The Impact of Goal Framing on the Choose–Reject Discrepancy

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Removing options from a fully loaded model (rejecting) typically leads to a larger final option set than adding options to a base model (choosing), resulting in a choose-reject discrepancy. In two studies, we find that it is possible to take advantage of information processing differences in choosing versus rejecting to modify the finding that rejecting options from a fully-loaded model leads to more options in the final option set compared to adding options to a base model.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Consumers often make decisions about options that go with a base product configuration, such as deciding whether to purchase "wireless card" connectivity when buying a computer. In this regard, researchers have examined whether the task of adding options to a base model (choosing) versus removing options from a fully loaded model (rejecting) affects the composition of the final configuration (Levin, et al. 2002; Park, Jun, and MacInnis 2000). Research suggests that choosing versus rejecting, i.e., task framing, is of consequence; choosing typically results in a smaller final configuration than rejecting (Huber, Neale, and Northcraft 1987; Park, et al. 2000; Yaniv and Schul 1997). We refer to this as the choose–reject discrepancy (CRD).

In this research, we argue that it is possible to take advantage of the information processing differences between choosing and rejecting to modify/reverse the CRD; sometimes, choosing options will lead to larger option sets relative to rejecting. Several studies indicate that choosing is more motivating than rejecting, and that people are more willing to commit the necessary resources and time to complete a choose than a reject task. For example, researchers find that people employ a stricter decision-criterion when choosing relative to rejecting (Huber et al. 1987; Yaniv and Schul 1997). Other researchers (Ganzach 1995; Wedell 1997) argue that decision-makers see the task of choosing as more important because they feel greater need to justify their choices compared to rejecting. “In a sense, rejection is a passive form of expressing preferences. Because one makes a positive statement in the choice task about which alternative is preferred, one may feel a greater need to justify preferences (p. 883).”

In light of the above-mentioned research, we argue that people will be more motivated and willing to commit the needed cognitive resources and time to execute the choose task compared to the reject task. This difference in processing motivation can be leveraged to reverse the choose–reject discrepancy through positive or negative goal framing; positive goal frames stress gained realized by action whereas negative goal frames emphasize gains given up by inaction.

The question of whether framing effects interact with the level of processing motivation has been examined in a variety of domains including decision-making, health communication, and marketing (Meyerowitz and Chaiken 1987; Rothman et al. 1993; Wegener, Petty, and Klein 1994). Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) find that decision-makers are more persuaded by negatively-framed messages because of higher motivation. Also, Chaiken (1980) and Petty and Cacioppo (1986) suggest that under low motivation, people will not scrutinize the entire message and will be persuaded by the valence of the message. Thus, positively-valenced messages should be more persuasive under low (rather than high) motivation. Along similar lines, Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy (1990) suggest that positive (negative) information is differentially compelling under low (high) motivation. Overall, this literature implies that negatively-framed information is given greater weight when the processing motivation is high and positively-framed information receives greater weight when the processing motivation is low.

If positive frames are over-weighted under low, rather than high processing motivation, then they should be more effective under rejecting relative to choosing. Thus, in the context of choosing or rejecting product options, describing the benefits achieved by not rejecting options (reject–positive frame) should be more compelling than describing the benefits achieved by choosing options (choose–positive frame). Hence, the number of options in the final configuration, and the monetary value thereof, will be greater in the reject-positive condition than in the choose-positive condition. This replicates the choose–reject discrepancy. However, for negatively-framed information, the reverse should be true. Describing the benefits given up by not-choosing (choose–negative frame) should be more compelling than emphasizing the benefits given up by rejecting (reject–negative frame). This is our principal choice prediction. To investigate the above prediction, we juxtapose task framing with goal framing.

In study 1 we examine whether choosing is indeed more motivating than rejecting. One way to establish greater motivation and willingness to commit cognitive resources to the task at hand is to examine the effect of a secondary, orthogonal resource-depleting task on the decision-maker’s ability to focus on the principal task of choosing versus rejecting. If the primary task is inherently motivating and people are willing to commit the necessary resources to the task at hand, increasing resource depletion via a secondary task will have a smaller impact on one’s ability to maintain focus on the primary task. The results from study 1 indicated that resource depletion affects task focus only under the reject frame but not under the choose frame, which comport with the idea that processing motivation may be higher under choosing. We also observed that the task of choosing took more time than rejecting. Since choosing takes more time than rejecting, it corroborates the idea that choosing is more motivating than rejecting.

The results from study 2 support the principal choice prediction. Under positive goal framing, rejecting led to an increase in the number and value of the options in the final configuration than choosing, replicating previous results. However, under negative goal framing, choosing led to a higher number and greater value of the options, reversing the traditionally observed–choose reject discrepancy.

**References**


