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경영학석사학위논문

**The Effects of Significant Other's Perceived State on
Consumers' Product Evaluation and Choice**

친밀한 사람의 상태에 대한 인식이 소비자의 제품 평가와
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경영학과 마케팅 전공
이 지 영

The Effects of Significant Other's Perceived State on Consumers' Product Evaluation and Choice

지도교수 박기완

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서울대학교 대학원

경영학과 마케팅 전공

이지영

이지영의 석사학위논문을 인준함

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위원장 김재일 (인)

부위원장 송인성 (인)

위원 박기완 (인)

Abstract

The Effects of Significant Other's Perceived State on Consumers' Product Evaluation and Choice

Jiyoung Lee

College of Business Administration, Marketing

The Graduate School

Seoul National University

The present research is intended to examine how the perceived state of one's significant other affects his/her subsequent product evaluation and choice. Specifically, I hypothesized that individuals will attempt to compensate for their partner's "shaken" attribute by choosing virtue (vs. vice) products that will bolster the self in that certain domain. I expected, on the other hand, that they will be licensed to choose vice (vs. virtue) products that will potentially harm the self in that domain when they believe their partner's self-concept has been boosted. Two studies confirmed these hypotheses.

Keywords : Compensatory consumption; vicarious licensing effect;
shared identity; interpersonal influences

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Introduction

Imagine that you heard someone insulting your significant other or pointing out his/her flaws. What if you found out that your relationship partner was caught in misdeeds? How would you feel in such situations and how would you behave afterwards? Would you feel the urge to recover from the unfavorable state on behalf of your partner? On the other hand, if your close other is perceived to be extremely ethical or frugal, would you be more inclined to spend less on cause-related products or splurge on luxury items? This research tries to address people's compensatory attitudes and behaviors as a result of close other's perceived state.

Romantic partners and family members often live under the same roof, share each other's food, live the same experiences, and even read each other's minds just as if they are thinking the exact same thing. Academic research has shown that couples do indeed share not only physical objects but also cognitive resources, perspectives, and identities with each other (Mashek, Aron, and Boncimino 2003). When two people are extremely close, especially if they are involved in a romantic relationship, they will often come to view each other as included in the sense of self (Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson 1991). Close interpersonal relationships have also been shown to influence self-control and goal pursuit (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003;

Ackerman, Goldstain, Shapiro, and Bargh 2009; Chartrand, Dalton, and Fitzsimons 2007).

Recent research on self-view confidence suggests that when an individual's own self-view is challenged, he/she exhibits self-view bolstering behaviors in response to such threat (Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009). People were also shown to behave in an indulgent manner after their positive self-concepts were activated (Khan and Dhar 2006; Sachdeva, Iliev, and Medin 2009). The goal of this research is to extend previous literature on self-concept and its effect on subsequent behavior by including people's significant others in to the picture. Specifically, I was interested in finding out whether individuals will favorably or unfavorably evaluate certain products and ultimately whether such preference is reflected in people's subsequent choices depending on how their significant others behaved or were evaluated prior to such product assessment task.

The flow of this article is designed as follows. In the next section, I have laid out the theoretical background on self-view threat and licensing effect, along with literature review of close interpersonal relationships. After a section on hypotheses development, two studies are discussed in detail, followed by general discussion.

Theoretical Background

Compensatory Consumption as a Means of Self-Threat Recovery

Self-view confidence is the certainty that an individual has in his/her own self-concept and it is usually confirmed by the personal characteristics a person possesses or past experiences that one went through (Campbell 1990; Pelham 1991). However, researchers have shown that self-concept can also be influenced by situational factors, such as temporary threats (Briñol and Petty 2003; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006; Gao et al. 2009) and subtle priming procedures (Sachdeva et al. 2009). In such circumstances when their self-concept is challenged or shaken, people search for ways to cope with the threats to their self-esteem (Cohen, Aronson, and Steele 2000; Sherman and Cohen 2002, 2006; Steele, Spencer, and Lynch 1993). Affirming a threat-unrelated, but still important attribute of the self is an indirect way of recovering from a threatened self-view. Self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988) proposes that a “fluid compensation” procedure is a way of coping with self-threats. Another, more direct means of coping with such threatened self-view is through engaging in compensatory consumption.

Compensatory consumption refers to the broad set of consumer behaviors that is aimed at offsetting a self-threat (Kim and Rucker 2012).

