

Shopping Goals, Goal Concreteness, and Conditional Promotions

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We propose a two-stage model to describe the increasing concreteness of consumers' goals during the shopping process, testing the model with a series of field experiments at a convenience store. Using a number of different process measures (experiment 1), we first established that consumers are less certain of their shopping goals and construe products in less concrete terms when they are in the first (vs. second) stage of the shopping process. The results of experiments 2 and 3 next demonstrate that goal-evoking marketing promotions (e.g., conditional coupons) are more effective in influencing consumers' spending when consumers' goals are less concrete.

Accumulating evidence points to the pivotal role of goals in our daily lives: they provide us with a sense of direction and clarity for our actions and influence the way that we think and behave (Gollwitzer 1990; Kruglanski et al. 2002; Kunda 1990; Locke and Latham 1990). It has been demonstrated that goals can serve as an effective self-regulation mechanism (Shah, Friedman, and Kruglanski 2002), an important source of experienced utility (Kahneman 2000; Loewenstein 1999), and an avenue to satisfy "innate psychological needs" such as competence and autonomy (Deci and Ryan 2000). Building on the concept of goals, we examine how the types of consumption goals consumers have change over time as consumers go through the shopping process. We also test an important marketing implication of these ideas—that the success of marketing actions, such as promotions, depends on the type of goals consumers have when they are exposed to such promotions and on the ways in which these promotions can influence the consumers' goals.

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When considering consumers' goals, it is difficult to imagine that such goals would be highly specified at all times. For example, a thirsty consumer might have an initial goal of drinking something, but this goal might later translate into the more specific goal of drinking a particular flavor of milk shake. Evidence for the idea that goals change from being abstract to more precise is apparent in Trope and Liberman's (2003) construal level theory. From this stream of research, it is becoming clear that individuals define objectives and actions in superordinate terms for target activities in the distant future and translate them into more concrete, subordinate actions only as the target activities draw nearer. For instance, respondents to a questionnaire (Trope and Liberman 2003, 406) construed the activity "locking a door" as "putting a key in the lock" if they were told that the activity was to take place tomorrow but as "securing the house" if it was to take place sometime next year. A more direct treatment of this idea in the goals literature is Gollwitzer's (1990, 1999) mind-set theory. According to Gollwitzer, people's execution of volitional control involves two phases. In the first phase, individuals are uncertain about their goals; they are in a deliberative mind-set and seek to define "a desired performance or an outcome" (Gollwitzer 1999, 494). In the second phase, individuals have already established their goals, and they switch to an implemental mind-set where they pursue implementation intentions and well-defined "when, where, and how responses leading to goal attainment" (494; see Carver and Scheier [1998], Kruglanski and Webster [1996], and Lewin et al. [1944] for other analogous dual-process models of motivation).

Empirical research has shown that, in addition to being associated with different thought contents, these two distinct mind-sets are also characterized by different cognitive orientations tuned toward thoughts and information that are

congruous to the mind-sets. This congruency between mind-set and cognitive orientation further facilitates the attainment of the deliberative and implemental goals by causing selective attention to and encoding of congruent information (Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, and Steller 1990). Furthermore, individuals in a deliberative mind-set are generally more receptive and open minded toward available information, as compared to those in an implemental mind-set. This higher receptivity to information is evident not only in a greater sensitivity to new information but also in an increased readiness and a faster speed of processing peripheral information (Gollwitzer and Bayer 1999; Heckhausen and Gollwitzer 1987).

One other stream of research that might shed some light on the process by which goals become more specific and concrete over time is the work on preference construction in decision making (see Payne, Bettman, and Johnson [1993] for a thorough review). As an example of preference construction, Ariely, Loewenstein, and Prelec (2003, experiment 1) found that participants' willingness to pay for a bottle of '98 Côtes du Rhône was highly correlated with the price equivalent to the last two digits of their social security number when they were first asked whether they would be willing to pay that particular price for the wine (although the participants were reminded that their social security numbers were random quantities that conveyed no relevant information). What this and other research in the same vein demonstrates is that consumers' preferences are generally ill defined and incomplete, and when the time to make a decision arrives, consumers "construct" their preferences in a way that is based partially on their internal likes and dislikes and partially on the environmental cues available at the time that they make the decision (Huber, Payne, and Puto 1982; Tversky, Sattath, and Slovic 1988; Tversky and Simonson 1993). In terms of its applicability to goals and how they change over time, the work on preference construction suggests that goals might not only change because of their natural progression but that they are defined by their context and available environmental cues (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999), particularly when the goals are not concrete or have not already been defined. This differential influence of contextual cues on goal definition as a function of the concreteness (or stage) of goals resonates with the aforementioned finding by Gollwitzer and his colleagues (Gollwitzer and Bayer 1999; Heckhausen and Gollwitzer 1987) that individuals in a deliberative (vs. implemental) mind-set are more receptive toward new information.

Integrating the general ideas from Trope and Liberman's construal level theory, Gollwitzer's mind-set theory, and the work on preference construction leads us to a two-stage framework that combines the increasing concreteness of shopping goals with the sensitivity of these goals to contextual influence—we refer to this theory as the *shopping goals theory*. According to this framework, the initial stage of shopping is a stage where consumers are generally uncertain about what they want to buy or how much they want to spend and are thus susceptible to contextual and external influences as they

consider different factors in constructing their shopping goals. Once consumers have constructed concrete shopping goals, they move to a second stage, one that is characterized by goal determinism and action tenacity. In this stage, consumers largely adhere to the goals they have set. They strive to attain these goals and are thus less susceptible to contextual and external influences such as promotions.

