The Impact of Metacognition on Commitment For Attainment Versus Maintenance Goals

Antonios Stamatogiannakis, IE Business School, Spain
Haiyang Yang, INSEAD, Singapore
Amitava Chattopadhyay, INSEAD, Singapore

Despite the importance of attainment and maintenance goals, little is known about their interactions with metacognitive experiences. We examine these interactions and show that they are complex: Easy generation of success strategies increases commitment only for maintenance goals. Moreover, an accessible independent (interdependent) self-construal increases commitment for attainment (maintenance) goals.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1009505/volumes/v39/NA-39

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The Impact of Metacognition on Commitment for Attainment versus Maintenance Goals
Antonios Stamatogiannakis, IE Business School, Spain
Haiyang Yang, INSEAD, Singapore
Amitava Chattopadhyay, INSEAD, Singapore

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Consumers and firms across many domains (e.g., charity, 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, goals can be classified as either attainment or maintenance goals. Attainment goals are those for which the actual state differs from the desired state (e.g., increase your balance). Maintenance goals are those for which the actual and the desired states match, and need to remain matched (e.g., maintain your balance; Stamatogiannakis, Chattopadhyay, and Chakravarti 2010).

Given the mixed use of these two goal types, it is surprising that we know little on how they compare with each other. Recent research is covering some of this gap. First, people tend to strive for better states when they focus on what they need to do, but they are satisfied with the present state when they consider what they have already done (Koo and Fishbach 2010). Second, modest attainment goals are perceived as easier than objectively easier maintenance goals (Stamatogiannakis et al. 2010). As a result, they are also more attractive (Stamatogiannakis, Chattopadhyay, and Chakravarti 2011). Finally, matching attainment goals with promotion focus and/or maintenance goals with prevention focus increases outcome evaluations (Brodscoll, Kober, and Higgins 2007).

The current research examines the complex effects of metacognitive experiences (Schwarz 2004) on consumers’ commitment to the two types of goals (Kruglaksi et al. 2002). Our findings make several contributions. First, they show that, as people draw on their subjective experience when making an evaluative judgment (Wänke, Bohner, and Jurkowitsch 1997; Schwarz 2004), perceived goal difficulty, and thereby goal commitment, are affected by how easy or difficult strategies for success are generated. This generation is particularly difficult for maintenance goals (Jiraporn and Desai 2011). Therefore, we predict that a maintenance goal will become more attractive when strategy generation is made easy (e.g., by asking people to generate only one strategy) versus when it is made hard (e.g., by asking people to generate five strategies). Finally, as success strategy generation is relatively easy for attainment goals (Jiraporn and Desai 2011), the attractiveness of these goals will not be affected by the number of strategies that have to be generated, within the range studied in this research (i.e., 1 vs. 5 strategies). We test these predictions in study 1.

After examining the effects of perceived ease of strategies generation, we turn to another metacognitive experience related variable, increased accessibility; increased accessibility improves processing fluency of related constructs and thus positively impacts preference for such constructs (Schwarz 2004). Specifically, we show that the commitment for the two goal types is dependent on the accessibility of different self-construals. Independent and interdependent orientations coexist within each person (Markus and Kitayama 1991), and they can be primed by contextual cues (Maddux et al. 2010). Independent self-construals emphasize values such as seeking personal achievement, improving individual status, and being distinct and unique (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Thus, they are congruent with attainment goals. Interdependent self-construals, however, emphasize values such as maintaining social relationships, conforming to others, and not standing out (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Thus, they are congruent with maintenance goals. Given that increased accessibility improves processing fluency of related constructs (Schwarz 2004), when independent (interdependent) aspects of self-construals are made more accessible by the situation, people are likely to see attainment (maintenance) goals more favorably. We test these predictions in study 2.

Third, and importantly, the above predictions are tested with goals that are important for the participant, rather than with imaginary goal scenarios.

Experiment one uses a 2 x 3 between participants design. Participants were recruited for two proofreading tasks, lasting three minutes each. After they have completed the first task, some participants were assigned a maintenance goal (i.e., find at least one equal number of mistakes in the second task) and some an attainment goal (i.e., find at least one more mistake in the second task). Further, some participants had to list 1 strategy that would help them achieve their goal, some had to list 5 such strategies, and some did not have to list any strategies. As expected from past research (Stamatogiannakis et al. 2011), attainment goals were more attractive than maintenance goals in the control (0 strategies) condition. In addition, as strategy generation is easy for attainment goals (Jiraporn and Desai 2011) the number of strategies manipulation did not affect attainment goals. However, generating only 1 strategy made maintenance goals more attractive compared to the control condition, and as attractive as attainment goals. However, generating 5 strategies made attractiveness ratings relapse to the control condition levels, and less attractive than attainment goals.

Experiment two uses a 2 x 2 between participants design. Following Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999), we primed independent (interdependent) self-construal by asking participants to read a text and clicking on singular (plural) pronouns such as I and myself (we and ourselves). Then they were asked to think about their favourite charity, and indicate any amount they would like to donate to it. After that, they were asked their willingness to pre-commit to donate exactly the same amount (a maintenance goal), or the same amount plus 1 cent (an attainment goal), a year from now. The priming x goal type interaction was significant. People indicated greater willingness to pre-commit to an attainment (maintenance) goal when primed with an independent (interdependent) self-construal.

To conclude, this paper adds to previous literature comparing attainment with maintenance goals. It demonstrates that at the baseline, and when strategy generation is difficult, attainment goals are more committing than maintenance goals. However, the two goal types are equally committing when strategy generation is easy. Moreover, attainment (maintenance) goals are more committing when an independent (interdependent) self-construal is accessible. Thus, commitment for the two goal types is context dependent, and is affected differently by meta-cognitive experiences.

REFERENCES


