The Effect of Experience: A Matter of Salience?

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A labeling technique was employed to explore processes underlying the effects of experience. It was found that labeled individuals both behaved and perceived themselves in a manner consistent with their label. However, these effects were mediated by the consistency of the label with the individual's initial self-schema and the availability of other relevant cues. The findings are interpreted in terms of an extended self-perception explanation that incorporates the notion of cue salience.

The effect of individuals' behavior on their subsequent action has emerged as a significant issue in consumer behavior research. Inquiry pertaining to this issue has been based primarily on self-perception theory (Bem 1972). According to this formulation, individuals employ their own behavior and the circumstances in which that behavior occurs as cues to guide their subsequent actions. To the extent that behavior is attributed to internal causes, and is not viewed as motivated by external factors such as incentives or social pressure, a positive attitude toward the behavior is acquired that, in turn, directs future behavior.

Tests of self-perception predictions have yielded what seems to be strong support for the theory. One source of evidence emerges from investigations using the foot-in-the-door paradigm. This entails gaining compliance with a small request in the hope of enhancing compliance with a subsequent larger request. In self-perception terms, it is expected that those who comply with a small request will view themselves as the kind of people who engage in such behaviors, and this self-perception will result in greater compliance with a large request than if the large request alone was solicited. In a substantial number of investigations, where the delay between small and large requests ranged from a day to several weeks, the findings are consistent with the self-perception prediction (Freedman and Fraser 1966; Pliner, Kohl, Hart, and Saabi 1974; Reingen and Kernan 1977; Scott 1976; 1977; Snyder and Cunningham 1975).

Support for self-perception predictions is also seen in studies using a labeling technique. This entails classifying research participants, purportedly on the basis of their behavior, in the hope that they will later act in a manner consistent with the characterization. From the standpoint of self-perception, it is predicted that labeling people's behavior will cause them to view themselves as the kind of people who engage in such behaviors, and therefore enhance the likelihood of subsequent label-consistent behavior. A study by Swinyard and Ray (1977) provides support for this prediction. They found that Palo Alto residents who were labeled as "interested in their fellowman" and "Red Cross Supporters" were significantly more likely to state an intention to do volunteer work for the Red Cross in follow-up telephone interviews than were nonlabeled participants. Other investigations have indicated a similar labeling effect (Kraut 1973; Miller, Brickman, and Bolen 1975).

Despite the substantial evidence supporting self-perception theory predictions, its adequacy as an explanation for the effect of an individual's own behavior on his/her subsequent response is problematic. In several foot-in-the-door investigations where small and large requests have been made contiguously, the self-perception prediction has not been maintained (Cialdini and Ascani 1976; Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, and Miller 1978). In these studies, the foot-in-the-door technique was no more effective than soliciting only a large request. Moreover, even when effects on in-

