A Variety of Explanations for Variety-Seeking Behaviors: Physiological Needs, Memory Processes, and Primed Rules

Session Chair: Rebecca Ratner, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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High Satiety: The Effect of Sensory-Specific Satiety on Choice J. Jeffrey Inman (University of Pittsburgh), Zata Vickers (University of Minnesota), and Andrea S. Maier (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique)

The goal of our research is to explore the attributes of food products that drive switching. Specifically, we build upon Johnson and Vickers (1992) to examine crossover effects of sensory-specific satiety (a temporary reduction in liking of a food following consumption of that food) as a function of the similarity between the consumed flavor and the target flavor. We also extend Inman’s work (2001) by directly assessing the role of sensory-specific satiety and crossover effects on subsequent flavor choice. We test our hypotheses in two product categories in both experimental and field contexts.

Retrospective Preference for Variety: An Ease of Retrieval Perspective Michelle Lee (Singapore Management University), Barbara Kahn (University of Pennsylvania), and Susheela Varghese (Singapore Management University)

This research demonstrates that preference for variety in memory as opposed to real-time evaluation extends to situations where variety comes about, not as a result of choosing a sequence of options (e.g., Ratner, Kahn & Kahneman 1999), as is typical of studies in variety-seeking behavior, but as a result of varied features contained within an option. We hypothesize that ease of retrieval is the underlying process that accounts for the advantage accruing to the high-variety option in memory. People use the ease of information retrieval as a cue for their preferences or attitudes. Three studies provide support for the predictions.

Variety vs. Consistency Seeking: A Matter of the Primed Rule Rebecca K. Ratner (University of North Carolina), Ying Zhang (University of Chicago) and Ayelet Fishbach (University of Chicago)

When do people make subsequent consumption choices that are similar versus dissimilar to an initial choice? We argue that the amount of variety people incorporate depends on the mental rule that is accessible. This rule could associate either variety or repetitiveness with being a “good choice.” In three studies we find that priming these mental rules – “variety is good” (i.e., open-minded, interesting) or “consistency is good” (i.e., loyal, committed) – influences subsequent choice. These mental rules activate a specific choice criterion, either variety or consistency, which is then applied to actual choice with minimal deliberation or conscious awareness.

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Why do individuals so often switch away from items that they liked in the past? Why is variety evaluated differently in real-time evaluations vs. retrospective evaluations? This session included three papers that reflect the quite different directions that research in this area has developed in recent years.

The first paper (by Inman, Vickers, and Maier) suggests that variety-seeking behaviors emerge when individuals have satiated on characteristics (e.g., flavors) of an initially-consumed product. This work extends the conventional view of variety-seeking as consumers’ seeking to maintain an optimal stimulation level to consider the sensory satiety process whereby the pleasantness of a just-eaten flavor declines. The second paper (Lee, Kahn, and Varghese) extends previous work in the variety-seeking literature that views individuals’ preference for variety as reflecting a bias. Specifically, this work follows up on previous research indicating that when people make retrospective evaluations of options, there is a tendency to prefer options that contain greater variety, compared to when evaluations are made in real-time (Ratner, Kahn and Kahneman 1999). This paper shows that this effect generalizes to persuasive contexts and establishes ease of retrieval as the underlying process driving this preference for variety. The third paper (Ratner, Zhang, and Fishbach) indicates that whether or not variety is viewed positively can be easily manipulated by the rule (“variety is good” or “consistency is good”) that is made accessible to consumers, suggesting that even very subtle aspects of the context in which the individuals make choices can impact the amount of variety they seek, and whether they perceive “consistency” negatively (e.g., as boringness) or positively (e.g., as loyalty).

Collectively, the three papers in this special session, along with the insightful comments by discussant Don Lehmann, focused on new insights about the psychological mechanisms underlying one’s preference for variety, and the extent to which variety-seeking behaviors reflect physical needs vs. primed conceptual constructs (e.g., “variety is good” or “consistency is good”).

“High Satiety: The Effect of Sensory-Specific Satiety on Choice”

J. Jeffrey Inman, Zata Vickers, and Andrea S. Maier

Retailers and manufacturers continue to struggle to manage the assortment of product offerings within a given product category. For example, should the available popcorn flavors include plain, cheese, caramel, white cheese, and orange cheese, or is some subset acceptable? In the absence of established methodologies to address this issue, they largely rely on ad hoc approaches with little consideration of which attributes are more important to consumers in terms of assortment. Improved understanding of the dynamic factors that contribute to switching within a product category will better enable food retailers to set their category assortment.

