

Master's Seminar in Behavioral Marketing: A Selection of Previously Offered Topics

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Prof. Dr. Miguel Brendl

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A. Topics

1. The Attraction Effect

There is a curious but important phenomenon identified by consumer researchers called the attraction effect (also known as the decoy effect or the asymmetric dominance effect).

We often face tradeoffs when we have to choose between two or more choice options. For instance, there might be two beers on offer, one better tasting but more expensive. Switching to the more expensive option has the advantage of better taste but the disadvantage of higher price.

Let us call the expensive option the target. Researchers have demonstrated that there is a surprising way to increase the likelihood that people select the target: add an undesirable third option (a decoy) that resembles the target but is undeniably worse than the target. For instance, the third option may be even more expensive than the target beer but tastes equally good as the target. This is surprising because the decoy should be irrelevant. As the decoy is clearly worse than the target, people should dismiss it and face the same choice problem as before: the cheaper or the better tasting beer.

Even though this effect is well known and considered very important, recently its robustness has been called into question. Specifically, recent research claimed that this effect only occurs when the options are presented as numbers (for instance price and quality ratings), and the effect disappears when people can visually examine the products. Despite efforts by many researchers, there is, as of yet, no agreed upon explanation for why this effect occurs and why under some conditions it disappears.

Your task is to review the attraction effect literature and develop a research question and hypotheses that would improve our understanding of the attraction effect.

2. Motivated Perception and the Attraction Effect

We often face tradeoffs where we need to choose between options that have attributes with different magnitudes, whether it is size, price, or distance. Say you want to buy a cup of coffee at Starbucks. You might first choose which kind of coffee you want, but also which size. You may hesitate between the medium and large coffee, because they differ in size and in price. You want a large amount of coffee, but on the other hand you want to pay the least you can. Making that choice may be constrained by the context in which you are at the moment you make a decision.

One such context effect is known as the attraction effect. In the coffee situation, I must choose between two options, cup A and cup B. Both cups contain the same coffee. Cup A is quite expensive, but on the other hand it is quite a large amount of coffee. Cup B is less expensive, but it is smaller. Now say a cup A' is added to the set of option. It is the same

price as cup A, but it contains a bit less coffee than cup A. It is thus clearly the worst option to choose, because the price per liter is the highest. When cup A', called a decoy, is added to the set of cups A and B, the preference for cup A increases.

This effect requires the ability to perceive magnitudes to occur, amounts of coffee in the above case. If I'm better able at perceiving a difference in amounts, it is likely that I will suffer less from any effects of context on my choice. That is, it is possible that when comparing cups A and A', I see A as more filled than it is, and as more filled than when I compare it solely to cup B. Maybe this is why people tend to choose A more often when there is a decoy than when there is none.

When motivated, people tend to be more accurate in perceiving magnitudes. Is it possible that then motivation decreases the proneness to be influenced by the attraction effect? For this topic, you would design a study in which you include a need state or motivation manipulation (e.g., a manipulation of hunger, but it can also be a correlational study) and assess whether it decreases the likelihood of the attraction effect when the options to choose from are related to the motivational state you elicited.

3. Fake News

There has been recent interest in the phenomenon of fake news, especially in the context of fabricated stories about politicians. But brands also suffer from fake news as McDonalds did when the false claim that the fast food chain used worms in their meat widely circulated.

Stories about brands (person-brands or product-brands) keep appearing. For instance, after a worm-meat story there were many different stories about McDonalds using disgusting or unhealthy ingredients. In those cases, people often make up their own minds about the validity of these new stories because the validity is not known for certain yet or people are not willing to spend the time and effort to fact-check the story.

Development of new technologies (e.g., deep fakes) and growing use of social media for getting information increases the concerns about the effect of fake news, or more generally, fake information. The effects are felt on businesses, important political outcomes, and the public perception of issues that matter for the society (e.g., vaccination, climate change, Brexit).

Investigate this topic and turn it into your own research project by coming up with a research question and hypotheses. You can start by thinking about how people mentally correct false information, the types of information that are resistant to correction, or the types of behavior that would be vulnerable to misinformation.

