Desire to Learn About the Category Sparks Preference For Authenticity

Sharlene He, Northwestern University, USA
Gregory Carpenter, Northwestern University, USA
Kent Grayson, Northwestern University, USA

This research identifies a novel mechanism driving consumer preference for authentic options. We find that consumers prefer authentic options more in unfamiliar categories than familiar categories, motivated by a desire to learn about the category. We distinguish this learning account from a risk-reduction account.

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When Low Control and Uncertainty Do Good
Chair: Bora Min, University of Southern California, USA

Paper #1: I Can Do More with My Time, but Less with My Money: The Role of Control on Resource Efficacy Perceptions
Jerry Han, University of Texas at Austin, USA
Adriana Samper, Arizona State University, USA
Andrew Gershoff, University of Texas at Austin, USA

Paper #2: Novelty as Risk and Opportunity: Opposite Effects of Low Personal Control and Perceived Unpredictability on Novelty Seeking
Bora Min, University of Southern California, USA
Norbert Schwarz, University of Southern California, USA

Paper #3: The Surprising Effects of Attitude Certainty on Advocacy and Advocacy Receptivity
Lauren Cheatham, University of Hawaii, USA
Zakary Tormala, Stanford University, USA

Paper #4: Desire to Learn About the Category Sparkles Preference for Authenticity
Sharlene He, Northwestern University, USA
Gregory S. Carpenter, Northwestern University, USA
Kent Grayson, Northwestern University, USA

OVERVIEW
Consumers are inherently motivated to have mastery of the environment, which leads them to seek control and certainty. A voluminous literature has shown that situations in which consumers feel out of control or uncertain are threatening to the self (Dow et al. 1992; Kay et al. 2008), which primarily highlights the downside of such states. Yet, low control and uncertainty may not always have detrimental effects on consumer behavior. The four papers of this session address a set of related questions focused on potential benefits of such ‘aversive’ states.

The first two papers of the session deal with the downstream consequences of low control on consumer belief and choice, differentiating its upsides and downsides. Han, Samper, and Gershoff document how a feeling of low (vs. high) control affects consumers’ perceptions of two resources: time and money. They find that while incidental low (vs. high) control decreases consumers’ money efficacy perceptions, it also increases their time efficacy perceptions. This is because time is perceived as more self-representative compared to money. They also show that low (vs. high) control leads consumers to have higher expectations about outcomes when spending time, but lower expectations when spending money. Min and Schwarz differentiate two aspects of low control that have been treated as equivalent and subsumed under a generic “control” label: perceptions of unpredictability and low personal control. They show that perceptions of unpredictability (vs. low personal control) give rise to different perspectives on novelty (opportunity vs. risk, respectively), hence thinking about an unpredictable world actually increases novelty-seeking whereas thinking about a lack of personal control decreases novelty-seeking.

The second two papers of the session focus on potential advantages of uncertainty in the context of consumer belief and choice. Cheatham and Tormala look at the effectiveness of advocacy messages depending on the level of perceived certainty about one’s attitude toward an issue (e.g., labeling of GMO foods, banning/taxing of high sugar drinks). They find that consumers who hold less certain attitudes are perceived as actually more persuasive than certain advocates, when advocates and recipients have dissimilar (vs. similar) views. Their work provides evidence that uncertainty can be more persuasive than certainty under some conditions. He, Carpenter, and Grayson identify a novel antecedent of preference for authenticity: uncertainty about a product category. They show that authenticity is more preferred when consumers are uncertain about a product category than when they are certain and familiar with the category. Authentic options are perceived as more prototypical and representative of the unfamiliar category, thereby providing an opportunity to reduce uncertainty (i.e., learn) about that category. They demonstrate that this learning mechanism is distinct from a risk-reduction account.

Taken together, the combination of the current work contributes to shifting perspectives on the effects of low control and uncertainty by providing convergent support for their favorable effects on consumer belief and choice and demonstrating when and how they can do good. We expect this session to generate significant interest among researchers investigating control, uncertainty, and consumer choice-making and evaluation more broadly.

