Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth: How Conflicting Nonconscious Goals Influence Consumer Choice

Ji-Hoon Jhang, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

The present study proposed and tested three competing hypotheses regarding the pursuit and resolution of conflicting nonconscious goals (i.e., inhibition, overriding, and competing). One study showed that conflicting nonconscious goals were activated and pursued together when conflicting goal cues were primed. Moreover, it was demonstrated that nonconsciously pursuing conflicting goals increased the tendency to defer choice.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15432/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/.
Consumers who had subscriptions to newspapers (i.e., including local or national newspapers such as USA Today) or to economic/political/academic periodicals (e.g., Fortune) were lower in consumer aliteracy than those who did not have these types of subscriptions (i.e., mean news=2.39, mean no news=3.10, p=.027, and mean periodical=2.53, mean no periodical=3.18, p=.015). Consumers who admitted to not holding any print subscriptions were more aliterate than those who did have some kind of print subscription (i.e., mean no print=3.49, mean print=2.71, p=.003).

Interestingly, consumers who held subscriptions to either magazines (e.g., Cosmopolitan or Sports Illustrated) or to hobby periodicals (e.g., Golf) did not significantly differ on consumer aliteracy (i.e., p=.181 and p=.236, respectively). Also, consumer aliteracy did not significantly correlate with number of books read in the past 30 days (i.e., r=.158, p=.10), nor did it significantly correlate with print or online newspaper readership (r=-.160, p=.09). This may be evidence that reading strictly for pleasure is not related to consumer aliteracy in the marketplace.

**Consumer Aliteracy Research Questions**

Additional research is necessary to understand the effects of consumer aliteracy on consumer behaviors. The current research will continue with two additional studies, focusing on the following research questions.

1. **Does consumer aliteracy bring about lower ad comprehension/ad liking?** Research on levels of processing effect (e.g., Craik & Lockhart, 1972), holds that there are several factors that affect processing depth. Because they lack the motivation to read, aliterate consumers may not engage in deeper processing levels. In turn, failure to use their processing abilities may cause aliterate consumers to poorly comprehend written materials (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999).

2. **Does ad complexity moderate the relationship between consumer aliteracy and ad comprehension/ad liking?** When message readability gets more complicated, individuals’ ability to assess message arguments tends to be reduced because their working memory capacity is reduced (Chebat et al., 2003). Thus, although both literate and aliterate consumers will display a drop in comprehension and subsequent ad liking as text difficulty increases, the drop should be more pronounced among highly aliterate consumers.

3. **Do visual aids in advertisements moderate the relationship between consumer aliteracy and ad comprehension/ad liking?** In information processing, aliterate individuals have been shown to rely more on pictorial information than on detailed written information (Kylene, 1996, 110-113). Thus, pictures used as a form of visual aid in product advertisements will benefit aliterate consumers more than such aids will help literate consumers.

**Conclusion**

The aliteracy social phenomenon is growing but is difficult to detect and thus difficult to counter. An investigation of consumer aliteracy may enable managers to either try to influence the consumer aliteracy tendencies, or use non-word message strategies in order to better communicate with highly aliterate consumers.

**References**


**Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth: How Conflicting Nonconscious Goals Influence Consumer Choice**

Ji-Hoon Jhang, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

Consumers are surrounded by a seemingly infinite number of brand images. Since Bargh (1990) proposed powerful effects of environmental cues on behavior, a burgeoning set of research in marketing has demonstrated that 1) environmental cues (e.g., brand images) can activate a consumer goal outside of awareness and 2) consumer choices are affected by this incidentally activated goal (e.g., Chartrand, Huber, Shiv, and Tanner, 2008).

These earlier works, however, leave two important questions unanswered regarding nonconscious goals. First, can various environmental cues encountered in everyday life (e.g., Nordstrom vs. Wal-Mart) activate multiple conflicting goals (e.g., prestige-related vs. thrift-related goals) outside of individuals’ awareness? Second, if multiple (conflicting) nonconscious goals can be activated, how can those conflicting nonconscious goals shape consumer behavior? Despite a body of research in which multiple (conscious) goal pursuit...
has been examined (e.g., Fishbach and Dhar, 2005), no research has yet explored multiple nonconscious goal pursuit (for exception, see Laran and Janiszewski 2009 JCR). This study aims to address these two questions.