Research has shown that consumers who face threats to their self-concept will purchase and consume goods that help them regain their original sense of self (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982; Levav and Zhu 2009; Rucker and Galinsky 2008). For instance, Gao et al. (2009) demonstrated that individuals whose intelligence had been threatened show greater preference for intelligence-bolstering products (e.g., fountain pen) over those not related with intelligence (e.g., candy). When facing self-threats related to power, people sought to restore the lost sense of power by choosing status-related products (Rucker and Galinsky 2008). Moral cleansing, or actions people engage in when their moral self-worth has been threatened (Sachdeva et al. 2009; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006), is another type of such compensatory behavior. As such, when people come to face a situation in which they are negatively evaluated by others or realize that they lack on some important features that they previously believed they had, people will go to extra miles to recover from the uncomfortable threatened state. Such consumption behavior in response to self-threat was termed as *reactive* compensatory consumption by Kim and Rucker (2012), who showed that people also engage in *proactive* compensatory consumption to buffer against potential threats. In the current research, I will focus only on individuals' *reactive* compensatory consumption as a result of close other's perceived state.

Licensing Effect as a Result of Boost in Self-Concept

Contrary to self-view threat, there are instances in which people perceive that their self-concept has been elevated. When people find the opportunity to see themselves in a positive light, they sometimes feel the urge to act in a less favorable way because they believe that the prior positive self-concept licenses them to behave in a different manner. This type of behavior is called *licensing effect* (Monin and Miller 2001) and has been closely examined in moral psychology. Monin and Miller (2001) found that when individuals established themselves as non-racists or anti-sexists, they were subsequently licensed to behave in a discriminatory manner.

Interestingly, supporting Barack Obama (vs. John Kerry) before the 2008 election rather licensed people to make racist statements (Effron, Cameron, and Monin 2009). Sachdeva et al. (2009) showed that people whose moral identities had been previously affirmed were licensed to act immorally in a subsequent task (e.g., make less amount of donation), while Jordan, Mullen, and Murnighan (2009) obtained similar results using pro-social intentions as the dependent measure. People were also found to act less altruistically (e.g., lying and stealing) after purchasing environmentally-friendly products (Mazar and Zhong 2010).

Such licensing effect was also shown several times in the marketing context. Khan and Dhar (2006) demonstrated how prior choice which activated and boosted a positive self-concept of an individual subsequently licensed the person to choose more self-indulgent products (e.g., luxury goods). In a similar vein, when consumers exerted greater effort in loyalty programs, their consumers' preferences toward rewards geared toward luxury (vs. necessity) products (Kivetz and Simonson 2002), while promised donations to charity were proven to be more effective in promoting frivolous products than utilitarian ones (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). These findings illustrate how an elevated self-concept liberates an individual and licenses indulgent or egoistical behavior.

Significant Others and Shared Identity

Although the self is a distinctive being, it rarely stands alone, especially when one is involved in a close relationship with another. Aron and Aron (1986) developed the self-expansion model, which assumes that individuals form relationships to facilitate growth and expansion – one key motivation of human beings (Maslow 1943). They asserted that one of the key sources for expansion and progress derives from romantic relationships

and that, when people get involved in such intimate relationships, their own sense of self assimilates some of the qualities of their partners.

Indeed, past studies of close relationships have shown that individuals tend to include their significant other's perspectives, experiences, characteristics, and even identities into their own self-concept (Aron and Aron 1997; Aron and Fraley 1999) and come to confuse the boundary between the self and their partner (Mashek et al. 2003). In an experiment by Aron et al. (1991), participants who were involved in romantic partnership were faster to label traits as true of themselves when the traits were also true of their significant other as well. These results illustrate how the self possesses a shared identity with the significant other.

Relationships with close others are not only significant in that it generates a shared identity, but also in that it has an impact on an individual's goal pursuit. There have been several researches on interpersonal relationships and their effect on self-regulation and goal-directed behaviors (Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010). Presence of and thoughts about close others can trigger new goals (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003), leave individuals resource depleted (Ackerman et al. 2009), or assist them in their pursuit for goal achievement (Rusbult, Finkel, and Kumashiro 2009; Feeney 2007). In regards to dependence on others for regulatory resources, Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011) demonstrated that thoughts about relationship partners cause

individuals to make less ambiguous goal-pursuit plans and spend less time pursuing their goals. This means that individuals have a tendency to depend on their significant other and are likely to even outsource self-control to them.

Such dependence on others is not characteristic only of a dyadic interpersonal relationship. Research on group behaviors and attitudes has shown that people who strongly identify with the ingroup and receive unfavorable feedback about their group in a certain domain are highly likely to compensate on alternative dimensions (Cadinu and Cerchioni 2001). Also, when people are members of a group and they have a common goal to accomplish, there is a tendency to exert less or no effort on the group task because they have others to depend on (Karau and Williams 1993, 1995). Such phenomena are also known as social loafing or free-rider problems.

Although research on interpersonal influences on self-regulation suggest that close others have a strong impact on individuals' behaviors, no research has yet to discover whether people seek to compensate for significant other's threatened identity and whether people feel compensated by close other's elevated self-concept. I seek to address this gap and show that close interpersonal relationships have an impact on identity-relevant consumer behavior.

