

Less Is More, Until It Isn't:
Feature-Richness in Experiential Purchases

by

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ABSTRACT

When consumers make experiential purchases, they often have to decide between experiences that contain many or few features. Contrary to prior research demonstrating that consumers prefer feature-rich products before consumption but feature-poor products after consumption, the author reveals a reversal of this effect for experiences.

Specifically, the author hypothesizes and finds that consumers prefer feature-poor experiences before consumption (a phenomenon denoted as ‘feature apprehension’) but prefer feature-rich experiences after consumption. This feature apprehension occurs before consumption because consumers are concerned with the uncertainty associated with attaining a satisfying outcome from the experience. Manipulating the temporal distance with which consumers view the experience can attenuate this effect.

Additionally, locus of control and social signaling moderate consumers’ post-consumption preference for feature-rich experiences. The author proposes several recommendations for consumers and providers of experiences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES | iv |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| THEORETICAL BACKGROUND..... | 4 |
| Products vs. Experiences | 4 |
| Pre-Consumption Experiential Preferences | 5 |
| Post-Consumption Experiential Preferences..... | 7 |
| Hypothesis 1..... | 7 |
| The Mediating Role of Uncertainty | 8 |
| Hypothesis 2..... | 9 |
| The Moderating Role of Temporal Construal..... | 9 |
| Hypothesis 3..... | 10 |
| The Moderating Role of Locus of Control and Social Signaling | 10 |
| Hypothesis 4..... | 11 |
| Hypothesis 5..... | 13 |
| Overview of Studies..... | 13 |
| STUDY 1 | 14 |
| Method | 15 |
| Results..... | 17 |
| Discussion..... | 18 |
| STUDY 2 | 20 |
| Method | 20 |

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Results..... | 22 |
| Discussion..... | 24 |
| STUDY 3 | 25 |
| Method | 26 |
| Results..... | 27 |
| Discussion..... | 29 |
| STUDY 4 | 30 |
| Method | 31 |
| Results..... | 32 |
| Discussion..... | 34 |
| STUDY 5 | 35 |
| Method | 35 |
| Results..... | 37 |
| Discussion..... | 39 |
| GENERAL DISCUSSION | 40 |
| Practical and Theoretical Implications..... | 41 |
| REFERENCES | 45 |
| APPENDIX | |
| A: EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI USED | 54 |
| B: HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL | 61 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Study 1: The Effect of the Number of Features and Purchase Timing on Participant Evaluations | 49 |
| 2. Study 2 Results: The Effect of the Number of Features And Purchase Timing on Participant Evaluations | 50 |
| 3. Study 3 Results: The Effect of the Number of Features And Temporal Distance on Participant Evaluations | 51 |
| 4. Study 4 Results: The Effect of the Number of Features And Locus of Control on Participant Evaluations | 52 |
| 5. Study 5 Results: The Effect of the Number of Features, Locus of Control, and Social Signaling on Participant Evaluations | 53 |

INTRODUCTION

Consumers face a variety of situations in which they must select between experiences comprised of a lesser or greater number of features or activities. Experiences, or purchases that tend to be intangible and impermanent (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003), can vary significantly in the number of features or activities available to consumers. For example, when planning an upcoming vacation, a consumer might struggle with the dilemma of whether to maximize an experience by including additional activities (“When will I be able to zipline through a rainforest again?”) or to focus on relaxing and limiting activities in order to avoid feeling overscheduled. Consumers face a similar situation in the context of making purchases from increasingly popular discount services such as Living Social, Groupon, or Travelzoo, which often package multiple visits or activities into multi-feature experiences (i.e., experiences that are paid for once but consist of many smaller activities). In both contexts (the vacation package and Living Social deal), consumers must consider how many activities they would be interested in consuming.

In the present research, I ask how the number of features or activities in a multi-feature experience influences the desirability of that experience both before and after consumption. While prior work finds that consumers prefer feature-rich products relative to feature-poor products (Goodman and Irmak 2013; Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005; Thompson and Norton 2011), research has yet to investigate how consumers react to the number of features included in an experiential purchase. This issue is critical to understand given that experiences offer the potential to provide consumers a great deal of happiness (more than products; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003) and as the popularity of

multi-feature experiences (vs. single activities) continues to grow. Across five studies, I demonstrate that consumers prefer feature-poor experiences before consumption but prefer feature-rich experiences after consumption.

A feature is defined as a positively-valued attribute of a product (Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005). I retain this definition within the context of experiential purchases because I am interested in multi-feature experiences, or experiences that are made up of several smaller activities that consumers pay for in a single purchase. These multi-feature experiences can range from simple, or “feature-poor,” such as a relaxing beach vacation, to complex, or “feature-rich,” such as a vacation package that includes several outings to local dining, entertainment, and historical places of interest. Thus, I define a feature of an experience as an activity (e.g., lounging on the beach, visiting an art museum) that is part of a larger experience. I recognize that there are complex differences in the characteristics of features of a product compared to those of an experience; in the current research I limit my focus to how the number of features of an experience acts as a purchase heuristic.

Although the characteristics of features of products and experiences differ, features of both purchase types should be positively valued. Initially, this positive value would imply that adding activities to create larger feature-rich experiences should be appealing to consumers (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Indeed, feature-rich products are more attractive than feature-poor products (Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005) and research has shown that consumers like to collect a broad range of experiences (Keinan and Kivetz 2011). However, I propose that the underlying differences between products

and experiences cause consumers in an experiential context to shy away from feature-richness, a phenomenon I call feature apprehension.

I draw on the literature that compares experiential and material purchases (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003) to hypothesize and demonstrate that, in the case of experiences, a reversal of the previously discovered “feature fatigue” effect emerges. I show that consumers prefer feature-poor relative to feature-rich experiences before consumption, yet are less satisfied with these feature-poor choices after consumption. In doing so, I contribute to the consumer behavior literature by being the first to examine how the notion of feature-richness applies differently to experiences than to products. Second, I add to growing evidence that consumers are poor predictors of what they will prefer after consumption (Meyer, Zhao, and Han 2008; Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005). Third, I identify the underlying mechanism driving feature apprehension—showing that consumers shy away from feature-rich experiences because they view them as having a more uncertain outcome than feature-poor experiences.

Importantly, I reveal three moderators of this phenomenon. Before consumption, I demonstrate that by manipulating temporal distance (when the experience takes place) I can ease consumers’ uncertainty concerns associated with the experience’s outcomes, and thereby eliminate the feature apprehension associated with the experience. After consumption, I show that locus of control (Rotter 1966) and social signaling (Thompson and Norton 2011) moderate consumers’ evaluations of the experience. Thus, I identify three useful boundary conditions of this effect that: (1) contribute to our understanding of consumers’ preferences for feature-richness in experiential purchases, and (2) can make pre-consumption decisions more consistent with post-consumption preferences.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Products vs. Experiences

Previous research has differentiated between products and experiences in several ways (Van Boven 2005; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). Products invoke a sense of ownership, tend to be tangible, and are time invariant (i.e., they are timeless). Experiences, on the other hand, are positive activities (usually hedonic) that tend to be intangible and impermanent. As noted by previous scholars, this differentiation is not black and white but rather a continuum within which consumers are able to distinguish differences (Carter and Gilovich 2010; Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009; Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). For instance, Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) find that while most consumers agree that clothing is a product and a concert is an experience, they are evenly split between considering dining a product or an experience.

Despite the fact that experiences are intangible and last for a shorter period of time, research consistently finds that consumers are happier with experiences than with products (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). Consumers adapt less quickly to positive experiences than to products (Frederick and Loewenstein 1999; Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009), experiences are more easily incorporated into one's self-identity than products (Carter and Gilovich 2012), and experiences tend to be more social than products (Caprariello and Reis 2013). Even though researchers generally consider experiences to be more beneficial purchases than

their material counterparts, previous research has primarily focused on studying the heuristics consumers use with material purchases.

A good example of a material purchase heuristic is the feature fatigue phenomenon identified by Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust (2005), whereby consumers prefer feature-rich products before consumption but feature-poor products after consumption. Consumers' mistaken preference for products that are feature-rich before consumption is due to three factors: (1) consumers are most concerned with the potential capability of the product (Meyer, Zhao, and Han 2008; Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005), (2) consumers overestimate how much they will use the features of a product (Goodman and Irmak 2013; Meyer, Zhao, and Han 2008) and (3) there is inherent social value in choosing feature-rich products (Thompson and Norton 2011). In this research, I investigate how the number of features within an experience acts differently than the number of features within a product as a purchase heuristic. In what follows, I explore how features of experiences differ from features of products, and how these differences shape pre-consumption preferences.

Pre-Consumption Experiential Preferences. To illustrate the differences between material and experiential features, consider a feature-rich vacation package to Mexico which includes an excursion to Mayan ruins. There are two significant ways in which the features of an experience differ from the features of a product. First, using a feature of an experience carries a time cost. When purchasing a product, consumers must learn how to use the product's features, but the time cost associated with that learning process is incurred only once. Subsequently, the consumer can use the feature without incurring any other time cost. However, a feature of an experience, such as the Mayan ruins excursion,

occupies time that is necessarily incurred when the consumer makes use of the feature. Although researchers have found that consumers may be optimistic with time availability in the distant future, in the near future, consumers in Western cultures are highly risk-averse with allocating their time (Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1995; Trope and Liberman 2003) which is viewed as a limited resource (Zauberman and Lynch 2005). Thus, consumers should act conservatively when they are making decisions to exchange their time—a limited resource—for additional features within an experience. Second, a feature of an experience has a shelf life. Again, consider the excursion to the Mayan ruins: if you decide to sleep in and miss the excursion, you lose this opportunity and cannot save the feature for future use. Thus, unlike with products, consumers incur an immediate cost if they do not use the features of an experience. In other words, because experiential features can only be used once, consumers cannot over- or under-estimate usage (as they do with products). Instead, consumers likely overestimate the costs associated with adding features to an experience. In sum, I expect that for experiences, the combination of consumers' risk-averse attitude toward spending time and the inability to save purchased features for future use will make consumers prefer feature-poor to feature-rich experiences before consumption (feature apprehension).

