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Threats to Hope and Motivated Reasoning of Product Information

ABSTRACT

Three studies find that when hope is threatened consumers engage in motivated reasoning related to products that purport to enable goal attainment. Specifically, they (a) selectively search for information from a product-favorable information source, (b) regard this information as more credible, and (c) are less discriminating of low credibility message arguments. They also (d) require more negative information before they feel that they can evaluate a product's effectiveness, and (e) are more likely to judge the product as effective at helping them attain what they hope for. Motivated reasoning appears to act as a coping mechanism for restoring confidence that what consumers hope for is possible. The implications of this research for theory on motivated reasoning, hope, confidence, self-efficacy, consumer vulnerability to sham products and scams, and public policy are discussed.

Sheila hoped to look good for her upcoming high school reunion. But when she stepped on the scale and found that she had gained weight she began to fear that this goal might not be possible. Her confidence shaken, she scoured weight loss magazines hoping to find a product that could restore her desired weight. She was particularly persuaded by one product that claimed to help people lose 10 pounds in 3 days. Although the ad indicated numerous disclaimers and potentially serious side effects, she disregarded them and decided to try the product for herself.

The example above illustrates a process called motivated reasoning, defined as the process of searching for, evaluating and weighing information, and forming judgments with a self-serving, goal-affirming purpose (Kunda 1990, 1999). Prior research verifies that individuals engage in motivated reasoning when they wish to (a) perceive themselves as free from risk (Kunda 1987; Sherman and Kunda 1989; Lieberman and Chaiken 1992; Menon, et al. 2002), (b) perceive themselves in a positive light (Kunda and Santioso 1989; Dunning, et al. 1995), or (c) reduce cognitive and attitudinal inconsistency (Jain and Maheswaran 2000; Ahluwalia, et al. 2000).

Recent work links emotions like hope with motivated reasoning (MacInnis and de Mello 2005; de Mello and MacInnis 2005). To “hope” is to yearn for an uncertain but possible goal congruent outcome. Hope is threatened when consumers lose confidence that what they yearn for is possible. Such reasoning may be particularly likely when consumers are put in a state of hedonic loss (Tversky and Fox 1995, Lee and Aaker 2004). In these cases, anxiety and a potential loss of self-efficacy is induced as hope that what one yearns for is possible mixes with fear that it is not (de Mello, MacInnis and Folkes 2003, Cubitt and Sugden 2001). To cope with these negative feelings, consumers

engage in motivated reasoning of products that purport to help them attain what they hope for. Rendering this conclusion serves the self-serving purpose of restoring confidence in the possibility of a yearned outcome. Through such a conclusion hope can be restored and negative feelings like fear and anxiety can be assuaged. While these ideas are interesting, empirical tests of their validity is limited. The objective of this article is to test their veracity.

This paper makes several contributions. First, we verify that reduced confidence in attaining what one hopes for is a novel antecedent to motivated reasoning. In the three studies described below, motivated reasoning is indicated by (a) biased search for product supportive information, b) biased evaluation of the credibility of product claims, (c) less discrimination between high and low credibility arguments, (d) less weight placed on negative information in judging product effectiveness, and (e) the formation of a self-serving conclusion regarding product effectiveness. We also add to literature that shows that motivated reasoning is a distinct process with unique effects on information search, information use, and decision-making. Finally, we contribute to the literature on goals by showing that motivated reasoning can restore confidence in goal attainment when hoped is threatened. The three studies that demonstrate these effects are presented next.

STUDY 1

Study one was designed to provide initial evidence for the proposition that when confidence in attaining what one hopes for is threatened, consumers engage in motivated reasoning of products touted as facilitators of goal attainment. Motivated reasoning is

indicated here by (a) selective information search, (b) biased information evaluation, and (c) forming a self-serving conclusion regarding product effectiveness.

