



Are maximizers unhappier than satisficers? A comparison between Japan and the USA [☆]



Shigehiro Oishi ^{a,*}, Yoshiro Tsutsui ^{b,*}, Casey Eggleston ^a, Iolanda Costa Galinha ^c

^a Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, United States

^b Graduate School of Economics, Osaka University, Japan

^c Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa and Centre for Psychological Research and Social Intervention, CIS/ IUL, Lisbon, Portugal

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 14 December 2013

Keywords:

Maximizing
Satisficing
Well-being
Happiness
Life satisfaction

ABSTRACT

The present research examined whether maximizing tendencies are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being among Japanese and American residents. Two popular scales exist to measure maximizing tendencies: a Schwartz et al. (2002) scale that conceptualizes maximizing as a combination of high standards and a strong desire to optimize choice and a Diab, Gillespie, and Highhouse (2008) scale which primarily emphasizes the high standards component of maximizing tendencies. Among Americans, maximizers reported being more depressed, less happy, and less satisfied with their lives when assessed by Schwartz et al.'s (2002) scale. In contrast, when assessed by Diab et al.'s (2008) scale, American maximizers actually reported being happier than satisficers. Among Japanese, however, maximizers reported being more depressed, less happy, and less satisfied with their lives regardless of the scale used.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In economics, people are believed to behave in a rational way, or to maximize their utility (Persky, 1995). Questioning this rationality assumption, Simon (1955) proposed the idea of bounded rationality, namely, that people are rational and look to maximize utility to a certain extent (limited by available information, the actor's motivation and abilities). He argued that instead of always aiming for the best possible option, people set a certain "good enough" standard, and when the standard is met, people reach their decision. Simon called this "satisficing." In psychological science, Schwartz et al. (2002) for the first time conceptualized and assessed maximizing tendencies as individual differences. They found that maximizers were less happy and more depressed than satisficers. Iyengar, Wells, and Schwartz (2006) further discovered that graduating college seniors with maximizing tendencies found higher paying jobs than seniors with satisficing tendencies, yet maximizers were less satisfied with their jobs than satisficers (see also Bruine de Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007; Parker, Bruine de Bruin, & Fischhoff, 2007 for unfavorable decision outcomes for

maximizers relative to satisficers). Based on these findings, at first, it appeared that maximizing is undesirable for subjective well-being (here operationalized by life satisfaction and happiness, and relative lack of depression).

Recently, however, several studies have shown that the inverse association between maximizing and subjective well-being was not as robust as originally believed. Diab, Gillespie, and Highhouse (2008), for instance, created an alternative maximizing scale, and showed that maximizing is not negatively associated with subjective well-being when measured by the new maximizing tendency scale. This is in part because Diab et al.'s scale focuses only on the maximizer's high standards (e.g., "I don't like having to settle for 'good enough'.") rather than the neurotic aspects of maximizing (e.g., "When I watch TV, I channel surf, often scanning through the available options even while attempting to watch one program."). In addition to creating a new maximizing scale (Diab et al., 2008), several researchers have modified the original Schwartz et al. scale to improve its psychometric properties (see Lai, 2010; Nenkov, Morrin, Ward, Schwartz, & Hulland, 2008; Rim, Turner, Betz, & Nygren, 2011; Weinhardt, Morse, Chimeli, & Fisher, 2012).

Purvis, Howell, and Iyer (2011) have also shown that maximizing tendencies measured by Schwartz et al.'s (2002) original scale were correlated with neuroticism, and that once neuroticism was statistically controlled for, the inverse correlation between maximizing and subjective well-being disappeared. Also, among the three subscales, only "alternative search" (e.g., "When I watch TV, I channel surf, often scanning through the available options

[☆] This study was in part supported by the Global Center of Excellence program at Osaka University.

* Corresponding authors. Address: Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400400, Charlottesville, VA 22902, United States (S. Oishi). Address: Graduate School of Economics, Osaka University, 1-7 Machikaneyama, Toyonaka 560-0043, Japan (Y. Tsutsui).

E-mail addresses: soishi@virginia.edu (S. Oishi), tsutsui@econ.osaka-u.ac.jp (Y. Tsutsui).

even while attempting to watch one program.”) and “decision difficulty” (e.g., “When shopping, I have a hard time finding clothing that I really love.”) subscales were negatively associated with subjective well-being, whereas the “high standards” subscale (e.g., “No matter what I do, I have the highest standards for myself.”) was not negatively associated with subjective well-being.

