

Anytime versus Only:

Mindsets Moderate the Effect of Expansive versus Restrictive Frames on Promotion Evaluation

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### Anytime versus Only:

#### Mindsets Moderate the Effect of Expansive versus Restrictive Frames on Promotion Evaluation

Three studies demonstrate that the framing of redemption windows as *expansive* or *restrictive*, while keeping the actual length of the window constant, influences consumers' evaluations of sales promotions. When feasibility concerns are highlighted (e.g., in an implemental mindset), consumers prefer the expansive "anytime" (vs. the restrictive "only") frame. However, consumers in a deliberative mindset prefer the restrictive "only" (vs. the expansive "anytime") frame. Study 1 reveals that while the former attend more to their ability to redeem the offer, the latter are influenced more by the precision of the offer. Study 2 highlights the mediating role of these inferences on consumers' likelihood of availing the offer. Study 3 demonstrates the impact of these frames on real-world coupon redemption. The authors conclude with a discussion of the scope of this framing effect, the implications of the findings, and directions for future research.

Keywords: framing, mindsets, construal level, coupons, rebates

Sales promotions are a popular tool used by marketers to increase store visits and purchase (Pauwels, Hanssens, and Siddharth 2002). Promotions are effective because they provide consumers with price savings as well as non-price benefits (Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent 2000). When defining a typical sales promotion, the marketer decides the nature of the promotion (e.g., 30% off), along with the time for which the promotion is valid i.e. the redemption window (e.g., between noon and 4 pm). In three studies we demonstrate how framing a promotion as *expansive* or *restrictive*, keeping all other aspects of the promotion constant, influences promotion evaluation and usage. Specifically, we study how framing the redemption window as expansive (e.g., you can take advantage of the sale *anytime* between noon and 4 pm) or restrictive (e.g., you can take advantage of the sale *only* between noon and 4 pm) interacts with consumers' mindsets to influence promotion evaluation and usage.

Prior research has shown that characteristics of the redemption window affect usage (Ward and Davis 1978; Inman and McAlister 1994). We extend this literature to demonstrate that expansive/restrictive framing of promotions influences evaluation and usage even when actual promotion characteristics are held constant. Specifically, we propose that how a consumer views the promotion offer (their mindset, Heckhausen and Gollwitzer 1987; also referred to as their level of action construal, Vallacher and Wegner 1987) influences perceptions of expansive/restrictive framed promotions. We find that consumers in an implemental mindset, who focus relatively more on the feasibility of availing the promotion, prefer the expansive (anytime) frame because it is perceived to be longer and more accommodating than a restrictive (only) frame (cf. Reibstein and Traver 1982). In contrast, consumers in a deliberative mindset perceive a restrictive frame to be more precise and less ambiguous, making it more preferred, than an expansive frame (cf. Mobley, Bearden, and Teel 1988).

These results therefore provide a useful guide for managers regarding *when* expansive or restrictive framing improves promotion effectiveness. We find that expansive (vs. restrictive) framing of promotional offers is likely to increase promotion evaluation and usage when processed by consumers who are in an implemental mindset (those concerned with feasibility of availing of the offer), but is likely to decrease promotion evaluation and usage when processed by consumers who are in a deliberative mindset (those concerned with precision of the offer).

While the research reported in this paper manipulates expansive/restrictive framing of sales promotions through varying descriptions of the redemption window (anytime/only), the results may be equally applicable to other marketing communication cues. This is consistent with research which shows that the verbal structure of a promotional offer influences promotion evaluation (Berkowitz and Walton 1980; Della Bitta, Monroe, and McGinnis 1981), and that the choice of words and logically equivalent attribute frames conveys implicit meaning and information (Hilton 1995; McKenzie 2004). We discuss these implications and other issues concerning the scope of expansive versus restrictive framing in the general discussion.

### *FRAMING OF PROMOTION REDEMPTION WINDOWS*

In this research we test the hypothesis that the framing of redemption windows as restrictive or expansive, while keeping the objective time available for redemption constant, influences the evaluation of promotions. Framing effects, which occur when logically equivalent descriptions lead to different responses, have been well-established in the extant literature (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). However, the study of framing in the context of time is still somewhat limited. Extant research in this area is discussed next.

