

Research Dialogue

A research dialogue on mindsets

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How individuals understand and make sense of their world underlies many of the questions and much of the theory that has guided the field of consumer psychology. Carol Dweck and her colleagues have conducted extensive research that explores the role of mindsets in how individuals understand and make sense of their world. This research has revealed that human characteristics (such as personality and ability) can be understood as being either relatively fixed or changeable. Those with “fixed” mindsets believe that whatever characteristics a person possesses are unlikely to change: One is born with and continues to possess a certain set of traits. In contrast, those with “growth” mindsets believe that the characteristics that a person possesses are changeable: One’s traits evolve and change over time.

This Research Dialogue explores the implications of mindsets for consumer psychology. In their target article, Mary Murphy and Carol Dweck outline the conceptual framework of mindsets and explore the implications for consumer psychology. The points of intersection between mindsets and consumer psychology that they find and explicate are many and important, ranging from goals to brands to advertising effectiveness and beyond. For example, the goals underlying similar consumer behavior (such as purchasing a cookbook) may significantly differ depending upon a consumer’s mindset; brand meanings can be cultivated to reflect either fixed or growth mindsets, and the resulting differences in brand perception may be differentially attractive to consumers who possess either a fixed or growth mindset; and the effectiveness of ads and the success of brand extensions may be moderated by mindsets. These are but a subset of the connections that the authors provide.

We are fortunate to have four commentaries by researchers with relevant expertise and complimentary perspectives on the relationship of mindsets and consumer psychology.

Christian Wheeler and Omair Akhtar question the implicit assumption that a growth is superior to a fixed mindset, for both companies and consumers. In addition, they explore the possible influence of implicit theories on persuasion and social influence. Pragya Mathur, HaeEun Helen Chun, and Durairaj Maheswaran elucidate the role of mindsets on identity signaling, as well as offering methodological approaches to exploring mindsets within the consumer psychology context. Deborah Roedder John and Ji Kyung Park tie the concepts advanced by that target article more explicitly to traditional brand theory and provide further exploration of how mindsets can influence consumer experience. Derek Rucker and Adam Galinsky situate the construct of growth versus fixed mindsets within a broader array mindsets (regulatory focus, construal level, implementation versus deliberation, and power), and suggest that possible hierarchical ordering may be an important research question. In addition, they question whether a matching approach, wherein a fixed message is targeted to fixed consumers and a growth message is targeted to growth consumers, always leads to greater persuasion than mismatched approaches. The authors of the target paper provide a reply to commentaries.

On a final note, this Research Dialogue represents the last to be co-edited by us. We would like to thank the authors of the target articles and commentaries. It is our hope that these Research Dialogues have been of value. And we are thankful and appreciative of our opportunity to serve as co-editors.

References

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