

Sequential Mitigation: A Motivational Context Effect in Repeated Choice



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Background

- Sequential Decision making
 - Background Contrast Effect (Simonson & Tversky, 1992; Priester, Dholakia & Fleming, 2004)
 - Highlighting and Balancing (Dhar and Simonson 1999)
- Impulsive choices
 - Selection of an unplanned option (Rook & Fisher, 1999)
- Question: How does a first impulsive choice influence a second impulsive choice?
- Research with Rick Bagozzi and Mahesh Gopinath

Sequential Decision Making

- **Another possibility: Consider the role of motivation explicitly**
 - **Consumer's motivational state may be influenced through the initial decision making process**
 - **Relevant for impulsive choices which are driven by desires (Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991)**
 - **Recent work on self-regulation (e.g., Muraven, & Baumeister, 2000)**

Sequential Mitigation Effect

- “Merely participating in a prior impulsive choice reduces impulsiveness of choice in the subsequent task”
 - Specific mechanism hypothesized: sequent choice task musters a lower level of desire on account of having participated in a prior impulsive choice beforehand

Study One: SME Demonstration

- N = 132
- **Single choice** (“gourmet sandwich” scenario alone) or **Two choices** (“sweater” followed by “gourmet sandwich” scenario) conditions
- Dependent measures: desire to buy and likelihood of buying

Study One: Scenarios

- Sweater scenario: “Imagine that you have gone to the mall to buy a few pairs of socks. As you are walking through the mall, your eyes fall upon a fashionable and attractive sweater. It happens to be in your size and favorite color. The salesperson tells you that the piece on display is the last one left, and they are unlikely to get more of the sweaters in this particular style in the future.”
- Gourmet sandwich scenario: “Imagine that you have gone to a cafeteria to get a healthy and nutritious salad for lunch. As you are looking through the display case while standing in line, you see a special gourmet sandwich.”

Study One Results

Dependent Variables	Single choice	Two choices
Desire for gourmet sandwich	4.7/7.0*	4.1/7.0
Purchase likelihood of gourmet sandwich	58.0/100**	44.5/100

Explaining the SME

- Limited resource perspective (Muraven, Baumeister, and colleagues)
 - Desire is a limited resource
 - When experienced the first time, it is depleted
 - Influence of the prior choice will be through the decision maker's ability to experience desire for the impulsive option again in the second task
 - Motivational context effect

Experiment Two: Need to Make Impulsive Prior Choices

- N = 103
- 3 conditions: single choice (sweater alone), impulsive choices (two impulsive scenarios, then sweater), non-impulsive choices (two non-impulsive scenarios, then sweater)
- Dependent measures: desire and purchase likelihood for items

Experiment Two: Impulsive Choices Scenarios

- Cheesecake Scenario: “Imagine that you have gone to a cafeteria to get a healthy and nutritious lunch. As you are looking through the display case while standing in line, you see a mouth-watering tray of strawberry cheesecake.”
- MP3 player Scenario: “Imagine that you have gone to a web-site to buy a music CD. As you are surfing through the website, you come across a newly-introduced MP3 player, which you currently do not own. It has a lot of useful features such as a 20 gigabyte storage capacity, 12 hour battery life, and a one-year warranty.”

Experiment Two: Non-Impulsive Choices Scenarios

- Cheesecake Scenario: “Imagine that you have gone to the cafeteria for lunch see the following two desserts in the display case.

Dessert A: Slice of strawberry cheesecake

Dessert B: Slice of key lime pie”

- MP3 player Scenario: “Imagine that you are surfing on a website, you come across the following two MP3 players”

MP3 Player A

Features:

- Memory: **15 GHz**
- Battery Life: **12 Hours**
- Warranty: **12 months**

Price:

- **\$225**

MP3 Player B

- Memory: **20 GHz**
- Battery Life: **10Hours**
- Warranty: **6 months**

- **\$250**

Experiment Two: Focal Sweater Scenario

- Imagine that you have gone to the mall to buy a few pairs of socks. As you are walking through the mall, your eyes fall upon a fashionable and attractive sweater. It happens to be in your size and favorite color. The salesperson tells you that the piece on display is the last one left, and they are unlikely to get more of the sweaters in this particular style in the future.

Experiment Two Results

Dependent Variables	Single choice	Impulsive choices	Non-impulsive choices
Desire for sweater	5.7/7.0*	4.4/7.0	5.5/7.0
Purchase likelihood of sweater	78.6/100*	51.9/100	74.6/100

Summary of Research

- **Show a motivational context effect to add to extensive literature on cognitive context biases**
- **Study impulsive sequential choices applicable to variety of domains**
- **Interesting extension to study interactions with self-control**