Although these studies have advanced our understanding of the link between maximizing/satisficing tendencies and subjective well-being, one major limitation of this work is that it was conducted mostly among North American college students. As pointed out by [Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan \(2010\)](#), sampling bias of this sort could severely distort our knowledge of the phenomenon. To this end, a recent study by [Roets, Schwartz, and Guan \(2012\)](#) is instructive. These researchers collected data in the US, Western Europe and China, and largely replicated the previous findings in the US and Western Europe. Unlike the previous studies, however, maximizing was *not* negatively associated with well-being among Chinese. Roets and colleagues interpreted these findings to indicate that maximizing tendencies are aversive in a society full of choices, where making a right choice is highly valued, but not detrimental in a society without too much choice. Although China is the second largest economy in the world in terms of GDP, China's GDP per capita is still a fraction of the US's, indeed less than 1/5 of the US's GDP per capita in 2012. In addition, there are a myriad of cultural differences between the US and China (e.g., [Nisbett, 2003](#)). Thus, the US/Western Europe–China distinctions could be due to economic as well as cultural factors. In addition, Roets and colleagues used only [Schwartz et al.'s \(2002\)](#) original scale. It is unclear whether differential cross-national differences would emerge if [Diab et al.'s \(2008\)](#) maximizing scale, which does not assess the negative, neurotic aspects of maximizing, was used instead.

2. The present study

We conducted the current study to address the limitations of the previous research on maximizing/satisficing and well-being. We collected data from Japan and the US, using both [Schwartz et al.'s \(2002\)](#) original maximizing scale and [Diab et al.'s \(2008\)](#) revised scale. We decided to sample Japan and the US in part because Japan is one of the few nations comparable to the US in terms of economic prosperity yet quite different culturally. Any difference between Japan and the US is more likely to be socio-cultural rather than purely economic. Therefore, this comparison provides an ideal first step toward testing generalizability of the association between maximizing and subjective well-being.

Maximizing tendencies should be more pronounced in a culture where choice is cherished than in a culture where it is not. Previous cultural psychology research showed that Americans cherish choice and are even energized by choice ([Iyengar & Lepper, 1999](#); [Markus & Schwartz, 2010](#) for review). In contrast, Japanese are not given as many personal choices by parents or teachers ([Lewis, 1995](#)) and are not particularly motivated to justify their personal choices ([Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2002](#)). Because maximizing requires choices to begin with and making the right personal choice is highly valued in the US, we predicted that Americans on average would show a greater degree of maximizing tendencies than Japanese. In addition, because being able to make a good personal decision is a major socialization goal among Americans ([Markus & Schwartz, 2010](#)), some aspects of maximizing tendencies such as having high standards might be positively associated with subjective well-being among Americans. Being able to make an independent decision is not a major goal among Japanese; instead being able to adjust to others' expectations is a major goal among Japanese ([Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto,](#)

[2002](#)). Thus, we expected that maximizing tendencies are counter-productive, and are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being among Japanese.

3. Method

Participants were 952 Japanese (481 males; 471 females; $M_{age} = 45.17$, $SD = 13.64$) and 891 American adults (438 males, 453 females; $M_{age} = 43.71$, $SD = 14.01$). Nikkei Research Inc. and its US affiliate used a national probabilistic sampling method based on gender and age to obtain these data (i.e., the sample was nationally representative in terms of gender and age). The data were collected online in November and December, 2012.

Participants completed two maximizing scales ([Diab et al., 2008](#); [Schwartz et al., 2002](#)) and three well-being scales: Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS: [Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985](#)), Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS: [Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999](#)), and Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D, [Radloff, 1977](#)). There are three overlapping items in Schwartz et al. and Diab et al.'s scales. During measurement, these items were included in Schwartz et al.'s scale, but not in Diab et al.'s scale to avoid redundancy. The SWLS includes five agree-disagree items such as “In most ways my life is close to my ideal” and “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life,” while the SHS contains four items that ask respondents to evaluate their own relative happiness (e.g., “Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?”). The CES-D (20 items) asks respondents to report how often during the past week they experienced various emotional states, for example “I felt lonely” and “I felt that everything I did was an effort.” In addition, participants completed the neuroticism scale taken from [Goldberg et al.'s \(2006\)](#) 50-item International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) Big 5 measure (“get stressed out easily,” “worry about things,” “am relaxed most of the time” [reversed], “seldom feel blue” [reversed], “am easily disturbed”), and demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, and highest education. Most scales show acceptable levels of reliability (see [Table 1](#)). Japanese participants completed these scales in Japanese: Schwartz et al. maximizing scale ([Tsuzuki, 2008](#)), SWLS ([Oishi, 2009](#)), SHS ([Shimai, Otake, Utsuki, Ikemi, & Lyubomirsky, 2004](#)), CES-D ([Iwata, 2004](#)), and Big Five ([Nakayama, Yamamoto, & Santiago, 2007](#)). Translations of these scales had already been validated in Japan with appropriate psychometric properties. Because [Diab et al.'s \(2008\)](#) maximizing tendency scale did not have any published Japanese translation, the second author translated it from English to Japanese, and the first author double-checked the translation.

4. Results

To make it easier to compare the current findings with the existing findings, we will first report the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients using the original scales. In the main part of the analyses, however, we will utilize structural equation modeling to test whether the associations between maximizing and subjective well-being are different across cultures, while controlling for measurement error.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

First, we examined cross-national differences in the mean levels of maximizing tendencies, and subjective well-being. As predicted, Americans were more maximizing than Japanese using either scale (see [Table 1](#)). Regarding the maximizing subscales, Americans were

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/951396>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/951396>

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