

Disassociating Preferences from Evaluations Towards Pseudo Drink Brands

Authors : Micah Amd

Abstract : Preferences towards unfamiliar drink brands can be predictably influenced following correlations of subliminally-presented brands (CS) with positively valenced attributes (US). Alternatively, evaluations towards subliminally-presented CS may be more variable, suggesting that CS-evoked evaluations may disassociate from CS-associated preferences following subliminal CS-US conditioning. We assessed this hypothesis over three experiments (Ex1, Ex2, Ex3). Across each experiment, participants first provided preferences and evaluations towards meaningless trigrams (CS) as a baseline, followed by conditioning and a final round of preference and evaluation measurements. During conditioning, four pairs of subliminal and supraliminal/visible CS were respectively correlated with four US categories varying along aggregate valence (e.g., 100% positive, 80% positive, 40% positive, 0% positive – for Ex1 and Ex2). Across Ex1 and Ex2, presentation durations for subliminal CS were 34 and 17 milliseconds, respectively. Across Ex3, aggregate valences of the four US categories were altered (75% positive, 55% positive, 45% positive, 25% positive). Valence across US categories was manipulated to address a supplemental query of whether US-to-CS valence transfer was summative or integrative. During analysis, we computed two sets of difference scores reflecting pre-post preference and evaluation performances, respectively. These were subjected to Bayes tests. Across all experiments, results illustrated US-to-CS valence transfer was most likely to shift evaluations for visible CS, but least likely to shift evaluations for subliminal CS. Alternatively, preferences were likely to shift following correlations with single-valence categories (e.g., 100% positive, 100% negative) across both visible and subliminal CS. Our results suggest that CS preferences can be influenced through subliminal conditioning even as CS evaluations remain unchanged, supporting our central hypothesis. As for whether transfer effects are summative/integrative, our results were more mixed; a comparison of relative likelihoods revealed that preferences are more likely to reflect summative effects whereas evaluations reflect integration, independent of visibility condition.

Keywords : subliminal conditioning, evaluations, preferences, valence transfer

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