I Can Do More with My Time, but Less with My Money: The Role of Control on Resource Efficacy Perceptions

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
As consumers, we all use resources such as time and money to obtain the outcomes we want. However, even though a unit of resource should have a fixed objective value, incidental factors may influence how people view their resources (e.g., Soster, Gershoff, & Bearden, 2014) including those in which participants earn and spend real resources and evaluate real products, explore this bottom dollar effect. This research contributes to prior mental accounting research regarding how costs influence decision making (e.g., bundling, coupling, sunk costs). It is important to understand how certain factors impact consumers’ evaluation of resources, since such evaluations can further affect consumer expectations and satisfaction. In this paper, we show that while incidental low (vs. high) control increases people’s time efficacy perceptions, it decreases people’s money efficacy perceptions. Moreover, we find that this change in resource efficacy perception has commensurate effects on consumer expectation and satisfaction.

Since the belief that one has control is integral to the self (Sweeney, 1995), incidental events that make one feel low control can be perceived as a threat to the self (e.g., Chaxel, 2016). Past work shows that one way in which people respond to such threats is by becoming defensive, where they reinforce their personal beliefs or engage in compensatory behavior (Hart et al., 2009). Alternatively, the literature also suggests that people can become more conservative, where they become more cautious during decision-relevant information search (Fischer et al., 2011) yet others have found contradictory effects. The present series of 5 studies consistently found that the crucial moderator for these inconsistent findings was whether the induced threat was contextually related to the subsequent decision and information search tasks. Contextual incongruence (e.g., an induction of terrorist threat followed by an economic decision case) Importantly, past work shows that whether people become defensive or conservative in response to a threat depends on the relevance of the subsequent task to the threat itself (Fischer et al., 2011) yet others have found contradictory effects. The present series of 5 studies consistently found that the crucial moderator for these inconsistent
findings was whether the induced threat was contextually related to the subsequent decision and information search tasks. Contextual incongruence (e.g., an induction of terrorist threat followed by an economic decision case). Considering that feelings of low control is a threat to the self, low control could lead to defensive processing for self-relevant evaluations, whereas it could result in conservative processing for non-self-relevant evaluations. A pertinent situation is when consumers are thinking of their time versus money resources.

Specifically, the literature on consumer resources finds that people view their time (vs. money) as more reflective of the self (Mogilner & Aaker, 2009; Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007)activating time (vs. money, and this could mean that consumers engage in defensive (conservative) processes when evaluating their time (money) resources in response to a threat to the self. Therefore, we predicted that incidental feelings of low (vs. high) control would heighten people’s time efficacy perceptions, whereas it would decrease their money efficacy perceptions. We tested these predictions across four studies.

In study 1, we manipulated control by having participants read a purported science article on how effort (high control) or genes (low control) are responsible for people’s life outcomes (Cutright & Samper, 2014)what role should products play in helping consumers pursue their goals (e.g., losing weight, maintaining a clean home. Next, we measured people’s resource efficacy perceptions using an adopted version of the Instrumentality of Money Scale (Duclos, Wan, & Jiang, 2013). As expected, the data revealed a significant interaction effect ($F (1, 166) = 7.36, p < .01$). Moreover, simple effects analyses showed that low (vs. high) control people felt higher time efficacy perceptions ($F (1, 166) = 3.54, p < .06$), but lower money efficacy perceptions ($F (1, 166) = 3.84, p < .05$). The results provided initial evidence that threats to control differentially affect time vs. money resource efficacy perceptions.

Study 2 investigated the underlying process of our effect. Here, we measured perceived self-representativeness of the resource in addition to manipulating control and measuring people’s perceived resource efficacy. First, the results again yielded a significant interaction effect ($F (1, 235) = 8.91, p < .01$). Also, low (vs. high) control people felt higher time efficacy perceptions ($F (1, 235) = 6.37, p < .01$), whereas they felt marginally lower money efficacy perceptions ($F (1, 235) = 2.88, p < .09$). Importantly, as our theory would predict, a mediated moderation model using the PROCESS macro (model 15; Preacher & Hayes, 2004)formal significance tests of indirect effects are rarely conducted. After a brief overview of mediation, we argue the importance of directly testing the significance of indirect effects and provide SPSS and SAS macros that facilitate estimation of the indirect effect with a normal theory approach and a bootstrap approach to obtaining confidence intervals, as well as the traditional approach advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986) showed that perceived self-representativeness of the resource was driving the differential effect of low (vs. high) control on time versus money (95% CI in low control: [0.0189, 0.2164], high control: [-0.0395, 0.1842]).

