

Subliminal Perception

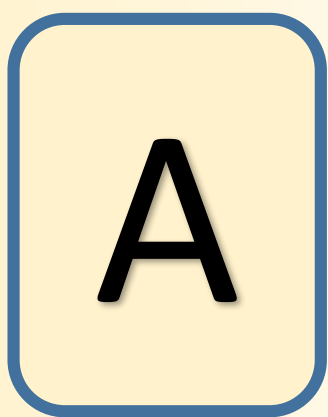
What is Subliminal Perception?

It is the process of being unaware that one is processing an undetected stimulus.

This technique is often used in advertising.

The first study: The Psychology of Suggestion: A Research into the Subconscious Nature of Man and Society, Boris Sidis (1898)

- ❖ Sidis wanted to measure the effects of “uncritical acceptance of ideas or actions suggested” (<https://www.sidis.net/ps1.htm>)
- ❖ The experiment consisted of participants being shown a card very briefly in low light and having to determine if it was a letter or a number



James Vicary – The cinematic "Drink Coca-Cola" and "Eat popcorn" experiment (1957)

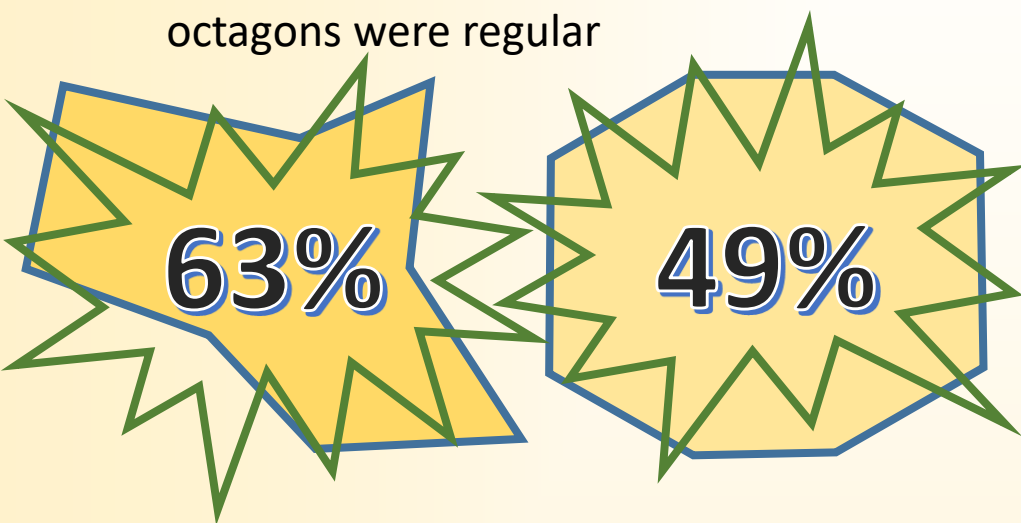
- ❖ The study involved a group of reporters being shown a film
- ❖ The participants were unaware that they were part of an experiment
- ❖ Throughout the film the advertisements "Drink Coca-Cola" and "Eat popcorn" were flashed up too quickly to be consciously perceived
- ❖ It showed that sales for cola and popcorn had risen significantly throughout the film



Percentage by which sales increased

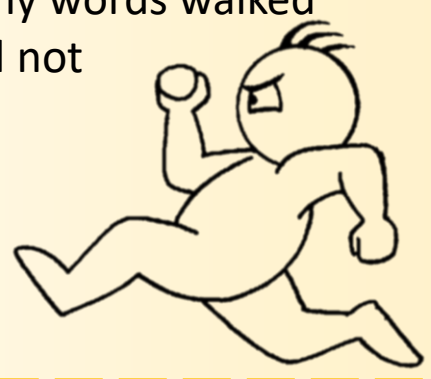
Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc 'Affective discrimination of stimuli that cannot be recognized' (1980)

- ❖ Participants were shown 20 irregular octagons, each for 1ms
- ❖ No one reported seeing the shapes
- ❖ However when given a forced-choice question of shapes, 63% of participants chose the correct octagon, compared to only 49% choosing the correct octagon for the test series done first, where all the octagons were regular

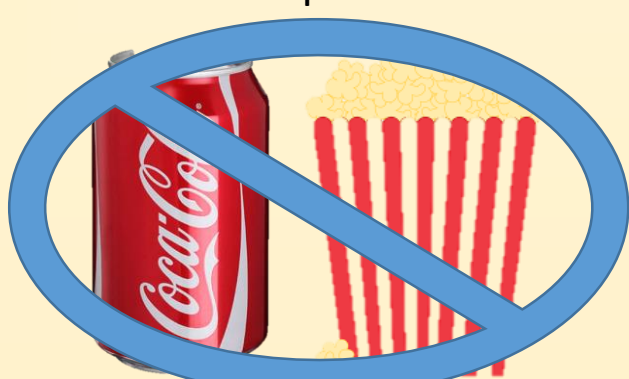


Behavioral Effects of Activating the Elderly Stereotype
Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996)

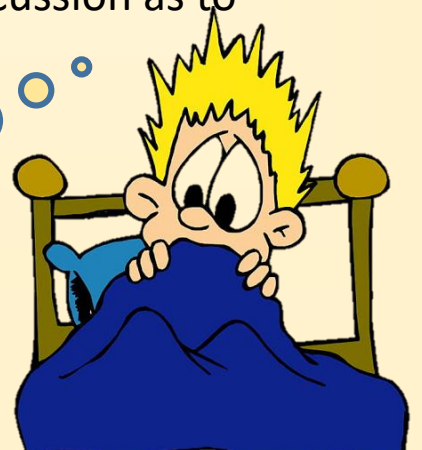
- ❖ The experiment investigated subliminal social priming effects
- ❖ Participants were given a sentence scrambling task, each sentence contained words associated with elderly stereotypes
- ❖ Control group sentences did not have elderly words
- ❖ Those exposed to the elderly words walked slower than those who had not



Subliminal Perception is an interesting area of psychological research where there is still nothing definitive about the affects of subliminal perception. Although it has also been evident that some of the experiments were fake; Vicary's Coke and Popcorn study was probably faked. Vicary was an advertising market researcher, so he would want results in his favour, Also the study has never been officially published with many claiming it as a 'publicity hoax' (J.C. Karremans et al 2006). There is also an uneasy feeling, or fear, over the power of subliminal perception especially in regards to political campaigns, and there have been discussion as to whether it should be prohibited from being used in advertising (Class, 1956).



Subliminal Messages...



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