

Elastic Justification: How Tempting but Task-Irrelevant Factors Influence Decisions

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This research is concerned with task-oriented decision situations where the decision maker faces two options, one superior on a factor directly related to the given task (called the A factor) and the other superior on a factor not central to the accomplishment of the task but tempting to the decision maker (called the B factor). According to the elastic justification notion, the decision maker may find it unjustifiable to choose the B-superior option over the A-superior option if there is no uncertainty in the A values of the two options, but will construct a justification and become more likely to choose the B-superior option if there is uncertainty. In support of this proposition, two experiments employing a simulated decision situation found that subjects were indeed more likely to choose the B-superior option when there was uncertainty in the A factor than when there was not, no matter whether the uncertainty resided in one of the options (Experiment 1) or in both options (Experiment 2). © 1995 Academic Press, Inc.

Imagine the following: A salesman is asked by his company to take a trip to find as many buyers for a certain product as possible. He has a choice of two destination cities: He can find 60 buyers in one city and 40 in the other but the city with fewer buyers is more enjoyable. Here, the salesman's decision involves two factors, number of buyers and enjoyability of a city. A major difference between these factors is that number of buyers is directly related to the task prescribed to the salesman, namely, to find buyers, and enjoyability of a city is not central to this task but is nevertheless tempting to him. For convenience, let me refer to the

former type of factors—those which are directly related to the task prescribed to the decision maker—as A factors and refer to the latter type of factors—those which are not central to the accomplishment of the prescribed task but nevertheless tempting to the decision maker—as B factors.

The present research examines how the decision maker chooses between an option superior on an A factor (the A-superior option) and an alternative option superior on a B factor (the B-superior option). In the salesman case, for example, the city with more buyers is the A-superior option and the more enjoyable city the B-superior option. A basic assumption underlying this research is that the decision maker will find it unjustifiable to choose the B-superior option over the A-superior option, because doing so apparently deviates from the goal of the given task. This assumption is consistent with the observation by other researchers that in making a choice or judgment people attempt to maintain a sense of accountability (Tetlock & Kim, 1987; Tetlock & Boettger, 1989) and objectivity (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). People do not arbitrarily choose what they want to choose merely because this choice is attractive to them (Klein & Kunda, 1992; Kunda, 1990).

The above assumption implies that the decision maker's hesitation to choose the B-superior option is not because the person doesn't want to choose it but because he or she has no justification. The central proposition of this research, which can be called "elastic justification," is that elasticity in the A factor can provide the decision maker with the justification to choose the B-superior option. Here, "elasticity" refers to uncertainty in the A value of an option; it has nothing to do with the same term in economics. The rationale behind the proposition is that elasticity in the A factor allows the decision maker to bias his or her view of the A values of the options in such a way that the B-superior option may seem not as inferior on the A factor as it originally is, and this biased view makes it more justifiable for the decision maker to choose the B-superior option.

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The elastic justification notion is consistent with two related lines of research in the existing literature. First, people tend to bias their view of events in a self-serving manner (Ditto, Jemmott, & Darley, 1988; Gilovich, 1983; Jemmott, Ditto, & Croyle, 1986; Klein & Kunda, 1992; Kunda, 1990, 1987; Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Showers & Cantor, 1985). For example, subjects expecting to interact with (and therefore motivated to regard positively) a particular schizophrenic person expressed more positive stereotypes of that entire group than subjects not motivated to do so (Klein & Kunda, 1992). Second, ambiguous information allows for multiple interpretations (e.g., Montgomery, 1989a, 1989b), and therefore provides room for people to hold biased views that support their stereotype (e.g. Darley & Gross, 1983; Snyder, Kleck, Strenta & Mentzer, 1979) and belief (e.g., Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Ross & Lepper, 1980). For example, subjects who watched a video of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds taking a test made more discriminatory judgments about these children than subjects who did not watch the video (Darley & Gross, 1983). The video contained ambiguous information and presumably it provided room for subjects to interpret the children's performance in a way consistent with subjects' stereotypes.

