The Interaction Effect of Mood and Price Level on Purchase Intention

Fengyan Cai, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
Felix Tang, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
Jian-Min Jia, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

The present study examines the interaction of price level and mood on purchase intention. It integrates the mood congruency argument and mood regulation argument of affect influence by specifying how consumers’ affective state influences their interpretation of price as a mood lifting, mood threatening, or neutral cue, which in turn guides their behavior. The experiment demonstrates that consumers in positive mood have higher intention to purchase a regular-priced product than consumers in negative mood, consistent with the mood consistent explanation. However, the reverse is true when the price of the product is high, as predicted by the mood regulation explanation.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14211/volumes/v36/NA-36

[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/.
concealing a product from sight constitutes a form of avoidance. Therefore, obstructing one’s view of an object related to a fulfilled goal reduces clutter in the visual field and helps satisfy the motivation to avoid potentially distracting objects. As this motive is satisfied, value is generated that can transfer to product evaluations. Across several studies, I attempt to demonstrate that compatibility between an individual’s goal status and a product’s perceptual status enhances product attractiveness.

A preliminary study examined how 58 participants differed in their evaluations of the U.S. Postal Service after reading a passage adapted from Horton and Rapp (2003) about a fictional character whose implied goal to walk to the mailbox was either fulfilled or unfulfilled. During the passage, the mailbox either remained visible or was hidden from the main character’s view. When the character’s goal was fulfilled, participants reported more favorable attitudes toward the U.S. Postal Service when the mailbox was hidden than when it was visible. However, this difference was not found among participants who read the version of the story in which the character’s goal was unfulfilled. Because this study was not designed with the above hypothesis in mind, two additional studies were designed to more directly test the notion that products related to fulfilled goals are evaluated more favorably when hidden than when visible.

The first study compares evaluations of hidden products (opaque packaging) to visible products (transparent packaging) when participants have either an unfulfilled or a fulfilled goal to quench their thirst. Of 200 online participants, half were instructed to imagine that they were “extremely thirsty” and the other half were instructed to imagine that they were “not at all thirsty.” All participants were then asked to choose between two plastic cups of water—one opaque and the other clear. Whereas the opaque cup was preferred by only 18% of participants in the thirsty condition, it was preferred by 27% of the participants in the not-thirsty condition. Thus, among participants whose goal to quench thirst was inactive, the water was more attractive when it was hidden from their sight by opaque packaging.

Because participants’ choices may have been influenced by actual thirst levels, a second study was conducted in the laboratory in which thirst was manipulated. Furthermore, a behavioral measure rather than a self-reported measure was used as the primary dependent variable in the second study. Adopting a procedure similar to that used in Brendl et al. (2005), all participants consumed several salty pretzels upon arriving at the lab. Participants were then assigned to one of three conditions—very-thirsty, moderately-thirsty, or not-thirsty. Participants in the not-thirsty condition drank a full bottle of flavored water; those in the moderately-thirsty condition drank half of a bottle, and those in the very-thirsty condition did not drink anything. Participants who did not finish eating the pretzels or drinking the water were excluded from the analysis. Analysis of self-reported thirst confirmed that the thirst manipulation was successful.

Following the thirst manipulation and a filler task, participants learned about a new energy drink and were told that they would be permitted to sample it. On the desk of each participant were two cups—one opaque and one clear. Participants were instructed to bring one of the cups to the front of the room where they could pour as much or as little of the energy drink as they liked into their cup and drink it. The dependent measure of interest was the amount of beverage they consumed. As predicted, participants in the not-thirsty condition drank more when the beverage was poured into an opaque cup than when it was poured into a clear cup (M = 53.8mL vs. 37.7mL). However, the reverse was true for moderately-thirsty participants; they consumed more of the beverage when it was easily visible in a clear cup than when it was partially occluded in an opaque cup (M = 74.8mL vs. 50.0mL). Not surprisingly, the amount consumed by participants in the very-thirsty condition was higher than the other two conditions and did not differ by the cup into which it was poured (M = 98.5mL (opaque) vs. 94.0mL (clear)).

Judging by consumption, the results of the second study suggest that participants whose thirst-quenching goal had already been fulfilled found the beverage more attractive in an opaque than in a transparent container, but that the opposite occurred for participants with an active goal to quench their thirst. A ceiling effect seems to exist in that once thirst levels reach a certain threshold, the container makes no difference in the attractiveness of the beverage.

Together, the evidence from these studies suggests that hiding a product from view can increase its appeal to consumers when that product is related to a recently fulfilled goal. By helping consumers avoid objects that might distract them from active goals, the act of visually concealing a product can actually enhance its attractiveness.

