

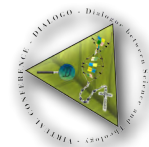
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The influence of subliminal messages on decision-making capacity

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ABSTRACT

Subliminal messages are a series of stimuli (visual and auditory) that have the power of influencing the psychic and human behavior, although they are not consciously perceived. These messages are so short that, once transmitted, the brain cannot detect them consciously. Therefore, through subliminal messages, the brain receives specific information without being able to refuse it, hence without discernment.

Although subliminal messages are everywhere, especially in the media, where commercials are made with an increasingly sophisticated psychological substrate, their power to influence our decisions and behavior is still debatable. As we will see, the power of these messages of significantly influencing certain decisions hangs much on the character traits we have, on our passions and desires.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand what subliminal messages mean, we need to define each element that constitutes this concept.

The message represents the vehicle of information. It includes the transmitted information as well as the symbol code that gives a certain meaning to the report. It depends on two components: the transmitter and the receiver. It is encoded by the transmitter, transposed into signs,

signals, symbols, respectively in the language of a code. This is the content of communication. [1] (Abric Jean-Paul, 2002).

Subliminal refers to something that is beyond the threshold of consciousness, which cannot be made aware even by sustained effort.

Thus, the subliminal message corresponds to a message that transmits certain subliminal stimuli below the normal processing limits of conscious perception.

Subliminal excitement refers to an excitation below the normal sensory threshold, which cannot cause a conscious sensation.

Subliminal messages are defined as signals below the absolute threshold of our conscious capacity. As a result, we cannot become aware of subliminal stimuli, even if we try to detect them. Absolute threshold is defined as the lowest level of stimuli we can detect, whether visual, auditory, or sensory, etc. When an external stimulus falls below this threshold, it cannot be consciously detected.

Subliminal perception is considered to be the result of a deliberately communication technique designed to generate an answer so that people do things they would not normally do.

Both perception and reaction to subliminal messages take place at the subconscious level. What is often confusing are the terms of subliminal and supraliminal. Supraliminal is the opposite of the subliminal. While both evoke neuronal responses and therefore influence our behavior, supraliminal stimuli can be perceived by the conscious mind.

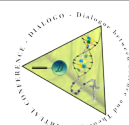
Subliminal stimuli (literally meaning "below the threshold"), unlike supraliminal stimuli or "over the threshold", are any sensory stimuli below the individual threshold of conscious perception. A recent analysis of magnetic resonance imaging studies (fMRI) shows that subliminal stimuli activate certain regions of the brain, even though the participants are at an unconscious level. [2] (Loftus, Elizabeth F., Klinger, Mark R., 1992)

Visual stimuli can be displayed so quickly, before the person can process them, or shown and then masked, thus interrupting the information processing. Audio stimuli can be played at very moderate volume, so as not to be obvious, consciously perceived or masked by other stimuli. [3] (Brooks, S.J., Savov V, Allzen E, Benedict C, Fredriksson R, Schiöth HB, 2012).

Research of Philip M. Merikle [4] (1998) reviews the history of psychological investigations of unconscious perceptions and summarizes the current state of experimental research in this area of investigation. The conclusions of the research described in the paper illustrate how it is possible to distinguish between conscious and unconscious perception. The most successful experimental strategy was to show that a stimulus can have qualitatively different consequences on congenial and affective reactions depending on how it was perceived: consciously or unconsciously. In addition, recent studies in which patients undergoing general anesthesia have shown that the effects of unconscious stimuli during surgery may take about 24 hours. Taken together, the results of these recent psychological investigations provide empirical support to highlight the importance of unconsciously perceived information in determining cognitive and affective responses.

In the Encyclopedia of Psychology, E. Kazdin [5] (2000), there is a discussion about subliminal perception. This occurs whenever it is found that the below the threshold of awareness stimuli seem to influence thoughts, feelings or actions. The term subliminal perception was initially used to describe situations where weak stimuli were perceived without awareness. In recent years, the term has been generalized to describe any situation in which stimuli that cannot be directly observed are perceived.

This concept of subliminal perception is of considerable interest because it suggests that people's feelings, thoughts and actions are influenced by stimuli beyond their conscious perception. This interest is reflected in some of the earliest psychological studies conducted during the 1800s and early 1900s. In these early studies people were merely asked if they were aware when they perceived certain stimuli.



