Maximizers tend to seek the best choice, whereas satisficers are satisfied with a good enough choice. This research examines whether maximizers and satisficers prefer products highest in desirability or feasibility when there is a trade-off between feasibility and desirability attributes.
The Influence of a Maximizing versus Satisficing Orientation on the Evaluation of Desirability and Feasibility Attributes

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Maximizer categorizes those who expand and extend their search to identify the best choice, whereas satisficers settle for a “good enough” choice. When there is no option superior on all attributes, consumers must accept trade-offs. Do maximizers and satisficers differ in their trade-off preferences? When evaluating products, individuals can focus on the benefits provided, the acquisition and use costs, or some combination. For example, some consumers might covet a new advanced smartphone because of its innovative, high-tech features and capabilities. Others might be concerned about the higher price and complexity of learning how to use these features and opt for a basic smartphone. The advanced features of the first option relate to the product’s desirability, whereas the ease of use of the second relates to its feasibility (Liu 2008). The issue explored in this paper is whether there is a difference in the relative focus on desirability and feasibility among consumers who vary in their maximizing versus satisficing tendencies.

Research has identified significant differences between maximizers and satisficers. For example, maximizers achieve objectively better decision outcomes than satisficers because of their greater search effort. However, they feel more regret and less happiness with their choices (Iyengar et al. 2006; Schwartz et al. 2002). In addition, if maximizers are given an opportunity to make a choice again, they are more likely to change their initial choice (Chowdhury, Ratneshwar, and Mohanty 2009). Consumers tend to use a maximizing strategy when selecting material purchases but a satisficing approach when selecting between experiences because they tend to engage in more comparison for the former than the latter (Carter and Gilovich 2010). However, research has not examined how maximizers and satisficers evaluate attributes that vary in desirability and feasibility.

Feasibility relates to the ease or difficulty of obtaining an outcome, while desirability is the benefit derived from an outcome (Liberman and Trope 1998). A trip to a nearly park may be highly feasible but not much fun (Liu 2008). Choices involving feasibility and desirability have been studied in construal level research looking at how abstract and concrete thinking may be affected by distance (Liberman and Trope 1998) but have not been studied in terms of how one’s maximizing or satisficing orientations might affect the relative importance of each dimension.

In our research, we propose that those with a maximizing orientation favor desirability over feasibility. Consequently, they are more likely to prefer higher-desirability, lower-feasibility options to lower-desirability, higher-feasibility options and are persuaded more by advertising highlighting desirability attributes than advertising highlighting feasibility attributes. In two studies, participants are presented with several scenarios involving alternatives with varying levels of desirability and feasibility. In the first study, the choice is between a more desirable but less feasible hike and a less desirable but more feasible hike. In the second study, participants are exposed to advertising highlighting either the desirable or feasible attributes of a laptop computer before evaluating the product.

In study 1, we used a hiking trip scenario, in which desirability refers to the beauty of park scenery and feasibility refers to the distance from home and the amount of parking available (Liu 2008). Participants responded to the maximizing–satisficing scale (Schwartz et al. 2002). The analysis revealed that participants with a greater maximizing orientation had an increased preference for the higher-desirability, lower-feasibility option.

In study 2, we extend study 1’s finding by testing the prediction that advertising that claims superiority in desirability attributes rather than feasibility attributes will appeal more to those with a maximizing orientation than similar advertising promoting the opposite. The prediction is based on maximizers wanting the best benefits and therefore being attracted to advertising that claims benefit superiority for a product. On the other hand, satisficers are more balanced in their concerns and are not expected to evidence a preference for products using superiority claims for desirability-oriented attributes relative to feasibility-oriented claims.

Participants read an advertisement for a new laptop computer that highlight desirability or feasibility attributes. They then responded to the maximizing–satisficing scale (Schwartz et al. 2002). The results show that maximizers were more likely to purchase the brand when they saw the desirability- rather than the feasibility-oriented superiority claim. However, satisficers were equally likely to purchase the brand regardless of the claims’ orientation.

Taken together, this research provides insights into how maximizers and satisficers evaluate feasibility and desirability information differently. Results indicates that maximizers tend to focus more on desirability attributes relative to feasibility ones and they are persuaded more by advertising highlighting desirability attributes than advertising highlighting feasibility attributes. In contrast, satisficers do not exhibit such differences across message attribute orientation.

REFERENCES