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People develop attitudes and opinions toward many different things. Those attitudes may be positive (e.g., toward a person’s favorite food or restaurant), and they can be negative attitudes (e.g., toward a style of architecture or clothing). Attitudes are important because they help people navigate judgments and decisions, making daily life more efficient.

We know that not all attitudes guide our behaviors. Research finds that the strength of the attitude moderates the influence of attitudes on the person’s thoughts and behaviors (Fazio 1995); compared to weak attitudes, strong attitudes are more likely to guide our judgments and decision-making. More specifically, strong attitudes are distinguishable from weak attitudes because strong attitudes possess five key characteristics: (1) perceived as more certain; (2) come to mind faster; (3) resist counter-persuasion; (4) persist over time; and (5) guide behavior; (Fazio 1995).

A fundamental principle in the attitude strength research is that strongly held attitudes are the results of relatively effortful cognitive elaboration or effortful thinking (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). A considerable amount of prior research has documented that stronger attitudes are likely to be formed if only the person deliberately processes a persuasive message (i.e., taking time and efforts to process the information) as opposed to attitudes formed when a person quickly or less deliberately processes the message (Petty and Cacioppo 1984).

However, we can easily generate some anecdotes of other people forming strong opinions with no time or effort. For instance, many people talk about falling in love at first sight; we can easily relate stories of other individuals who strongly believe a particular brand is “the best” with no experience or little thought as attested to by an almost no questioning of the merits of their stance. These anecdotes suggest that, at least under some situations/contexts, people who do not devote much thought about a certain target can still form really strong attitudes toward it.

Through our research, we challenge the long-standing notion in psychology that people’s strong opinions are always products of effortful thinking processes. We set out to discover whether a type of people can form strong attitudes from non-elaborative processes, to test whether it is possible to develop strong attitudes towards brands, products and advertisements without spending great time and effort. Specifically, we set out with the argument, and provided evidence...
to support that argument, that *it is possible to develop strong attitudes (that guide one’s further judgments and decisions) from non-elaborative processes.*

**Exploring Attitude Strength without Elaboration: Research and Results**

Prior research has established what is known as implicit self-theories, which are individuals’ lay beliefs about the malleability of their own personal traits. Research on the implicit self-theories suggests that a type of individual is able to judge other people’s dispositional traits more quickly and easily, but hold these judgments with a lot of conviction (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997). Within implicit self-theories are two distinct sub-theories – entity theory and incremental theory – that have a variety of influences on the theory holder’s information processing and judgments (Dweck, Chiu, and Hong 1995).

The distinction between the two theories (entity and incremental) is this: entity theorists (those who endorse entity theory) believe that their personality (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997), intelligence (Dweck and Leggett 1988), and morality (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, and Fu 1997) traits are relatively fixed, whereas incremental theorists (those who endorse incremental theory) believe personality traits are more dynamic and malleable. Individuals who believe that these traits are fixed (entity theorists) are able to form opinions of people more easily and are more likely to place a label on other people because they believe that not only are their own personal traits fixed, but so too are the traits of others (e.g. Chiu, Hong and Dweck 1997). In other words, the implicit self-theory research suggests that individuals who believe that a person’s traits are fixed can readily (i.e. without a high level of cognitive elaboration) form strong attitudes toward other individuals. Our present research asks a more general question about how beliefs on the fixed or malleable nature of self-traits influence attitude formation processes toward different kinds of targets, particularly toward brands and products. We hypothesized that effortful thinking may be sufficient for individuals to form strong attitudes about things, including but not limited to brands and products, but it is not necessary to form strong attitudes. In other words, if individuals are given information about a brand, consumers with different beliefs will require varying levels of information and evaluation before they are able to form, and be certain about and confident in, their attitudes towards that brand.

Our research extends implicit self-theories from social judgments of other people to the evaluative judgments of nonhuman objects, namely, brands and products. We proposed and provided evidence that entity theorists (those who believe that traits are fixed) quickly process a lesser amount of information to form attitudes toward brands/products and display a tendency to hold those attitudes with greater strength than incremental theorists (individuals who believe that traits are more malleable). We were able to test our proposals by measuring multiple dimensions of attitude strength, including felt-certainties about and confidence in their attitudes, attitude accessibilities (response latencies to answer attitude questions), and the change in attitudes that
individuals felt towards advertisements and brands after receiving counter-additional information about those same advertisements and brands.