In study 3, we examined the downstream consequences of biased resource efficacy perceptions on expected outcomes. In the study, participants first went through a control manipulation task and then were instructed to imagine that they had to use either time or money in order to search for a moving company (Saini & Monga, 2008). After reading the scenario, we measured participants’ resource efficacy perceptions and also their expectations toward the moving company. First, there was a significant interaction effect of control and resource type on efficacy perceptions ($F (1, 146) = 11.15, p < .001$), where the mean patterns replicated previous results. Moreover, there was a significant interaction effect of control and resource type on expected outcomes ($F (1, 146) = 8.73, p < .004$), where low (vs. high) control people had higher expectations when spending time ($F (1, 146) = 6.38, p < .01$), but marginally lower expectations when spending money ($F (1, 146) = 2.76, p < .09$). Finally, a moderated mediation using the PROCESS macro (model 8) revealed that the interaction effect of control and resource type on outcome expectations was driven by the interaction effect of control and resource type on efficacy perceptions (95% CI: [-0.2472, -0.0597]).

Finally, study 4 looked at how perceived control affects post-experience satisfaction. We expected that those who spent resources that were perceived as more efficacious would be less satisfied with the same experience. After completing the control manipulation task, participants read a scenario in which they had spent either 4 hours of work (time) or $50 (money) to purchase a restaurant dinner voucher and further read that the actual dinner was a mix of positive and negative experiences. Subsequently, they were asked how likely they would write a positive or negative review for the restaurant. The data again revealed a significant interaction effect ($F (1, 165) = 10.41, p < .002$). As expected, low (vs. high) control led to decreased satisfaction when using time ($F (1, 165) = 3.79, p < .05$), but increased satisfaction when using money ($F (1, 165) = 6.88, p < .01$).

In short, the current paper finds that incidental feelings of control can differentially impact consumers’ perceptions of time versus money resources and that control can further affect consumer expectations and satisfactions.

Novelty as Risk and Opportunity: Opposite Effects of Low Personal Control and Perceived Unpredictability on Novelty Seeking

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Novelty can have two different implications in consumer behavior. Trying out new products can offer consumers opportunities to explore potentially superior alternatives (Hirschman 1980) but can also entail risks of handling uncertainty (Kalish 1985; Schiffman 1972). Since the propensities of consumers to adopt novel products play a critical role in forming brand loyalty (Thompson and Sinha 2008), decision making, and preferences (Bianchi 2006; Hekkert et al. 2003), understanding when consumers regard novel products as positive versus negative carries considerable weight.

One stream of research that investigates consumer novelty-seeking concerns the warm glow effect (James 1961; Titchener 1910) which claims that familiarity is associated with security and safety, thus consumers tend to stick with familiar products when they confront problematic situations (e.g., “chicken soup for the soul”). Low control is one of the detrimental states that consumers are motivated to overcome (Janoff-Bulman 1992). Past research on control showed that consumers who lack personal control show aversion to novel products (Faraji-Rad et al. 2016). However, personal control is only one aspect of control; motivation for personal control fulfills the motivation to overcome perceptions of unpredictability/randomness (Hafer and Bégue 2005) so previous research has treated low personal control and perceived unpredictability as two interchangeable causes of low control (e.g., Rutjens et al. 2013). In this research, we examined whether perceptions of unpredictability and low personal control would have the same downstream consequences on novelty-seeking. In contrast to earlier work, we hypothesized that perceptions of unpredictability would increase novelty-seeking, whereas perceptions of low personal control would decrease novelty-seeking. Six studies confirmed these predictions.

