Examining the Effect of Perceptual Saliency on the Liking Judgment

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Humans tend to be attracted by stimuli with more salient features, and hence tend to value them more highly. No prior research, however, has investigated the effects of perceptual salience on value judgments. In this study, we manipulated the perceptual salience of the study stimuli in order to verify the aforementioned tendency. Participants were asked to memorize a list of objects, a few of which were printed in distinctive colors. Afterwards, they were asked to recognize the test stimuli and make the preference judgment. The results showed that when there was sufficient time to encode the study stimuli and to retrieve details regarding the stimuli (Experiment 1 and 3A), the more salient test stimuli were valued more highly. In addition, the participants' memory performance and probability of recollection were higher. On the other hand, with insufficient time for encoding (Experiment 2) or retrieval (Experiment 3B), the participants did not show any preferences for the salient stimuli, and the distinctiveness effect on memory was not present. In addition, the participants indicated preference for a stimulus when they responded "remember" as opposed to responding "know." They also preferred a stimulus when it had been subjectively perceived at the study phase. Taken together, these results are consistent with the uncertainty reduction hypothesis. Perceptual salience can enhance memory performance, reduce uncertainty in memory recognition, and therefore affect value judgments.

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