



INTRODUCTION

Recent studies show the effect of priming by religious concepts (Norenzayan and Shariff 2007) and the effect of environmental cues on the honesty and prosocial behavior (Haley and Fessler 2005, Bateson et al. 2006, Xygalatas et al. (2012)

Religious environments are often populated by statues and icons of saints and other anthropomorphic representations. We speculate that such representations are partly responsible for the effect religious setting have on human behavior. Marcel (1983) argues that visual stimuli can activate structurally related representations in their respective representational domains.

Religious symbols accompanied by anthropomorphic representations which include detailed facial expressions – especially those that highlight the eyes – may be a good strategy for a religious tradition to foster preferred mental states and behaviors among their parishioners.

The important element of this study, already introduced by Bateson et al. (2006), features a weekly alteration of the experimental treatment while keeping the rest of the setting untouched. Though inspired by the study by Bateson et al. (2006), our experiment hopes to bring more rigor into the experimental design (controlling for gender, amount of individual contributions, etc.) while studying priming effects in a more open and natural setting. The study also aims to explore the different forms of material representations in successive treatments. By presenting stimuli in two conditions (2D/3D), we hope to better understand the role of materiality in religious representations and contribute to theoretical discussions related to the visual priming paradigm more generally.

METHOD

Behavioral experiment (quasi-experiment) in naturalistic setting.

GENERAL HYPOTHESIS Participants will contribute more money in the presence of the *face* than in the presence of the *cactus flower*.

SPECIFIC HYPOTHESIS Participants will contribute more money in the presence of the *3-dimensional face* than in presence of the *2-dimensional face* presented as an image on paper.

SUBJECTS Participants are recruited on a pseudo-random basis from the library visitors.

DESIGN OF A STUDY AND STIMULI

TREATMENT Factor1

Agency vs. Non-agency stimulus object
 (1) Sculpture of head
 (2) Cactus flower



treatment condition 1



treatment condition 2

TREATMENT Factor2

2D vs. 3D

(1) Stimuli presented as a 2-dimensional image
 (2) Stimuli presented as a 3-dimensional object
Conditions are randomized on a daily basis throughout the 20 working days.

DEPENDENT MEASURES

- (1) amount of monetary contribution per person, number of drinks taken, time code
- (2) sequence of contributions

Study also controls for gender.

We also record ethnographic observations that will provide us with qualitative data regarding the experimental treatments.

SETTING The study is situated in the foyer of the library of the faculty of natural sciences that appears as an ideal niche for our study. Since there is no cafeteria or beverage machine in the entire facility, the drink offer appears natural and does not arouse suspicion in the potential participants of our study. The equipment needed for the course of study, namely the table and notice board, were already in place. We added a small refrigerator (provided by the drink manufacturer) filled with cans of Redbull energy drink, envelopes designated for individual contributions (marked and sorted by gender, and a large transparent honesty box.

COVER STORY AND MECHANISM

OF CONTRIBUTION A relevant and credible cover story was written for the task. We tried to carefully balance letting participants know enough to competently engage in the study while at the same time knowing as little as possible concerning the actual nature of the study. The situation was introduced as marketing research for the library. In our story, the library intends to sell drinks in the future and is keen to know what type of products they should offer and what prices they should charge.

PROJECT STATUS

A pilot of the study was successfully completed, so we progressed to the actual experiment which is currently in the data collecting stage. Preliminary analysis of the data will be completed by June 2013.

We plan to run a similar study in Aarhus, Denmark in order to achieve cross-cultural validation of the data.

References

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