Design and Procedures

Ninety-nine undergraduate students were randomly assigned to one of two conditions designed to manipulate perceived confidence about the possibility of attaining an outcome they hope for—here, good academic performance. Respondents, who were preparing for mid-term exams, were asked to judge the clarity, importance and informativeness of an abstract purportedly published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*. The abstract suggested that stress either impaired (enhanced) brain performance, inducing reduced (heightened) confidence in attaining the hoped for goal—good grades. Respondents next participated in a purportedly different study ostensibly conducted by the Office of Student Affairs. That “study” asked students to report on a variety of things, including how confident they felt about getting good grades by the term’s end.

Respondents then participated in a third “study” that asked them to evaluate a new product—a memory booster. Information about the product was minimal and was limited to a statement of the product’s benefits. After seeing the product description, participants were told that they could search for as much or as little product information as they wished from the manufacturer’s brochure (a product favorable source) or a newspaper article written about the product (an objective source). A total of 15 pieces of information could be examined from each source, for a total of 30 pieces of information. Participants

searched for pieces of information individually by clicking buttons on a computer screen that revealed the information from the selected source.

After completing the information search task, respondents evaluated the product, and then rated the perceived credibility of the arguments examined from each source. Several covariates, including mood, gender, and need for cognition were also obtained. They had no effects on the results reported in this study or those reported subsequently and hence are not discussed further.

Thirty pretest respondents verified that consumers expected product information in a newspaper article to be less favorable toward a product, more objective than, and preferred over information found in a brochure.

Measures

Confidence in the Hoped for Outcome. Two manipulation check items ($r = .71$) which asked how (a) capable and (b) confident respondents were that they would actually get a good grade by the end of the semester (1=not at all; 9= very) were combined to form an overall confidence scale. A t-test confirmed the success of the confidence manipulation. Respondents reported feeling significantly less confident in the lower ($M = 5.94$) versus the higher confidence condition ($M = 6.83$) ($t(98) = 8.81, p < .01$).

Indicators of Motivated Reasoning. The amount of information gathered from the brochure and the newspaper article respectively served as measures of information search. Respondents also used nine-point scaled items to evaluate the credibility of

product claims in the brochure and in the newspaper article. They also evaluated the effectiveness of the product (all items were anchored by 1 = not at all; 9 = very).

Results

Respondents in both conditions used information from both sources. As expected, however, consumers in the lower confidence condition search for more information from the product favorable source ($M = 8.35$) than did consumers in the higher confidence condition ($M = 6.40$; $t(98) = 4.40$, $p < .05$). This result is consistent with the notion that reduced confidence in attaining a hoped for goal induces motivated reasoning.

Consumers did not differ in the amount of information they gathered from the impartial source (see Table 1).

Motivated reasoning was also revealed by the fact that respondents in the reduced confidence condition regarded the product's claims as more credible ($M = 4.61$) than did respondents in the higher confidence condition ($M = 3.86$, $t(97) = 2.25$, $p < .05$). They also regarded the product as more effective ($M = 4.49$ versus 3.74 ; $t(97) = 5.67$; $p < .05$) (See Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here

In order determine whether credibility of the claim mediated the relationship between confidence and beliefs about effectiveness, an ANCOVA was conducted using confidence as the independent variable, product effectiveness judgments as the dependent

variable, and claim credibility as a covariate. The results show that the significant effect of confidence on judgments of product effectiveness disappeared when controlling for claim credibility, suggesting that claim credibility mediates the effect of confidence on product effectiveness judgments.

To further explore this effect we conducted a set of regressions using the continuously scaled manipulation check variable as the independent variable. As expected, confidence was negatively associated with claim credibility ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .05$) and perceived product effectiveness ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .01$). Claim credibility was positively associated with perceived product effectiveness ($\beta = .62$, $p < .01$). A Sobel test of the mediating role of credibility of product claims on the relationship between confidence and judgments of product effectiveness was significant ($Z = 2.02$, $p < .05$). When the influence of claim credibility was controlled the relationship between confidence and product effectiveness judgments became insignificant. Hence the impact of reduced confidence on product judgments appears to be mediated by claim credibility; lower confidence produces more positive perceptions of the claim credibility which, in turn, results in more positive evaluations of the product's effectiveness.