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dividual behavior have been observed. attempts to
demonstrate that self-perceptions mediate these ef-
fects have often failed (e.g., Davison and Valins 1969;
Lepper 1973; Storms and Nisbett 1970; Valins and Ray
1976).
These failures have both theoretical and practical
implications. From a theoretical perspective, they sug-
gest that self-perception theory is, at best, underspe-
cified. From a practical perspective, the failures in-
dicate the danger of implementing strategies such as
foot-in-the-door and labeling strategies that are pre-
scribed on the basis of self-perception theory. In some
cases, such strategies will be successful, whereas in
others they will not, and self-perception theory does
not have the precision to distinguish between these
situations.
This analysis suggests the need for a change in re-
search focus on the effects of behavior on subsequent
action. There is a surfeit of evidence that past behavior
and the circumstances in which it occurs affect future
action. Lacking is a detailed understanding of when
self-perception will occur. Some insight regarding this
issue can be obtained by addressing two questions:
Does past behavior influence both subsequent be-
havior and self-perceptions in a consistent manner?
If the effect of past behavior on subsequent behavior
is the product of the belief inference process hypo-
thesized by self-perception theory, then past behavior
should not only affect future behavior, but it should
affect self-perceptions as well. Support for this un-
derlying process is desirable because it helps define
the situations in which self-perception predictions re-
garding the effects of behavior will be obtained. These
predictions will hold only when the behavior is used
to draw inferences about internal states. This suggests
the following question.
When will a behavioral cue be used as a basis for
forming self-perceptions and guiding subsequent be-
havior? Recent theorizing about the self-perception
process provides a starting point for inquiry on this
issue (Taylor and Fiske 1978). It suggests the salience
hypothesis—that the most salient cues, i.e., cues eas-
ily brought to mind, will be used to infer self-percep-
tions and guide future actions. In turn, salience ap-
pears to be a function of a cue’s consistency with an
individual’s existing self-schema, and its availability
relative to other schema-relevant cues.¹
Evidence for a schema-consistent bias in processing
comes from research examining individuals’ uses of
schema-consistent and schema-inconsistent data in
making self-judgments (Marcus 1977) and in estimating
the covariation of factors in the environment (e.g.,
Crocker and Taylor 1978). Thus, behavioral cues that
are salient insofar as they conform to existing self-
schema are ones that should serve as a basis for de-
termining self-perceptions and future actions.
In addition, cue salience appears to be a function of
cue availability. Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977)
found that individuals who were asked to make judg-
ments of others based on ambiguous information, used
applicable cues, which had been recently rehearsed or
primed in an unrelated task, in forming their evalua-
tion. Rholes (1977) and Salancik (1974) obtained sim-
ilar results in comparable studies. This suggests that
relevant cues serve as a basis for self-perception only
to the extent that they are highly available or easily
retrieved as a function of recent processing.

OVERVIEW
Current theorizing suggests that one’s own behavior
serves as a basis for making inferences (self-percep-
tions) that guide future actions, but only to the extent
that it is salient. Further, it is hypothesized that the
salience of a behavior is determined by its consistency
with an individual’s existing self-schema and its avail-
ability in relation to other relevant cues. To test this
hypothesis a labeling procedure was employed. People
were first approached in their homes by a canvasser,
i.e., the experimenter, who administered a question-
aire. Among the questions asked were ones pertaining
to individuals’ attitudes toward voting, their attitudes
about specific issues and candidates in an upcoming
election, and their self-perception and intention with
respect to voting (i.e., self-schema). Then, the can-
vasser purported to use the participant’s responses to
confer a label. Those participants randomly assigned
to the above-average label condition were told that
their responses to the questionnaire indicated that they
were likely to vote in elections, whereas those assigned
to the average label condition were told that they were
no more likely to vote in elections than the typical
person in their community. Participants’ subsequent
self-perceptions of whether or not they were voters
and whether or not they voted constituted the de-
pendent measures. Actual voting behavior was mon-
itored at two points in time, one week after the label
was conferred and eight months later.
Several predictions were made. First, it was antic-
ipated that the findings of previous labeling studies
would be replicated—individuals’ short-term behavior
would tend to be consistent with their label. Thus, in-
dividuals who were labeled above-average would be
more likely to vote than those labeled average. It was
also predicted that support would be obtained for self-
perception theory as the process by which past be-
havior influences future action. It was expected that
labeling would influence self-perceptions such that
people given the above-average label would perceive
themselves as voters to a greater extent than those

¹ The term schema refers to stored “scripts” or scenarios about
a particular object or issue. Self-schema are defined by Markus
(1977) as “cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past
experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related
information contained in the individual’s social experience” (p. 64).
given the average label. However, self-perception predictions regarding the effects of the labeling were only expected when the label was a salient cue regarding voting in local elections.

