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ABSTRACT

We examined the usefulness of an implicit attitude measure (IAT) to explain the weak attitude-behavior relationships often found in research about ethical consumer behavior. The results indicated that the IAT effects for buyers and non-buyers of Fair Trade products were significantly different, showing that the IAT can be used to differentiate between buyers and non-buyers. Further, the authors conclude that the IAT has unique predictive validity and that most importantly implicit attitudes need to be enhanced to raise ethical consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Although the consumers' commitment to environmental issues, animal testing, working conditions, fair trade, and other ethical issues has gained more attention in recent years (Nicholls 2002), ethical consumer behavior remains a relatively under-researched consumer domain (Folkes and Kamins 1999; Uusitalo and Oksanen 2004). Evidence of a growing market for ethical products is often inferred from the results of opinion polls indicating increasing concern with the ethical features of products (Tallontire, Rentsjendorj and Blowfield 2001). However, this raising concern does not seem to translate into actual purchase behavior. More specifically, several authors have reported an attitude-behavior gap (Bird and Hughes 1997; Boulstridge and Carrigans' 2000; Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Folkes and Kamin 1999) and pointed out that most of the ethical labeling initiatives with respect to, for instance, organic food, products free from child labor, legally logged wood, and fair-trade products, have market shares of less than 1% (MacGillivray 2000).

The purpose of this study is to propose and test a measurement technique of implicit attitudes that can partly account for the attitude-behavior gap in ethical consumer behavior, to investigate to what extent implicit attitudes determine ethical buying behavior, and to discuss the marketing implications of the findings.

THE ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOR GAP AND IMPLICIT ATTITUDES

There are two plausible explanations for the reoccurring discrepancy between attitudes towards ethical issues and buying behavior as measured in survey research and actual buying behavior. The first relates to characteristics of ethical products, while the second is related to measurement problems. Primarily, the low attitude-behavior consistency in ethical consumer behavior may be ascribed to the fact that ethical products may well be desirable because they are environmentally friendly or serve a social cause, but still a premium price has to be paid or extra effort has to be exerted to find the products (Hurtado 1998). Previous research indicates that higher prices and efforts are the main reasons that ethically-oriented consumers mention when their attitude-behavior

inconsistency is pointed out to them (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, and Rayp 2005). Moreover, the majority of people evaluate product attributes jointly in making purchase decisions. Price, quality, convenience, availability in regular supermarkets, and brand familiarity are often still the most important factors affecting the buying decision (e.g.Boulstridge and Carrigan 2000; Carrigan and Attalla 2001; De Pelsmacker et al. 2005a; Tallontire, Rentsendorj and Blowfield 2001). Thirdly, consumers may still need to be convinced that their purchase behavior can make a difference in ethical terms in order to be persuaded to buy them (Bird and Hughes 1997).

With respect to the measurement problems in ethical consumer research, there is the heavy reliance on self-report measures that assume that people are aware of their attitudes and that they are able and willing to reveal them if asked appropriately. However, these assumptions are not always valid (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). Ulrich and Sarasin (1995) somewhat cynically claimed not to do any research and not to ask the public any question on ethical buying behavior, because the answers are never reliable, and often useless if not misleading. Especially in situations in which respondents want to make a good impression on the researcher or want to conform social norms, attitudes tend to be more positive than actual behavior (King and Bruner 2000). Typically in questionnaires on sensitive topics such as ethical issues this could be the case. (La Troobe, Helen, and Acott 2000).

Furthermore, self–report attitude measures operate on the assumption that people have a-priori attitudes towards all attitude-objects or that they are able to form them on the spot (Schwarz and Bohner 2001). Consequently, even when respondents are unfamiliar with the attitude-object (and do not have a-priori attitudes), they will still answer the question in order not to seem ignorant. Especially, the presence of an interviewer, monetary and physical inducements or the expectation of knowledge may motivate respondents to provide uninformed responses or “guessing” at answers (Hawkins and Coney 1981). In other cases, previously formed attitudes may not be easily accessible to the individual (Fazio et al. 1986). Thus, even when individuals have a previously formed attitude, they may report a newly created one.