Discussion

The results of study one suggest that when consumers become less confident about attaining what they hope for, they engage in motivated reasoning of products touted as goal enablers. Reduced confidence results in greater search for information from a source perceived *a priori* as providing favorable product information (the brochure) and

more positive judgments about the credibility of the product's claims. Such judgments, in turn, enable the self-serving conclusion that the product is effective.

Interestingly, high and low confidence consumers differed only in information search for and evaluation of information from the product favorable source, not the impartial source (the newspaper article). Lack of effects here may be due to the fact that impartial sources can also provide favorable information. Lower confidence consumers may search such sources because they wish to find hypothesis confirming information that such sources may indeed contain. Higher confidence consumers may search such sources because they wish to find unbiased information. Though their motives differ, the amount of information they search may not differ.

STUDY 2

Study two further examined the link between reduced confidence in attaining a hoped for outcome and motivated reasoning. In this study, motivated reasoning was indicated by reduced confidence respondents' showing less ability to discriminate between high and low credibility arguments (here from the same source). Study two was also designed to replicate the effect of confidence on product evaluations and to rule out the possibility that individual difference variables, including intelligence or logical reasoning capabilities, explain study one's results. We do so by showing that the same consumer (with the same traits and capabilities) engages in motivated reasoning only when the product is relevant to what they hope for.

Design and Procedures

Eighty-one undergraduates were randomly assigned to groups using 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial design. Confidence (low versus high) in attaining the hoped for goal and claim credibility (high vs. low) were manipulated as between-subjects factors. The product's relevance to the hoped-for goal, which served as a within subjects factor, was manipulated by asking respondents to evaluate a goal relevant (memory-booster) and a goal irrelevant product (stain remover). Presentation order of the two products was counterbalanced. It had no effect on the results and is not discussed further.

The manipulation and measures of confidence were identical to those described in study one. In a purportedly separate study participants were asked to sequentially consider two new products; one that claimed to boost memory and another that claimed to remove stains. Half of the respondents saw an ad in which the products claimed to be the only one on the market that produced the advertised benefit (better memory; removal of tough stains). The remaining half saw ads in which the products claimed to be one of many on the market that produced the purported benefit. Participants completed measures of claim credibility and product effectiveness and were debriefed.

Claim credibility was manipulated by claims that the product was the only one or one of many on the market to have the advertised benefits. A claim that the product is one of many on the market with the advertised benefit tends to be more believable than a claim that the product is the only one on the market with that benefit. The reason is closely related to the common heuristic, "if many have it, it must be true" (e.g., Axsom, Yates and Chaiken 1987). In contrast, an uncommon claim is more likely to be seen as

extraordinary, and thus less credible. A pretest with 50 individuals confirmed that consumers believed that a claim was less credible and they regarded it with greater skepticism if it was made by one versus many products on the market.

We anticipated that higher confidence consumers (who do not need to engage in motivated reasoning), would process message arguments in an objective fashion and hence discriminate between high versus low credibility arguments. This discrimination would result in more favorable judgments of goal-relevant and goal-irrelevant brands that use high versus low credibility claims. However, when confidence is low and the product is goal-relevant, consumers are motivated to believe that message arguments are credible. Concluding otherwise would suggest that what they hope for is unattainable. They will therefore be less likely to discriminate between high and low credibility arguments.

Measures

Confidence in Attaining the Hoped for Outcome. The two items used in study one to indicate confidence ($r = .72$) were combined to reflect a measure of confidence.

Motivated Reasoning. Respondents used a 9-point scale to indicate how credible they believed the product's claims were (1= not at all credible; 9= very credible). Brand evaluations were assessed with two nine-point measures that assessed evaluations of the product's effectiveness and quality (1= not at all; 9= very). A composite index of the two items was created ($r = .74$ and $.72$ for the memory and stain remover respectively).