The objective of the current study is to examine 1) whether or not conflicting nonconscious goals can be activated and 2) how conflicting nonconscious goals, once activated, influence consumer behavior. I tested three competing hypotheses regarding the pursuit of conflicting nonconscious goals (i.e. inhibition, overriding, and conflicting) using product choice task.

Arguments for each hypothesis

Three competing hypotheses are as follows. The first is the inhibition hypothesis; the focal goal pursuit may inhibit the alternative goal pursuit. Both goal shielding theory (Shah et al. 2002) and conflicting goal pursuit literature (Fishbach and Dhar 2005) lend their supports to this hypothesis. The second is the overriding hypothesis; the alternative goal pursuit may undermine the focal goal pursuit. This overriding effect is hypothesized by goal pull theory (Shah and Kruglanski 2002) as well as associative network model (Anderson et al. 2004). Finally, the third is the conflicting hypothesis; both the focal goal and the alternative goal may be pursued simultaneously so that they compete. Atkinson and Birch (1970)’s temporal escalation criterion combined with goal pull theory (Shah and Kruglanski 2002) lends its support to this conflicting hypothesis. In summary, three competing hypotheses will be formally stated as,

H1a (The inhibiting hypothesis): The nonconscious pursuit of the focal goal would inhibit the nonconscious pursuit of the alternative goal.

H1b (The overriding hypothesis): The nonconscious pursuit of the alternative goal would override the nonconscious pursuit of the focal goal.

H1c (The conflicting hypothesis): Both the focal goal and the alternative goal would be nonconsciously pursued simultaneously.

The following experiment was designed to test three competing hypotheses proposed above. By looking at individuals’ choice deferral tendencies, I examined which hypothesis is the most viable.

Study

Dhar (1997) showed that people who have to make a choice among equally attractive alternatives often opt not to choose or choose the no-choice option. This no-choice option task provides an experimental circumstance in which proposed three competing hypotheses can be tested.

The experimental design was a 4 (nonconscious goal priming: prestige vs. thrift vs. mingle (prestige-thrift or thrift-prestige) vs. control) between-subjects design. Since the prestige, thrift, and control conditions served as control conditions for each hypothesis, the three competing hypotheses were tested by comparisons between each goal priming condition. For instance, if the inhibition hypothesis is correct, the choice pattern between the prestige-thrift condition and the prestige condition would show no difference, and the same result should appear in the comparison between the thrift-prestige condition and the thrift condition. If the overriding hypothesis is correct, the choice pattern between the prestige-thrift condition and the thrift condition should be the same, and we should expect no differences between the thrift-prestige condition and the prestige condition as well. If the conflicting hypothesis is right, the proportion of the no-choice option should be greater in the mingle conditions than in other conditions.

Method

78 undergraduate students participated in the study for partial course credit. Following the introductory instruction, participants engaged in a scrambled-sentence task. Each participant conducted twenty sets of scrambled-sentence task. For participants in the ‘one-goal’ conditions (i.e. the prestige goal, the thrift goal), only the first ten sets of words will include goal-relevant words (e.g. “what, did, luxury, want, she”) while the goal-relevant words will be replaced with goal-irrelevant words for the following ten sets of words (e.g. “what, did, can, want, she”). For participants in the ‘conflicting goals’ conditions (i.e., the prestige-thrift goal, the thrift-prestige goal, i.e., the mingle goal), each ten set included either prestige-relevant words or thrift-relevant words. Finally, all twenty sets of words included goal-irrelevant words for the control condition. After completing the sentence-scrambled task, each participant was asked to make a hypothetical choice between two sock options and the no-choice option. The choice task used in Chartrand et al. (2008) was modified and used; a) Nike at $5.25 a pair, b) Hanes at $6 for two pairs, and c) no-choice.

Results

The results supported the competing hypothesis. A greater proportion of participants chose the no-choice option in the mingle condition than the other three conditions (Choice mingle = 42.1%, Choice prestige = 20%, Choice thrift = 23.8%, Choice control = 16.7%, χ²(6)=16.11, p=0.013). There was no difference among the prestige, thrift, and control conditions. Also, the other choice proportions reflected the similar pattern found in Chartrand et al. (2008).