4. Preference for Locally Produced Goods

Locally produced goods such as locally grown fruits and vegetables seem to have an allure. Often people seek such products and are willing to pay a premium for them over similar products shipped from elsewhere. Common reasons that people mention for this preference include freshness and a preference to support local producers. This project investigates a potentially more fundamental psychological reason.

Previous research has shown that products that are connected to the self are valued more than similar products that lack such a connection, even though the connection is superfluous. This project will investigate the possibility that local production establishes such a connection between the product and the self (via shared location) and therefore adds subjective value.

5. Access-based Consumption

The opportunities to access consumer goods without the need to own them has risen dramatically in recent years. Car rentals have been available for a long time but car sharing companies such as Mobility expanded the possibilities and made the process easier. Millions of people enjoy movies, books, and music legally but without purchasing any copies by subscribing to Netflix, Spotify, and Kindle Unlimited. Airbnb provided easy access to short term accommodation. Bike sharing companies have spread in big cities. What unites all of these new businesses is that they offer people to use products (for a limited period of time) without purchasing and owning them.

For consumers this seems like a new form of engaging with what the market offers. Being able to access without ownership can be considered a new form of freedom for consumers. On the other hand, people enjoy and derive psychological satisfaction from owning things; relying too much on access might conceivably have negative psychological consequences. Investigate this topic; learn about what consumer researchers have discovered so far, and formulate your own research question and hypotheses regarding this topic.

6. What makes a face attractive and what makes it desirable?

Faces are ubiquitous not only in our lives, but are often carefully placed into marketing materials, e.g., they are on TV, on social media, on print ads, and on products. Of course, one aspect that leads to a face being chosen for such materials is its attractiveness. Another aspect is its desirability. Research has discovered different attributes that make a face attractive, for example, averageness and symmetry. However, less is known about what makes a face desirable. Attractive faces should of course be desirable, but finding a face attractive and being drawn to it may not always co-occur. Dai, Brendl, and Ariely (2010) published a paper that suggest that men find attractive male faces attractive, but do not desire to look at them. Another paper that may convey an effect of face desirability is by Kim and Labroo (2011). We would like to know more about the relationship between face attractiveness and face desirability. This was not tested in Dai et al. One way to approach

this issue would be to think about whether there exist characteristics that make a face desirable but not attractive, and vice versa. One candidate may be attributes that elicit sexual arousal, maybe slightly open lips. Compared to ten years ago, today it is quite easy to manipulate attributes in avatar faces that would allow testing specific hypotheses about unique effects of particular attributes. Your task is to review literature in order to develop hypotheses about what makes a face attractive or desirable, but also what makes unattractive and undesirable. Your final objective for a thesis would be to test your hypotheses using avatar faces.

7. The reverse Endowment Effect

Previous research has identified and investigated the endowment effect—the observation that owning something increases the subjective value of that thing. For instance, buyers’ willingness to pay (the maximum amount of money they would pay for the item) is usually lower than sellers’ willingness to accept (the minimum amount of money they would accept for selling the item). This is either explained by loss aversion (the pain of giving up the item is stronger than the pleasure of having the item) or psychological ownership (an owned item is connected to the self and people assign extra value to the things that are connected to the self).

Even though there is plenty of evidence for the endowment effect, there may be cases where owning something does the exact opposite: decrease the subjective value of the item. Sometimes once we get what we want, it loses its appeal to us. For instance consider a child who cries and begs to have a toy, but after getting it leaves it aside after playing with it for a short while. Or the person who really wants to own a particular piece of clothing, is even prepared to go over-budget to have it, but after the purchase isn’t that excited about it anymore. The item mostly stays in the closet and when a friend says he/she can use it, the person doesn’t mind giving it away. Or children who exchange stamps or trading cards who always want other kids’ cards and are ready to give away their own in exchange.

The idea that other people’s possessions often appear more valuable than ours made its way into popular culture. As the saying goes, grass is always greener on the other side. There’s a Swiss children’s song called *De Hans im Schnäggeloch* that describes a person who doesn’t want what he has and who doesn’t have what he wants. What makes these cases different from the cases studied in the endowment effect literature? In other words, does a reverse endowment effect exist and if so, under what circumstances does it arise?