Two factors were expected to mediate salience—consistency with individuals' initial self-schema regarding voting, and the availability of other voting relevant cues. When individuals had an initial self-schema that included being a "voter," it was anticipated that the feedback about their voting behavior would be salient. Further, because the above-average feedback would be consistent with their self-schema, it should be accepted by these individuals and have its intended effect of enhancing voting and self-perception of being a voter relative to the average feedback. In contrast, when individuals initially had no strong self-schema of being a voter, i.e., either viewed themselves as nonvoters or had no well-developed self-image regarding voting, the feedback expected to be less salient. This expectation was based on the assumption that a nonbehavior (not voting) would result in a less well-defined self-schema with respect to voting than a behavior. Moreover, because the above-average feedback would be inconsistent with any self-schema that did exist for these individuals, it would be unlikely to serve as a basis for future behavior and self-perceptions.

Consequently, for individuals without a well-defined self-schema of being a voter, the above-average feedback was not expected to differ in effect from the average feedback. Thus, it was anticipated that when individuals were classified on the basis of their initial self-schema, the above-average label would result in a significantly greater likelihood of voting in the election one week later and greater probability of classifying oneself as a voter, only for those individuals who initially viewed themselves as "voters."3

Finally, labeling was not expected to have a systematic effect on behavior eight months later. This prediction was based on the notion of cue availability. During the eight-month period, additional information on voting would be acquired and this information would be unlikely to vary systematically for individuals in the different label treatments. Because this new information would be more recent than the label, it would be more available or salient at the time of the second election and consequently it, rather than the label, would guide behavior.

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2 Ross's (1977) observation that individuals do not chronically attend to things that do not happen, but rather focus on effects, can be interpreted as congenial to this assumption.

3 The labeling effects on voting and voters' self-perceptions were expected to be embodied in the acceptance of the above-average label. Although variation in acceptance of the average label also was anticipated ("nonvoters" should be more likely to accept it than "voters"), accepting this label does not have clear implications for voting behavior and self-perceptions. (Does one vote or not vote if one is behaving consistently with the average label?) Therefore, the impact of accepting the average label was not predicted.

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METHOD

Context

The voting context was uniquely suited to this research in two respects: (1) it allowed unobtrusive monitoring of behavior, minimizing the potential effect of demand character, and (2) it enabled the monitoring of behavioral persistence of the label effect, because the opportunity for the behavior occurred at several points in time for all individuals.

Within the voting context, two local elections that were similar and likely to be modest in involvement and turnout (Rothschild 1978) were selected. It was necessary that the two elections be similar so that differences in the elections would not swamp the effect of the independent variables. In addition, it was important that the overall election turnout not be so high as to inhibit observing the impact of the treatments. Avoiding such a ceiling effect was a particular concern because it has been demonstrated that merely interviewing citizens about political issues prior to an election significantly increases voter turnout (Yalch 1977). Overall voter turnout was 53 percent in the first election and 51 percent in the second election. This provides some indication that these criteria were met.

Participants

A convenience sample of 162 Chicago area voters were contacted in their homes. Professional interviewers were assigned to different precincts and instructed to interview only one home per block. Lists of registered voters were used by the interviewers to qualify respondents. Interviews were conducted primarily in the evenings and on weekends. These procedures were instituted to minimize the possibility of participant communication prior to the election, and to increase the chances of getting a heterogeneous sample. Heterogeneity enhances the likelihood that the effects observed are not unique to an isolated, homogeneous population.

In fact, a diverse sample was obtained. Participants included apartment dwellers and home owners, individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Black, Jewish, Polish), income categories (under $5,000 to over $20,000), occupations (students, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, and professionals), and educational backgrounds (less than high school graduate to post-graduate work).

In general, participation among those registered voters actually contacted in their homes was high—approximately 80 percent agreed to participate. Because random assignment to feedback treatments was done after contact, nonresponse problems do not affect the validity of the comparisons between experimental treatments, although they may limit the generalizability of the absolute level of turnout observed.
Procedure

One week before a runoff election for alderman in a Chicago ward, registered voters were contacted in their homes and asked to respond to a questionnaire as part of a research project by graduate students at a nearby university. Individuals who agreed to participate spent approximately 15 minutes responding to questions about their political attitudes, knowledge of issues related to the upcoming election, past political behavior, voting intentions for the upcoming election, self-perceptions regarding voting, and demographic characteristics. After participants had responded to these questions, the interviewer offered to give them feedback about their interest in politics and elections in relation to other people in their community.