In all studies, participants chose 3 chocolate bars from a set of 6 choice options that consisted of 3 familiar (domestic) and 3 unfa-
miliar (international) chocolate bars. In study 1, participants read a news excerpt (from Friesen et al. 2014) and wrote about an event where they felt like the world is unpredictable (vs. predictable) before choosing 3 chocolate bars (which they received for consumption). Those who thought about unpredictability chose more novel items ($M = 1.15$) than those who thought about predictability ($M = .74$; $t(71) = -2.64, p = .009$).

Studies 2A and 2B directly juxtaposed two different aspects of low control: perceptions of unpredictability and low personal control. Consistent with previous findings, participants who wrote about an event where they had a complete lack (vs. sense) of control over the situation (from Faraji-Rad et al. 2016) were less likely to choose unfamiliar products ($M_{\text{high-personal-control}} = .99$ vs. $M_{\text{low-personal-control}} = .61$), whereas participants who wrote about the unpredictable (vs. predictable) world were more likely to choose unfamiliar products ($M_{\text{predictability}} = .58$ vs. $M_{\text{unpredictability}} = 1.07$) replicating study 1, yielding a significant 2-way interaction ($F(1, 274) = 14.94, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .052$).

These divergent effects of unpredictability and low personal control highlight that the two constructs are distinct, although they are often treated as equivalent and subsumed under a generic “control” label (e.g., Rutjens et al. 2013). Study 3 added a neutral condition to make comparisons with a baseline. Participants in the neutral condition wrote a short summary about vitamins. This study replicated the 2-way interaction of studies 2A and 2B ($M_{\text{predictability}} = .45$ vs. $M_{\text{unpredictability}} = .95$; $M_{\text{high-personal-control}} = .94$ vs. $M_{\text{low-personal-control}} = .54$; $F(1, 220) = 14.07, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06$). In addition, participants in the neutral condition ($M_{\text{novelty}} = 96$) showed as much novelty-seeking as participants in high personal control condition and unpredictability condition ($r's < .1$), but more novelty-seeking than low personal control condition and predictability condition ($p's < .004$). This suggests that consumers may perceive the world as generally unpredictable, but their own personal circumstances as controllable.

These findings presumably reflect that different control manipulations give rise to different perspectives on novelty. An unpredictable world requires flexible adaptation and preparation for change, making novel products an opportunity worth exploring. In contrast, familiar alternatives may be comforting in a context where one lacks an opportunity to exert influence. Study 4 explicitly manipulated these perspectives. It replicated all conditions of study 3 while adding conditions that highlighted that new products can be seen as new opportunities (opportunity framing) versus risks resulting in wasted resources (risk framing). The replication conditions reproduced the interaction pattern observed in studies 2 and 3. The frame manipulations produced the expected results in the absence of any control manipulation (i.e., increased novelty-seeking under opportunity framing and decreased novelty-seeking under risk framing). More important, the choices of the participants exposed to unpredictability resembled those under opportunity framing, and the choices of the participants exposed to low personal control resembled those under risk framing.

These findings highlight that thinking about an unpredictable world differs from thinking about a lack of personal control, despite a long history of treating both manipulations as interchangeable. Whereas an unpredictable world fosters the exploration of novel products, a lack of personal control impairs it. We discuss the conceptual implications for theories of control, highlight the need for distinctions, and note their implications for consumer behavior.

The Surprising Effects of Attitude Certainty on Advocacy and Advocacy Receptivity

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

What drives people to advocate on behalf of their own attitudes? When, and why, do people engage in advocacy and how successful are they when they do? On a daily basis, we are exposed to countless advocacies generated by individuals. One person might advocate for the purchase of fair trade clothing after learning about how garment makers are often underpaid, whereas another might endorse a policy proposal such as the legalization of marijuana based on having recently learned a bit about it. What drives the success or failure of these advocacy attempts? Despite a voluminous literature on attitude change and persuasion, we know relatively little about the psychological drivers of advocacy, and whether the processes that motivate people to advocate also affect the success of their advocacy. One variable that has been studied in this context is attitude certainty (Akhtar, Paunesku, & Tormala, 2013; Cheatham & Tormala 2015; Cheatham & Tormala 2017).

