Brand or Generic: Printing Consumer Choices in Their Favor

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ABSTRACT

U.S. consumers could save nearly $44 billion per year by purchasing generic products whenever possible. Given that the producers of generics are unlikely to spend large sums on traditional advertising to compete with brand products, another paradigm was examined. Traditional advertising is based on classical conditioning but in-store priming-based advertising might also be possible. Priming refers the effect where, due to recent exposure to a particular prime stimulus, certain mental concepts associated with the prime stimulus become more accessible and influence behavior, cognition, or mood. The results of these experiments suggest that priming the concept of luxury can increase preferences for generics in some product categories, and that smaller distances between aisles and lower ceiling height can increase preferences for generics.

INTRODUCTION

"Is generic okay?" That is a question that most people have been asked or asked of others. On some level, most people likely know that the generic option is just as good as the more expensive brand product or at least very similar in the majority of cases. Yet, it has been estimated by Bronnenberg, Dubé, Gentzkow, and Shapiro (2014) that U.S. consumers spend roughly $196 billion per year in product categories that have a generic alternative and if they purchased generics "whenever possible" (p. 2), U.S. consumers could save roughly $44 billion each year. This averages to approximately $380 per household per year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015) and the per household amount likely varies tremendously. Given the potential savings, why do many consumers consider generics second to brand products? There are several possible explanations for this. It could be due to a sense of brand loyalty on the part of the consumers. In our materialistic society, consumers might feel a sense of superiority in being able to afford brand products, just as they would with a luxury car. Additionally, it could be simply that brand products are advertised more often and more effectively than generics.

Advertisers typically seek to promote or influence consumers to buy non-generic products, however, there is no reason why retail stores cannot employ their own strategies to make their generic products more desirable. Generally, advertising is based on classical conditioning principles that seek to associate particular emotions, concepts, or information with a product. This, however, is a relatively distal approach to persuading consumers to buy certain products, as classical conditioning typically requires multiple trials to achieve the desired associative learning. Additionally, retailers might not be willing to do this for their store brand generics, as the brand products they sell are advertised in the same manner. Therefore, retailers would be explicitly competing against their suppliers. Thus, rather than employing a classical conditioning paradigm to encourage purchasing of generic products, retailers might use other techniques, such as priming.

Another possible explanation is that consumers simply do not know very much about the products they buy. Bronnenberg, et al. (2014) found that, when purchasing headache medication, the average U.S. household buys generic products 74% of the time. More, they found that households with a primary shopper who correctly matched active ingredients in headache remedy medications to their respective brand products (e.g., acetaminophen matches to Tylenol, ibuprofen matches to Advil) were 19% more likely to buy generic headache remedy medications than one who cannot correctly match any of the active ingredients. Furthermore, pharmacists and physicians were 15 percentage points more likely to buy generic than the average consumer. Similarly, professional chefs chose generic pantry staples, such as flour, 77% of the time whereas average consumers do so 60% of the time. Thus, the authors showed that consumers who have a better understanding of certain product categories are more likely to buy generics than the layperson.

Since educating U.S. consumers about pharmaceuticals and other product categories is an unfeasible and unrealistic goal, and retailers are unlikely to spend large amounts of money on advertisements that compete with their suppliers, retailers should employ other techniques to increase the purchasing of generic products. Specifically, they should choose a technique that can be implemented within their stores. With this in mind, priming is an optimal paradigm to utilize.

Priming refers the effect where, due to recent exposure to a particular prime stimulus, certain mental concepts associated with the prime stimulus become more accessible and therefore influence behavior, cognition, or affect. Additionally, prime stimuli can either be physically perceived (e.g., a

person sees the prime stimulus) or simply thought of or imagined (e.g., a person thinks about the prime stimulus). Thus, priming is an extraordinarily flexible paradigm that can temporarily influence cognitions, moods, and behaviors in various ways (Janiszewski & Wyer, 2014).

