

SUBJECTIVE PROBABILITY UTILITY AND DECISION MAKING, 2023

Emotions and Disclosures: Calm versus Frustrated States

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Keywords: Decision Making, Information Disclosure, Hot-Cold Empathy Gap

Research focusing on emotions and their effect on decision-making demonstrates several connections between the two. For example, an induced sad state would mean taking less risks compared to a neutral or happy state (Yuen and Lee, 2002) while also extending decision making time (Duque, Turla and Evangelista, 2013). Decision-making research on the front of privacy and disclosures provided a procedural understanding on what drives divulgence. Prominent models on this front include the Privacy calculus (Culnan and Armstrong, 1999) and Disclosure Management (White 2004) which propose that risk-benefit analyses precede disclosures. Nevertheless, there is little research delimiting disclosure decision-making when under the influence of certain emotional states, with the latter potentially asynchronising the accuracy of risk-benefit assessments.

The present research focuses on the hot-cold empathy gap (Loewenstein, 2000) and seeks to identify the impact of frustration-inducing exercises on disclosure decision-making on three fronts. First, how frustrated (hot) and calm (cold) states will interfere with consumer overall disclosure. This front investigates whether procedures that prompt frustration will lead respondents to over-disclose or clam-up. Insights from psychology indicate that frustration (induced by listening to infant-crying) clammed-up men but not women when it came to self-disclosures (Stein and Brodsky, 1995). Applying this reasoning, H1 states:

H1: Calm participants (cold condition) will disclose more information than frustrated participants (hot condition).

Secondly, whether frustration will influence the accuracy of assessments of what is contextually relevant to disclosure compared to a calm state. This relates to the impact of context (Acquisti et al., 2016) and whether consumers accurately assess a contextually relevant disclosure to a contextually irrelevant one where the latter probes for disclosure avoidance. For example, being asked in a medical form about the breed of your cat while an option to skip the questions is provided.

Thirdly and following the same reasoning, whether consent to default settings relating to use of acquired information will be more prevalent in the frustrated condition. Thus, customisation of data use options will be higher in the calm (consent to some uses) condition compared to the frustrated condition (consent to all uses). The flow of effects for H2 and H3 are based on a key

principle of the visceral states indicating that hot states are linked to questionable assessments due to limited reflection on consequential aspects (for example a greater likelihood of not using a condom when in a hot state compared to a cold one; Ariely and Loewenstein, 2006). Formally:

H2: Calm participants (cold condition) will make more accurate assessments of what is contextually relevant to disclose than frustrated participants (hot condition).

H3: Calm participants (cold condition) will engage in more customisation relating to data use options than Frustrated participants (hot condition).

Hypotheses are tested using a series of experiments with the treatment groups subjected to the frustration-inducing exercise prior to disclosure assessments. Through this examination, the present study investigates emotions, and specifically frustration, and how it can amplify imperfect rationality for divulgence thus positioning consumers in risky, valnurable disclosure situations.

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