

REVIEW

Consumer psychology of implicit theories: A review and agenda

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Abstract

Implicit theories are the beliefs that individuals hold regarding the nature of human and nonhuman attributes, as well as more global phenomena. Over the past three decades, social and consumer psychologists have garnered a rich set of findings from investigating the processing and judgmental impact of implicit theories on various facets of people's day-to-day lives. This review begins with a brief summary of the history of implicit theory research before explicating its current state in consumer psychology. The review categorizes the current, and rather fragmented, landscape of the consumer psychology of implicit theories into three broad areas: brands, persuasion, and consumption behaviors. We conclude our review by contributing to an expanding dialogue regarding the future of consumer research pertaining to implicit theories.

KEYWORDS

advertising, brands, decision-making, implicit theories, malleability, mindsets

1 | INTRODUCTION

Can human beings change their most basic attributes such as human intellect? Are health conditions malleable? What about self-control? Even fate? Each of these queries represents the types of questions that form the basis of individuals' implicit theories, defined as the beliefs individuals hold regarding the nature of human attributes/characteristics, as well as more global phenomena (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Dweck, 1999). One specific conceptualization focused on herein captures such theories/beliefs in a dichotomy of consumers espousing two opposing perspectives: *entity theorists*, who believe that peoples' traits are relatively unchanging, and *incremental theorists*, who believe that people can substantially change through time and effort (Dweck, 1999). These belief systems are implicit in that many may not be aware of their own psychological orientation and rarely explicitly state them.

For example, entity theorists of intelligence believe that human intellect is *fixed*. To them, human beings are born with a certain amount of intelligence, so no matter how hard they try, actions to overcome that reality are likely to be in vain. Conversely, incremental theorists of intelligence believe that intellect is something human beings can *grow* and nurture through effort and determination.

Besides intelligence, the major domains of implicit theories that have endured in the literature include human personality, morality, and general world order. Increasingly, researchers have averred that people espouse implicit theories relating to a wide range of domains, such as body type (Cinelli & Yang, 2016), fate (Kim, Kulow, & Kramer, 2013), and self-control (Mukhopadhyay & Yeung, 2010). In this paper, we discuss the significant consequences on individual motivations, information processing, and judgments of these two antipodal lay beliefs. However, we do not review the entirety of lay beliefs or mindsets that people may possess; for instance, those that pertain to procedural knowledge and behaviors (e.g., Wyer, 2011) or "naïve" theories regarding the implications of cognitive processes (e.g., Schwarz, 2004) will not be covered. Instead, our focus is solely on the dichotomy that exists between the perceptions of malleability for various implicit theories across several domains.

Over the past three decades, social and consumer psychology researchers have garnered a rich set of findings from investigating implicit theories and their downstream impacts on varied facets of individuals' day-to-day lives. For instance, implicit theories have been found to drive responses to failure (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999), cause people to seek divergent goals (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 1999;

Elliott & Dweck, 1988), and shape perceptions on effort (Blackwell et al., 2007; Grant & Dweck, 2003). Stemming in part from findings in social psychology, consumer researchers have studied how implicit beliefs can impact consumption-oriented processes and outcomes. Our emphasis being on consumer research pertaining to implicit theories, we find that most extant consumer literature pertaining to implicit theories has tended to center on three main areas: brands, persuasion, and consumption behaviors.

In this review, we first summarize the history of implicit theories research, highlighting its core conceptual contributions that feed into virtually all published and forthcoming consumer research. We believe that doing so grounds our understanding of how implicit beliefs interplay with different aspects of consumers' lives. Second, we compile, organize, and summarize the current state of implicit theories research within consumer literature. This effort shows the somewhat disparate and disconnected spaces of implicit theories research in the consumer field. Third, we contribute to the ever-evolving dialogue on what the future of implicit theories research in consumer behavior may hold. In the process, we hope not only to collate implicit theories' past and present, but to offer a potential (albeit limited) roadmap for consumer researchers interested in implicit theories.

2 | THE ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES OF IMPLICIT THEORIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

2.1 | Historical perspective: origin as a theory on children's failure attributions

Implicit theories are beliefs about the nature of human attributes that individuals use to enhance their understanding of the world around them. Evolving from the work of Dweck and colleagues in the 1970s and 1980s, the initial focus of this research pertained to attributions children made after failure experiences. In an early investigation, Dweck and Reppucci (1973) found that children who attributed failure to a lack of ability tended to exhibit decrements in performance when faced with setbacks; children who attributed failure to lack of effort, however, did not. This finding led Diener and Dweck (1978) to begin uncovering two very different styles of coping with difficulty: helplessness versus mastery orientation. Helpless children ascribed their problems to absence of ability, expressed negative affect, and wasted time on solution-irrelevant thoughts. In contrast, mastery-oriented children refrained from dire attributions, expressed optimism, and maintained focus on the task at hand.

In an effort to explain children's mastery-oriented and helpless responses to failure, Elliott and Dweck (1988) argued that the two patterns had different goals. They distinguished between performance goals, which motivate people to demonstrate their ability, and learning goals, which innervate individuals to develop their ability. Performance goals lead people to work to attain positive judgments of their ability and to avoid negative assessments that would discredit their capacity. In contrast, learning goals direct individuals to seek

increasing their competence. Elliott and Dweck (1988) investigation found that performance goals tended to make children more vulnerable to the helplessness syndrome in response to failure; learning goals, though, were more likely to foster a mastery-oriented response to setbacks. This insight led Dweck and her colleagues to ask why some individuals embraced performance goals and others learning goals. Their conclusion centered on individuals' implicit theories about the malleability of human traits. Not surprisingly, researchers in the nascent stages focused on children's implicit theories of intelligence.

Some children subscribe to an entity theory of intelligence, while others favor an incremental theory of intelligence. Entity theorists believe that intelligence is a fixed, immutable trait; incremental theorists, in contrast, posit that intelligence is a malleable quality that can morph through one's own effort. These disparate implicit theories of intelligence determine whether individuals adopt performance or learning goals. Working under the perception of the fixedness of intelligence, entity theorists focus on people's level of ability and on performance goals to verify their ability. Perceiving the malleability of human's intelligence, incremental theorists have a reduced concern for momentary failures and, therefore, are more willing to embrace challenges that may increase one's capacity. Although Dweck and Leggett (1988) centered primarily on implicit theories of intelligence, they speculated that individuals may also hold implicit beliefs about the immutability of other traits, such as personality and morality.

Consistent with this supposition, subsequent research demonstrated that implicit theories about the malleability of various human attributes may not only exist but can have important consequences. For example, implicit theories of personality were linked to lay dispositionism—the tendency to use personal traits as the dominant unit of analysis in social perception (Chiu et al., 1997). Findings indicated that, in contrast to their incremental theorist counterparts, entity theorists draw stronger trait inferences from observations of others' behavior and use traits to make stronger predictions about others' future behavior. Moreover, empiricism has revealed that in making judgments of others, entity theorists tend to neglect the influence of situational factors (Erdley & Dweck, 1993) while focusing on trait-consistent information (Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001); moreover, they are reluctant to revise their trait inferences (Erdley & Dweck, 1993). In other words, entity theorists' belief in fixed traits leads to their searching for information about others' fixed traits and to view people in terms of fixed traits.

A study of social perception found that implicit theories about the stability of personal traits influence people's tendency to stereotype various groups (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). In comparison with incremental theorists, entity theorists made more stereotypical trait judgments of various ethnic and occupational groups, formed stronger stereotypes of a hypothetical group, and were more likely to view stereotyped traits as innate. Thus, entity theorists' thinking in terms of fixed traits apparently leads them to think about groups in terms of stereotypes.