Results

Manipulation Checks. The confidence manipulation was successful ($F(1, 76) = 9.03, p < .001$). Respondents reported significantly greater confidence in attaining the hoped for goal in the higher ($M = 6.77$) versus the lower confidence condition ($M = 5.80$).

The claim credibility manipulation was also successful. Respondents perceived that claims were more credible when the ad claimed that the product was one of many versus the only one on the market with the purported benefit ($F(1, 76) = 3.00, p < .10$). However, as anticipated, this result was qualified by the interactions described below.

Test of Hypotheses. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA's using product relevance as the within-subjects factor showed that when confidence was high and the product was goal relevant consumers were able to discriminate between high and low credibility claims; ads that claimed that the product was the only one on the market with the purported benefit were viewed as less credible ($M = 2.53$) than those that claimed to be one of many on the market with the same benefit ($M = 3.53; t(36) = 5.12, p < .05$). As predicted, lower confidence consumers did not discriminate between high ($M = 3.60$) and low credibility claims ($M = 4.14$) ($t(40) = 0.88, p = ns$) when the product was goal-relevant.

When the product was not goal relevant, both high and low confidence consumers were able to discriminate between high and low credibility claims. That is, they were more likely to believe that the product's claims were credible when the product claimed to be one of many ($M = 5.72$) versus the only product on the market with the purported benefits ($M = 4.95$) ($F(1, 78) = 5.21, p < .05$).

A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA on perceived product effectiveness also revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 76) = 5.17, p < .05$). When confidence was high, consumers judged the goal-relevant product that claimed to be the only one on the market as less effective than the product that claimed to be one of many on the market with the stated benefit ($M's = 2.86$ versus $3.94, t(36) = 5.23, p < .05$). As expected though, when the product was goal relevant, low confidence consumers did not differ in their evaluation of the product regardless of whether it was the only one or one of many on the market making the claim ($M's = 4.5$ and 4.07 for one versus many products; $t(40) = 0.54, p = ns$). When the product was not goal relevant, low and high confidence consumers did not differ in judgments of the product's effectiveness ($M's = 5.57$ and 5.51 for low and high confidence consumers) ($t(78) = .03, p = ns$).

As in study one, the manipulation check measure of confidence was used to assess how confidence impacted judgments of product effectiveness. As expected, for the stain remover, there was no significant relationship between confidence and either the credibility of the product's claim or its perceived efficacy. Neither was there a significant relationship between confidence and either credibility of the claim for the brain booster or its perceived effectiveness in the case of high confidence consumers.

As predicted though, for low confidence consumers evaluating a goal relevant product there was a significant effect of measured confidence on credibility of the brain booster's claims ($\beta = -.33, p < .05$), and on perceived product effectiveness ($\beta = -.32, p < .05$). There was also a significant effect of claim credibility on perceived product effectiveness ($\beta = .89, p < .01$). A Sobel test examining the mediating role of perceived credibility on the confidence-product effectiveness relationship was significant,

($Z = 2.09$, $p < .05$), suggesting that perceived credibility mediates the impact of confidence on judgments of product effectiveness for low confidence consumers who are evaluating the goal relevant product. This result replicates study one's finding that reduced confidence impacts product judgments through the mediating role of credibility.

Discussion

Study two further supports the link between reduced confidence in attaining a hoped for goal and motivated reasoning. When confidence is reduced consumers fail to discriminate between the high and low credibility arguments regarding a goal relevant product. This effect is not observed when confidence is high. Because they are less discriminating of argument credibility, they view goal relevant products as effective even when they use low credibility claims. Study two also shows that the results obtained in study one are not attributable to individual difference variables. The same consumers do not engage in motivated reasoning when the product is irrelevant to what they hope for.