It is also important to consider consumers' preferences for experiences after consumption. With products, consumers prefer feature-rich options before consumption but shift their preferences to feature-poor options after consumption (Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005). With experiences, I propose a shift in the opposite direction. That is, consumers will prefer feature-poor experiences before consumption but shift their preferences to feature-rich experiences after consumption.

Post-Consumption Experiential Preferences. After consumption, consumers will no longer be concerned with the perishability or time costs associated with additional experiential features. As a result, since feature-rich experiences naturally have more positively-valenced activities, there are several reasons to believe they will be preferred after consumption. First, at the most basic level, each feature within an experience should break up the experience so that it feels like it has more positive components—or what Thaler (1985) would call more segregated gains. As such, a feature-rich experience will inherently feel more segregated than a feature-poor experience and so consumers should prefer the feature-rich experience after consumption. Second, experiences make us happier than material products because they provide us with stories to share (Van Boven 2005). Thus, more experiential features give consumers more opportunities to tell stories about their overall experience. Third, the “Peak-End Rule” suggests that consumers evaluate their experiences based on the best and the last part of the experience (Kahneman 1999). This evaluation method suggests that a feature-rich experience would provide the possibility of a higher peak and better ending. Lastly, regret with experiences is derived from inaction (i.e., “I wish I had done that.”), and a feature-rich experience reduces the possibility of experiencing regret of inaction (Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012). As a result, I predict a reversal of consumers’ before-consumption evaluations, such that they will give higher evaluations to feature-rich experiences after consumption.

H1: (a) Before consumption, consumers will give feature-poor experiences higher evaluations than feature-rich experiences, however, (b) after consumption, consumers will give feature-rich experiences higher evaluations than feature-poor experiences.

The Mediating Role of Uncertainty

I next examine the cognitive process underlying my feature apprehension effect. As discussed previously, consumers are inherently risk averse with their time (Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1995) and are unable to save the features of an experience for future use. Thus, consumers' preference for feature-poor experiences is likely a result of overestimating the perceived costs (i.e., time cost and possible perishable cost) of adding features to an experience. In particular, I propose that as an experience becomes more feature-rich, the perceived uncertainty—or the unknown probability of an outcome occurring (Tversky and Fox 1995)—associated with attaining a satisfying outcome from the experience will increase. Hence, before consumption, I expect that uncertainty with the outcome of the experience underlies feature apprehension.

Furthermore, the task complexity literature suggests that consumers may view feature-rich experiences as more complex and uncertain than feature-poor experiences. Specifically, complexity increases as the number of paths to a desired outcome (e.g., satisfaction with the experience) increases and as the interdependence among paths to the desired outcome increases (Campbell 1988). Thus, as the number of features within an experience increases, the overall outcome of the experience becomes more uncertain because it is the culmination of the many smaller outcomes associated with each specific feature. This increasing complexity should lead consumers to favor simpler, less uncertain, experiences. As a result, although each individual feature of an experience may be enticing as a singular experience, the combination of small positive experiences will make the overall outcome of the experience more difficult to envision due to the added complexity. In other words, consumers will overestimate the costs associated with adding

features to an experience and hence view feature-rich experiences with more uncertainty than feature-poor experiences.

H2: Before consumption, the uncertainty associated with the outcome of an experience will mediate the relationship between the number of features of the experience and consumers' evaluations of the experience.

The Moderating Role of Temporal Construal

Fortunately, consumers' uncertainty concerns are not static. Instead, the temporal distance with which an experience is viewed should impact the importance of participants' uncertainty concerns and alter consumers' pre-consumption evaluations (Wakslak and Trope 2009). That is, how consumers think of an event depends on the distance in the past or future in which that event takes place (termed Temporal Construal; Trope and Liberman 2003). Temporally proximate experiences lead to low-level construals, which tend to evoke a focus on the process and concreteness of the experience. On the other hand, temporally distant experiences lead to high-level construals, evoking a focus on the outcome and abstractness associated with the experience (Trope and Liberman 2003). Thus, an experience that is temporally close (e.g., will take place next week) focuses the consumer on the process and the corresponding uncertainty that may impact its outcome (Wakslak and Trope 2009). Hence, consumers will experience more feature apprehension when an experience is temporally close. Conversely, an experience that is temporally distant (e.g., will take place in a year) focuses the consumer on the abstract outcome and not the process required to attain the outcome (Wakslak and Trope 2009). Hence, when the experience is in the distant future, consumers will no longer use the uncertainty associated with the

experience to determine their preferences for feature-richness and, as a result, will not exhibit feature apprehension. Therefore, I expect that shifting the temporal distance of the experience into the future will eliminate the effect of feature-richness on preferences:

H3: Before consumption, when the temporal distance of an experience is close, consumers will give higher evaluations to feature-poor experiences than to feature-rich experiences, but when the temporal distance of an experience is far, consumers will evaluate the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences equivalently.

The Moderating Role of Locus of Control and Social Signaling

While the feature-richness of an experience impacts post-consumption preferences, I also anticipate that individual differences may moderate consumers' post-consumption preferences. For instance, consumers have different beliefs regarding their ability to control the outcomes of particular circumstances (Rotter 1966). Those that view outcomes as a result of the actions that they take have an internal locus of control, whereas those that view outcomes as a result of chance or powerful others have an external locus of control (Levenson 1974).

Previous research shows that when an experience is managed by a third party, as is typically the case in the organized activities on which I focus, consumers with an external locus of control enjoy it more than those with an internal locus of control (Bradley and Sparks 2002). Similarly, I expect locus of control to impact the enjoyment that consumers receive from an experience because it influences consumers' initiation, effort, and persistence within the experience (Skinner 1996). That is, because external locus of control consumers appreciate that the experience is being managed for them and

that they are not in control of the outcome of the experience (Bradley and Sparks 2002), I anticipate that after consumption they will prefer the feature-rich experience more than the feature-poor experience. On the other hand, internal locus of control consumers want to be responsible for the outcomes of the experience, and when they are not in control, they enjoy the experience less because they are sensitive to the fact that they have to depend on someone else for the outcome (Keller and Blomann 2008). Since a feature-rich experience has more activities in which the internal locus of control consumer is not in control, the positive aspects of the feature-rich experience will be mitigated by internal locus of control consumers' inability to influence the outcome. Thus, I predict that after consumption, unlike externals who are happier with a feature-rich experience, internal locus of control consumers will evaluate feature-rich and feature-poor experiences similarly.

H4: After consumption: (a) consumers with an external locus of control will evaluate the feature-rich experience higher than the feature-poor experience and (b) consumers with an internal locus of control will evaluate the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences equivalently.

While locus of control is a stable individual trait, there are characteristics of locus of control that would suggest the outcomes associated with it are malleable. For instance, internal and external locus of control consumers have dissimilar social orientations. Internals are more extroverted and exhibit more of a tendency towards pro-social behavior than externals (Levenson 1974; Nowicki and Duke 1983). This difference in social orientations suggests that internal locus of control consumers' evaluations of experiences may change due to the social signaling associated with an experience.

Specifically, consumers' preference for feature-richness in products changes in the presence of social influences. Thompson and Norton (2011) showed that when consumers make public purchases, they prefer more feature-rich products than when they make private purchases. This preference for feature-richness derives from the social utility associated with adding features to products. By choosing feature-rich products, consumers signal to peers that they are more open to new experiences (Thompson and Norton 2011). This aspect of experiential purchases is particularly poignant to investigate considering consumers' desire to collect experiences (Keinan and Kivetz 2011) and tell others about them through the pervasive use of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.). As such, I propose that the anticipated social signaling of a specific experience will impact post-consumption evaluations.

Further, consumers' prospective expectations can impact enjoyment of an experience (Ariely and Norton 2009). For instance, altering the price of the same wine changed consumers' taste evaluations (Plassmann, O'Doherty, Shiv, and Rangel 2008), a beer with a little balsamic vinegar tasted better when consumers thought it was an "MIT Brew" before consumption (Lee, Frederick, and Ariely 2006), and cartoons seemed less funny when consumers thought they would be funny ahead of time (Wilson, Lisle, Kraft, and Wetzel 1989). It then follows that if the enjoyment of an experience can be altered by prospective expectations, giving an experience a social signaling focus before consumption may change consumers' enjoyment of that experience, represented in post-consumption evaluations, depending on their reaction to social cues.

I predict that an experience's social signaling focus will interact with locus of control to impact consumer preferences for feature-rich and feature-poor experiences

after consumption. In particular, externals are less responsive to social cues and find communicating with others less satisfying and less rewarding than their internal counterparts (Rubin 1993). Thus, I anticipate that their focus on the social signaling aspect of an experience will eliminate the positive outcomes usually associated with feature-rich experiences after consumption—I predict a null effect of feature richness. On the other hand, internal locus of control consumers are more responsive to social cues (Nowicki and Duke 1983) and if given the opportunity to tell others about their upcoming experiences, they will appreciate the social signal of feature-rich experiences, which will improve their post-consumption evaluations compared to feature-poor experiences. Thus, I hypothesize a three-way interaction between feature-richness, social signaling, and locus of control.

H5: After consumption, the effects on consumer evaluations suggested in H4 will reverse when consumers tell their friends about an upcoming experience such that; (a) consumers with an external locus of control will evaluate feature-rich and feature-poor experiences equally, and (b) consumers with an internal locus of control will evaluate the feature-rich experiences higher than the feature-poor experiences.