If elasticity in the A factor indeed gives the decision maker the justification to choose the B-superior option, then the following hypothesis should be true:

The decision maker will be more likely to choose the B-superior option over the A-superior option if there is elasticity in the A factor than if there is not, even though the (a priori) expected A values of the options in the two cases remain the same.

In terms of the salesman case this hypothesis says that the salesman will be more likely to go to the more enjoyable city if the number of buyers in either city is elastic than if it is fixed even though the expected number of buyers in the elastic case equals the number in the fixed case. The above hypothesis will be referred to as *the elasticity hypothesis* and the effect as *the elasticity effect*.

Depending on the particular form of elasticity, the above hypothesis can be translated into different specific hypotheses. In one form of elasticity, which I call *positive elasticity*, the A value of the A-superior option is fixed but that of the B-superior option is presented in a range. Take the salesman case, for example. Recall that, in the original *fixed* condition, the number of buyers in the less enjoyable city is exactly 60 and that in the more enjoyable city is exactly 40. In the positive elastic condition, the number of buyers in the less enjoyable city remains exactly 60, but that in the more enjoyable city ranges, say, from 10 to 70. Note that the midpoint, or the a priori expected value of the range,

remains 40. With this type of elasticity, the general elasticity hypothesis can be translated as the following *positive elasticity hypothesis*:

The decision maker is more likely to choose the B-superior option if the A value of the B-superior option is presented in a range than if it is a fixed amount, even though the midpoint of the range equals the fixed value.

Parallel to positive elasticity, another form of elasticity, which I call *negative elasticity*, is one where the A value of the A-superior option is presented in a range while that of the B-superior option remains fixed. In the salesman case, the negative elastic condition is one where the number of buyers in the less enjoyable city ranges, say, from 30 to 90 (the midpoint remains at 60), and that in the more enjoyable city remains exactly 40. With this type of elasticity, the general elasticity hypothesis can be translated as the following *negative elasticity hypothesis*:

The decision maker is more likely to choose the B-superior option if the A value of the A-superior option is presented in a range than if it is a fixed amount, even though the midpoint of the range equals the fixed value.

The positive and the negative elasticity hypotheses together suggest that the decision maker is more likely to choose the B-superior option if the A value of one of the two options—no matter which one it is—is elasticized than if the A values of both options are fixed.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Overview. Experiment 1 was designed to test the positive and the negative elasticity hypotheses. Briefly, subjects were led to believe that their task was to proofread text stored in the computer and thereby earn money. The options were two files, one containing more interesting text (personal ads) but a lower error rate, and the other less interesting text (furniture ads) but a higher error rate. Here, error rate was an A factor because it was directly related to the prescribed task—finding errors. Appeal of the files was a B factor because it was not central to this task but presumably tempting to subjects.

The experiment consisted of three conditions. In the fixed condition, the error rate of neither file was elastic. In the positive and the negative elastic conditions, the error rate of the personal ads file and that of the furniture ads were elastic, respectively (see the top portion of Table 1). The dependent variable was the number of pages subjects chose to proofread from each file. Based on the positive and the negative elasticity hy-

potheses, the prediction for this experiment was that both subjects in the positive elastic condition and those in the negative elastic condition would choose to proofread more from the personal ads file than would subjects in the fixed condition.

Subjects. Subjects were 58 undergraduate students from Yale University who participated in the experiment for cash payment. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: fixed, positive elastic, and negative elastic.

Procedures. Every subject was assigned a personal computer and received written instructions on the screen. The instructions began by telling subjects that there were several files in the computer that would be used as stimulus materials in a future experiment about advertising; that two of those files—one containing furniture ads and the other containing personal ads—had been contaminated with inappropriate characters that the computer was unable to identify; and that subjects' task was to proofread and locate the errors in the files.

The furniture ads file contained a list of used furniture ads and the personal ads file a selection of personal ads. In a pretest involving 15 subjects similar to those in the experiment, the personal ads were rated as significantly more interesting than were the furniture ads ($M_s = 3.26$ and 2.26 , respectively, $t(14) = 2.74$, $p < .05$; ratings were made on a 1–6 scale with 1 indicating "very uninteresting" and 6 indicating "very interesting.")

