The Role of Mindfulness in Consumer Behavior

Frederic Brunel, Boston University
Weimin Dong, Boston University

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Abstract
This research calls for consumer researchers’ attention to the potential role of mindfulness, as either a psychological trait or state. In this presentation, we provide (1) a general review and description of the mindfulness construct, (2) a discussion of how mindfulness can be used in consumer research (e.g., information processing, decision making, consumer welfare), (3) results from an advertising persuasion study where mindfulness is shown to moderate persuasion routes, and (4) an overall discussion of our on-going research program as well as further research areas for this construct.

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Explaining the Negative Spillover Effect in Target Marketing: Automatic Social Comparisons
that Threaten Collective Self-Esteem
Claudiu V. Dimofte, Georgetown University
Ronald C. Goodstein, Georgetown University

The present research proposes that previously inconsistent findings on the NSE in consumer behavior work can be explained by accounting for the unconscious impact of activated negative stereotypes among non-targeted consumers. More importantly, it appears that (for those consumers highly identified with a particular group membership) this activation occurs even when prompted by cues that are largely irrelevant to the particular stereotype in question. While this finding is troubling, a particular way to mitigate the risk of NSE by advertisers refers to their use of specific regulatory focus manipulations, such as execution variables that put consumers in a state of promotion (strategic eagerness).

Effective Counter Persuasion: Creating Lasting Resistance to a Stronger Opponent
Petia K. Petrova, Arizona State University
Robert B. Cialdini, Arizona State University
Daniel W. Barrett, Western Connecticut State University
Noah Goldstein, Arizona State University
Jon Maner, Florida State University

Two studies investigated a counterpersuasive strategy that can be effective for a communicator facing a rival who can deliver his or her message many more times than the communicator. This strategy incorporated: 1) strong counterarguments against the claims of the target message and 2) a mnemonic link between the target message and these counterarguments. Results demonstrated that the combination of counterarguments and mnemonic links not only produced greater resistance to the target ad than a counterad that lacked mnemonic links, but it also undermined the target ad more strongly as the number of exposures to the target ad increased.

The Role of Mindfulness in Consumer Behavior
Weiming Dong, Boston University
Frédéric F. Brunel, Boston University

Since its initial publication by Langer and her colleagues (Langer 1977; Langer, Blank and Chanowitz 1978), the psychological construct of mindfulness has gained increased influence in the field of social psychology (e.g., Martin 1997; Brown and Ryan 2003). In this research, we provide (1) a general review and description of the mindfulness construct, (2) a discussion of how mindfulness can be used in consumer research, (3) results from an advertising persuasion study where mindfulness is shown to moderate persuasion routes, and (4) an overall discussion of our on-going research program as well as further research areas for this construct.

Mindfulness refers to “a state of conscious awareness characterized by active distinction drawing that leaves the individual open to novelty and sensitive to both context and perspective” (Langer 1992). There are four main features to mindfulness: greater sensitivity to one’s context or environment, more openness to new information, greater aptitude at cognitive categorization, and enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving (Langer 1989). As such, mindfulness is distinct from other important psychological constructs which tend to solely apply to issues that are central or salient to an individual. In contrast, mindfulness speaks more about one’s general aptitude to notice and deal with what is new. Studies between mindfulness and other cognition, personality and social psychology constructs have shown that mindfulness should be seen more as a cognitive style than just a specific cognitive ability or a personality trait (Sternberg, 2000), and therefore it should seen as existing at the boundary of personality and cognition, and can used both as a state or trait variable.

This very brief description should be enough to outline the potential relevance of the mindfulness construct in a vast array of consumer behavior issues, such as consumer decision making, marketing communication, persuasion, and so on. However, a review of articles published in the leading consumer research journals reveals that this construct has been largely overlooked by consumer research scholars.
This lacuna is unfortunate as we believe that mindfulness can provide valuable insights into the study of consumption. First, when used as an individual difference measure (trait variable), mindfulness can be a valuable tool to segment consumers into groups, and can be used in theory testing and development. Second, when used as a state variable, it can provide insights on how contexts, marketing interventions, education and message elements might influence one’s level of mindfulness and therefore consumption behavior. Third, we believe that mindfulness can provide new insights into consumer cognition, judgment and decision making, and especially help us better understand issues such as heuristic processing, selective perception, routine behavior etc. Fourth, because it has been shown that mindfulness can be increased through training or other interventions, it seems that there is a direct consumer welfare implication as well, as increased mindfulness should help consumers make better decisions and achieve improved wellbeing.

To illustrate the potential role of mindfulness, we present a study on how mindfulness might affect persuasion efforts. In particular, we are interested in the role of mindfulness in the well established dual process models of attitude formation and change (e.g., Elaboration Likelihood Model, Petty and Caccioppo 1986; Heuristic-Systematic Model, Chaiken 1987). In this context, we also wish to contrast mindfulness with need for cognition (NFC), as NFC has also been shown to moderate the routes to persuasion, and on the surface, the two construct might appear quite related. However, we also believe that there are fundamental differences between the two. For instance, mindfulness is characterized by high level of conscious awareness, sensitivity to context change, openness to new information, ability to create new categories in cognition, and awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving (characteristics not necessarily shared by high NFC individuals). In persuasion contexts, where both motivation (e.g., NFC, mindfulness) and ability (e.g., expertise) to process a claim have been shown to determine persuasion routes and outcomes, we propose that NFC and mindfulness operate differently. Figure 1 shows how the two processes can differ. One key difference is that we believe that high mindful individual will attempt to process a claim, even if the information is outside of their typical expertise.

