On the Compatibility of Orientation, Task and Preference: The Role of Brand Information

Jingjing Ma, University of California, Los Angeles
Shi Zhang, University of California, Los Angeles

This research predicts and finds the compatibility of orientation (promotion versus prevention), task (choose versus give-up), and preference (hedonic versus utilitarian products). Further it shows that the compatibility occurs in conditions where brand information is not given, and disappears in conditions where brand information is given. When hedonic and utilitarian products have brand information, the effect of orientation on hedonic/utilitarian product preferences diminishes in choose task but in give-up task.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13155/volumes/v35/NA-35

[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/.
likelihood to go to each supermarket using seven-point ratings (1=very unlikely; 7=very likely). Results on choice and repurchase intention ratings supported our central prediction that the preference for an option is reduced when it is associated with a surplus than when it is not. Specifically, the willingness to walk an extra distance to make a repurchase and get an immediate reward was significantly reduced when the repurchase would lead to surplus loyalty stamps than when it would not, despite the shorter distance from the goal in the former than in the latter case.

Our results provide preliminary evidence showing that the robust effects of goal-gradient could be reversed when completing a goal and getting the reward is associated with surplus stamps. Thus far, we have argued that surplus avoidance stems from an overgeneralization of the “Don’t waste” rule, but we have not assess this psychological mechanism. According to Arkes and Hutzel (1997), waste is less of an issue when an item is reusable or when it has some scrap values. However, it becomes a prominent concern when the item cannot be reused. To test this idea, the next step would be to compare the surplus avoidance effects in two different reusability conditions involving the surplus stamps. If the surplus avoidance pattern are found to be stronger when surplus stamps are non-reusable than when they are reusable, our argument that surplus avoidance stem from an overgeneralization of the “Don’t waste” rule will be supported.

References

On the Compatibility of Orientation, Task and Preference: The Role of Brand Information
Jingjing Ma, University of California, Los Angeles, USA
Shi Zhang, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

Hypotheses
Consumer choices are often driven by their hedonic and utilitarian preferences. Existing research has shown that orientation (promotion versus prevention) and task (choose versus give-up) are two important determinants of such preferences. Based on the earlier research and the regulatory fit theory, we propose that promotion orientation, choose task and hedonic preference are compatible, whereas prevention, give-up task and utilitarian preference are compatible. Given this proposal, the following specific hypotheses will follow.

H1a. Participants with prevention orientation in give-up task prefer utilitarian products more than participants with promotion orientation in give-up task.
H1b. Participants with prevention orientation in give-up task prefer utilitarian products more than participants with prevention orientation in choose task.
H2a. Participants with promotion orientation in choose task prefer hedonic products more than participants with prevention orientation in choose task.
H2b. Participants with promotion orientation in choose task prefer hedonic products more than participants with promotion orientation in give-up task.

Given products and brands are inseparable (Keller 1998; Samiee, 1994), we further propose that one cannot only examine preference towards hedonic/utilitarian products without considering the role of the brand information in hedonic/utilitarian preferences. For example, both hedonic and utilitarian products can be evaluated as utilitarian when they are perceived to be utilitarian brands, whereas both can be evaluated as hedonic when they are perceived to be hedonic brands. Thus, the difference between preferences for hedonic and utilitarian products on the hedonic/utilitarian measure would diminish or even disappear when brand information is included.
To illustrate, American brands are more utilitarian than French brands, while French brands are more hedonic than American brands. Many French products are perceived by Americans as hedonic products even when they belong to utilitarian product category. Hedonic and utilitarian are in relative terms. Chinese brands are seen in general to be more utilitarian than American brands, while American brands are seen to be more hedonic than Chinese brands. Therefore, Chinese consumers may perceive American products as relatively more hedonic products even when those products belong to utilitarian product categories (American brand shampoo, American brand towel). In contrast, Chinese consumers may perceive Chinese products as relatively more utilitarian products even when the products are in hedonic product categories (e.g. high-end Chinese brand cosmetics and boots). We refer to this kind of brand information effect as “suppression effect”.

We suggest that the suppression effect occurs when both hedonic and utilitarian products have hedonic/utilitarian brand information, and under such condition, participants may not perceive much difference between hedonic and utilitarian products. As a result, the influence of promotion and prevention orientation on choice between hedonic and utilitarian products may diminish. Specifically, promotion orientation may not lead to more choices of hedonic products, and prevention orientation may not lead to more choices of utilitarian products. In other words, the early noted compatibility effect may not hold. We thus predict:

H3a: When neither hedonic nor utilitarian products have brand information, prevention focused participants in give-up task are most likely to prefer utilitarian products while promotion focused participants in choose task are most likely to prefer hedonic products.

H3b: When both hedonic and utilitarian products have hedonic/utilitarian brand information, a brand suppression effect occurs such that promotion and prevention focused participants should have similar preferences for hedonic and utilitarian products.

We further suggest that that the brand suppression effect can lead to a consequence regarding how orientation affects hedonic/utilitarian product preferences, and that such consequence can only be observed in choose task condition but not in give-up task condition. Brand characteristics are more likely to tap into emotional, symbolic, subjective and affect-related decision making, while product characteristics are more likely to be used for rational, objective and cognition-driven decision making. In the choose task mode, participants undergo a relatively simple thinking process, and their responses are driven by emotional and affective elements and sometimes can be impulsive (Bazerman Tenbrunsel, and Wade-Benzoni, 1998). Thus, participants are more likely to be influenced by brand information than product information. However, in given up task mode, participants undergo a more careful process, and their responses are more detailed driven, and elaborate (Strahilevitz and Loewenstein, 1998), thus they are more likely to be influenced by product information than brand information.

H4a: When both hedonic and utilitarian products have hedonic/utilitarian brand information in choose task, a brand suppression effect occurs that leads to the consequence such that promotion and prevention focused participants have similar preferences for hedonic and utilitarian products.

H4b: When both hedonic and utilitarian products have hedonic/utilitarian brand information in give-up task, a brand suppression effect occurs, but participants still can perceive the difference between hedonic and utilitarian products, which leads to the consequence such that promotion focused participants prefer hedonic products more than prevention focused participants.

Method

In experiment one we test the compatibility of promotion and prevention orientation, choose and give-up task, and hedonic and utilitarian preference in both no-brand and with-brand situations. This constitutes a 2 (promotion and prevention orientation) X 2 (choose and give-up tasks) X 3 (None, Chinese and American brands) between subjects design. The dependent variable is participants’ choices between a hedonic product and a utilitarian product. In experiment two we further test brand effect in choose and give-up situations with brand information provided for the hedonic and utilitarian products.

Discussion

Our research extends the noted two-variable compatibility to a three-variable compatibility effect. We found that promotion-choose-hedonic and prevention-give-up-utilitarian are the compatible situations. Promotion-focused consumers in choose task prefer hedonic products more than both prevention focused consumers in choose task and promotion focused consumers in give-up task. Promotion-focused consumers in give-up task prefer utilitarian products more than both prevention focused consumers in choose task and promotion focused consumers in give-up task. However, this compatibility only holds in no-brand information situation. In with-brand information situation, the compatibility effect goes away. We further found that brand suppression effect only works in choose task situation but not in give-up task situation. The choose situation is more emotion involving than give-up situation which is more elaborate and effortful. Since brand information is more subjective than product information, participants would rely more on brand information in choose task and more on product information in give-up task. Thus, we have uncovered interesting new results that intersect information processing, decision tasks and hedonic/utilitarian preferences that can help further research in this area.