Subjects were then directed to proofread a sample from each file as practice. Subjects were asked to read the text slowly and carefully and to check for inappropriate characters only. Each subject proofread two screens, each containing six errors (i.e., strings of inappropriate characters). The first screen was ostensibly a sample from the furniture ads file. Below are some excerpts.

... (2) Used painting frames, imported, all in mint c_\#ondition. Call 839-2229 after 6 pm. ... (5) Antique oak table, \$120; Sears twin bed, \$100; waterbed mattress, single, frame included, \$30; teak office desk in excell@X_ent condition, \$50; banquet size Pecan wood dining room set with 8 chairs plus hutch, \$125; Walnut dining table with six colonial style chairs, slightly d_@%amaged, \$80. Prices negotiable. Call Jane at 588-2573 or leave message. . .

The second screen was supposedly a sample from the personal ads file. Below are some excerpts:

... (2) Alluring beauty, early 20s, slim, lively, smart, caring, will take down my hair and trade in all the hand-made bagels and home-made ice cream in t\$_%he valley for one intelligent man who wants to eat quiche (rather than make it, "do" it, or jog it off). Va\$#@ley Area 3133. . . (5) Desperate? SWM, 27, 160 lbs, with all the qualities of a good used car (dependable, low miles, looks and runs great, clean, no body rot). Seeks SF !%*to share

a quiet, normal life of co-dependent bliss. Hartford Area 21992. . .

At the right margin of each screen were line numbers for the text. Whenever they found an error, subjects would type the line number where it occurred.

During the proofreading, the computer recorded the number of errors subjects identified. After the proofreading, the computer reported the "total number of errors in the samples" and the "total number of errors you identified." Regardless of whether these two numbers matched, subjects were always told that they did. This was to minimize unnecessary variance in subjects' confidence in the task. Next, subjects were told that they were expected to proofread 10 pages (i.e., 10 screens), and that it was up to them how many pages to proofread from each file. Subjects were also told that they would be paid 2 cents for every error they found, and that they could earn more the more errors they found. Subjects were then asked to type the word "LINK" on the keyboard, ostensibly to get access to the target files in the computer. After that, a message appeared on the screen saying, "For your information: The error rates in the two files are expected to be as follows:" Below that were listed the error rates for the two files.

As illustrated in the upper part of Table 1, the rates were presented differently for subjects in different conditions. For those in the fixed condition, the rates were:

in FURNITUR.ADS: always 9 errors/page
in PERSONAL.ADS: always 7 errors/page

For those in the positive elastic condition, the rates were:

in FURNITUR.ADS: always 9 errors/page
in PERSONAL.ADS: at least 1 error/page, can be as many as 13 errors/page

For those in the negative elastic condition, the rates were:

in FURNITUR.ADS: at least 3 errors/page, can be as many as 15 errors/page
in PERSONAL.ADS: always 7 errors/page

Note that the midpoint of the error rate range for the personal ads file in the positive elastic condition (i.e., 7 errors/page), and the midpoint of the furniture ads file in the negative elastic condition (i.e., 9 errors/page), equaled their respective fixed values in the fixed condition.

Below the rate information on the same screen, subjects were asked to indicate the number of pages they planned to proofread from each file, and were reminded that it was to their advantage to proofread more from the file that had the higher error rate because it would enable them to earn more money. Subjects then en-

tered their responses on the keyboard. This marked the end of the experiment. There was no further proofreading. At the end of the session, subjects were debriefed and paid.

Results

Recall that the prediction for the experiment was that both subjects in the positive elastic condition and those in the negative elastic condition would choose to proofread more from the personal ads file than subjects in the fixed condition. The bottom part of Table 1 summarizes the mean numbers of pages subjects chose to proofread from the two files in the three conditions. As predicted, subjects in both elastic conditions chose to proofread more from the personal ads file than subjects in the fixed condition ($t(40) = 2.78, p < .01$ for the positive elastic condition and $t(36) = 3.18, p < .01$, for the negative elastic condition).