Priming is of interest to the field of psychology for myriad reasons. At the most fundamental level, priming effects are evidence of implicit learning because with little if any cognitive effort, a person will use the information of a prime stimulus to interpret a later stimulus. This is similar to the way that explicit or purposeful learning leads people to use what they already know to interpret new stimuli or ideas. Additionally, the non-effortful nature in which primes temporarily influence cognition and behavior potentially supports the general notions of the Levels of Processing (LoP) framework. Levels of Processing posits that, during learning, individuals should engage in effortful or deep processing of what is to be remembered and that this will aid later recall (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Therefore, since priming occurs at what LoP would categorize as a very shallow or non-effortful level, it is not likely to be remembered, which is congruent with the temporary nature of priming effects. In addition to the theoretical importance of priming, there are societal implications as well.

An experiment by Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) is one example of the effect that primes can have on socially important behaviors. They showed that by having participants arrange words such as “aggressive” or “disturb” (p. 234) and other filler words into grammatically correct sentences, they could prime the concept of rudeness. This is evidenced by the fact that participants who were primed with the concept of rudeness interrupted a conversation the experimenter was having with a confederate significantly sooner and more often than the control group. More, by using the same technique to prime the concept of the elderly instead of rudeness, the researchers induced participants to walk slower after exposure to the prime stimuli than at baseline. With this study, the researchers demonstrated that semantic primes could have significant effects on behaviors, including relatively automatic behaviors like walking.

One limitation of priming is demonstrated by the fact that the infamous notion of subliminal advertising is not as powerful as once thought or hoped. Most famously, subliminal advertising sought to introduce prime stimuli during films shown in theaters. These prime stimuli were shown very briefly and used messages like “Drink Coca-Cola,” which supposedly increased sales of Coca-Cola during the movie. Eventually, it was uncovered that the data supporting this advertising technique were falsified (Love, 2011). Despite this hoax, priming can still be useful if used properly and under the right conditions. For example, Strahan, Spencer, and Zanna (2002) found that subliminal primes could not be used to create a new goal-completing behavior (e.g., make a person who is not thirsty get go get a drink) but only influence the likelihood that a goal-completing behavior will be enacted (make a thirsty person get a drink sooner). In essence, showing that new goals could not be created with subliminal primes but subliminal primes can motivate the completion of an existing goal.

Another limitation of priming is that different types of prime stimuli require different lengths of exposure to have an effect. A series of experiments by Murphy and Zajonc (1993) demonstrate this point. The researchers used a computer screen to display a series of Chinese glyphs to participants, who did not know the meaning of the glyphs, therefore making the glyphs novel stimuli. Before showing each of the glyphs, the researchers displayed a prime stimulus on the screen. In one experiment, the primes were affectively charged faces that displayed for 4 milliseconds or 1000 milliseconds immediately before Chinese glyphs, displayed for 2000 milliseconds. In the 4-millisecond condition, which did not allow the participants time to consciously process the faces, the affects of the faces were transferred onto the participants’ concepts of the glyphs as evidenced by the participants’ ratings of the glyphs’ likability and whether the participants viewed the glyphs as representing a good or a bad object. The same effects did not occur in the 1000-millisecond conditions. Thus, they showed that affective primes delivered below conscious awareness could influence people’s evaluations of new stimuli.

In a similar experiment using semantic primes, the researchers used either large or small circles, which, although not lexical still provided information regarding size, instead of faces. In this experiment, they found that displaying the prime of a large (small) circle for one second led more participants to interpret the glyph following the circle as representing a large (small) object, such as an elephant (mouse) than random chance. This shows that even non-lexical but nonetheless informational stimuli, in this case, the circles, can influence the way in which people consider and judge the meaning of novel stimuli.

Taken together, these experiments demonstrate that affective primes, or at least affectively charged faces, presented below conscious awareness can influence perceptions but that semantic primes cannot because semantic primes require cognitive processing. This suggests that certain stimuli are processed sooner or faster than others might.

Some affective primes, however, presented on a supraliminal level (i.e., at the level of conscious

awareness) can influence certain behaviors, as shown by Yuen and Lee (2003). They used affectively valenced video primes to induce a negative mood, which led to statistically more conservative risk-taking (i.e., choosing less risky choices) than a prime-induced positive mood. Likewise, Zemack-Rugar, Bettman, and Fitzsimons (2007) found that priming the concept of guilt led to lower levels of indulgence than control, and priming the concept of sadness led to higher levels of indulgence than control. Thus, both studies showed that primes used to induce affective states could influence reward- and indulgence-seeking behaviors.

