The Birthdate Effect: An
Extension of the Mere Ownership Effect
Gary Nickell, Katie Pederson, and Cassie Rossow
Minnesota State University Moorhead
Abstract

Studies have shown that attributes or variables associated with oneself are liked or preferred more compared to similar attributes unrelated to the self. Nuttin (1985) found that people tend to prefer the letters that occur in their own name more than the letters that do not occur in their names. This name-letter-effect was later explained as a more general "mere ownership effect." The purpose of the present study is to test whether the mere ownership effect generalizes to a person’s evaluation of their birthdate (month and year). One-hundred participants will be asked to evaluated a variety of dates and objects. It is expected that participants will show a significantly more positive evaluation of their own birth month and year compared to their non-birth months and years.
The Birthdate Effect: An Extension of the Mere Ownership Effect

Using a simple self-association, Nuttin (1985) found that people tend to prefer the letters that occur in their own name more than the letters that do not occur in their names. This effect regarding names and letters was later explained as a more general Mere Ownership Effect. Hoorens and Nuttin (1993) hypothesized, based on the Mere Ownership Effect, that people will like their own belongings and objects more than belongings and objects that they don’t own. Beggan (1992) and others have suggested that the Mere Ownership Effect is a self-enhancing bias directed toward one’s possessions. Self-enhancement involves a person’s basic desire to feel good about themselves, and may involve conscious and/or unconscious processes (Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002). Recently, Pelham et al. (2002) define unconscious self-enhancement as “people’s positive automatic association about themselves [that] may influence their feelings about almost anything that people associate with the self” (p. 470). Cialdini and De Nicholas (1989) found that the presence of a trivial association (same birthday) between a perceiver and another person produced a more positive evaluation of that person. Similarly, Finch and Cialdini (1989) found that participants softened their negative evaluation of Rasputin the
"mad monk of Russia," if they thought they had the same birthday as he did.

The purpose of the present study is to test whether the Mere Ownership Effect generalizes to people's evaluation of their own birthdate (month and year). Based on Mere Ownership Effect, it is expected that participants will show a more positive evaluation (liking) of their own birth month and birth year compared to their nonbirth months and nonbirth years. We also expected that participants will show a more positive liking for their high school graduation year compared to the average of their four pre-graduation years.

(Note: If this was an actual proposal I would discuss previous research and develop the background for this study in more detail)

Method

Participants

One-hundred college students in psychology classes at a midwestern university will be asked to participated in a study called "Preference Study." The participants may receive extra credit in their classes and will be treated in accordance with the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association.

Procedure and Design

Participants will be run in groups of (15-20). The participants will read and sign an informed consent form before
being given the survey materials. Participants will be given the Preference Survey and asked to rate their level of liking for various dates, years, seasons, etc. on a scale from 1 (Dislike a lot) to 7 (Like a lot) (See Appendix). (Note Appendix is not included in this sample paper). The two key issues involved their rating of the month and the year of their birth. After completing the Preference Survey, they will be instructed to place the survey in a manila envelope. Next, they will be asked to complete a few basic demographic questions (including their birthdate) and to place them in the same manila envelope. Finally, participants will be thanked and debriefed.

The study is a single-factor (birthdate vs. nonbirthdate) within-subjects design. Based on mere ownership effect, it is expected that participants (Ps) will show a more positive evaluation (liking) of their own birth month and birth year compared to their nonbirth months and nonbirth years.
References