Overview of Studies

In five studies, I investigate the impact of feature-richness on consumers' preferences for experiences. In Study 1, I demonstrate that before consumption, consumers prefer feature-poor rather than feature-rich experiences (H1a), but after consumption, they prefer feature-rich rather than feature-poor experiences (H1b). In Study 2, using a hypothetical Living Social deal, I replicate my findings from Study 1

and show that uncertainty mediates this relationship (H2). In Study 3, by manipulating the temporal distance of the experience, I ease consumers' concerns with the uncertainty of the experience's outcome and eliminate their pre-consumption feature apprehension (H3). In Study 4, I replicate my basic effect—that consumers prefer feature-poor experiences before consumption, but feature-rich after consumption—in a study where consumers are allowed to choose the feature-richness of their experience. Also in Study 4, I investigate locus of control as a post-consumption moderator (H4). Finally, in Study 5, I randomly assign participants to a feature-poor or feature-rich experience to replicate my locus of control findings from Study 4, and I show that social signaling moderates post-consumption experiential evaluations (H5).

STUDY 1

Study 1 investigated whether the number of features of an experience differentially impacted consumers' evaluations before consumption (H1a) and after consumption (H1b). In this study, I made use of comedy video experiences as a conservative test of feature-richness in experiential purchases by comparing participants' evaluations of the same feature-poor and feature-rich experience either before or after consumption. I also tested an effort-related alternative explanation of my theory: it could be that consumers prefer feature-rich experiences after consumption because they work harder during the feature-rich experience than the feature-poor experience, which may improve their evaluations of the experience (Cardozo 1965).

Method

Participants and design. I recruited 298 participants using Amazon's Mechanical Turk to participate in a 2 (feature-richness: feature-poor vs. feature-rich) x 2 (evaluation timing: before consumption vs. after consumption) between-subjects experiment, randomly assigning participants to all four conditions. Eight participants were omitted from my analyses because they had previously participated in a similar experiment (all interactions remain significant at $p < .05$ when they are included). In the pre-consumption condition, I replicated real-world purchase situations where consumers have a choice of options in close proximity. Because consumers are typically exposed to multiple products or experiences before making a purchase decision, I designed this study so that participants in the pre-consumption condition viewed a comparison of both the feature-poor and feature-rich versions but were randomly assigned to only rate one of the two options. On the other hand, after purchase, consumers typically only consume and evaluate one option—the one that they chose. Therefore, in the post-consumption condition, participants watched the feature-poor or feature-rich comedy videos and then evaluated the experience without being exposed to the other experiential option.

Stimuli. I told participants in both the pre- and post-consumption conditions that they would be watching a special selection from Mitch Hedberg's 1999 Comedy Central show. I created two versions of this video experience and both versions included the same jokes in the same order. By keeping the same jokes in both the feature-poor and feature-rich conditions, I eliminated the possibility of one set of jokes being more enjoyable than another and kept the run time for both conditions the same (approx. 10 minutes). The only difference between the conditions was how the jokes were split into

separate videos which created the perception of differential levels of feature-richness. The feature-poor comedy video condition grouped the jokes into 3 different videos, while the feature-rich condition grouped the jokes into 19 different videos (see Appendix A). Notably, literature has shown that disruption also improves consumers' evaluations of experiences. I control for disruption by inserting a break in between every joke (in both the feature-poor and feature-rich conditions) and by using stimuli (individual comedy jokes) that are less susceptible to hedonic adaption (Nelson and Meyvis 2008).

In the pre-consumption condition, participants viewed descriptions of both a feature-poor (3 video clips) and feature-rich (19 video clips) selection from Mitch Hedberg's 1999 comedy show. I then randomly assigned participants to evaluate either the feature-rich or feature-poor experience. Finally, participants watched the comedy video experience in order to keep the duration of the study consistent across both conditions (before and after consumption). In the post-consumption condition, participants viewed a description of either a feature-poor (3 video clips) or feature-rich (19 video clips) comedy video, watched the video, and then evaluated it.

Participants evaluated the comedy video experience by expressing their agreement with the following questions: "Please indicate how much you like(d) this comedy video experience" (Don't Like at All = 1, Very Strongly Like = 9), "This comedy video experience is very desirable" (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9), and "How satisfied would you be (were you) with this comedy video experience" (Very Dissatisfied = 1, Very Satisfied = 9). The combination of these measures served as my dependent variable ($\alpha = .96$). As a feature-richness manipulation check, I asked

participants: “How many comedy videos are included in this comedy video experience” (Not Very Many = 1, A Lot = 9).

Because consumers expend more effort depending on how hard it is to achieve an outcome associated with an experience (Kim and Labroo 2011), a possible alternative explanation for my proposed reversal in post-consumption preferences is that during the experience, participants in the feature-rich condition had to work harder than those in the feature-poor condition and, as a result of the increased effort, enjoyed the experience more (Cardozo 1965). To measure the effort or difficulty associated with the experience, I asked participants to respond to the statement: “This comedy video experience was hard to watch because of the way it was setup” (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9).

Results

Manipulation check. Using a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (evaluation timing) ANOVA I found that participants in the feature-rich condition felt there were more videos associated with their experience ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 7.85$, $SD = 1.42$) than those in the feature-poor condition ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 5.72$, $SD = 2.45$; $F(1, 289) = 80.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$). No other effects were significant.

Evaluation. Using a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (evaluation timing) between-subjects ANOVA, I found a significant main effect of evaluation timing on consumer evaluations, indicating that participants preferred the comedy video more after consumption ($M_{\text{after}} = 6.68$, $SD = 2.01$) than before ($M_{\text{before}} = 5.89$, $SD = 2.17$; $F(1, 289) = 10.91$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$). There was no main effect of feature-richness on consumer evaluations ($F(1, 289) = 1.04$, $p = .31$). Importantly, I found a significant feature-richness x evaluation timing interaction on evaluations ($F(1, 289) = 17.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$). As predicted in H1a, in

the pre-consumption condition participants preferred the feature-poor option ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 6.57$, $SD = 1.81$) over the feature-rich option ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 5.22$, $SD = 2.33$; $F(1, 289) = 15.02$, $p < .001$). However, these preferences reversed (in support of H1b) in the post-consumption condition such that consumers preferred the feature-rich option ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 7.01$, $SD = 1.72$) over the feature-poor option ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 6.35$, $SD = 2.22$; $F(1, 289) = 4.18$, $p < .05$), see Figure 1.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

Effort. Using a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (evaluation timing) ANOVA, I found a significant feature-richness x evaluation timing interaction on consumer effort ($F(1, 289) = 7.21$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$). For participants in the pre-consumption condition, the feature-rich experience seemed more effortful ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 5.89$, $SD = 2.60$) than the feature-poor experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.95$, $SD = 2.02$; $F(1, 289) = 26.93$, $p < .001$). Importantly, however, there was no significant difference in effort for those in the post-consumption condition ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 3.57$, $SD = 2.25$; $M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.00$, $SD = 1.86$; $F(1, 289) = 2.60$, $p = .11$) ruling out effort as a possible alternative explanation for participants' post-consumption feature-richness preferences.

Discussion

In Study 1, I used the same stimuli for both the feature-poor and feature-rich conditions to conduct a conservative test of feature-richness' impact on consumer evaluations. I elicited different perceptions of feature-richness by merely manipulating how the comedy jokes were split up. As a result, I control for the length of the experience, variety seeking behavior, and the quality of the experience. Moreover, by ensuring there was a break in both forms of the comedy videos, I controlled for disruption

(Nelson and Meyvis 2008). Consistent with my theorizing, I found a reversal of consumers' preferences for feature-richness before versus after consumption. Although the feature-poor experience (3 videos) was preferred before consumption, the feature-rich experience (19 videos) was preferred after consumption despite the fact that the overall experience was the same—a conservative test of my prediction. While previous research has shown that consumers prefer feature-rich products before consumption but feature-poor products after consumption, Study 1 reveals the opposite effect with experiences, whereby consumers exhibit feature apprehension before consumption, but prefer feature-rich experiences after consumption¹.

One limitation of Study 1 is that my stimuli did not perfectly reflect the differences between a feature-poor and feature-rich experience. In most cases, a feature-poor experience will not include the same activities as a feature-rich experience. Additionally, although I tried to replicate realistic purchase scenarios—where consumers view multiple options before consumption but consume only one option—a criticism of Study 1 could be that those in the pre-consumption condition had more information than those in post-consumption condition. Therefore, in Study 2, I make two changes to address these shortcomings. First, I alter the stimuli and use a day-long experiential scenario—a more typical experience than a comedy video. Second, participants in both the pre- and post-consumption conditions review and evaluate one option—solving the possible discrepancy in information before versus after consumption.

¹ In an unreported study, I replicated the effects of feature fatigue as described in Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust (2005).

STUDY 2

In Study 2, participants encountered a hypothetical “Living Social” deal for a day-long experience that either included two (feature-poor) or six (feature-rich) activities. In the pre-consumption condition, participants evaluated either the two- or six-activity experience as an imagined upcoming experience. In the post-consumption condition, participants imagined they had just completed the two- or six-activity experience and evaluated it. Thus, in the feature-rich condition consumers imagined engaging in more activities than in the feature-poor experience. To increase realism, I included the prices of the feature-rich and feature-poor experiences.

Method

Participants and design. I recruited 189 participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk and randomly assigned them to a 2 (feature-richness: feature-rich vs. feature-poor) x 2 (evaluation timing: before consumption vs. after consumption) between-subjects experimental design. Eight participants were omitted from my analyses because of previous participation in a similar experiment (all interactions remain significant at $p < .05$ with all individuals included).

Procedure. I asked participants in the before (after) consumption condition to imagine they had found (just returned from) a Living Social deal for a day trip of “must do” activities around Santa Monica, California on a Saturday of their choice. In the feature-poor condition, this deal included two activities—a 2 hour whale watching tour

and a 3 hour sunset dinner cruise—for \$100 per person. In the feature-rich condition, the deal included six activities—the same activities as the feature-poor condition, in addition to a 2 hour surfing lesson, 2.5 hours at the Getty Art Museum, a 1.5 hour beach cruiser ride, and a 1.5 hour reception with drinks at the Griffith Observatory—for \$200 per person. See Appendix A.

