

Coke or Pepsi? Being distracted can make you more susceptible to ads

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A can of Coke next to the word "awesome"; a can of Pepsi next to a picture of a happy couple. Seem too basic to be effective advertising? Prior research has shown that reported attitudes towards brands are not affected by such simple juxtapositions. However, a new paper in the June 2008 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research* examines our implicit opinions – and finds that we may actually be more susceptible than we think.

Bryan Gibson (Central Michigan University) showed undergraduate psychology students pairings of well-known cola brands with words and images. Some had positive associations: a field of flowers, the word “awesome,” or a mother holding a child. Others had negative associations: people at a gravesite, the word “terrifying,” or a person in a contamination suit.

Participants were then distracted by an unrelated cognitive task – memorizing an eight-digit number – and offered a can of Coke or Pepsi to take home with them.

When distracted, those who were initially neutral towards both brands strongly tended to choose the brand that had been paired with positive images or words in the earlier task. Importantly, this happened even when the participant couldn’t remember which brand had been paired with positive information, Gibson reports.

Those who had an established preference for one brand before the

experiment, as established by a pre-test, were not affected by the inclusion of a distracting task while making their choices.

“These results have implications regarding how consumer attitudes are formed, and how they are then applied in brand choice situations,” Gibson explains. “This suggests that implicit product attitudes may play a greater role in product choice when the consumer is distracted or making an impulse purchase.”

Citation: Bryan Gibson, “Can Evaluative Conditioning Change Attitudes toward Mature Brands” New Evidence from the Implicit Association Test.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2008.

Source: University of Chicago

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