The Iat Is Not Enough: the Added Value of Projective Techniques in Consumer Research

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Since new response latency based indirect measures such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) were developed in the 90s, they have rapidly displaced projective techniques as most prominent measurement technique to assess implicit attitudes and motivations. However, in this working paper, we show that the IAT and projective techniques are not interchangeable, and that projective techniques predict behavior independently from the IAT. As a result, both techniques can best be used in combination with each other. The research topic of this study is impulsive buying behavior.

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association with a product, and only when this association is not in line with the product’s actual nutritional value. Consumers primarily associate chocolate with hedonic value and more with healthiness, reference information therefore changed these two perceptions of the two products.

In sum, this study suggests that the evaluability of nutrition table information can influence consumers’ perception of a food product so that it corresponds to a greater degree with the product’s nutritional value. An interesting suggestion for further research may be to study what kind of reference class induces this effect, thereby focusing on different food products.

References

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Introduction

Consumers do not only think and act rational. Also implicit or subconscious processes can influence their (consumer) behavior (e.g. Maison, Greenwald, and Banaji 2004). Consequently, in order to fully understand the consumer, both explicit and implicit attitudes have to be measured. Moreover, explicit attitudes can best be measured with direct measures and implicit attitudes with indirect measures (Greenwald and Banaji 1995).

One indirect measure that gets a fast growing support is the Implicit Association Test (IAT: Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998). Apart from some exceptions (e.g. Blanton et al. 2006), the extensively tested psychometric properties of the IAT have mostly been approved (for an overview: see Nosek, Greenwald, and Banaji 2007). Whereas the IAT is frequently applied in research about stereotyping and prejudices, the interest by consumer researchers is also growing (e.g. Friese, Wanke, and Plessner 2006; Maison et al. 2004).

Another class of indirect measures are projective techniques. These research techniques appeared for the first time in consumer research in the 50’s (Haire 1950). However, due to a lack of consensus on their psychometric qualities and subjective interpretation, these techniques disappeared virtually from attitude research. Yet, the interest in projective techniques seems to grow again (e.g. Boddy 2005; Vargas, von Hippel, and Petty 2004).

To conclude, two distinct indirect research techniques coexist, but, up to now, comparisons between both are very scarce (Sheldon et al. 2007). Hence, a clear need exists to compare the IAT with projective techniques. One important question that needs to be answered in this context is: “Are both techniques interchangeable, or do they measure distinct aspects of implicit attitudes?”

The relationship between the IAT and projective techniques

In the few studies in which the IAT was combined with a projective technique, the correlation between both is mostly non-significant or rather low. In the literature, we found correlations ranging from 0,11 (Vargas et al. 2004) to 0,28 (Meagher and Aidman 2002). Brunstein and Schmitt (2004) attribute this lack of correlation to method variance inherent to projective techniques, but Vargas et al. (2004) argue that low correlations can also indicate that projective techniques and the IAT assess different aspects of implicit attitudes. Next to Vargas et al. (2004) also Sheldon et al. (2007) showed that projective measures predict independently from the IAT a unique part of behavior. What is not clear yet is whether the IAT and projective techniques predict the same kind of behavior. According to McClelland et al. (1989), projective techniques outperform direct measures in the prediction of long term behavior and especially when behavior is triggered by activity incentives (e.g. long term job performance, …), rather than social incentives. McClelland (1980) classifies this type of behavior as operant behavior. The IAT from its side, seems to outperform direct measures, especially if behavior is triggered by social incentives (e.g. prejudices, stereotyping, …) (for an overview: Nosek et al. 2007). This kind of behavior can be classified as respondent behavior (McClelland 1980). Based on these findings, we hypothesized that projective techniques predict operant behavior whereas the IAT predicts respondent behavior.

Methodology

In order to operationalize this hypothesis, an exploratory study with 60 business students, was set up in which the personality dimension ‘extraversion’ was assessed by an IAT and a projective photoelicitation technique (selection of the most and least liked paintings out of a list 20 pre-tested paintings, followed by a semantic differential (based on the BFI: John, Donahue, and Kentle 1991)) measuring the extraversion of the paintings. The correlation between the liking of the painting and its extraversion rating can than be interpreted as a projective measure of the respondent’s extraversion (procedure: see Liggett 1959).

Operant and respondent behavior were measured by nine five point likert items about impulsive buying behavior (IBB). IBB was chosen because a clear link exists between extraversion and IBB (Verplanken and Herabadi 2001). Respondent items comprised a stimulus element while operant items did not. An exemplar respondent item is “After having seen a TV commercial about sweets, I regularly indulge
myself with some candy that I have in stock”. An exemplar operant item is “When I come home from shopping, I am regularly surprised from all the unnecessary things that I bought”. The items were factor analyzed and after deletion of three items, two factors could be maintained. The first factor clearly measured operant behavior and the second respondent behavior. The scores of each factor were summed which yielded into two reliable constructs (Operant: a=0.67; Respondent: a=0.75).

Results

As depicted in Figure 1, the results indicate that the projective measure indeed outperforms the IAT in predicting operant behavior. The projective, but not the IAT measure of extraversion correlated significantly with operant IBB ($r_{\text{IAT-operant}}=0.041; p>0.05$; $r_{\text{projective-operant}}=-0.387; p<0.01$).

Concerning respondent behavior, we could not find any difference between both implicit measures of extraversion. The IAT nor the projective measure correlated with respondent IBB ($r_{\text{IAT-respondent}}=0.192; p>0.05$; $r_{\text{projective-respondent}}=0.221; p>0.05$).

Discussion and follow up

In this first study, we found evidence that projective techniques and the IAT indeed predict different classes of behavior. However, it is not yet clear why they do so. A possible explanation could be that projective techniques are better in assessing personality traits than the IAT whereas (McClelland et al. 1989) the IAT will probably outperform projective techniques in the assessment of attitudes. (e.g. Nosek et al. 2007). This may also be a reason why in the current study, the IAT did not correlate with respondent IBB. Hence, to clarify the relation between implicit personality and attitudes, we will extend the current study in such a way that both, personality and attitudes are assessed separately by a projective technique and an IAT. We hypothesize firstly that personality assessed by a projective technique will outperform the IAT in predicting operant behavior. Next, we hypothesize that implicit attitudes measured by the IAT will outperform projective techniques in the assessment of respondent behavior.

References


