Doing a Good Thing Or Just Doing It: the Effects of Attitude Priming and Procedural Priming on Consumer Behavior

Hao Shen, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
Cai Fengyan, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
Robert Wyer, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Three experiments examined the relative impact of attitude-based and procedure-based processing on consumer behavior. Unobtrusively manipulating participants’ rate of speaking in one situation affected the speed with which they later completed a marketing survey. When participants’ attention was drawn to the time available for completing the questionnaire, the effect was only evident when participants had listed positive thoughts about the task in which their speaking speed was manipulated. When the time for completing the questionnaire was not mentioned, however, participants’ rate of speaking affected their time to complete the questionnaire regardless of other considerations.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14968/volumes/v37/NA-37

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Doing a Good Thing or Just Doing It: The Effects of Attitude Priming and Procedural Priming on Consumer Behavior

Hao Shen, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Fengyan Cai, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Robert S. Wyer, Jr., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Individuals form behavior-related concepts at different levels of generality. Thus, several different behaviors (walking slowly, eating slowly, etc.) may become associated with a more general concept (i.e., doing things slowly). Based on research on knowledge accessibility (Wyer 2008), it seems reasonable to suppose that performing a situation-specific behavior may activate a more general concept that it exemplifies. Furthermore, once this concept becomes accessible in memory, it may increase the likelihood that other exemplars of the concept are activated and employed under conditions in which they are applicable.

However, at least two quite different conceptualizations have implications for the above effect. One, Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1976) theory of reasoned action, assumes that behavioral decisions are based on a conscious evaluation of the behavior’s consequences or, alternatively, on the intrinsic pleasure that one expects to derive from performing it. The second conceptualization is based on Anderson’s (1982, 1983) formulation of procedural knowledge, which assumes that previously acquired concepts and knowledge, along with features of the immediate stimulus situation, can elicit a behavior spontaneously with a minimum of cognitive mediation. In previous research, these two conceptualizations have normally been examined independently and the conditions in which process is likely to predominate in any given situation are unclear. In this paper, we are interested in the conditions that determine the relative impact of attitude-based and procedure-based processing on consumer behavior.

In experiment 1, participants were asked to shadow a speech that was either conveyed at a fast or slow speed. After that, they were asked to finish an unrelated marketing survey. We found that participants finished more questions in the survey if they had been induced to speak fast than slowly in the previous situation.

The objective of experiment 2 was to identify attitude-based and procedure-based processing on consumer behavior. Participants were again asked to shadow a speech that was delivered at either given at a fast or slow speed and then were asked to complete the marketing survey administered in experiment 1. Before doing so, however, they were asked to write down either positive or negative thoughts they had about shadowing a speech at the speed to which they were exposed. Furthermore, some participants were forewarned that they might not be able to finish all the questions within the time allotted, thus inducing them to think about the speed of answering the survey items. But this procedure was omitted for other participants.

We assumed that writing down positive or negative thoughts about the speed of speaking during the shadowing task would have implications for the desirability of doing things quickly or slowly in general. Therefore, these thoughts would provide the basis for the strategy they decided to employ in completing the survey when they were likely to make a conscious decision about how quickly they should complete it. When participants’ attention was not called to their speed of completing the questionnaire, we expected that the speed of performing the first task would influence their speed of working on the marketing survey independently of their attitude toward working quickly or slowly. The results of experiment 2 supported these assumptions.

In experiment 2, participants were unaware of how quickly or slowly they completed the marketing survey unless it was called to their attention, and so their attitude toward this behavior had little effect. However, participants are typically conscious of which behavior they choose to perform and are more likely to use their attitude toward the behavior as a basis for their decision. In this case, increasing their cognitive load when making this decision should decrease the impact of attitude-based considerations, leading the effects of procedural knowledge to be evident.

Experiment 3 examined this possibility. Participants first completed a questionnaire in which they were asked to indicate whether or not they would participate in a number of activities. In one questionnaire form, the activities had socially desirable implications (e.g., supporting human rights, protecting the environment, etc.). In a second form, they had undesirable implications (harming the country, breaking the law, etc.). In responding to each question, however, some participants were asked to circle the option they favored (“join” vs. “not join”) whereas others were asked to circle the option they opposed.

Participants were expected to have a positive attitude toward participating in socially desirable activities and a negative attitude toward participating in undesirable ones, and these attitudes were expected to be reflected in their responses. That is, if the activities in the questionnaire were desirable, they were expected to choose the “join” option when they are asked which option they favored and to choose the “not join” option when they are asked which option they oppose. When the activities were undesirable, they were expected to choose the “not join” opinion in the first case and the “join” opinion in the second. Thus, participants’ responses to the opinion items (“join” or “not join”) were manipulated independently of the attitude conveyed by these responses.

Participants after completing this survey were asked to decide whether to participate in an unrelated promotion for a soft drink being offered by a foreign country. While making this decision, however, they were either asked to remember a 12-digit number or 2-digit number.

The effects of completing the opinion questionnaire on participants’ reactions to the promotion were expected to depend on their ability to think carefully about these reactions when making a decision. That is, priming a motor procedure of circling “join” or “not join” affected participants’ decision to join a marketing promotion. This influence depended on their attitude toward this procedure when they had sufficient cognitive resources to compute this attitude. When participants were put under cognitive load, however, they were more likely to join a promotion if they had repeatedly circled “join” rather than “not join” in the priming task, independently of their attitude toward this behavior.

To summarize, our research is the first to demonstrate that performing a behavior can activate both attitude-based and procedure-based processing strategies, and to identify conditions that influence the relative impact of these strategies on behavior.

REFERENCES