Hypothesis Development

Taken together, prior literature on threatened or elevated self-view and the relationship between the self and significant other suggest that intertwinement with the significant other may influence individuals to engage in a compensatory or licensing consumer behavior in response to perceived threats to or boost in close other's identity. The first hypothesis is intended to show that consumers will seek to complement their close other's threatened self-concept. Formally, I propose:

H1: When the significant other's self-concept is threatened, individuals will exhibit a more favorable attitude toward products that can boost the self in terms of the other's threatened aspect.

Contrary to the proposed vicarious compensation, I propose that consumers will be licensed by their close other's boosted self-concept and will hence engage in indulgent consumer behavior that may offset the elevated state of the close other. Formally, I hypothesize:

H2: When the significant other's self-concept is elevated, individuals will exhibit a more favorable attitude toward products that liberate the self in terms of the other's elevated aspect.

The perceived state of the significant other will have an impact on consumer's subsequent product choice because people tend to include other's identity into the self. I believe people will mistakenly believe that their own self-concept is threatened or elevated, even if there has been no direct threat or boost. Additionally, the shared identity between the self and significant other may be a potential mediator. I propose:

H3: The effect will be mediated by changes in either consumer's own self-concept or shared identity with the close other.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed to test the hypotheses in the health domain. I expected such compensatory and licensing effects to occur even without participants themselves being directly challenged. While prior researches have employed handwriting procedure to subtly manipulate the level of confidence in a particular self-view (Briñol and Petty 2003; Gao et al. 2009),

I relied on scenarios, a more direct method of manipulating the view of one's significant other.

Health and physical well-being are among the most fundamental needs humans have (Maslow 1943) and are considered important qualities for people to enjoy “healthy” relationships. However, people sometimes face internal conflicts between maintaining their health and relishing in unhealthy but joyful activities, such as consuming unhealthy but tasty food (Fishbach and Dhar 2005; Townsend and Liu 2012). The topic of health is not only discussed daily in mass media (Pollack 2011; Boseley 2002), but it is also used often in academic psychological research (Boney-McCoy, Gibbons, and Gerrard, 1999; Jemmot, Ditto, and Croyle, 1986; Kunda, 1987; Liberman and Chaiken, 1992). In particular, prior literature on self-affirmation (Harris and Napper, 2005; Reed and Aspinwall, 1998; Sherman, and Cohen, 2002) and self-view confidence (Gao et al. 2009), which are both relevant to this research, have dealt with health issues and health-consciousness in their studies. Hence, I decided that it would be viable to use health as the topic of the first experiment. Specifically, I hypothesized that those who perceived that their close other was unhealthy (vs. healthy) would have a greater willingness to purchase and consume a virtue (vs. vice) product, while those who perceived that their close other was healthy (vs. unhealthy) would show a higher willingness to purchase and consume a vice (vs. virtue) product.

Method

Participants and Design. One hundred and twenty-nine undergraduate students at Seoul National University participated in the experiment and were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in a 2 (close other's health: healthy vs. unhealthy) x 2 (product type: virtue vs. vice) between-subjects design. Upon entering the laboratory, the participants were informed that they would be asked to complete a couple of unrelated surveys. Each section of the experiment was designed in a way that participants would not associate the preceding section with the next. Data for three participants were eliminated because they had participated in a similar survey before and also for two other participants who did not complete the experiment with care. The final analysis was conducted with one hundred and twenty-four participants.

Procedure. In order to disguise the true nature of the experiment, participants were informed that the survey was being conducted for research on duration of emotion. They were first asked to think of their significant other and past memories with that person for at least twenty seconds. Afterwards, they provided information on the type of relationship (i.e.,

family members, friends, or romantic partners) and duration of relationship with the close other. I measured how closely the participants identified themselves with their significant other (i.e., Modified Group Identification Scale; adapted from Brown, Condor, Matthews, Wade, and Williams 1986) and how much they believed the other is included in their own self (i.e., Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale; Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992) to ensure that the relationship with the significant other is indeed a close one. To manipulate participants' perception about their significant other's health, I used a scenario in which a certain part of the results from the close other's hypothetical medical checkup was shown. Specifically, people in the healthy condition were presented with the information that their significant other's blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar level were all within the normal range and that he/she had a low risk of developing adult diseases. On the other hand, those in the unhealthy condition were told that their significant other's blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar level exceeded or fell short of the normal range. They were also given detailed diagnosis of the symptoms and possible diseases that could be brought in the future. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to indicate how they perceived of their significant other's health. These statements, including "My significant other may become ill in the future," served as manipulation checks. Participants were then told that they would be engaging in an

unrelated, filler survey to allow for lapse of time and thus allow for measure of emotion duration. The ostensibly unrelated, filler survey was indeed our main dependent measure.

