If It'S Similar, It'S More Likely… But Can It Be Worth It? Perceived Similarity, Probability and Outcome Value

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Assessment of precise probabilities is difficult, and research has pointed to various cues people use to form probability judgments. In this research we investigate the effect of enhancing perceived proximity on probability judgments. Furthermore, we propose that inflated probability judgments could in turn abate perceived impact level of the event.

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When Seeing Many Types of Wine Makes You More Sensitive to Technological Threats: Unrelated, Prior Categorizations and Reactions to Change

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Detecting change is a fundamental, all-pervasive cognitive activity. It forms the core of many cognitive activities, such as visual, auditory, olfactory, and taste discrimination tasks, similarity judgments, and categorization. Naturally then, the ability to detect a change, to accurately assess the magnitude of the change, and to react to the change in a commensurate fashion, is of critical importance in many substantive domains (Massey and Wu 2005, Rensink 2002), ranging from medical decisions, business investment decisions, and face recognition, to air traffic control. Thus, it is important to understand factors that systematically affect people’s ability to detect change. To that end, we document a simple, yet novel effect: people’s reactions to a change (e.g., visual change, or technology change), are systematically affected by the categorizations they encounter in an unrelated, prior task (e.g., how a wine store categorizes its wine).

Before surmising about reactions to change, it is important to consider, more generally, how exposure to many, narrow (vs. few, broad) categorizations might affect an individual’s information processing. First, an individual who is exposed to a detailed environment with many, narrow (vs. few, broad) categories, should be cued to the notion that objects differ from each other in many different ways, and will fine tune her cognitive apparatus accordingly, using more (vs. less) dimensions to perceive and evaluate objects (e.g., see Barsalou 1993, Linville 1982). Further, as long as the subsequent context does not cue the need for cognitive reorganization, the recently tuned cognitive apparatus will likely be used, as is, for the next task at hand (e.g., see Bargh and Chartrand 2000, Smith and Branscombe 1987, Mullen, Pizzuto, and Foels 2002, Ülkümen, Chakravarti, and Morwitz (forthcoming)). Therefore, in a subsequent, unrelated task, an individual previously exposed to narrow (broad) categorizations is likely to continue to employ and discern relatively many (fewer) dimensions.

This brings us to the more specific question: how would such an individual react to a change that she subsequently encounters? Theoretically, there are two distinct possibilities. If the perceptual system alone is affected, then people previously exposed to many, narrow (few, broad) categorizations should have a more (less) sensitive perceptual encoding system, one that is attuned to processing incoming perceptual stimuli on relatively many (fewer) dimensions. Such people, therefore, should detect and perceive more (less) change, subjectively, when they encounter a subsequent change. In this case, then, prior exposure to unrelated, narrow (broad) categorizations will lead to stronger (weaker) reactions to a given change.

In contrast, if the evaluative system is affected, then prior exposure to many, narrow (few, broad) categorizations should encourage decision makers to evaluate the subsequent change more (less) carefully, using many (few) dimensions. The use of many (few) dimensions to evaluate the presented change should lead to perceptions of a relatively small (large) change, since the presented change would have to satisfy multiple (fewer) criterion in order to be deemed a significant enough change. Thus, in this case, prior exposure to narrow (broad) categorizations will lead to weaker (stronger) reactions to a given change. The question of which of these two conjectures is likely to prevail, is an empirical one, one which we leave our studies to answer.

Across four different studies, we find that unrelated, prior exposure to narrow (vs. broad) categorizations improves decision makers’ ability to detect a visual change (study 1) and leads to stronger reactions to a given change (studies 2-4). These differential reactions occur because the prior categorizations, albeit unrelated, alter the extent to which the subsequently presented change is perceived as either a relatively large change or a relatively small one.

Each experiment comprised two, ostensibly unrelated studies. The first task was used to administer the prior categorization manipulation and the second task was used to record reactions to a presented change (Figure 1). We began by looking at how these prior categorizations affect a person’s ability to detect a presented visual change, using well-established stimuli from the “change-blindness” paradigm (study 1). We then went on to looking at judgments that are contingent on people’s subjective reactions to a presented change (studies 2-4). Specifically, we assessed their reactions to an innovative new technology that loomed in the horizon. A pretest was used to verify that the new technologies were perceived to be relatively innovative.

We operationalized the fine grained nature of the decision context in multiple ways. In some instances participants answered preference questions presented either on relatively simple 3-point semantic differential scales, or on more differentiated 7-point ones. In other instances, participants are incidentally exposed to the same set of products that have been grouped either in a coarse-grained manner (e.g., movies classified as comedy or drama movies), or in a fine-grained manner (e.g., movies classified as comic action, dark comedy, romantic comedy, courtroom drama, historical drama, or melodrama movies). Irrespective of the nature of the manipulation, we find a very similar pattern of carryover effects.

The manipulations used show that even incidental exposure to narrow-broad categorizations can have a systematic effect on change detection, and reactions to change. Interestingly, the effects are not attributable to differential involvement, confidence, familiarity, knowledge, mood, and task completion times. Taken together, these findings suggest the interesting possibility that decision makers can become more discerning, even in the absence of having exerted any extra effort. Given that category structure is a ubiquitous feature of many decision environments, our work constitutes an important first step in documenting how seemingly innocuous categorizations might affect a decision maker’s reactions to change.

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Does Exposure to Concept Products Affect Judgment of Marketed New Products?
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
In some industries, it is a common practice to develop prototypes that are very innovative and that are loosely coupled with the actual product that is subsequently marketed. These prototypes are referred to as concept products, and are usually exhibited at trade shows and at industry events. They typically feature technical functionalities that are very innovative, sometimes too advanced to be implemented on large scale production, and are typically characterized by an extreme design, often too futuristic to be featured by marketable versions without substantial adaptations and moderations.

By means of theories on the effects of exaggeration and on structural alignment, we argue that exposure to the design and functionalities of concept products may affect consumer evaluation of marketed products. Specifically, we predict a positive effect of exposure to a visually exaggerated concept product on the judgment of the marketed product (H1): when a novel design is preceded by exposure to its exaggerated form, i.e., the concept product, exaggeration may attract subjects’ attention to the distinctive features of the design more than in the case of exposure to a non-exaggerated exemplar (Rhodes, Brennan and Carey 1987; Mauro and Kubovy 1992; Rhodes and Tremanew 1996). Moreover, the emphasis on the distinctive features of the design provided by exaggeration is feasible to leave a stronger trace in subjects’ implicit memory. This trace may eventually enhance the ease in elaborating those features when subjects encounter other exemplars, more moderate, of the same design, thus enhancing their evaluation. We expect, however, that functional exaggeration of the concept product moderate such effect (H2): On the one hand, we expect that exposure to an exemplar featuring very high (extreme) levels of performance on a given functional feature may set a new standard for the judgment of other exemplars on that same feature, causing a contrast effect that hurts the judgment of the other exemplars (Herr, Sherman and Fazio 1983; Herr 1986). On the other hand, however, the occurrence of such contrast effect is contingent upon the degree of context-target similarity, i.e., occurs only both the priming (concept product) and target (marketed product) are judged as belonging to the same category (Stapel and Winkielman 1998). An exaggerated design (high visual exaggeration) may favor the perception of the concept product as less thematically or temporally related, thus reducing the contrast effect due to the concept product exaggerated functionalities on the judgment of the moderate target product.

Concept products may feature different degrees of visual and functional alignment with their respective marketed versions. For instance, firms may invest in developing and promoting a very advanced technological feature within a concept project, but then implement and promote different features in the moderate marketed version. Similarly, they can develop very innovative and futuristic designs for their concept products, but then base the actually marketed products on different and less disruptive designs. We argue that the visual alignment between the concept product and the marketed product influences negatively the judgment of the marketed product (H3), since it activates a ‘thematic link’ between the two objects in consumers’ mind. The more the two products are visually aligned, the higher likelihood that they are judged as belonging to the same category and thus compared in terms of functionalities. Once this link is activated, it leads to an implicit comparison between the technical features of the concept product and those of the marketable product. In the case in which the concept product features high functional alignment with the marketable product, then the very high (extreme) levels of performance on the technical functionalities are likely to influence negatively the evaluation of the marketable product, since the latter typically features more moderate levels of performance on those same technical functionalities than the former. However, it may be that the concept product features different technical functionalities (low functional alignment) than the marketable car. Therefore, it is less easy for consumers to compare the features of the concept product with those of the marketable products, since non-alignable differences are harder to compare than alignable differences (Markman and Gentner 1996; Gentner and Markman 1993). In such case, consumers would be less likely to be influenced by the extreme performance of the concept product when they evaluate the marketable product (H4).

Results of two experimental studies using concept cars and cars as stimuli support our hypotheses and show that i) exposure to a visually exaggerated concept product positively affect the judgment of a moderate product featuring a similar design, and moderates the negative effects of the concept product functional exaggeration; ii) the degree of functional alignment between a concept product and a marketed product negatively affects the judgment of the marketed product upon exposure to the concept product, with this effect being moderated by the degree of visual alignment between the concept product and the marketed product. Our results contribute to shed light on the role of concept products on the evaluation of marketed products, thus emphasizing a different way in which the use of design in the initial stages of new product development may enhance new product performance.
Choosing versus Rejecting: How Power Shapes our Decision Strategies
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
When deciding among several alternatives, consumers may proceed by choosing (selecting, including) the most attractive option. Alternatively, they may adopt a decision strategy of rejecting (eliminating, excluding) the unattractive options. The literature on task framing investigates whether choosing and rejecting are two sides of the same coin. The principle of task invariance requires that decision makers should arrive at the same conclusion about product choice regardless of whether they reject or choose from the same finite set. However, past research has shown that the principle of task invariance does not always hold, and that decision outcomes are sensitive to which decision strategy consumers adopt (e.g., Park, Jun, and Maclnnis 2000; Shafir 1993). Prior research has focused primarily on the consequences of framing a decision as either a choosing task or a rejecting task. However, much less is known about the circumstances under which consumers are more inclined to choose versus reject. Initially, Shafir (1993) noted that choosing might be the more preferred strategy relative to rejecting. Conversely, Ordonez, Benson, and Beach (1999) concluded that the norm during screening tasks seems to be to reject the bad options rather than to screen in the good ones. Later investigations, however, revealed that the natural process for screening choice options is dependent on the characteristics of the decision task. Levin et al. (2001), for instance, found that people are more likely to favor an inclusion strategy when the task is positive (e.g., hiring employees), while preferring a rejection strategy when the task is negative (e.g., firing employees).

The present research goes beyond the influence of task characteristics, and examines the role of power—a consumer characteristic—in determining the preferred decision strategy. It also investigates the interactive effect of power and task frame on consumer satisfaction with the chosen option. Building on the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al. 2003), we hypothesize that activation of the behavioral approach system would make choosing a more natural strategy than rejecting for powerful consumers, whereas activation of the behavioral inhibition system would make rejecting a more natural strategy than choosing for powerless consumers. Indeed, activation of the behavioral approach system results in greater attention to potential rewards and positive outcomes. This should lead powerful consumers to favor a decision strategy that accentuates the choice options’ positive features, which is more typical of a choosing strategy (Shafir 1993). In contrast, activation of the behavioral inhibition system heightens the perception of threat in the environment. Further, a focus on threats and negative outcomes is likely to emphasize the choice options’ negative features. Since negative features tend to be weighted more heavily under rejection instructions than under choosing instructions (Shafir 1993), we predict that powerless consumers are likely to prefer rejecting over choosing decision strategies.

Consistent with our predictions, study 1 found that a heightened sense of power increases preference for choosing versus rejecting. Further, high power consumers were more satisfied with their choices when they adopted a choose strategy than when they adopted a reject strategy. Conversely, low power consumers were more satisfied with their choices when they adopted a reject strategy than when they adopted a choose strategy.

In study 2, we investigated the moderating role of responsibility. We argued that a heightened sense of responsibility would raise the perceived constraints that a powerful individual feels which, in turn, would lead to reduced approach-related tendencies and reduced preference for choosing versus rejecting. Our data showed that the effect of power on decision strategy indeed disappeared when consumers’ sense of responsibility was made salient. We also found that a high sense of responsibility makes both high and low power consumers more satisfied with their choices after adopting a reject strategy than after adopting a choose strategy.

REFERENCES
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

At the end of an extensive shopping trip or after a complicated decision task, we should be depleted. We worked hard, so we must be tired, not? How will this influence how much resources we will allocate to a subsequent task?

We test the hypothesis that resource allocation to a task depends not only on the actual amount of resources available for a task, but also on consumers’ inferences about the amount of resources available. More specifically, we propose and test the idea that inferences about the resource demands of preceding tasks (regardless of that task’s actual demands) affect the amount of resources that will be allocated to a subsequent task. When people believe that a preceding task was difficult, they will allocate fewer resources to a subsequent (unrelated) task and task performance on this task will thus deteriorate, compared to when people believe that the preceding task was easy.

Of course, resource allocation to a task depends on the demands set by that task (Locke and Latham 1990), and on the amount of resources the consumer has available for that task. When a demanding preceding task has depleted one’s pool of mental resources, insufficient resources will be available for subsequent tasks and task performance will decrease (Ackerman and Kanfer 2009; Baumeister et al. 2008; Vohs et al. 2008).

Research on the effects of resource scarcity has mainly focused on the objective amount of mental resources available (i.e., how many resources one actually has available), but little is known about whether and how beliefs about resource availability (i.e. how many resources one assumes to have available for a task) affect resource allocation to a current task. This is surprising, because most people find it difficult to determine how much mental resources were consumed in the past (Ackerman and Kanfer 2009) or will be required for a future task (Fennema and Kleinmuntz 1995; Garbarino and Edell 1997). Because people find it difficult to assess their objective resources, they may instead rely on their ideas about subjective resources when allocating resources to a task.

The results of three studies in which we manipulate perceived task demands but keep the actual task demands constant support our “I worked hard, I must be depleted” hypothesis. In a first study we asked participants to write a short essay about a task they had executed in the recent past that was either easy and simple or complex and difficult, thereby manipulating the salience of preceding task demands. In a control condition, we simply asked participants to write an essay about the physical environment they were currently in. Consistent with the “I worked hard, I must be depleted” hypothesis, we observed that participants consulted less information about a new product in a subsequent task when they were first asked to write about a difficult task performed in the near past, compared to when they were asked to write about an easy task or about the physical environment.

In a second study we tested our proposed hypothesis under different conditions of actual and perceived depletion. We asked participants to work on an anagram task for either one or ten minutes (thereby manipulating actual depletion levels). In both conditions, participants were led to believe that the anagram task was either easy or difficult (thereby manipulating perceived depletion levels). Afterwards, task performance on a subsequent (unrelated) task was measured. We observed that, as long as actual depletion levels were low, people inferred the amount of resources available for a task from the perceived difficulty level of the preceding (anagram) task. That is, when people believed that the preceding task was difficult, they felt more depleted and allocated fewer resources to a subsequent task compared to when they believed that the preceding task was easy.

In study 3, we tested the hypothesis that people would be less likely to infer available resources from the perceived demands of a preceding task when both tasks appear dissimilar. Indeed, when we explicitly instructed participants that both tasks drew on different psychological processes and resources, the amount of resources consumed in the past was no longer informative when assessing the amount of resources available for a subsequent task and the “I worked hard, I must be depleted” effect disappeared.

In sum, we observed that resource allocation to a current task does not only depend on the actual amount of resources available for that task, but is also a function of the inferences that people make about the amount of resources they assume to have available. Characteristics of the context, such as the perceived ease or difficulty of a preceding task, can inform people about how many resources they can allocate to subsequent tasks. These findings reveal the great flexibility in resource allocation that consumers have and show that resource depletion is not necessarily an objective phenomenon. Our studies show that not only the actual level of resource depletion, but also consumers’ naïve theories about when they should or should not be depleted determine subsequent task performance.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

People often encounter decision situations in which they have to choose between an option that is on the short term more rewarding and attractive, and another option that is on the long term the more beneficial one, like choosing between going out for dinner tonight versus saving money for retirement. When people follow their impulses (prefer the more immediate option) and when people resist impulsive input (and opt for the more long-term beneficial option), has been an important topic of previous research (e.g., Vohs 2006). Recent research adds to this domain by providing evidence for the existence of a general reward system (Briers et al. 2006; Vanden Bergh, Dewitte, and Warlop 2008). When people's desire for a reward is triggered (e.g., by the sight, smell or taste of rewarding stimuli), their desire for any kind of reward increases, rather than only their desire for stimuli that are directly linked to the aroused state. For example, exposing people to a consumption sample of a tasty food does not only increase their desire for food, but also their desire for other rewarding goods (like beverages and a holiday).

In the current research, we argue that inhibitory signals are domain unspecific. Recent neurological research (Berkman, Burk Lund, and Lieberman 2009) suggests that inhibitory signals in the motor, cognitive and affective domain share the same neurological network. Berkman and colleagues argue for the relative efficiency of such a network from a neurological point of view. However, a side-effect of such a shared network is the possibility that inhibitory signals are not completely domain specific, but can spill-over to other domains and result in an unintentional increase in inhibitory signals in unrelated domains as well. Berkman et al. provide neurological evidence for inhibition spill-over effects. We aim to provide evidence for inhibition spill-over from a behavioral point of view. We argue that inhibitory signals from one domain can spill-over and result in more impulse inhibition in unrelated domains. One important physiological condition that largely relies on inhibitory signals is bladder control. As the bladder becomes increasingly full, the impulse (immediate voiding) has to be inhibited until an appropriate place and time. This inhibition occurs during most parts of the day, and is relatively automatized since an early age. Griffiths and Tadic (2008) show that the inhibitory signal stems from the Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC), which is also one of the brain areas identified as an important part of the general inhibition network. In the current research, we argue that increased inhibitory signals due to increased bladder control will spill-over to unrelated domains and result in increased impulse control.

In the first study, we manipulate peeing urgency by means of a water drink test approximately one hour upfront. After one hour passed, respondents engaged in an intertemporal choice task (adapted from Li 2008). They were asked to choose eight times between either a smaller but sooner reward, or a later but larger reward. Foregoing a smaller but more immediate reward in order to obtain a later, but larger reward requires impulse control. Manipulation checks showed significant differences in reported peeing urgency. In line with our expectations, respondents more often chose for the later larger reward when they had to pee more urgently.

In the second study, we show that sensitivity of the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) moderates this effect. BIS is known to be involved in response inhibition and punishment avoidance (e.g., Carver and White 1994). In line with our expectations, peeing urgency had a stronger effect on intertemporal patience for people with a relatively sensitive BIS compared to people with a relatively insensitive BIS.

In study 3, we examined whether the inhibition system can also be triggered by exogenous cues. We primed half of the respondents with the concept of peeing, which we expected to induce an increase in peeing urgency. In line with this reasoning, we found that the peeing prime induced an increase in reported peeing urgency, which subsequently significantly influenced intertemporal patience. Mediation analysis was significant.

Finally, in study 4 we show that increased peeing urgency also impacts performance on a task that strongly relies on inhibition, namely switching abilities in a stroop task (Stroop 1935). When people had to pee relatively more urgently, they could more easily switch between two tasks (word naming versus color naming), indicating that they were relatively better in inhibiting the previously learned behavior (which interferes with the currently required behavior after switching between two tasks).

The results of these four studies provide support for inhibition spill-over effects. With this research, we contribute to recent neurological research suggesting that people possess a general inhibition system (Berkman et al. 2009), by providing behavioral data that suggests in the same direction. This suggests that inhibition spill-over effects are not only of neurological nature, but also show itself in human behavior. Furthermore, this research contributes to the current knowledge about impulse control. We show that increased impulse control can be the unintentional side-effect of increased inhibition in an unrelated domain (e.g., bladder control). We provide evidence for inhibition spill-over effects on an intertemporal choice task which is quite deliberative in nature, but also on a task relying more on automatic responses, namely response times on a stroop task. This suggests that inhibition spill-over is a relatively automatic process. The current research suggests that impulse control does not necessarily rely on an energy consuming resource that can become depleted after previous acts of self-control, but can also be a by-product of inhibitory signals in a completely unrelated domain.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Apparel is one of the big success stories of online retailing, with double digit sales growth in recent years (Mui 2007). As competition has intensified, online retailers have begun to rely on product visualization tools, such as virtual models. While product visualization tools have been shown to enhance the retail experience (Daugherty, Li, and Biocca 2008; Kim and Forsythe 2008), most research ignores the potential for individual differences to influence their effectiveness. In high body-involvement categories, such as apparel, the effectiveness of product visualization may depend on consumers’ perceptions and beliefs about their physical body in ways that potentially limit its accuracy and effectiveness.

To explore the influence of body beliefs, we surveyed women consumers to examine how two different body belief systems affect their perception of virtual model accuracy and willingness to use them. We focus on how two distinct types of body beliefs—body image discrepancy (Cash 1994; Cash and Szymanski 1995) and body boundary aberration (Fisher 1986)—a cognitive evaluation of how well the appearance of various aspects of our body (e.g., hair, muscle tone, body proportions, and weight) aligns with our ideals for those body parts (Cash 1994; Cash and Szymanski 1995). To assess the body boundary, the respondents were shown a virtual model based on their body dimensions. After viewing the model, respondents assessed the quality (3 items α=.93) and accuracy (2 items r=.88) of the model, and their interest in using such a model in the future (2 items r=.91). Finally, they responded to BID and BBA items.

Body image discrepancy (BID) was assessed using the scale developed by Cash and Szymanski (Cash and Szymanski 1995); respondents rate how well they match their ideals on eleven physical characteristics and indicate the importance of each aspect. The 11 items form a single factor (α=.81) with higher score indicating higher BID.

Body boundary aberration was assessed using a scale developed by Chapman et al. (Chapman, Chapman, and Raulin 1978), subjects responded to 49 statements with 10 BBA items interspersed. The 10 items form a single factor (α=.87), with higher scores signifying higher BBA. The BBA scores are widely distributed; 1-1.99 (highest BBA) = 4%, 2-2.99 =14%, 3-3.99 =45%, 4-5 (lowest BBA) = 37%. As expected, the two body beliefs are not highly correlated (r = .11).

The structural equation model shows an acceptable level of fit (SRMR of .05, TLI of 0.95, NFI of 0.94, and RMSEA of 0.04) with all of the hypothesized relationships as expected and statistically significant. Virtual model accuracy (γ = .315, p < .00) has a positive influence on consumer intentions to use virtual models. Body Boundary Aberration has a positive influence on virtual model accuracy (γ = .117, p < .00), consistent with the idea that consumers high in BBA consider renditions that highlight the body’s edges more accurate. In contrast, Body Image Discrepancy (γ = -.120, p = .00) has a negative influence on assessed virtual model accuracy, suggesting that consumer whose body image differs substantially from their held ideals are less likely to consider virtual models accurate. As expected, quality perceptions have a positive influence on assessed virtual model accuracy (γ = .507, p = .00) and intentions to use models (γ = .486, p = .00). The SEM results affirm our expectations that body beliefs influence consumer assessments of the accuracy of virtual models even after accounting for quality perceptions.

Additional SEM analyses show that the effects of body beliefs on model usage intentions are fully mediated by their influence on perceived accuracy. All alternative models lead to substantial reductions in model fit, supporting that the influence of body beliefs on intentions to use virtual model is mediated by perceived accuracy.

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Satisfaction in the Context of Customer Co-Production:  
A Behavioral Involvement Perspective  
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT  
Customer satisfaction has a decades-long history of research in marketing. Scholarly interest has been sustained by evidence that satisfaction leads to loyalty (Suh and Yi 2006), efficiency of promotional programs (Luo and Homburg 2008), and financial performance (Anderson, Fornell, and Mazvancheryl 2004; Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson, and Krishnan 2006).  

Against this backdrop of the established importance of satisfaction, marketing appears to be undergoing a paradigm shift from goods dominant logic to services-dominant logic (S-D Logic: Vargo and Lusch 2008; Vargo and Lusch 2004). That is, marketing scholars and practitioners have shifted their focus from tangible resources, to intangible resources, to the co-creation of value, and relationships (Vargo and Lusch 2004). A cornerstone of S-D Logic is the assumption that consumers are integrated in value creation from the initial stages of design through the entire usage life of a product (Lusch, Vargo, and O’Brien 2007).  

This development represents a dramatic shift in researchers’ interest in consumer behaviors that occur after a market transaction to consumer behaviors that are wholly integrated throughout production and consumption. This wholly integrated role of consumers likely is not devoid of implications for consumers’ evaluations of their experiences with goods. The influence of behaviors on a broad range of experiences is well established (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). However, despite evidence that behaviors influence attitudes and despite the increasing emphasis on customer value creation, research has not addressed the degree to which behavioral engagement in value creation activities relates to customer satisfaction.  

The present study aims to address this gap by examining the extent to which behavioral commitment to value creation is associated with satisfaction with the product. Our study differs from past studies in that we examine how behavioral variables, as opposed to attitudinal variables, relate to customer satisfaction outcomes. Satisfaction studies grounded in an attitudinal perspective are limited in the degree to which they can explain how the behavioral demands of customer value creation relate to satisfaction.  

The produce product category reflects a market landscape where some consumers are presented with choices between traditional market channels or less traditional channels that require greater customer co-production. Understanding why consumers pursue and remain within alternative market channels has obvious implications for marketing practice. However, a conceptual framework for understanding these consumer decisions is a necessary prerequisite for developing generalizable practices. We argue here that dissonance theory is an apt framework for examining the co-production effects that occur in non-traditional market channels.  

The purpose of this paper is to add to the current research on consumer satisfaction by 1) using CSAs as a context to test Vargo and Lusch’s (2004) service dominant logic, 2) offering an initial conceptual frame for understanding consumer satisfaction in this CSA context; 3) developing a framework for further research and practical steps for increasing the market for alternative food channels such as CSAs.  

In order to test our theoretical framework, data were collected in three urban areas using a stratified random sample design. Respondents were randomly recruited from zip codes found to have a high concentration of CSA locations. One-hundred ninety-eight individuals, serving on a panel at a large marketing research firm, completed an online survey. Results showed several significant differences between CSA and non-CSA members. First, CSA users were found to have greater levels of satisfaction with their vegetables than traditional grocery shoppers. Second, CSA members reported more behavioral involvement in food-related activities than traditional supermarket shoppers. Third, the relationship between CSA membership and product satisfaction was found to be mediated by behavioral involvement in food-related activities. Finally, this mediated effect is more robust with time. In other words, continued behavioral involvement increases the likelihood of continued CSA membership and increases in product satisfaction.  

Our findings suggest that the relationship between greater customer co-production and greater satisfaction can be explained by a dissonance-reduction framework. The effort demanded from co-production produces dissonance that is reduced by strong feelings of satisfaction with the product. These findings are consistent with the inherent value from co-production suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004). Lusch, Vargo, and O’Brien (2007) argue that consumers add value to product experiences through both pre-purchase co-production and post-purchase consumption activities. That is, consumers collectively create value through both co-production and value-in-use activities (Merz, He, and Vargo 2009). By demonstrating significant relationships between satisfaction and both commitment to co-production and behavioral involvement in the produce category, our study provides empirical support for both types of value-adding activities proposed by service-dominant logic theorists.  

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The Impact of Emotions on Customers’ Perception of Website Atmospheric Cues: An Empirical Cross-Cultural Investigation

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Eroglu, Machleit and David (2001) categorized the environmental cues into two groups: high- and low-task relevant cues. They defined high-task relevant cues as all the site descriptors on the screen which facilitate the consumer’s shopping goal attainment and low-task relevant cues as the ones that are “relatively inconsequential to the completion of the shopping task” (p. 180).

Previous research has studied the importance of site atmospheric cues such as site informativeness and entertainment (e.g., Davis, Wang, Lingridge, 2008; Hausman and Siekpe, 2009; Richard, 2005). It has been suggested that these site atmospheric cues influence customers variables such as website attitudes, involvement, flow, and purchase intentions (Hausman and Siekpe, 2009; Richard and Chandra, 2005). Surprisingly, the impact of emotions is often ignored in customers’ evaluation of site atmospheric cues. The purpose of this research is twofold: First, consistent with Zajonc’s (1980) theory of emotions we propose that the customers’ emotions arise upon the initial Internet experience, which influence other affective and cognitive variables. As a result, we investigated the impacts of emotions on customers’ perception of site high-task and low-task relevant atmospheric cues. Then, following the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1972) and previous literature, we hypothesize the impacts of customers’ perception of site atmospheric cues on other consumer variables such as site attitudes and site involvement, and purchase intention.

Second, the attempt was made to compare the proposed model between two cultures: Chinese and Canadian. Given the wide reach of Internet and the fact that culture does impact the customers’ responses to store atmospherics (Davice, Wang, and Lingridge, 2008); it is crucial to explore the role of culture in customers’ reactions to the online store atmospherics. Based on Hofstede’s (1991) cultural value dimensions, we hypothesized that the impact of high- and low-task relevant cues on customer variables vary across the two cultures.

For testing the hypotheses, 8 service industries were chosen: hotels, online bookstores, dental services, banks, vacation destination, restaurants, financial investments and plastic surgery. We selected four websites four dental services, two sites for online bookstores, four sites for restaurants, two sites for financial investments, four sites for hotels, four sites for plastic surgery, and three sites for vacation destinations and two sites for banks. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of the twenty-five websites. They were exposed to a real website of a service company and were asked to surf the site and collect information.

Data were collected online using a computer lab in a large Northeastern university. After elimination, the data consist of 234 Chinese (54% female and 46% male) and 350 Canadian (58% female and 42% male). The majority of the respondents were undergraduate students (98.3% of Chinese and 98.9% of Canadian) between the age of 18 to 24 (75% of Chinese and 80% of Canadian).

The results of multi-group analyses in EQS strongly supported the overall model. Emotions strongly impacted the customers’ perception of high- and low-task relevant cues in both cultures. Customers’ perceptions of site atmospheric cues influenced customers’ attitudes toward the site and site involvement; which in turn impacted purchase intentions. Moreover, the result suggested that the impacts of low-task relevant cues on site attitudes and site involvement are stronger for Chinese customers compared to their Canadian counterparts. On the other hand, customers’ perceptions of high-task relevant cues on site attitudes and involvement was found to be stronger for Canadian customers compared to their Chinese counterparts.

REFERENCES


A Meta-analysis on the Effectiveness of Publicity versus Advertising

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study tries to provide an answer to the question whether and when publicity (versus advertising) is more or less effective. For this purpose, we investigate the trade-off between enhanced credibility effects (due to third-party endorsement) and negative effects of recipients’ exposure to negative information (due to lack of control over media content by the advertiser) by means of a meta-analysis.

Three models are applied in the literature to explain the effects of publicity versus advertising. The source credibility model shows that highly credible sources are viewed as more trustworthy and generate more attitude change than low-credibility sources. The information processing model assumes that intentional exposure to news and publicity enhances the number of cognitive responses. Publicity, compared to advertising, also lends greater salience to information. Enhanced information processability can produce positive responses towards the message and the product being evaluated. The information evaluation model assumes that publicity in comparison to advertising will not only lead to enhanced processing, it is also likely that the increase is higher for negative than for positive information. Negative information is also more salient. That leads to more thorough processing of negative information than positive information, which directly impacts object evaluation.

The literature search for the meta-analysis covered the period from 1971 (the publication year of a study that is considered the first empirical study on the topic) up to and including 2009. Only studies that investigated the impact of marketing-oriented publicity versus advertising on recipients concerning the following dependent variables were considered: attitude towards message, attitude towards brand, cognitive responses (total, positive, and negative), message processing, purchase/behavioral intention, source credibility, recall, and recognition. This search resulted in 30 independent samples with 257 effect sizes that could be included in the meta-analysis. The effect size metric selected for the analysis is the correlation coefficient; higher values of the coefficient indicate a stronger effect of marketing-oriented publicity over advertising on outcome variables.

The meta-analytic integration procedures were performed taking a random-effects perspective. The integration of the correlations uses variance weights in order to consider the varying sample sizes of the studies. Furthermore, measurement errors were corrected by considering reliability coefficients of the dependent and independent variables. Weights for multiple measures were considered as well. Study moderator variables are used as predictors in a regression model in order to explain the heterogeneity of the effect sizes of dependent variables that are based on a sample of at least twenty effect sizes. Furthermore, a structural model analysis was performed. The suggested models include seven variables in total. That is, 28 off-diagonal cells have to be filled in order to produce the input of the correlation matrix for structural equation modeling. Hence, in addition to the results of the effect size integration, the studies were searched for further statistical measures reporting the relationship between the dependent variables.

The meta-analytic results show that marketing-oriented publicity (compared to advertising) has a positive effect on all dependent variables. The structural models show an acceptable fit. All coefficients are significant and indicate the assumed direction in the models. That is, marketing-oriented publicity versus advertising enhances source credibility, total, positive, and negative cognitive responses. Both source credibility and total cognitive responses enhance attitude towards message, which enhances attitude towards brand. Positive cognitive responses enhance and negative cognitive responses reduce attitude towards brand. Attitude towards brand enhances purchase/behavioral intention. The total effects show that the source credibility path explains most of the variance in the dependent variables; brand attitudes and purchase/behavioral intentions; the effect is about twice as strong as the effect of the information evaluation model, and about five times as strong as the total effect of the information processing model. The moderator model showed that the effect of publicity versus advertising on positive cognitions and on source credibility decreases significantly for known versus unknown products. If we replace the coefficients in the model with the coefficients for the subgroups of known versus unknown products the results indicate a moderator effect. For unknown products, the total effects become stronger. For known products, however, the total effects become negative with the negativity effect increasing and the source credibility effect even reversing due to a superior effect of advertising over marketing-oriented publicity.

The results of the meta-analysis support the effect of publicity over advertising that is due to a source credibility effect, an information processing effect, and an information evaluation effect. While the last effect is an overall negative effect, both other paths show a positive effect, with the source credibility effect being about twice as strong as the negative effect due to evaluation of negative information. The results show that the trade-off between credibility and control is in favor of the credibility of the source. This effect is moderated by prior product knowledge, though. The described relationship holds and even becomes stronger for unknown products. However, the effect changes for known products where the total effect of the source on dependent variables becomes even negative. These results show that marketing-oriented publicity versus advertising is superior for products where consumers lack prior knowledge. Indeed, most studies that have investigated and supported the positive effects of media coverage refer to product innovations, product pre-announcements, or products with which most consumers are not yet familiar. The meta-analytic results further contribute to the research on the negativity effect as triggered by publicity, because they support this effect but also show that an overall evaluation of publicity effects needs to take different effect paths into account in order to produce an overall effect on consumers. By introducing prior knowledge as an important moderator for the negativity effect, the findings show that the negativity effect can be outweighed by a positive source credibility effect in case consumers do not yet know a product.
Bounded Defensive: Advertising Deception, Deception Knowledge, and Meta-cognitive Expectancies

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Advertisers often emphasize positive product attributes and promise superior value. When consumers’ experience falls short of expectations, the perceived discrepancies are often ascribed to advertising deception (Russo et al. 1981). Using the framework of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright 1994), we propose that consumers’ deception knowledge and meta-cognitive expectancies influence their attitudes toward ads and brands in two ways: while the expected seriousness of the consequences of being misled aggravates the negative effect of deception, the optimistic tendency to trust the claims attenuates this effect.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 employed a 2 (deception knowledge: more salient vs. less salient, between) x 2 (high- vs. low-stake, between) x 2 (high- vs. low-deceptiveness ads, within) mixed design. Participants (N=133) were asked to carefully evaluate six print advertisements (pre-tested) presented on PC screens. For each ad, they were asked to identify the brand name first, and then answered attitudinal questions on 9-point scales. Deception knowledge salience was manipulated by the priming instructions at the beginning of the questionnaire. The one-page instructions described the nature of deception knowledge, common deceptive tactics, and cues to detect advertising deception. Participants in the control condition were not primed. The seriousness of expected consequences and deceptiveness were manipulated by having the participants view different types of print ads. In the high-stake condition (more serious consequences), the participants rated six ads: three were high in deceptiveness and three were low in deceptiveness (within-group). This was repeated in the low-stake condition (less serious consequences).

Participants in the primed condition (M=5.17) rated the ads as more deceptive than those in the unprimed condition (M=4.61), F(1, 130)=4.23, p=.032. The interaction between manipulated deceptiveness and deception knowledge salience was not significant, F(1, 130)=.38, p=.35. But the deceptiveness had a significant negative impact on attitude toward the ads: the attitude (M=3.35) was more negative toward high-deceptiveness ads than low-deceptiveness ads (M=4.62), F(1, 128)=75.22, p<.001. The interaction between deceptiveness and high- vs. low-stake situation was significant: the negative attitude (M=2.84) was significantly stronger toward the deceptive than non-deceptive ads (M=4.83) in the high-stake condition, F(1, 130)=38.93, p<.001. In the low-stake condition, however, attitude toward deceptive ads (M=4.60) was not significantly different from non-deceptive ads (M=4.64), F(1, 130)=.02, p=.89.

Experiment 2

The purpose of Experiment 2 (N=176) is to examine the effect of optimistic expectancy and need for cognition in relation to the outcome expectancy of deception. We followed the same procedure as that in Experiment 1. In addition, the optimistic expectancy scale was asked for each advertisement, and participants also completed the Need for Cognition (NFC) scale (Cacioppo et al. 1984) at the end. Structural equation modeling was used to test mediation/moderation effects following the methods suggested by Judd et al. (2001). In the best-fit model, the expected seriousness of consequences moderated the effect of advertising deceptiveness on attitude toward ads. The moderation effects of all other exogenous variables were not significant at p < .05. In comparison, the attitude differences toward brands differed significantly across the average, the difference of optimistic expectancy in high- and low-deceptiveness ads conditions, as well as the individual difference in NFC. The proposed moderation effect was found in the attitude towards the brands, but not in the attitude toward advertisements.

The results suggest that optimistic expectancy can function as both a moderator and mediator of the attitude difference toward brands between high- and low-deceptiveness ads. The advertised claims (deceptive or not) may have caused more optimistic expectancy, which in turn, leads to less negative attitude toward the advertised brands.

Discussion

In two experiments, we demonstrate that consumer deception knowledge and expectancies may not only undermine advertising effectiveness as widely acknowledged, but also regulate the effect of deceptiveness in favor of the advertised brands. The salience of deception tactics schema can significantly increase the perceived deceptiveness of ads but the salience does not necessarily lead to more negative attitude toward the ads. More interestingly, the optimistic expectancy can be both a moderator and mediator for the negative effect of advertising deception on attitude toward the brands. A possible explanation is that the optimistic expectancy serves two functions. The mediation effect occurs because expectancy is a significant motivating factor in favor of the brands (but not the ads). In comparison, the moderation effect occurs as a result of individual difference in the extent to which consumers would like to think positively about the brands. Even when the advertised claims are perceived more deceptive, those with more optimistic expectancy would have less negative attitude toward the brands.

REFERENCES

Match-Up Effects Happen for a Reason: The Impact of Activating Persuasion Knowledge on Endorser Effectiveness
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
An experiment was set up to clarify the when and why of endorser effectiveness. We found that match-up effects are more likely in case of high than low activation of persuasion knowledge (advertising vs. product placement) due to differences in perceptions of fit. The depth of processing did not contribute...

The use of endorsers is a common ad tactic. Research on endorser effectiveness has put forward the match-up hypothesis which states that the message conveyed by the image of the endorser and of the product should converge (Kahle and Homer 1985). However, the results of empirical studies testing this hypothesis are inconclusive. Therefore, researchers started to investigate moderators.

For example, Kang and Herr (2006) recently showed that the depth of processing and/or the sensitivity to source biases moderate the impact of endorsers on persuasion. More specifically, in case of heuristic processing and/or in case of low sensitivity to source biases, endorsers merely serve as cues, whereas in case of depth processing and/or in case of high sensitivity to source biases, the link between the source and the product becomes important and match-up effects on persuasion arise.

Although prior studies already tested moderators related to the depth and the type of processing, they did not examine the relative weight of each antecedent in the formation of match-up effects yet. The contribution the current research would like to make is to integrate the different prior perspectives and further clarify the conditions in which match-up effects can be expected and why in particular.

Therefore, we turn to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) of Friestad and Wright (1994). Research built on the PKM shows that the depth of processing only explains skeptical responses to persuasion to the extent that it also leads to a more intense activation of PK (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Based hereupon, we predict that the activation of PK, rather than the mere depth of processing, drives the perception of the level of product-endorser fit, and as such, determines the persuasiveness of product-endorser combinations used in marketing campaigns.

Additionally, we also look into the role of specific perceptions of tactic appropriateness next to the more general perceptions of persuasive intent (i.e., activation of PK), as the results of Kang and Herr (2006) also indicate that a product-endorser match generally leads to highly favorable attitudes, even after an endorser bias is primed. This is counter-intuitive given the assumption that the activation of PK leads to resistance to persuasion and thus, to unfavorable responses (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). However, concerning the latter, Wei, Fischer, and Main (2008) showed that the activation of PK only had a strong negative impact on evaluations when respondents perceived the stimulus to be inappropriate. So, perceptions of tactic appropriateness also seem to determine consumer responses to persuasion attempts.

Therefore, we set up an experiment with a 2 (level of product-endorser fit: non-fit vs. fit) x 2 (level of PK activation: high vs. low) x 2 (depth of processing: high vs. low) within-between-subjects design in the context of promoting foods as healthy by means of healthy-looking endorsers. We also measured perceived product-endorser fit and perceived appropriateness of the persuasion attempt to test whether they mediate match-up effects on persuasion.

To investigate the impact of depth of processing, we implemented a distraction task (Williams, Fitzsimons, and Block 2004). To manipulate the level of PK activation, we used TV ads versus product placements (Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006). Within these formats, real-life stimuli showing either congruent (i.e., healthy model and healthy food) or incongruent product-endorser (i.e., healthy model and unhealthy food) combinations were sought. To prevent confounds, we set out standards for content and execution style and selected several (i.e., four) stimuli per condition (Jackson, O’ Keeffe, and Jacobs 1988). An online pretest with our target group (i.e., female respondents between 18 and 26 years old) showed that the selected stimuli contained the intended level of product-endorser fit.

In the main experiment, run in a lab, 252 young females participated. In two seemingly independent studies, we first randomly exposed them to one of the 16 stimuli, whether or not accompanied by the distraction task, and then asked stimulus related questions (attitudes and attention). A second study with filler and target questions concerning product considerations and purchase intentions followed. Finally, we incorporated questions about mediators, manipulation checks and covariates.

As predicted, we found that in a clear persuasive context, the difference between a product-endorser fit and a non-fit was clearly perceived, which led to a significantly more favorable attitude towards the congruent versus the incongruent stimulus and towards the accompanying endorser. Moreover, the congruent combinations were perceived to be more appropriate than the incongruent ones, also partially explaining the match-up effects. In a context in which the persuasive intent was less obvious, there was no significant difference in perception of product-endorser fit. As a result, no match-up effects were found.

As such, we demonstrated the usefulness of the PKM for the endorsement domain (Friestad and Wright 1994). Based on this model, we were able to clarify the type of processing that leads to the perception of a match versus a mismatch between products and endorsers, and as such, extend prior research (Kang and Herr 2006). Further research could study whether the perception of product-endorser fit and the perceived appropriateness of a product-endorser combination are independent concepts and examine their relative contribution.

Despite the contributions of this study, we did not find the same results on product related responses as on ad related responses. However, prior research has encountered the same issue (Till and Busler 2000). Explanations could be found in the differences between these dependent measures, as, for example, they tend to result from a different type of processing (i.e., rational vs. emotional, conscious vs. unconscious).

The current study also suffers from the limitation that the ads we used are not ads versus product placements to manipulate PK activation. We controlled for several potential confounds (e.g., type of creative strategy: transformational and positive), but from a theoretical point of view, this was not the cleanest manipulation. Further research could, therefore, manipulate PK activation in a more conservative way. However, using several real-life stimuli has the advantage that they enhance the external validity of the results.
REFERENCES
Mere Proactivity Effects of Sales-related Service Offerings: A Field Experiment

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Excellent post-sales services are considered to be an effective strategy for stimulating customer loyalty. However, as relationships evolve, customers’ repurchase intentions become increasingly salient making so-called pre-sales services for existing customers an important feature of relationship marketing. For example, a car dealer might offer the opportunity to test drive a new car in temporal proximity to a prospective repurchase decision (Bhattacharya and Bolton 2000). To the best of our knowledge, pre-sales services have been the subject of scientific inquiry only in the context of customer acquisition but not in the context of relationship marketing. Pre-sales services like product trials can either be provided reactively, i.e. in response to customer requests, or they can be provided proactively, i.e., the firm takes the initiative to contact customers and offer the product trial (Challagalla, Venkatesh, and Kohli 2009). Despite the enormous relevance of pre-sales services in the repurchase phase of a customer’s buying process, it is not clear if suppliers should really offer these services proactively or remain with their traditional reactive strategy. In the present paper, we answer this question for product trials by existing customers.

At first glance, a positive effect of a proactive strategy could be fully attributed to the fact that some customers (so-called “compliers”) are encouraged to test the product, which in turn enhances their loyalty. This argument implies that the effect of proactively offering a product trial on customer loyalty is completely mediated by the customer’s increased probability to experience the product (Jo 2008). However, we propose that this argument neglects that “the mere act of a supplier proactively reaching out to customers” (Challagalla et al. 2009, 73) produces psychological and behavioral effects above and beyond the effects of using the service (product trial). More specifically, we argue that there are two mere proactivity effects: First, a proactive strategy results in a significant proportion of a customer’s buying process, it is not clear if suppliers should really offer these services proactively or remain with their traditional reactive strategy. In the present paper, we answer this question for product trials by existing customers.

At first glance, a positive effect of a proactive strategy could be fully attributed to the fact that some customers (so-called “compliers”) are encouraged to test the product, which in turn enhances their loyalty. This argument implies that the effect of proactively offering a product trial on customer loyalty is completely mediated by the customer’s increased probability to experience the product (Jo 2008). However, we propose that this argument neglects that “the mere act of a supplier proactively reaching out to customers” (Challagalla et al. 2009, 73) produces psychological and behavioral effects above and beyond the effects of using the service (product trial). More specifically, we argue that there are two mere proactivity effects: First, a proactive strategy results in a significant proportion of customers rejecting the offer as they do not have interest in a product trial (so-called “never-takers”). We argue that never-takers, who do not test the product independent of any company activities, are likely to perceive the offer as an intrusive tactic which undermines their loyalty (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan 1999). Second, there are customers trying the product independent of the company’s strategy (“always-takers”). We assume that always-takers, due to their intrinsic interest in the product, are likely to perceive a firm proactively and voluntarily offering product trials as likeable and empathic (Palmatier et al. 2009), which should increase their loyalty.

Our hypotheses are tested by means of a large-scale field experiment with more than 3000 customers of a car manufacturer. The experiment consisted in proactively offering a test drive to a randomized set of customers by means of a personalized invitation by their respective car dealers (proactive condition) and withholding the offer from the remaining customers (reactive condition), i.e. the latter group could conduct a self-initiated test drive under the same conditions. Our analysis combines experimental, psychometric, and behavioral data. We used the principal stratification approach (based on Rubin’s Causal Model) to estimate the effect of proactive strategy on repurchase behavior via relationship satisfaction with the car dealer and brand loyalty for the three latent customer classes or “principal strata”: compliers, always-takers, and never takers (Jo and Muthén 2001; Frangakis and Rubin 2002). The identification of principal stratification models requires the inclusion of covariates predicting class membership (Mecalli and Rubin 2002). In this study, we consider perceived value of test-driving, perceived importance of the brand, age, gender, price of the current car, and number of purchased cars of the brand.

For compliers we find that a proactive product trial strategy initiated by the dealer directly boosts brand loyalty-creating a direct upstream spillover to the aggregated manufacturer level-and indirectly enhances brand loyalty via increasing dealer satisfaction, i.e. creating an indirect upstream spillover. The increased brand loyalty in turn enhances repurchase probability. Therefore, at a first glance, the predominant goal of dealers’ proactive strategies could be to encourage customers to use a service (product trial) that they would otherwise not use. However, this focus neglects the fact that compliers only account for a very small proportion of the customer base and hence exclusively targeting this group hinders the deployment of economies of scale. Moreover, it neglects that—against intuition—significant effects can also occur for customers whose service usage decision is independent from dealers’ actions (always-takers and never-takers).

In support of our hypotheses, we not only find significant proactivity effects for compliers but also for always-takers and never takers, i.e. we find mere proactivity effects. Specifically, we find that for never-takers and always-takers satisfaction with the dealer fully mediates the proactivity-brand loyalty link, i.e. we only observe indirect upstream spillovers. With respect to always-takers, by providing proactive offers the dealer can not only enhance customer evaluations for the own business but indirectly facilitates the generation of favourable manufacturer-related evaluations although the manufacturer does neither provide nor control the proactive offerings. For the never-takers, we find that the frustration following a proactive (i.e. intrusive) action is not only targeted to the dealer but subsequently also to the brand.

It has to be noted that the observed positive dealer- and brand-related effects for the always-takers are exclusively caused by proactively offering a service that is used anyway by the consumer, i.e. it is the incremental effect of mere proactivity beyond and above the effect of using the offered test drive. At the other hand, the negative response of never-takers to a proactive strategy (negative mere proactivity effect) is exclusively caused by the unsolicited offer of a service that they would never use.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

While the notion of possessions as an extension of the self has received extensive research attention (e.g., Belk 1988; Hirschman and Labarbera 1990), most of the literature has focused on possessions as reflecting a holistic self or specific aspects of the self (e.g., uniqueness). However, according to Erikson (1956), conflicts between different aspects of their self-identity are experienced by all individuals throughout their lifetime. Though some argue that possessions play an important role in cases of self-conflict (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981), there have been very few studies on this subject. Taking a qualitative approach, this study seeks to understand the role possessions play in the formation, development, coping and resolution of the conflict between different selves using an extreme example of gender identity conflict—transgenderism.

Since gender is one of the most defining characteristics of the self (Gagne, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997; Rudacille 2006), incongruence between gender identity and one’s genital configuration leads to a gender identity conflict. The establishment of gender identity occurs during early childhood, becomes an internalized aspect of one’s self and is virtually immutable. Transgender people experience a gender identity conflict which compels them to develop an alternative gender identity and enact a gender presentation that does not coincide with their sex (Gagne et al. 1997). In this study, using grounded theory analysis and interpretation of five in-depth, unstructured interviews with male-to-female transgenders, we explore the way transgenders utilize material possessions in negotiating their gender conflict. We assert that insights gathered from these extreme cases of self-conflict can educate us about more common or usual behaviors (Katz 1998).

The formation of an alternative gender identity requires transgenders to cross over either temporarily or permanently from one sex/gender category to another (Gagne et al. 1997; Lev 2004). In Western society, dominated by the binary perceptions of gender, the act of crossing over challenges the cultural and structural social order, exposing the person to social sanctions. Several multiple stage developmental models have been used to describe this process, building on Erikson’s (1956) social development theory.

Our findings are consistent with Gagne et al.’s (1997) integrative model. In its first stage, conflict emergence, our informants experienced transgendered feelings, but have not labeled them as such. This stage occurs during childhood, and our informants reported feeling that something was wrong with them (Bockting and Coleman 2007; Katz 1998). The gendered meaning of possessions (such as clothing and toys) raised their feelings to the level of conscious awareness. Possessions also defined the boundaries of socially accepted behaviors. While using possessions the “wrong way” (e.g., a boy wearing a skirt) resulted in acts of correction or punishment from others in an attempt to address the “problem”, at the same time they allowed the informants to engage in initial cross-gender socialization.

Identity exploration, the second stage, involved an extensive information search in an effort to label the source of the conflict as well as reach out to similar others. Our informants reported building a parallel world that enabled them to practice the performance of their new identity. Possessions (e.g., a secret cosmetics box) helped them segregate their conflicting identities, and thus, minimize and control their conflict.

In the third stage, coming out to one’s self, our informants coped with and internalized the meaning of their new transgender identity (“this is who I am”). Possessions played different roles in the variety of coping strategies utilized (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) such as denial (dressing like their original sex), acceptance (dressing according to their alternative gender identity), and self-control (keeping their alternative gendered possessions private). However, in order to resolve the conflict, transgenders had to accept and build their alternative gender identity and develop its public presentation (“to pass”).

In the fourth stage, coming out to others, the participants disclosed their transgender identity to significant others (spouses, family, friends), and often experienced rejection as a result (Lev 2004). Passing in this stage was not enough for them as they felt the need to present a convincing public image of cross-gender identity. As part of the new self, possessions were presented as embedded in the new gender identity.

Striving to find their “true” identity, most of our informants reached the final stage of conflict resolution. They explored various identities in an attempt to achieve a coherent identity in which transgenderism was only a part. Decisions regarding to what extent to cross over (e.g., have full surgery, just take hormones, etc.) were made in order to finalize their private and public identity. Possessions were no longer perceived as a means to project gender identity but as a means to express a new congruent self-identity.

Our study can be viewed in the context of the overarching theory of the extended self. The findings indicate that a person’s process of dealing with self-conflict is reflected in the use of possessions. As the conflict evolves, the role of possessions changes. They surface the conflict to the level of consciousness, are part of the coping process, and reflect the conflict’s resolution and the eventual formation of a new self-identity. We posit that our findings can be generalized to many other self-conflicts such as those involving athleticism, overt sexiness, and class affiliation, thereby contributing to the literatures on transgenders and the extended self.

REFERENCES

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Muslim women’s clothing is a visible form of public consumption, and has been the subject of much debate within social science literatures. A large body of work has looked at the diverse meanings and connotations of the Muslim veil and the practice of hijab (observing Muslim women’s dress code) in many Muslim countries including Egypt (e.g., El-Guindi, 1999b), Turkey (Sandikci and Ger, 2007; Secor, 2002; Gol, 2002), Mali (Shultz, 2007), Cote D’Ivoire (leBlanc, 2000), Indonesia (Jones 2003), South India (Oseall and Osealla, 2007), and London (Tarlo, 2007b). However, the black abaya within oil-rich Gulf countries is embedded in a different contemporary local context and is increasingly associated with status and wealth (Abaza, 2007). Young Muslim women’s dress in the Gulf States of Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE) is both emotionally and politically charged.

The Gulf States are unique for several reasons: 1) There is a distinct and strong ethos of traditional dress for both men and women, 2) There is an omnipresent awareness of Islam and religious values in shaping identities and informing behavior, 3) There has been a rapid increase in wealth due to petrodollars, and 4) There is a dramatic presence of foreigners from both Western and Non-Western cultures, such only around 17% of Qatar residents are Qataris and 16% of Emirates residents are Emiratis. The latter conditions create a situation unique in the immigration literature in which there is pressure for the locals to acculturate to the immigrant rather than the more normal reverse situation. Locals increasingly fear the dissolution of their ethnic identity and therefore strive to emphasize their authenticity and ethnic affiliation distinction through wearing ethnic dress but also through other consumption styles such as extravagant conspicuous and luxurious consumption that foreigners in general cannot afford. Furthermore, the main acculturative agent in our context is not the dominant host culture as opposed to the minority or immigrant culture, but rather the forces of globalization and more specifically transnational Western consumer culture and its underpinning ideology that fundamentally conflicts with the local religious and patriarchal principles. Hence, new clothing styles and adornment practices are increasingly adopted by young women in the region and reflect the conflicting forces of Western values that emphasize display of women’s beauty and sexuality in the public sphere and traditional values requiring modesty and promoting a virtuous public domain. The abaya itself has been gradually reinvented and has evolved from being a concealing garment that hides women’s sexuality and beauty in public to an embellished fashionable, trendy haute couture garment that enhances beauty and reveals sexuality, all supposedly without undermining the local look. We propose to understand the dynamics underlying conflicting imperatives of modesty and vanity and to probe the ambivalence inherent in such performative constructions of identity and conceptions of the self as well as explore how young women negotiate and reconcile resulting tensions.

In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty four middle class university students in business from Qatar University (12) and American University of Sharjah (12). The informants ranged in age from 17 to 22. In addition to interviews, all researchers used observations of clothing and adornment practices in public places by young women (e.g., university, malls, restaurants) and the female researcher observed clothing and adornment practices in private spaces as well (homes, social gatherings, fashion shows, weddings and other women’s parties). Projective techniques were used and consisted of showing participants a set of stimulus pictures of girls wearing different types of abayas and using adornment practices across the spectrum from vain to modest.

Our findings reveal that young women resolve conflicting tensions between the conflicting imperatives of the transnational consumer ideology and traditional local values through a number of appropriation and adaptation processes. Informants construct idiosyncratic meanings of prevalent religious, cultural and fashion discourses informed by the two conflicting ideologies. They negotiate dominant values in the Western ideology, adopting and adapting some while resisting and rejecting others. They appropriate global fashion trends to create local glamorous fashion trends and symbolically charged clothing practices that give them a sense of uniqueness and superiority over expatriates and foreigners. In effect they out-global the global consumer culture representatives, at least in some respects. Young women also enact Western style identities in uncontrolled spaces and settings such as in women-only gatherings and gender segregated spaces where tensions between the traditional and modern and the modest and vain are alleviated.

While accepting and acknowledging the local value systems, they manipulate and reinterpret some of the meanings to justify their clothing practices and condemn those of others. Regardless of their degree of religiosity, Islam was used by all informants to justify their clothing practices whether vain, modest or somewhere between the two extremes. Informants negotiate their need for beauty display in public within the Islamic discourses of beauty and the legitimacy of good self-presentation and enjoyment of life.

Besides, young women seem to reconcile opposing pressures by injecting Western symbols such as designer names and fashion trends and patterns into traditional garments in order to rejuvenate and bestow modernity on them. This reinvention of tradition gives them a feeling of connection with the youth consumer culture and engagement in the world of fashion while still maintaining connections to local traditions that they are proud of. The purpose of wearing the abaya is also manipulated to be more aligned with Western ideologies and beauty discourses. Ironically, the abaya is interpreted by locals as a camouflage garment that makes them look taller and thinner, hence enhancing their beauty and hiding their body imperfections, tendencies which are in accordance with Western fashion discourses. Playing with meanings and altering the original uses and meanings of the abaya can be interpreted as unintentional resistance (Ger and Belk 1996) of the local hegemony emphasizing social conformity and as an affirmation of young women’s power in managing their appearances and enacting their identities in public. Following Blumer (1969), the abaya fashion seems to help young women mediate cultural contradictions they are subject to in some Arab Gulf countries and to adjust in a disciplined and orderly way to their fast moving society to help cope with the major social changes their countries have been undergoing as a result of globalization.
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Mixed Origins, Diverse Preferences: Consumption Compromises in Contemporary Homes
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research examines everyday food consumption relationships and compromises in contemporary bi-national and mono-national homes. In this study, a bi-national household consists of spouses from differing countries of origin (e.g., China and the U.S.), whereas a mono-national household has partners from the same country of origin. Building on the studies and methodological approaches of Fournier (1998) and Coupland (2005), this study seeks to further our understanding, as researchers and consumers, of the significance of food purchases and food consumption patterns in bi-national homes. To better understand food consumption practices in the home, this research uses a combination of interviews, observation and photographic documentation to take a deeper look at the contents of consumers’ food storage areas. The following research questions are asked: 1) How are consumption compromises manifested in bi-national and mono-national families in the context of everyday food consumption? 2) What symbolic role does food play in the formation and maintenance of the individual and collective identities within the bi-national family unit?

We find that compromise happens not at the individual purchase level as the family decision making literature assumes, but over time and in response to other decisions. When cultures interact within the confines of the family, consumption decisions take on meaning beyond simply what is purchased and why. There is a blending process taking place in bi-national families, as well as an alternative type of juggling–juggling of consumption preferences based on cultural differences. The usual compromises spouses face are amplified when one spouse is an immigrant to the native spouse’s homeland. Household member preferences are seen to be very specific, yet there are a host of constraints to satisfying those preferences, both internal and external to the household. The specificity of the preferences and the impact of the constraints vary depending on the type of household. In bi-national families, there seem to be greater constraints on preferred consumption, but there is also considerable effort expended to mitigate those constraints. The limited accessibility to immigrants’ food choices results in greater shopping effort and stockpiling, with the native spouse also seeking out opportunities for the immigrant spouse to connect to their country of origin through food.

For members of bi-national homes, especially for immigrant household members, preferred food items were more than just sustenance or even desired treats, but links to home, identity and a vital aspect of maintaining access to both cultures within the family unit. Substitutability of preferred products was not a desired option or even a considered option at all. Stockpiling in these homes is based not just on price and bulk (Mela et al. 1998, Wansink and Deshpande 1994), but also on availability of the preferred items for the immigrant spouse. Food consumption is shown to be a manifestation of negotiated influence and compromise between the immigrant and native spouses, with the bi-national family unit providing a unique setting for harmony, resourcefulness, ingenuity and ultimately enhanced food consumption experiences.

Implications are drawn for the family decision making literature and consumer/brand relationships. Conflict and negotiated compromise are seen to be manifested not through major purchase decisions, but through everyday food consumption decisions. The analysis demonstrates that while there are clear similarities between mono-national and bi-national households, there are also key differences in everyday consumption experiences. This research highlights the importance of considering household characteristics and cultural diversity within the home as key factors in better understanding family decision making and consumption.

This study also augments the findings of researchers such as Fournier (1998) and Coupland (2005), by showing that partners who were born and raised in different countries, and even in different regions within the U.S., expend maximum effort to satisfy their specific consumption preferences. Participants expressed aversion to substitution, an aversion often intensified after a less than positive substitution experience. In several cases brand preferences seemed to be strengthened after substitution and then substitution at the same brand or preference level was no longer an option. These findings have implications for brand relationships when there’s limited accessibility and advocate future research on the effect of accessibility and substitution on brand preference and loyalty.

The findings also emphasize the paradox within the home to build the collective unit versus the effort to retain the individual identities of the spouses. Compromise in food consumption choices and offerings is both a means of achieving harmony and a manifestation of respect for what each culture has to offer. The bi-national family is an aggregate entity, but an entity with a role and requirements that transcend those of the family members of which it is composed. Individual preferences are both encouraged and contained, as the bi-national household as a unit accommodates, unifies and eventually develops into a distinct entity that is greater than the sum of its founding partners.

REFERENCES

Globalization Tug-of-War: Consumption as a Site of Conflict
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, consumer researchers have taken timely steps in uncovering the complexities associated with globalization and their findings have delicately supported some of the key debates on the globalization of consumption culture; that is, ‘consumptionscapes’ (Ger and Belk 1996) and the proliferation of identities via the commodification of consumer goods (Friedman 1994). Based on their key contributions, the existing seminal studies could fall within at least three thematic categories: 1) addressing Wilk’s (1995) notion of ‘global structures of common difference’ (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard 2002; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006) 2) addressing Robertson’s (1992) proposed concept of ‘glocalization’ (Kjeldgaard and Ostberg 2007) 3) addressing consumers’ ‘identity salience’ (Kjeldgaard 2009; Sandici and Ger 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Russell and Russell 2006).

These studies have genuinely enriched the consumption culture literature on globalization; yet, they focus mainly on Western or, at least, secular contexts in which consumers are viewed as emancipated individuals whose ‘liberatory consumption’ choices (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) provide them with a broad array of opportunities to exploit a choice of lifestyles. None of these studies has investigated consumers’ interactions with globalization in a non-secular society, widely disciplined according to a set of non-secular socio-cultural and political ideologies. Moreover, these investigations have generally examined the contents and consequences of globalization. That is, they have analyzed either the ways by which consumers use the global contents (market resources) to create meanings (i.e., identities) or the ways these people react to the manifestations of globalization (e.g., brandscapes and global styles). Therefore, the processes in which ‘tensions between local and global meanings systems and institutions’ (Armould and Thompson 2007, 12) occur have been considerably overlooked in consumer research. It is these traits that underpin our study as we analyze the mechanisms of the global-local interactions.

We present an analysis of ‘cultural globalization’ (Appadurai 1990; Ger and Belk 1996) in order to examine consumption practices and lifestyle choices of young adult individuals in Iran, a society in which globalization is highly contested and problematic. In so doing, we analyze the processes in which the consolidating forces of the local socio-cultural and political context clash with the dynamics of cultural globalization and tackle individuals’ ‘self-actualization’ projects (Giddens 1991). Iran offers an interesting context to study the local and global institutions, but between the local and local policies. Therefore, the real clash happens to be not merely between the local and global socio-cultural conflict; one in which consumers’ very personal life choices are determined with history and tradition), they are strongly related to the grand narratives of the state that forces them to believe that their culture is superior to ‘other cultures’. This mentality with the solid teachings of Islam explicitly stated in the Holy Koran.

Based on our findings, we propose our conceptual models as useful tools to systematically investigate consumers’ multiple interactions with global and local dynamics in other societies as well.
NEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE OTHER: INDIVIDUATION AND ASSOCIATION THROUGH SOCIALLY-VISIBLE BRAND USE

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent research in consumer culture theory has focused on the role of the brand as an instrument in the interpretation of social interactions. In this paper, we expand this stream of research by examining how consumers use socially-visible brands to create and communicate their identity. Here we define a socially-visible brand as a brand located on or near an individual’s body that is visible to another individual in the public atmosphere. Socially-visible brand use is centered on the everyday and even mundane brands all consumers use during their daily routines. It is argued that socially-visible brands are a strategic tool consumers can use for impression management. Socially-visible brands offer identity cues to others about one’s self-concept, but they also assist in the bonding relationships one has with others. Overall, socially-visible brands serve in the identity negotiation process between an individual and society.

We briefly explain how three social psychology theories, namely social identity theory, self-verification theory, and impression management theory, juxtapose with consumer culture theory in general and self-extension theory in particular. The goal is to impart a framework for understanding the interaction of people, their possessions, and society. Every individual faces the conflicting task of connecting with other individuals in pro-social interactions (i.e., association), while at the same time maintaining a comfortable boundary so the individual self remains intact (i.e., individuation). The individuation side of this self-other boundary negotiation has been discussed in previous consumer research literature topics such as a “consumer’s need for uniqueness,” “counter-conformity” (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001), and “identity signaling” (Berger and Heath 2007). The association side of this self-other boundary negotiation has also been discussed in several ways, but can best be described as communal consumption. This can occur at the dyadic level (Argo and Main 2008; Ramanathan and McGill 2007; Tanner, Ferraro, Charttrand, Bettman, and Van Baaren 2008) and at the reference group level (Epp and Price 2008; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Luna, Ringberg, and Peracchio 2008; White and Dahl 2007).

Social identity theory argues that one’s personal identity (the individual self) and one’s social identities (the collective selves) combine to form one’s total identity (Hogg 2003). Through the process of identity negotiation, people maintain social group membership and distinctiveness. Swann (1987) argued that people engage in identity negotiations in order to obtain “existential security” (p. 1039). Individual self-concepts are the lens people use to understand their world and their place in the world. They desire stable self-concepts, and engage in activities that will provide them with feedback from others confirming their self-concept. He called this process “self-verification.” One technique utilized by individuals during times of incongruence is impression management (Goffman 1959). During this process, individuals attempt to exert control over the perceptions others may have of them. Using a theatrical metaphor, Goffman explained how people put on shows for one another by managing their impression through the use of social cues.

Self-extension theory describes the items used during impression management, which can include setting, clothing, appearance, words, and nonverbal actions. In terms of mass communication, self-extension theory looks at how consumers use the possession of specific brands in order to express their identity (Belk 1988). The symbolic meanings attached to brands are cultural markers. Therefore, if one is able to possess that brand, one can indirectly possess that cultural meaning. Therefore, during impression management, socially-visible brands are a tool utilized to create one’s identity for the self and to communicate one’s identity to others.

Forty-one informal face-to-face interviews were conducted with graduate and undergraduate students at a university in the southwestern U.S. Most of the interviews lasted about 30 minutes. The structure for the interview protocol consisted of asking respondents about the individual and social aspects of their identity, top-of-mind brand awareness, the specific brands they own for socially-visible items such as clothes, shoes, sunglasses, etc., and the socially-visible brands the respondent was currently wearing.

From these interviews, a Boundary Negotiation Framework is presented that can be used as a guide to gain a better understanding of how individuals use socially-visible brands in order to develop their self-concept and various levels of social identity. The results show how people use socially-visible brands in order to associate with other individuals, reference groups, and society as a whole during interpersonal interactions. Using this Boundary Negotiation Framework, individuation and associations interactions can be analyzed at the dyadic, reference group, and societal level. This Boundary Negotiation Framework can be utilized in the future to analyze post-purchase behavior of consumers with their socially-visible brands. In addition, advertisers can use this framework while crafting their branding and communication strategies.

REFERENCES


Copycats as Uncertainty Reducing Devices
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Purchase decisions are often made under conditions of varying uncertainty regarding product quality. When the context induces such uncertainty, consumers tend to seek additional information to reduce these feelings. Copycat brands may benefit under these circumstances.

Copycats imitate the trade-dress of a leading brand in order to leverage the positive associations that the latter has in the mind of the consumer (Loken, Ross, and Hinkle 1986; Zaichkowsky 2006). Research has demonstrated that consumers generally dislike blatant copycats, especially when these are blatant and awareness of the imitation strategy is high (Van Horen, Pieters and Stapel 2009; Warlop and Alba 2004, study 4). Surprisingly little is however known about the circumstances under which consumers actually like blatant copycats even when fully aware that the copycat is imitating. The extant research has focused on how package similarity influences copycat evaluation and purchase, but has not yet tested the potential influence of contextual factors on evaluation and choice of copycats.

