Special Session Summary    Feeling the Future Now: the Influence of Affect on Preferences, Predictions and Perspectives

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PAPERS PRESENTED

“Sadness, Anxiety and the Ordering of Future Events”
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Marketers have a natural interest in understanding the drivers of predicted utility (cf. Kahneman and Snell 1990), since it presumably determines one’s propensity to sample future consumption events. Work on affective forecasting (e.g. Patrick et al 2004; Raghunathan and Mukherji 2004) suggests that people often make erroneous predictions about how much they will enjoy a future consumption event, displaying, in general, a tendency to over-predict the extent to which they will enjoy a future pleasant event. Consistent with the theme of this special session, this research examines whether one’s ordering of future events is influenced by the current mood state one is in. In particular, we examine whether two affective states of the same (negative) valence, viz., anxiety and sadness may produce differences in preference for ordering of future consumption events. Research on ordering of future consumption events (e.g., Loewenstein and Prelec 1993) suggests that people tend to prefer an improving sequence. We predict that this general tendency is moderated by one’s current negative mood state, as explained below.

According to cognitive theories of affect, affective experiences are preceded by cognitions, with different cognitive themes evoking different affective states (Roseman 1991). Sadness related states (depression, distress, gloom, etc.) are evoked by cognitions pertaining to the loss or absence of a cherished object. In contrast, anxiety related states (such as nervousness, tension, and fear) are preceded by cognitions pertaining to uncertainty and lack of control, especially with regard to the potential occurrence of a negative outcome. Thus, uncertainty about achievement of a desired end-state (e.g., salary raise) evokes anxiety, while knowledge that one has not achieved that state evokes sadness. This theme is echoed in psycho-evolutionary perspectives on affect, according to which, affect is experienced in response to changes in the environment, with different changes evoking different affective experiences (Plutchik, 1980). In this view, sadness is experienced when the environment indicates loss of a source of support (e.g., a loved one or an opportunity), whereas anxiety is experienced when the environment spells risk or danger of not being able to fulfill desired goals (e.g., illness or loss of job security). Combining the cognitive and psycho-evolutionary perspectives, we predict that:

H1: Sadness leads to greater seeking of pleasurable stimuli.
H2: Anxiety leads to greater attentiveness.

As a result, when presented with the task of ordering two future activities—one that is consistent with the goal of seeking pleasure, and another that is consistent with the goal of being attentive—sad subjects prefer to completing the former activity first, while anxious subjects prefer completing the latter activity first.

Two experiments were conducted to test our hypotheses. The objective in the first experiment was to show that the states of sadness and anxiety do indeed prime goals of seeking pleasurable stimuli, and attentiveness, respectively. The procedure in experiment 1 (n=173), adapted from Raghunathan and Trope (2002), had two stages. In the first stage, mood was induced by asking participants to recall a recent sad or anxious from memory. Following the mood manipulation, participants were exposed to an essay on caffeine consumption that contained 5 neutral, 5 negative and 5 positive pieces of information. After reading the essay, subjects participated in a recall task, in which they were asked to recount any and all information from the essay. The number of correctly recalled positive, negative, and neutral items served as the dependent variable. Consistent with H1, sad mood resulted in a recall advantage for positive items (M=3.38), compared to negative items (M=2.44, F(1, 31)=9.29, p<.01), whereas this difference was in the opposite direction for those in the happy mood condition (M=2.81 and 3.33, respectively, F(1, 26)=6.14, p<.05), and was non-significant for those in the anxious mood condition (M=2.73 and 2.88, respectively, F<1). Consistent with H2, the total number of items recalled was greater among anxious participants (M=4.63), than among sad participants (M=3.64) or happy participants (M=3.03, F(2, 166)=15.64, p<.001). In experiment 2, we turned to the primary focus of this research: the influence of sadness (anxiety) on ordering of future consumption events. This experiment (n=93) also consisted of two stages. In the first stage, anxiety, sadness or a neutral was induced through an affect manipulation procedure borrowed from Raghunathan and Pham (1999). Then, in a purportedly unrelated study, participants were asked to imagine that they were faced with completing two tasks in the next two weeks, one task per week. One of the tasks, meeting friends for dinner, was portrayed as enjoyable, while the other, meeting with a plumber to fix a leaking sink, was portrayed as necessary. Whereas the former had greater hedonic potential, the latter held greater appeal for individuals motivated to display attentiveness. Consistent with our predictions, a significant main effect of mood (F(2, 90)=4.80, p<0.05) emerged, revealing that preference for the more enjoyable task was greatest in the sadness condition (M=6.13) and lowest in the anxiety condition (M=4.59), with the neutral condition in-between (M=5.27). The difference between the sadness and anxiety conditions was significant (F(1, 90)=10.53, p<.01).

