

Conventional beliefs about unconscious thought may be overblown

If you have to make a complex decision, will you do a better job if you absorb yourself in, say, a crossword puzzle instead of ruminating about your options? The idea that unconscious thought is sometimes more powerful than conscious thought is attractive, and echoes ideas popularized by books such as writer Malcolm Gladwell's best-selling *Blink*.

But within the scientific community, 'unconscious-thought advantage' (UTA) has been controversial. Now Dutch psychologists have carried out the most rigorous study yet of UTA — and find no evidence for it.

Their conclusion, published this week in *Judgement and Decision Making*, is based on a large experiment that they designed to provide the best chance of capturing the effect should it exist, along with a sophisticated statistical analysis of previously published data.

The report adds to broader concerns about the quality of psychology studies and to an ongoing controversy about the extent to which unconscious thought in general can influence behaviour. "The bigger debate is about how clever our unconscious is," says cognitive psychologist David Shanks of University College London. "This carefully constructed paper makes a great contribution." Shanks published a review last year that questioned research claiming that various unconscious influences, including UTA, affect decision making.

Read full, original article: [Unconscious thought not so smart after all](#)