Special Session Summary  Emergent Moderators of Affective Response in Consumer Behavior

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SESSION OVERVIEW:

As the study of affect in consumer behavior has accelerated in recent years, more sophisticated models have emerged. Factors which were once overlooked or thought to be minor are being recognized as fundamental. This session examined three of these moderators of affect, which are coming to be recognized as critical to our understanding of affect in consumer behavior. Specifically, the session explored (1) how trust in ones feelings impacts the degree to which people rely upon them in their judgments, (2) how focusing on episodic, rather than global experience can largely eliminate the impact of product quality on affective response, and (3) how preceding a positive affective component with a negative one can actually enhance positive affective response relative to presenting positive components alone.

For those researchers already interested in this area, the session served as a lightening rod for exploration of the issues, critique of the current state of research and methods employed. The discussion period facilitated an exchange of ideas, not only from the presenters and the discussion leader, but from many members of the audience.

While the three papers were clearly substantively related, they were also highly complementary. Each focused on a different moderator of affect in consumer behavior. The three papers also shared many methodological similarities.

The format of the session was as follows. The chair briefly introduced the topic and the participants. Each paper presenter then presented their research, with time left over to allow for several questions after each talk. In the last 20 minutes, Robert Wyer gave his insights into this emergent topic area, and led a substantial and meaningful discussion in which many participated.

“Should I Trust My Feelings or Not?” The Metacognition of Affect as Information in Judgment

Tamar Avnet, Columbia University
Michel Tuan Pham, Columbia University

According to the affect-as-information framework, we tend to rely on our feelings because we believe that they convey valuable information about the object being evaluated. If we feel good while evaluating a target, we infer that the target is desirable; if we feel bad, we infer that the target is not desirable. The “how-do-I-feel-about-it?” heuristic is generally regarded as a low-effort, “peripheral” strategy (e.g., Forgas 1995), invoked primarily as a means of simplifying judgment. Some research indicates, however, that people can be quite discriminating in their reliance on feelings. Under certain conditions, people’s reliance on their feelings appears to be very sensitive to the perceived diagnosticity of these feelings (e.g., Pham, 1998; Raghunathan & Pham, 1999; Schwarz, Strack, Kommer, & Wagner, 1987). This suggests that the “how-do-I-feel-about-it?” heuristic could be used more reflectively than previously believed. In particular, the reliance on feelings may be regulated by some metacognitive assessment of whether these feelings should be used in a given judgment rather than by a sole concern for judgmental efficiency.

The purpose of this research is to provide a better understanding of when and why people rely on their feelings in judgment. Results from four studies (already completed) confirm that feelings can be used more reflectively in judgment. It is suggested that this reliance is not the product of shallow peripheral processing. Instead, the increased reliance on feelings seems to reflect a fairly strategic process whereby people perform a metacognitive assessment asking if they should use their feelings and draw conclusions from the level of trust they experience in their feelings. Results also confirm that processing resources are required to perform this metacognitive assessment.

In all four studies trust was manipulated using a procedure adapted from Schwarz and colleagues (1991). The rationale behind this procedure is that when people are asked to generate or retrieve information, they monitor not only the content of the information they generate or retrieve but also the ease with which this information is generated or retrieved. People draw inferences that are consistent with the implications of accessible content when recall or generation of content is experienced as easy. However people draw inferences that are contrary to the implications of accessible content when recall or generation of content is experienced as difficult.

In our studies respondents were asked to describe either 2 (high trust condition) or 10 (low trust condition) situations in which they trusted their feelings to make a judgment. It was expected that the ease respondents felt when identifying 2 versus 10 such situations would affect their momentary confidence in their feelings.

The purpose of study 1 was to show that people reflect on the use of their feelings in judgment and that the level of trust in feelings would affect the reliance on feelings in the evaluation process. After being primed for high trust versus low trust in feelings, respondents were asked to express their attitude toward the issue of reading based on a British TV commercial praising the virtues of books. To manipulate respondents’ subjective affect toward the issue (holding the TV commercial constant), we varied the pleasantness of the musical soundtrack of the commercial. Consistent with our theory, we found that the pleasantness of the commercial’s soundtrack had more influence on attitudes when respondents experienced high trust in their feelings than when they experienced low trust in their feelings.

The purpose of study 2 was to test the reliability and generality of study 1’s findings, using an incidental mood manipulation of feelings toward the target. After manipulating trust as in study 1, respondents’ mood state was manipulated. Respondents were then asked to evaluate a book based on a synopsis. Results showed that respondents who were primed to trust their feelings were more influenced by their mood states in their evaluations than respondents who were primed not to trust their feelings. This result suggests that the metacognitive assessment of feelings applies to feelings in general, including to incidental feelings arising from a mood state.