Finally, substantial research on social cognition suggests that a large portion of our daily activities is the result of cognitive processes that occur outside conscious

awareness and control (Bargh 2002; Greenwald and Banaji 1995). As a result, traditional self-report measures are not well suited to capture these implicit processes. Related to the latter point is the renewed interest in the "unconscious" (Weinberger 2000) and the distinction between explicit and implicit attitudes. Explicit attitudes are attitudes that operate in a controlled conscious mode and are typically measured by self-report tasks. Implicit attitudes can be defined as "introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action towards social objects" (Greenwald and Banaji 1995, p. 8). Given these insights, several authors have argued that automatic processes should also be considered in order to fully understand consumer attitudes and decisions (e.g. Brunel, Tietje, and Greenwald 2004; Maison, Greenwald, and Bruin 2004).

The arguments discussed above suggest that the discrepancy between ethical consumer behavior and self-reported attitudes could partially be due to problems with self-report tasks. Recently, researchers have developed a number of alternative measures that do not rely on self-report. These measures are assumed to register implicit attitudes and to be less sensitive to social desirability effects. One of these measures, the Implicit Association Test (IAT), is perhaps the most promising upcoming solution to these measurement problems.

IMPLICIT ATTITUDE MEASUREMENT

The Implicit Association Test

The IAT, developed by Greenwald et al. (1998), is presumably the most well-known implicit measurement technique in psychology (Fazio and Olson 2003). The IAT is a computerized task that measures the strength of association between two contrasted target concepts (e.g. flower and insects) on the one hand and an attribute dimension (e.g. positive and negative words) on the other hand. The idea behind the IAT is that it should be easier to map two concepts onto a single response when those concepts are similar or associated in memory than when the concepts are unrelated or dissimilar. The difference in reaction times between these two tasks is taken as an indication of the degree of association between concepts (Greenwald et al. 1998). A substantial number of studies

have demonstrated the reliability and validity of the IAT in psychological research (Greenwald and Nosek 2001). For example, IAT-effects were shown to be indicative of in-group preference with respect to ethnic groups (e.g. Japanese-American and Korean-American, Greenwald et al. 1998), spider and snake phobics (Teachman et al. 2001), homosexuals (Banse et al. 2001), vegetarians, cigarette smokers (Swanson et al. 2001), etc. Further, convergence has been reported between IAT measures on the one hand and semantic priming measures (e.g. Cunningham et al. 2001) and physiological measures such as the fMRI (Phelps et al. 2000) on the other hand. Although less work has been conducted concerning the prediction of behavior from IAT scores, different studies demonstrated the IATs' ability to predict behavioral leakage. For instance, Asendorpf et al. (2002) showed that the IAT significantly increased the prediction of spontaneous (but not deliberative) shy behavior in a realistic situation.

IAT in Consumer Research

According to Bargh (2002) "the realm of consumer research would seem to be the ideal playing field on which to establish whether the new models of automatic goal pursuit and automatic evaluation processes do, indeed, apply to the real world, […]". However, only a few researchers have accepted this challenge by introducing the IAT into consumer research. Maison, Greenwald and Bruin (2004) examined implicit attitudes towards different types of products (juices and sodas; low and high calorie products) and brands (brands of yoghurt, fast food restaurants and cola). The results showed positive correlations between implicit attitudes and both explicit attitudes and behavior (self-reported and observed). Generally, heavy users of a particular product or brand demonstrated more positive implicit attitudes towards that product or brand than light users. Further, there are some indications that implicit attitude measures may reveal evidence of unique contribution to the prediction of behavior (i.e. consistently positive beta coefficients, Maison, Greenwald, and Bruin 2004).

