cooperative choices) in a prisoner’s dilemma game. Differences between these games were explained in terms of other- and self-focus.

“Effects of Priming on Product Choices for the Self versus for Others”
Jongwon Park, Korea University
Kyeongheui Kim, University of Minnesota
Junsik Kwak, Korea University
Irene Blair, University of Colorado at Boulder

It is well documented that priming can have a substantial effect not only on perceptions of other persons, but also on one’s own behavior. For the most part these two effects have been considered separately. The goal of our present research is to investigate priming effects on both social perception and self behavior in a single experiment using a consumer choice paradigm. Participants in Study 1 were administered an initial task in which either concepts associated with “wasteful” was unobtrusively primed or not. Then, in an ostensibly unrelated study, they read information about two automobiles (“luxury” model and “basic” model) with an objective of making a choice between the two either for themselves or for someone else unknown (choice objective: self/others). The results confirmed that priming can have different effects on choices made for the self versus for others. Finally, Study 2 is to provide insights into the underlying processes that mediate the findings in Study 1.