Much of the most widely cited implicit theory research has focused on how those theories impact students in their academic pursuits. Several early field studies in academic settings reported



that efforts to encourage students to adopt a more incremental theory of intelligence led to improvements in motivation and achievement (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Blackwell et al., 2007; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003). For example, a longitudinal study that followed several hundred seventh graders across their transition into junior high school found that students exposed to a workshop designed to convince them that intelligence is malleable exhibited markedly better math grades than those in the control condition (Blackwell et al., 2007).

2.2 | The present and future of research on implicit theories/mindsets in psychology—interventions for growth?

Research on implicit theories has burgeoned in recent years, as the arena has found traction across a wide range of phenomena. One interesting observation is a gradual shift in terminology, as an increasing number of articles are using the term “mindsets” instead of, or interchangeably with, implicit theories (Lüftenegger & Chen, 2017). The term mindset seems to have been introduced in a trade book titled *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Dweck, 2006); it summarized the work on implicit theories for the lay public. This publication refers to entity theories as fixed mindsets and to incremental theories as growth mindsets. This seemingly more intuitive nomenclature has gained acceptance in academia, as more and more research publications are employing the mindset lexicon. Because most extant work in consumer psychology has remained consistent by using the incremental-entity jargon, we will often not address implicit theories in terms of “mindsets”; nonetheless, readers should generally consider the terms interchangeable.

A plethora of research has continued to explore how implicit theories influence students' academic engagement and performance. Much of that literature was examined in a meta-analysis of implicit theories and self-regulation in performance contexts. It found that, across a set of 85 published and unpublished studies consisting of 113 independent samples and 273 effect sizes, 68% of the studies were concerned with academic performance (Burnette, O'Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, & Finkel, 2013). Subsequent to publication of this meta-analysis, additional studies of the link between implicit theories and academic performance have appeared. Particularly prominent among these are two large-scale intervention studies, the findings of both which suggest that training students to adopt a growth mindset can lead to enhanced academic performance among at-risk, low-performing students (Paunesku et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2016).

Although a fulsome amount of research on implicit theories has focused on academic performance, some researchers have moved on to examine behavior in other contexts, such as exploring the impact of entity versus incremental orientations on success in weight regulation (Burnette & Finkel, 2012), leadership (Hoyt, Burnette, & Innella, 2012), athletic performance (Chen, Yang, & Zhao, 2008), and self-control. Another line of inquiry has explored the relationship between implicit theories of intelligence and subjective well-being,

finding that entity beliefs are associated with lower life satisfaction and higher levels of negative affect (King, 2017).

One other critical finding is that motivational considerations can strategically alter individuals' implicit beliefs about the malleability of specific traits. For example, three studies supported the notion that individuals may shift their endorsement of implicit theories to avoid unpleasant inferences about themselves (Leith et al., 2014). These apparently dissonance-reduction strategies appeared again in three additional studies which found that people adjusted their implicit theories to protect their feelings about political candidates that they favored or opposed. In particular, participants shifted toward an incremental view when they wanted to excuse a favored candidate for regrettable statements but toward an entity view when they wanted a candidate that they opposed to be permanently tainted for making deplorable statements. In a similar vein, people appear to lean toward entity theories that suggest that their strengths will remain stable; when contemplating personal weaknesses or undesirable traits, though, they gravitate toward incremental theories that infer that these weaknesses may be correctable (Steimer & Mata, 2016). In other words, people perceive their weaknesses to be more pliable than their strengths, a finding compatible with the classic self-serving bias (Miller & Ross, 1975) and the notion of preference consistency (Jain, 2003). Though these findings do not mean that chronic individual differences in implicit theories are unreliable or unimportant, they do highlight a previously unexplored source of strategic fluidity in individuals' implicit theories.

A recent retrospective on implicit theories suggests that in psychology, there has been abundant research exploring the means by which people can intervene to inspire others to adopt a growth (incremental) orientation of intelligence (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Originating from a theory of academic achievement, this retrospective highlights the challenges present in enhancing academic performance in real-world settings by exploiting the consequences of implicit theories, such as the difficulty in getting strong effects. However, early work shows encouraging results that instilling implicit theories is possible, and the downstream consequences of shifting one to an incremental belief may be beneficial to academic performance. This retrospective also demonstrates the importance of viewing implicit theories as the core of a *meaning system*—one's implicit theory orientation changes the way one perceives many aspects of his/her life, such as goals, attributions, helplessness, and effort beliefs (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Hong et al., 1999; Molden & Dweck, 2006).

In summary, 30 years of research on implicit theories within psychology has yielded an array of interesting findings that can inform researchers on consumer processing, judgments, and behavior (with the most important points conveniently presented in Table 1). Implicit theories shape the goals that people embrace, the strategies on which they rely in pursuing these goals, the attributions they make in response to success and failure, and the resultant emotions that they experience. Implicit theories help people to understand their social world: They provide a framework for perceiving, judging, and acting on information. As such, their influence over the decisions people make in the realm

TABLE 1 A brief distillation of the differences between entity and incremental theorists

Entity theorists...	Incremental theorists...	Selected references
Believe that select qualities are fixed and unchangeable	Believe that select qualities are malleable	Chiu et al. (1997), Dweck and Leggett (1988)
Exhibit a helpless coping strategy when presented with difficulties	Exhibit a mastery coping strategy when presented with difficulties	Blackwell et al. (2007), Diener and Dweck (1978), Dweck and Reppucci (1973)
Focus on performance-related goals	Focus on learning-related goals	Cho and Johar (2011), Dweck and Leggett (1988), Park and John (2014)
View mistakes as implying incompetence	View mistakes as a path to learning	Dweck and Leggett (1988), Dweck and Reppucci (1973), Shih (2009)
Believe that putting in effort is unlikely to pay off	Believe that putting in effort fosters growth	Blackwell et al. (2007), Miele and Molden (2010), Miele, Son, and Metcalfe (2013), Park and John (2012), Sharifi and Palmeira (2017)
Form quick and strong trait-based inferences	Are less prone to form quick and strong trait-based inferences	Erdley and Dweck (1993), Plaks et al. (2001)
Often think in terms of stereotypes	Less often think in terms of stereotypes	Dweck, Chiu, and Hong (1995a), Levy et al. (1998), Plaks et al. (2001)
Seek to signal good qualities about oneself	Seek to improve themselves	Ommundsen (2001), Park and John (2010, 2012)
Tend to focus on the outcome	Tend to focus on the underlying process	Erdley and Dweck (1993), Jain et al. (2009), Mathur et al. (2013)

Implicit belief of...	# of Studies	Citations
Personality (Self-Theory/Domain General)	12	Kim et al. (2018), Kwon and Nayakankuppam (2015), Kwon et al. (2016), Mathur et al. (2013), Mathur et al. (2012), Park and John (2010, 2012, 2014, 2018), Puzakova et al. (2013), Rai and Lin (2019), Yin et al. (2016), Yorkston et al. (2010)
Health Conditions	3	Cinelli and Yang (2016), Hsieh and Yucel-Aybat (2018), Mathur et al. (2013)
General World Order	2	Jain et al. (2009), Mathur et al. (2014)
Intelligence	2	Cho and Johar (2011), Sharifi and Palmeira (2017)
Self-control	1	Mukhopadhyay and Yeung (2010)
Fate	1	Kim et al. (2013)
Attitudes	1	Akhtar and Wheeler (2016)
Relationships	1	Park and John (2018)

TABLE 2 Types of implicit beliefs utilized in consumer research

of consumer psychology and behavior appears reliable. Indeed, consumer researchers have convincingly incorporated implicit theories of numerous domains into consumer psychology at large (see Table 2 for the various kinds of implicit theories examined in consumer literature). In the rest of the manuscript, we focus on this body of research which holds promise for an enhanced understanding of consumers. As stated earlier, our examination of the literature led us to classify consumer research on implicit theories into three areas—brands, persuasion, and consumption behaviors. The next three sections explore each of these.