### *The Framing of Time*

Consumers' experience of time is subjective (Hornik 1984) and may radically differ from objective (clock) time (Fraisse 1984). Distortions in consumers' perception of time have important marketing implications because duration perceptions influence outcomes such as evaluations, satisfaction, and consequent behaviors (Hornik 1984; Dube-Rioux, Schmitt, and Leclerc 1988). In research examining duration estimates for future time intervals, LeBoeuf (2006) found that consumers engage in greater discounting when delay intervals are described by extents of time ("waiting eight months to ...") than by dates ("waiting till October 15 to ..."). Furthermore, time intervals were perceived to be shorter when participants focused on the extent of time ("how many days until...") versus dates ("on what date will....," LeBoeuf and Shafir 2005). Sanna et al. (2005) found that framing distances to deadlines to imply a little time remaining ("only three months to finish") made the deadlines feel subjectively closer and highlighted the difficulty of completing the task compared to framing distances in a manner that implied a lot of time remaining ("still have three months to finish"), keeping the objective amount of time constant.

Importantly, research on the framing of time intervals demonstrates that different, logically equivalent, ways of describing time intervals "may not always be psychologically interchangeable," (LeBoeuf 2006, p 60). Other recent research (McKenzie 2004) also suggests that equivalent frames "leak" different attribute information. Indeed, uttering a statement one way ("the glass is half full") versus another ("the glass is half empty") implicitly conveys different information about the target attributes to a listener (specifically that the glass was previously empty versus full, respectively). In the present context, we expect that a restrictively

framed redemption window may be perceived to be of shorter duration than one that is expansively framed, especially when consumers are focused on the feasibility of availing the promotion offer.

### *Expansive (Anytime) versus Restrictive (Only) Framing of Redemption Windows*

Research contrasting positive versus negative frames has found that, in general, consumers prefer positive frames (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), or frames that give consumers more time (Sanna et al. 2005). We extend this research to examine the effect of framing when the frames have either positive or negative implications depending on the perspective of the consumer. Specifically, we investigate the use of the words “anytime” and “only” in the framing of redemption windows and assess the impact on consumers’ evaluation of the offer.

Prior research has demonstrated that the verbal structure of a promotion influences its evaluation (Berkowitz and Walton 1980; Della Bitta et al. 1981). We theorize that the semantic meaning conveyed by an expansive (anytime) frame is different from that conveyed by a restrictive (only) frame. Specifically, we propose that, depending on consumers’ mindsets, expansive and restrictive frames differ in the extent to which they draw attention to the feasibility of availing the offer and offer precision, with positive or negative implications. In other words, consumers’ mindsets moderate the effect of expansive versus restrictive frames on evaluation. We next discuss research that suggests reasons why one frame may be evaluated more favorably than the other.

*Preference for feasible expansive frames.* We expect that if a consumer evaluates a promotion on the basis of how feasible it is to avail of, the expansive frame is likely to be

evaluated more favorably than the restrictive frame. Consumers' perception of offer feasibility is linked to their perceptions of the length of the redemption window (Reibstein and Traver 1982; Ward and Davis 1978), and in this case the expansive frame is perceived to be longer and more accommodating than the restrictive frame. This is consistent with previously demonstrated preferences for frames that appear to give individuals more time to complete a task (Sanna et al. 2005). Furthermore, consumers often prefer flexibility in options (cf. Gilbert and Ebert 2002), and when focused on feasibility they may prefer the expansive frame to a restrictive frame. Moreover, when consumers are motivated to attend to the feasibility of the offer, they may use the relative ambiguity associated with the expansive (vs. restrictive) time frames to increase their perceived likelihood of availing the promotion offer (Kunda 1990).