TESTING THE SHOPPING GOALS THEORY

To test this two-stage theory, we first have to demonstrate that consumers conceive of their shopping goals in different ways during their shopping process. That is, we need to show that they think about their goals initially in more general and abstract terms and later in more specific and concrete terms.

We first tested this idea by approaching consumers either before or after they had entered a store, examining the differences in how they construed the products they were about to buy and the amount of money they were considering spending. We considered the following hypothesis:

- H1:** Compared to consumers in the initial stage of their shopping, those in the later stage of their shopping are (a) more certain of what they want to buy and how much they are going to spend and (b) construe the products they are considering in lower-level, more concrete terms.

The next aspect of the theory to be tested is the idea that the influence of external factors (e.g., promotions) on shopping goals can be more pronounced in the first stage of the shopping process but more limited in the second stage. We tested this idea in a series of field experiments held at a convenience store using conditional coupons that entitled customers to a monetary discount if they spent at least a stipulated amount (e.g., "Spend \$X or more and get \$Y off"). We selected this type of coupon specifically for its goal-evoking property—the minimum spending requirements on these coupons can suggest concrete spending targets for consumers. Common examples of conditional promotions include offers of free shipping conditional on spending \$X at Amazon.com and promises of a small gift conditional on spending \$Y at the Clinique counter (see also Nunes and Drèze [2004] for a discussion of the effects of concrete rewards in loyalty programs). In our field experiments, we approached consumers under different conditions that should make them think about their shopping goals at different levels of concreteness (we did so using different operational definitions for the causes of the transition from the first stage to the second stage of the model). We examined how the type of coupon promotion interacts with these conditions to influence consumer spending, thereby testing the following hypothesis:

- H2:** The effects of conditional coupons with minimum spending requirements are likely to be larger when consumers are in the initial stage of their shopping

when their shopping goals are less concrete, relative to when consumers are in the later stage of their shopping when their shopping goals are more concrete.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: we first describe a series of five experiments we conducted at a convenience store, each of which looked at one measure related to hypothesis 1. Having established that consumers do indeed have different mind-sets and different levels of goal concreteness in different stages of the shopping process, we next report the results of two field experiments involving conditional coupons conducted at the same convenience store. In experiment 2, we tested the ability of conditional coupons to either increase or reduce spending under conditions where consumers' own goals were either more or less concrete. The results show that such coupons can either increase or decrease spending, depending on the required minimum spending, but that this is the case only when consumers' goals are not concrete. In experiment 3, using a different manipulation of goal concreteness, we again demonstrate the effectiveness of conditional coupons (relative to unconditional coupons) in evoking the construction of concrete shopping goals and the dependence of this effectiveness on the concreteness of consumers' own shopping goals. We conclude with a general discussion of our findings and suggestions for future research.

GENERAL EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

We conducted a series of field experiments at a local convenience store—La Verde's Market—to test the proposed theory. Since all of the experiments utilized the same basic setup, we will first provide general details about the experimental environment. Formed in 1989, La Verde's Market is a midsize convenience store situated within the premises of a large northeastern urban university. The store has a floor space of 4,000 sq. ft. and stocks more than 20,000 SKUs (stock keeping units) of common grocery products and household items. About 3,500 customers visit the store each day, with the average customer spending about \$4 per visit and buying two items at the store. (These figures were obtained from an analysis of La Verde's Market's transaction history, as well as from interviews with both the owner and the manager of the store.)

In the field experiments, a research assistant, disguised as a store employee, randomly handed customers either different types of questionnaires (in experiments 1A–1E) or coupon promotions (in experiments 2 and 3) that were either conditional (i.e., "Spend \$X or more and get \$1 off") or unconditional (i.e., "Spend any amount and get \$1 off"). Whereas experiment 1 was based on responses to surveys and hence posed no particular challenge, experiments 2 and 3 involved real purchases and thus some experimental challenges. The first challenge was to minimize any potential selection bias due to missing data. In order to capture the spending amounts of all customers whether or not they met the spending conditions, the cashiers were instructed to ask

all customers for their coupons during checkout. We were not fully successful in this endeavor. Inevitably, there were some customers who entered the store and exited without buying anything, such that we were unable to account for their data. Nonetheless, given that the number of these "missing coupons" across conditions was comparable, we do not believe that these missing data limit our analysis (moreover, pilot studies that varied greatly in the proportion of coupons accounted for showed the same pattern of results). The second challenge involved variability in spending. Although average spending was generally low across the various conditions and experiments (below \$5), there were some large transactions, usually made by departments or student groups. To avoid any biases due to these outliers, we removed transactions that were above \$20 (just over 3 SDs above average spending) from the analyses of all experiments. However, we checked, and retaining these in the analyses does not change the results or the conclusions.

EXPERIMENTS 1A–1E: UNCERTAINTY AND PRODUCT CONSTRUCTION

Overview and Method

To test the hypothesis that consumers modify their goals and cognitive orientations during the shopping process, we designed a set of five experiments, each of which used a different dependent measure to capture the change in the concreteness of consumers' goals over the course of their shopping. These dependent measures examined either how certain consumers were about the amount they expected to spend or how concretely they construed the products they considered buying.

