

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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COGNITIVE PSY. SEM.2

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PERCEPTION

SUBLIMINAL PERCEPTION

The term subliminal is derived from the term sub(low) and limen(threshold). For instance one can flash words or pictures so quickly on a computer screen that the perceiver have the feeling that they did not saw anything. In other words, they are not consciously aware of the presented word or picture.

The presumed ability to perceive a stimulus that is below the threshold for conscious experience.

It occurs when the stimulus is too weak to perceive yet a person is influenced by it. It was first noticed when the marketing executive announced he had embedded subliminal message like” eat popcorn” and “drink coke” into a popular movie. The messages were flashed on the screen in front of movie audiences so briefly that audience members were not aware of them.

By *subliminal* most people mean a stimulus is too weak or distorted to be detected through conscious effort. A better word for that is *undetectable*.

Undetectable stimuli can be created by flashing a visual stimulus then quickly *masking* it with another stimulus. If the masking stimulus appears quickly, such as 20 sec after the first stimulus, it prevents the first stimulus from being consciously perceived.

Subliminal perception is any information you receive from your senses that you are not consciously aware of happening.

How Effective is Subliminal Advertising?

Applications of subliminal stimuli often base themselves on the persuasiveness of the message. Importantly, research on action priming has shown that subliminal stimuli can trigger only actions a receiver of the message plans to perform anyway.

The term subliminal is derived from the terms sub (below) and limen (threshold), and it refers to perception so subtle it cannot reach conscious awareness. Most of the research on subliminal perception is done on visual subliminal perception. For instance, one can flash words or pictures so quickly on a computer screen (generally faster than 10-15 milliseconds) that perceivers have the feeling they do not see anything at all. In other words, they are not consciously aware of the

presented words or pictures. However, such visual stimuli are processed unconsciously, and they can have brief and subtle effects on our feeling and thinking. In addition, some research has been done on auditory subliminal perception. No reliable scientific evidence exists, however, for psychological effects of auditory subliminal perception.

Effects of subliminal perception are generally small and not easy to establish in controlled laboratory research. However, a few findings are reasonably well established, the most prominent being subliminal mere exposure; Repeated subliminal exposure to a stimulus (for example a picture) leads perceivers to like this picture a little more. Effects of mere exposure have even been obtained for stimuli that were perceived for only one millisecond. Perceivers can to some extent infer the valence (is something good or bad?) from subliminal stimuli. This is shown in research on the subliminal perception of short positive (e.g., sun) and negative (e.g., death) words.

Thresholds

According to Schmeidler, and the vast majority of psychologists studying subliminal phenomena, a threshold is the point at which a stimulus is perceived 50% of the time. For example, if my aural threshold were to be tested, I would be played numerous sounds in varying volumes. To signal that I heard the tone-I perceived the stimulus-I would raise my hand or press a button, whatever the researcher had instructed me to do when I heard a sound. By controlling and tracking the frequency of the emitted sound, the researchers are able to find the volume at which I hear a sound-perceive the stimulus-half of the time. This point is my auditory threshold. A working definition of threshold is paramount.