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Retail Therapy Or Rose-Tinted Glasses? the Effect of Mood on Impulse Buying

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Positive as well as negative mood states have been suggested to promote impulse buying. In three experiments we aim to clarify the role of both positive and negative mood states in causing impulse buying. We also attempt to uncover the mechanisms at work in both moods.

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and processing). Results suggest that subjects in the positive valence conditions attended more to surface cues (i.e. heuristic processing) while those in negative valence conditions attended to information implied but not overtly highlighted (i.e. systematic processing).

Specifically, subjects in positive valence conditions focused their attention on the highlighted possibilities of gains and losses while subjects in the negative valence conditions attended to the implied possibilities of non-gains and non-losses.

Retail Therapy or Rose-Tinted Glasses? The Effect of Mood on Impulse Buying

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Extended Abstract

Opportunities to give in to the sudden impulse to buy have never been more abundant. Marketing developments like 24-hour retailing, outlet stores, credit cards, and online shopping make it easier than ever for consumers to purchase products or services when they experience the impulse to do so. Paralleling consumers' often heard claim that they were "overwhelmed by an irresistible impulse to buy" (Rook 1987) are estimations that impulsive consumption annually accounts for over \$4 billion of sales in the US alone (Mogelonsky, 1998). At the same time, household debts are at an unprecedented high and show no sign of diminishing (Vohs & Faber 2007). Considering its potentially self-destructive nature, increasing our insight into impulse buying is essential.

Though a number of factors that may contribute to impulse buying have been investigated, one important but relatively understudied factor is mood. Ironically, in recent reviews of the relevant literature, impulse buying has been related to positive as well as negative mood states. Consumers are more likely to act on their buying impulses when they are in a positive mood ... and when they are in a negative mood (Rook and Gardner 1993; Silveira, Lavack, and Kropp 2008). How is that possible? We argue that people may engage in impulse buying to repair negative moods, whereas in positive moods impulse buying may occur because happy consumers are more likely to act relatively capriciously and carefree. And indeed, shoppers report making impulsive purchases to alter an unpleasant mood (Baumeister 2002; Silveira, Lavack, and Kropp 2008), reflecting the idea of "retail therapy". Also, research on self-gifting (Mick and DeMoss 1990) has observed that consumers tend to indulge after stress or depression by acquiring self-gifts. Conversely, impulse buying in positive mood states seems common as well. For example, when a group of consumers were asked to select the one mood that would be most likely to encourage them to make an impulse purchase, "pleasure" was most frequently named, followed by "carefree" and "excitement" (Rook and Gardner 1993). On a more general level, research has shown that objects are typically evaluated more positively when individuals are in a positive rather than a negative mood (Cohen, Pham, and Andrade 2008; Gardner 1995). Thus, a positive affective state may make mood congruent associations more accessible, and the offerings consumers encounter to be evaluated more positively, which in turn leads consumers to engage in impulsive purchasing. Stated otherwise, consumers can at times engage in mood-congruent behavior, by looking at the (consumption) world through so-called "rose-tinted glasses."

In three experiments we aim to clarify the role of mood in impulse buying and uncover the mechanisms at work in positive and negative moods in promoting impulse buying. As experimental research is still lacking, our first goal is to offer a straightforward demonstration that both positive and negative moods compared to a control condition would increase impulse buying tendencies. Our second goal is to shed more light on the mechanisms underlying the positive and negative antecedents of impulse buying. We hypothesize that increased impulse buying results from a motivation to improve one's mood, whereas increased impulse buying in a positive mood is driven by mood-congruent behavior. This hypothesis should manifest itself in at least two ways: first, the type of products that are bought on impulse in positive and negative moods should differ. As hedonic products provide more fun and pleasure and more so than utilitarian products trigger an urge for immediate consumption (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000), consumers in a negative mood (vs. a positive mood) should be more likely to impulse buy hedonic products. Utilitarian products are primarily functional and instrumental and hence the likelihood that they are bought on impulse should not differ between positive and negative moods. Second, the motivational component in impulse buying in response to negative moods should make it more goal-directed in nature than impulse buying in response to positive moods. Goal-directed behavior is known to be different from non-goal-directed behavior: it is persistent through obstacles, it increases following a delay, and decreases when the goal is fulfilled (Förster, Liberman, and Freedman 2007). Thus, if impulse buying in negative moods is a motivational process, impulse buying tendencies should be larger after a delay than immediately after the mood induction.

