

I Will Like It Later But Not Now: The Roles of Temporal Distance and Guilt in Hedonic Product Evaluation^{*}

KIWAN PARK^{}**

*Seoul National University
Seoul, Korea*

YOUNGRONG KIM^{*}**

*LG Electronics
Seoul, Korea*

Abstract

How and why does temporal distance influence consumers' evaluation of future hedonic consumption? Drawing upon the construal level theory, we propose that guilt is a lower-level construal than hedonic pleasure and becomes salient in the immediate versus distant consumption. As such, we hypothesize that consumers evaluate future hedonic consumption less positively as temporal distance becomes smaller. We find that temporal distance influences product evaluation when the product is framed as a hedonic option, but not when it is framed as a utilitarian one (study 1). The effect of temporal distance is mediated by anticipated guilt (study 2).

Keywords: construal level, guilt, hedonic consumption, temporal distance

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^{**} Kiwan Park (Tel: +82-2-880-2596; Fax: +82-2-878-3154; E-mail: kiwanp@snu.ac.kr) is an Associate Professor of Marketing, Graduate School of Business, Seoul National University, Korea. Address correspondence to Kiwan Park.

^{***} Youngrong Kim (Tel: +82-2-3777-5189; Fax: +82-2-3777-5189; E-mail: yrkim0914@gmail.com) is an Assistant Manager of LG Electronics, Seoul, Korea.

INTRODUCTION

When we imagine dinning out at a “luxurious” restaurant with the significant other on the anniversary day, one month later from today, we primarily focus on positive experiences such as the luxurious ambience, haute cuisine, and customized services. As we approach that day in time, however, we become much worry about several costs we have to pay to enjoy the experiences. One of the costs is the experience of guilt associated with the hedonic consumption (Okada 2005; Wertenbroch and Dhar 2000).

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate how temporal distance influences the evaluation of future hedonic consumption. Our basic premise is that hedonic consumption typically consists of two emotional experiences, hedonic pleasure and the feeling of guilt that ensues. We argue that hedonic pleasure is more primary and guilt is more secondary to such hedonic consumption. Accordingly, we expect that the (anticipated) guilt becomes more salient when an individual faces the near-future (rather than distant-future) hedonic consumption, thus hampering the savoring of the consumption more.

Our understanding of such phenomenon can be established through the construal level theory (Liberman et al. 2007; Trope and Liberman 2003; Trope et al. 2007). When individuals conceptualize objects or events from the perspective of larger temporal distance, they tend to focus on high-level representations of the objects or events (i.e., core, primary features), not on low-level representations (i.e., peripheral, secondary features). We conceptualize guilt as a low-level construal and hedonic pleasure as a rather high-level construal. Thus, we predict that, when imagining consuming hedonic products in the future, people evaluate them more negatively as their purchase becomes more imminent and that such negative evaluations are mediated by the higher level of anticipated guilt.

In the next section, we first review the literature on hedonic consumption, (mis)predictions for future events, and the role of temporal distance. Then we derive our basic prediction that evaluations of hedonic products are moderated by temporal distance and that anticipated guilt mediates the effect of temporal distance. We test our hypotheses in two experimental studies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Hedonic Consumption and the Feeling of Guilt

Extant research has paid much attention to different affective natures of our everyday consumption experiences (Ahtola 1985; Babbin et al. 1994; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Lofman 1991). A basic premise in the literature is that not all consumption evokes the same feelings. For example, consuming utilitarian products such as detergent, stationary, or dairy products may produce a set of feelings different from those evoked from consuming hedonic items such as chocolate truffles, a vacation in a resort, or a massage service (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). Thus, we often make a distinction between two types of consumption that differ in terms of the affective content and basic consumption motives.

Hedonic, pleasure-oriented consumption is motivated mainly by the desire to seek for sensory pleasure, fantasy, and fun, whereas utilitarian, function-oriented consumption is motivated primarily by the desire to satisfy a basic need or to accomplish a functional task (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998: 436). It is no doubt that many product categories may fit into both of these categories (Babbin et al. 1994); however, some products, say, luxury fashion products, provide much higher level of pleasure than others. Interestingly, the acquisition of such hedonic products entails both a negative emotion of guilt and a positive emotion of pleasure as the yin and yang of them. The negative feeling of guilt can kick in from the consumption of hedonic pleasure, even before the consumption takes place, thereby reducing the positive feeling of an otherwise pleasurable experience. As such, pleasure and guilt basically constitute two sides of hedonic consumption because the two components often go hand in hand (Lascu 1991).

