Confidence, Mindset, and Self-Efficacy in Goal Pursuit

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This paper explores how to mitigate the adverse effect of low confidence in reaching a goal, given that low confidence might have a detrimental effect on taking the necessary actions to accomplish the goal. Specifically, perceived self-efficacy is proposed to be an important benchmark dependent variable to focus on as prior research has shown a positive relationship between self-efficacy and persistency in pursing a goal. A study was conducted to investigate the effect of priming a deliberative or an implementational mindset on perceived self-efficacy across the high and low confidence conditions. The results are discussed and future research directions are proposed.

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Consider what is happening at this moment in time: economic downturns make despair palpable to many individuals, who feel unconfident in achieving their retirement or other savings goals. How could these low confidence individuals persevere to save and work toward their goals? The current study is motivated by scenarios like this and examines the possibility of boosting self-efficacy (i.e., a belief in one’s ability to achieve something) in view of low confidence.

The marketing literature on hope indicates the effect of strong versus weak hope on product evaluation and choice (e.g., MacInnis and de Mello 2005). In particular, De Mello et al. (2007) find that when consumers have low confidence about achieving their hoped-for goals, they are engaged in motivated reasoning about the effectiveness of products touted as problem solutions. Yet, in an effort to restore hope, besides a biased perception about products, could consumers have biased views about themselves? Indeed, a likely side effect of reduced confidence in a hoped-for goal is low perceived self-efficacy, as both low confidence and low perceived self-efficacy may result from a lack of mastery experience (cf. Bandura 1997). A vicious cycle can occur such that low perceived self-efficacy would, in turn, prevent a consumer from making vigorous, persistent efforts or enhancing the commitment to achieving a goal (Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2005). Therefore, it is relevant to investigate how to boost perceived self-efficacy when consumers have low confidence in reaching their goals.

This study proposes that mindset activated (deliberative vs. implementational) may affect perceived self-efficacy for low confidence consumers. Theoretical support comes from the research on construal levels and self-control (Fujita et al. 2006). Their experiments demonstrate that construing a situation in high-level terms (such as priming a deliberative vs. implementational mindset) would promote self-control (such as reduced preferences for immediate over delayed outcomes). To boost self-efficacy in a discouraging, low confidence situation certainly requires self-control, thus it is likely that a deliberative mindset would similarly have a favorable effect on self-efficacy. In addition, it is likely that a deliberative (vs. implementational) mindset would engender a fair and balanced evaluation of the situation (Taylor and Gollwitzer 1995), which may be lacking especially for low confidence consumers. In sum, the prediction is that a deliberative (vs. implementational) mindset would help boost self-efficacy for low (not high) confidence consumers.

To test the aforementioned relation among confidence, mindset, and self-efficacy, a 2 (confidence: low vs. high) x 2 (mindset: deliberative vs. implementational) between-subjects design was employed. Eighty-nine undergraduate respondents were divided into high and low confidence groups based on their answer, on a nine-point scale, to the item: “I am confident that I would get good grades by the...” which was embedded in a lifestyle survey. They then were primed with either a deliberative or an implementational mindset, following the procedures in Taylor and Gollwitzer (1995). Specifically, respondents in the deliberative mindset condition were asked to consider the immediate and long-term consequences of a personal project, whereas respondents in the implementational mindset condition were asked to write down the implementation steps involved in an intended project. The main dependent measure was perceived self-efficacy. Four domain-specific items of perceived self-efficacy were constructed; for example, “There is a lot that I as a student can do to get the best grades that I can,” and “With enough effort I can get very good grades.” Questions regarding the extent of studying were also included. Additional measures collected (and later used as covariates) included self-control, self-regulatory focus, mood, involvement, gender, and GPA.

Significant main effects of mindset and of confidence, as well as a moderately significant interaction effect of confidence and mindset on perceived self-efficacy were found (F (1, 71) = 2.82, p = .097). The interaction pattern was such that high confidence respondents were not influenced by the mindset manipulation, whereas low confidence respondents had higher perceived self-efficacy when they were primed with a deliberative (vs. implementational) mindset, as hypothesized. Another intriguing finding was that prevention-focused low confidence respondents said they would study more in the following week than did promotion-focused low confidence counterparts (no significant effect was found for high confidence respondents).