More specifically, we hypothesize:

**H1:** Low mindful consumers and low NFC consumers both tend to employ peripheral/heuristics routes in processing persuasive messages (regardless of expertise).

**H2:** Experts who are high in mindfulness or and high in NFC will tend to employ central/systematic routes in processing persuasive messages.

**H3:** Novices high in NFC will tend to employ peripheral/heuristics routes in processing persuasive messages, whereas novices high in mindfulness will tend to employ central/systemic routes in processing persuasive messages.

A 2 (NFC/Mindfulness: high vs. low) X 2 (Argument Quality: strong vs. weak) X 2 (Expertise: high vs. low) experiment was designed. 228 undergraduates participated in this study. Participants were shown a series of print ads, in which a target ad for a digital camera (adapted from previous advertising studies) had been imbedded. We varied the product messages (strong/weak arguments, a between-subject manipulation) in the target ad, and took individual difference measures of mindfulness, NFC, and expertise (within-subject measures). Groups (based on median splits) were created for each of the individual difference measures.

Even though our results confirmed that mindfulness and NFC are significantly correlated (r=0.49, p<.001), these results also establish that these two constructs are distinct (only 25% common variance). Further, we were able to confirm that the two constructs do not serve

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**FIGURE 1**
The Contrasting Roles of Need-For-Cognition and Mindfulness in Persuasion
the same function in persuasion. Analyses of variance for product evaluation (attitude toward the product) and cognitive responses confirmed our theoretical predictions and allowed us to support hypotheses H1, H2 and H3.

In conclusion, we were able to show in this study that individual differences in NFC and mindfulness lead to significant differences in how consumers respond to persuasive messages. Especially, it is important to note that the introduction of the Mindfulness construct expands our understanding of the routes that lead to persuasion, and outlines routes that were previously deemed unlikely (central processing of a message under low expertise). Futurer research, however, should investigate further the nature of the processing styles that high mindful novice engage in (e.g., item specific, relational etc.). Also, it would also be important to consider the role of mindfulness in situations where consumers are repeatedly exposed to a message. In these situations, do high mindful consumers notice small change in information more than other consumers do, and are they more likely to update (keep constructing) their attitudes over time (as opposed to retrieving already formed attitudes)? Thus, the next step in our on-going program of research targets longitudinal studies designed to explore how consumers (characterized by mindfulness and NFC respectively) respond differently to multi-exposed messages. These questions can be investigated by exposing respondents to multiple instances of a similar message, with a slight alteration to the message content at a later exposure (for example a change in price), and then showing that this later change gets incorporated in the judgments of the high mindful respondents, but not for high NFC respondents. Also, we believe that this line of research has potential in providing some insights on the constructive vs. retrieval-based perspectives on attitude formation.

References

Identifying the Black Sheep From the Ordinary: Social Categorization and Within Group Deviation in Print Advertisements
Tracy R. Harmon, University of South Florida

From a social influence perspective, Grier and Deshpande (2001) suggest that academics and practitioners seek to better understand how social context and individual characteristics influence consumer response to marketing communications. By addressing the perceived likeability of spokespersons presented in marketing communications, the factors of social identity will emerge allowing for a better understanding of how social identity strongly impacts consumer receipt of marketing communications. The biggest implication for this research is that marketers will be able to construct their strategy in a manner that not only has homogenous appeal for targeted groups but it appeals to the overall heterogeneous market. The lack of empirical data that addresses the deviant norms expressed by a spokesperson of the ingroup, and how it impacts the recipient’s evaluation is the motivation for our research question: What happens when consumers reject an ad because the spokesperson undermines the ingroup norms? It is suspected that the consumer will garner an unfavorable attitude of the advertisement and the spokesperson based on the salient ingroup norms, and ingroup derogation for the unlikely target will occur.

Social identity theory (SIT) offers a social-psychological perspective of group formations and inter/intragroup relationships. According to SIT, individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various categories, such as religious affiliation, gender, ethnicity, and organizational affiliations. Social identity theory attributes the general form of intergroup behavior such as ethnocentrism, stereotypic intergroup attitudes, and intergroup differentiation to social categorization and self-esteem processes. Where the categories are defined by the prototypical characteristics derived from the group members (Turner 1985). Social categorization serves two functions 1) it cognitively segments and orders the social environment, allowing individuals to defines others around them, and 2) it enables the individual to define himself within the social environment. When members of a particular group differentiate ingroup members from the outgroup, and simultaneously differentiate between specific likable and unlikable ingroup members, the “black sheep effect” occurs. Ingroup members who conform to the ingroup prototype or consistently maintain group norms validate their social identity, and therefore attract favorable reactions. However, in contrast members of the ingroup who do not conform to ingroup norms, exercise deviant (norm undermining) behavior. Participants. One hundred and twenty-three undergraduate students from a major Southeastern University participated as a part of a class requirement.