

Introduction to the Special Issue on the Dynamics of Consumer Preferences

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Consumer preferences evolve and unfold over time and are derived from what has occurred in the past and in light of expectations about future events. Moreover, consumers often decide between options that vary in the utility streams that are realized over time and devise plans for sequential choices. Duke University's first Marketing Forum, held in the fall of 1995, brought together researchers from marketing and related disciplines to review current work on the dynamics of preferences and discuss its implications for marketing.

We compiled this special issue of *Marketing Letters* on "The Dynamics of Consumer Preferences" from contributions to this Forum and some related work. The articles in this special issue of *Marketing Letters* discuss a variety of behavioral regularities relating time and preference, including how consumers form and change preferences over time and how they schedule sequences of choices and outcomes as well as how they evaluate and allocate utility (cost and benefit) streams over time. Below is a brief overview of the individual papers.

Preference formation and change

Morwitz reviews causes of discrepancies between consumers' initial behavioral intentions and their subsequent actual behavior, including factors that moderate how accurately consumers represent their current intentions and how accurately they predict if and how their intentions will change over time. Gibbs describes how the preference formation process can be influenced by characteristics of the decision maker's state of mind (for example, surreptitious physiological arousal, positive mood, inflamed desire). He suggests that manipulating the state of mind can predispose consumers to prefer particular options.

Evaluating utility streams

Kahn, Ratner, and Kahneman experimentally investigate choice sequences in which consumers must repeatedly select one of several options. Their findings suggest that the

hedonic interactions between events in a sequence are more complex than previously thought and that variety-seeking theory may require further research. Prelec and Loewenstein review psychological research on intertemporal choice. They discuss nonexponential discounting and dynamic inconsistency as well as nonnormative principles that govern hedonic interactions between events in a sequence (for example, why people want to "save the best for last") and between streams of costs and benefits over time. Winer suggests that, contrary to standard economic theory, individuals' discount rates for durable goods vary across product categories and across attributes in multiattribute choice models.

The timing of choice

Dhar reviews evidence that shows that consumers' choices from a set of alternatives vary with whether these choices can be delayed when there are no deferral costs. He proposes that consumers are more likely to postpone a choice when it is difficult or when the decision alternatives are similarly attractive. Meyer experimentally explores the process of sequential search among choice sets and the timing of choosing a single alternative from one of these sets. Larger choice sets encourage immediate purchases, but choice difficulty does not affect purchase timing, when there are explicit deferral costs. We conclude the issue with an article that suggests that consumers manage the resources and constraints under which they make their purchase and consumption choices in order to maintain the quality of their hedonic experiences over time. We refer to this process as *dynamic preference maintenance*.

The articles in this special issue illustrate and emphasize the many ways in which preferences depend on the temporal context in which consumer choice occurs. While it may not be necessary to formally include time as a variable in any and all empirical consumer research, its consideration in the conceptualization can generate new hypotheses and insights.

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