

Research Report

The effects of affect, processing goals and temporal distance on information processing: Qualifications on temporal construal theory☆

Fangyuan Chen^{a,*,1}, Robert S. Wyer Jr.^{b,2}^a Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong^b Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Received 9 October 2013; received in revised form 26 September 2014; accepted 30 September 2014

Available online 8 October 2014

Abstract

According to temporal construal theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010), people are likely to evaluate a product on the basis of global, high-level criteria (e.g., the intrinsic desirability of its features) if they consider it for future consumption but consider situation-specific (e.g., feasibility-related) criteria if they consider it for immediate use. However, this may be true only when people are unmotivated to assess the implications of all of the information they have available, and this motivation, in turn, is a function of both their mood and the goal they happen to be pursuing. When individuals' objective is to make a good decision, the theory's implications are more likely to be supported when they are happy (and believe they have enough information to make a good judgment) than when they are sad. When their goal is to enjoy themselves, however, the theory is more strongly supported when they are sad (and are unmotivated to engage in extensive processing) than when they are happy.

© 2014 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Affect; Processing objectives; Temporal construal theory

Introduction

When people receive information about a stimulus object or event, they sometimes focus their attention on its high-level, intrinsic features that have implications for the stimulus as a whole. At other times, however, they focus on low-level features, the desirability of which is often context-dependent. Two theories—temporal construal theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010) and the impact of affect as information (Schwarz & Clore, 1996, 2007)—have been particularly influential in conceptualizing these effects.

The interdependence of the effects implied by these theories has rarely been examined, however. We find that although people are often more likely to base their judgments on high-level construals when the information has implications for a future action than when it has implications for an immediate one, this difference depends on not only the affect they happen to be experiencing but also the purpose for which they are processing this information.

Theoretical background

Effects of temporal focus on information processing

Temporal construal theory implies that when individuals contemplate a future course of action, they construe its consequences in terms of high-level constructs that have implications for its intrinsic desirability. When they consider acting immediately, however, they typically construe the action's consequences in low-level, context-specific terms that are peripheral to its intrinsic value. Thus, for example, people who consider a vacation to Hawaii next year may think about its

☆ This research was supported by grants GRF 640011, GRF 453710, GRF 453110, and GRF 451812 from the Research Grants Council, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Marketing, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Hong Kong.

E-mail address: fangyuan@ust.hk (F. Chen).

¹ Fangyuan Chen is now a doctoral student at the Department of Marketing, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

² Robert S. Wyer, Jr. is visiting professor at the Faculty of Business Administration, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

natural beauty and warm temperatures. If they contemplate visiting next week, however, they may think about the three rejected papers they have to revise and a Rolling Stones concert they would miss. As a result, they are likely to evaluate the activity more favorably in the former case than in the latter (Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004; Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003).

As Kim, Park, and Wyer (2009) suggest, however, individuals who have information available about both types of judgment criteria may not consider all of this information; they simply give higher *priority* to the features that they consider to be most relevant. To this extent, the differences predicted by temporal construal theory may only be pronounced when individuals are not motivated to consider all of the information available. Their motivation may depend in part on both (a) the goal they are pursuing and (b) the mood they happen to be in at the time. When they are motivated to consider all of the information available, the differential impact of high-level and low-level construals may be less apparent.

Affect and motivation

People often use the positive or negative affect they happen to be experiencing at the time they consider an object or event as a basis for inferring their feelings about it (Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 1996, 2007; Wyer, Clore, & Isbell, 1999). However, affect can also influence the level at which stimulus information is construed. Schwarz, Bless, and Bohner (1991), for example, assume that happy individuals process information in less detail than sad individuals and apply relatively more global concepts in construing its implications. Gasper & Clore (2002) (see also Clore, Gasper, & Garvin, 2001) find that happy persons are generally more inclined to process stimuli at a global level. These findings suggest a general tendency for happy individuals to give priority to abstract, high level criteria when evaluating stimuli.

A conceptualization by Martin, Ward, Achee, and Wyer (1993), however, suggests that the type and amount of information that individuals bring to bear on a judgment or decision depend on the goal they are pursuing at the time. They assume that when individuals engage in goal-relevant activity, they use the affect they are experiencing as information about their success in attaining the goal at hand. Thus, if persons' goal is to make a good judgment, they may implicitly ask themselves if they have done enough to attain this objective. Consequently, they consider relatively less goal-relevant information and think less extensively about its implications if they are happy (and answer the question affirmatively) than if they are not. If their goal is to enjoy themselves, however, people are likely to ask themselves if they are attaining this goal. In this case, happy persons are likely to infer that they are attaining this objective and consequently may spend *more* time thinking about the information than sad persons do. Thus, as Martin et al. (1993) found, happy persons consider less information than sad persons do if they have the goal of making a good judgment, but consider more information than sad individuals do if their goal is to enjoy themselves. In other words, happy individuals with an evaluation goal may tend to base their judgment on only the information they consider to be particularly

relevant to the attainment of this goal. Sad persons, however, are likely to consider low-priority information as well. When individuals' goal is to enjoy themselves, however, happy individuals may consider more information than sad individuals do.

These possibilities have obvious implications for the effects implied by temporal construal theory. Suppose an apartment has intrinsically desirable features but its peripheral features suggest that renting it may be unfeasible. Individuals who consider renting the apartment a year from now may give priority to the inherent, desirability-relevant characteristics of the apartment whereas those who think about renting it immediately may give more priority to context-specific, feasibility-relevant features. If their goal is to make a good decision, happy individuals are likely to consider relatively little information and to base their judgments on only features they consider to be of high priority. Consequently, they should evaluate the apartment more favorably if they contemplate renting it in the future than if they consider doing so immediately, as temporal construal theory implies. In contrast, unhappy persons are more likely to consider low priority information as well as high priority information. In this case, therefore, the difference implied by temporal construal theory should be less evident.

When individuals process the information for enjoyment, however, they should process *more* information if they feel happy than if they feel sad. In this case, therefore, the implications of temporal construal theory should be *less* strongly supported in the former case than in the latter. Two studies examined these possibilities.

Experiment 1

Participants received information about both an apartment and a clock radio set. The apartment's high-level features were favorable but its low-level, situation-specific features were unfavorable. The radio set's high-level and low-level features were unfavorable and favorable, respectively. Thus, pooled over the two products, the valence of the high-level and low-level attributes was controlled. In each case, the product was available for consumption either immediately or in the future. Based on the considerations raised earlier, we made two hypotheses:

H1. When individuals have the goal of making a good decision, the implications of temporal construal theory for the relative use of high-level (desirability-related) criteria and low-level (feasibility-related) criteria will be more strongly supported when individuals are happy (and are unmotivated to consider all the information available) than when they are sad.

H2. When individuals have the goal of enjoying themselves, the implications of temporal construal theory for the relative use of high-level (desirability-related) criteria and low-level (feasibility-related) criteria will be more strongly supported when individuals are sad (and are less motivated to process all of the information) than when they are happy.

One methodological feature of our experiment is worth noting. That is, all of the information was presented simultaneously in an ad, and individuals had to search actively for the particular information they considered to be relevant. Thus, the effects we

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882170>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882170>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)