Results from Experiment 2 show that one’s preference for ordering future consumption events is influenced by one’s current mood state. In particular, they indicate that the general preference for an improving sequence of future episodes does not hold true when one is feeling sad: in this state, people exhibit “weakness” and consume the more pleasurable event first.

“The Future is Colored Pink or Blue: The Effect of Mood on Affective Forecasting”
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This paper examines the role of mood on affective forecasting, the predictions of future affective states. Loewenstein et al. (2003) suggest that people “project” their current emotions onto the future, a phenomenon called “the projection bias.” The notion underlying the projection bias is that people tend to overestimate the extent to which future experiences of an event can be equated to a current experience (a notion referred to as “presentism” by Gilbert et al (2002)). This research, would predict that when in a “hot” state, say negative or positive mood, people would rely on this mood state as...
a proxy when making predictions about a future affective state. Consequently, mood would color affective predictions in the direction of the mood state.

However, the mood literature suggests that mood may have an influence only on stimuli that are neutral or unambiguous but not on valenced stimuli. Research on the mood-congruency effect has shown that mood-congruent evaluations are more pronounced when the stimulus itself is affectively unambiguous (Gorn 2001; Isen 1985; Isen 1982; Miniard 1992). Thus, this research would predict that when the mood is positively or negatively valenced and the stimulus is also valenced, the effect of mood disappears. The literature on mood thus suggests a boundary condition for the “projection bias”.

Study 1 (N=208) was designed to examine the influence of mood on affective forecasts of future events that are positive, negative or neutral in valence. The study was a 3X3 between-subjects design with mood (positive, negative and neutral/no mood baseline) and valence of the future event (positive, negative and neutral) as the two independent factors manipulated. After participants’ mood was manipulated by using film clips, they completed a brief survey that asked them to imagine themselves at either a restaurant with friends (positive future event), doing an in-class quiz (negative future event) or at a grocery store (neutral future event) two weeks later. Participants were then asked to predict how they would feel while at the restaurant/doing the quiz/at the grocery store. The results of this study indicate that mood influences the affective forecast of a neutral future event (visit to a grocery store) in the direction of the mood state. Specifically, a mood congruency effect is observed in which a positive mood state leads to a more positive affective forecast of a neutral future experience while a negative mood state leads to a more negative affective forecast, and 2) Mood has no impact on affective forecasts of valenced future events (dining at a restaurant or an in-class quiz). Thus affective forecasts of valenced future events are not altered by mood states of same or opposite valence.

These results further our understanding of the influence that ambient affect has on affective forecasts of future events. Moreover, this study proposes a boundary condition the “projection bias” suggesting that the bias is more likely to influence the affective predictions of neutral future events but not those that are valenced.

In study two, we examine the influence of recalling similar past events on the impact of mood on affective forecasting. The two literatures, namely the affective forecasting literature and the mood literature, make opposite predictions about the impact of such elaboration. Specifically, the affective forecasting literature suggests that elaborating about or recalling similar past experiences improves the accuracy of the affective forecast (Buehler and McFarlan 2001) while the mood literature suggests that ambient mood has an impact on the valence of recalled thoughts (Lee and Sternthai 1999; Lyubomirsky et al. 1999) such that valenced mood states would elicit the recall of only mood-congruent thoughts that would in turn limit the accuracy of affective forecasts. Thus, in this study we empirically examine these opposing predictions to investigate the impact of mood and recall on affective forecasting of affectively valenced and neutral future events.

Study 2 (N=371) was designed to investigate the role of recall of past experiences on the influence of mood on affective forecasts of future events that are neutral or positively or negatively valenced. The design of the study was a 3X3 between-subjects design with mood (positive, negative and neutral/no mood baseline) and valence of the future event (positive, negative and neutral) as the two independent factors manipulated. Results of this study reveal that elaboration decreases the impact of mood on affective forecasting of neutral future events but increases the impact of negative and positive mood on future events.

Study three (planned) is designed to examine the process by which affective forecasts are influenced by situational factors (e.g. mood) and the impact on behavioral intentions.

“Augmenting Affect and Discounting Cognition: Consumers’ Attitudes Toward Environmentally Friendly Products”

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Research from environmental and social psychology suggests that consumers need to have environmental values and these values to be a part of long-term goals in order to have higher purchase intentions and more positive product evaluations of environmentally friendly products (EFPs; e.g., Norlund and Garvill, in press; Verplanken and Holland 2002). However, this stream of research fails to recognize the time-dependent benefits that are offered by EFPs. We suggest that EFPs not only have short-term, consumption-related (and, therefore, more cognitive) benefits just like any other product, but also offer long-term, protection-of-environment related (and more affective) benefits. Therefore the interplay of time and affect might play a significant role in consumers’ evaluations of such products.