3 | BRANDS

Brand research is central to the consumer (as well as strategy) domain, as brands are firms' coveted assets in proactive, as well as

reactive, strategic endeavors (Palmatier & Sridhar, 2017). Within consumer psychology, research has explored the relation between implicit theories and brands in a diverse set of ways—ranging from how a brand's personality traits can influence consumer beliefs to what strategies managers may consider employing when their brands harm customers. First, empirical work on implicit theories has explored how consumers, through the brands they use and endorse, can experience downstream consequences to themselves, whether in self-perception or their performance on brand-related tasks. Second, various studies have analyzed how implicit theories influence consumer perceptions of brands. Indeed, implicit theories seem to lead to different evaluations and perceptions of brands partly through their reliance on such strategies as brand extensions and brand alliances. Finally, scholars have examined implicit theories vis-à-vis situations where consumers perceive brands to have transgressed (i.e., marketers have engaged in ethical misconduct with



the brand). The key takeaway from the brand transgression literature is that, when people perceive brands to be enrobed with marketer malfeasance, consumer frustrations might surface. However, the way consumers perceive and respond to these wrongdoings may vary depending on their implicit theory orientations.

3.1 | Brand personality, brand promise, and implicit theories: consumer consequences

Notable among the features of brands is brand personality, the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Successful brands typically possess sufficiently distinct and desirable personality traits to offer consumers a way to express their actual and desirable selves. In other words, brands carry signaling potential through their personality traits. Entity theorists are particularly prone to using brands as instruments to demonstrate desirable qualities about themselves. For example, entity theorists perceive themselves as more intelligent, more of a leader, and harder working after using an MIT-branded pen than after using a generic pen (Park & John, 2010). Hence, the desirable traits of a brand tend to rub off onto entity theorists who use these branded products. However, incremental theorists do not perceive themselves differently from their counterparts because of the products they use.

Beyond self-perceptions, entity theorists utilizing brands that make performance-enhancing promises to its users can alter their performance on brand-related tasks, mediated by improvements in beliefs of their self-efficacy. Depending on one's implicit theory orientation, consumers “develop confidence about their abilities in different ways” and, as such, brand usage can positively stimulate self-efficacy for entity theorists resulting in greater overall (relevant) task performance (Park & John, 2014, p. 235). Whereas incremental theorists generally gain self-efficacy through learning and engaging in activities, entity theorists' endorsement of the fixedness of traits results in the underlying belief that the products they use give them assurances of their ability to perform well on certain tasks. This notion functions through the concept of brand promise (i.e., the statements that a brand makes about the benefits it offers to consumers of the brand). Therefore, a product such as Gatorade could advertise a promise, such as helping “consumers succeed in strenuous athletic exercise,” and in response to this promise, entity theorists can perform as well or even better on a relevant task than their incremental theorist peers (Park & John, 2014, p. 238).

3.2 | Brand personality, brand promise, and implicit theories: brand consequences

Implicit theories may not apply only to human traits—people can imbue nonhuman entities with humanlike qualities specifically relating to beliefs of malleability (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995a, 1995b). Indeed, research in marketing has shown that beliefs

regarding the malleability of traits can apply to aspects of brands that consumers humanize, such as their personality. For example, when a brand launches an extension varying in fit (i.e., its similarity) between the product and the parent brand, consumers' implicit theories of personality can lead to updating the parent brand's personality, for better or for worse. When exposed to brand extensions, incremental theorists dilute their brand personality impressions for brand extensions having a good fit (e.g., Guess-branded watches), but enhance their personality impressions for extensions possessing a poor fit (e.g., Guess-branded USB drives). Entity theorists, conversely, do not update their impressions of the brand's personality regardless of an extension's fit (Mathur, Jain, & Maheswaran, 2012).

The theoretical logic underlying these findings stems from the perceived difficulty in developing the extensions, as well as effort associated with this development. Consumers perceive extensions possessing a good fit are relatively easy to establish and thus entail little effort or risk. Extensions having poor fit, alternatively, are seen as requiring significant effort to establish and so possess enhanced risk to the parent brand establishing itself in a distant category (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). Incremental theorists focus on process and are motivated by learning goals based on effort; entity theorists, though, tend to be outcome-driven and believe that effort may not be consequential in changing an outcome (Levy et al., 1998). Therefore, incremental theorists regard favorably a brand's efforts to grow and expand through a poor fit extension, but entity theorists stand unaffected because of their emphasis on outcome.

However, brand personality needs to be salient for the foregoing effects to emerge. If, for instance, brand personality is not salient, either because “the brand does not possess strong associations with one or more brand personality dimensions” or because the “brand information provided is not geared towards building a strong personality,” implicit beliefs will have minimal or no impact (Mathur et al., 2012, p. 547). In addition, brand personality impressions and brand evaluations seem to be discrete in their interplay with implicit beliefs. When extensions have a good fit, relative to those with a poor fit, extension and parent brand evaluations are independent of implicit beliefs and are more favorable (Mathur et al., 2012). Yet, while evaluations of an extension may not change as a function of implicit theories, the number of brand extensions deemed *viable* may. As such, compared with individuals primed with an entity view, those primed to believe in an incremental view of personality perceive that brands are capable of introducing additional brand extensions (Yorkston, Nunes, & Matta, 2010).

Differences caused by implicit theories of personality on perceptions of brand extension fit appear to be guided by the congruence of its personality to the brand, not its physicality (Yorkston et al., 2010). For instance, the brand Subaru may have a physical trait of engine technology and a personality trait of ruggedness. Thus, an extension lacking physical congruence would be something without an engine—such as a kayak or skateboard—while an extension with no personality congruence would be something not viewed as

rugged—such as a motorized scooter or skateboard. When an extension is physically dissimilar, entity and incremental theorists do not evaluate perceptions of fit differently within their respective personality congruence conditions. The same is true for extensions that are consonant on physical and personality dimensions. However, incremental theorists express greater perceptions of fit for physically congruent, but personality incongruent brand extensions than entity theorists (Yorkston et al., 2010). In other words, although congruency on both physical and personality dimensions impacts perceived fit, implicit theory moderates only the personality congruency aspect of fit, as consumers ascribe the application of implicit beliefs to the anthropomorphized feature of the brand, notably its personality. There is a limit, however, to how far brands can stretch themselves before their evaluations begin to suffer across both types of theorists. Specifically, if a change in personality violates a *latitude of acceptability*, even incremental theorists may not evaluate the change positively (Yorkston et al., 2010).

How do the fit and success of a brand extension affect brand perceptions? When a good fit extension fails, incremental theorists have a negative valence for the unsuccessful attempt. That is, they feel that a successful brand extension should have been relatively easy to achieve given that the extension had a good fit. Consequently, incremental theorists dilute their brand personality impressions vis-à-vis an unsuccessful poor fit extension (Mathur et al., 2012). Conversely, if a poor fit extension succeeds, incremental theorists enhance their brand personality impressions relative to a successful good fit extension because of the effort they perceive underlying the creation of a low fit extension. Entity theorists display a reduced nuanced response: They possess favorable impressions of brand personality only when they are exposed to successful extensions and have diluted personality impressions only when they encounter extension failure (Mathur et al., 2012). Accordingly, these findings lend further support to the theoretical premise that incremental theorists focus more on the effort, while entity theorists center more on the outcome.

