Brand Conviction and Cognitive Conflict

Every day we make tons of decisions, some of which follow our habitual procedures while others require harder thinking and deliberation before making a final decision. In fact, human decisions arise along a continuum, where multiple cognitive processes, ranging from more mindful to more mindless operate at the same time.

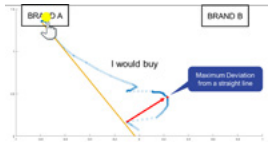
For example, when shopping for the usual and favorite ice cream brand, we buy the same brand over and over and the ice cream purchase behavior becomes automatic, mindless. However, the context may change. One day we might notice a promotion or a new flavor from a different brand, or our usual brand raises prices. In this new context, you may or not decide to switch to a different brand. Either way, the decision-making process becomes deliberative, and we consume more cognitive resources in weighing the options. The new context has generated cognitive conflict about your brand choice.

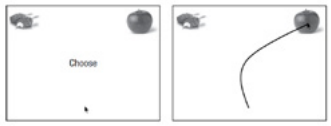
Approach

Brand Resilience reflects how your brand would perform when consumers are in a position of cognitive conflict and therefore, in a deliberate decision mode. It measures the extent to which, in the context of deliberation, we would still choose the usual brand. This is, to what extent brands are ready to face and resist disruption from inside or outside the category.

We have found that examining the degree of cognitive conflict through this lens is key to understanding behavior change. One interesting approach that we have found that provides insight into conflict is the path of a trace that people make when choosing between two options (process tracing). This is a variation of mouse tracking that has been shown to identify types of conflict, like self-control, in lab settings. At Ipsos, we have developed a scalable version, a mobile application where people can trace a path with their finger and the degree of drift from a straight path to a choice provides insight into how conflicted people are between options which is, again, predictive of who is likely to change their behavior.

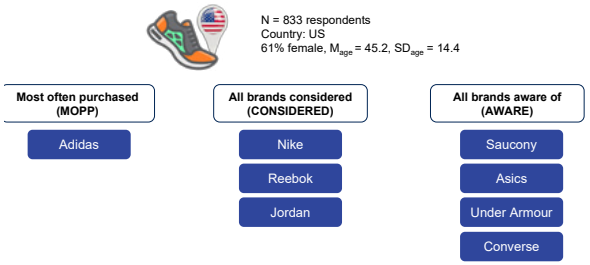
***Process Tracing** (PT) is adapted from online mouse tracking to evaluate the path followed when selecting a choice from a pair.*



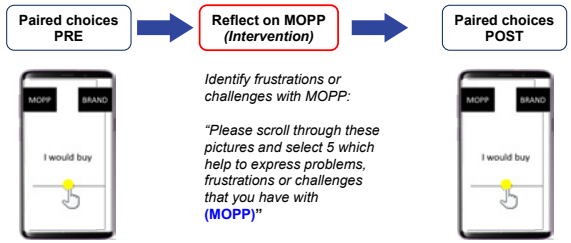


Stillman, P. E., Medvedev, D., & Ferguson, M. J. (2017). Resisting temptation: Tracking how self-control conflicts are successfully resolved in real time. Psychological Science, 28(9), 1240-1258.

In this study, Ipsos recruited 833 respondents in the United States (61% female) and conducted an exercise through the Ipsos Decision Process Tracing mobile app. Respondents were exposed to pairs of brands, including their most often purchased product (MOPP), the brands they considered purchasing, and those brands they are aware of, within a given category.



Respondents underwent this exercise before and after an intervention, consisting of reflecting on the challenges and frustrations associated with their MOPP. During the decision process, we collected data on the maximum deviation from a straight path of a choice during the process tracing exercise.

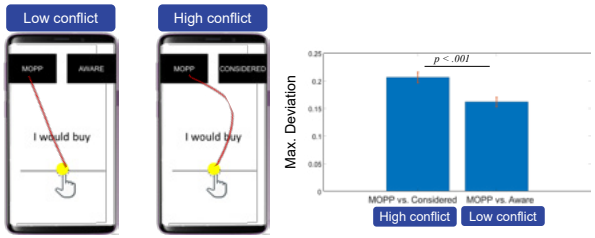


Results

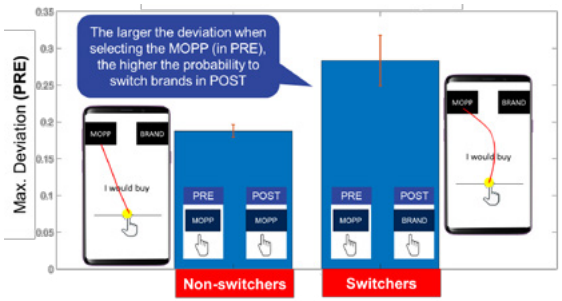
Our test confirmed that the Ipsos Decision Process Tracing approach is capable of measuring conflict by means of maximum deviation. We tested the following conditions:

- Condition A: MOPP versus brand considered as a purchase; this condition should, by definition, generate more conflict.
- Condition B: MOPP vs. brand respondents are aware of, but not considered as a purchase; this condition should, by definition, generate less conflict.

We computed the grand average of the maximum deviation for these two conditions and found that A, high conflict condition, led to a significantly larger deviation than B, which was defined to generate less conflict. This confirmed the ecological validity of the approach.



We also found that respondent behavioral change, defined as switching brand, could be predicted by the cognitive conflict, as shown by maximum deviation, during brand choice before the intervention. In other words, the higher the cognitive conflict respondents showed when selecting the MOPP, as indicated by the larger trace deviation, the higher the likelihood of switching to the other brand after the intervention.



Results showed that the Ipsos Decision Process Tracing approach can both detect cognitive conflict and predict behavioral change.

Conclusions

The Ipsos Decision Process Tracing mobile app was able to distinguish heuristic brand selection from more deliberative brand choice including identifying the different types of evaluation across brands.

Additionally, it has proven to be an effective tool in identifying cognitive conflict and showing that the higher the conflict, the higher the likelihood of changing choices and behaviors.

Final Thoughts

Finally, these results show that this method is able to quantify the likelihood of behavioral change, such as brand switch, by measuring cognitive conflict. This approach can help identify cognitive conflict and it provides insights into consumers' decision processes. These insights allow us to pinpoint who is prone to change their behavior and against which specific alternatives. With this understanding, these individuals can be profiled to better target campaigns to induce change or to protect against it.

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