



SELF-PERSUASION AS HABIT CHANGE TECHNIQUE: UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE BEHIND ADOPTING NEW HABITS AND MAKING THEM STICK

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to show how self-persuasion can be utilised to improve customer involvement in target behaviour. The scope of persuasion includes not only limited to inhibition of undesired behaviour, but also the encouragement of desired behaviour, significantly broadening the reach of this technique. Self-persuasion could be used as a marketing strategy to influence customers' buying decisions. This could be especially useful in circumstances when customers have a strong emotional attachment to products or behaviours. Self-persuasion has recently been shown to be a more efficient technique of limiting unwanted, addictive behaviour than direct persuasion, according to a recent study in health psychology. Further this paper highlights how self-persuasion can be effective in the fields of health, reducing addictive habits, sustainable practices and financial investments.

METHODOLOGY

Electronic literature databases were searched to identify studies that examined the relationship between self-persuasion and encouraging desired behaviour. This systematic literature review is guided by the Cochrane method, and the search method and findings are presented in accordance with the relevant sections of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Higgins and Green, 2011, Moher et al., 2009). Studies were included in the systematic literature review based on the following inclusion criteria: they must (a) quantitatively examine and report the relationship between self-persuasion & themes like sustainable practices, health, financial management and reducing addictive habits; (b) use a multidimensional conceptualization of indirect self-persuasion; (c) be published in an academic journal and public sector behavioural science reports; and (d) be available in English.

INTRODUCTION

What motivates consumers to purchase goods, pay greater prices, volunteer for a good cause, or increase their restaurant tip? Persuasion researchers and practitioners are eager to learn when and how

persuasion works to influence consumers. More precisely, indirect persuasion strategies are the subject of a large amount of research in marketing and related domains. Indirect approaches are more subtle and unconscious than explicitly presenting consumers with arguments or simply requesting that they change their behaviour.

Framing techniques, the foot-in-the-door technique, low-balling, door-in-the-face. One of the primary disadvantages of direct persuasion tactics is that consumers show reactance to persuasion. By approaching consumers in an indirect manner, one of the major disadvantages of direct persuasion strategies is that consumers show reactance to persuasion. Indirect persuasion increases the chances of a persuasion attempt to succeed.

In the field of health psychology and addictive behaviours, another indirect persuasion strategy has recently demonstrated promising outcomes. Instead of supplying consumers with arguments to persuade them, this approach encourages people to construct their own arguments regarding a given notion or activity (Kardes et al., 2001; Müller et al., 2016). Currently, the implementation of this strategy is primarily limited to the health domain, where governments and other institutions have traditionally communicated a clear



injunctive norm about the desired conduct (e.g. warning labels on cigarette boxes; Hamilton et al., 2008). Müller et al. (2009) found that expressing an injunctive norm by direct persuasion is a less effective method for modifying smoking behaviour than utilising self-persuasion. Although the approach of self-persuasion appears to be effective in modifying behaviour, the environment in which it was examined is of limited significance to marketers. Furthermore, the effects of self-persuasion have mostly been demonstrated in controlled experimental settings.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to research, information generated by oneself is viewed as more accurate and trustworthy, and hence more convincing, than information obtained from a third party (Hoch and Deighton, 1989; Levin et al., 1988). People have a tendency to compensate for information provided by an external source, but they fail to correct for the influence of self-generated information, according to Mussweiler and Neumann (2000). In other words, while people may and will resist persuasion attempts from others (Knowles and Linn, 2004), they cannot resist persuasion attempts from themselves. Furthermore, when people are challenged to develop arguments, they tend to come up with the most persuasive and compelling assertions (Greenwald and Albert, 1968; Slamecka and Graf, 1978). This shows that allowing people to persuade themselves to influence consumer behaviour might be more effective.

The persuasion technique that makes use of this bias in favour of self-generated information is referred to as self-persuasion (Aronson, 2007). For example, Müller et al. (2009) demonstrated that self-persuasion is a more effective technique for inhibiting smoking behaviour, compared to external persuasion attempts. Regular smokers, who were instructed to write down arguments against smoking, waited longer to light up a cigarette compared to smokers who read arguments against smoking provided by the experimenter.