*Preference for precise restrictive frames.* We also expect that in certain situations the restrictive frame may be preferred over the expansive frame because it is more precise and less ambiguous. Indeed, prior research has found that consumers prefer precise, less ambiguous, promotional offers to those that are tensile (non-specific). For instance, Mobley et al. (1988, p 274) found that consumers dislike tensile (vs. precise) price claims because they “introduce a certain amount of ambiguity that reduces the specificity and usefulness of the information provided.” MacKenzie (1986) similarly found that precise ad copy was more influential than ad copy that was phrased in abstract terms. Consumers generally dislike ambiguity and prefer precision. Indeed, the certainty principle is a robust framing effect in which consumers are more likely to choose an option where the probability of a favorable outcome occurring is known over an option for which the probability of a favorable outcome is unknown (Ellsberg 1961).

Furthermore, it is possible that scarcity considerations may heighten the evaluation of a restrictively (vs. expansively) framed offer making it appear more exclusive (Cialdini 1985;

Lynn 1989). In sum, we propose that the framing of a redemption window as expansive or restrictive communicates differently the feasibility versus the precision of the promotion offer. Next, we discuss how each of these aspects becomes relatively more salient depending on the consumer's mindset.

### *Mindsets Moderate the Effect of Framing on Promotion Evaluation*

Consistent with the implemental versus deliberative mindset differences demonstrated by Gollwitzer (1999), we propose that the extent to which consumers' initial evaluation is likely to focus on the feasibility of the promotion will depend on their mindset (or level of action construal, Vallacher and Wegner 1987). An implemental mindset (lower level of construal) focuses consumers on how possible it is to actually avail of the promotional offer and requires an assessment of the feasibility of the promotion. When the feasibility of availing the offer is highlighted in this manner, consumers prefer the relatively more accommodating expansive (anytime) frame to the restrictive (only) frame. In contrast, a deliberative mindset (higher level of construal) leads consumers to assess the offer at an abstract level. In such an evaluation, the restrictive (only) frame is perceived to be more precise than the expansive (anytime) frame, and is thus preferred. This moderating role of mindset is diagrammatically illustrated in figure 1.

< Insert figure 1 about here >

The aforementioned pattern of differential attention to feasibility across mindsets is also supported by the two stages of decision making, pre-decision deliberation and post-decision implementation, discussed by Heckhausen and Gollwitzer (1987). Freitas, Gollwitzer, and Trope

(2004) successfully prime consumers' mindset to be deliberative (focused on the purpose) or implemental (focused on the process) in the context of self-regulation. To prime an implemental mindset, Freitas et al. (2004) asked participants to report *how* they would perform a certain action, moving down a hierarchy of levels to increasing amounts of detail and lower levels of construal. To prime a deliberative mindset, on the other hand, participants were asked to report *why* they performed certain actions, moving up a hierarchy of reasons to higher levels of construal. We use such a mindset manipulation in study 1.

Another goal-subordination approach is the action identification theory (Vallacher and Wegner 1987) which discusses the cognitive hierarchy of the levels in which an action can be identified. These range from low levels that specify *how* an action is performed, to higher levels that specify *why* an action is performed. Thus, according to Vallacher and Wegner (1989), "drinking alcohol" may be identified as "swallowing" (low level construal) or "rewarding oneself" (high level construal). Lower-level identities are suited to monitoring actions and are focused on how an action is performed, similar to implemental mindsets. Alternatively, higher level identities are suited to provide meaning for actions and are focused on why an action is performed similar to deliberative mindsets. Vallacher and Wegner (1989) develop the Behavior Identification Form (BIF) to characterize individuals' chronic action construal level. In study 2 and 3 we use BIF scores to characterize consumers as having chronic low (implemental) or high (deliberative) levels of action construal.

These streams of research demonstrate that when the consumer engages in relatively lower-level (implemental) processing, they attend more to the feasibility of redeeming the promotion offer. In contrast, when a consumer engages in higher-level (deliberative) processing, they are likely to evaluate the promotion offer in an abstract manner. Specifically, we suggest

that for consumers in an implemental mindset, the expansive (anytime) frame is perceived to be more accommodating, and therefore more feasible to use, than the restrictive frame. For consumers in a deliberative mindset, on the other hand, the restrictive (only) frame indicates that the promotion is precise and thereby more desirable than the expansive frame.

