

How Your Client's Private Self-Awareness Influences Choice

By Caroline Goukens, PhD (Netherlands), Siegfried Dewitte, PhD (Belgium), and Luk Warlop, PhD (Belgium/Norway)

Introduction

What is self-awareness and why is it important? Self-awareness is critical for buyers and sellers because self-focused attention makes people more conscious of their attitudes and beliefs (Duval and Wicklund 1972). Social psychologists have investigated the implications of self-awareness for a variety of basic social and cognitive processes (emotions, pro-social behavior, and group dynamics) (Gibbons 1990). Our research focuses on the role of private self-awareness in the choice-making process of consumers and examines how this internal state may affect two well-known choice phenomena: variety-seeking (or diverting from what you normally choose) and selecting a compromise option. Understanding how self-awareness can affect buyer behavior can be very helpful for agents as they increase their ability to meet the client's needs.

What is Self-Awareness Theory?

Self-awareness theory (Duval and Wicklund 1972) begins with the assumption that at any given moment, people's attention may be focused on themselves or the environment, but not both. People are typically not self-focused, but certain situations can cause them to focus their attention inward, such as gazing into a mirror, standing in front of an audience, or seeing themselves in a photograph or videotape. When their attention is directed to the self, people reside in a state of objective self-awareness. Self-awareness can be public, involving the awareness of oneself from the perceived perspective of others (e.g. standing in front of an audience), or private, which refers to awareness of oneself from a personal perspective (e.g., gazing into a mirror) (Fejfar and Hoyle 2000).

The Impact of Private Self-Awareness

The focus of this article is placed on private self-awareness. In contrast to public self-awareness, the concept of private self-awareness has received little attention in marketing. In response, we consider the extent to which private self-awareness plays a role in consumer decision-making. A self-focused person is more concerned with which type of action is most appropriate. If a person perceives a difference between a standard and a current behavior, his or her self-focus should enhance the motivation to reduce that difference (Gibbons 1990). Thus, when possible, a self-aware person conforms to internalized standards of correct behavior, which may or may not coincide with the common social standard of conduct. However, sometimes no behavioral standards are accessible. Hormuth (1982) suggests that in this case, privately self-aware people behave in a manner congruent with their own personal standards or ideas (Gibbons 1990). That is, previous research demonstrates that self-focused people become more conscious of their

personal attitudes and beliefs (Gibbons 1990), which should make it easier for them to construct product preferences. Heightened private self-awareness can make people more willing and able to use their personal characteristics as guides for their behavior.

Variety-Seeking Behavior

Typically in real estate, clients seek to purchase a single property, which may make variety-seeking behavior or diverting from what you might normally choose appear as an irrelevant topic in this context. However, when considering the amount of available options during the decision-making process, agents are well advised to study the variety-seeking behaviors of consumers in order to better understand how to present viable options to clients. As our research reveals, purchasing an item to meet long-term needs creates the risk of increasing disappointment, should the consumer's preference for that item decrease in the near future. In contrast, selecting a variety of acceptable items is less risky because it seems unlikely that the person's preferences for all selected items will decrease. In light of this finding, it is essential that agents become intimately familiar with the customer's future vision so as to best direct their attention to those properties that align with their goals. Providing your clients with an opportunity for private awareness can assist in not only helping you define the clients' goals, but can also contribute to helping clients define the goals they may have not yet considered. Because private self-awareness should enhance confidence in one's preferences, we also expect it to decrease the tendency to seek variety. As you develop your clients' ability to pinpoint what they are looking for, you will both benefit from a narrowed focus, weeding out those properties that do not conform to the clients' vision for the future homes.

Compromise Effect

The compromise effect implies that an alternative tends to gain market share when it represents the compromise option in the set (Simonson 1989). For example, the attractiveness of a medium-quality/medium-price alternative increases compared with that of a lower-quality/low-price alternative when a high-quality/high-price product also appears in the consideration set shapes the "ideal" compromise of quality and price. Using think-aloud protocols, Simonson (1989) finds that people who experience greater decision conflict are more prone to the compromise effect. Consistently, when people select compromise alternatives, their decision processes are longer (Dhar, Nowlis, and Sherman 2000), they tend to consider the relative advantages and disadvantages of all options (Simonson 1989), and they are more likely to attempt compensatory trade-off comparisons (Dhar 1996). In contrast, consumers with more articulated preferences (i.e., preference fluency) are more selective in processing the available information and are less likely to rely on compensatory processing (Chernev 2003). Combining both insights, we argue that private self-awareness may suppress the tendency to select compromise options.