Having reviewed the literature, what follows is a series of three experiments to test the possible effects of priming-based advertising or other changes within stores that could increase purchasing of generics.

EXPERIMENT 1

This last study by Zemack-Rugar, et al. (2007) provides the basis for Hypothesis 1. If consumers consider brand products indulgences, relative to generics, then Hypothesis 1 predicts that priming the affect of guilt will increase the likelihood that participants will prefer a generic product over a brand product compared to those primed with the affect of sadness, and controls will fall between these two conditions. To account for the possibility that choices in some product categories might be differentially affected by the prime condition, Experiment 1 was designed as a mixed-factorial.

METHODS

Experiment 1 used 30 college-aged participants recruited via sign-up sheets. Participants in all experiments were recruited during the same time period, and were randomly assigned to one of the 4 conditions. Experiment 1 used a 2 (product category: headache medication, drinks) by 3 (prime condition: guilt, sadness, control) mixed-factorial design and the dependent variable of questionnaire responses.

MEASURES

Participants were asked to compete a word search puzzle consisting of 10 target words associated with the prime condition (see Appendices A to D for all word search puzzles). Target words were selected from subsets of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule – Expanded Form (Watson, & Clark, 1999), from thesaurus synonyms of the prime concepts (Oxford University Press, 2012), and from items associated with the affective states (e.g., “tears” and “tissues” in the sadness condition). The word search puzzle for the control condition used shapes as target words, as shapes are presumably affectively and semantically neutral.

The effects of the primes were measured with a questionnaire regarding various economic habits such as spending and saving behaviors, henceforth referred to as the economic habits questionnaire (EHQ) (See Appendix E for a copy of the EHQ). The first question asked participants to imagine they have a headache, and indicate their brand versus generic preference (BVGP) for headache medication on a 6-point scale ranging from “Greatly prefer generic” to “Greatly prefer brand.” A similar scenario was used for the last question, which assessed BVGP for drinks. This questionnaire was developed largely for the purpose of maintaining the cover story and only the first and last questions were included in analyses.

PROCEDURE

Participants were told that they were participating in a study on the correlation between spending habits and processing speed, and asked to sign an informed consent form. They were randomly assigned—except when needed to fill a condition—to complete a word search puzzle with target words associated with guilt, sadness, or shapes. To maintain the cover story, participants were told they had ten minutes to complete the puzzle and were instructed to record the time remaining on a large digital timer when they finished. Upon completion of the word search puzzle or when the ten minutes passed, participants were instructed to complete the EHQ. Once all participants completed the questionnaire, they were debriefed and thanked for their time.

EXPERIMENT 1

Participant responses on the EHQ to questions regarding BVGPs (questions one and ten) were coded on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Greatly prefer generic” equal to 1, to “Greatly prefer brand” equal to 6. Thus, BVGP acts as an index with a lower BVGP indicating a greater preference for generics and a higher BVGP indicating a greater preference for brands. Data were analyzed using a 2 (product category: headache medication, drinks) by 3 (prime condition: guilt, sadness, control) mixed-factorial ANOVA. All analyses were performed in SPSS at the significance level of $p < .05$.

RESULTS

Figure 1 plots of the means and standard errors of BVGPs by prime condition and product category. Figure 1 shows that there was a higher BVGP for drinks than headache medication. This was confirmed with the tests of within-subjects effects, which yielded a significant main effect of product category on BVGPs, $F(1, 27) = 5.05$, $p = .03$. Figure 1 also shows that the mean BVGPs did not differ between the prime conditions. Inferential statistics confirm this. The tests of between-subjects effects indicated that prime condition did not have a significant main effect on BVGPs, $F(2, 27) = .03$, $p = .97$. Additionally, there was not a significant product category by prime condition interaction effect on BVGPs, $F(2, 27) = .348$, $p = .709$.