Study three was designed to show further support for the reduced confidence-motivated reasoning relationship. Here we examine whether (a) reduced confidence impacts the weight consumers assign to negative information in forming evaluations and (b) whether motivated reasoning acts as a coping device to restore confidence in attaining what one hopes for.

STUDY 3

Weight Assigned to Negative and Positive Information

A rather consistent finding in the literature is that consumers tend to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information in judgments, presumably because it is more diagnostic of product quality (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs 2001; Rozin and Royzman 2001). Unfortunately, negative product information does not support the conclusion that the product can help one attain a hoped for goal. Indeed, research on motivated reasoning shows that when people wish to arrive at a particular conclusion they place *less weight* on negative information that is at odds with their desired conclusion (Ahluwalia, et al., 2000). One reason why is that they are motivated to find fault with it. This view is supported by research that shows that scrutiny and counter-argumentation of negative information is characteristic of motivated reasoning (Schaller 1992, Ditto and Lopez 1992; Kunda 1987). If negative information is more likely to be scrutinized and hence regarded as faulty or weak by low versus high confidence consumers, they may give it less weight in their brand judgments.

Restored Confidence

Motivated reasoning allows consumers to conclude that they can get what they hope for because there is a means (a product evaluated as effective) to do so. Such a self-serving conclusion should restore confidence that what one hopes for goal is indeed

possible. We therefore expect that exposure to a goal-enabling produces positive changes in perceived confidence for consumers for whom confidence is initially threatened, but not for consumers whose confidence has not been threatened.

Design and Procedures

One hundred and one undergraduate students participated in a 2 (high versus low perceived confidence) x 2 (exposure to positive versus negative product information) between subjects factorial design study. Confidence was manipulated in a manner identical to that used in the previous studies.

Immediately after the confidence manipulation, participants were told that they were to evaluate a product that claimed to boost memory. Following Ditto and Lopez (1992), respondents were told to look at product information one item at a time and to indicate when they were ready to render a judgment about the product's effectiveness. Respondents were asked to make their decision based on as few of the items as possible, but to also use enough information to make a reasonably accurate decision.

Participants then proceeded to a computer screen that had two buttons: one to request an item of product information and another to indicate that they were ready to evaluate the product. In both conditions respondents could choose to see as many items of information as they deemed necessary to form their evaluation. Half saw only positive product information while the other half saw only negative information, making information valence a between subjects factor. Information presentation order was randomized. When participants believed that they had seen enough information to decide

whether the product was or was not effective, they stopped the information search task and evaluated the product. Finally, they indicated how confident they felt about getting good grades by the end of the term (post-product exposure confidence).

Measures

Confidence and Change in Confidence. Confidence was measured in a manner identical to the previous studies. The first confidence measure ($r = .65$) served as a manipulation check. The second confidence measure ($r = .61$) (taken after exposure to information about the product) served as a measure of restored confidence.

Information Search and Product Judgments. The weight given to positive and negative information was measured by a count of the number of pieces of information respondents used to judge product effectiveness. Respondents also used 9-point scaled items to judge product effectiveness (1 = not at all effective; 9 = very effective) and willingness to try to the product (- 4 = not at all willing; +4 = very willing).

Results

Manipulation Checks. A 2 x 2 ANOVA on the confidence manipulation check supported the success of the manipulation ($F(1, 97) = 13.34, p < .001$). Respondents felt significantly less confident in the lower ($M = 6.35$) versus the higher confidence condition ($M = 7.40$). The results did not vary by information valence condition.

