Conveying an Impression: Effects of the Consumer Review Process on Attitude Communication and Persistence

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This research examines the long-term impact of review writing on the evaluation of a consumption experience. Relevant theories offer conflicting predictions regarding the extent to which writing a product review will stabilize attitude towards the product. We investigate this question in an experimental setting using short movie clips as target stimuli. Our results indicate that the timing and format of the review task systematically influence attitude persistence over time, as well as readers’ inferences regarding that attitude. Implications and extensions of these results are discussed.

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Method
Sixty-three undergraduate students completed a questionnaire related to underconsumption and the internal control mechanisms discussed earlier. First, the participants filled out each set of items for frugality (Lastovicka et al. 1999), tightwaddism (Rick et al. 2007), and hyperopia (Haws and Poynor 2008). Then, participants were provided with a scenario in which they were to imagine saving for a spring break trip. The participants were asked to assess their ability to budget themselves and save money for the trip (i.e. willpower). After completing the scenario, participants concluded the study by filling out two self-control scales from Tangney et al. (2004) and Haws and Bearden (2006).

Results
In order to determine whether the concepts of frugality, tightwaddism, and hyperopia fit within the overarching construct of underconsumption, a correlation analysis of the data was conducted. Results showed that hyperopia significantly correlated with frugality ($r=.33, p<.01$) and with tightwaddism ($r=.31, p=.01$). Frugality was also significantly correlated with tightwaddism ($r=.50, p<.01$). Given that all three of these concepts are related to one another, these findings suggest that each classification shares a common underlying concept, in this case underconsumption.

To analyze the concept of self-control and its relationship to the types of underconsumption, a regression analysis was conducted between the total score on the self control items and the total scores of each measure of underconsumption. Findings revealed that increased levels of self control predicted increases in both frugality ($\alpha=.63, p<.01$) and tightwaddism ($\alpha=.55, p<.01$). Conversely, self control was not predictive of hyperopia ($\alpha=.09, p>.47$).

The consumption scenario was also analyzed to provide further insight on the processes that consumers utilize to promote underconsumption. Results demonstrated that greater willpower in the scenario was predictive of increased levels of frugality ($\alpha=.30, p<.05$) and tightwaddism ($\alpha=.28, p<.05$), and was unrelated to hyperopia ($\alpha=.08, p>.53$). The self control and willpower findings together provide support for internal mechanisms of control promoting underconsumption behavior within tightwads and frugal consumers. Furthermore, the lack of self control and willpower in hyperopic consumers suggests that external mechanisms of desire control need to be investigated. A follow-up study will be conducted to determine the influence of avoidance, postponement, and distraction in hyperopic consumers. Ultimately, a comprehensive model of the antecedents to underconsumption will be created.

References

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Abstract
This research examines the long-term impact of review writing on the evaluation of a consumption experience. Relevant theories offer conflicting predictions regarding the extent to which writing a product review will stabilize attitude towards the product. We investigate this question in an experimental setting using short movie clips as target stimuli. Our results indicate that the timing and format of the review task systematically influence attitude persistence over time, as well as readers’ inferences regarding that attitude. Implications and extensions of these results are discussed.
Introduction

Increasingly, consumers are involved in reading as well as writing reviews about consumption experiences. Many studies have explored the influence of consumer-created content on attitudes and behaviors of the audience (Chen and Xie 2008; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006), but research that examines the influence of the creation process on creators themselves has been rare. An exception is recent evidence that writing a product review can change one’s attitude toward the product (He and Bond 2009). However, it remains unclear whether any influence of review writing will endure over time. More generally, the intersection of review writing and attitude persistence is a neglected but important topic.

Different research streams imply contradictory predictions for the impact of review writing on attitude persistence. On the one hand, classic models of elaboration such as the ELM and HSM (Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1986) suggest that greater cognitive processing of attitude-relevant information should increase attitude strength and persistence. However, another approach has focused on the effect of reasoning about attitudes on attitude change over time and attitude-behavior consistency (Sengupta and Fitzsimons 2000; Wilson and Schooler 1991). Findings from this stream reveal that analyzing reasons before attitude measurement generally reduces attitude persistence, while analyzing reasons after measurement increases persistence.

