What’S Important Depends Upon How I See Us: the Influence of Self-Construal on Choice and Advice-Giving

Jason Stornelli, University of Michigan, USA
Richard Gonzalez, University of Michigan, USA
Carolyn Yoon, University of Michigan, USA

People are often faced with the task of making consumer choices for others, such as making product recommendations. However, although a good deal of research has examined choices for oneself, we know relatively little about the ways individuals consider product features when choosing for other people.

Past research (Kray & Gonzalez 1999; Kray 2000) has shown that decision-makers assign differing attribute weights in choice decisions for the self versus for others. We extend this model to a marketing context and hypothesize that self-construal influences this attribute weighting process by prompting individuals to engage in either self-other merging or increased perspective-taking when making choices for others; the former prediction suggests that participants with a collective self-construal should be more likely to weight attributes in choices for the self in the same manner as choices for close others, while the latter prediction suggests an enhancement of self/other differences in weighting for collectivist participants.

Our results support the perspective-taking hypothesis – respondents primed with a collective self-construal were more likely to select an option that prioritized one attribute when choosing for others, and an option that facilitated tradeoffs when choosing for the self. In contrast, respondents primed with an individual self-construal did not choose significantly differently when asked to decide for the self versus for others. Future directions and implications of these findings for decision theory are discussed.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1009601/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/
In conclusion, this study suggests that for single female baby boomers, their general attitude towards retirement is a salient factor in the application of the TPB in the context of post-retirement housing decisions. Pertinent to achieving a greater understanding of how single female baby boomers are planning their post-retirement housing, is the examination of psychological barriers to retirement planning. This study provides insights into what is driving post-retirement housing planning, or lack therefore, in this cohort. Such information allows marketers and public policy makers to develop and communicate housing retirement planning products and services offerings specific to this demographic.

REFERENCES

What’s important depends upon how I see us:
The influence of self-construal on choice and advice-giving

Jason Stornelli, University of Michigan, USA
Richard Gonzalez, University of Michigan, USA
Carolyn Yoon, University of Michigan, USA

Consumers are often faced with the task of making recommendations about products and services to others; explosive growth in online reviews, brand communities, and social networks has made sharing recommendations more common than ever before. Yet, although much marketing research has examined choices for the self, we know relatively little about how individuals consider marketing features when choosing for others.

Research examining advice-giving shows that advisors use a weighting strategy that is more lexicographic, placing emphasis on one attribute when recommending jobs, courses and volunteering opportunities. Conversely, when choosing for the self, the difficulty of making tradeoffs and foregoing valued attributes leads to more equal weighting patterns (Kray & Gonzalez 1999; Kray 2000).

We broaden the scope of this framework in two ways. First, in contrast to Kray & Gonzalez, who explored decisions that are central to personal identity, we examine the model’s effectiveness in a less identity-centric and broader product/service context. Additionally, we examine the role of self-construal – how the self is defined in relation to others – in this process. As recommendation networks become more global with the growth of online interaction, we need to study how culture impacts attribute weighting (Park 2008). Changes in self-construal generate two opposing hypotheses regarding attribute weighting for self-choices versus other-choices.

First, a self-other merging perspective (e.g. Aron et al. 1991) argues that collective self-construals promote a shared sense of resources, perspectives, and characteristics between the self and close others. This perspective suggests that self-other differences in attribute weights should be attenuated when the decision-maker operates under a collective (vs. independent) self-construal.

Conversely, the ability and motivation to engage in perspective-taking varies by culture, suggesting that collectivism may enhance differences in self-other attribute weighting structures. For instance, Cohen, Hoshino-Browne and Leung (2007; see also Wu & Keysar 2007) argue that Asian-Americans are more likely to use attention toward the background, habits, and feelings of others when understanding the world, compared to Euro-Americans who rely on egocentric projection. However, it remains unclear whether these results are driven by self-construal or other cultural norms, and if they would also apply to a choice context, particularly in light of research demonstrating that the links between agency, preferences, and choice are inconsistent across cultures (Savani, Markus & Conner 2010).

Thus, we predict that,

**H1:** When making product/service choices, decision-makers are more likely to assign greater weight to one attribute when making a recommendation to others, compared to when they are making a choice for themselves.
H2a: This self-other difference will be attenuated when the decision-maker is operating under a collective self-construal due to self-other merging, or;

H2b: This self-other difference will be enhanced when the decision-maker is operating under a collective self-construal due to improved perspective-taking.

METHOD

Two factors were varied between-subjects (n=91): self-construal [individual/collective] and choice target [self/other]. Participants began by completing two self-construal primes: pronoun-circling and Sumerian Warrior (Oyserman & Lee 2008; Gardner, Gabriel & Lee 1999). Respondents then read a scenario about choosing an apartment for themselves or recommending an apartment for a close friend of the same gender, and chose between two apartments described on three dimensions (rent, neighborhood, and in-unit laundry). The attribute structure allowed inference of the weighting strategy (Kray & Gonzalez 1999; Kray 2000). The equal weighting alternative was an apartment that maximized utility on two dimensions (the cost of rent and the washer/dryer), while the lexicographic alternative maximized utility on one dimension (the safety of the neighborhood). Thus, by observing the selection of the lexicographic alternative, we can infer that participants are giving greater weight to safety at the expense of the other two attributes. Conversely, the selection of the equal weighting alternative suggests participants maximize value on the greatest number of attributes.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Results support the perspective-taking hypothesis. A logistic regression yielded a significant omnibus interaction of self-construal and choice target: Z = -1.99, p < 0.05. More importantly, planned contrasts within each self-construal condition indicated that the choice target impacted choice patterns differentially. When respondents were primed with a collective self-construal, they preferred the lexicographic alternative when choosing for a friend, and the equal weighting alternative when choosing for themselves. This self-other difference in choice pattern was significant: Z = 2.38, p < 0.05. Conversely, there was no significant difference in self-other choices under an independent self-construal (Z = -0.37, p = n.s.). The equal weighting alternative was preferred for both self-choices and recommendations to others.