In each experiment, we "manipulated" the location where we approached consumers—50 customers were approached just outside the store at the entrance, and 50 were approached along the back aisles inside the store. The rationale for this manipulation is based on the intuition that customers inside the store are more likely to have, at least partially, made up their minds about what they want to buy, given that they are closer to having to make such decisions. Hence, the customers who are asked to respond just before entering the store are representative of those with less concrete shopping goals (in the earlier stage of their shopping), whereas the customers who are asked to respond inside the store are representative of those with more concrete shopping goals (in the later stage of their shopping.)

To measure the potential change in consumers' degree of certainty of their spending amount across the two stages, we asked customers for their estimated spending and their confidence in the accuracy of the estimate. In experiment 1A, we first asked customers to estimate how much they thought they were going to spend at the store and then had them indicate (on a scale from 1 to 10) how certain they were of this amount. In experiment 1B, we asked customers to indicate the upper and lower bounds on their expected spending. We predicted that customers interviewed just before entering the store (those in the earlier stage of their

shopping) would have less concrete goals than those interviewed inside the store (those in the later stage of their shopping) and that they would thus express a lower degree of certainty in their expected spending.

To measure the potential change in the degree of concreteness of consumers' product construal, we asked respondents to create and classify shopping lists into categories. In experiment 1C, we asked the customers to list the items that they planned to buy. Subsequently, two independent raters (blind to the objective of the experiment) were asked to rate the degree of concreteness of the shopping lists on a scale from 1 to 3. In experiment 1D, we asked customers to list the items that they would buy if there was a storewide 20% discount in the store. Following two filler questions, customers were then asked to classify the items that they had just listed into as many or few categories as they wanted or deemed appropriate (ranging from broad categories [e.g., food, drinks] to narrower categories [e.g., soda, lunch, candy]). In experiment 1E, which was based on Liberman, Sagristano, and Trope (2002, study 1), we gave each customer a fixed list of 20 products (e.g., Diet Coke, Duracell AA Batteries, and Lays Potato Chips) to categorize as they wanted or deemed appropriate. We predicted that customers interviewed just before entering the store (those in the earlier stage of their shopping) would have less concrete goals than those interviewed inside the store (those in the later stage of their shopping) and would thus construe products in less concrete terms. In particular, we expected customers in the earlier stage of their shopping to list less concrete items on their shopping lists (experiment 1C) and to use fewer (and broader) categories to classify their own shopping lists (experiment 1D) as well as the

external shopping lists that we provided for them (experiment 1E).

Results and Discussion

The results of these five experiments are summarized in table 1. Collectively these results support the idea that consumers have less concrete shopping goals when they first enter a store but more concrete shopping goals and well-defined preferences as their shopping progresses (perhaps after they have gained greater exposure to the products in the store and/or have had more time to consider these products in relation to their own needs and preferences). Consistent with our predictions, the customers, in the earlier stage of their shopping, expressed a significantly lower degree of certainty (experiment 1A) and a bigger numeric range (experiment 1B) for their expected spending amount. Their lower degree of certainty in their expected spending amount was also reflected in their significantly more varied responses in experiments 1A and 1B. At the same time, in the earlier stage of their shopping, customers listed less concrete products (e.g., generic categories instead of specific brands) on their shopping lists (experiment 1C) and used fewer (and broader) categories to classify the products that they self-generated (experiment 1D) or that were given to them (experiment 1E). These results support the first basic aspect of our theory (hypothesis 1). Our next step is to examine whether this difference in goal concreteness creates differential susceptibility to particular types of marketing promotions. In experiments 2 and 3, we will use price promotions to test hypothesis 2—that the effects of conditional coupons are likely to be larger when consumers are in the

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF EXPERIMENT 1 RESULTS

Dependent measure		Mean	Significance testing
Experiment 1A: Spending certainty (1 = very uncertain, 10 = very certain)	Outside	7.70 (1.72)	Means: $t(98) = 4.56, p < .001$ Variances: $F(49, 49) = 2.48, p = .002$
	Inside	9.02 (1.10)	
Experiment 1B: Spending range (\$)	Outside	3.92 (3.64)	Means: $t(98) = 3.86, p < .001$ Variances: $F(49, 49) = 4.31, p < .001$
	Inside	1.72 (3.08)	
Experiment 1C: Concreteness of shopping list (1 = least concrete, 3 = most concrete)	Outside	1.97 (.66)	Means: $t(98) = 3.29, p = .001$
	Inside	2.40 (.65)	
Experiment 1D: Number of categories used in classification	Outside	2.24 (.96)	Means: $t(98) = 2.03, p = .04$
	Inside	2.70 (1.28)	
Experiment 1E: Number of categories used in classification	Outside	4.82 (1.70)	Means: $t(95) = 2.76, p = .007$
	Inside	6.08 (2.72)	

NOTE.—Standard deviations are in parentheses. For experiment 1C, interrater reliability was 86%.

earlier stage of their shopping (with less concrete shopping goals), compared to when they are in the later stage of their shopping (with more concrete shopping goals).

EXPERIMENT 2: COUPON CONDITIONS AS SHOPPING GOALS

Overview and Method

One of the goals of experiment 2 was to replicate the general findings from experiment 1 using a measure of real expenditures and to test if indeed consumers in the earlier stage of the shopping process are more susceptible to conditional coupons of the form "Spend \$X and get \$1 off." As in experiment 1, we manipulated the degree of concreteness of the consumers' shopping goals by handing out coupons to them either just before they entered the store (i.e., low level of goal concreteness) or when they were along the back aisles of the store (i.e., high level of goal concreteness).