In addition to launching brand extensions, marketers establish alliances with other marketers' brands. Brand alliances represent a spill-over mechanism where the partnering brand's personality is transferred to the host brand, which induces consumers to re-conceptualize its personality (Desai & Keller, 2002). Because entity theorists believe in the fixedness of traits, moderately incongruent alliances dilute perceptions of the brand's personality (e.g., fashion retailers allying with visual artists; Kim, Vaidyanathan, Chang, & Stoel, 2018). Specifically, entity theorists' rejection of malleability "disrupts cognitive processing and generates instability in cognition" (Kim et al., 2018, p. 426). However, the same dilution effect does not occur with incremental theorists who, based on their belief in personality malleability, can expand their view of the brand's personality in cases of moderate incongruency and thus accept the expansion. Regardless, when extension incongruency is too great, both entity and incremental theorists dilute brand personality. In cases of sufficiently strong discordance, neither entity nor incremental theorists accept the expansion.

3.3 | Brand transgressions, brand recovery, and implicit theories

Various events surrounding brands, products, and firms may affect consumers negatively to varying degrees. These events often relate to brand transgressions and/or product/service failures. Unsurprisingly, brand transgressions and wrongdoings are usually viewed negatively, particularly when they are perceived as intentional (Folkes, 1984; Klein & Dawar, 2004). When a brand transgresses, consumers often make one or more of three attributions regarding the causes underlying the transgression: (a) locus of responsibility, (b) stability (permanence) of the problem, and (c) controllability of the issue.

Because entity and incremental theorists process the world differently, each group may respond to brand/product transgressions and failures dissimilarly. Psychology literature provides support for this supposition. For instance, relative to their entity theory counterparts, individuals subscribing to incremental beliefs of moral character have been found to renew their trust in someone following his/her apologies and trustworthy behavior (Haselhuhn, Schweitzer, & Wood, 2010) to a greater extent.

Consumer researchers have begun increasingly to explore directly the link between implicit theories and negative events surrounding brands and products. For example, participants read a news article about a fictitious body wash brand indicating that was found to contain certain carcinogenic chemicals (Yin, Yu, & Poon, 2016). Participants then read about the firm's response to this news—the firm either denied responsibility or assumed responsibility and took corrective actions. Following the presentation of the product-harm crisis, implicit theories of personality, attributions (locus, stability, and controllability), and brand evaluations were measured. Evidence suggested that when firms deny responsibility, entity and incremental theorists evaluate the brand similarly. However, when companies assume responsibility and issue corrective actions, incremental theorists view the crisis as more malleable in nature, consistent with a belief that the crisis was caused by neglectful management rather than basic traits of the organization (Yin et al., 2016). Consequently, incremental theorists, more so than entity theorists, view product-harm crises as more externally caused, temporary, and outside the brand's control and thus evaluate the brand more favorably.

However, the above patterns seem to appear only when both entity and incremental theorists have no prior knowledge of the brand. When a brand's corporate image is considered, regardless of a firm's response, a weak image causes entity theorists to attribute the crisis as more internal and permanent compared with incremental theorists (Yin et al., 2016). If the company does assume responsibility, entity theorists lower their brand favorability evaluations more than do incremental theorists. However, irrespective of the organization's response, a strong corporate image induces incremental theorists to attribute the crisis as more internal and permanent compared with entity theorists. And if the business denies responsibility, incremental theorists lower their brand favorability evaluations more compared with entity theorists. The disparity in responses to strong and



weak corporate image appears to be related to the process and outcome orientation of incremental and entity theorists, respectively. As such, in cases with strong corporate image, entity theorists "tend to find cues or information of the firm in crisis to accord with their prior impression" because they "prefer external evidences and signals that are consistent with their judgments" (Yin et al., 2016, p. 89). Incremental theorists, conversely, "put more attention on 'what the company has done' rather than 'what the company is' and the firm's recovery strategy" (p. 89) when corporate image is strong.

Product-harm crises represent only one specific type of transgression (see Khamitov, Grégoire, & Suri, 2019 for a review). Broadly, transgressions can represent a litany of failings on the part of the brand and include poor customer service, broken or poorly performing products, and moral and ethical violations/scandals surrounding the brand (Tybout & Roehm, 2009). For example, when products of a given brand are below consumers' expectations, consumers with weak incremental beliefs about relationships (i.e., the notion that one's relationships are malleable or fixed) and a weak self-brand connection (i.e., the belief that there is an intrinsic tie between a brand and oneself) are unlikely to engage with that brand. This response is likely to occur because they are not committed to the relationship and do not feel that they could build their relationship by working through the conflict. Those with strong self-brand connections or strong incremental beliefs in relationships, however, show no such decrease in engagement following a transgression; this reaction presumably is because their relationship with the brand is important to them, or they view relational struggles as providing opportunity for growth between the two parties (Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003). Further, consumers with high self-brand connections engage in defensive processing, which leads to further engagement for self-protection.

Strategically, there are many types of responses a firm might employ to recover from a brand's transgression. Emotional distress appears to be highest for consumers who receive no response and possess either a strong self-brand connection or a strong incremental belief, as these consumers desire engagement with the brand (Park & John, 2018). Further, when a brand is consistent with consumers' feelings, those with strongly held incremental beliefs combined with a weak self-brand connection become more attached to the brand because the firm has made good on its effort to grow the relationship. If a brand seemingly reflects that its efforts to respond and support customers are purposefully aimed at achieving "business success" rather than growing its relationship with consumers, only consumers' self-brand connection predicts emotional attachment, as weak or strong incremental beliefs are not associated with different responses (Park & John, 2018, p. 183).

Finally, entity and incremental theorists' responses to product wrongdoings may be different as a function of the brand's decision to humanize itself. To humanize themselves, many brands employ anthropomorphization or the attribution of human features to non-human objects (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). Anthropomorphism can influence numerous phenomena, including attributions of mindfulness (Epley & Waytz, 2009), thus

leading to perceptions that nonhuman targets can experience emotions, have morals and intentions (Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010), and form impressions (Epley & Waytz, 2009). Entity theorists perceive that anthropomorphized brands have a greater degree of responsibility for their negative actions and, therefore, evaluate them more negatively than incremental theorists because they view the humanized brand's behavior as reflective of a stable characteristic (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013). Furthermore, providing compensation to entity theorists seems to be the only strategy that permits transgressing anthropomorphic brands to overcome these negative perceptions. Incremental theorists do not perceive a difference between anthropomorphic or nonanthropomorphic brands, in either brand evaluations or responsibility, because they do not attune to trait information as entity theorists do. Apologizing and compensation strategies appear to be equivalently effective for incremental theorists for both anthropomorphized and nonanthropomorphized brands, with the least effective strategy being denial of responsibility (Puzakova et al., 2013).

4 | PERSUASION AND ADVERTISING

Implicit beliefs can also impact how consumers respond to persuasive marketing messaging. Research has engaged different types of implicit theories in examining their influence on the processing and judgmental consequences of marketing messages in varied settings and contexts: luxury and fashion product advertising, healthcare messaging, and appeals for charity. Findings from these works depict the role of implicit theories in the processing of persuasive messaging. First, implicit theory orientation interacts with marketing appeals situated in various contexts, framed in specific ways, and distinguished in a brand's personality, thus changing their effectiveness for entity and incremental theorists. Second, implicit theories interact with different kinds of persuasive appeals to change consumer attitudes and perceptions of a brand's attributes (e.g., strength, stability, accessibility).