We propose that sensory-specific satiety is an attribute of foods that can drive consumers to switch among products within a food category. Sensory-specific satiety is a temporary drop in the pleasantness of a food produced by eating that food. This drop in pleasantness is relative to changes in pleasantness of other foods that have not been recently eaten (e.g., Lyman 1989; Rolls et al. 1981a). For example if one eats a bowl of strawberry yogurt, liking for strawberry yogurt drops but liking for other foods (e.g., chocolate, bananas, bread, chicken, etc.) remains relatively unchanged. Importantly, when two foods have similar sensory attributes the liking for one can be diminished by consuming the other (e.g., eating a bowl of strawberry yogurt might also diminish the liking for a strawberry jelly bean). Sensory-specific satiety differs across foods (Johnson and Vickers 1992), and it may partly explain why consumers seek variety on some attributes more intensively than others. For example, Inman (2001) reported that consumers switched more intensively among flavors than among brands in 14 of the 15 product categories examined. However, while these findings are consistent with a sensory-specific satiety explanation, this has never been directly tested.

Our objectives are twofold. Specifically, we build upon Johnson and Vickers (1992) to examine crossover effects of sensory-specific satiety as a function of the similarity between the consumed flavor and the target flavor. We also extend Inman’s work (2001) by directly assessing the role of sensory-specific satiety and crossover effects on subsequent flavor choice. We draw upon the sensory-specific satiety literature to generate three hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that greater levels of sensory-specific satiety will correspond to increased switching away from a flavor in a subsequent choice. Second, we hypothesize that both sensory-specific satiety and switching among flavors are inversely related to the flavors’ similarity to the consumed flavor. That is, we expect the influence of flavor consumed and similarity thereto to be mediated by sensory-specific satiety and crossover sensory-specific satiety. Finally, we hypothesize that sensory-specific satiety and switching among flavors will be moderated by liking—extremely should be stronger for less liked flavors.

We test our hypotheses in two product categories (popcorn and potato chips) across three studies, all of which are complete. The first study uses a consumption diary panel and the second and third studies employ experiments. In the first dataset, 850 participants completed a diary of their consumption occasions of several snack categories over a six-week period (see Inman 2001). The database includes measures of flavor consumed and we supplement this data with inter-flavor similarity data collected in the Food Science laboratory at the University of Minnesota. A multinomial logit analysis shows that, controlling for flavor liking and prior flavor consumed, the degree of similarity to the previously consumed flavor has a deleterious effect on the flavor’s choice likelihood.

The two experiments were conducted at the Food Science laboratories at the University of Minnesota and enable us to (a) test the hypotheses in a controlled setting and (b) perform a mediation analysis. Subjects first performed a taste test in which they tasted and rated the similarity between each pair of popcorn/potato chip flavors. Subjects then participated in 5 separate test sessions—one for each popcorn/potato chip flavor, with order randomized across subjects. During each session, subjects rated their hunger, fullness, and liking for each flavor, along with a set of five control products (bread, granola bar, carrot, orange juice, and M&Ms). We then gave each subject an 80g serving of the test popcorn and instructed them to eat the entire amount. When they finished, they repeated their hunger ratings and re-tasted and re-rated a second tray of the 10 rating set foods. Immediately after re-tasting and re-rating the
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foods, we presented the subjects with a tray containing five bowls of popcorn/potato chips (one of each of the five flavors) and told them they could take more of whatever they wanted. We then recorded the choice and measured the amount consumed.

The analysis revealed strong sensory-specific satiety effects for all flavors. Further, crossover sensory-specific satiety effects were correlated with similarity to the test flavor, as predicted. Importantly, a mediation analysis supports our thesis that flavor choice is influenced by sensory-specific satiety and crossover sensory-specific satiety, which are in turn driven by prior consumption and similarity to the consumed flavor, respectively. Implications for research and category management were discussed.

References


“Retrospective Preference for Variety: An Ease of Retrieval Perspective”

Michelle Lee, Barbara E. Kahn, and Susheela Varghese

Previous research (Ratner, Kahn and Kahneman 1999) has shown that when preferences are made retrospectively, there is a tendency to favor the more varied sequences than when preferences are made in real-time. That is, there is a preference for variety in memory that is not driven by the utility of the option with the greatest utility. The reason for why it occurs, however, has not been systematically explored and provides the impetus for the current research. In addition, we explore whether this “diversification bias” extends to situations where variety is not instantiated between choices but within choices.