Participants next viewed a schedule and corresponding photographs of the activities that were included in either the feature-rich or feature-poor experience. In the pre-consumption condition, participants reviewed pictures depicting each activity in the vacation package alongside the time and length of the activity on the schedule. In the post-consumption condition, participants reviewed the pictures they imagined taking from the activities they experienced, also alongside schedule information. By having participants imagine this trip as upcoming or in hindsight, I concretized the differences in timing of the scenario while keeping the stimuli as similar as possible. Notably, I emphasized a 1st person perspective in all conditions.

Participants then evaluated the experience according to the same items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .95$). To better understand the process underlying my participants' evaluations, I also asked about the uncertainty associated with the Living Social deal's outcomes, using the items: "I am uncertain whether this Living Social deal would be enjoyable" (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9), "I am uncertain whether the format of this Living Social deal would allow it to be fun" (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9), and "I don't know if I would find this Living Social deal entertaining" (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9). I combined these items to form an uncertainty variable that served as my mediator ($\alpha = .89$).

Finally, to ensure that participants perceived a difference in the number of features included on the feature-poor and feature-rich Living Social deals, participants rated, “How many activities are included in this Living Social deal?” (Not Very Many = 1, A Lot = 9). To ensure that they understood the difference in the timing of the evaluations (before consumption vs. after consumption) they also responded to the statement: “In this scenario this Living Social deal was supposed to...” (Take Place in the Distant Past = 1, Take Place in the Distant Future = 9).

Results

Similar to Study 1, I predicted that participants in the pre-consumption condition would prefer the feature-poor to the feature-rich experience. However, I expected these preferences to reverse after consumption. I also predicted that uncertainty would mediate the relationship between feature-richness and experiential evaluations before (but not after) consumption.

Manipulation checks. Using a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (evaluation timing) ANOVA, I found that both manipulations were successful. Participants felt there were significantly more features within the feature-rich deal ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 7.12$, $SD = 1.47$) than the feature-poor deal ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.16$, $SD = 1.61$; $F(1, 180) = 298.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .63$). My consumption timing manipulation was also successful; there was a significant difference in participants’ perceptions of the timing of the experience ($M_{\text{after consumption}} = 5.63$, $SD = 1.97$; $M_{\text{before consumption}} = 6.77$, $SD = 1.79$; $F(1, 176) = 16.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$). No other effects were significant. Of note, four participants did not complete the final manipulation check measure, hence the slight change in degrees of freedom.

Evaluation. I conducted the same 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (evaluation timing) between-subjects ANOVA on experience evaluations, revealing a significant feature-richness x evaluation timing interaction ($F(1, 180) = 10.30, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$). There were no significant main effects ($p > .39$). Planned contrasts revealed that, supporting H1a, before consumption, participants gave higher ratings to the feature-poor ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 7.34, SD = 1.11$) than the feature-rich deal ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 6.49, SD = 1.80; F(1, 180) = 6.57, p < .05$). However, supporting H1b, after consumption, participants gave higher ratings to the feature-rich ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 7.45, SD = 1.26$) than the feature-poor deal ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 6.79, SD = 2.00; F(1, 180) = 3.93, p < .05$)—see Figure 2. Thus, I replicate the findings of Study 1 in a context where participants in the feature-rich (vs. feature-poor) condition imagined doing more activities and paying more for those activities.

<Insert Figure 2 about here>

Uncertainty. Using a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (evaluation timing) between-subjects ANOVA, I found a significant main effect of feature-richness on perceived outcome uncertainty, where consumers in the feature-poor condition felt the experience had less uncertainty ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 2.79, SD = 1.52$) than the feature-rich experience ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 3.61, SD = 2.13; F(1, 180) = 8.88, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$). I also found a significant feature-richness x evaluation timing interaction on perceived uncertainty ($F(1, 180) = 3.85, p = .05, \eta^2 = .02$). Before consumption, participants felt less uncertainty with the feature-poor experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 2.69, SD = 1.30$) than the feature-rich experience ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 4.04, SD = 2.33; F(1, 180) = 12.41, p < .001$). However, after consumption, participants did not perceive such differences ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 2.88, SD = 1.72; M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 3.16, SD = 1.80; F(1, 180) = .51, p = .48$).

Mediation analysis. To test whether uncertainty mediated consumers' evaluations of the Living Social experience, I conducted a percentile mediation analysis with 10,000 bootstrapped samples (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010), using model 8 from Hayes' (2012) SAS macro. I expected to find moderated mediation, such that uncertainty would mediate the relationship between the feature-richness of the experience and consumers' evaluations of the experience before consumption. After consumption, I did not expect a mediation effect, since the outcome of the experience was already known. In support of H2, in the pre-consumption condition, consumers' uncertainty concerns mediated the relationship between the feature-richness of the experience and consumer evaluations of the Living Social deal ($b = -.66 [-1.10, -.29]$). In other words, as the number of features included on the experience increased, the uncertainty with the experience also increased, decreasing participants' evaluations. There was no mediation effect in the post-consumption condition ($b = -.14 [-.51, .22]$).

Discussion

In Study 2, I replicated the findings from Study 1 using a more typical experiential context. I found that consumers preferred the feature-poor experience before consumption—feature apprehension—even when the feature-rich experience has more activities, more variety, and a lower cost per activity (2 activities for \$100 = \$50 per activity, or 6 activities for \$200 = \$33 per activity). In contrast, after consumption, consumers preferred the feature-rich experience to the feature-poor experience. Importantly, the underlying process driving feature apprehension was the increased uncertainty associated with the outcomes of feature-rich experiences.

The results of Studies 1 and 2 showed that consumers are poor predictors of the kinds of experiences they will prefer after consumption. Consumers prefer the feature-poor option before consumption, but reverse their preference to prefer the feature-rich option after consumption. In Study 3, I consider how I can better align consumers' choices before and after consumption.

STUDY 3

In Study 3, my goal was to ease consumers' uncertainty concerns so that their pre-consumption preferences more closely match the experiences they will enjoy the most after consumption. To do this, I manipulated the amount of time participants had before the start of the experience (i.e., the temporal distance for when participants expected the experience to take place). By manipulating this distance, consumers should view the experience with a high or low construal (Trope and Liberman 2003). As described in my theorizing, when an experience is to take place soon, consumers should view it with a low level construal, and so concerns about the uncertainty associated with the outcome of the experience should increase. This focus on uncertainty should cause consumers to prefer a feature-poor experience, exhibiting feature apprehension. However, an experience that is to occur far in the future should be viewed with a high level construal, and participants should not be concerned with its uncertainty. Thus, the feature-richness of the experience should not impact participants' experiential preferences (H3).

Method

Participants and design. I recruited 487 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk and randomly assigned them to a 2 (feature-richness: feature-poor vs. feature-rich) x 2 (temporal distance: low vs. high) between-subjects experiment. Twelve participants who reported that they had participated in a similar study were omitted from the analyses. Of note, all key interactions remain significant ($p < .05$) when they are included.

Procedure. In this study, I used a vacation package context. I asked participants in both conditions to imagine they were planning a vacation to Santa Monica, CA. In the low temporal distance condition, participants imagined they were planning this vacation for next week, while in the high temporal distance condition, they imagined planning the vacation for next year. In the feature-rich condition, the vacation package cost \$1,250 and included 21 activities, while in the feature-poor condition, this package cost \$1,000 and included 7 activities. All participants then viewed a schedule of either the 21 (feature-rich) or 7 (feature-poor) activities; see Appendix A. Finally, participants evaluated the vacation package using the same three items from Studies 1 and 2 ($\alpha = .96$). To measure participants' uncertainty with the experience, I used the same three items I used in Study 2 ($\alpha = .90$).

Finally, to assess whether my feature-richness manipulation was successful, I asked: "How many activities are included in this vacation package" (Not Very Many = 1, A Lot = 9). To test whether my temporal distance manipulation was successful, I asked: "When I think of this vacation package, I picture myself making use of it a long way off in the future" (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9).

Results

I anticipated that consumers in the close temporal distance condition would exhibit the same feature apprehension that I observed in Studies 1 and 2. However, by moving the experience into the temporally distant future, I predicted that there would be no difference in consumers' uncertainty concerns or evaluations between the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences. Additionally, I anticipated that I would find moderated mediation, such that uncertainty would only mediate the relationship between feature-richness and experiential evaluations when the temporal distance of the experience was close.

Manipulation checks. I ran a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (temporal distance) ANOVA to test my manipulations. Both manipulations had the intended effect. Those in the feature-rich condition felt there were significantly more features within their vacation package ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 8.28$, $SD = 1.03$) than those in the feature-poor condition ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 6.40$, $SD = 1.29$; $F(1, 470) = 305.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .39$). Those in the high temporal distance condition felt they would make use of the vacation package further in the future ($M_{\text{high temporal distance}} = 5.39$, $SD = 1.55$) than those in the low temporal distance condition ($M_{\text{low temporal distance}} = 4.11$, $SD = 1.80$; $F(1, 470) = 69.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$). No other effects were significant. Of note, four participants did not complete the manipulation check measures, hence the change in degrees of freedom.

Evaluation. I ran a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (temporal distance) between-subjects ANOVA, which revealed a significant feature-richness x temporal distance interaction on participants' evaluations ($F(1, 474) = 4.00$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$); there were no main effects

($p > .12$)². Replicating Studies 1 and 2, those in the low temporal distance condition rated the feature-poor experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 7.03$, $SD = 1.24$) more highly than the feature-rich experience ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 6.45$, $SD = 2.10$; $F(1, 474) = 6.31$, $p < .05$). In contrast, those in the high temporal distance condition did not evaluate the experiences differently ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 6.64$, $SD = 1.74$; $M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 6.71$, $SD = 1.90$; $F(1, 474) = .10$, $p = .75$), see Figure 3. These findings support H3.