4.1 | Implicit beliefs and effectiveness of marketing appeals

4.1.1 | Message context

If individuals cannot change their personality through effortful action, then signaling to other positive attributes about oneself (rather than improving those attributes) becomes a potential persuasive strategy. And brands with desirable personalities offer entity theorists opportunities to do so (Kwon, Seo, & Ko, 2016; Park & John, 2012). Indeed, those subscribing to incremental beliefs respond more favorably to advertisements that contain self-improvement appeals from brands with distinctive personalities; conversely, those embracing entity beliefs react more favorably to advertisements that contain signaling appeals from the same

brand (Park & John, 2012). Accordingly, implicit beliefs also impact consumer judgements of luxury product advertising. In particular, entity theorists exhibit more positive evaluations for advertisements that describe a luxury product's symbolic benefits (e.g., "PRADA. The Luxury. The shades that will make you look luxurious."); alternatively, incremental theorists exhibit more positive evaluations for advertisements that denote a luxury product's functional benefits (e.g., "PRADA. Extremely Durable. The shades that last for years.") (Kwon et al., 2016, p. 465).

In addition to luxury product advertising, implicit theories also affect the effectiveness of persuasive messaging in women's fashion featuring plus-sized female models. A study with 91 young to middle-aged overweight women (overweight as defined by the participant's BMI exceeding 25) completed an implicit self-theory scale of body type (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). Participants viewed a picture of a plus-sized fashion model from a purportedly anonymous, but well-known, women's clothing brand. Results showed that most participants, regardless of implicit beliefs, agreed with the brand's choice of model. However, participants' opinions regarding the clothing product advertised varied as a function of implicit beliefs and their BMI. For incremental theorists, participants with higher BMI expressed marginally more favorable attitudes regarding the dress than did those with relatively lower BMI. For entity theorists, higher BMI participants revealed significantly less favorable feelings about the dress than did lower BMI respondents.

The foregoing findings, however, did not hold for non-apparel products (i.e., when the plus-sized model was advertising hair care products). Additionally, perceived similarity to the model appears to mediate the overall effect (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). Entity theorists, espousing a fixed notion regarding their body type, varied in their perceived similarity to a plus-sized model dependent on their objective similarity (i.e., how close their BMI matched). However, those who with higher BMI and held incremental beliefs about body malleability tended to "imagine themselves as thinner than they actually are," reporting greater similarity to a plus-sized model (Cinelli & Yang, 2016, p. 478).

4.1.2 | Message framing

Advertisers frame their messages in many ways. For example, an advertisement might construct a persuasion appeal in terms of either gains or losses (Berger & Smith, 1998). Contrasting gain or loss message framing often relies on prospect theory, which promulgates that some people are risk averse when potential gains become salient but are risk seeking when potential losses become salient. Other frames are comparative. For instance, casting a persuasion appeal as "Lysol is 50% more effective than the next leading brand" suggests a positive (approach) comparison; a negative (avoidance) advertisement might be crafted as "The next leading brand is 50% less effective than Lysol," (Jain, Mathur, & Maheswaran, 2009, p. 57). In both cases, the frame of reference changes from a positive movement, which individuals might process as a gain, to a negative movement, which individuals might process as a loss (Jain & Posavac, 2004).

Also, some frames relate to the recipient of the benefit of an action (e.g., "Donating to this charitable organization is good for society," or "Donating to this charitable organization is good for me"). Across all types of framing, a purposeful choice of wording impacts the contextual and perceptual cues that individuals use in evaluating the persuasiveness of a marketing appeal. Consumers evaluate these cues differentially depending on their implicit beliefs.

Entity theorists appear to be insensitive to either approach or avoidance framing. Incremental theorists, though, express more favorable brand evaluations under approach scenarios that emphasize a product's benefits over the avoidance scenarios that criticize its competitor (Jain et al., 2009). In other words, entity theorists show a pattern of being frame agnostic while tending to focus on outcome-related thoughts; incremental theorists reflect a pattern of being frame sensitive while tending to center on the underlying process, thus generating an augmented number of counterarguments for avoidance-framed appeals.

In healthcare marketing, efforts are often undertaken to persuade people to engage in healthy behaviors. They might be in the form of prevention appeals—and thus attempt to encourage behaviors that prevent occurrences of diseases—or as detection appeals—and therefore try to encourage behaviors that relate to detecting the presence (or absence) of health issues (Rothman, Salovey, Antone, Keough, & Martin, 1993). Individuals typically perceive detection as high risk, as they could learn that they have a certain disease. Individuals usually perceive prevention, though, as low risk, because the encouraged healthy behavior likely does not have obvious downsides.

With detection appeals, incremental theorists are more persuaded by messages that frame what they might lose by not adopting a corrective behavior, as they focus on the underlying process (Mathur, Jain, Hsieh, Lindsey, & Maheswaran, 2013). That is, when observing a risky behavior, incremental theorists respond in accord with prospect theory: They seek to avoid losses rather than gain benefits. Conversely, with preventative appeals, incremental theorists are more persuaded by messages that frame potential gain from adopting a corrective behavior, again compatible with prospect theory. Thus, entity theorists, known for focusing on outcomes, exhibit frame insensitivity to losses and gains. However, entity theorists are more persuaded by prevention appeals, rather than detection appeals, owing to their strong preference for maintaining the status quo (Mathur et al., 2013; Quintanilla, 2011).

Implicit beliefs also lead to different perceptions and responses to medical conditions of others. For example, entity beliefs pertaining to health conditions (i.e., beliefs that health conditions are fixed) are less likely to lead to donating to charities that support obesity research than to cancer research (Hsieh & Yucel-Aybat, 2018). In fact, entity theorists attribute higher blame for individuals with obesity that mediates their unwillingness to donate to such charities. Thus, evidently entity theorists draw negative personality inferences about individuals experiencing what they perceive as controllable health conditions. However, incremental theorists do not show such differences in their likelihood to donate to either cancer research or obesity charities.



Despite their similar intentions to donate to cancer and obesity charities, incremental theorists, driven by thoughts of the perceived efficacy of their donation, can be encouraged to contribute when appeals are framed as others benefiting for less controllable health conditions and self-benefiting for more controllable conditions (Hsieh & Yucel-Aybat, 2018). That is, incremental theorists more strongly expect their gift to be salubrious for those others suffering from less controllable health conditions as: They feel that the “less fortunate cannot help themselves and require support” (Hsieh & Yucel-Aybat, 2018, p. 118). Incremental theorists, however, perceive those experiencing the effects of more controllable conditions appear as having put themselves in that situation (i.e., they “did not take the necessary actions to prevent them”). Accordingly, emphasizing how the process of donating will benefit the self by making the donator feel good can “heighten the perceived efficacy of the donation” (Hsieh & Yucel-Aybat, 2018, p. 118).

4.2 | Implicit theories and attitudes

Central to fathoming persuasion is an understanding of attitudes. Two influential models of persuasion—the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken, 1987), have guided research in this area. In the ELM model of persuasion, “attitudes formed through the central route to persuasion (wherein one pays attention to and thinks about issue-relevant information rather than peripheral cues) result in stronger attitudes that are persistent (i.e., stable), resistant (to counter-persuasion), and more predictive of behavior” (Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015, p. 317). In the heuristic-systematic model of persuasion, availability, accessibility, and applicability of attitudes govern heuristic processing, while systematic processing relies on developing attitudes formed thoughtfully and deliberately.

When exposed to ad appeals, entity theorists form attitudes toward brands faster and with stronger certainty. In addition, their attitudes are more congruent with the positioning of the ad appeal (Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015). However, these strong attitudes do not necessarily arise through a process of effortful cognitive elaboration. Rather, when presented with either strong or weak argument in an advertisement, only incremental theorists show variation in their attitudes, attitude accessibility, and metacognitive measure of attitude strength. Entity theorists appear to be insensitive to differences between weak and strong arguments, which suggests that, as they form strong attitudes quickly (consistent with the belief that attitude strength is a consequence of elaboration), they may not necessarily be engaging in differential elaboration (Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015). Entity theorists are also more resistant to counter-persuasion, to the extent that they anchor themselves more toward their initial evaluation rather than updating their beliefs when encountering new information. For example, they display significantly less attitude change when presented with two sequential dissonant reviews (i.e., they read a positive, then a negative, review about the same product

or vice versa) than do those with incremental beliefs (Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015).