In addition, since the issue of financial incentives is central to coupons, we needed a control to tease apart the goals and financial incentives accounts in explaining consumers' redemption of conditional coupons. Without such controls, it would be impossible to claim that consumers are using these coupons to construct concrete shopping goals rather than merely to enjoy financial savings. To achieve this objective, we also manipulated the condition (minimum required spending level) of the coupons to be either above or below consumers' typical spending at the convenience store. The logic for this manipulation is that the goals and financial incentives accounts have divergent predictions for the spending of consumers who receive conditional coupons with a lower-than-average (but not higher-than-average) spending requirement. If the financial value of coupons is the only factor that consumers consider in their spending decisions, conditional coupons with lower-than-average minimum required spending can be less effective in increasing consumers' spending than those with higher-than-average minimum required spending, but this should not have an overall negative effect on their spending (relative to how much they would have spent without any coupons). In contrast, the goals account predicts that these lower-than-average coupons can result in the construction of lower shopping goals and thus a decrease in overall spending.

To set the coupon condition levels in this experiment, we started with an analysis of La Verde's Market's transaction history, which showed that the average consumer spends about \$4 on each visit. Based on this baseline, the spending requirement for the high minimum spending level was set at \$6, whereas the spending requirement for the low minimum spending level was set at \$2. In the conditional \$6 (conditional \$2) coupon condition, consumers were given a coupon that entitled them to receive a \$1 discount if their total purchase was at least \$6 (\$2).

In sum, we investigated whether conditional coupons can both increase and decrease consumer's spending depending on the coupon condition levels and whether this increase or decrease would be larger when consumers' shopping goals

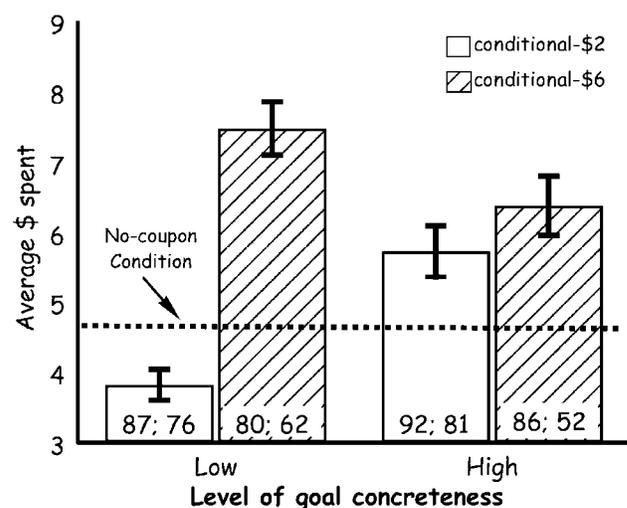
were less concrete (before entering the store). The overall design was a 2 (level of goal concreteness: low vs. high) \times 2 (minimum required spending: \$2 vs. \$6) between-subjects design. One hundred coupons per condition were handed out in line with the general procedure described previously.

Results

Customers' total spending was analyzed in a 2 (level of goal concreteness) \times 2 (minimum required spending) ANOVA, revealing a significant main effect of minimum required spending ($F(1, 341) = 20.52, p < .001$), a nonsignificant main effect of the level of goal concreteness ($F(1, 341) = 1.05, p = .31$), and a significant interaction between the level of goal concreteness and minimum required spending ($F(1, 341) = 14.95, p < .001$).

As shown in figure 1, consumers who received the coupons inside the store (i.e., consumers with a higher level of goal concreteness) responded in a similar way to the two levels of minimum spending ($F(1, 341) = 1.42, p = .23$). In contrast, consumers who received the two types of coupons outside the store (i.e., consumers with a lower level of goal concreteness) differed in their average spending ($F(1, 341) = 42.72, p < .001$). Examining separately the two coupon types, planned contrasts revealed that, relative to the customers who received the conditional \$6 coupons inside the store, those who received the conditional \$6 coupons outside the store spent significantly more ($F(1, 341) = 3.90, p < .05$). In contrast, relative to the customers who received the conditional \$2 coupons inside the store, those who received the conditional \$2 coupons out-

FIGURE 1
CUSTOMER SPENDING IN EXPERIMENT 2



NOTE.—Error bars denote standard errors. The two numbers at the base of each column denote, respectively, the number of coupons accounted for and the number of coupons redeemed.

side the store spent significantly less ($F(1, 341) = 12.43$, $p < .001$).

In order to better understand how the coupons influenced individual spending levels, we used two different binary variables to code whether each consumer spent just above the required minimum expenditure of the two coupons (\$2–\$4 and \$6–\$8). Using these two variables as dependent measures, we ran two separate logistic regressions with dummy independent variables for the two factors of minimum required spending and level of goal concreteness, as well as their interaction. As predicted, the interaction terms significantly predicted customers' probability of spending within the \$2 range just above the two minimum required spending levels ($\beta = 1.79$ and $p = .007$ with \$2–\$4 spending as the dependent measure; $\beta = 1.64$ and $p = .003$ with \$6–\$8 spending as the dependent measure). As can be seen in figure 2, for customers who received the conditional \$2 coupon, the propensity to spend between \$2 and \$4 was significantly higher when their level of goal concreteness was low (57.5%) than when it was high (28.3%; $\chi^2(1) = 14.44$, $p < .001$). Similarly, for customers who received the conditional \$6 coupon, the propensity to spend between \$6 and \$8 was marginally higher when their level of goal concreteness was low (47.5%) than when it was high (32.6%; $\chi^2(1) = 3.24$, $p = .07$).