In the current research, we posit and show that copycat evaluation is critically dependent on contextually induced uncertainty.

Consumers are often faced with uncertainty about product quality when choosing between competing brands. Uncertainty refers to situations in which consumers do not know which choice to make (Lipsitz and Strauss 1997, Muthukrishnan and Kardes 2001). When feeling uncertain, consumers are likely to search for signals to assess quality in order to reduce these feelings of uncertainty. Information about the price, packaging, and brand image can then serve as such signals (Dawar & Parker, 1994; Kirmani & Rao, 2000). As copycats imitate the trade-dress of leading national brands and packaging is an important component of stored product knowledge, imitation can activate knowledge associated with the leader brand and serve as a signal. Thus, when consumers are uncertain about the quality of products and are looking for familiar cues to guide them in decision-making, copycats may be able to profit most. However, when consumers feel certain about the quality of products and do not need to rely on familiar cues, copycats may be interpreted negatively. When consumers are aware that a copycatting strategy is being used, similarity may be perceived as a intentional ploy to mislead consumers about product quality (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Warlop and Alba 2004).

Three studies demonstrate that consumers systematically prefer copycats to visually differentiated products when the situation induces feelings of uncertainty about the quality of products, whereas the reverse is true when the situation induces feelings of certainty. In addition, we show that the positive evaluation of copycats in uncertainty inducing situations is due to consumers’ reliance on familiar cues that signal quality. Two situations are explored that are likely to induce different levels of uncertainty. The first, more explicit, situation is when people are abroad as compared to being at home. When consumers are visiting another country and are unacquainted with the available brands, they are likely to feel uncertain about product quality. A second, more subtle situation is store-type. As compared to high-end stores, the quality of products at discounters is more variable and perhaps lower, which should activate consumers’ feelings of uncertainty.

Study 1 tested the influence of being abroad or at home on copycat evaluation and choice. Participants were either instructed to imagine being in Being, China, or in their home country, looking for a coffee shop. Next, they evaluated a copycat logo, which was a clear imitation of the “Starbucks” logo and a visually differentiated logo that did not share any similarities with the Starbucks logo. Further, they were asked to indicate whether their evaluation of the coffee shops was guided by familiar cues. In support of the hypothesis, copycat evaluation was dependent on country-induced uncertainty: when people imagined to be in a foreign country, the copycat was evaluated more positively and chosen more often than the visually differentiated product, whereas the opposite pattern emerged when people imagined to be in their home country. These results were mediated by reliance on familiar cues and were not due to source confusion. Study 2 tested whether the same effects appeared when uncertainty was manipulated through store-type. Half of the participants were asked to imagine doing shopping in a typical discount store, whereas the other half in a typical high-end store. Then, they were asked to evaluate a copycat chocolate bar (“Milka” look-alike) as compared to a visually differentiated brand. The results reveal that—compared to a visually differentiated product—a copycat was evaluated more positively in a discounter, than in a high-end store. These effects were shown not to be due to source confusion. In study 3 uncertainty was directly manipulated, instead of indirectly through specific situations, to provide further support for the idea that uncertainty is the key factor. Two packages (a copycat and a visually differentiated product) were created within the product category “Energy drinks”. In the uncertainty (certainty) condition participants were asked to imagine doing shopping in an unknown (well known) supermarket, in which they were uncertain (certain) about the quality of the products. Again, participants were asked to evaluate both energy drinks and to make a choice. As predicted the copycat energy drink was evaluated more positively and chosen more often when uncertainty was induced than when certainty was induced. These results provide direct support for the underlying “uncertainty reduction” mechanism.

These results contribute to the literature on trademark infringement in several ways. First, the present research is, to our knowledge, the first to demonstrate that, besides package similarities, the specific shopping situation critically determines copycat evaluation and choice. This underlines the importance of moving beyond the similarities between copycat and leader brand in package design to understand copycat effects. Furthermore, it shows that even when fully aware and thus “not tricked”, consumers may still prefer and choose copycats to reduce feelings of uncertainty. Hence, whereas consumers generally prefer differentiated brands to copycats, the reverse holds under conditions of uncertainty.

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Reputable Brand Names can Improve Product Efficacy
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Common sense suggests that the efficacy of products should be a function of how they are designed and produced. Brand names, on the other hand, can presumably only influence expectations and subjective assessments of efficacy. However, we illustrate that the brand name that products carry can also influence rather than merely reflect objective efficacy. We thereby extend Shiv, Carmon, and Ariely’s (2005) pioneering work on placebo effects of marketing actions, to a different type of marketing action (branding), study it with several new types of tasks, less likely to be influenced by voluntary control. In particular, across four experiments, each conducted in carefully controlled conditions, we show that attaching a prestigious brand name to a product can boost the performance of those who consume the product.

In experiment 1, participants repeatedly held the same titanium framed eyeglasses bearing either a prestigious or the less prestigious brand name in one hand, then held one of several paperweights each weighing slightly less or slightly more than the eyeglasses with no cue to its weight in the other hand, then judged which was heavier—the eyeglasses or the paperweight. Several aspects of the experimental design made it difficult to be insincere, thus reducing the likelihood of demand effects. As predicted, results showed that participants underestimated the true weight of the frame bearing the prestigious brand name more frequently and overestimated its weight less frequently, suggesting that the glasses seemed lighter when they bore the more prestigious brand.

In experiment 2, all participants first drank a cup of the same chamomile tea that was described as soothing to body and mind, which carried either a prestigious brand name or a less prestigious one. After a few minutes they were asked to complete as many puzzles as they could during a limited timeframe. As predicted, results showed that participants whose tea bore the more prestigious brand name gave more correct answers and fewer incorrect answers than those whose tea bore the less prestigious brand name.

In experiment 3, all participants faced a glaring light and were asked to read printed words as accurately and as quickly as they could, receiving compensation proportional to their performance. As predicted, those wearing sunglasses bearing a reputable brand name were able to read more quickly and with fewer errors than those wearing sunglasses bearing a less reputable brand name but were otherwise identical. Note that there are two ways that a participant who believes he or she is wearing quality sunglasses might perform better, to fulfill the expectation caused by the prestigious brand name. One is to try harder. That could account for the smaller number of errors, but not for the faster rate. Since both were recorded, willful effort seems to be ruled out. The other is to contract the pupil more, thus cutting out more glare. But our experimenters were instructed to make sure that participants did not do this. More importantly, inasmuch as the pupil is under voluntary control, it seems that putting one’s faith in one’s sunglasses would lead to the opposite inclination: One need not contract one’s pupil as much when one has effective sunglasses as when one does not. Whatever happens in this task, then, is not trivial.

In experiment 4, all participants wore the same pair of earmuffs said to reduce noise while assisting in hearing conversations, bearing either the prestigious brand name or a less prestigious one. They listened to a recording of an announcer reading a list of 62 unrelated words, read on the background of a very loud and noisy construction site and were asked to identify the words as they heard them. As predicted, participants whose earmuffs bore the more prestigious brand name identified more words correctly and fewer words incorrectly than those whose earmuffs carried the less prestigious brand name. Note that in this task it is not clear what a motivated participant could do in order to improve performance over a less motivated participant.

Altogether, this paper illustrates that in addition to coloring preferences and expectations the commercial reputation that is embodied in brand names can also influence objective efficacy in a manner that is difficult to attribute to volitional effort. The results can have significant managerial and public policy implications. As one example, firms may be able to boost the efficacy of their products by attaching more reputable names to them. Analogously, the findings suggest that generic medications may in fact not be as effective as branded ones, putting into question the common practice of substituting one for the other.
Guilt Appeals in Green Advertising: Influences of Issue Proximity and Environmental Involvement
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
With increasing public concern about the environment and corporate social responsibility on environmental sustainable development, the 1990s was declared the decade of environmentalism (Drumwright, 1994; Kangun, Carlson, and Grove, 1991). Consequently, recent studies have begun to examine potential factors that might affect the effectiveness of green marketing campaigns and how consumers respond to green marketing initiatives (e.g., Chan, 2000; Obermiller, 1995; Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). One influential variable that has been identified to determine the success of green marketing is its advertising (e.g., Karna et al., 2001). Emotional appeals are widely used to “cut through the clutter” and arouse persuasive communication. Among them, guilt appeals are identified as popular, especially in the contexts related to public service announcement.

This article contributes to this evolving stream of research by applying guilt appeals in green marketing campaigns to demonstrate that guilt appeals are not equally persuasive in all conditions, and can be influenced by the impacts of issue proximity and environmental involvement. A fictitious product, leftover-grounds printer, was developed as the test product. An experiment with 2 (advertising appeal: guilt appeal vs. positive appeal) X 2 (issue proximity: low vs. high) X 2 (environmental involvement: low vs. high) factorial design was conducted. The first two factors were manipulated and the final one was measured. Therefore, four experimental versions were produced. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions above. After successful manipulation checks, a series of analysis of variance were conducted to examine proposed hypotheses.

The results indicate that focusing on the comparison between guilt and positive appeals may be overly simplistic. Indeed, the findings presented here establish that the influence of guilt appeals on consumer response is relatively complex and contingent on issue proximity and environmental involvement. Three observations are noteworthy.

First, in terms of the relative effects of issue proximity, this study shows systematic effects on consumer responses by comparing low and high issue proximity. High proximity made a difference in advertising effectiveness; a local issue, as opposed to a foreign issue in a less familiar region, yielded more favorable evaluation and higher behavioral intention. This perspective is conceptually consistent with social impact theory and signaling theory. The reason could lie in the notion that the local community is more salient to consumers—regardless of the advertising appeal. No differences are found between a guilt and positive appeal in advertising effectiveness of high-proximity issue. This idea does not suggest, however, firms only address local issues and neglect global or foreign issues because advertising appeal may not be a concern in their advertising campaign when presenting a local issue. When an issue is perceived as less proximal, the tactic of guilt appeal allows a firm to enhance consumers’ attitudes toward the product and purchase intention.

Second, that effects of advertising appeal are contingent on environmental involvement is noteworthy. This construct delineates the boundary conditions for the guilt appeals on persuasion. A guilt appeal works for those with low environmental involvement, those with high environmental involvement are less likely to be not influenced by the advertising appeals. The results are consistent with the observation by Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius (1995). The study here also echoes that guilt can generate negative responses and disrupt the advertiser’s intended objectives as well (Cotte et al., 2005; Shrum et al., 1995).

Third, the effectiveness of guilt and positive appeals depends on issue proximity and environmental involvement simultaneously. Instead of blindly applying any type of advertising appeal, advertisers should pay particular attention to perceived proximity of the environmental issue and consumers’ individual differences in environmental involvement. When facing individuals with low environmental involvement, the guilt appeal performed better than the positive appeal in promoting an issue with high proximity. Thus, when dealing with a problem people regard as relatively important or about which they are self-relevant, the impact of guilt appeal may offer advantages. As Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius (1995) note that consumers pay attention to external cues such as how an ad is framed when they do not possess strong beliefs about the environment. Alternatively, when concern for the issue is low (low issue proximity), no differences of advertising effectiveness between a guilt and positive appeal can be found. Because of weak impetus to process the message and less well-developed green product schema, the less involved consumers may not be able to identify the differences between the two appeals. When facing highly involved consumers, the guilt appeal was more persuasive than the positive appeal in promoting a less proximal issue. However, this observation appears to be reversed when the ad was presented to less involved consumers. The guilt appeal may offer a redundant warning, or worse, cause a boomerang effect. Consistent with prior work on involvement and skepticism about advertisers’ environmental claims, environmentally involved individuals may engage in more effortful and elaborative processing and discount the received information. In such cases, the positive appeal is preferable. The implication is that advertisers must be careful not to arouse guilt feelings through the ads. If such care is not taken, a backlash may occur whereby the consumers develop negative attitudes toward the promoted product. In any event, advertisers are advised to adopt a situational perspective by taking the possible interaction effect among advertising appeal, issue proximity, and environmental involvement.

Findings from this investigation are informative both theoretically and pragmatically. This study contributes to the academic literature and industry by increasing our understanding of guilt appeals in a green marketing context by proposing issue proximity and environmental involvement as factors that moderate the relationships between guilt appeal and consumer responses toward the promoted product. The findings underscore the importance for green marketers to learn more about whether guilt appeals work, and in turn describe how practitioners can avoid negatively toward guilt appeals. The present research should serve a starting point for entry into this under-researched area.
Metaphors in Advertising: Cognitive Flexibility Matching Perspective

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Prior research suggests that a metaphor in advertising can have a positive effect on evaluations of the target product (McQuarrie and Phillips 2005; Moreau, Markman, and Lehmann 2001). However, the effect tends to be restricted to the metaphors which are easy to interpret (Gregan-Paxton and John 1997; Roehm and Sterntall 2001). Yet, it is common that companies employ complicated, idiosyncratic, and difficult metaphors in their advertising. This discrepancy can be resolved, however, if we consider both the level of individuals’ actual cognitive flexibility at the time of metaphor processing as determinants of the effectiveness of a metaphor.

The present research proposes a cognitive flexibility matching hypothesis that the match between the required and actual level of cognitive flexibility is a key determinant of the metaphor’s effectiveness. That is, when the level of cognitive flexibility necessary to comprehend a metaphor matches the level of individuals’ actual cognitive flexibility at the time of metaphor processing, the metaphor in an ad could be beneficial for evaluations of the target product. When the individuals’ actual cognitive flexibility is either below or above the required level to process a metaphor, however, using the metaphor could be detrimental.

To test this proposition, we borrow from research based on temporal construal theory that a distant-future perspective (vs. a near-future perspective) increases individuals’ cognitive flexibility momentarily (Forster et al. 2004; Trope and Liberman 2003). Based on this, we hypothesize that a difficult metaphor, compared to its easier version or a literal message counterpart, can lead to more favorable product evaluations when people consider the target product for a distant-future purchase, but would produce less favorable evaluations when they consider it for a near-future purchase. To put it differently, an increase in temporal distance is expected to increase the effectiveness of a difficult metaphor, but to decrease the effectiveness of an easy metaphor.

These hypothesized (diametrically opposite) effects were confirmed in five experiments in which participants evaluated a target product described by either a difficult metaphor, an easier version of the metaphor, or its literal message counterpart, while considering the message for a possible purchase of an advertised product either next day (near-future condition) or next year (distant-future condition). Moreover, the effects generalized over different products and metaphors and were evident regardless of whether the level of difficulty of a metaphor was manipulated by employing different versions of a metaphor, by varying individuals’ knowledge to process a metaphor, or by varying their mood state.

Experiment 1 demonstrated that a difficult metaphor, compared to a literal message that has a same implication of the metaphor, led to a more favorable evaluation of the target product in the distant future condition, whereas this difference was reversed in the near future condition. Experiment 2 replicated these results and in addition showed that a difficult metaphor was more effective than an easy metaphor as well in the distant future condition, whereas this difference was reversed in the near future condition. Experiments 3a, 3b, and 3c investigated the role of individuals’ knowledge to process the metaphor and found that a difficult metaphor was more effective for low-knowledge individuals than for high-knowledge individuals when the product decision was made for a distant future, whereas the difference was reversed when the decision was made for a near-future. Similarly, Experiment 4a and 4b demonstrated that a (difficult) metaphor was more effective for individuals in the positive mood condition than for those in the negative mood condition when the product was evaluated for purchase in the distant future, whereas the difference was reversed when the product was considered for a near-future purchase. Finally, experiment 5 assessed the level of comprehension about the metaphor based on participants’ thought protocols. A mediation test confirmed that the effect of temporal distance on the effectiveness of a difficult metaphor was mediated by its influence on the extent to which participant actually comprehended the meaning of the metaphor.

Thus, collectively, results from five experiments provide consistent evidence for our cognitive flexibility matching hypothesis. At the same time, the research identifies moderators (product knowledge and mood state) for the diametrically opposite effects observed in the experiments. Theoretical and managerial implications of these findings are discussed.

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Testing Phonetic Symbolism Effects on Brand Name Preference for Bilinguals Across Multiple Languages

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Good brand names can enhance memorability, create favorable images, and increase preference for the products, and are an important component in building brand equity (Aaker 1996; Keller 1993). When investigating the construction of the brand names, researchers found that not only the semantic meaning, but also phonetic symbolism, which refers to a non-arbitrary relation between sound and meaning, may influence brand preference (Klink 2000). In simplest form, phonetic symbolism suggests that phonemes (the smallest unit of sound) can convey meaning apart from their configuration in words or syllables. Research on the relation between phonetic symbolism and brand name preference has shown that brand name preference and brand attitudes are more positive when the fit between phonetic symbolism and the product attributes is maximized. Although previous research has been successful at documenting phonetic symbolism effects in brand names, the processes underlying these effects have remained elusive. First, as some critics have pointed out, phonetic symbolism effects do not necessarily occur spontaneously, but only when specific dimensional judgments (e.g., size, shape, brightness) are elicited (Bentley and Varon 1933), suggesting that the effect may be a methodological artifact. Second, the effects that have been obtained with determining the meaning of foreign words (e.g., matching pairs of antonyms in a foreign language with comparable English antonyms; Brown, Black, and Horowitz 1955) are eliminated if both sets of stimulus words are in languages foreign to the participants (Maltzman, Morrisett, and Brooks 1956). Besides, there are in fact some reasons to think that phonetic symbolism effects would not hold for some forms of language. For example, in the Chinese written language, there are important differences in how alphabetic and logographic word representations are processed (Schmitt, Pan, and Tavassoli 1994; Tavassoli 2001), and there is considerable debate as to whether phonetic information in logographic characters can even be activated prior to some semantic activation (Chua 1999; Zhou 1978).

The goal of this paper is to extend previous research on the existence of phonetic symbolism and its application to brand naming by testing the generalization of these findings across languages, and testing the extent to which fluency may moderate the phonetic symbolism effects. On one hand, if the phonetic symbolism effects are indeed universal (Ultan 1978), fluency may have little effect. On the other hand, research shows that form and meaning in a second language, even for fluent bilinguals, are not as tightly connected as for a first language (Luna and Peracchio 2001). If so, then we would expect to see weaker effects for less fluent second-language learners.

Three experiments were conducted to determine the extent to which phonetic symbolism effects are spontaneous and generalizable to other languages, and the extent to which non-native speakers are influenced by second-language fluency. In experiments 1–3, Spanish-, French- and Chinese-speaking participants who were fluent in English expressed preferences between brand name pairs that differed only in their primary vowel sound (front vs. back), and did so as a function of product category (2-seater convertible, knife, 4 X-4 vehicle, hammer). In addition, Chinese-speaking participants received brand name stimuli that were constructed using either alphabetic letters or logographic symbols in order to test possible differences in the two presentations. Our focal hypothesis was that preference for front versus back vowel sound words as brand names would vary as a function of product category: front vowel sound words should be preferred over back for 2-seater convertible and knife, and back vowel sound words should be preferred over front for 4 X-4 vehicle and hammer. Note that the elicitation of a brand name preference for each product category does not directly elicit a judgment regarding concepts such as size, speed, or sharpness (cf. Bentley and Varon 1933). Rather, the predicted effects should be noted only if participants form perceptions of these concepts spontaneously and then apply them to their preference judgments. The results of the ANOVA indicated that there was a significant interaction between vowel sound and product category as we predicted, whereas the effect of experiment was not significant. These findings indicate that phonetic symbolism effects are robust across the different languages and cultures we tested, including logographic representations in Chinese. The results also show that these general relations were for the most part unaffected by whether participants completed the experiment in their native language or a foreign language, and were also unaffected by their proficiency in that language.

The studies we have presented make a number of contributions to the consumer behavior literature, but they also contribute to the more general fields of cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics. We replicate the phonetic symbolism effects noted in previous studies (Lowrey and Shrum 2007; Yorkston and Menon 2004), but also show that a) these effects generalize to languages other than English, b) generalize to languages in which presentation is non-alphabetic (logographic), c) hold for second-language as well as first-language participants, d) these latter effects are observed regardless of level of proficiency of participants, and e) the effects are spontaneous rather than a function of being elicited by the research method.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Coolness is a socially desirable trait often pursued by consumers and marketers (Belk, Tian, and Paavola 2008; Dar Nimrod et al. 2008; Kerner and Pressman 2007). Both people and brands can become cool, although it is not well understood how this occurs. Leading theories suggest that coolness comes from conforming to behaviors desired within a particular subculture (Danesi 1994; O’Donnell and Wardlow 2000; Thornton 1996) or by quickly mimicking the behaviors of other cool people (Gladwell 1997; Lupiono-Misdom and de Luca 1998). These theories, however, provide an incomplete explanation because they do not account for the origins of coolness nor do they explain how coolness diffuses across subcultures.

Building on prior work in cultural studies, sociology, and psychology (Frank 1997; Heath and Potter 2004; Pountain and Robins 2000), we hypothesize an alternative way people and brands can become cool: display bounded autonomy from mainstream society. In other words, we suspect that people and brands can become cool by going their own way, rather than following society’s conventions. We test this hypothesis in three experiments.

Autonomy cannot be directly observed. Rather, it must be inferred by observing the extent to which a person or brand adheres to society’s norms. People and brands that resist or ignore these norms will likely be seen as more autonomous than people and brands that conform. Consequently, we hypothesize that rebellion and uniqueness will influence perceptions of autonomy, which will influence perceptions of coolness.

Our first study tests whether people who are more rebellious and unique are perceived to be cooler than people who are less rebellious and unique. Furthermore, we test whether these effects are mediated by perceived autonomy. Participants read descriptions of target people who either described themselves as fairly rebellious or not rebellious and fairly unique or not unique. Rebellion and uniqueness were fully crossed and manipulated between-subjects. For example, one target person was either described as “not afraid to go against the grain” or “careful not to go against the grain,” depending on whether the participant was in the high or low rebellion condition, respectively. After reading the descriptions, participants rated their perceptions of the target person’s autonomy and coolness. As expected, target people who seemed more rebellious were considered cooler than target people who seemed less rebellious (M 6.9 vs. 4.6). Uniqueness had a similar effect (M 6.8 vs. 4.8). Importantly, both main effects were mediated by perceptions of autonomy.

Next we investigate whether the relationship between autonomy and perceptions of coolness is strictly increasing or curvilinear. Social norms exist in part to prevent destructive, anti-social behavior (Rousseau 1994). Consequently, we suspect that showing extreme levels of autonomy by completely disregarding these norms will not be seen as cool. Thus, the relationship between autonomy and perceived coolness will likely be curvilinear: perceived coolness will initially increase with displays of autonomy, but will begin to decrease as displays of autonomy become too extreme.

Individuals differ in terms of the extent to which they value autonomy and, consequently, the amount of autonomy they will consider acceptable. Individuals higher in counterculturalism, an ideology centered on the belief that societal institutions promote widespread conformity while repressing individuality, will likely value autonomy more than individuals lower in counterculturalism. Consequently, we hypothesize that the level of autonomy considered cool—i.e., the point at which the curvilinear function between autonomy and perceived coolness peaks—will be higher for consumers higher in counterculturalism.

Our second study tests whether the relationship between autonomy and perceived coolness is curvilinear, and whether the amount of autonomy considered cool varies depending on counterculturalism. Participants read about a target person who was described as displaying either a low (e.g. “she rarely would assert her independence”), moderate (e.g. “she occasionally would assert her independence”), high (e.g. “she often would assert her independence”), or extreme (e.g. “she always would assert her independence”) level of autonomy. Participants rated perceived coolness of the target person and completed a scale measuring their level of counterculturalism. As hypothesized, perceived coolness initially increased as autonomy increased from a low to moderate level, but decreased as autonomy moved from a high to extreme level. Additionally, however, participants higher in counterculturalism considered higher levels of autonomy cooler than participants lower in counterculturalism.

Our third study explores when consumers will desire cool brands. Because displays of autonomy lead to perceptions of coolness, we suspect that consumers can use cool brands to signal an autonomous identity. Individualistic consumers will want to signal their autonomy, and hence will be most likely to prefer cool brands, when their identity as an autonomous individual has been threatened (Brewer 1991; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009).

In this study we test whether American consumers whose autonomous identity has been threatened are more likely to prefer cool brands. We threatened the autonomous identity of some participants by making them feel undifferentiated from others by priming their interdependent self (e.g., Aaker and Lee 2001). Subsequently, participants indicated whether they preferred a cool winter hat brand (i.e., one displaying bounded autonomy) or an uncool winter hat brand (i.e., one displaying low autonomy). Participants primed with an interdependent self were more likely to select the cool hat brand (68%) than participants primed with an independent self (44%). Desire to express autonomy was higher for participants primed with an interdependent self, and this measure mediated the effect of the self-construal prime on brand preference.

Following subcultural norms and mimicking cool people are not the only ways to become cool. People and brands can also become cool through displays of bounded autonomy. Identifying autonomy as an additional antecedent of perceived coolness suggests where coolness originates and how cool trends diffuse across subcultures. Things first become cool when they are seen as autonomous from mainstream society and cool trends typically diffuse from outsider subcultures and consumers higher in counterculturalism to more mainstream subcultures and consumers lower in counterculturalism. Our research suggests that consumers and brands that want to be cool should be rebellious and unique, but be careful not to go too far.

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How Asking “Who Am I?” Affects What You Buy: The Influence of Self-Discovery on Consumption

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Are you an introvert or an extravert? A dreamer or a realist? Tools that ask and answer such questions are becoming a ubiquitous part of our lives, seeking to serve a universal thirst for self-discovery. Stores like Nordstrom and Bloomingdales offer color consultations to shoppers so they can learn whether “summer” or “winter” colors are better for them. Gyms offer fitness assessments to help consumers understand what type of exerciser they are and which activities they should be doing to reach their fitness goals. Self-help books abound which profess to help consumers learn about the self.

Consumers’ drive towards self-discovery makes sense—the better we understand ourselves, the better decisions we can make. Interestingly, the process of discovering and defining the self can also be seen as a way of placing constraints on the self. If you are Type A, you cannot also be Type B. For individuals who are sensitive to the prospect of limitations, the findings from self-discovery may be particularly likely to be viewed as a constraint on who they can be. Thus, these individuals may reject such findings. We hypothesize that individuals characterized by an independent self-construal (for whom the act of defining the self is inconsistent with their conception of the self as an indefinable whole), as well as individuals who are highly reactant, will reject the findings of self-discovery and make consumption choices inconsistent with them, even as they actively seek to learn about themselves. Conversely, individuals who are characterized by interdependent self-construals and are low in reactance should accept the findings of self-discovery and incorporate such into their consumption decisions.

In study 1, participants completed a “personality quiz” consisting of personality items, IQ questions, and Singelis’ (1994) Self-Construal Scale. Participants were either told that they were better than 70% of students in competence and better than 95% in excitement, or that they were better than 95% of students in competence and better than 70% in excitement. As the dependent measure, participants chose between Business 2.0 (low competence/high excitement) or Consumer Reports (high competence/low excitement) magazines. As expected, interdependents were more likely to choose Business 2.0 (low competence) when they received low competence feedback. They were more likely to choose Consumer Reports (high competence) when they received high competence feedback. In contrast, independents were more likely to choose Consumer Reports (high competence) when they received low competence feedback and Business 2.0 (low competence) when they received high competence feedback. Thus, interdependents made choices that were consistent with the self-information they received while independents made decisions that were inconsistent.

In study 2, we further explore the idea that self-knowledge can be constraining by demonstrating that individuals who are known to react against constraints (i.e., highly reactant individuals) also react against the limiting nature of self-knowledge. Participants first made a series of selections between pairs of products. Product pairs could consist of two branded products, two generic products, or one branded and one generic product. Participants were then assigned to one of two feedback conditions. In the ‘brand conscious’ condition, participants read that they were more brand conscious than the average consumer. In the ‘not brand conscious’ condition, they read that they were less brand conscious than the average consumer. Participants then made a second series of choices between branded and generic products. As expected, highly reactant individuals chose fewer brands when told that they were more brand conscious than others, and more brands when told that they were less brand conscious than others. Individuals low in reactance, however, chose more brands when told that they were more brand conscious than others, and fewer brands when told that they were less brand conscious.

While the results of studies 1 and 2 reveal that in response to self-discovery findings, interdependents conduct themselves like high reactants and that interdependents behave like low reactants, we aimed to show a more direct link between self-construal and reactance in study 3. We expected interdependents to report increased levels of state reactance in response to the limitations inherent in self-discovery findings relative to interdependents. We further expected feelings of state reactance to mediate the relationship between self-construal and subsequent choice. Participants first completed the same product choice quiz described in study 2 before being primed to be independent or interdependent (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Next, participants read that they were more brand conscious than average, less brand conscious than average, or received no information at all. Participants who received feedback then answered four questions about their feelings of reactance toward the information (Lindsey, 2005). Finally, all participants made choices between a second series of brands and generics. As expected, interdependents made product choices that were inconsistent with the self-knowledge they received while interdependents made choices consistent with their self-information. Importantly, reactance mediated the relationship between self-construal and brand choice as independent respondents reported stronger feelings of reactance, regardless of the type of feedback.

Overall, studies 1-3 suggest that certain individuals may view self-knowledge as constraining, and that this may lead to some unexpected consequences for consumer behavior. Specifically, we find that independents and high reactants reject self-discovery findings and make consumption choices inconsistent with them even as they actively seek to learn about themselves. Thus, this research provides a key theoretical refinement in terms of when individuals will seek and yet reject self-discovery findings and establishes how this has significant consequences for consumption. We also contribute to research suggesting that individuals use consumption to enhance and express the self, especially when threatened (Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv, 2009). We show that individuals’ conceptualization of the self will determine how they use consumption to express the self in the face of feedback. This research also brings together the reactance and self-construal literatures in a novel way, offering new insights regarding when and why they exert similar effects on consumers’ choices. Moreover, our results have important practical implications: Consumers’ innate desire for self-discovery may be one need that marketers should be wary of fulfilling, as it may lead to surprising and unintended consequences.

REFERENCES


Distracted by the Man in the Mirror: Focusing Attention on the Outside Body Reduces Responsiveness to Internal Signals in Food Intake

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In Western societies, an increasing number of people is overweight or obese (WHO 2004). At the same time, media increasingly emphasize thinness ideals and outward appearance (Wiseman et al. 1992). In the current study, we test the relation between focusing on outside appearance and food consumption. More specifically, we hypothesize that focusing on the outside of the body impedes internal body cues to have an effect on food consumption.

A wealth of literature shows how internal cues, external cues and psychological states separately influence food intake (Wansink 2004), yet little is known on whether and how these cues and psychological states interact. Our study extends this work by examining consumers’ responsiveness to internal satiety cues in different psychological states. To do so we assess how capable consumers are of compensating for previous food intake rather than looking at an absolute amount of food intake at a single point in time. One of the psychological states that has been found to stimulate food intake is distraction. Whereas it has been repeatedly demonstrated that distraction increases food intake within the consumption episode (e.g. Bellišle, Dalix and Slama 2004), there is some recent evidence that the effects of distraction may go beyond the consumption episode in affecting subsequent consumption (Higgs and Woodward 2009). We build on this work and, drawing on self-objectification theory, propose that focusing on outward appearance is a distractor that hinders individuals in compensating for previous food intake.

Self-objectification has been defined as the process whereby individuals observe themselves from a third-person perspective and regard their body as an object instead of as a subject (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Appearance focus is a manifestation of self-objectification. Fredrickson et al. (1998) found that a state of self-objectification, had detrimental effects on task performance due to a limited availability of cognitive resources. Based on the same reasoning, self-objectification theory predicts that focusing on outward appearance reduces responsiveness to bodily cues. Initial evidence indeed shows that self-reported measures of self-objectification and responsiveness to bodily cues are negatively related (Daubenmier 2005). However, using self-report measures of these constructs seems problematic. In the current study we have therefore tested this prediction assessing actual consumption.

In a pilot study we tested and showed that exposure to a mirror induces in participants a focus on public observable parts of the body, but not on private parts of the body. Thus, the use of a mirror appears to be a good manipulation of an outward appearance focus. In an experiment we subsequently tested the effects of an outward appearance focus on consumers’ ability to compensate for the caloric content of previous food intake. Participants were served either a high caloric milkshake or a low caloric milkshake and were either seated in front of a mirror or not. In a second part of the experiment, participants evaluated neutral video fragments with a bowl of M&M’s placed next to their screens. At the end of the experiment, participants’ M&M consumption was assessed.

The effects of appearance focus and caloric content of the milkshake were assessed for the likelihood of M&M consumption and for the amount of M&M consumption. The results showed that the likelihood of starting to eat M&M’s was influenced by the caloric content of the milkshake: When participants had previously been served a high caloric milkshake, they were less likely to start consuming M&M’s. Interestingly, the effect that the caloric content of the milkshake had on the amount of consumption, was qualified by whether an appearance focus was induced in participants. Under control conditions, participants compensated for the caloric content of the milkshake by consuming fewer M&M’s when previously served a milkshake of high caloric content than when served a low caloric milkshake. However, when participants were induced to focus on their outward appearance, the effect of caloric content on M&M consumption was (marginally) significant in the opposite direction. That is, participants consumed more M&M’s when they had previously consumed a high caloric milkshake than a low caloric milkshake, indicating counterregulation rather than compensation of previous food intake.

The current study makes a number of contributions to the literature on cues affecting eating behavior. As our findings demonstrate that an appearance focus reduces the extent to which individuals are able to compensate for their previous intake, this indicates that the psychological state a consumer is in affects the influence of internal cues on consumption. This extends previous work that has looked mostly at how internal cues, external cues and psychological states separately affect food intake. The current findings provide insight into how a psychological state and internal physiological cues can jointly affect consumption. We have done so by looking at compensation for previous intake, rather than at absolute amounts of food intake. How well individuals are able to compensate for previous food intake under different psychological states, may also provide an understanding of when individuals are able to counteract the negative influences that a range of external cues and psychological states have on consumption levels (Wansink 2004). Finally, our findings suggest that future research may benefit from assessing both initiation of consumption and the amount of consumption, as our findings indicate that they may be affected by different processes.

This study has implications for consumers who regularly focus on their looks to monitor and regulate the potential harmful consequences of food consumption on body appearance. Our findings show that the effect may be counterproductive: Focusing on the outer body diminishes the power of internal satiety cues to regulate food consumption. This could result in a pattern where consumers overeat, gain weight and subsequently focus even more on their looks. On a broader level, the thinness and beauty ideals that are conveyed through commercials and other media may also foster an attentional focus on outward body appearance. These have the potential of negatively affecting healthy eating patterns as they may exert their effects within consumption contexts such as TV commercials, shopping malls or cinema’s.
Bandwagon, Snob and Veblen Effects in Luxury Consumption
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Conceptualization

Many years ago Leibenstein (1950) highlighted the importance of “signaling effects” on consumption, which means that the utility derived from a product is enhanced or decreased due to the fact that “others” are purchasing and consuming it or due to the fact that the product bears a higher or lower price tag. In marketing it was taken for granted that “people buy luxuries to impress”: most of consumer research has implicitly assumed that luxuries are consumed for social signaling purposes (Kapferer, 2006; Dubois, Laurent, and Czellar, 2001). However, there is a scarcity of empirical support to this claim. This study tries to plug this gap by providing empirical support to the possible antecedents of three luxury consumption effects. It aims to improve the existing theoretical understanding of the psychological antecedents and signaling behavior of luxury consumption.

Specifically, a veblen effect arises when consumer preference for a good increases as a direct function of its price; a snob effect when preference for a good increases as its quantity in the market is decreased; and a bandwagon effect is observed where consumer preference for a good increases as the number of people buying it is increased. As Vigneron and Johnson (1999) have pointed out, these effects are particularly observed in luxury product markets.

Research on luxuries’ consumption has led to recent evidence (Tsai, 2005) that calls for a distinction between socially and personally-oriented luxury consumers (Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Siebels, 2007). The origins of these two orientations can be traced in an individual’s self-concept. Some individuals focus more on the “internal domain” and their self-related goals or needs (independent self-concept); while others are more concerned about the inter-personal domain, the reaction of others and their external “persona” (inter-dependent self-concept). This literature (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998) advocates that consumers with an independent self show a more personal orientation in the way that they consume luxuries (focusing on their hedonic, utilitarian and self-communication goals) whereas consumers with inter-dependent self care more for the social impact of such consumption (the three investigated effects).

The existing work has not paid sufficient attention to the social effects (i.e., the bandwagon, snob, and veblen effects). It is not clear how exactly the self orientations impact on the consumption of luxuries. Against the previous background, this study proposes that these effects are driven by both an independent and an inter-dependent self-concept (they are both personally and socially-driven behaviors) and that a number of relevant traits act as mediators between the self-concept(s) and the signaling behavior.

With the help of the literature and qualitative exploratory research (interviews with managers of luxury products) the following four traits emerge to be related to the bandwagon, snob and veblen effects: need-for-uniqueness, vanity, status-seeking, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

Need-for-uniqueness (NFU) is “the trait of pursuing different relations to others through the acquisition, utilization and disposition of consumer goods” (Tepper, Bearden and Hunter, 2001). NFU is positively related to both independent and inter-dependent self concepts and is hypothesized to be an antecedent of both snob and veblen effects, while negatively related to a bandwagon effect.

Vanity (Netemeyer, Burton, and Lichtenstein, 1995) has a physical and an achievement dimension. Vanity is hypothesized to be positively related to both independent and inter-dependent self concepts. In addition vanity is an antecedent of a veblen effect (i.e., expensive luxuries), a snob effect (i.e., rare luxuries) and a bandwagon effect (i.e., through consumption of popular luxuries) as well.

Status-seeking is defined as the “process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing trough the conspicuous consumption of products that confer and symbolize status” (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn, 1999). It reflects a social orientation and it is hypothesized to be positively related to the inter-dependent self (and negatively to the independent self). In addition, using the same argumentation line, status-seeking is hypothesized to be an antecedent of the veblen, snob and bandwagon effects.

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, refers to the need to “identify with or enhance one’s image in the opinion of significant others” through relevant consumption (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel, 1989). This trait reflects a social orientation and, as such, is hypothesized to be positively related to the inter-dependent self (and negatively to the independent self). It is an antecedent of the bandwagon effect and it is negatively related to snob effect.

Method

Data were collected by the “drop and collect” survey method in a probability sample of 431 consumers of luxuries in London. Three mediated structural models with the following variables were estimated: (independent and inter-dependent) self-concepts as antecedents (exogenous variables), need-for-uniqueness, status-seeking, vanity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence as mediators, and bandwagon, snob and veblen behavior(s) as outcome variables.

Major Findings

Bandwagon behavior is mostly influenced by inter-dependence. Managers who want to position their products as popular luxuries should focus-with this order-on enhancing their products’ projected status (status from popularity/conformity), normative (fit-in) messages, and (physical) vanity/attractiveness appeal; while avoiding “stand-out” (avoidance of similarity) messages.

Snob behavior is mostly influenced by independence. Managers who want to position their products as exclusive luxuries should focus-with this order-on status derived from exclusivity, creating an aura of scarcity and uniqueness, and (physical) vanity/attractiveness appeal; while avoiding conformity (fit-in) messages.

Veblenian behavior is marginally influenced by inter-dependence. Managers who want to boost consumption of their luxury products using (very expensive) price-signaling should focus-with this order-on communicating messages coherent with the traits of these target consumers: status messages (status from prestige-pricing since, for the purely conspicuous consumer, the satisfaction comes from audience reaction to the wealth displayed), (physical) vanity/attractiveness appeals, as well as on scarcity and uniqueness messages based on creative counter-conformity.

These results contribute to understanding in depth the antecedents behind the signaling behavior of consumers of luxury goods. This behavior is both personally meaningful and socially driven. These findings provide practical help to managers in a) segmenting their markets, and b) evaluating and predicting the reaction of consumers to changes in their offerings and communication campaigns.
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The Power of Positive Thinking: Asymmetrical Affective Perseverance in Consumer Brand Judgments

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers update their attitudes towards brands as new information in encoded. For example, when reading online reviews about hotels or restaurants when booking a holiday, consumers will adjust their attitude in line with the positivity or negativity of the reviews being read. In many situations, the valence of information encoded about a product or service is mixed. It is rare for instance for online hotel reviews to be consistently positive or negative; there are always some patrons who appear to have had a more positive or more negative experience with the hotel than the majority. From a big picture standpoint, the issue of how consumers form attitudes towards products and services from reading online reviews raises the more general issue of how consumers adjust their attitudes when information describing the quality of product or service is mixed. The goal of this research therefore is to explore how consumers update their attitudes towards products and services when information encountered during decision making is of opposite valence.

Conventional wisdom would suggest that if a consumer has a favorable attitude towards a brand, which is then contested by negative information, the consumer will have control over their judgments and adjust their evaluation accordingly. For example, a consumer may hear a rumor about a brand, which they later find to be untrue. Similarly, when a consumer encodes positive information contesting previously encoded negative information, they will also have control over their judgments and adjust their evaluations accordingly. The present research argues however that consumers are less successful at adjusting their attitudes in a positive to negative direction than they are at adjusting their attitudes in a negative to positive direction. Specifically, this research proposes a theory of asymmetric affective perseverance, whereby positive attitudes continue to contaminate judgments towards a brand when replaced by negative attitudes, but negative attitudes do not. This leads to the paradoxical finding that consumers’ attitudes towards a brand are positively skewed if they encode positive information before negative information, than if they encode the same information in the opposite order.

This research further finds that this asymmetrical perseverance of affect is contingent on trend of information over time, and that it only occurs when information is deeply encoded. When trend information is available, such as when positive reviews are old, and negative reviews are recent, the pattern of results is reversed, and the nature of asymmetric affective perseverance is muted.

The phenomenon of asymmetric affective perseverance is attributed to people’s relative difficulty in shifting their attitude in a positive to negative direction, than in a negative to positive direction. Anecdotally, the concept of denial in psychiatric literature describes a similar cognitive process. A person given bad news will often experience the protection mechanism of disbelief, deferral, and dismissal before a relatively negative affective state sinks in (Lubinsky 1994). In contrast, the shift from relative despair to happiness is often instantaneous, and has a stronger effect on imagined outcomes than negative factors. In general, human beings prefer to remain optimistic and are more willing and hopeful towards adopting a positive outlook than remaining in a relative state of negativity. The asymmetry in attitude adjustment pertaining to brands is demonstrated in two studies comprised of four experiments.

The first study demonstrates asymmetric perseverance of positive affect in two hypothetical brand evaluation exercises. Experiment one documents the existence of positive contamination when a positive attitude is replaced by a negative attitude, with an absence of negative contamination when the attitude replacement is from negative to positive. Experiment two further documents asymmetrical attitude replacement, finding the same effect when attempts by participants to adjust attitudes to a relative state of ambivalence are unsuccessful after participants are told the positive information that shaped their attitude was false.

The second study investigates the mechanisms underlying asymmetric affective perseverance. Specifically, experiment 3 further tests the theory by demonstrating how asymmetric perseverance of affect is contingent on time trend information. In a simulated task of evaluation based on online reviews, it is assumed that a consumer should be more forgiving of a brand if negative reviews are relatively old, and have been replaced by more recent positive reviews. This pattern should suggest improvement, and therefore less likelihood of regret. The results suggest attenuation of positive contamination when trend information is available. Finally, experiment four lends support to the theory by showing that asymmetrical affective perseverance appears to be a function of cognitive elaboration.

From a big picture standpoint, our theory is interesting because it sheds light on how consumers form attitudes towards brands, when influenced by oppositely valenced information. Our theory is also interesting because it explains inconsistent findings in psychology literature about attitude replacement, which is also relevant to how consumers form brand judgments. Although some research has found that people are successful at discounting previously formed judgments (Golding et al. 1990), other research has found that invalidated information may continue to contaminate future judgments, without the subject being aware (Bekerian and Bowers 1983; Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Lindsay and Johnson 1989).
Mood Matching: The Importance of Fit between Moods Elicited by TV Programs and Commercials

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Previous consumer research suggests that TV viewers have more favorable attitudes toward commercials when they are in a happy mood than when they are in a sad mood. Research has demonstrated this effect with moods induced by commercials themselves (Batra and Stayman 1990; Derbaix 1995; Edell and Burke 1987; Holbrook and Batra 1987) and with moods induced by TV programs in which the commercials are embedded (Goldberg and Gorn 1987; Mathur and Chattopadhyay 1991). This research has revealed two main effects. All else equal, TV viewers like commercials more when (1) they induce happy moods rather than sad moods, and (2) they are embedded in programs that induce happy moods rather than sad moods. These effects are important since attitude toward the ad (A_a) reliably influences brand attitudes and purchase intentions (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986; Madden, Allen, and Twible 1988; Miniard, Bhattacharya, and Rose 1990; Mitchell and Olson 1981; see Brown and Stayman 1992 for a review), and is the single best predictor of an ad’s ability to influence sales (Haley and Baldinger 1991). However, previous research has not examined whether commercials that induce a happy mood elicit more favorable responses compared to those that induce a sad mood, irrespective of whether the mood induced by the program is positive or negative. This is the focus of our research.

In this paper, we propose that when TV viewers watch a program that establishes a mood, they expect to continue experiencing that mood throughout the duration of the TV viewing experience. We draw on research on mood as input to role fulfillment evaluation processes (Martin et al. 1997) to hypothesize that TV viewers have more favorable attitudes toward commercials that support moods established by programs than toward those that break established moods. Our hypothesis leads to the novel prediction that, during a sad program, TV viewers will like sad commercials more than happy commercials.

The results of experiment 1 support our hypothesis. In the experiment, we find that participants liked two sad commercials significantly more when they followed sad program clips than when they followed happy program clips, and liked two happy commercials more when they followed happy program clips than when they followed sad program clips, albeit not significantly so.

A key finding of experiment 1 is that, under some conditions, viewers may actually have more favorable attitudes toward commercials when they are aired during sad programs than when they are aired during happy programs. This finding may initially seem to be at odds with mood as information theory (Schwarz and Clore 1983, 1988), which proposes that people use their momentary affective states as information when making judgments and evaluations, for example by asking “how do I feel about it?” Mood as information theory thus predicts that people will evaluate stimuli more favorably when they are in a positive mood than when they are in a negative mood. However, we assert that the apparent contradiction between our predictions and those of mood as information theory can be reconciled by noting that role fulfillment evaluations are based on an expectation comparison process. Specifically, we hypothesize that role fulfillment evaluation theory makes accurate predictions when people are likely to have mood expectations, whereas mood as information theory makes accurate predictions when people are unlikely to have mood expectations.

The results of experiment 2 support this hypothesis. In the experiment, we find that, following a sad program clip, viewers who focused on their mood during the TV watching experience liked sad commercials more than happy commercials, whereas viewers who were distracted from their mood during the negative experience liked happy commercials more than sad commercials. Furthermore, we find that a second focus manipulation administered after, rather than during, the TV viewing experience, did not affect viewers’ evaluations, thus providing further evidence that a difference in expectations underlies the aforementioned results.

Our research contributes to theory and practice in three ways. First, we use role fulfillment evaluation theory to identify an effect that is at odds with the recommendations of previous research on the attitudinal effects of moods induced by TV programs and commercials. Second, we identify mood expectations during the experience as a moderating variable, allowing us to reconcile our main result with those of extant research. Third, our results provide guidance to advertising managers who seek either to select a program during which to air existing commercials, or to produce commercials that will be aired during a particular program. Our suggestion that sad commercials can be more effective when aired during sad programs than during happy programs seems to go against common advertising practice. According to Mathur and Chattopadhyay (1991), several major organizations have policies that prohibit advertising during sad programs. Consistent with this, news articles report that many groups have pulled their commercials from sad programs. Based on our findings, we believe that advertising managers should reassess the usefulness of scheduling some commercials during sad programs.

REFERENCES


How Mood Moderates the Effect of Context on Product Judgments
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Does a restaurant serve meals that are sufficiently large? Is a 640MB 2.5GH laptop at $1300 attractive? How one perceives, evaluates, and judges a product is not only driven by characteristics of the product itself, but also by the context the product is presented in. The size of a gastronomic nouvelle cuisine meal may look ridiculously small on an oversized plate, but sufficiently large when served on a normal sized plate (Wansink and van Ittersum 2006; Wansink, van Ittersum, and Painter 2006). And the same notebook is typically perceived as more attractive when it is the middle option in a choice set than when it is an extreme option (Simonson 1989; Simonson and Tversky 1992). As pervasive and robust as context effects are, however, we predict that mood critically determines the extent to which consumers take the context into consideration when making product judgments.

Our prediction is mainly based on the assumption that mood alters attentional scope as such that positive mood broadens attentional scope to both the target product and context and negative mood narrows attentional scope to the target product only. First support for this assumption is provided by studies using perceptual tasks that contain both broad and narrow visual features. These studies consistently found that happy individuals focused more on the broad feature and sad individuals focused more on the narrow features (Basso et al. 1996; Frederickson and Branigan 2005; Gasper and Clore 2002). In addition, other studies in which participants were asked to focus on a central target and ignore flanking distracters showed that sad participants were less affected by the distracting context stimuli and therefore performed better compared to happy participants (Fenske and Eastwood 2003; Rowe, Hirsh, and Anderson 2007). Finally, Schmitz, Rosa, and Anderson (2009) provided neuroscientific evidence illustrating that mood alters visual cortical responses, such that negative affect decreases and positive affect increases the scope of early perceptual encoding in a visuospatial task.

So, previous research suggests that attentional scope is fundamentally influenced by mood. Therefore, it seems reasonable to predict that happy consumers will rely more on positive mood and will make product judgments compared to consumers who are in a neutral mood state. We provided support for this prediction with three studies testing the effect of different mood manipulations on a variety of context effects that have been previously observed in consumer behavior.

In the first study, we employed the perceptual contrast effect (based on the Ebbinghaus Illusion task) to find initial evidence for the notion that mood moderates the extent to which product judgments are affected by the context. After we induced mood, we asked participants to estimate the size of a target product (apples, coke cans, bottles of liquid laundry detergent, peanut butter jars) that was surrounded by either larger or smaller versions of the target product. Consistent with our predictions, size estimations of positive mood participants were significantly more and those of negative mood participants were significantly less affected by the surrounding stimuli than those of neutral mood participants. In other words, happy participants were more and sad participants were less susceptible to the Ebbinghaus illusion than neutral mood participants.

In study 2 and 3 we further tested the effect of mood on two well-known and robust context effects in consumer behavior: the attraction (or asymmetric dominance) effect and the compromise effect. Consistent with our assumption that positive (negative) mood results in more (less) attention to the other products in the choice set, we found that positive (negative) mood resulted in stronger (weaker) attraction and compromise effects compared to the neutral control condition.

Together the current studies provide strong evidence that positive mood strengthens and negative mood eliminates the effect of context on product judgments and refute a depth of processing account as alternative explanation. Instead, we argue that our effects are driven by a shift in attentional scope with positive mood promoting broader attention to both the target and the context and negative mood focusing attention on the target. Study 3 indeed illustrated that the effect of mood on context dependence was fully mediated by attentional scope.

We believe that the effect of mood on context dependence may have ample implications for consumers and decision makers. As long as there is a target product to be judged and a context in which it is presented, the pattern we proposed should hold strong. We would speculate that a sales assistant who is trying to trick us into buying a product by comparing it to a ridiculously overpriced alternative, or a product’s television ad featuring poignant music and heart-warming scenes will be more successful if we are in a good, than in a bad mood. Our findings suggest that being happy can make us more susceptible to persuasive communication that relies on the power of context. However, being happy can also be pretty useful. Looking at the top and bottom (and left and right) shelves in the supermarket can save you money, and make you discover new and potentially better product alternatives.

REFERENCES


Responses to Animal Anthropomorphism in Advertising Based on Character Similarity to Humans

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Throughout civilization, people have imbued creatures from the natural world with human traits and motivations. Marketers have capitalized on this tendency by creating a plenitude of anthropomorphic animal mascots for a variety of products and services. Yet, research examining anthropomorphism on consumer behavior is sparse. The purpose of this research is to understand which types of animals are portrayed anthropomorphically most often in marketing communications (based upon their perceived similarity to humans) and how consumers’ attitudes are affected by such anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism is the process of assigning real or imagined human characteristics, intentions, motivations, or emotions to non-human objects, often motivated by explaining and understanding the behavior of those nonhuman agents (Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2008). People do this with a seemingly unending array of things, including brands and television characters, to the extent that they sometimes form parasocial relationships with them (Fournier 1998; Russell, Norman, and Heckler 2004). Instead of leaving it up to individuals to anthropomorphize objects of consumption, marketers often create advertising mascots with the express intent of imbuing them with personality characteristics, in a sense anthropomorphizing the brand for the consumer (Aaker 1997).

Individuals help to make sense out of their world by organizing things in categories. Each category and subcategory has mental prototypes. Objects are stored in memory around these prototypes by both their similarity to the prototype and their similarity to other items in the category (Tversky 1977). People seem to be particularly adept at categorizing animals. Henley (1969; see also Tversky 1977) devised a study asking participants to rate the similarity of 30 familiar animals to each other. The results were plotted on a cognitive map where the animals that were perceived to be most similar to each other were closer to one another (i.e., closer in psychological distance) on the cognitive map. While Henley (1969) interpreted this cognitive map as having two axes of size and ferocity, one could also interpret this cognitive map as indicating each animal’s similarity to human beings. I characterize these animals as highly similar to humans (e.g., non-human primates such as monkeys and gorillas), moderately similar to humans (e.g., carnivorous animals such as lions and wolves as well as rodents and rodent-like animals such as rabbits), and relatively dissimilar to humans (e.g., hoofed mammals such as horses, goats, and deer). Results from a pilot study support this categorization.

A large body of research has converged on the finding that people like similar others, possibly due to an increased motivation to process information about close others (Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson 1991). The foundational work in this literature stream was built on attitude similarity (Byrne 1971; Byrne, Clore, and Smeaton 1986; Heider 1958). This research has been subsequently extended to domains such as similarity in personality traits (Tesser and Campbell 1980; Tesser and Paulhus 1983) and biological characteristics (Chen and Kenrick 2002). Miller and colleagues (1998) found that even trivial similarities, such as a shared birthday, cause people to view others more favorably. In extending this similarity-attraction principle to animal images, the most obvious prediction would be that high-similarity animals would be viewed more positively than moderate-similarity animals, which would in turn be viewed more positively than low-similarity animals. Furthermore, all types of animals should be viewed more positively when presented in anthropomorphic form due to heightened levels of similarity to humans.

However, researchers have found that construal level can moderate the relationship between similarity and attraction. Less similar objects, because they are psychologically more distant, are construed at higher, more abstract levels (Liviatan, Trope, and Liberman 2008). Likewise, higher similarity leads to lower-level, more concrete construals. Thus, it is possible that nonanthropomorphic images of all animals would be assigned more abstract representations, such as “animal.” Therefore, due to lower similarity to humans among all animal types in nonanthropomorphic portrayals, there may be little or no preference for highly similar animals over less similar animals. However, because greater similarity leads to more concrete construals with more focus on secondary features, it is possible that anthropomorphizing animal images increases salience to the differences between the high, moderate, and low similarity animals, thus leading to differences in preference for anthropomorphic images but no preference among nonanthropomorphic images.

Additionally, Chen and Kenrick (2002) found that increasing similarity for outgroup members can have a more powerful effect on liking than increasing similarity for ingroup members. The authors argue that these effects are driven by lower levels of baseline similarity, and thus liking, in outgroups. Thus, enhancing similarity leads to a positive violation of expectations and increased attraction that does not occur for ingroups, whose baseline similarity is already high. In the context of this research, relatively dissimilar animals would have lower baseline similarity to humans, whereas moderately animals would have higher baseline similarity to humans, and highly animals would have the highest baseline similarity to humans. Therefore, it is possible that relatively dissimilar animals would benefit more from anthropomorphism than moderately similar animals, which would in turn benefit more from anthropomorphism than highly similar animals.

The purpose of this research is to explore how anthropomorphized animal images are used in marketing communications and how consumers respond to them based on their similarity to humans. Findings of content analyses indicate that animals that are perceived to be moderately similar to humans are more frequently used as anthropomorphic mascots than animals that are either highly similar or relatively dissimilar to humans. However, results from an experimental study indicate that, while participants are indifferent between animal types when they are presented non-anthropomorphically, relatively dissimilar animals gain the most in terms of attitude favorability when presented anthropomorphically. I argue that these results are driven by a lower level of baseline similarity to humans in the nonanthropomorphic form. Thus, enhancing similarity to humans via anthropomorphism leads to positive violation of expectations and enhanced attraction toward relatively dissimilar animal images. Consequently, animals that are relatively dissimilar to humans might be underutilized as anthropomorphic spokescharacters.
Brand Anthropomorphization: A Homocentric Knowledge Activation Perspective

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

We describe a four-stage process of brand anthropomorphization, which begins with primary cognition and proceeds through secondary cognition stages. Two types of anthropomorphized brands perceptions are formed—one that is transient and one that lasts longer. Stronger forms of brand anthropomorphization, going beyond brand personality attribution (e.g., weaker forms), exist.

Consumers’ perceptions of brands as human may have important implications in the area of branding. At present, we do not know much about the process that influences the degree to which consumers perceive brands as complete human beings. Social science researchers have considered anthropomorphization an automatic psychological process that does not vary among individuals, and marketing researchers who have explored the notion of humanized brands (e.g., brand personality), have also considered the process as a chronically occurring consumer judgment (Fournier 1998). However, the anthropomorphization theory introduced by Epley et al. (2007) posits that the tendency to anthropomorphize objects is a phenomenon varying in strength depending on different domains, contexts, and individual differences.

This research contributes to the literature in the following three manners. First, we fill a gap in the marketing literature by extending consumers’ perceptions of brands as fully human, instead of as merely possessing personality traits. We show that consumers consciously report their anthropomorphic perceptions of brands and behave toward them as if they, in fact, possess human traits. Second, we go beyond the idea that anthropomorphism is explained by the qualities of the target (i.e., morphological features of a product (Aggarwal and McGill 2007)) and show that the characteristics and motivations of perceivers are an important component of the process of anthropomorphization. Third, we introduce a process of brand anthropomorphization. Finally, we delineate the outcomes of the brand anthropomorphization process for consumer behavior.

Deriving our argument from related research in social and neuropsychology, and from the results of in-depth interviews (8 focus-group interviews (n = 21) and three one-to-one in-depth interviews), we posit that the process consists of two phases: a) primary cognition and b) second-order cognition. In the first phase, we argue that the concurrent activation of human knowledge (i.e., highly accessible and salient brand personality attributions) and a strong emotional arousal triggered at a specific moment of consumer-brand interaction make individuals anthropomorphize brands. Amygdala, the neural structure in the brain, participates in both emotional processing and complex social judgments, including anthropomorphism (Heberlein and Adolphs 2004). Thus, the processing of social information and emotionally arousing stimuli are causally related. In fact, we observed that respondents experienced strong emotional arousal at their first encounters with brands, and, concurrently, they possessed accessible social (e.g., brand personality) knowledge about the brands that they perceived in human terms. A less stable initial perception of anthropomorphized brand (AB) is formed at the end of the primary cognition stage.

In the secondary-order cognition (metacognition) stage, a more enduring perception of AB is formed. At the metacognition phase, individuals evaluate their initial judgment and identify their thoughts as favorable or unfavorable (Petty et al. 2007). When consumers find that their AB perceptions are favorable or desirable, they will be motivated to refine their existing thoughts of afferent AB. We define the refinement process of afferent AB as the process through which consumers engage in more complex attribution of human capabilities to the initial afferent AB judgment. The relevant literature and the results of in-depth interviews have shown that AB refinement agents such as sociality motivation, effectance motivation, and brand love-dependency operate as drive states which facilitate the perception of brands as human. In turn, high cognitive capacity leads to the correction of the initial perception of brand as a transient human to the perception of brand as a commercial entity.

In the refinement stage, we find that consumers project mind, intentions, emotions, and spirit to brands. Consumers also show signs of parental solicitude by viewing their brands as little brother or son. That is, individuals feel the desire to treat a brand with the same social conventions that they would give to another human. The fourth stage ends with the formation of stable, long-lasting perception of brand as a human. Finally, AB perceptions have important theoretical and practical implications. Specifically, consumers who anthropomorphize their brands trust the brands more, expect higher performance, forgive the brands’ transgressions as they would forgive a friend, care for them with parental solicitude, and are willing to spend extra for brands’ accessories. Brands also consciously affect consumers’ manner to behave. Deeper understanding of the nature of anthropomorphic brand judgment presents rich material for more effective marketing communications.

This is an exploratory, qualitative study, and future research should further empirically test the process presented across a wider variety of respondents. We believe that the theory of anthropomorphism may be extended by incorporating the activation of not only human knowledge structures but also self-knowledge representations. We also believe that there are additional avenues for future examination regarding how specific marketing communication efforts may impact consumers’ perceptions of brands as empathic or moral and, subsequently, influence further inferences regarding brands in human terms.

REFERENCES


Emotional Anthropomorphism: What Kind of Face Sits Well on a Car’s Frontal Appearance?

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

While there is an increasing body of research on the effects product design and its aesthetics unfold on consumers’ behavior (e.g., Bloch 1995; Chitturi et al. 2007, 2008) the specific aspect of anthropomorphism as a guideline for designers has only attracted scattered attention in the scientific study of product design (Aggarwal and McGill 2007). This is astonishing since it is well known that the human face possesses an evolutionary highly relevant stimulus configuration that is processed faster and with more attention than most other stimuli in the environment (Mondloch et al. 1999). Both these characteristics constitute basic marketing aims (Pieters and Wedel 2004).

Although scientific insights into the specific mechanisms underlying anthropomorphism are only scattered, this concept seems nevertheless to enjoy at least in the domain of car design a high popularity among practitioners. In a detailed exploration of several car designs and based on interviews with car designers Welsh (2006) for example reaches the conclusion that in practice the analogy between human faces and car fronts is a widespread source for inspiration and used by almost all car makers as an orientation for their designs. While it is appealing to rely on this simplified heuristic and go ahead with designing anthropomorphized cars, it nevertheless leaves open some questions that are both from a theoretical as well as from a practical point of view critical. The present research is aimed at providing insights into detailed aspects of anthropomorphizing on a process level and employs the neuroscientific method of fMRI to shed light on the involved mental processes. Answers to three major questions regarding the specifics of anthropomorphism are intended to be answered by the present research endeavor.

First, whether the reference to human faces is suited to guide a company’s design strategy or whether it is just a scientific construct that is pulled on the shapes that actually unfolds its effect independently of any emotional interpretation. We found evidence in the neuronal activation pattern that the perception of car and human faces leads to a considerable correspondence in neuronal activity which suggests more of an effect for anthropomorphism than a simple descriptive metaphor that conveys placement and shape of the car’s features. Our findings suggest that people do indeed see cars as having facial expressions in a way that goes beyond simple descriptive metaphor.

Second, the question whether different kinds of faces (male vs. female) are equally suited to serve as an inspiration to design a product with the aim of increasing its liking. We found that liking of car faces and female faces can be traced back to similar patterns of activation in the reward circuit while male faces are (at least by male participants) judged on a different basis. In addition to the insight that there are many different kinds of faces and one is well advised to think about anthropomorphism in a more detailed way, this finding also offers some initial hints for the clarification of the underlying motives for a peoples’ preference for certain car designs. In particular, one can clarify whether people are searching for a design that allows them to express themselves in a desired way; thus, literally using the car front as a kind of mask for themselves or whether they simply strive for the most attractive or aesthetically appealing design, respectively. Because car fronts activate the reward circuit in a similar way as female faces do, it is unlikely that our exclusively male participants are willed to use a car as a way to express themselves. In contrast, as men like female faces better than male faces, are longer looking to them and appreciate them according to their attractiveness (Levy et al. 2008), the similarity in processing indicates that car fronts cause a feeling of reward directly due to attractiveness and not mediated by semantic associations.

Finally, the third question asks for the best liked combination of friendliness and aggressiveness in a car’s front. Our findings allow the recommendation to give the grille a friendly expression whereas the headlights should rather look aggressive. From a theoretical perspective it is very interesting to notice that this preference pattern was found both in the reward circuit as well as in the observed behavioral pattern. This points to the conclusion that this specific combination of emotions unfold a rather direct impact on preference without complex or sophisticated mental processes mediating this relationship. That is, people seem to have an initial preference for this combination of emotions rather than having to think intensively about the potential meaning of these emotions. Further research is however needed to clarify the exact nature of the underlying mental mechanism to better understand this result.

Cars do have a face–this is the answer to the central question posed at the outset of this research project. The remarkable similarity in processing human faces and car fronts indicates that the anecdotic evidence gathered by Welsh (2006) has a substantial basis and is suited to serve as a valuable source for inspiration when it comes to design a new car front. This result enables a more intense application of insights gathered in the domain of human facial attractiveness and, thus, to tap so far unused potentials. Especially proportions that constitute an attractive female face seem to be suited to optimize a car’s front to please the eyes of the beholder.
Product Involvement vs. Product Motives as Moderators of the Effects of Ad-evoked Feelings: An Analysis of Consumer Responses to 1,100 TV Commercials

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Many studies have shown that ad-evoked feelings have a positive influence on consumers’ brand attitudes (e.g., Brown, Homer and Inman 1998; Burke and Edell 1989, Holbrook and Batra 1987). While these effects of ad-evoked feelings thus seem well established, three things are striking: (1) the limited pool of ads in each study, raising issues of selection bias (e.g., Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty 1986, Burke and Edell 1989, Stayman and Aaker 1988), (2) the fact that unknown brands are often used (e.g., Burke and Edell 1989, Derbaix 1995, Miniard et al. 1991), and more importantly, (3) the fact that product category effects are not considered, even though academics and advertising practitioners generally assume that the effectiveness of emotional advertising appeals depends on the product category (e.g., Adaval 2001, Batra and Stephens 1994, Johar and Sirgy 1991, Malhotra 2005, Morris et al. 2002, Rossiter, Percy and Donovan 1991). The purpose of this research is to revisit the role of feelings on brand evaluations using a much more comprehensive and representative set of existing commercials (addressing the issue of potential selection bias, fictitious ads and unfamiliar brands) and testing whether these effects depend—as previous experimental lab research would suggest—on the level of involvement and the type of motives, hedonic versus utilitarian, associated with the product category.

Although a dual role of affect has been theorized by several researchers in the sense that ad-evoked feelings automatically transfer to brand attitude under low involvement, whereas under high involvement feelings are assumed to impact brand attitudes by biasing brand cognitions (e.g., MacInnis and Park 1991, Miniard et al. 1991, Petty et al. 1993, Olsen and Pracejus 2004), other researchers suggest that emotional advertising works better for low than for high involvement products (e.g., Lautman and Percy 1984, Morris et al. 2002, Rossiter et al. 1991). Indeed, it is a classic prediction of dual-route models of persuasion such as the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) that feelings should have lower influence on persuasion under conditions of high elaboration likelihood than under conditions of low elaboration likelihood. Our studies will test whether this theoretical prediction holds when the source of involvement comes from the product category being advertised rather than from an external manipulation, as in typical persuasion research.

Another stream of research on the effects of affective states in consumer judgments and decisions suggests that affect is more likely to be relied upon when consumers have hedonic motives than when they have utilitarian motives (Pham 1998)—a finding that has been replicated in multiple subsequent studies (e.g., Adaval 2001, Yeung and Wyer 2004). According to a feeling-as-information explanation (Schwarz and Clore 1983, 2007; Pham 1998), this is because feelings are perceived to be more relevant in light of hedonic/experiential motives than in light of instrumental motives. This finding raises the question of whether similar moderating effects would occur in typical advertising exposure settings when the type of motives comes not from an external manipulation (as in previous studies) but simply from the product category being advertised.

Therefore, previous experimental laboratory research makes very clear predictions about the moderating effects of involvement and types of motives on the effects of feelings on attitudes and evaluations. However, it is not clear whether these predictions would hold in typical ad exposure settings where the primary source of involvement or type of motives is not an experimental manipulation, but merely the product category being advertised. The purpose of this research is thus to submit these two lab-derived theoretical predictions to a large-scale “external reality check.”

Study 1 examines how the emotions evoked by 413 TV commercials (featuring 294 different brands across 93 different product categories) influence the brand evaluations of a representative set of 907 adult consumers. Each respondent evaluated a set of about 20 commercials and each commercial was evaluated by 40 to 60 respondents. After seeing each commercial, respondents rated their (1) attitude toward the ad (Aad) (3 items, α=.96), (2) their cognitive assessments of the ad’s content (2 items, α=.90), and (3) their attitudes toward the advertised brand (Ab) (2 items, α=.86). These Aad, cognitive assessments (CogAss), and Ab responses were averaged across respondents for each ad to form 413 aggregate ad-level dependent-variable observations. The emotional content of each ad was assessed on a 15-item emotional scale by an independent group of 12 judges who were blind to the study’s hypotheses (α=.97). To control for the possibility that ratings of emotional responses to the ads may reflect some other aspects of the ads, such as their originality or creativity, the same 12 judges also rated the ads in terms of their originality (5 items, α=.99). Finally, the 93 product categories represented in the ads were coded by another set of six judges. This second set of judges were given the names of the product categories and asked to rate them on 5 ‘product category involvement’ items (α=.94) and 5 ‘utilitarian/hedonic product motive items’ (α=.95). Inter-judge reliabilities were high for all items and for all judges.