The ostensible filler survey was framed as a survey on snack preference of college students. Participants were given a short description and picture of either a virtue (i.e., organic fruit juice) or vice (i.e., Oreo Frappuccino) product. The virtue product was described as a fresh-squeezed orange juice that does not contain any artificial ingredients, while the vice product was described as an iced coffee drink with grinded Oreo cookies and whipped cream. Participants were asked to write down how much they would be willing to pay (in Korean Won) to purchase and drink the given product. They were also asked to indicate their attitude toward the given product. Attitude toward the product was measured via three items (attractiveness of, desire to purchase, and desire to drink) on nine-point scales (1 = *not at all attractive, no desire to purchase, and no desire to drink*, 9 = *very attractive, high desire to purchase, and high desire to drink*). Both willingness-to-pay and attitude were used as dependent variables in the analysis. To control for difference in initial preference toward the given products, I asked participants about their food habits – whether they often enjoy high-calorie food, like to eat sweet desserts, and eat unhealthy food.

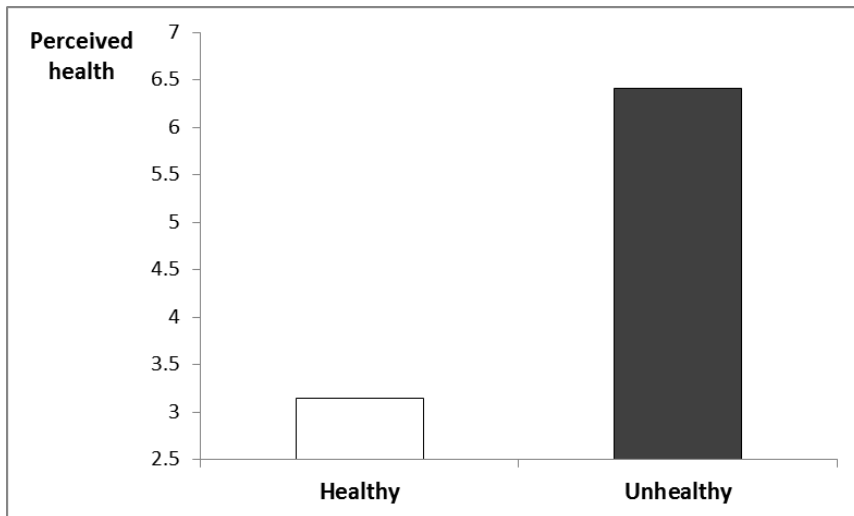
Participants were then told that the filler survey was done and that they would be returning to the initial emotion duration survey. They were asked to indicate their emotions regarding the assigned scenario; this mood measure (i.e., The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988) was also used as a control variable. In the final section, participants indicated their own self-concept: how much they perceived themselves to be healthy (reverse-coded), ill, and weak. This was asked to see if a change in self-concept mediates the effects of significant other's perceived state on subsequent product attitude. After completing both parts of the survey, all participants were asked for demographic information, probed for suspicion, thanked, and dismissed.

Results

Manipulation Check. Manipulation check index was formed by averaging three items (close other's *perceived healthiness* (reverse-coded), *illness*, and *possibility of deterioration in health*; $\alpha = .79$). Analysis confirmed that participants in the unhealthy (vs. healthy) condition perceived their significant other to be unhealthier ($M_{\text{unhealthy}} = 6.41$ vs. $M_{\text{healthy}} = 3.14$; $F(1, 123) = 315.18, p < .0001$). There was no significant interaction between

close other's perceived health and product type ($F(1, 123) = 2.39, p < .13$), revealing that the perceived level of health did not differ depending on the type of given product.

Fig. 1 Close other's perceived health



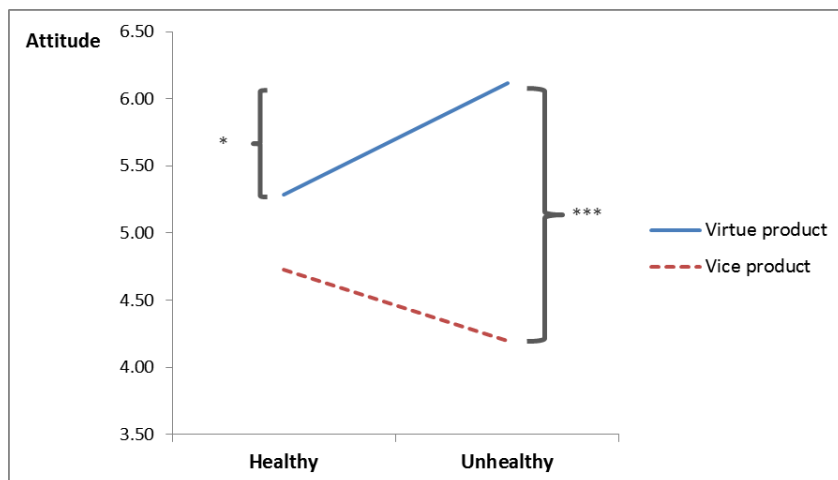
To check for differences in initial level of identification with the significant other, I ran a 2 (close other's health) x 2 (product type) ANOVA on the modified group identification scale (Brown et al. 1986) and IOS scale (Aron et al. 1992). Analyses revealed that there was no significant difference in the level of identification with close other ($F(1, 123) = 1.93, p > .16$) nor in the IOS scale ($F(1, 123) = 0.03, p > .86$). Therefore, I proceeded with the analyses of the main dependent measure.

