

# Influence of Social Desirability In Direct and Indirect measures of Attitudinal Ambivalence

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## Can the expression of ambivalence be used for self-presentation?

### A lack of consensus to assess attitudinal ambivalence

#### 2 Measures commonly used :

##### 1) Direct measure (Felt Ambivalence, Priester & Petty, 1996) using a 7-points Likert scale, which averages 3 items :

- a) With regard to genetically modified food, I feel conflicted
- b) With regard to genetically modified food, I feel undecided
- c) With regard to genetically modified food, I have no hesitation \*

##### 2) Indirect measure (Potential Ambivalence, Bell, Esses & Maio, 1996) in 2 steps :

- a) List the adjectives / emotions (out of 10) that come to your mind when you think of genetically modified food
- b) Assign a valence from -3 (extremely negative) to +3 (extremely positive) to each listed adjective / emotion

#### Testing the influence of Social Desirability on both measures

**Hypothesis:** a Direct measure is more affected by Social Desirability compared to an Indirect one.

We used the Self-presentation Paradigm (Jellison & Green, 1981) to reveal the permeability of ambivalence to Social Desirability:

First the participants answer without a specific instruction (standard measure) then they answer again in order to be **positively evaluated** (self-enhancement) and one last time in order to be **negatively evaluated** (self-depreciation).

This paradigm has been used in a **between - participants (Study 1)** and a **within - participants (Study 2)** design.

The type of measure was always a between - participants variable.

## Study 1

67 participants (39 females and 28 males, mean age = 21.16, SD = 3.77). Zscores are computed to test our hypothesis.

### Procedure

The participants are first asked to read a text on genetically modified food. (this text was previously pre-tested for its neutrality)

They are then randomly assigned to one of our 4 conditions :

- Direct measure Self-Enhancement
- Direct measure Self-Depreciation
- Indirect measure Self-Enhancement
- Indirect measure Self-Depreciation

The hypothesis contrast is 2 -3 2 -1 (respectively for the above listed conditions)

### Results

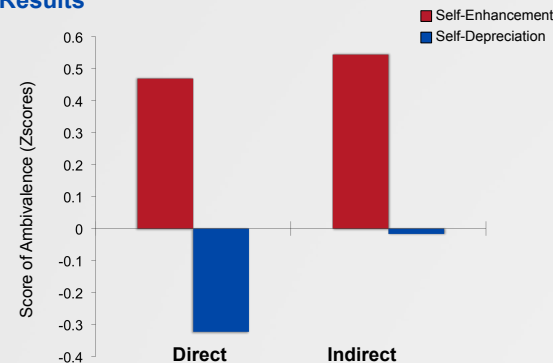


Figure 1. Score of Ambivalence as a function of the self-presentation condition and the type of measure.

The analysis revealed a significant effect:  $t(63) = 2.86, p = .006$

## Study 2

523 participants (343 females and 180 males, mean age = 23.76, SD = 4.85) from the University of Lausanne. We have used Limesurvey to collect the data. We collected both adjectives and emotions for the indirect measure. Our hypothesis is tested via:

- a) the comparison of the correlation between the Standard score and the Self-Enhancement one, as a function of the type of measure.
- b) the comparison of the number of non-clearsighted participants as a function of the type of measure.

The non-clearsightedness variable points out the number of participants who made no difference in their answers between the two Self-Presentation conditions. The lower the number of non-clearsighted participants, the stronger the influence of Social Desirability.

### Procedure

The same procedure as for the Study 1 was used **within** the participants.

### Results

- a)  $r$  Indirect = 0.4;  $r$  Direct = 0.2;  $\chi^2(1, N = 521) = 4.3, p < .04$
- b) **Between Direct and Adjectives:**  $\chi^2(1, N = 521) = 3.1, p = .07$   
**Between Direct and Emotions:**  $\chi^2(1, N = 521) = 34, p < .001$

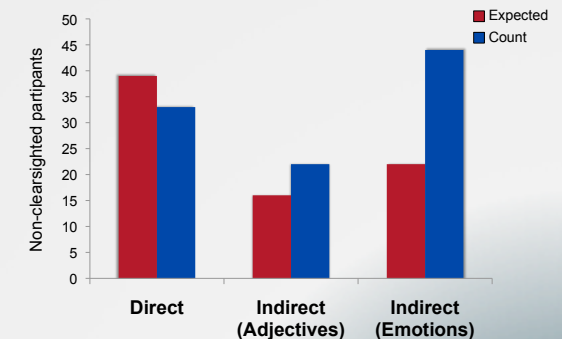


Figure 2. Number of non-clearsighted participants regarding the condition.

## Discussion

These two first studies allow us to say that **direct measures are more affected by Social Desirability than indirect ones.**

This indicates that Direct measures allow the respondents to express or not their ambivalence for self-presentational reasons.

Future research should consider assessing ambivalence implicitly to avoid the expression of self-presentational concerns. Indeed, in a recent review, Olson and Fazio said about implicit measures that "their major appeal is that these indirect estimates are likely to be free of social desirability concerns" (2009, pp.300)

## References

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