In the first two experiments, following Vohs and Faber (2007), impulse buying was conceptualized as willingness to pay (WTP). In Study 1, both positive and negative moods, relative to a control condition, were found to increase WTP for a number of diverse products. In Study 2, we differentiated between hedonic and utilitarian products. Results showed that the pattern for utilitarian products replicated Study 1: both positive and negative moods enhanced WTP, compared with a control condition. For hedonic products, however, the pattern was different. For hedonic products, a negative mood produced higher WTP compared to both a positive and a control mood. The latter two conditions did not differ in WTP for hedonic products. In Study 3, the impulse buying measurement was modeled after Rook and Fisher (1995). Participants were presented with a scenario that described a shopping situation with an opportunity to make an impulse purchase. They then indicated their level of impulsive urge and buying behavior. In addition, Study 3 also explored the moderating role of trait impulsiveness. Using a 3 (mood: positive vs. negative vs. control) x 2 (delay: yes vs. no) between-subjects design, participants in a negative mood experienced stronger urges to buy after a delay and indicated that they were more likely to make an impulse purchase than participants in the no-delay condition. For participants in a positive and neutral mood, there was no such difference.

As impulse buying has been suggested to account for up to 80% of all purchases in certain categories (Kacen and Lee 2002), insight into this widespread phenomenon is imperative. This research focused on the role of mood in impulse buying and illustrates that (1) both positive and negative mood states enhance impulse buying relative to neutral moods, and (2) the mechanisms underlying both mood states differ profoundly.

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When Is It Better To Be Bad? Schema-Congruency Effects in Moral Evaluations of Products

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Extended Abstract

All things being equal, people prefer good things over bad. People seek pleasure, and avoid pain (Bentham 1779, James 1890, Higgins 1997). Within psychology, the approach-avoidance hierarchy has dominated the motivation literature (Elliot 2006). Perception researchers have shown that stimuli are classified into positive and negative with only 30 milliseconds of subliminal presentation (Stapel, Koomen & Ruys, 2002, Osgood 1955). Across multiple disciplines, people are believed to quickly classify targets into high level categories of "good/approach" and "bad/avoid".

Managers have embraced this perspective in their marketing communication tactics. Brands spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year on celebrity endorsements, with the logic of associating their product with a persona that consumers already like to gain some halo affect. Recent events have shown that if a spokesperson's image shifts to bad or immoral, managers are quick to disassociate themselves from the disgraced endorser. Yet is it always the case that any association with an immoral figure is bad for a product? The present research proposes that in certain cases a product may benefit from association with an immoral persona.

Previous research has demonstrated that individuals' appraisals of a new product may be dependent on the degree to which the product's features and the activated category schema are congruent (Aggarawal and McGill 2007; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). In general, objects that are schema congruent are evaluated more favorably than objects that are schema incongruent because people tend to like objects that conform to their expectations. People may transfer positive affect about the fit between the product's features and their beliefs about the category (e.g., satisfaction for schema congruent products) to the object itself (Fiske 1982).

Consistent with the findings of previous schema congruency research, we hypothesized that consumers would be more likely to prefer vice products invented by immoral creators as compared to vice products invented by moral creators or virtue products invented by immoral creators. Specifically, if a product is framed for use in a vice behavior context, we predict that consumers will be more interested in purchasing it when it was created by an immoral person.

The present studies directly tested the effects of a product's moral history on consumer preferences. Across four studies we manipulated the moral history of the product and the product's framing. In study 1 participants read a story describing the inventor of an energy drink as moral or immoral, then were told that the energy drink was intended to "provide the extra energy needed for studying for exams and working hard (partying with friends and having fun) throughout the long hours of the night". The results of Study 1 support our predictions. Specifically, when a product (e.g., an energy drink) is positioned for use in a virtuous context, people prefer the moral inventor, $F(1,190)=6.92, p=.009, M_{study/moral}=3.82, M_{study/immoral}=2.82$). However, when the same product was framed in a vice behavior context (i.e., partying), participants instead preferred the product to have been invented by the immoral person compared to a moral person ($M_{party/moral}=2.25, M_{party/immoral}=2.78$).

We believe that Study 1 provides initial evidence for a congruency effect between the moral valence of the product's creator and the moral valence of a product's intended use, such that people prefer the immoral inventor when the drink is intended for a vice-like use. However, these results might be due to a general semantic priming of a vice-like frame of mind, which could result in increased purchase intent for any party aid. Another possibility is that people believe that an immoral inventor would make a better party-aid than a moral inventor—perhaps due to expertise on the part of the inventor in the behavioral domains. We conducted Study 2 in order to rule out