To date, variety-seeking behavior has been studied in contexts where variety in choices is extended in time or across consumption occasions. We examine if variety in the features of an option gives it an advantage over an option with less variety. A context that lends itself particularly well to this objective is that of persuasive appeals in the form of consumer reviews. One of the growing uses of the Internet is to provide consumer-to-consumer reviews of products and services. The website www.epinions.com, for instance, is a platform that allows consumers to share their experiences about various products. These reviews often contain variety on a number of dimensions, such as when reviewers discuss positive and/or negative aspects of the product (i.e., one-sided vs. two-sided appeals), or use different argument types (e.g., utilitarian vs. emotional arguments) to justify one’s stand. The increasing prevalence of consumer reviews and the greater reliance on them as a source of information suggests the need to devote research attention to how they influence purchasing behavior.

Three experiments provide support for our hypotheses. We first demonstrate that retrospective preference for variety extends to situations where variety comes about, not as a result of choosing a sequence of different options, as is typical of studies in variety-seeking behavior, but as a result of varied features contained within an option. This is shown in the context of consumer reviews.
the target person in addition to indicating whether they would choose two of the same type of chocolate across two choice occasions or two different types (for all participants, on the first occasion they either were randomly assigned to consume their favorite type or a less-favored type).

Participants in the repetition-is-good (positive) construal condition evaluated the target person as more likable (M=5.15) than those in the repetition-is-bad (negative) construal condition (M=4.00). Further, more participants in the positive construal condition indicated that they would choose the same chocolate on the second occasion as had been assigned for the first occasion than did those in the negative construal condition. Thus, their own willingness to make a repetitive choice was influenced by whether repetition had been primed to be interpreted positively or negatively in the initial phase of the experiment. However, this priming effect only emerged when the chocolate type assigned on the first occasion was the participant’s favorite type. Therefore, the rule to “be loyal” encouraged repetitive behaviors only when individuals had a reason (i.e., underlying preference) to be loyal to the initially-consumed item.

In another experiment, we activated these choice criteria in a different manner. Participants were asked to answer various questions (e.g., “to what extent are cassette tapes and compact discs the same or different?”; “how good do you think soy milk tastes in general?”) by recording their responses on one of two pairs of scale labels that were placed above or below a single 7-point scale. One pair of scale labels contained the endpoints “bad” and “good” (appropriate for the question about soy milk), the other contained the endpoints “same” and “different” (appropriate for the question about cassettes and compact discs). In one condition, the scale labels “same” and “good” were placed as anchors at the same end of the scale and “different” and “bad” on the other end of the scale, thus creating an association between the terms and presumably activating the “same is good” and “different is bad” rules. In another condition, these terms’ concordance was reversed, hence presumably activating the “same is bad” and “different is good” rules. This more subtle manipulation was shown to influence participants’ subsequent choices across a variety of domains, such that those who saw “good” paired with “different” chose significantly more variety than those who saw “good” paired with “same” (and both were significantly different from a no-prime control condition in the expected directions). For example, participants in the “different is good” condition preferred different brands of cereals to stay in different hotels, etc., more than those in the no-prime control condition, who preferred more variety than those in the “same is good” condition. As predicted, none of the participants suspected the connection between the two parts of the study (the priming task and the choices task). An additional study demonstrated that these effects emerge using a subliminal priming task, suggesting that these rules for consistency vs. variety can be activated completely outside of awareness.

A final study demonstrated that people’s perceptions of their own levels of commitment vs. satiation mediate the effect of the primes. When primed with “repetition is good,” people construe their initial choice as reflecting their underlying preference for and commitment to the item. When primed with “repetition is bad,” people construe their initial consumption occasion as having fulfilled their desire for the item (i.e., satiation).

Whereas a large number of studies in consumer behavior focus on reasons why people seek variety, the present studies indicate that variety seeking can be attenuated if the salient rule is that “repetition is good” rather than “variety is good.” Thus, priming these rules can influence whether individuals construe repetition as indicating loyalty rather than closed-mindedness. These results suggest that one way to attenuate the amount of variety sought in simultaneous or sequential choice (Ratner, Kahn, & Kahneman, 1999; Read & Loewenstein, 1995; Simonson, 1990) is to activate the rule that it is appropriate or even desirable to be loyal to one’s favorite items.