In order to reconcile this conflict and make predictions, we consider two cases, in which consumers review a product either before or after reporting their attitudes. In the first case, we note that review writing is different from typical reasoning manipulations, which force participants to justify their views with reasons and therefore focus on aspects of the experience that are verbalizable and accessible but may not contribute meaningfully to attitudes. Review writers, on the other hand, are instead free to list both positive and negative aspects of their experience without needing to defend or justify their views. Because review writers are not bound to an attitude derived from available reasons, we suggest that their attitudes are likely to cohere with the content of reviews and persist over time (a reinforcement effect). In the case of writing a review after providing one’s attitude, both streams of research cited above agree on a reinforcement effect. Therefore, the act of writing about a consumption experience will make initial attitudes more persistent, whether or not the review precedes or follows attitude assessment.

Hypothesis 1: Writing a product review prior to stating one’s attitude will increase the stability of that attitude over time.

Hypothesis 2: Writing a product review after stating one’s attitude will increase the stability of that attitude over time.

Although some review forums (e.g., car.com) request meal-related, guided reviews that discuss specific attributes of the product, others (e.g., imdb.com) request open-ended, unguided reviews that encompass the whole product experience. We expect that guiding consumers to focus on specific attributes should especially enhance elaboration and encoding of thoughts during the review process, strengthening attitudes and increasing attitude persistence.

Hypothesis 3: The enhancement effect of review writing on attitude persistence will be stronger for reviews that are guided rather than unguided.

Design/Procedure

The study was conducted in a lab with 118 student participants. A mixed design included two between-subjects factors (order: review-first vs. attitude-first; review type: guided vs. unguided vs. filler) and one within-subjects factor (time: immediate vs. one month later). At t1, all participants watched the target stimulus, a short animated movie clip portraying an origami artist performing his craft. After viewing the movie, participants were given different instructions according to condition. The review-first conditions were asked to generate written reviews: the guided review group answered a series of questions focusing on attributes of the clip and the unguided review group was instructed to write an integrated, open-ended review. The filler group wrote 10-15 sentences summarizing events of the previous day. Next, these participants rated the clip on four 7-point attitude scales; they also answered various follow-up questions and demographic measures. Participants in the attitude-first conditions completed the steps above in opposite order. One month later, all participants took part in a second session where identical attitude measures were collected.

Results and Conclusions

Composite attitude measures were formed by averaging the four attitude questions at both t1 and t2. The absolute attitude difference between t1 and t2 was used to represent attitude persistence. For the following analyses, the condition in which attitudes were reported immediately and followed by the filler task served as an omnibus control.

Data for the control condition showed an average absolute attitude change of .69 over the one-month delay. This change is both surprisingly large and significantly different from zero (t(=44, 16, p =.001), suggesting participants were generally poor at retrieving their prior attitudes. The main effect of order was marginally significant (F(1, 111) = 3.54, p = .06), indicating that whether the attitude was measured before or after review writing influenced the stability of that attitude over time. In support of Hypothesis 1, attitude persistence was increased by the provision of a review before attitude assessment. Planned contrasts revealed that participants who provided guided reviews before reporting their attitudes exhibited marginally less attitude change (M = .42) than those in the control condition (M = .69, F(1, 35)=2.74, p=.11), while participants who provided unguided reviews before reporting their attitudes exhibited attitude change that was directionally less than controls (M = .57, ns). The difference between the two review conditions was only directional, lending weak support to Hypothesis 3.

In order to test Hypothesis 2, we compared the attitude change of participants who provided guided reviews after reporting their attitudes (M = .60) to that of participants who provided unguided reviews after reporting their attitudes (M = .71) and the omnibus control condition (M = .69). No reliable differences were observed; therefore, H2 was not supported.