Discussion

The results lend support to both the positive elasticity and the negative elasticity hypotheses, suggesting that the decision maker is indeed more likely to choose the B-superior option over the A-superior option if the A value of either option, no matter which option it is, is presented elastically in a range than if it is presented as a fixed amount.

The positive elasticity finding in Experiment 1 should not be attributed to the illusion of control effect, the tendency for people to feel a sense of control over a chance event and overestimate its expected outcome (e.g., Langer, 1975, 1977; also, Dunn & Wilson, 1990). According to this idea, subjects in the positive elastic condition, where the error rate (and pay rate) of the personal ads file were elastic, may have overestimated the expected pay rate, and therefore exhibited a greater tendency to choose that file. Has this been the case, then subjects in the negative elastic condition, where the error rate (and pay rate) of the *furniture ads*

file were elastic, should have exhibited a greater tendency to choose the *furniture ads* file. However, the result was in the opposite direction.

Experiment 1 raised two questions. First, the general elasticity hypothesis was tested when the A value of only one option was elasticized. Does the hypothesis apply when the A values of *both* options are elasticized? Second, in Experiment 1, the proposition that people bias their view of the A factor in favor of the B-superior option when there is elasticity was only assumed and not tested. Can this bias be demonstrated empirically? Experiment 2 was designed to address these questions. Before introducing Experiment 2, let us first consider how to elasticize the A values of *both* options and then discuss how to assess biases in judgment.

The most obvious way to elasticize the A values of both options is to present the A values of both options in ranges simultaneously. However, this kind of elasticity may be too transparent to produce the elasticity effect. Another way to introduce elasticity to both options is to introduce an "extra" factor that has equivalent but uncertain effects on the A values of the two options. Again take the salesman case for example. Recall that, in the fixed condition, the number of buyers in the more enjoyable city is 40 and that in the less enjoyable city is 60. Now, suppose that the two cities are competing for a big upcoming show, that it is unknown which city will succeed, and that the salesman can find an extra 50 buyers in the city which eventually hosts the show. Here, the uncertain outcome of the show competition constitutes an extra factor. This extra factor introduces elasticity to the number of buyers of both cities. Specifically, depending on which city finally hosts the show, the number of buyers in the more enjoyable city can be either 40 (without the show) or 90 (with the show) and that in the less enjoyable city can be either 60 (without the show) or 110 (with the show). Let me refer to the above kind of elasticity as *dual elasticity*, for in this case the A values of both options are uncertain.

According to the elastic justification idea, the salesman will be more likely to go to the more enjoyable city under the dual elastic condition than under the fixed condition. The reason is: in the dual elastic condition, the salesman can (mis)judge the more enjoyable city to be more likely to host the show and hence allow him to find more buyers. This biased judgment may give the salesman a justification for and hence increase his likelihood of going to the more enjoyable city. Suggested in the above analysis is the following *dual elasticity hypothesis*:

The decision maker is more likely to choose the B-superior option if there is some extra factor that elasticizes the A values of both options than if there is no such a factor.

TABLE 1
Error Rates in and Selected Amounts from the Two Files in the Three Conditions of Experiment 1

		Elasticity conditions		
File	Appeal	Fixed	P.	N.
			Elastic	Elastic
Manipulation:				
Error rate per page				
A	Interesting (personal)	7	1-13	7
B	Uninteresting (furniture)	9	9	3-15
Responses:				
Selected amount (pages)				
A	Interesting (personal)	2.41	4.30	5.19
B	Uninteresting (furniture)	7.59	5.70	4.81

Also suggested in the above analysis is that the salesman will (mis)judge the more enjoyable city to be more likely to host the show than the less enjoyable city. Importantly, this bias is not purely cognitive but motivated by the salesman's desire to seek a justification for going to the more enjoyable city. If number of buyers does *not* depend on which city hosts the show, then the salesman should *not* hold such a biased judgment, or, at least, he should be less likely to do so. The foregoing discussion can be summarized in the following *biased judgment hypothesis*:

The decision maker is more likely to hold a biased judgment of the extra factor in favor of the B-superior option if the A values of the options depend on the extra factor than if they don't.

