How I Feel Is More Important Than How You Feel: the Role of Process and Outcome Emotions on Object Evaluation

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Increasingly companies are encouraging consumers to be more involved in the production process. However, we know little about how process as well as outcome emotions affect consumers’ relationship with objects. Three studies demonstrate that positive process and outcome emotions result in attachment to, identification with, and higher valuation of the object. Symbolic meaning of the object mediates the effect of emotions on attachment and identification. Furthermore, process emotions are a more influential factor in shaping consumer-object relationship than outcome emotions.

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Major Findings

Participants in the suspicion condition were more likely to delay than were control participants (F(1,224)=4.39, p=.037). Delaying participants were asked to imagine circumstances in which a choice was necessary, and to choose between the two alternatives. In this case, suspicious participants were more likely to choose the inexpensive option compared to controls. Additional evidence showed that these effects occurred through generalized suspicion rather than any negative affect associated with the initial deception. Overall, this study provides initial support for the notion that suspicious consumers may defer choice when possible, and seek refuge in less expensive alternatives when a choice must be made.

Further experiments in this project will attempt to replicate these findings, while extending them by investigating boundary conditions. Stronger (weaker) effects are predicted under conditions of relatively subjective (objective) quality claims. When quality claims are attributed to an objective third party source (e.g. Consumer’s Union), the effects of suspicion are hypothesized to be extinguished.

References


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All of the products we buy are produced either by other people or, in part, by us. Once we decide that we need a new product such as a coffee table, a sweater or a mug, we have the option to buy it or we can make it ourselves. The Home Depot, Build a Bear and other stores encourage consumers to become more involved in the production process. This research explores the effects of process-related and outcome-related emotions on object-self relationship and valuation of products. Specifically, three studies explore when and how making a product oneself will increase or decrease the final valuation of the object compared to a product constructed by someone else.

Common wisdom suggests that consumers will derive utility from participating in the construction of a product and perhaps be more satisfied with it than if they had simply purchased the product. However, imagine that the process of crafting a mug is quite unpleasant for the consumer (the clay feels clumpy and gross, etc.). This process is likely to color the consumer’s final evaluation of the mug differently than if the process was pleasant (he loves the texture and smell of clay). Furthermore, the consumer is likely to have feelings about the final product that are unrelated to the process. For example, he may feel proud or ashamed of the outcome regardless of whether the process was pleasant or unpleasant. In either case, the object may be contaminated by the emotions and gain a symbolic meaning. As a result of the process and/or outcome emotions, consumers may identify with and become more attached to the object.

I propose that process and outcome emotions 1) contaminate the object by giving it a symbolic meaning, 2) symbolic meaning of the object affect identification with and attachment to the object, 3) alter valuation of the object. Previous research (Norton & Ariely, 2007) suggests that self involvement enhances the value of objects but does not explain the process or make any distinction between process and outcome emotions. Importantly, I predict that although both process and outcome emotions will affect valuation, only process emotions will affect valuations of self made objects more than other made objects, despite the fact that the emotions themselves may not differ for self and the other person. When the outcome emotion is negative (positive), it does not matter whether it is self or another person who made the object. The consumer will be unhappy (happy) either way. However, when self is involved in the process, reactions to the object are likely to be stronger.