References

The Interaction Effect of Mood and Price Level on Purchase Intention
Fengyan Cai, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
Felix Tang, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
Jian-Min Jia, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

Abstract
The present study examines the interaction of price level and mood on purchase intention. It integrates the mood congruency argument and mood regulation argument of affect influence by specifying how consumers’ affective state influences their interpretation of price as a mood lifting, mood threatening, or neutral cue, which in turn guide their behavior. The experiment demonstrates that consumers in positive mood have higher intention to purchase a regular-priced product than consumers in negative mood, consistent with
the mood congruency explanation. However, the reverse is true when the price of the product is high, as predicted by the mood regulation explanation.

Extant literature on impulsive and compulsive consumption demonstrated that people in positive or negative mood are more likely to buy than people in neutral mood (e.g., Faber and Christenson 1996). On the basis of the theory about mood congruency and mood regulation, the present study explores the interaction effect of price level and mood on consumers’ purchase intention.

In terms of the impact of mood on behavior and judgment, there are two kinds of arguments. The mood congruency argument predicts that people in positive mood are more likely to believe the environment is benign and in turn more likely to do something (e.g., consumption), whereas negative mood is expected to lead to a less favorable evaluation of the environment, which inhibits actions (e.g., don’t buy anything) (Bower 1981; Andrade 2005). The mood regulation argument states that people try to regulate their feelings to maximize their hedonic state (Isen 1987). It predicts people in positive mood will try to maintain and protect their positive mood, whereas people in negative mood are motivated to improve their mood. These motivations are contextual, stored in memory, and cannot be activated without situational cues (Vallerand 2004).

Price is an important marketplace cue for consumers (Gijsbrechts 1993). On one hand, it represents the amount of money consumers must give up to get the product (Volckner and Hofmann 2007). On the other hand, many consumers use price as a quality cue (Erickson and Johansson 1985). Thus, high price can be seen positively (good quality) and negatively (high cost). In the present study, we argue that whether consumers perceive high price as a good quality cue or as a high cost cue may depend on their incidental affective state. Specifically, since people in negative mood usually believe that shopping especially buying hedonic product will make them feel better (Faber 1992; Rook 1987), high price may be regarded as good quality and treated as a mood lifting cue; conversely, people usually avoid spending too much money on products they want to buy instead of products they should buy as such consumption may make them feel guilty later (Okada, 2005), in this respect, high price may be perceived as high cost and treated as a mood threatening cue. Interpreting the high price level as a signal of good quality product acts as a mood lifting cue; likewise, interpreting the high price level as high cost acts as a mood threatening cue. According to mood regulation argument mentioned above, people in positive mood have the motivation to protect their positive mood and people in negative mood try to improve their negative affective state, thus people in positive mood may be more sensitive to mood threatening cue (high cost), while people in negative mood are more likely to pay attention to the mood lifting cue (good quality). Therefore, we propose H1a: For a high price product, people in negative mood are more likely to buy than those in positive mood.

As utilitarian product with a regular price does not lift or threaten consumers’ mood, both mood lifting cue and mood threatening cue are absent when a product’s price is regular. Andrade(2005) demonstrated that people in positive mood are more likely to try a product than those in negative mood when mood lifting cue or mood threatening cue is absent. Based on mood congruent argument and Andrade’s (2005) findings, we derived our H1b: For a product with regular price, people in positive mood are more likely to buy than those in negative mood.

Previously, we argue that people in positive mood perceive high price as a mood threatening cue while people in negative mood perceive high price as a mood lifting cue, so people in negative mood should perceive the quality of high-priced product better than those in negative mood do, which in turn influence consumers’ purchase intention. Thus, we expect a mediation effect of perceived quality. That is, H2: The interaction effect of mood and price on purchase intention is mediated by perceived quality.

One hundred students participated a 2 (price level: high vs. regular) x 2 (mood: positive vs. negative) between-subject experiment for extra course credit. Mood manipulation method and experiment procedure were adopted from Zhang and Fishbach (2005). The stimulus was a ball pen, pretested and priced at RMB10 (approximately US$1.20) in the high price level condition and RMB3 (approximately US$0.40) in the regular price level condition. Perceived quality and purchase intention were the dependent variables. The manipulation of mood was successful (F(1,98)=20.834, p<0.01; Mpositive=5.76, Mnegative=3.37) and all scales were reliable, with Cronbach level above 0.70. The results of a two-way ANOVA showed that the interaction effect of mood and price level on purchase intention was significant (F(1,96)=24.3, p<0.01), the direction accorded with our expectation, and the simple main effects were also significant (Regular price condition: Mpositive=4.07, Mnegative=3.11; High price condition: Mpositive=2.91, Mnegative=4.23). Therefore, our H1a and H1b were supported. The results of hierarchical linear regression showed that the significant impact of the interaction term (Price*Mood) on purchase intention became non-significant when perceived quality was added (b=0.740, t=1.74, p>0.05), supporting our H2.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways. Firstly, it extends existing literature about the impact of mood on behavior by demonstrating that it is consumers’ perception of external cue instead of the cue per se that lead to different impact of mood on consumers’ decision. Secondly, the evidence suggests that people in negative mood are more likely to buy expensive utilitarian product and people in positive mood tend to buy relatively cheap utilitarian product.

References