<Insert Figure 3 About Here>

Uncertainty. I conducted a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (temporal distance) between-subjects ANOVA, which revealed that there was a significant main effect of feature-richness ($F(1, 474) = 8.38$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$), such that participants felt more uncertainty associated with the feature-rich ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 4.23$, $SD = 2.13$) than the feature-poor experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.69$, $SD = 1.93$). More importantly, I found a significant feature-richness x temporal distance interaction on the uncertainty participants associated with the experience ($F(1, 474) = 5.31$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Under low temporal distance, participants associated less uncertainty with the feature-poor experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.45$, $SD = 1.74$) than the feature-rich experience ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 4.41$, $SD = 2.16$; $F(1, 474) = 13.49$, $p < .001$). As predicted, however, under high temporal distance, there were no differences in uncertainty ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.94$, $SD = 2.07$; $M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 4.05$, $SD = 2.08$; $F(1, 474) = .17$, $p = .68$).

Mediation. I again tested whether uncertainty was driving consumers' evaluations of the experience using model 8 from Hayes' (2012) SAS macro. I expected to find

² I also tested a between subjects manipulation of flexibility (whether the features could be rescheduled or not). There was no significant effect or interactions due to flexibility so I collapsed results across this factor and do not discuss it further.

moderated mediation, such that uncertainty would mediate the relationship between feature-richness and consumers' evaluations when the temporal distance associated with the experience was low (but not when it was high). In support of H2, in the low temporal distance condition, uncertainty concerns mediated the relationship between feature-richness and participants' evaluations of the experience ($b = -.55$, 95% CI: $-.86, -.26$). In other words, when temporal distance was low, as the number of features included on the experience increased, the uncertainty with the experience also increased which reduced participants' evaluations of the experience. However, there was no mediation effect in the high temporal distance condition ($b = -.06$, 95% CI: $-.36, .24$).

Discussion

Study 3 showed that when consumers viewed experiences with close temporal distance, they exhibited the feature apprehension I observed in Studies 1 and 2. However, when consumers considered an experience with far temporal distance, they no longer exhibited feature apprehension. Additionally, with far temporal distance, participants' perceptions of uncertainty were not significantly different between the feature-rich and feature-poor experience. Thus, when consumers are building their own experiences, if they plan their experiences to take place in the distant future, the feature-richness of the experience will not impact their choice and they will be more likely to choose a feature-rich experience—one they will prefer more after consumption. However, if they plan their experiences to take place in the near future, they will be more likely to select feature-poor experiences—which they will prefer less after consumption—based on the uncertainty associated with the experience.

Thus far, I have established my basic effect of feature apprehension pre-consumption and its post-consumption reversal, as well as the underlying process. I have also presented temporal distance as a moderator of these effects. In Study 4, I test whether consumers show the same feature apprehension and preference reversal in a study where they choose their experience, go through the experience, and then evaluate it. Furthermore, since moderation may occur at the individual difference level, with certain traits altering consumers' enjoyment of feature-poor or feature-rich experiences, I examine locus of control as one such trait.

STUDY 4

In Study 4, I tested my prediction that consumers prefer feature-poor experiences before consumption but prefer feature-rich experiences after consumption using a study design where they chose the feature-richness of their upcoming experience. In this study, participants chose their experience, completed the experience, and then rated the experience (H1a and H1b). I anticipated that most participants would choose the feature-poor experience but would later evaluate it lower than those who chose the feature-rich experience. By using this design, I provide further external validity to my finding that consumers choose the option that they are less satisfied with after consumption. I also anticipated that a consumers' locus of control (Rotter 1966) would moderate their post-consumption evaluations of an experience (H4).

Method

Participants and design. I recruited 190 undergraduate students from a large southwestern university to participate in a 2 (feature-richness: feature-rich vs. feature-poor) x continuous (locus of control) between-subjects experimental design.

Procedure. Before arriving for this study, as a component of a survey of individual differences taken at the beginning of the semester, participants responded to the 9 item locus of control scale ($\alpha = .78$) developed by Levenson (1974; e.g., “My life is determined by my own actions,” “I am usually able to protect my personal interests”). I coded responses such that a low score indicates an external locus of control and a high score indicates an internal locus of control (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). When participants arrived at the lab, I told them that they would get to choose from a set of activities. Participants could either choose: (1) to do one of the following activities: play an online video game titled “micro machines”, play putt putt, play darts, or draw a picture with crayons—for five minutes (feature-poor experience), or (2) to do all four activities for about 1 minute and 15 seconds each, for a total of five minutes (feature-rich experience), see Appendix A. I emphasized that both the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences would last for five minutes in total.

After making a choice, an experimenter took the participant to begin his or her chosen experience. Importantly, in both conditions the experimenter was in charge of setting up, timing, and determining when each activity in the experience was over. After the five minute experience was complete, participants evaluated the experience using the same items I used in Studies 1-3, ($\alpha = .95$) and responded to the same uncertainty measures I used in Studies 2-3 ($\alpha = .92$). Finally, participants completed the feature-

richness manipulation check: “It seemed like there were many activities during my experience” (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9).

Results

I anticipated that, replicating prior studies, more participants would choose the feature-poor than the feature-rich experience (H1a). Conversely, after participants completed their experience of choice, I expected those who chose the feature-rich experience would evaluate it higher than those who chose the feature-poor experience (H1b). I also anticipated that locus of control would interact with the feature-richness of the experience to impact evaluations. Specifically, I predicted that external locus of control participants should give higher evaluations to the feature-rich experience (H4a) whereas internal locus of control participants’ evaluations would not be impacted by feature-richness (H4b). Furthermore, I anticipated that there would be no differences in post-consumption uncertainty between the feature-rich and feature-poor experiences.

Manipulation check. Using a one-way ANOVA, I found that participants who chose the feature-poor experience felt there were fewer activities ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.28$, $SD = 2.18$) than participants who chose the feature-rich experience ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 7.67$, $SD = 1.24$; $F(1, 189) = 114.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$). There was no significant interaction between feature-richness and locus of control on participants’ perceptions of feature-richness ($F(1, 189) = .69$, $p = .41$).

Choice. Participants overwhelmingly chose the feature-poor experience. More specifically, 84% (N=160) of participants chose the feature-poor experience compared with 16% (N=30) of participants who chose the feature-rich experience, in support of H1a and as a replication of the feature apprehension that I found in Studies 1 and 2. Of

the 160 that chose the feature-poor experience, 38 (20%) chose to play the video game, 28 (15%) chose to play putt putt, 27 (14%) chose to play darts, and 67 (35%) chose to draw a picture. Locus of control had no impact on participants' choice ($b = -.17$, $\chi^2 = .23$, $p = .64$).

Evaluations after consumption. Among participants who chose the feature-poor experience, those who played the video game evaluated their experience significantly lower ($M_{\text{video game}} = 3.89$, $SD = 2.04$) than the other activities (all p values $< .001$). However, there were no significant differences between any of the other activities ($M_{\text{putt putt}} = 6.33$, $SD = 1.71$; $M_{\text{darts}} = 6.53$, $SD = 1.44$; $M_{\text{coloring}} = 6.69$, $SD = 1.69$; all $p > .36$). Controlling for the activities that each participant experienced, I conducted a 2 (feature-richness) x continuous (locus of control) ANCOVA to evaluate participants' evaluations of the feature-poor or feature-rich experience they chose. I found a significant main effect of feature-richness such that, after consumption, participants who chose the feature-rich experience evaluated it higher ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 6.45$, $SD = 1.80$) than those who chose a feature-poor experience (supporting H1b; $M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 5.93$, $SD = 1.79$; $F(1, 189) = 3.86$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Notably, this result replicates my findings from Studies 1 and 2 in a context where participants chose the experience they wanted, highlighting the difficulty consumers have in predicting the types of purchases they will prefer after consumption.

Importantly, I also found a marginally significant interaction between feature-richness and locus of control ($F(1, 189) = 3.16$, $p < .08$, $\eta^2 = .01$) on evaluations after consumption, see Figure 4. To explore the nature of this interaction, I analyzed the effect of feature-richness using a spotlight analysis (Aiken and West 1991) at 1 SD above and below the mean of locus of control ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .55$). For participants with an internal

locus of control, there was no difference in evaluations of feature-rich and feature-poor experiences ($b = -.08$; $t(189) = -.18$, $p = .86$). In contrast, participants with an external locus of control preferred the feature-rich experience to the feature-poor experience ($b = 1.14$; $t(189) = 2.22$, $p < .05$), in support of H4.

<Insert Figure 4 About Here>

Uncertainty after consumption. By conducting another 2 (feature-richness) x continuous (locus of control) ANCOVA I found that, after consumption, there was no main effect of feature-richness ($F(1, 189) = .15$, $p = .70$) or locus of control ($F(1, 189) = 1.01$, $p = .32$) on uncertainty nor was there a significant interaction ($F(1, 189) = .22$, $p = .64$). As a result, I demonstrate that after consumption it is not uncertainty that is impacting consumers' evaluations but rather how differences in locus of control alter evaluations of feature-richness in experiences.

Discussion

Study 4 provides further evidence of consumers' mistaken feature apprehension with experiential purchases in a context where participants were able to choose either a feature-rich or feature-poor experience. Participants primarily chose feature-poor experiences; however, those that chose the feature-rich experience evaluated it higher than the majority who chose the feature-poor experience. Additionally, I showed that locus of control moderated consumers' post-consumption evaluations. Importantly, this study reveals a reversal of preferences even for experiences that consumers choose themselves. However, since the experience was chosen and not randomly assigned, inherent selection biases exist. In Study 5, I overcome this selection bias by randomly assigning participants to similar feature-rich and feature-poor experiences.

STUDY 5

In Study 5, I chose to focus on post-consumption evaluations only. Additionally, I sought to replicate my findings from Study 4 using a randomly assigned between-subjects experimental design. Specifically, I expected that external locus of control consumers would prefer the feature-rich to the feature-poor experience after consumption, while internal locus of control consumers would evaluate the feature-rich and feature-poor experiences similarly (H4).