8. Brand Image Crises and Centrality of Goals to Brands

Brands often suffer from mishaps. Recent examples include Pepsi’s withdrawn ad campaign that was accused of trivializing political dissent, and United Airline’s handling of a passenger who refused to give up his seat on an overbooked flight. A challenge in those cases is to predict the damage that those issues would inflict on the brand. Seemingly similar offences can lead to severe damage or virtually no damage at all.

People care about brands, whether they are person-brands or product-brands, because brands often help people achieve their goals or fulfil their needs. The main goal

that a brand serves for most of their customers may be an important factor that determines the amount of damage after a mishap. For instance, let's assume that the central goal that Volkswagen helps people achieve is to have solid, reliable cars. The Volkswagen emissions scandal is a serious criminal offense but arguably doesn't hinder this goal—the company still produces solid, reliable cars. In cases like that it is plausible that the company would suffer a reputational damage (people would regard the brand more negatively than before, i.e., attitudes toward the brand would suffer) but, paradoxically, people would still purchase the company's products. Indeed, VW's sales since the scandal have increased.

Therefore, this project explores the relationship between a central goal for a brand and the amount of damage it suffers from a mishap, taking into account that damage may be multi-dimensional, i.e., attitudinal vs. behavioral. Specifically, the project tests the hypothesis that mishaps that hinder a central goal are more damaging than other mishaps, especially when purchase behavior is concerned.

9. Recategorization / reframing of negative publicity

Brands often face negative publicity. Consider the following example about BMW. Many American consumers are accustomed to a comfortable ride, whereas sporty cars such as BMW's tend to have stiff suspensions which produce a less smooth driving experience than do standard sedans. As a consequence, there was talk about BMW's giving a rough ride. Presumably BMW's response was to describe their cars as helping the driver *feel the road*.

This is an instance of reframing or recategorizing a seeming disadvantage into an advantage. Is this strategy effective in countering negative publicity? If so, what is the best way of implementing it? Negative publicity often creates a particular negative emotion such as fear or anger. The reframing may be most effective when the new way to look at the situation creates the emotion that directly opposes the initial negative emotion, e.g., feelings of safety for fear or feelings of gratitude for anger. An effective way to reframe the negative publicity might be to find an appropriate metaphor, i.e., driving BMW is like This project will propose an experiment to test these ideas.

10. How Your Language Affects Your Wealth and Health

Recent research (Chen 2013) provided correlational evidence that the structure of the language people speak influences their future oriented behavior. Resisting our impulses for immediate pleasure is often the only way to attain the outcomes that are important to us. We want to keep a slim figure but we also want that last slice of pizza. We want a comfortable retirement, but we also want to drive that dazzling car, go on that dream vacation, or get those gorgeous shoes. Some people are better at delaying gratification than others. Those people have a better chance of accumulating wealth and keeping a healthy life style. They are less likely to be impulse buyers or smokers, or to engage in unsafe sex.

Some languages strongly distinguish the present and the future. Other languages only weakly distinguish the present and the future. Chen's (2013) recent research suggests that people who speak languages that weakly distinguish the present and the future are better

prepared for the future. They accumulate more wealth and they are better able to maintain their health. The reason may be that the way these people conceptualize the future is similar to the way they conceptualize the present. As a result, the future does not feel very distant and it is easier for them to act in accordance with their future interests.

Although Chen's (2013) findings are consistent with these ideas, the ideas have not yet been tested experimentally; therefore it is not clear whether the language-future oriented behavior relationship is causal. This project will investigate the problem, and propose an experiment to test Chen's (2013) hypothesis.

11. The Desire for Money

Money is a strong motivator, and a uniquely human phenomenon. People strive to have money. In this thesis you will explore the psychological basis of the desire for money. People can convert money to goods and services, but does that entirely explain people's drive for money? Are there fundamental social-psychological needs that money helps fulfil?