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

Overview. Experiment 2 was designed to test the dual elasticity hypothesis and the biased judgment hypothesis. The cover story was similar to that used in Experiment 1: Subjects were led to believe that their task was to proofread text on the computer and thereby earn money. Again, the options were a furniture ads file and a personal ads file. The furniture ads file was said to need proofreading more urgently and would thereby allow the subject to earn more money. Here, pay rate was an A factor, because it reflected the relative urgency of the two files for proofreading. Appeal of the files was a B factor, because it was not central to the accomplishment of this task but was presumably tempting to subjects.

The experiment consisted of two conditions: fixed and dual elastic. In both conditions, it was said that one file was shorter than the other. In the fixed condition, the relative importance of the files did not depend on file length. In the dual elastic condition, the shorter file was said to be more important and would pay more. There were two dependent variables: (a) judging which file was shorter, and (b) choosing which file to proofread. From the biased judgment hypothesis and the dual elasticity hypothesis were derived two predictions for the experiment. First, subjects in the dual elastic condition were more likely to judge the personal ads file to be the shorter file than were subjects in the fixed condition. Second, subjects in the dual elastic condition were more likely to choose the personal ads file than were subjects in the fixed condition.

Subjects. Subjects were 70 undergraduate students from Yale University who participated in this experiment as part of their research participation requirement. Subjects were randomly assigned to either the fixed or the dual elastic condition.

Procedures. Every subject worked individually on a personal computer and received written instructions on the screen. The instructions began by telling subjects that there were many files in the computer that would be used as stimulus materials in a future experiment about advertising, that these files had been contaminated with error strings and that each subject was assigned two files to proofread. Ostensibly, these two files were randomly selected from among the many contaminated files for the particular subject, and the files assigned to other subjects were different. The two files were virtually identical to those used in Experiment 1: the personal ads file was a selection of personal ads and the furniture ads file a list of used furniture ads.

Following these instructions, subjects were directed to proofread a sample from each file as practice. Each subject proofread two screens, each containing 3 errors. The first screen was ostensibly a sample page from the personal ads file and the second screen one from the furniture ads file. Both sets of text contained 19 lines per page (per screen). At the right margin of each screen were irregular line codes (e.g., E1, E2, K1, . . .). Using irregular line codes was designed to prevent subjects from being aware of the number of lines contained in the text. The procedure for proofreading was essentially identical to that in Experiment 1. After proofreading each screen of text, subjects were asked a trivial question about the text on the computer (they were asked to choose from among several choices the word that had appeared in the text); all answers, whether correct or not, were said to be correct. This procedure was designed to encourage subjects to read the text carefully.

Following these procedures, subjects were told that due to time limitation they were expected to proofread only one file, and that it was up to them which one to proofread. Subjects were also told that they would receive monetary incentive for proofreading; that the amounts of money for proofreading different files were different depending on how urgently a given file needed proofreading; and that the amounts for proofreading the files selected for them were:

PERSONAL.ADS: \$1.00

FURNITURE. ADS: \$1.40

Subjects were then instructed that each file contained 20 pages (screens), and that most files had 19 lines per page but some had only 18 lines per page. Depending on the condition to which they were assigned, subjects then received different instructions. Those in the fixed condition read,

Note: The previously stated incentives apply to both files that have 19 lines per page and files that have only 18 lines per page. Example: If the incentive for a file is \$1.20, then we will pay you

\$1.20 for proofreading that file, regardless of whether it has 19 lines or 18 lines per page. Of the two files selected for you, chances are that only one file has only 18 lines per page, but we don't know which one it is. Tip: The file that enables you to earn more money is the file that offers the higher incentive, regardless of whether it has 19 lines per page or 18 lines per page.

Subjects in the dual elastic condition read the following instead:

Note: The previously stated incentives only apply to files that have 19 lines per page. Because files that have only 18 lines a page are most important for us, we'll pay you an EXTRA \$1.00 for proofreading a file that has only 18 lines per page. Example: if the incentive for a file is \$1.20, and it has only 18 lines a page, then we will pay you \$1.20 plus \$1.00, or \$2.20, for proofreading that file. Of the two files selected for you, chances are that only one file has only 18 lines per page, but we don't know which one it is. Tip: The file that enables you to earn more money is not necessarily the file that offers the higher incentive; it is the file that has only 18 lines per page.