### *OVERVIEW OF STUDIES*

Three studies demonstrate the effect of expansive/restrictive framing of redemption windows on promotion evaluation and usage, and investigate the process underlying this effect. In study 1 we explore the process underlying the framing effect by manipulating participants' mindsets to be implemental or deliberative. We demonstrate that consumers in an implemental mindset, paying greater attention to feasibility of availing the offer, rate the feasibility of redemption to be higher for the expansive frame than for the restrictive frame. Participants in a deliberative mindset do not demonstrate this effect of frame on feasibility. However, consumers with a deliberative mindset perceive a restrictive frame to be more precise than an expansive frame. Consumers in an implemental mindset do not change their precision estimates.

In study 2 we measure participants' chronic level of action identification (BIF, Vallacher and Wegner 1989) to classify them as low-level (implemental) or high-level (deliberative) construers. We replicate the effect of framing on feasibility and precision observed in study 1 for low-level and high-level construers, respectively. We also demonstrate the process by which framing affects evaluation. Low-level construers perceive the expansive frame to be more feasible to avail of than the restrictive frame and prefer the former. In contrast, high-level construers perceive the expansive frame to be less precise than the restrictive frame and prefer

the latter. Thus, feasibility and precision mediate the effect of frame on evaluation for low- and high-level construers, respectively.

Study 3 is a real-world demonstration of the effect of framing redemption windows on actual coupon usage. We classify participants as chronic low-level (implemental) or high-level (deliberative) construers. We find that low-level construers are significantly more likely to redeem expansive versus restrictive frame coupons. In contrast, high-level construers are directionally less likely to redeem expansive versus restrictive frame coupons. We subsequently discuss the scope of expansive versus restrictive framing and conclude with a discussion of implications and avenues of future research.

*STUDY 1: EFFECT OF FRAME AND MANIPULATED MINDSET ON  
OFFER FEASIBILITY AND PRECISION*

*Participants, Method, and Design*

We asked 133 undergraduate students to complete a survey in exchange for refreshments. Two non-US students, whose primary spoken language was not English, were excluded; all analyses are for 131 participants. The first section of the survey primed participants' (implemental/deliberative) mindset with a manipulation used by Freitas et al. (2004). Participants in the implemental mindset condition completed a protocol focusing on *how* they would achieve certain outcomes, while participants in the deliberative mindset condition completed a protocol focusing on *why* they performed certain activities.

On the next page, participants read a scenario where they received a promotion offer with a fixed redemption window. Participants read that they are shopping at one of their favorite stores. This store carries clothes, cosmetics, health and beauty products, office supplies, and other product categories. They receive a discount coupon for future purchases at the store. The magnitude of this discount was manipulated between subjects, to be 30% versus 60% off their next purchase. We used these two discounts levels to explore whether the discount magnitude would impact the effect of frames on evaluation.

We then manipulated the frame of the redemption window, between subjects, holding the length of the redemption window constant. Participants in the expansive frame read that they could use the coupon “*anytime* between 12:00 noon and 4:00 pm for a one week period” while those in the restrictive frame read that they could use the coupon “*only* between 12:00 noon and 4:00 pm for a one week period.” The promotion started the next day. Thus, the study was a 2 (mindset: implemental, deliberative) x 2 (frame: expansive, restrictive) x 2 (discount: 30%, 60%) full factorial between-subjects design with random assignment.

Participants rated the *feasibility* of being able to use the promotion in the time interval (composite of two items: is the time interval long enough/is it convenient to use the coupon; 1 = no, 11 = yes;  $r = .71, p < .001$ ), the *precision* of the time interval (composite of two items: is the time interval precise/concrete? 1 = no, 11 = yes;  $r = .39, p < .001$ ), and the attractiveness of the discount (is this a large/attractive/ tempting discount; 1 = no, 11 = yes; Cronbach  $\alpha = .88$ ).

Participants rated the 60% discount to be more attractive ( $M_{60\%} = 9.71$ ) than the 30% discount ( $M_{30\%} = 7.87$ ),  $F(1, 129) = 30.00, p < .001$ . As discount magnitude did not interact with the effect of mindset and frame on precision and feasibility, subsequent analyses collapsed

data across the two discount levels, as a 2 (mindset: implemental, deliberative) x 2 (frame: expansive, restrictive) between-subjects design.