The results of a series of regressions show that, even after controlling for respondents’ Aad and cognitive assessments of the ad and for the ads’ originality, the emotional content of the ads had a significant positive influence on consumers’ brand attitudes (β=.236, t=4.93, p<.001). Further, the results suggest that, contrary to what one would predict based on a peripheral-route explanation of affective influences, the effects of emotions on brand attitudes did not depend on the level of involvement associated with the product category (β Emotion x Involvement =.014, t<1). However, the effects of emotions on brand attitudes were significantly moderated by the type of motivation associated with the product categories (β Emotion x Hedonism =.112, t=3.03, p<.01).

A second study was carried out (1) to assess the robustness and generalizability of the first study’s findings, and (2) to address a limitation of the first study by controlling for brand familiarity effects. To this end a different set of 687 TV commercials were evaluated by a different sample of 427 consumers, keeping the design and methodology largely identical to Study 1. This time the impact of the emotional content of the ad on consumers’ brand attitudes was fully mediated by Aad. However, the results concerning the product category motivational factors remained identical as in Study 1. Again product involvement did not and utilitarian/hedonic product motive did moderate the impact of emotional ad content on brand evaluations. The latter finding is consistent with recent theoretical suggestions that the selective reliance on feelings as a function of their relevance is quite flexible (Pham 2004).
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The Variety Paradox. Why LESS Evokes MORE
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Conceptualization

Nowadays, consumers are used to being spoilt with choice: Most retailers offer an abundance of product variants since they acknowledge that consumers prefer stores that provide large assortments. Some stores, however, (strategically) form an exception. For instance, convenience stores trade fulfilling consumers’ need for convenience against their wish for variety. Accordingly, choice is limited to one or two kinds per product category. In this research we examine whether consumers behave differently when facing low-variety assortments compared to high-variety assortments. In particular, we intend to find out whether they will include more variety in their subsequent choices to make up for the perception of limited choice triggered through low-variety assortments.

Although consumer researchers have extensively studied the effects of assortment breadth on choice making (Chernev 2003; Gourville and Somas, 2005; Iyengar and Lepper, 2000; Kahn and Wansink, 2004; Sela et al., 2009), they have focused on choice-specific effects within the assortment. They neglected general motivational effects that are triggered through looking at the assortment, lingers on, and influence subsequent decisions from different choice sets. We know from psychological research that providing choices determines consumers’ feelings of autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Being able to choose from various options enables consumers to express themselves as individuals (Kim and Drollet, 2003) and boosts happiness (Patall, 2008). On the contrary, situations perceived as restricting one’s option to choose freely arouse reactance (Brehm, 1966), a motivational state that triggers behavior aimed at reasserting one’s personal freedom (Wicklund, 1974).

Accordingly, we propose that low-variety assortments trigger the perception of limited choice and evoke reactance. Once the motivational state of reactance is aroused consumers are increasingly interested in behavior that functions as a means to regain their freedom. Levav and Zhu (2009) showed that spatially confined consumers engage in more variety seeking in order to reassure their personal freedom. Thereby, they demonstrated that variety seeking behavior constitutes a means to deal with reactance. Hence, we predict that low-variety assortments trigger subsequently more variety seeking than high-variety assortments since they evoke the need to offset the perception of limited choice.

Studies

The validity of this prediction is tested in five studies. In the first study (N=94) we manipulated the variety that participants saw before making a subsequent, seemingly unrelated choice. They saw either three (low variety) or eight (high variety) different chips flavors. Afterwards, they chose five snacks out of a five item choice set as a reward for their participation. We measured variety seeking behavior through the number of different snacks that participants chose. Consistent with our hypothesis participants sought significantly more variety after seeing the low-variety assortment than after seeing the high-variety assortment.

The objective of study 2 (N=68) was to test the robustness of the effect by varying the nature of the stimuli. We used a print advertising depicting chocolate. Second, we kept the overall number of items equal across conditions: both advertising showed twelve chocolate bars and differed only in the variety of different flavors they showed (3 vs. 12). The results confirmed our previous finding: Participants who saw the low-variety advertising sought significantly more variety.

We use reactance theory to explain the underlying process of our finding. The objective of study 3 (N=67) was to test the effect of reactance directly by measuring participants’ chronic reactance tendencies. As predicted participants’ chronic reactance tendency interacts with the variety manipulation. This suggests that reactance is the underlying psychological factor driving the effect. The effect of the variety manipulation was accentuated for highly reactive individuals and attenuated for weakly reactive individuals.

We claim the perception of limited choice to be responsible for evoking more variety seeking. The objective of study 4 was to test this by deliberately manipulating the perception of limited choice. Hence, this study made use of three conditions: one low-variety condition and two high-variety conditions. One of the high-variety conditions (high-confined) showed some items crossed out indicating that they are no longer available. This evokes the perception of limited choice. The results showed that participants in the low-variety and high-confined condition did not significantly differ from each other in their variety seeking behavior. However, both sought significantly more variety than the high-variety condition. This implies that the perception of limited choice is responsible for evoking a heightened need for variety.

While the previous studies demonstrate the effect in laboratory conditions, study 5 intended to replicate our findings in a real purchase context, i.e. the coffee shop at the university. One day we put up advertisings showing a low-variety of pastries in the while on another day we used advertisings showing a high-variety of pastries. We compared students’ variety seeking behavior on the two days. Thereby, we defined variety seeking not as taking several different products but as trying out something special. Students tried out significantly more special coffees when they saw the low-variety advertising while they chose more normal coffee kinds when they saw the high-variety advertising.

General Discussion

Across five studies we show that facing low-variety assortments compared to high-variety assortments evokes subsequently more variety seeking. This is grounded in reactance theory: Low-variety evokes the perception of limited choice and triggers reactance. Accordingly, consumers experience the heightened need to reassure their threatened freedom and engage in variety seeking behavior.

Our findings hint at a ‘variety paradox’. Although retailers offer high-variety to cater consumers’ needs for variety, less variety is more effective in triggering subsequent variety seeking. Our findings provide some interesting guidelines for retailers and convenience stores: It is important to acknowledge that assortment variety triggers motivational states which prevail and affect consumers’ subsequent behavior. For instance, in stores where the assortment is limited facing the first shelves evokes the perception of limited choice and triggers consumers to seek more variety. These stores could cater this need by providing more variety in the following shelves or offering specialties, new or lesser known brands. Consumers’ desire to express themselves through their
choice will increase the likelihood of choosing several different items or trying out new products.

REFERENCES
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumer inferences play an important role in marketing (see Kardes, Posavac, and Cronley 2004 for a review). For example, consumers often use observable product attributes to judge unobservable ones, such as inferring product quality based on its price (e.g., Huber and McCann 1982), warranty period (Srivastava and Mitra 1998), or country of origin (Teas and Agarwal 2000). However, although research has shown that consumers may indeed often rely on observable attributes or the overall product evaluation (e.g., Broniarczyk and Alba 1994) when evaluating products, we currently do not know if, or more specifically, under which conditions, consumer inferences of product quality are based on retailers’ assortment variety. This lack in the literature is even more surprising given that assortment variety differs greatly across stores.

Based on our proposition of the existence of a lay theory suggesting that retailers with larger product assortment variety cannot know much about the quality of any one product and hence offer lower quality product selections overall, we identify a “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference strategy as a tool employed by consumers when evaluating a product. That is, although normatively quality perception of a product should not differ according to the variety of other noncomparable products sold in the store, we propose that consumers are likely to rely on the degree of variety of a retailer’s assortment for quality inferences, which in turn will drive purchase likelihood. Furthermore, because we expect that the “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference requires cognitive resources, purchase likelihood and quality perceptions based on this lay theory should be limited to those consumers with available cognitive resources.

To examine the proposed lay theory consumers have regarding the presence of noncomparable products, we investigated the effects of the size of the assortment of noncomparable products in the purchase environment on consumers’ evaluations of a target product. For our first study, we told participants that they were shopping for a toothbrush that was found in an assortment with either three or twenty noncomparable products (such as household cleaners, food items, etc.). Since we expect the proposed inference strategy to be employed only when consumers have the cognitive resources to do so, we also varied some participants’ cognitive resources with a cognitive load task. After the presentation of the hypothetical shopping scenario, we assessed participants’ likelihood of purchasing that product. Our results support the hypotheses that consumers use a “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference strategy, and thus are more likely to purchase a product when it is found in a small (vs. large) assortment variety. However, as hypothesized, this effect occurs only with participants who have the cognitive resources available.

We extend our findings with our second study, and also demonstrate that use of the “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference is moderated by the level of comparability of other products in the assortment. More specifically, participants were told that they were shopping for a notebook that was found in an assortment of either three or twenty comparable or noncomparable products. Similar to study 1, we also varied participants’ cognitive resources. Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that the extent of comparability of the other products in the assortment moderated consumers’ use of the “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference.

In our third study, we sought to find process evidence for our proposed inference strategy, and to demonstrate that differences in quality perceptions drive the effect of assortment variety on purchase likelihood. We told participants that they were shopping for a digital camera that was found in an assortment variety of either three or twenty noncomparable products. In addition to purchase intentions, we also examined participants’ quality perceptions of the digital camera. Analyses show that quality perceptions drive the effect of assortment variety on purchase intentions. In particular, participants were more likely to purchase the digital camera and had higher quality perceptions of the digital camera that was part of a small (vs. large) assortment variety. Quality perceptions fully mediated the effect of assortment variety on purchase likelihood.

In sum, we were able to provide evidence for a “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference strategy that consumers use. We found that consumers use this inference when evaluating products that are found in assortments of noncomparable products, suggesting that it is variety, and not size, of the assortment that drives this lay theory. We showed that consumers were more likely to purchase an item when it was found in a small (vs. large) assortment variety. Since we argued that use of this inference would require cognitive resources, we did not expect to find this inference to be utilized when consumers were under cognitive restraint. Furthermore, we provide evidence that it is the level of comparability of the other items in the assortment, and not merely the size of the assortment variety itself that drives consumers to use the “jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none” inference. Lastly, we provide support that shows how the relationship between assortment variety and purchase intent is mediated by consumers’ quality perceptions.

REFERENCES


Improving the Power of Switching Intent to Predict Actual Switching Behavior—A Construal Level Theory Perspective

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent research has shown that repurchase intent is often not a good predictor of actual repurchase. A number of reasons for this discrepancy have been suggested in the literature, but have not been examined empirically. We propose that one critical distinction between switching intention and actual switching is that the former is a response to a hypothetical situation, whereas the latter is an action that is actually carried out. Recent behavioral research on construal level theory (CLT; see Trope and Liberman 2007 for a review) shows that when an event feels psychologically far away (e.g., when the event is going to happen in the distant future, is socially distant, or is hypothetical), people tend to focus on “central” aspects of the event—i.e., aspects that give direct implications to the desirability of the event. According to CLT, these aspects constitute the “higher level construal” of the event. On the other hand, when an event feels psychologically near (e.g., when it is going to happen in the near future, is socially near, or when is not hypothetical), people tend to focus on aspects that are associated with the procedures involved in carrying out the action (e.g., practicality, feasibility considerations). These aspects constitute the “lower level construal” of an event.

We first conducted a longitudinal study surveying cell phone service subscribers of all three providers in a city state. This approach allowed us to measure satisfaction and other attitudinal variables and switching intent in one period, and subsequently observe actual switching behavior in the next period. The survey was conducted in six waves over a 24 months period.

Monetary switching costs (e.g., penalties for switching during a contractual period) and non-monetary switching costs (e.g., the hassle of going to the service provider to cancel the contract, signing up for a new contract, potentially changing cell phone number) feature highly in switching cell phone service switching. Based on CLT, we expect that monetary switching costs, which are closely related to the desirability of switching, constitute a higher level construal, whereas non-monetary costs constitute a relatively lower level construal of switching. According to CLT, consumers are likely to focus on desirability-related aspects and underestimate the importance of other feasibility-related considerations when they respond to hypothetical situations—to this extent, monetary costs, but not non-monetary costs, are likely to serve as a basis for their response to intention questions. Moreover, non-monetary costs will be taken into account only when consumers consider carrying out actual switching.

The findings of our longitudinal study confirm this hypothesis, to the extent that the non-monetary switching cost main effect and its interaction effect with satisfaction are insignificant in predicting switching intent. However, for actual switching behavior, the non-monetary switching costs effects explain more variance than the equivalent effects of monetary switching costs. This finding suggests that while non-monetary switching costs are important determinants of actual switching behavior, they may not be taken into consideration when consumers report their switching intention.

We then conducted a series of experiments to directly test the CLT and demonstrate how the consideration of non-monetary costs can be facilitated when consumers respond to intention questions. Specifically, recent research has shown that process simulation (i.e., asking respondents to visualize the step-by-step process of carrying out a certain action) highlights the feasibility-related aspects of an event and encourages a lower-level construal of the event (Zhao, Hoeffler and Zauberman 2007). We therefore predicted and found that when process simulation is employed in surveys, it can potentially reduce the inconsistency between responses to intention measures and actual switching behaviors. Our findings suggest the possibility of an unobtrusive administration of this procedure in surveys that will improve the predictive power of intention measures of actual switching behavior. These findings have potential applications beyond the immediate switching behavior application to any intent-actual behavior measurement context.

REFERENCE:
Can Thinking Abstractly Help Choosing From Large Assortments?
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
A visit to the supermarket attests to the large assortment or variety in almost any product category. Recent research shows findings for the negative effects of assortment size and relies on the assumption that choosing from large assortments involves making more trade-offs among the competing advantages and disadvantages and thus making decision makers generally worse off. Prior research has shown that an increase in the assortment size is accompanied with an increase in choice difficulty, and consequently a decrease in choice satisfaction (Chernev 2006; Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

Besides number of options in the assortment, choice conflict depends on whether the attribute differences among assortment options are seen as linked to competing goals or seen as servicing the same goal. Specifically, a consumer may experience greater conflict when the options in an assortment are seen as more dissimilar and being linked to different goals. This is because the more dissimilar are the alternatives to each other, the more distinct dimensions are considered and compared and require more difficult trade-offs to be made (Shugan 1980). On the contrary, a consumer may find choice less difficult to make when the attributes of the assortment options are seen as servicing the same objective and options appear to be more similar to one another. Thus, holding constant the assortment options, changes in similarity perception could affect levels of difficulty and satisfaction experienced in the choice process. This paper examines how changes in mental representation of choice options in large assortments affect similarity perceptions, and subsequently influence choice difficulty and outcome satisfaction.

We propose that when choosing from large assortments, consumers who represent the options at a higher level are likely to engage in higher-level, alternative-based evaluations and perceive alternatives in a single category as serving the same higher order goal and thus more similar and substitutable to one another. In contrast, consumers who represent options at a lower level will focus on lower-level, feature-based trade-offs and perceive alternatives as attaining different competing sub-goals and thus more dissimilar and unsubstitutable to one another. This reliance on feature level comparisons heightens the level of conflict and choice difficulty experienced when choosing from large assortments. Here, we stress that similarity perceptions of options in a large assortment made by different levels of representations are construed at different levels. Specifically, whereas a higher level of representation finds options in a single category more similar in terms of serving the same consumption goal and providing similar benefits, a lower level of representation perceives options as more dissimilar to one another with respect to the attribute level difference.

Therefore, we hypothesize that when choosing from a large assortment, individuals who represent assortment options at a higher level experience less choice difficulty and more satisfaction with the chosen option than those who represent options at a lower level. Consistent with our proposition, three experiments demonstrated that, when facing large assortments, participants activated with a higher level of representation found options in an assortment more similar to one another, experienced less difficulty while choosing, and reported greater satisfaction with the chosen option than those activated with a lower level of representation.

Experiment 1 tests the effect of mental representations of the choice set on choice difficulty and satisfaction in a real choice scenario involving small versus large assortments. Experiment 1 found that, when facing a large assortment, consumers who represent options at a lower level find options more dissimilar to one another and competing for different sub-goals. As a result, they considered more distinct dimensions, made more comparisons, and consequently experienced more difficult trade-offs. On the other hand, representing options at a higher level makes the options in large assortment seen as more similar, less diversified, more substitutable in satisfying the same consumption goal, and consequently experiences less conflict and less difficult trade-offs. Indeed, our mediated moderation analysis show that perceived similarity among options mediated the moderating effect of mental representation of options on assortment size and choice difficulty.

To provide a stronger test of our argument, we next explicitly manipulate the perceived similarity among options in Experiment 2 and Experiment 3. Experiment 2 manipulates perceived similarity with same-colored plates vs. different-colored plates for candy options. Since different-colored plates highlights the differences among options, consumers with lower level of representation in such condition perceive greater dissimilarities among choice options and engage in more trade-off comparisons than when candies displayed in same-colored plates. Consequently, consumers with lower level of representation experience greater degree of difficulty and less satisfaction with the chosen outcome when candies displayed in different-colored plates than in same-colored plates.

Experiment 3 manipulates perceived similarity with assortment structure. Whereas choosing from feature-based categories highlights the differences among options and would lead to more trade-off difficulty and less satisfaction, choosing from benefit-based assortments focuses on the similarities among options and would lead to less choice difficult and greater satisfaction with choice outcome. The results show that choice difficulty experienced by consumers with a lower level of representation is mitigated when perceived similarity among items increases in benefit-based assortment structure. As options are perceived as more similar to one another in a large assortment, they are seen as more substitutable and servicing the same consumption goal.

The present paper contributes to the existing literature in two important ways. First, our research provides new insights into the ways in which levels of mental representations affect choice making process and choice consequences in large assortments. Second, we provide new perspective of the role of similarity perceptions in comparisons and choice process. Particularly, we show that different levels of representation construe similarity perceptions differently. Our results also provide important implications for marketers. Although recent research on assortment size has generally concluded that large assortments lead to increased choice difficulty and decreased satisfaction, marketers can improve choosers’ experience and satisfaction with large assortments by altering the level at which assortment options are represented.
Price-Based Expectations
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers often lack the time, training, or inclination to judge the quality of a product. Consequently, to infer quality, they seek simpler alternative signals (cf. Aaker 1991), such as the product’s country of origin, how heavily it is promoted (Raghupathi 1998), or, most relevant to the current paper, its price.

Considerable evidence demonstrates that consumers judge higher-priced products to be of higher quality (Riesz 1979; Huber and McCann 1982; Gerstner 1985; Rao and Monroe 1989). It appears that our pleasure from consuming products like wine does not depend only on our sensors (e.g., smell, taste), but also on extrinsic attributes such as price or brand name.

One way in which prices can affect quality judgment is through expectations. For example, prices have been shown to produce placebo effects such that discounted products are less effective than regular-priced products (e.g., Shiv, Carmon, and Ariely 2005; Waber, Shiv, Carmon, and Ariely 2008). Participants in these experiments assigned higher efficacy to the fully priced product, hence the placebo effect. In line with these findings, we can reasonably assume individuals tasting wines are following the same reasoning: having relatively high expectations when tasting highly priced wines.

In a between-participants design, we asked three groups of participants in Experiment 1 to indicate how much they expected to like our 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon before asking them to taste it, based only on price ($10, $20, or $40) and appearance. We find that expectations were positively correlated with price.

What will the effect of high expectations be after tasting the wine? Expectations Confirmation Theory (ECT, Oliver 1977, 1980) conjectures that the interaction between expectations and perceived or actual performance leads to post-purchase satisfaction. If a product meets one’s expectations, satisfaction will follow. However, if a product falls short of expectations, the consumer is likely to be dissatisfied (Oliver 1980; Spreng et al. 1996).

One way to consider expectations here is as a reference level in which people are loss averse and the environment determines endogenously the reference point they use (Ko“szegi and Rabin, 2006). By this account, a person’s reference point is the rational expectations she held in the recent past about outcomes that are consistent with optimal behavior given expectations. In the language of our Experiment 1, the model predicts that higher prices will increase peoples’ expectations that will be subsequently used as a reference point.

Moving to a dynamic setup (Ko“szegi and Rabin, 2009), higher prices should create higher expectations, and consumers would judge the realization (taste of the wine) relative to this reference point. If the wine meets or exceeds the high expectation, an individual will evaluate a wine using the price-quality heuristic, assigning higher ratings for higher-priced wines. In contrast, if the wine quality falls short of the expectations, we expect tasters to be disappointed and give the wine a lower rating. Since higher prices result in higher expectations, the likelihood of disappointment increases with price.

To test this prediction, in Experiment 2, we gave six different groups of participants the opportunity to taste and rate the wine. Three groups tasted the lower-quality Cabernet Sauvignon, whereas the other three groups tasted the higher-quality Cabernet Sauvignon (a pretest confirmed the wines’ quality). Participants were informed that the wines were available for purchase in the winery, for $10, $20, or $40. Consistent with past research, the higher the price of the high quality wine (2005), the higher the participants rated it. In line with the above predictions, the responses of participants tasting the lower quality wine produced a negative correlation between price and quality.

The results of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 suggest that high prices create high expectations, and that these expectations serve as a reference point in subsequent quality judgments. When a product meets (or exceeds) expectations, quality judgments are high, but when a product falls short of expectations, quality judgments drop.

Experiment 3 provides a direct test of the degree to which participants’ expectations are met under each price-quality combination. We asked participants in this experiment to first taste the wine under the same six conditions as in Experiment 2. Then each participant indicated what they thought about the wine: “disappointing,” “meets expectation,” or “exceeds expectations.” The results support our predictions: the good wine met expectation, and disappointment in the low quality wine increased with price.

Even if consumers’ appreciation of a product is positively correlated with its price, demand will not necessarily increase. Often consumers approach the winery with a budget constraint, so even if a higher price makes the wine tastier, actual sales may not increase. Recently, Heffetz and Shayo (2009) investigated the relationship between price, inferred quality and demand by disentangling the price-quality effect from the budget-constraint effect. Their findings show that prices do affect the stated willingness to pay. When they considered actual demand, however, quality-judgment elasticities were smaller than budget-constraint elasticities, and hence, in line with standard assumptions, the demand function was downward sloping.

How should wine sellers use our empirical findings when pricing their products? The most appropriate way to test the effect of expectation confirmation on demand is by conducting a field study in a real business. To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first demonstration of the effect the price-quality heuristic has on demand in an actual market setting. In the winery we study, despite the noticeable difference in quality between the 2004 and 2005 wines, the owner of the winery was planning to price the new wine at $10 also, primarily because sales were slow and he did not want to scare customers away (the experiment was conducted during the summer of 2009). Before introducing the higher-quality wine, the owner agreed to experiment with different prices.

We offered winery visitors one of the Cabernet Sauvignon as part of the six wines they tasted (we never had the 2004 and 2005 present at the same time). On different days, the wines’ prices varied: $10, $20, or $40. The dependent variables were the number of bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon sold in each of the six treatments, and the profits to the winery. We find downward-sloping demand for the lower-quality wine. For the higher-quality wine, however, more people bought the wine at $20 than at $10.

REFERENCES


Deep Discount or Free? The Effects of Price Promotion on Willingness to Pay

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on price promotions has shown that when a free product is bundled together with another product, consumers reduce their willingness to pay for the free product when it is not being offered for free (Kamins, Folkes and Fedorikhin 2009; Raghubir 2004). For example, when a pizzeria offers free bread sticks with the purchase of a pizza, consumers expect to pay less for bread sticks on a subsequent visit when the promotion is no longer in effect. Raghubir (2004) reasoned that when a product is offered as a free gift, consumers infer that the cost of the product is low and lower their willingness to pay for it when it is not in promotion.

In the current research, we examine promotions in which a product is offered for a low price— but not free—with the purchase of another product. If a free offer reduces consumers’ reservation price through inferences regarding the cost of the product, it follows that the impact of a promotion that allows a purchase for a reduced price should be a function of the magnitude of the promoted price. In this sense, free, or zero price, would be an extreme example of the application of this inference. In other words, compared to a situation in which a product is promoted for free, when a product is promoted for a price greater than zero, consumers should infer a higher cost. In turn, we should expect that this type of promotion would have a smaller impact on consumers’ willingness to pay on subsequent purchases.

Research on several aspects of human psychology has shown that zero is used in a qualitatively different manner than other numbers, often causing discontinuity in the transition from small numbers to zero (Heyman and Ariely 2004; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Shampanier, Mazar and Ariely 2007). This literature suggests that zero is a special number and the effect of price promotions on subsequent purchase occasions may not be a direct function of magnitude of the discount. We propose that the value of the required purchase is used as an anchor when consumers estimate their reservation prices. In addition, when a product is not offered for free, but for a low price, consumers will also use this low price as an anchor. While a product can’t possibly cost zero, it can conceivably have a low price. Thus, we argue that zero will not be used as an anchor to estimate the price of a product, but a low price will. In this case, the reservation price of a free product will have only one anchor (value of the required purchase), while the reservation price of a product promoted for a value greater than zero will have both the required purchase and the promoted price as anchors.

Our reasoning leads to an interesting effect: a low price can lower reservation prices further than a zero price. Referring back to our opening example, we expect that a promotion that offers bread sticks for free with the purchase of a pizza will have a smaller impact on reducing consumers’ willingness to pay for bread sticks on subsequent visits, than one that offers bread sticks for a low price, like one dollar with the purchase of a pizza. Consistent with an anchoring mechanism, as the promoted price increases, reservation prices also increase and eventually are superior to those of the free condition. Therefore, we predict a discontinuity in the relationship between promoted product price and reservation price at zero, such that a zero price will lead to higher reservation prices than a low price.

Our hypothesis was tested in two studies. In our first study, 164 participants answered a series of questions about two promotional advertisements. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: control, free, 50 cents and 2 dollars. Thus, the between-subject manipulation was the type of promotion (if any) that was offered with the purchase of a product. In the control condition, participants were informed about the price of a product (pizza and tomato sauce), but no mention was made to the price of the promoted product (bread sticks and spaghetti). For both products, we found that participants in the free condition were willing to pay more for the promoted products when they were not in promotion than participants in the 50 cents condition. For bread sticks, even a two-dollar price lead to lower WTP than a free price. For both products, expected quality was not affected by the price manipulation.

In study 2, we manipulated two factors: type of promotion (free vs. low price) and price of the required purchase (medium vs. high). Participants were randomly assigned to four conditions and asked to consider that they were looking for a gift for a friend who loved wine and to state how much they would be willing to pay for a wine thermometer. Participants also answered a few questions related to their expectations of quality. We found main effects for required purchase price and promotion type. More importantly, we found a significant interaction, as the WTP of a free product was significantly affected by the price of the main purchase, whereas the WTP of a low price product was not. Together, these studies offer support for our hypothesis.

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Europoly Money: The Impact of Currency Framing on Tourists’ Spending Decisions

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In January 1999, 12 countries decided to adopt the Euro at a given exchange rate: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland. In all of these countries, except Ireland, the nominal prices of goods were lower in Euros than they were in the prior local currency. From January 1999 onwards, the 12 participating countries included prices in Euros along with the prices in their local currencies. The legal tender of Euro was introduced on January 1, 2002, and countries gradually ended the circulation of their existing national currencies. There was a dual circulation period until the changeover was complete, during which time both the new Euro and the old national currency remained in circulation. By the end of February 2002, all 12 countries had discontinued the use of their local currency. However, to help people translate prices from one currency into the other, in many countries, a reverse pricing communication system was adopted: Prices were displayed in Euro terms, with the local national currency conversion shown just below. It was expected that, over time, consumers would become accustomed to thinking in Euro terms, and would no longer require the local currency reference as an aid. This paper examines whether that assumption was well founded.

We investigate how framing a price in two nominally different (but economically identical) currencies affects consumer-spending decisions based on the predictions of the “money illusion,” a tendency to over-weight nominal values relative to real values (cf. Shafir, Diamond, & Tversky, 1997). Prior research has shown that the money illusion influences spending in foreign currencies: People under spend when one unit of their home currency buys multiple units of the foreign currency and overspend in the reverse situation (Raghubir & Srivastava, 2002). We extend this line of research by examining how sequential and simultaneous exposure to multiple currencies, that is exposure to a price in French Francs and in Euros, affects consumers’ price magnitude perceptions and spending. The primary theoretical contribution of this paper is to show that when multiple nominal values are available, then the manner in which people integrate them can lead to “money illusion” biases, and that these individual level effects have economic consequences with implications for consumer welfare, public policy, and the prices that companies can charge.

We first examine the impact of sequential exposure to foreign currencies on price perception and intended spending. We propose that people will perceive prices in Euros to be cheaper if they are first exposed to a currency whose face value is larger than the Euro (DM 2 ≡ €1) than if they are first exposed to a currency whose face value is smaller than the Euro (£0.5 ≡ €1). A one-way ANOVA on the total cost of a hypothetical shopping basket using three levels of prior currency exposure (DM, £ or Irish Punt =€1) was significant (F (2, 48)=9.96, p<.01). As predicted, those in the UK £ condition overestimated the cost of their shopping basket (M=€89.78 vs. Actual=€46.96, Control Irish Punt=€52.13), whereas those in the German DM condition underestimated it (M=€33.47).

The second experiment examines the impact of simultaneous exposure to two foreign currencies. We propose that people anchor on the nominal value of the currency that is more salient and display the “money-illusion” effect, even when the original currency is available to them in the context. We provided people prices in two currencies: Euro and French Franc highlighting one and providing the second as a reference: €p or FF€. Study participants rated their likelihood of purchasing 13 different products including toiletries and clothing, using the cover story that they had to shop due to their baggage being misplaced by an airline. A repeated measures ANOVA on the purchase intentions for the thirteen items showed that people are likely to spend more when the frame is €p versus FF€(M€p=2.24 vs. MFF=1.87, F (1, 22)=3.55, p<.05), and are also likely to consider a larger set of items (M€p=5.60 vs. MFF=3.62, F (1, 22)=4.49, p<.05). Study 3 examines the external validity of these effects. We analyzed tourist receipts data from 1993–2008 for 10 of the 12 countries that adopted the Euro (excluding Ireland as the exchange rate is in the opposite direction, and Luxembourg due to data unavailability) compared to a set of six comparable countries that did not: UK, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. To control for country differences and overall trend in tourism expenditures, we included GDP, CPI, population, and unemployment numbers for the year as predictor variables along with whether or not the country had adopted the Euro (0=not, 1=eyes), the number of years prior to or subsequent to the introduction of the Euro (e.g., 1993=−9, 2002=0, 2008=6), as well as the interaction between these two variables. The regression was significant (R²=.73, F (8, 196)=66.24, p<.01), with the interaction term positive and significant (β=4433.93, t β=2.64, p<.05). The positive and significant interaction implies that tourism receipts were higher after the Euro introduction in 2002 for those countries that adopted the Euro as compared to those who did not, controlling for overall trend and other differences across Euro and non-Euro countries.

To summarize, we show that while presenting prices in multiple currency frames could lead to a gradual adaptation to the new Euro currency standard as demonstrated by Marques and Dehaene (2004), it may not be sufficient. Results of our laboratory experiments determined that there was a systematic error in the price magnitude perceptions of the same unfamiliar currency due to differences in prior exposure to another currency (experiment 1), and when prices were presented in more than one currency (experiment 2), suggesting that providing both currencies simultaneously is not adequate at attenuating money-illusion effects.

REFERENCES


Framing and Sales Promotions: Understanding the Characteristics of Present and Prospective Consumers
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Economic-based literature suggests that charging loyal customers a higher price than prospective customers would lead to greater profits if loyal customers are comparatively more price insensitive than prospective customers (Chen 1997; Chen, Narasimhan, and Zhang 2001; Taylor 2003). Behavioral research, however, shows that when targeted promotions occur, loyal customers perceive higher unfairness and betrayal when they know that they paid higher prices than non-loyal customers (Feinberg et al. 2002). Targeted promotions may generate a side effect by making the targeted segment salient as potential comparison others to those consumers who are not offered the promotions. Other consumers (e.g., loyal customers) will necessarily be at a price disadvantage in relation to the targeted segment (e.g., prospective customers). In particular, loyal customers, knowing that they paid higher prices, exhibit higher perceived unfairness than prospective customers (Tsai and Lee 2007). Loyal customers often perceive that they are entitled to an equal or even a lower price since they invest comparatively more than prospective customers in the firms (Cox 2001). These different conclusions from marketing research raise an interesting and important question: what is the effect of sales promotion framing on consumers’ perception of price fairness across different customer segments (regular vs. prospective)? Recently, a study showed that price framing, presenting the same price offer or price change in various formats, may reduce consumers’ negative reactions even when consumers know that they paid higher prices than other people (Lee and Monroe 2008). However, the study did not examine whether using price framing to minimize consumers’ negative perceptions can be implemented across different customer segments. This research contributes to consumer research by showing that using different price promotion framing tactics can induce price-disadvantaged customers to have different transaction perceptions and subsequently increase their perceived price fairness across different customer segments and promotion deal comparisons of different magnitudes.

The prediction that consumers generally would prefer segregated gains more than reduced losses in their buying decisions was first proposed by Thaler (1985). Diamond and Sanyal (1990) later confirm that sales promotions framed as gains are chosen more often than promotions framed as reduced losses. Their study finds that consumers perceive promotions of equivalent financial magnitude framed as gains as better value than those framed as reduced losses. We propose that for assumed less price sensitive and more emotionally attached regular customers, they would be more attracted to a reward promotion (e.g., free gift) framed as a separate extra gain than discount promotion framed as a reduced monetary loss. The additional reward may generate an exclusiveness effect that loyal customers may feel more special than other customers who do not receive any rewards. On the other hand, if prospective customers are more price sensitive and less emotionally attached to the firm, they would be more attracted to a discount promotion (e.g., pure price reduction) framed as a reduced monetary loss.

Using two experiments, we examined whether the effect of sales promotion framing can successfully reduce consumers’ negative perceptions of targeted pricing across different customer segments and deal comparison situations. Participants first read a short scenario asking them to consider buying a notebook computer from their all-time favorite and frequently visited online store or an online store that they had never patronized before. All participants were presented the same notebook computer web page with the same product but with a different sales promotion framing format. Participants were randomly assigned to either the control or various framing conditions. After all participants indicated their willingness to buy the notebook computer, they were told that a friend recently bought the same notebook computer from the same online store for a much lower price. Finally, participants were asked to evaluate the dependent measures on nine-point scales.

In both two studies, price discount and reward framing, compared to an equivalent financial offer without any framing tactics, successfully increased consumers’ perceived transaction dissimilarity, which subsequently increased their perceived price fairness. The results confirmed that the degree of perceived transaction similarity is highly related to perception. In addition, price promotion framing tactics work differently across different customer segments. Our findings suggest that regular customers perceived significantly higher price fairness when they received a price promotion that was framed as a reward than as a discount. On the other hand, prospective customers perceived significantly higher price fairness when they received a promotion that was framed as a discount than as a reward. Previous studies suggest that retailers should treat regular customers better since they would be more upset when they learn that prospective customers received a better deal than they did. We propose an alternative explanation that price-disadvantaged regular customers’ negative price unfairness perception might also be influenced by the easiness of comparing their own transaction to other individuals’ transactions. Our research findings suggest that price-disadvantaged customers’ negative perceptions toward targeted pricing can be mitigated by not only using different price promotion presentation formats but also giving different levels of promotion to different customer segments so that the offers will be less comparable.
Consumer’s Motivation of Counterfeit Consumption in China
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Vane-Ing Tian, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
Judith Lynne Zaichkowsky, Simon Fraser University, Canada

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Economic-based literature suggests that charging loyal customers a higher price than prospective customers would lead to greater profits if loyal customers are comparatively more price insensitive than prospective customers (Chen 1997; Chen, Narasimhan, and Zhang 2001; Taylor 2003). Behavioral research, however, shows that when targeted promotions occur, loyal customers perceive higher unfairness and betrayal when they know that they paid higher prices than non-loyal customers (Feinberg et al. 2002). Targeted promotions may generate a side effect by making the targeted segment salient as potential comparison others to those consumers who are not offered the promotions. Other consumers (e.g., loyal customers) will necessarily be at a price disadvantage in relation to the targeted segment (e.g., prospective customers). In particular, loyal customers, knowing that they paid higher prices, exhibit higher perceived unfairness than prospective customers (Tsai and Lee 2007). Loyal customers often perceive that they are entitled to an equal or even a lower price since they invest comparatively more than prospective customers in the firms (Cox 2001). These different conclusions from marketing research raise an interesting and important question: what is the effect of sales promotion framing on consumers’ perception of price fairness across different customer segments (regular vs. prospective)? Recently, a study showed that price framing, presenting the same price offer or price change in various formats, may reduce consumers’ negative reactions even when consumers know that they paid higher prices than other people (Lee and Monroe 2008). However, the study did not examine whether using price framing to minimize consumers’ negative perceptions can be implemented across different customer segments. This research contributes to consumer research by showing that using different price promotion framing tactics can induce price-disadvantaged consumers to have different transaction perceptions and subsequently increase their perceived price fairness across different customer segments and promotion deal comparisons of different magnitudes.

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Purchase Intention Toward Counterfeits–Antecedents And Consequences From Culturally Diverse Countries
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Karin Pennemann, Trier University, Germany
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Cristian Dabija, Babes-Bolyai University, Romania

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction
The sale of counterfeit products accounted for up to 9% of the world trade volume, amounting to an increase of 10,000% in the past two decades (IACC 2009). Since firms manage their brands internationally across many markets, marketers should understand how the antecedents’ impacts on consumer behavior vary across countries. Even counterfeiting is a cross-national phenomenon; its antecedents have rarely been investigated cross-nationally.

Brand manufacturers of illegally copied brands sustain damage: the brand’s equity is jeopardized and the consumer’s demand is diverted into gray markets (Green and Smith 2002). Nevertheless, Nia and Zaichkowski (2000) note that the majority of consumers “did not believe that counterfeits decrease the demand for original, luxury brand name products” (Nia and Zaichkowski 2000, 494). Commuri (2009) states that the impact of counterfeiting on consumers of genuine goods (originals) is little-noticed. Thus, a further investigation is needed on counterfeiters’ impact on originals.

In their literature review, Eisend and Schuchert-Güler (2006) note antecedents related to the person, such as demographics, antecedents related to the product, such as price, social as well as cultural context, and also purchase situation, which all stimulate the purchase of counterfeits. They emphasize a more solid theoretical grounding for further studies and call for cross-cultural investigations to illuminate potential differences between the antecedents (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler 2006).

The purpose of the following study is to examine antecedents of purchase intention toward counterfeits (PiTC) and its influence on consumers’ willingness to pay for the original (WtPO).

Conceptual Framework
To develop the conceptual model, we draw firstly upon the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991), secondly on the adaptation-level theory (Helson 1964), and thirdly focus on the moderating effect of country specifics.

Armitage and Conner (2001) achieved a higher explained variance for intention using the theory of planned behavior instead of the theory of reasoned action. Following the theory of planned behavior, we first hypothesize the impact of subjective norm of socially legitimate (counterfeit) behavior, and secondly hypothesize the impact of perceived behavior control, defined as the ease of access to counterfeits, on purchase intention toward counterfeits (PiTC). Additionally we hypothesize the impact of novelty seeking, perceived risk, integrity, and fairness toward the original on purchase intention toward counterfeits (PiTC).

We refer to Helson’s (1964) adaptation-level theory linking PiTC to willingness to pay for the original (WtPO). According to this theory, exposure to formerly perceived stimuli serves as a reference by which stimuli perceived later are judged. As noted by Cordell, Wongtada, and Kieschnick (1996), counterfeits are sold at a lower price, thus we hypothesize a negative impact of PiTC on WtPO.

We suggest that culture (i.e. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, Confucian values, and holistic thinking), economic development (GDP per capita) and trademark legislation serve as context factors. Thus, consumer behavior in the counterfeit context and its antecedents’ impacts are proposed as varying across countries.

Method
Our sample included 700 face-to-face consumer interviews in each country of investigation. Enhancing the generalizability of the study (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra 1999), we chose China, Romania and Germany as countries of investigation in view of their differences in economic development, culture, and trademark legislation, where we note a considerable variation, to make our hypothesis more suitable for generalization (van de Vijver and Leung 1997). In addition to validity and reliability confirmation, we also confirmed partial scalar invariance of the measurement in comparing country samples (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998). Since we operationalized PiTC as a formative measurement to include the main product categories that are counterfeited, we applied the partial least squares approach for its handling of formative and reflective measurement models and its less stringent assumptions concerning the distribution of variables and error terms (Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics 2009). The structural model was estimated for each country, and differences in path coefficients were tested for significance (Keil et al. 2000).

Findings and Discussion
Our study pursues the call of Eisend and Schuchert-Güler (2006) for a better theoretical grounding and a cross-cultural investigation in further studies on the counterfeit context, and the call of Commuri (2009) for an examination as to how counterfeits impact genuine brands.

Applying the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991), we examine the antecedents’ impact on PiTC and reveal that country specifics, such as culture, economic development and Confucianism, matter when investigating consumers’ illicit behavior. Such a cross-country investigation amplifies the understanding of consumer behavior and thus provides insights for internationally implemented actions that are aimed at tackling companies’ losses caused by counterfeits.

In China, where Confucian values are a strong cultural trait, Fairness to the genuine brand does not lower PiTC, whereas in Western countries it does. Thus Fairness, which has not been discussed previously in the counterfeit context, matters as an antecedent of PiTC when investigating societies where Confucian values are not common. The Asian understanding of copying and of honoring one’s master differs from Western beliefs and has its roots in the Confucian set of values and ethical norms.

Integrity has no significant/negative impact for developing countries, such as China and Romania, where trademark law was only established quite recently and its implementation is somewhat sporadic. Recently, China has aligned its legal framework within the international intellectual property rights treaty and is still revising its trademark legislation. Since laws and norms are related, a cross-national legal alignment is of increasing importance.

Subjective Norms do legitimate counterfeiting behavior and have a higher impact on PiTC for collectivistic countries, such as China and Romania, than for individualistic countries. Popular...
endorsers and opinion leaders are a means of increasing consumers’ awareness of negative outcomes affecting brand manufacturers, as well as society at large. Once counterfeiting is socially disregarded, especially in collectivistic societies, counterfeits will not be used any more to display status and prestige.

Following the adaptation-level theory (Helson 1964), we show that the availability of typically low-priced counterfeits lower the reference price for genuine brands in the consumer’s mind. Especially in Romania, brand manufacturers seem to be jeopardized by the visibility level of counterfeits.

REFERENCES


Opinion Seeking In Consumer Networks
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The importance of social communication in explaining consumer behaviour has been highlighted across a wide variety of research streams (e.g., Childers 1986). What is known from prior research is that consumers tend to rely on their social networks (e.g., a network of friends) as resources for product information, evaluations, and recommendations to make better purchase decisions (Brown and Reingen 1987; Gershoff, Broniarczyk, and West 2001). Given the importance of social networks in the consumer's search process, it is surprising that research has largely ignored the effect of consumer's position in a social network on opinion seeking behavior. Studies in this domain have generally ignored the possibility that where a consumer is located within a social network may influence the degree to which that consumer seeks opinions from others. For instance, will the opinion seeking behavior of a consumer be any different if he is strategically connected to others in the network versus if he is not strategically connected? Will a consumer increase her propensity to seek out opinions knowing she is in a better network position to reach those who could help her with her information search? These research questions suggest that as a discipline we do not have a thorough understanding of how network positions influence the opinion seeking behavior of consumers. Therefore, our research focuses on both the structural properties of the social network (network centrality), and the outcomes of those relational characteristics (e.g., how the social links affect opinion seeking behavior).

Opinion seeking is the act of searching out advice from other consumers (Flynn et al. 1996). Our research investigates how occupying a certain network position affects the extent to which consumers seek the opinions of others, as well as the extent to which consumers are approached by others for their opinions. One of the ways in which individuals can occupy such an advantageous position is to become central in a network (Lee, Cotte, and Noseworthy 2010). Network centrality is measured by examining the number of direct relationships an individual has with others, or by assessing the extent to which an individual links otherwise unconnected cliques or individuals (Freeman 1979). Thus, centrality can be defined by the number (quantity) of ties or the configuration (strategic location) of ties. In this paper, we focus on two common measures of network centrality: degree centrality and betweenness centrality.

Occupying a central position, through either degree or betweenness centrality, reflects greater social capital (Burt 2000). Individuals located in central positions have unique social advantages; they can take advantage of their network structure for information and resources (Coleman 1990). We propose that those who are centrally located in a network will exhibit a greater tendency to seek opinions than those who are on the periphery of the network. By tendency, we mean the frequency with which central people approach others for their opinions. In addition, we propose that central individuals are more likely to be approached for opinions than those residing in the periphery.

To test our theory, we conducted two network studies using social network analysis. One of the main strengths of social network analysis is that it enables researchers to locate the structural position of individuals in a network (Lee et al. 2010). In study 1, we examine a brand community made of primarily young adults. We measure an individual’s opinion seeking behavior for a product associated with the brand community. In study 2, we extend our theory to a different type of a social network (a seniors’ social club), and measure opinion seeking behaviors for a service associated with this club.

The results of two field studies provide strong support the positive association between network centrality and opinion seeking, as well as, network centrality and opinions sought. With regards to degree centrality, out-degree centrality was positively related to both opinion seeking measures. However, this was not the case for in-degree centrality. The results support the notion that people who rated themselves as central (social perception) were associated with having higher opinion seeking tendencies, while people who were central (as rated by others) did not have higher opinion seeking tendencies. In contrast, for the opinions sought measure, a positive relationship was found for in-degree centrality, but not for out-degree centrality.

With regards to betweenness centrality, the data reveals positive relationship with both opinion seeking and opinions sought. Results from the two field studies reveal that those occupying a high betweenness position are most likely to take advantage of their brokering opportunities to seek opinions from others; but it also opens up opportunities for others to seek opinions from them. This is an important finding because it emphasizes the social benefit (i.e. increased opportunity to seek out diverse information) from occupying a betweenness central position. However, it is possible that they may also face social costs or burdens as others may come to depend on them for information.

Concluding, this research contributes to the literature by recognizing that there are unique opportunities and advantages of occupying a central position in a social network. Overall, the findings suggest that centrality is positively related to both opinion seeking and opinion approachability. We have firmly demonstrated the importance of both the number of social ties and the position of those ties in the flow of opinions through a social network. Future researchers can continue to advance on this understanding in both face-to-face and online social networks and communities. The growth in peer-to-peer technologies is fuelling growth in virtual social networks, and the opinion-seeking and opinion-sharing that attend those communities.
The Flow of Cosmetic Routines in Iran
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Pauline Maclaran, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK
Babak Taheri, University of Strathclyde, UK

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Conceptualizing consumption as an experiential process rather than solely a cognitive purchasing behavior (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Bloch 1982; Hawkins et al. 1983; Bloch and Bruce 1984), in the past three decades, researchers have addressed “consumers' subjective and emotional reactions to consumption objects” (Holt 1995, 2). Among a variety of dimensions of consumption as experience (e.g., emotional, experiential, hedonic, aesthetic) (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Belk et al. 1989; Celsi et al. 1993), autotelic consumption has gained momentum in studying recreational activities in which consumption becomes 'an end in itself' (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). That is, consumers' deep involvement with the object of consumption results in their self-defined form of recreation, pleasure, and flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1992; Bloch and Bruce 1984).

Within consumer research, Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’ has been acknowledged as an important part of autotelic consumption, usually associated with various leisure activities such as games (Holbrook et al. 1984), aesthetic appreciation (Joy and Sherry 2003), sports (Holt 1995; Sherry et al. 2005), extraordinary experiences such as skydiving (Celsi et al. 1993; Celsi 1992) or white water rafting (Arnould et al. 1999), gambling (Cotte 1997), and even online search experience behaviors (Mathwick and Rigdon 2004). Noticeably, although Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1992) highlights opportunities for finding flow in their self-defined activities, and perhaps due to the cultural turn’s emphasis on identity issues, the more mundane aspects of everyday life have been overlooked in the literature on autotelic consumption. Neither has his point about flow’s context-dependency triggered any cross-cultural research, particularly in non-Western societies. Our present study addresses these gaps in the literature and scrutinizes consumption of cosmetics as an everyday life practice among young adult women in Iran.

In our study, first, we were inspired by the fact that with a population of only 70 million (25 million women under the age of 35), Iran achieved the seventh rank in global markets for consumption of cosmetics and toiletries in 2007 (Euromonitor, 2008). Also, given the recent political interpretations of Iranian women’s excessive consumption of make-up (as either a silent rebellion against the political ideology of the Islamic Republic or a sign of Western decadence), we were motivated to explore the potential symbolic meanings (McCracken 1988; Schouten 1991) embedded in these individuals’ consumption of cosmetics. Although our non-participatory observations and memos provided us with a pool of ideas, through our in-depth interviews with 15 young adult women (aged between 21 and 32) in Tehran and Karaj, we gained a deep understanding of our informants’ consumption practices. Our data analysis followed a systematic process of constant comparison in terms of searching for similarities and differences (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Quite contrary to our expectations, our emergent findings revealed that our informants’ make-up practices were less to do with identity construction (Schouten 1991; Merskin 2007; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Askegaard et al. 2002; Reynolds et al. 1977; Bloch and Richins 1992; Brownmiller 1984; Ragas and Kozlowski 1998; Peiss 1990) and more to do with a total immersion in the experiential and creative aspects of make-up use and as a way to uplift their tired spirits in a monotonous environment. Despite facing various challenges, including frequent stigmatization on account of their often excessive use of make-up, our informants derived high levels of satisfaction from their make-up routines.

The consumption of cosmetics, as our study reveals, is a way of sustaining wellbeing for those women who have less exciting lives. They use their body as an immediate natural environment (Tuin 1997) and a great potential source of joy (Csikszentmihalyi 1992; Stebbins 1977, 2009). Their ‘escapist’ (Hirschman 1983) engagement with make-up as a source of ‘flow’ provides them with a sense of solace, pleasure, and creativity (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Bloch and Bruce 1984). In the absence of extrinsic satisfaction and appreciation from their society (Csikszentmihalyi 1992; Bloch and Bruce 1984), they continue to engage in their make-up rituals on a daily basis. Although they do not necessarily believe that make-up makes them more beautiful or relate its use to their self-esteem, they still experience ‘significant mood changes’ (Celsi 1992). For them, flow (i.e., application of make-up) becomes its own reward and offers intrinsic satisfaction (Bloch and Bruce 1984) and brings feelings of serenity and ecstasy. Yet, for these women, the real challenge of flow experience lies not in the task itself (i.e., consumption of cosmetics) (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) but in the consequences of accomplishing the task, which are related to the dominant cultural order of their society (Jafari and Goulding 2008). Generally speaking, excessive use of make-up is frowned upon in Iran. The state views it as an un-Islamic behavior and a sign of Western decadence. Therefore, women with heavy make-up are labeled as ‘street women’ and are usually stopped and advised by the morality police. Likewise, conservative families do not approve of their female members’ excessive use of make-up as it signals lack of dignity. Such women are also more susceptible to sexual harassment.

Despite all these problems, these individuals accomplish the task of wearing make-up with determination. They feel more “alert, concentrated, happy, satisfied and creative” (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre 1989, 316). The ‘activation energy’ embedded in their autotelic experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) focuses them in total absorption on the task in hand to the exclusion of all else around them. Although they know that make-up will do little to change their situation in real life, they can escape into a fantasy world for some part of the day. They give themselves up to the processes of its application, losing themselves in the creative play and artistry that these processes facilitate without giving much thought to final outcomes.

Based on our findings from this context, we stress that changing socio-cultural dynamics in contemporary societies give rise to new forms of autotelic consumption which need to be investigated. By extending the application of autotelic consumption to very mundane life practices, we also emphasize that flow is context-bound and what may lead to flow for one person in a particular socio-cultural context may not necessarily hold true across different socio-cultural environments.
Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Adult Children’s Consumption of Care Services for Their Elderly Parents
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT:
There is no shortage of anecdotal or scholarly evidence that adult children experience stress as they engage in care decisions for their elderly parents. However, adult children are often conflicted when faced with the task of translating their respect and love for their parents into actual decisions about care. This is, the tasks of choosing and using elder care services are not straightforward or unproblematic for adult children.

The purpose of this paper is to theoretically account for the stress experienced by adult children by attending to the underlying cultural influences on elder care consumption. We take the position that adult children are consumers of elder care services because they are (typically) caregivers for their parents; adult children can choose to provide the requisite care themselves, or to consume commercial services that provide care. The marketplace for elder care services has responded to the care-giving needs of adult children by offering a variety of care options, ranging from in-home visits to assisted living facilities to long-term nursing care. However, although the need for elder care services is often inevitable and the marketplace offers a number of solutions, many children find the experience of making care decisions traumatic and stressful.

It is critical that we acknowledge that we are examining only a sub-set of elder care decisions—those made by the adult children—and, in doing so, we implicitly strip agency from the elderly parents. Certainly, many seniors make their own decisions about care, and others make decisions in conjunction with their children. In this paper, we choose to focus on the experiences of adult children who play the lead roles in decisions about their parents care. We use the context of making care decisions for an elderly parent to reveal how consumers experience stress in the marketplace, and, therefore, do not seek to imply that elder care decisions are the sole responsibility of adult children.

The context of elder care is particularly revealing of consumption-related stress because it often does not involve one specific decision. Rather, elder care consumption involves a cycle of major and minor decisions as various care services are chosen, used, and then deemed inappropriate. Further, adult children typically want to do what is best for their parents, yet are torn between a desire to keep parents safe (from physical harm, etc.) and a desire to respect their parents’ wishes to live as independently as possible. However, being physically and cognitively self-sufficient can become problematic as we age, and many children find themselves worried about their parents on a host of issues including mobility and physical safety, diet and medication, hygiene, finances, and social interaction. Further, many children experience significant lifestyle changes as their parents become more dependent on them to provide and manage their care. This can result in children feeling torn between their responsibilities to their parents and to their own spouses and children.

In this paper, we use data gathered from depth interviews with adult children to examine these tensions and to reveal how they are experienced. We find evidence of two dominant tensions in our informants’ narratives. The first is a general awareness that it is not possible to respect a parent’s wishes to live independently and to maintain independence from the parent. We suggest that adult children experience stress as an outcome of these tensions, and we find that stress is characterized by guilt, exhaustion, and anxiety.

We also discuss the cultural ideologies of autonomy and active care management, and suggest how they are related to the context of elder care. Autonomy encompasses the strong cultural value placed on being independent individuals. In the context of elder care, the independence of both parties (i.e., the adult and the child) becomes compromised as the parent’s need for care becomes apparent. Active care management encompasses the broad, pervasive expectation that adult children will employ an active, managerial approach to their parents’ care by taking all steps necessary to ensure health and safety.

In our interpretation, we propose that the tensions arise as adult children encounter these two distinct cultural ideologies, which can have opposing implications for elder care consumption. That is, in the context of elder care, consumers experience tensions across their individual interpretations of the cultural ideologies because these interpretations push them in different directions in terms of consumption. The outcome of these tensions is stress, as adult children feel torn between the different levels of care that would satisfy them and that would satisfy their parents.

The theoretical contribution of this research is that it demonstrates that consumers are not always able to satisfactorily resolve tensions between their interpretations of cultural ideologies. Prior research has demonstrated that consumers can appropriate discrepant ideological positions and discourses to effectively negotiate personalized consumption meanings and shape their individual consumption behavior. In this paper, we build on this extant work, and we suggest that a particular consumption context can link seemingly unrelated cultural ideologies such that consumers are unable to negotiate an acceptable outcome, and that inability to negotiate the discrepancy can result in stress. Further, we demonstrate that marketplace solutions to consumer needs can, in fact, problematize and complicate consumption; in the context of choosing and using elder care services, many adult children are unable to negotiate disparate ideologies and are therefore unable to reach a satisfactory consumption outcome.
Inalienable Wealth and Trauma Resolution: An Explanation of Genealogy Consumption
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Inalienable wealth has been defined as possessions that are intentionally kept within a close group, with previous research focussing on certain possessions taking on behavioural dynamics of guardianship or temporal orientation (Curasi, Price and Arnold, 2004; Price, Arnold and Curasi, 2000). These perspectives, however, have focussed on possessions becoming a contested area arising from issues of ownership and wanting to maintain and perpetuate cherished meanings associated with products. However, this perspective is from a living individual wanting and willingly seeking out ways to engage with later generations by perpetuating these memories. This paper aims to understand how the living create inalienable wealth by seeking out possessions and information from previous ancestral generations (including photographs, sharing ancestral data, visiting places and historical documents), even though there may be no living, emotional, linkage between the generations concerned. We will argue that peoples motivations to undertake genealogical consumption reflects not only cultural and societal changes but a fundamental need by individuals to use genealogy consumption for, conscious and unconscious, resolution of personal and inter-generational traumas.

The antecedents of genealogical consumption were explored using a Consumer Culture Theory perspective that focussed on the individual’s self-identity and their cultural context. Western culture has been identified to varying levels with individualism, referring to a cultural system that emphasises the rights of the individual over the community and attributed to declining levels of family orientation and, from a British context, declining levels of religiousness (Halman, 1996; *, *, 2005). Previously individualism has been attributed to materialism, reflecting wider dissatisfaction within an individual’s life (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; La Barbera and Gurhan, 1997). However, the failure of possessions, and hence materialism, to lead to personal happiness may be reflective of a deeper, personal, crisis, within the individual. This crisis, we argue, motivates the consumer to seek resolution through alternative possession meanings, i.e. obtaining inalienable wealth through genealogy. The motivation for these behaviours we argue can be identified with personal and inter-generational trauma, i.e. inherited from previous generations.

Inter-generational trauma can be identified from two perspectives. First, the psycho-analytical perspective argues that trauma is inherited by the child from the parent preventing the child from developing their own, unique, personality, consequently, resulting in inter-generational trauma (Abraham and Torok, 1994; Praeger, 2003). The second distinct research field draws upon sociological studies, which argues that each generation occupies a particular social location, allowing for social experiences to be refracted and made meaningful. However, failure by the individual to identify with and belong to that period of time ensures that they remain traumatized and instead focused on historical experiences and events (Dilthey, 1924; Mannheim, 1928/1972). The methodology involved a four year immersion into the genealogical consumption arena, covering the period January 2006 to January 2010, including access to a variety of genealogical data and consumption arenas. The sampling procedure employed was theoretical, relational and discriminative. To achieve this, only participants who were related to the researcher were interviewed, regardless of whether this connection was within their wider extended family or from several generations back. This was assessed by participants having a *, * surname appear within their respective genealogical lineage. All the participants were approached via a genealogy website producing a sample group consisting of eight people, aged from 48 to 67, living in Australia or Britain. Participants were interviewed with open-ended, grand tour style questions exploring various inter-related themes including: the participants’ reasons for their genealogy research, how they engaged with historical records (including their personal meaning for the participant) and their immediate family histories. During the interview process the author probed participants to explore in greater depth personal experiences, family myths, stories and traumas, opinions and thoughts and how this was reflected in their genealogy research.

The interviews were then transcribed, analyzed to identify emergent themes. Finally to ensure reliability and validity the findings were reviewed and discussed with the help of two academic reviewers—one a consumer behaviorist, the other a qualified psychotherapist.

The findings supported the notion that participants were using genealogy as a means of creating a sense of identity in response to their irreligious, lack of materialistic traits and need to seek out a community and wider sense of family. Genealogy offered then an opportunity to substantiate and maintain a sense of identity through creating inalienable wealth through genealogical consumption. Participants discussed how they collected, shared and exchanged ancestral documents, photographs, and stories, often leading to meetings and trips to shared ancestral locations. These engagements offered an opportunity for a reconstruction of a sense of family and inter-connectedness. The need to seek information from the past is reflective of the sociological perspective of inter-generational trauma.

From a psycho-analytical perspective, only one participant did not discuss a personal and/or inter-generational trauma that had motivated them to undertake genealogical research. Personal traumas ranged from loss of a father, unwanted divorce or a wider need to understand their world, whilst inter-generational trauma included stories of slavery, death in child birth and loss of aristocratic titles and lands. Participants by seeking out ancestral documents, stories and myths provided an opportunity to explore, understand and resolve the cultural, economic and social aspects of their inherited trauma.

Genealogy then presented opportunities for participants to seek out and develop the cues, materials and prompts for the individual to recall particular events to the extent of creating memories that they may never have experienced. These memories were then actively shared and sought out amongst participants and genealogical communities providing a needed and sought affirmation of their self-identity. Commemorative and other related memory symbols (such as documents and photographs) become then symbolic to the participants because of their ability to elicit a reaction from individuals; a reaction identifiable with and developing further previous work into inalienable wealth by Curasi, Price and Arnold’s (2004) and Price, Arnould and Curasi’s (2000). The genealogical community based upon a shared ancestor offered opportunities for intimacy, creating social networks and resolution of personal and inherited traumas but also a means to achieve autonomy and independence.

REFERENCES


The Defensive Trust Effect: Consumers’ Defensive Use of Belief in a Just World to Cope with Decision-Generated Threat
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
The Defensive Trust Effect: Consumers’ Defensive Use of Beliefs in a Just World to Cope with Decision-Generated Threat
Consumers cope with many threats in the course of buying, consuming, and interacting with marketers. Previous research has examined how consumers cope with the threat of negative emotions (Yi and Baumgartner 2004), potentially misleading persuasion attempts (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Darke and Ritchie 2007), and difficult decisions (Luce 2005; Luce, Payne, and Bettman 1999). Decision-making is inherently threatening to consumers; both in terms of their goal to make accurate decisions (Luce, Bettman, and Payne 1997), and also their goals of maintaining self-esteem and self-presenting as competent decision makers (Janis and Mann 1977; Luce 2005). This research introduces a previously unexamined coping strategy consumers engage—termed defensive trust coping—in which consumers fall back on positive world beliefs to re-construct the situation as one in which they can and should trust marketing agents.

Drawing on just world theory (Hafer and Begue 2005; Lerner 1980), positive illusions research (Taylor and Brown 1988, 1994) and cognitive experiential self theory (CEST; Epstein and Pacini 1999), we develop theory that specifies psychological mechanisms and situational moderators. Just world theory specifies that individuals are motivated to perceive the world as a place where they can get what they deserve (Lerner 1980; Lerner and Simmons 1966). This belief is more strongly held by some individuals than others (Rubin and Peplau 1975). BJW functions as a healthy coping mechanism that helps individuals adapt to their own potential fortunes (i.e. if I am a good person, I deserve good outcomes, so I will get good outcomes; Furnham 2003; Hafer and Begue 2005). Our research views BJW as a type of positive illusion (Taylor and Brown 1988, 1994), which operates through consumers’ trust judgments of marketing agents. Past research suggests that consumers typically respond negatively to threat by becoming less trusting of marketers (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Darke and Ritchie 2007) (Slovic, Flynn, and Layman 1991). In contrast, our model predicts that high-BJW consumers respond to decision-generated threats by falling back on their BJW as a coping resource, leading to buffering—whether positive or negative—on trust judgments. The result of four experiments support our conception and predictions.

Exp 1 used choice as a manipulation of threat, with post-choice serving as the high threat condition. Pre (post) choice participants responded to an adapted seven-point trust scale (Delgado-Ballester 2004) before (after) choosing between the two cameras. BJW was measured as a continuous variable using seven items from an established scale (Dalbert 1999). Participants imagined an interaction with a retail salesperson culminating in the salesperson recommending one digital camera over another. Moderated multiple regression analysis (Aiken and West 1996) revealed a significant choice-stage x BJW interaction ($\beta = .259, t = 2.422, p < .05$), such that high-BJW participants (+1 SD) trusted the salesperson more [Predicted Value ($PV$) = 4.46] than low-BJW (-1SD; $PV$ = 3.58), but only in the post-choice stage, when decision-generated threat was high. A mediation test (Baron and Kenny 1986), using coded thought listings of valenced thoughts as a mediator, supported the assumption that defensive trust coping operates through a relatively pre-conscious process, in that it did not require cognitive elaboration.

Exp 2 examined conditions wherein consumers experience threat both pre- and post-choice. Consumers experience conflict in the pre-decision phase when choice alternative are not differentiable, because they cannot find a reason on which to base their choice (Shafir et al. 1993). A non-differentiable choice set was inserted into the scenario described for Exp 1. Under this form of decision conflict, high-BJW consumers again trusted a retail salesperson more ($PV$ = 5.01) than low-BJW ($PV$ = 3.73; $\beta = .429, t = 4.428, p < .001$), across both decision phases.

Exp 3 further extended the findings in three important ways: 1) an experimental priming manipulation of BJW provided causal evidence for the effects, 2) a cognitive load manipulation provided further evidence that defensive trust coping occurs through a pre-conscious process, and 3) a manipulation of prior motive established a boundary condition of the effects, such that they were extinguished under prior motive.

Exp 4 provided clearer evidence of the defensive nature of the effect by manipulating the level of decision-generated orthogonally along two dimensions, material consequence and psycho-social threat. Material consequence threat was manipulated by instructions to half the participants that a draw would award some participants the actual digital camera chosen. Psycho-social threat was manipulated by assigning half the participants to role of buyer (high-threat), and the other half to observer (low-threat). Exp 4’s protocol differed from the earlier studies in that participants shopped for a digital camera on an actual electronic retailer website. The salesperson interaction occurred through an instant messaging (IM) software protocol that ensured a plausible, but controlled, salesperson interaction. The main result was a marginal BJW x consequence x role interaction ($\beta = .113, t = 1.904, p = .058$), such that high-BJW participants in the buyer role/real consequence condition trusted more ($PV$ = 5.13) than all other conditions ($PV$’s from 4.46 to 4.60).

This research makes a number of contributions to our understanding of the ways in which consumers cope with decision threat. For instance, whereas extant research on consumer coping has focused on conscious coping strategies (Duhachek 2005; Duhachek and Iacobucci 2005; Duhachek and Oakley 2007), we extend this pursuit by examining a new coping strategy that focuses on a just world belief, which seems to defend consumers against threat without the need for conscious awareness. Moreover, in contrast to extant research (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Darke and Ritchie 2007; Slovic et al. 1991) which shows threat generally has negative effects on trust, we identify conditions under which threat can actually lead to positive effects on consumer trust of marketers. Although this pattern is somewhat counterintuitive, it is nonetheless predicted by the proposed model of defensive consumer coping.

REFERENCES


When Does an Attack to the Brand Call for Action? The Role of Self-Brand Connection and Implicit Self-Esteem

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the modern marketplace consumers are often exposed to negative brand information. Existing research shows that brand commitment, which reflects consumers’ desire to have a particular brand, influences how people respond to negative brand information. After reviewing negative brand information, low commitment consumer revisit their attitude toward the brand downward, whereas high commitment consumers tend to counterargue the negative information and resist attitude change (Ahuwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava 2000). More recent research shows that brand commitment is influenced by the extent consumers identify and connect with the brand (Escalas and Bettman 2003). In this paper, we suggest that to understand how consumers respond to negative brand information, it is important to examine the interplay between their connection with the brand and their implicit self-esteem.

Research suggests that consumers who are connected with a brand include the brand in their self-concept (e.g., Belk 1988; Escalas and Bettman 2003). Seminal work by W. James (1890) suggests that when objects are incorporated in the self, they elicit the same emotional responses and behaviors as the self. Therefore, an attack to the brand is analogous to an attack to the self. When people are attacked, they use an arsenal of defensive strategies to maintain a positive self-evaluation. Research shows that when participants cope with threats by affirming important aspects of the self, they are no longer defensive (Steele and Liu 1983; Tesser and Cornell 1991), suggesting that different defensive strategies are substitutable for one another. People also defend more when the self is activated (Steele, Spencer and Lynch 1993).

People’s defensive responses are influenced by their self-esteem. Research suggests that implicit self-esteem, which is an automatic evaluation of the self, buffers people against threats (e.g., Spalding and Hardin 1999; Greenwald and Farnham 2000). Following a threat to the self, people with low implicit self-esteem become defensive, whereas those with high self-esteem are not.

By building on these findings, we suggest that consumers who are connected with a brand will defend the brand when it is under attack. More importantly, we predict that consumers’ defensive responses will be accentuated among those with low implicit self-esteem when their self-concept is activated. Finally, we predict that their defensive response will dissipate if they have the opportunity to self-affirm. We tested these predictions in three experiments.

In experiment 1, we first measured participants’ implicit self-esteem by using the name–liking measure (Gebauer et al. 2008). Then, we assessed the connection participants had with Starbucks by using the self-brand connection scale (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Next, participants were randomly assigned to write an essay that either activated or not the self. Finally, participants were presented with an unfavorable editorial about the Starbucks and asked to report how their attitude toward the brand might have changed. Consistent with past research we found a main effect of self-brand connection, whereby participants who felt connected with Starbucks were less likely to devalue the brand after reading the negative editorial. This effect, however, was qualified by the three-way interaction between self activation, self-brand connection and implicit self-esteem. When the self was not activated, participants’ self-brand connection negatively predicted attitude change; whereas implicit self-esteem had no effect. However, when the self was activated, participants’ self-brand connection and their implicit self-esteem jointly influenced attitude change. In particular, participants with low implicit self-esteem who felt connected with Starbucks reported more favorable attitudes toward the brand. We replicated these findings in a follow-up experiment using the implicit association test (IAT; Karpinski and Steinman 2006) as a measure of implicit self-esteem.

