

Subconscious encounters: How brand exposure affects your choices

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Products with visible brand names are everywhere; many times we don't even notice them. But how much do those unnoticed exposures affect brand choices? Quite a bit, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Authors Rosellina Ferraro (University of Maryland), James R. Bettman, and Tanya L. Chartrand (both Duke University) conducted a series of experiments using Dasani water and found that study participants who viewed pictures of ordinary people near bottles of Dasani were more likely to choose that brand over three other brands—even if they were unaware they had seen the logo.

"For example, on any given morning, one might pass several people with Starbucks coffee in hand. Will this repeated exposure affect an observer's decision to select Starbucks coffee if given a choice among coffee brands? We show that the answer is yes, and that repeated exposure to a brand will lead to an increased likelihood of selecting that brand," write the authors.

In the first study, undergraduate study participants viewed photos of people engaged in everyday activities, such as waiting for a bus. Most of the participants were not aware of the presence of the brand. The more pictures of Dasani they viewed, the more likely they were to choose it from a list of brands.

In subsequent studies, participants saw the same photos, but were also

distracted by music on headphones and exposed to subliminal flashes of the Dasani logo. The researchers discovered a backlash effect: People with a lot of subliminal exposures to the brand name and a lot of incidental exposures to it were not as likely to choose it.

In a final study, participants were more likely to choose Dasani after seeing photos of people wearing caps with their university's logo (with Dasani nearby) than photos of people wearing a rival team's logo.

"In essence, consumers act as their own implicit market researchers, registering information on frequency of brand exposure and its users and utilizing that information in making brand choices," the authors conclude.

Source: University of Chicago

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