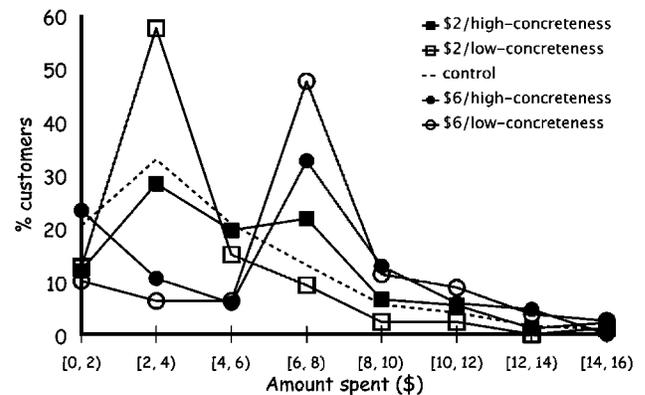
Discussion

Consistent with hypothesis 2, the results of experiment 2 indicate that issuing conditional coupons to customers has differential effects on their spending depending on the concreteness of their shopping goals (i.e., the location where these coupons were handed out). This experiment also demonstrates that customers' spending tends to shift with the minimum spending conditions stated on their coupons. When the required spending level is higher than their typical spending level, they spend more; when the required spending level is lower, they spend less. This difference in response to the two types of conditional coupons illustrates that consumers' redemption of conditional coupons cannot be completely accounted for by pure financial incentives.

We replicated this latter result in a separate one-factor experiment where, instead of minimum spending requirements, we handed out coupons that required customers to buy a certain number of items before they could enjoy a discount. Keeping in mind that the typical customer who visits the store buys an average of two items, we found that customers in the experiment who had to buy at least three items before they could enjoy a discount ($N = 85$, $M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.17$) bought significantly more items than those without coupons ($N = 114$, $M = 2.69$, $SD = 2.13$; $t(197) = 2.31$, $p = .02$), whereas those who had to buy just one item before they could enjoy a discount ($N = 89$, $M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.50$) bought significantly fewer items than those without coupons ($t(201) = 2.19$, $p = .03$). In addition to the replication, these results also show that the goal-evoking property of conditional coupons is not exclu-

FIGURE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF CUSTOMER SPENDING IN EXPERIMENT 2



sive to the use of monetary conditions (and thus goals) but can potentially be generalized to other types of conditions.

Taken together, the results in this experiment demonstrate that conditional coupons are “time sensitive.” This type of promotion seems to be more effective when consumers are in the earlier stage of their shopping (when their goals are less concrete and when they are more open to external influences) than when they are in the later stage of their shopping. If consumers were consistently flexible in deciding what to buy or how much to spend throughout their shopping process, then they should have been equally likely to set new shopping goals based on the coupons' conditions regardless of where they had obtained the coupons. Thus, these results suggest that the flexibility of consumers' shopping targets is higher when they enter the store, causing them to shape their behavior according to the conditions on the coupons. Once inside the store, consumers' targets are more concrete and rigid, and the effectiveness of the conditional coupons is largely diminished.

EXPERIMENT 3: GOAL-RELEVANCE RECALL

Overview and Method

In experiment 2, we demonstrate the effects of changes in goal concreteness by using a type of promotion that has goal-evoking properties (i.e., conditional coupons) and by relying on a natural change in the concreteness of consumers' goals during the shopping process. While relying on natural variations, such as location, is useful in reducing possible demand effects and interference with consumers' natural shopping process, this manipulation also lacks empirical control. In experiment 3, we replaced the location manipulation with another manipulation that was aimed at the same general construct of goal concreteness but that used a more controlled, though more intrusive, manipulation. Using a different manipulation had a further advantage of providing another operational definition for goal concreteness.

The manipulation we chose hinged on the similarity between the time of day of the focal visit to the convenience store and the time of day of a recalled previous visit. The logic of this manipulation is based on the idea that recalling a previous visit that took place during a similar time can activate relevant goals for the focal shopping and thus make the focal goals concrete, while recalling a previous visit that took place during a dissimilar time is most likely to activate irrelevant goals and to have a weaker effect on the concreteness of the focal goals. Thus, the customers' current shopping goals might be made more concrete if they recalled what they had bought during a relevant past shopping experience instead of an irrelevant one.

In experiment 3, as customers approached the entrance of the convenience store, a research assistant (disguised as a store employee), holding a coupon in his hand, asked them to recall what they had bought on a previous visit to the store. Once a customer had given his or her answer, the research assistant handed the customer the coupon he was holding in his hand and immediately approached another incoming customer. This procedure was used to ensure that customers did not think their answers would influence in any way the coupon they would get, as well as to make it clear to them that their responses were not recorded.

The first factor we manipulated was the type of coupon. To test the effectiveness of conditional coupons, we contrasted consumers' response to conditional coupons ("Spend \$X and get \$1 off") with their response to unconditional coupons ("Spend any amount and get \$1 off"). The basic idea for this comparison is that, although both types of coupon provide a financial incentive, only the conditional coupon can provide a goal for spending. Another difference from experiment 2 is that experiment 3 was conducted in the evening (after 5 p.m.). Given that the level of spending in the store was higher in the evenings (many customers bought dinner foods), we used a higher minimum required expenditure of \$8 for the conditional coupon.

