The Appeal of Hidden Products

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Can hiding a product from view increase its appeal? Normally, marketers aim to increase product visibility. However, this research suggests that products related to recently-fulfilled goals are evaluated more favorably when hidden than when visible. Given a limited attentional capacity, individuals may prefer not to clutter their visual field with potentially distracting objects such as products relevant to goals that have already been fulfilled. Concealing these products from sight enables consumers to focus on products relevant to active goals. Across several studies, I attempt to demonstrate that compatibility between an individual’s goal status and a product’s perceptual status enhances product attractiveness.

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by appearing in the middle of the article). Evidently, participants who were highly transported by the narrative perceived an interruption to the transportation experience as a negative event that became associated with the advertisement. Of note is that Wang and Calder’s research focused on evaluations of the interrupting event (the advertisement) rather than the task (the narrative) or a decision object, which may somewhat limit the applicability of their findings to the present research. Nevertheless, we reasonably hypothesize that involvement may moderate whether the positive forces or the negative forces associated with interruption will prevail.

In experiment 1, we attempted to show whether decision interruption would affect choice valuation, using task involvement as a potential moderator. Participants made a choice from a set of baby video monitors (if in the low involvement conditions) or a set of video iPods (if in the high involvement conditions). For half the subjects, this decision task was unexpectedly interrupted for 20 seconds. Stimuli were created such that one option in each choice set was objectively the most attractive and therefore chosen by nearly all participants across conditions. Four dependent variables related to the chosen object were captured after all participants had made a selection: Willingness to Pay (WTP), Satisfaction, Attitude, and Likelihood to Trade. On all four measures, highly involved participants who had been interrupted valued the chosen object (i.e., the selected iPod) less than participants who had not been interrupted. Conversely, participants in the low involvement conditions valued the chosen object (i.e., the selected baby monitor) more if they had been interrupted. A manipulation check confirmed that the experiment’s involvement manipulation (the use of video iPods vs. baby monitors) was effective. We acknowledge that the involvement manipulation used in experiment 1 is subject to a host of alternate explanations since iPods and baby monitors differ along many dimensions, including familiarity and level of hedonism/utilitarianism. Nevertheless, our findings provide strong evidence that the effects of decision interruption transfer onto the chosen object, given the differences in valuation exhibited by interrupted and non-interrupted participants. The results also illustrate that interruption can cause spillover of either positive or negative affect onto the decision object, thereby raising the question as to when each type of affect will transfer, that is, which factors moderate the value transfer effect.

In subsequent experiments, we attempt to provide more rigorous support for task involvement as such a moderator by varying involvement at the level of the individual and keeping product information constant across participants. Assuming involvement moderates the value transfer effect, we intend to explore why increased involvement would cause individuals to be more influenced by the negative forces of decision interruption. Finally, we seek to implicate value confusion as the mechanism underlying the altered valuation of decision objects following an interruption.

References
Nelson, Leif D., Tom Meyvis, and Jeff Galak (working paper), ”Mispredicting Adaptation and the Consequences of Unwanted Disruptions: When Advertisements Make Television Programs More Enjoyable.”

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Can hiding a product from view increase its appeal? Normally, marketers aim to increase product visibility. However, this research suggests that products related to recently-fulfilled goals are evaluated more favorably when hidden than when visible, whereas the reverse is true for products relating to active goals. For example, a consumer who is not hungry may prefer food items in opaque packaging rather than transparent packaging, whereas a hungry consumer may exhibit the opposite preference.

Prior research has shown that objects relevant to active goals are evaluated more favorably than those relevant to recently fulfilled, inactive goals (Ferguson and Bargh 2004). The present research identifies an object’s perceptual status as a moderator of this effect and suggests that occluding products relevant to fulfilled goals can boost their attractiveness, but occluding products relevant to active goals can decrease their attractiveness.

I propose a two-part explanation for this effect. First, given a limited capacity to attend to objects within the perceptual field, individuals may prefer not to clutter their surroundings with objects that could distract them from the pursuit of active goals. Thus, the adaptive practice of avoiding products related to already-fulfilled goals facilitates focusing on products relevant to active goals. Second,