Post-test. A post-test was conducted to check whether people perceived the organic fruit juice as a virtue product (i.e., healthy but not as tasty) and Oreo Frappuccino as a vice product (i.e., tasty but not as healthy). Sixty-nine students from the same pool of Seoul National University students rated the two products on taste and healthiness. Repeated-measures ANOVA revealed that participants perceived the taste and healthiness to be significantly different for the two given products. They perceived Oreo Frappuccino to be tastier than the organic fruit juice ($M_{\text{vice}} = 7.23$ vs. $M_{\text{virtue}} = 6.06$; $F(1, 68) = 11.47, p < .002$), while they perceived the organic fruit juice to be healthier than Oreo Frappuccino ($M_{\text{virtue}} = 7.46$ vs. $M_{\text{vice}} = 4.54$; $F(1, 68) = 88.06, p < .0001$).

Attitude. I examined how the perceived state of significant other's health affected participants' attitude toward given products. The attitude index was formed by averaging the three attitude items ($\alpha = .95$). There was a significant main effect of product type ($F(1, 120) = 10.16, p < .01$) – in general, participants showed a greater willingness to purchase and consume the virtue product ($M_{\text{virtue}} = 5.70$) compared to the vice product ($M_{\text{vice}} = 4.46$). However, more importantly and relevant to my hypotheses, there was a marginally significant close other's health x product type interaction ($F(1, 120) = 3.35, p < .07$), indicating that attitude toward the two products

differed marginally depending on whether the participants perceived their partner to be healthy (vs. unhealthy). Specifically, those who perceived that their close other is unhealthy showed a more favorable attitude toward the virtue product compared to the vice option ($M_{\text{virtue}} = 6.12$ vs. $M_{\text{vice}} = 4.20$; $F(1, 120) = 13.54, p < .0005$), supporting hypothesis 1. Although there was no significant difference in the attitude toward the two products for those in the healthy condition ($F(1, 120) = 1.09, p > .29$), they had a marginally lower willingness to purchase and consume the virtue product compared to those in the unhealthy condition ($M_{\text{healthy}} = 5.28$ vs. $M_{\text{unhealthy}} = 6.12$; $F(1, 120) = 2.77, p < .1$).

Fig. 2 Attitude toward virtue vs. vice products



Note. – * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Willingness-to-Pay. I also examined participants' willingness-to-pay (WTP) for the given products depending on condition. A 2 (close other's health) x 2 (product type) ANOVA revealed only a significant main effect of product type on log-transformed WTP ($M_{\text{virtue}} = 7.64$ vs. $M_{\text{vice}} = 8.14$; $F(1, 120) = 33.10, p < .0001$). I suspected that participants' WTP could have been influenced by uncontrollable factors other than the manipulated independent variables, such as the actual price people usually pay for the given products (e.g., the price of Starbucks' Oreo Frappuccino is over 5,400KRW in Korea while organic orange juice of the same size is sold at around 4,000KRW). Hence, I concluded that WTP may not be suitable in finding out the effects of significant other's perceived state on product evaluation and discontinued further analysis.

Mediation analysis. I conducted bootstrapping analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2004) to find out whether the effect of significant other's perceived health on product evaluation is mediated by a change in one's own self-concept. The proposed mediation was found to be insignificant ($\beta = -0.05, SE = 0.11, 95\% \text{ confidence interval} = -0.54 \text{ to } 0.07$). Therefore, I concluded that change in one's own self-concept indirectly did not influence the effect found in Study 1.