Weight Placed on Negative Information. A 2 (confidence) x 2 (information valence) between subjects ANOVA on the number of pieces of information examined

revealed a significant valence by confidence interaction ($F(1, 97) = 4.59, p < .05$). As anticipated, respondents in the reduced confidence condition examined significantly more pieces of negative information before they felt they could judge product effectiveness ($M = 6.88$) than did those in the higher confidence condition ($M = 2.85$). There were no differences in the amount of positive information gathered by respondents in the reduced ($M = 7.96$) versus the higher confidence condition ($M = 8.21$) (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 here

Judgments of Brand Effectiveness. A 2 x 2 between subjects ANOVA on willingness to try to the product produced main effects for valence ($F(1, 97) = 96.01, p < .001$), and confidence ($F(1, 97) = 11.95; p < .001$), and a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 97) = 4.31, p < .05$). Not surprisingly, consumers were more likely to try the product when they were exposed to positive ($M = 1.44$) versus negative information ($M = -1.90$). Replicating studies one and two, reduced confidence consumers were more willing to try the product ($M = .36$) than were higher confidence consumers ($M = -.82$). Lower confidence consumers exposed to positive information were more likely to try the product than their higher confidence counterparts (M 's = 1.68 versus 1.21, respectively).

Most relevant though is that the difference between lower and higher confidence consumers' willingness to try the product was particularly great among subjects exposed to negative information ($M = -.96$ versus $M = -2.85$ respectively). This pattern of effects was replicated for consumers' judgments of the product's effectiveness (see Table 2). Interestingly then, even though reduced confidence respondents were *exposed to more*

negative information than high confidence consumers, they had *more favorable* judgments of the brand's effectiveness and were more willing to try the product. These results are consistent with the idea that lower confidence consumers place less weight on negative information than do higher confidence consumers.

Change in Perceived Confidence Following Product Exposure. A 2 x 2 between subjects ANOVA on the difference between pre- and post-product exposure confidence revealed a significant main effect for confidence ($F(1, 97) = 5.17, p < .05$). Respondents experienced a significantly greater positive change in perceived confidence in the lower ($M = .43$) versus the higher confidence condition ($M = .04$). Interestingly, this effect did not depend on whether consumers were exposed to negative or positive information. These results further support the idea that when confidence is low, consumers weigh product disconfirming evidence less heavily in judgments.

Discussion

Study three demonstrates that when confidence is reduced, consumers require more pieces of negative information than their high confidence counterparts before they are willing to judge the product's effectiveness. Moreover, even though they gather more negative information than do their higher confidence counterparts they have more favorable judgments of the product and they are more willing to try it. The negativity bias observed in other settings does not appear to operate under conditions of motivated reasoning. In addition, mere exposure to a goal-relevant product seems to restore

confidence in attaining a hoped for goal, even when consumers are exposed to only negative information.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Combined, the three studies support the notion that when confidence in attaining what one hopes for is threatened, consumers engage in motivated reasoning. Such reasoning allows them to form a self-serving conclusion; namely that products touted as goal enablers will indeed facilitate the outcome they hope for.

Theoretical Implications. This research highlights the importance of confidence in attaining what one hopes for as a construct relevant to consumption. The role of confidence in directing behavior, though widely recognized in psychology, has received scant attention in the consumer behavior literature. The link between confidence and motivated reasoning suggests that consumers may acquire and use some products because they provide the illusion of control even if they do not provide or have a low probability of providing the stated or implied benefit. Weight loss products, alternative medicines, and supplements are examples of product categories for which low confidence may be relevant and for which an illusion of control may be highly prevalent.

This research also contributes to the goals literature. Although research has focused on such goal dimensions as relevance and importance, we add to this literature by suggesting an under researched dimension—confidence in attainability (Austin and Vancouver 1996). Finally, these findings are consistent with recent theoretical arguments linking hope for goal attainment and motivated reasoning (MacInnis and de Mello 2005 de Mello and MacInnis, 2005).

Pragmatic Implications. The present article also has important implications for understanding consumers' marketplace behaviors. The dominant paradigms related to information use and decision-making in both economics and psychology suggest that consumers should be well informed and will make a correct, objective decision if (a) information is fully disclosed in a meaningful way and (b) consumers have the motivation, ability and opportunity to process it. This view has guided much of the practice and regulation of labeling, disclosures, and warnings (Stewart and Martin 1994, 2004). The present findings suggest that disclaimers such as "not evaluated by the FDA" or warnings about possible side effects may not have the intended effects.