Self-persuasiveness is a persuasion strategy that takes advantage of this bias in favour of self-generated information (Aronson, 2007). Müller et al. (2009), for example, it was found that self-persuasion is more successful than external persuasion in reducing smoking behaviour. Regular smokers who were asked to put down arguments against smoking took longer to light up a cigarette than smokers who read the experimenter's arguments against smoking. Recent study has revealed that it is not essential to write down

arguments to induce self-persuasion; instead, asking questions, encourages people to come up with arguments (Loman et al., 2015), a process that is considered to be automatic, is an easy way to induce self-persuasion (Fitzsimons and Williams, 2000). Several research have shown that simply asking participants questions about why smoking is dangerous (rather than making claims) results in a greater smoking-related risk perception (Glock et al., 2013) and longer abstinence rates (Müller et al., 2016).

In terms of other health-related behaviours, asking questions rather than making statements has been proven to increase negative outcome expectancy perception (Krischler and Glock, 2015), lower alcohol consumption rates (Loman et al., 2015), and an increase in exercise behaviour (Williams et al., 2006; Fitzsimons and Moore, 2008). Based on these findings, regardless of the behaviour we're seeking to change, self-persuasion should be our first choice when trying to influence someone. However, most individuals are aware of what they should be doing whether it comes to smoking, drinking alcohol, or exercising, thanks to government initiatives that attempt to encourage a healthy lifestyle by disseminating injunctive norms regarding health-related conduct.

However, as could be expected (Johnson and Eagly, 1989), this awareness did not lead to a greater relevance of the persuasive messages; rather, it appeared to result in a form of immunity against anti-smoking messaging. In other words, persons who engage in addictive activities, such as smoking, may be resistant to direct argumentation because they have formed defensive responses in response to repeated government efforts that express injunctive norms. Thus, based on this research, it may be stated that self-persuasion is superior to expressing injunctive norms for modifying addictive behaviours. However, it is unknown if this is also true for activities that are not subject to injunctive norms (e.g., those promoted by government campaigns) and for which consumers are less likely to have acquired strong defensive responses than addictive behaviours.

SELF-PERSUASION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable Electricity Consumption Practices

Polycab Wires has launched a new campaign called 'Connection Bachat Ka, Connection Zindagi Ka', which includes a TV commercial in which the family head is attempting to save energy and reminds us of the financial and environmental benefits of simply turning off lights, turning off televisions, and

unplugging mobile phone chargers. However, while the ad raised consumers' knowledge of the possible

savings; it did not translate into durable changes in behaviour, according to a research.



Fig 1: Polycab Energy Saving Commercial

If every home, business, and office park is required to be more energy efficient, the quantity of energy we all consume will decrease. Bounded rationality, on the other hand, places cognitive restraints and limitations on humans. However, we may adopt the principles of behavioural science to help us here. 1) Reciprocity: in exchange for giving and receiving, the persuaded individual feels obligated to the persuader; 2) Commitment: persons are under pressure to act in a way that reflects their commitment; 3) Social Acceptance: obtaining the approval of others; 4) Affection: People are more influenced by those with whom they have a stronger bond; 5) Power: People

with more power have a higher ability to influence others; 6) Scarcity: When something is scarce or limited, it becomes more valuable.

The Victoria State Government's Australian campaign, which features helium-filled black balloons emerging from a clothes dryer, filter coffee maker, central heating vent, television, and other electronic equipment, is a more impactful variation of this commercial conveying the same message. According to the advertisement, every year, the average home produces 200 thousand balloons (each emitting 50 gms of greenhouse gas), all of which contribute to climate change.



Fig 2: Victoria State Government Commercial

Lack of openness and nudging, according to the authors, is one of the key causes of non-reduction in energy usage and waste. One of the primary issues facing residential consumers is the cost of electricity consumption, because most of the time, the consumer will only know the amount of energy consumed when the light bill arrives at the end of the month. The availability of immediate and indirect feedback on consumption in dwellings through systems and apps, according to the author, can influence this behaviour and lead to cost savings.

Sustainable Water Consumption Practices

To address the issue of increasing water scarcity, Sunday-Mid-day launched the "Bucket Sundays" initiative. The programme encouraged Mumbai residents to use only one bucket of water instead of a shower on Sundays to reduce waste of flowing water. With the help of Radio City's "EK Balti Sunday" and "Bucket Sundays" programmes, which were vigorously promoted on-air, on-ground, in print, and on digital platforms, 1,07,58,400 litres of water were successfully saved in just four weeks.