Discussion

Study 1 examined the effect of close other's perceived state on the attitude toward products. As predicted, participants who perceived that their significant other was unhealthy tried to compensate for the partner's weakness by favorably evaluating a health-enhancing product. On the other hand, those who perceived that their partner's health was in good condition exhibited a marginal licensing behavior – they evaluated the virtue product less favorably than those who perceived significant other's poor health. These results indicate that individuals are influenced by the perceived state of close other, just as they are highly affected by threats to and boost in their own self-concept. Unlike research on self-view threats and elevation, however, change in self-concept was not a significant mediator of the effects. Although people have a tendency to include the close other into their own self-concepts (Aron and Aron 1997; Aron and Fraley 1999), the proposed effect could have occurred as a result of change in the “shared” identity between the self and the significant other. Hence, in the next study, I included a change in the shared identity as the potential mediator.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to confirm the second hypothesis – vicarious licensing effect of significant other’s perceived state. In the first study, there was a marginally significant licensing effect resulting from close other’s boost in self-concept. I sought to replicate this effect with a more subtle manipulation. I used the ease-of-retrieval manipulation (Schwarz, Bless, Strack, Klumpp, Rittenauer-Schatka, and Simon 1991) to trigger the perceived healthiness of one’s significant other. Schwarz et al. (1991) showed that participants found recalling twelve (vs. six) examples of assertive behaviors more difficult and subsequently rated themselves as less (vs. more) assertive. The subtle manipulation of metacognitive difficulty would reduce any demand characteristic that could have existed in the former study. Additionally, instead of measuring participants’ attitude toward a given product, I asked the participants to make a choice between two options in a hypothetical but realistic situation. Specifically, I hypothesized that those who recalled four (vs. twelve) healthy habits of their significant other would be more likely to choose the vice option over the virtue option.

Method

Participants and Design. Fifty-two undergraduate students at Seoul National University participated in the experiment and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (ease-of-retrieval: easy vs. difficult). Participants were told that this survey consisted of multiple parts and that there was no relation among them. The first part of the survey was said to be conducted for research finding the correlation between habitual behaviors and intimacy with significant other, while the second part of the survey – ostensibly unrelated to the first – was framed as a survey about college students' product preferences. No participant figured out the true nature of the study.

Procedure. As was done in Study 1, participants were first asked to think of their significant other and past memories with that person for a short amount of time. They then indicated the age of the close other, the type of relationship (i.e., family members, friends, or romantic partners) and duration of relationship with him/her. To check whether the relationship with the significant other is close, I asked the participants to mark the level of intimacy, similarity, and familiarity with their significant other. To control

for any difference in the initial level of perceived health, I also asked how healthy and fit the close other was, along with five other filler items.

Using ease-of-retrieval manipulation (Schwarz et al. 1991), participants in the easy condition were asked to write down either *four* examples of their significant other's health-enhancing habits, while those in the difficult condition were asked to write down *twelve* examples.

Manipulation checks were conducted via two ways – a two-item index for ease-of-retrieval and another for perceived health of close other. Before moving onto the next section, participants answered questions about how certain they perceived themselves to be healthy and how certain they perceived their “shared self” with their significant other to be healthy. These measures were used to find out whether change in one's own self-concept or in people's shared identity with their significant other mediates the proposed effect. All items were measured on seven-point scales.

In the second part of the survey, which was ostensibly unrelated, participants were asked to read the following scenario and imagine that they were in the given situation: “Once a month, you have a habit of taking time out to spend just by yourself. On that day, you do not make plans with anyone else but rather spend quality time relaxing at home or going places. Today is that day of this month and you decide to go shopping.” Participants were asked to make a choice between two items – either a virtue product (i.e.,

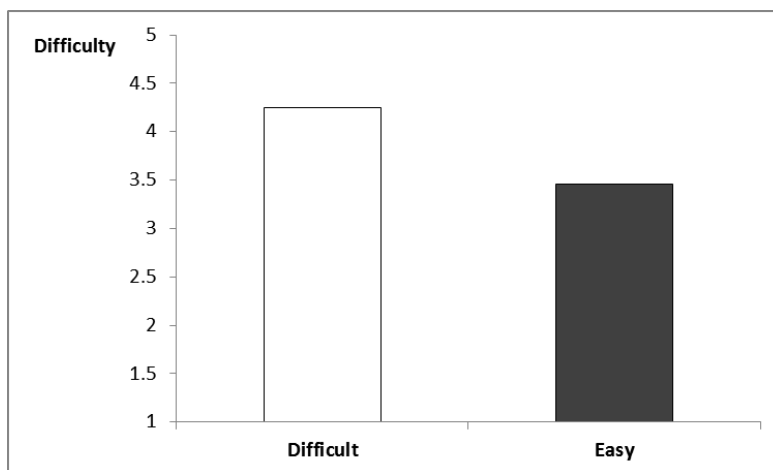
organic sandwich made with wheat bread or fruit juice) or a vice product (i.e., hamburger with beef patties or carbonated beverage). To accentuate the virtue and vice aspect of each option, ratings on taste and healthiness were given. Specifically, the virtue option scored high in terms of healthiness but low on taste, while the vice option scored low on healthiness and high on taste. The level of satiety, calories, and price was controlled for both options. I also included two other filler choice contexts – choosing between green vs. non-green backpacks and between cause-related vs. cause-nonrelated sneakers – to prevent participants from associating the former section of the survey with the latter.