Since there are probably several such needs, your proposal can concentrate on only one of them, e.g., power. Power is a positive feeling state associated with having an influence over other people. Your thesis may explore power as a goal that underlies the desire for money. Money has different functions such as being a store of value (saving) and serving an exchange function (spending). Consider the possibility that saving and spending could serve different psychological needs. In other words, an underlying goal such as having power might increase the desire for saving but not spending.

12. Does deprivation increase smokers' implicit motivation to smoke?

This thesis will investigate the relation of pleasure from consumption and motivation to consume. *Wanting* and *liking* are two different yet entangled constructs. *Wanting* refers to a cue-triggered incentive motivation: when I see a food-related cue, I will automatically be motivated to exert effort in order to obtain food. *Liking* refers to the actual hedonic experience during consumption: the pleasure I feel while eating food. Both *wanting* and *liking* are unconscious.

Incentive-sensitization theory posits *liking* and *wanting* are dissociated in addiction (Robinson & Berridge, 1993): for example, individuals suffering from alcohol addiction *want* alcohol more than they *enjoy* it when drinking it; also they *want* alcohol automatically when they see a related cue in their environment (e.g., seeing a bar will trigger a *wanting* for drinks).

Consistent with this perspective, Grigutsch et al. (2019) found that smokers' *wanting* was higher than their *liking* for cigarettes, while non-smokers *liking* and *wanting* were both low. They also found that smokers who had abstained from smoking for several hours and smokers who had just smoked did not differ in the *wanting* measure.

A key to observe incentive-induced motivation (i.e., *wanting*) is a state of physiological need: if I am hungry, I will be more motivated by food cues than if I am not (Epstein *et al.*,

2003). Similarly, if I am smoke-deprived, I should be more motivated by smoke-cues than if I am satiated, which is not what the authors found. This is the puzzle: it doesn't fit the theory, nor previous results obtained with food.

There are multiple potential reasons to explain why these authors did not observe the expected result of deprivation on *wanting* cigarettes, and most of these reasons are methodological: did their task actually measure *wanting*? Would the result be the same with more statistical power? Were the subjects really smoke-deprived?

Your goal will be to try to reproduce their results using a different and simpler methodology to see whether deprivation in smokers can induce an increase in incentive-induced motivation.

13. Boredom

Boredom seems to be a rather negative phenomenon. It is not an enjoyable state, and tasks we execute that lead to boredom are perceived as meaningless. Boredom in small doses is an everyday phenomenon. Just imagine being without your phone for a day.

When bored, one seeks stimulation and sensations, even when these are negative. For instance, boredom is such an unpleasant state that people tend to prefer administering themselves electric shocks rather than doing nothing (Wilson et al., 2014; Havermans et al., 2015). Bored individuals also take more financial risks (e.g., Dal Mas & Wittmann, 2017) and exhibit more behaviors at risk for their own health. On the other hand, boredom also increases information seeking, exploration and prosocial behaviors (Van Tilburg & Igou, 2017). Overall, boredom increases risk taking (Kılıç et al., 2020) and is circumscribed by a decrease in self-control and an increase in impulsiveness (e.g., Moynihan et al., 2017).

A. Boredom and food consumption

We are currently investigating how predicted pleasure from consuming food and motivation to consume foods diverge in some settings. For instance, eating a small amount of food increases motivation to eat more food, but decreases the pleasure one predicts from eating more. When bored, people tend to consume more unhealthy or exciting foods in an attempt to distance themselves from their current unpleasant boredom state (Havermans et al., 2015; Moynihan et al., 2015), this increase in unhealthy food consumption might be due to an increase in motivation, similar to the motivation increase we observed in our studies. On the other hand, boredom leads to an inability to experience pleasure. But the effect of this inability to experience pleasure on how we perceive future outcomes is not clear. Thus, we do not know whether bored individuals who are drawn to eating, might not expect to get pleasure from eating.

In this topic, you would investigate in what manner boredom might have different kinds of influences on motivation and predicted pleasure related to food. Boredom possibly increases motivation to consume foods, since it increases actual food consumption. But does boredom influence the pleasure we predict from consuming foods? One way to

address this question would be to induce boredom and measure the effect of this induction on motivation and predicted pleasure towards foods (e.g., salty snacks).