As a result, the pay rates of the personal ads file and the furniture ads file in the dual elastic condition were in effect elastic between \$1.00 and \$2.00, and between \$1.40 and \$2.40, respectively, while the pay rates of those files in the fixed condition were fixed at \$1.00 and \$1.40, respectively (see top portion of Table 2).

Following the above instructions, subjects were first asked to judge which file had only 18 lines per page. Subjects answered this question by choosing a number between 1 ("definitely PERSONAL.ADS") and 4 ("definitely FURNITUR.ADS"). After that, subjects were asked to choose the file they wanted to proofread. Subjects indicated their choice by pressing a specified key on the keyboard. This marked the end of the experiment. There was no further proofreading. Subjects were debriefed and received \$1.00 cash in addition to experimental credit.

Results

Recall that the predictions for the experiment were (a) that subjects in the dual elastic condition were more likely to judge the personal ads file to be the one that had only 18 lines per page than subjects in the fixed condition and (b) that subjects in the dual elastic condition were also more likely to choose the personal ads file than were subjects in the fixed condition. The middle and the bottom parts of Table 2 summarize the results of the judgment question and the choice question, respectively.

To test the prediction concerning judgment, a *t* test comparing the fixed and the dual elastic conditions was performed on subjects' responses to the judgment question. As predicted, subjects in the dual elastic condition indeed judged the personal ads file as significantly more likely to be the one that had only 18 lines per page than did subjects in the fixed condition ($t(68) = 3.34, p < .005$). (It is interesting to note that, as a mat-

TABLE 2

Pay Rate for, Judgment of File Length of, and Percentage of Subjects Choosing Each File in the Two Conditions of Experiment 2

		Elasticity conditions	
File	Appeal	Fixed	Dual elastic
Manipulation:			
Pay rate (\$/page)			
A	Interesting (personal)	1.00	1.00–2.00
B	Uninteresting (furniture)	1.40	1.40–2.40
Response:			
Judgment of file length			
A	Interesting (personal)	2.34	2.84
B	Uninteresting (furniture)	2.66	2.16
Response:			
Choice (% of subjects)			
A	Interesting (personal)	56	82
B	Uninteresting (furniture)	44	18

Note. The numbers under judgment of file length were converted to a 1–4 scale, greater number indicating greater likelihood of having only 18 lines per page.

ter of fact, neither file had only 18 lines per page according to the samples.) One group *t* tests using the midpoint of the response range (i.e., 2.5) as the expected mean indicated that subjects in the dual elastic condition judged the personal ads file as significantly more likely than the furniture ads file to be the one that had only 18 lines per page ($t(37) = 3.55, p < .001$), but subjects in the fixed condition did not judge either file as significantly more likely to be shorter than the other ($t(31) = 1.35, ns$). It appears that only subjects in the dual elastic condition where pay rates depended on file length had a biased judgment of file length; those in the fixed condition where pay rates did not depend on file length did not seem to have such a biased judgment.

To test the prediction concerning choice, a χ^2 test comparing the fixed and the dual elastic conditions was performed on the percentage of subjects who chose the personal ads file. Again, the result was in the predicted direction and significant: More subjects in the dual elastic condition chose to proofread the personal ads file than those in the fixed condition ($\chi^2(1) = 5.30, p < .05$).

Discussion

The choice responses from this experiment support the dual elasticity hypothesis, suggesting that when faced with an A-superior option and a B-superior option the decision maker is indeed more likely to choose the B-superior option if there is an extra factor that elasticizes the A values of both options than if there is not such an extra factor.

This result should not be attributed to the dilution effect, the tendency for nondiagnostic information to dilute the extremity of predictions (and choices) people make when presented only with diagnostic information (Nisbett, Zukier, & Lumley, 1981; Zukier, 1982). Although file length in this experiment may be regarded as nondiagnostic information, if the inclusion of it simply produced a dilution effect, then subjects' choices in the dual elastic condition should have been more regressive (i.e., closer to 50/50) than those in the fixed condition. The result, clearly, was in the opposite direction.