Results

Manipulation Check. Manipulation check indices for both ease-of-retrieval and perceived healthiness were formed by averaging two items each. Ease-of-retrieval index consisted of how *difficult* and *easy* (reverse-coded) it was for participants to generate four or twelve examples ($\alpha = .88$); perceived healthiness index consisted of *how healthy they perceived the close other to be* and *the extent to which they believed that the other was well-managing his/her own health* ($\alpha = .74$). A one-way ANOVA revealed that participants had a marginally more difficult time generating twelve (vs. four) examples of

their significant other's healthy habits ($M_{\text{difficult}} = 4.25$ vs. $M_{\text{easy}} = 3.46$; $F(1, 51) = 3.07, p < .086$). Unfortunately, participants showed no significant difference in perceived healthiness of close other regardless of ease-of-retrieval condition ($F(1, 51) = 0.04, p > .84$). Although participants did not respond to the manipulation as expected, it may have been that they were not aware of their own perceptions since metacognitive manipulation was used. Hence, relying on Schwarz et al.'s (1991) research on availability heuristics, I proceeded with rest of the data analyses.

Fig. 3 Ease-of-retrieval manipulation check

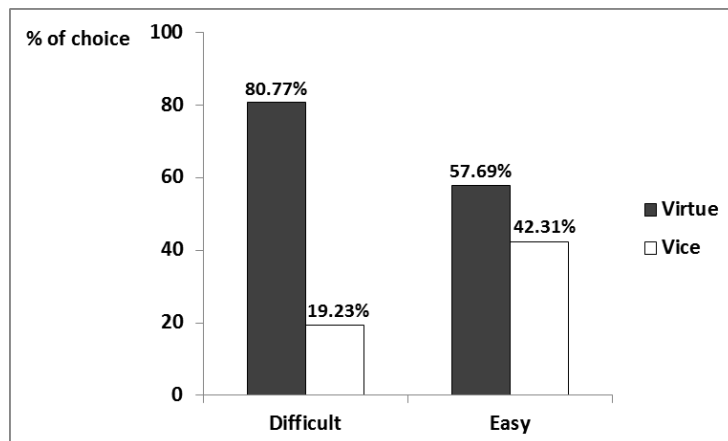


In terms of closeness with the significant other, there was no significant difference in the level of intimacy, similarity, and familiarity with close other across conditions (all F 's < 1). Also, there was no significant difference in the initial level of significant other's health ($F = 0.01, p > .91$).

Therefore, the subsequent difference in choice can be solely attributed to the difference in ease-of-retrieval factor.

Choice. In order to examine whether vicarious licensing effect occurs as a result of difference in metacognitive difficulty, I conducted a logistic regression analysis with choice as the outcome variable and ease-of-retrieval as the predictor variable. As expected, the relationship between ease-of-retrieval and subsequent product choice was found to be marginally significant ($\beta = 0.56$, odds ratio = 3.08, $\chi^2 (1) = 3.12$, $p = .08$). Specifically, participants who recalled their close other's healthy habits with ease (vs. difficulty) were marginally more likely to choose the vice (vs. virtue) option. Chi-square analysis also found similar results ($\chi^2 (1) = 3.25$, $p = .07$).

Fig. 4 Choice between virtue and vice option



Mediation analysis. To test whether changes in either shared identity or one's own self-concept mediates the effect of metacognitive difficulty on subsequent choice, I again used the bootstrapping analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2004). The mean indirect effect of shared identity ($\beta = -0.006$) was not significant: SE = 0.13, 95% confidence interval = -0.38 to 0.16); change in one's own self-concept was also not significant ($\beta = -0.16$, SE = 0.26, 95% confidence interval = -1.03 to 0.15).

Discussion

Study 2 supplements the findings of Study 1 – it replicated the marginally shown vicarious licensing effect. Drawing upon Schwarz et al.'s (1991) research on metacognitive difficulty as a heuristic, I predicted that those who had recalled their significant other's health-enhancing behavior with ease (vs. difficulty) would be more likely to be licensed and hence would become more indulgent in their subsequent choice. As expected, those who wrote four (vs. twelve) examples of their partner's healthy habits were more likely to choose the vice food over the virtue option. The proposed mediators – change in shared identity and change in self-concept – were found to have no significant influence on the main effect.

General Discussions

The current research investigates whether the perceived state of significant others influences a person's subsequent product evaluation and choice. Specifically, it looks at two opposing effects of perceived state of significant other. When people perceive a threat or weakness in their close other's self-view or condition, they seek to compensate for such threat or weakness on behalf of the other by showing greater purchase intentions for products that will restore their own self in terms of that attribute. On the other hand, when people perceive a boost or strength in their close other's self-concept or condition, they are vicariously licensed by such boost or strength of their partner and show greater purchase intentions for indulgent or vice products. Such vicarious compensatory consumption and licensing effect were shown via two experiments, each using different manipulations and dependent measures. Although the initially proposed mediators were found to be insignificant, the hypotheses regarding the direct effects were successfully demonstrated in the two studies.