References


SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY

Motivational Influences in Consumer Behavior: The Role of Regulatory Focus

Rongrong Zhou, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Jaideep Sengupta, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

SESSION OVERVIEW

The objective of this special session is to present recent theoretical advances and empirical studies investigating the role of promotion and prevention self-regulation in persuasion and decision making. In his regulatory-focus theory, Higgins (1998) proposed two distinct self-regulatory systems. The first, called “promotion,” regulates nurturance needs and those motives related to aspiration and accomplishment. The second, called “prevention,” regulates security needs and those motives related to safety and responsibilities. These two systems are distinct, not only in the kinds of needs and motives that they regulate, but also in the types of strategies and means that these systems invoke to fulfill these needs and motives. To achieve a given desirable end-state, the promotion system relies primarily on approach strategies and means. The prevention system, in contrast, relies primarily on avoidance strategies and means. The chronic and momentary activation of these two systems has a variety of motivational consequences as suggested by the three presentations in this special session.

The first presentation by Michel Pham and Tory Higgins titled “Promotion and Prevention in Consumer Decision Making: A Propositional Inventory” advances altogether 38 theoretical propositions about the effect of regulatory focus on different stages of consumer decision making. From problem recognition and information search to choice and post-choice reaction, each stage in consumer’s decision making is posited to be differentially influenced by promotion vs. prevention self-regulation. For example, in terms of decision rules, promotion focus is suggested to be associated with greater reliance on disjunctive and lexicographic rules, whereas prevention focus is suggested to be associated with greater reliance on conjunctive and elimination-by-aspect-type rules. This presentation sheds light on many interesting areas of future research and serves as research agenda for researchers who are interested in motivational influences in consumer behavior.

Jaideep Sengupta and Rongrong Zhou examine why some people make unwise eating choices with regard to hedonically appealing but unhealthy food options. They propose that exposure to a tempting food triggers a heightened promotion focus (Zhou and Pham 2004) among impulsives. Such a promotion focus involves an emphasis on the potential upsides of consuming the food (e.g., great taste) while potential downsides (e.g., high calories) are suppressed, thus leading impulsives to choose the hedonically appealing food. Results from two experiments confirmed the mediating role of regulatory focus in impulsives’ eating behavior. Apart from identifying a psychological mechanism underlying impulsive eating, this research also suggests a way to rectify such behavior: inducing a counteracting goal, i.e., a prevention focus. Two additional experiments showed that inducing a prevention focus (using totally unrelated tasks) prior to choice would reduce impulsives’ choice of hedonic food and that inducing a prevention focus after a hedonic choice has been made would reduce the overall satisfaction associated with the earlier decision.

In the third presentation, Prashant Malaviya and Miguel Brendl examine how message framing and the regulatory goal orientation of the message recipient interact to determine the level of persuasion. In particular, they examine message framing along two dimensions: regulatory frames (highlighting a promotion versus prevention outcome), and hedonic frames (highlighting a pleasurable or painful outcome). They conducted experiments by manipulating four message frames (gain, non-gain, loss, or non-loss) and two regulatory goal orientations of the message recipient (promotion versus prevention). Overall the results are consistent with a disinhibition model that they have proposed. That is, a regulatory goal orientation (e.g., promotion focus) activates mental representations that are compatible both on the hedonic dimension and on the regulatory focus dimension (e.g., gains), inhibits mental representations that are compatible only on one of the two dimensions (e.g., non-gains, non-losses), and dis-inhibits representations that are compatible on neither dimensions (e.g., losses), where disinhibition has the equivalent effect as activation. In a message persuasion context, activation and dis-inhibition result in greater persuasion than inhibition. Their results also suggest that the matching effect and fit effect that have been documented in previous literature can be reversed under certain conditions.

At the conclusion of the presentations, Bob Wyer led the discussion. He highlighted the similarities and differences across papers and provided insights on directions for future research.