The judgment responses from Experiment 2 lend support to the biased judgment hypothesis, suggesting that the decision maker indeed distorts his or her judgment of the elastic extra factor in such a direction that the B-superior option may appear less inferior on the A factor than it otherwise is. Note that the exaggeration of the likelihood of the personal ads file to be the one having only 18 lines per page occurred only in the dual elastic condition and not in the fixed condition. Thus, the biased judgment of the file length was not because the personal ads file indeed looked shorter than the furniture ads file, but associated with subjects' desire to choose the personal ads file.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research explores choice between two conflicting options: one superior on a factor directly related to the prescribed task (the A factor) and the other superior on a factor not central to the achievement of the task but tempting to the decision maker (the B factor). It is assumed that the decision maker will find it unjustifiable to choose the B-superior option over the A-superior option if it is unequivocal that the B-superior option is inferior on the A factor. According to the elastic justification idea, elasticity in the A factor may allow the decision maker to (mis)judge the A factor in favor of the B-superior option and thereby construct a justification to choose that option. This proposition leads to the general hypothesis that elasticity in the A factor increases the decision maker's likelihood of choosing the B-superior option.

This hypothesis was tested by the two experiments reported above. The experiments involved different types of elasticity. In Experiment 1 the A value of only one option was elasticized. In Experiment 2 the A values of both options were elasticized. In addition, in the elastic conditions of Experiment 1 the A value (error rate) of the elasticized option could lie anywhere in the given range whereas in the elastic condition of Experiment 2 the A value (pay rate) of each option could be at only one of the two extremes of the specified interval. Even under these disparate conditions, both experiments confirmed the elasticity hypothesis.

There are several possible directions for future research on this topic. First, the kinds of elasticity explored in this research are far from the only forms of elasticity. One direction is to explore other forms of elasticity. For example, dual elasticity may occur not only where there is an extra elasticizing factor (as in Experiment 2) but also when there are multiple attributes with elastic relative weighting. In the latter case, the decision maker can make it justifiable to choose the B-superior option by deemphasizing the attributes on which the A-superior option is superior, or bolstering the attributes on which the B-superior option is superior, or both. These strategies are similar to what Montgomery (1989a, 1989b) refers to as dominance search, that is, the decision maker restructures the representation of the options in such a way that one option—here, the B-superior option—seems dominant.

Second, the basic finding of the present research is that elasticity in the A factor increases one's likelihood of choosing the B-superior option. It would be interesting to see whether this effect works in the reverse direction, that is, whether elasticity in the B factor increases one's likelihood of choosing the A-superior option. My speculation is that the effect, if any, will be weaker. According to the elastic justification idea, the B-superior option is the less justifiable option, and the elasticity effect is a result of the decision maker's need for justification to choose that option. The A-superior option, on the other hand, is the more justifiable option, and therefore the decision maker does not need as much justification to choose that option as to choose the B-superior option.

Finally, in the two experiments reported in this article as well as in the salesman case, the A factor was always associated with monetary gains or losses, and the B factor always a nonmonetary affective factor. However, the elastic justification idea is expected to apply more generally to any task-oriented decision situation where there are conflicts between relatively justifiable factors and relatively unjustifiable but tempting factors, regardless of whether these factors are related to monetary concerns or not. Suppose, for example, that a physician (who is ethical but also interested in money) is contacted by two patients but has the time to see only one of them. One of these patients is wealthier but the other has a more urgent medical condition. In this decision, the urgency of a patient's medical condition is probably a more justifiable factor than the wealth of a patient, even though in this case the urgency factor is not monetary and the wealth factor is. Based on the elastic justification concept, I conjecture that the physician will be more likely to admit the wealthier patient if there is elasticity in the relative urgency of the two patients' medical conditions than if there is not. Generally speaking, a tempting but

(somewhat) unjustifiable factor will have a greater impact on one's decision if there is elasticity in a relatively justifiable factor than if there is not. Of course, this proposition is speculative and awaits further research to test it.

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