I also sought to test my prediction that, similar to what has been documented with products (Thompson and Norton 2011), social signaling moderates feature-richness preferences for experiences. In particular, since external locus of control consumers find communicating less rewarding (Rubin 1993), their negative view of the social signaling focus of the experience should reduce their post-consumption evaluations, causing them to rate the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences similarly after consumption (H5a). In contrast, since internal (vs. external) locus of control consumers are more responsive to social cues (Levenson 1974; Nowicki and Duke 1983), giving them an opportunity to tell a friend about an upcoming feature-rich experience should increase their evaluations of the feature-rich experience compared to the feature-poor experience (H5b).

Method

Participants and design. I recruited 197 undergraduate students at a large southwestern university and randomly assigned them to a 2 (feature-richness: feature-

poor vs. feature-rich) x 2 (social signal vs. control) x continuous (locus of control) experimental design.

Procedure. As in Study 4, participants responded to the 9 item locus of control scale (Levenson 1974) in a survey administered prior to this study ($\alpha = .82$). I told participants that they would engage in an activity/activities for 5 minutes. Additionally, I explained to those in the feature-poor condition that they would get to choose and experience one of four activities ((1) Simon – a memory game, (2) the Labyrinth marble maze, (3) putt putt, or (4) darts), see Appendix A. In the feature-rich condition, I told participants that they would get to choose three of the four same activities to experience for about 1 minute and forty seconds each, or five minutes in total. Participants made their activity choices.

Next, I asked participants to complete a writing task. I wanted participants to do the writing task before consumption because I am trying to replicate situations where consumers briefly write about upcoming experiences on social media websites (i.e., “My cruise starts on Monday!”). In this sense, participants’ focus on the social signaling of feature-richness before consumption should influence their enjoyment of the experience itself (e.g., Lee, Frederick, and Ariely 2006). I asked those in the social signaling condition to write to their friend about the upcoming activities that they were about to experience in the lab. I asked those in the control condition to write to their friend about a normal day in their life. Thus, in both conditions participants wrote to a friend, however, in the social signaling condition, participants connected a social signal to the upcoming experience. After the writing task, the researcher took participants to a separate room to experience the single activity (feature-poor) or the three activities (feature-rich) they

chose. After doing either the feature-poor or feature-rich experience, I asked participants to evaluate the experience using the same three questions used in Studies 1-4 ($\alpha = .96$).

Finally, as in Study 4, as a manipulation check for feature-richness, I asked participants to respond to the statement: “It seemed like there were many activities during my experience” (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 9). To test whether participants actually wrote to a friend about their average day or the upcoming experience to which they were randomly assigned, three independent coders rated the extent to which the participant wrote about their average day (1), or wrote about their upcoming lab experience (9). Inter-rater reliability was strong ($\kappa = .86$).

Results

Replicating Study 4, in the control condition, I expected that external locus of control consumers would prefer the feature-rich to the feature-poor experience (H4a), but that internal locus of control consumers would evaluate the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences similarly (H4b). However, in the social signaling condition, I expected that external locus of control consumers would evaluate the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences similarly (H5a), but internal locus of control consumers would evaluate the feature-rich experience higher than the feature-poor experience (H5b).

Manipulation Check. Using a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (social signal) ANOVA, I tested my feature-richness and social signaling manipulations. My feature-richness manipulation was successful; participants in the feature-poor condition felt there were fewer features in their experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 3.58$, $SD = 2.41$) than those in the feature-rich condition ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 6.68$, $SD = 1.81$; $F(1, 196) = 103.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .35$). Additionally, my writing task manipulation was successful; coders found that

participants in the control condition were more likely to write to their friend about their average day ($M_{\text{control}} = 1.13$, $SD = .49$) while those in the social signaling condition were more likely to write to their friend about their upcoming experience ($M_{\text{social signal}} = 8.70$, $SD = .98$; $F(1, 196) = 95.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$).

Evaluations. Participants in the feature-poor experience rated the putt putt experience significantly higher ($M_{\text{Putt putt}} = 7.54$, $SD = 1.41$) than the Labyrinth ($M_{\text{Labyrinth}} = 5.06$, $SD = 1.84$) and Simon ($M_{\text{Simon}} = 5.92$, $SD = 2.57$; both p values $< .05$) games, but only marginally significantly more than darts ($M_{\text{Darts}} = 6.55$, $SD = 1.79$; $p = .10$). Participants also evaluated darts significantly higher than the Labyrinth marble maze ($p < .05$). All other comparisons were not significantly different from one another ($p > .12$).

Controlling for the activities that each participant experienced, I conducted a 2 (feature-richness) x 2 (social signal) x continuous (locus of control) ANCOVA to evaluate participants' evaluations of the feature-poor versus feature-rich experience. I found a significant feature-richness x social signal interaction ($F(1, 196) = 5.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$) such that participants who did not write about their experience to a friend preferred the feature-rich ($M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 7.05$, $\sigma = 2.47$) to the feature-poor experience ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 5.70$, $\sigma = 2.80$; $F(1, 196) = 4.51$, $p < .05$). However, those who wrote about their upcoming experience to a friend evaluated the feature-rich and feature-poor experiences similarly ($M_{\text{feature-poor}} = 5.88$, $\sigma = 2.48$; $M_{\text{feature-rich}} = 6.83$, $\sigma = 2.81$; $F(1, 196) = 2.21$, $p = .14$). While this would seem to suggest that social signaling diminishes the post-consumption effect of feature-richness, I next consider locus of control.

Importantly, I also found a significant feature-richness x social signal x locus of control interaction ($F(1, 196) = 5.22$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$) on evaluations of the experience.

To investigate this interaction further, I conducted a spotlight analysis at 1 SD above and below the mean of locus of control ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .59$) at two different levels of social signaling—the control and social signaling conditions (Aiken and West 1991). In the control writing task condition, I found a significant impact of feature-richness on external locus of control participants' evaluations of their experience ($b = 1.85$; $t(196) = 2.48$, $p < .05$), such that they gave higher evaluations to the feature-rich than feature-poor experience. Conversely, I did not find an effect of feature-richness for participants with an internal locus of control ($b = .85$; $t(196) = 1.10$, $p = .27$). Thus, I found support for H4a and H4b in a replication of my findings from Study 4.

In the social signal condition, I found support for H5. The impact of feature-richness on experiential evaluations for external locus of control participants disappeared when they wrote about their upcoming experience to a friend (H5a; $b = .17$; $t(196) = .23$, $p = .82$). Conversely, I found that participants with an internal locus of control preferred the feature-rich experience more than the feature-poor experience (H5b; $b = 1.74$; $t(196) = 2.29$, $p < .05$) after having written to a friend about the upcoming experience. Thus, when internal locus of control participants wrote to a friend about an upcoming experience, they preferred the feature-rich (vs. feature-poor) experience. See Figure 5.

<Insert Figure 5 About Here>

Discussion

In Study 5, which focused on consumers' experiential post-consumption evaluations, I replicated the results of Study 4 in a randomly assigned between-subjects experimental design. Thus, I found further evidence that external locus of control consumers prefer the feature-rich experience after consumption (H4a) while internals

were indifferent (H4b). Additionally, I showed that I could moderate my findings from Study 4 and improve internal locus of control consumers' post-consumption evaluations by having them write to their friend about their upcoming experience (H5b). In particular, I found that because internal locus of control consumers are responsive to social interaction, they enjoyed the social signal from the feature-rich experience and preferred it over the feature-poor experience after consumption. However, I also found that since external locus of control consumers do not find communicating rewarding, the social signaling focus of the experience altered their evaluations such that they rated the feature-poor and feature-rich experiences similarly (H5a). Thus, by using a common social medium—similar to a Facebook post or another social media outlet—I found support for the effect of social signaling derived from feature-richness in experiential purchases.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this research, my goal was to fill the gap in the existing marketing literature regarding multi-feature experiences. Across a variety of experience types, I sought to: (1) understand how the number of features included in an experience influences consumer decision making and post-consumption evaluations, (2) examine the underlying mechanism of this phenomenon, and (3) identify moderators that inform managers' ability to align consumers' pre-consumption and post-consumption preferences.

In Study 1, I found support for my first hypothesis that, contrary to products (Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005), consumers prefer feature-poor experiences before consumption but prefer feature-rich experiences after consumption. In Study 2, I

replicated my findings from Study 1 using a more typical experience and identified uncertainty with the outcome of the experience as the process underlying consumers' pre-consumption preferences (in support of H2). In Study 3, I replicated my finding that uncertainty was the underlying driver of feature apprehension and found that by increasing the temporal distance of the experience, I could ease consumers' uncertainty concerns and eliminate their use of feature-richness as a bad purchase heuristic (supporting H2 and H3).

In Study 4, I expanded the external validity of the preference reversal I found with experiential purchases by having participants choose the experience they wanted, complete the experience, and then evaluate it. I found additional support for H1 and identified locus of control as an individual difference that moderates consumers' post-consumption evaluations (H4). Finally, in Study 5, I replicated the moderating effect of locus of control on the post-consumption evaluations identified in Study 4. Additionally, I showed that social signaling acts as a moderator of the interaction between feature-richness and locus of control (H5).

Practical and Theoretical Implications

My findings suggest that if consumers want to maximize their happiness, they should choose feature-rich experiences which they will like more after consumption. Although this recommendation may be counterintuitive to consumers making experiential purchase decisions, they can make following this strategy easier by planning vacations or other multi-feature experiences further out in the future. An additional benefit to planning multi-feature experiences further out in the future is that consumers will get to desire and anticipate them for longer. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) suggest that consumers can

make an experience even more delightful by adding an additional amount of time to look forward to the experience.