For example, visual stimuli such as letters, figures, or geometric figures were displayed at such a distance by observers, who were communicating either that they do not see anything, or that they see only blurry points. Also, auditory stimuli, such as the names of letters, were whispered so slowly that the observers said they could not hear any sound. In order to test whether these visual or auditory stimuli can be perceived despite the contrary statements, observers were asked to make assumptions about certain stimuli. For example, if half of the stimuli were written messages, and the other half – numbers, the observers had to tell what letters or numbers they had been presented. The consistent result found in these early studies was that after the presentation of subliminal stimuli, the subjects were more likely to guess the stimuli, rather than they would have been able to guess them by chance. In other words, despite the statements of the observers who said they did not become aware of these stimuli, their responses indicated that sufficient information was perceived to make accurate assumptions about the stimuli. Over the years there have been many studies similar to these. Taken together, these studies show that considerable information meant to guide decisions or actions exist, even if subjects are not aware of it. [5] (E. Kazdin, 2000, pp. 497-499).

Another way in which subliminal perception has been demonstrated in laboratory studies shows that stimuli can be perceived even when presented under conditions that make it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish one stimulus from another. Classical studies conducted by the British psychologist Marcel in the 1970s were based on previous results which indicate that a decision about a stimulus is facilitated or prepared when the stimulus follows a relevant stimulus.

These studies have not only confirmed

Marcel's original discoveries but have also shown that other stimuli such as images, facial expressions, and certain spoken words, may also facilitate subsequent decisions even when presented under conditions that make it difficult to distinguish one stimulus from another. A firm conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that considerable information is perceived even when subjects are not aware of it. [6] (A. Marcel, 1983)

Nonverbal and paraverbal communication play an essential role in transmitting desired messages, or in perceiving subtle messages by listeners. "Nonverbal communication transmits information, emotions, feelings, personality characteristics, etc." This type of communication involves unconscious reactions, and nonverbal language is given more credibility than verbal language, believing that it transmits the true meanings of our interlocutor's message." [7]

There is a lot of information on subliminal messages on the Internet. These are either overlooked or praised and loaded with enormous powers. It is appropriate, however, to look at them with a lot of discernment, that is, neither to overlook them, nor to consider them capable of fulfilling any desire.

The fact that in Romania the products containing subliminal information are forbidden must give us a thought. The Law on Advertising in Romania decides the following: "Advertising that is subliminal is prohibited" (Article 6 (b)). I do not know how respectful this law is, given the fact that the ads contain more and more psychological information.

Subliminal messages can influence choices and behavior only in certain contexts. They address our inner inclinations. The fact that the advertisers know the passions of the soul and channel the subliminal messages towards them can

weaken our will to such an extent that we can no longer resist any temptation. The pride, the thirst for power and money, the sexuality, the saturation and comfort are the soul movements towards which most of the commercial messages (both messages that can be acknowledged and subliminal messages) are directed.

Persecutions against Christians in the Roman Empire are more actual than ever, but today they are too well hidden under fine manipulation techniques, under laws and carefully elaborated constitutions, so that humans can think of themselves as being free, even when they are not. When they come to know Christ and follow Him, Christians are no longer "from the world", that is, by their special living they no longer live for the flesh and for the world, but they live in it as if they were from another world, as if they are waiting to leave it at any moment, in order to reach home, in the real world, that is, in the kingdom of Christ, of which Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

In a time of apparent freedom, when the soul comes to being influenced by the most hidden methods, discernment remains the only escape. At the time of the persecutions, Christians "insisted in the teaching of the Apostles and in impartation, in breaking the bread (Liturgy) and in praying" (Acts 2:42). The freedom of will and the gift of discernment can only be kept in a permanent connection with God, who gives His Grace to all who seek and love Him.[8]

II. OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this paper is to prove whether the subliminal messages that are encountered every time in advertising, advertisements, and various spots alter our consumption behavior. These advertisements are formulated in a way that is more agreeable and "edible"

directed to the target audience for raising the interest, and finally to the purchase of the product in question. The packaging is interesting and attractive, but is the exterior the only manipulating factor? This is where subliminal messages and their ability to influence our decision-making capacity to a greater extent intervene.

III. HYPOTHESES

It is assumed that the effects of subliminal messages from the advertising ads change at least temporarily the decision-making capacity of the individual.