The second factor we manipulated was the level of fit between the focal shopping visit and the recalled shopping visit. In the condition designed to evoke a similar past experience, customers were asked to indicate what they had bought the last time they had visited the store in the evening, while in the condition designed to evoke a dissimilar past experience, customers were asked to indicate what they had bought the last time they had visited the store in the morning.

The overall experimental design was a 2 (coupon type: conditional vs. unconditional) \times 2 (level of goal concreteness: low vs. high) between-subjects design. One hundred coupons were handed out in each condition. We predicted that the similarity to the recalled shopping visit would influence the concreteness level of consumers' current shopping goals and that the level of goal concreteness would in turn influence consumers' susceptibility to the goals evoked by the conditional coupons. If this prediction holds, customers who were asked the time-relevant question (evening recall) should be less influenced by the conditional coupons, as compared to those who were asked the time-irrelevant question

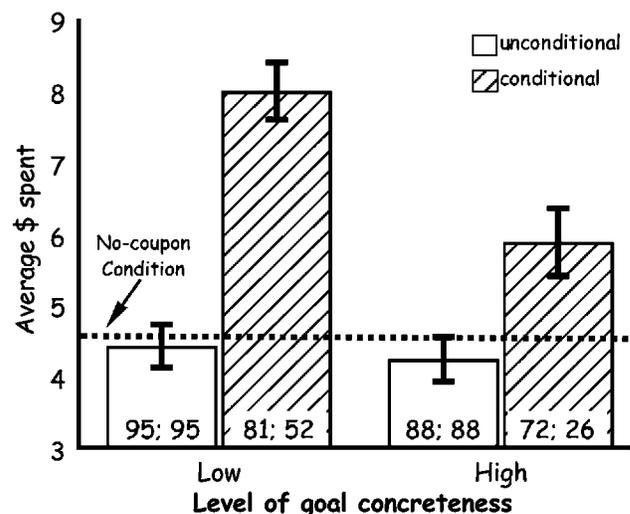
(morning recall). Based on this reasoning, however, the type of recall question should have no effect on the spending of customers who received the unconditional coupon.

Results

Customers' total spending was analyzed in a 2 (coupon type) \times 2 (level of goal concreteness) ANOVA, revealing a significant main effect of coupon type ($F(1, 332) = 41.18, p < .001$), a significant main effect of goal concreteness ($F(1, 332) = 8.01, p = .005$), and a significant interaction effect between coupon type and goal concreteness ($F(1, 332) = 5.66, p = .02$). As shown in figure 3, on the whole, customers who received the conditional coupon (with a higher-than-average minimum required spending) spent significantly more than those who received the unconditional coupon. However, this difference was less pronounced for the customers who were asked to recall a time-relevant shopping experience, which presumably made their goals more concrete, relative to those who were asked to recall a time-irrelevant shopping experience. Examining the separate effects of the two coupon types, planned contrasts revealed that, for customers who received the conditional coupon, those who had to recall a time-relevant shopping experience (i.e., high level of goal concreteness) spent significantly less than those who had to recall a time-irrelevant shopping experience (i.e., low level of goal concreteness; $F(1, 332) = 12.45, p < .001$). However, the time relevance of the recall question had no significant effect on customers who received the unconditional coupon ($F(1, 332) = 0.11, p = .74$).

A broader inspection of spending levels (see fig. 4 for the proportion of customers who spent within different spending

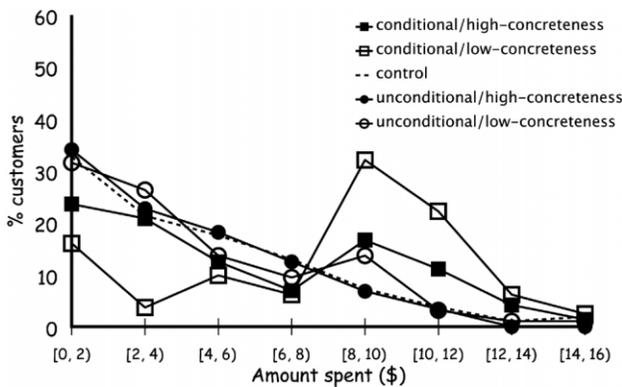
FIGURE 3
CUSTOMER SPENDING IN EXPERIMENT 3



NOTE.—Error bars denote standard errors. The two numbers at the base of each column denote, respectively, the number of coupons accounted for and the number of coupons redeemed.

FIGURE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF CUSTOMER SPENDING IN EXPERIMENT 3



brackets in each condition) revealed that, consistent with the general spending pattern found in experiment 2, among customers who received the conditional coupon in experiment 3, those whose shopping goals were less concrete (i.e., those who recalled their last morning purchase) were more likely to spend just above the minimum required spending (i.e., \$8–\$10) on the coupons than those whose shopping goals were more concrete (i.e., those who recalled their last evening purchase; 32.1% vs. 16.7%, $\chi^2 = 4.05$, $p = .04$). In contrast, among customers who received the unconditional coupon, there was no significant difference in the proportion of customers who spent within the same bracket between customers with different levels of goal concreteness (6.8% vs. 13.7%, $\chi^2 = 1.66$, $p = .2$).

Discussion

The results of experiment 3 once again demonstrate the basic effect of conditional coupons as drivers of spending behavior, as well as consumers' differential responsiveness to these coupons contingent on the level of concreteness of their current shopping goals. Experiment 3 thus provides a conceptual replication of experiment 2 while using a more controlled (and intrusive) experimental manipulation. With these results in mind, we are more confident that the results of experiment 2 were not due to a particular way of "manipulating" the concreteness of consumers' shopping goals. Notably, the results also demonstrate the importance of the relevance of cues for goals beyond their mere presence.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Building on separate streams of research—mind-set theory, construal level theory, and preference construction—we described a two-stage model by which consumers construct and complete concrete shopping goals or targets. According to this view, consumers start the shopping process with ill-defined goals, construct concrete goals as they go through

the shopping process, and after constructing these goals implement them.