Notes. A list of tasks to measure motivation and/or a brief description of our previous measures of motivation and predicted pleasure will be shared on request.

B. Boredom, meaninglessness and conspiracy theories / fake news endorsement

The meaninglessness sometimes associated with boredom is in itself unpleasant. Finding meaning in the world (e.g., in our own cognitions, behaviors, or in external events) is a fundamental need, especially when meaninglessness implies a threat to our existence (e.g., Solomon et al., 2004, Landau et al., 2006). Endorsing fake news or conspiracy theories might help finding meaning when there is none, and thus satisfy our basic need for meaning.

It's possible the meaninglessness associated with boredom increases one's proneness to endorse fake news and conspiracy theories. This could be caused by an increased need for closure on questions related to threatening topics when the real answer is difficult to obtain. Need for closure refers to one's need for a quick answer, any answer, to a given question (Kruglanski, 1990), and it is specifically high when one feels pressure of any sort, like stress or time pressure. For instance, the question of whether vaccines are dangerous for one's health can be answered by reading scientific articles that assess the benefits and risks of such vaccines. Understanding such articles requires training, which implies time and effort that are not compatible with the need for a quick answer. Answering the question of whether vaccines are dangerous also requires that one compares different information and assesses the relevance of each source of information, which is costly. This cost is the reason why we make decisions based on heuristics. On the other hand, fake news are easy to understand and often involve coherent story telling. People trust coherent stories as sources of explanations (Kahneman, 2011, e.g., chapter 6).

In this topic, you would investigate whether meaninglessness leads to changes in information seeking strategies (e.g., whether meaninglessness implies people rely more on heuristics when searching information) and whether it consequently leads to endorsing fake news. You would also assess whether endorsing fake news reduces meaninglessness.

14. Changing behaviors by changing the way we describe an outcome

It is not clear yet to which extent predicted pleasure and motivation cause consumption behaviors. But one study showed that describing a meal with sensory attributes led to choosing smaller portion sizes (compared to a control condition) (Cornil & Chandon, 2016). That is, when a chocolate cake was described in terms of smell, flavor, with very specific sensory details, participants chose a smaller cake portion than those participants who did not read such a description. Surprisingly, those participants who chose

smaller portions were willing to pay more than those participants who chose bigger portions (i.e., the control participants).

In our own studies, portion size choices correlated with predicted pleasure. The higher the predicted pleasure, the bigger the chosen portion size. On the other hand, researchers often use willingness to pay as a proxy to measure motivation. The higher the motivation to get something, the higher the willingness to pay.

In Cornil and Chandon's (2016) studies, it is not clear which processes are at play in the dissociation they observed between portion size and willingness to pay, i.e., whether it is indeed predicted pleasure that underlies portion choice and whether motivation drives willingness to pay. It is possible that reading a detailed description of how a food smells and tastes like works as if one was actually eating, and thus satiates while it also works as an incentive that elicits motivation to actually get the foods.

For this topic, you would reproduce the methods these authors used (i.e., multisensory description vs. control description, see study 4 in the paper cited above) with a twist: instead of measuring portion size and willingness to pay, you would measure motivation and predicted pleasure. To measure motivation, you can use either a perceptual bias measure if you want to design an online study (e.g., Zitron-Emanuel & Ganel, 2020) or an effort measure if you want to design a lab study (e.g., clicking as fast as possible during a limited time to get the reward). Or, you could choose another measure depending on your readings and own ideas. We usually measure predicted pleasure is measured with a self-report scale.

Your results would allow us to shed light on which processes the different foods descriptions used by Cornil and Chandon (2016) elicit. Although it is indeed important to know the effects of different manipulations on "real-life" behaviors, it is crucial to understand which constructs are at play (e.g., motivation) to predict a wider range of behaviors. Ultimately, we would make one more step towards helping people understand and control better their irrational tendencies.