Discussion

Above result suggests that participants’ choice pattern can be explained by the competing hypothesis. Neither the inhibition hypothesis nor the overriding hypothesis explains the choice pattern observed in the above study. Therefore, it is initially demonstrated that conflicting nonconscious goals are pursued simultaneously, rather than being inhibited or overridden. It should be noted, however,

4The prestige and thrift goals are chosen because 1) both goals are basic motivations every consumer would already have in their associative networks so that both goals can be activated outside of awareness, 2) both goals are perfectly conflicting and cannot be resolved, and 3) both goals are at similar level of specificity.

5There was no differences between the prestige-thrift and thrift-prestige condition, thus two conditions were collapsed and analyzed as the mingle condition.
that these results are just the initial evidence for conflicting nonconscious goal pursuit hypothesis. Thus, further tests should be done to clearly rule out the other two hypotheses.

References

When Does Halo Prevail against Animosity? Country-of-Origin Effects Contingent on Regulatory Focus
He Jia, Nanjing University, China
Yonggui Wang, University of International Business and Economics, China
Yiren Dong, Nanjing University, China
Guocai Wang, Nanjing University, China

Prior research has demonstrated that country-of-origin-related associations with a foreign product play a significant role in consumers’ evaluation (Maheswaran and Chen 2006). Two general types of association are indentified as halo and animosity, which influence consumers’ product attitude in opposite directions (Hong and Kang 2006). For some foreign products marketed in certain regions, the halo effect and the animosity effect could co-exist when consumers’ attention are drawn to the country of origin. Examples abound from Chinese consumers’ evaluation of Japanese products to Australian consumers’ attitude towards French products (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998).

An important question going unheeded by prior research is: When does the halo dominate over the animosity in determining consumers’ evaluation when a product’s country of origin could stimulate both the halo effect regarding the association with superior quality and the animosity effect concerned with the persistent or temporary antipathy? This research addresses the aforementioned issue by drawing on regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997). We propose the dual roles of regulatory focus in influencing consumers’ attitude towards foreign products, whose country of origin could make both halo- and animosity-related associations simultaneously accessible to consumers in certain regions (referred to hereinafter as foreign products). Chinese consumers are investigated as a typical group who are susceptible to both the halo effect and the animosity effect when evaluating Japanese products.

Hypothesis Development
Extant country-of-origin literature suggests that consumers are susceptible to halo effect or animosity effect when they rely on the country-of-origin information rather than the attribute information for evaluation. Consumers use the country-of-origin information as a heuristic, whereas they rely on the substantive attribute information when they adopt systematic processing (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran 2000). Furthermore, halo and animosity differ in valence. The halo concerning the country-of-origin-related reputation in advanced techniques is positively valenced, whereas the activated animosity toward the country from which the product originates is negatively valenced.

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997) suggests that people can pursue a goal with either a promotion or prevention focus. Promotion focus is oriented at accomplishment, whereas prevention focus is oriented at security. Friedman and Förster (2001) find that promotion-focused people tend to adopt a heuristic style of processing, whereas prevention-focused people are inclined to base their evaluation on a systematic style of processing. Besides, promotion-focused consumers are more sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes, whereas prevention-focused consumers are more sensitive to the presence and absence of negative outcomes (Higgins 1997). As a consequence, the positive component of the focal object is more diagnostic to consumers with a promotion focus than the negative component, whereas the negative component of the focal object is more diagnostic to consumers with a prevention focus than the positive component (Shine, Park, and Wyer 2007).

Based on those findings of country-of-origin research and regulatory focus research, we posit that regulatory focus has dual effects during the process in which consumers evaluate foreign products. In the first stage, a promotion focus should propel consumers to adopt heuristic processing and rely on the country-of-origin information, whereas a prevention focus should propel consumers to adopt systematic processing and rely on the attribute information. In the second stage, a promotion focus makes the positively-valenced country-of-origin-related halo more diagnostic to consumers than the negatively-valenced country-of-origin-related animosity, whereas neither

**References**