The finding of the interaction effect of confidence and mindset is consistent with the rationales provided by Fujita et al. (2006) and Taylor and Gollwitzer (1995). That is, a deliberative mindset makes consumers consider both pros and cons (i.e., high-level features), and that helps our low confidence respondents boost perceived self-efficacy because the appraisal of self-efficacy was not colored by low confidence. In other words, a deliberative mindset makes consumers resist the crippling effect of low confidence. On the other hand, it seems that priming an implementational mindset may not be helpful in enhancing perceived self-efficacy for low confidence consumers because these consumers simply lack the confidence about achieving their goals and even taking the necessary steps.
During goal pursuit consumers differ in their confidence about reaching their hoped-for goals (e.g., exercising, dieting, savings). It is important to understand how reduced-confidence consumers can boost their perceived self-efficacy and keep trying persistently. This working paper found that priming a deliberative or an implementational mindset can make a difference in consumers’ perceived self-efficacy in a low confidence situation. Follow-up studies are needed to shed more light on our understanding of boosting self-efficacy. Possible directions include: (1) manipulating confidence in reaching a goal; (2) studying the prediction in a different context for generalizability; (3) monitoring, as a dependent measure, real behavior needed for reaching a goal; and (4) exploring additional ways to boost perceived self-efficacy (e.g., inducing a promotion or a prevention self-regulatory focus).

References

The Impact of Implicit Theories on Family Brand Evaluations
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Introduction
Previous studies examining reciprocal extension effects on family brand evaluations mainly focus on the accessibility and diagnosticity of brand extension information (e.g., Ailawalia and Gurhan-Canli 2000; Chang 2002, 2007; Chang and Lou 2006), the categorical similarity between brand extensions and their family brands (e.g., Chang 2002; Chang and Lou 2005; Loken and John 2003; Milberg and Sinn 2008; Salinas and Perez 2009), and the nature of family brands, such as varieties and perceived entitativity of family brands (e.g., Chang 2007; Chang and Lou 2005, 2006; Gurhan-Canli, 2003). In social cognition, research on lay theories (entity vs. incremental) indicate that subjects who begin social perception with different initial assumptions follow various cognitive paths and reach various social endpoints of expectations, perceptions, and inferences (Levy, Plaks, Hong, Chiu, and Dweck 2001). As with social cognition, the impact of implicit theorists may also affect reciprocal extension effects on family brand evaluations.

Conceptualization
Entity theorists believe that personal characteristics are fixed or static despite person’s efforts or motivation to change them, which means that personal characteristics are beyond personal control. They believe that “everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that” (measure statement). In contrast, incremental theorists believe that personal characteristics are dynamic or malleable and can be changed over time and with efforts. They believe that “anyone can change even their most basic qualities” (measure statement). Research results indicate that entity theorists are more likely to elicit greater stereotype endorsement, greater perceived outgroup homogeneity effects, more susceptibility to the ultimate attribution error, greater intergroup bias, and more biased behavior toward outgroup members (Levy et al. 2001).

As believing that personality is dynamic or malleable (vs. static or fixed), incremental (vs. entity) theorist are more open to, and lay more weight on, latest relevant information about brand extensions to update their impression about the family brands if they are motivated to process the information on-line. Therefore, it is hypothesized that new brand extension information is more influential or diagnostic on family brand evaluations for incremental (vs. entity) theorists (Study 1). Moreover, as believing that personality is static or fixed (vs. dynamic or malleable), entity (vs. incremental) theorists are more likely to expect the existence of underlying essences of family brands and the congruency of brand extension information. Given the congruency, the processing of integrating the extension information with the family brand is expected to be a relatively easier task for the entity theorists, who subsequently are more highly motivated to spontaneously process new relevant information about the family brands. Therefore, it is hypothesized that, as expecting the existence of underlying essences about family brands, entity theorists tend to perceive the entitativity of family brands higher (Study 2-1). Moreover, as being more highly motivated, entity theorists tend to have spontaneous on-line (vs. memory-based) extension information integration for the impression formation about family brands (Study 2-2). Based on the theory of group level trait transference (GLTT) model (Crawford, Sherman, and Hamilton 2002), the information integration for the impression formation about family brands may involve the three-stage process of attribute abstraction (or inference), stereotyping, and attribute transference. As entity (vs. incremental) theorists are more likely to have spontaneous on-line extension information integration, it is hypothesized that stereotyping and attribute transference within family brands are more likely to occur to entity (vs. incremental) theorists, where as attribute abstraction occurs to both entity and incremental theorists (Study 3-1). Moreover, the processes of stereotyping and attribute transference may amplify the magnitude of extension information and lead to more salient polarization extension effects on consequent family brand evaluations (Chang and Lou 2006; Crawford et al. 2002; Study 3-2).