Fig 3: Radio City's 'Ek Balti Sunday' Initiative Poster

Another effective campaign was Hindustan Unilever's "The Shower," a water conservation film that makes an important point about how we all need to do our part to conserve water. Instead of presenting judicious water use in a city, the commercials featured the first sight of a contemporary glass toilet in a drought-stricken village. The sequence conveys the point by affecting your senses and forcing you to realise the frightening concept of how much water we squander. The rallying call asking us to save water compels our hearts to act, which is the film's ultimate goal. As a result, the behavioural science concepts of empathy gap and reciprocity are being used.

Using the behavioural science idea of message framing to change behaviour can be an important aspect of offering water demand solutions. Households who got the information in the form of water-saving tips/strategies were more concerned about water scarcity and more likely to act. Increased households'

capacity (self-efficacy), opportunity, and/or motivation in water-conservation acts mediated the message expressed in terms of specific water-saving tips/strategies, according to mediation analyses.

Self Persuasion & Reducing Addictive Habits

Have you noticed anti-smoking advertisements before movies start in a theatre? If yes, ever wondered are they effective? Conversely the answer is such commercials can help to immunise non-smokers against the influences of film stars' smoking. Anti-smoking advertisements are ineffective, especially if the smoker gains self-esteem from smoking because it "makes them look cool." As a result, messages that emphasise the risk of mortality encourage self-esteem-building behaviours. Anti-smoking messages are assumed to have a simple, direct, and strong impact on individuals by health campaigns, but the indirect approach must be understood.

Thus, research suggests that campaigns succeed not by persuading individuals to avoid tobacco, but rather by assisting in the changing of social norms around smoking, in which the smoker tries to persuade himself or herself to quit smoking in order to conform to the social norms. The message will not be effective unless people pay attention to it, understand it, accept it, and assimilate it into their self-concept. In 2018, the Indonesian government initiated anti-smoking

initiatives aimed at changing people's minds about smoking.

Social norms are beneficial in modifying behaviour and in instilling confidence in persons who want to quit smoking. The commercial actively aims to work on the notion of social norms by advocating the usage of the same money spent on cigarettes to instead purchase sanitary napkins to boost female cleanliness in the Indian context. It seeks to redefine what it means to be "cool" when doing the right things.



Fig 4: Akshay Kumar's 'No Smoking' Campaign

According to previous research, marketers should use six tactics to help individuals form new habits, including creating a stable, supportive environment for

the new habit, making the new behaviour as simple as possible, and allowing people to develop distinctive cues and rewards.



Fig 5: Six Strategies for Building Habits. Source: The Behavioural Architects 2017 based on Neal, D. "The Science of Habit" 2015

Self-persuasion and Healthy Eating

Unhealthy eating habits have evolved into a global health threat that must be addressed. Direct

persuasion is a method of persuasion that uses direct communication to influence people's attitudes or behaviours. People are informed what they should and



should not do immediately. Such an approach has been found to be ineffectual and capable of creating just a temporary shift in attitude, if at all. Furthermore, direct persuasion may have a boomerang effect, resulting in increased unhealthy eating, likely because this direct method tends to elicit psychological reactance and defensive emotions in the listeners of the message

Self-persuasion is a subtler persuasive strategy that involves asking people to deliver a public statement about the benefits of the target behaviour or asking questions that can elicit positive sentiments about the target behaviour. Presenting people with open-ended questions is one of the simplest and least expensive methods.

Self-persuasion tends to be more effective in motivating those with individualistic origins to eat healthier, while direct persuasion appears to be more effective in motivating people with collectivistic backgrounds. People are convinced by their own thoughts in response to the communication, rather than by the message itself, according to this viewpoint. Persuasive appeals that generate predominantly positive ideas about a communication (e.g., if I eat veggies, I'll be smaller and more attractive) elicit more agreement than messages that trigger negative thoughts (e.g., if I eat veggies, I won't have enough energy later) that do not elicit such responses.