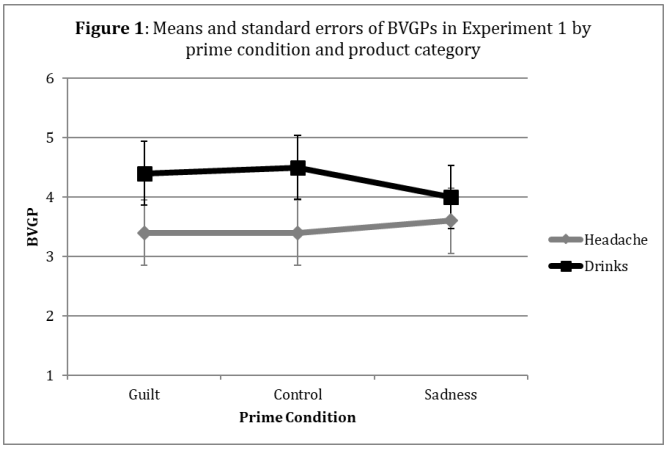

Figure 1: Means and standard errors of BVGPs in Experiment 1 by prime condition and product category

DISCUSSION

The results of Experiment 1 show that attempts to induce sadness and guilt were unsuccessful in significantly influencing participants' BVGPs in the two product categories examined. The effect of product category does, however, justify the use of a factorial design.

These results could be due to a number of factors. It is possible that the assumption that consumers consider brand products to be indulgences compared to generics is wrong, and thus, the effects that sadness and guilt had on indulgence-seeking behaviors reported by Zemack-Rugar et al. (2007) would not generalize to purchasing behaviors. Additionally, as no manipulation checks were performed, it is possible that the intended mood states were not successfully primed or, if the mood states were primed, it is also possible that BVGPs in the two product categories tested might not be susceptible to the effects of these mood states, or to priming in general. The second possibility could easily be addressed by in future research by having participants complete manipulation checks.

Since the aim of this research was to explore various methods by which retailers might prime shoppers to choose generics, more than one possibility was examined.

EXPERIMENT 2

Rather than priming guilt or sadness, which could influence the way shoppers feel about the store instead of the products, retailers could make generics appear to be the more practical or utilitarian choice. Park, Kim, Kwak, and Wyer (2013) showed that priming the concept of extravagance made participants less likely to choose a luxury product for themselves than controls if they were not under a cognitive load. Relatedly, Tong, Zheng, and Zhao (2013) showed that participants exposed to primes involving the concept of money, such as bank notes, were significantly more likely to select utilitarian products over hedonistic products than controls. Therefore, the researchers showed that participants could be primed to choose products that were presumably less desirable than other available options. Hypothesis 2 attempted to generalize these two studies to the realm of generic and brand products. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 predicted that priming the concept of luxury would increase the likelihood that participants will prefer a generic product to a brand product compared to controls. Additionally, due to the effect of product category in Experiment 1, Experiment 2 was also run as a factorial design.

METHODS

Experiment 2 used 10 college-aged male participants recruited via sign-up sheets and data from the control group in Experiment 1, which served as the control for Experiment 2. To account for a possible interaction or main effect of product category, Experiment 2 used a 2 (product category: headache medication, drinks) by 2 (prime condition: luxury, control) mixed-factorial design with the dependent variable of BVGPs.

MEASURES

Participants in the luxury condition received a packet containing a 10-item word search puzzle with target words related to luxury (see Appendix D for a copy of the luxury word search puzzle) and the EHQ.

PROCEDURE

Experiment 2 followed the same procedure as Experiment 1.

RESULTS

Figure 2 plots of the means and standard errors of BVGPs by prime condition and product category. Figure 2 shows that there was little difference between the luxury and control groups on BVGPs for headache medication but BVGPs for drinks did differ by prime condition. The tests of within-subjects effects indicated that there was not a significant main effect of product category on BVGPs, $F(1, 18) = .282$, $p = .602$. The tests of between-subjects effects