Indeed, adding a delay can make consumption more enjoyable for pleasurable products and/or experiences (Nowlis, Mandel, and McCabe 2004). In particular, a delay provides the most enjoyment for fleeting experiences that can be easily imagined (Loewenstein 1987). Therefore, the best kind of vacation should be the feature-rich one that you plan in the distant future because you get to savor the anticipation for an extended period of time (by delaying consumption), enjoy the many features during the experience, and then enjoy the stories for many years after consumption (Elster and Loewenstein 1992; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). However, the transaction decoupling effect (Soman and Gourville 2001) would suggest that by booking a feature-rich experience in the distant future, consumers will be less likely to use all of the features purchased. While this behavior may be profitable for firms, my research would suggest that encouraging consumers to enjoy all of the features included within an experience will help improve overall satisfaction with the experience.

Although I found a general preference for feature-rich experiences after consumption, my finding that consumers' locus of control has an impact on their enjoyment of feature-rich versus feature-poor experiences is useful. One possible solution to bridging the gap between internals' and externals' preferences for feature-richness is to ensure that consumers have the optional ability to control aspects of managed feature-rich experiences. By creating those optional opportunities, internals should enjoy the feature-rich experiences more than when they are not in control. At the same time, external locus

of control consumers can continue to let the feature-rich experience be managed for them. This flexibility should satisfy both groups.

Finally, it is interesting to note that when encouraging consumers to make use of social media to share information about their upcoming experiences (Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009), managers may in fact be reducing how much a group of consumers enjoys the experience. While a prospective social media promotional strategy is probably useful from the standpoint that it encourages positive word of mouth and has a positive impact on internal locus of control consumers' feature-rich evaluations, it also has a negative impact on external locus of control consumers' evaluations of feature-rich experiences. Thus, while managers may be benefiting from the positive word of mouth, they may also be reducing the repeat business of their external locus of control customers. However, future work should be done to investigate whether the negative and positive effect of social signaling on evaluations of feature-rich experiences diminishes as the time between the sharing of the experience and the experience itself increases.

One limitation of this work is that I restricted the scope of my research to multi-feature experiences where the features in my research had similar characteristics to the experience as a whole (e.g., time-invariant and intangible). However, there are also material features of experiences. Consumers may have to choose between a resort with one or five pools included within a vacation package. My research does not address how this difference would affect consumers' purchase decisions or post-consumption evaluations. Do the number of material features within an experience act as a bad purchase heuristic similar to the features of a product (Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005) or experience (as this research suggests)? Do consumers recognize the difference

between these features when they are presented with a mixed set of material and experiential features? Future research should investigate these empirical questions.

By identifying that consumers may make experiential purchase decisions that conflict with their future satisfaction, I hope this research can promote simple interventions that can align preferences before and after consumption. As consumers pursue experiences with varied numbers of features and plan these experiences across different time horizons, both consumers and marketers will benefit from understanding the inherent biases held toward different types of experiences (feature-rich vs. poor), and what will ultimately satisfy consumers the most.

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FIGURE 1

STUDY 1: THE EFFECT OF THE NUMBER OF FEATURES AND PURCHASE

TIMING ON PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

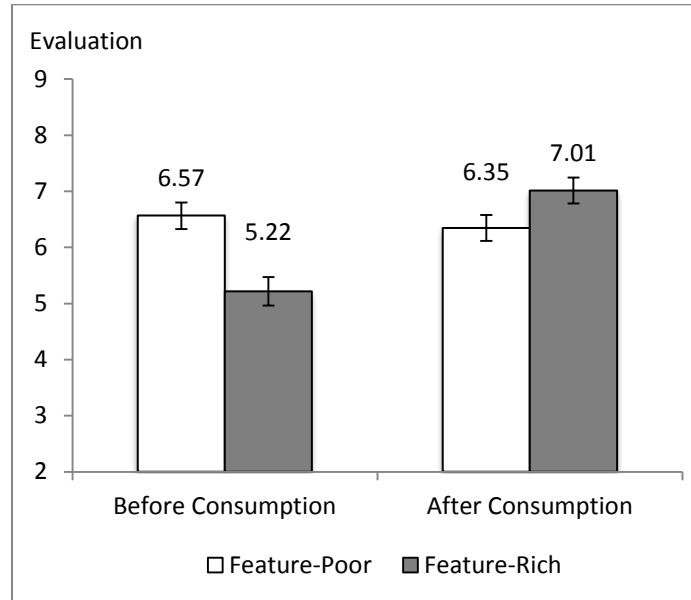


FIGURE 2

STUDY 2 RESULTS: THE EFFECT OF THE NUMBER OF FEATURES AND
PURCHASE TIMING ON PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

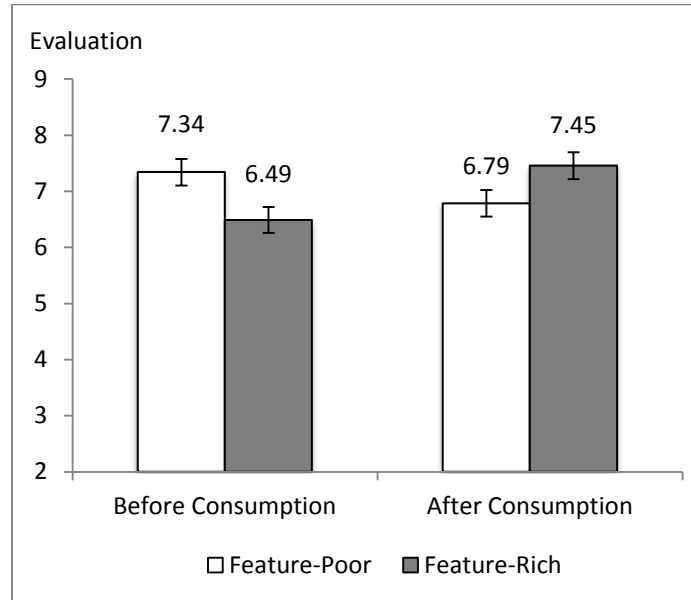


FIGURE 3

STUDY 3 RESULTS: THE EFFECT OF THE NUMBER OF FEATURES AND
TEMPORAL DISTANCE ON PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

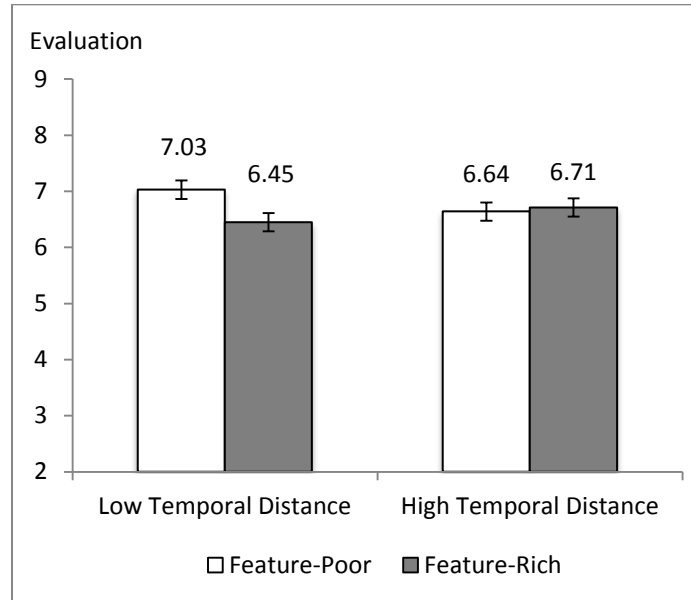


FIGURE 4

STUDY 4 RESULTS: THE EFFECT OF THE NUMBER OF FEATURES AND
LOCUS OF CONTROL ON PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

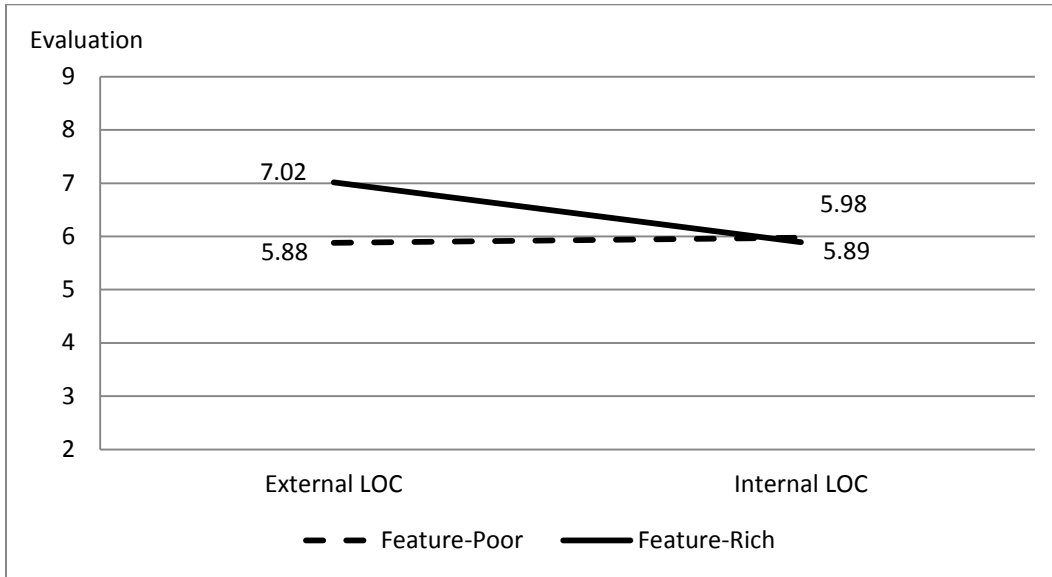
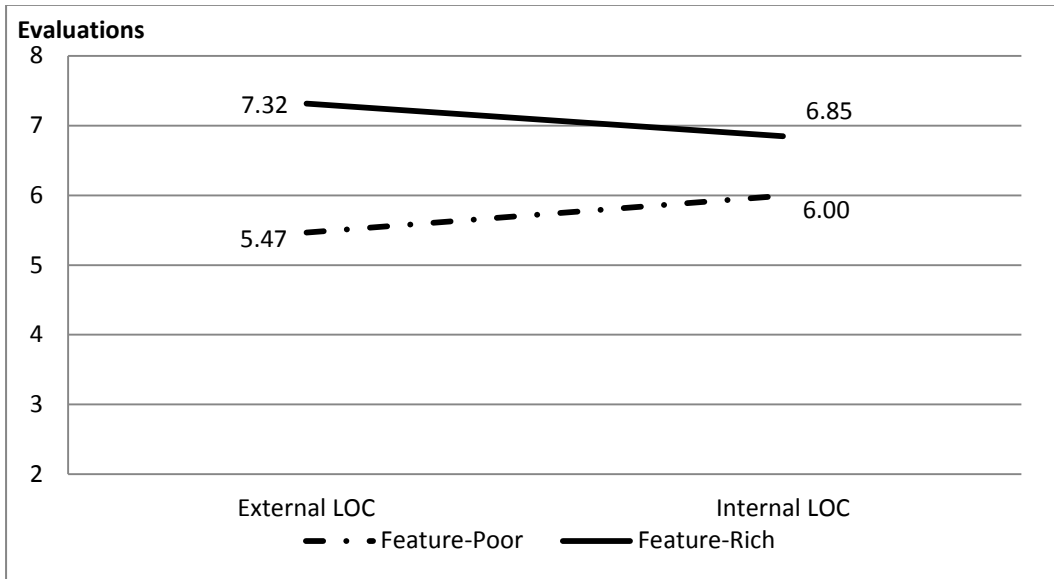