To provide this feedback, the interviewer used a voter profile scale attached to the back of the questionnaire. The scale, which consisted of five items related to voting, though not identical to items in the questionnaire itself, displayed the voter profile for the "average" citizen in the community. The interviewer rated participants on this same scale, ostensibly interpreting their responses to the questionnaire as the basis for obtaining their rating on the scale.

In actuality, participants were randomly assigned to one of two feedback treatments or labeling conditions. The interviewer used participants' ratings on this scale as a basis for either labeling them as average citizens with an average probability of voting, or above-average citizens with an above-average probability of voting. After the interviewer provided this feedback, participants were given their voter profile scales and thanked for participating in the survey.

Two types of dependent measures were administered. First, the voting behavior of participants in the runoff election and in a second local election eight months later was determined from records maintained by an independent political organization. In addition, a different interviewer, who also identified himself as associated with the university research project, contacted participants by telephone during the two weeks following the election under the pretext of verifying their participation in the door-to-door interview. During this contact, participants were asked to respond to several additional questions needed to complete the research. These questions included an evaluation of their self-perception as voters and a recall measure of the feedback they received. The delayed behavior measure (voting eight months later) prevented any immediate debriefing of participants. Delayed debriefing was planned but, because long-term behavior ultimately showed no labeling effect, it was decided that debriefing was not necessary to return participants to their preexperimental state, and that it could have had the adverse effect of creating suspicion regarding all "get out the vote" appeals.

Independent Variables

Two independent variables were manipulated by the experimenter in this study: (1) the nature of the label (above-average, average) and (2) the time of measurement of the voting dependent variable (one week later, eight months later). Premixing of the questionnaires was used to randomly assign participants to the different label treatments. The interviewers were blind to the treatment assignment until reaching the last page. At this point, the interviewer learned which feedback was to be administered.

**Above-Average Label Treatment.** The 77 participants assigned to the above-average label treatment were given a voter profile indicating greater concern and community involvement than the average person. This was done by connecting some faintly marked dots on the voter profile sheet, although the interviewers gave the appearance of using the participants' responses to the questionnaire as a basis for profile construction, i.e., the interviewer referred back to the questionnaire responses while doing the rating. The interviewer then used participants' profiles to label them as above-average citizens who were likely to vote in elections by stating:

> That's interesting, your profile indicates that, relative to others in this community, you are an above-average citizen. Our research shows that people like you are very likely to vote in elections and participate in political events.

The participants were also given their profile sheet to reinforce their label.

**Average Label Treatment.** The 85 participants assigned to the average label treatment were given a voter profile similar to the profile shown for the "average" citizen in their community. This was also done by connecting some faintly marked dots on the profile sheet. On the basis of their profiles, participants in this treatment were labeled as average citizens who were as likely to vote in elections as the average person in

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4 The five items were: "knowledge about the issues" (very knowledgeable—not very knowledgeable), "feel it is important to vote in local elections (feel it is important—do not feel it is important)," believe that my vote has an effect on election outcome (believe—do not believe), "concerned about policies" (concerned—not concerned), and "talk to other people about politics" (a great deal—very little).

5 To check the believability of the feedback procedure, a pretest was conducted with 12 individuals from the target population, who underwent the same procedures as experimental participants. After they had been labeled, these individuals were queried on their reaction to and acceptance of the feedback procedure. No suspicion regarding the legitimacy of the feedback process was evident in their comments.
their community. They were told:

That's interesting, your profile indicates that, relative to others in this community, you are an average citizen. Our research shows that people like you have an average likelihood of voting in elections and participating in political events.

As in the above-average treatment, participants were given their profile sheets to reinforce their label.

