

Research Dialogue

Growing beyond growth: Why multiple mindsets matter for consumer behavior

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Accepted by Joseph R. Priester, Editor

Received 24 June 2015; accepted 24 June 2015

Available online 27 June 2015

Abstract

In this commentary, we reflect on several important issues and questions provoked by Murphy and Dweck's target article. First, we define a mindset as a frame of mind that affects the selection, encoding, and retrieval of information as well as the types of evaluations and responses an individual gives. As such, we suggest that while studying fixed versus growth mindsets is important, it is critical to explore and understand how a variety of mindsets affect consumer behavior, including regulatory focus, construal level, implementation versus deliberation, and power. Second, we argue that it is necessary to understand if a hierarchy exists among this variety of mindsets, with some mindsets being more foundational and more important than others. Finally, we raise questions about whether matching effects, where information matches a mindset, always produce more persuasion, or whether cases might exist where mismatches, or complementarity, are better.

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Keyword: Mindsets

Introduction

Murphy and Dweck provide a provocative and compelling case for the role of fixed versus growth mindsets in consumer behavior; they are comprehensive in delineating the distinct types and full range of consumer behaviors affected by whether people are in one or the other of these mindsets. It is an impressive and important summarization.

As a good article should, the authors do not fully satisfy our appetite for understanding mindsets. Rather, their commentary provoked in us a series of questions that we think can push the field of mindsets even farther. In this commentary, we propose three critical considerations. We offer these ideas not as criticisms of the target article, but as a springboard to important and largely unexplored issues, which we believe will serve as a foundation to further the exploration of mindsets and consumer behavior. Our hope is that this commentary will ignite the desire for additional

research in what we believe is an important and integral area for consumer psychology.

Consideration no. 1: Mindsets aren't just for breakfast anymore

A famous commercial for orange juice proclaimed, "It's not just for breakfast anymore!" This simple phrase informed the audience that orange juice had multiple uses and could be consumed multiple times of the day. In a similar vein, our first suggestion is to broaden readers' scope and use of the mindset terminology beyond the scope of fixed versus growth. We believe it is of paramount importance to acknowledge that psychological mindsets are not limited to, and in fact extend far beyond, those related to beliefs regarding whether human traits are fixed or can change.

We define a mindset as a psychological orientation that affects the selection, encoding, and retrieval of information; as a result, mindsets drive evaluations, actions, and responses. As our definition makes clear, the concept of a mindset extends

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beyond fixed and growth mindsets and connects to literatures on construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010), power (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015), regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997), implemental-deliberative (Gollwitzer et al., 1990), and self-monitoring (Snyder & DeBono, 1985), to name but a few.

To take a concept we have some familiarity with, research has suggested that structural differences in power can give rise to a psychological mindset that is consistent with our definition. Indeed, power has been directly labeled as a mindset (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Rucker, 2012). By understanding that power functions as a mindset, many of the important questions raised by Murphy and Dweck on fixed versus growth mindsets become applicable to how power affects consumer behavior.

Importantly, a power mindset need not inherently reflect any differences in beliefs related to the fixed versus growth beliefs. Instead, power can affect people's evaluations and actions based on fundamentally different principles. A high-power mindset is known to decrease perspective-taking (Galinsky et al., 2006), empathy (Van Kleef et al., 2008), and generosity (Rucker, Dubois, & Galinsky, 2011); decrease psychological distance (Lammers et al., 2012; Magee and Smith (2013); and increase agency and confidence (Fast et al., 2009; Galinsky et al., 2003), whereas a low-power mindset is known to increase inhibition, decrease psychological distance, and increase one's sense of communion (see Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015). These power mindsets shift the lens people use to approach the world and can affect a wide variety of consumer behavior outcomes such as the products consumers seek (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, 2009), how they spend money on gifts for themselves and others (Rucker et al., 2011), and how they view money (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2010; for a review see Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012).

Thinking of power as mindset helps us understand that power can affect both propensities (i.e., the tendency to engage in certain actions) and also needs that activate compensatory impulses. For example, the high-power mindset leads to action more generally, but the low-power mindset leads to action when that action serves the need for status (i.e., compensatory status consumption, Rucker & Galinsky, 2008).

Furthermore, the power mindset can be driven by either the experiences of power or the expectations for power (Rucker, Hu, & Galinsky, 2014). When a high-power mindset is made up of the expectations people have for power, it leads them to behave in accordance with these role prescriptions. For example, powerful consumers who have thought about what is expected of them are more likely to purchase status-signaling products and to be more careful and thoughtful in their processing of information (Rucker et al., 2014). However, when a high-power mindset is focused on the internal experience of having power, the opposite pattern of results occurs, consistent with the effect described above.

The key first point is that consumer researchers should not limit their emphasis on fixed versus growth mindsets. We do not challenge the importance of these mindsets. Rather, we simply note that fixed and growth mindsets represent just two important parts in a much larger cast of characters.

Consideration no. 2: Who among the mindsets is king?

If one accepts that multiple mindsets exist, an important question that naturally follows is how all of these different mindsets relate to one another. One possibility is that a hierarchy exists among these mindsets, such that some mindsets are more important or more foundational than others. For example, the large body of research cited by Murphy and Dweck could be taken as evidence that fixed and growth mindsets are relatively robust mindsets that govern much of human behavior. Perhaps such mindsets form a cornerstone that largely subsumes other mindsets. Or it could be that when these mindsets are pitted against other mindsets, their influence diminishes. In either case, an important direction for future research is to establish whether the various mindsets could ultimately be boiled down to a smaller subset of mindsets. For example, research might examine whether fixed versus growth mindsets are a better predictor of behavior compared to other mindsets such as power, construal level, or regulatory focus. Or researchers could test whether some mindsets are responsible for (i.e., mediate) the effects of other mindsets. For example, we know that power is closely connected to both regulatory focus (Keltner et al., 2003) and construal level (Magee & Smith, 2013; Smith & Trope, 2006). Is power a foundational mindset that can help explain how these other mindsets affect behavior? Might some cases exist where regulatory or construal level can be reduced to power but other cases where they work independently?

Different mindsets might be more relevant in particular contexts or multiple mindsets may operate in the same context. For example, fixed versus growth mindsets might affect consumer behavior in competitive contexts or in educational contexts as these mindsets are particularly relevant for helping consumers know where they stand in terms of their abilities. Or construal level may matter when people are in a high sense-making mode. Or power may matter in organizational contexts, especially when there is a clear, formal hierarchy.

By broadening the concept of mindsets, we also heed the original Lewinian call that all behavior is a joint product of both the person and the situation. That is, which mindset is on active duty is likely driven by both dispositional factors (chronic accessibility) and situational factors (temporary accessibility). Thus, in a given situation, both chronic and situational factors likely govern which mindset is accessible. According to the principles of accessibility (Higgins, 1996), the most accessible mindset might serve to guide how people select, encode, and retrieve information.

We believe this idea of determining when each mindset is more likely to be on active duty is an exciting direction for future research. Specifically, scholars could focus on understanding the natural triggers that would make different mindsets more applicable. Thus, instead of the common approach of studying different mindsets in isolation (e.g., fixed vs. growth, powerless vs. powerful, low vs. high construal), researchers could examine antecedents of when one mindset is most likely to operate. The key point here is that by broadening the emphasis beyond fixed versus growth mindsets, researchers can carve out an important direction to understand when a given

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