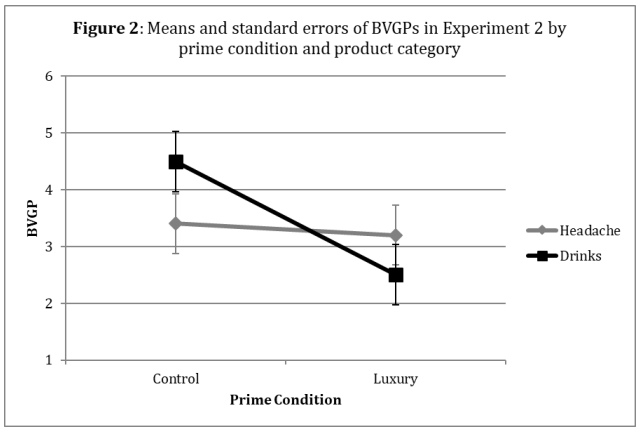

Figure 2: Means and standard errors of BVGPs in Experiment 2 by prime condition and product category

indicated that the main

effect of prime condition approached but failed to reach conventional levels of significance, $F(1, 18) = 2.89$, $p = .107$. There was a significant interaction effect between product category and prime condition, $F(1, 18) = 5.718$, $p = .028$, such that in the drinks category, those primed with luxury reported significantly lower BVGPs than controls.

DISCUSSION

As proposed in Experiment 1, the results of Experiment 2 indicate that certain product categories might be more susceptible to the effects of certain primes than others. This was evidenced by the luxury group reporting greater preference for generics than controls for the drinks product category but not headache medication. One possible reason why headache medication specifically was not influenced by the luxury prime is that, if priming the concept of luxury made participants more averse to loss, as proposed by Tong, et al. (2013), then a potential concern would be that the generic medication would not work as well as the brand. Thus, an aversion to the possibility that a generic medication might not be as effective in relieving the headache might have negated the aversion to paying more for brand medication. This explanation is consistent with the findings of Chernev (2004) who found that individuals who are more focused on minimizing negative results were more likely to prefer utilitarian products whereas those who focus on maximizing gains preferred hedonistic products. This would suggest that in-store signs to encourage money-saving generics, especially those displaying money or luxury, might in fact have little or no effect on the purchasing of generics at pharmacies even though the intended effect might occur in other store areas. This particular pattern is also important in the context of the findings of Bronnenberg, et al. (2014). This is because Bronnenberg, et al. found that individuals who did not have a background in health sciences were responsible for a large portion of the purchases of brand health products. Outside of health products, however, this pattern was not as apparent. Bronnenberg, et al. posited that this was a result of misinformation resulting from advertisements. If misinformation is responsible for much of the brand purchases of health products, then the combined findings of Bronnenberg, et al. and Experiment 2 suggest that an optimal strategy for retailers to increase purchasing of generics in all areas would be to use educational materials in the pharmacy area and use luxury primes in the rest of the store.

EXPERIMENT 3

One possible issue with the explanation given in Experiment 2 is that by making shoppers more loss averse—although a greater portion of their purchases might be generics—it is possible that shoppers might simply buy fewer products overall and purchase only the strictly necessary items. Experiment 3 was conducted to determine if stimuli that carry neither salient affective nor obvious semantic meaning (peripheral stimuli) could influence the way in which people evaluate other stimuli without this potential for generalized loss aversion.

Zarkadi and Schnall (2013) examined one example of the effects of peripheral stimuli as primes. When considering moral dilemmas and social issues, they found that participants whose questionnaires had black and white checkered backgrounds responded with answers farther from the midpoint of the scale than participants given questionnaires with solid gray or blue and yellow checkered backgrounds. This suggests that the black and white backgrounds led to a black and white or polarized way of thinking. Similarly, ceiling height has been shown to influence people's sense of freedom with higher ceilings priming the concept of freedom and lower ceilings priming confinement. Moreover, higher ceilings led participants to engage in more abstract

thinking and evaluate products in a more global fashion that emphasized commonalities over differences (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2007). These two studies show that peripheral primes can be used to not only influence choices but also the way that those choices are mentally evaluated. In an attempt to extend the results of Meyers-Levy and Zhu (2007) to the potential effects of environmental factors in stores such as ceiling height and distances between aisles, Hypothesis 3 predicted that the BVGPs of participants who complete the EHQ in an open space would differ from controls, and from participants who complete the EHQ in a confined space, who would differ from controls.

METHODS

Experiment 3 used 20 college-aged male participants recruited via sign-up sheets and data from the control group in Experiment 1, which served as the control group in Experiment 3. Experiment 3 used a 2 (product category: headache medication, drinks) by 3 (prime condition: open space, confined space, control) mixed-factorial design with the dependent variable of BVGPs.

MEASURES

Participants in Experiment 3 completed the shapes word search puzzle and the EHQ described in Experiment 1.