IV. METHODS/INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaire measuring the decision-making capacity of individuals. [9]

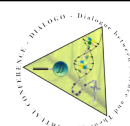
The objective of this test is to assess the rationality of the decision maker. This means a reduced sensitivity to the decisional biases highlighted by empirical research that treated the issue of limited rationality of the human decision maker. The test includes 14 items describing decision situations and presents the alternatives for which they can opt for the subjects, being formulated as situations with responses of free choice.

V. LOT OF PARTICIPANTS

The sample of subjects was formed exclusively of 30 women, all of them coming from the urban environment.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data processing was possible using the SPSS program [10]. Regarding the administration of the decision-making questionnaire, we drew a parallel between the initial decision maker's questionnaire and the same questionnaire applied 8 weeks



later, in order to highlight the significant differences that occurred following the subliminal message projected into the advertising ad.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	initial_decision_capacity	3.53	30	1.008	.184
	final_decision_capacity	2.13	30	.937	.171

For the comparison, we used the T test to “assess the significance of the averages of the two sets of scores” [11]

Hence, by comparing the two average scores, the decision-making capacity questionnaire initially administered and the final one (the retest), we observe a decrease in the decision-making capacity after seeing the subliminal message, after the retest, the final_decision_capacity.

Thus, between the two tests initially applied and after the visualization of the subliminal message there is a significant difference ($t = -9,424$, $p = 0.000$). From this result, we can conclude that subliminal messages do have significant effects on the alteration of decision-making capacity, which confirms the hypothesis that subliminal messages show the expected effect in changing the decisional capacity at least temporarily.

There are many studies and examples that suggest the effectiveness of these messages and the way they manage to change our decision to choose and act unconsciously.

Cooper, Joel; Cooper, Grant [12] (2002) suggests a study that is also based on participants' thirst of research. Thus, following watching an episode of “The Simpsons” series which contained unique frames of the word “thirsty” or the picture of a Coca-Cola can, they noticed ratings as being positive as far as the effectiveness of subliminal messages is concerned. Thus, the

participants' thirst increased significantly.

Another significant study is the one from 1982, when John Bargh and Paulo Pietromonaco formed two groups of subjects who were presented a cartoon with Donald Duck. In this program, Donald had to donate blood to the Red Cross, but was refusing to do it. Certain neutral subliminal messages, such as “water” or “people” were inserted to the first group of subjects and to the second group - words as “insult” or “malice”. Subjects from group 1 were indifferent after watching the movie, while the second group showed indignation, calling him “selfish”, “pumpkin”, etc. As evidence, researchers have reached to the conclusion that subliminal messages have a certain influence in inducing certain attitudes in the behavior of subjects. [13] (Bogdan Ficeac, 2004).

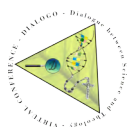
Kunst-Wilson & Zajong [14] (1980) agreed with the supposed influence of subliminal messages on our thoughts and behavior. The first premise is that both animals and humans easily develop strong preferences for objects that become familiar through repeated exposures. Evidence of the experiment is that these preferences can develop even if exposures are so degraded that their recognition is excluded.

Bornstein, Leone and Galley [15] (1987) found that people shared the same opinions with some individuals in a larger proportion after being subliminally flashed with a picture of the person in question.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the obtained results, we can say that subliminal messages significantly influence our consumption behavior as well as the change, at least temporarily, of the decisions we follow.

The fact that our decisions can be unconsciously changed could raise a lot of question marks like: Is that what I really



wanted to do? Are there factors that can influence me so much that I can change my own beliefs? Under normal circumstances, would I have chosen anything else? It is, as I have already pointed out, a scary concept and a tough reality in which our decisions are unconsciously altered and manipulated without our will. The incorporation of these subliminal messages goes beyond the limits of morality, beyond the freedom of preserving our beliefs, ideas, of making decisions on our own account, and take responsibility for it. Practically, the wishes and actions determined by each of us do not belong to us to a large extent, but have been induced unconsciously, for the personal use of those who use this concept for mean and immoral purposes. Unfortunately, we have all become robots that slowly lose their innovative element, the uniqueness of decisions, the ability to control their own judgment, and to act in accordance with their own convictions. No one should take advantage of this mass manipulation that proves to be harmful from the point of view of the uniqueness of the person. Practically, decision-making power and control over our decisions are stolen, we behave as if we are identical, having the same preferences and acting similarly to our peers.

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BIOGRAPHY

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I have a Doctor of Psychology degree and my domains of interest are neuropsychology, cognitive psychology, diagnosis and settlement of social problems and statistics.