As a first test of the shopping goals theory, we conducted a series of field experiments at a convenience store, using a number of process measures to ascertain the different goal orientations and mind-sets that consumers have in the two stages of the shopping model. In congruence with the predictions of the theory (hypothesis 1), experiments 1A–1E demonstrate that consumers who are in the earlier stage of their shopping process are not only less certain about their shopping lists and spending but also construe products in higher-level, less concrete terms. Having established that consumers do indeed have different orientations and concreteness of shopping goals in the two stages of the shopping model, we next examined the marketing implication of consumers' differential responsiveness to promotions across the two different stages (experiments 2 and 3). We tested whether marketing promotions that could help consumers set shopping goals (such as conditional coupons) would be more effective in the earlier stage than in the later stage of their shopping (hypothesis 2). We found that (1) consumers tend to use conditional coupons with minimum spending requirements to set concrete shopping goals, increasing or decreasing their spending in tandem with the required level stipulated on the coupons; (2) a substantial proportion of consumers tend to spend just above the condition level, consistent with a shopping goals account; and (3) the propensity for consumers to be influenced by conditional coupon promotions is highly sensitive to the stage at which the consumers receive the coupons. Irrespective of whether consumers' own shopping goals became more concrete naturally during their shopping process (experiments 2) or externally through recall of a relevant prior shopping experience (experiment 3), consumers with more concrete shopping goals were less influenced by the conditional coupons they received as compared to those with less concrete shopping goals.

Together, these results support the two-stage shopping goals theory, where consumers start with fuzzy shopping goals, which became more concrete as the shopping experience progresses. Because of the initial lack of concreteness of their goals, consumers' sensitivity to external cues such as conditional coupons is likely to be higher in the earlier stage of their shopping when their goals are more malleable. However, although shopping goals are potentially labile when consumers are in this initial stage, they can also be rather resistant to change in the later stage of shopping, even in the presence of attractive promotions.

The results of these field experiments might also be useful in extending our understanding of preference construction and promotions more generally. In terms of preference construction, the results suggest that consumers are more susceptible to external influences such as marketing messages, promotions, and context effects in earlier stages of the shopping process but that they are more resistant to these influences once they have selected a course of action. In terms of promotions, in addition to factors such as deal proneness (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, and Burton 1990), advertising

value (Leclerc and Little 1997), and psychological income effect (Heilman, Nakamoto, and Rao 2002), the results of our experiments suggest that the degree of shopping goal concreteness is yet another factor that could influence the effectiveness of in-store promotions, particularly those that evoke the extemporaneous construction of shopping goals.

Looking at the results of our experiments, one might ask whether consumers are aware of the influence of these conditional coupons on their goal setting and subsequent spending. To examine this question, we first conducted another field experiment in which we handed out either conditional or unconditional coupons (as in experiment 3) to customers either inside or outside the store (as in experiment 2). As predicted, the results showed a significant interaction between the two factors on customers' spending ($F(1,347) = 5.44$, $p = .02$); while the location of coupon distribution did not affect the spending of customers who received the unconditional coupon ($p = .28$), those who received the conditional coupon outside the store (i.e., low level of goal concreteness) spent significantly more than those who received the conditional coupon inside the store (i.e., high level of goal concreteness; $p = .03$). Next, we asked a different set of customers to predict, in a within-subjects design, the results of this experiment. Consistent with the actual behavior, the respondents predicted that the conditional coupon would lead to higher average spending than the unconditional coupon ($p < .001$). However, in stark contrast to the actual behavior, the respondents predicted that customers who received coupons inside the store would spend more (not less) than those who obtained them at the entrance of the store, regardless of the type of coupon ($p = .004$). These results suggest that, although consumers can intuit the effects of the financial incentives of conditional coupons on spending decisions, they cannot intuit the interaction between their level of goal concreteness and the effectiveness of conditional coupons on spending decisions.

Other Accounts for the Effects of Conditional Coupons: "Deal Seeking" and Anchoring

In our field experiments, we used conditional coupons as a vehicle to demonstrate that when consumers do not have well-defined preferences or concrete shopping goals, they can construct shopping goals based on external promotional devices. One way to think about conditional coupons is that the conditions themselves help define the best deal consumers can get, and it is consumers' proclivity for deal seeking that drives their subsequent purchasing behavior. For example, having received a coupon that offers \$1 with a minimum spending of \$6, consumers could evaluate the magnitude of the discount as a ratio to their spending, hence perceiving the \$1 discount to be greater if they were to spend closer to \$6 than \$12. Yet another related way to think about the implied "deal attractiveness" of conditional coupons is that they signal to consumers information (or expectations) regarding deal value and scarcity (Inman, Peter, and Ra-

ghubir 1997) or cues about the idiosyncratic fit between consumers and coupons (Kivetz and Simonson 2003).