Guilt refers to an individual's unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her actions, inactions, circumstances, or intentions (Baumeister et al. 1994: 245). Guilt could result from an individual's knowledge that he or she acted against his or her own moral or ethical standards (Freedman et al. 1967). In the same vein, Stein (1968) defined guilt as the sense of being accountable for violating internal standards. In the consumer-behavior con-

text, individuals who desire hedonic or luxury products feel guilty about spending a lot of money on non-practical items, which often deter them from purchasing those items (Keinan and Kivetz 2008; Kivetz and Keinan 2006; Kivetz and Simonson 2002). Compared to utilitarian products, the consumption of hedonic or luxury products seem wasteful, immoral, and consequently is difficult to justify. It is possible, however, that not only hedonic products, but also utilitarian items can evoke guilt because of too high price since guilt is generally correlated with the sense of responsibility or control (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). When individuals overspend their money on utilitarian products, they may feel guilt as much as they do from the purchase of luxury or hedonic products.

The Roles of Temporal Distance and Guilt in Future Hedonic Consumption

The construal level theory (Liberman and Trope 1998; Liberman, Trope, and Stephan 2007; Trope and Liberman 2000, 2003; Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007) suggests that temporal distance to an object or event systemically changes how the object or event is mentally construed; individuals represent distant events in terms of high-level construals, while they represent close events in terms of low-level construals. High-level construals typically feature abstract, general, superordinate, and essential aspects of the object or event. In contrast, low-level construals are comprised of relatively concrete, specific, subordinate, and incidental aspects of the object or event (Trope and Liberman 2000).

First, general terms such as abstract personality adjectives are used to describe human behaviors when high-level construals are adopted, whereas specific examples or concrete cases are used to construe the behaviors when low-level construals are adopted (Trope and Liberman 2000; Semin and Fiedler 1988). Second, actions are construed at either the superordinate goal (i.e., "Why do I this?") or the subordinate goal (i.e., "How do I this?"), depending on what types of construals are adopted (Vallacher and Wegner 1985, 1987). Third, when consumers pursue specific consumption goals, features that are directly related to their actions are fundamentally important to fulfilling the pursued goals, thus constituting the central aspects of mental representations (Trope and Liberman 2000). However, goal-distant features of actions are peripheral to the inherent meanings of such actions, thereby comprising the secondary aspects in the mind.

As such, individuals represent temporally-distant objects more in terms of prototypical experiences and broader categories (Liberman et al. 2002), organize others' distant- versus near-future behaviors in terms of abstract traits (Nussbaumer et al. 2003), and shift their preferences systemically as a function of temporal distance because they base their judgments on either the desirability (ends) or feasibility (means to an end) (Trope and Liberman 2000).

As discussed, hedonic consumption entails two basic components, hedonic pleasure and guilt. We argue that hedonic pleasure is a primary (positive) motive to consume hedonic products, where guilt is a secondary (negative) emotion that accompanies the consumption. As such, hedonic pleasure constitutes a high-level construal, while guilt represents a low-level construal of the hedonic consumption. Thus, we predict that temporal distance increases the tendency to represent the hedonic consumption in terms of hedonic pleasure, making the pleasure more salient to individuals. As temporal distance decreases (i.e., as the purchase becomes more imminent), guilt gets more salient, making the consumption more negative. Thus, evaluation for distant-future hedonic consumption may be more positive than those for near-future one because guilt, a secondary feature, is not well accommodated in the evaluation process. Specifically, we hypothesize;

H1: Temporal distance influences the evaluation of hedonic products. Specifically, individuals evaluate hedonic products more negatively when the purchase is imminent versus distant in the future.

According to our conceptualization, there are two possibilities about the roles of hedonic pleasure and guilt for future hedonic consumption. One possibility is that both anticipated hedonic pleasure and guilt interactively determine temporally differential evaluation of future hedonic consumption, as established in hypothesis 1. The other possibility is that the change in anticipated guilt primarily determines the time-dependent evaluation of future hedonic consumption, while anticipated pleasure remains relatively constant regardless of temporal distance. We argue that the latter is the case since hedonic pleasure is inherently essential to the hedonic consumption and less vulnerable to temporal distance, a subtle contextual variable.