Brunel, Tietje, and Greenwald (2004) obtained similar results. On the basis of the results of their first study, they concluded that in situations where implicit and explicit attitudes were expected to converge (attitudes towards Macintosh versus PC Windows based machines), IAT measures of brand attitude and brand relationship showed strong,

positive correlations with explicit measures of brand attitude, ownership, and usage. Moreover, they found that the IAT effectively discriminated between consumers with more favorable explicit attitudes, ownership, and usage of one brand versus those with unfavorable explicit attitudes, ownership and usage of the same brand. In a second study on the race of advertising spokespeople, they demonstrated that under some conditions the IAT could uncover consumers' attitudes that traditional measures did not detect. In this second study, explicit and implicit attitudes towards ads for sportswear advertisements portraying African-American (Black) and European-American (White) athlete-spokespersons were measured. The results showed that at the explicit level there was no difference between attitudes towards the ads with White spokespersons compared to ads with Black spokespersons. However, the IAT revealed a strong preference for ads containing White spokespersons. When analyzing White and Black participants' subgroups, divergent results arose. White participants showed an in-group (=pro-White) IAT preference, but no significant explicit preference. Opposite results were found for the Black group: Black respondents showed a pro- Black preference at the explicit level, but no significant implicit preference. However, in consumer research, it has until now not yet been examined whether the use of the IAT in combination with explicit measures predicts behaviour more accurately than self-report measures alone in situations where consistently weak explicit attitude-behavior relationships have been found. This is the main purpose of this study.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS AND DATA COLLECTION

In an experiment we measured explicit and implicit attitudes towards Fair Trade and traditional (non-Fair Trade) products in participants who did (buyers) or did not (non-buyers) regularly buy Fair Trade products. The purpose of Fair trade products is to establish trading partnerships that aim for sustainable development of excluded and/or disadvantaged producers in the Third World. In a narrow sense, Fair Trade products can be defined by their best-known component: fair prices for the products of producers in developing countries (Krier 2001). Explicit attitudes toward the two assortments ('assortment with traditional products' vs 'assortments with Fair Trade products') were measured using semantic differential scales whereas implicit attitudes were measured

using the IAT. The specific attitude-objects were coffee and rice, two commonly used fast moving consumer goods. This allowed us to examine whether implicit measures can differentiate between buyers and non-buyers. More specifically, we expected that IAT scores would reveal less positive implicit attitudes towards Fair Trade products (as compared to traditional products) in non-buyers than in buyers. Because we also included explicit measures, we could examine whether implicit measures are related to actual purchase behavior even when explicit attitudes are taken into account.

Method of analysis

Participants and procedure. Eighty-six people (52 women, 34 men) participated in the experiment in exchange for a coupon with a monetary value of approximately 6 euro (a coupon for purchases in Fair Trade shops for the 'buyers' of fair trade and a movie ticket for the 'non-buyers' of fair trade). Thirty-seven participants were recruited at the time of fair-trade purchase and conducted the experiment in a room next to a Fair Trade shop. The other participants (N=49) were selected by means of street interviews and completed the experiment in a meeting room of the University. All participants questioned at the Fair Trade shop and 11 participants questioned at the University reported to buy Fair Trade products at least a few times a year, whereas the remaining participants indicated never to buy Fair Trade products. As a result, we labelled the former participants 'Buyers of Fair Trade products' (N=48), while the latter participants were considered 'Non-buyers of Fair Trade products' (N=38). All respondents were between 18 and 64 years old (Mbuyers=29.79, SD=11.84; Mnon-buyers=30.66, SD=13.10, $F(1, 85)= 0.103$, $p=0.749$).

The experiment consisted of three phases: (1) a learning phase, (2) an IAT and (3) a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The IAT preceded the explicit measure to minimize potential, if any, carry-over effects (Egloff and Schmukle 2002). The entire study was conducted individually and each individual session took about 20 minutes.