Our research provides the first demonstration that elaboration is a sufficient but not necessary condition for attitude strength. Through our research, we discovered that individuals who believe that traits are fixed are able to develop stronger attitudes towards products and brands with low cognitive elaboration. These individuals are able to form strong attitudes despite low levels of effortful thinking because they expect more consistency in objects as well and therefore require a smaller sampling of information to sufficiently form a strong attitude. If an individual believes that traits are fixed they will stop attending to information earlier than those who believe that traits are malleable. In contrast, individuals who believe that traits are more malleable attend to more information and require longer to reach some level of comfort before forming their attitudes.

We also traced the underlying mechanism for this strong-attitude-formation-without-elaboration effect – when individuals do not think sufficiently about a certain object, how do they form a strong opinion about it? We found that if an individual believes that their personal traits are fixed, then that individual is likely to keep rehearsing their initial attitudes once they are generated, rather than attending to further information, as a way of making that attitude stays accessible for later use when encountering the object. In contrast, if an individual believes that his/her personality is malleable, then that individual is willing to attend to the new pieces of information – s/he is likely to repeat his/her evaluation through processing further information about the target object.

People have differing beliefs on the fixed or malleable nature of their personal traits, and those beliefs will alter the amount of information an individual will require in order to form strong attitudes about the object they are evaluating. Therefore, it can be very useful and informative for marketing managers and salespersons to know how much information should be provided to individuals before they create attitudes strong enough to guide their purchasing decisions.

**Real Estate Perspective**

Real estate agents are constantly looking for ways to improve the sales process and their relationships with their clients. One way in which real estate agents can better manage the agent/client relationship is by understanding how the client thinks and how much information a client will need prior to forming strong attitudes about either agents themselves or
different properties that agents may present to their clients. Real estate agents will have numerous clients with differing personalities, interests, and expectations. It is very important for a real estate agent to understand their clients and to know if their clients have a fixed or malleable belief about traits.

We are conducting follow-up research to document a simple way for a lay person to know whether another person operates with a fixed or malleable belief system. We, so far, find that: 1) younger individuals are more likely to believe that their personal traits do not change, while older people are more likely to believe that their personal traits are malleable; and 2) people in Asian cultures are more likely to believe that their personalities are relatively fixed, whereas those in Western culture are more likely to believe that their personalities are malleable.

Clients that believe their personalities are fixed will require less information before they form strong attitudes towards a property or the agent. It is therefore essential for real estate agents to carefully consider the quality and quantity of information that they deliver to their clients. Some clients will believe that their own personalities are more dynamic and malleable and therefore will be more interested in updating and changing their initial attitudes as more information is presented and the situation changes. However, clients who believe that their own traits are fixed will not be receptive to changing their attitudes in light of new information, because they will continue to rehearse their initial attitudes that were formed at the outset based on the initial information. Real estate agents can better manage the relationships with their clients, and their clients’ expectations and impressions of different real estate properties and the real estate transaction process by understanding how the clients form their attitudes.

Additionally, real estate agents can benefit from a better understanding of how they themselves form attitudes toward things. Real estate agents can become more effective negotiators if they train themselves to be more consciously receptive to additional information. Developing more malleable beliefs on traits through the continued assessment of additional information allows real estate agents to conduct more current and objective evaluations in the constantly changing world of the real estate industry.

**Recommended Reading**


**References**


**About the Authors**

**JaeHwan Kwon, PhD**

Assistant Professor of Marketing, Hankamer School of Business, Baylor University

JaeHwan Kwon (PhD in Marketing, University of Iowa) is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Baylor University. His research interests include human judgment and decision making, visual information processing, and consumer choices.

**Dhananjay (DJ) Nayakankuppam, PhD**

Associate Professor of Marketing, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa

DJ Nayakankuppam (PhD in Marketing, University of Michigan) is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the University of Iowa. His research interests include decision making, consumer evaluative processes, and social cognition and judgment. His research has been published in the *Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, Marketing Science, Psychological Science, Journal of Consumer Psychology*, and many other journals.