H2: Individuals anticipate that they will feel more guilt from buying hedonic products when the purchase is imminent versus distant in the future.

H3: The level of anticipated guilt mediates the relationship between temporal distance and an individual's evaluation of hedonic products.

We conduct two studies to test our hypotheses. In study 1, we vary the frames of product appeals for the identical product, a mini-bicycle, to investigate whether the evaluation of the product is influenced by temporal distance only when it is positioned as a hedonic product, but not when it is presented as a utilitarian one. In study 2, we test the proposed process by which anticipated guilt mediates the effect of temporal distance on the evaluation of a hedonic product. We use the luxury wallet as a target product.

STUDY 1: THE EFFECT OF TEMPORAL DISTANCE ON THE EVALUATION OF HEDONIC VERSUS UTILITARIAN PRODUCT APPEAL (MINIVÉLO)

The primary objective of study 1 is to investigate whether consumers' product evaluation for Minivélo, a mini-bicycle, would be differentially affected by temporal distance to its purchase, depending on how the product's appeal is framed. We frame the product appeals of this bicycle in two different ways by positioning it as either a hedonic or a utilitarian option. We hypothesize that when Minivélo is framed as a hedonic option, consumers' evaluation is more favorable when the purchase is immediate versus distant in the future, whereas temporal distance does not influence consumers' product evaluation when the product is framed as a utilitarian option.

Method

Participants and Design. One hundred and twenty-one undergraduate students (63 female) participated in exchange for a cash of KRW 5,000. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in a 2 (Temporal Distance: Near vs. Distant) X 2 (Product Appeal: Utilitarian vs. Hedonic) between-subjects design. All participants read a paragraph about Minivélo on the first page of the book-

let. As described in the next section, we manipulated the two independent variables via the information contained in the paragraph. After reading the paragraph, participants reported their attitude toward the product on three seven-point scales (1 = unfavorable/negative/bad; 7 = favorable/positive/good). For confound checks, we measured the level of interest on Minivélo on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all; 7 = very much interested).

Manipulations of Independent Variables. We manipulated temporal distance by making participants imagine that they would purchase the bicycle shortly (near-future condition) or at least one month later (distant-future condition). In order to reinforce the temporal-distance manipulation, we used different labels for the booklets. Participants received a questionnaire, titled as either “Short-Term” or “Long-Term” Shopping, which was ostensibly interested in consumers’ short-term (long-term) shopping behavior.

Then, we manipulated product appeal by focusing on either hedonic- or utilitarian-related aspects of the product in the description. Participants in the hedonic-frame condition read a paragraph where Minivélo was presented as a stylish alternative for those who wanted to express themselves to others because it was cute, colorful, and fashionable in design. In the utilitarian-frame condition, the product was presented to participants as a practically useful alternative that was small in size, light in body weight, and easily foldable. Such attributes as portability, high speed, and high stability were also highlighted in this condition.

Results

Product Evaluation. A 2 (Temporal Distance) X 2 (Product Appeal) ANOVA on the involvement in Minivélo showed that there were no significant effects (all p 's > .118). We ran the same 2 (Temporal Distance) X 2 (Product Appeal) ANOVA on the product evaluation index formed by the three attitude items ($\alpha = .93$). First, the main effect of product appeal was significant ($F(1, 117) = 9.76, p < .01$), indicating that participants evaluated the utilitarian appeal more positively than the hedonic appeal ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.14$ vs. $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.71$). This result may be driven by the fact that utilitarian appeals are better aligned with characteristics of the bicycle category. More importantly, however, the significant main effect of product appeal was qualified by the significant two-way interaction between temporal

