The Impact of Mood on Consumer Choice: Compromise Or Not?

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This research examines how mood may influence consumer choice among a low-end option, a middle (compromise) option, and a high-end option. Preliminary findings show that when mood clarity is relatively low, both positive and negative moods may enhance the choice of the compromise option as compared with a neutral mood. The different mechanisms through which mood may influence the assessment of choice options are discussed for reconciling the seeming inconsistency with previous findings. Further studies are proposed to validate the underlying mechanism.

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Will Dangling the Carrot Make them Eat it? An Exploration of Children’s Perceptions Towards Rewards for Healthy Food
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This study explored children’s experiences with and perceptions towards rewards for food. This study explores how children perceived rewards for healthy food. A Consumer Socialization framework (Roedder-John, 1999) was applied to understand how a child’s consumer socialization stage influences their perceptions towards the attributes of concrete and abstract rewards. Phenomenological interviews were used to gain understanding of children’s perspectives and enabled the identification of the attributes of rewards which are most persuasive in influencing children’s healthy food choices.

Reference

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This research investigates how mood influences consumer choice among a low-end option, a middle (compromise) option, and a high-end option. Previous research suggests that mood may affect consumer judgment through different mechanisms (Schwarz and Clore 2007) which bear different implications for the present research. One possibility is that mood may have motivational impact which drives consumer choice. Happy consumers may wish to maintain their pleasant feelings whereas unhappy consumers may seek mood-lifting opportunities (Isen 1984). In this case, consumers are more likely to choose the compromise option if they are in a good mood than if they are in a bad mood (Lin, Yen, and Chuang 2006). This is because the compromise option is perceived to be a safe choice (Simonson 1989). Such a low-risk choice may contribute to maintaining a good mood while at the same time entail less mood-lifting potential than a high-risk one (Nygren et al. 1996; Raghunathan and Pham 1999).

A second possibility is that mood may signal how benign or problematic the environment is and influence information processing (Schwarz and Clore 2007). Happy consumers tend to process information in a top-down manner, which may facilitate seeing the relationship among the options and their respective mood-management property. Happy consumers may therefore be more attracted by the compromise option than those in a neutral mood. When consumers are in a bad mood, however, they tend to process information in a bottom-up manner based on an assessment of individual product features. When this happens, consumers may be less likely to see the relationship among the options and the corresponding mood-management potential. Rather, they may be more sensitive to negative product features than to positive ones, and to give the former more weight in their decisions (Adaval 2001). In this case, the low-end option may be assessed most negatively in terms of quality whereas the high-end option may be assessed most negatively in terms of price. Greater weight given to these negative features may lead unhappy consumers to shun the low-end and high-end options, resulting in choosing the compromise option more often than those in a neutral mood. Thus, consumers in both positive and negative moods may be inclined to choose the compromise option.

Further, this research proposes that the first possibility is more likely to occur when mood clarity is high, whereas the second possibility is more likely to occur when mood clarity is low. This is because for the mood-lifting motivation to guide consumer decision, consumers need to assess their current mood and forecast future mood after choice (Andrade 2005). Thus, when consumers have higher (lower) clarity about their current mood, they may be more (less) likely to act in accordance with a mood-lifting motivation. In the previous research demonstrating the first possibility (Lin, Yen, and Chuang 2006), participants assessed their mood before they made the choice, which may have enhanced mood clarity. In the study reported below, participants did not assess their mood until after making product choices. We expect that the relatively low mood clarity may yield a different pattern of findings as suggested by the second possibility.

Experiment
The experiment had a 3 (mood: positive vs. neutral vs. negative) x 2 (justification for choice: provided vs. not provided) between-subjects design. The latter factor was added to show a boundary condition where the predicted mood effect would diminish if people were induced to deliberate over their decisions and make easily justifiable choices.
Method. First, 194 participants were asked to write a happy, neutral, or sad experience which induced mood. Next, in a product survey, they were asked to imagine that they were going to buy a computer monitor, and were considering three options that differed only in viewable size and price—monitor A (17 in., $119), monitor B (19 in., $159), and monitor C (21 in., $199). After seeing the information, participants in the justification-not-provided condition just indicated their choices, whereas participants in the justification-provided condition wrote down the reasons for choices before indicating their decisions. Next, they were asked to imagine they encountered another set of options—monitor A (19 in., $159), monitor B (21 in., $199), and monitor C (23 in., $239), and then completed procedures same as those in the first scenario. These two scenarios together can rule out the possibility that participants preferred a particular product that coincided with the compromise option. In the end, participants indicated their mood.

Main Findings. For the first scenario, when not asked to provide justifications, participants were more likely to choose the compromise option when they were in a positive (50%) or negative mood (53%) than when they were in a neutral mood (24%; z-values = 2.32 and 2.57, p-values < .05). In contrast, when participants explained their choices, they were similarly likely to choose the compromise option regardless of mood (44%, 40%, and 38%). Analyses regarding the second scenario provided converging evidence. When justifications were not required, choice shares of the compromise option were larger when participants were in a positive (50%) or negative (59%) mood than when they were in a neutral mood (24%; z-values = 2.32 and 3.13, p-values < .05). When participants explained the reasons for choices, their choices were likely to be consistent with the decision they made in the first scenario. These findings provide initial evidence that both positive and negative moods may lead to more compromise choices than would a neutral mood under low mood clarity circumstances.

Future Research Plan. More data involving multiple product categories will be collected to validate the robustness of the findings. Whether participants assess their mood before or after the choice will be manipulated, such that a comparison between the two conditions would help further reconcile the present findings with the previous ones. Participants’ mood clarity tendency will also be measured (Salovey et al. 1995). If the proposed moderation effect of mood clarity is viable, individuals’ chronic differences in mood clarity would also have an impact on the mechanism through which mood influences choice.

References

Correlates of Cool Identity: Humor, Need for Uniqueness, Materialism, Status Concern and Brand Consciousness
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Despite some advances in understanding the meaning and origin of cool (Belk, 2006; Bird and Tapp, 2008; O’Donnel and Wardlow, 2000; Nancarrow et. al. 2002), literature uncovering the meaning of cool is still in its infancy in consumer research. However, cool is a heavily used term by marketing practitioners. Advertising, web pages, shirts, music lyrics, book titles, business documents and above all people’s conversations are examples of places where the word cool is used. For example, a simple search in Amazon.com alone produced over 300 titles of published books which have the word cool as part of their titles, primarily with its slang meaning.

The focus of this paper is to examine the meaning of cool from a marketer’s point of view. From literature, we identify possible correlates of cool identity. We conceptualize cool identity as the extent to which consumers consider themselves to be cool. One agreement among the researchers is that they consider the origin of contemporary cool to be the African American culture (Belk, 2006; Moore, 2004). It was basically an attitude adopted by African Americans as a defense mechanism against the prejudice they faced and as a form of detachment from their difficult and often insecure working conditions (Nancarrow et al., 2002). However, the meaning of cool has evolved. As Belk (2006, p. 7) describes it, cool “refers to a person who is admired because she, or more often he, exhibits a nonchalant