These general alternative perspectives suggest that a fruitful venue for future research could involve a deeper understanding of the complete set of inferences consumers can draw from the conditional coupons that they receive regarding the value of the offered deal, its scarcity, or the level of idiosyncratic fit between them and the coupons as a way to understand the effects of such promotions on consumers' behavior. We should note, however, that while it is important to understand the inferences consumers draw from conditional coupons, such inferences are unlikely to be able to account for the changes in construal levels reported in experiment 1, the interactions with the location of coupon distribution in experiment 2, or the interactions with the relevance of shopping recall in experiment 3.

Another way to interpret the effects of the conditional coupons might be based on the consumers' anchoring on the required minimum spending amounts on the conditional coupons (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). At first glance, our experimental manipulations do not seem to have much in common with the most standard manipulations of anchoring, which are based on irrelevant anchors such as numbers on a roulette wheel (Tversky and Kahneman 1974), social security numbers (Ariely et al. 2003), and other forms of unrelated numerical priming (Chapman and Johnson 1999; Mussweiler and Strack 2001), as well as explicitly asking participants to compare these anchors with the target. Yet, it is possible that goals and anchoring are conceptually related mechanisms. In fact, Wilson and his colleagues (1996) demonstrated empirically that anchoring can occur even in the absence of any specific instruction to compare the anchor and the target, an effect they called the "basic anchoring effect." Related results by Wansink, Kent, and Hoch (1998) also proposed anchoring as the process to describe how promotions such as multiple-unit prices and purchase quantity limits can influence the quantity of products that consumers buy.

One way to distinguish between the goals account and the anchoring account is to consider the expected effectiveness of different types of anchors. In experiment 3, customers who received conditional coupons were given two anchors—one (high) anchor was based on the minimum required spending (\$8), and the other was based on the amount that they recalled to have spent on their previous visit to the store. This second anchor was low for the time-irrelevant conditions (based on the amount that they had spent in the morning) and high for the time-relevant conditions (based on the amount that they had spent in the evening). Based on a simple anchoring account, one would predict that the consumers who received two high anchors would spend more than those who received one high and one low. The prediction of the goals account, which was supported by the data, is the opposite—evoking the high-relevance recall (i.e., high second anchor) should reduce consumers' spending with the conditional coupons com-

pared to evoking the low-relevance recall (i.e., low second anchor).

Another way in which the basic anchoring account and the goals account differ is the time course of their effectiveness (Mussweiler and Strack 2001). If we consider our shopping setup, the straightforward prediction of anchoring is that anchors introduced at the closest proximity in time to when buying decisions are made should, arguably, have the largest influence on behavior. This leads to the prediction that providing coupons inside the store just next to the goods will have the highest impact. The prediction of the goals account is the opposite—providing the coupons earlier in the shopping process might be more effective. Again, the experimental results support the goals account over the basic anchoring account. Nonetheless, more work is clearly needed to better understand the process of anchoring and adjustment and its links to goal setting.

Future Research: Underlying Mechanisms of the Two-Stage Model

There are many unanswered questions regarding the proposed two-stage shopping goal process. First, while the current research conceptualizes goals in line with Gollwitzer's (1990) mind-set theory, it is unclear whether the concept of two goal types or two goal stages is a useful simplification of a truly continuous process or whether there are indeed two distinct stages by which goals are defined. Being able to answer this question will also help us understand the factors that can shift consumers from the first stage to the second stage of their shopping, as well as factors that contribute toward an early or late shift between the first and second changes.

A second unanswered question pertains more specifically to the progression from the first stage to the second stage of the shopping process. According to our model, consumers who are in the second stage cannot go back to the first stage of their shopping (even when they obtain new information or new incentives). While the results of our experiments support this unidirectional progression, it is not clear whether consumers can, under some circumstances, traverse more freely between the two stages, nor is it clear why movement between these two stages is not symmetric. Broadly speaking, there are multiple candidate accounts for why people might set goals and stick to them: ambiguity aversion (Webster and Kruglanski 1994), self-control (Shah and Kruglanski 2003), loss aversion (Heath, Larrick, and Wu 1999), emotional depression (Kuhl and Beckman 1994), and the most likely candidate, in our opinion, shopping efficiency (Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent 2000). From the perspective of shopping efficiency (Chandon et al. 2000), consumers are cognitive misers and therefore use the coupon conditions as a convenient means to help them set spending goals, subsequently refusing to entertain other goals for similar cognitive efficiency reasons (i.e., to avoid the cost of thinking) or to avoid the emotional cost of changing their decisions. One way to test this particular account could be

to use individual differences such as need for cognition (Cacioppo and Petty 1982) or need for cognitive closure (Webster and Kruglanski 1994) to shed some light on the role of cognitive efficiency in this process.

A third unanswered question concerns the possibility of negative long-term effects of conditional coupons. For example, in our coupon experiments, consumers' pursuit of their externally based goals might have caused them to purchase items that they did not really need or want, leading to possible subsequent regret over their impulsive and imprudent purchases. It would be important to investigate the extent to which such negative long-term behavior can occur in our setting, since such adverse outcomes can lead consumers to develop negative attitudes toward such promotions or toward the retailers using them.

A fourth, and final, unanswered question relates to the degree of generalizability of our experimental findings. For methodological consistency, we have conducted all of our experiments in a local convenience store. Arguably, the process of purchasing more expensive goods, for example, furniture and high-end electronics, might involve more planning, that is, a higher tendency to self-generate concrete shopping goals, but perhaps it would be characterized by even greater openness to revising the decision process. Such factors could cause consumers to be either more or less prone to the contextual goal construction effects that we found, but they should also be informative regarding boundary conditions for these goal effects and, more generally, the mechanisms underlying the two-stage shopping model.

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