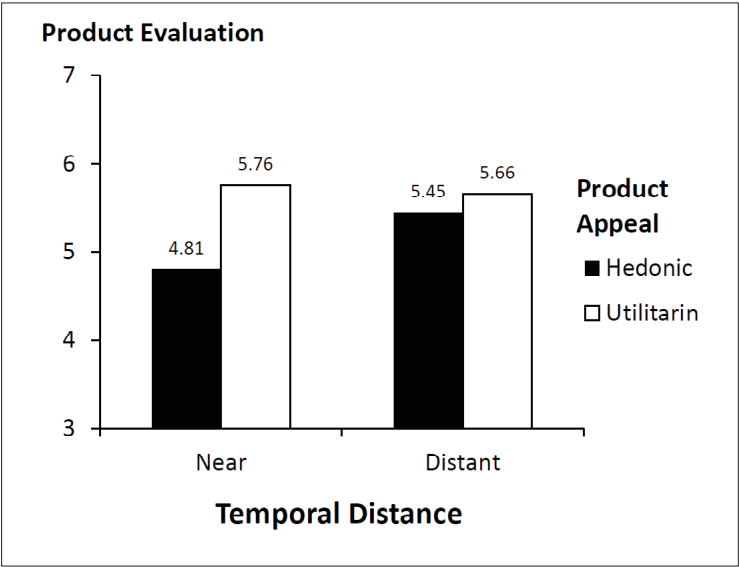


Figure 1. The Effects of Temporal Distance and Product Appeal on Product Evaluation (Study 1)

distance and product appeal ($F(1, 117) = 4.00, p < .05$; figure 1). Planned contrasts indicated that Minivélo, when framed as a hedonic alternative, was evaluated more negatively when the purchase was imminent than when the purchase was far ($M_{\text{near}} = 4.81$ vs. $M_{\text{distant}} = 5.45, F(1, 117) = 6.08, p < .05$). However, there was no significant difference in product evaluation when Minivélo was presented as a utilitarian option ($M_{\text{near}} = 5.76$ vs. $M_{\text{distant}} = 5.66, F < 1$). On the other hand, decomposing the two-way interaction by temporal distance indicated that there was a significant difference in product evaluation between two appeals only in the near-future ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.81$ vs. $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.76, F(1, 117) = 12.82, p < .001$), but not in the distant-future condition ($M_{\text{hedonic}} = 5.45$ vs. $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.66, F < 1$).

Discussion

As predicted, we found that the evaluation of the same product depended on how its product appeal was framed. Temporal distance influenced the evaluation of the bicycle when it was presented as a hedonic alternative: participants evaluated the product less favor-

ably when the purchase was near versus far in the future. However, temporal distance did not influence the product evaluation when the product was framed as a utilitarian option.

This study provides a rather pure test for the basic effect that temporal distance affects the evaluation of hedonic products because we only varied product appeals for the identical product. In other words, we could control for the influences of other extraneous variables that might have been otherwise unavoidable if we compared two different products. A question that remains untested concerns the proposed process by which temporal distance influences the evaluation of hedonic products.

In study 2, we conduct a mediation test to investigate whether anticipated guilt mediates the effect of temporal distance on product evaluation, as observed in study 1. Drawing upon the construal theory that suggests that guilt is a low-level mental construal, we test whether differential evaluations of a luxury wallet depending on temporal distance are based on the change in the level of anticipated guilt.

STUDY 2: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ANTICIPATED GUILT (LUXURY WALLET)

In study 2, we examine whether hedonic guilt mediates the effect of temporal distance for the evaluation of hedonic products. We hypothesize that individuals feel more guilt as they approach actual purchases and this enhanced level of guilt leads to lower evaluations of hedonic products in the near- but not in distant-future condition. By using a luxury product whose purchase is primarily driven by the hedonic motive, we test whether the lower level of willingness to pay in the immediate versus distant purchase is mediated by the higher level of anticipated guilt. Unlike study 1, we use willingness-to-pay as our dependent measure to avoid potential biased responses on attitude measures due to participants' stereotype about luxury items.

Method

Participants and Procedure. Ninety-seven undergraduate students (49 women) participated in exchange for KRW 5,000. All participants

were asked to imagine that they were on the online shopping mall named Luxury.com to make a purchase for a new luxury wallet. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions that manipulated temporal distance in the scenario. They were provided with the information on a special discount event where they could purchase a luxury wallet of their favorite brand at a discounted price that was similar to the level of price at duty-free shops. They were told that the event would take place in two days (near-future condition) or one month later in the future (distant-future condition). As in study 1, we labeled the booklets with different names, “Short-Term” versus “Long-Term” Shopping.