Entity and incremental theorists' attitudes possess varying strength, as a rehearsal of attitudes may be a key consideration. When incremental theorists rehearse their attitudes, their behavior is similar to those of entity theorists. Conversely, when distractions hinder the attitude rehearsal for entity theorists, their deportment is similar to that of incremental theorists. In other words, “entity theorists rehearse their ‘initial’ attitudes probably to reinforce the object-evaluation association, which results in strong attitudes” (Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015, p. 334).

Another aspect of attitudes is consumers' implicit beliefs regarding the malleability of attitudes themselves (i.e., their attitude stability) in applications of word of mouth and brand advocacy. Implicit beliefs of attitude stability may seemingly have no direct effect on one's willingness to persuade others; two competing indirect effects appear responsible for canceling out the direct effect (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016). Both certainty in one's attitude and perceived persuadability of others increase one's willingness to attempt to persuade others. And while entity theorists of attitude stability are more certain in their attitudes, their belief that the attitudes of others cannot change leads to a perception that persuading others is difficult or impossible. Conversely, incremental theorists of attitude stability—though not as certain in their attitudes—believe that others are persuadable.

However, depending on the framing of advocacy, direct effects of implicit beliefs of attitude stability can emerge (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016). When told that the advocacy was about standing up for one's own views, entity theorists were more likely to be willing to attempt to persuade others than incremental theorists were. When informed that the advocacy was about exchanging one's own views with others, entity and incremental theorists were equally likely to attempt to alter others' attitudes. Similarly, when focused to think about others rather than the self, incremental theorists were more likely to be willing to seek to sway others. When the focus was on the self, entity and incremental theorists were equally likely to attempt to alter others' attitudes. However, decoupling one's implicit beliefs of attitude malleability related to the self and others is possible. In other words, people can be made to believe in the fixedness of their own attitudes, while others' attitudes are more malleable (or vice versa). When an entity-self, incremental-others belief of attitude stability is salient, willingness to persuade is higher than with an incremental-self, entity-others belief (Akhtar & Wheeler, 2016).

5 | CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR

Implicit theory research has also explored the broader domain of consumption behavior. We use the term *consumption* to include consumers' personal preferences for an array of physical goods and abstract concepts. For example, implicit beliefs of the malleability of fate can change consumer preferences between healthy and indulgent choices (Kim et al., 2013). Consumer researchers have

implicated implicit beliefs in changing consumer preferences for more abstract qualities, such as risk-taking tendencies in financial decision-making (Rai & Lin, 2019) or evaluations of various line-queueing systems (Mathur, Block, & Yucel-Aybat, 2014).

5.1 | Implicit beliefs influence preferences for physical goods

A novel type of implicit belief consumers may hold pertains to fate. Fate beliefs are intrinsically linked to cultural worldviews (Young, Morris, Burrus, Krishnan, & Regmi, 2011) and social axioms (Leung et al., 2002; Zhou, Leung, & Bond, 2009), and beliefs dealing with the malleability of fate lead to different preferences for healthy and indulgent offerings. For instance, those possessing an incremental view of fate and receive favorable predictions tend to indulge themselves, but individuals receiving unfavorable predictions are less likely to do so (Kim et al., 2013). Conversely, people with an entity view of fate do not alter their preferences based on the valence of the fateful predictions. Moreover, apparently incremental theorists of fate holding unfavorable prophecies tend to have more positive illusory thoughts. Illusory thoughts are responsible for leading consumers to opt for indulgent choices, thus suggesting that their preference for such alternatives may be an "incidental outcome of ego-depletion following the construction of positive illusory thoughts" (Kim et al., 2013, p. 1143).

In addition to the foregoing findings, implicit beliefs of personality malleability can lead to differences in preferences for luxury versus nonluxury goods. Entity theorists, in particular, express more favorable attitudes toward luxury brands than incremental theorists (Kwon et al., 2016). These results are consistent with the notion that entity theorists appreciate luxury products, as they afford opportunity to self-enhance through symbolic value, owing to luxury brands' tendency for increased distinctive and appealing personalities (Kwon et al., 2016; Okonkwo, 2007). Additionally, entity theorists "perceive themselves more positively in line with the appealing personality traits associated with the brand" (Park & John, 2010, p. 657). Incremental theorists do not completely spurn luxury products; however, for them, luxury product advertisements should highlight functional product benefits over symbolic benefits (Kwon et al., 2016).

Incremental and entity theories of intelligence and their resulting perceptions of effort also lead to varying evaluations of technologically complex products. As noted previously, incremental theories of intelligence correlate highly with positive effort beliefs; entity theories of intelligence, though, tend to hold negative effort beliefs, as low performance is often attributed to low intellect (Blackwell et al., 2007; Molden & Dweck, 2006). When contrasting simple and complex technological products, beliefs about the difficulty of assembling and configuring a product can impact preferences for the offering (Burnham, Frels, & Mahajan, 2003). In particular, entity theorists are likely to avoid complex products due to their beliefs that the greater effort required may not pay dividends. Individuals with incremental beliefs, however, evaluate complex products more favorably (Sharifi & Palmeira,

2017). For simple products, entity and incremental theorists respond similarly.

Beyond purchasing goods for oneself, implicit theories of self-control play a role in the items that consumers purchase for others, notably the selection of products for children. Generally speaking, adults can hold four contrasting beliefs regarding individuals' capabilities for self-control: beliefs that people have unlimited self-control which can or cannot be changed over time ("unlimited-incremental theorists," "unlimited-entity theorists"), beliefs that people have limited and fixed amounts of self-control ("limited-entity theorists"), and beliefs that people have limited, but malleable, amounts of self-control ("limited-incremental theorists") (we have changed the terminology to remain consistent with the terminology of implicit theories used in this review; Mukhopadhyay & Johar, 2005; Mukhopadhyay & Yeung, 2010).

These lay theories on both the malleability and amount of self-control can influence the products parents select for their children. For instance, if parents believe in the fixed nature of self-control, there is seemingly no need for monitoring the products given to the child vis-à-vis helping them grow and learn self-control. However, if parents believe that self-control is malleable, then yielding to an offspring's desires for an indulgent or vice kind of product may impede the development of self-control. Additionally, if one believes that self-control reserves are large or unlimited—even if they believe in an incremental view of self-control—the need to purchase goods that further develop self-control is minimal. As such, when choosing a gift for a child, those believing in the limited and incremental nature of self-control (vs. unlimited-incremental) choose gifts with more long-term (vs. short-term) value in terms of fostering augmented self-control (Mukhopadhyay & Yeung, 2010). Comparing limited- and unlimited-entity theorists, no differences appear, but both tend to prefer gifts with short-term value. A similar pattern of results emerges when examining unhealthy snack consumption. However, parents' frequency of visits to fast-food restaurants for their children only varies among unlimited-incremental theorists, who exhibit a significantly higher frequency of patronage. Entity theorists, both limited and unlimited, take children to fast-food locations as often as limited-incrementalists. This finding is consistent with a view that entity theorists use some other criterion not measured when evaluating fast food, but not inconsistent with the hypothesis that limited and unlimited-entity theorists of self-control are inconsistent in their evaluations.