The objective of experiment 2 was to provide converging evidence for our predictions by using a different brand (Facebook) and to investigate the underlying process. We first assessed participants’ implicit self-esteem and their connection with Facebook by using the same measures as in experiment 1. Participants then wrote an essay that activated (or not) the self. Next, participants read a negative editorial about Facebook. Finally, participants were asked to report their attitude change and respond to some process measures. Similar to experiment 1, the results revealed a significant effect of self-brand connection, which was qualified by the three-way interaction. When the self was not activated, no effect was significant. However, when the self was activated, participants with low implicit self-esteem had a more favorable attitude toward Facebook compare to their high implicit self-esteem counterparts. Participants’ net positive brand thoughts partially mediated the effect.

In our final experiment, we examined whether affirming the self might dissipate the defensive response of low implicit self-esteem individuals. As in experiment 1, participants first filled in a measure of implicit self-esteem and reported their self-brand connection with Starbucks. To activate the self, participants were asked to write a brief essay. Next they were asked to read a negative editorial about Starbucks. After reviewing the editorial, half of the participants were affirmed while the other half were not. Finally, participants were asked to report their attitude change toward Starbucks. We found a main effect of self-brand connection, which was further qualified by the three-way interaction. When participants were not affirmed, we replicated the results from previous experiment. That is, participants with low implicit self-esteem who were connected with Starbucks boosted their brand attitude. However, when participants were affirmed, low implicit self-esteem participants who felt connected with Starbucks did not defend the brand. It seems that it is possible to buffer low-implicit self-esteem participants against self-threats by making them feel good about themselves.

This research demonstrates the importance of examining the interplay between consumers’ connection with the brand and their implicit self-esteem when trying to gain a better understanding of how people respond to negative brand information. After receiving negative brand information, low implicit self-esteem consumers who are connected with the brand defend the brand as they would defend the self.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Although there is evidence in the literature that being authentic provides benefits to the firm, most, if not all, of these conclusions have been drawn from depth interviews or other qualitative work. What is missing is experimental evidence that perceptions of brand or product authenticity provide other benefits to the firm. Using an experimental approach, this paper demonstrates that authenticity is a malleable facet of the brand, and provides evidence that consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s authenticity affect other brand-related cognitions such as quality perceptions and willingness to pay. This paper also shows the potentially ironic consequences of fostering authenticity.

Although many definitions of authenticity have been offered in the literature, this paper will focus on two main sources of authenticity: inherent qualities of the object and consumers’ subjective judgments about the brand. In general, offerings that are natural, handmade, simple and/or based in fact are generally considered by consumers to be more authentic (Grovess 2001; Boyle 2003; Munoz, Wood and Solomon 2006; Beverland 2005; Potter 2008). Consumers also make subjective judgments about the authenticity of a product using contextual information such as information about the brand’s image and its marketing. Summarized in Gilmore and Pine’s (2007) Polonius Test, brands are considered to be authentic if they are “true to self” and/or “are what they say they are”. Being “true to self” means that a brand is perceived as existing because of the passion of its founder—not simply for monetary gain. On the other hand, “being what you say you are” means that to be authentic, a company or offering must live up to its own promises—there must be truth in advertising.

While much attention has been given to the importance of authenticity to the consumer, limited attention has been paid to the benefit (or detriment) being authentic has for the firm. The extant literature provides some evidence that judgments of authenticity have the potential to have a direct and indirect impact on consumers’ search for information, consideration set formation and, ultimately, choice (Chalmers 2007; Groves 2001). While existing work suggests that consumers’ perceptions of authenticity may affect inferences consumers make about the brand, it does not address the types of inferences that consumers make. We hypothesize that consumers will infer that more authentic brands are also higher in quality, and that they will be willing to pay more for these products. Additionally, to the extent that consumers believe that authentic products are more “real” than inauthentic products, we hypothesize that consumers will be more confident in the inferences they make about authentic products than inauthentic products.

In studies 1a and 1b, authenticity was manipulated by informing participants that authentic and inauthentic brands were owned by large corporations. Revealing this information should cause consumers to doubt the authenticity of the authentic brands, because the discrepancy between the images and motives of the authentic brands and their parent corporations should bring into doubt whether the authentic brands truly are who they say are, a key component in perceptions of authenticity. Measures of authenticity perceptions, product quality, willingness to pay and attitude confidence were taken both before (Time 1) and after (Time 2) the corporate ownership information was revealed. Study 1a and 1b revealed that perceptions of authenticity do affect other brand-related cognitions. At Time 2, after reading of the authentic brands’ corporate parents, participants’ reported lower perceptions of authenticity of quality, decreased willingness to pay, and less confidence in their attitudes. The drops in quality perceptions, willingness to pay, and attitude confidence were fully mediated by participants’ lower perceptions of brand authenticity. However these results were unique to the authentic focal brands. The inauthentic brands actually benefited from their connection to a large parent corporation. At Time 2, perceptions of authenticity, product quality, and willingness to pay increased among the inauthentic brands.

While studies 1a and 1b, and previous work on brand authenticity, seem to suggest that increased authenticity is uniformly positive for the brand, might there be situations where a brand’s authenticity could be detrimental? In study 2, we are interested in determining how authentic brands weather brand transgressions, and if perceptions of the brand following the transgression are affected by the type of transgression committed. Although all transgressions should be detrimental to any brand, we hypothesize that some transgressions will be especially harmful for authentic brands. Specifically, we hypothesize that a transgression directly related to the basis of an authentic brand’s authenticity will be more damaging for the authentic brand than an equivalent transgression would be for another brand.

In study 2, participants were given information about an authentic or inauthentic brand and were then informed that this brand had committed one of three types of transgressions (moral, generic, or dangerous ingredient). While each transgression should be damaging to any brand, we hypothesize that the ingredient transgression will be especially damaging to the authentic brand (Burt’s Bees) because the transgression undermines its authenticity (all-natural ingredients). As hypothesized, following the moral and generic transgressions, both the authentic and inauthentic brands’ quality perceptions were damaged to a similar degree. However, following the ingredient transgression, the authentic brand’s quality perceptions were damaged significantly more than the inauthentic brand’s. This drop in quality perceptions was fully mediated by the decrease in participants’ perceptions of the authentic brand’s authenticity.

Drawing on the importance of “being what you say you are” in consumers’ judgments of brand authenticity, we presented three studies that demonstrate positives and negatives of brand authenticity. Our findings show that consumers perceive more authentic brands to be higher in quality and suggest that they may also be willing to pay more for them. Additionally, consumers’ confidence in their opinions about brands is directly tied to the extent to which they perceive those brands to be authentic. However, despite these advantages, we also demonstrated that authenticity can harm the brand if the brand commits a transgression that undermines its authenticity. Additionally, these studies demonstrate ways in which consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s authenticity can be manipulated.

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“Keeping It Real”: Marketing Implications of Brand Authenticity


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Motivated Consumer Innovativeness: Concept, Measurement and Validation
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Since the early seventies, several researchers have tried to predict consumers’ innovative buying behavior by means of different scales intended to measure innovativeness as a personality trait. However, most previous research disregards the consumer-product relation (Gatignon and Robertson 1985; Goldsmith and Flynn 1992) and ignores the different motivation sources. By constructing a new Consumer Innovativeness scale which incorporates a diversity of underlying goals and motivations for buying an innovation, we take the notion of product-consumer interactions in Consumer Innovativeness one step further: Consumers differ not only in level of innovativeness (i.e., personality trait of consumers) but also in type of innovativeness (i.e., motivations to buy the innovation).

Consumer innovativeness is “the tendency to buy new products in a particular product category soon after they appear in the market and relatively earlier than most other consumers in the market segment” (Foxall, Goldsmith, and Brown 1998, 41). This personality trait should provide an explanatory basis for innovative buying behavior; however, predictive validity still is problematic with the existing innovativeness scales (Im, Bayus, and Mason 2003). By including a wider spectrum of motivations, we are able to construct an innovativeness scale that performs better both in terms of content validity and predictive validity. Moreover, it may help marketing researchers and managers to identify and reach the motivated innovative consumer for their innovation more effectively.

We base our conceptualization on general motivation, goal and value taxonomies (Ford and Nichols 1987; Schwartz 1992) and can conclude that at least four motivational dimensions are of importance for Consumer Innovativeness: (1) Functionally Motivated Consumer Innovativeness (fMCI) is Consumer Innovativeness motivated by the functional performance of innovations which focus on task management and accomplishment improvement. (2) Hedonically Motivated Consumer Innovativeness (hMCI) is Consumer Innovativeness motivated by an affective or sensory stimulation and gratification. (3) Socially Motivated Consumer Innovativeness (sMCI) is Consumer Innovativeness motivated by the self-assertive social need for differentiation. And finally, (4) Cognitively Motivated Consumer Innovativeness (cMCI) is Consumer Innovativeness motivated by stimulation of the mind. These four motives often recur in general consumer behavior literature (Rossiter and Percy 1997; Sweeney and Soutr 2001), innovativeness literature (Arnould 1989; Fisher and Price 1992; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grogmann 2003) or different innovativeness scales (Baumgartner and Steenkamp 1996; Roehrich 1994; Venkatraman and Price 1990), however, hardly any innovativeness scale has been developed that includes a wider array of potential consumer motives.

We develop a 20-item 4-dimensional MCI scale based on a combination of eight studies (with about 2,600 respondents in total).

We start with an item pool of 254 items, based on literature review, existing Consumer Innovativeness scales, exploratory interviews and an exploratory quantitative study with 279 respondents who had to indicate to what extent 135 human motives (Chulef, Read, and Walsh 2001) are applicable to the purchase of innovations. Based on expert and consumer judgments of all items, taking content validity, representativeness, dimensionality, comprehensibility, and unambiguousness into account, 90 items remain. These 90 items are included in an online survey with 452 respondents. Based on principal component analyses and confirmatory factor analysis taking scale development procedures of Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma (2003) into account, we can reduce the pool to 30 items, and confirm the 4 MCI factors. These factors prove to possess high internal validity, sufficient discriminant validity, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Furthermore, the 4-factor correlated model results in an acceptable overall fit and proves to be the best model. Moreover, we can prove convergent validity with Roehrich’s (1994) Hedonic and Social Consumer Innovativeness scale, and discriminant validity with Baumgartner and Steenkamp’s (1996) Exploratory Acquisition of Products scale and Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett’s (1985) Extraversion scale.

We further refine the scale with a new survey including the 30 MCI items. Based on similar procedures, we have to remove 10 extra items, resulting in the 20 final MCI items. Again, the fit indices indicate a good model, which outperforms other models. In addition, MCI proves to be stable over time, as we can prove test-retest reliability. Moreover, MCI is not sensitive to social desirability bias.

Finally, an innovativeness scale also needs to predict innovative consumer behavior in everyday life. We check this with two studies: First, a predictive validity study is set up with fictitious innovations, which are manipulated towards the four innovativeness motivations. Moreover, as we add two existing general innovativeness scales to the survey, we can verify whether MCI performs better in predicting innovative behavior than existing scales. Second, we have another study with a list of existing innovations. Both studies prove that there is a unique relation between each motivation dimension and the attitude, the buying intentions or buying behavior of consumers regarding innovations that satisfy these specific functional, hedonic, social or cognitive needs. Moreover, we prove that MCI predicts innovation buying behavior better than the traditional Cognitive and Sensory Innovativeness scale of Venkatraman and Price (1990), and the recently developed Global Consumer Innovativeness scale of Tellis, Yin, and Bell (2009).

To conclude, this four-dimensional Consumer Innovativeness scale consisting of a hedonic, functional, social, and cognitive dimension is useful for several reasons. First, the eight studies show that the dimensionality, reliability, convergence, discriminant, and predictive validity of MCI prove satisfactory. Second, MCI measures more than existing Consumer Innovativeness scales: (1) MCI not only measures the intensity of Consumer Innovativeness, but also its origin. (2) MCI keeps the middle ground between existing general innovativeness scales, which are unimpressive in predicting innovative buying behavior, and the domain-specific innovativeness of Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991), which is product-specific and thus not very practical, leading to a better performance in terms of predicting innovative behavior. (3) Moreover, MCI disproves the general consensus that younger people are more innovative than older people: Older people are as innovative as younger people as far as functional innovations are concerned. As most existing innovativeness scales focus on hedonic and social innovativeness, and older people are less hedonically and socially motivated to buy innovations, these scales are not able to capture the innovativeness of older people.

REFERENCES


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(Papers not presented at the conference)
Innovation Aesthetics: The Relationship between Category Cues, Categorization Certainty and Newness Perceptions
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Research suggests a disconnect between what marketers deem to be new and innovative versus what consumers actually perceive (Gourville 2006). Many factors may contribute to this, however, we investigate the factor that has significant potential to first attract a consumer to a new product, the product’s visual aesthetic design. Despite the capacity for innovative product design to elevate a company’s success in the marketplace, there has been little attempt to determine how this may influence newness perceptions. It is acknowledged that “product newness is a vital selling point,” (Bloch 1995) and “widely respected” (Moreau and Dahl 2005), and visual design is often a central focus of new product managers; yet when considered together, there is limited insight into the factors that underlie their relationship. While research on innovation adoption has identified factors that influence consumer preferences, the majority of the studies assume product newness to be objectively perceived and appreciated by participants. In contrast, we introduce a unique perspective of consumer response to new products by examining newness perceptions as a dependent variable that is inherently comparative, highly subjective and dependent on the certainty of underlying categorization processes. By utilizing a categorization framework to examine the relationship between innovative visual aesthetics and newness, we are also able to provide support for the role of categorization certainty, a type of certainty that may account for the somewhat surprising subjectivity of newness perceptions.

The relation between innovative visual aesthetics and newness perceptions has not been well defined. There are at least two reasons for this. First, studies on new products have typically made visual product information non-essential in the evaluation of an innovation by not providing product pictures and focusing participants explicitly on written descriptions of a product’s non-visual features, functionality, and benefits (e.g., Alexander et al. 2008; Castano et al., 2008; Hoeflber 2003; Lajos et al. 2009). Second, research investigating consumer response to design has used products that do not deviate visually in any substantial way from typical category members (Cox and Cox 2002; Page and Herr 2002; Verryzer and Hutchinson 1998). In contrast, our focus is on innovative visual aesthetics. When the exterior of a product differs significantly from known category members, identifying the product’s category may be difficult, uncertain or impossible. With the innovative Roomba vacuum, for example, even if consumers were provided with the product’s category, uncertainty in the vacuum label may arise because its design is drastically different from that of a prototypical vacuum. It is this uncertainty in a new product’s categorization that we predict will explain the influence of innovative aesthetics on newness perceptions.

We define categorization certainty as the level of confidence an individual has in their categorization of a product. This parallels a construct in attitude persuasion, thought confidence (Petty, Brinol, and Tormala 2002). Similar to how thought confidence is proposed to influence attitudes, we propose that how certain a consumer is in the categorization of a product will influence newness perceptions. The source of categorization uncertainty may vary. For instance, Gregan-Paxton et al. (2005) and Lajos et al. (2009) explored categorization uncertainty associated with products that possess features and functionality from different categories. We build on this, by explicitly defining and measuring categorization certainty and its independent effect on newness perceptions in response to innovative aesthetics. Specifically, we predict that when categorization certainty is low (high), an aesthetically innovative new product will be rated as less (more) new (hypothesis 1).

When faced with innovative product design, consumers will first seek to identify the new product’s category. Innovative aesthetics may make categorization difficult and reliance on all available category cues will be necessary to identify a product’s category with certainty. In our attempt to isolate the effect of innovative visual aesthetics on newness perceptions, we treat product function and brand name as additional sources of category information or cues, as these may be processed in addition to visual aesthetics to confirm a product’s categorization. Thus, we anticipate that when additional diagnostic category cues are available, the more certain consumers will be in a product’s categorization and the newer they will perceive an innovative product. We predict that categorization certainty will mediate the influence of category cues on newness perceptions (hypothesis 2).

In studies 1 and 2, we manipulated the availability of supplemental category cues, during exposure to a new product, to examine how additional category information affects the relation between categorization certainty and newness perceptions. In study 1, the number of category cues available to participants was manipulated through the presence or absence of a brand name on the product’s exterior. In study 2, category cue level was manipulated by having participants either view a picture of a new product or a video demonstration. Support for both hypotheses was found in studies 1 and 2. In study 3, we contrasted two products from the same category, through a manipulation of design prototypicality, to further demonstrate that innovative visual aesthetics exacerbates the negative effect of categorization uncertainty on newness perceptions. Prior investigations have not defined or isolated the effect of categorization certainty on judgements, like newness perceptions, that occur early in the new product adoption process, nor examined the role of visual aesthetics and availability of category cues as antecedents to categorization uncertainty. We demonstrate that if a consumer cannot categorize a new product with certainty, as can happen with innovative aesthetic design, a product’s newness is likely to be underappreciated. Our findings do not imply that product designers should be conservative in the visual design of their new products. In fact, Verganti (2006) points out that radical innovations actually tend to have longer commercial success, higher margins and increased consumer receptivity. Rather, our findings suggest that there is a potential danger in letting consumers self-select and validate a new product’s category membership. Consistent with Verganti (2006), our research emphasizes the importance of “preparing the public” for “ground-breaking products”. When introducing new products with innovative visual aesthetics, this preparation should come through the careful and deliberate disclosure of a product’s category membership.

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You Get What You Pay for But I Don’t: Effect of Construal Level on The Price-Quality Relationship

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consider the following scenario: you observe that a friend has bought a well-designed, attractive bag for a surprisingly low price. What inference would you draw regarding the quality of that bag: high quality (because of its attributes such as design and materials) or low quality (because of the low price)? And would your quality inference be any different given a perspective shift—namely, would you be more or less inclined to assess quality on the basis of price if it were a bag you had bought yourself? Alternately, suppose you were evaluating the quality of a product for immediate use as compared to future use—when would you give greater weight to the product’s price, as opposed to its attributes, when forming your judgment of quality?

In seeking to answer questions such as the above, this paper addresses the key issue of how consumers form inferences regarding product quality; and in particular, the extent to which they base these inferences on price as opposed to product attributes. The current research builds on construal level theory (Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007) to propose a key contingency as to when the influence of price on quality perceptions may be diminished or enhanced. The central idea is that price has greater impact on consumers’ quality judgments of psychologically distant vs. nearer purchases, with the reverse being true for the impact of product attributes. The concept of psychological distance subsumes several dimensions, such as interpersonal distance (e.g., whether an inference is drawn on the basis of one’s own or another’s behavior) and temporal distance (whether an inference has to do with the immediate or distant future). Thus, invoking construal level theory allows us to provide a unified answer to the seemingly disparate questions raised in the opening paragraph as to how price may influence quality perceptions in different scenarios.

Theoretical Background

Findings from the construal theory literature suggest that abstract information, compared with concrete information, tends to exert more impact on representations and judgments of psychologically distant events, while the reverse holds when the focal judgment is about psychologically near events (e.g., Liberman and Trope 2000). We argue that this premise contains direct implications for how quality inferences are formed in different situations. Compared to specific, concrete product attributes, price can be thought of as a more abstract, general cue, especially with regard to its implications for quality. One reason for the relatively more abstract nature of the price cue has to do with it being a universal component for practically all products; thus, the price-quality heuristic itself represents a generalized abstraction of a consumer’s many observations and experiences. In contrast, the diagnosticity of attributes is usually specific to different product categories (e.g., hard disk capacity can be used to infer computer quality, but is inapplicable to judgments about cars; on the other hand, the physical attractiveness of the packaging is often used for quality judgments of food items, but less so for computers). Indeed, the idea that the price-quality belief is an abstract “theory” while product attributes are more concrete “data” has been widely adopted in previous consumer research (Baumgartner 1995; Broniarczyk and Alba 1994). In light of this distinction, and given the preceding arguments arising from construal level theory, it follows that:

Consumers’ reliance on price for making quality inferences will be enhanced when the judgment is psychologically relatively distant. Information relating to product attributes, on the contrary, will be utilized more when the quality judgment is psychologically closer.

Studies

A series of five experiments provided convergent support for these predictions. The first three experiments used the “self” vs. “other” interpersonal dimension to operationalize psychological distance.

The first study looked exclusively at the influence of price on quality judgments. Participants were asked to predict the quality of a series of products whose prices (high vs. low) were given; they were told either that the purchase had been made by themselves (“self” condition, representing low psychological distance) or by others (“other” condition, representing high psychological distance). Experiment 2 assessed quality inferences after manipulating both price and the favorability of product attributes. Specifically, we asked participants to judge the tastiness of a dish of fried rice, on the basis of two cues: its price, and its physical attractiveness. In Experiment 3, we sought to replicate the previous findings obtained on quality assessments (Experiments 1 and 2) using a selection paradigm. Instead of simply being asked to make a quality judgment based on information about a single product, participants were asked to indicate which of two yogurts was tastier: one that was expensive and had an unattractive package, while the other was presented as being cheap but attractive. Experiment 4 then operationalized psychological distance through a different (temporal) dimension. Finally, experiment 5 provided strong support for the posited mechanism by directly manipulating construal level. In line with our hypotheses, and across different product categories, results across from all of these studies showed that participants relied more on price than on product attributes when predicting product quality from an “other” vs. a “self” perspective; in contrast, the weight accorded to product attributes followed the reverse pattern. It is noteworthy that convergent support for our predictions was obtained across a variety of product categories, different dependent variables (single-option quality judgments as well as the choice paradigm used in experiment 3), pre- and post purchase scenarios, and several different manipulations of construal level, including two different dimensions of psychological distance (interpersonal and temporal) as well as the direct manipulation used in experiment 5.
How Does Construal Level Influence Donations to Individuals and Organizations

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The current research explores the interacting effect of individuals’ construal level and the donation target (i.e., person or organization) on willingness to donate time and money.

According to findings from research on construal level (CLT, Trope & Liberman 2003), individuals’ cognitive mindset influences the way they process information and, as a result, their preferences and behaviors. It is argued that psychologically proximal events are mentally represented via low level construal, while psychologically distant events are mentally represented through high level construal (e.g. Trope & Liberman 2003; Chandran & Menon 2004; Bar-Anan, Liberman & Trope 2006; Trope, Liberman & Wakslak 2007).

We suggest that a donation campaign may be processed differently depending on its psychological distance from the audience. For example, a campaign calling for immediate donations is more likely to be processed with a low level of construal while a campaign that is expected to be launched in the future is more likely to be processed with high level construal due to the differences in time distance. Also, a campaign for poor elderly people launched at a university campus is more likely to be processed by students via a high level of construal while a campaign for students in financial need is more likely to be processed via low level construal due to differences in social distance.

We hypothesize that individuals led to adopt a low-level construal mindset will be more willing to donate to a specific, rather than general, donation target. A campaign focused on a specific donation target, that is, on a particular individual in need, fits with low level construal representation because it focuses on specific categories, details and context-dependent information. On the other hand, individuals led to adopt a high construal mindset will be more inclined to donate to a general, rather than personal, donation target. That is so because a campaign focused on a general donation target, such as a charitable organization, fits with high level construal processing, as it focuses on broader categorization, general descriptions, and de-contextualized information.

STUDY 1

Expectancy and value are two components of the motivational force (Vroom, 1964). Thus, donations are based on the expectancy that a campaign will be successful and on the value of the campaign. We suggest that the fit between level of construal and the campaign message’s personalization level increases both expectancy and value.

One hundred and thirty two participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (construal level) x 2 (personalization) design.

Personalization: Participants were either asked to help an immigrant settle-in (personal) or to help at an absorption center (non-personal).

Construal level: Participants were either told that the campaign focuses on helping immigrant students (low level), or that it focuses on helping elderly immigrants (high level).

Finally, participants were asked how many hours they were willing to give per month and how many months they would be willing to volunteer as well as report their expectancy and campaign importance.

As expected, under low construal participants were more willing to donate time when the message was personalized. Conversely, under high construal participants were more willing to donate time when the message was non-personalized (Hours: $F_{1,118}=5.16, p<.05$; Months: $F_{1,118}=4.27, p<.05$).

Furthermore, replicating the results of Study 1, the cross over interaction was found significant for both expectancy ($F_{1,118}=6.17, p<.05$) and value ($F_{1,118}=3.92, p=.05$).

STUDY 2

In Study 2 we investigated that the fit between level of construal and the campaign message’s personalization level increases participants’ willingness to donate time.

One hundred and twenty two participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (construal level) x 2 (personalization) design.

Personalization: Participants were either asked to help an immigrant injured in a car accident (personal) or to assist in the department for rehabilitating individuals injured in car accidents (non-personal).

Construal level: When a potential donor’s gender is congruent with the target’s gender, information will be processed more with low level construal due to high psychological proximity than when gender is incongruent. Therefore, participants’ gender was coded.

Match conditions (e.g. male participant and male target) were coded as the low level condition while discordant conditions were coded as the high level condition.

Finally, participants were asked how much money they were willing to donate.

As expected, a three-way interaction was found ($F_{1,130}=4.64, p<.05$). Men were willing to donate more money to injured men in the low construal condition when the message was personalized. When the message was not personalized, men were willing to donate more money to injured women under the high construal condition.

The same effect was found for women.
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Socially Conscious Consumption and Civic Engagement: Mobilizing Collective Concern through Private Interest
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumer culture is often criticized for the deleterious effects it is assumed to have on civic connectedness and concern for the social good. The rising trend of socially conscious consumption, such as buying fair-trade products, offers a challenge to this view of consumer behavior. However, little research exists empirically testing the relationship between socially conscious consumption and civic and political engagement. The modest amount of research that does explore these connections is largely conceptual and assumes a negative relationship, with consumer preferences winning out over civic ones.

The research outlined here challenges these shortcomings. Using a series of depth interviews, I demonstrate that pro-social consumer orientations can have a positive influence on civic and political engagement. Accepted wisdom among critics of consumer-motivated civic involvement holds that this consumer orientation fosters individualism and self-interest at the expense of a collective focus, and that it redirects civic action away from the political realm to the corporate arena. The concern is that politically motivated consumers will be civic-minded only to the degree that their own issues can be resolved and will avoid collective action at resolving more generalized societal issues. The data, which were collected using an existential-phenomenological approach, suggest such fears may be overstated. Among socially conscious consumers, marketplace behaviors offer a viable and meaningful springboard to political engagement. It is by attending to private, individual concerns that consumers address moral and ethical issues at the collective level. Socially conscious consumption taps into and encourages a kind of enlightened self-interest whereby concern for the self, as expressed through consumption, breeds concern for the collective.

This study draws on Soper’s (2008) notion of the alternative hedonist to understand how socially conscious consumers relate their private consumer practices to their public citizenship practices. It relies on a series of depth interviews with socially conscious consumers aimed at understanding the meanings they ascribe to their consumer choices. These meanings are uncovered through existential-phenomenological interviewing and hermeneutic analysis (Craig J. Thompson, 1997; Craig J. Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

To explore the consumption as politics thesis, a group of white, middle-class, college-educated consumers who self-identify as socially conscious were interviewed using the E-P approach about their consumer practices and motivations. Literature about socially conscious consumption indicates that socially conscious consumers address moral and ethical issues–as object entities–but as subjective symbols. Consumers engage in hedonic consumption when they impart subjective attributes–as object entities–but as subjective symbols. Consumers engage in hedonic consumption when they impart subjective meanings to objects and incorporate emotion into their consumer practices. This emotional aspect muddies the simple cost-benefit analysis that rationalizing consumers are assumed to make but also explains why consumers will make decisions that are not always the easiest or most cost effective.

Instead of focusing on the problematic aspect of the consumption act (“the store is difficult to get to” or “I can’t eat strawberries in January”), the informants emphasized the potential joy (“the store delights my senses” or “depriving myself of strawberries makes them taste that much sweeter when I can eat them”). One informant underscores this mental readjustment when she says: “We don’t feel like we’re sacrificing anything really. It’s all a gain.” By understanding the informants’ consumption practices through an “alternative hedonist” lens it is possible to understand how socially conscious consumers privilege their private desires while also benefiting the collective good.

REFERENCES


**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Extant consumer concerning authenticity has imbued the literature with numerous definitions and conceptualizations of authenticity but little in the way of theory about its antecedent/consequent processes (cf. Leigh, Peters, and Shelton 2006). The present research attempts to bring authenticity into the lab and pursue the phenomenon in a unique way. We draw on research in semiotics (e.g. Grayson and Martinec 2004; Hoshino 1987; Mick 1986, 1998) and test explicit hypotheses about how indexical and iconic cues influence judgments about brands in a context of “green” consumption.

Indexical cues are attributes of an object that provide a spatio-temporal and/or verifiable link to a reference point (Grayson and Martinec 2004). Their presence provides overarching validation that a consumption object has the appropriate characteristics and abilities to bear a “green” meaning. Assuming that individuals recognize the connection suggested by a “green” indexical cue, they will be more likely to judge an object as having an authentic “green” meaning leading to increased beliefs that it is “green,” thus yielding more favorable attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Lutz 1977).

Iconic cues are qualities that suggest “schematic fit” with expectations for an authentic object but lack an externally-verifiable reference point or “correspondence of fact” (Mick 1986). These cues emphasize general congruence with a consumer’s idiosyncratic, internal frame of reference (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh et al. 2006). Provided an individual has some expectations, he/she should judge an object as more authentic to the extent that there is matching between expected and observed iconic cues. As with indexical cues, this should have positive effects on both “green” beliefs and brand attitudes. However, given the straightforward meaning validation provided by a singular indexical cue, it seems plausible that these stronger cues will have a greater effect on beliefs and attitudes.

The efficacy of both indexical and iconic cues is likely to vary according to relevant characteristics of their associated product. One very basic product quality is whether it is an infrequently purchased durable or a more frequently purchased non-durable. Durable goods tend to have more features and be larger purchases in terms of cost, both of which may incline consumers to desire more information and engage in a more extended search (e.g. Brucks 1985). Thus, it is conceivable the information provided indexical and iconic cues will be less effective for a durable versus a non-durable.

Beyond predicted effects of indexical and iconic cues and a differential effect between durable and non-durable goods, a general assertion of this conceptualization is that semiotic cues enable a consumer to validate a “green” product meaning. This “green” meaning should lead to specific beliefs about a product as well as more positive attitudes. Hence, the effect of the indexical and iconic cues on brand attitude likely operates through brand beliefs (Ajzen 2008).

These general predictions were tested in a 2 (Indexical Cue: Green/Non-Green) x 2 (Iconic Cue: Green/Non-Green) x 2 (Product Type: Consumable/Durable) within-subjects design (n=140). Participants evaluated 8 durable or non-durable brands based on visuals and text information embodying indexical and iconic cues. The indexical cue manipulation took the form of recognizable labels or co-brands intended to verify the target quality of “green.” The iconic cue manipulation comprised elementary information about such features as product composition or usable life to signal the target quality of “green.” The product type manipulation took the form of consumables versus durables. Each participant evaluated 4 consumable brands (2 laundry detergents and 2 batteries) and 4 durable brands (2 desktop computers and 2 car tires).

Participants reported their brand attitudes and beliefs via a 7-point semantic differential scale. Attitude items were favorable/unfavorable, pleasant/unpleasant, and good/bad. The belief items of primary interest were green/not green, thrifty/wasteful, and natural/artificial. Additional items belief items were collected to make memory-based comparison more difficult. The dependent variables retained for subsequent analyses were attitude and green-belief for each brand represented by a mean-centered sum of respective items. The data were analyzed with linear mixed models using maximum likelihood estimation to account for potential non-independence across ratings.

Results indicate that indexical cues and iconic cues had significant effects on green beliefs. Participants had more favorable green beliefs and attitudes when indexical and iconic cues signaled a “green” quality. Indexical cues were stronger than iconic cues in affecting green beliefs but not brand attitude. In addition to the cue types alone, results suggested that changes in green beliefs and attitudes towards durables were less sensitive to indexical cues and iconic cues than were consumables. A mediation analysis indicated that green beliefs fully mediated the effect of indexical cues and partially mediated the effect of iconic cues on brand attitude.

Overall, indexical cues had a more robust effect on green beliefs and attitudes and that these effects of both cue types are stronger upon consumables versus durables. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these semiotic cues varies according to a basic durable/non-durable distinction among products and green beliefs fully or partially mediate the effects of indexical and iconic cues manipulations on brand attitudes. Hence, it can be said that indexical cues and to a lesser extent iconic cues activate spontaneous inferences that manifest as new beliefs and corresponding brand attitudes. In addition, the pattern of results generally in line with predictions provides evidence that iconic versus indexical cues can be systematically manipulated to affect authenticity judgments. Taken together, the results provide evidence supporting a meaning validation process as the basis of authenticity judgments.

This research conceptualizes authenticity judgments in familiar terms for consumer researchers; that is, as a process involving spontaneous inferences about specific brand beliefs that then effect brand attitudes. Viewed this way, it is possible to bring authenticity phenomena into the laboratory and construct a nomological network to guide theory building. This research represents a first step on that path. Supplementing extant, interpretive research on authenticity with disciplined theory building represents a meaningful opportunity to inform the debate in a substantive domain where there is broad researcher and practitioner interest.
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The Dark Side of Product Attachment: An fMRI Study of Reactivity of Users and Non-Users to Addictive Advertising Cues
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Advertising is a ubiquitous and pervasive environmental cue. The average consumer, for example, is exposed on average to three thousand ads per day (Schwartz 2004). Under normal circumstances, consumers choose which advertising cues to attend to both consciously and non-consciously (Bargh 2002; Grunert 1996). However for consumers, environmental cues may elicit a unique type of response affecting decision making and driving behavior (Bernheim and Rangel 2004). The aim of this research is to explore how environmental cues affect addictive product users and non-users using the brain imaging technique developed in neuroscience functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) for cue-exposed users and non-users.

A great deal of debate, both in the literature and among advertisers and public policy makers, centers on how environmental cues influence people to engage in risky and addictive behaviors (Pollay 1986; Pollay et al. 1996a). Marketers and manufacturers argue that advertising and promotional materials offer consumers brand options and information that enhance the consumer’s ability to make choices (Gilly and Graham 1988; Goldberg et al. 2006), while researchers and public health officials argue that there is a strong correlation between detrimental behavior and exposure to marketing for addictive products (Pollay 1986; Pollay et al. 1996b). There remain unanswered questions regarding how users and non-users respond to this type of stimulus. In addition, there are conflicting indications of how craving elicited by cues impacts cognitive processing, including cognitive depletion leading to impulsivity outside the addictive substance domain. Given the ongoing debate there is a need for a better understanding of the underlying psychological and physiological mechanisms that drive the reactive response to advertising cues by users and non-users.

The research question addressed in this research is whether environmental cues—namely cigarette advertising—cause a reactive response in the form of increased craving in users or non-users resulting in downstream impulsive behavior as a result of cognitive resource depletion. The study uses functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine the underlying neural response to addictive (cigarette) advertising versus non-addictive (non-cigarette) advertising in users (smokers) and non-users (non-smokers). Brain imaging data have been collected from 10 current, daily smoker and 10 non-smokers for this study. This study was a 2 (user type: smoker vs. non-smoker) x 2 (cue type: addictive ad cue vs. non-addictive ad cues) design using a 3T fMRI scanner.

A long history of addiction studies demonstrates how drug cues elicit craving via reactivity to the cue (for reviews see Carter and Tiffany 1999; Childress et al. 1993; Stritzke et al. 2004). There has also been evidence of attentional bias toward addictive cues in users (Robinson and Berridge 2003; Robinson and Berridge 2001; Robinson and Berridge 1993). Some studies have shown that this response may result in increased attentional bias and increased arousal (Bradley et al. 2004; Drobes 2002; Johnsen et al. 1997; Mogg and Bradley 2002; Munafò et al. 2003). However other studies have found that addictive product users, when exposed to these cues, may have an ability to inhibit the craving response and its effects (Artiges et al. 2009; Goldstein et al. 2007a; Stippekohl et al. 2010; Volkow and Fowler 2000; Volkow et al. 2010). On the other hand, non-users have been shown to be largely unaffected by exposure to addictive cues (Due et al. 2002; Tapert et al. 2003). However, research on the uptake of addictive products by new users points to evidence that addictive product cues, such as advertising, do indeed have an effect on non-users (Altman et al. 1996; Pierce et al. 1991). Thus there remains a debate in the literature as to whether advertising enhances or attenuates the craving response in users and how it ultimately affects non-users.

This brain imaging data indicates neural activation of brain regions that are related to craving and self-control in smokers and non-smokers. For example, there is differential activation in regions associated with craving including the amygdala and the thalamus. Regions associated with self-control including the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex are also differentially activated with significant deactivation in smokers exposed to cigarette ads. The results show significant differential activation for non-users when exposed to addictive ad cues versus non-addictive ad cues. In addition, the results show a different effect when users are exposed to addictive ad cues versus non-addictive ad cues. They demonstrate that a cue reactivity response elicits significant activation in brain regions associated with craving in both non-users and users. There is also significant activation in regions associated with cognitive resource depletion for non-users as a result of the increased craving activation. This may be due to the fact that non-users underestimate the effect of this type of advertising, assuming that because they do not smoke, there are not targeted directly to them. However, because these non-users have not been built up the ability to resist the tempting urge response generated by the addictive product ads, brain regions necessary in order to resist the temptations are activated. Interestingly there is significant deactivation in brain regions of users associated with self-control indicating inhibition of the cognitive resource depletion possibly as a way for users to cope with stimuli that they feel is targeting towards them and an urge response for which they feel they cannot satisfy at that moment.

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Subliminal Prime-to-Behavior Effects
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A wide variety of consumer judgments, decisions, and behaviors occur automatically, or without conscious awareness or intention (Baron 2007; Deval 2007; Dijksterhuis 2010; Dijksterhuis & Smith 2005; Wager 2008). Many different situational cues prime or activate consumer goals and traits in a nonconscious manner. Our research contributes to the understanding of prime-to-behavior effects by: (a) investigating the influence of subliminal goal primes and trait primes, (b) demonstrating that subliminal goal and trait prime-to-behavior effects are influenced by different moderating variables, and (c) investigating the influence of subliminal goal primes and trait primes related to money.

Prior research on subliminal priming has demonstrated that subliminal goal primes are influential only when the goal is already active (e.g., Strahan, Spencer, and Zanna 2002). Theoretically, however, the influence of subliminal trait primes on behavior should not depend on goal activation. Instead, the Active-Self model suggests that the influence of trait primes on behavior should depend on the extent to which these primes alter self-conceptions via selective processing of self-relevant information or on the extent to which these primes expand the self-concept (Wheeler, DeMarree, and Petty 2007). Both of these processes are influenced by individual differences in self-monitoring, or the extent to which consumers attempt to control their behavior to influence the impressions that others form of them (Snyder 1974). High self-monitors adapt their behaviors to their social environments, whereas low self-monitors behave consistently across situations.

Although prior research has shown that trait prime-to-behavior effects are often greater for low self-monitors than for high self-monitors (DeMarree, Wheeler, and Petty 2005), Wheeler et al. (2007) suggest that trait primes should have a greater influence on high self-monitors when social norms are invoked or when ought primes are activated. In addition, because the attitudes of high self-monitors frequently serve the social-adjustive function (Lavine and Snyder 2000), trait primes pertaining to the social-adjustive function should have a greater influence on high than on low self-monitors. Money frequently serves a social-adjustive function because money can be used to impress others (a self-presentational strategy) or to attain goals without assistance from others (the self-sufficiency principle; Vohs, Mead, and Goode 2006). Further, a strong association between money and consumption behavior has been illustrated in prior research. Briers et al. (2006) demonstrated that money related-supraliminal primes increased the consumption of candies.

In two experiments, we show that subliminal priming of goals and traits influence consumption behavior in goal-consistent and trait-consistent ways. Subliminal goal primes were influential only when a relevant goal was already active, regardless of individual differences in self-monitoring. Conversely, subliminal trait primes were more influential when self-monitoring is high rather than low, regardless of the level of goal activation.

In study 1, we predicted that subliminally priming hungry participants with either money related trait primes (rich and millionaires) or goal related primes (spend and money) would increase the amount of food eaten when compared to participants in the neutral prime condition (stone and picture). The effectiveness of the subliminal goal primes should depend on whether the goal is already active. Since all participants were instructed to arrive at the study in a hungry state, all participants in the goal prime condition were expected to eat more than those in the control condition. In contrast, since trait primes influence self-perception, they should have a greater effect on high self-monitors than on low self-monitors. As a result, we predicted that the level of self-monitoring would moderate the eating behavior of those in the subliminal trait prime condition in such a way that high self-monitors would eat more than low self-monitors.

All participants were asked not to eat anything but tea, coffee, or water for at least 3 hours prior to the study. The subliminal primes (goal, trait, or neutral) were imbedded in a lexical decision task (LDT). Following the LDT, participants were asked to perform a taste test in which they evaluated two types of candy. They were instructed to eat as much as they wanted in order to comparatively evaluate the two types of candy. Following the taste test, participants completed the 18-item Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder and Gangestad 1986) and performed a subliminality check to insure the integrity of the priming manipulation.

The primary dependent variable was the amount of candy eaten by the participants during the taste test. To test our hypotheses, we submitted this measure to a hierarchical regression analysis using the prime conditions, the self-monitoring score, and their interactions as predictors. As expected, the presence of both goal and trait primes had a significant positive main effect on the amount of candies eaten. Further, the interactions revealed that participants in the trait prime condition ate more candies as self-monitor scores increased. Self-monitoring had no influence on participants in the goal prime condition.

Study 2 was designed to replicate that effect from study 1 as well as demonstrate that goal primes but not trait primes depend on whether the goal is already active at the time of priming. The primary difference in the procedure between study 1 and study 2 was the addition of a cookie taste test to manipulate satiation. Participants in the satiated condition performed the cookie taste test at the beginning of the study before the LDT and candy taste test. Participants in the hungry condition performed the cookie taste test after the LDT and candy taste test.

Consistent with study 1, participants in the trait prime condition ate more candies as self-monitor score increased, but self-monitoring had no effect on participants in the goal prime condition. Also, consistent with our predictions, participants in the goal prime condition ate more candies when they were hungry than when they were satiated, but satiation had no effect on participants in the trait prime condition.

Both these experiments contribute to the existing literature by providing further support for the strong cognitive link between money and consumption, extending prior findings from supraliminal priming to subliminal priming, and demonstrating that trait and goal primes operate under different boundary conditions.

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Revealing an Advertising Myth: How Supportive is Editorial Support?
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
In public relations and marketing, positive media articles about companies or brands are considered to be “gold standard”. Yet, other than what has been learned from anecdotal evidence, little is known about their success with consumers. In two experimental studies we thus focus on two critical questions:

Does coupling positive news stories with advertisements leverage ad memory and attitudes toward the advertised brand?
Could coupling advertisements and editorial content actually backfire and damage brand and/or media brand image?

Research on Effects of Editorial Content on Brands in Consumer Research
Positive news stories about companies or brands are often deemed to be more effective in influencing attitudes than advertisements (Jo 2004; Putrevu 2005; Çelebi 2007). This has been explained by the higher credibility of editorial content due to a lack of “manipulative intent” (Hallahan 1999). Only a few studies deal explicitly with ads and editorial content about a brand in the same medium. Loda and Coleman (2005) and Micu (2005) tested whether sequencing of the same message presented either as an ad or as news has an impact on persuasion. Both established mildly positive effects of supporting ads with positive news stories. However, the studies lacked realistic contexts and relied solely on forced exposure procedures in which subjects were asked to examine the stimulus material closely and didn’t have the chance to avoid exposure altogether.

Repetition and “Memory Trace Refreshment” Effects on Brand Recall
From the perspective of memory research, coupling means repeating a brand message. Information that is perceived successively from two different sources (ad and news), and thus in two different contexts, leaves more “memory traces” to facilitate retrieval than information presented in only one context. Thus:

H1: If a positive editorial report about a brand appears in the same medium as an advertisement for the brand (“article/ advertisement coupling”), consumers’ recall of the brand will be higher than if the editorial report were to appear alone.

Effects of Supporting Ads with News Stories on Brand Image
The mere exposure effect suggests that repeated exposure should lead to a more positive attitude toward the object (Zajonc 1968). Familiarity of the message is increased by repetition in both ad and news story, and coupling multiple sources leads to a “truth effect” (Roggeveen and Johar 2002). Based on these theories, a positive effect on could be hypothesized.

Expecting a positive effect is based on the assumption that consumers do not notice the connection between a news story and an ad at all (due to typical low-involvement situations). If consumers do consciously notice the connection, or if they just feel that there might be manipulative intent behind the editorial support, a negative effect can be hypothesized. Friestad and Wright (1994; 1995) posited that consumers possess knowledge about persuasion strategies used in advertising. The use of such knowledge typically requires cognitive processing of messages. However, even when consumers are not willing or able to elaborate on persuasive messages, it is possible that they would unconsciously draw on former experiences of perceived manipulation by editorial support. Such “tacit” knowledge about manipulative or covert ad strategies can work as a readily available quick heuristic that could alert consumers to intended manipulation. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) pointed to the fact that, in low-involvement situations, an attitude can be shaped not only by the features offered but also by the advertising context. However, we focus first on since we are interested in natural exposure situations in which may not be the best indicator of immediate ad effectiveness (Coulter and Punj 1999). Weighing all arguments, we find stronger theoretical bases for a negative effect of couplings:

H2: If a positive news story about a brand appears in the same medium as an advertisement for the brand, consumers’ attitudes toward the brand will be more negative than if the news story were to stand alone.

The Persistence of Editorial Support Effects Over Time
Most studies on persistence of attitudes are based on the sleeper effect, positing that negative evaluations caused by the message source (in our case, the coupling of ad and news story) can phase out over time. However, two critical conditions for such an effect are not met here: the discounting cue “editorial support”, from which consumers could gather possible vested interests, is not conveyed beforehand, and the ability or motivation to think about the message and its context is usually low in standard media exposure situations. In such low-involvement situations, a second contact with the brand by way of supportive editorial support (e.g., in the course of a second survey), which was evaluated negatively after the first contact, could even trigger a reinstatement effect which could intensify the negative affective reaction to the ad itself and to the brand. Thus:

H3: If a positive news story about a brand appears in the same medium as an advertisement for the brand, after two weeks, consumers’ attitudes toward the brand and to the ad will be more negative than if the news story were to stand alone.

The Problem of Realistic Experimental Designs in Advertising Research
Experimental designs in advertising and media research differ from natural settings in two ways. In the first place, the stimuli often lack realistic contexts. Secondly, the typical paradigm in experimental advertising effectiveness research uses forced exposure, and this creates a risk that consumers start hypothesis-guessing and potentially adapt their behavior accordingly. Forced exposure provides no opportunity for non-selection of the medium, thus ruling out ad avoidance and making ad and ad context processing generally more likely than in biotic media contact situations (Schuman and Thorson 1990). Consequently, in a pretest, we tested for the effects of exposure in experimental research on editorial support by comparing forced exposure with quasi-biotic exposure (where consumers know that they take part in a study but they are not informed that the stimuli are part of the design)

Key Findings
Our two studies show that news stories consistently do not improve the impact of ads on brand image. On the contrary, over time, the image of deteriorates due to the coupling, and H3
finds support. When consumers’ active involvement with the medium is low, $A_{\text{total}}$ deteriorates if the ad receives editorial support (H2 is supported). Thus, we presume to have observed a peripheral or heuristic process to be at work. In both studies we found a positive effect of coupling ad and news story on recall, thus confirming H1. However, the second study shows that this result can also be achieved by adding a reminder spot to a commercial break, because familiarity seems to be the reason for the improved recall rather than a multiple source effect.

From a methodological perspective, the forced exposure designs commonly used in advertising research run the risk of exaggerating positive evaluations of $A_{\text{total}}$. On the other hand, forced exposure experiments tend to downplay the memory effects.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In advertising theory and practice, atypicality is considered to be an effective creative strategy to break through the clutter, and to boost ad evaluations and memory for the ad and brand (Heckler and Childers 1992; Smith and Yang 2004). However, research on this issue is limited (Smith and Yang 2004). Moreover, most advertising research used long and forced ad exposures of up to thirty seconds or longer to investigate advertising processing and effectiveness (reviewed by Meyers-Levy and Malaviya 1999), whereas attention to ads is much shorter in practice, typically a few seconds or less (Pieters and Wedel 2004). It remains unclear whether the positive effects of atypicality carry over to these much shorter durations. In fact, considering people’s basic need for certainty (Loewenstein 1994), there is reason to believe that the effects of atypicality may be different at shorter exposures.

The present research focuses on information processing within the first exposure to the ad, from 100 ms onwards. Motivated to identify the stimuli they are exposed to, people attempt to identify the ads that they encounter, i.e., what they are for. In three experiments, we show that, depending on the typicality of the ad, this identification process can take different forms over the course of a single exposure, which in turn influences how evaluations develop over time (experiment 1 and 2), the attention devoted to the ad (experiment 3), and subsequent memory (experiment 2).

Typical ads display objects and scenes that are expected for the advertised category (Mervis and Rosch 1981), such as a car in a car ad. The product category of these ads is rapidly identified and with certainty in 100 ms or even less (“Ha, it’s a car ad”; Pieters and Wedel 2009), and this identification certainty contributes to an immediately positive ad evaluation (Loken and Ward 1990). Additional information that becomes available after the first glance confirms the immediate identification, leaving the ad evaluation at relatively high levels of positivity, until boredom eventually befalls these ads. We distinguish two types of atypical ads, hereafter referred to as “atypical” and “typical-other” ads. Atypical ads display objects and scenes that do not immediately bring up a product category, leading to identification uncertainty (“What is that ad for?”). This negatively affects the initial ad evaluation. When exposure to the ad continues, additional information and cognitive integration contribute to ad comprehension reducing identification uncertainty (“Aha, it’s a car ad”). This increased certainty is appreciated, leading to a positive updating of the evaluation. Finally, typical-other ads display objects and scenes that are typical for another category, such as a lady misting her face in a car ad. These ads are initially identified with certainty (“Ha, it’s a fragrance ad”), which is liked. However, new information that becomes available during exposure disconfirms the initial identification, which needs to be revised (“Oh no, it is a car ad”). This need to revise one’s initial identification may lead to confusion and requires more cognitive effort, which is disliked and leads to a downward adjustment of the initially positive evaluation.

Thus, typicality determines the identification process—identification confirmation (typical), identification disconfirmation (typical-other) or uncertainty reduction (atypical)—which has predictable effects on how ad evaluations are updated within a single exposure. In addition, it influences attention and memory, and we predict different effects depending on whether recall or recognition performance is assessed. Typical ads do not retain attention well, since they are immediately identified and additional processing does not provide much “new” information. However, because a connection between the ad and the advertised category is immediately established upon exposure, and the ad category serves as a useful retrieval cue (Goodman 1980), they are recalled well, even after brief exposures. Recall performance of atypical ads, in contrast, is relatively poor after brief exposures, but strongly improves when additional processing leads to ad comprehension (Bransford and Johnson 1982). Because atypical ads cannot be immediately identified, they retain attention longer, such that memory should be good. In case of typical-other ads, rapidly identified inconsistencies between the initial identification and newly processed information motivate people to prolong attention to the ad. However, recall performance remains relatively poor for these ads despite additional time attending, because of source-confusion (Roediger and McDermott 2000). Recognition performance, in contrast, is poor after very brief exposures for all three ad types, but strongly improves with additional time attending (Loftus and Bell 1975), except for typical ads, that remain relatively difficult to discriminate from other ads. Due to their typicality, these ads appear familiar regardless of whether they were presented or not, increasing false recognition (Silva, Groeger, and Bradshaw 2006).

We tested and found support for our predictions about the dynamic identification, evaluation and memory processes within a single exposure in experiments 1 and 2, where we systematically varied the exposure duration of ads between-conditions from 100 ms (which is less than a single eye fixation) up to 10 seconds (cf. Donders 1868). Finally, support for the prediction that atypical and typical-other ads retain attention longer than typical ads was provided in experiment 3, where participants freely viewed a large set of ads. These findings are the first to provide insights into the rapid advertising processes from 100 ms onwards. They reveal that the effects of typicality critically depend on the exposure duration, and require revision of the idea of atypicality as a universal creative strategy to improve advertising effectiveness. Although we observe the benefits of atypical ads, we also find that their effectiveness crucially depends on their ability to retain the consumer’s attention. Typical ads, in contrast, do not require such sustained attention in order to develop positive ad evaluations and memory traces for the ad and brand. Moreover, we argue for careful consideration of the type of atypicality, since typical-other ads failed on almost all accounts in the present research. We believe that the proposed theory and methodology are applicable to other situations where initial feelings may be rapidly updated, and point to repeated ad exposures as a relevant area of future research.

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Generation Y’s Representations of Who They Are and How They Give

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The emergence of each successive generation raises new questions on the transmission, continuity and rupture of social behaviors (work, consumption, daily life…). Also referred to as the E-generation, Net Generation or Millennial Generation, the generation Y is composed, in the western world, of individuals born between the late 1970s and the mid 1990s who grew up with the excesses of the consumer society and amidst the astounding development of the information society. This generation takes the social and societal transformations of the 1960s and 1970s for granted, or even considers them obsolete, and is immersed in ecological, the harmful effects of globalization and tomorrow’s uncertainties (Allain, 2009). Socialized in a world in profound mutation, it is made up of young adults liable to develop new and unexpected solidarity and giving representations and practices.

In the face of the emergence of these new lifestyles and mindsets, and of growing debate over monetary donation collection methods, how should associations and charities approach this generation? This question brings out two preliminary lines of investigation which are the focus of this research:

How do the individuals of this generation define themselves?
How do they represent giving?

Several conceptions of giving emerge from the human and social sciences literature: an instrument of power for the giver (Mauss, 1923-1924), of domination (Weiner, 1992) making the receiver dependent, or even alienated (Testart, 1982), a sacrifice (Lévinas, 1987, 1995), a deprivation, an impossibility (Derrida, 1991), a purely disinterested, altruistic gesture, a free exchange but which creates links, obligations, debts (Mauss, 1923-1924; Lévi-Strauss, 1949; Titmuss, 1970; Sahlins, 1972; Godbout and Caillé, 1992). This polysemy shows that giving is both a collective and an individual phenomenon which is represented by a wide range of practices (Authors, 2009b). Our work is assimilated with the comprehensive research trend which has developed within Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Giving is thus regarded as a system (Sherry 1983) and revolving around consumption (Giesler, 2006 ; Marcoux, 2009).

Our research focus on social representations (SR), known as allowing individuals to interpret reality in their physical and social environment and direct their behaviors and social relations (Abris, 1994). SR studies can mobilize different methodological approaches (Viaud and Roussiau, 2002; Doise, Clemence and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993). The free association technique, already employed in marketing (authors, 2009a), was selected for this study. This technique “consists, based on an induction word (referring to the object of the SR), of asking the informant to provide all the words, expressions or adjectives which come to mind” (Abris, 1994).

In order to answer the research questions, an exploratory quantitative study was conducted on a convenience sample of 276 individuals born between 1979 and 1991 (people belonging to Generation Y aged 18 plus as they were presumed to have autonomous giving practices). In French language, the questionnaire began with the following open question: “Generally speaking, what does the term giving evoke for you?”, in response to which informants were asked to provide five words. It carried on to cover giving practices, exchange behavior, entourage, knowledge of associations, to finish with questions on identity (sex, age…), including “give five words which come to mind to describe your generation”. The free associations generated were analyzed with the software EVOC2005.

These results show both an individualistic Generation Y and a very mobile generation seeking links which is unified around technology and the consumer society. This generation is not marked by collective events (as previous generations may have been). Festivity appears to be a structuring element.

Over and above this specificity, Generation Y givers and non-givers express convergence in their representations of giving:

- A vision of giving which is becoming institutionalized: associations and volunteering are terms which structure the representation.
- The strong presence of a relationship with others: at the center or close to the representation we find the notions of solidarity, sharing, aid, charity and gifts.
- A freely consenting act: a free gesture, or a gesture belonging to a gratuitous approach, which reflects an individualist dimension.

Illness is the prominent element against which giving can be mobilized: it appears first, far ahead of poverty for instance. This risk is no doubt conveyed by the media more frequently than ecological risks or natural disasters (telethon, AIDS, cystic fibrosis…) and is more easily associated with the person’s close entourage.

Givers and non-givers have a pragmatic vision of giving: the objects of giving of blood, money and organs are central elements of the representation. Nevertheless, non-givers insist upon this functional component (blood and money are quoted significantly more). One hypothesis is the media coverage of giving blood or money, non-givers thus expressing a “media-broadcast” vision of giving (they more frequently employ the term telethon). Furthermore, givers show a collective apprehension of giving, seen as a system, while, in an emerging trend, non-givers have a more personal vision.

Finally, two results are worth emphasizing. First, the almost complete absence of terms expressing a negative vision of giving. Secondly, the notions of constraint and commitment were rarely touched upon. This conception of giving is distant from the notion of obligation presented in the literature on the subject (Sahlins, 1972; Sherry, McGrath and Levy, 1993; Marcoux, 2009). This representation of giving is coherent with the way in which Generation Y describes itself: turned towards others, free, largely unconcerned with notions of duty and effort. Commitment and investment must undoubtedly be a pleasure.

From a managerial point of view, these results are the first to shed light on the factors liable to cause members of this generation to give: use of social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, use of factors such as pleasure, festivities and efficiency to encourage them to adhere to causes and actions rather than recourse to guilt and duty, encourage them to “work for the association” using their skills to improve its offer.
Exploring the Everyday Branded Retail Experience -
The Consumer Quest for ‘Homeyness’ in Branded Grocery Stores

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper extends consumer culture theories of branded retail environments by analyzing the meanings that experiences of the everyday site of the branded grocery store hold for consumers. In consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson 2005), despite a growing interest in branded retail environments, little interest has been paid to the ordinary and everyday experience of the grocery store. While this site has been the predominant focus in more evidence-based consumer marketing research (e.g. Burt & Carralero-Encinas 2002; Choi, Chan and Coughlan 2006; Collins-Dodd & Lindley 2003; McGoldrick 2002; Richardson, Jain and Dick 1996), in CCT, marketplaces of more spectacular character have made out the arenas of investigation (Borghini et al 2009; Kozinets et al 2004, 2002; Thompson & Arsel 2004; Sherry 2008). Among these the development of the concept ‘themed flagship brandstore’ (Kozinets et al 2002, 2004; Borghini et al. 2009) is of extra interest for our investigation, as it looks at the mythological appeal in the physical as well as symbolic structure of the store. However, as the symbolic properties of such spectacular brand venues were understood as constellations of mythotypic characteristics, creating “awe” and other intense sensations among its consumers, another cultural constellation was highly likely needed to understand the more ordinary, but yet meaningful, ideal consumer experience of the everyday branded grocery store. Noting the growth of heavily branded grocery retail chains with their accompanying private brands, some of these sites may in the future live up to the epitaph brandstore, but is it the same symphony of impressions sought, in these venues for everyday visits, as it is in more entertainment-heavy brand arenas?

Using ethnographic data collection methods (photo-diaries, participant observations, long interviews, artifact collections) we studied the grocery shopping habits and life at home among six Swedish middle-class working women with children during a month in the fall of 2008. Through diligent and time-consuming hermeneutic data analysis, where we iteratively moved between data and theory (Thompson et al 1994), we found that Grant McCracken’s (1989) cultural account of the properties making out the experience of ‘homeyness’ was readily applicable to our consumers’ experiences of the ideal branded grocery retailer. In addition, the eight properties of ‘homeyness’ — the diminuitive, the variable, the embracing, the engaging, the mnemonic, the authentic, the informal, and the situating — were infused with meanings in marketplace myths through which the meaning structure of homeyness was intensified. Such marketplace myths could be fantasies about the bella viva around the Mediterranean, the romanticization of the simple life and the humble farmer etc.

The properties of ‘homeyness’ and myths inflected in the consumers’ everyday retail experience were of a more subdued, less mind-blowing, kind than the mythotypic emotional state conveyed by Kozinets et als (2002, 2004) and Borghinis (2009) themed brandstores. Yet, highly meaningful. These consumers held strong ties to their favorite grocery retailer brand where the ‘homeyness’ constellation, despite its seemingly subdued character, executed power over these women that went beyond mere convenience. Still, in terms of retail brand ideology, where the immersion into marketplace myths supports the agendas of ideologies (Thompson 2004) the myths conveyed in these everyday marketplaces rather supported unreflected dominant ideologies, than paradigm-breaking and emerging ideology which more spectacular arenas may strive for in their quest for an overwhelming consumer experience. Thus, the powerful and distinctive experience of homeyness demands an ideology-neutral surrounding supported by marketplace-crafted myths.

We discuss the alternative understanding of the data had we selected another group of respondents. Additional research is needed to see if and how the constellation of homeyness is applicable in other national, gender, class, ethnic and lifestyle contexts. Hence, the conceptual implications of our analysis for consumer research concern on one hand the possible transferability and appropriation of the specific constellation of ‘homeyness’ to other important consumer cultural contexts, and on the other hand more generally the importance for consumer cultural researchers to not primarily always aim for the spectacular but also direct their eyes towards experiences of the more ordinary, yet culturally rich, kind.

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Rituals in Transition: Reciprocal Pig Feasts in Northeastern Rural China
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

With the rapid globalization and urbanization occurring in many parts of the world, many celebratory rituals that have been practiced for generations are likely to become extinct in upcoming years. Examining rural traditions in transitional communities offers an opportunity to understand how ritual activities contribute to social standing and provide structure to economic processes. At what point do the benefits secured through long-standing rituals cease to be worth the sacrifice of time, labor, and money necessary to participate in the tradition? Answering this question can not only provide increased understanding of the practice of rituals, but offer insight into the effects of economic development and privatization.

Research on ritualistic acts has shown that ceremonies and celebrations serve to initiate, strengthen, or reproduce social ties (Driver 1991; Marshall 2000; Mathwick, Wiertz, de Ruyter 2008). Consonant with this theme, a number of consumer culture theorists have approached some consumption activities as ritualistic practices that serve to maintain social cohesion (e.g. Belk and Costa 1998; Bonsu and Belk 2003; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). The social solidarity nurtured through ceremonies makes the instrumental and symbolic value of these ritual events akin to similar benefits derived from gift giving (Belk 1976; Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel 1999; Sherry 1983; Wooten 2000), with ritual ceremonies functioning as “gift systems” (Geisler 2006). In rural settings, in which the roles of producer and consumer are tightly interwoven, ritual ceremonies can serve to establish embedded economies that operate independently from capitalist markets via norms of reciprocity and trust (Gouldner 1960). Some theorists argue that communal activities involving private citizens, such as ceremonies and celebrations, which produce an abundance of social capital, can help to create civil societies, which, in turn, provide individuals some protection from the vagaries of the external market and the state (Edwards and Foley 1998; Fukuyama 2002; Woolcock 1998).

With this theoretical backdrop, this research examines the annual pig roasts, hosted by Chinese families in Jilin Province during the Spring Festival (lunar New Year). Our fieldwork included sixteen in depth interviews conducted with farm families over the course of two summers. During the first trip, made during the summer of 2008, we conducted in depth interviews with nine families in Zhenlai County, located in western Jilin Province approximately 250 kilometers northwest of Changchun, the provincial capital of Jilin. The first round included five families in the township of Dongping, and four families in the township of Momoge. During the second trip, made during the summer of 2009 and using a slightly revised interview guide, in depth interviews were conducted with an additional seven families in Jiucai County, just fifty kilometers northeast of Changchun. These interviews included three families in the township of Lianhua and four in the townships of Longjiapo. The two counties represent two quite different conditions of rural economic development, with per capita income about twice as high for residents of Jiucai County as for Zhenlai County.

Each of the families we interviewed, following a long-standing rural tradition in northern China, raises pigs throughout the year and then slaughters the pig during the period shortly before Spring Festival and cooks part of it to host a feast for friends and relatives. Via the descriptions and interpretation of the pig feasts by farmers, we learned that these annual ceremonies have provided an important role in stabilizing and maintaining rural societies through the generation of social capital (Bourdieu 1984; Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000). The pig feasts have served to establish and reinforce a social network of relatives and friends that can be relied upon for assistance throughout the year (Kipnis 1997; Yan 1994). We identified four kinds of social capital—identity, moral, emotional, and instrumental—that have provided distinctive, but interrelated, benefits to the participants of the social gatherings.

In less-developed Zhenlai County, the pig feast ritual continues to be practiced by every household that we encountered and appears to continue to provide an important purpose in affirming an informal market that serves to collectivize tasks that are necessary for survival in rural villages. In wealthier, better-connected Jiucai County, the pig feast ritual is no longer uniformly practiced. Even the households that continue to engage in the tradition do not all feel it is necessary to commit the time and labor necessary to sustain this ritual on an annual basis. As Jiucai County is becoming more economically developed, alternative means to acquire social capital have emerged, and a formal economic system is developing that operates to perform many of the activities (e.g. loans, farm tasks, house building) that previously might have been executed with the help of an informal social network.

The decrease in the practice of the pig feast in Jiucai County raises some broader issues related to globalization, modernization, and capitalization, including potential support for western theory that ties modernization to individualization (e.g. Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) and substantiation of a link between reciprocal feasts and egalitarian societies (Durrenberger 2008). Given the prevalence of ceremonies involving ritual transaction in most societies, this research suggests the usefulness of studying the rise and fall of rituals to gain greater understanding of the rules and meanings of rituals within the larger social and economic order (Arnould and Thompson 2005).
Cultural In-betweeness and Migrant Identity: Recreating Culture in Online Thirdspaces or Heterotopias
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ABSTRACT
This Cyberethnographic (Robinson and Shulz 2009) study follows migrant women living over 3 continents. Beginning with Babha’s (1994) “thirdspace” and cultural hybridity; this examines disjunctive notions of place, ‘other space’ and time. Foucauldian heterotopia is offered as an explanation of this ‘Other Space’ and as a metaphor for migrant experience.
Opportunity or Challenge?
The Impact of Exposure to Similar Extensions on the Extensions of Late Movers
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research examines how consumers evaluate brand extensions in the context of rivalry and competition. Specifically, unlike the extant literature, which has investigated consumers’ responses to extensions with isolated market situations, the current research investigates how consumers use their knowledge of previous similar brand extensions when generating evaluations toward similar extensions from follower brands. Because any market is shared by multiple competitors, and because consumers can be exposed to competitors’ actions, it may be wrongful to assume that consumers will generate new product evaluations solely based on fit perceptions (i.e., how well an extension matches the parent brand). Rather, consumers who have been exposed to similar brand extension examples may use this cue when evaluating similar extensions of other brands. Thus, this research intends to extend the consumer brand extension model by incorporating consumer knowledge into the market situation, which is assumed to be a more realistic approach.

Motivated by the importance of considering rivalry and competition situations, this research draws on consumer learning by the analogy model (Gregan-Paxton and John 1997), which postis that consumers attempt to understand and form preferences toward something unfamiliar and new by relating it to something familiar. Such relational reasoning involves a process by which people transfer their knowledge of a well-known base to a lesser-known target. Moreover, the driving force behind this knowledge transfer via analogical reasoning is the perceived similarity between the base and the target (Moreau, Markman, and Lehmann 2001; Roehm and Sternthal 2001). For instance, when faced with a generic drug, consumers may be unsure about its performance. However, these people may predict how it will work when they are informed that generic drugs have the same active ingredients as the original formulation, and they rely on their knowledge about branded counterparts.

Such a human tendency to learn about and evaluate new targets hints at the possibility that consumers can base their evaluations on prior examples that they know. For instance, when evaluating Mercedes motorcycles, consumers may rely on how good (or bad) BMW motorcycles have been, since the BMW brand is similar to the Mercedes brand, and since consumers are aware of the performance of BMW motorcycles. Therefore, we reason that consumers who have knowledge of prior similar extensions (e.g., BMW entering the motorcycle category) may generate evaluations on new extensions from other brands by relying on such a prior example, but not necessarily on the extension fit perception. Extending the notion that consumers do not generate evaluative judgments in a vacuum, this research proposes that consumers may have other evaluative input on which they can rely more than perceived fit. To be more specific, we show that the performance of prior similar extension exemplars can be a factor more diagnostic than perceived fit. Furthermore, we expect that such an influence of prior examples (success or failure) will become greater as the base and the target brands are similar to each other. Therefore, we hypothesize that the degree of perceived similarity between brands will moderate the impact of prior extensions on consumer responses toward a new similar extension from a different brand.

Two experiments were conducted to test the above hypotheses. Experiment 1 aimed to assess whether prior success or failure of similar brand extensions influences consumers’ responses to similar types of subsequent brand extensions by other brands. To accomplish this goal, we employed a 2 (Prior Example: Success, Failure) x 2 (Fit Level: High, Moderate) between-subjects design and measured participants’ evaluations of a new product idea from the BMW brand when the performance of a similar type of extension from the Mercedes-Benz brand varied. Providing support for our hypothesis, participants in the prior failure condition (i.e., those who were reminded that the same type of products introduced by the Mercedes-Benz brand failed) evaluated a moderate-fit extension (sunglasses) from the BMW brand less favorably than participants in the prior success condition (i.e., those who were reminded that the same type of products introduced by the Mercedes-Benz brand succeeded). However, there was no difference between prior failure and success conditions in terms of brand extension evaluations toward a high-fit extension (tires). This pattern of evaluations reflects relational reasoning involving a process by which people transfer their knowledge of a well-known base (prior examples) to a lesser-known target (a new extension).

In a follow-up study, we replicated these findings using a different set of brands and extensions. More importantly, we further investigated the moderating role of the perceived similarity between brands. The results from experiment 2 confirmed our premise that the transfer of knowledge is further facilitated as the similarity perception increases. Specifically, by using simple slope tests on extension evaluations when the perception of similarity was centered at 1 standard deviation above and below the mean, we found that only among participants who perceived these two brands as similar to each other (i.e., +1 SD above case), was the interaction between prior example and fit level significant, thus replicating our previous findings. Therefore, these findings supported our prediction about the moderating role of the perceived similarity between pioneer and follower brands.