Analysis of within-cell attitude variance at t1 revealed one potential means by which reviews may affect attitude persistence. Specifically, the variance within the rate-first conditions (V = .96) was considerably smaller than that of participants who had written
reviews ($V=2.19$, Leven’s test $F(1, 91)=3.53$, $p=.06$). This suggests that that as a result of cognitive reflection, initial attitudes in the review condition were more well-formed and less subject to fluctuation over time.

Overall, these results provide initial evidence that the act of writing a review can influence consumers’ attitude persistence. In subsequent research, we plan to explore the robustness of this finding to consumption experiences that differ in product category, valence, or intensity, and also to analyze the content of reviews themselves for differences that may affect long-term memory and retrieval of the consumption experience.

Selected References


**Players’ Attitudes Toward Preorders and Adoption Intention of New Videogames: A Qualitative Approach**

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Launching of new products connotes high costs and high probability of risk for manufacturers. Marketers of video games, books, music CD, DVD movies, and telecommunication gadgets usually promote new products months ahead of introducing them to the market. Consumers can preorder these products and receive them as soon as they become available. Despite the economic importance of worldwide videogame sales (Magiera 2009), the motives of players relying on preorders have not been explored. Why are consumers willing to pay in advance when they have other readily available alternatives? Why do some consumers buy products when they do not know about their features? How do they choose between a promised superior functionality versus a trialable alternative? We seek to bring insights into these issues. The contribution of this research is threefold: (1) explore the motives of videogame players in preordering, (2) highlight the unique pattern of the phenomenon in the early adoption of new videogames, and (3) adopt a qualitative approach to explore preorder decisions rather than an experimental approach to provide richer and broader coverage of the likely factors associated with the topic of interest.

In the case of videogames, preorders display two patterns: (1) Continuous innovation or an updated and enhanced version of a preexisting game (e.g. Guitar Hero III, Rock Band), (2) discontinuous innovation or a totally new product including new features and qualities (consider the game Guitar Hero introduced for the very first time). In the former situation, consumers preorder video games when they have had certain experience with an earlier version of the game or at least with the game developer. For instance, players who have been satisfied with the videogame FIFA 2008 are potential buyers of FIFA 2009. We can extend this situation when new video game consoles are introduced. The second situation occurs when some videogames—similar to new telecommunication devices—usually come with totally new features that the consumer has never experienced before.

We conducted focus group interviews with videogame players to obtain insights about preordering behavior. Each session was videotaped and lasted about 70 minutes. We followed a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to formulate a theory about the phenomenon of interest. The interviewees were asked to describe their thoughts and experiences regarding the preorder and gaming process. We identified common emerging themes and discussed the implications of these themes on preorder intentions. We classified emerging themes into two groups: purchase and adoption (psychological and product related elements).

**Purchase:** (1) **Securing the purchase:** Players expressed their concern about the risk of the unavailability of the videogame. Hui et al. (2008) concluded that the highest point of sales of new products occurs in the preorder stage. After launching the product, sales decline. A plausible explanation is that players rush to preorder a game to secure its acquisition rather than waiting and find it unavailable due to high demand and/or low supply. This situation is akin to Belk et al.’s (2003) description of desire: players’ intent on acquiring the symbolic benefits of a desired game rather than the game itself is fulfilled through preordering. True thrill is kept alive through preordering until the actual game is acquired. Once acquired, players undergo exploration of new features stage. Subsequently, players’ thrill ends if they no longer have anything to discover or learn about the game, and if perceived challenge or competition is over. (2) **Risk absence:** New technologies derive new tasks for consumers and generate uncertainty (Ziamou 2002). Despite the absence of trialability, consumers expressed no functional (performance) risk involved in the preorder, confirming the claim that a continuous innovation has lower levels of perceived risks. Similarly, they do not perceive any risk of making a poor purchase decision. Players expressed that they never