Attitude certainty refers to the subjective sense of conviction with which one holds one’s attitude (Rucker, Tormala, Petty, & Briñol, 2014). For the most part, past research has indicated that people are more likely to advocate on behalf of their own views—for example, more likely to try to persuade others—when they feel certain about those views (Akhtar et. al. 2013; Cheatham and Tormala 2015; Visser, Krosnick, & Simmons 2003). More recently, Cheatham and Tormala (2017) found that attitude certainty has a curvilinear relationship to advocacy such that low and high certainty participants both advocate more than their moderately certainty counterparts. The current research is designed to further examine this unique relationship. First we will explore the different ways that individuals engage in advocacy across the certainty spectrum. Second we will investigate how these differences affect the receptivity of the advocacy recipient. In other words we will explore how persuasive different types of advocacy are across the certainty spectrum.

Based on the differences in what they do and what they say, we posit that there may be conditions under which low certainty advocacy is more persuasive than high certainty advocacy. We predict that uncertain individuals will be more persuasive than highly certain individuals under conditions of disagreement. Low certainty advocacy is likely much less threatening than high certainty advocacy when individuals disagree. However, if individuals are in agreement they will likely prefer the more certain advocacy because they will be drawn to expressions of confidence and a belief that they are correct.

In study 1 ($N=600$) we experimentally manipulated three levels of certainty using a novel paradigm. Participants were asked to think of an issue that they were very uncertain, somewhat certain, or very certain about. They were then asked what their attitude and attitude certainty was toward that issue. Finally, participants responded to an open-ended behavioral question asking them what they would say to someone who did not necessarily agree with them. As expected, we successfully manipulated attitude certainty at three levels and found that highly certain advocate messages were significantly longer (more word, more arguments) than either moderate or low certain advocate messages. However, our core interest was in determining the distinctly different forms of advocacy engagement across the certainty spectrum. While an overwhelming majority of participants across the three conditions expressed a clear belief, what they said subsequent to that belief expression was substantively different. Specifically, we found that high certainty fostered significantly more expressions of rational argumentation, moral conviction, judgment of others who disagree, as well as making salient that one’s own
Desire to Learn About the Category Sparks Preference for Authenticity

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Authenticity as a brand concept has become popular among marketing practitioners; indeed, some view authenticity as fundamental to brand success (The Economist 2015; Gilmore and Pine 2007). Despite the apparent importance of authenticity in marketing practice, a fundamental question remains under-examined in consumer behavior research: what psychological factors drive preference for authentic options? Our research identifies a novel antecedent of preference for authenticity.

Authenticity is often defined as what is real or genuine (Grayson and Martinec 2004). The present research demonstrates that greater preference for authentic options can manifest in unfamiliar product categories, relative to familiar categories. We suggest that in an unfamiliar product category (e.g., Ethiopian restaurants), a natural motive arises to learn about – thus reduce uncertainty regarding – the category. In such situations, consumers have a stronger preference for authentic options than they would in a familiar category (e.g., Italian restaurants) because authenticity is associated with a greater opportunity for category learning. Specifically, we hypothesize that in unfamiliar categories, authentic options are perceived to be more prototypical or representative members of the category. Due to their representativeness, authentic options facilitate greater learning about what the category is like. Moreover, we distinguish this “learning” account from a “risk-reduction” account. A risk-reduction account predicts that in an unfamiliar category, consumers would prefer a “safe” option, and the perceived typicality of the authentic option may also cause it to be viewed as safer. However, we find that preference for the authentic option persists despite the existence of another, safer alternative in the set.

Experiment 1. A 2 (category: familiar vs. unfamiliar) x 2 (attribute type: regular vs. authentic) mixed design was used to test our hypothesis. Participants (N=97) were randomly assigned to rate a series of attributes for Italian restaurants (familiar) or Tunisian restaurants (unfamiliar). They rated their preference for four “regular” attributes (e.g., service, menu options, etc.) as well as four attributes that connoted authenticity (e.g., chef was trained in Italy [Tunisia], spices imported from Italy [Tunisia], etc.). Participants subsequently rated how authentic each attribute was of Italian [Tunisian] restaurants, how typical, as well as several measures assessing their familiarity with the category (α=0.95).