Two follow-up studies are underway. It is possible that, rather than differentially weighting attributes for self-versus-other choices, collectivist participants preferred lower rent for themselves and a safer neighborhood for a friend. Risk judgments are impacted by culture (e.g. Weber & Hsee 1998; Hsee & Weber 1999) and the judgment target (e.g. Raghubir & Menon 1998), so choice may have been influenced by the judged likelihood of one's ability to absorb financial obligations or of a dangerous event in the less-attractive neighborhood. Further, Luce (1999) argues that certain attributes, including safety, generate more loss aversion. Participants in the collective/self condition may be more attuned to this consideration and hesitant to recommend less-desirable neighborhoods. Thus, we employ a flipped attribute pattern, where the lexicographic apartment maximizes rent utility, and the equal weighting option maximizes utility from the neighborhood and washer/dryer. We measure risk perception, decision difficulty, and decision importance.

In a second follow-up, we change the attribute structure to infer weights differently. Participants choose between gyms that maximize one dimension (aesthetics or travel distance). When collective decision-makers give advice, we expect one option to garner a greater choice share because a disproportionate degree of weight is placed on the focal attribute. In contrast, both collective advisors and independent choosers/advisors should display choice shares closer to parity.

Additional follow-up studies are also in progress to explore whether the mechanism is affective or cognitive in nature.

This package provides an exciting advance in our understanding of the ways in which people weight attributes when choosing for another person, and begin to shed a brighter light on mechanisms underlying cultural differences in perspective-taking.

REFERENCES


Effects of Legibility of Text in Product Descriptions on Price Perceptions

Rajneesh Suri, Drexel University, USA
Chiranjeev Kohli, Cal State Fullerton, USA
Dhruv Grewal, Babson College, USA
Shan Feng, Drexel University, USA

Marketing often needs to engage consumers and hold their attention in likable ways. It is not surprising then that retailers like Trader Joe’s use creative point-of-sale materials with fancy calligraphy, a merchandising technique that not only provides product details but also capture consumers’ attention by its uniqueness. Pieters and Wedel (2004) showed that advertisers aiming to maximize attention to their communications should consider devoting more space to its text, but also asserted that the extent to which such effects were caused by text layout (e.g., font type) was not well understood. The focus of the present study is whether typeface used to present product information affects attention to different text elements (price and product attributes).

Several recent studies provide evidence confirming that words are identified during reading by discriminating the underlying structure of their component letters. In particular, Sanocki (1987) showed that the visual cues readers use to derive the underlying structure of letters, and the rules they implement to achieve this, are adjusted according to the typeface in which text appears. Based on this research and evidence that individuals have limited visual attention (Wolfe, Cave and Franzel 1989), we predict that when typeface consumes greater cognitive resources, it results in increased attention to product details using that text at the expense of price information. Integrating this underlying process and the concept of working memory capacity (Hambrick and Engle 2002) and left-digit effect in number processing (Thomas and Morwitz 2005), we predict that consumers when processing product information presented in a harder to read typeface will pay greater attention to product attributes than if they were presented information in a relatively easy to read typeface. Because consumers’ attentional resources are limited, increasing attention to an element in a communication maybe at the expense of other elements. Consequently recall of price information in more difficult to read typeface will be distorted and consumers will truncate numbers in a price (say $29.58) and recall a lower price (e.g., $20.08) than when price was presented in an easier to read typeface.

Pretests led to the selection of two typefaces that were either easy (Helvetica) or hard (Bradley) to read. Two studies then collected initial evidence for whether legibility of such typeface affected processing of attribute information and a distortion of price recall. In study 1, materials were presented on computer stations in a behavioral laboratory and participants (55 undergraduate students) were included in a lottery to stimulate their engagement with the task. The study was conducted as part of a larger study and the software randomly presented product information for two products using these two typefaces. At the conclusion of the study, participants completed a working memory task adapted from Hambrick and Engle (2002). Results revealed that participants committed fewer errors recognizing attributes when product descriptions were presented in the harder to read typeface. Furthermore, such a pattern of errors was explained by participants’ working memory capacity; those with lower working memory capacity showed greater errors.

Though study 1 showed differences in the scrutiny of product attributes described in the two typefaces, the effects of this closer examination of attributes on recall of price information was not measured. Study 2 assessed both processing of product attributes, as well as price recall for the target product. Using the same typefaces as in study 1, four versions of the target description were created. These versions differed in whether product descriptions accompanied price in the same or a contrasting typeface. Similar to study 1, working memory capacity of participants (111 undergraduate students) was also measured. The results were interesting and revealed that the harder to read typeface resulted in a greater distortion of price recall, supporting not only a parallel visual search by consumers (Wolfe, Cave and Franzel 1989), but also left digit-effects on price recall. Furthermore, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction effect of typeface and working memory capacity, with differences between the typefaces on price recall becoming non-significant for those with high working memory capacity. Consistent with study 1, the harder to read typeface also increased accuracy of processing product attributes.

Though Nelson (1985) endorsed a complexity in advertising as it “slows down the reader making things more difficult to take in” (p. 115), others suggest that complexity hurts advertising because it makes people pay less attention to the brand (Pieters Wedel and Batra 2010). The initial evidence from this research shares kinship with the latter research and shows a superior effect of harder-to-read typeface on consumers’ recognition of product attributes, but a weaker recall of the accompanying price. These results add not only to our understanding of how consumers conduct visual search, but also how consumers’ attention to product descriptions compromises their attention to price.

REFERENCES: