

THE BREADTH-BASED ADJECTIVE RATING TASK AS AN INDIRECT MEASURE OF CONSUMER ATTITUDES

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Consumer researchers have sought the development of indirect measures of consumer attitudes in order to illuminate aspects of consumer behavior that otherwise might be difficult to study (Haire, 1950). However, relatively limited attention has been paid to these aspects of consumer behavior that operate outside of conscious awareness due to the lack of reliable and valid measures in the consumer domain. Indirect measures are not a novel concept in consumer research, but methodological weaknesses have limited their usage.

This study was designed to evaluate the Breadth-based Adjective Rating Task (BART; Karpinski, Steinberg, Versek, & Alloy, 2007) as an indirect paper-and-pencil measure of consumer attitudes. The BART is based on the premise that people tend to describe expectancy-consistent information with broad, abstract traits, and expectancy-inconsistent information with narrow, concrete traits. The BART quantifies this abstraction bias by having participants rate how well trait adjectives, known to vary by breadth and valence, describe an attitude object. Evidence has been provided in initial studies of the reliability and validity of the BART as a measure of self-esteem (Karpinski et al., 2007). The primary advantage of the BART is that it is a flexible measure that can be used to measure

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a myriad of attitudinal objects. In addition, it is straightforward to administer and uncomplicated in scoring and interpretation. These qualities have distinguished it from other commonly used indirect measures in social research. This research was the first attempt to extend the validity of the BART into the consumer domain.

The experiment involved 102 students (87 women, 15 men) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a university in the northeast of the United States of America. In this study, attitudes toward a prominent newspaper with wide readership in this region were assessed. All participants first completed the BART followed by the explicit attitude measures. The BART is similar in administration to other paper-and-pencil attitude measures. Participants rated how well each of 144 trait adjectives described a target object on a 9-point scale. The trait adjectives were selected such that the breadth and valence of the trait varied orthogonally. Explicit attitudes were assessed using semantic differential, feeling thermometer and rating scale measures. It was hypothesized that the BART would predict participants' prospective choice for a consumer object. It was expected that the BART would highlight the role of nonconscious processes ostensibly affecting consumer behavior.

There was a significant relationship between the BART and participants' verbal reports of newspaper choice. The BART was a significant predictor of newspaper choice when entered separately into the logistic regression equation, $\chi^2_{WALD}(1) = 8.08, p < .01$. When entered simultaneously with explicit attitudes, the BART continued to be a significant predictor of prospective newspaper choice above and beyond explicit attitudes, $\chi^2_{WALD}(1) = 7.48, p < .01$.

The results indicate that the BART could have utility in measuring consumer attitudes without having to ask participants directly about their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. The BART appears to be a viable alternative to projective techniques and a worthwhile addition to current measurement techniques. However, additional research is needed to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the BART in the consumer domain. Future studies should address the effect of time and motivation on consumer choice. This will enable consumer researchers to have a better understanding of the role of conscious and nonconscious processes impacting consumer behaviors.

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