Learning phase. The purpose of the learning phase was to ensure that every respondent knew the products in the experiment as well as the category that a product was meant to represent ('Fair Trade' versus 'traditional, open market'). During the learning phase, the assortment labels 'Fair Trade' and 'traditional' were paired together

with their (1) specific characteristics (fair price for the producer and control of production and trade, price premium due to the fair price and restricted number of outlets [Fair Trade], or striving for maximum profit, normal price and large number of outlets [traditional]) and (2) four illustrative (pictures of) Oxfam products (the best known fair-trade brand in Belgium): coffee 'dessert', coffee 'mocha', 'white' rice, and 'basmati' rice; and the two leading coffee and rice brands in Belgium respectively). Respondents were instructed to memorize the assortment labels, characteristics and products. In the memory test following the learning phase, respondents had to indicate to which assortment the product presented on the computer screen belonged by pressing the appropriate key. When the memory test was error free (which was the case for all respondents), the IAT was initiated. The order of learning the concepts and/or products was counterbalanced.

IAT. The IAT was designed to measure implicit attitudes towards the Fair Trade and traditional products in the experiment. The target stimuli were the individual pictures of the Fair Trade and traditional products shown during the learning phase. The attribute stimuli were positive (e.g. smile, paradise) and negative (e.g. pain, murder). Stimuli were presented in the centre of the computer screen and the respondents' task was to assign each stimulus to one of four categories. The IAT procedure comprised five blocks. In the first block, respondents discriminated between positive and negative words on 20 trials. Block 2 consisted of a target discrimination task (20 trials) in which respondents had to classify the pictures of the products in 'Fair Trade' and 'traditional' categories. In Block 3 (24 practice and 48 data collection trials) respondents were asked to categorize items by pressing one of the two keys (pictures of Fair Trade products and positive words assigned to one key versus pictures of traditional products and negative words assigned to the other key). Block 4 included once again a target discrimination task, but now with a reversal of the side of the screen on which the two category labels appeared (20 trials, the reverse of task 2). Block 5 (24 practice and 48 data collection trials) consisted of the reversed combined categorization task of block three (pictures of Fair Trade products and negative words assigned to one key versus pictures of traditional products and positive words assigned to the other key). The order of performing block 3 and 5 was counterbalanced between subjects. Before and during each phase, category labels were

displayed on the left and right sides of the screen. Respondents were asked to respond as quickly but also as accurately as possible.

Explicit measures. A four-item seven-category semantic differential scale measured explicit attitudes towards the Fair Trade and traditional products (Alpha = 0.66).

RESULTS

Explicit attitudes

Overall, explicit attitudes towards Fair Trade products (MFair Trade= 5.43, SD= 1.08) were significantly more positive than towards traditional products (Mtraditional= 4.79, SD=1.07, t (85) = 3.96, $p < 0.001$). An ANOVA with type of consumer (buyers or non-buyers) as a between subjects variable and type of product Fair Trade products or traditional products) as a within-subjects variable revealed a main effect of type of type of product, $F(1, 84) = 14.85$, $p < 0.001$, and a significant interaction effect between type of consumer and type of product $F(1, 84)= 40.80$, $p < 0.001$. Moreover, t-tests indicated that buyers of Fair Trade products showed explicit attitudes towards these products (MFair Trade buyers= 5.93, SD= 0.93) that were significantly more positive than towards traditional products (Mtraditional buyers= 4.55, SD= 1.18, , t (47) = 6.83, $p< 0.001$), while non-buyers (MFair Trade non-buyers= 4.79, SD= 0.90, Mtraditional non-buyers= 5.09, SD= 0.93, $t(37) = -1.82$, $p = 0.08$) only showed a trend in the opposite direction.

Implicit attitudes

Prior to analysis, IAT data were treated following the procedure outlined by Greenwald and colleagues. (1998). The average error rate was 2.28% (0%- 12%) and all respondents were included in the analysis. We conducted an ANOVA with type of consumer (buyerss or non-buyers) as a between subjects variable and IAT task (fair trade-positive or fair trade-negative) as a within-subjects variable. The ANOVA revealed a main effect of IAT task, $F(1, 82) = 5.43$, $p = .022$, and a significant interaction between type of consumer and IAT task $F(1, 82)= 45.64$, $p < 0.001$. Further t-tests showed that buyers performed significantly better in the fair trade-positive block (M = 841, SD= 165) than in the fair trade-negative block (M = 1012, SD= 210), $t(47) = 7.20$, $p < .001$,

whereas non-buyers were faster in the fair trade-negative block (M= 850, SD= 174) than in the fair trade-positive block (M= 935, SD= 214), t(35) = -2.80, p = .008). These results indicate that buyers had a more positive implicit attitude toward fair trade products than toward traditional products whereas the reverse was true for non-buyers.