After reading the presented scenario, participants were first asked to provide a brand name that they planned to purchase. Then participants were asked to provide the maximum amount of money in KRW they would be willing to pay for the wallet, which was used for our main dependent measure.

Next, they indicated their level of anticipated pleasure and guilt they would experience from buying a luxury wallet in this special event. To measure the hedonic pleasure, participants were asked the following two questions and provided their opinions on seven-point scales (1 = not at all; 7 = very much): “How much are you excited about getting a new wallet in two days [one month] from today?” and “How much do you look forward to having a new wallet in two days [one month] from today?” To measure the hedonic guilt, participants provided their opinions on seven-point scales (1 = not at all; 7 = very much) about the following questions: “How much do you feel guilt about buying an expensive luxury wallet?” and “How much do you mind buying an expensive luxury wallet?”

For confound checks, we measured the level of interest on the luxury wallet on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all; 7 = very much interested) and also task involvement on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all; 7 = very much involved). To measure the manipulation check for the temporal-distance manipulation, we asked participants, “How much do you feel the event far from today?” (1 = very near; 7 = very far). Finally, we measured the individual difference in the impulsive buying tendency (Rook and Fisher 1995) as a control variable.

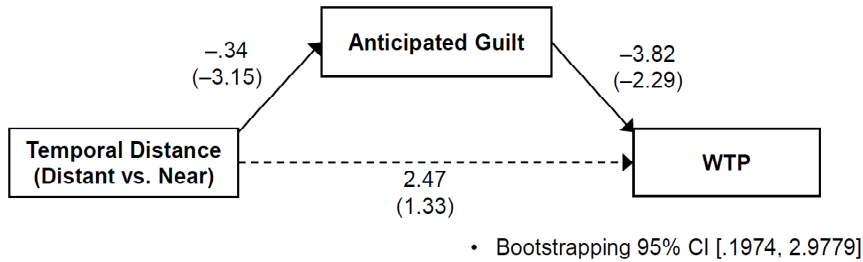
Results

Manipulation and Confound Checks. A one-way ANOVA on the ma-

nipulation check for temporal distance indicated that participants in the near-future condition perceived the special event to take place sooner in the future than those in the distant-future condition ($M_{\text{near}} = 3.31$ vs. $M_{\text{distant}} = 3.98$; $F(1, 95) = 4.36$, $p < .05$). The same ANOVA was used to investigate whether participants' interest in the luxury wallet and task involvement were influenced by the temporal-distance manipulation. None of the effects were significant (all p 's $> .20$). Analyses of the manipulation and confound checks suggest that the temporal-distance manipulation was deemed successful at producing a differential perception of when the special event would take place, controlling for participant's involvement in the product category and the task.

Willingness to Pay. Using the impulsive buying tendency ($\alpha = .91$) as a covariate, we ran an ANCOVA on the willingness-to-pay price. The effect of the impulsive buying tendency was significant ($b = 4.71$, $SE = 1.46$, $F(1, 94) = 10.44$, $p < .01$), indicating that the higher such tendency, the higher the willingness-to-pay price for a luxury wallet. More importantly, the effect of temporal distance was also significant ($F(1, 94) = 4.40$, $p < .05$), controlling for the effect of the impulsive buying tendency. The willingness-to-pay price was lower for participants in the near-future condition than those in the distant-future condition ($M_{\text{near}} = 290,769.23$ vs. $M_{\text{distant}} = 374,444.44$).

Hedonic Pleasure and Guilt. For potential mediators, we measured both hedonic pleasure and guilt. We created the hedonic pleasure index ($\alpha = .90$) using the average score of the two items we assessed. We also created the guilt index ($\alpha = .70$) in the same manner. Each of the two indices was subject to the same ANCOVA. An ANCOVA on the hedonic pleasure index revealed that the effect of temporal distance was not significant ($M_{\text{near}} = 5.54$ vs. $M_{\text{distant}} = 5.27$, $p > .20$), while the effect of the impulsive buying tendency was marginally significant ($b = .18$, $SE = .10$, $F(1, 94) = 3.50$, $p = .0644$), suggesting that the higher the impulsive buying tendency, the more participants felt hedonic pleasure from buying a luxury wallet. On the other hand, the same ANCOVA on the hedonic guilt index indicated that the effect of temporal distance was significant ($M_{\text{near}} = 5.45$ vs. $M_{\text{distant}} = 4.72$, $F(1, 94) = 9.91$, $p < .01$). The effect of the impulsive buying tendency was also significant in the negative direction ($b = -.26$, $SE = .09$, $F(1, 94) = 8.78$, $p < .01$), indicating that the higher the impulsive buying tendency, the less participants felt hedonic guilt from buying a luxury wallet.