“Promotion and Prevention in Consumer Decision Making: A Propositional Inventory”
Michel Tuan Pham, Columbia University
E. Tory Higgins, Columbia University

In a recent chapter (Pham and Higgins 2005), the authors discuss how regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1998) can be drawn upon to explain a variety of consumer decision making phenomena. They clarify some common misconceptions about the theory and draw on existing empirical evidence and new conceptual analyses to advance a series of 38 theoretical propositions about the effects of promotion and prevention on consumer decision making. These propositions are organized along the traditional stages of the decision making process postulated by standard consumer behavior theory (i.e., problem recognition, information search, consideration set formation, etc.). Some of these propositions have already received empirical support, but most await formal empirical testing in consumer research. This propositional inventory can thus be viewed as a research agenda for studying the role of regulatory focus in consumer decision making. The authors hope that this agenda will help revive consumer and marketing scholars’ interest in the motivational analysis of consumer decision making. Examples of theoretical propositions being advanced are provided below.

The authors propose, for example, that states of promotion versus prevention will result in different perceptions of discrepancies between actual and desired states, hence in different experiences of problem recognition. Under promotion consumers will pay relatively more attention to the desired state compared to the actual state, whereas under prevention consumers will pay relatively more attention to the actual state compared to the desired state. In general, promotion-oriented consumers will tend to experience the situation as a “need to be met,” whereas prevention-oriented consumers will tend to experience the same situation as a “problem to be fixed” (Proposition 1.1). With respect to information search, the authors propose that promotion-focused consumers will engage in relatively more internal search than prevention-focused consumers, whereas prevention-focused consumers will
engage in relatively more external search than promotion-focused consumers (Proposition 2.3). The authors also propose that, under promotion, information will be searched in a more global and “top-down” manner, whereas under prevention information will be searched in a more local and “bottom-level,” serial manner (Proposition 2.7). With respect to consideration set formation, the authors propose that the consideration set of promotion-oriented consumers will generally be larger than the one of prevention-oriented consumers (Proposition 3.1). The authors also propose that, holding the size of the set constant, the consideration set of promotion-oriented consumers will be more heterogeneous than the one of prevention-oriented consumers (Proposition 3.2). The authors further propose that under promotion, consideration sets will tend to be formed through the gradual inclusion of alternatives, whereas under prevention, consideration sets will tend to be formed through the gradual exclusion of alternatives (Proposition 3.3).

With respect to the evaluation of alternatives, the authors propose that under promotion, consumers will tend to rely on more heuristic modes of evaluation; under prevention, consumers will tend to rely on more systematic modes of evaluation (Proposition 4.2). The authors also propose that promotion will foster greater reliance on personal preferences and private attitudes, whereas prevention will foster greater reliance on group preferences and social norms (Proposition 4.3). With respect to choice, the authors propose that under promotion, choice within the consideration set will be guided by a process of selection or acceptance, whereas under prevention, choice within the consideration set will be guided by a process of elimination or rejection (Proposition 5.1). The authors also posit greater reliance on disjointive and lexicographic rules under promotion and greater reliance conjunctive and elimination-by-aspect-type rules under prevention (Propositions 5.2 and 5.3). The authors further propose that in choices involving a default option, prevention-oriented consumers will be more likely to choose the default than promotion-oriented consumers (Proposition 5.5). The authors additionally propose that promotion and prevention will moderate the well-known context effects in consumer choice. For instance, the authors predict that the “attraction” effect will be stronger among promotion-focused consumers than among prevention-focused consumers (Proposition 5.8). However, the “compromise” effect will be stronger among prevention-focused consumers than among promotion-focused consumers (Proposition 5.9).

Finally, the authors propose that promotion and prevention will have significant influences on post-choice processes. For example, satisfaction from desirable outcomes should be more intense under promotion than under prevention, whereas dissatisfaction from undesirable outcomes should be more intense under prevention than under promotion (Proposition 6.1). In addition, promotion-focused consumers will be more likely to experience post-decisional dissonance and regret about errors of omission, whereas prevention-focused consumers will be more likely to experience post-decisional dissonance and regret about errors of commission (Proposition 6.3). Additional theoretical propositions are offered in the chapter (Pham and Higgins, 2005), along with detailed theoretical and empirical rationales.

“Understanding Impulsives’ Unwise Eating Choices”
Jaideep Sengupta, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Rongrong Zhou, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Around 1.7 billion people worldwide are overweight. People who are overweight are subject to higher risks of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure etc. In addition, problems created by weight excess have led to huge health care costs. Apart from physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary habit is the primary cause of overweight and obesity. Many people often seem unable to resist temptation when faced with hedonically appealing yet unhealthy food options. This research examines why some people (eating impulsives) tend to make unwise eating choices.

