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Just Don't Think! The Role of Unconscious Thought in Attitude Change

Contrary to intuition, individuals sometimes make better decisions about complex information (e.g., persuasive information about a topic) when they are distracted, as compared to not distracted, from consciously deliberating on the information. Such findings support the idea that unconscious thinking processes are capable of using information to output sound judgments. The current experiment investigated whether unconscious thinking processes are capable of using optimal information, rather than relying on suboptimal information, to develop attitudes about a given topic. In particular, assuming unconscious processes can discriminate between more and less useful information, we predict that unconscious thought will lead individuals to form attitudes based primarily off of the quality of arguments in a persuasive message compared to relatively tangential information such as the expertise of the message author.