**Time of Behavior Measurement.** Participants' voting behavior was monitored at two points in time. Short-term behavior was determined one week after participants were initially contacted; long-term behavior eight months after the initial contact.

**Dependent Variables**

**Responses to Preelection Questionnaire.** Two questions included in the preelection questionnaire were used to check the random assignment treatments. These questions measured: (1) self-perceived voting behavior, "Do you always vote in local elections?" (yes or no), and (2) voting intentions, "How likely are you to vote in the runoff elections on July 3?" (responses scaled on a 7-point scale from definitely will to definitely will not). These questions also served to measure participants' initial self-schema with respect to voting in local elections.

**Behavior Measure.** The impact of the independent variables on voting behavior was assessed using information collected by the organizations involved in the campaign. As a voter requested a ballot, a campaign worker would mark off his/her name on the voter registration list. This information was made available to check on the behavior of those participating in the experiment. Because these records are routinely collected in all elections and there was no direct link to the research conducted prior to the election, it is unlikely that the respondents' voting behavior was influenced by demand characteristics.

**Self-Perception Measure.** During the postelection interview, participants were asked to respond to the following question:

Compared to the average voter in your community, would you say that you are: (a) more likely, (b) about as likely, or (c) less likely to vote in an election?

The proportion in each group stating that they thought themselves to be more likely to vote was used to measure the effect of the label on self-perception.

**Feedback Recall Measure.** The final question in the post-election interview was:

At the end of the previous interview, were you given a sheet of paper showing how your answers compared to those of other people?

Responses were "no," "yes," or "can't recall." This measure served as an index of participants' recall of receiving the feedback and, as such, provided some index of the salience of the feedback.

**RESULTS**

**Randomization Check**

To determine whether the random assignment of research participants was effective, the two labeling treatment groups were compared on self-reported initial self-perception and initial intention to vote in the aldermanic election. These variables were selected because they were likely to have an impact on the dependent measures. No significant differences between groups were obtained. Thus, it is concluded that the random assignment procedure was successful in creating two initially equivalent groups.

**Overall Effect**

First, the impact of the labels on behavior and self-perception was examined for the total sample. These data are summarized in the Table. As expected on the basis of previous labeling studies, it was found that individuals tended to behave in a manner consistent with their label in the short-run (July election). The proportion of participants voting in the above-average label treatment was significantly greater than the proportion voting in the average label condition ($Z = 1.72, p < 0.05$). Further, consistent with the self-perception prediction, individuals in the above-average label treatment were significantly more likely to view themselves as "voters" (i.e., report themselves as more likely to vote than the average citizen in the postelec-

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6 Responses to a question on the preelection survey indicated that, on the average, participants expected the turnout for the July election to be between 40 and 59 percent. Therefore, the average feedback would seem to imply a 50/50 chance of voting, whereas the above-average feedback would seem to imply a higher likelihood of voting. An average, rather than a below-average, label was employed because it would be ethically questionable to undertake a strategy likely to depress voter turnout.

7 The sample sizes for the dependent measures are reflected in the Table. For the voting behavior measures, only those individuals for whom data were available for both the July and March elections were included. This resulted in a loss of three participants in the above-average condition and eight participants in the average condition, due to people moving out of the area. This attrition was not significantly different for the two treatments. The sample sizes for the measures taken in the postelection survey reflect some further loss of participants. Thirteen persons in the above-average treatment and 21 in the average treatment could not be recontacted for this interview despite repeated attempts. However, because the rates of attrition do not differ significantly for the two treatment groups, they should not affect the results.

8 Where the specific direction of an effect was predicted a priori, one-tailed tests of significance were employed.
short-run behavior and self-perceptions were obtained for individuals classified as having a "voter" self-schema (Table). Within this group, the above-average label resulted in significantly higher turnout in the July election ($Z = 1.86, p < 0.05$) and significantly greater self-perception of being a voter ($Z = 3.05, p < 0.01$) than did the average label. In addition, recall of feedback was in the expected direction; voters labeled above average were more likely than those labeled average to recall having received their feedback at the time of the postelection interview. However, this effect was nonsignificant. No difference attributable to the labels was observed for voters' long-term behavior.

