Public Commitment Leads to Weight Loss

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This paper investigates the role of public commitment in influencing motivation and compliance behavior in a long-term service, weight loss. The role of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) is also examined. The "public-ness" with which a commitment to weight loss is made, has a significant and favorable impact on long-term weight loss compliance behavior. Higher levels of public commitment result in higher levels of weight loss motivation, and higher levels of weight loss. Weight loss motivation partly mediates the effect of public commitment on weight loss, while SNI moderates the effect of public commitment on weight loss. Keywords: compliance behavior, motivation, public commitment, social influence

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In compliance dependent services (CDS), e.g., weight loss programs, the client is expected to continue to perform for himself or herself once away from the service provider in order to ensure positive outcomes and customer satisfaction (Dellande and Gilly 1998). Given that the customer of CDS must provide the inputs as well as create a major portion of the service, it is important to understand the underlying motivation-compliance process. Motivating the customer to comply with his or her service roles becomes all-the-more difficult/important when the customer must carry out his or her roles for extended periods of time. The research objective of this investigation is to explore aspects of motivation in long-term customer compliance behavior. We examine public commitment and its influence on motivation, and the effect of these on customer compliance behavior in a weight loss program. Further, we investigate the role of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI), to understand the underlying relationship between public commitment and customer compliance behavior.

Conceptualization

This paper investigates the role of public commitment in influencing motivation and compliance behavior in weight loss. In addition, susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) is also examined. The theoretical model suggests that public commitment to weight loss leads to long-term weight loss compliance behavior; further, weight loss motivation partly mediates the effect of public commitment on weight loss and SNI moderates the effect of public commitment on weight loss. As such, we offer the following hypotheses:

H1: Higher levels of public commitment to a target behavior will result in higher levels of compliance with that behavior.

H2: The effect of public commitment on long-term customer compliance behavior will be, in part, mediated by weight loss motivation.

H3: Susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) will moderate the relationship between public commitment and compliance such that, at high levels of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI), the positive influence of public commitment on compliance will be strengthened.

Method

Design

The study uses a 3 x 2 full factorial design manipulating three levels of public commitment (no public commitment, short-term public commitment, and long-term public commitment), and a median split to generate two levels (low and high) of Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI).

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 211 women between the ages of 20 and 45 enrolled in a women’s weight loss program at a center in southern India. The subjects were selected from clients who signed up for a 16 week weight loss program designed to help clients lose modest amounts of excess weight (typically 15 to 20 pounds). Weight loss goals were set for the 8th week and the 16th week of the 16 week program. The weight loss goal for the follow-up visit held during the 24th week was the same as the week 16 goal, i.e., participants were expected to maintain their weight loss during the eight week period following the program.

Subjects completed a survey that included measures of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI), and weight loss motivation using modified versions of the sub-scales from Snell and Johnson’s (1997) Multidiimensional Health Questionnaire. Versions of this survey were also administered during the 4th week and during the 12th week of the 16 week program. During the second and third administrations of this questionnaire an additional question was included to assess the manipulation of public commitment. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three manipulated experimental conditions in a 3 x 2 full-factorial experimental design.

In this study we investigated the effect of long-term versus short-term public commitment, and consequently public commitment was manipulated as follows. Each subject in the long-term public commitment condition had their weight loss goal, and their name printed on an index card and displayed in a locked glass-faced bulletin board for the duration of the 16 week program. Subjects in the short-term public commitment condition had their weight loss goal and their name displayed in the bulletin board for the first three weeks of the program. Subjects in the no public commitment condition did not have their information posted in the bulletin board. After eliminating participants who did not complete the entire 16 week program, 211 subjects remained.

Subjects were weighed at the start of the program, eight weeks into the program, at the end of the 16 week program, and once more during the follow-up visit during the 24th week. The percentage of weight loss goal achieved (WL) was computed for each of these weigh-ins and these form the major dependent variables in this study. Thus a subject with weight loss goals of 10, 20 and 20 pounds (for weeks 8, 16 and 24) who achieved weight loss of 9, 16 and 14 pounds respectively, would have WL scores of 90%, 80% and 70% for the three weigh-ins.

Major Findings

In this study, we investigated the effect of making public “the commitment” to lose weight. Subjects who made a long-term public commitment to a weight loss goal were found to have achieved greater results compared to subjects who made a short-term public commitment, and compared to those who made no commitment at all. Further it was found that weight loss motivation partly mediated the effect of public commitment on weight loss. Higher levels of public commitment resulted in increased weight loss motivation which in turn resulted in increased levels of weight loss. In addition, the personality trait susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) was found to be a moderator of the effect of public commitment on weight loss. Subjects high in SNI were more likely to be affected by public commitment, compared to those lower in SNI. Finding significant differences in compliance behavior lends greater support to our hypothesis that the “public-ness” with which a commitment is made will have a significant and favorable impact on long-term compliance behavior.

REFERENCES


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Does Precipitation Affect Consumers’ Smoking Tendency?
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Smoking consumption perhaps is the most striking example of a harmful pattern of consumer behavior. Yet, smoking consumption is still very common in developed markets, nearly 25% of the U.S. population smokes tobacco despite the well-known negative consequences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997), and its usage seems to be getting increasingly higher in emerging markets (World Health Organization 2004).

Due to the health and social significance of smoking consumption, over the years academic attention has been paid to understand the determinants for smoking consumption tendency. Different literatures seem to emphasize the relative importance of different factors. For example, the economic literature has mostly stressed that economic factors such as prices as the most critical driver for smoking consumption. While the social psychology literature tends to recognize that psychological, and interpersonal social determinants are important in understanding the smoking consumption, the role of social environmental factors such as family or peer group has been demonstrated as extremely important determinants. But, the role of natural environment factors such as temperature or precipitation has not been systematically investigated. These factors arguably are the very important factor in explaining consumers’ consumption activities (Parker 1997), so the current research aims to offer an initial step to understand the impact of these factors in smoking consumption.

Starting with two secondary data sources, we show that measure of precipitation correlates significantly with percentage of adult smokers at both country and state levels, even after controlling for many plausible alternatives. This relationship was further confirmed with a survey on smokers for many plausible alternatives. This relationship was further confirmed with a survey on smokers for many plausible alternatives. This relationship was further confirmed with a survey on smokers for many plausible alternatives. This relationship was further confirmed with a survey on smokers for many plausible alternatives.

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