5.2 | Implicit beliefs influence preferences for abstract qualities

Beyond preferences for physical goods, implicit theories also impact preferences for abstract constructs. For instance, implicit theories of personality have downstream consequences on preferences for risky financial investments (Rai & Lin, 2019). Other scenarios show that not only can implicit beliefs impact one's preference for indulgent or virtuous products, but they can also influence preference for



participating in indulgent or virtuous experiences (e.g., attending a party vs. cleaning one's home; Kim et al., 2013).

Borrowing from regulatory focus theory—which suggests consumers may hold either a promotion-focused orientation, driving one toward growth and advancement, or a prevention-focused orientation, motivating one toward safety and security (Higgins, 1997)—those with incremental beliefs about the malleability of personality seek promotion-focused goals, and those having entity beliefs of personality pursue prevention-focused goals (Rai & Lin, 2019). This hypothesis is based on the idea that incremental theorists tend to be forward-thinking and sensitive to positive outcomes, whereas entity theorists are inclined to be situated in the present and are particularly sensitive to negative outcomes. As such, incremental theorists prefer risk-seeking investments, but entity theorists opt for risk-averse investments, while regulatory focus mediates this linkage (Rai & Lin, 2019).

With applications in consumer financial decision-making and beyond, those who hold entity and incremental beliefs of intelligence can have varying degrees of satisfaction based on their levels of performance (Cho & Johar, 2011). For instance, if two people set differing goals—high versus low—and both meet their goals, will everyone be equally as satisfied with his/her choices? Evidence suggests no. In fact, implicit theories of intelligence are responsible for some of this variation. Entity theorists have a tendency to compare their performance to their potential performance. Alternatively, incremental theorists are inclined to compare their performance to an initially set goal, which often starts low so that over time they can experience performance increases (Loewenstein & Prelec, 1991; Novemsky & Ratner, 2003). Satisfaction with one's choices has been found to be lower for entity theorists when their initial goals were set low, rather than high, and largely attenuated for incremental theorists (Cho & Johar, 2011). When providing only performance feedback to incremental theorists, the difference for those with low versus high goals does not vary; when incremental theorists, though, also receive a reminder of their potential performance, those with low goals are less satisfied than those having high goals. Hence, incremental theorists only utilize potentiality as a reference point when it is made salient. Finally, apparently incremental theorists do not focus on potential, unless made salient, as those with a low goal and do not receive potential feedback have higher satisfaction with their decisions than those receiving the potential feedback.

As previously discussed, entity theorists concern themselves largely with maintenance of external positive judgements—that is, they prefer cues and situations in which they can highlight their positive attributes to others. Incremental theorists, conversely, center on the learning experience—they do not need to signal to others their positive attributes, but instead focus on self-monitoring their progress in the development of new abilities. Thus, the way that individuals perceive the various cues that inform them of their overall progress toward a goal differs based on one's implicit beliefs (Mathur et al., 2014).

For example, in the context of retail check-out queues, customers' use the physical movement through the line as a goal progress

cue toward completing the task (of checking out). Participants in a study ostensibly designed “to understand how visual stimuli impact judgments and attitudes” had a retail queueing system explained to them (Mathur et al., 2014, p. 486). The description of the system was as follows:

At this supermarket, customers line up in any of the five columns (Columns A, B, C, D, and E) in the 'line-up area.' An electronic board with five sections tells customers which register is available next by displaying the register number which is available. When the lined-up customers see the next available register number, they proceed to the register and are checked out.

As such, movement in the queue could be seen as both in their column (as individuals sharing the same column are checked out) and in rows (as individuals at the front of various columns are checked out). Participants throughout the queueing simulation recorded the number of people they believed were in front of them and their attitudes toward the queueing system (relative to “standard lines...seen in the supermarket”). When individuals with beliefs consistent with an entity view of general world order (Levy et al., 1998) evaluated the queueing system, their assessment tended to be more favorable than evaluations from incremental theorists. Their assessments were more positive for both the queueing system and the store, which were driven by their perceptions that there were fewer people in front of them. This finding supports the notion that entity theorists focus more on movement down the column as a readily available goal progress cue, biasing upwards their overall progress; incremental theorists, though, more accurately focus on the entire line in determining their overall progress.

The foregoing only holds for cues that represent completion but not learning. In another study, participants viewed a goal progress cue in one of four forms: completion, learning, self-affirmation, or no cue. All three cues showed progress in bar form (i.e., a bar was split into four equally sized segments, each representing 25% of the completion toward finishing all tasks). However, the text inside each segment of the bar varied. In the completion condition, participants saw the percentage completed (e.g., 25%, 50%). In the self-affirmation cue condition, participants viewed positive affective phrases (e.g., “Great job!”). In the learning cue condition, participants viewed a note of the skills that they had learned (i.e., “Visual Skills,” “Spatial Skills,” “Reflective Skills,” “Intuitive Skills”). Incremental theorists' evaluations were observed to be the most favorable in the learning cue condition; entity theorists' evaluations were the highest in the self-affirmation and completion cue conditions (Mathur et al., 2014).

6 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Evolving as an increasingly robust theory in social psychology but a nascent one in consumer psychology, the potential for research examining implicit theories, their antecedents, and consequences seems abundant. A 2016 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*

featured a research dialogue discussing the various implications and overall future of implicit theories' research in consumer psychology. Many of the ideas proposed within that issue have yet to find traction. Therefore, our relatively brief discussion below about the future of implicit theories research will summarize and extend the discussion stemming from this dialogue, both by borrowing ideas previously promulgated and by positing novel opportunities.

6.1 | Instantiating different belief systems

In consumer literature, rather than manipulating/priming an implicit belief system through fabricated scientific articles, pronoun rehearsals, etc., temporarily shifting one's implicit orientation through other means is likely to be of marked interest in the future. From the research discussed, we have seen select instances of advertising subtly priming differing implicit beliefs. Seemingly, this practice could be extended to other scenarios where clear and salient information emphasizing an implicit orientation could prime the intended orientation (Kwon et al., 2016; Mathur et al., 2013). A popular 1970s TV show, "All in the Family," featured Archie Bunker as a stereotypical individual and a significantly more open-minded son-in-law Michael Stivic. The premise here is that depending on which of these characters the audience members find compelling during an episode may lead them modify their orientation for that period of time. As another example, placing a brand's advertisement during television shows that feature matching implicit orientations has been proposed as a possible means of augmenting persuasion effectiveness (Murphy & Dweck, 2016). This idea is consistent with evidence that reveals even short movie clips can prime differing implicit orientations (Jain et al., 2009; Mathur et al., 2013). Such naturalistic settings can temporarily shift consumers' mindset and, in the process, may be of particular relevance to managers who can more effectively target persuasion appeals under appropriate situational conditions (Mathur, Chun, & Maheswaran, 2016). More research thus is necessary to establish how to make different orientations salient and delineate the boundary conditions thereof.

6.2 | Does a growth mindset always trump a fixed one?

In the broader psychological literature, particularly within educational psychology, a robust finding is that students adopting incremental beliefs consistently outperform and respond better to failure than their entity-oriented peers (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck & Yeager, 2019). This "incremental is a superior orientation to entity" thinking is observed to some extent even within the consumer literature (Mathur et al., 2016; Wheeler & O'mair, 2016). Yet acceptance of this notion has experienced some resistance in recent years. Indeed, entity theorists' fixed belief regarding their own features may imbue them with a sense of confidence and security, especially if they *a priori* believe that they are successful and accomplished (Mathur et al., 2016).

Similarly, not all growth and changes are in a positive direction. Quality of goods can decrease, and package sizes may shrink (Wheeler & O'mair, 2016). A brand on a consistent decline may be less appealing to incremental theorists (a) who believe that change is possible (b) but may still abandon the offering because of its consistent downward trajectory. Paradoxically, entity theorists might be more immune to such a phenomenon because of their belief in fixedness and emphasis on first impressions. Consequently, they may treat the decline as a less reliable predictor of the future of the brand. Of course, this proposition is highly simplistic and likely encircled by several moderators.