Construal Level Theory (CLT; Trope and Liberman 2003) contrasts different theories of time-discounting and suggests that only when the moderating role of goals are taken into account, then the divergent predictions made by different time-discounting theories can be resolved by a common explanation. CLT suggests that judgments, predictions, and choices regarding the more temporally distant events are likely to be based on higher-level construal (goal-relevant, primary, central aspects) of those events, and similarly more temporally close events are likely to be based on lower-level construal (goal-irrelevant, secondary, non-central aspects) of those events. Depending on the goals of the individual, different aspects of a target object or event might constitute the high versus low-level construal.

Theories of affect-based time discounting (Loewenstein 1996; Metcalfe and Mischel 1999) suggest that affective value is discounted more steeply than cognitive value. Metcalfe and Mischel (1999) suggest that affective (hot) value is represented at concrete level (therefore should construe the low-level representations) and cognitive (cold) value is represented at abstract level (therefore should construe the high-level representations). Thus, no matter what the goals are (affective or cognitive) affective value should be valued higher in the short-term and cognitive-value should be valued higher in the long-term.

We conducted two studies to test alternate theories. In Study 1, we manipulate mindset by asking subjects about ‘how’s versus ‘why’s of past purchase situations. Under each mindset, subjects evaluate an EFP when its environmentally friendly benefits versus consumption related/utilitarian benefits are highlighted in an ad message. We contrast time-matching hypothesis with goal-matching hypothesis in this study. According to time-matching hypothesis, if answering ‘how’ questions puts subjects in a concrete mindset and answering ‘why’ questions puts them in abstract mindset (Freitas, Gollwitzer, Trope, Working Paper, Study 1), then environment-related benefits which are reaped in the long-term should be valued more in abstract mindset and consumption-related benefits should be valued more in the concrete mindset. According to goal-matching hypothesis, if answering ‘how’ questions puts subjects in an affective mindset and answering ‘why’ questions puts them in cognitive mindset (Millar and Millar, 1990), then environment-related benefits which is more affective should be valued.
more in affective mindset and consumption related benefit which is more cognitive should be valued more in the cognitive mindset. We find support for goal-matching hypothesis in study 1 with a significant two-way interaction of mindset and message content (F=3.967, p<.05). Furthermore, we find that thinking about environment mediates this two-way interaction predicted by goal-matching hypothesis. We also show that environmentally friendly benefit versus consumption related benefit creates more increase in positive emotions and more decrease in negative emotions hence carries more affective value.

The pattern of results in support for goal-matching hypothesis of study 1 might also mean that people discount cognitions (higher purchase intentions for EFP in why mindset) however they neither discount nor augment affect (no difference in purchase intentions for EFP between why and how mindsets). In the EF message condition (representing affective value) people might be under the influence of both time-matching and goal matching hypothesis. More specifically, they may be augmenting affective value and also might be immediately discounting it, because of the dual meaning in the mindset manipulation. Therefore, in study 2, we manipulate time and goals orthogonally. Furthermore, study 2 provides us the opportunity to directly contrast affect-based discounting, construal level theory and our prediction that affect will be evaluated more highly in the longer-term and cognition will be evaluated more highly in the shorter-term.

In the second study, we manipulate time (buy an EF car tomorrow versus buy an EF car next year) as well as goals (consummatory versus instrumental) and ad message content (affective versus cognitive) between subjects. We used ‘purchase intentions’ as the main dependent variable. We find support for our prediction that affective value is augmented and cognitive value is discounted with a two-way interaction of message content and time (F=4.205, p<.05). We also find a two-way interaction of goals and time (F=6.135, p<.02). The pattern of means in goals and time interaction is opposite of the pattern in message content and time interaction. Goals and time interaction show that when people evaluate a target product under a consummatory goal, they want to consume it sooner, whereas when people evaluate a target product under an instrumental goal, they want to consume it later. The goals and time two-way interaction is a support for Metcalfe and Mischel (1999) affect and cognition discounting theory. However, we also find support for our predictions. This suggests that affect and cognition can be both augmented and discounted. We argue that augmenting or discounting depends on the specific meaning of affect and cognition. For example, when affect activates warm emotions (calm, peaceful, hopeful–Edell and Burke, 1987) such as in the case of EF message content, affective value can be discounted. However, when affect activates upbeat emotions (excited, happy, joyful –Edell and Burke, 1987), such as in the case of a consummatory goal of enjoying oneself, affect can be discounted. A similar explanation can be constructed to explain the results for cognition: cognition that is related to short-term benefits (utilitarian, cost-saving benefits for a car) should be discounted, whereas cognition that is related to long-term benefits (an instrumental goal of making a rational and logical decision) should be augmented. In this study, we also find a two way goals and message content interaction (F=6.729, p<.02). This final interaction was not predicted and theoretically is not of interest to us, but is well supported by previous research (Pham, 1998). There wasn’t a significant three way interaction (F<1), as construal level theory would have predicted.