We draw together knowledge from three different areas—impulsive behavior, regulatory focus theory, and goal structure theory—to identify and provide evidence for one possible mechanism underlying the (usually unwise) eating choices of impulsive versus non-impulsive people. We propose that self-regulatory goals known as promotion and prevention (Higgins 1998) guide people’s choices of hedonic but unhealthy food. Specifically, we propose a mechanism whereby eating impulsives (vs. non-impulsives) spontaneously develop a promotion focus upon exposure to a hedonically tempting food. In turn, this leads to an emphasis on the potential upsides of consuming the food (e.g., great taste) while potential downsides (e.g., high calories) are suppressed, thus leading impulsives to choose the hedonically appealing food. Four experiments provided support for this mechanism and suggested ways of correcting such impulsive eating tendencies.

In experiment 1, all participants were exposed to either a hedonic snack or a non-hedonic snack and later filled out a measure of regulatory focus (Higgins et al. 1994). Results from this experiment suggested that mere exposure to a hedonic food induced a different regulatory focus for high versus low impulsives. High impulsives exposed to the hedonic snack manifested a significantly greater promotion focus, as measured by responses on a completely unrelated task (friendship strategies), compared with low impulsives. Of importance, this difference cannot be attributed to a chronic difference in regulatory focus amongst the two groups, since exposure to a non-hedonic snack did not yield any differences on the regulatory focus measure. In other words, the results confirmed that high impulsives are not intrinsically more promotion focused than low impulsives. Rather, it is the exposure to a hedonic food stimulus that triggers the observed difference in regulatory focus.

Experiment 2 was conducted to test the mediating role of a greater promotion focus in impulsives’ eating behavior. Results from this experiment suggested that faced with a choice between a tempting cake and a healthy salad, greater levels of eating impulsivity produced higher intentions to eat the cake. More importantly, mediation analyses suggested that eating impulsives’ greater tendency of choosing the hedonic food (i.e., the cake) was mediated by a concomitant increase in promotion focus.

One objective of this research is also to identify a corrective mechanism for impulsive behavior. If impulsives’ eating behavior is indeed driven by the heightened promotion focus activated upon exposure to a hedonic food, it should be possible to rectify such behavior by inducing a counteracting goal, i.e., a prevention focus, which would sensitize even impulsive people to the negative aspects of consuming hedonic food. We argue, therefore, that the situational induction of a prevention focus will reduce the propensity of impulsives to consume hedonically appealing, but unhealthy food. Experiment 3 was conducted to test this hypothesis. As in previous experiments, participants were asked to choose from a hedonic snack and a healthy snack. Before they made the choice, for half of the participants, a prevention focus was manipulated by two totally unrelated tasks: a word-categorization task and a proof-reading task. Results from this experiment showed that under baseline conditions, replicating our earlier results, high impulsives were more likely to choose the cake as compared to low impulsives. However, when a prevention focus was induced, high impulsives were less likely to choose the hedonic snack. In fact they did not differ from the low impulsives.
We have argued that impulsive tendencies develop in a heightened promotion focus when exposed to hedonic food; such promotion focus in turn guides increased choice of the hedonic food by highlighting the potential benefits of consuming such a food. Following this line of reasoning, after a hedonic choice has been made, if impulsive people are asked to evaluate satisfaction with their earlier choice while under the influence of an externally-induced prevention focus, the downsides arising from their earlier decision (e.g., weight gain) should become more salient. This mismatch in regulatory focus between the time of choice and the time of reporting post-choice satisfaction should lower post-choice satisfaction as compared to a situation where impulsive people stay in a promotion focus even after choice. Experiment 4 was conducted to test this possibility. Results showed that even after a hedonic choice is made, inducing a prevention focus post-choice decreased the level of satisfaction with that choice; thus providing a first step towards correcting the impulsive behavior in the future.

This research contributes to the impulsive behavior literature by identifying a possible mechanism underlying the eating choices of impulsive versus non-impulsive people. It also offers something of practical interest for those looking to correct impulsive eating behavior. Finally, the implications of this research to goal representation theory and regulatory focus theory was discussed in the presentation.