PROCEDURE

Participants were asked to wait outside of either a large room (open space condition) or a small room (confined space condition) until all participants arrived, at which point they were asked to enter the room. Participants were instructed to wait in the room for an additional five minutes, allegedly to ensure that all participants had in fact arrive. This ensured that all participants were exposed to the peripheral prime stimulus of room size for the same amount of time. From this point, the procedure was the same as the control condition in Experiment 1.

RESULTS

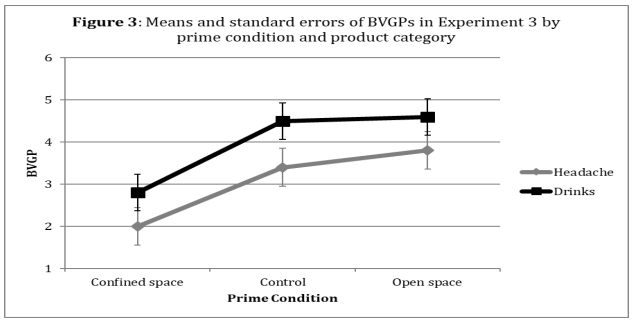

Figure 3 plots of the means and standard errors of BVGPs by prime condition and product category. Figure 3 shows that the confined space condition had lower BVGPs in both product categories than the control and open space prime conditions, which did not differ from one another. Additionally, it shows that there was a higher BVGP for drinks than for headache medication across prime conditions. Inferential statistics verify this. The tests of within-subjects effects revealed a significant main effect of product category on BVGPs, $F(1, 27) = 8.401$, $p = .007$, such that headache medication was significantly lower than the drinks category. The tests of between-subjects effects indicated a significant main effect of prime condition, $F(2, 27) = 7.845$, $p = .002$. Pairwise LSD comparisons indicated that BVGPs for the confined space condition were significantly lower than the control condition at the significance level of $p = .004$; BVGPs for the confined space condition were significantly lower than the open space condition at the significance level of $p = .001$; and BVGPs for the open space and control conditions did not differ significantly, $p = .616$. There was not a significant interaction effect between product category and prime condition, $F(2, 27) = .104$, $p = .902$.

DISCUSSION

As predicted, the peripheral prime of room size was able to influence BVGPs but only in the confined space condition. By priming confinement, which Meyers-Levy and Zhu (2007) found to result in a processing style that emphasizes the individual details of each item, it would follow that the confined space condition would lead participants to prefer generics because the most salient difference between brand and generic products is often price. Therefore, by inducing a processing style that emphasized that difference, it would also follow that the confined space condition would lead participants to prefer generics. Conversely, since the open space condition fostered more abstract and relational

processing that emphasizes commonalities, it would also follow that this condition would lead participants to find little difference between brand and generic. This is because, if one is seeking commonalities between a brand and generic product of the same category, at an abstract level, the two are practically the same. This would account for the lack of difference between the open space condition and controls.

It is not beyond reason to believe that these results might translate to retail stores, as finding that relatively small differences between in-store environmental factors can impact purchasing behaviors is not without precedent. In 1982, Milliman found that slow tempo music resulted in a significantly slower pace of in-store customer movement than fast tempo music, and that slow tempo music resulted in significantly higher sales volumes than fast tempo music. Notably, in Milliman's study, customers were no more likely to remember the pace of the music in one condition than the others, which could indicate that the music acted as a prime that induced a state change. In the light of Milliman's experiment, the results of Experiment 3 suggest that stores could make customers more likely to purchase generic products by lowering the ceilings and/or decreasing the distances between aisles. Importantly, however, the opposite effect—that open spaces might increase purchasing of brands—was not evident. This could easily by tested by future experimenters by working with retailers to make the noted changes to the retail environment and recording unit sales of equivalent generic and brand products before and after the changes are made. Optimally, such research would occur across multiple locations, record unit sales of all feasible product categories, and perhaps even use an ABAB design.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

As stated previously, U.S. consumers could save large sums of money by purchasing generics but do not do so as often as would be expected given the potential savings. This issue is compounded by the fact that producers of generic products, as well as the retailers that sell them, are unlikely to devote large amounts of capital to expensive, traditional advertising campaigns. Thus, the possibility of implementing priming-based advertising or other changes within stores was examined in this series of experiments.