Taken together, these findings add to an emerging stream of research that explores the contextual differences in consumer responses to brand extensions. In addition, the managerial implications from the current research can be important in that the first-movers (extending a new branding category for the first time) have to spend a great deal of resources to convince consumers to adopt new products from their brands, while other followers can gain an advantage by strategically following (or not following) trails of pioneer moves. Therefore, the results of the current research imply the possibility of free-riding in a competitive market structure: second-movers had better simply follow the successful route of the first-movers, and first-movers (who should avoid free-riders) have to build uniqueness of their own brands in order to disconnect them from their followers.

REFERENCES


**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

### Conceptualization

Social cognition research has paid considerable attention to the influence of two characteristics of social groups on how they are perceived (e.g., Crawford, Sherman, and Hamilton 2002; Lickel, Hamilton, Wieczorkowska, Lewis, Sherman and Uhles 2000), namely variability and entitativity. As the cognitive processes underlying the evaluations of objects and subjects are common (Loken 2006), it is expected that at least some influences on the perception of social groups apply also to the perception of family brands, which suggests that the feedback effects of brand extensions on high- and low-entitative family brands may also be disproportionate. However, relatively little empirical research has investigated this important issue. Therefore, in addition to categorical similarity and perceived variability, this study moves a further step to examine how family brand entitativity mediates feedback extension effects on its subsequent family brand evaluations. Crawford and colleagues (2002) proposes the model of group-level trait transference (GLTT; Figure 1) to discuss the influence of individual members on the group and other group members. In the GLTT model, perceived entitativity serves as a pre-determinant of a three-stage information processing: trait abstraction (or trait inference), stereotyping (or group impression formation), and trait generalization (or trait transference). As with social groups, the attribute transference across brand extensions is more likely to occur for high-entitative family brands and induces asymmetric effects on family brand evaluations. Given the same quality of brand extensions, high-entitative family brands shall be more favorably evaluated than low-entitative family brands because perceivers make more extreme judgments and form more disproportional polarized impressions on high-entitative groups (Hamilton and Sherman 1996; Sherman et al. 1999). Therefore, a high- (vs. low-) entitative family brand is more favorably evaluated (Hypothesis 1). Based on the cue-diagnosticity model (Skowronski and Carlson 1987), as extreme cues receive more weight on impression formation (e.g., Anderson 1981), the diagnostic cue of positive extension information is perceived as more extreme to, and will have more positive impacts on, a low-entitative family brand, which yields extremity and positivity biases (e.g., Skowronski and Carlson 1987). In contrast, the diagnostic cue of negative extension information is perceived as more extreme to, and will have more negative impacts on, a high-entitative family brand, which yields extremity and negativity biases. In other words, a low-entitative (or moderate-quality) family brand is expected to be more significantly enhanced by positive extension information, whereas a high-entitative (or high-quality) family brand is expected to be more significantly diluted by negative extension information. This result yields asymmetric (or disproportionate) impacts of positive and negative extension information on family brand evaluations, which is likely mediated by the prior perceived entitativity of family brands. Hence, low- (vs. high-) entitative family brands are more significantly enhanced by positive extension information (hypothesis 2), whereas high- (vs. low-) entitative family brands are more significantly diluted by negative extension information (hypothesis 3).

### Method

Two studies were conducted to examine the hypotheses under highly and lowly accessible conditions respectively. For the first study (the high accessibility condition), following previous research (e.g., Loken and John 1993), two fictitious XXX (high-entitative) and YYY (low-entitative) family brands in Consumer Reports’ format were portrayed representing high- and low-entitative family brands respectively. Anti-cavity toothpastes and pain relievers were selected as similar and dissimilar brand extensions respectively based on a pre-test which requested respondents to list possible similar and dissimilar brand extensions of the hypothesized family brands. The research design of the second study was similar to the first study, except intervening tasks were added to manipulate the low accessibility of brand extension information. The accessibility of extension information was manipulated by varying the intervening material between the experimental treatment of extension information and family brand evaluations. The intervening materials were confusing tasks designed to decrease the accessibility of experimental treatments (e.g., Feldman and Lynch 1988) including a filler task and a confusing task.

### Major findings

The study’s results indicated that, when extension information was highly accessible, family brand images were enhanced and diluted by positive and negative extension information respectively, regardless of the categorical similarity of brand extension and the perceived entitativity of family brand. However, while both high- and low-entitative family brands were enhanced and diluted by positive and negative extension information respectively, the dilution and enhancement effects on high-entitative family brands were different from those on low-entitative family brands. High- (vs. low-) entitative family brands were more significantly diluted by negative extension information (H2), whereas low- (vs. high-) entitative family brands were more significantly enhanced by positive extension information (H3). The asymmetric result was caused by the polarization effect of perceived entitativity on family brand evaluations. Based on the GLTT model, attribute transference should be more significant for high-entitative family brands. The abstracted attributes of high-entitative family brands transferred across brand extensions and, eventually, associated with each individual brand extension. The strongly associated attributes across brand extensions amplified consumers’ impressions about the attributes of high-entitative family brands and led to the result that high-entitative family brands were more favorably evaluated (H1). The research results of the second study paralleled the first study. However, by comparisons, highly accessible positive extension information was more diagnostic and, thus, more enhancing than lowly accessible extension information on family brand evaluations, while highly and lowly accessible negative extension information yielded similar dilution effects on family brand evaluations. In conclusion, except the factor of categorical similarity, the determination about the dilution and enhancement of brand extension information on family brands pretty much depended on the cue-diagnosticity of extension information, rather than the accessibility.

### REFERENCES


Can Brand Commitment be Harmful to the Brand? The Moderating Role of Psychological Contracts

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on brand commitment has typically focused on the benefits that commitment provides in protecting the brand when brand failures occur (e.g., Ahluwalia 2007; Ahluwalia, et al. 2000; Raju and Unnava 2008). However, recent research has found that committed consumers may pose risks for brands, especially when brand failures occur. Researchers have found that when a brand fails to live up to some expected standard, committed consumers under certain circumstances are likely to retaliate, seek revenge, and change from loving the brand to hating it (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Gregoire, Tripp, and Legoux 2009). A possible reason that consumers in strong relationships turn around and retaliate against something they love might have to do with the belief that in such relationships the other partner (in our case, the brand) is obligated to them more than in weak relationships (Ward and Ostrom 2006).

We suggest that it is not the failure itself but the nature of the failure that leads consumers to support or not support the brand. That is, we propose that failures that violate perceived pacts or “psychological contracts” between the consumer and the brand create a greater likelihood of retaliation, while failures that do not violate such perceived pacts lead to support for the brand. The term psychological contract refers to the beliefs that a consumer has about the reciprocal obligations that exist between the consumer and the brand. These beliefs are based on perceived promises that the consumer deems the brand has made to them in return for their patronage of the brand (Rousseau 1989).

We argue that consumers committed to a brand are voluntarily restricting their consideration set by being psychologically tied to a brand and excluding other brands (Raju and Unnava 2005). Because committed consumers give up something, they are likely to believe that the brand owes them more than consumers who are less committed (Gregoire et al. 2009). Because committed consumers saddle brands with this reciprocal obligation, we propose that committed consumers are likely to have many more items in their psychological contract with the target brand compared than less committed consumers.

H1: Committed consumers will report more items in their psychological contracts than less committed consumers.

Further, if committed consumers believe that the brand is contractually obligated to perform at some level and it fails to do so, they will view the failure as a breach of the contract. However, as reviewed earlier, others have found that brand commitment also offers brands a buffering effect from negative information (Ahluwalia et al. 2000). We resolve this apparent discrepancy in the literature by arguing that committed consumers feel betrayed only when the brand failure relates to a feature that is part of the psychological contract (henceforth called “in-contract”). When the brand failure relates to a feature that is outside the psychological contract (henceforth called “out-of-contract”), we expect that the buffering effects of commitment will occur. In contrast, less committed consumers do not have as strong a tie to the brand as committed consumers; therefore, we do not anticipate any differences in their responses to a brand failure regardless of whether they classify the failure as in-contract or out-of-contract.

H2: Committed consumers will rate in-contract violations less favorably than out-of-contract violations.
H3: Less committed consumers will rate both in-contract and out-of-contract violations unfavorably.

Study 1

The objective of this study is to demonstrate that consumers who are more versus less committed to a brand will exhibit differences in the contents of their psychological contracts with a preferred brand. Participants either high or low in commitment to an existing brand in each of the two categories (online store and bank) participated (n=201). For each category, participants were asked to provide the name of their preferred brand, after which they were presented with the list of promises that were obtained from a pretest. For each item on the list, respondents were asked to report the extent to which their preferred brand promised them each item using a four-point scale obtained from Conway and Briner (2005).

Consistent with the idea that psychological contracts exist and their contents differ for high versus low commitment consumers, the analysis revealed a different pattern of results for high versus low commitment participants for online stores and banks. Specifically, a larger percentage of high versus low commitment consumers indicated that their preferred brand either strongly suggested the promise of the item or explicitly promised the item in writing or verbally.

Study 2

This study directly tests whether a violation of an item in the psychological contract versus outside of the psychological contract results in different effects for high and low commitment consumers. A 2 (commitment: high or low) x 2 (contract item violation: in-contract vs. out-of-contract) between-participants design was implemented.

Participants were presented with a description of a barbershop/hair salon that included a brand failure (i.e., unexpected price increase) and to two filler consumption descriptions. The primary dependent variable was their evaluation of a fictitious competitive barbershop/salon.

Our expectation was that high commitment consumers would evaluate the competitive brand more favorably if their preferred brand’s failure pertained to an item in-contract versus out-of-contract. However, we expected low commitment consumers to evaluate the competitive brand equivalently, regardless of their inclusion of the violation item in their contract. Consistent with our expectations, this analysis revealed a significant interaction (F (1, 205)=4.46, p<.05). Low commitment participants that reported that “competitive prices” was not an item in their contract (M=5.39) evaluated the competitive brand equivalently to participants that reported that the item was part of their contracts (M=5.23, t (103)=0.68, p>.1), supporting H3. However, high commitment participants evaluated the new brand more favorably when the violation item was included in their contract (M=5.37) versus not perceived as part of their psychological contract (M=4.81, t (104)=2.30, p<.05), supporting H2.
The results of the two studies support the idea that the nature of the brand failure-whether it is in-contract or out-of-contract has a major role to play in determining whether committed consumers support or respond negatively to a brand failure.
Got to Get You into My Life: Do Brand Personalities Rub Off on Consumers?
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers often use brands as an instrument to create a more positive self-image. In particular, brands with appealing personalities, such as Cartier (sophisticated) and Harley-Davidson (adventurous), are particularly useful for consumers wanting to enhance a self-image in line with a brand’s personality (Escalas and Bettman 2003). In this research, we ask the question, “Does using a brand with an appealing personality enhance the way consumers view themselves?” Prior research documents that consumers often prefer and choose brands in an effort to affirm and enhance their sense of self, but what happens when consumers actually have an opportunity to use these brands?

We propose that only consumers with certain implicit theories view brand experiences as opportunities to signal that they possess the same appealing traits as the brand, and only these consumers actually perceive themselves more positively after a brand experience. Implicit self-theories are lay beliefs people hold about the malleability of their personalities. Two types have been identified: entity versus incremental theory (Dweck 2000). Individuals who endorse incremental theory (“incremental theorists”) view their personal qualities as something they can enhance through their own direct efforts at self-improvement. In contrast, individuals who endorse entity theory (“entity theorists”) view their personal qualities as something they cannot improve on their own direct efforts. Instead, they seek out opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self or others. We predict and find that entity theorists (not incremental theorists) are responsive to the signaling value of brands with appealing personalities. They use a brand associated with an appealing personality to signal that they possess the same appealing personality as the brand, resulting in more positive self-perceptions.

Study 1: Does Victoria’s Secret Make You Feel Better-Looking?

Consumers at a local shopping mall were asked to use a Victoria’s Secret shopping bag (brand experience) or a plain pink shopping bag (no brand experience) during their shopping trip. This setting provided an initial test of our proposition in a natural environment where consumers could experience the signaling value of a brand through a common activity of carrying a shopping bag. Victoria’s Secret was selected because of its appealing brand personality, associated with traits such as good-looking, feminine, and glamorous. Implicit beliefs about personality were measured (Implicit Persons Theory Measure: Levy et. al. 1998) prior to the shopping trip, with self-perceptions regarding personality traits (including those associated with Victoria’s Secret) measured after the shopping trip.

After carrying the Victoria’s Secret shopping bag (vs. plain pink shopping bag), entity theorists perceived themselves to be better-looking, more feminine, and more glamorous. However, incremental theorists were not influenced by their brand experience. Differences between these groups were not evident for personality traits unconnected to the Victoria’s Secret brand, which rules out response biases, general affective states, and contextual factors as possible alternative explanations.

Study 2: Why Are Entity Theorists More Affected by Brand Personalities?

Study 2 extends prior findings by: (1) manipulating implicit self-theories to rule out the possibility that individuals who endorse entity or incremental theories may also vary on other dimensions that influence response to brand experiences; and (2) examining the mediating process for why entity theorists, but not incremental theorists, are affected by brand experiences. Female undergraduate students were asked to participate in treasure hunt. To collect items during the treasure hunt, they used a Victoria’s Secret shopping bag or a plain pink shopping bag. After using the shopping bag, participants were asked about their self-perceptions on traits associated with Victoria’s Secret, and were also asked how much they used Victoria’s Secret as signals of one’s identity.

The results replicated the findings from study 1. Further, a mediation analysis revealed that relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists are more responsive to the signaling value of the Victoria’s Secret brand experience and this difference mediates the influence of implicit self-theory on self-perceptions.

Study 3: Can Entity Theorists Recover From Self-threats Using Brand Personalities?

Entity theorists view personal qualities as something that they cannot directly improve through their own direct efforts. Dweck and her colleagues suggest that such pessimistic thinking about self-improvement reduces emotional and psychological resources available to cope with negative feedback on personal qualities. In study 3, we examined whether or not entity theorists can recover a threatened self through experiences with a brand associated with an appealing personality in a threat-related domain. After receiving negative feedback on a GRE test, participants were asked to use either a MIT pen or a regular pen, and then completed the self-perception measure.

The results showed that entity theorists recovered negative self-views after brand experiences; they perceived themselves to be more intelligent, harder-working, and more of a leader after using the MIT pen (vs. the regular pen).

Summary

We identify implicit self-theories as an important moderator of the influence of brand experiences on consumer self-perceptions. Only entity theorists view use a brand associated with an appealing personality to signal that they possess the same appealing personality as the brand, resulting in more positive self-perceptions.

REFERENCES

**It’s all about THE GREENS: Conflicting Motives and Making Green Work**

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Consumers frequently encounter decisions regarding whether to purchase environmentally-friendly products in place of more traditional products (e.g., reusable vs. plastic grocery bags, non-toxic, biodegradable cleaners). While there has been an increasing emphasis on green attributes of products in the marketplace, the potential goal conflicts of engaging in environmentally-friendly purchases are not well understood. We seek to determine how to identify green consumers, whom we define as those with a tendency to consider the environmental impact of their purchase and consumption behaviors, and distinguish their preferences from those of non-green consumers to aid the marketing of green products, considering both product positioning and product pricing.

Though there have been several efforts at identifying green consumers (e.g., Antil 1984; Roberts 1995; Webb, Mohr, and Harris 2008; Webster 1975 over the last few decades, such efforts have led to rather complex and often dated measures. We present a parsimonious, yet valid measure of green consumer attitudes, enabling managers and marketers to better determine potential responses to green-related efforts based on their consumer base. In doing so, we focus on characteristics of consumers that might provide underlying motivations for green consumption. Specifically, we expect those who are more green to be more conscientious of their monetary resources and more careful users of physical resources.

**Study 1.** We first develop a simple six-item measure to succinctly capture green attitudes. We find our measure correlates positively with socially responsible consumption behavior (r=.69; Antil 1984) and negatively with environmental claims skepticism (Mohr et al. 1998) and hindrances to buying green (adapted from Harris Interactive 2008). A separate follow-up study using an adult panel further validates the GREEN measure.

We also assess the relationship of green attitudes with both monetary and nonmonetary resources. Regarding monetary resources, consumers demonstrating a higher level of GREEN were also found to be more frugal, more self-controlled, and more value and price conscious suggesting that consumers who express green attitudes are also quite sensitive to the wise use of financial resources. For physical resource consumption, product retention tendency and use innovativeness were positively related to GREEN, suggesting that consumers with strong green attitudes are also reluctant to discard of possessions and likely to find new ways to use existing possessions.

**Study 2.** We examined the extent to which GREEN predicted behavioral intentions and product choice. Measuring GREEN three weeks in advance of reported behaviors and choice, results indicated participants choosing a reusable grocery bag (green option; n=99) had a higher average green score than those choosing the pens (non-green option; M=4.23 vs. 3.70, F(1, 235)=11.68, p<.001). GREEN was also positively correlated (r=.73) with reported likelihood of engaging in eight green behaviors such as recycling (adapted from Straughan and Roberts 1999). This study provides evidence that our simple measure of GREEN predicts behavioral intentions and actual behaviors.

**Study 3.** Though high GREEN consumers conserve monetary and physical resources, they also value environmentally-friendly products. Goldsmith and Dhar (2008) state that green products can be positioned based on two distinct dimensions: self benefits (gentle on your skin) or earth benefits (save the planet). If costs are equal, consumers with higher green attitudes are likely to be more concerned with earth (vs. self) benefits.

To test the effect of benefit framing, students responded to the 6-item green scale and were later asked to view an advertisement for a new natural dish washing liquid and indicate their purchase likelihood. The benefits of the product were described as leaving your dishes clean and shiny and helping to protect and sooth your skin (self benefits) or as posing no threat of harm to the environment and contributing to a healthier planet (earth benefits).

Results revealed an interaction such that the earth (vs. self) framing increased purchase likelihood among consumers high in GREEN whereas purchase likelihood did not differ among low GREEN consumers regardless of benefit framing. For GREEN consumers, positioning a green product with earth benefits is more effective than positioning with benefits for oneself, which may be of particular importance to marketers who may decrease green purchases if they attempt to capture a larger share of the market by emphasizing self benefits.

**Study 4.** In our final study, we directly examine the inherent conflict between the economic and the green motivations of consumers by examining environmental products with a price premium. Though we anticipate that green consumers will be more accepting of price premiums than will nongreen consumers, products that meet goals of both greenness and frugality will be most favorably received by consumers pursuing these multiple goals.

Student participants completed the 6-item GREEN scale in a battery of unrelated items and then completed the main study a week later. The main study consisted of a one-factor (price premium: none vs. 20% premium for more green product) between-subjects design. Participants were shown two laundry detergents which were identical except that one received an excellent environmental score whereas the alternative product received an average environmental rating. In the no premium condition, the two products were the same price, whereas in the price premium condition, the green product (high rating) was listed at 20% higher. Respondents indicated which of the two products they preferred on a 9-point scale.

Results indicated, as expected, an interaction of GREEN and price premium condition such that GREEN consumers are more likely to prefer premium-priced green products than are non-GREEN consumers. However, both GREEN and non-GREEN consumers significantly prefer the equally-priced green option. The significant decline in the price premium condition, even among GREEN consumers, demonstrates their value on both environmental and economic goals. Though important to equalize price of green products as much as possible, these results indicate there is a segment of consumers willing to pay the premium for green.

Clearly, understanding the multiple motivations underlying consumers’ decisions regarding green products will help managers better market their environmentally-friendly alternatives. Furthermore, theoretical insights are provided by considering the goal conflict inherent in valuing green products while valuing conservation of monetary resources.
REFERENCES


Green Requests: Issue Importance and Compliance with Assertive Language  
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Background
While any request limits the freedom of the addressee (Brown and Levinson, 1987), assertive language is even more restricting, as it leaves the addressee an even smaller option for refusal (Searle, 1969; Vanderveken 1990). Consequently, as it is shown in previous research, assertive message phrasings typically decrease compliance with the message, compared with non-assertive messages (e.g., Dillard and Shen 2005; Edwards, Li, and Lee 2002; Quick and Considine 2008). However, some counterintuitive findings (e.g. Buller, Borland, and Burgoon 1998) imply that compliance with assertive language can be elevated in situations of higher issue importance.

We show this general phenomenon, employing the example of messages which relate to environmental behavior. Issue importance plays a great role in consumer’s reaction to environmental campaigns because environmental issues bear a non-personal character and therefore are generally less close to the consumer’s heart. While the common finding is that assertive environmental messages result in low compliance (e.g., Lord 1994; Shrum, Lowrey, and McCarty 1994), many environment-related issues are being promoted aggressively through assertive messages such as “Use only what you need!”—the Denver water economy campaign.

We suggest that issue importance not only diminishes non-compliance with assertive messages, but even leads to higher compliance with assertive messages than with non-assertive ones. The key reason for this suggestion is that when an issue is important, an assertive message supports one’s attitude, while a non-assertive request may have the opposite influence as it implies a non-serious attitude toward the issue. Thus, we hypothesize that when an issue is considered important and the message is assertive, the fit between message phrasing and consumer’s attitude leads to higher compliance. A non-assertive message in this situation would contradict consumer’s ends and yield lower compliance. However, if an issue is not deemed important, a non-assertive message would be a higher fit than and assertive one, resulting in higher compliance with a non-assertive message.

METHOD

Study 1–Field Study
The purpose of the study was to measure compliance with an assertive versus a non-assertive ad as an effect of issue importance. To meet our hypothesis we created a 2 (assertiveness) by 2 (issue importance) design in the following way:

Assertiveness manipulation: We placed two sponsored links in Google Adwords advertising system, calling viewers to sign a petition to save the Mediterranean Sea: one assertive (You must save the Mediterranean Sea!) and one non-assertive (You could save the Mediterranean Sea.)

Issue importance conditioning: Two types of search words were identified: Sea-related (e.g. Mediterranean Sea pollution) and General (e.g. knitting machines). We relied on the assumption that people who type a sea-related search word deem higher importance to sea pollution than people who type in a general word.

We then compared the number of clicks on each of the ads, following a general or a sea-related search word. In line with our prediction, we found significantly higher ratio of clicking the assertive ad after typing in a sea related search word, and significantly higher clicking on the non-assertive ad after typing in a general search word.

Studies 2 and 3
In order to support our socio-linguistic explanation which involves issue importance, we conducted two studies which were similar in their 2 by 2 design, but different in type of behavior and in operationalization.

Study 1 used an assertive and a non-assertive message regarding an important (water economy) and an unimportant (recycling plastic containers) issue for the specific society we examined (www.hh-law.co.il). Participants (N=102) were exposed to a short and simple message, which was either assertive or non-assertive and related either to water economy or to recycling plastic containers. The assertive message read: “You must economize water/recycle plastic containers.” The non-assertive message read: “It’s worth economizing water/recycling plastic containers.” After reading the message participants filled out a questionnaire which measured issue importance and compliance intention. Results revealed a significantly higher compliance intention with the assertive message vs. a non-assertive message calling for water economy. As predicted, for recycling messages there was no difference in compliance intentions between people who read an assertive and a non-assertive message.

Study 2 manipulated issue importance by addressing two different groups: low issue importance (students of Business school, N=53) vs. high issue importance (students of Agriculture and Environment, N=52). Assertiveness was manipulated using the recycling related materials from Study 1. Our results showed an interaction for assertiveness and issue importance: while for Business students there was no difference in compliance as an effect of assertiveness, Environment students showed significantly higher compliance intentions with an assertive recycling message than with a non-assertive one.

Study 4
We hypothesized that the effect of compliance with an assertive message can be created by temporarily elevating issue importance. This is an important point because of its practical implications. In this study we temporarily elevated issue importance using a clip about air pollution. Participants (N=146) were divided into two groups: one group first completed a general environmental issue importance questionnaire, then saw the clip, and then completed an air-pollution issue importance questionnaire and compliance intention questions. The second group filled out all three measures in a row.

Results: While the groups did not differ in general environmental issue importance, the group that saw the clip showed significantly higher air-pollution issue importance. This evidence implies that issue importance can indeed be temporally elevated. Further, the group that saw the clip revealed significantly higher compliance intention with the assertive pollution message than with the non-assertive message, while the group that did not see the clip revealed no difference in compliance intention. These results suggest that even a temporarily elevated issue importance can affect compliance with assertive environmental messages.
Summary
When compliance is the goal, issue importance appears to be a central variable in determining message phrasing. This is true not only for environmental issues, but also in health related promotion (e.g. sunscreen usage), and possibly even in encouraging the public to pay taxes regularly. We therefore hope to further explore this general and straightforward mechanism of the influence of issue importance on perception of assertive requests.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Virtually every product available on the market can boast at least some environmentally-friendly attributes. But consumer response to marketers’ positioning their offerings on the basis environmental attributes—so-called green marketing—is relatively understudied, and has produced equivocal results. Consumers' concern for the environment does not predict responsiveness to green marketing, or marketing communications that positions itself on the basis of environmental attributes (Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius 1995). One promising stream of research examines the role of marketing communications in stimulating consumer demand for green products. However, the efficacy of green marketing strategies remains equivocal (e.g., Kung, Carlson and Grove 1991; Montoro-Rios, Luque-Martínez and Rodríguez-Molina 2008) and research examining how consumers can be motivated to engage in environmentally friendly actions is relatively understudied (Goldstein, Cialdini and Griskevicius 2008).

In this article we examine the process by which the implicit anticipation of guilt leads consumers to make product selections in favor of marketing communications that highlight environmentally-friendly attributes. While previous research has examined explicit guilt appeals that directly induce consumer guilt, we find that the increased prominence of environmental information in advertising is itself enough to alleviate consumer guilt in situations where guilt has been implicitly activated. Across three studies we find that consumers respond most positively to environmental appeals when the product category is hedonic in nature, when the setting is public, and when relevant social norms are activated. We find evidence that green marketing can be successful in guiding consumer choice, and that this effect is mediated through anticipatory guilt.

Study 1 used brands in a hedonic category (Chocolate: Mars and Cadbury) and utilitarian category (Soap: Dove and Ivory), each positioned via a green appeal or a performance-based appeal (e.g., taste, cleansing ingredients). Information in each appeal was held constant. The design of either appeal was based on color, images and prominence given to environmental attributes.

Participants (n=99) in the hedonic category responded more positively to the green appeal (74% chose the brand promoted through a green appeal versus 26% for the brand that used a performance-based appeal). Those in the utilitarian category responded more to the performance-based appeal (67% versus 33% for the green appeal), $\chi^2(1)=22.365, p<.001$. Mediation analysis to test for the role of anticipatory guilt confirms that the preference for the green appeal is based on implicit guilt related to the product category. To test for mediation through anticipatory guilt, first guilt was regressed on the product category, which was significant ($\beta=1.996, t=-10.269, p<.001$). Next, the product choice (choice corresponding to either the green or performance-based appeal) was regressed on guilt using logistic regression, which was also significant ($\beta=1.904, Wald=26.124, p<.001$). Product choice was regressed on product category, which was also significant ($\beta=-2.070, Wald=20.456, p<.001$), and finally product choice was regressed on both product category and guilt. Product category was no longer significant ($\beta=1.029, Wald=1.565, p=.211$) while guilt was highly significant ($\beta=2.239, Wald=22.388, p<.001$). A Sobel test (Baron and Kenny 1986) was significant as well, $z=4.583, p<.001$.

Study 2 (n=119) uses the presence of others as the basis for stimulating anticipatory guilt and promoting response to green marketing appeals. Two brands of granola bars (Kellogg’s and Quaker) were used, and offered to participants through either a green or performance-based appeal. Participants viewed the ads and selected products either alone or as part of a small group. As expected, those in the group condition favored the green appeals (68% versus 32% selection based on the performance-based appeal). In the alone condition, appeals were equally successful (49% green versus 51% performance-based), $\chi^2(1)=4.518, p=.034$.

Mediation analysis again confirms the role of anticipatory guilt in the preference for green appeals. The regression of guilt on setting (group versus alone) was significant ($\beta=-.427, t=-2.63, p=.01$), as was the regression of product choice (product corresponding to either the green or performance-based appeal) on guilt ($\beta=-.831, Wald=10.671, p<.001$). Product choice was regressed on setting, which was also significant ($\beta=0.803, Wald=4.452, p=.035$), and finally product choice was regressed on both product category and guilt. Product category was no longer significant ($\beta=.570, Wald=2.01, p=.156$) while guilt was highly significant ($\beta=-.771, Wald=8.95, p=.003$). The Sobel test was significant as well, $z=2.052, p=.02$.

In study 3 (n=111) we manipulate the relevant social norms and seek to either stimulate perceived expectations to respond to a green appeal, or give participants “permission” to choose a product based on performance-based (i.e., self-serving) appeals. The same brands of granola from study 2 were used, but prior to the experiment participants were primed with the relevant social norm (White and Peloza 2009). As expected, green appeals were more successful in the environmental norm prime condition (64% versus 36%) but in the product performance prime, participants responded to the performance-based appeal 57% of the time, $\chi^2(1)=5.020, p=.025$.

Mediation analysis again confirms the role of anticipatory guilt in participants’ product selection. The regression of guilt on norm manipulation (environmental versus product performance) was significant ($\beta=-.818, t=-4.309, p<.001$), as was the regression of product choice (choice corresponding to either green or performance-based appeal) on guilt ($\beta=-.526, Wald=7.318, p=.007$). The regression of product choice norm manipulation was significant ($\beta=.854, Wald=4.943, p=.026$), and finally, product choice was regressed on both product category and guilt. Product category was no longer significant ($\beta=.534, Wald=1.653, p=.199$) while guilt was significant ($\beta=-.433, Wald=4.471, p=.034$). The Sobel test was significant as well, $z=2.689, p=.003$.

REFERENCES


Trust of the Virtual eWOM Reviewer and the Role of Gendered Self-Construal
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Summary of the Paper
Previous research has found that compared to men, women are significantly more likely to consider eWOM consumer reviews as informative, and report that they are more likely to use these in their decision-making. Women also exhibit the negativity bias, viz. find reviewers of negative eWOM significantly more trustworthy than those who write positive reviews, in comparison with men. We investigate the role of gender differences in consumers’ self-construals in influencing these attitudes towards the virtual reviewers writing the eWOM consumer reviews. We find that the differences in a person’s relational-interdependent self-construal is an underlying reason leading to this gendered difference in the trust of a virtual eWOM reviewer.

Conceptualization
Based on our research and the extant literature, we propose two hypotheses relating to the effect of gender on the trust of eWOM reviewers. In our first hypothesis, we propose how this relationship between gender and trust of the reviewer may be moderated by review valence and the type of product being reviewed. We draw from previous research (Sen and Lerman 2007; Sen (forthcoming)) and propose that women will more likely exhibit the negativity bias than men, and moreover, be more likely to trust a virtual reviewer writing a negative review for a utilitarian product than for a hedonic product. To investigate the process of this gendered difference, we explore the role played by the subject’s relational-interdependent self-construal (RISC), since literature in social psychology has demonstrated that many gender differences in cognition, motivation, emotion, and social behavior may be explained in terms of men’s and women’s different self-construals (e.g., Sherif 1982; Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Baumeister 1998; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Method
A 2 (Gender: male, female) x 2 (Review valence: negative, positive) x 2 (Product type: hedonic, utilitarian) between-subjects experiment was conducted. Proposition 1 was tested using linear regression. Subjects’ relational-interdependent self-construal (RISC) was measured using the scale developed by Cross et al. (2000), and used to test mediation of the effect of gender on the trust of an eWOM reviewer by the subject’s RISC score (Proposition 2). The mediation was tested by using the 3 step regression analysis suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986).

Major Findings
We found support for our mediated moderation model in Proposition 2 which posited that relational-interdependent self-construal (RISC) would mediate the effect in Proposition 1 and would be the reason behind the gender differences in trust of the virtual reviewer. Our finding is consistent with Cross and Madson (1997)’s view that individuals’ self facilitates their engagement in and adaptation to the environments, and we believe that in the case of women, their higher RISC motivates them to adapt their attitudes or behavior to the virtual reviewer, to ensure a smooth and harmonious interaction (e.g., having trust in the motivations of the virtual reviewer.)
Conversations Sell: How Dialogical Judgments and Goals Underpin the Success of Viral Videos
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The potential for online videos to command widespread attention without the need for extensive resources or interference from traditional media gatekeepers has attracted millions of professionals and consumers alike to put up videos on media-sharing sites like YouTube in the hope that they will go viral. Highly successful viral videos can command a large following, obtain substantial media coverage, and may spawn a slew of remixes that feeds on their popularity. But viral phenomena are fraught with uncertainty. Without a clearer understanding of the forces driving individuals to pass on viral contents or engage in word-of-mouth communications about them, explicit efforts to stimulate buzz through deliberate viral attempts run the risk of backfiring.

This paper illustrates an approach to explicate virality by examining how individuals make sense of a viral phenomenon, and engage in interpersonal communication about it. Successful viral videos are typified by their phenomenological attributes—people typically mention a viral video by first talking about the elements for its popularity or about the attention it receives. In this way, a highly significant quality for virality is based on how the video becomes elaborated within the group it is popular with. What people find salient, meaningful and useful about the video, and the degree to which these knowledge structures are commonly shared within the group are fundamental to the communicative success of the video.

The present research examines the emergence of collective meaning of a viral video within a given socio-cultural context, and from which to form hypotheses and make predictions concerning individuals’ choices and actions associated with it. Using the example of the “Bus Uncle” viral video—a man covertly filmed on a camera phone reviling a fellow Hong Kong bus passenger for interrupting his call?three studies were conducted to elicit participants’ goals, judgments and collective meaning-making of the phenomenon. The case helps to exemplify the socio-cultural aspects of consumers’ participation in viral phenomena, the nature of user-generated content, and the psychological mechanism of ‘virality.’

The first two studies were conducted with local participants in Hong Kong. In Study 1, a laddering questionnaire was used to elicit participants’ goals for viewing the Bus Uncle video and the linkages between these goals. Using means-end chain analysis, the structure of the viewing goals and their linkages was mapped. In Study 2 participants were asked to sort newspaper comments obtained from local press coverage of the phenomenon. The sorted comments were then subjected to multidimensional scaling (MDS) to uncover participants’ common conceptual space and judgments. To elucidate contextual differences in the representations of the phenomenon, Study 3 replicated the procedures in Study 2 with British participants in the U.K. Using a geometric analytical procedure, the concordance between the knowledge structures obtained from the MDS analysis of the two samples was tested.

Study 1 showed that the desire for common conversation topics among friends was the most salient goal for viewing the video. Study 2 revealed that participants’ interpretations of press coverage on the video were guided by their judgments of whether the issues mentioned would make good conversations. These judgments converged with a relevant set of goals for viewing the video, suggesting that participants’ interpretations were motivated by their goals. When Study 2 was replicated in Study 3, judgments that serve dialogical purposes in the out-group sample were notably missing.

This paper proposes that a video becomes a viral phenomenon when it is sufficiently elaborated within a social group and shared ideas begin to emerge. The ability to make conversations about the video is arguably the most proximal determinant in this process. Tracing the goals and linkages that preceded this goal can illuminate the process that leads a video to virality. The studies show that salient aspects of individuals’ representations of viral videos do not arise from item characteristics but correspond to the relationships between people and the item, and the events represented by these relationships. They also reveal that the role of media coverage in facilitating a video going viral was not in raising the salience of any particular issue but in helping people understand what went on.

The findings suggest that the buzz and virality arising from the video were attributable to participants’ goals to create and negotiate social relationships through conversations with others in their social group. The need for personal judgments about the video becomes extenuated when participants were initially drawn to the video owing to others’ recommendations or to a lesser extent because it was widely talked about. In such circumstances, participants would rely on the judgments of others provided that their superordinate goal was to create conversation topics. This point to the importance of examining consumers’ goal-directed behaviors when seeking explanations for the persuasiveness of word-of-mouth communication.

REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Online nutrition retailers offer consumers an enormous selection of highly nutritious foods, drinks, and dietary supplements. For a novice health and fitness enthusiast, deciding which of these categories of products is likely to be helpful, and then choosing individual products within those particular categories, can be confusing, even when only a few options are available. For example, when selecting a nutrition bar, consumers may consider a diverse array of product attributes, including Calories, fat content, fiber content, glycemic index, protein to carbohydrate ratio, protein quality, and vitamin and mineral content, among others. Typically, the product that is best for a given consumer will depend on a variety of individual factors as well, such as age, eating patterns, exercise frequency and intensity, gender, and strength and weight goals, among others.

This example illustrates how the increasing selection of products and product features available in the marketplace, and especially online, has increased the complexity of many purchase decisions. Since consumers do not want more choices per se, but rather the more customized options that expanded choice can bring (Pine, Peppers, and Rogers 2005), it follows that the attractiveness of the expanded choice set offered by internet retailers depends on the ability of consumers to sort through it efficiently (Alba et al. 1997).

Product recommendation websites assist consumers in making complex purchase decisions in diverse product categories. These websites provide electronic recommendation agents that first ask users questions about individual factors and their preferences for product attributes, and then rate available products on the basis of their responses. The goals of these agents include improving decision quality and increasing satisfaction (West et al. 1999).

Although previous research has extensively examined the influence of electronic recommendation agent use on decision quality (e.g., Haubl and Trifts 2000), far less research has examined effects on satisfaction. Furthermore, those papers that have examined satisfaction have primarily focused on satisfaction with the choice process (e.g., Bechwati and Xia 2003), rather than on satisfaction with the choice itself. However, choice satisfaction is important to marketers, since it has been shown to influence attitudes and purchase intentions (Oliver 1980).

In this paper, we examine how use of an electronic recommendation agent for nutrition bars impacts consumers’ choice satisfaction, attitudes, and purchase intentions over a period of one to two weeks, the time frame in which repurchase decisions for nutrition bars are typically made.

We conducted an experiment within the nutrition bar product category. The experimental design had two between-subjects conditions (recommendation agent vs. control). People recruited outside a behavioral laboratory near a large, urban university were assigned to one of the conditions and asked to examine descriptions of eight brands of nutrition bars (four of which were relatively utilitarian, and four of which were relatively hedonic) and to select one of these brands to sample at home. At the conclusion of the in-lab portion of the experiment, participants received a package containing five sample bars of the brand that they had selected. Then, one week later, they received an email that contained a link to an online follow-up survey that assessed their satisfaction with the brand as well as their attitudes, purchase intentions, and other measures of interest.

Based on Wilson et al.’s classic finding that when people carefully analyze the reasons underlying their decisions they become biased to overweight utilitarian considerations and underweight hedonic considerations (see Wilson and Dunn 1985), we predicted that participants in the agent condition would be more likely to choose one of the four relatively utilitarian brands compared to participants in the control condition. The data supported this prediction. The data also revealed that although the total amount of time that participants spent examining the brands did not differ between the two conditions (suggesting that participants in the agent condition did not blindly follow the recommendations provided to them), across these conditions participants who ultimately selected a utilitarian brand spent more time on average examining the brands than did those who ultimately selected a hedonic brand, consistent with the notion that utilitarian choices result from more intensive processing than do hedonic choices (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999).

The data further revealed that, in addition to influencing participants’ brand choices, use of an electronic recommendation agent reduced their satisfaction with the chosen brand. This is consistent with Wilson et al.’s (1993) finding that analyzing reasons can reduce post-choice satisfaction. Furthermore, the data revealed that among participants in the agent condition satisfaction was lower among those who chose a utilitarian brand than among those who chose a hedonic brand, whereas among participants in the control condition satisfaction did not differ between those who chose a utilitarian or hedonic brand. These findings suggest that the observed decrease in satisfaction among participants who used an agent resulted from the utilitarian bias that was induced by interacting with the agent. It seems that after some time had passed participants’ decision bases returned to their normal levels, leading those who had selected a utilitarian brand after interacting with the agent to regret their choice.

We observed this same pattern of results with a rich set of additional dependent variables, including participants’ taste ratings, their likelihood of purchasing the chosen brand, and their likelihood of recommending the chosen brand to a friend.

In a planned second study, which we will conduct before ACR, we will attempt to rule out alternative explanations based on the content of the agents’ recommendations. In the study, participants who use an agent will either receive a set of recommendations that, unbeknownst to them, has been generated randomly, or, after providing their responses to the agents’ questions, will receive a message saying that the recommendation agent server has malfunctioned and that the brands will therefore be displayed randomly.

By showing that including a product in an electronic recommendation agent can have negative consequences, our results give a word of caution to managers. In particular, our results suggest that marketers who manage relatively utilitarian brands within product categories in which both hedonic and utilitarian brands are established should be especially cautious. Although agents might help increase short-term sales of such products by leading consumers to overweight utilitarian product attributes and underweight hedonic product attributes, this boost may come at the cost of long-run profitability due to consumers’ reduced satisfaction with their choices and a resulting decline in repurchasing behavior.
REFERENCES


Balance as an Embodiment of Parity
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Philosophers and linguists have long postulated that metaphorical language is more than a simple cultural construction, but reflects deeper cognitive relationships (Aristotle, circa 335 BCE). According to research on embodied cognition, our understanding of abstract concepts is grounded in physical experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). New, unfamiliar, abstract concepts are understood through metaphorical association with familiar, physical activities in a process known as “scaffolding” (Williams, Huang, & Bargh, 2009). Because language utilizes neural systems that were developed for other purposes, the activation of motor behavior can similarly activate the deeper cognitive associations that are scaffolded onto that motor behavior. Similarly, activation of an abstract concept can activate the motor regions of the brain upon which it was scaffolded.

We examine the balance metaphor, which has not been experimentally demonstrated to exhibit multi-modal influence. Balance is one of the earliest developing and most pervasive physical metaphors (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Beginning in early childhood, people learn through repeated experiences the importance of maintaining physical balance. To bipedal mammals, balance is so fundamental for well-being that balance and anxiety disorders share neuronal circuitry and commonly co-occur (Balaban & Thayer, 2001; Furman & Jacob, 2001). As a learner encodes the actions required to obtain balance, they are also encoding other relevant information from the learning context. One of the important ways that a standing person obtains balance is by equalizing the weight placed across both feet. In the learning process, the concept of balance and the need for evenness are encoded concurrently, creating a strong mental association between these two concepts.

The neural connection between physical balance and the more abstract concept of evenness or parity is evidenced by many metaphorical phrases from the English language. Accountants’ “balance the ledger” while chemists “balance equations.” Fair-minded individuals ascertain “both sides of the story”, and someone in control of their emotions is said to be “even-tempered.” (Many of these metaphors are similar in other languages.) These idioms are best understood in the guise of a twin-pan balance scale evaluating opposing abstract states. The balancing apparatus reaches equilibrium when both pans hold equal portions. Similarly, accounts are balanced when they reflect equal parts debits and credits, while truth is ascertained when opposing viewpoints are weighed against each other.

These balance-based metaphors arise because of the strong neural connections between balance and parity that are encoded during infancy. Exposure to balance metaphors causes concurrent activation of the neural systems governing balance and the neural systems governing cognitions about parity, which strengthens the association (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Repeated exposure to symbolic representations of balance, for example the twin-pan balance scale and the yin and yang symbol, also reinforces the link between balance and parity.

Given this link between the neural systems governing balance and more abstract thoughts on parity, we expect that experiencing physical balance should consequently access the mental representation of the balance metaphor, which is closely associated with the need for parity, and thereby influence choice. Engaging in physical balance activities should activate instinctual desires for balance, and thereby enhance the desirability of metaphorically balanced choice options. Specifically, activation of physical balance should increase the desire for choice options that offer some form of parity.

In four studies, we activate physical balance through a variety of means and observe a consistent increase in the choice share of options that offer various forms of parity. In study 1, participants played one of three games on the Wii Fit™ while simultaneously responding to a verbal survey administered by a research assistant that was blind to the hypotheses of the study. Two of these games (Yoga and Penguin Slide) activated significantly more thoughts on physical balance than the neutral (Jogging) condition. Participants selected a printer and a car from a set of three choice options that included a compromise choice. Participants in the Yoga and Penguin Slide conditions demonstrated an increased selection of both a compromise printer (M=40% vs. M=23%) and a compromise car (M=55% vs. M=38%). The pooled test was significant (z=1.99, p=.05).

In study 2, physical balance is activated through mental simulation. Participants performed a fifteen second mental simulation of either walking across a balance beam in perfect balance, walking across a balance beam with poor balance, or swinging around a high bar. Those in either of the two balanced beam conditions selected the compromise computer (M=66% and M=63%) more often than those in the high bar condition (M=45%, z=2.04, p=.04). The results suggest that the strength of activation of balance metaphor is not dependent on the kind of physical activation, unbalanced or balanced. Furthermore, the results indicate that the activation of the association between balance and parity occurs even when balance is activated through mental simulation.

In study 3, the balance metaphor is activated through supra-liminal exposure to balance symbols. In the balance condition, the four corners of the web survey displayed a crude silhouette of a balance (see Figure 2). In the control condition, no picture was shown. The survey asked participants to make six meal choices; each choice set showed two meals, with one meal being more balanced than the other (offering greater parity across food groups). In the balance condition, participants chose the balanced meal 68% of the time as opposed to only 56% of the time for the control. A logistic regression on meal choices showed that condition assignment was significant, t(399)=2.3, p=.02.

Finally, study 4 activates semantic representations of the balance metaphor. We asked half the participants to write for three minutes about a time when their life felt “out of balance”. These participants chose the compromise computer more often (M=83%) than those who wrote about their typical day (M=50%), z=2.15, p<.05.

Across four studies, we activate balance a number of ways and demonstrate that such activation consistently leads to an increase in the choice of options that offer parity.

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Staying Warm in the Winter: Seeking Psychological Warmth to Reduce Physical Coldness

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

On a cold, snowy night, there is nothing better than sitting by the fire and drinking a hot cup of cocoa. It is a basic human drive to seek physical warmth when feeling cold. This research explores whether there also exists a drive to seek psychological warmth when feeling cold. On a cold, snowy night, are people especially interested in having a romantic dinner with a loved one or a phone conversation with a dear friend? More broadly, we ask: When people are physically cold, are they motivated to engage in psychologically warm activities?

Psychologically warm events are positive experiences that promote a feeling of social connection. Recent research on embodied cognition suggests that a link exists between physical warmth and psychological warmth (IJzerman & Semin, 2009; Williams & Bargh, 2008; Zhong & Leonardelli, 2008). For instance, people perceive a target individual to be “warm” (e.g., kind and charitable) when they are holding a hot cup of coffee (Williams & Bargh, 2008), they perceive themselves to be socially close to others when they are in a warm room (IJzerman & Semin, 2009), and they report feeling physically cold when they are socially excluded (Zhong & Leonardelli, 2008).

In this research we suggest that psychological warmth, like physical warmth, is perceived as a means of reducing the feeling of coldness. As a result, people are more interested in engaging in psychologically warm activities when they are physically cold. This argument goes beyond the “metaphor” or “priming” domain of embodied cognition research. Instead of asking whether activities will be perceived as psychologically warmer or colder, we focus on the goal-oriented nature of the phenomenon and test whether feeling cold motivates people to seek psychological warmth. We suggest psychological warmth and physical warmth are two means for satisfying the same goal of reducing a feeling of coldness.

Study 1 supports the basic prediction by showing that cold participants are especially interested in psychologically warm activities. Specifically, participants who completed a questionnaire outside in the cold in a Midwestern city’s winter showed more interest in warm events than in non-warm activities, but those who completed the study inside a heated building were equally interested in warm and non-warm activities. Study 2 extends the work to real-world behavior. Beginning a romantic relationship is perhaps the most powerful tool for forging social connection. We find that participants are more likely to start relationships in cold weather than end them. In Study 3, we primed people either with the goal of reducing physical coldness or the concept of coldness. The results showed that priming people with the goal of reducing physical coldness led to greater interest in both physically and psychologically warm events (relative to non-warm events), but priming people with the concept of coldness did not, suggesting that it is the motivation to reduce coldness that is central to people’s interest in warm events. Finally, in Study 4, to test whether psychological warmth and physical warmth are two means for satisfying the same goal of reducing a feeling of coldness, we asked participants to fill out the same questionnaire as in Study 1 either outside in the cold or inside a heated building. However, half of the participants were reminded that they would step into a heated building momentarily. We replicated the results of Study 1 in the no-reminder condition, showing that people showed greater interest in psychologically warm events if they were feeling physically cold than if they were not feeling cold; but this increased interest in psychologically warm events is reduced when participants were reminded that their motivation to reduce coldness will be met through physical means, indicating that psychological warmth and physical warmth are two means for satisfying the same goal of reducing a feeling of coldness.

Our findings support the argument that while people satisfy their physical goals through physical means, the mapping between mind and body also leads them to satisfy their physical goals through psychological means. This research adds to the growing body of work supporting a theory of embodied cognition, and specifically to work suggesting that the mental concepts of psychological warmth and social connection are deeply rooted in the sensorimotor experiences of physical warmth. In addition, the present work goes beyond demonstrating a conceptual mapping between the physical sensation of warmth and the psychological experience of warmth. It highlights the role of goals and motivation in the link between the mind and the body. We find that the link leads people to satisfy their physical goal with actions that could satisfy the matching psychological goal. Namely, when people are motivated to reduce physical coldness, they show interest in events that promote psychological warmth.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent studies show an alarming increase in obesity in the United States with 74.1% of the population over 15 years old considered overweight (Streib 2007). Various organizations are dealing with this issue and trying different weight-loss strategies such as low-carbohydrate diets, physical exercises, fat burning or appetite reducing pills, and fat removal surgeries. At the same time, others are looking for more self-driven ways of controlling obesity by changing people’s eating habits and introducing standards of healthy eating. The aim of these standards is to promote eating of healthy foods and prevent unhealthy eating practices. Emphasizing by media and many food producers through calorie or fiber intake, smaller portions, and reduced fat or fat-free products, standards of healthy eating have been widely accepted. However, there are still many people who do not follow these standards though they believe that it is harmful for them.

One of the critical aspects of unhealthy foods, which attracts people’s attention and convince them to choose it over a healthy option, is the taste of unhealthy foods. Research has shown that regardless of the actual taste, considering a food as less healthy makes it more tasty (Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006). Thus, making an unhealthy food less tasty could potentially reduce its consumption and help people to practice healthy food consumption. Therefore, in this research, we investigated the possibility of making unhealthy foods less tasty without changing their ingredients.

Past research has shown that self-focused people tend to compare themselves with standards of correctness (Duval and Wicklund 1972), and experience positive affect when they act in concert with standards, and negative affect when they act in opposition to standards (Duval, Silvia, and Lalwani 2001). The person who feels the positive or negative affect does not immediately know why he or she has such feelings (Oatley and Johnson-Laird 1996). Moreover, research has shown that self-focused people tend to attribute positive events to self and negative events to external factors (Duval, Silvia, and Lalwani 2001).

Since mirror, as a self-awareness enhancing tool, can be used as a decorative item in many food consumption settings, this research examined if, and under what conditions, eating a food product in front of a mirror affects its taste perception. According to the reviewed literature, it is expected that eating a healthy or an unhealthy food in front of a mirror generate positive or negative feelings since standards of healthy eating are widely accepted. Therefore, we propose that if people consume their food in a room decorated with mirrors compared to a room without mirrors, they will attribute the positive affect of eating a healthy food internally to self and the negative affect of eating an unhealthy food to the food taste as an external factor.

The first study was designed to provide empirical evidence for the proposed effect of mirror decoration on food taste. We used fruit salad and chocolate cake to represent healthy and unhealthy foods. Results confirmed our expectations and showed that participants gave a lower overall taste evaluation to the chocolate cake when they consumed it in front of mirror compared to the no-mirror condition. However, the taste evaluations of the fruit salad were not significantly different between the mirror and no-mirror conditions.

Study 2 and 3 investigated two factors moderating the effect of mirror decoration on food taste. Research has shown that people must perceive themselves responsible for acting against standards in order to experience the negative feelings (Duval, Silvia, and Lalwani 2001). Accordingly, the second study showed that when participants did not perceive themselves to be responsible for eating the unhealthy food (i.e., when they think that there is no choice and they have to do it), they did not give a lower evaluation to the taste of the unhealthy food in the mirror condition compared to the no-mirror condition.

Research has also found that simplicity of the connection between cause and effect is an important factor for the attribution system; and people tend to attribute the effects to the most plausible causes (Duval, Silvia, and Lalwani 2001). Therefore, we expected that introducing a more plausible cause for the negative affect would move the attribution of discomfort away from the unhealthy food taste. Study 3 supported this expectation and showed that when we introduced music as a more plausible cause of the negative affect, participants did not evaluate the taste of the unhealthy food to be lower in the mirror condition compared to the no-mirror condition.

In sum, this research contributes to the extant body of literature on the self-awareness theory by demonstrating the link between the self-awareness and the attribution of feelings induced by the self-standards comparison system. At a practical level, results of this research suggest that mirror decoration can be used in food consumption settings to decrease unhealthy eating practices as mirrors make the consumption of an unhealthy food less pleasant.

REFERENCES


Boundary Conditions for Copy Complexity Enhancement Effects
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Five experiments investigated copy complexity, length, level of involvement, medium, task attention, and reading level on persuasion. Experiments 1 and 2 investigated involvement, complexity, and length. Experiment 3 investigated involvement, complexity, and medium. Experiments 4 and 5 investigated reading level and task attention as boundary conditions.

EXPERIMENT 1
Experiment 1 involved a 2 (simple/moderately complex copy) X 2 (short/long) manipulation of direct mail pieces. Complexity should impact the persuasiveness of the offer but length should not (although this is a null prediction, it is important to demonstrate that complexity, isolated from length, exerts effects on persuasion). Motivation should also exert a main effect on order intentions (high involvement participants will have greater intentions than low involvement participants). Motivation should also moderate the effect of complexity. An interaction between complexity and involvement is expected, such that intentions will be greatest for those high in involvement exposed to complex versions.

Independent variables included complexity, involvement, and length. Involvement was a self-reported measure on two nine-point scales, with higher numbers indicating greater involvement. The two scales correlated significantly (.63; p<.001), so were averaged, and then dichotomized (M=5.46). The dependent variable was order intention on a nine-point scale (higher numbers indicated greater order intention).

Participants were 85 college students who provided informed consent to participate. Participants participated in groups of 12, seated at cubicles in a laboratory. Participants read the direct mail offer, then received the measurement booklet. Upon completion, the participants were debriefed and were free to leave.

A 2 (simple/moderate copy) X 2 (short/long) X 2 (low-/high-involvement) ANOVA was conducted. Complexity contributed to order intentions, as expected. Those who received the complex versions had higher intentions to order (M=2.98) than those who received the simple versions (M=2.05; F(1,83)=3.99; p<.05). There was also a main effect for involvement, as expected, such that those who reported high levels of involvement were more likely to order than those low in involvement (2.96 vs. 2.04; F(1,83)=3.78; p<.05). Length did not contribute to order intentions, consistent with expectations.

Involvement moderated the impact of complexity on order intentions, as expected. High involvement participants who received the complex offer had higher order intentions than all other participants (F(1,81)=9.24; p<.005). Thus, complexity had a positive impact on those high in involvement. The expected results were obtained, but order intentions were quite low.

EXPERIMENT 2
Given this negative response, Experiment 2 used a more interesting item (otherwise, the replication was identical). Participants were 103 college students participating for extra credit.

Experiment 2 replicated Experiment 1—complexity exerted a main effect on intentions (moderate=5.00 vs. simple=3.77; F(1,85)=6.23; p<.05). Involvement also exerted a main effect (high=5.57 vs. low=3.36; F(1,85)=23.48; p<.001). Length had no effect. The pattern of results for the interaction between involve-

ment and complexity was as expected, and was significant (p<.05). Highly involved participants exposed to moderate copy had higher intentions to order than all other participants.

EXPERIMENT 3
Experiment 3 involved a 3 (simple/moderate/complex copy) X 2 (print/broadcast medium type) manipulation for the same item from Experiment 2. The addition of radio was intended to test the hypothesis that the persuasiveness of copy in commercials will decrease as copy gets beyond moderate complexity. An interaction between complexity, medium, and involvement (identical to procedures in Experiments 1 and 2) was expected.

Participants were 241 college students participating for credit in the same laboratory. Participants were randomly assigned to a cubicle with a computer monitor, which showed a randomly pre-selected condition. Participants in the print conditions read the offer on the screen and responded to the questionnaire. Participants in the radio conditions listened to the commercial on headphones and responded to the questionnaire. Six print and six radio versions were prepared, adding a very complex version. Order intentions were measured on a five-point scale.

There was no main effect for complexity but there was one for involvement (high=2.91 vs. low=2.16; F(1,239)=6.42; p<.05). The interaction between medium, complexity, and involvement was also marginally significant (F(2,239)=2.37; p=.10). For those high in involvement exposed to the print version, complexity enhanced persuasion (even at the highest level of complexity), but for those high in involvement exposed to the radio version, complexity had a deleterious effect on persuasion.

EXPERIMENT 4
Experiment 4 involved a 3 (simple/moderate/complex copy) X 2 (item offered) within-subject design, measured reading level, and included an instructional manipulation check (IMC [Oppenheimer, Moyer, and Davidenko 2009]). An interaction between complexity, reading level, and involvement was expected.

Participants were 93 college students participating for credit in the same laboratory. Participants were randomly assigned to a cubicle with a computer monitor, which showed a randomly pre-selected condition from Experiment 3 (print only). Order intentions were measured on a five-point scale. Participants engaged in a non-timed distraction task between presentation of the two offers.

There was no main effect for complexity, reading level, or involvement for the first offer. All but two participants passed the IMC. The interaction between complexity, reading level, and involvement was not significant (p>.10). The results for the second offer were difficult to interpret. Given the distraction task was non-timed, the low number of errors on the IMC, and the low cell size, Experiment 5 was conducted to replicate the basic design with a timed distraction task and a higher sample size.

EXPERIMENT 5
Experiment 5 replicated Experiment 4, but with a timed distraction task. An interaction between complexity, reading level, and involvement was expected. Participants were 117 college students participating for credit in the same laboratory.

There were no main effects for complexity or reading level, but there was one for involvement, such that those who reported high levels of involvement had greater order intentions than those...
at low levels of involvement (3.19 vs. 2.60; $F(1,116)=5.64; p<.05$). Again, errors on the IMC were quite low. The interaction between medium, complexity, and involvement was not significant ($p>.10$). It would appear that, at least for college student participants, neither reading level nor task attention serve as boundary conditions.

**REFERENCES**


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In this paper, we aimed at identifying and testing principles that can explain and predict color harmony perception. Color harmony is a function of distance between colors in the color space. We first briefly described different models of color space and reviewed the color harmony literature, based on which we summarized three classic principles of color harmony (i.e., identity, similarity, and contrast) that were relatively well-accepted in this literature. Because the coordinate system underlying the classic color solids does not provide a straightforward distance metric to represent color similarity or difference (i.e., do not satisfy perceptual uniformity), we adopted the theoretical background of a more recent, alternative coordinate system (i.e., CIELAB coordinate system), which was designed to approximate human vision thereby provides a straightforward distance metric for color perception. We then reviewed prior empirical tests of classic color harmony theories that are similar to the principles we summarized. Some of these tests were conducted using the classic cylindrical coordinate system, others using the modern CIELAB color space. Nevertheless we found that these tests generate mixed results.

For our own test of the color harmony principles we adopted a unique and realistic context: aesthetic self-design of an athletic shoe (which has seven areas: base, secondary, swoosh, accent, lace, lining, and shox). This specific type of self-design task is especially suitable for testing color harmony principles because, first, the task environment allows for interactive color harmony judgment and, second, color harmony plays a major role in consumers’ decision. Based on this context, we proposed hypotheses about the relationships between the observed frequencies of color combinations in self-designed athletic shoes and color distance for identity, similarity, and contrast. Further, we hypothesized that a “small palette” can meet the need for color harmony if it is indeed determined by identity (if a single color is used repeatedly then less colors are needed in the palette) or contrast (colors that are mutually complementary spread evenly in the color space and the number of such colors is limited).

Results from our empirical tests provide evidence for our hypotheses. First, the principle of identity was supported for color pairs involving minor shoe areas (e.g., swoosh, lace, lining, and shox). Second, the principle of similarity was supported for the two major shoe areas (i.e., base and secondary). Third, the principle of contrast was supported for color pairs involving a major and a minor shoe area (e.g., base-lining, base-shox). Finally, the “small palette” hypothesis was also supported as the number of colors actually used in self-designed athletic shoes was smaller than the number expected based on assumption of statistical independence.

Taking these results together, we can picture the color coordination strategy consumers use during the self-design process, in which they make seven sequential color decisions for base, secondary, swoosh, accent, lace, lining, and shox (ordered as such). First, they pick a color for base according to their own preference. Second, anchoring on the base color, they choose a secondary color that is similar to that of base. Third, when making color decisions for the remaining five minor areas, consumers tend to use the same color for most of these areas, and this color oftentimes is a color contrasting to the base color. Taking into account the relative area of the seven shoe components, this strategy leads to a harmonious design where large areas define the overall color scheme of the shoe while small areas deviate from the basic scheme and “spice up” the overall design. This shows that when coordinating multiple colors, consumers are guided by intuitions about color harmony and their intuitions are consistent with the principles of identity, similarity, and contrast.

The identification and confirmation of several robust principles of color harmony provide some practical insights for managers of aesthetic self-design programs. First, these well-defined principles can be used as guidelines to design the color palettes. Second, the number of colors included in the color palettes can be greatly reduced therefore the size of the solution space of the self-design configurator can be largely reduced as well. Third, based on color harmony principles, the configurator can be designed to generate automatic recommendations to the user regarding her color choice. Last but not least, although in this paper we implicitly assume that most people prefer color harmony, those who are fond of disharmonious color combinations can also benefit from our research findings. Online product configurators include a simple survey about personal color taste to categorize their customers and, for some of them, provide “clashing” color palettes.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Customer knowledge has been extensively discussed in terms of objective and subjective knowledge, where subjective knowledge is what the individual perceives s/he knows and objective knowledge is what they truly know (Alba & J. W. Hutchinson, 2000). Knowledge exerts a significant and fundamental influence on customer decision-making; customers’ decisions vary as a function of what they think they know (Moorman, Diehl, Brinberg, & Kidwell, 2004). In the case of choosing to co-create, it is their subjective knowledge about their perceived competence that will drive the process.

Customers can use their social networks as an external memory, blending the social and cognitive seamlessly into a social hard drive holding vast amounts of information (Ward & Reingen, 1990). Viewed under the service-dominant logic definition of co-creation (Lusch & Vargo, 2006), social networks are part of the customer’s operant resources, which means the customer can tap into them to co-create value. Companies have used the Internet to give customers the opportunity to engage in the production process (Xie et al., 2008).

Even with access to Internet, people seem to prefer turning to other people for information (Cross & Sproull, n.d.; Levin & Cross, 2004). In other words, a customer facing a perceived lack of competence to complete a task will seek what s/he needs from other individuals (Arias, Eden, Fischer, Gorman, & Sharff, 2000; Salomon, 1993).

H1: Customers with higher (lower) perceived competence are more likely to engage (not engage) in co-creation

H2: Customers engaging in individual co-creation will have higher perceived competence than those engaging in collaborative co-creation

H3: Customers engaging in collaborative co-creation will elicit partners with higher perceived competence

The willingness to engage in co-creation requires a strong degree of product involvement (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). Customers will not only need to use their knowledge but must also be willing to invest their time, which is a scarce and premium resource for most (Etgar, 2006, 2008). In addition, involvement with the product category and the brand itself can determine their choice to co-create since customer’s product involvement can lead to increased perception of attribute differences, greater product importance and greater commitment (Howard & Sheth, 1968; Zaichkowsky, 1985). When product differences are perceived to be of greater importance, customers can be more willing to get involved in co-creation and dispense the required effort and time (Etgar, 2008). If under low involvement individuals involve in minimal searches while high involvement results in extensive searches then it follows that involvement would also moderate the amount of time a customer is inclined to spend on his/her purchase—in this case, in co-creation.

H4: Customers with higher (lower) product involvement are more likely to engage in co-creation (not engage in co-creation).

Marketers are increasingly interested in how consumers use products and brands to build and maintain a social identity, and previous studies have emphasized that self brand congruence alone can determine consumer choice (Malhotra, 1988). Brands, as social objects, are socially constructed and imbued with meaning, and customers actively engage in that creation using brands as bridges towards or fences against other people (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Research on brand communities shows that customers can use commercial offerings (brands) and brand associations as ways to create and further their self-image and shape their reality (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Co-creation may be seen as a way of self-expression through production of their own products and experiences, and taking pride while strengthening their self-identity and fulfillment (Holt, 1995).

H5: Customers who choose to engage in co-creation will develop stronger self-brand associations.

Methodology

Two-hundred and forty students from a large northwestern and southeastern university participated in an on-line survey, where they read a pretested scenario to make one of three decisions: (1) purchase what is available at the store (2) engage in individual co-creation or (3) engage in collaborative co-creation. A final sample size of 233 students was attained. Participants were aged 21–22 (58.3%) and between 18–21 years of age (41.8%). Gender was evenly distributed with 53% males and 47% females. There was no university effect on the main dependent variables ($F(2,232) = .65, p = .52$; Levene$_{(2,232)} = 1.08, p = .34$).

Competence was significantly different across co-creation groups ($F_{(2,229)} = 30.10, p < .01, \text{MS} = 5.90$) with participants’ perceived competence highest among those choosing individual co-creation ($M_{\text{IndCC}} = 7.18, SD = 1.47, M_{\text{CollCC}} = 6.38, SD = 1.64, M_{\text{NoCC}} = 5.15, SD = 2.07$). These results support H1 and H2.

The competence of participant’s selected tie(s) was significantly higher ($t_{(220)} = 4.94, p < .01$) than participants’ competence ($M_{\text{Participation}} = 6.35, M_{\text{Participation}} = 7.33$), supporting H3.

Involvement was not significantly different across co-creation groups ($F_{(2,228)} = 1.19, p = .31$) although it noted some directional results with those choosing Coll CC having higher involvement ($M_{\text{Involvement}} = 5.90$) than participants choosing IndCC ($M_{\text{Involvement}} = 5.69$) or purchasing at the store ($M_{\text{Involvement}} = 5.74$). Therefore H4 was not supported.

There were significant differences ($t_{(218)} = 51.65$) between the SBB ($M_{\text{SBB}} = 3.75, SD = 1.53$) and SBA ($M_{\text{SBA}} = 4.55, SD = 1.66$).

SBB and SBA were significantly different across groups ($F_{(2,229)} = 20.683, p < .01$), with those choosing IndCC ($M_{\text{SBB}} = 3.75, M_{\text{SBA}} = 4.19$) and CollCC ($M_{\text{SBB}} = 3.85, M_{\text{SBA}} = 4.84$) having significantly higher after brand associations ($p < .01$), supporting H5.

Discussion

The results reported bring new challenges for companies wanting to implement co-creation strategies. First, they need to consider a customer’s ability. The companies interface with the customer must be easy or make customers feel competent to take on the task at hand.

Second, companies must consider the possibility that customers will not be acting alone, and this can affect not only their relationship with the individual customer but also gives the company the opportunity to present themselves to a new set of customers—those invited to help.
REFERENCES


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

We propose that even on so called “objective” scales (e.g., pounds, calories, meters, etc.), many contextual effects, such as anchoring, are often best interpreted as scaling effects—reflecting changes in the use of the response scale rather than a change in respondents’ perception of the focal stimulus. We present a theory which details how prior responses act as comparative standards for the interpretation and use of other numbers on that scale.

In support of our theory of scale distortion, we first show that a contextual stimulus only affects subsequent judgments that share the response scale. In our first demonstration, we randomly assigned 467 picnickers to one of three conditions. One group judged only the weight of a giraffe in pounds. A second did this after first judging the weight of a raccoon in pounds. The third group was like the second, except that they raccoon’s weight on a 7-point heaviness scale.

The giraffe estimates averaged 1254 pounds among the group who made only that judgment, but just 709 pounds among those who first judged a raccoon’s weight in pounds. Thus, the presence of the raccoon in the judgmental sequence induced a pronounced assimilation effect when judgments of its heaviness were rendered in units identical to the target judgment. However, when judged on a subjective heaviness scale (from 1 to 7), the raccoon judgment had no effect on estimates of the giraffe’s weight (which averaged 1265 pounds).

The second set of studies also implicate a pure scaling effect, by showing that contextual manipulations which affect the target response have no influence on conceptually affiliated judgments of the target stimulus rendered on different scales. All participants then estimated three features of a giraffe: its weight (in pounds), its height (in feet), and its weight relative to a grand piano, on a seven point scale. Half of the 218 respondents made only these judgments. The other half had first estimated the weight of a raccoon in pounds. Again, the giraffe was judged to weigh less by those who had first judged the weight of a raccoon [760 pounds vs. 1117 pounds], but, notably, the raccoon had no appreciable effect on conceptually affiliated estimates rendered on other scales.