15. Relation of Predicted Pleasure and Motivation

The objective is to examine in specific consumption contexts whether predicted pleasure and motivation can diverge. This is of interest to marketing practice because motivation may relate to willingness to buy, whereas pleasure may relate to satisfaction with the consumption experience and thus to loyalty, hence, to different stages of "the consumer decision journey". Further, if pleasure and motivation can diverge, marketing actions may increase one at the expense of the other. As another example, a social marketing domain where a divergence of pleasure and motivation is highly relevant

concerns compulsive consumption behaviors, such as overeating. Finally, the question of divergence is of theoretical importance because most models of choice, including in economics, assume at least implicitly that predicted pleasure and motivation would be aligned.

A. Effect of having watched few or many episodes of a Netflix series

Imagine you have watched the 3rd episode of *The Witcher* on Netflix. How desperately would you want to watch the 4th episode? How much pleasure would you predict from watching it? As a thought experiment, let us give both a number of 6 on a scale of 1-10. Now imagine you have watched the 30th episode. Answer the same two questions for watching the 31st episode. Let us assume that now your desire to watch would be at 7 whereas you would predict pleasure of only 5. Why would you want to watch something more than the pleasure you expect from it? Wouldn't this be paradoxical? It would, but such a phenomenon seems intuitively possible. The objective of this project is to empirically test if this type of effects exists, and to theoretically speculate why it may exist. One possible direction is that curiosity is larger after the 30th episode, yet, maybe curiosity is not solely driven by pleasure. It will probably be easier to plan your experiment with stimuli other than movies, e.g., a series of images. Hsee and Ruan's (2016) Study 4 could serve as model: There, on each trial participants saw tiles with titles (e.g., mosquito) and had to decide if they wanted to turn the tile around and see the image on the backside of the tile (i.e., of a mosquito) or rather move on to the next tile. However, you would need to think about how to change this paradigm, importantly, finding a way to turn the images into a sequel. Joo, Liu and Wilbur (2019) reported a related experimental paradigm where they showed sequences of real TV-advertisements to participants, and measured liking of the advertisements and wanting of the advertised products. Liking (pleasure) was relatively higher early in the sequence and wanting (motivation) late in the sequence. These authors propose an explanation in terms of different mechanisms of habituation and appetizing.

B. Facial features signaling beauty (pleasure) versus sexual readiness (motivation)

The brand Viagra had a first mover advantage when it launched the Erectile Dysfunction (ED) drug category. When Cialis entered the market as second mover in this category, as a key decision they positioned their drug on "relationship quality", opposing Viagra's position as "male sexual performance". This was supported by Cialis's effect lasting 36 hours after ingesting the drug, as opposed to Viagra's lasting only 4 hours. Given these different positions, it would seem useful if these two brands were to target different segments based on the pleasure-motivation distinction: for Cialis, couples who wish for

pleasure associated with sex would seem relevant, whereas for Viagra the (male's) with a desire for sex would seem more relevant.

This was merely an example showing how the topic can be of relevance to marketing practitioners. The more general theoretical point is that a divergence of predicted pleasure and motivational desire may exist in the mating domain. It may be possible to reveal this by studying faces. You would review the gender literature concerning facial features that determine attractiveness (maybe the symmetry of a face) as opposed to sexual readiness/openness (maybe very red lipstick, a particular facial expression). You could select to study just one gender. Develop hypotheses about whether specific features or cues concern aesthetic pleasure, motivational desire, or both. The interesting question is whether these cues vary independently such that you could construct faces that are sexually seductive but not attractive and vice versa. This would be a way to show that perceived beauty/attractiveness and sexual readiness really are different. One possibility would be to test your hypothesis with actual face images and simple ratings as in "how long would you look at this face?" (motivation) vs. "how attractive/beautiful is this face?" (pleasure). Maybe more interesting, you could also test your hypothesis by constructing avatar faces using software, where the avatars only differ in the features you hypothesize matter. Another possibility would be to put the face images on packages. Then you could in addition examine respondents' reactions to the product.

