



## Now or later: Delay's effects on post-consumption emotions and consumer loyalty<sup>☆</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

This study identifies differences in immediate and delayed post-consumption emotional assessments, triggering a dynamic shift in word-of-mouth evaluation and repurchase intention. Experiment 1 compares participants' responses to cellphone purchases in immediate and half-hour delay conditions. Experiment 2 generalizes the research scope by examining biscuit consumption and imposing an additional 24-hour delay. Results indicate that (1) products with higher hedonic value elicit excitement and cheerfulness, which intensify over time and increase consumer loyalty; (2) products with higher utilitarian value induce feelings of confidence and security, which gradually fade in intensity and diminish consumer loyalty over time; (3) products with lower hedonic value lead to dissatisfaction, which dissipates over time, and low-level consumer loyalty rises; and (4) products with lower utilitarian value generate feelings of anger, which grow over time and erode consumer loyalty.

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### 1. Introduction

Purchasers often reflect on their purchases or consumption moments. These recollections, which may conflict with the emotions of the actual purchase, can affect subsequent behavior. For example, a male customer enjoys eating a specific brand of instant noodles. Several days later, he likely associates a lower satisfaction level with the noodles, and offers a relatively less positive product evaluation.

All other things being equal, time affects evaluations. Does time have a threshold point where consumption evaluations change measurably? Recent consumer behavior research examines how time affects post-consumption evaluations of emotion and loyalty. Immediate post-consumption evaluations seem to have close ties to the actual experience, while delayed evaluations require recollection of an emotional state (Robinson & Clore, 2002; Xu & Schwarz, 2009), increasing the likelihood of recall bias (Aaker, Drolet, & Griffin, 2008; Hsee & Hastie, 2006). However, is there a threshold point where consumption evaluations change measurably?

Information accessibility theory posits a distinction between current and noncurrent emotional assessments (Robinson & Clore, 2002). If

such differences exist, the passage of time may affect the emotional response according to the product's hedonic and utilitarian dimensions. Hedonic and utilitarian benefits are arguably independent components of product evaluations and attitudes (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Hedonic benefits relate to multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of the product usage experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), and utilitarian benefits to functional and instrumental tasks (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Although hedonic and utilitarian attributes may produce different emotions (Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2008), no known studies examine their strengths over time. The current study examines hedonic and utilitarian product dimensions and their relations to time differences, comparing immediate versus delayed consumer evaluations, and explores how these emotions affect consumer loyalty (e.g., repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth referrals) (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). The results contribute to both theory and practice. First, the findings extend theory by identifying how time evaluation delays affect emotions and consumer loyalty. Second, they help practitioners by providing insights for optimal timing and prioritizing of evaluations, referrals, and product failure recovery.

### 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

#### 2.1. Hedonic and utilitarian benefits' effects on post-consumption emotions

Post-consumption emotion evaluations depend on the consumers' pre-purchase goals and on the product's hedonic and utilitarian dimensions associated with goal attainment. Regulatory focus theory suggests a prevention focus and a promotion focus (Higgins, 1997, 2000). The former involves behavioral safety and responsibilities to eliminate or minimize possible painful or negative experiences (Chitturi, Raghunathan, &

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Mahajan, 2007; Higgins, 1997), while the latter suggests maximum goal fulfillment, increasing pleasurable experiences and generating positive emotions in the consumer (Chitturi et al., 2008; Higgins, 1997).

A cellphone's prevention goals may be selecting a product with a long standby time or wide signal coverage, which give confidence and security, while the product's promotion goals may be a high screen resolution or fancy appearance, which cause happiness and excitement. Evidence confirms that a product's hedonic and utilitarian dimensions satisfy many consumer goals (Chernev, 2004). Utilitarian benefits—the product's functional, instrumental, and practical merits—help meet prevention goals; hedonic benefits—aesthetic, experiential, and enjoyment values—fulfill promotion goals (Chernev, 2004; Chitturi et al., 2007, 2008; Higgins, 1997).

How do consumers weigh prevention and promotion goals? Those viewing pain avoidance as a necessity and pleasure as a comparative luxury assign more weight to utilitarian benefits than to hedonic benefits (Chitturi et al., 2008; Higgins, 1997; Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, et al., 2001). Even if a cellphone is eye-catching, a short standby time is a deal breaker. Once consumers achieve their prevention goals, hedonic dominance shifts to implementing promotion goals. When both utilitarian and hedonic criteria are fulfilled or transcended, consumers typically focus on hedonic attributes (Chitturi et al., 2007). One such case is the stylish Apple iPhone, which consistently outsells durable Nokia phones.

Chitturi et al. (2008) find that products with higher hedonic value cause greater excitement and delight, and those with higher utilitarian value, greater security and confidence levels, encouraging higher consumer satisfaction. Lower hedonic value products induce higher post-consumption dissatisfaction; those with lower utilitarian value, greater anger.