At the same time, there is a need to appreciate the important role that coping behavior, like motivated reasoning, plays in creating a sense of control and in maintaining the motivation to achieve a specific goal. Disclosures designed to compensate for consumers' tendencies to engage in motivated reasoning in specific situations may have unintended consequences related to increased anxiety and a sense of helplessness.

An additional implication relates to consumers' vulnerability to scams and fraud. Langenderfer and Shimp's (2001) review identifies two factors that impact vulnerability to scams and fraud: (1) the consumer engages in elaborate information processing, scrutinizing the relevant offer but lacks the knowledge that would enable them to categorize the offer as a scam or (2) the consumer engages in limited information processing and hence fails to identify scam cues. Our research suggests a third possibility; threatened confidence about attaining a hoped for goal may induce a state of

situational vulnerability. Given the many goals consumers hope to achieve, even knowledgeable and sophisticated consumers may be subject to situational vulnerability.

Our studies also bear on protection motivation and self-efficacy theories (Block and Keller 1995; Bandura 1997; Floyd, Prentice-Dunn and Rogers 2000). Lowered confidence that a hoped for goal can be attained may impact one's sense of efficacy in goal attainment. Such a response is threatening and may induce a protection motivation response. The response we have identified here is motivated reasoning.

Limitations and Future Research. The limitations of these studies offer considerable opportunities for future research. First, additional study of the processing mechanisms by which consumers form their desired conclusion is necessary. Future research that examines process measures, such as thought listing and reaction time, could be especially helpful. Second, additional research is necessary to understand factors that minimize or magnify the impact of confidence on motivated reasoning. Finally, additional research might further examine the process by which motivated reasoning restores confidence. The theoretical arguments here were that motivated reasoning reduces anxiety and provides a sense of control over goal attainment. However, these process variables were not examined.

The present article illuminates an important and infrequently examined dimension of consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is driven by the goals consumers hope to attain, and many products and services are purchased and consumed in the service of these goals. The proposition that threats to what one hopes for induce motivated reasoning mechanisms that in turn reduce this threat represents a rich domain for future research.

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Table 1

Study 1: Impact of Confidence on Information Search and Information Evaluation

<u>Dependent Variable</u>	<u>Confidence Condition</u>	<u>Means</u>	<u>t</u>
Total Information Searched from Brochure	Reduced confidence	8.35	4.40*
	Heightened confidence	6.40	
Total Information Searched from Newspaper Article	Reduced confidence	6.77	0.38
	Heightened confidence	5.96	
Credibility of the Product's Claims	Reduced confidence	4.61	5.07*
	Heightened confidence	3.86	
Perceived Product Effectiveness	Reduced confidence	4.49	5.67*
	Heightened confidence	3.74	

* = $p < .05$

Table 2: The Impact of Confidence in Attaining a Hoped for Goal and Information Valence on Information Search and Product Evaluation: Study 3

Dependent Variable	Information Condition	Confidence Condition	Means	Main Effects		Interaction Confidence x Information Valence (F)
				Confidence (F)	Information Valence (F)	
Number of Pieces of Product Information Searched	Favorable	Reduced	7.96	3.58+	10.40***	4.59*
		Heightened	8.21			
	Unfavorable	Reduced	6.88			
		Heightened	2.85			
Evaluation of Product as "worth a try" (minus 4= definitely not worth a try; +4= definitely worth a try)	Favorable	Reduced	1.68	11.95**	94.60***	4.31*
		Heightened	1.21			
	Unfavorable	Reduced	-0.96			
		Heightened	-2.85			
Perceived Product Effectiveness (1= not at all effective; 9= very effective)	Favorable	Reduced	6.52	7.46 **	160.89***	3.44*
		Heightened	6.25			
	Unfavorable	Reduced	3.52			
		Heightened	2.00			

^a = p < .10

* = p < .05

** = p < .01

*** = p < .001