The results of Experiment 1 showed that priming guilt and sadness were not able to influence BVGPs yet, both Experiment 2 and Experiment 3 did find priming effects. The common difference between Experiment 1 and the other experiments is that Experiment 1 used affective primes whereas the other two used semantic primes. While Experiment 1 by no means tested a large number of affective states, it could be that affective primes are not able to influence BVGPs. If the mood states were primed, it could also be that the mood states were too short-term or weak to influence BVGPs.

The results of Experiment 2 are important because they suggest that in-store signs to encourage purchasing of generics might in fact have little or no effect in pharmacy areas even though the intended effect might occur in other store areas. To test this explanation, future research could examine the effects of money and luxury primes on BVGPs in two broad categories: products that provide an appetitive stimulus (e.g., toys, food) and products that remove or lessen an aversive stimulus (e.g., analgesics, adhesive bandages). If this explanation is correct, luxury primes should encourage the purchasing of generics in the first category but not the second.

Experiment 3 suggests that aspects of the shopping environment, which are often taken for granted, could have significant effects on purchasing behaviors. As such, if retailers discover differences in the proportion of brand and generic product sales between stores that cannot be easily accounted for by socioeconomic differences in the customers, they should look to possible differences in the stores' environments.

While it is possible that the results of these last two studies are due to a shared mechanism, it seems more probable, and safer to assert, that any such shared mechanism is both unnecessary and unlikely to exist given the differential results. Therefore, it appears that this is the only reasonable conclusion that can be made: taken together, the results of these experiments suggest that a new priming-based paradigm for in-store changes to increase sales of generics might be effective if applied selectively based on product categories and the type of prime stimulus used. However, due to the limited external validity, limited number of product categories examined, and small sample sizes of the present series of experiments, further testing would be required before putting any great confidence in the efficacy of such techniques. There is one caveat to the point of the small sample sizes, however. Across all three experiments, there was a greater preference for brand drinks than headache medication. This is generally congruent with the findings of Bronnenberg, et al. (2014), which had a much larger sample of no fewer than 80,000 individuals in approximately 50,000 households and roughly 38,000 stores across more than 100 chains. Bronnenberg, et al. found that for non-staple food items (i.e., food items other than flour, sugar, salt, baking soda, etc.), which are an analog for the drink product category, consumers bought a brand product 57% of the time. Similarly for

headache medication, which was specified in both studies, consumers bought a brand product only 26% of the time. This suggests that participants in the present experiments were at least partially representative of the larger consumer population. This pattern is likely due to the fact that many U.S. consumers are aware of the fact that the Food and Drug Administration regulates medications such that generics are required to have the same active ingredients as their brand equivalent. Thus, since consumers might know this, they would be more willing to try generic medications, as there is less risk. In contrast, the ingredients used by drink manufacturers are not regulated in the same way. Therefore, consumers might be able to taste—or at least think they can taste—the difference between a brand name drink and its generic counterpart.

As such, assuming a representative sample, future research should incorporate posters, displays, music, or other stimuli typically found in shopping environments or conduct the research in stores to increase the external validity. More, efforts should be made to include a greater number of and more specific product categories than examined in this series of experiments. Specifically for affective primes, future research ought to test a greater number of affective primes, perhaps specifically comparing elevated moods to depressed moods, and include manipulation checks to ensure the mood states are successfully induced.

If future research on the use of primes to increase purchasing of generics finds that the paradigm is largely unsuccessful, there are a few options still available. The most obvious alternative would be to embrace the model taken by name brand companies and use classical conditioning. However, as discussed in the introduction, the companies that produce generic products are unlikely to either be able to afford the costs that such an advertising campaign based on classical conditioning would require or, in the case of store brand generics, to have a desire to do so. Therefore, again turning to changes that could be made within stores, the best alternative might be educating consumers about the equivalence of brand and generic products, and the potential savings from buying generic.

Beyond the economic implications, this series of experiments contributes to the growing fields of persuasion, consumer psychology, priming, and behavioral economics by exploring a question that billions of people face numerous times but has nonetheless received relatively little empirical attention: brand or generic?

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