Logistic Regression Analysis

In order to assess the explanatory power of implicit and explicit attitude measures, a logistic regression analysis was carried out. The criterion for the logistic regression analysis was the dichotomous behavioural variable 'buying or not buying Fair Trade products', which is identical to the earlier split up of respondents into 'Buyers' vs 'Non-buyers' of Fair Trade products. For the explicit and implicit predictors (attitude measures) we calculated two difference variables that were scored in such a way that higher values indicated preference for Fair Trade products. The explicit attitude difference score (EDS) was computed by subtracting the standardized score of 'attitude towards traditional products' from the standardized score of 'attitude towards Fair Trade products'. We used an analogue procedure for the implicit attitude difference score: standardized values of the mean response time for performing the 'Fair Trade-positive" (same key for fair trade products and positive words'; Combination 1) were subtracted from the 'Fair Trade-negative task (same key for fair trade products and negative words; Combination 2). The correlation between the explicit and implicit predictors was 0.43 ($p < 0.001$). In the stepwise logistic regression, the explicit difference score was entered in the first step and the IAT in the second step. This enabled us to estimate the additional predictive value of the implicit attitude measure beyond the influence of the explicit measure.

$$Buyer \approx Z = B_0 + B_1\, Explicit\ attitudes + B_2\, Implicit\ attitudes$$

The analysis yielded a significant positive relationship between the dependent variable on the one hand and the explicit (Exp(B)= 3.89; B= 1.36; Wald's statistic=10.96; p= 0.001) and implicit difference score (Exp(B)= 3.72; B=1.32; Wald's statistic= 11.45, p= 0.001) on the other hand. The overall –2 log likelihood difference for the fitted logistic model indicated a significant fit (χ^2=54.18; df=2; p<0.001; Nagelkerke R^2= .63). Moreover, we found a significant decrease of the –2 log likelihood in the transition from

the first model (including only the explicit difference score; -2LL= 78.43, χ^2=37.98; df=1; p<0.001; Nagelkerke R^2= .48)[1] to the full model (including both difference scores; -2LL=62.23, χ^2=16.20; df=1; p<0.001, Δ Nagelkerke R^2= 0.15). This result implies that the IAT accounts for 15% unique contribution to the prediction of behaviour. In fact, the full model was able to classify 83.5 % of the respondents correctly, while the model based on the explicit measure alone assigned only 76.5 % of the respondents to the right category.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to examine the usefulness of implicit attitude measurement with respect to ethical consumer behavior and to better investigate its relevance for the prediction and establishment of ethical buying behavior in society. Our results support the relevance of implicit measures such as the IAT as a useful tool in this context. First, we found that the IAT effects for buyers and non-buyers of Fair Trade products were significantly different, showing that the IAT can be used to differentiate between buyers and non-buyers. Moreover, it is suggested that to incite non-users to consume in a socially responsible way, not only explicit, but also implicit attitudes need to be changed. Thirdly, the logistic regression analysis demonstrated that IAT effects partially predicted ethical consumer behavior even when the influence of the explicit measure was controlled for. In other words, the IAT provided an independent contribution to the prediction of behavior. This conclusion is consistent with previous research that suggested independence in predictions of behavior by IAT and explicit measures (e.g. Egloff and Smukle 2002; Maison, Greenwald, and Bruin 2004). Although Maison, Greenwald and Bruin's (2004) study 3 already indicated significant positive beta-coefficients for the IAT in multiple regression analysis, so far no formal statistical test was used to validate a predictive pattern of behavior (e.g. Nosek 2004).