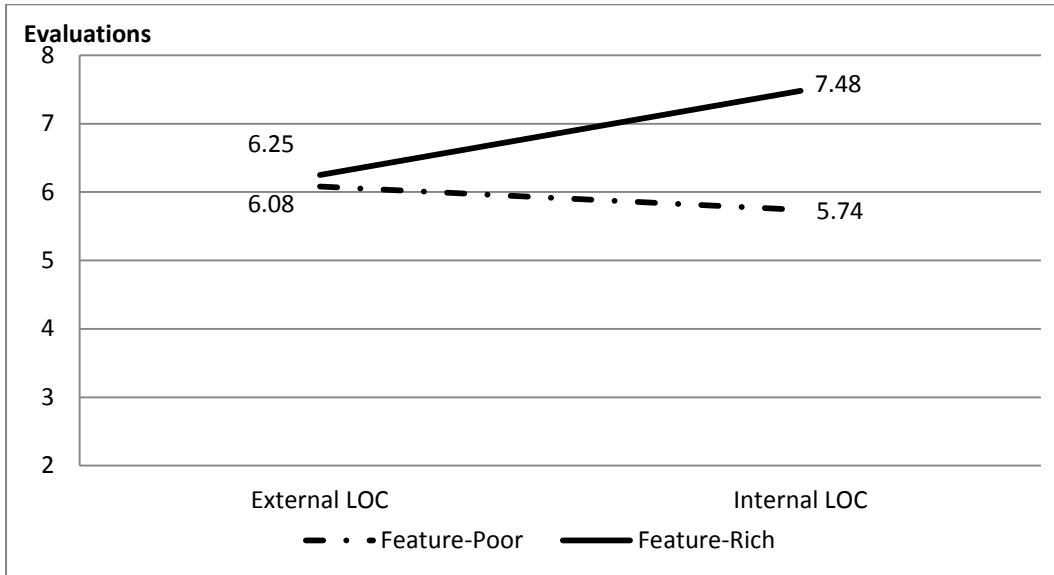
FIGURE 5

STUDY 5 RESULTS: THE EFFECT OF THE NUMBER OF FEATURES, LOCUS OF CONTROL, AND SOCIAL SIGNALING ON PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

A: Control Writing Task



B: Write to a Friend About the Upcoming Experience






















APPENDIX A
EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI USED

Study 1 Stimuli.

Experiential stimuli, feature-poor (left) vs. feature-rich (right).




















Comedy Video Experience Option 1

(Run time is 10 minutes total)

| Video Montage 1 | Video Montage 2 | Video Montage 3 |
|--|---|--|
|  1. "Go Around!" |  8. "Fore!" |  15. "Smokey" |
|  2. "Escalator" |  9. "Receipt" |  16. "A Physical" |
|  3. "Brake" |  10. "Potatoes" |  17. "People" |
|  4. "Not Fair!" |  11. "Crackers" |  18. "T-Shirts" |
|  5. "Human?" |  12. "Fire Exit" |  19. "Duphranes" |
|  6. "Girlfriend" |  13. "Death Metal" | |
|  7. "Passenger" |  14. "Candle Holder" | |

Comedy Video Experience Option 2

(Run time is 10 minutes total)

| Clip 1 | Clip 8 | Clip 15 |
|--|---|--|
|  "Go Around!" |  "Fore!" |  "Smokey" |
|  "Escalator" |  "Receipt" |  "A Physical" |
|  "Brake" |  "Potatoes" |  "People" |
|  "Not Fair!" |  "Crackers" |  "T-Shirts" |
|  "Human?" |  "Fire Exit" |  "Duphranes" |
|  "Girlfriend" |  "Death Metal" | |
|  "Passenger" |  "Candle Holder" | |

Study 2 Stimuli.

Experiential stimuli, feature-poor.

Saturday

Whale Watching Tour



Your group won't believe it, these whales come right up to the boat.

Sunset Dinner Cruise - Marina Del Rey



Your group will enjoy food and drinks while gazing at beautiful scenery.

Study 2 Stimuli (continued).

Experiential stimuli, feature-rich.

Saturday

Surfing Lessons

Saturday Santa Monica Schedule

| 8am | 9am | 10am | 11am | 12pm | 1pm | 2pm | 3pm | 4pm | 5pm | 6pm | 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm | 11pm | 12am |
|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| | | Surfing Lesson | Whale Watching Tour | J. Paul Getty Art Museum | Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental | Sunset Dinner Cruise Marina Del Rey | Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory | | | | | | | | | |



Everyone in your group will be able to stand-up and ride some waves.

Whale Watching Tour

Saturday Santa Monica Schedule

| 8am | 9am | 10am | 11am | 12pm | 1pm | 2pm | 3pm | 4pm | 5pm | 6pm | 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm | 11pm | 12am |
|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| | | Surfing Lesson | Whale Watching Tour | J. Paul Getty Art Museum | Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental | Sunset Dinner Cruise Marina Del Rey | Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory | | | | | | | | | |



Your group won't believe it, these whales come right up to the boat.

J. Paul Getty Art Museum

Saturday Santa Monica Schedule

| 8am | 9am | 10am | 11am | 12pm | 1pm | 2pm | 3pm | 4pm | 5pm | 6pm | 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm | 11pm | 12am |
|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| | | Surfing Lesson | Whale Watching Tour | J. Paul Getty Art Museum | Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental | Sunset Dinner Cruise Marina Del Rey | Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory | | | | | | | | | |



This is a must see, both the art inside and the building itself.

Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental

Saturday Santa Monica Schedule

| 8am | 9am | 10am | 11am | 12pm | 1pm | 2pm | 3pm | 4pm | 5pm | 6pm | 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm | 11pm | 12am |
|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| | | Surfing Lesson | Whale Watching Tour | J. Paul Getty Art Museum | Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental | Sunset Dinner Cruise Marina Del Rey | Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory | | | | | | | | | |



Early afternoon ride along the beach, enjoying the cool breeze.

Sunset Dinner Cruise - Marina Del Rey

Saturday Santa Monica Schedule

| 8am | 9am | 10am | 11am | 12pm | 1pm | 2pm | 3pm | 4pm | 5pm | 6pm | 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm | 11pm | 12am |
|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| | | Surfing Lesson | Whale Watching Tour | J. Paul Getty Art Museum | Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental | Sunset Dinner Cruise Marina Del Rey | Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory | | | | | | | | | |

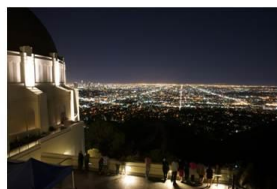


Your group will enjoy food and drinks while gazing at beautiful scenery.

Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory

Saturday Santa Monica Schedule

| 8am | 9am | 10am | 11am | 12pm | 1pm | 2pm | 3pm | 4pm | 5pm | 6pm | 7pm | 8pm | 9pm | 10pm | 11pm | 12am |
|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| | | Surfing Lesson | Whale Watching Tour | J. Paul Getty Art Museum | Beach Cruiser Bicycle Rental | Sunset Dinner Cruise Marina Del Rey | Evening Drinks at the Griffith Observatory | | | | | | | | | |



Your group won't see stars (too close to LA), but the view is still amazing.

Study 3 Stimuli.

Feature-poor vacation.



Feature-rich vacation.



Study 4 stimuli.

Now we would like you to choose what experience you will do today.

Each will last 5 minutes in total.

Your choices are as follows:

1. Play an online video game (a racing game called "Micro Machines") for 5 minutes.
2. Play putt putt for 5 minutes.
3. Play darts for 5 minutes.
4. Color a picture with crayons for 5 minutes.
5. Do all four activities (Micro Machines, putt putt, darts, and color a picture) in 5 minutes. About 1 minute and 15 seconds for each.

The experimenter will give you further instructions.

Study 5 stimuli.



Simon: A memory game in which you copy the sequence of colors that light up.



Labyrinth Marble Maze: Move the marble from the starting location to the finish line avoiding obstacles and holes by turning the two knobs on the side of the maze.



8 Foot Putting Green: Practice your putting on a putting green with an elevation rise in the last foot.



Dartboard: Practice your dart throwing by playing darts.

APPENDIX B
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Adriana Samper

From: Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 05/14/2012

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 05/14/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1205007821

Study Title: Complexity in Hedonic Experiences

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.