The final two studies bear further hallmarks of scale distortion: In one, a total of 157 participants recruited from an online survey site examined a list of fifteen animals ordered by weight, from very small (mouse) to very large (elephant) and were asked to select the one whose average adult weight was closest to 1000 pounds. Half of the participants estimated the weight of an average adult wolf before making this judgment while the other half did not. As predicted, estimating the weight of a (comparatively light) wolf increased the perceived size of the animal corresponding to ‘1000 pounds.’ Respondents in the “wolf” condition selected animals whose true weight averaged 2170 pounds, whereas those in the control condition selected animals whose true weight averaged 1385 pounds.

In the second study, a total of 206 students were given a brief paper and pencil survey which listed thirteen food items ordered from least caloric (hard-boiled egg) to most caloric (Burger King Whopper with cheese) and were asked to select the item closest to 400 calories. Half of the participants first estimated the number of calories in an average apple before making this judgment, while the other half did not.

The conceptual replication succeeded. Prior estimates of the number of calories in an apple appeared to increase participants’ perception of what ‘400 calories’ means. Respondents in the “apple” condition picked items that were significantly more caloric [M=394] than respondents in the control condition [M=330]. Unlike previous studies 1 and 2, in which the numeric contrast effects specified by our theory manifest as assimilation effects in the responses (since a smaller number of units will seem adequate to represent the mass of a giraffe), here the proposed numeric contrast effects are transmitted directly to the overt response.

In summary, we suggest that objective scales may be susceptible to the same sorts of response scale effects that plague the interpretation of subjective scales. Though judgments on objective scales (such as pounds) are markedly affected by preceding judgments, we find no evidence that this effect is accompanied by a corresponding change in the underlying representation of the judged stimulus. Thus, we propose that the presence of contextual effects on objective scales cannot be assumed to reflect changes in the mental representation of the target stimulus, and that response scale effects play a much larger role in these results than is customarily acknowledged. Our findings resurrect the challenge of distinguishing representational effects from response language effects across a broad array of judgments where that distinction formerly seemed secure.
Effects of Alphanumeric Brand Names: A Selective Anchoring Perspective

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Airbus A330, 7-Up, Coke Zero, Miss Sixty: these are just a few examples of the many brands and products featuring numbers in their name. Given the astronomical and ever growing budgets spent today on brand-building advertising, this research examines whether the presence of seemingly innocuous numbers in brand names bears any impact on consumers. More specifically, we focus our efforts on understanding how and when alphanumeric brands names (i.e., those containing both letters and numbers) may influence consumer judgments.

Building on anchoring theory, our central proposition is that consumers may use the number contained in alphanumeric brands as an anchor which can subsequently bias either up- or downward their appreciation of a product’s price, weight, volume, etc.

We qualify this proposition, however, by arguing that such anchoring effect should occur mostly when (a) the numeric component of a name appears relevant for the judgment at hand, and (b) consumers evaluate attributes on the basis of heuristics (rather than systematic deliberation).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Across industries, marketers dedicate nowadays colossal sums of money (i.e., billions of dollars in the US alone) to branding activities. Not surprisingly, academic research focusing on brand naming has soared in the last two decades (Klink 2000; Schmitt et al. 1994; Zhang and Schmitt 2001). Interestingly, much of this research focuses primarily on linguistics (e.g., understanding the interplay between morphemes, sounds, and the mental images they trigger in consumers). But despite this rich work, little research examines the impact of alphanumeric brand names on consumer behavior and decision-making. In one of a few exceptions, Pavia and Costa (1993) found that alphanumeric brand names are more suitable for technically complex, manufactured items (e.g., stereos, computers, cameras) and/or unemotional, formulated products such as vitamin-oriented cereals.

Drawing from anchoring theory and previous work in psychology and BDT, we propose that consumers may sometimes derive product information from alphanumeric brand names, regardless of the original meaning of the latter. That is, consumers use alphanumeric brand names as self-generated anchors to infer unknown product attributes. For example, consumers may assume that the Airbus A330 has roughly 330 seats, even though its name has little to do with seat capacity.

For this anchoring effect to occur, however, we argue that at least two conditions should be met. First, consumers must perceive the numeric component of the brand name as relevant to the attribute under consideration (e.g., “330” in the Airbus example should appear relevant to the number of seats in the aircraft). Second, consumers must process information heuristically (i.e., superficially) rather than systematically. In the next section, we report four studies aimed at testing our anchoring hypothesis and its boundary conditions.

EXPERIMENTS

Study 1 aimed to demonstrate our basic proposition that the number contained in alphanumeric brand names can indeed function as an anchor and subsequently bias consumers’ judgments. To this end, we randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions (Boeing B767 vs. Airbus A330) and asked them to estimate the number of seats in their aircraft. As predicted, subjects in the Boeing condition believed their aircraft had more seats than their counterparts in the Airbus condition.

Seeking to extend these results and test our first boundary condition, we randomly assigned participants in study 2 to two new conditions (Sprite vs. 7-Up) and asked them to estimate the price, volume, launch year, calories, and vitamin content of their drink. Whereas both products sell for approximately HK$5 in Hong Kong (i.e., the country where this study was run), subjects in the 7-Up condition estimated their drink to be more expensive (and closer in price to HK$7) than their counterparts in the Sprite condition. Importantly, however, the two groups did not differ on any other dependant variable. These results further confirm our anchoring proposition and shed light on the first boundary condition hypothesized earlier: i.e., for anchoring to occur, consumers must perceive the numeric component of the brand name (e.g., “7”) as related to the attribute under consideration.

Building on the “relevance” argument aforementioned, we asked participants in study 3 to review information about one of two MP3 players (named M-200 vs. M-900) before estimating the price of the product. To test our second boundary condition, we manipulated participants’ processing style (heuristic vs. systematic) by manipulating the order and lay-out of our study materials. As predicted, subjects in the M-900 condition perceived their product to be more expensive. This anchoring effect was reduced, however, when subjects processed information systematically.

Study 4 mirrored study 3 with the exception of the processing-style manipulation. To extend our results, we adopted here a classic cognitive-load manipulation known to reliably favor heuristic vs. systematic processing. While rehearsing an 8- vs. 2-digit number for an alleged memory task, participants estimated the price of one of two MP3 players (cf. study 3). As expected, subjects in the M-900 condition perceived their product to be more expensive. Yet, this effect vanished in the low cognitive-load (i.e., systematic-processing) condition.

DISCUSSION

This research examines how and when seemingly innocuous alphanumeric brand names (e.g., 7-Up, CokeZero) can bias a variety of consumer judgments (e.g., price estimates) by anchoring them either up- or downward. In four experiments, we find that consumers do indeed utilize the numbers contained in alphanumeric brand names as self-generated anchors to infer ostensibly relevant product attributes. For this effect to occur, however, consumers must process information heuristically, not systematically.

These findings provide new theoretical insights to two distinct lines of research. First, our results contribute to the brand-naming literature by proposing another mechanism through which numeric brand names can influence consumer judgment. Indeed, compared to prior work, our conceptualization is more general and therefore could be applied to a variety of numbers, product classes, and cultures.

Second, our findings contribute to the psychology and BDT literatures by showing that anchoring can occur automatically (i.e., without the need for explicit or heavy-handed manipulations). As such, our studies suggest that anchoring might be more pervasive in consumer’s daily life than previously assumed.
Whether You Win or Whether You Lose: The Differential Risk of Priming the Deliberative and Affective Systems in On-line Auctions
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers’ decision processes are generally influenced by both emotional and cognitive systems (Damasio 1994; Lee, Amir and Ariely 2009; Loewenstein and O’Donoghue 2004). For example, Loewenstein and O’Donoghue (2004) have developed a comprehensive two-system model in which a person’s behavior is the outcome of an interaction between a deliberative system that assesses options with a broad, goal-based cognitive perspective and the affective system that encompasses emotions such as fear and is primarily driven by affective states that are currently activated.

The present research examines the role of the two-system model as a basis for further understanding the loss aversion phenomenon (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). This is important because the marketing literature has paid relatively scant attention to the question of how the deliberative system influences loss aversion. Overall, the marketing literature has focused to-date almost solely on the affective system.

We posit that each system has an opposite effect on the perception of loss aversion and therefore on the price bidders will be willing to pay for a given product. The direction of effect is contingent on the expected outcomes of the auction. In the case that the affective system is activated, bidders are proposed to pay higher prices when they are primed to anticipate losing the item rather than winning it. That is, the fear of losing the item is expected to override the joy of winning and consequently enhance the willingness to pay. On the other hand, when the deliberative system is made more accessible, bidders should pay higher prices if the potential of winning is made salient as opposed to losing. In this case, priming the goals of winning the auction, increases the cognitive focus on the product benefits, and therefore makes the perceived risk of losing the item less acceptable.

The first study manipulated two between-subject factors, thus creating a two (winning vs. losing outcome expectation) by two (affective vs. deliberative orientation) matrix. Its findings demonstrated the contradicting effects of the two-model system and the expected outcomes of the auction in determining the price bid for the product as well as the perceived risk of losing the item. The perceived risk of losing was also found to mediate the interactive effect of one’s winning expectation and the two-model system on the placed bid.

The second study confirmed our expectations in terms of the placed bid, in a field setting. The field study was conducted on eBay over the period of four months. It consisted of four different conditions of actual auctions of the identical product, in which we activated either the affective or deliberative system and the type of outcome expectation via the product description.

The third study examined the robustness of the proposed effect when priming the winning or losing orientation in an unrelated prior task. This study is extremely important because it shows that one’s success or failure in environmental tasks can have a behavioral effect on subsequent totally unrelated tasks. Findings supportive of our hypotheses would present the tantalizing suggestion that the way one sees oneself through the looking glass (i.e., as a “winner” or as a “loser”) may have important implications in terms of which orientation is appropriate to use in inducing task specific behavior. Specifically, this study manipulated ones perception of performance in a game through winning or losing points when completing a task by deciphering jumbled brand names. After this task, subjects were then subsequently asked to participate in an auction. Hence, a winning or losing orientation was independently induced prior to participation in the auction rather than win or loss expectations for the auction itself.

In future research, it would be interesting to examine the effect of expected outcomes on different types of products: emotional oriented products (such as a wedding ring) and cognitive oriented products (such as a scientific book). It is likely to assume that the type of product may differentially prime the influence of cognition and/or affect in the two model system and possibly make it easier to observe field effects. It will also be interesting to explore the association between this research and the regulatory focus stream of research. This research stream suggests that consumers are driven by either the prevention orientation (e.g. their duties, obligations, and responsibilities) or the promotion orientation (e.g., their hopes, aspirations, and dreams) (Higgins 1997, Freitas and Higgins 2002).

From a practical perspective, this research offers marketers simple and effective tools for activating the loss aversion effect among consumers. It shows that inserting a short note within the product description from a deliberative or affective perspective regarding the possible outcomes of winning or losing the product, can have a dramatic influence on the consumers’ decision processes and behavior.
Can I Correct My Errors without Knowing?: The Effect of Nonconscious Priming of a Target Attribute on Judgmental Errors
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Attribute substitution (Kahneman and Frederick 2002) has been used to explain why people rely on heuristics and show biases. Attribute substitution occurs “when an individual assesses a specified target attribute of a judgment object by substituting another property of that object—the heuristic attribute—which comes more readily to mind” (p53). Substituting the target attribute with the heuristic attribute inevitably introduces systematic errors because these two attributes are different. What would happen if the target attribute is more accessible by subliminally priming words related to the target attribute? We expect that people are less likely to make the errors because the target attribute is made more accessible. The purpose of the present research is to examine whether and how subliminal priming of a target attribute can reduce the errors (e.g., base-rate neglect) and whether this correction process elicited by unconscious priming requires cognitive resources, which implies the involvement of reasoning.

Experiment 1 examines whether the subliminal priming of a target attribute can correct judgmental errors by using the Kirkpatrick and Epstein (1992)’s jelly beans task which shows the ratio-bias (RB) phenomenon. The RB phenomenon refers to “the perception of the likelihood of a low-probability event as greater when it is presented in the form of larger (e.g., 10-in-100) rather than smaller (e.g., 1-in-10) numbers” (Paciocchi and Epstein 1999, p303). This phenomenon is attributed to a tendency to focus on the frequency of the numerator (i.e., heuristic attribute) instead of the overall probability (i.e., target attribute). Selecting one of two trays that offer equal probabilities is, in itself, not a judgmental error. However, the preference for a 9% over a 10% probability is (Denes-Raj and Epstein 1994).

In experiment 1, participants were asked to choose one of two trays from which they could participate in a lottery where they could win $50 if they drew a red jelly bean: tray A (10% tray) containing 1 red and 9 white beans and tray B (9% tray) containing 9 red and 91 white beans. Since the target attribute is the ‘objective probability’ of drawing a red bean, if participants choose a tray based on the target attribute instead of the number of red jelly beans, they should be more (less) likely to choose the 10% tray (the 9% tray).

Participants were randomly assigned to either a control or a target attribute priming condition. The priming task was disguised as a perception task. Words related to the objective probability (e.g., probability, proportion) were subliminally (i.e., 20 ms) shown to participants depending on the priming conditions. The primed words were masked by a string of letters (e.g., addick). Participants were asked to identify whether each string of letters presented on a computer screen contained two vowels or not. After finishing the perception task, participants were asked to complete the next task—the jelly beans task. They were asked to indicate their own preference between the two trays on a five-point scale. Next, they were asked to choose which tray they wanted to draw from for a real drawing.

We found main effects of attribute priming in self-preference scale and tray choice. Participants primed with the target attribute were more likely to prefer the correct 10 % tray than those who were not primed. Consistent with this result, participants primed with the target attribute chose the 10% tray significantly more than those who were not primed.

Experiment 2 extends the findings in Experiment 1 to a different judgmental bias, base-rate neglect by using an analogue of the engineer-and-lawyer problem (Kahneman and Tversky 1973). In the engineer-and-lawyer problem, people are given the base rate of engineers (e.g., 30 engineers out of 100 individuals) and the description of a person (e.g., typical characteristics of an engineer such as having no interest in political and social issue and spending time in home carpentry). Although the base-rate of engineers in a given sample is very low (e.g., 30%), people’s estimation of the probability that a person is an engineer is much higher (e.g., 80%) than the base rate due to their tendency to rely on the description of the person rather than the base rate. The base-rate neglect in probability judgment is problematic because it induces people to violate the fundamental Bayesian rule of statistical prediction.

The procedures in experiment 2 are similar to those in experiment 1. We used Betsch et al. (1998)’s professor-and-non-professor item. Participants were randomly assigned to either a control or a target attribute priming condition. After finishing the priming task, participants were given a description of a person. They were told that this description was one of a survey sample which contained 17.6 % professors and 82.4 % non-professors. Their task was to rate the probability that the person is a professor given the description of the person and the base rate.

We found that participants primed with the target attribute were more likely to estimate the probability to be lower (closer to the base rate of professors) than those who were not primed. This finding provides further evidence that subliminally priming the target attribute reduced the judgmental error.

Experiment 3 examines whether the process of correcting judgmental errors requires the involvement of System 2 by manipulating cognitive load. Since the processes of System 1 are automatic and effortless whereas those of System 2 are slow and effortful, if System 2 is involved in the correction process, a high cognitive load should interfere with this correction process which is facilitated by subliminally priming the target attribute.

The procedures in experiment 3 are similar to those in experiment 2 except the manipulation of cognitive load. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (target attribute priming: no priming vs. target attribute priming) x 2 (cognitive load: low vs. high load) between-subjects design. We manipulated cognitive load by asking participants to memorize either a 2- or 9-digit number. To rule out the alternative explanation of mood effect, we measured their mood using PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988).

Our manipulation check was successful in that participants found it more difficult to memorize the 9- than the 2-digit number. In the low cognitive load conditions, participants primed with the target attribute were more likely to estimate the probability to be lower (closer to the base rate) than those who were not primed. However, in the high cognitive load conditions, participants’ probability estimates were equally high (far from the base rate). This finding implies that cognitive busyess impairs the process of correcting the bias (i.e., the base-rate neglect). We ruled out the alternative account by showing no differences in the PANAS scale as a function of cognitive load. The findings of experiment 3 suggest that System 2 is involved in the process of correcting judgmental errors.
These studies provide evidence for the idea that priming the target attribute *nonconsciously* can reduce judgmental errors. We believe that this research is important for two reasons: First, it contributes to extend our understanding of the underlying mechanism for reducing judgmental errors by demonstrating that not only explicit/conscious methods but also implicit/nonconscious methods (i.e., priming a target attribute) can reduce the judgmental errors. Second, it shows that the process of correcting judgmental errors requires cognitive resources, which implies the involvement of System 2.

**REFERENCES**


Attainment Versus Maintenance Goals: Differences in Cognitive Processing and Goal Attractiveness

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers and firms across many domains (e.g., dieting, saving, exercising) use goals to regulate behaviour. For example, HSBC offers the “Premier Investor Savings” account, which requires the maintenance of a $25000 minimum balance, but at the same time offers higher interest rates with higher balances.

Depending on the relation between the actual and the desired state of the goal, these goals are classified in two categories: attainment and maintenance goals. Attainment goals are those for which the actual state differs from the desired state (e.g., increase your balance to get a higher interest rate). Maintenance goals are those for which the actual and the desired states coincide, but there is a time difference between the present and the goal time horizon (e.g., maintain your balance to be eligible for this savings account).

Given the mixed use of these two goal types, it is surprising that we know very little on how attainment and maintenance goals compare with each other. Recent comparisons between these two goal types revealed that people are overoptimistic for attainment goals, but not for maintenance goals. As a result, attainment goals are perceived as easier than objectively easier maintenance goals (Stamatogiannakis, Chattopadhay and Chakravarti 2010).

This paper adds to the above results in two important ways. First, it investigates the content of thoughts triggered by attainment versus maintenance goals, and tests whether it can account for differences in the perceived difficulty. We predict that people will tend to focus on the comparison between the actual and the desired state more for attainment goals, relative to maintenance goals. As a result, they will be overoptimistic for attainment goals’ achievement (Dunning 2007), and will perceive them as easier (Stamatogiannakis et al. 2010).

Second, it examines whether attainment or maintenance goals are more attractive. Easier and more achievable goals are more attractive (Kruglanski et al. 2002). We predict therefore that attainment goals will be more attractive than maintenance goals, because they are perceived as easier.

To test these two predictions we examine in depth the open ended responses collected by Stamatogiannakis et al. (2010), and we conduct two scenario based experiments. In all three studies goal type (attainment vs. maintenance) is manipulated between participants. Scenarios about weight, GPA, daily working out time, money, and weekly sales goals are used.

Stamatogiannakis et al. (2010) asked participants to rate goal difficulty and list their thoughts on what would make goal achievement more or less likely. To uncover differences in thoughts generation between attainment and maintenance goals, we did an in-depth analysis of these thoughts. These were coded across two dimensions, valence and content. In valence coding, each thought was categorised as favorable (i.e., a success thought), unfavorable (i.e., a failure thought), or neutral (i.e., unrelated thought) for goal achievement. In content coding, each thought was categorised as related or not to the following: effort/motivation put for goal achievement, the person pursuing the goal, goal context, specific plans for goal achievement, and goal level. Finally, statements related to the goal level were further categorised depending on whether they involved a comparison between the actual and the desired state, or not.

The results suggest that attainment goals evoke more thoughts comparing the actual and the desired state, and more plan-related success thoughts, but less context-related failure thoughts relative to maintenance goals. Only the first mediate the effects of goal type on difficulty.

The next two experiments examine effects of goal type on goal attractiveness. We predicted that attainment goals will be more attractive than maintenance goals, because they are perceived as easier.

Experiment one uses a 2 x 2 between participants design. Some participants judged maintenance goals and some attainment goals. Further (to draw attention to possible goal difficulties), the action required for goal achievement was explicitly stated only for some of the participants. Goal attractiveness and difficulty were the dependent measures. The goal type x required action interaction was significant for both. When no action was provided, attainment goals were seen as more attractive and easier than maintenance goals. However, when attention was directed to required action, the two goal types were seen as equally attractive and difficult. The interaction on attractiveness ratings was mediated by the difficulty ratings.

Experiment two uses a 2 x 2 x 2 between participants design. Some participants judged maintenance goals and some attainment goals. Further (to draw attention to possible goal difficulties), some participants rated only goal attractiveness, but some rated goal difficulty before that. Finally the difficulty question was negatively framed (i.e., “How difficult?”) for some of the participants, but positively framed (i.e., “How challenging?”) for others. The goal type x attractiveness question order interaction effect on attractiveness was significant. Attainment goals were judged as more attractive than maintenance goals when the attractiveness question was asked first. However, when the difficulty question was asked first, drawing attention to goal difficulty, the results reversed. Finally, difficulty framing did not moderate the above result.

To conclude, this paper adds to previous literature comparing attainment with maintenance goals. It demonstrates that maintenance goals evoke more contextual interference thoughts, but attainment goals evoke more success plans and actual-desired state comparison thoughts. The latter cause attainment goals to be perceived as easier and more attractive than maintenance goals. Effects on goal attractiveness are attenuated or even reversed, when consumer attention is drawn to possible difficulties for goal achievement.

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Maintenance versus Attainment Goals: 
Influence of Self-Regulation Goal Type on Goal Pursuit Behaviors

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The extant goal literature has focused mainly on attainment goals, in which the desired state is positively discrepant from the current state, but has neglected the maintenance goals, in which the current state is equal to or better than the desired state. This casts doubt on whether the implications of findings from the literature can apply to the challenges related to maintenance goals. We address these gaps by contrast the two goal types and examine the mechanisms underlying each of them. Our findings suggest that consumers in the two groups are attracted to different self-regulation strategies. Therefore, firms can provide different products for consumers in these two groups.

What differentiate maintenance goals from attainment goals? First, by their definitions, the two goal types differ in the distance between the current and the desired states. Second, the two goal types differ in the clarity about temporal ending of goal pursuit (H1). In case of an attainment goal, achieving the desired state suggests end of goal pursuit. However, in case of a maintenance goal, there is less clarity about the temporal ending because the current state is already better than the benchmark. Moreover, some maintenance goals are to be pursued over long term such as health-related goals (e.g. exercise goal) so these goals are not temporally bound.

Moreover, the two goal types differ in their underlying mechanisms. We propose that maintenance goals activate retrospective (vs. prospective) thought because maintenance goals indicate the past actions of consumers were good enough. In contrast, attainment goals activate prospective thought because attainment goals suggest that the past actions did not bring about the desired state so consumers focus more on future actions (H2). Moreover, maintenance goals trigger more process-focused (vs. outcome-focused) thinking while attainment goals trigger more outcome-focused thinking (H3). The reason is that thoughts in retrospection tend to have richer context (Van Boven, Kane, & McGraw 2009) and make consumers think at more concrete (vs. abstract) level. Thoughts at concrete level involve feasibility aspects and process of means to goal but thoughts at abstract level focus on consequences of means or goal (Liberman & Trope 1998; Trope & Liberman 2003). Hence, when considering goal pursuit strategies, maintainers tend to focus more on processes of the strategies whereas attainers focus more on outcomes of the strategies.

The two underlying mechanisms lead to different goal pursuit behaviors. First, we predict that maintainers will construct smaller consideration set of goal pursuit strategies than attainers (H4). This is because maintainers’ retrospective thoughts constrain them with reality (Van Boven et al 2009) and prevent them from choosing strategies that are less practical. Consistently, process-focused thinking makes maintainers consider only strategies with easier implementation process. In contrast, attainers are less constrained by reality and more outcome-driven so they consider any strategies which appear to deliver satisfactory outcomes.

Furthermore, based on the difference in clarity about temporal ending of the two goal types, maintainers will prefer strategies that require less (vs. more) effort because the temporal ending of their goal pursuit is not clear. On the other hand, attainers might be more willing to exert higher effort as they perceive that the goal pursuit is more temporally bound (H5a). In addition, the outcome-focused thinking might make attainers prefer strategies that require higher effort because they rely on ‘instrumentality heuristics’, naïve belief that higher effort leads to better outcome (Labroo & Kim 2009). Along the same line, we predict that maintainers prefer a disaggregated framing of strategy implementation (e.g. exercise 15 minutes for 6 days per week) than an aggregated framing (e.g. exercise 45 minutes for 2 days per week) (H5b). This is because maintainers might perceive the former as easier to implement.

In three studies, the two goal types were manipulated. All three studies successfully established that maintenance goals are characterized with less clear temporal (H1). Study 1 with a 2 (maintenance vs. attainment goal) x 2 (domain replicates) between-subject design (n =225) tested the consideration set size hypothesis in two goal domains, cholesterol and money saving. The results were consistent across two domains and showed that maintainers considered fewer strategies than attainers (M{Maintainer} = 3.61 vs. M{Attainer} = 4.12, (F(1, 207) = 4.16, p <.01). Thus, our H1 & H4 were supported.

Study 2 (n = 56) replicated the results of Study 1 with stronger measures of psychological processes. The analysis revealed that maintainers engaged more in prospective than prospective thoughts (M{Pros} = 4.44 vs. M{Pros} = 5.10, t(28) = 2.14, p <.05) but maintainers engaged in thoughts in both time frames. Thus, H2 was partially supported. Further analysis showed that maintainers engaged more in outcome-focused thinking than process-focused thinking (M{Proc} = 4.56 vs. M{React} = 5.25, t(28) = 3.28, p <.01) but maintainers did not differ between the two thinking styles. Thus, H3 was also partially supported. We added measures of whether consumers consider old versus new strategies. The results indicated that maintainers considered both old and new strategies but attainers tended to consider new strategies (M{Old} = 4.31 vs. M{New} = 4.93, t(28) = 1.98, p = .06).

Study 3 (n = 28) tested our effort-related hypothesis (H5) with a 2 (maintenance vs. attainment goal) x 2 (aggregated vs. disaggregated framing) design with framing as within-subject factor. The results revealed that maintainers evaluated a disaggregated framing (workout 15 minutes for 6 days per week) more positively than an aggregated framing (workout 45 minutes for 2 days per week) (F(1, 25) = 2.85, t aggregated = 5.08 vs. M aggregated = 4.78, p<.1). In addition, maintainers rated the former as less effortful than the latter (M aggregated = 3.36 vs. M aggregated = 5.69, t(11) = 2.97, p <.05). However, attainers did not differ in their attitude between the two framings. Thus, H5 was partially supported.

Across three studies, the results showed robust supports that maintenance goals differ from attainment goals in characteristics, underlying processes, and pursuit behaviors. The research helps managers recognize that consumers striving different goal types are not homogenous and distinct marketing strategies are needed to serve the two consumer groups.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Consumers tend to be optimistic in predicting when they will complete an upcoming activity. Optimistic predictions are often more problematic than pessimistic predictions, because they not only delay other planned projects, but they also make consumers use unexpected additional resources to complete the current project. Even though research to date has proposed various bias reduction aids in the context of optimistic time predictions (e.g., Roy, Christenfeld, and McKenzie 2005), many of them were not empirically supported or earned only mixed support. The purpose of this paper is to propose and test new debiasing strategies that help to reduce consumers’ optimistic prediction biases.

One of the possible causes of the optimistic prediction bias is that individuals overestimate the likelihood of the occurrence of a chain of events in completing a project. As shown in the explanation bias literature (e.g., Hirt, Kardes, and Markman 2004), people tend to view a particular outcome as more likely to occur if they have explained a sequence of steps required to complete the project. Because individuals often base their judgments upon the information that is readily available, the project that has been explained is more accessible and thus gets higher likelihood estimates. Thus consumers who can easily simulate the sequence of an event may be optimistic in concluding that the event is likely to take place soon.

Drawing upon the literature in judgment and decision making, we argue that the magnitude of planning difficulty effects will be mitigated when an individual planner’s accountability increases, a planner write a pessimistic scenario, or a planner is led to believe that ease is bad. First, accountable individuals tend to thoroughly process the information and do not heavily rely upon heuristics such as ease of generation (e.g., Tetlock, Lerner, and Boettger 1996). Thus, we predicted that the influence of planning difficulty on optimistic prediction bias would be weaker when individuals’ accountability for their prediction outcome was high, rather than low. Second, following up Sanna and Schwarz (2004), we predicted that individuals’ optimistic prediction bias would be smaller when it was easy, rather than difficult, to generate a pessimistic scenario about an upcoming event. Third, building upon Briñol, Petty, and Tormala (2006), we predicted that experiencing ease in generating an optimistic scenario would reduce optimism when people interpreted ease of generation to be bad, rather than good.

Using “real world” planning activities, each of these predictions were tested across three experiments, respectively. In Experiment 1 we examined how planning difficulty would influence individuals’ optimistic prediction biases. We also tested the role of accountability as a debiasing aid. People who were engaged to be married were first asked to identify one of their pre-wedding activities that would be completed soon. Then they were told to describe how they would complete the activity by writing about it in relatively easy or difficult steps. They were also assigned to one of two accountability conditions. Next the participants estimated the time that the target activity would be completed and then evaluated their planning processes. Lastly, participants reported their actual completion times when they were contacted 10 days after the predicted deadline of the chosen activity. As predicted, people who were engaged to be married made more realistic time estimates for the project completion when they were asked to write a relatively difficult, rather than easy step, optimistic scenario. However, unlike our prediction, accountability did not play any moderating role. Each individual in the high accountability condition seemed to have been less susceptible to our accountability instruction because his or her responses would be ultimately examined by the experimenter as well as the other member of the couple. In Experiment 2 we tested how planning difficulty would interact with scenario type: optimistic versus pessimistic. As predicted, the planning difficulty effect shown in Experiment 1 was qualified by the type of scenario that people generated. The optimistic prediction bias decreased when individual planners generated the difficult, as opposed to the easy, optimistic scenario or when individuals generated the easy, as opposed to the difficult, pessimistic scenario. In Experiment 3 we tested how planning difficulty would interact with shoppers’ interpretation of the feeling of ease. As expected, the planning difficulty effect was qualified by the subjective meaning of ease. Planners who generated a difficult, rather than an easy, optimistic scenario were less likely to exhibit the optimistic prediction bias when they positively interpreted the feeling of ease. In contrast, planners who generated an easy, rather than a difficult, optimistic scenario were marginally less likely to exhibit the optimistic prediction bias when they negatively interpreted the feeling of ease.

In sum, across three experiments using “real world” planning activities we found support for two important debiasing aids. We hope our new debiasing strategies will not only help illuminate the processes behind the optimistic prediction bias but will also assist all of us in making more realistic plans.

**REFERENCES**


When Small Steps Become Big Leaps: Goal-Consistency Judgments and the Illusion of Goal Progress

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Goals play a central role in driving consumers’ mental processes and ultimate behaviors. Whether consciously held (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Locke & Latham, 1990), or activated outside of awareness (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Chartrand & Bargh, 1996) goals act as motivational drives (Gollwitzer, 1999) prompting people to engage in actions functional to achieving the desired end-state.

An important aspect of achieving a goal involves monitoring progress toward the desired end-state. Monitoring goal-progress plays a fundamental role in regulating consumer behavior by informing individuals about the contribution of each action to reaching the desired end-state.

In line with this idea, monitoring goal-progress has been conceptualized as a process involving comparing a behavioral outcome with a relevant standard of reference (Carver & Scheier, 1998). For example, one can adopt either the initial or the final state as the standard of reference and monitor goal-progress by considering whether what has been achieved so far, or what still needs to be achieved (Koo & Fishbach, 2008). Consequently, perceived goal progress is typically measured by asking participants to indicate on a Likert scale the extent to which a particular decision contributes to advancing toward an active goal (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005; Louro, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2007). We refer to such judgments as degree-of-progress evaluations.

Building on previous research we propose that often people evaluate progress toward a goal by judging whether their actions are consistent with the active goal (i.e., “Will this help me reach my goal?”). For example, a person who is trying to save money could evaluate progress toward the goal by judging whether dining at home rather than at a restaurant is consistent with the goal to save money, without accurately considering how much money he is actually saving. We refer to such judgments as goal-consistency judgments.

Goal-consistency judgments are frequently triggered both by external and internal constraints. Often, the choice task induces people to categorize actions as consistent or inconsistent with an active goal. For instance, people are often bounded to choose the best option among the available ones. Moreover, due to limited mental resources, people tend to simplify judgments by employing mental shortcuts, simplifying rules and heuristics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Previous research has argued that one simplifying approach to judgment involves categorical or qualitative thinking (Rozin, Ashmore, & Markwith, 1996). Thus, people engage in categorization to easily make sense of the complexity of the world (Allport, 1954; Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Does engaging in goal-consistency judgments influence degree-of-progress evaluations? In this research, we argue that consumers focused on goal-consistency are likely to overestimate the degree-of-progress granted by an action that provides a marginal contribution toward reaching a desired end-state. We test the hypothesis that goal-consistency judgments influence goal-progress evaluations in a series of four experiments.

In Experiment 1 we show that goal-consistency judgments lead to overestimating goal-progress. We test this basic proposition across three domains, representing three different goals: saving money, controlling calorie intake and caring for the environment. We find that respondents making goal-consistency judgments overestimated goal-progress compared to respondents not focusing on goal-consistency. This effect was directionally consistent across all three domains.

In Experiment 2 we provide further evidence for the phenomenon and show that the goal progress overestimation is not a function of progress valence. In particular, we show that goal-consistency judgments lead to overestimating the movement toward a goal produced by a goal-consistent action, as well as the movement away from a goal produced by a goal-inconsistent action.

In Experiment 3 we identify boundary conditions and show that the influence of goal-consistency judgments on goal-progress evaluations is a function of the magnitude of actual progress. In particular, goal-consistency judgments lead to overestimating goal-progress only when the actual progress is marginal, but not when the actual progress is large.

Finally, in Experiment 4 we show that goal-consistency evaluations can be spontaneously triggered by the choice task. In particular we show that a series of goal-consistent choices is perceived to yield more progress than a single choice producing the same final result.

Overall, the four experiments reported in this research offer converging evidence for the proposition that goal-consistency judgments bias goal-progress evaluations. In particular, we show that consumers focused on goal-consistency are likely to overestimate the degree-of-progress granted by an action that provides a marginal contribution toward reaching a desired end-state. Our results point to the importance of investigating how different strategies consumers use to monitor progress toward a goal might create the illusion of goal-progress and eventually backfire.

REFERENCES


Film Festival 2010

The Last Picture Show

Russell Belk and Robert Kozinets, York University

Unlike the movie theater in Peter Bogdanovich’s The Last Picture Show, the 2010 ACR Film Festival will not be the last. But after 10 years of co-chairing the Festival, we have turned over the reigns to the very capable hands of Marylouise Caldwell and Paul Henry. Over the past 10 years we have seen videographic consumer research grow, mature, and ripen into something quite amazing. Both the quality and quantity of consumer research videos have grown over this period. The North American ACR Film Festivals have shown more than 125 films and the ACR Conferences in Europe, Latin America, and the Asia Pacific have developed their own exciting and locally-flavored Film Festivals as well.

From its inception, the North American festival itself has always had strong international representation among filmmakers and topics. If one of the challenges of consumer ethnography is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange, consumer videography has excelled in meeting this challenge. Many of these films have found their way into classrooms and a number of them have been included in special DVD issues of several journals as well as into print journal article and chapter form. With its origins in an ACR Special Session in 2000, the Film Festival is now an ACR institution. We hope that no one could imagine a future ACR that did not offer researchers the option of representing our knowledge of consumer in an audio-visual format. As industry increasingly embraces videographic techniques for representing consumer realities and portraying their marketing research findings, it is useful for our field to follow suit and, in many ways, lead the charge towards finding new, rich forms for understanding the consumer.

The format of video and video editing over this period has been non-linear and digital throughout the past decade. Technologies have evolved and have driven the costs of video storytelling down to quite affordable levels. Thanks to the conference chairs, at the 2010 ACR Film Festival we not only had trailers available on the conference hotel CCTV, but also on the conference web site. For the upcoming Beijing ACR Conference in 2011 we will be receiving and reviewing (jurying) Film Festival entries on the Internet. ACR Films over the past decade have gone from standard definition analog VHS tapes to high definition DVDs. Camcorders have become smaller, cheaper, and more sophisticated. Digital still photography cameras are no longer so still. These technologies have also become ubiquitous as even the constrictive technologies of mobile phones are capable of capturing high definition video. And editing equipment and software that would have been prohibitively expensive for the individual videographer two decades ago is now inexpensive or included free with computer operating systems and cameras. But it is not just technologies that have changed, so have the skills of filmmakers. We don’t mean by this that the ACR videos have been produced by film school graduates (although a few have), but rather that ACR members have learned from practice, by watching other ACR films, through videos on YouTube, Vimeo, and similar sites, and from occasional consumer videography workshops and classes. Over the past decade, we have witnessed dramatic improvements in the quality of Consumer Research Videography as a field. We have been fortunate to watch as several stars of the field emerged and excelled in this medium.

The medium of video has allowed experimentation with different ways of representing consumer behavior. Resulting films have varied from two and one-half minutes to ninety minutes. They have represented consumption on every continent. No doubt the medium is best used when there is behavior to be shown rather than the talking heads of interviews. Many of these stories are allowed to unfold without much narration or voice-over, but “voice-of-god” storytelling has not disappeared. Much more use is now made of video montages, quick-cuts, music, and other cinematic devices for sustaining audience interest and managing the pace and flow of the video. These techniques too have evolved and kept pace with what’s on TV and what’s on the Internet. Some films have had amusing topics and approaches while others have been deadly serious. Interestingly, both of these extremes have resulted in award-winning films.

We have had a People’s Choice Award from the first ACR Film Festival, but over the past six years we have also had a Juror’s Award. The latter award also has a monetary prize, thanks to the generosity of Gary Bamossy, Alladi Venkatesh, the Center for Consumer Culture, and the University of California, Irvine. The criteria for evaluating submitted films and the Juror’s Award have also evolved over the first decade of ACR Films. We have described these criteria in several papers (Belk 2006; Belk and Kozinets 2006a, 2006b; Kozinets and Belk 2005). They include the “Four Ts” of topical, theoretical, theatrical, and technical considerations.

This year’s ACR Film Festival showed ten films out of 19 submitted for a 53 percent acceptance rate. The films are a good example of the geographic and cultural diversity noted above. The films focus on consumption phenomena in Botswana, Brazil, China (Tibet), Japan, Qatar, and the United States, with filmmakers from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Norway, Qatar, Spain, and the U.S. As noted in the abstracts below, the topics were equally diverse, ranging from Twitter, videogamers, and World of Warcraft to Green Consumption, AIDS in Africa, Beer in Montana, Japanese tea ceremonies, Arab Gulf homes, and Shangri-La.

This year for the first time, both the People’s Choice Award and the Juror’s Award went to the same film: “Walk the Talk, Talk the Walk,” by Marylouise Caldwell, Ingeborg Kleppe, and Stephen Watson. Congratulations go to these filmmakers for their powerful and moving film about a competition for positive role models for HIV positive men in Botswana. It is fitting that we should turn over the film festival at this time in its history to one of its top award-winning film-makers. We are looking forward to the next decade of successful ACR Film Festivals.
BRIEF ABSTRACTS

Beer Country
Caroline Graham Austin, Montana State University, USA

Since the first settlers arrived at the St. Mary's mission in the mid-19th century, Montanans have loved beer --- they love making it, sharing it, talking about it, and drinking it. In this film, we investigate the historic, economic, cultural and aesthetic values that make Montana America’s own Beer Country.

Retweet: A Digital Meditation on the Power of Twitter
Donna Hoffman, University of California, Riverside, USA
Thomas P. Novak, University of California, USA

The phenomenal growth of Twitter, a popular microblogging application, is testament to consumers’ desires to instantaneously connect with other consumers. Though many deride the seeming meaningless of the “twitter stream,” consumers are putting the application to use in surprisingly potent ways. This video offers a brief reflection on the recursive power of Twitter.

Talk The Walk, Walk the Talk
Marylouise Caldwell, University of Sydney, Australia
Ingeborg Kleppe, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration
Stephen Watson, e+b media, University of Sydney, Australia

This documentary shows how HIV+ people in Botswana radically transform themselves from AIDS victims to become public role-models of Positive Living, a health life-style that prolongs infected people’s lives and prevents them from infecting others and reinfecting themselves. They learn to deal with stigma, ignorance and limited social or financial support.

Tea for Two: Luxury in Japanese Tea Ceremony
Hiroshi Tanaka, Chuo University, Japan
Junko Kimura, Hosei University, Japan

This study aims to anatomize the mechanism of luxury generation in the Japanese tea ceremony. Based on detailed interviews, we found that (1) Teamwork, (2) Theme-orientation, and (3) Game, are the three key concepts which depict the interactions between host and the guests and thus lead to generate sense of luxury.

Is Green?
Gary Bamossy, Georgetown University, USA
Basil Englis, Berry College, USA

This film examines consumers’ reactions to the marketing practices of “Green Washing”—representing products as being environmentally friendly in ways that result in consumers feeling confused, skeptical, and cynical about those claims, and more generally, about the green movement towards sustainable consumption practices. The public discourse around “environmentally friendly” offerings is becoming increasingly contentious, socially divisive, and politicized, and this film explores these dynamics.

Domains of Privacy in Arab Gulf Homes
Sobh Rana, Qatar University, Qatar
Russell Belk, York University, Canada

Globalization has both ameliorating and exacerbating effects on traditional cultural patterns. Based on ethnographic fieldwork over a three-year period, we analyze how local Islamic cultures affect consumption and marketing amid this swirl of new influences.

Paradise Lost: The Making of Shangri-La
Russell Belk, York University, Canada
Rosa Llamas, University of León, Spain

Once upon a time, there was a peaceful Himalayan Fairyland that was a Garden of Eden, an earthly Paradise, and a Heaven on Earth. Its name was Shangri-La. And now the harried city dweller can vacation there. In 2002 the county of Zhongdian in China’s Yunnan Province changed its name to Shangri-La. Based on fieldwork in 2009, we consider the positive and negative effects of this bid to attract tourists and transform the local economy.

Sustainability: A New Consumer Movement
Adam Schmidt, Saint Joseph’s University, USA
Thomas Ferraro, Saint Joseph’s University, USA
Diane M. Phillips, Saint Joseph’s University, USA

Consumers define sustainability in different ways and enact a variety of different behaviors to construct, maintain, and enhance their sustainable lifestyles. Further, those resulting multi-dimensional lifestyles are clearly personal. They tap into deeply held values, connect to communities, and evoke strong emotions. Sustainability is a new consumer movement.
We aimed at analyzing and understanding the peculiarities of video game consumption interviewing hardcore players that interact in Microsoft Xbox 360 virtual communities. The results allowed us to infer that the virtual experience and the online interaction are key elements presently in the consumption of games.

World of Warcrafters
João Fleck, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Carlos Rossi, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Rodrigo Segabinazzi, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Getúlio Reale, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Diego Costa, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil
Marco Martins, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

We aimed at understanding, through a videographic study, what caused the reputed online game, World of Warcraft, to become such a phenomenon of consumption. Our results indicate that the involvement of players results from the achievement of goals, through the manipulation of an avatar that cooperates with others to compete.

References
Roundtable Summaries

ROUND TABLE
Neuroscience, Marketing, and Vulnerable Consumers: Integrative Approaches to Advancing Theory and Social Welfare

Chairs:
Dante Pirouz, University of California, Irvine, USA
Ab Litt, Stanford University, USA
Baba Shiv, Stanford University, USA

Participants:
James R. Bettman, Duke University, USA
June Cotte, University of Western Ontario, Canada
Adam Craig, University of South Carolina, USA
Angelika Dimoka, Temple University, USA
Laurette Dubé, McGill University, Canada
William Hedgcock, University of Iowa, USA
Todd A. Hare, California Institute of Technology, USA
Ming Hsu, University of California, Berkeley, USA
Uma Karmarkar, Stanford University, USA
Theo Noseworthy, University of Western Ontario, Canada

Extended Abstract

**Topic and Motivation.** Two exciting recent developments in consumer research have been the burgeoning use of decision neuroscience to explore unanswered questions about consumer psychology and behavior, and transformative consumer research taking the express aim of investigating and improving personal and collective well-being. For the former, an ongoing undertaking has been the identification of explanatory niches in which neuroscience can most often offer major conceptual advances above and beyond behavioral approaches alone. In contrast, the task of transformative consumer researchers is to identify important questions for consumer welfare, and integrate diverse research strands to best answer those questions and yield new insights.

This roundtable centers on a topic that ideally melds these goals of both movements, one that is both a core issue in transformative research and that can be studied with unique and essential depth using neuroscientific techniques: the effects of marketing actions on vulnerable and at-risk consumers, and the consumption patterns exhibited by these individuals. Vulnerable consumers are defined as individuals who have personal or situational disadvantages in the marketplace that can create negative outcomes for either themselves or for society as a whole. These vulnerable consumers include age segments such as children, adolescents, and the elderly; those suffering from addiction and substance-abuse problems; and those with behavioral control problems in other domains such as spending money, gambling, eating and weight management, and even problematic overuse of the internet and video games. Vulnerable consumers also include those compromised by medical conditions, including neurological damage, deficits, or disorders, or by medications and medical interventions meant to deal with such conditions.

Such consumers often exhibit distorted patterns of consumption within and across domains, and unusual susceptibility to various types of marketing actions. The typical consumer is exposed to numerous marketing messages every day. Under normal circumstances, consumers are generally able to process which to attend to and which to filter out in order to successfully regulate their overall consumption. However, this is often not the case for vulnerable and at-risk consumers. Consequently, an area of critical importance in transformative research and its public policy applications is the protection of vulnerable and at-risk consumers from the adverse effects of products and their marketing.

Neuroscientific techniques can provide detailed and direct insight into the most basic biological, pharmacological, and psychophysical mechanisms responsible for the deficits and risk factors characterizing vulnerable consumers. Such efforts can leverage much existing research regarding neurological changes over the lifespan, effects of specific brain impairments, and how different neural circuits predict, adapt to, and develop sensitivity and tolerance to specific stimuli. As such, they can reveal much about the nature, fundamental bases, and underlying conceptual constructs and interactions responsible for diverse decision-maker vulnerabilities. Doing so in a manner informed by theories and conceptual constructs from behavioral research, decision neuroscientists can contribute distinctively to the construction of more enlightened and biologically informed policy viewpoints and recommendations. Thus, revealing the bases of consumer vulnerabilities is an area where decision neuroscience has clear promise and value to consumer research overall and transformative consumer research in particular, in terms of both generating novel conceptual insights and revealing key results for consumer well-being.

This roundtable will be a chance to discuss these possibilities for advancing theory and social welfare, and to develop interesting and promising new research directions from behavioral, neural, and integrative perspectives. We have drawn together a diverse panel of experts in neuroscience, decision research, and transformative consumer research, who are eager to explore these questions and issues regarding vulnerable consumers. Several specific issues already identified to be discussed are:

1. How research should be conducted and communicated when it has both clinical and managerial antecedents and consequences.
2. Identifying vulnerable consumer groups that can be most effectively studied and whose well-being has most potential for improvement by integrating neural and behavioral approaches.

3. Discussion of past experiences of panel members who have researched various vulnerable consumer groups using behavioral and neural techniques—what was found, and what couldn’t be ascertained but is important to further explore.

4. How findings from disparate areas may be best communicated both to researchers in distal fields, and more broadly in order to influence critical public policy issues.

5. The most promising conceptual and methodological frontiers for studying vulnerable consumers, both in terms of specific populations deserving deeper study, and novel or integrative approaches with high potential for revealing important new insights.

**Interested and Likely-to-Benefit Audiences**

A wide range of attendees would benefit from attending this roundtable. Those interested in transformative consumer research, clinical consumer research, public policy, and consumer well-being would find this roundtable illuminating and informative regarding results from a burgeoning consumer research sub-field with particular relevance to key questions of interest. In addition, those working in neuroeconomics and decision neuroscience, as well as the larger community of consumer researchers who recognize the growing importance and promise of neuroscientific approaches and results, would also find this roundtable valuable for identifying novel consumer domains in which neuroscientific investigation could offer important insights.

To a large degree, each of these groups is only infrequently exposed to the discoveries and approaches of the other. Hence, a key benefit of this roundtable is in bringing these groups together in active discussion.

**Facilitating Pre-Conference Discussions**

The roundtable organizers are committed to fostering vigorous informal discussion amongst participants prior to the conference. We plan to facilitate such discussions primarily using either the ACR Knowledge Exchange forum or through moderated e-mails. Prior to the conference participants will be encouraged to develop and share with the group discussion points of most interest to them, as well as informal summaries of relevant research they have been conducting themselves or are interested in learning more about through discussions. All such materials will be collated by the organizers as needed and distributed to the group, and interactions regarding the issues, questions, and research results brought to the fore will be both encouraged and actively initiated by the organizers. Through these pre-conference efforts we hope to maximize the value and meaningfulness of the session itself.
ROUND TABLE

Barbara Stern’s Legacy to Consumer Research

Chairs:
Cristel Antonia Russell, University of Auckland, New Zealand
Stephen J. Gould, Baruch College, USA

Participants:
Aaron Ahuvia, University of Michigan, Dearborn, USA
Barbara Olsen, SUNY Old Westbury, USA
Brett Martin, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Craig Thompson, University of Wisconsin, USA
David Mick, University of Virginia, USA
Ed Mcquarrie, University of Santa Clara, USA
Eileen Fischer, York University, Canada
Eric Arnould, University of Wyoming, USA
Gita Johar, New York University, USA
Jennifer Escalas, Vanderbilt University, USA
Jonathan Schroeder, University of Exeter, UK
Laurie Meamber, George Mason University, USA
Margo Buchanan-Oliver, University of Auckland, New Zealand
Mark Ritson, Melbourne Business School, Australia
Marla Royne Stafford, University of Memphis, USA
Michael Mulvey, University of Ottawa, Canada
Sandy Bennett, University of Auckland, New Zealand
Steven Kates, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Extended Abstract

The purpose of the roundtable is to review and discuss the contributions of Barbara Stern’s literary approach to the field of consumer research. Participants who have worked with Barbara will provide a brief review of her contributions in key areas and solicit participant discussion around each topic. The discussion of Barbara’s legacy has already begun in email exchanges between roundtable participants and the co-organizers. We have created a Barbara Stern listserv. Once the roundtable is accepted, an online forum will be activated on the ACR website so that anyone will be able to post comments and thoughts. The proposal incorporates contributions from others who, while unable to attend this year’s conference, have shared how Barbara Stern’s work influenced their own research. These scholars will contribute to the discussion via the online board, pre- and post-conference.

In Barbara Stern fashion, the proposal begins with an etymological analysis of the word legacy. Legacy is something transmitted from the past. It is also defined as a gift and this second meaning is just as suited to describe Barbara’s contributions to the field of consumer research. Gifted herself, she gifted us with novel insights and theoretical perspectives from English literature. In organizing this roundtable, we solicited statements from scholars who knew Barbara and/or her work. Some worked directly with her, all found her work inspirational. The purpose of the gathering will be to review and uphold her thriving legacy to consumer research.

Barbara’s pioneering contributions to consumer research are best stated in Morris Holbrook’s words: “she transformed the possibilities for interpretive work in marketing research. By virtue of her training and experience in critical analysis—her ability to draw on a wealth of literary material not available to the typical marketing scholar—Barb infused her research with an authoritative command of interpretive methods not heretofore found in our discipline… She has incorporated key ideas from feminism, has made a case for advertising as a species of drama, has applied influential taxonomic and structural models borrowed from the basic discipline, and has even ventured forth into an exploration … of deconstructionism …. she loads her critical approach with insights into the meaning of consumption and other marketing-related phenomena. These discoveries make her work a constant challenge—and joy—to read … one is constantly impressed by the high level of originality, imagination, creativity, and wisdom that she has brought to her work.” (Holbrook 2009, 6).

The roundtable will proceed as an open discussion guided by the topics brought up in pre-conference discussions amongst participants. Since the exchange has already begun, emerging topics are listed here, using or paraphrasing (or quoting but unattributed) the participants’ own words in describing Barbara’s contributions to themselves personally and to the field as a whole.

Literary Theory. Barbara’s work brought to light the centrality of the humanities in general and literary approaches to the study of marketing in particular. She covered such topics as the uses of literary devices (allegory, personae, rhetorical irony) in advertising and the relationship of literary criticism to consumer research. In her breakthrough article (JM 1988) Barbara compared advertising to medieval allegory in that it provides didactic instruction to consumers. In 1989 (JCR), she introduced us to the role literary criticism can play in consumer research, etching out the different schools and how they focus on different elements, including author, reader and text (e.g., reader response, genre analysis, deconstruction). She then playfully applied deconstruction to Joe Camel (JCR 1996) in a subversive, destabilizing reading to reveal how his behavior hovers in undecidability (différence) between various gendered-sexualities including dominant masculinity, repressed male homosexuality and implied femininity.
Advertising. Barbara’s research offered new insights into the study of advertising text and narrative. She transformed our understanding, for instance, of the traditional communications model in advertising (source, message, recipient) by treating advertising as crafted text rather than as mere everyday speech as the model implies (JA 1994).

Feminism. Barbara was an “embodiment of the kind of feminist who opened up opportunities for others both because of her exemplary scholarship and because of her supportiveness of specific individuals” (female participant). She was “a true 2nd wave feminist as well as having overcome a bad marriage and all the obstacles professional women faced in the 60s. She was pretty fearless” (male participant). This topic will undoubtedly lead to lively discussion about feminism and how it has been manifested in the marketing academy. In 1993 (JCR), Barbara introduced us to feminist-deconstructive reading of ads suggesting that consumers engage in gendered reading such that males and females exhibit different reading styles.

Pluralism. Barbara believed that pluralistic research projects drawing from different paradigmatic strengths (Kuhn 1962; Laudan 1984) contributed to each other (Lakatos 1978) in fruitful knowledge exchanges. She viewed the humanities as a source of theoretical insights and hypotheses testable by empirical methods but, although she was intrigued by experimental research, she had no background in it. She walked the talk of synergy between humanities theory and scientific method (Geertz 1988; Holbrook 1987), collaborating with researchers with complementary background to hers in experimental design (e.g., Escalas and Stern 2003).

Likely Audience. Seasoned and novice consumer researchers will benefit from attending this session. We anticipate that the discussion will evolve more generally from Barbara Stern’s legacy of literary criticism to more general ways in which theory advances and the contribution of other disciplines to consumer research.

Selected References
The Evolving Definition of Rationality

Chair:
Rajagopal Raghunathan, University of Texas at Austin, USA

Participants:
Christopher Hsee, University of Chicago, USA
Michel Tuan Pham, Columbia University, USA
Ming Hsu, University of California at Berkeley, USA
J. Edward Russo, Cornell University, USA
Itamar Simonson, Stanford University, USA
Dan Ariely, Duke University, USA
Eduardo B. Andrade, University of California at Berkeley, USA

Extended Abstract

The concepts of rationality and utility are irrevocably intertwined, since rationality is generally defined and conceived as utility maximizing behavior (e.g., Edwards 1954). Thus, to understand what rationality means, it is important to understand what utility means.

From a classical economist’s perspective, utility can be taken to mean whatever it is that an individual (or a group) wishes to maximize. In this view, even the so-called “dark” consumption behaviors—their addiction to drugs or alcohol (Solomon 1980), the inability to save sufficient money for the future (Thaler and Shefrin 1992), or the inability to prevent oneself from compulsive shopping (Rook 1987)—can be conceived as rational. As such, many scholars interested in examining these types of (dark) behaviors have been careful to avoid characterizing these types of behaviors as irrational, and prefer, instead, to use less loaded terms such as, time-inconsistent preferences, or myopia to refer to them (e.g., Hoch and Loewenstein 1991).

If utility can mean anything and everything, however, the concept of rationality is rendered meaningless, since any judgment or decision could be considered rational. To circumvent this conceptual impasse, one yardstick that has often been applied is whether the judgment/decision in question conforms to logic (Kahneman 1994); in this view, people are rational if their “beliefs, judgments, choices and actions respect certain standards of logic” (Pham 2007, p. 156). For instance, judgments or decisions that do not satisfy transitivity (Birnbaum 2008) or do not sufficiently account for base-rates (Bar Hillel 1980) would be considered irrational. But is conformance to norms of logic alone enough? Some scholars appear to think so; for instance, Sharif and Leboeuf (2002, p. 492) note that “the predominant theories of rationality are predicated on notions of consistency”; thus, in the eyes of these scholars, even behaviors that would be considered patently irrational by lay-people (e.g., addiction to drugs or extreme impulsivity) could be construed as rational so long as these behaviors are, in some logically justifiable way, consistent and coherent.

Other scholars, however, have taken a different stance: by implicitly equating utility to subjective well-being or happiness, they appear amenable to characterizing judgments/decisions that diminish emotional positivity—even if they are logically justifiable—as sub-rational (e.g., Thaler and Sunstein 2008). This perspective, of equating utility to emotional well-being, also appears to be echoed in the work of some other scholars (e.g., Hsee et al. 2003; Wilson and Schooler 1991), in as much as they portray the more (vs. less) enjoyable options as being superior, even though the choice of other options may be logically defendable.

A third perspective on rationality adopts a societal-level lens through which judgments and decisions are evaluated; in this view, judgments/decisions that maximize societal (vs. individual) well-being are rational. This, so-called, “ecological” perspective of rationality (e.g., Miller 2009; Haidt 2001, 2007) would characterize judgments/decisions that serve the higher-purpose of enhancing the utility of the society or group to which the decision-maker belongs as rational, even if these judgments/decisions come at a cost to the decision-maker himself.

One framework that could prove useful in clarifying the pros and cons of subscribing to a particular definition of utility (and, therefore, rationality), is that offered by Kahneman and his colleagues (e.g., Kahneman, Wakker and Sarin 1997). These researchers distinguish between two types of utilities—decision and experienced utility—where decision-utility refers to the “wantability” of options whereas experienced utility refers to the amount of pleasure (minus pain) provided by them. Thus, an option that provides higher levels of pleasure (minus pain) would be the rational choice from the perspective of an individual aiming to maximize experienced utility, and yet be sub-rational from the perspective of someone interested in concerns other than just enjoyment. For example, some people may attach great importance to making choices that appear (to oneself or to others) as justifiable (e.g., Simonson 1989), and to such people, the hedonic superiority of an option may not guarantee its choice.

The primary objective of this session is to provide clarity on the various ways in which rationality and utility have been conceptualized and to shed light on the subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways in which these conceptualizations differ. As a result of such clarity, we expect the audience to be able to judge for themselves the pros and cons of adopting different perspectives of utility and rationality. Time permitting, the panelists in the session may also discuss other related questions, including the following: (1) What is the role of consciousness in making rational judgments or decisions, that is, could a decision be rational if it were made sub-consciously (a la Dijksterhuis 2004)? Or is it necessary for the decision-agent to have been conscious of the process underlying the calculation of utilities? (2) What is the role of stability of preferences, and to what extent is the assumption of stability of preferences valid (Ariely, Loewenstein and Prelec 2003)?, and (3) When are preferences constructed and when do they appear to be based on inherent tastes (Simonson 2008)?

The session is expected to have broad appeal, since assessing the quality of a judgment or decision (whether one refers to such assessments by the use of the term rationality) is central to all of consumer research.
**Roundtable**

**Compliments, Critiques, and Consumption: The Effects of Word-of-Mouth Valence and Social Ties on Peer Advice in Socially-Embedded Settings**

**Chair:**
Renee Gosline, MIT Sloan School of Management, USA

**Participants:**
Breagin Riley, Syracuse University, USA
Kent Grayson, Northwestern University, USA
Aronte Bennett, Villanova University, USA
Tiffany White, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA
David Dubois, Northwestern University, USA
Jeff Lee, Harvard Business School, USA
Lora Harding, Northwestern University, USA
Omar Woodham, Syracuse University, USA

**Extended Abstract**

The concepts of rationality and utility are irrevocably intertwined, since rationality is generally defined and conceived as utility maximizing behavior (e.g., Edwards 1954). Thus, to understand what rationality means, it is important to understand what utility means.

From a classical economist’s perspective, utility can be taken to mean whatever it is that an individual (or a group) wishes to maximize. In this view, even the so-called “dark” consumption behaviors—such as addiction to drugs or alcohol (Solomon 1980), the inability to save sufficient money for the future (Thaler and Shefrin 1992), or the inability to prevent oneself from compulsive shopping (Rook 1987)—can be conceived as rational. As such, many scholars interested in examining these types of (dark) behaviors have been careful to avoid characterizing these types of behaviors as irrational, and prefer, instead, to use less loaded terms such as, *time-inconsistent preferences, or myopia* to refer to them (e.g., Hoch and Loewenstein 1991).

If utility can mean anything and everything, however, the concept of rationality is rendered meaningless, since *any* judgment or decision could be considered rational. To circumvent this conceptual impasse, one yardstick that has often been applied is whether the judgment.decision in question conforms to logic (Kahneman 1994); in this view, people are rational if their “beliefs, judgments, choices and actions respect certain standards of logic” (Pham 2007, p. 156). For instance, judgments or decisions that do not satisfy transitivity (Birnbaum 2008) or do not sufficiently account for base-rates (Bar Hillel 1980) would be considered irrational. But is conformance to norms of logic alone enough? Some scholars appear to think so; for instance, Sharif and Leboeuf (2002, p. 492) note that “the predominant theories of rationality are predicated on notions of consistency”; thus, in the eyes of these scholars, even behaviors that would be considered patently irrational by lay-people (e.g., addiction to drugs or extreme impulsivity) could be construed as rational so long as these behaviors are, in some logically justifiable way, consistent and coherent.

Other scholars, however, have taken a different stance: by implicitly equating utility to subjective well-being or happiness, they appear amenable to characterizing judgments/decisions that diminish emotional positivity—even if they are logically justifiable—as sub-rational (e.g., Thaler and Sunstein 2008). This perspective, of equating utility to emotional well-being, also appears to be echoed in the work of some other scholars (e.g., Hsee et al. 2003; Wilson and Schooler 1991), in as much as they portray the more (vs. less) enjoyable options as being superior, even though the choice of other options may be logically defendable.

A third perspective on rationality adopts a societ-al-level lens through which judgments and decisions are evaluated; in this view, judgments/decisions that maximize societal (vs. individual) well-being are rational. This, so-called, “ecological” perspective of rationality (e.g., Miller 2009; Haidt 2001, 2007) would characterize judgments/decisions that serve the higher-purpose of enhancing the utility of the society or group to which the decision-maker belongs as rational, even if these judgments/decisions come at a cost to the decision-maker himself.

One framework that could prove useful in clarifying the pros and cons of subscribing to a particular definition of utility (and, therefore, rationality), is that offered by Kahneman and his colleagues (e.g., Kahneman Wakker and Sarin 1997). These researchers distinguish between two types of utilities—decision and experienced utility—where decision-utility refers to the “wantability” of options whereas experienced utility refers to the amount of pleasure (minus pain) provided by them. Thus, an option that provides higher levels of pleasure (minus pain) would be the rational choice from the perspective of an individual aiming to maximize experienced utility, and yet be sub-rational from the perspective of someone interested in concerns other than just enjoyment. For example, some people may attach great importance to making choices that appear (to oneself or to others) as justifiable (e.g., Simonson 1989), and to such people, the hedonic superiority of an option may not guarantee its choice.

The primary objective of this session is to provide clarity on the various ways in which rationality and utility have been conceptualized and to shed light on the subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways in which these conceptualizations differ. As a result of such clarity, we expect the audience to be able to judge for themselves the pros and cons of adopting different perspectives of utility and rationality. Time permitting, the panelists in the session may also discuss other related questions, including the following: (1) What is the role of consciousness in making rational judgments or decisions, that is, could a decision be rational if it were made sub-consciously (a la Dijksterhuis 2004)? Or is it necessary for the decision-agent to have been conscious of the process underlying the calculation of utilities?, (2) What is the role of stability of preferences, and to what extent is the assumption of stability of preferences valid (Ariely, Loewenstein and Prelec 2003)?, and (3) When are preferences constructed and when do they appear to be based on inherent tastes (Simonson 2008)?

The session is expected to have broad appeal, since assessing the quality of a judgment or decision (whether one refers to such assessments by the use of the term rationality) is central to all of consumer research.
ROUNDTABLE
Walking the Work-life Tightrope

Chair:
Raj Raghunathan

Participants:
Darren Dahl, University of British Columbia, Canada
Kelly Haws, Texas A&M University, USA
Gita Johar, Columbia University, USA
Aparna Labroo, University of Chicago, USA
Rhiannon MacDonnell, University of Calgary, Canada
Himanshu Mishra, University of Utah, USA
Vicki Morwitz, New York University, USA
Joseph Nunes, University of Southern California, USA
Stijn van Osselaer, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Deborah Small, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Extended Abstract

Although the economists’ assumption, that “more of a good thing is better” has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism in recent years—for example, it has been shown not to be true for many things, including jam (Iyengar and Lepper 2000), TV channels, and babies (personal experience 2010)—, it seems to be true for at least one thing: happiness. We all want to be as happy as we can be, and the happier we are, well, the happier we feel! But, what does it take to be happy?

According to Freud, the two biggest determinants of happiness are: (1) satisfaction with work and, (2) satisfaction with love. So, the more productive we are at work, and the greater the sense of intimacy/belongingness we have with our chosen social circle (which includes our partner, kids and friends), the happier we are likely to be. But, given that being productive at work and maintaining a healthy social-life take time, effort and (sometimes) money, and given that we have a limited pool of these resources, it can be a challenge to maintain a good work-life balance. So, how do we decide how much resource to allocate to work vs. family vs. friends?

This is a tough nut to crack, as most of us (especially those with kids) have found out the hard way. Some of us decide to allocate more resources to family/friends, only to feel bad that we haven’t been as productive as we could have been. (And those pesky, super-productive single colleagues don’t help!) Others decide to devote more resources to work, only to feel socially isolated and miserable.

In sum, the challenge of leading a happy life—through an ideal mix of “work” and “love”—presents an optimization problem that is more challenging than the health-care problem currently facing the US government (some may disagree with us on this, but we have anecdotal and apocryphal data to back our stance). So, who better to turn to, than the elite set of marketing faculty who have it all—productivity at work, a great family life, an intimate circle of friends, and more! Yes, our esteemed panel members lead enviable, “happily now (vs. ever after)” lives because they have hit the work-life balance sweet-spot!

But, before you let that tinge of envy (which is no doubt creeping up your spine) develop into a full-blown bout of uncontrolled jealousy, let me assure you that the happy position in which our panelists find themselves wasn’t easy to achieve. They had to endure a long, harrowing period of struggle, with periodic attacks of spasmodic back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, thou-art-neither-here-nor-there syndrome and spontaneous spousal spurnment. (Some of these are new diseases.)

But, despite all the hardships that they had to endure to painfully assimilate their pearls of wisdom, the panelists are eager to share their perspectives on this important topic (bless their hearts!). Each panelist will spend about 5-8 minutes first, outlining their preferred solution to the “work-life balance dilemma”. In the course of doing so, they will share their views on a number of issues, including the following:

What are some creative ways by which one can have “one’s cake and eat it too” (i.e., be productive at work and enjoy a healthy social life)? Who are some people who stand out as good exemplars of maintaining a good “work-life” balance and what are their strategies?

Should the allocation of resources vary depending on where (in which stage) one is? For instance, should one devote more resources to work (vs. social life) before tenure, and more to social life (vs. work) after having kids?

For those who have chosen to devote more time to family (vs. work), how can they cope with feelings of inadequacy that comes with a (hopefully temporary!) dip in productivity?

For those who have chosen to devote more time to work (vs. family), how can one get “one’s groove back” (i.e., develop and maintain healthy social relationships)?

Are there any resources (e.g., books, agencies) that can help us out with this issue?

Once the panelists have had a chance to share their perspectives, the floor will be opened to a question and answer session, which is expected to last about 30 minutes.

The session is expected to have broad appeal, since most of us value both our work life and our social life. The session will be particularly valuable for junior faculty (and PhD students) with an active social/family life.


**Roundtable**

**Green, Ethical, Sustainable Consumption**

**Chair:**
Andrew Gershoff, University of Texas at Austin, USA

**Participants:**
- Susan Dobsha, Bentley College, USA
- Amitav Chakravarti, New York University, USA
- Julie Irwin, University of Texas at Austin, USA
- Karen Page Winterich, Pennsylvania State University, USA
- Michael Luchs, William and Mary, USA
- Bram Van den Bergh, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- Rebecca Walker Naylor, Ohio State University, USA
- Kelly Haws, Texas A&M University, USA
- Vladas Griskevicius, University of Minnesota, USA

**Extended Abstract**

Over the last decade there has been a steady increase in sales and consumer interest of environmentally friendly, ethically produced, and so-called sustainable products (Freedonia 2009). Mainstream manufacturers and retailers such as Walmart, Home Depot, P & G, and General Electric have increased their offerings of products labeled “green” and they have altered many business practices in order to decrease or offset their impact on the environment.

Research on consumer attitudes and response to green, ethical, and sustainable marketing has also begun to take root in a number of important directions, especially as it becomes apparent that despite positive attitudes toward such products, in many product categories consumers still don’t buy or use them (Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, Raghunathan 2010; UNEP 2005). As a result, questions of when and why these products will be adopted have been on the forefront. For example, a number of researchers have explored questions associated with the traits and indicators of consumers who tend to be green consumers (Haws, Winterich, Naylor 2010; Webb, Mohr, and Harris 2008). Others have asked about consumer response to the real or inferred trades-offs that consumers must make between the green benefits of the products and other primary benefits of the products (Luchs et al. 2010). In addition, many researchers have begun to uncover a potential dark side associated with purchase of green products. For example Ehrich and Irwin (2005) found that consumers may intentionally avoid leaning about a product’s negative ethical connections in order to protect a favored status of a preferred product.