“The Influence of Hedonic and Regulatory Focus Framing on Message Persuasion”
Prashant Malaviya, INSEAD
C. Miguel Brendl, INSEAD

Research on the regulatory goal framing of persuasive messages can be broadly classified into two effects. In the matching effect, a message is more persuasive when there is correspondence between the regulatory focus frame of the message and the regulatory goal orientation of the message recipient. Thus, this effect predicts that a person in a prevention goal orientation would be more persuaded by a loss or a non-loss frame while a person in a promotion goal orientation would be more persuaded by a gain or non-gain frame.

The second phenomenon called the fit effect (Higgins 2000, 2002) posits that because people derive value from pursuing a goal with means that fit their goal, a message that conveys a means that fits the goal would be more persuasive. Specifically, a message about a promotion oriented goal is more effective when the message conveys a gain as means to approaching the goal rather than avoiding a non-gain, and a message about a prevention oriented goal is more effective when the message conveys avoiding a loss as a means to the goal, as opposed to approaching a non-loss (Higgins 2000, 2002; Lee and Aaker 2004).

Although research has provided support for the matching and fit effects, it has generally focused on one or the other. As Higgins (1997, 2000) observed, message framing based on the regulatory focus dimension is independent of framing on the hedonic dimension, with distinct effects. This suggests that understanding how frames interact with goals would require varying frames on both hedonic and regulatory focus dimensions, and varying the regulatory goal orientation of the person independently.

Research by Brendl, Higgins and Lemm (1995) adopted such an experimental design. These authors found that respondents who had a chronic promotion orientation were sensitive to monetary gains (promotion outcome) and were not sensitive to monetary non-loss (prevention outcome), a result consistent with the matching effect, but were also sensitive to losses and insensitive to non-gains, a finding that is inconsistent with the matching effect. Moreover, the assumption that gains fit a promotion goal better than non-gains also cannot account for these results because this assumption is silent on how well losses fit a promotion goal.

To account for their findings, Brendl et al. proposed an information processing model that assumes inhibitory associations between mental representations that vary along the hedonic dimension and the regulatory focus dimension. The model posits three kinds of compatibilities that an individual in a particular goal orientation could experience when exposed to a message frame. Full compatibility occurs when there is a match between the message frame and the individual’s goal orientation (e.g., gain and message are about gains). Partial compatibility occurs when the goal orientation and message frame match on one motivational dimension, but mismatch on another dimension (e.g., goal is about gains and message is about non-gains). Finally, full incompatibility occurs when the goal orientation and the message frame do not match on both motivational dimensions (e.g., goal is about gains and message is about losses). The model predicts that a goal (e.g., promotion) activates mental representations that are fully compatible (gains), inhibits mental representations that are partially compatible (non-gains, non-losses), and dis-inhibits representations that are fully incompatible (losses), where dis-inhibition has the equivalent effect as activation. Greater activation of a mental representation of a message in turn should lead to greater persuasiveness of the message advocacy.

We formally tested this model by manipulating four message frames (win, not win, lose, or not lose in a tennis match) and two regulatory goal orientations (promotion versus prevention). Respondents read an advertisement for a tennis racket (adapted from Aaker and Lee 2001), where the potential outcome of a tennis match was framed in one of the four ways indicated above. Regulatory orientation was manipulated by describing a person who either plays for him/herself or plays as a member of a team, thus varying respondent’s self-construal: independent versus interdependent. Independent self-construal invokes a promotion orientation, whereas an interdependent self-construal induces a prevention orientation (Lee et al. 2000). The dependent measure was respondent’s evaluation of the target tennis racket.

Consistent with the dis-inhibition model, results showed a matching effect when the message frame has positive hedonic valence (win or not lose), such that respondents in a promotion orientation were more favorable toward the target product when the situation was described in a “win” frame and respondents in a prevention orientation were more persuaded when the situation was presented with a “not-lose” frame. In contrast, when the message frame had a negative valence (not win or lose), a mismatch between the regulatory message frame and regulatory goal orientation was more persuasive. Further, when respondents were in a promotion goal orientation, the results are consistent with the fit effect, such that the “win” and the “lose” framed messages were more persuasive. However, for respondents in a prevention goal orientation, the opposite pattern was observed: target evaluations were more favorable for the “not lose” and the “not win” frames. A follow-up replication study provided convergent results. While these evaluation results are consistent with the notion of value from fit, they cannot be accounted for by current assumptions about when fit occurs, but are compatible with the inhibition-disinhibition model. Further, these results help delineate the role of two motivational principles, namely, the hedonic and the regulatory focus principles.

REFERENCES