Researchers from the University of Birmingham discovered that social-based messages advocating healthy eating can increase fruit and vegetable consumption while decreasing high-calorie snack consumption. People have long been aware that they modify their behaviour to what they believe is socially acceptable in that context, and eating choices are no exception. We may strive to eat more fruits and vegetables if we are taught that other people in our social group do as well. As a result, societal norms and framing principles from behavioural science play a vital role in propagating enhanced healthy eating habits among the public.

Self-persuasion and Financial Investments

Advertisements are used by mutual funds to interact with its investors. According to Jain and Wu (2000), mutual fund advertising and investing decisions have a strong cause-and-effect relationship. Mutual fund businesses rarely use standard advertising strategies like massive ad images, emotional appeals, or celebrity endorsements, which have long been proven to improve ad readership through advertising research.

Many mutual funds advertise and run large advertisements in well-read consumer investment

magazines to attract investment flows by convincing consumers that the mutual funds are successful and good quality through the obvious expense of large advertisements in magazines with high advertisement placement costs, according to a study of behavioural factors. Furthermore, they advertise with a large amount of copy to persuade consumers who, while unlikely to read the entire text, will likely perceive the mutual funds to be honest because they conclude that the large amount of information indicates full disclosure and high quality and that there must be many good things to say about them.

Relevant information that elicits an emotionally favourable response can also be used in effective persuasion. If the loads and management fees to administer a mutual fund are low relative to competing mutual funds, one might expect mutual fund advertisements to include transaction cost information to and try to increase sales to price-sensitive consumers or try to increase sales to consumers using a price-quality heuristic if the loads and management fees to administer a mutual fund are high.

Self-Persuasion strategies to Encourage Healthy Habits

It's crucial for any marketer to be able to have a reliable and effective strategy for building new habits and making them stick. First, we need to develop a complete understanding of the habitual behaviour in focus, and then analyse how it might be built, maintained, broken or changed. Habits are always triggered by a cue, the cue triggers our memory of doing the same action or routine previously and helps to initiate it again. Take an example of a person discharged from rehabilitation for an addictive smoking habit.

They might be cued by a particular time of day, an object in our surrounding environment (Local store where they used buy cigarettes) or being in the environment as a whole (chain-smoking peers), a preceding behaviour (reaching out for a lighter), or even a person or sound (cigarettes fumes). When such an environment is stable and consistent – when we are in the same place at the same time of day - we are more likely to carry out a particular behaviour, deeply embedding a habit.

If we believe we will be rewarded for repeating behaviour, we are more likely to do so. It is this element which can fix behaviour in place so it becomes a habit – to the extent that we might not even need the reward once the behaviour has become automatic. We are motivated by many different types



of rewards – from intrinsic to extrinsic, conscious and subconscious, physical to physiological, short-term or long-term, one-off or a reward that is cumulative and builds up over time. We may build a habit with just a single reward, or with a mix of different types of rewards.

Intervening during a large, permanent life transition, such as a new job or career, moving house, or the start of a new life stage, such as going to university, having a baby, or retiring, is one of the finest ways to promote new habits. These occurrences frequently include changes in the surrounding environment and/or daily routines, implying that established habits are no longer as automatic as they once were.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, the application of self-persuasion extends beyond the inhibition of addictive behaviour to the facilitation of desired consumer behaviour, significantly broadening the scope of this strategy. However, because the focus of these studies was tipping behaviour, caution should be exercised when extrapolating these findings to the broader realm of consumer behaviour.

More study is needed to understand the types of consumer behaviour for which self-persuasion is effective, as tipping behaviour may be influenced by social desirability or customer experiences (Rind and Bordia, 1996), as well as willingness to spend (Kim et al., 2009). Self-persuasion, for example, could be a particularly useful method for persuading highly involved customers.

When it comes to high-involvement products like vacations, vehicles, and insurance, self-persuasion may be most effective (Percy and Donovan, 1991). Furthermore, it has been established that framing arguments as questions and presenting these questions to an audience can be quite powerful in a mass-media context (Glock et al., 2013; Müller et al., 2016).

A new model of consumer behaviour highlights the phenomenon of motivated preference, which has led to a revised view of advertising's role (i.e. self-persuasion). It becomes conceivable to imagine how persuasion might impact rational customers when they want to change their decisions. It's possible that the influence is mutual. As a result, the motivated preference proposition answers a key question about persuasive advertising primitives.

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