
Rana Sobh, The University of Auckland
Christina Lee, The University of Auckland
Graham Vaughan, The university of Auckland

This study examines how the type of goal-directed behaviour engaged (discrepancy-reducing vs. discrepancy-enlarging) moderates the impact of feedback valence (positive vs. negative) on women’s subsequent motivation to deal with visible signs of skin aging. Ninety-eight women from an Anglo-European descent took part in an experiment. A 2 (discrepancy type: reducing vs. enlarging) x 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on their intentions to use a set of procedures/products/services to deal with visible signs of skin aging revealed a significant interaction effect between feedback valence and the type of goal-directed behaviour engaged.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13018/volumes/ap07/AP-07

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
FEEDBACK VALENCE AND CONSUMER MOTIVATION: THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REFERENCE VALUES IN SELF-REGULATION

Rana Sobh, The University of Auckland
Christina Lee, The University of Auckland
Graham Vaughan, The University of Auckland

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Contrasting findings have been reported in goal literature about the impact of feedback valence on subsequent motivation (e.g., Carver and Scheier 1990; Ford 1987; Locke and Latham 1990). This suggests that there might be some personality variables that moderate the effects of feedback valence on performance (Kluger and DeNisi 1996, 1998).

Recent work about approach and avoidance goals (Carver, Sutton, and Scheier 2000; Emmons 1996) claims that some individuals have chronic tendencies to regulate towards positive end states – approach strivers. Others have tendencies to regulate away from negative end states – avoidance strivers. Carver et al (2000) argue that these tendencies can be mapped into the personality traits of extraversion and neurotism, respectively.

Approach and avoidance tendencies are relevant to consider in a consumption context because many of the products and services available on the market are consumed as means of reducing the discrepancy or gap between actual states and desired end states or as means of increasing the distance between current states and negative end states (Hogg and Banister 2001; Morgan 1993; Patrick, McInnes, and Folks 2002; Sobh, Vaughan, lee, and Brodie 2005).

Although individuals differ in their predispositions to adopt one or the other type of self-regulation, these orientations can be situationally activated through marketing communication such as advertising and message frames.

Building and expanding on feedback control theory in social psychology (Carver and Scheier 1990, 1992, 2000), this study examines how the type of goal-directed behaviour engaged (discrepancy reducing vs. discrepancy enlarging) moderates the impact of feedback valence (positive vs. negative) on women’s subsequent motivation to deal with visible signs of skin aging. Carver and Scheier’s (1992, 1996) control model was the first to draw a clear distinction between self-regulatory systems that have positive versus negative reference values. A self-regulatory system with a positive reference value has a desired end-state as the reference point. The system is discrepancy reducing and involves attempts to move one’s current self-state as close as possible to the desired outcome. In contrast, a self-regulatory system with a negative reference value has an undesired end-state as the reference point. This system is discrepancy amplifying and involves attempts to move the current self-state as far away as possible from the undesired end-state. Some studies conducted by Carver and his associates (e.g., Carver, Lawrence, and Scheier 1999) revealed that negative and positive feedback loops lead to qualitatively different emotional qualities; agitation-related emotion and dejection related emotion respectively. It has also been suggested that negative agitation-related emotions (e.g., fear) are more energizing than negative agitation-related emotions (e.g., sadness). Alternatively, positive dejection-related emotions (e.g., excitement and joy) are believed to be more motivating than positive agitation-related emotion (e.g., relief and contentment) (Carver 2001). One would expect that a negative feedback (doing worse than expected) is more motivating for those regulating away from an anti-goal than for those regulating towards goals. The opposite will be true when feedback is positive.

To address this issue, an experiment was conducted among 98 women from an Anglo-European descent ranging in age from 30 to 60 (M = 41.11, SD = 6.87). A 2 (discrepancy type: reducing vs. enlarging) × 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on women’s intentions to use a set of procedures/products/services to deal with visible signs of aging. Participants were randomly assigned to receive one of two versions of a survey designed to activate one of the two types of discrepancy regulation systems. The type of discrepancy regulation was engaged through a guided imagery task aiming to activate either a positive reference value, in particular a hoped-for possible self (e.g., looking younger than other people of my age), or a negative reference value, in particular a feared possible self (e.g., looking older than other people of my age) (Markus and Ruvolo 1986). Consistent with control theory (Carver and Scheier 1992), feedback about current performance in dealing with visible signs of skin aging consisted of women’s judgments about their success or failure in dealing with skin aging so far.

Results revealed a significant interaction effect between feedback valence and type of goal-directed behaviour engaged. More specifically, findings suggest that success (positive feedback) maintains motivational intensity more than failure (negative feedback) when behaviour aims to reduce the discrepancy between a current state and a positive reference value, whereas failure maintains motivational intensity more than success when behaviour aims to enlarge the gap between a current state and a negative reference value. These findings contribute to explain some of the previous contradicting results about feedback-performance relationship in social psychology. Further, they suggest the importance of studying discrepancy-reducing behaviours in distinction from discrepancy-enlarging behaviours in the context of consumer goal-directed behaviour. Findings may also be extended to other types of goal-directed behaviours and yield significant implications in a social marketing context.

REFERENCES


Markus, H., and P. Nurius, (1986); “ Possible selves,” American Psychologist, 4, 954-969.