Note: Provided are t-values in parentheses. The solid lines represent significant paths, and the dotted line represents a non-significant line at $p < .05$. Temporal distance is coded as 1 if distant, and -1 if near. The effect of the covariate, the impulsive buying tendency, is not presented for simplicity.

Figure 2. The Mediating Effect of Anticipated Guilt (Study 2)

Mediation Analyses. We used the bootstrapping procedure (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007) to test the proposed process where hedonic guilt mediates the effect of temporal distance on participant's willingness to pay for the luxury wallet (figure 2). First, temporal distance had a direct positive influence on participants' willingness-to-pay price ($b = 3.78$, $SE = 1.80$, $p < .05$). Second, temporal distance decreased the experience of anticipated guilt ($b = -.34$, $SE = .11$, $p < .01$): the smaller temporal distance, the greater the level of anticipated guilt. Finally, the direct effect of temporal distance on willingness to pay, which had been otherwise significant, became non-significant ($b = 2.47$, $SE = 1.85$, $p > .18$), once guilt was controlled for. On the other hand, the level of anticipated guilt still influenced participants' willingness-to-pay price negatively ($b = -3.82$, $SE = 1.67$, $p < .05$). We confirmed the full mediation process via the bootstrapping procedure (95% CI: [.1974, 2.9779]).

Discussion

We confirmed the mediating role of guilt for the time-dependent evaluation of the hedonic product. Anticipated guilt was higher in the near-future than distant-future purchase and this enhanced level of anticipated guilt drove the difference in product evaluation across temporal distance. Our findings are consistent with the prediction of the construal level theory that a low-level construal, anticipated guilt in this case, exerts its effect more heavily in near-

future than distant-future condition. To the best of our knowledge, this study provides a first attempt to test the proposition that guilt is conceptualized as a low-level construal in hedonic consumption, thus becoming more influential in the immediate versus distant purchase.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Theoretical and Managerial Contributions

At the most basic, we confirmed that temporal distance influences the evaluation of hedonic products. In study 1, we manipulated the communication frames of product appeals for the same product, Minivélo, and found that consumers' attitude toward the product was more negative when the purchase was immediate versus distant in the future. However, such moderating effect of temporal distance was limited to the case where the product was positioned as a hedonic option. When it was presented as a utilitarian alternative, temporal distance did not influence product evaluation. In this study, we varied the product appeals for the same product instead of using different products for the target object; as such, this study provides a strong and clean test for our hypothesis 1.

In study 2, we confirmed the role of anticipated guilt as the mediator for the relationship between temporal distance to the purchase and product evaluation. This result is consistent with our basic premise that guilt is rather secondary to consuming hedonic products, while hedonic pleasure is more primary. As hypothesized, we found that anticipated guilt was higher when the purchase was imminent versus far in the future and that the higher level of anticipated guilt mediated lower willingness to pay for the luxury wallet in the near- versus distant-future condition. On the other hand, we found that the level of hedonic pleasure remained constant regardless of temporal distance. One could argue that if people evaluate distant-future hedonic consumption more favorably, such result is driven by people's tendency of exaggerating the amount of hedonic pleasure they will enjoy. Our empirical findings suggest, though, that more positive evaluation of distant-future hedonic consumption is due to higher level of anticipated guilt for near-future consumption, not to higher level of anticipated pleasure for

distant-future consumption.

Theoretically, the current research advances an explanation based on guilt as a low-level construal. This proposition is consistent with previous literature on misprediction. Several lines of research suggest that an individual's misprediction for future events comes from his or her failure to incorporate non-schematic and mundane aspects of reality into the construal of future situations (Sherman 1980). For example, the rosy-view showed that people's expectations of future personal events (e.g., family visit to a theme park) are typically more positive than their actual experiences during the events because they cannot accommodate in advance actual distractions, disappointment, and a less positive view of the self (Mitchell et al. 1997; Shutton 1992).