In contrast to the effects of the labels on short-run behavior and self-perceptions observed in the voter segment, no significant effects of the labels on these variables were found among nonvoters. Further, nonvoters were significantly more likely to recall receiving feedback in the case of the average as opposed to the above-average treatment ($Z = 1.82, p < 0.05$). Finally, there was no significant effect of the labels on nonvoters' long-run behavior.

Thus, self-perception theory predictions were supported for voters' short-run behavior and self-perceptions, but not for the nonvoter segment. Although the small sample sizes for nonvoters in the two treatments may have contributed to the lack of significant differences for this segment, the fact that two of the three nonsignificant effects are in the opposite direction of the self-perception prediction suggests that support for the theory would be unlikely even if larger samples were employed. In addition, nonvoters' significantly greater recall of the average versus the above-average feedback is not explained by self-perception theory.

**DISCUSSION**

Using a labeling technique, the findings of previous studies indicating that past behavior, or an interpretation of past behavior (i.e., label), guides future action were replicated. Overall, individuals labeled above-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>Strong voter self-schema</th>
<th>No strong voter self-schema</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above-average</td>
<td>Average label</td>
<td>Above-average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>label</td>
<td></td>
<td>label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-run behavior (voting in July election 1 week later)</td>
<td>64/74 (86.5%)</td>
<td>58/77 (75.3%)</td>
<td>49/53 (92.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception as voter (percent viewing themselves as more likely than average to vote)</td>
<td>45/61 (73.8%)</td>
<td>32/56 (57.1)</td>
<td>40/45 (88.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent recalling feedback</td>
<td>40/61 (65.6)</td>
<td>35/56 (62.5)</td>
<td>32/45 (67.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-run behavior (voting in March election, 8 months later)</td>
<td>40/74 (54.1)</td>
<td>41/77 (53.2)</td>
<td>36/53 (67.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Significantly different from the average treatment at 0.05 level, one-tail test.

*b* Significantly different from the average treatment at 0.01 level, one-tail test.

Consistency with Initial Self-Schema

It was anticipated that the above-average label would enhance voter turnout and self-perception of being a voter, only among individuals who already had a well-defined self-schema of being a voter. To examine this issue, participants' initial self-perception of being a voter in local elections and intentions to vote in the July election were used to classify them as either having a well-defined self-schema of being a voter or not. Individuals who stated that they always voted in local elections and indicated that they intended to vote in the July election (i.e., scored 5 or above on a 7-point scale from definitely will vote to definitely will not vote) were classified as having a well-defined self-schema of being a voter. All other individuals were classified as not having such a self-schema, and are hereafter referred to as "nonvoters."

Significant differences in the effects of the labels on
average citizens with an above-average probability of voting, were more likely to actually vote in an election a week later than those labeled average citizens with an average probability of voting. Furthermore, the data support the contention that self-perception is the process by which a label influences subsequent behavior. Individuals labeled as above-average citizens were more likely to perceive themselves as voters than those labeled as average citizens.

This latter finding, while consistent with the self-perception explanation, is in contrast to previous studies examining the effect of past behavior on both subsequent self-perceptions and behavior. Typical of these studies has been the observation of a significant effect of the behavior on subsequent action, but not on self-perceptions (Davison and Valins 1969; Lepper 1973; Storms and Nisbett 1970; Valins and Ray 1976). This discrepancy may be due to differences in the research contexts employed previously and in the present study. Most previous tests have been conducted in laboratory settings using contrived behaviors. In such situations, research participants' behavior may be influenced but attributed to peculiarities of the situation rather than internal causes. Hence, their self-perceptions remain unaffected.