[1] When including only the implicit difference score in the regression analysis a Nagelkerke R^2 of .45 is obtained with -2LL= 81.53, χ^2=34.88; *df*=1 and *p*<0.001

The present study is the first demonstration of the usefulness of implicit attitude measurement for the prediction of consumer behavior in general, and ethical buying behavior in particular.

More specific, the data suggest that in ethical consumer behavior research the combined use of explicit and implicit attitude measures could lead to a better prediction of behavior as compared to when only explicit attitude measures would be used. This finding is in line with the dual attitude model of Jarvis [2]et al. (2001) suggesting that, in certain situations, old and new attitudes can be jointly activated and influence subsequent thought and action. However, we also need to point to the fact that in the regression analysis the explicit attitude measure had larger β values and accounted for the largest part of the variance explained in the behavioral intention variable. This means that the explicit measure predicted behavior better than the IAT. A possible explanation for the importance of the explicit measure in current experiment is that social desirability distortion did not form such a big problem as could be expected on the basis of previous research. That is, it is suggested that not measurement problems, but rather the discordant character of ethical consumer products account for the attitude-behavior gap found in our experiment. This interpretation is further confirmed by the moderate and significant correlation that was found between the two types of measures (r=.43). Furthermore, the correlation indicates that although there is an overlap between the two types of measures, they may still measure different constructs.

The findings have a number of practical implications. First, to make non-users of ethical products behave more ethically, not only explicit, but also implicit attitudes need to be enhanced. As a consequence we recommend practitioners to not only attune their product strategy to the influence of explicit, but also implicit attitudes. Because especially positive affective experiences with products form the basis of implicit attitudes (e.g. Rudman, 2004) and positive affective reactions and familiarity are shown to be closely related (Janiszewski, 1990), we believe that exposure to and thus familiarity with the

[2] According to the dual attitude model of Jarvis et al. (2003) persuasion does not necessary lead to attitude change, but rather to changes in confidence with respect to prior held attitudes. That is, people may lose confidence in their prior attitude and have enhanced confidence in a new attitude. Consequently, if an individual comes to have less confidence in an attitude, even if it has not changed in valence, it should be less directive of behavior, less stable and more susceptible to subsequent persuasion.

products should be increased. To that end, we advise an improved and extended distribution network next to a greater visibility of the products in all kind of food shops.

That is, ethical products should become part of daily life by placing them next to A-brands of the same product category in supermarkets as well as bars and restaurants. Further, negative or less positive affective reactions can be altered by giving consumers positive experiential contact with the products. Free samples of ethical products in the supermarket or within the framework of a direct marketing campaign could serve this goal. In the context of fair trade, the authors found in a previous study that the indifference towards these products was substantial and that they were not particularly liked. Furthermore, in a follow-up study, an explanatory model of fair-trade buying behavior showed that these factors had a substantial effect on buying behavior. Stimulating product experiences may therefore be very important. Fair-trade organizations and other non-profit organizations promoting ethical consumer behavior should therefore develop strategies that lead to maximum trial and product experience.

As a limitation, we should point to the fact that this study was conducted in a relatively small exploratory group of Belgian consumers. Moreover, the study focused on only two product categories in one specific ethical buying situation (fair trade). Further research in different cultures and for different ethical products and issues should be conducted to corroborate our findings. Indeed, implicit attitude measurement in general and the IAT in particular could also be useful to study reactions to environmentally friendly products and initiatives and to other social marketing issues, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, speeding, not wearing a seatbelt… Secondly, although the purpose of the learning phase was to make sure that all respondents (and especially the non-buyers) knew the difference between the traditional and Fair Trade products, it remains questionable whether the distinction between buyers versus non-buyers would itself translate to differences in implicit attitudes, without the learning phase. Further research could also try to clarify what kind of variance it is exactly that is uniquely predicted by the IAT or focus on the potential moderating effects of, for instance, the amount of experience with the product and the intensity of product use, and perceived consumer effectiveness. Maybe the most interesting suggestion for further study is to try to identify

the relative importance of factors such as the type of information and product experience to diminish negative implicit attitudes.

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