In a similar vein, prior research has shown that individuals are overly confident in predicting future tasks or behaviors (Buehler, Griffin, and MacDonald 1997; Buehler, Griffin, and Ross 1994; Dunning et al. 1990; Griffin, Dunning, and Ross 1990; Vallone et al. 1990). For example, Buehler et al. (1994) found that when asked to predict the completion date for a specific task, individuals tend to underestimate their task completion time. Such optimism may result from individuals' failure to incorporate incidental, task-unrelated features into the prediction of completion time.

This misprediction tendency is also prevalent in affective forecasting. People often fail to predict the intensity and duration of their reactions to future events (Gilbert et al. 1998, 2002; Wilson et al. 2000). People tend to overpredict how long their affective reactions to future events will last because of the failure to accommodate the consequences of other activities in the future. This misprediction is driven by both focalism (i.e., tendency not to consider other factors than the focal one) and immune-neglect (i.e., neglect of our psychological immune system to effectively adapt to negative events).

The underlying process proposed in these streams of research shares the commonality that reliance solely on schematic construals can lead to incorrect, often excessively positive, predictions for future events. Given that people's predictions depend on how they construe future situations, our research suggests that evaluations of future hedonic consumption may depend on how the consumption is construed, that is, how much guilt is accommodated in the evaluation process. When this non-schematic, low-level construal of guilt is considered (as it was in the near-future condition), future

hedonic consumption is less favorable, the very finding of the current research. As for hedonic consumption, the present research offers an additional, guilt-based explanation of why people cannot predict future event correctly.

From this research, we can draw important managerial implications for marketing hedonic products. Since consumers feel more guilt in relatively short- versus long-distance frame, marketers can effectively use tactics on the point of purchase designed to reduce consumers' level of guilt, such as bundling a product with charity or utilitarian products or highlighting practical features. On the other hand, for consumers who face long-distance purchases, marketers may induce more favorable product evaluation by raising consumers' expectations about hedonic pleasure than through guilt-reducing communications. For example, when marketers design marketing communications for their new product which will be launched in several months, they need to emphasize a high level of pleasure that consumers can enjoy from getting the product. As the product launch becomes imminent over time, however, the communication should be geared toward focusing on the usefulness or practical features to reduce consumers' anticipated guilt. Similarly, when marketers identify the core concept for mass-media advertisements, focusing on anticipated pleasure is much more effective to maximize consumers' attitude toward the product. On the other hand, sales persons' direct communications to the customer at the point of purchase should be more targeted toward products' utilitarian features or practicality.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

This research possesses several limitations and opportunities for future research. First, in study 2, we used the luxury wallet as a stimulus to evoke guilt. However, luxury wallets are too expensive and less relevant for most university students so participants might not be involved very much in the task at hand. More importantly, the effect of guilt could have been exaggerated due to the high price of luxury wallets to our participants. That is, participants may have felt guilt more from buying an expensive luxury wallet and the test mediation was partly due to this enhanced level of guilt. Although this concern can be attenuated by the fact that the product was on promotion in the scenario and such possibility cannot explain the

findings of study 1 effectively, it would be better to use other affordable hedonic products such as travel package to enhance the robustness of our findings.

Second, since our empirical studies are based on hypothetical scenarios, some of the participants might have had difficulty in immersing themselves in the presented situations. In future research, we could conduct a field study to enhance the external validity by observing how much people spend or how they evaluate products in the real situations. Third, although our focus was on temporal distance, prior research suggests that various types of distance – social, spatial, or psychological – work in the similar fashion (Fujita et al. 2006; Liberman et al. 2007). One may investigate whether similar effects are obtained for the case of other types of distance. Similarly, an individual difference in action identification can be used to understand the effects of temporal distance and guilt in the context of hedonic consumption, without using any artificial interventions.

Conclusion

The present research suggests that our representation of future hedonic consumption depends on the temporal perspective we adopt. When seen from a larger temporal distance, hedonic consumption is represented in terms of positive pleasure, while the negative experience of guilt comes into play when the consumption is construed from a smaller-distance perspective. Thus, our predictions for future hedonic consumption seem malleable in that they are affected by the subtle effect of contextual temporal information.

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