For the Heart, Less Is More: the Role of Emotions in Assortment Size Preferences

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We examine how reliance on one’s feelings during decision making influences assortment size preferences. Two studies demonstrated that greater reliance on feelings mitigated the difference in preferences for large versus smaller assortments due to individuals’ insensitivity to the difference in perceived variety provided by large versus smaller assortments. In particular, consumers who relied on their feelings to a greater extent were more likely to prefer smaller assortments.

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REFERENCES

My Heart Longs for More: The Role of Emotions in Assortment Size Preferences

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Past research has documented the factors that influence consumer choice among assortments, such as the decision flexibility (McAlister and Pessemier 1982), the probability of a match between consumers’ preferences and the available alternatives (Lancaster 1990), availability of ideal point (Chernev 2003), the anticipated cognitive effort in making a choice (Huffman and Kahn 1998) and the nature of decision process (Chernev 2006). This research has mainly focused on the cognitive processes used in the construction of assortment size preferences.

In this paper, we investigate the role of emotions in influencing consumers’ assortment-size preferences. In particular, we explore whether decisions based on affective versus cognitive processes may influence preferences for assortment size. Prior research has shown that emotional system is holistic (Epstein 1994). Accordingly, we argue that while evaluating the assortment, people who engage in such holistic processing may focus more on judging the overall features of the choice set. Research has shown that individuals who perform global evaluations favour high variety (Ratner, Kahn and Kahman 1999). Compared to smaller assortments, larger assortments may therefore provide greater “fit” to the desire for more variety. Hence, we argue that people who make feeling-based choices would be more satisfied with a large assortment than a small assortment.

In contrast, people who are more likely to engage in cognitive processing may experience less “fit” from the large assortment compared to people who engage in affective processing. As a consequence, the difference in preference for large versus smaller assortment is mitigated when people are making reason-based choices. The predicted effect of different types of processing strategies on preference for large assortments versus smaller assortments was tested in three studies by using both individual difference measure and indirect manipulation of likelihood of reliance on feelings.

In study 1, we provided participants a scenario where they were asked to consider purchasing a DVD at an entertainment store that either provided a selection of 24 movies (small-set condition) or a selection of 60 movies (large-set condition). We measured (1) their satisfaction with the assortment and (2) their dispositional tendency to rely on their feelings as opposed to their reason and logic by using the 10-item version of the Rational-Experiential Inventory (Epstein et al. 1996). As hypothesized, for participants who are inclined to adopt affective thinking styles, those in the large-set condition were more satisfied with their assortment than those in the small-set condition. Conversely, this difference in satisfaction was not significant for those who adopted cognitive processing.

Study 2 was designed to replicate the effect found in Study 1 by manipulating the degree of reliance on affective processing. This study was a 2 (assortments size: small vs. large) x 2 (cognitive load: high vs. low) between-subjects design. We provided participants a scenario in which they were asked to select a coffee for their friend from either a selection of 12 options (small-set condition) or a selection of 36 options (large-set condition). In order to induce different degrees of reliance on affective system, we used the cognitive load manipulation (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999), where participants were asked to memorize either a 2-digit code (low-load condition), or a 10-digit code (high-load condition) and to reproduce the code at the end of the study. Prior research has demonstrated that choice under cognitive load limits cognitive capacity, thus generating a greater degree of reliance on affective system than choice under low cognitive load (Lieberman et al. 2002). Accordingly, we predicted that participants who memorized 10-digit (vs. 2-digit) code are likely to rely more on their affective system while making decisions. Consistent with our hypothesis, when their cognitive capacities were constrained and therefore had to rely on affective system, participants in the large-set condition were more satisfied with the selection of coffees than those in the small-set condition. However, this difference in satisfaction was not significant for low-load participants who relied on affective system less.