The purpose of study 3 was to test the proposition that (a) assessing the diagnosticity of feelings from a metacognitive standpoint requires a significant amount of processing resources, and (b) if sufficient resources are unavailable, people rely on their feelings without much consideration to the diagnosticity of the feelings. Using study 1’s manipulation of integral feelings, the influence of these feelings was compared across 3 conditions representing different combinations of respondents’ momentary trust in their feelings and the availability of processing resources (controlled through a cognitive load manipulation). Results confirmed that under high resource availability, respondents replicated the results of study 1. However, under low trust with limited resource availability, respondents behaved differently. These respondents relied...
on their feelings without much consideration to these feelings’ diagnosticity, and therefore were influenced by the commercial’s soundtrack despite being primed not to trust their feelings.

The purpose of study 4 was to test the robustness and generality of the results of study 3 using an incidental mood manipulation of respondents’ feelings toward the target. As in Study 3, the effects of the manipulation of affect were compared across three conditions. Replicating the results of study 2, respondents’ evaluations were more influenced by their mood when they were primed to trust their feelings than when they were primed not to trust their feelings. In contrast, under conditions of limited resource availability, respondents’ evaluations were influenced by their mood even though they were primed not to trust their feelings, replicating the results of Study 3.

Based on our results, it is proposed that the reliance on feelings in judgment often involves a metacognitive assessment of whether one’s feelings should be used in judgment. It is conjectured that the reliance on feelings in judgment operates in two different ways: a reflective way that involves a metacognitive assessment of the diagnosticity of the feelings when resources are available, and a non-reflective way that is insensitive to the diagnosticity of the feelings when resources are unavailable.

References


“Is Driving a BMW More Enjoyable than Driving an Escort? Depends on How You Think About It”
Jing Xu, University of Michigan
Norbert Schwarz, University of Michigan

Hedonic expectations play a major role in many consumer decisions. People expect, for example, that driving a luxury car is a more pleasant hedonic experience than driving an economy car and this expectation plays a major role in their purchase decisions. But do people actually feel better when driving a better car? The answer depends on how consumers’ hedonic experience is assessed, with important implications for research methods and consumer decision making.

A large body of literature has documented discrepancies between people’s reports of current and past emotional experiences (see review by Robinson and Clore, 2002). When people report on their current feelings, the feelings themselves are accessible, allowing for accurate reports. When they report their feelings during a specific past episode, they can often draw on episodic memory, retrieving specific moments and details of the past. In contrast, global reports of past feelings and predictions of future feelings are based on semantic knowledge. In this case, people draw on their general beliefs about the event class to infer what their feelings “must have” been or will be. These different sources of information give rise to systematic differences in people’s self-reports of emotion.

Drawing on Robinson and Clore’s (2002) accessibility model of emotional self-report, we asked our participants to report their driving experience. We first asked undergraduates at a Midwest university (M=177) to predict how they would feel while driving either a BMW, Honda Accord, or Ford Escort along several affect dimensions (e.g., happy, enjoyable, depressed, annoyed, etc.). The results showed that driving a BMW is associated with the most positive and least negative feelings and driving a Ford Escort is associated with the least positive and most negative feelings, with Honda Accord scored in between. The results support our hypothesis that hedonic expectations of driving experience map onto the economic value of the car. In our second study, we asked drivers to report how they feel while driving their car in two reports conditions. In a global reports condition, participants first reported which car they have (model and year) and subsequently how they feel while driving their car along the same affect dimensions used in the first study. In an episodic reports condition, participants first recalled the last time they drove their car to work, next reported how they felt during this specific episode along the same affect dimensions, and finally identified the model and year of their car. On theoretical grounds, we predicted that the type of car driven is related to participants’ reported hedonic experience in the global but not in the episodic condition. We used the Kelly Bluebook value of respondents’ cars as a proxy for car quality. As is standard with income data, we took natural log of cars’ Kelly Bluebook values to normalize the distribution and used it as a predictor of reported affect.

A total of 173 participants participated in this study. Confirming our hypotheses, the natural log of cars’ Bluebook values
predicted reported hedonic experiences under global report conditions (p<.01), but not under episodic report conditions (p>.05). This pattern is reflected in a significant interaction of the natural log of Bluebook value and reporting condition, β=2.43, p<.05.

Our third study replicated study 2 with a broader range of driving episodes in an Internet survey. Specifically, participants classified the most recent driving episode (e.g., drove to work, went to shopping, gave kids a ride, going out, etc.) in the episodic reports condition. The global reports condition remained the same as in study 2. Again, the results supported our hypothesis. The natural log of car’s Bluebook value was a significant predictor of reported affect only in global reports condition (p<.01) but not in episodic reports condition (p>.05). We also hypothesized that the value of the car would matter in some car-focused episodes (e.g., driving the car just for fun). Unfortunately, we only had few respondents that fall into this category (i.e., driving for fun). Nevertheless, we found that the value of the car was a significant predictor of negative feelings in “going out” category (somewhat car-focused episode) in episodic reports. This provided partial support for our hypothesis.

These findings have several implications. First, they suggest that the cars we drive make a difference when we focus on the car, e.g., while driving it just for fun. But under most circumstances, something else is likely to be on the driver’s mind and the car driven may contribute little to consumers’ online hedonic experience. This is consistent with Robinson and Clore’s (2002) accessibility model, which suggests that the information that is chronically or temporarily accessible at that point in time drives the differences in emotional reports. Second, our findings highlight that global recall of product experience are likely to (erroneously) confirm consumers’ expectations: consumers’ predictions of hedonic experience as well as their global retrospective reports are based on features of the product, resulting in similar prospective and retrospective answers. Neither of these reports, however, matches consumers’ actual online experience during product use, suggesting that people’s semantic beliefs and expectations are rarely updated. Third, because consumers are unlikely to spontaneously think about their product experience in an episodic (rather than product focused) way, they fail to realize that the product may not deliver what they expected. Fourth, in combination, these processes impede learning from experience and may result in the erroneous impression that one’s expectations were right on target.

Reference

“Mixed Emotions: Impact of Positive and Negative Emotional Content in Advertising”
G. Douglas Olsen, University of Alberta
John W. Pracejus, University of Alberta

Investigations of how affective experiences are combined have all examined the integration of affective stimuli of a single valence. These studies converge on the conclusion that recency is a primary driver of overall affective response. The effect of recency, which is implied by the “peak-end rule” proposed by Fredrickson and Kahneman (1993), has been replicated for both aversive stimuli (Ariely & Carmon, 2000; Kahneman et al., 1993; Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1993; Varey & Kahneman, 1992) and positively valenced messages in an advertising context (Baumgartner, Sujan & Padgett, 1997). This stream of research, however, has always held valence constant while varying intensity.

The implications of this research for conditions in which both positive and negative affective components are combined into an overall affective response are unclear. For example, suppose a radio ad begins with sad music and suddenly switches to happy music. How will the overall affective response to such an ad differ from the response to only the positive or only the negative material? Would switching the order of positive and negative material change the overall affective response? Finally, how would response differ if some or all of the affect eliciting music were removed, leaving only the more evaluative information? This research addresses these questions.

Theory Development In Brief
Contrast occurs when the perception of a stimulus is more extreme than it would be if considered alone. For example, preceding a positive stimulus by a negative one may lead it to be perceived as more positive than it would if it were presented in isolation. As a consequence, responses to the two stimuli in combination may be biased toward the second, positive stimulus.

Contrast effects on evaluative assessments are typically assumed to be symmetric (see, e.g., Raghunathan & Irwin, 2001). We believe, however, that the motivational effects of affect will lead to a specific form of asymmetry and that the order of the positive and negative stimuli will have an impact on the amount of contrast observed. This expectation is grounded in evidence that people who experience negative affect are prone to engage in behaviors that allow them to get out of this unpleasant psychological state (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Clore et al., 2001; Clore, Schwarz & Conway, 1994; Schaller & Cialdini, 1990) and that people who experience positive affect may wish to maintain this state (Wegener & Petty, 1994; Wegener, Petty & Smith, 1995). The former effect may be thought of as mood repair and the latter as mood maintenance.

Experiment 1
Overview
A total of 116 introductory marketing students participated for research credit. This study employed a four-level, between-subject design, manipulating the affective valence(s) present in the advertisement. The four conditions were: positive-only; negative-only; positive affective stimulus followed by negative affective stimulus (positive-negative); and negative affective stimulus followed by positive affective stimulus (negative-positive). In this experiment, the affect was induced by the type of music used in the background in a 30 second advertisement for a diabetes foundation. Pretesting was conducted to ensure that the music used was appropriately valenced. Further, the valence of the verbal material presented in the advertisement was kept consistent with the background music. Each individual listened to one of four different advertisements regarding diabetes, played on a portable cassette recorder. After this, participants provided overall affective responses, content specific perceptions of seriousness and hope, and a global evaluation of the ad.

Results
For positive affect, contrast was observed for the increasing sequence (i.e., negative-positive), but not the decreasing sequence (i.e., positive-negative). A negative stimulus followed by a positive one resulted in the highest reported positive affect and the greatest level of perceived hope. This negative-positive sequence also did not result in lower levels of perceived seriousness, relative to the negative content alone. This is particularly important from a communications strategy perspective, as it appears that the negative-
positive sequence is able to increase hope without reducing seriousness, making it a powerful format for this type of persuasion attempt.

**Experiment 2**

**Overview**

A total of 291 individuals in an introductory psychology course participated for research credit. Individuals received the verbal information in either a negative-positive order or a positive-negative order, as in Experiment 1. Positive music was either presented or not presented while positive information was conveyed, and negative music was either presented or not presented while negative information was conveyed. Thus, the design was a 2 (information order) x 2 (positive music present vs. absent) x 2 (negative music present vs. absent) factorial. Aside from these differences, the stimulus materials, procedure and dependent variables were identical to those of Experiment 1.

**Results/Discussion**

The combination of negative affect-eliciting music followed by positive affect-eliciting music had a disproportionate influence on measures of positive affect, global assessment of the ad and perceptions of hope regarding the treatment of diabetes. This sheds additional light on the negative-positive superiority effect found in Experiment 1. That is, neither the rapid cessation of negative music nor the rapid onset of positive music has the same impact as rapidly switching from negative to positive.

**Selected References**