In contrast, the present investigation was conducted in a setting where behavior occurred naturally and was monitored unobtrusively. These features probably enhanced attribution of the behavior to internal causes, leading to an effect on both subsequent behavior and self-perceptions. Alternatively, the labeling paradigm may be more powerful than paradigms employed in previous tests where, typically, behavior has been manipulated and individuals have been permitted to draw their own inferences on the basis of that behavior.

Although support was obtained for self-perception as the process underlying the effects of experience, this finding requires qualification. When individuals were classified on the basis of whether or not they initially had a well-defined self-schema as a voter, the above-average label resulted in significantly greater voter turnout in the election, one week later, and significantly greater self-perception of being a voter than the average label only for those who had an initial voter self-schema. Further, the labeling did not significantly affect voting behavior eight months later regardless of self-schema.

These limitations to the self-perception theory predictions were anticipated on the basis of the salience hypothesis. It was argued that a label would only serve as a basis for inferring self-perceptions and guiding future behavior when it was a salient cue—that is, when it was consistent with an individual's existing self-schema and was highly available relative to other relevant cues. On the basis of this theorizing, the labels were expected to be highly salient and readily processed by individuals initially viewing themselves as voters, because the feedback would be relevant to their self-schema. Further, voters should accept the above-average label on the basis of its consistency with their self-image. As a result, the above-average label was anticipated to have its observed effect of enhancing turnout and self-perception of being a voter, relative to the average label, for voters.

In contrast, nonvoters were expected to have less interest in the feedback in general, and less acceptance of the above-average feedback in particular, due to its inconsistency with their initial self-image. Therefore, the observed absence of any effect of labeling on short-run voter turnout and self-perceptions was predicted for these individuals.

Further support for the salience hypothesis as the explanation for the effects of labeling comes from the feedback recall data. Because the hypothesis predicts that individuals will be more likely to process information consistent with their initial self-schema, voters should be more likely to recall the above-average than the average feedback, and nonvoters should be more likely to recall the average than the above-average feedback. The data are consistent with this prediction, although the difference in recall by treatment only reaches conventional levels of significance for nonvoters. Stronger support is obtained when the sample is partitioned on the basis of whether schema-consistent (voter, above-average feedback and nonvoter, average feedback) or schema-inconsistent feedback (voter, average feedback and nonvoter, above-average feedback) was given. This comparison demonstrates that feedback recall is significantly greater for those receiving schema-consistent information than for those receiving schema-inconsistent information (Z = 2.11, p < 0.01).

Finally, the absence of an effect of the labels on voting behavior eight months later also was predicted from the salience hypothesis, because it was expected that, with the passage of time, the salience of the label would be reduced.

These findings have several important implications. From a theoretical perspective, the data suggest that traditional self-perception theory provides an inadequate explanation for the effect of past experience on future action. Specifically, it is silent on how the effects of past experience are mediated by individuals' initial dispositions or the passage of time. However, when self-perception theory is augmented by the salience hypothesis, the effect of these variables can be accounted for.

In addition, the findings have important practical implications. They suggest that strategies to influence behavior, such as labeling, are likely to be particularly effective in situations where individuals have an initial interest in the focal behavior. Further, such strategies may only be effective in the short-run, because in the long-run new relevant cues become available and superplant previously salient information as a basis for guiding behavior. In this event, repetition of the label over
time may enable strategies such as labeling to have a sustained impact. However, the authors do not wish to claim too much for the salience hypothesis. The salience construct and its determinants are emerging, but not yet crystallized (Taylor and Fiske 1978). Further, while the salience hypothesis fits our data well, the operationalizations of the salience construct have limitations. Although consistency with initial self-schema may be one aspect of salience, our procedure allowed self-selection to levels of this variable. As a result, effects attributed to differences in initial self-schema may instead be the product of some other variable that is not of theoretical interest. Similarly, while salience may be a function of cue availability, and cues may become less available with the passage of time, other factors also change over time. Thus, it is difficult to ensure that cue availability was the cause of the difference in effects observed at various time delays.

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REFERENCES