Study 3 was designed in order to test the underlying mechanism, as well as to replicate the effect demonstrated in Study 1 and Study 2. This study was a 2 (assortments size: small vs. large) x 2 (cognitive load: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Similar to Study 2, reliance on feelings was operationalized by manipulating participants’ cognitive capacities. Participants were asked to select a snack for their friend either from a selection of 36 snacks (large-set condition) or a selection of 12 snacks (small-set condition). At the end of the study, participants answered some questions about (1) their satisfaction with the assortments they were given; and (2) desire for variety. Replicating the previous findings, the results showed that high-load participants who were confronted with large assortments were more satisfied with their snack selection than those who were confronted with smaller assortments. Mediation analysis showed that the desire for variety mediates the effect of the choice-set size on satisfaction with the selection, in the context of making either feeling-based or reason-based choices.

To summarize, we found that the reliance on affective processes boosts individuals’ preference for larger assortments as opposed to smaller assortments. However, this difference in preferences is mitigated when individuals rely on cognitive processes.

798 / Working Papers
REFERENCES


Dispositional Greed: Scale Development and Validation

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Greed is often invoked as an explanation for non-cooperative behavior in economic games (Stanley & Ume, 1998), as a driving force in resource exploitation (Ludwig et al, 1993) and is considered as intrinsic in a materialistic lifestyle (Belk, 1985). Despite this view of greed as a fundamental motive, no empirical research has been conducted to investigate causes and consequences of greed. Related to this, it is not clear why people differ in how greedy they are. To investigate these issues, a measure for dispositional greed - or greed as an individual behavior caused by internal characteristics - is develop to investigate the extent to which various factors covary with greed.

We first engaged in a thorough review of the philosophical and psychological literature concerning greed and conducted focus group research to identify different associations with ‘greed’ that may serve as the foundation for the development and individual difference measure of greed. In a second step an initial item pool of 60 items was generated based on theoretical assumptions, on operationalizations of theoretically related constructs in previous studies, like materialism (Richins and Dawson, 1992), envy (Belk, 1995) and greed avoidance (Lee and Ashton, 2004), and on population sampling, thus enhancing face validity. Furthermore, the response format was determined based on response tendencies and social desirability literature. The item pool and response format were both judged by laypersons for face and content validity, and the response format was assessed by a measurement expert. Moreover, the scale items and question wording were checked by a professional copy editor to ensure wording clarity, wording redundancy and correct meaning of the items. This resulted in an initial item pool of 60 questions attributed to five latent dimensions, of which three were highly related. These dimensions were: wanting more than is merely needed; insatiability; joy and pleasure from owning much; greed for status, wealth and power; and the use of ethically questionable methods to gain more.

METHOD

Pilot testing was used as an item-trimming procedure and to obtain initial estimates of reliability and validity. Given that the scale will be administered to further samples for refinement, a pilot study can reduce the number of items that do not meet certain psychometric criteria in an initial pool to a more manageable number. Also, items can be assessed initially for internal consistency, means, variances, average inter-item correlation and factor structure. Therefore, as part of a bigger questionnaire, the greed scale was administered among 400 Caucasian Americans (200 males, M age = 44.5, SD = 12.4).

RESULTS

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted for trimming and retaining items for the final scale. This EFA was used to reveal items that load poorly in terms of magnitude on an intended factor or load highly on more than one factor. The useful sample of this pilot study was 318. Factor interpretation took all items into account with loadings greater than 0.35. The requirements for the measures of sampling adequacy were met: KMO was 0.884 and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was highly significant at p < 0.001. Items which violated the criteria of anti-image correlations greater than 0.5, high inter-item correlations through item-wording redundancy, high cross loadings on different factors or low factor loadings were eliminated from the factor solution. The cumulative percentage of total variance explained by the final factor solution was 63%. Three factors were retained: insatiability, materialistic greed and unethical greed, measured by 10, 15 and 7 items respectively and with Cronbach’s Alphas of 0.89, 0.83 and 0.78, respectively.