Others have shown that a licencing effect appears to occur with either the purchase of green products or beliefs about one’s own past green behavior. This may result in consumers becoming less likely to make subsequent green purchases, and may even be more likely to engage in other immoral or selfish behavior (Becker-Olsen, Bennett, Chakravarti 2010; Mazar and Zhong 2010). Finally, even when people do purchase green products, the benefits they seek may not be associated ethical, nor altruistic goals. Instead, the decision to purchase a green product may be driven by a goal of signaling status (Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2010).

Although a respectable body of knowledge in green and sustainable consumer behavior has clearly been established, this area is still both young enough and important enough to society to merit further inquiry. Rather than simply reviewing the work that has been completed thus far, the purpose of this roundtable will be to discuss and develop key questions and research priorities for future study of green, sustainable, and ethical marketing. At least nine recognized researchers this area have agreed to attend and contribute. Toward developing these research priorities, a number of areas for discussion have been proposed.

One area for consideration is consumer response to the way in which green and sustainable benefits are introduced and manifest in the products they consume. For example, products may become more green in a number of ways. First, manufacturing and transportation methods may be used by a company to reduce any negative impact on the environment or society but these changes may not alter the product or consumer experience in any way. Second, materials used in the product or package may have a reduced impact on natural resources either by reducing material use, reusing materials, or using alternative materials. These methods may have an impact on the environment, but it may be affect the product experience as well. Third, design of products may be altered so that when used the products have less impact on the environment by reducing their energy consumption or pollution. Finally, products may be designed so that when they are disposed of they have less impact on the environment. Each of these methods may result in a similar impact on the environment, but they may differ in consumer reactions. For instance, tangible and observable aspects of the greenness of products may lead to inferences that the product is less effective in other ways, which may reduce demand, yet it may facilitate public signaling of the purchase, which could increase demand through perceived benefit to status (Griskevicius et al. 2010). Further, even unobservable changes may influence demand for green products depending on where in the consumption stream the change has occurred. For instance, upstream improvements toward the greening of a product (i.e. alterations in manufacturing transportation processes) may be perceived as more desirable than downstream benefits because the greening of the product has already taken place when the consumer makes the purchase decision, while downstream changes (i.e. alterations in design that improve efficiency during use of disposal) may be perceived as more desirable than upstream benefits because they allow the consumer to be a cooperative player in the green benefit being realized.

While aspects of the product may be one area for consideration of key research objectives, a second area is in aspects of consumers’ identities. Recent work suggests that people have many identities, or self-construals, that may be activated at different times, leading to differences in motivations, information processing, and behaviors (Oyserman 2009). Such identity activation may be important for facilitating consumer compliance with behaviors and purchase of products that benefit a common good, rather than their own self interest. In other domain this has been shown to be effect. For example, identity congruent appeals have been shown to be effective for influencing decisions to exercise and to reduce alcohol and drug use (Martin and Leary 2001; Werch 2007, 2008).
The session is expected to have a very broad appeal as research in this area continues to take off. Further, the questions posed in this line of research also dovetail with many other areas of research including the role of emotions in decision making, common goods decisions, attitude formation and change, and self presentation. As a result it is expected that this session will draw both attendees immediately interested in green, ethical and sustainable marketing, as well as those interested in these varied, yet influential, research topics.

References
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2005), Talk the Walk: Advancing Sustainable Lifestyles through Marketing and Communications. UN Global Compact and Utopies.
ROUNDTABLE

Developing a Dissertation Idea

Chair:
Eduardo B. Andrade, University of California, Berkeley, USA

Participants:
Clayton Critcher, Cornell University, USA
Jeff Galak, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
Chris Janiszewski, University of Florida, USA
Peter McGraw, University of Colorado, USA
Tom Meyvis, New York University, USA
Leif D. Nelson, University of California, Berkeley, USA
Joseph P. Simmons, Yale University, USA
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Extended Abstract

To generate a dissertation idea is a daunting task. Those who have gone or are going through this process know it well. Interestingly, there is unfortunately little discussion about (1) how PhD students (should) develop their dissertation ideas and (2) how professors (should) involve themselves in the process. This roundtable is meant to address this issue. Specifically, it will discuss descriptive and normative aspects related to: research topics of interest, hypothesis generation, faculty involvement, and differences between psychology and marketing departments.

Choosing an Area of Interest Within Consumer Research. Given its interdisciplinary approach, consumer research topics can vary dramatically. After being exposed to a wide range of areas, how does a student decide on a topic of interest? Moreover, how much is the choice process influenced by intrinsic vs. extrinsic considerations (e.g., passion for the area vs. whom to work with vs. likelihood of publication)? How to balance these two aspects? How variation is there between schools and between students? Are there specific rules of thumb to be followed?

Selecting a Specific Idea/Hypothesis. Once a research area is identified, how does the student identify a novel research question and a testable research hypothesis? Are there specific strategies to facilitate this process?

Faculty involvement. How much should the faculty adviser be involved? The answer to this question is hotly debated. Should faculty contribute to idea generation or should they merely step back? How should students navigate the considerable cultural differences between universities?

Psychology/Consumer Research. The fact that many marketing professors have been trained in psychology also raises the question on whether or not the preceding topics vary systematically depending on the nature of the faculty adviser’s personal training. Where systematic differences exist, is there room for identifying a strategy that synthesizes the best tactics from both?

In short, this roundtable will shed light into the different strategies employed by individuals, departments, and disciplines, in the generation and consolidation of a dissertation idea. We hope to attract the interest of senior and junior faculty, and, most importantly, doctoral students.
ROUNDTABLE
Understanding Prosocial Behavior Among Consumers and Organizations

Chair:
Michal Strahilevitz, Golden Gate University, USA

Participants:
David Mick, University of Virginia, USA
Deborah Small, Wharton School of Business, USA
Carlos J. Torelli, University of Minnesota, USA
Andrew M. Kaikati, Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, USA
Kelly Goldsmith, Kellogg School, Northwestern University, USA
Michael Norton, Harvard School of Business, USA
Nicole Verrochi, University of Pittsburg, USA
Sankar Sen, Zicklin School of Business, Baruch College/CUNY, USA
Sergio Carvalho, University of Manitoba, Canada
Karen Page Winterich, Pennsylvania State University, USA
Christopher Olivola, Cognitive, Perceptual and Brain Sciences, University College London, UK
Ekant Veer, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
Susan Dobscha, Bentley University, USA
Uri Simonsohn, Wharton School of Business, USA
Wendy Liu, U.C. San Diego, USA
Stacy Wood, University of South Carolina, USA
Aronne Bennett, Villanova University, USA
Andrea Scott, Pepperdine University, USA
Jing (Alice) Wang, University of Iowa, USA
Lalin Anik, Harvard School of Business, USA
Shuili Du, Simmons College School of Management, USA
Stefanie Rosen, University of South Carolina, USA
Zoe Chance, Harvard School of Business, USA
Aditi Grover, Plymouth State University, USA
Susan Harmon, Pacific Lutheran University, USA
Diane Martin, University of Portland, USA

Extended Abstract
The interest in prosocial behavior has increased in the last few years as consumers seek greater meaning in their everyday lives. Many companies and consumers are paying attention to the impact their choices have on society at large, and an increasing number of consumer behavior scholars have begun to look at the causes and consequences of prosocial behavior among consumers and organizations.

This roundtable will appeal broadly to those scholars interested in the factors influencing different types of prosocial behavior as well as the effects of different types of prosocial behavior on consumers’ lives. Beyond this, it will also appeal to those interested in research examining the effects of prosocial behavior on the part of organizations and the effects of CSR on both employees and consumers. Our relatively large panel of committed attendees purposefully includes scholars from a diverse mix of methodological backgrounds as well as a broad range of topics related to understanding the causes and effects of prosocial behavior. Researchers on our panel are doing research on many important subjects that fit under the “prosocial” umbrella. These include exploring factors affecting charitable giving and volunteerism, the effects of charitable behavior on consumer welfare and satisfaction, cause marketing, sustainability and green consumer behavior, how prosocial activities within organizations affect employee morale and job satisfaction, and the many factors influencing consumer responses to corporate social responsibility (including the type of CSR, the nature of the product, the nature of the consumer, the communication strategy, and prior CSR activities by the organization). Our panel includes scholars with diverse backgrounds and interests, so that we can learn from each other and foster a community that keeps the big picture in mind, rather than focusing on one type of research methodology or paradigm.

We aim to encourage dialogue before, during and after the roundtable. This will include identifying key areas of current research, discussing potential synergies between different streams of work, identifying directions for future research and discussing the challenges of doing research in this area. Due to the huge appeal of this topic to many scholars with diverse perspectives, we hope to not only attract a wide range of scholars from different backgrounds and interests, but also to help foster a community that will continue to be active even after ACR 2010 has passed. Due to the diverse backgrounds of those on our panel, this roundtable will be of interest to both qualitative and experimental researchers. The topics covered will be relevant to those interested in broadening our theoretical understanding of prosocial behavior, those dedicated to doing research with prosocial benefits (TCR), and those focused on managerial implications. Indeed, many on our panel are dedicated to doing research that addresses all three of these goals.

While many of our confirmed participants are impressive, we are particularly happy to have David Mick, who is considered by many to be the founder of the currently active Transformative Consumer Research community. In his ACR presidential address several years ago, Mick described transformative consumer research as “consumer research in the service of quality of life” (Mick 2006, p. 3). This roundtable will appeal to a large portion of the TCR community, but will also attract a range of scholars who are not (currently) part of the TCR group. One of the “big picture” questions we will address in our discussion is whether or not it is prosocial
Understanding Prosocial Behavior Among Consumers and Organizations

to study prosocial behavior. Obviously, prosocial behavior is not always motivated by purely by altruistic motives. Indeed, researchers
our panel have demonstrated a connection between prosocial behavior and happiness (Liu and Aaker 2008; Dunn Aknin and Norton
2008), while others have identified the effectiveness of appealing to rather selfish status-seeking motives to encourage seemingly pro-
social behavior in certain contexts (Torelli, Monga, and Kaikati, 2010). More and more, nonprofits are focused not only on helping
the causes they support, but also on keeping their donors and volunteers feeling appreciated and happy, if not downright entertained
(Strahilevitz 2010). Still, understanding that prosocial behavior is not always motivated purely by a desire to help others can still help us
to encourage actions that benefit society. Given the importance and “bigness” of these topics, we will ask David Mick to briefly speak
on the potential value of doing research in this area, with a focus on work that is both rigorous in terms of theory, but also potentially
helpful in terms of service to society. We will also, as a group, briefly discuss strategies for promoting the value of research on prosocial
behavior within a business school setting.

Before and after the conference, continued dialogue will be facilitated via a combination of email exchanges (facilitated by the
roundtable chair), postings on the ACR Knowledge Exchange Forum, and postings on our newly created FaceBook group “Prosocial
Consumer Research.” The FaceBook group is open to any scholar interested in research in this area, but will begin with invitations to
the roundtable participants. In our pre-ACR dialogue, we will develop a plan for organizing breakout sessions focusing on issues such
as factors affecting consumer responses to CSR, causes and consequences of different types of prosocial behavior by consumers, the
prosocial nature of research on prosocial behavior, and the challenges that come with research in this area.

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The Impact of Preannouncements and Rumors on Consumer Evaluations

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In the contemporary high-tech markets, products are rarely launched unexpectedly, as new product preannouncements have become common practice (Kohli, 1999; Lilly and Waters, 1997). Besides new product preannouncements, or “formal, deliberate communication” (Eliashberg and Robertson, 1988), informal communication, such as rumors, often take place prior to the launch of a new product. Rumors provide signals on the incoming new product and together with preannouncements develop market anticipations (Schatzel and Calantone, 2006) and build prior-to-launch expectations of the forthcoming new product (Nagard-Assayag and Manceau, 2001).

Rumors have become especially important due to the internet, in which rumors spread quickly through online-blogs and various websites. The most active participants of online-blogs often are lead users and early adopters (Dorge, Stanko and Pollitte, 2010), who play an important role in new product adoption (Rogers, 1962). Despite their increasing importance, the role of rumors in new product adoption has received little research attention (Kamins, Folkes, Perner, 1997). The present two studies explore the impact of rumors and preannouncements on consumer evaluations of new high-tech products. Specifically, we investigate the role of two factors—(1) type of innovation (incremental versus radical) and (2) extent of ambiguity of the rumors—on the consumer curiosity and purchase intentions towards high-tech innovations. We propose that rumors stimulate consumer curiosity towards a new product, which subsequently influence consumers purchase intention. In addition, we hypothesize that rumors about a radical innovation involve more novel content that could create greater curiosity than that about an incremental innovation.

Study 1 used a content analysis to explore both preannouncements and rumors about two types of innovations: radical versus incremental innovations. We selected the iPhone as a radical innovation as it was the first touch-screen mobile phone that radically changed how consumers interact with their Smartphones. Sony’s PlayStation 3 was chosen as the incremental innovation as it was an improvement over the previous two generations of the PlayStation gaming consoles. We followed the preannouncements and rumors about these two innovations through press releases and blogs from credible sources. As rumors are mainly transmitted through blog postings, we chose Engadget and Gizmodo as the main research sites because of their consistently high ratings, popularity and focus on new product information (Dorge, Stanko, Pollitte, 2010).

We collected a sample of 49 postings on the iPhone (1999–2007) and 47 postings on the PlayStation 3 (1999–2006). We analyzed the content as well as the timing of these postings. The content of the postings was classified based on the core elements of the marketing mix: namely, content related to product (including product name and performance features), price, distribution and promotion. The majority of the content was related to the product (iPhone: 80%, PlayStation 3=79%). There were more discussions on the price of PlayStation 3 (16%) than that of the iPhone (6%). Nearly a quarter of the postings discussed launch timing (iPhone 18%, PlayStation 3: 26%), while only a few mentioned distribution (iPhone: 4%, PlayStation 3: 4%) and promotional programs (iPhone: 2%, PlayStation 3: 4%). An analysis of the timing revealed that the rumors started well in advance of the company’s official preannouncement. Rumors on Apple’s iPhone and Sony’s PlayStation 3 started eight and six years, respectively, before the two companies officially preannounced the product releases. One major difference between the preannouncements of the two products was the ambiguity of the information. Apple remained ambiguous in their responses to rumors. It did not discuss product specifics before the official announcements. In contrast, Sony’s executives responded to rumors and made specific comments about the product features in the press.

In Study 2, we decided to further investigate the effect of ambiguity of rumors on consumer curiosity and purchase intention. We used a 2x2 between-subjects design manipulating product innovativeness (radical innovation versus incremental innovation) and rumor ambiguity (ambiguous rumor versus unambiguous rumor). Consumer curiosity served as a mediator and the dependent variable was purchase intention. We collected data from 71 participants aged between 18 and 42, who first read a rumor about a new product, and we measured their extent of curiosity about the product. Subsequently, they read an official preannouncement about the product by the firm, and we measured their purchase intentions. The type of innovation (radical versus incremental) and the ambiguity of the rumor (ambiguous versus unambiguous) was manipulated in the scenarios read by the participants.

We found a significant effect of product innovativeness on consumer curiosity [F(1,69)=25.612, p<0.001]. The mean score on curiosity towards the radical innovation (M=5.026, SD =0.877) was significantly higher than that for the incremental innovation (M=3.888, SD=1.019), t(69)=5.061, p<0.001. Rumor ambiguity did not have a significant influence on curiosity [F(1,69)=0.067, p=0.797]. We further found an interaction between product innovativeness and rumor ambiguity leading to a positive effect on consumer curiosity (F=8.242, p<0.01). Respondents have stronger curiosity towards the radical innovation in an ambiguous rumor (M =5.253, SD=0.718) than the radical innovation in an unambiguous rumor (M=4.800, SD=0.978). Conversely, respondents are more curious about the incremental innovation in an unambiguous rumor (M=4.244, SD=0.866) than that in an ambiguous rumor (M=3.460, SD=1.051). Finally, we found that consumer curiosity had a positive effect on purchase intention (regression coefficient=0.456, p<0.001).

The results of our two studies suggest that new product rumors spread much earlier than the official preannouncements, indicating that consumers’ first impressions of a new product are formed based on rumors rather than on preannouncements. Moreover, the preannouncements for an incremental innovation were less ambiguous than that for radical innovations. Companies intentionally remain ambiguous about radical innovations, while being clear on incremental innovations. This strategy is supported in study 2, which shows that people are more interested in radical innovations when the rumor is more ambiguous, while they are more interested in an incremental
innovation when the rumor is unambiguous. It suggests that companies should be clear about their radical innovations in order to make their product interesting in the eyes of the consumers.

References


Frisbee for Friends, Furniture for Family:
The Influence of Products on Network Activation and WOM Intentions
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People use different products to signal desired identities to different social networks—iPods to impress their friends, briefcases to impress their employers. We suggest that this behavior causes those products to become linked to specific social networks, such that mere exposure to products can prime different social networks, making some relationships more salient than others. We furthermore explore how people perceive the closeness of these salient networks as a possible mechanism to examine subsequent WOM intentions.

Previous research has demonstrated that situational and environmental cues or primes can activate associated representations, making them more accessible (Berger and Fitzsimons 2008; Higgins, Rhines, and Jones 1977). As priming a given construct leads to the activation of related constructs in memory, it can also have impact on the perceptually-related objects, and furthermore on the product choice and evaluations (Lee and Labroo 2004; Whittlesea 1994). In this project, we use products belonging to different categories as our primes, and explore whether exposure to these primes makes certain social networks more accessible.

The literature on goal instrumentality previously showed that active goals lead to the activation of different relationship partners, specifically of those who are goal congruent (e.g., Fitzsimons and Shah 2008). We, however, look at the salience of relationship partners in relation to product categories rather than personal goals or motivations. Moreover, we argue that the products as primes influence social perceptions and as a result offer people’s changing perceptions of network closeness as a mechanism for following WOM behavior. To examine this linkage of products to networks to WOM, we ran three studies.

In Study 1, we investigated whether exposure to products belonging to various categories make related networks more salient than others in the minds of people. One hundred and thirty-five participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: family, friends, co-worker priming and control conditions where they were presented with products belonging to family, friends, co-worker categories respectively, and asked to indicate their preference in a set of four. Those in the control condition didn’t see any products. Subjects went through a total of twenty trials, viewing eighty different options. Afterwards, participants were asked to write down the initials of the first five people that came up to their mind and subsequently, instructed to indicate their relationship to each of the five people they listed.

The dependent variable was the number of family members, friends and co-workers listed in each of the four conditions. Our results showed that participants in the family priming condition listed significantly more family members than those in the friends priming, co-worker priming, and control conditions. These results were parallel for the friends and co-worker priming conditions, such that when primed with friends related products, people thought of their friends more so than when they saw family or work related products. Finally, those people in the co-worker priming condition reported significantly more number of colleagues than the participants in the other conditions.
Having shown the increase in the salience of networks as a result of being exposed to related products, next we wanted to examine whether exposure to products from different categories impacts people’s perception of network closeness, and as a result who they think of passing on information to. In Study 2, one hundred and eight participants were again randomly assigned to one of the four (family, friends, co-worker priming or control) groups and exposed to the same product priming tasks as in Study 1. After the priming tasks, participants were randomly presented with five print ads and asked “Who would you forward this ad to?” With this question, we aimed to capture word of mouth intentions. Participants were furthermore instructed to specify the relationship of the person.

We predicted that the priming categories would impact who participants listed as possible recipients of print advertisements. In line with our previous findings, participants who were in the friends priming condition listed more friends who they would forward the ads to than those in the family priming, co-worker priming, and control conditions. Our results again held in the family and co-worker priming conditions as participants in those groups listed many more family members and co-workers, respectively, than those in the other conditions.

So far, we showed that exposure to different product categories increases salience of category-related network members, who are then considered more accessible in word of mouth considerations. Next, we tested whether product categories influenced the salience of network members in WOM considerations via changing the perception of network closeness. In Study 3, one hundred and twenty seven participants were randomly assigned to family, friends or no priming conditions where the products task was the same as in the previous two studies. Following the priming task, they were shown three products they had not seen before. Participants were presented with announcements about a new model of each of the three products (printer, MP3 player, coffee maker) and were asked to indicate three people to whom they thought of passing this info. In order to understand whether the WOM intentions were mediated by network closeness, we asked subjects how close they perceived their family and friends networks.

Replicating our previous findings, participants in the family priming condition listed significantly more friends and those in the friends priming condition significantly more friends when asked about their WOM intentions than the listings in the other conditions. Additionally, our results showed that people in corresponding priming conditions feel their networks to be both closer to themselves and also closer to each other. Further analysis showed that the relationship between family priming and preference for sharing information with family members was mediated by the perception of family network closeness. Perception of network closeness was also a significant mediator for the friends priming condition.

These initial experiments provide insights about how products can influence people’s perception of and interaction with various networks they are a part of. Our investigation demonstrates how the self can be linked to specific networks, which can subsequently alter WOM intentions. We are currently running a field study where we manipulate social interactions of people via product primes and look forward to engaging in deeper discussions about our findings with ACR members.

Selected References:

Hopelessly Devoted? Word-of-Mouth and Diagnosticity in a Stable Preference Context
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Peter Dacin, Queen’s University, Canada
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Consumption-related word-of-mouth (WOM) is considered one of the more persuasive forms of information exchange among consumers (Dichter 1966), receiving considerable attention in the marketing literature (e.g., Bearden and Etzel 1982; Herr, Kardes and Kim 1991; Stephen, Lehmann and Toubia 2010). Much of the research on the persuasiveness of WOM occurs in contexts where the audience does not have an initial preference for a product (e.g., innovations), or in which the audience demonstrates no initial commitment to the product (e.g., Herr et al 1991). Many consumers, however, have strong, stable preferences for a given product, leading to questions of whether and how WOM can affect these preferences? We address these questions by examining conditions under which WOM might convince consumers with stable brand preferences to, at least, consider switching brands.

We hypothesize two conditions under which stable preferences may be swayed by WOM. These are the motivation of the consumer receiving the WOM and his or her perceptions regarding the diagnosticity of the WOM message. With respect to motivation, based on the concept of naïve realism, we suggest that although consumers may perceive that others use biased reasoning, consumers view their own evaluative judgments as objective and unbiased (Robinson, Keltner, Ward and Ross 1995). Consequently, consumers will tend to process information with an accuracy motivation, and likely view arguments that positively highlight a clear alternative choice, as opposed to suggesting something negative about their preferred brand, as more persuasive.
Although accuracy motivations tend to lead consumers to process information with an open mind and give greater diagnostic weight to negative information (Ahluwalia 2002), we argue that when consumers have stable preferences, the diagnosticity of WOM lies not in its valence, but rather in the degree to which it makes it easier for the consumer to provide reasons to discriminate between choices and highlight decisions (Darke and Chaiken 2005, Herr et al 1991). In short, diagnostic messages can provide the reasons to support a new choice (Shafir, Simonson and Tversky 1993). We also argue that the diagnosticity of WOM messages is related to the type of WOM message—be they WOM against the current preference (WOM-ACP) or WOM in favor of an alternate brand (WOM-IFA)—such that WOM-IFA will be seen as more diagnostic by clearly demonstrating reasons for a better choice. In addition, the speaker’s expertise and evident biases will also affect the diagnosticity and persuasiveness of the WOM in that perceptions of WOM messages from a biased source should be neither diagnostic nor persuasive, while WOM messages from experts should be both diagnostic and persuasive. When both bias and expertise are low, however, we expect WOM-IFA rather than WOM-ACP to be more diagnostic and persuasive.

In the first of two studies, subjects listed a product that was important to them in a category (personal grooming products) in which pretests revealed consumers develop strong preferences. Participants then read a scenario describing a hypothetical exchange about the product with a colleague. In the scenario, we manipulated three factors, i) speaker’s expertise (high vs. low), ii) speaker’s bias (strong vs. weak), as well as iii) WOM type (WOM-IFA vs. WOM-ACP). We randomly assigned each of 145 participants to one of the eight cells and measured diagnosticity and persuasion (the latter via consideration of switching brands).

As expected, there was a significant main effect on persuasion for both bias (weak-bias was more persuasive) and expertise (higher expertise was more persuasive). WOM-IFA was significantly more persuasive than WOM-ACP. That is, when the bias manipulation offered a clear reason to dismiss the message (i.e., high bias) or the expertise manipulation gave a clear reason to accept the message (i.e., high expertise), we found no significant impact of WOM type on persuasion. However, when these reasons were absent, our participants revealed a noticeable difference in both diagnosticity and persuasion and WOM-IFA was more persuasive than WOM-ACP. This supports our expectation for greater persuasion when WOM offers a clear choice.

To ensure that accuracy goals formed the basis of the motivation for processing WOM, we conducted a second study in which we manipulated two factors: i) diagnosticity (higher vs. lower) and ii) WOM type (WOM-IFA vs. WOM-ACP). This second study also allowed us to demonstrate that the message valence (i.e., a positivity effect) was not driving the outcomes from Study 1. The procedure mirrored Study 1, as we again asked participants to think about a brand in a given product category (juice) for which they held strong preferences. In the higher diagnosticity condition, WOM either mentioned the alternative brand as the only one using fresh fruit (WOM-IFA) or the current preference as using frozen fruit (WOM-ACP). In the lower diagnosticity condition, WOM mentioned either the alternative brand or current preference as being one of many companies that used a certain process. We also included self-monitoring as a covariate to examine whether effects were driven by social impression goals.

With persuasion as the dependent variable the analysis revealed no effect for self-monitoring; no main effect for WOM type; a significant main effect for diagnosticity; and a significant interaction effect between WOM type and diagnosticity. In the lower diagnosticity condition, WOM-ACP was less persuasive than WOM-IFA, while in the higher diagnostic condition there was no difference in effect on persuasion between WOM types. This is consistent with our expectation of participants using an accuracy motivation to maintain their sense of naïve realism. Results also revealed no relationship between message valence and perceived diagnosticity.

We posed the questions of whether and how WOM can persuade consumers with stable preferences to consider switching brands. The results demonstrate that many consumers hold strong preferences only so long as they believe they can reasonably support their choice. When presented with unbiased, credible and diagnostic WOM highlighting a better choice, consumers’ accuracy goals are activated, and they are willing to consider another option. Furthermore, reasons for preferring or switching brands do not appear to be rooted in the valence of the message but rather in their ability to clearly specify a better choice.

Selected References
Information But at What Cost?
The Positive and Negative Impact of Informational Social Influence
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Johny K. Johansson, Georgetown University, USA

Under conditions of uncertainty the presence of an informational social influence has long been thought to impact consumer judgments (Asch 1955). Originally conceptualized as the influence to accept information from another as evidence of reality (Deutsch and Gerrard 1955, pg. 629), prior work has found that informational social influence can positively impact consumer judgments, encourages product usage, and creates positive perceptions towards products (Cohen and Golden 1972). However, the creation of informational social influence is not without its harmful consequences. A nightclub owner may keep patrons waiting in long lines outside of the establishment in order to signal the popularity of the venue; by doing so potential patrons may be scared away at having to wait for a long period of time or the possibility of not being afforded enough personal space once inside. When assessing the validity of informational social influence consumers must ascertain whether the informational social influence signals a positive or negative outcome. The purpose of the present paper is to explore the conditions under which the deployment of informational social influence causes impacts negative judgments and when informational social influence impacts positive judgments.

The context for the present study was a virtual environment. Over 30 years has passed since the pioneering work on informational social influence and product judgments conducted by (Cohen and Golden 1972) as well as (Pincus and Waters 1977). However, the impact of the construct in judgments towards products is as relevant if not more so than ever. The growth of virtual environments and e-commerce in particular, has fueled an environment rich in informational social influence. Much of this influence is deliberately created by consumers as a means to share their experiences and communicate their recommendations, such as the writing of user reviews or the rating of certain products (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). However, in a virtual environment, informational social influence is also created inadvertently by consumers. For example, each time a consumer downloads a piece of music or software online that download is accumulated and then displayed to other potential users as a sign that others have made the same decision that the consumer is considering. Thus, when forming a product judgment regarding a product viewed in a virtual environment, consumers must interpret the informational social influence that they are faced with and use it to assess the product either positively or negatively.

One of the greatest concerns consumers have when purchasing products in a virtual environment is that the product will appear to be one thing online and then actually be something else once it arrives (Trocchia and Janda 2003). At best the product in question has slight deviations from what was expected; at worse, the product is a fake or a forgery. Through exposure and experience, consumers have gained a level of knowledge that helps them to ascertain the quality of the product before purchase (Pavlou and Gefen 2004). For example, consumers which purchase certain luxury brand name apparel may be apprehensive of purchasing the product online if it is selling for a third of the price that it does at the local retailer regardless of the number of the consumers that have purchased the product before. We argue that when knowledge of the product category is high consumers may be less susceptible to informational social influence and would be more likely to view the negative aspects of the informational social influence. Conversely, when consumers are uncertain as to the quality of the product then we believe that informational influence will play an enhanced role in reducing that uncertainty and will positively impact judgment towards the product.

The predictions above were tested using a 2 (familiarity: high vs. low) x 2 (informational social presence: present vs. absent) study design. A total of 133 undergraduate students from a large private university in the South Eastern United States participated in the study in exchange for course credit. Familiarity was manipulated by product category. A total of 22 participants drawn from the same sample as the study population participated in the pretest and were asked to rate their familiarity and purchase frequency of several different product categories. We ultimately chose DVDs and a universal remote control as our products for this study based on the differing levels of familiarity that the sample had of these two products (M\_DVD=5.87 vs. M\_Remote=3.35, F(1, 43)=4.46, p<0.05) and the high rate of counterfeiting in each of these two product categories. Two popular DVDs were chosen so as to eliminate unique effects of using one DVD that the participants may be familiar with.

The research team then searched for versions of these products for sale on the popular online marketplace “eBay.com”. Once found, the web pages displaying these items for sale was then saved and edited by a graphics design team in order to remove any previous feedback the seller of the products had previously received and to standardize the information given by each seller for each of the products. Informational social influence was manipulated by either adding bidders for the item or removing any bidders from the item. In the informational social influence condition several bidders were competing for the item while in the non informational social influence condition there were no other bidders. All of the DVDs were priced at $9.50 while all of the Universal Remote Controls were priced at $79.95. Participants used their personal computers to log into the school’s intranet where they were then able to access the study. Once the study was activated the participants would then see the edited eBay seller page and were asked to state the probability that they thought the product was counterfeit and to state the maximum amount of money that they would pay for the item.

Our findings revealed a significant interaction between product familiarity and informational social presence in terms of the product being viewed as counterfeit (F(1, 110)=3.95, p<0.05). Participants rated the DVDs as more likely to be counterfeit if others had bid on it (Mdvd\_social presence=43.86 vs. Mdvd\_social presence absent=35.43); conversely, the universal remote control was viewed as less likely to be counterfeit if others were bidding on it than if there were no other bidders (MRemote\_social presence=51.67 vs. MRemote\_social presence absent=35.43). Main effects for familiarity or social presence were not significant.

For the DVDs the presence of other bidders adds cost increases to the price of the DVDs but provides little value in terms of signaling the authenticity of the product. The presence of others may actually have signaled to consumers that the price was previously lower and thus more likely to be counterfeit. With the unfamiliar good, the universal remote control, the presence of other bidders seems to have provided a signal to consumers that the product is authentic. Furthermore, we tested between group differences on the maximum
amount that participants were willing to pay for both products. A between groups analysis revealed that participants were willing to pay significantly more for the DVDs when there were no other bidders versus the condition where there were multiple bidders (F(1, 59)=7.93, p<0.01, MSDVD_social presence=10.114 vs. MSDVD_social presence absent=7.749). There were no observed differences between the two groups in the willingness to pay for the universal remote control.

In conclusion, our findings demonstrate that under conditions of uncertainty, informational social influence can enhance the perceived quality of products. However, when consumers are familiar with the products in question, informational social influence can create negative byproducts through its employment which we have demonstrated can decrease the value of the product as well as its perceived quality.

### Selected References:

### Investigation of Differences in Diffusion Between Positive and Negative Word-of-Mouth
Andreas M. Kaplan, ESCP Europe, France
Michael Haenlein, ESCP Europe, France

**Extended Abstract**

Word-of-Mouth (WoM) is a topic that has received regular interest among Marketing researchers over the last 50 years in both traditional (e.g. Day 1971; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Thorelli 1971; Udell 1966) and electronic settings (e.g. Dellarocas 2003; Dwyer 2007; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Kozinets 2002). Within this stream of research, we investigate how WoM valence (i.e. positive vs. negative WoM) influences WoM diffusion characteristics based on data from a French virtual world, similar to the US-based “Second Life” application.

**Study 1**

Study 1 investigates the impact of valence on WoM diffusion frequency (i.e. the number of contacts WoM is spread to) and speed (i.e. the time elapsed between receiving and retransmitting the information). With respect to WoM diffusion frequency, it is commonly believed that negative WoM is spread to more contacts than positive WoM (e.g. Silverman 1997), triggered by several research studies showing that negative WoM from dissatisfied customers exceeds the amount of positive WoM by satisfied clients (e.g. Bearden and Teel 1983; Richins 1983a, b; Westbrook 1987). However, East, Hammond, and Wright (2007) show that differences in aggregated WoM volume are caused by differences in WoM penetration (i.e. the share of the population spreading WoM) instead of differences in individual-level diffusion frequencies. Given that people take account of the needs of others when engaging in information transmission, the same customers are likely to spread both positive and negative WoM (with equal frequency), depending on the information needs of the receiver (East et al. 2007; Mangold, Miller, and Brockway 1999). We therefore assume that WoM diffusion frequency is independent from WoM valence. Regarding diffusion speed, we expect negative WoM to spread faster than positive WoM as unpleasant or potentially dangerous situations lead to a strong negative reaction, the negativity bias (e.g. Ito et al. 1998). This is supported by studies in the Finance discipline showing that stock prices tend to reflect bad news faster than good news (Lobo 2000) and that good news have more pronounced lagged effects than bad news (Marshall and Walker 2002). This leads to the following two hypotheses:

**H1:** There is no impact of WoM valence on individual-level WoM diffusion frequency.

**H2:** WoM diffusion speed is higher for negative WoM than for positive WoM.

**Study 2**

Study 1 provides insight into the impact of WoM valence on basic WoM diffusion characteristics (i.e. how often and when). Study 2 analyzes the influence of social network-related variables on WoM transmission (i.e. to whom). We expect that strong ties are activated more frequently than weak ties in WoM diffusion as strong tie relationships tend to be more influential as information sources (Brown and Reingen 1987; Reingen and Kernan 1986) and their presence leads to higher levels of WoM (Fitzgerald Bone 1992; Wirtz and Chew 2002). Concerning WoM valence, we assume a moderating influence in the sense that this strong-tie preference will be even more pronounced for negative than for positive WoM. One the hand, we expect people to be reluctant to transmit negative WoM to weak tie relationships as it tends to be associated with unpleasant messages and a notion of complaining, potentially resulting in...
a negative impression that the transmitter may want to avoid (Sperduto, Calhoun, and Ciminero 1978; Tice et al. 1995). On the other hand, WoM to strong ties is likely to be caused by altruistic motives and the desire to help the receiver making better decisions. Given that the sender is likely to have a good level of understanding of the needs and likes of strong ties (Kiecker and Hartman 1994), s/he may be sufficiently confident sharing even negative information (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993; Wirtz and Chew 2002). This leads to the following two hypotheses:

H3: Strong ties are activated more often than weak ties in the WoM diffusion process.

H4: The preference for strong ties gets stronger with increasing WoM negativity.

Study 3
Studies 1 and 2 analyze WoM diffusion by focusing on messages received by some source and passed on to social contacts of varying degree of closeness. Study 3 addresses the question whether WoM that reflects hearsay shows different diffusion patterns than WoM originating from a personal and direct experience made by the WoM sender. Generally, we expect that personal experiences lead to higher degree of WoM than hearsay as they result in unique and less ambiguous information that people feel more confident to transmit (Fazio and Zanna 1981; Kardes, Allen, and Pontes 1993). With respect to WoM valence, we expect a moderating impact in the sense that information based on hearsay is more likely to be transmitted when it is of negative compared to positive valence. This is based on Kamins, Folkes, and Perner (1997) who showed that consumers are more inclined to spread negative than positive rumors and (Donavan, Mowen, and Chakraborty 1999) who indicate that urban legends with negative information are associated with higher levels of communication intent. This leads to the following two hypotheses:

H5: WoM based on personal experience will be transferred more often than WoM based on hearsay.

H6: For WoM based on hearsay, negative WoM is more likely to be transmitted than positive WoM.

Research Methodology
We plan to investigate the aforementioned hypotheses based on data we collected from a French virtual world, which is targeted toward children and teenagers. We chose this setting over traditional laboratory-style experiments as we expect it to provide a higher degree of external validity. Within this virtual world we launched 16 different messages (4 message per cell within a 2 levels of message strength x 2 levels of message valence design) and recorded the resulting WoM activities generated by the virtual world users (diffusion frequency, diffusion speed, type of social tie activation). Currently, we are in the process of coding the data obtained form the virtual world platform (weblogs) in order to prepare our data analysis.

References


### Are Bad Reviews Stronger than Good?

**Asymmetric Negativity Biases in the Formation of Online Consumer Trust**

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This research examines biases in the formation of trusting beliefs and intentions in an online environment. Interactions with unfamiliar sellers contain an element of uncertainty and risk (Reichheld and Schefter 2000), but modern consumers have access to various forms of information to help resolve this uncertainty, including online consumer reviews. Empirical studies have demonstrated a negativity bias whereby even a limited number of “bad” reviews from prior consumers have stronger impact than good reviews on sales and price premiums (Ba and Pavlou 2002; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). However, measurements of trust and corresponding beliefs are generally unavailable in secondary data. On the other hand, survey-based studies in the trust literature have tended to measure relevant constructs without regard to potential biases. To address this gap, we take an experimental approach and ask the following: Do consumers exposed to online reviews of a seller exhibit bias in the formation of trusting beliefs and intentions? If so, is the bias always negative? Drawing upon prospect theory and models of person perception, we propose that although consumers may exhibit a general negativity bias, the magnitude of this bias will depend on the dimension of seller behavior involved.

That tendency to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information has been established as a general principle of human judgment (Baumeister et al. 2001; Rozin and Royzman 2001). This tendency follows directly from Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) prospect theory, which posits that people derive value from gains and losses according to a nonlinear “value function” that is concave for gains and convex for losses; losses loom larger than gains. Applied to the risky environment of e-commerce, consumers will be more concerned with potential losses than with potential gains. In particular, when considering positive and negative information related to the trustworthiness of a seller, they will overweight the negative information, and this bias will subsequently lead to more negative trusting beliefs and eventual intentions.

However, evidence from the arena of person perception suggests that when judging others’ behavior, “bad is not always stronger than good”. For example, Skowronski and Carlton’s (1987) category diagnosticity model separates person-relevant information into ‘competence’ and ‘morality’ domains. The model suggests that most individuals possess schemas in which moral people exhibit moral behaviors all the time; therefore, a single immoral behavior is a reliable indicator of immorality. The same is not true for competence, where even competent individuals occasionally fail; a single success is a more reliable indicator of competence, while a single failure is generally discounted. Online trust literature also breaks trusting beliefs into “competence” and “integrity” dimensions among others.
Advances in Consumer Research (Volume 38) / 741

(McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany 1998). Applying this domain-specific approach to the current setting, we predict that consumers’ trusting beliefs pertaining to a seller’s integrity will be more negatively biased than their trusting beliefs pertaining to a seller’s competence.

We conducted two studies to test our hypothesis in a typical e-commerce setting involving word-of-mouth. Study 1 presented 36 undergraduate participants with aggregated profile ‘ratings’ regarding different characteristics of online sellers. The study utilized a 2 (profile dimension: competence, integrity) × 2 (store rating manipulation: treatment, control) within-subject design. Participants were told that they were shopping for a camera and asked to read profiles summarizing consumer reviews of four different online stores. Each store’s profile was composed of two sections, one related to competence and the other related to integrity; each section listed three relevant items along with an average rating for each item. All ratings were presented using a 5-point “smiley face” scale ranging from “very negative” to “very positive”. The ratings for treatment stores’ first profile section were (0, -2, 2) or (0, 2, -2), while those for control stores were all neutral; ratings in the second profile section were identical between treatment and control stores. Participants were asked their competence and integrity beliefs after the first profile section, and their overall trust and purchasing intention after the whole profile of a store. As predicted, results indicated that negativity bias implied by a lower evaluation of the treatment stores was not universal, but rather depended on the category of seller behavior involved. Participants in the integrity condition were negatively biased in their trusting beliefs, overall trust and purchasing intention; however, none of these biases were significant for participants in the competence condition.

Study 2 extended our investigation from simple, numeric seller ratings to the more elaborate domain of written reviews. The study involved a mixed design in which participants were asked to read five consumer reviews about a particular online store before deciding whether to buy a camera from that store. The first three ‘baseline reviews’ were the same for all participants and had been pretested to be neutral in their implications regarding the sellers’ competence and integrity. Next, participants read two additional ‘treatment’ reviews pertaining to either competence or integrity, depending on condition. The two treatment reviews were pretested to be opposite in valence and similar in extremity. In order to capture belief changes, participants were asked to report their trusting beliefs and overall trust before and after reading the two treatment reviews. Analysis of belief changes revealed that as predicted, both groups exhibited significant negativity bias, but the extent of bias was dramatically greater for the integrity condition. Furthermore, analysis of overall trust revealed a negativity bias for participants in the integrity condition, but no significant bias for the competence condition.

This research contributes to literature on trust formation and e-commerce in several ways. Theoretically, we break new ground by identifying the existence of negativity biases in the formation of trusting beliefs and intentions and by exploring whether “bad is always stronger” in B2C commerce. Our studies indicate that although negativity bias does impact trust formation in this setting, it is much more prevalent for information regarding sellers’ integrity than for information regarding their competence. Our results also have practical implications for retailers seeking to establish trust among potential customers: e.g., negative word-of-mouth regarding integrity is particularly difficult to overcome, and should be handled proactively.

Selected References


The Impact of Negative Online Reviews: When Does Reviewer Similarity Make a Difference?

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Extended Abstract

The advent of the internet has brought major changes to the way consumers search for information and express their opinions about products or services. Message boards, blogs, user review websites, etc. have become increasingly important for today’s online consumers to exchange opinions and experiences related to both companies and their offerings. Although online reviews have been mainly perceived to be anonymous, recent improvements in the design of websites have enabled individuals to have different degrees of profile disclosure (picture, name, age, gender, short biography) which, contrary to the general assumption in the word of mouth literature, introduces cues on which consumers can rely and base their judgments on. We conduct a study to investigate whether the perceived homophily between the reader and the reviewer has any impact on the influence of the word of mouth message. Homophily is defined as “the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar with respect to attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, age, gender, lifestyle, etc”(Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). We also seek to qualify this effect by focusing on the different nature
of hedonic and utilitarian consumption (Adaval, 2001; Batra & Ahtola, 1991). Because utility maximization is considered to be more tangible and objective, consumers should be just as willing to rely on other consumers’ evaluations whether that consumer is similar to them or not. In contrast, the evaluation of hedonic products is linked to expectations which could be subject to individual lifestyle. Therefore, we hypothesize that higher (vs. lower) homophily influences the effect of negative product reviews on product evaluation for hedonic products, but not for utilitarian ones.

The hotel industry was chosen as the context of the study. One hundred and eleven bachelor students participated in a 2 (Hedonic vs. Utilitarian) x 2 (Homophilous vs. Non-homophilous) between-subjects experiment in class. The dependent variable was participants’ evaluation of the hotel.

After an introductory first page, participants read a scenario which was designed to manipulate the hedonic or utilitarian consumption situations. In the utilitarian case, participants were asked to imagine themselves trying to book a hotel for a stay in Frankfurt with a colleague. In the hedonic scenario, they were asked to imagine themselves going to Paris with their partner and choosing a hotel which would ensure their enjoyment. Participants were then presented with two online reviews about the hotel. Each review included a profile, a comment (one-two lines explaining how the reviewer saw the hotel), and a rating (a star ranking of the hotel given by the reviewer on a seven-star system). The first review and its corresponding profile were kept constant for all the groups and was a neutral review (rating of 5 out of 7) coming from a journalist. Negative word of mouth and homophily were manipulated through the second review and its corresponding profile. The negative comment (rating of 2 out of 7) was kept constant for all the groups. For the homophilous group, the reviewer was a business student and in the non-homophilous group the reviewer was a researcher for “a major chemical company”. Next, eleven items measured the product evaluation, manipulation checks and two covariates. Two questions were asked to measure the participants’ product evaluation (good choice; favorable attitude). Homophily manipulations were checked using a three item scale. Two items measured the extent to which participants perceived the hotel to be hedonic (fun; enjoyable and exciting) and two items the extent to which they perceived it to be functional (cover functional needs; practical considerations). The two covariates were the perceived degree of expertise of the reviewer and importance of the decision of choosing the hotel. Manipulation checks and covariate question were presented last in order.

An analysis of the data revealed that the manipulations worked as intended. For testing the hypothesis we first ran an ANOVA test with hotel evaluation as a dependent variable and “homophily” and “product type” as independent factors, and using the two covariates mentioned earlier. The expertise covariate had a significant effect on the dependent variable (F(1,105)=3.93), whereas the choice importance did not (p>.7). The ANCOVA model suggested that the main effect of “homophily” failed to reach significance (3.86 vs. 4.19, F(1,105)=2.74, p>.1). Meanwhile, the main effect of “product type” was significant, with the evaluation of the hedonic product being significantly lower than the one for of utilitarian one (3.81 vs. 4.23, F(1,105)=4.26, p<.05). Supporting the hypothesis, the interaction was significant (F(1,105)=4.49, p<.04). Planned contrasts analyses revealed that the effect of “homophily” was not significant when the hotel was perceived to be utilitarian (4.28 vs. 4.19, F(1,105)=.13, p>.7). However, when the hotel was perceived to be hedonic, the hotel evaluation was significantly lower when the reviewer was “homophilous” rather than not (3.44 vs. 4.19, F(1,105)=7.26, p<.01). Also, a similar analysis revealed the same results, not including the covariates.

Therefore, consistent with the hypothesis, homophily increases the influence of negative product reviews only in case of hedonic products.

From a theoretical perspective, this study sheds light on how the cues consumers use in the face-to-face environments map into online environments. To our knowledge, this is also the first research that qualifies the influence of homophily in the word of mouth literature.

From a managerial perspective, the study provides insights into how reviews on websites can influence consumers’ product evaluations. It shows that negative word of mouth is riskier for experiential (hedonic) products and that this risk is higher when it comes from similar consumers providing reviews. In terms of segmentation, managers should be encouraged to pay more attention to consumer complaints about experiential products, especially when they are coming from company’s target or core customers. Such customers are more likely to form a unitary and similar group. This will prevent target customers from engaging in word of mouth that is most harmful for the company.

Selected References

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**Best-Seller or Your-Style Recommendation Sign?**

**Effect of Self-Construal on Inclination Towards Inter- vs. Intrapersonal Norm**

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**Extended Abstract**

Modern consumers are often loaded with options. Despite the initial pleasure one might feel when provided with many goods to choose from, it is very likely that s/he will feel frustrated by how difficult a choice is to make (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2005). Product recommendations are intended to aid consumers with their decision making process and to promote sales by highlighting a
particular product. The present research focuses on two broad types of norm-based product recommendations and demonstrates how the level of self-construal determines the way consumers react to these recommendations.

Recommendations can be based on intropersonal norm or interpersonal norm. An intropersonal norm is realized through a repeated behavioral pattern within a single individual (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). People have the need to act in a coherent manner (Swann Jr, 1983), and technology has allowed retailers to generate recommendations designating a product alternative as “Your-Style” based on consumers’ purchase histories, browsing patterns, and preferences. On the other hand, an interpersonal norm is formed through observing other people’s behavior. Simply observing what other people are doing could influence one’s own decision, even when there is no apparent pressure (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004). The most common example of an interpersonal norm in a consumption setting would be the indication of “Best-Seller” that captures consensus between individuals.

Which norm-based recommendation is more effective, however, will depend on one’s level of self-construal. An independent construal of the self “requires construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful by reference to one’s own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions,” whereas the interdependent self-construal entails understanding oneself “as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one’s behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, pp. 226–227). Because of the differential sensitivity towards internal vs. external repertoires among independent vs. interdependent individuals, we predict that interpersonal (vs. intrapersonal) norm-based recommendations have a stronger effect on recommendation evaluation, choice of the recommendation, and post-choice evaluation among highly interdependent (vs. low interdependent or independent) people. Specifically, we compare inter- and intrapersonal norm recommendations operationalized as Best-Seller and Your-Style recommendation signs, respectively. Three studies examine the moderating effect of self-construal via priming (pilot study), measured as a chronic trait (study 1), or operationalized by culture (study 2).

A pilot study confirms that evaluation of the two norm-based recommendations differed as a function of self-construal. Participants read a scenario describing either a Best Seller or Your Style recommendation. Self construal was primed using the established scenario of Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991). Supporting our prediction, a Norm Recommendation Type x Self-Construal interaction showed that interdependence-primed (vs. independence-primed) participants reported the Best-Seller (vs. Your-Style) recommendation as more attractive (F(1,90)=3.569, p=.062) and had stronger intentions to follow (F(1,90)=3.698, p=.058).

Study 1 examines how the presence of either a Best-Seller or a Your-Style sign affects participants’ choice of office chairs as a function of self-construal. Although the product recommendations were in fact placed on the same product across all conditions, participants were lead to believe that the Best-Seller sign was generated based on the retailer’s customer database and the Your-Style sign based on their own previously revealed preferences. In order to make it a strong test, the recommendation was always placed on the second most attractive product. Self construal was measured using the classic self-construal scale of Singelis (1994). Consistent with our prediction, the Norm Recommendation Type x Self Construal interaction revealed the likelihood of participants choosing a recommended product over the most attractive product was higher when the product recommendation was based on a norm that was highly relevant to their given self-construal (b=1.432, t=1.737, p=.082). Specifically, highly interdependent (vs. independent) participants were more likely to choose the recommended product when presented with a Best-Seller (vs. Your-Style) sign recommendation.

Study 2 then explores whether the interaction between norm recommendation type and self-construal extends to post-choice satisfaction. Moreover, instead of examining compliance behavior, study 2 looks at the effect of deviating from recommendations. Norm based recommendation was manipulated similar to Study 1 and self construal was operationalized as individualistic vs. collectivist cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The product stimuli was sofa chairs. In all conditions, the recommendation was placed on an objectively unattractive option so subjects would choose a non-recommended option (93%). This allowed us to gauge the effect of deviating from a recommendation on participants’ choice satisfaction after choosing a non-recommended option. Supporting our conceptualization that the presence of a self-relevant recommendation would impact people’s post-choice evaluations, there was a significant Norm Recommendation Type x Self Construal interaction on post-choice satisfaction (F(1,90)=5.425, p=.022). Specifically, when participants from a highly interdependent (vs. independent) cultural background were presented with a Best-Seller (vs. Your-Style) recommendation and rejected it, they felt lower choice satisfaction. This result suggests that even when a person strongly disagrees with a recommendation and decides not to follow it, the fact that s/he has been presented with and had to forgo a self-relevant recommendation can undermine his consumption experience.

The present research introduces self-construal as a meaningful predictor in determining which type of norm-based recommendation has a more powerful influence on people’s evaluation of the recommendation, compliance to recommendation, and post-choice satisfaction after deviating from recommendation. Presenting consumers with a self-relevant norm could be an efficient way to aid consumers’ decision as it increases the appeal of the recommendation and the probability of choosing the recommended item. However, when a relevant norm is misplaced it could also be a source of consumer dissatisfaction and regret. Practical implications and future research extensions are discussed.

References
Prospective Motivated Reasoning in Charitable Giving:
Making Sense of Our Future Behavior and Protecting Our Future Self
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Extended Abstract
The present research also falls under the large umbrella of motivated or biased reasoning (Bem 1972, Greenwald & Ronis 1978, Wicklund & Brehm 1976). It is similar to previous work showing that people alter their attitude to reduce the gap between what they believe and how they have behaved, in order to restore a favorable self-view. However, our design differs from previous research in two ways. First, our research looks at people’s tendency to make sense of their prospective (rather than retrospective) behavior, and second, our findings do not depend on the respondents actually behaving in the way they fear they might behave. While a decision has not yet been made, people may reason in a forward looking manner, preparing a basis or a safety net for their potentially undesirable future behavior. We look into this effect of prospective biased reasoning in the context of donation or charitable giving. Even without the conventional form of “products” involved, the topic of altruistic consumer behavior is highly relevant to marketing because the structure or relationship between providers and suppliers remains largely similar. Moreover, understanding people’s altruistic behavior gives insights into the consumption of ethically enhanced products.

Acting against one’s own self-interest to satisfy a moral imperative (such as helping others) is likely to involve struggle or conflict between one’s actual and ideal self. The present research examines how this struggle or conflict plays a role in people’s prospective reasoning—specifically, how people prepare a safe pathway to escape from the perceived obligation to help others, without hurting their positive and moral self-view.

In our experiment, participants were told that the study was a collaborative project with a non-profit organization. Before starting, they were given information about this organization to read and learn about its identity, goal, and activity. One group of participants were informed at the beginning of the survey that they will be asked to donate a part of their compensation to the organization at the end of the experiment, while the other group was not told that they would be asked to make donations to this organization. Whether the donation was made by real or hypothetical money was also manipulated as a proxy for motivational strength to talk oneself out of making a donation. Thus, there was a 2 (donation request revealed at beginning vs. not revealed) X 2 (real vs. hypothetical donation) design. We were particularly interested in the change in participants’ beliefs regarding the seriousness of the social issues being addressed by the organization (AIDS and poverty). We found a number of two-way interactions, including for rated seriousness of the AIDS problem (b=.199, t=2.30, p=.022) and rated seriousness of poverty (b=.146, t=1.772, p=.078). Participants in the real money condition who were informed (vs. not informed) about the donation opportunity prior to the evaluation of social issues were more likely to believe that the social issues were less serious. (b=.437, t=3.005, p=.003 for AIDS and b=-.281, t=2.039, p=.043 for poverty).

We were also interested in the effect on behavior. Those who saw (vs. did not see) the donation information prior to the evaluation questions donated significantly less hypothetical money (b=-.411, t=2.744, p=.007). However, this behavioral effect was non-significant in the real money condition, probably because most people in this condition did not donate (i.e., a floor effect). Interestingly, however, when participants were asked to donate their real money, those who were informed about the donation opportunity ahead of time perceived higher level of financial constraint, compared to those who were informed about the donation opportunity later (b=.477, t=1.805, p=.076). We also found a mediating pattern where a set of negative moods (e.g. afraid, scared, and hostile) explained why knowing ahead about the donation opportunity led to lowered perception of issue seriousness (z=1.69, p=.08).

Overall, our findings suggest that informing people that they may be asked to donate in the future causes a particular type of “potential dissonance” reduction process in a prospective direction, even when respondents do not donate anyway. That is, knowing about a donation opportunity earlier makes people feel uncomfortable because there is a potential threat on one’s positive self-view in case one decides not behave in an altruistic manner in the future. While people have not yet made any decision, they may still prepare for this potential threat by creating a safety pathway to escape if necessary, while keeping their positive self-view intact. Consequent (proposed) studies aim to discover whether people have already made their decision to donate at an implicit (or may even at an explicit) level once they are informed about the donation opportunity. This will clarify the question about how similar or different the effect is from classic dissonance theories. Another research direction is to examine whether one’s level of self-esteem serves as a moderator, as the motivation seems to come from the restoration or defense of positive self-view. In addition, whether or not the changes in attitudes persist after the experiment also matters of interest; it would be good to know whether the denigration of the issue and the organization persists after the threat is gone.

References
Promoting Products versus Outcomes to impact the Decision Making Process: the Power of Recommending One Product
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Extended Abstract
When going online to buy a product, consumers are often exposed to several product variants instantly on the introductory page of the website. This can be a presentation of the web shops’ bestsellers, or a presentation of the available assortment within the specific product category. An immediate confrontation with concrete products may stimulate consumers to buy, but it may suppress consumers’ goal oriented thinking. In other words, consumers may choose a product to buy, but may neglect to formulate personal goals or benefits previously. Although it might have a positive effect on sales, this can be unfavorable in situations in which you want consumers to think about their decision behavior in a structured way. For example, in the current health debate we want to make people more conscious about their food decisions.

We distinguish two types of messages in purchase settings. Specific product exposures, on the one hand, recommend specific products because of a certain benefit. Generic messages, on the other hand, recommend a product category because of a certain benefit—for example “Yoghurt is healthy—and are not specific on product level.

Within the decision making process of daily goods, we distinguish two decision stages. In the first stage consumers investigate their need for the product being considered and weigh the pros and cons of buying a product. This leads to a goal-oriented mental representation with more attention and better recall of goal related information. The second stage incorporates the decision which of the alternatives consumers prefer. This type of decision making leads to a comparative mental representation (Xu, Wyer, 2008).

A message functions as a stimulus, which leads to a mental representation. Exposing consumers to a generic recommendation, moves consumers in a goal-oriented mental representation. Exposing consumers to a specific multiple product recommendation moves consumers in a comparative mental representation (Xu, Wyer 2008). These mental representations in turn impact the processes of benefit activation and choice. A good understanding of the impact of different types of messages on the mental representations in the defined decision stages is still lacking. In this paper a theoretical framework is developed to understand the impact of different types of messages on the decision making process.

Our contribution is to give insight in how generic and specific product recommendations can be combined best to steer consumers’ mental representations of daily decisions and therefore to promote the product choices anticipated by the recommender. The first contribution of this paper is that we show that generic recommendations are more effective in activating benefits than specific multiple product recommendations. We give evidence why specific multiple product recommendations are not very effective in benefit activation. Recommendations are more effective in benefit activation when generating a goal-oriented mindset. Specific multiple product recommendations seem to bring people in a comparative mindset. The second contribution is that specific multiple product recommendations are more effective in activating choices, which are anticipated by the recommender, than generic recommendations.

The third and main contribution of this paper is that it shows that a specific single product recommendation has best of both worlds; it is able to activate benefits— as well as a generic recommendation—and to translate these activated benefits into choice activation—as well as a multiple product recommendation. In the end we show that the above relationship between recommendation type and task performance is moderated by the focus of the respondent. For example, for respondents with a health focus, health benefit activation is attenuated for their need for the product being considered and weigh the pros and cons of buying a product. This leads to a goal-oriented mental representation (Xu, Wyer, 2008).

In five experiments under students in between-subject designs, we examined the impact of the different types of health recommendations on benefit activation and happy product choice.

Selected references:
The Use of Rankings in Uncertainty Reduction Efforts: A Basis Paradigm
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During the last years there has been a huge increase in available choice options for customers (Schwartz et al. 2002), a phenomenon called hyperchoice (Mick, Broniarczyk, and Haidt 2004). But confrontation with an overload of alternatives makes decision making more difficult (Schwartz 2004), partly because customers feel more responsible for their choices (Iyengar, and Lepper 2000). The result is a decrease in choice confidence (Chernev 2003), leading to greater uncertainty (Anderson 2003). In addition, consumers often face decisions involving unfamiliar goods (Chocarro, Cortíñas, and Elorz 2009). According to Berger and Calabrese (1975) there is a human drive to reduce uncertainty. Consumer will engage in uncertainty reduction efforts by searching information, where especially the opinions of others are often consulted (Weiss, Lurie, and MacInnis 2008). One possible source of information is rankings. Ranking are applied in an increasing number of situations, yet no relevant research has been conducted so far. In this study we will explore the effect of rankings on consumer decisions.

Making a choice in the modern purchasing environment, that is characterized by an ever growing consumption, increasing assortment sizes, and a growing number of brands and products (Mick 2008), requires the access to information. It has repeatedly demonstrated that information search increases systematically with experienced uncertainty (Lanzetta, and Driscoll 1968; Urbany, Dickson, and Wilkie 1989). It enables the decision maker to evaluate alternatives on relevant traits and to make a thoughtful choice, reducing the risk and probability of a non-optimal outcome (Mitchell 1992). Additionally, in situations where the consumer possesses little knowledge about the products, no prior experience is present and it is assumed that consumers depend on information available in the choice itself (Bettman, and Park 1980). One kind of information often consulted for this is the opinion of others. Available in numerous forms, other’s opinion have been shown to influence consumers’ evaluations, when relevant product attribute information was not accessible (Bearden, and Etzel 1982). Information sources in the form of online forums, book recommendations and newspaper columns are therefore of great value for the customer.

While former research focused on some of this information sources, we will investigate the effect of rankings. From the New York Times Best Seller list, the Nielsen Ratings and Billboard charts, to the top 10 lists in our local video and music stores, rankings are a part of our everyday life. They structure our ways of thinking about comparisons, contrasts and order and may be another way for consumers to reduce their uncertainty (Hakanek 1998). The purpose of this study is to investigate what role rankings play in the preference formation task. We hypothesize that in a situation of uncertainty, consumers will use rankings in order to form their preferences.

In order to test our hypothesis, we administered a questionnaire to eighty-eight respondents, asking them to express their preferences for 10 rather unknown brands of champagne. We randomly divided the respondents into 4 conditions each facing a different ranking. Condition 1 provided a simple top 10 list, while condition 2 additionally included expert scores. Condition 3 also was a simple ranking, but the 2 top brands of condition 1 were ranked as the two “worst” brands, and vice versa. Condition 4 simply was a list, without any ranking implied. Respondents had to indicate their willingness to pay (WTP) for each of the brands. We also included measures concerning the familiarity with the product category and the different brands (showing no familiarity with the brands included), and a scale measuring respondents’ preference for numerical information. In order to test our hypothesis we estimated a multilevel regression model.

Our results indicate that rankings may indeed strongly affect consumer preferences. In particular, we found that our respondents’ evaluation of a given brand (expressed by the WTP) depended on the rank of the brand in the list. Respondents are willing to pay more for brands that are ranked higher (versus lower). In addition, for the 10 brands involved, respondents indicate a higher WTP than for those same brands when the order of presentation reflected no ranking (condition 4). We assume that the ranking itself could offer respondents some indication about the value of the brand. Interestingly, the effect of rank was moderated by preference for numerical information (PNI). A high PNI indicates that respondents have an eye for numerical information and use it in their decision making, especially in settings that require only a minimum level of mathematical ability (Viswanathan 1993). Our results show that individuals with a high PNI are more likely to use rankings, compared to individuals with a low PNI. The effect of rank was also moderated by familiarity with the product category. For respondents not familiar with champagne, rankings show less effect. That is, the slope relating rank position and WTP was less steep for them. Finally, we also observed a main effect of product category familiarity: respondents unfamiliar with champagne indicated a lower WTP for champagne brands.

To conclude, our results show that rankings have an influence on the preference formulation in uncertain situations. Further research must indicate the robustness and generalizability of the current findings. Investigating the potential moderation by other customer characteristics, such as the difference between maximizers and satisficers or the need for closure on the use of specific rankings would also add to the literature.

References


### Citations and Herding: Why One Article Makes It and Another Doesn’t

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The information era has brought with it the well-known problem of ‘information explosion’ (Hanani, and Frank 2000): researchers face an ever-increasing amount of information and with the arrival of the internet and search engines they have more options in seeking and obtaining information than ever before (Junni 2007). At the same time, the number of marketing-related journals has increased rapidly in recent years (Baumgartner, and Pieters 2003) and journals expand into broader fields of research. This proliferation of information comes with greater uncertainty (Anderson 2003) and increases the difficulty to select an option (Schwartz et al. 2002). According to the uncertainty reduction theory (Berger, and Calabrese 1975), people will engage in uncertainty reduction efforts to alleviate and eliminate the risk caused by uncertainty and to maximize outcome value. One kind of information often used in these efforts is the number of citations. While the number of citations may not be a perfect indicator of quality (Walter et al. 2003) it does play an important role in the evaluation of academics and papers (Stremersch, Verniers, and Verhoef 2007). In this study we will explore the role of herding in citing behavior.

In order to select sources for their research, one has to make a choice out of a seemingly endless amount of articles. In such a context of uncertainty, Parker and Prechter (2005) have seen a default to a herding impulse: people may imitate each other out of a desire to be safe. They may believe that persons before them had better information on the quality of articles than they themselves do, and therefore may include the articles in their own research (Bonabeau 2004). We assume that the number of citations serves as a quality cue for a given paper. As individuals follow the previous citing behavior of others without taking their own information into account, they will concentrate on a limited amount of articles with an established citation record. When this imitation occurs in large numbers, informational cascades can be formed (Banerjee 1992; Bikchandani Hirshleifer, and Welch 1992). The limited number of papers that is already cited tends to accumulate citations increasingly rapidly while a larger set of initially uncited papers tends to be (virtually) ignored.

While former research (Stremersch et al. 2007) focused on static determinants of citations (e.g. quality and domain of the article, visibility and personal promotion), we focus on herding behavior of researchers, a dynamic determinant. In order to investigate our hypothesis, our study will be divided into two parts, the demand and the supply side: On the one hand, we will examine the herding effect of citations by the means of citation counts. On the other hand, we will look at the possible increase in the supply of journals and its articles.

For the first part of our study we collected citation data via Web of Science. We sampled six major marketing journals: *JCR, JRM, JM, MKS, JCP and IJRMA*. We inventoried all articles published in these journals in 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2005. For each article we tallied the number of citations made in each of the 5 years following its year of publication. The herding effect will be examined by means of a mixed model approach, where the number an article got cited each year is the dependent variable and the year of publication, the year after publication, the journal and the number of citations in the first year serve as independent variables. In the absence of herding, the cites that a paper receives in the first five years after publication should be distributed uniformly over those five years. In case of herding, on the other hand, a steady increase of the number of cites that a paper attracts should be observed. Moreover, this increase should be more pronounced for papers that are already heavily cited in the first year after publication.
The results confirm our expectations. We can see a significant increase in the number of citations each year, therefore indicating a more than linear rise in the cumulative number of citations. This herding effect is moderated by the year of publication, the specific journal as well as by the number of citations in the first year. The herding effect is more pronounced in 2005 than in 2000 ($p=.07)$. In addition, stronger herding is observed in 2000 than in 1985, 1990 and 1995; the latter three do not significantly differ. The stronger herding in 2000 and 2005 can partly be explained by the growing use of electronically retrieved information, causing a larger amount of information. The difference between 2005 and 2000 can be explained by the introduction of Web of Science, making citation-oriented search even more convenient and common. The herding behavior observed for $JM$ also differs significantly from that of $JCR$, $JMR$, MKS, $JCP$ and $IJRM$. It exhibits strong herding. We also found stronger herding for articles that are heavily cited in the first year.

The second part of the study investigates whether the information supply for researcher has increased over the past decade (years 1998 to 2008). To do so, we developed a list of the different journals that were cited in the 6 target journals. We also tallied how often a specific journal was cited. If the supply of relevant information has increased, we would expect that the number of cited journals has also steadily increased.

Our findings confirm this expectation. Interestingly, the number of cites that come from the Top 5–cited journals have increased. This implies that the distribution of citations has become more lopsided: an increasing amount of journals are hardly cited while another, small proportion is heavily cited. This again testifies to the herding phenomenon in citing behavior.

To conclude, our results show that citing behavior is characterized by significant herding. In addition, herding has become more pronounced over the past decade. Finally, increased herding may be attributed to the increased supply of relevant information. The latter is exhibited by an increase of the number of used journals.

References


Living a Second Life: The Role of Goals and Mental Imagery on Satisfaction Online

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Online Virtual Environments (OVE), a new technology launched during the late 1980s, are revolutionizing the way products are consumed. OVEs are environments in which synthetic sensory information leads users to perceive the virtual environment as if it was not synthetic (Blascovich et al. 2002). Because of this unique characteristic, OVEs allow users not only to buy or sell products, but also to consume products online. For instance, in Second Life, a virtual world available on the web, consumers may purchase and drive a virtual Mercedes-Benz, wear virtual Giorgio Armani shirts or visit the Smithsonian’s Virtual Latino Museum.

Because of its ability to enable online consumption, OVEs are gradually gaining attention from both managers and consumers. Recently, the CIO of the Smithsonian Institute affirmed that the institution’s investment in the virtual world is supported by the prediction that 80% of active Internet users in 2008 will be consumers in virtual worlds by the year 2011 (Smithsonian Institute 2008). Furthermore, consumers in the virtual world spent, in 2009 alone, around $400 million in products and services from thousands of companies such as Mercedes-Benz, Nike, and Dell. However, although the importance of the OVE as a marketing channel and branding tool is increasing (Barnes and Mattsson 2008), the main determinants of individual satisfaction with online consumption are still unknown (Hoffman and Novak 2009).
In the present research, we rely on literature from the general web-browsing context to build a model of online consumption. As a starting point, state of flow is a central antecedent of user satisfaction on the web (Hoffman and Novak 1996; Novak, Hoffman and Yung 2000). Furthermore, researchers have presented significant evidence of the importance of website content in inducing state of flow and user satisfaction with online experience (Novak, Hoffman and Duhachek 2003). Building on this basic idea, because use of OVEs is strongly associated with the satisfaction of experiential and symbolic needs (Viclam and Ulusoy 2008; Yee 2006), we propose that the extent to which the OVE allows users to satisfy experiential and symbolic needs will be an alternative content feature that influences both state of flow and user evaluation of online consumption experience.

Moreover, the dynamics of online experiences are structurally different than those of real world experiences. Specifically, unlike in the real world, the consumption in OVEs is reportedly an indirect experience (Hamilton and Thompson 2007). Importantly, in indirect experiences, sensory information is not presented directly, but depends on individual capability to emulate the sensations elicited by the OVE. As a result, the extent to which sensory information is presented in working memory (i.e., level of mental imagery processing (MacInnis and Price 1987)) will be a key moderator of the extent to which an OVE can satisfy aroused individual goals. Particularly, for high mental imagery processing, consumers will process the sensory information elicited by the OVE intensively. In this case, since consumers will have a significant amount of sensory information to support assessments of progress toward their aroused goals, the extent to which the OVE can satisfy these goals will have a positive effect on flow and, consequently, on individual evaluation of the online consumption experience. On the contrary, because under low imagery processing, consumers will process a lesser amount of sensory information, they will have a limited basis to judge the extent to which goals are being satisfied. As a result, even though consumers might still present moderate levels of flow (Novak et al. 2003), consumers under low imagery processing will not be sensitive to the extent to which experiential goals can be satisfied online. We test these hypotheses in one study.

We manipulated level of mental imagery and the extent to which goals can be satisfied online and measured individual state of flow and satisfaction with the online experience. Seventy-seven undergraduate students participated in the research. The virtual environment of the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institute was chosen as the OVE. Participants were first asked to write an essay to arouse goals that either could (i.e., learn new things) or could not (i.e., share experience with others) be satisfied online. Next, following previous manipulations of mental imagery (Petrova and Cialdini 2005), participants read the instructions to browse in the museum’s virtual environment, being either encouraged or discouraged to use their imagination.

The results of an ANOVA supported the hypotheses. Particularly, the extent to which a goal can be satisfied online had a positive effect on both flow (p<0.05) and evaluation of the online experience (p<0.01). Additionally, we found a significant interaction between the extent to which goals can be satisfied in the OVE and level of mental imagery on both flow (p<0.05) and satisfaction with the online experience (p<0.01). Specifically, individuals in high mental imagery processing felt higher state of flow and evaluated better the online consumption experience when they were able to satisfy aroused goals online. On the other hand, individuals in low imagery processing presented no difference in both state of flow and experience evaluation, regardless of the extent to which their goals could be satisfied in the OVE. Finally, using the bootstrap technique (Preacher, Rucker and Hayes 2007), we verified that flow is a significant mediator of the interaction on the “evaluation of online experience” for individuals in high mental imagery processing but not for those low in imagery processing.

The present research is, to the best of our knowledge, the first attempt to unveil the process underlying consumers’ consumption in this novel environment. Past research in psychology and marketing has linked individual state of flow with the pleasantness of the activity. In the present research we show that the extent to which goals can be satisfied in the OVE and level of mental imagery processing will be important variables in the process of online consumption experience.

References
“The existence of united groups of online consumers implies that power is shifting away from marketers and flowing to consumers” (Kozinets 1999:258).

Social movements are activists’ collective efforts to transform the social order (Buechler 2000) often with respect to consumption and marketing (Kozinets and Handleman 2004) in terms of anti-brands (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006) and other forms of resistance to consumption (Penaloza and Price 1993). Such movements organized to resist various industrial or marketing practices, comprises of the goal, the activists, and their adversary (Melucci 1989; Touraine 1981). While activism traditionally entailed activists meeting and engaging in protests, the Internet has given rise to web-based activism. Vegh (2003) classifies web-based, or web-enhanced, activism into three categories: awareness/advocacy, organization/mobilization, and action/reaction. Awareness/Advocacy entail providing contrary information to raise awareness on a given issue, organizing the movement, and engaging in lobbying efforts; Organization/Mobilization may comprise of calling for offline action, and calling for offline action that maybe more effectively conducted through the internet; finally, Action/Reaction involves online attacks on various sites of interest by hackers or “hacktivists” (Vegh 2003).

Social media has facilitated the rise of a new form of activist known as the ‘slactivist.’ While this term is somewhat derivative, it aptly describes consumers who care for social causes but only up to a certain point of engagement and effort. These consumers will sign on-line petitions and join Facebook activist pages but do not have the desire, and/or resources to engage in traditional activism such as protests (Caplan 2009). We contend that Internet activists who influence slactivists to the point that they engage in real-life action ways create win-win situations. The consumers win in terms of garnering psychological well-being thorough their contributions towards societal welfare; the corporations win through being rewarded for their efforts to adopt socially responsible practices; the society at large benefits through these practices; and the activists win through achieving their goals of encouraging corporations to adopt socially responsible practices, thereby planting seeds for industry-wide changes. This win-win situation mirrors the latest AMA definition of marketing perfectly and illustrates the power of consumers in today’s world. In this paper we focus on examining the way consumer activists, interested in forming cooperative relationships with firms, engage with other consumers using social media to influence their typical purchasing behaviors in order to create a win-win situation for all involved parties. Therefore, we explore Carrotmob, an online consumer activists’ movement, which exemplifies cooperative consumer activism and word-of-mouth (WOM) activities facilitated by Internet and social media.

Carrotmob

Carrotmob, focusing upon fostering cooperation between consumers and corporations, are organized in cities across the US and the world. The organization hosts events that entail businesses competing to do the most social good (e.g., increasing energy efficiency, reducing carbon footprints or start recycling). Carrotmob is essentially a viral phenomenon that is spread through consumer word-of-mouth (WOM) through YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and the Carrotmob blog. Consumers register on Carrotmob’s website, (www.carrotmob.org) and organizers send alerts (through email, blog, Twitter and Facebook) when a local store or firm adopts socially responsible practices. Carrotmobbers then mob the business or perform a “buycott” (Friedman 1996) and purchase products that they normally would not buy. In addition to their top Facebook site with nearly 6,000 members, organizers create a new page for each town in which a mob is organized (e.g., carrotmob NYC, carrotmob Berlin, carrotmob Portland). As the company’s website notes Carrotmob’s master plan and “model is not threatening, not expensive, not time-consuming, not uncomfortable, not ‘radical,’ not confusing, and not negative.” (www.carrotmob.org). Through engaging in friendly competition, the Carrotmob movements for specific locales generate new ideas, urge new cities to participate, and challenge existing movements to continue their efforts.

Method

The authors engage in netnography (Kozinets 2002), otherwise known as online ethnographic research (Maclaran and Catterall 2002) of the Carrotmob website, its blog and affiliated social media pages on Twitter and Facebook and other media coverage of their events. Both authors accessed the above social media sites and made individual field notes of their experiences, thoughts and ideas as they emerged from the member’s interactions and commentaries before any comparisons were made in the analysis stage.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our data analysis illustrates how consumers use social media to transform consumer behavior to reward companies that choose engage in practices that benefit the society at large, for example green efforts focusing on benefiting the environment. We present a model of how contemporary social media drive consumer action through the power of viral marketing where consumer activists target other consumers.

Due to the widespread use of computers and the Internet, online consumer activists have the means to reach a wide range of fellow consumers through listservs, online communities, and even spam e-mails similar to Kozinets et al.’s (2010) The Network Coproduction
Model. However, the present research involves consumer activists, not outside marketers, marketing their own events to other consumers in the network. Consumers in the social media network become one-time participants in the events that generate excitement and, we contend, are of some psychological benefit to the participants. In response, companies who wins a bid for a mob event may promote their business as being “more green” to other consumers at a later stage.

We contend that the ever-rising popularity and access to the internet has given rise to this class of ‘casual’ activists. Thus, the key to effective consumer activism that targets the casual consumer is to propose action, on the consumers’ part, that does not require much effort. In addition, we posit that Carrotmobs essentially entail value co-creation. While consumers may not co-create an actual product, or a service, they contribute to co-creating the firm’s overall value chain proposition through the firm adopting greener practices that, for this consumer segment, adds value to products or services. In the bargain, these consumers change the industry as corporations compete to gain the carrotmobs’ business realize that consumers are essentially rewarding them for adopting greener practices. This insight may encourage more firms to become green, thus contributing to changing industry practices, as they realize that socially responsible behavior can be profitable.

References

Source 2.0: Reading Source Cues in Online Communities
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“Granted when he is actually playing basketball there maybe scowls on Lebron’s face but darn this is Vogue not Sports Illustrated! He should have been in a great suit.

You also have to keep in mind that Vogue has only had a handful of Black People on their covers in their 100 plus history so when they do it stands out. This is the reason why diversity is needed in the editorial rooms of these magazines that we enjoy so much. If I saw the proofs of those pictures I would have vetoed it right away. And maybe just maybe it wouldn’t kill Vogue and other fashion magazines to try models/actresses of different hues on their covers.

This is about perspective and the acknowledgement that loyal readers of this magazine have different perspective and that should be taken into account.

Vogue you are not alone in this. There’s plenty of blame out there.” (Style.com; March 27, 2008; online participant DcetStyle30)

The quotation above is from an online discussion of a controversia! Vogue magazine cover that some critics deemed racist and derogatory. African American NBA player Lebron James and supermodel Gisele Bündchen are featured together to promote the magazine’s annual “shape” issue celebrating the human body. The controversy arose when an image was circulated online and in the media that juxtaposed the cover with a WWI propaganda poster for the U.S. Army featuring King Kong and its demsel in distress (see appendix). Claims that the two celebrities had re-enacted the essence of the poster and that the black athlete had been portrayed as a dangerous predator of the white woman brought up heated discussions amongst Internet forums posters. In this paper, we develop theoretical insight
on how consumers interpret and negotiate source cues both in relation to historical, experiential, and cultural knowledge they bring to the interpretation and in relation to their engagement with community and the development of shared meaning.

In basic communication models, the source is a person or organization with information to share. In advertising, a source can be the sponsor (i.e., a company or organization), the agency that authors the advertisement, or the persona within the text, often in the form of a spokesperson or model (Arens et al. 2009). The latter source, the spokesperson or model, has been a topic of great interest in scholarly works. To date, the advertising and marketing literatures have focused on experimental research perspectives derived from psychology (e.g., Micu et al. 2009; Bower and Landreth 2001; Kamins 1990; Petty et al. 1983). This stream of research emphasizes individual responses and attends to source characteristics such as credibility (expertise and trustworthiness) and attractiveness (similarity, familiarity and likeability).

While we acknowledge the valuable contributions these models have made, we heed the call of McCracken (1989), whose meaning model incorporates cues that include cultural codes such as gender, race and class and how they interact and inform people’s interpretation of the advertisement. For example, if we take the instance described above and adopt the point of view of the source literature to date, we most likely would attend to elements of credibility and trustworthiness of the two celebrities. We would not, however, account for the complex and dynamic ways that audiences may attribute meaning to the celebrity based on their own cultural knowledge, such as historical and contemporary understanding of race, gender, sports, fashion, specific media vehicles, knowledge about celebrity personal and professional lives, and the ways in which these various factors may interact. A more encompassing view of advertising sources is needed because the source literature to date has yet to treat consumers as readers of ads (Scott 1994; Scott and Vargas 2007).

McCracken’s model also implies that certain audiences share cultural codes and, because culture is not static, neither are shared meanings. Interpretation and negotiation of sources frequently happens at the collective level via the information, knowledge and opinions that people share. Consumer culture researchers have investigated the influence of interpretive communities in creating meaning in the consumer world (Arnould and Thompson 2005). However, there is still little theoretically and empirically informed insight into the collective reading of source cues. When McCracken developed his meaning model, the web 2.0 had not yet developed. We have found it timely to re-envision the source literature to accommodate more complex aspects of consumer engagement with meaning; with social media we now have the opportunity to observe these effects in sites such as online forums that extend beyond traditional boundaries of space and time. Our inductive, qualitative study thus draws on over 500 pages of netnographic data (Kozinets 2002) collected from two online communities, Foxsports.com and Style.com, following the controversy surrounding the infamous Vogue cover. This context is an ideal site to develop theory about how collectives read source cues. In brief, it is characterized by multiple layers of meaning, emerging from both the ad itself and from the dynamics between online posters who bring in their own knowledge and subjectivity.

The intended contribution of this paper is to extend the prior literature by examining interpretive practices of readers of ads in consumer collectives as they negotiate the dynamic interaction of various source cues. It posits that as readers engage in discussions with one another, interpretations of source cues do not remain static but evolve over short periods of time and shape further readings. Data analysis is ongoing but has already begun to illuminate the complex, socially constructed ways in which people engage with and create meaning through source cues. We find that various source cues move from the periphery to the center of the discussion, and back to the periphery again and so on, as readers negotiate interpretations of the cover and its sources’ representations and intentions. For example, race, gender, celebrity meaning, intentionality of image encoding and media context move and develop in relation to the controversy and to audience articulation of subjectivity. We anticipate that our findings will further articulate contemporary reading of source cues and offer nuances of readings in consumer collectives.

REFERENCES
Appendix

Virtual Worlds: New Marketing Channels or Emperor’s New Clothes? (Consumer Perceptions of Innovation in Product-oriented vs. Service-oriented Companies)
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Abstract
We examine the impact of brand presence in virtual worlds on consumers’ perceptions of brand innovativeness for product-oriented and service-oriented companies. Results from a pilot study show that the consumer’s perception of innovativeness significantly decreases with brand presence in virtual world for product-oriented companies, but significantly increases for service-oriented companies.

Outline
Virtual worlds are increasingly gaining attention in popular media as well as academia (Nelson, 2007), and growth in the virtual worlds is now building at a more reasonable and sustainable level. For example, consumers are spending more time online, there is has been an increase in the revenues generated as well as in the number of interactions (McCormick, 2009). Second Life continues to be an active playground for brands and there are more than 1000 virtual worlds in production around the globe (McCormick, 2009).

Research on what constitutes a successful strategy for entering and operating in virtual worlds is still limited (Goel and Mousavidin, 2007). Previous research shows that virtual worlds differ from traditional websites along several dimensions in terms of their interface and user experience (Goel et al., 2009), warranting further investigation. To better understand the success of an entry strategy one could look at the change in consumer perceptions after visiting the virtual world store for the first time. More specifically, we examine how the brand presence in virtual worlds impacts consumer perceptions of brand innovativeness, a factor that has been shown as important (Christensen, 1997; Christensen and Raynor, 2003; Keller, 2003). Additionally, our research aims to examine whether consumers in virtual worlds perceive product-oriented and service-oriented companies differently.

Majority of the research in virtual words has until now focused on marketing of products (e.g. Goel and Prokopec, 2009; Hemp, 2006). However, with more and more service-oriented companies opening their stores in virtual worlds such as Second Life, it is important to examine whether the consumer perceptions change and if so, in which aspect does the change occur. Services are different from products because they are intangible, unique (heterogeneous) and co-produced with the customer (inseparable) (Anderson, Fornell, and
Rust, 1997). The production and consumption of service occurs simultaneously, whereas the production and consumption of products occurs sequentially. Furthermore, customers are often co-producers of the services they consume (e.g., social networking sites) (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Inseparability means that consumers ultimately buy the organization’s capabilities and expertise, not merely their immediate offers.

Intuitively, it might seem that presence in a new channel like virtual worlds would be perceived as being innovative. In our research, we propose to explore this line of thought. We argue that perceptions of innovativeness may depend on whether the company is product oriented, or service oriented. In product-oriented companies, a new channel may not yield benefits in terms of consumer perception since innovativeness may be tied to the actual product offering (e.g., a car), and not necessarily the channel (e.g., a dealership/website). On the other hand, for service-oriented companies, due to the intangibility of the offering and the inseparability between the production and the consumption part of the offering, a consumer visiting the virtual world store (i.e., an university) is more likely to perceive the brand to be more innovative.

Thus we hypothesize:

H1: Virtual world brand presence will not impact the perceived level of innovativeness of product-oriented companies.

H2: Virtual world brand presence will positively impact the perceived level of innovativeness of service-oriented companies.

In order to measure the impact of virtual world brand presence, we plan to conduct an experiment that measures consumers’ perceptions of innovativeness before and after they have visited the virtual world. Since there are several factors that need to be considered to ensure internal and external validity of such a study, we conducted a preliminary pilot to help guide our future data collection and analysis. We present details of our pilot next.

**Pilot Study Methodology**

Thirty-five subjects participated in the pilot study. The virtual world selected was Second Life (SL). None of the subjects had a SL avatar prior to the study, although they were very familiar with using computers, the Internet, and social networking sites.

A survey was administered to the subjects that asked questions pertaining to their perceptions of brand innovativeness. Of the four companies selected, Toyota and Sony/BMG were considered representative of product-oriented companies, and Princeton and University of Southern California (USC) of service-oriented. The subjects were asked the question “Rate the brand on the level of innovativeness” for each of the four companies. Next, the subjects were asked to create SL avatars, and spend two weeks exploring the virtual world. After the subjects had completed their assignment, a second survey was administered with the same question for each of the four companies.

**Preliminary Results**

Given that n=35, we present our results with the caveat that this is intended to be a pilot study. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to measure differences between brand perceptions before and after the virtual world exposure. We find support for H2, i.e. perceptions of innovativeness increased for service-oriented companies (Princeton: Mpre: 3.26, Mpost: 4.11, p<.001 and USC: Mpre: 3.14, Mpost, p<.001). However, for H1, we find that perceptions significantly decreased due to brand presence in virtual worlds for product-oriented companies (Sony/BMG: Mpre: 4.26, Mpost: 3.09, p<.001 and Toyota: Mpre: 4.2, Mpost: 3.20, p<.001). These results, though simple, have significant implications for companies that wish to leverage the new channel of virtual worlds. A significant negative change in perception of innovativeness may result in harming the brand image, rather than helping, and it might be better for such companies to steer clear of the virtual world channel. Though this study is focused on innovativeness, consumer focus, and brand quality were also measured as part of the pre- and post-tests. These factors also significantly dropped for product-oriented companies. However, service-oriented companies, such as universities, would benefit significantly from a presence in the virtual world channel.

**Next Steps**

The study presented is intended to spur a broad research agenda in virtual worlds that includes several brand perception dimensions. We are interested in how consumers react to the virtual world channel, thus providing practitioners with guidelines for entry strategies in virtual worlds. A wider range of product and service-oriented companies need to be sampled to represent different types of products and services (e.g., hedonic, utilitarian etc).

**References**


Footnote 1The pilot was conducted before the press releases regarding quality issues surrounding Toyota.

Social Production Of Medicine in a Virtual Health Community Organization
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Extended Abstract

This research explores new systems of marketing developing as a result of transformations in technology (Web 2.0), consumer/marketer value systems, forms of discourse and institutional roles. I aim to provide insights into developments in healthcare provision as systems that utilize social networking and engage in reconstitution of roles and relations in healthcare develop. I revisit previous theories of market relations to understand why/how new perspectives need to be incorporated into our frameworks. Scholars have articulated the structure of relationships between consumers and organizations in the market largely exhibiting dialectical processes: (1) Marketeter/Consumer constitution in dominant/dominated dialectic (Peñaloza and Price 1993; Slater and Tonkiss 2001; Zwick et al. 2008), and (2) unidirectional provisioning and hierarchical relations that give control and primacy to the marketer (Firat and Dholakia 2006). These views rest mainly on modern conceptions of power including domination, confrontation (Venn 2007) and unilateral govern-mentality, and emphasize maximizing/normalizing discourses by marketers. Such discourses in healthcare include fear of loss of life, normalization of body and maximization of lifespan (Rose 2007), and make human body an object of one-way surveillance by a superior medical gaze (Foucault 1975).

I aim to discover new forms of organizing roles and relationships in healthcare through a non-participatory netnographic inquiry (Kozinets 2002) of a web-based Medicine 2.0 community organization, patientslikeme.com (PLM). PLM is a co-mediated market platform for real-time partnership among patients, physicians, pharmaceutical companies, healthcare researchers, and administrators of the website. PLM cultivates collaboration through proactive and complementary relations, intensifies connectedness among market actors, and contributes to social production of medicine. These relations seem to be qualitatively different from conventional market relations that treat organizations and consumers as distinct entities (Firat and Dholakia 2006; Peñaloza and Venkatesh 2006). Patients actively engage in real-time clinical research and generation of new medical knowledge, and determine their and others’ care along with other market actors. I attract attention to the meso level institution(alization) or legitimation processes that develop and maintain these new forms of interaction, make people become a part of these systems and enable their continued participation in sharing their private health data and experiences as a result of synergistic discourses among actors with an increasing appreciation for difference, and decreasing desire to contest, confront and establish supremacy. Findings are organized in two core themes: (1) provisioning diluted in healthcare through reorganization of business by PLM, and new roles patients and physicians/researchers adopt in this community, and (2) meso level dynamics of how actors relate to each other and maintain their participation in the market order constructed in PLM, and how these relations influence relations among market actors outside of the community. In doing so, sharing/privacy distinction will be articulated, forms of ‘sharing in PLM—which encourage disclosure of private health information—will be exemplified, and the why and how of sharing/not sharing in this community will be explicated.

I reconsider Foucauldian notions of govern-mentality (1982) and biopower (1990) to articulate the theoretical/conceptual explanations of how and why such a system may be attracting patients and other healthcare actors and (re)organizing their relationships, and how their interest and participation in the system are maintained. I attract attention to the shift from government intervention to the multitude of diverse healthcare market actors in organizing sharing of private health information, and negotiating meanings of privacy/disclosure. PLM enables organized decentralization of private health data sharing, and mobilizes market actors as a non-state institution through non-dominating discursive regimes (Rose 2007) (e.g., hope based versus fear based culture, sharing/openness versus privacy, quality of life and personalization). Consumers are governed by and govern through different institutionalizations that produce discourses through which roles and relations are legitimized and institutionalized (Thompson 2004). Through institution(alization)s grown out of these new business models, community participants make decisions to share private health information and stay in the community, which emerge from mutual, non-linear, and multi-way negotiations. Govern-mentality increasingly takes multiple forms that may not be categorized as either top down (domination) or bottom-up (domination over consumers through constituting them as free subjects) (Zwick et al. 2008) perspectives. As we observe the abandonment of unidirectional provisioning and overly deterministic actions of marketers–prominent in dominant marketing approaches–, and the realization that consumers and marketers are both a part of a social system and a market system, reflecting the multifaceted and multilayered nature of organizing roles and governing relations among market actors in the world of social networking necessitate the theorization of govern-mentality in productive and meridian (Cova 2005, p.210) terms. PLM as a meso level institution also becomes the locus of legitimation in sharing and organizing private health information and generating medical knowledge, and contributes to (re)institutionalizing surveillance in healthcare through clinical research with and intensified multilevel connectedness among healthcare actors.
References

APPENDIX

Theoretical Articulation Based on Initial Findings:

A. How PLM has developed and is functioning in the healthcare market?: Cultivating Biopower-Biopolitical Production-Biosociality Triangle in Healthcare through PLM:

B. Based on the themes discovered, this graph shows different levels of governing relations among healthcare actors as a result of connectedness intensified by/through PLM:
The Consequence of Screening Strategies on Decision Accuracy: The Roles of Perceived Uncertainty and Consideration Set Size

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Extended Abstract

Consumers screen from all available alternatives (Beach 1993) and consider a smaller subset of alternatives for further evaluation, called the consideration set (Bettman 1979; Nedungadi 1990). Two types of screening strategies are commonly utilized by consumers to form consideration sets: an exclusion (rejection) strategy wherein alternatives not worthy of further consideration are eliminated and an inclusion (choice) strategy wherein worthy alternatives are included into the consideration set (Shafir 1993; Yaniv and Schul 1997; 2000). Despite the understanding that an important motivation for consumers to engage in screening is to search and choose the best option (Beach 1993; Beach and Mitchell 1990), there is limited understanding of the consequences of the screening strategy on decision quality. This paper attempts to fill the void by investigating how screening strategies impact decision quality as well as the factors that moderate this relationship.

Two outcomes of using the screening strategy that have been investigated are the number of alternatives considered (consideration set size) and the accuracy of the decision (Heller, Levin, and Goransson 2002; Levin et al. 2001; Yaniv and Schull 1997, 2000). Evidence for the impact of the screening strategy on the size of consideration set is robust, such that sets created by exclusion screening strategy are significantly larger than those created by inclusion (Heller et al. 2002; Levin et al. 2001; Yaniv and Schull 1997, 2000). However, there is little consensus about the impact of the screening strategy on decision quality. Past studies demonstrated that consideration sets created by exclusion strategy are more accurate, but only when the consideration set size is not taken into account. Accuracy in these studies was defined by the outcome of the screening strategy itself (i.e. the percentage of sets that contain the correct answer) which is different from the accuracy of the final choice. In addition, existing research does not consider a wide range of contingent factors that might influence the screening strategy—decision accuracy relationship. In this paper, we focus on the accuracy of the final choice because it is the ultimate performance criterion of the screen strategy employed. We contend that the accuracy of the decision should be analyzed in terms of the ability of the screening strategy to improve the likelihood of making a good decision, depending on both perceived uncertainty and consideration set size.

Consumers frequently experience varying levels of uncertainty while making choices (Hansen 1976; Kahn and Sarin 1988). We argue that highly uncertain consumers who use inclusion screening strategy make more accurate decisions and consumers with low perceived uncertainty are better off using exclusion screening strategy. We draw upon the literature on decision making to suggest that screening by inclusion involves greater search for information (Levin, Huneke, and Jasper 2000). Greater search intensity of the inclusion strategy would facilitate highly uncertain consumers to improve decision accuracy by helping to clarify their preferences. Conversely, it would distract consumers with low perceived uncertainty from making an accurate decision because more information encountered during search will dilute their true preferences. Because search intensity of a screening strategy depends on consideration set size, we further argue for an interesting reversal of this interactive effect when consideration set sizes are varied. Since exclusion screening strategy involves greater search than inclusion strategy when forming larger consideration sets, we predict that highly uncertain consumers are better off using exclusion screening strategy in such context while consumers with low perceived uncertainty make better decisions using inclusion screening strategy.
Empirical Study

We conducted an experimental study (n=130) using an actual choice task that followed a 2 (perceived uncertainty: high or low) ×
2 (screening strategy: inclusion or exclusion) × 2 (consideration set size: high or low) design. In this study, perceived uncertainty
was measured whereas screening strategy and consideration set size were manipulated. Following Creyer, Bettman, and Payne (1990),
the measure of decision accuracy is derived by comparing the weighted additive value of the chosen alternative to that of
the best and worst alternatives in the set. Consistent with our predictions, there was a significant three-way interaction among
screening strategies, perceived uncertainty, and consideration set size on decision accuracy (F(1,122)=8.34, p<.01). Initial results
were directionally supportive for our predictions under smaller consideration sets (such that participants with low perceived uncertainty
made slightly more accurate decisions with exclusion strategy while participants with high perceived uncertainty made slightly
more accurate decisions using inclusion strategy) although the effects failed to reach statistical significance. More importantly,
the pattern of results was reversed when participants formed larger consideration sets. Those with low perceived uncertainty
made higher quality decisions with inclusion as compared to exclusion screening strategy when forming larger consideration sets.
On the other hand, participants with high perceived uncertainty made more accurate decision with exclusion as compared
to inclusion screening strategy and both mean comparisons were significant. Thus, results were generally supportive of our
predictions as indicated by a significant three-way interaction, although the effects under large consideration sets seem to
be stronger than those under small consideration sets.

Discussion

This paper seeks to address the issue of decision accuracy of screening strategies, given the perceived uncertainty consumers
experience during the choice process. Further, it also highlights the important moderating role played by consideration set size
on the interactive relationship between perceived uncertainty and screening strategy on decision accuracy. Drawing upon
literature in consumer decision making, we show that, the process benefits of information search and learning that are obtained
by choosing and applying the right screening strategy can greatly enhance the quality of decisions. This paper contributes to
our understanding regarding the consequence of using the screening strategies. Decision accuracy is an important outcome of
the decision making process and has huge public policy and consumer welfare implications. For instance, this research highlights
that consumers could make suboptimal choices through the use of a wrong screening strategy. Such suboptimal choices can have
seriously negative and long lasting consequences in various situations like medical decision making, financial and investment decision
making, and partner selection that are rife with uncertainty.

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The Influence of Assortment Size on Preference-Consistent Choice

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Extended Abstract

Decades of research on the effects of variety and assortment size have focused on the affective and motivational consequences of having personal choice (Iyengar, & Lepper, 2000). Providing consumers with choice has been linked to increases in perceived control, task performance and life satisfaction (Iyengar, & Lepper, 2000). When choosing from a large number of options, the likelihood that decision makers will be successful in finding an option that matches their preferences, increases (Chernev, 2003; Iyengar, & Lepper, 2000). Large assortments also help people satisfy their needs for variety, whether the reason for seeking variety simply reflects some desire for change or having multiple needs to satisfy (Herrmann, & Heitmann, 2006).

While much of the earlier work on variety provided support for the notion that more variety is better, a growing body of research suggests that more variety does not always lead to better choices. Research on the choice overload hypothesis suggests that having much choice can initially seem desirable, but prove to be demotivating in the end (Iyengar, & Lepper, 2000). Choosing from larger assortments demands a greater amount of cognitive effort from the decision maker and increases choice difficulty (Chernev, & Hamilton, 2009). An increased number of options to choose from has also been associated with greater anticipation of post-decisional regret (Herrmann, & Heitmann, 2006; Sela, Berger, & Liu, 2009). These cognitive and emotional costs of decision-making out of large assortments have been shown to lead consumers to defer decision, choose the default option or to simply not choose at all (Iyengar, & Lepper, 2000; Sela et al., 2009; Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, & Todd, 2009).

Both positive and negative consequences of assortment size on choice difficulty, choice likelihood and satisfaction are thus well-documented. Studies assessing the impact of assortment size on the option people actually choose are limited.

In this study we will examine how assortment size influences the choice of the preferred option and preference-consistent behavior. We argue that assortment size can have an important influence on preference-consistent choice. More specifically, we suggest that in small assortments; where making a choice is less difficult and results from a deliberative decision-making process (Herrmann, Heitmann, Morgan, Henneberg, & Landwehr, 2009), people might not always choose their preferred option, even if this option is available. To support this claim, we integrate two research streams; assortment size and deliberation.

Studies on the influence of assortment size on decision-making processes have shown that as the complexity of making choices rises, people tend to simplify their decision-making process by relying on simple heuristics (Iyengar, & Lepper, 2000; Herrmann et al., 2009). Therefore, we suggest that when choosing from larger assortments consumers will rely on readily available “cues”, whereas in small assortments they will evaluate the alternatives and compare and contrast different attributes before making a choice. Recent research has demonstrated that this kind of conscious thought and deliberation can have an influence on people’s judgments and preferences, often reducing the consistency of preferences over time (Dijksterhuis en Nordgren, 2006; Nordgren & Dijksterhuis, 2009).

As heuristics are often used in decision-making in large assortments, we hypothesize that when the most preferred option is available in a choice set, this option will be chosen in case of a large assortment. Consumers will use their initial positive evaluation of this option as a cue to select. When choosing from a small assortment, the deliberative decision-making process might lead consumers to focus on attributes of the attitude object that seem like plausible causes of the evaluation but were not weighted heavily before (Nordgren, & Dijksterhuis, 2009), resulting in less preference-consistent choices.

The experiment examining this prediction comprised two stages. In the first stage, participants’ preferences for twenty different ice cream flavors were measured. They were asked to rank their top six from a menu of twenty flavors (e.g. vanilla, pistachio, strawberry, …), and rate every flavor on a 7-item scale ranging from “totally unfavorable” to “totally favorable”. After this preference-measure task, respondents participated in an unrelated study of about 45 minutes to divert attention from the current study. In the second stage, participants were informed that they could win a bucket of ice cream and were asked which flavor they wanted if they would win. The assortment they could choose from consisted of either six (i.e. small assortment) or twenty (i.e. large assortment) different ice cream flavors. The latter assortment consisted of all twenty initial flavors, while the former assortment consisted only of the top six ice cream flavors they ranked earlier. Thus, participants’ top six flavors were presented in both the large and the small assortment. This was done to enhance comparability between choices from both assortments.

In order to test our hypothesis regarding the effect of assortment size on preference-choice consistency, we first calculated whether there was a match between the participants’ preferences in the first stage and their choice in the last stage. Thus, for each subject, we calculated whether their choice was consistent with the option they had ranked at the top in the first stage. This comprised the dependent measure of the study.

Next, we looked at the influence of assortment size on the preference-choice consistency. Chi-square analysis revealed a significant effect. Significantly more subjects were consistent in the large assortment condition (67.1%) than in the small assortment condition (52.4%) (χ²(1)=3.853, p<.05). Thus, this result supports our hypothesis.

Our results seem to indicate that as the variety of options to choose from decreases, the likelihood of choosing the most preferred option decreases as well—supposedly confirming the idea that, in terms of preference-choice consistency, more is indeed better. However, we propose that in other situations, preference-inconsistent choices will be more likely in large than small assortments. Specifically, we hypothesize that when readily available cues favor a less-preferred option, the likelihood of this option being chosen over the most-preferred option increases. Several experiments are being set up to investigate this prediction.
In investigating the strength of affectively and cognitively based attitudes

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Extended abstract

Attitude strength is often defined in terms of four characterizing features which strong attitudes are thought to possess. That is, strong attitudes are said to be persistent over time, more resistant to attack, more influential of information processing and more predictive of judgments and behavior (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Affective attitudes are supposed to be stronger than cognitively based ones (Giner-Sorolla, 2001) because empirical evidence shows that attitudes based on emotions tend to resist cognitive persuasion appeals, whereas attitudes based on cognitive beliefs do not resist affective appeals, and affective attitudes appear to be more stable over time.

Several studies exploring the accessibility of affect-based attitudes compared to cognition-based ones tend to support this supposition. Accessibility has been indicated as one of the strength-related dimensions of attitudes, with highly accessible attitudes being stronger than less accessible ones (Fazio, 1995). Responses to affective evaluations have been shown to be formed more quickly than responses to cognitive evaluations (Huskinson & Haddock, 2006; Verplanken, Hofstee & Janssen, 1998), possibly indicating that evaluations based on emotions and feelings are more accessible in memory than evaluations based on cognitive beliefs. Giner-Sorolla (2001) also found an accessibility advantage of affective over cognitive base, but only when attitudes were more extreme; when attitudes were less extreme, affective attitudes tended to be expressed more slowly, whereas affective attitudes were expressed faster (Giner-Sorolla, 2001). In some situations then, cognitively based attitudes seemingly are stronger than affectively based attitudes.

Accessibility, however, is not the only attitudinal variable proposed as a measure of attitude strength; several other dimensions have been identified as well, such as certainty, knowledge, importance, extremity, ... (Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, Berent & Carnot, 1993; Visser, Bizer & Krosnick, 2006). Yet, besides accessibility, none of these strength-related dimensions has been examined in relation to the structural base of attitudes.

In this study we take a look at two other strength-related dimensions, certainty and knowledge, and explore whether affectively versus cognitively based attitudes differ on these dimensions. We hypothesize that cognitively based attitudes are held with more certainty and more subjective knowledge, since some of the main antecedents of attitude certainty are made up of cognitive factors such as the amount, clarity and consistency of the information available (Gross, Holtz & Miller, 1995). Further, the amount of cognitive elaboration of attitude-relevant information has been proposed as a determinant of attitude certainty, mediated by subjective perceptions of knowledge (Smith, Fabrigar, MacDougall, & Wiesenthal, 2008). Since cognitions about an attitude object are believed to be formed based on deliberative and controlled information processing, whereas affective reactions are formed in a relatively automatic manner without much deliberate elaboration (Shiv, & Fedorikhin, 1999), a certainty and knowledge advantage for attitudes based on cognitive beliefs over attitudes based on affective reactions is proposed.

To investigate the level of certainty and amount of subjective knowledge associated with affectively versus cognitively based attitudes, an experiment was conducted. We manipulated the structural base of participants’ attitude toward a fictional animal by exposing them to either an affective or cognitive passage about the animal (see Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). The affective passage described a person’s encounter with the animal and was designed to evoke positive emotions about the animal. The passage designed to induce a cognitive attitude contained positive information about the same fictitious animal and was presented as an excerpt from an encyclopedia of marine life. Following the attitude base manipulation, participants were asked to complete the measures of attitude, affect and cognition validated by Crites et al. (1994). Next, attitude certainty and subjective knowledge were assessed.

In order to investigate whether the attitude formation manipulation resulted in affective and cognitive attitudes, we tested whether attitude-affect and attitude-cognition consistency differed across both formation conditions. This was done by computing two discrepancy scores, obtained by calculating the absolute value of the difference between the attitude score on the one hand and the affect and cognition...
score on the other hand. High consistency between the attitudinal base and the overall attitude is indicated by small numbers on these discrepancy scores.

A 2 (attitude-affect discrepancy vs. attitude-cognition discrepancy) x 2 (affective attitude formation condition vs. cognitive attitude formation condition) mixed-design ANOVA indicated that we were successful in creating affectively or cognitively based attitudes, since the predicted crossover interaction between type of discrepancy score and attitude formation condition was obtained, $F(1,118)=9.134$, $p<.01$. In the affective formation condition the affective discrepancy scores ($M=76$, $t(59)=3.605$, $p<.01$; whereas in the cognitive formation condition a nonsignificant tendency for cognitive discrepancy scores ($M=41$) to be smaller than affective discrepancy scores ($M=51$) was obtained, $t(59)$, $p=.374$.

To assess the difference between affective and cognitive attitudes concerning attitude certainty and subjective knowledge, an Independent Samples $t$-test was conducted with attitude basis as the independent variable. Both for certainty, $t(109)=-2.599$, $p<.05$, and subjective knowledge, $t(109)=-3.845$, $p<.001$, a significant effect of attitude basis was found. Cognitive attitudes were both held with greater certainty ($M=13$) as well as associated with greater subjective knowledge ($M=2.95$) than affective attitudes (respectively $M=4.57$ and $M=2.00$), thus supporting our hypothesis.

Based on these results we can conclude that, contrary to previous research where affectively based attitudes seemingly are stronger than cognitively based attitudes when accessibility was used as a strength measure, cognitively based attitudes appear to be stronger than affectively based ones in terms of certainty and knowledge. These results provide useful insights in light of future studies. Possible research entails to explore which type of persuasive appeal, cognitive or affective, is most suitable to create strong attitudes.

**Selected References**


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**When More is Merrier Indeed: The Impact of Product Involvement on Choice**

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**Extended Abstract**

Although generally extensive assortments are believed to benefit consumers, more recent research has highlighted the negative consequences of large assortments. Notably, research on the “More-is-Less” effect (Iyengar and Lepper 2000, Chernev 2003) established that extensive assortments can hinder choice and lower choice satisfaction. These adverse consequences are often explained with the decision difficulty consumers experience when choosing from extensive (as opposed to limited) choice sets. However, a recent meta-analysis (Scheibehenne, Greifender and Todd, forthcoming) invites a discussion on the generality of the “More-is-Less” effect since multiple studies failed to replicate the adverse effects of large assortments on choice satisfaction (Scheibehenne, Greifender and Todd 2009). Clearly, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the possible effects of extensive assortments on consumer choice and a thorough investigation of possible moderator variables and boundary conditions of the More-is-Less effect.

This work argues that choice from extensive assortments can trigger multiple sources of experiential information that affect choice satisfaction. Thus, going beyond experienced difficulty, we show that intrinsic pleasure from exploring the choice options can increase...
choice satisfaction and lead participants to be more satisfied when choosing from a larger assortment size. We refer to this finding as the “More-is-Merrier” effect. The involvement level of a consumer is an important moderator variable for this effect: Larger assortments can lead to greater choice-process difficulty and thus reduce the choice satisfaction of consumers with low levels of product involvement. In contrast, consumers with high levels of involvement experience choosing from the same large assortments as more enjoyable and report greater choice satisfaction. Perhaps similar to baseball fans enjoying recalling arcane statistics or splitting hairs over particular teams, high-involved consumers enjoy exploring and comparing options and are—if at all—a much smaller degree affected by the difficulty of a choice task than low-involved consumers.

Experiment 1 examined whether choice-set size would differentially affect the choice satisfaction of consumers with different levels of product involvement. Based on a large-scale online pretest, we selected participants with high and low levels of involvement with night clubs based on the Personal Involvement Inventory (Zaichkowsky 1994). Several weeks later, the same participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions with either a limited (6) or an extensive (16) choice set of night clubs and were instructed to choose a night club for a company party paid for by the firm. Care was taken to ensure that not the composition of the choice sets, but their size would be the underlying reason for the ease or the difficulty of the choice task. As predicted, we found that high-involved consumers liked better their choice after choosing from the extensive choice set and that this effect was mediated by involvement-induced task enjoyment measured by a three-item scale. Conversely, low-involved consumers liked better their choice when choosing from the limited choice set and this effect was mediated by experienced difficulty, in agreement with previous findings on the More-is-Less effect (Iyengar and Lepper 2000, Chernev 2003). Importantly, perceived variety in the choice sets and experienced difficulty were both found to increase significantly with choice set size and not to vary across involvement conditions.

The objectives of Experiment 2 were two-fold: First, the experiment was designed to test the sensitivity of high- and low-involved consumers to choice task difficulty in their judgment of choice satisfaction. For this purpose, we introduced a default option in the choice task that was expected to lower choice task difficulty and hence to increase the choice satisfaction of low-involved consumers. For high-involved consumers we expected no effect of the default option on choice satisfaction. Second, we selected a customization task to demonstrate that choice-option exploration can trigger task difficulty for low-involved consumers and enjoyment for high-involved consumers.

Participants were asked to customize a weekend trip, consisting of multiple choices among hotels, restaurants and activities. For each choice, we provided a default option in the low-difficulty condition. As in Study 1, we conducted a large-scale pretest to identify respondents’ involvement levels with planning and going on trips. Several weeks later, high- and low-involvement participants were invited to the lab and asked to customize a hypothetical complementary weekend escape for two in a popular winter resort. As predicted, we found that although the presence of a default option in a self-customization task reduced significantly the perceived difficulty of the task, it increased satisfaction with the customized offer only among respondents with low levels of involvement. Further, the exploration of the choice option mediated the effect of task enjoyment on choice satisfaction for high-involved respondents.

Study 3 considered temporal distance as a moderator variable of task-induced enjoyment. High-involvement participants were asked to plan their weekend trip—as in Study 2—but with the additional instruction that the trip would take place a year later. We predicted and found that this temporal distance manipulation both reduced significantly the exploration of choice alternatives and lowered experienced enjoyment: Compared to participants of Study 2 who did not have to wait for the trip to take place, participants of Study 3 reported significantly lower choice satisfaction with their customized weekend trip.

In sum, the contributions of this research are three-fold. First, the findings point to the importance of affective consequences of involvement, in addition to the motivational and cognitive ones considered in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty et al. 2005, Petty and Cacioppo 1990). Critically, it demonstrates that unlike task-unrelated affect (Bless et al. 1990), task-related affect increases the depth with which people explore and compare choice options. Experienced difficulty has no adverse effects on choice satisfaction. Second, this work adds to the literature on the More-is-Less effect by showing that involvement is an important moderator of this effect. Finally, this work is also of clear importance to practitioners since it demonstrates the need for differentiation of marketing strategies for consumers with high and low levels of involvement with a product category.

References
Should Variety Seeking Be Measured at the SKU, Brand, or Category Level? Does It Matter
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In a two-week period, the average US consumer snacks 32 times on 17 different brands coming from 4.5 different snack categories, e.g. salty, sweet, salsa/dips, fuel, grain and non-macro (fruits, vegetables). She switches among the brands 29 times and among the categories 22 times. Virtually no brand is eaten twice in a row and only 1.5 brands are from the same category. Thus, the US consumer seeks high variety in her snack consumption. Past research has focused on only one form of variety-seeking, usually at the brand level. In this research, we offer a comprehensive view of individual variety-seeking behavior in the snacks market, in which we associate consumer variety-seeking behavior at the SKU, brand, and category levels. We seek to understand the correlations between the different types of variety-seeking and study the effect of demographic, psychographic, environment (location), and consumption factors (needs, time of day/week, activity) on different types of variety-seeking.

Extensive consumer behavior and empirical marketing literature provides a benchmark of variety-seeking models and findings (Khan 1995, McAlister & Pessemier 1982). More recent research shows that variety-seeking is more likely to occur on taste than on brand (Inman 2001) or when consumers derive greater hedonic characteristics from the product category (Van Trijp, Hoyer and Inman 1996). However, past research had several restrictions. It looked at variety-seeking as a trade-off between flavor and brand (Inman 2001, 2008). It analyzed single product categories, e.g. potato chips (Maier et al. 2007) and considered variety-seeking at the brand level. Variety-seeking research that is based on scanner data explains variety-seeking at the household level, not the individual level. Last, it did not explain how variety-seeking changes over time, around holidays or seasons. Our proposed research circumvents these restrictions. We focus on consumption patterns at the individual level, thus, avoid the aggregation bias in studies of household demand. We measure variety-seeking across the entire US snack market, and get a better view on consumers’ overall snacking behavior and their consumption trade-offs when switching among brands/categories. The length of our study (2004-2009) allows us to show how variety-seeking evolved and how consumers seek more variety in some categories at the expense of others. Using over 80 variables of consumption, we can explain how variety-seeking changes with time of day (Roehm and Roehm 2004) or week, location, activity, needs, social occasion (Ratner and Kahn 2002).

To analyze variety-seeking in snacking for the whole US population, we rely on an extensive dataset monitoring the entire snacking behavior of 30,000 consumers located across the US. The respondents, chosen randomly, are weighted on six demographic variables that ensure a nationally representative sample. They self-report their snack consumption over 2-week periods and provide demographics and other personal information, such as weight/height, physical activity levels, household size, age, gender, race, marital status, income, etc. At each snack occasion, the panelist also records the consumption details: time of day/week, location, consumed on its own or with food or drinks, in public/private, needs (e.g. good to eat with others, to relax) and the activity the consumer was doing during the consumption (shopping, watching TV, socializing) etc. Each consumer reports the exact brand-flavor consumed by choosing from a list of 900 snacks ranging from leading brands (Pringles, Hershey's, etc) to regional and private label. Using the industry’s market structure, these brands are further categorized into 60 subcategories (potato chips, gum, salsa) and 6 snack categories (salty, sweet, accompaniments, fuel, grain, non-macro). Thus, this comprehensive dataset allows us to create a detailed map of the whole US snack market and to understand the overall snack consumption not only at the individual consumer level but also aggregated for the whole US population.

We use several measures of variety-seeking at the brand, subcategory, and category level and employ a model with a linear system of equations to understand and paint a comprehensive picture of overall variety-seeking in US snack consumption. First, we draw on the previous research literature and quantify variety-seeking as 1.) number of unique brands consumed, and 2.) number of switches among the brands consumed. Second, accounting for the brands’ dissimilarity, we perform the analysis not only at the brand level, but also at the subcategory and category level, e.g. when a consumer snacks on Lays, Orbit, and Hershey’s, we record 3 different brands, 3 subcategories (potato chips, gum, candy) and 2 different snack categories (salty, sweet). Third, due to high correlation among the variety-seeking measures either within or across categories, and endogeneity, we use system of equations analysis to understand what factors explain variety-seeking. We model the different measures of variety-seeking at the brand and category levels, within and across categories as dependent variables, regressed on 80-140 independent variables: demographics, psychographics, situational factors, seasonality, trend in consumption. With high R-squares (60%-80%), the models fit the data well and give a comprehensive understanding of the factors that explain variety-seeking.

Some of the research questions we asked and the partial results we obtained are:

1. The correlation between brand and category level variety-seeking is high but not for all individuals.
2. What consumption factors impact VS?–An interesting finding is that doing sports and shopping/running errands decreases variety-seeking.
3. How do demographics influence VS?–Heavier and older people switch less on brands; Men snack on fewer brands/categories and switch less; Hispanics seek more variety. Less educated consumers are high variety-seekers.
4. Is variety-seeking seasonal?–Overall, variety-seeking does not change throughout the year, but consumers seek more salty variety in the Fall and more non-macro variety in the Summer and Fall. Some holidays also impact variety-seeking positively, e.g. Valentine, Halloween for sweets.

The research seeks to understand the big picture idea “Should variety-seeking be studied at the category, brand or SKU level?” How do different measures of variety-seeking change if the analysis is done at different levels of variety-seeking? What is the magnitude of correlation between the different types of variety-seeking? This is the first research study that offers a comprehensive map of brand and within-across category variety-seeking for snacks for the whole US population.
References


Leaky Preferences: Fluency Effects in Perception and Choice

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Keys and Schwartz (2007) have argued that “psychological processes that affect decisions may be said also to “leak” into one’s experience.” Perhaps analogously, the ease of certain computational tasks may leak into one’s perception of the content that is being processed. That is, certain stimuli or environmental features may be preferred because they are easier to process. We will refer to this hypothesis as the “leaky preferences” assumption.

The leaky preferences assumption can be applied to both abstract and concrete stimuli, with different implications. When applied to abstract stimuli, the assumption predicts consumers to systematically share a set of aesthetic preferences for features such as symmetry, consistency, straightness, similarity, simplicity, familiarity, and certainty. Each of these environmental features serves to reduce the processing load and aids in the efficient compression of information.

It should be noted that the “leaky preferences” assumption is an instance of a more general fluency effect. Research which varies the ease or difficulty of reading certain fonts, or of searching for information from memory, for instance, can lead people to make attribution errors, generally favoring stimuli which can be processed with a greater degree of fluency. Oppenheimer (2008) notes, that “Fluency–the subjective experience of ease or difficulty associated with completing a mental task- has been shown to be an influential cue in a wide array of judgments…. Fluency impacts whether information is represented in working memory and what aspects of that information are attended to.” In applying the “leaky preferences” assumption we are proposing that certain environmental features are routinely processed with high degrees of fluency, and thus these stimuli are generally preferred.

The leaky preferences assumption may also operate on a more concrete level. Specifically, we propose that when no available option in a choice assortment is clearly superior to the others (and hence, preference uncertainty is high) people will base their decision on effort-reduction factors rather than on the content of the choice. That is, when appeal to preference is uninformative, people choose the option which simplifies the decision process. We will call this tendency, the choice-simplicity heuristic.

In the standard dual-process framework (e.g. Kahneman and Frederick, 2002), consumers are postulated to have two families of cognitive processes- one that is relatively automatic, affective, and intuitive (System 1) and the other that is more effortful, deliberative, and logical (System 2). In our view, the choice-simplicity heuristic applies to both cognitive systems. When System 2 is dominant (and preference uncertainty is high), the choice simplicity heuristic selects the option which simplifies the decision process by calculation. Likewise, when System 1 is dominant, the choice simplicity heuristic selects the option which simplifies the decision process by affect. In both cases, the decision process can be simplified by attending to certain cues in the choice environment.

Seemingly irrelevant contextual cues (i.e. features of the choice environment which do not relate to the content of the choices being considered), can nevertheless simplify the decision process. For instance, we can simplify the decision process for System 2 by selecting the option which involves the least tradeoffs. Selecting the option which minimizes tradeoffs between products leads to variety seeking behavior (Simonson, 1990). Similarly, selecting the option which minimizes tradeoffs between attributes leads to the compromise effect (Simonson, 1989; Simonson and Tversky, 1992). This approach significantly simplifies the calculations and deliberations in the choice process.

The choice-simplicity heuristic suggests that people often look for simplifying cues in the choice environment to aid them in the decision process. In particular, consumers may consider objective cues (such as the presence of a default option), perceptual cues (such as the recognition that one option dominates another), affective cues (such as a positive affective response toward a stimulus) or cognitive cues (such as minimizing the need to make tradeoffs). This perspective suggests that extremeness seeking, endowment effects, and asymmetric dominance effects are under the purview of system 1 since the (objective, perceptual, and affective) cues which generate
these effects are relatively automatic. Similarly, we would suspect that variety seeking and compromise effects result from System 2 processing since making tradeoffs is a more deliberative activity. This hypothesis gains some support in recent work (e.g. Bettman et al. (2008), Pocheptsova et al. (2009)).

Overall, the leaky preferences assumption may serve to integrate aspects of computational efficiency (ease of processing), aesthetic preferences (easily processed abstract stimuli), and difficult choices (easily processed concrete stimuli), into a basic model of perception, preference, and choice. At the abstract level, this assumption provides a simple framework for identifying potentially universal aesthetic preferences, and determining how these preferences are related. At a more concrete level, the leaky preferences assumption suggests that in the face of preference uncertainty, consumers may select an option simply because the structure of the choice environment makes that option easier to process. This leads to the choice simplicity heuristic which, in turn, can account for some notable behavioral anomalies.

Selected References

Choice Under Pressure: Perverse Outcomes of Enhanced Familiarity Preference
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Extended Abstract
Consumers often have to evaluate options and make decisions under time pressure, which can affect these behaviors in diverse and important ways (Chowdhury et al., 2009; Nowlis, 1995). Extensively documented in both animal research (Griebel et al. 1993; Heinrichs & Koob, 1992; Shephard & Estall, 1984) and cases such as preferences for “comfort foods” (Kandiah et al., 2006) is that pressure of various forms increases preferences for familiar stimuli and options. Familiarity signals safety, which gains heightened importance and appeal under stress. Similarly, in a converse case, happy moods can eliminate preferences for familiar stimuli by independently signaling safety (de Vries et al., 2010).

Sometimes, however, a familiar option is also the most disaligned with the very source of one’s felt pressure. Imagine that you drive the same route to work every day, along a frequently congested highway. You know of a likely quicker route involving various side-streets, but have only taken it a few times. When you’re running late and have a big meeting to make, the pressure to arrive on-time, by magnifying the attractiveness of taking the familiar but longer route, may make it more likely that you’ll be late. Similarly, time pressure may increase a consumer’s willingness to wait for their “usual” option (such as a regularly called cab driver, but who is ten minutes away) and foregoing other, more immediately available alternatives.

Of course, it is not that these familiar options are guaranteed to have worse outcomes: an unfamiliar driving-route might take longer if you get lost; an unfamiliar cab driver may drive slowly, get lost, or choose a bad route. But even with no objective evidence for these possibilities, pressure may increase worry over their prospect and conversely enhance the “warm glow” of safety associated with a familiar option, even if evidence suggests it is a worse choice.

Study Method. We tested such counterposing of familiarity and communicated option-characteristics in the case of selection between task options for completion under time pressure. In part 1 of the experiment, participants (n=145, from a national pool) encountered ancillary biographical information about a pictured person (name, birthday, number of siblings, hometown, etc.). In the second part, they were told that, if they solved a word-puzzle task correctly, they would be entered into a prize-drawing. In the No-Pressure condition, participants were told they could take as long as they wished to complete the task. In the Time-Pressure condition, they were told they would have at most four minutes to complete the task.

Participants were offered a choice between two puzzle-task options: one listed as having two passages of text to work through, and the other listed as having three. The only other information provided about these options was the name of the person who created each of them. In the Both-Unfamiliar condition, neither of these individuals had been encountered in the experiment. In the Longer-Familiar...
condition, the person associated with the three-passage option was the same one for whom participants encountered irrelevant biographical information in part 1 of the experiment. Crossing the pressure and familiarity manipulations, we explored how time pressure affected preferences for seemingly longer but incidentally familiar options.

Results. Cross-tabulations yielded significant differences in task-choice between the four cells (Chi-sq(3)=12.25, p<.01). As hypothesized, time pressure increased choice of the three-passage (i.e., objectively longer-seeming) option when it was associated with a familiar person, in comparison to when both options were associated with unfamiliar people (p<.01), and also compared to both No-Pressure cases, regardless of whether a familiar option was given (p<.05). Thus, time pressure enhanced familiarity bias, even when objective information indicated the familiar choice would actually take longer, and when the shorter option was preferred in the absence of any familiarity difference between options.

We also queried several process measures after the primary experimental sections that support our results. In both No-Pressure conditions and the Time-Pressure/Both-Unfamiliar condition, concern prior to the puzzle task about finishing in time was significantly correlated with choosing the two-passage task (r’s>.43), whereas in the Time-Pressure/Longer-Familiar case, this concern significantly correlated with choice of the three-passage task (r=.34). In contrast, perceived stress and pressure during the task was greater amongst those who chose the three-passage task, regardless of associated familiarity. Thus, despite their preference for the familiar option, individuals under time pressure choosing the longer task did not experience less stress or find the task less difficult.

As evidence for the bases of familiar-option preferences, under time pressure, choosing the longer task was correlated with higher risk aversion, as measured by lower minimum sure-gains preferred to a 95% chance to win $100 (r=-.29). In both Longer-Familiar conditions, choice of this longer option correlated with beliefs (for which no objective evidence existed) that this task would be easier (r’s>.35) and give a greater chance of success (r’s>.30), and also with beliefs that this choice was less risky (r’s>.34) and fit better with one’s “gut feeling” about the best choice to make (r’s>.50).

Ongoing Work and Extensions. In follow-up investigations we are exploring familiarity established through negative experiences, such as unpleasant interpersonal encounters. Whereas such familiarity commonly leads to biases against associated stimuli (Lewicki, 1986), our results suggest perceived pressure may reverse this preference. As well, we are exploring non-time forms of stress, such as performance pressure, and cases where objective evidence indicates familiar options are again more likely to aggravate such pressure.

Conclusions. Results indicate that not only does pressure magnify the attractiveness of familiar choice options, it can do so even when such options are contrary to the very source of the pressure one feels. These results are driven by heightened perceptions of safety and comfort with familiar options, even when objective evidence disfavors them. Consumers may thus make perversely distorted choices when available alternatives differ in their perceived familiarity, and objectively superior choices when choice-sets are limited to unfamiliar options.

References


When Ambivalence Increases Attitude-Behavior Correspondence

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Much of the past research has focused on the consequences of attitudinal ambivalence in terms of reduced attitude-behavior consistency, and the antecedents of ambivalence (Priester et al, 1996; Conner et al, 2002; Cavazza et al, 2008). There has not been much attention devoted to studying conditions under which attitudes may be predictive of behavior even when they are held with high ambivalence. The objective of this research therefore is to study ambivalent individuals’ attitude-behavior correspondence under conditions where one’s positive (negative) reactions are made more (less) diagnostic at the time of choice. We use different levels of mood to manipulate individual’s perceived diagnosticity of their initial reactions toward the attitudinal object. We argue that when individuals are put in a happy mood, they would perceive mood congruent (thus positive) aspects the product as of being more diagnostic; however when individuals are put in a sad mood, they would perceive mood congruent (thus negative) aspects of the product to be more diagnostic. The perception of reaction diagnosticity is believed to act as the key role determining whether an individual is more or less likely to behavior according to their attitude.
Theoretical Conceptualization

Attitudinal ambivalence is characterized by a person experiencing both positive and negative reactions to an object. Dominant reactions are those that are greater in number, whether positive or negative; Conflicting reactions, on the other hand, are those that are fewer in number, and are opposite in valence with the dominant reactions (Priester et al., 1996; Priester & Petty, 2001; Priester, Petty & Park, 2007). The idea that ambivalence is linked separately in memory to positive and negative components is important because it suggests that a different attitudinal reaction emerges depending on which of the components is activated in memory (e.g., Petty & Britiol, 2009). In normal conditions, if people hold a positive attitude without ambivalence, it is expected that primarily the positive reactions would come to their mind whenever they think about the attitudinal object. However, if individuals have ambivalence in their attitude, even though their overall evaluation of the attitudinal object is one-directional, the encountering of the object may invoke both positive and negative reactions within these individuals. Whether ambivalent individuals’ choice consistent with their overall attitude would depend on which reactions are perceived to be more diagnostic at the moment.

Thus, while ambivalent attitudes are characterized by positive and negative components of the attitude being retrieved simultaneously, they may experience a hard time making up their mind for decisions. At this time, the mood one is in may serve as the trigger for spreading activations of the positive aspects of the attitudinal object. Ambivalent individuals may have an easier time retrieving the positive (negative) associations about the attitudinal object when they are in a happy (sad) mood. The easier retrieval of the positive (negative) associations may increase the perceived diagnosticity of the retrieved associations thus affects the later behavior.

Explicitly, we predict that:

H1: For highly ambivalent attitudes, being in a happy (sad) mood will affect choice to be more (less) consistent with the positive component of the attitude while being in a neutral mood will make the choice to be less consistent with the positive component of the attitude.

H2: For attitudes held with low ambivalence, being in a happy (sad) mood will affect choice no differently from being in a neutral mood, in terms of consistency between the positive (negative) component of an attitude and choice.

Methods & Results

We conducted a 2 (low vs. high ambivalence) X 3 (happy vs. neutral vs. sad mood) study to test our hypotheses above. We randomly assigned subjects to different mood induction conditions then had them responded to a choice question of either a free order of French fries or a free order of parfait as reward for the participation of the study. The attitudinal object of the study was Wendy’s French fries. Subjects for the study all hold an overall positive attitude toward French fries, with a SM = 6.85, SD = 1.04; M ambivalence = 3.73, SD = .69); and the other seventy four participants hold a positive but low ambivalent attitude toward French fries (M attitude = 6.63, SD = .88; M ambivalence = 6.81, SD = .99). Subjects from the low vs. high ambivalent groups were significantly different in ambivalence (F (1, 132) = 418.057, p < .000) but they did not differ much in their attitude or attitude extremity toward French fries (F (1, 132) = 1.723, p > .192 NS).

Our hypotheses call for an interaction between mood and ambivalence such that choice probabilities of French fries are unaffected by mood in the low ambivalence conditions, but affected positively in the happy mood condition and negatively in the sad mood condition. In other words, while choice probabilities are about equal in four experimental conditions (low ambivalence neutral, happy and sad mood conditions; and high ambivalence neutral mood condition), there would be an increase (decrease) in the choice probability of French fries in the happy (sad) mood, high ambivalence condition(s).

For the whole sample, 66.4 % of the participants (89 out of 134) chose French fries with the rest of the sample choosing Parfait. Overall, individuals’ attitude toward French fries was positively correlated with their choice (r = .22, p < .01). The fact that more than 50% of the participants choosing French fries was not surprising but was predicted because all participants chosen for this study had indicated that they had an overall positive attitude toward French fries (M = 6.73 in a 9-point scale where “1” = very negative “9” = very positive). Choice probabilities for French fries do not vary much for the low ambivalent groups (β = -.158, p > .68) (F P obability Low+neutral = 6 .6% F P obability Low+ sad = 7 .9% F P obability Low+h appy = 6 .1% p for each pair-comparison all > .60). However, attitude consists with behavior the most likely for those the high ambivalent individuals in happy mood condition (F P obability High+happy = 9 .7%. F P obability High+neutral = 6 .8%).

Consistent with past literature pertaining that ambivalent attitudes are less predictive of behavior than less ambivalent attitudes, we find in this research that individuals who hold a positive but less ambivalent attitude toward French fries to show a more stable attitude-behavior correspondence than those who hold a positive but high ambivalent attitude. Further, individuals with less ambivalent attitude should tend to choose toward French fries regardless of what mood condition they are in. In contrast, high ambivalent individuals would have a more fluctuated behavior pattern in choosing for French fries because of the existence of conflicting reactions, and that the conflicting reactions can be perceived as deterministically diagnostic if they are made salient to them.

Selective References

It’s More Likely…But Can It Be Worth It?

**Perceived Similarity, Probability and Outcome Value**

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**Extended Abstract**

Individuals are prone to developing naïve theories about the likelihood of event occurrences because what is reckoned to happen determines their subsequent judgments and actions. Prior research suggests that intuitive probability judgments are susceptible to extraneous cues such as descriptions of the event (Tversky and Koehler 1994), the representativeness or availability of exemplars (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982), moods (Wright and Bower 1992), and cognitive orientation (Wakslak and Trope 2009). In this research, we propose that individuals employ an extraneous cue, perceived similarity, to infer the probability of an event, and in turn, use the probability judgment to evaluate the impact level of the event.

In order to understand, evaluate, and predict the outside world, individuals are motivated to develop naïve theories from cumulated life experiences (Strevens 2000) or knowledge (Springer 1995). For most daily life cases, the proximity to the target person and the likelihood of event occurrence are highly correlated. For example, sharing a living space with someone with a cold makes us more likely to get sick. Another common example is that individuals who have a family history of heart disease are high in risk as well because of genetic factors. Recently, research on probability judgment has also shown that lottery participants estimate their chance of winning as higher when the winner of previous round is similar to them than when the former winner is dissimilar (Laporte and Laurent 2009). Thus we posit that individuals build from the observations and experiences of such events the naïve theory that they are more prone to experience events that strike their close others than events that strike unknown individuals. Moreover, even though this naïve theory facilitates and leads to correct judgments in general, it does lead to inflated likelihood when people infer higher probabilities from proximities that are irrelevant.

Intuitive probability judgments in turn affect individuals’ judgments of the target event. For example, increasing individuals’ perceptions of their own risk leads to more favorable attitudes and intentions toward practicing HIV precautionary behaviors (Raghunib 1998). However, we argue that probability judgments would underact the perceived impact level of events in situations where the outcome of an event is ambiguous or unknown. That is, when the information about event outcome is absent, event probability serves as indirect information and signals the impact level of events. Previous research has shown that limited, scarce resources are deemed more desirable (Inman, Peter, and Raghubir 1997; Lynn 1992). Drawing on this logic, we further hypothesize that the inflated probability judgment based on perceived proximity would downplay perceived impact level of the event. In other words, an event that is related to a similar individual will appear more likely to occur, which in turn, will render the event less impactful.

Two studies tested the present predictions. Study 1 investigated the influence of probability information on perceived impact level. Participants read scenarios about winning a store gift card in a store lottery and getting a flight upgrade on a trip and then judged the outcome values. We manipulated the probability of each event (70%, 30%, and 5%). The dependent variable was the outcome value (i.e., value of the store gift card and value of the flight upgrade). The results confirmed our hypothesis. When the event is of lowest likelihood (5%), the highest outcome value estimation was achieved. Furthermore, the estimated outcome value decreased as the event probability increased.

Study 2 directly tested whether embedding a similar social cue (vs. dissimilar) in the description of events (winning a store gift card in a lottery and getting a flight upgrade on a trip) would construe the events to be more likely to occur, and the inflated probability would subsequently decrease the perceived impact level of the events. Participants were asked to read scenarios that contained different social cues (e.g., a friend or a stranger) and then rated the likelihood that the events would occur to them and how long the effect of events would last. As expected, we found that the presence of a similar social cue leads to a higher probability judgment. Furthermore, probability judgments negatively predicted the number of days participants believed the positive effect would last.

Probabilities are often difficult to assess objectively, and research has indicated various cues employed to infer probabilities. The present studies suggest that perceived proximity acts as such a cue. Specifically, our initial findings demonstrate that probability judgments may be biased by the presence of social cues because individuals make probability inferences from perceived proximity to the
target person. In addition, the probability judgment itself serves as a cue when the information about the event outcome is ambiguous, and thus affects the perceived impact level of an event. When an event is judged as more likely to occur due to perceived proximity, it is also judged as less impactful.

References
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Prior research has demonstrated that consumers use references to facilitate decision-making. The literature examined consumer’s reliance on reference points with comparable attributes within a product category (Rajendran and Tellis 1994; Rosch 1975). The current research aims to reveal that consumers often rely on a previous purchase from a different, often unrelated product category in order to justify a current purchase decision.

Literature
Consumers usually need various strategies to make/justify a purchase decision. In classical economics, a consumer’s decision is derived from her preferences for competing alternatives, as revealed by the indifference curve given a budget constraint. Little attention has been devoted to the formation of such indifference curve due to the subjective nature of preferences (Georgescu-Roegen 1936; Hauer and Urban 1986). Marketing scholars, especially consumer behavior researchers, have been dedicated to explore such subjectivity of consumers’ preferences.

Prior research focused on how consumers discover their own preferences through various decision-making strategies or tactics, for instance, framing (Kahneman and Tversky 1984), anchoring (Strack and Mussweiler 1997; Tversky and Kahneman 1974), and relying on a reference (Rosch 1975; Rajendran and Tellis 1994; Huber et al. 2008). Notably this research stream focuses on the comparison between products or attributes that are closely related or comparable, for example, different brands or different prices, respectively, within a given product category.

Recent research also acknowledged the possible influence of unrelated or cross-category products on consumer decision-making: for instance, the shopping momentum phenomenon (Dhar et al. 2007), the devaluation effect (Brendl et al. 2003), and the role of incidentally activated shopping goals (Chartrand et al. 2008). In these studies, unrelated or cross category purchases or products emerge as situational/environmental influences or consumer mindsets, rather than as references consumers actively use to evaluate a focal purchase decision.

The current research aims to broaden the view of reference by investigating situations in which consumers refer to an unrelated (cross-category) product as a reference to make a current purchase decision. We present a theory of “motivated anchoring” to understand (1) when consumers rely on cross-category referencing, (2) its impact on consumer decision-making, and 3) its underlying mechanism.

Cross Category Reference in Consumer Decision-making
The literature on motivated reasoning has studied how people’s motivational states can influence their perceptions and judgments (Kunda 1990). We present a theory of “motivated anchoring” to understand how a consumer may use seemingly incomparable references to help her justify a highly (less) desired target product as being more (less) worthy of purchase.

We argue that when a consumer desires to own a product, this form of biased evaluation will justify the purchase. In other words, a consumer driven by her desire for the target product is motivated to retrieve a cross category reference that helps justify her purchase