Both studies examined the hypotheses in the context of health. The first study directly manipulated the perceived health of significant other by presenting a scenario in which the significant other was said to be either healthy or unhealthy. After being exposed to such scenario manipulation,

people indicated how attractive the given product – either a virtue product or a vice option – was to them and how willing they were to purchase and consume the given product. As predicted, those who perceived that their partner was unhealthy (vs. healthy) exhibited a more favorable attitude toward the virtue (vs. vice) option, indicating that consumers seek to compensate for their significant other’s deficiency, even if temporary. Those who perceived that their partner was healthy (vs. unhealthy) did not explicitly show a greater willingness to purchase and consume the vice option, but they did show a marginally less favorable attitude toward the virtue product compared to those who perceived of poor health.

In Study 2, a more subtle manipulation – metacognitive manipulation – was used in place of scenarios and the dependent measure was also replaced by choice. Following Schwarz et al.’s (1991) logic, I manipulated the perceived level of significant other’s health by asking participants to recall either four or twelve examples of their close other’s healthy habits. Although the manipulation checks for perceived health was found to be non-significant, I continued data analysis as the ease-of-retrieval manipulation checks were successful and since there was a possibility that people may have not been aware of their own perceptions. Analysis of the dependent measure showed that people were vicariously licensed by their significant other’s healthiness, as was in Study 1. Those who generated close

other's healthy behaviors with ease (vs. difficulty) were more likely to choose the vice option over the virtue product. Neither change in one's own self-concept nor change in shared identity was found to mediate the effect in Study 1 and 2.

The results of this research are consistent with prior literature on reactive compensatory consumption and licensing effects, but can be differentiated in the sense that the current research looks at the effects of threatened or boosted identity of someone other than the self – a significant other. The theoretical contribution of the current research is that it extended the realm of self-concept and its effect on behavior into including the significant other's behavior into the self when deciding how to behave and what products to purchase. Up to this day, scholars have shown that other people's existence influence an individual's behavior and that people include their close others into their self-view, but no one has shown how such inclusion affects product choices and evaluations. This research is meaningful in that it provides both theoretical and marketing implications.

Limitations and Future Research

While the present research offers novel ideas about vicarious compensatory and licensing consumer behavior, the proposed effects have

yet to be shown separately in two studies. Further experiments replicating both effects need to be conducted in order to achieve external validity. Also, different contexts should be examined to strengthen the findings in Study 1 and 2, both of which were conducted in relation to health. Although health is an important aspect of one's self-concept, there are many extraneous variables that can confound the results of the experiments, despite efforts to control for such factors. Hence, future studies can examine the effect in the context of moral behavior – whether significant other's immoral (vs. moral) inclinations and behaviors lead an individual to become more fond of cause-related (vs. cause-unrelated) products, while moral (vs. immoral) inclination and behaviors license him/her to choose cause-unrelated (vs. cause-related) products.

Also, more research must be conducted in order to find the underlying process of the effect. An indirect way of testing whether shared identity mediates the proposed effect could be testing whether the effects only occur for close (vs. distant) others. If people do not exhibit similar vicarious compensatory or licensing behavior in response to threats to and boost in the identity of distant acquaintances, then we may be able to infer that shared identity functions as a potential mediator.

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요약 (국문초록)

본 연구의 초점은 소비자들이 제품을 평가하거나 선택할 때 있어 자신과 친밀한 관계에 있는 대상(significant other)의 상태에 영향을 받는다는 점을 밝히는 것이다. 자아 개념 (self-concept)에 대한 두 가지 이론과 친밀한 관계(significant other)의 특성 및 정체성이 개인의 자아에도 포함된다는 연구에 기반하여 친밀한 관계의 사람의 자아가 위협을 받았거나 신장되었다고 인식이 되었을 때 마치 자신의 자아가 영향을 받은 것처럼 행동한다는 것을 보인다. 구체적으로 친밀한 관계에 있는 사람의 자아가 위협받았다고 인식되면 그것을 상쇄시키기 위해 자신이 대신 보상적 소비(compensatory consumption)을 할 것이다. 반면, 친밀한 관계에 있는 사람의 자아가 신장되었다고 인식되면 그것으로 인해 자신이 자유롭게 행동할 수 있다는 생각에 방종적 소비(indulgent consumption)을 할 것이다. 두 차례의 실험을 통해 이와 같은 친밀한 관계의 사람의 상태가 소비자의 제품 평가와 선택에 영향을 미친다는 것을 검증하였다.