In summary, superior hedonic or inferior utilitarian benefits induce higher arousal emotions (see Section 2.3.), whereas inferior hedonic benefits or superior utilitarian benefits induce lower arousal emotions (see Section 2.3).

## 2.2. Differences in immediate and delayed post-consumption emotional evaluations

No known studies on post-consumption emotional evaluations of products' hedonic and utilitarian benefits consider the effect of time delays (Chitturi et al., 2008; Erev, 1998). Post-consumption evaluations change as delays affect the process. Consumers' actual consumption experiences determine immediate post-consumption evaluations, while delayed evaluations depend on memory (Robinson & Clore, 2002; Xu & Schwarz, 2009).

Many scholars note the existence of recall bias (Aaker et al., 2008; Hsee & Hastie, 2006). Since the utilitarian and hedonic product benefits differ, how does recall bias enter into delayed post-consumption evaluation of emotions?

To explain differences between emotional experiences and recall, Robinson and Clore (2002) propose the accessibility model, which states the consumer emotions are accessible for self-reports of a current emotional experience. For self-reports of noncurrent emotions, however, the previous episode's emotions are no longer clearly accessible, so the retrospective reports are based on episodic or semantic memory.

For consumers reporting their post-purchase experiences, a distinction exists between current and noncurrent emotional assessments. They forget or diminish certain information and magnify other information, forgetting the mundane and remembering the impressive. This study aims to identify emotions leaving strong impressions.

## 2.3. Emotional arousal and emotional recall evaluation

Emotions directly connect to memories of emotionally arousing experiences. McGaugh (2004) reveals that an emotion's arousal level closely correlates with follow-up memories. Positive, highly arousing emotions include excitement, happiness, and delight. Conversely,

negative highly arousing emotions are frustration, anger, anxiety, and sorrow (see Roseman, 1991; Russell, 1980). Post-consumption confidence, security, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction are less emotional (Chitturi et al., 2008).

Empirical studies confirm that highly arousing emotions enhance recall of the events causing them. Thomas and Diener (1990) find that people often overestimate their emotional intensity for positive and negative emotions. Painful experiences (e.g., a medical procedure) tend to be recalled more intensely than the actual experience (Miron-Shatz, Stone, & Kahneman, 2009; Morewedge, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2005). If the entire experience is negative and highly arousing, people report higher negative emotion levels in delayed assessments. For highly arousing positive emotions, the same effect exists. For example, parents tend to overestimate the happiness they feel when with their children (see Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004).

Chitturi et al. (2008) suggest that an inferior product with utilitarian benefits evokes negative, high-arousal emotions such as anger, while a product providing superior hedonic benefits induces positive, high-arousal emotions such as cheerfulness and excitement. Over time, these emotions become stronger, and consumers overestimate their original experiences.

Few studies investigate delay's effect on low-arousal emotions. Some indirect evidence suggests that evaluations of such emotion change over time. Bywaters, Andrade, and Turpin (2004) find that memories evoking low-arousal emotions fade over time. The evidence suggests that assessments of low-arousal emotions decrease as time passes.

The literature suggests high arousal emotions intensify over time, while low arousal emotions weaken. These findings inform the following hypotheses.

- H1.** Positive high arousal emotions resulting from consuming products with superior hedonic value (SH products) are more intense in delayed evaluations than in immediate evaluations.
- H2.** Positive low arousal emotions resulting from consuming products with superior utilitarian value (SU products) are less intense in delayed evaluations than in immediate evaluations.
- H3.** Negative low arousal emotions resulting from consuming products with inferior hedonic value (IH products) are less intense in delayed evaluations than in immediate evaluations.
- H4.** Negative high arousal emotions resulting from consuming products with inferior utilitarian value (IU products) are more intense in delayed evaluations than in immediate evaluations.

## 2.4. Post-consumption emotions and consumer loyalty

Prior research suggests a relationship between post-purchase emotions and consumer behavior (Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, & Greenleaf, 1984; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Westbrook (1987) verifies that post-consumption emotions are directly related to complaint behavior and word-of-mouth transmission. Positive emotions lead to higher loyalty levels (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Lee, Lee, Lee, & Babin, 2008; Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou, & Beatty, 2011). Recent post-consumption studies assert that cheerfulness and excitement induced by SH products generate a higher level of delight (Chitturi et al., 2008). Previous studies also confirm that delight affects consumer loyalty (Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997; Rust & Oliver, 2000). SU products generate consumer security and confidence encouraging greater consumer satisfaction and ultimately producing consumer loyalty differences (e.g., word-of-mouth and repurchase intentions). Conversely, IH and IU products produce negative post-consumption emotions of dissatisfaction and anger, respectively. However, anger is far more likely than dissatisfaction to discourage consumers from making positive word-of-mouth referrals (Westbrook, 1987).

Based on the relationships among evaluation timing, emotional arousal dimensions, and consumer loyalty, immediate and delayed

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