Earlier, we noted that incremental theorists tend to be more trusting when faced with a transgression (Haselhuhn et al., 2010). One implication of their more forgiving nature may be that such individuals might not only be more trusting but also more likely to ignore wrongdoing, either by minimizing it or, in the extreme, endorsing it themselves. An investigation in the accounting and organizational literature points to this possibility. In their first study, Desai, Jain, Jain, and Tripathy (2019) found that incremental theorists were more tolerant than entity theorists of opportunistic financial reporting and were more willing to engage in it. In a second study, they observed that incremental theorists were more forgiving of VW for its emissions scandal and Nike for its controversial child labor practices—even treating these company transgressions as less serious and less consequential. This finding begs the following question: "Is growth at any cost a normatively good idea?" One of the reasons why researchers have not yet documented the downsides of an incremental orientation may be because of the origins of this research—children's education and achievement motivation, where incremental mindsets motivate children to increase their effort. Nevertheless, future work should examine the costs of an incremental belief system.

6.3 | Peer-to-peer persuasion—how consumers use their implicit orientations in signaling, social media, and reviews

Social media platforms offer individuals unprecedented capabilities in self-enhancement and self-signaling. However, precisely how incremental and entity theorists interact with this technology is unknown. One proposition is that different implicit orientations inspire various motivations, causing downstream behavioral changes on these platforms. For instance, entity theorists might use social media to signal their desirable qualities through sharing photographs of themselves consuming brands having valuable attributes. Incremental theorists acting more as observers and absorbing information for self-growth may be less motivated to proactively transmit messages (Mathur et al., 2016). The underlying mechanism may be that entity and incremental theorists have varied signaling motivations. While entity theorists desire signaling to others to show their positive qualities, incremental theorists likely seek to signal to themselves a self-affirmation of their growth and progress (Mathur et al., 2016).

Additionally, one's proclivity to leave public product reviews may vary as a function of implicit beliefs. Entity theorists



possessing beliefs that a firm cannot adapt or improve itself may have different underlying motivations to author a review online (e.g., for retribution after a bad experience and to warn others to avoid adoption). Incremental theorists with beliefs that a firm can learn from its mistakes might leave reviews not for retaliation, but to provide helpful suggestions for the brand to improve itself in the future. Thus, entity theorists may be less forgiving and more punitive, but incremental theorists may be more forgiving and more complimentary.

6.4 | Product and people preferences—how implicit beliefs may impact online dating and co-creation

Though implicit beliefs can impact preferences for certain products or qualities, our understanding requires further study. Murphy and Dweck (2016) propose several specific areas where our comprehension of implicit theories' interplay with and influence on preferences is lacking. First, they propose that enhanced understanding is needed in the context of parental product preferences for children. Mukhopadhyay and Yeung (2010) present evidence that implicit beliefs of self-control lead parents to make purchases to help their children learn. There may be motivations beyond learning on which parents focus. For instance, indulgent consumption (e.g., ice cream, cookies, unhealthy cereal "more play, less work") is routine in the upbringing of children globally. Consequently, conceivably parental preferences extend beyond self-control beliefs. Second, they propose that in the domain of health and wellness, implicit theories could help improve our understanding of why some people might prefer quick and effortless solutions (e.g., weight loss pills), but others may choose more effortful solutions (e.g., diet and exercise). Perhaps quick fix solutions that promise effective results without concern about chances of failure more easily persuade entity theorists. An alternative prediction is that perhaps entity theorists are less prone to persuasion in such settings because they feel that change is unlikely, regardless of the type of solution. Incremental theorists may be more or less prone to acquiescing depending on their self-control and lay rationalist beliefs (Hsee, Yang, Zheng, & Wang, 2015), among other factors. Third, Murphy and Dweck (2016) proffer that in the context of online dating, consumers' preferences for one another likely differ based on one's implicit orientation. They hypothesize that entity theorists may prefer online dating services that focus on matching partners on their traits; alternatively, incremental theorists may seek potential partners with divergent (if not mismatched) tastes and preferences, thus providing incrementalists with growth opportunities. At a more theoretical level, this supposition captures the possibility that entity theorists prefer attitude objects matched to their traits, but incremental theorists opt for mismatched attitude objects in pursuit of learning and growth. However, extreme mismatch is unlikely to appeal to incremental theorists, as they too seem to have a *latitude of acceptability* (Yorkston et al., 2010).

Beyond the proposals offered by Murphy and Dweck (2016), a few other areas of research are worth considering. Recent shifts toward customization and co-creation offer consumers capability to develop and receive a product that precisely fits their preferences. However, implicit beliefs may affect how consumers derive utility through the customization process. Specifically, entity theorists might align themselves with the outcome of co-creation and value the self-signaling benefits of co-creation. Conversely, incremental theorists may focus on the co-creation process and value the effort to assemble and add new features to the product (Mathur et al., 2016).

6.5 | Preferences for prosocial and innovative products

For prosocial products and behaviors, marketers interested in persuading entity theorists toward supporting particular social causes may wish to consider message framing (Mathur et al., 2016). If, for instance, prosocial appeals are cast in terms of how entity theorists can signal to others their favorable qualities, overcoming the negative effects on charitable donations observed in Hsieh and Yucel-Aybat (2018) might be possible. In the context of new product development, implicit beliefs may play a role in influencing one's willingness to adopt innovative products. Because new or innovative products represent a departure from the status quo, entity theorists preferring to avoid expending effort may passively resist adopting new products. Incremental theorists, however, may see new products as an opportunity to learn and grow new skills. The extent of the product novelty may moderate this expectation.

6.6 | Stereotyping and its impact on reliance for heuristics

Entity theorists appear more stereotype driven than incremental theorists (Levy et al., 1998). Stereotypes themselves being heuristics (Bodenhausen, 1990), entity and incremental beliefs would likely lead to differences in how consumers, in turn, rely on various heuristics in decision-making, including a presumed positive price–quality correlation (for a meta-analysis, see Völckner and Hofmann (2007)), the country of origin effect (Maheswaran & Chen, 2006), and brand name in and of itself (Maheswaran, Mackie, & Chaiken, 1992). Each of these substantive areas represents a rich space for inquiry and for delving deeper toward understanding, how, when, and why implicit theories may influence consumer judgments specific to these and other heuristics.

7 | FINAL THOUGHTS

From its origins as a theory to explain the attributions made by children who experience failure, work on implicit theories has grown and found traction not only in the psychology literature, but also

in consumer behavior. Throughout this review, we have tried to encapsulate the essence of how consumer researchers have used implicit theories literature to enhance understanding of consumer psychology. Despite proving itself as a powerful theory in explaining and predicting a wide array of psychological and behavioral responses, much remains unexplored regarding downstream consequences of consumers' implicit beliefs.

We have attempted to paint a portrait of the broad areas within which consumer researchers have utilized implicit theories in consumer psychology (branding, advertising, and consumer preferences). Yet, acknowledging and recognizing that most of the implicit theory research in consumer literature is currently somewhat fragmented is important. This situation may be because erstwhile investigations have largely existed in isolation of each other, which, in turn, may be driven by the incipience of the field within consumer psychology. Clearly, implicit theories have great potential in helping grow our understanding of how consumers process the greater world around them and make judgments and choices thereof. At present, however, extant work in consumer psychology using implicit theories has branched off in many directions with tenuous connections at best. We hope that our review explicates and motivates a more cohesive understanding of implicit theories, while continuing to inspire research in domains we do not yet fully understand.

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