

Brand names subconsciously affect people's shopping goals

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Even 60 milliseconds of exposure to a brand name such as Wal-Mart or Tiffany can alter consumers' subconscious goals, according to new research in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Authors Tanya L. Chartrand, Joel Huber (both Duke University), Baba Shiv (Stanford University), and Robin J. Tanner (University of Wisconsin) examined goals that are triggered when consumers shop.

"Results suggest that simple exposure to brand names has the potential to activate goals which then influence choices," write the authors. "This data thus opens the door to an intriguing new way to think about the role and power of brands."

The research suggests that goals can be triggered without consciousness. In other words, passing a discount store on the way to the sporting good store might affect an eventual purchase.

In a series of four studies, the researchers had participants complete scrambled sentence tasks designed to subconsciously activate either "thrift" or "prestige" goals. In subsequent studies, participants completed those tasks and were then asked to make choices among various product brands. In the authors' final study, participants viewed numbers on a computer screen while U.S. retail brand names flashed on the edge of their field of vision. Those brand names were associated with prestige (Tiffany, Neiman Marcus, and Nordstrom) or thrift (Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and Dollar Store). Those 60-millisecond flashes influenced the

participants' choices of socks or microwaves.

"To the best of our knowledge, this provides the first evidence that such brands can automatically activate purchase goals in individuals and that these goals can influence consumers' product preferences without their awareness or conscious intent," the authors conclude.

Source: University of Chicago

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