The familiarity manipulation check confirmed that participants were more familiar with Italian restaurants (M=4.95) than Tunisian restaurants (M=1.84), t(95)=13.95, p<.0001. The authenticity manipulation check revealed that attributes intended to convey authenticity were indeed rated as more authentic (M=6.52) than the regular attributes (M=4.64), p<.0001. This was true across both the familiar category (p<.0001) and unfamiliar category (p<.0001).

The core dependent measure of preference showed a main effect of the authenticity factor, p<.0001. Overall, regular attributes (M=5.87) were more preferred than authentic attributes (M=5.24). Importantly, a significant familiarity x authenticity interaction emerged, p<.0001. Authentic attributes were more preferred when the category was unfamiliar (M=5.60) versus familiar (M=4.89), p=.0001. In contrast, preference for regular attributes did not differ across familiar (M=5.98) and unfamiliar categories (M=5.76), p=.214.

The proposed mediator of typicality exhibited a familiarity x authenticity interaction, p<.0001. Authentic attributes were perceived as more typical in the unfamiliar (M=5.57) compared to familiar category (M=4.69, p=.0001), whereas regular attributes did not differ in perceived typicality (M_{unfamiliar}=4.68 vs. M_{familiar}=4.91, p=.205). Moderated mediation analysis revealed that for authentic attributes, typicality mediated the effect of category familiarity on preferences (b=-0.31, p<.001, bootstrapped CI [0.19, 0.44]). In contrast, for regular attributes, typicality did not significantly mediate preferences (b=-.006, p>.05, bootstrapped CI [-0.11, 0]). This provides initial evidence that in unfamiliar categories, authenticity is preferred because it is viewed as more typical of the category, and thus facilitates category learning.

Experiment 2. This experiment distinguished the proposed learning account from risk-reduction. We assessed choice of an authentic option when another alternative in the set was indicated to be more certain (less risky), versus when such indication was absent. Participants (N=202) were assigned to conditions in a 2 (category: familiar vs. unfamiliar) x 2 (certainty information: present vs. absent) between-participants design. Participants read short descriptions of three Ethiopian or Italian restaurants and were asked to make a choice. One of the descriptions was constructed to indicate authenticity: the restaurant’s chef was trained in Ethiopia [Italy]. In the certainty-information absent conditions, only the descriptions were presented. In the certainty-information present conditions, the number of reviews for each restaurant was shown: the authentic restaurant had the fewest reviews (less than 50; least certain), while the safe option had five times more reviews (most certain), and the
other option had an intermediate number. Average rating was held constant. Participants also rated the perceived authenticity, typicality, and certainty regarding each restaurant.

Manipulation checks showed that participants rated the restaurant with the chef as more authentic than the other two options (p < .001), and this was true across both categories. The authentic restaurant was also rated as more typical on average than the others (p < .001), but consistent with experiment 1, significantly more so in the unfamiliar (M = 5.77) than familiar category (M = 5.25), p = .006.

Lastly, the option with the most reviews was rated as more certain or safer (M = 5.38) than the authentic option (M = 4.74) when review information was present (p < .001), and equivalently certain when this information was absent (M_{unsafe} = 4.78 vs. M_{authentic} = 4.88; p = .491).

A logit model of choice with the two factors and their interaction revealed only a significant main effect of category familiarity: a greater percentage of participants chose the authentic option when the category was unfamiliar (M = 46.0%) versus familiar (M = 32.4%). The two-way interaction was not significant (p = .61). Thus, preference for authenticity under unfamiliarity persisted despite the presence of a safer option, thereby ruling out a risk reduction account.

The present research demonstrates a novel mechanism – category learning – that drives consumer preference for authenticity. This work deepens marketers’ understanding of when consumers value authenticity in products and brands.

REFERENCES

Overview


Paper #1


Paper #2


**Paper #3**

**Paper #4**