16. Marketing Strategy

Marketing strategy textbooks tell you that it is important (1) to position a brand on a single attribute as a point of difference, and (2) to try to increase the level of abstraction of this attribute over time. For instance, initially a butter was positioned as "low cholesterol" (a product attribute, i.e., low level of abstraction) and then over time it moved to a more abstract attribute, "enable the buyer to be a good wife" (a goal, i.e., a high level of abstraction). (And yes, this was some time ago). You can watch Steve Jobs talk about Apple's Think Different campaign here, a deliberate decision to not talk about product attributes, that is, to only talk about a high level of abstraction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrZKoWqcZVg>

These prescriptions are widely believed in and constitute the basic marketing strategy curriculum. However, there is very little scientific evidence on whether and when they hold true. The purpose of this topic, then, is to experimentally test aspects of how to position a brand. You would review the managerial perspective, psychological theory, and then develop a testable hypothesis and an experiment or empirical study.

A. What are the consequences of focusing a brand position on a high versus low level of abstraction?

B. What are the consequences of focusing a brand position on one attribute or on more than one?

Note that both of these questions probably have “it depends on” type of answers. Thus, Steve Jobs in his video sounds very convincing, but there have to be cases when his proposal has disadvantages. You would be free to select one of numerous possible factors that the answer depends on and ignore others.

C. Are there brands that have “essence” and others that have less of it?

“Essentialism is the tendency to represent certain concepts in terms of a deeper, unobservable property that is responsible for category membership” (p. 585) (Newman & Knobe, 2018). For instance, people believe that there is an essential quality that makes “Hippies” similar in some deep way, but they ascribe less of such essence to English-speakers (Bailey et al., 2020). Also, mothers have more essence than fathers (Park et al., 2015). The concept of essentialism has been developed to understand how people perceive social categories and individuals. It is not part of marketing strategy, at least not yet, but some papers have been published in consumer behavior (see below). Does essence apply to brands? Does Nike have essence? Does Adidas? Could we show that some brands have more essence than others, and why? As marketers, should we care about this distinction? You would focus on understanding the concept of essence, translating it to marketing, and finding a way to measure it.

17. Reducing Vaccination Hesitancy: Reactance

Using the Covid-19 pandemic as a context, the objective is to examine non-obvious causes of vaccination hesitancy, to develop interventions to reduce it, and to test such an intervention with an online sample.

When people believe that something or someone threatens their freedom to act, they experience a motivational state called psychological reactance. This state aims at restoring the threatened freedom. It is not surprising that reactance is another reason underlying vaccination hesitancy. It is less obvious, however, what to do about it. Rather than trying to persuade these individuals that their freedom is not threatened, a different approach could be to use a communication to temporarily satisfy their need to restore

freedom in a domain other than vaccinations. This has been successfully done as part of behavioral experiments, but not in the context of communications. For instance, asking participants the following reduced their reactance: “Think about a situation in which your parents asked you to do something and you did the opposite of what they wanted you to do.” (p. 1007) (Laran et al., 2011).

18. Framing Climate Action: The Influence of Regulatory Focus and Human Values on Persuasion in the Context of Carbon Dioxide Removal

Abstract taken from thesis:

This master’s thesis examines the role of message framing and regulatory focus in promoting the adoption of climate action among Swiss residents. It offers a new approach to measuring perceptions of a realistic scenario in terms of regulatory orientation and valence. Based on this measurement, Study 2 identified one gain and one non-loss intervention (n = 96, 68%; n = 95, 57%), which were then used in Study 3 to test two opposing predictions derived from regulatory focus theory and the inhibition-disinhibition model against each other. A scenario-based online experiment with a 2 x 2 between-subjects design was conducted with 1,077 people living in Switzerland. The stimuli consisted of a persuasive message promoting climate interventions to permanently remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, where both the type of intervention (consumer voluntary vs. company mandatory) and the outcome of the message frame (non-gain vs. loss) were manipulated. The results suggest that the effect of outcome framing on persuasion not only depends on recipients’ mindset, but that the interaction between message frame and mindset is moderated by the value orientation of the message receiver. In particular, self-transcendence values determined when regulatory matching (vs. mismatching) was more persuasive.

B. Literature by Topic

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