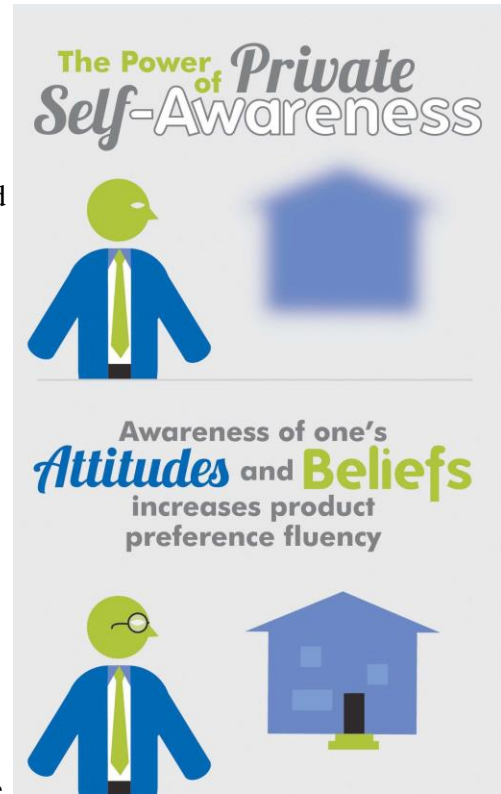
This information is applicable to the real estate agent as they select comparative homes for clients to evaluate before making a purchasing decision. By increasing a client's private self

awareness, agents will narrow the client's preferences, reducing the impact of the compromise effect.

How to Increase a Client's Private Self-Awareness

Realtors and brokers need to be aware of the substantive power of self-awareness. On the one hand, intentional manipulations of clients' self-awareness could prove beneficial; by increasing clients' self-awareness, agents could enable clients to make choices that match their personal preferences better, which might result in higher choice satisfaction. Conceivably, greater self-awareness could be achieved by, for example, strategically placing mirrors in a store or addressing the client by name. On the other hand, agents must understand that the general advantage of some selling strategies can disappear for self-attentive clients. In addition, some conditions make it more difficult to induce a consumer to choose a certain product. Thus, certain selling environments likely benefit from selling strategies that draw attention away from the self. In general, this research implies that agents should consider the side effects of their sales interactions

(e.g. small talk) on self-awareness because any incidental cue that redirects the client's focus inward will result in greater self-awareness and, consequently, increased preference fluency.



Conclusion

At the core of self-awareness theory is the idea that self-aware people try to decrease the differences between their current behavior and personal standards. Our research shows that this tendency has a direct and consequent impact on consumer decision-making. In four separate studies, this research shows that the ease of preference formation accompanying private self-awareness makes people more willing and able to rely on their personal preference weights. As we predict, privately self-aware consumers are less inclined to opt for a varied choice set and are less likely to select compromise options, unless they find that it is too difficult to construct their personal preferences.

Agents who successfully facilitate increased private self-awareness for their clients will minimize purchasing frustration for both the client and the agent. Clients who have a clear and well defined picture of what they want are much easier to serve. It is when a client does not have a clear picture of what they want that the time consuming and often self-defeating effects of variation and compromise begin to take over. Agents can become intimately knowledgeable of

their client's needs by intentionally placing the client's focus on private self-awareness. This knowledge will assist the agent as he/she selects properties for the client to view, and will also aid in the client's decision-making process.

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About The Authors

Caroline Goukens, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Marketing, Dept. of Marketing and Supply Chain Management, Maastricht University

Caroline Goukens received her PhD from K.U.Leuven. She is Associate Professor of Marketing at Maastricht University. Her current work focuses on the appetitive motivational system, self-awareness effects, decision making, choice, and consumption. Her work has been published in *Journal of Consumer Research* and *Journal of Marketing Research*.

Siegfried Dewitte, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing and Organization, K.U.Leuven

Siegfried Dewitte is Associate Professor of Marketing at K.U.Leuven. His academic profile is interdisciplinary: He reads and writes in marketing, psychology, evolutionary (human) biology, and philosophy. He has two main research interests: consumer self-control and altruism. His articles have been published in *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Psychological Science*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Proceedings of the Royal Society London: Biology*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, and *Journal of Research in Personality*.

Luk Warlop, Ph.D. Professor of Marketing, Dept. of Marketing & Organization, K.U.Leuven, and Professor of Marketing, Norwegian School of Management

Luk Warlop is Professor of Marketing in the Department of Marketing and Organization at K.U.Leuven and Professor of Marketing at the Norwegian School of Management. His research focuses on consumer behavior, judgment and decision making, and social marketing. His work has been published in *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Psychological Science*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Accounting Research*, *Marketing Letters*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, and *Management Science*.