### *Results*

*Feasibility (time adequacy).* We expected that participants in an implemental mindset would pay greater attention to the amount of time available to use the offer than would participants in a deliberative mindset. As expected, participants in an implemental mindset rated the expansive frame to be more feasible to redeem ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 5.84$ ) than the restrictive frame ( $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 4.35$ ),  $F(1, 127) = 4.42, p < .05$ . In contrast, the frame did not affect feasibility for participants in a deliberative mindset ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 5.87, M_{\text{restrictive}} = 5.81, F(1, 127) = 0.01, ns$ ). The mindset x frame interaction was not significant ( $F(1, 127) = 1.97, ns$ ).

*Precision.* We expected that participants in a deliberative mindset would pay greater attention to offer precision than would those in an implemental mindset. Participants in a deliberative mindset rated the expansive frame to be less precise ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 8.73$ ) than the restrictive frame ( $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 9.84$ ),  $F(1, 127) = 6.18, p < .05$ . However, frame did not affect offer precision for participants in an implemental mindset ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 9.56, M_{\text{restrictive}} = 9.85, F(1, 127) = 0.44, ns$ ). The mindset x frame interaction was not significant ( $F(1, 127) = 1.78, ns$ ). The main effect of frame was significant: the expansive frame was rated less precise than the restrictive frame ( $F(1, 127) = 5.04, p < .05$ ).

### *Discussion*

These results provide an insight into the process underlying the effect of frames on offer evaluation. Participants in an implemental mindset paid greater attention to offer feasibility, while those in a deliberative mindset differentially evaluated offer precision. Consistent with different levels of construal, offer *feasibility* appeared to vary by frame for implemental participants, who had a lower level of construal, but not for deliberative participants. Indeed, it was only implemental mindset participants who saw a restrictive frame who had lower feasibility ratings than others. In contrast, offer *precision* appeared to vary by frame for deliberative participants, who had a higher level of construal, but not for implemental participants. The latter, who were relatively more focused on redemption, rated both frames to be quite precise. Within-subjects analyses revealed that frame had opposite effects on precision and feasibility measures, as indicated by a significant process measure x frame interaction,  $F(1, 127) = 6.03, p < .05$ .

While theorizing about effects of restrictiveness we had suggested that deliberative mindset participants might prefer restrictive frames because these could be perceived to be a) more precise, and/or b) more exclusive, than expansive frames. However, a pretest with deliberative mindset participants revealed that perceptions of offer rarity or exclusivity did not vary across expansive/restrictive frames like the ones used in study 1. Participants rated the offers on perceived rarity, exclusivity, and being special (Is the offer rare/exclusive/ special, 1 = no, 11 = yes). Participants who saw expansively framed offers rated them to be equally rare ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 6.22$  vs.  $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 6.24, F(1, 54) = 0.00, ns$ ), exclusive ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 5.96$  vs.  $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 5.21, F(1, 54) = 0.89, ns$ ), and special ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 7.93$  vs.  $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 7.86, F(1, 54) = 0.01, ns$ ), as participants who saw restrictively framed offers. Thus, we focused on the effect of expansive/restrictive frames on precision for deliberative mindsets in our studies.

Interestingly, the effect of frame and mindset on perceptions of feasibility and precision was not moderated by the size of the discount per se. While consumers did rate the larger (60%) discount to be more attractive than the smaller (30%) discount, it appears that they paid as much attention to the frame with a large discount as they did with a smaller discount. Specifically, evaluations of feasibility and precision communicated by expansive versus restrictive frames did not differ across discount levels. Later, when discussing the scope of this framing effect, we highlight its robustness with even smaller levels of discounts (10%).

In this study we primed participants with implemental or deliberative mindsets before they evaluated an offer. In addition to these *contextual* differences in construal, consumers also differ in their *chronic* tendencies to construe actions at low or high levels. Vallacher and Wegner (1989) identified these chronic differences with a Behavior Identification Form (BIF). In study 2 and study 3 we used the BIF to measure consumers' level of action identification, categorized them as implemental (low-level construers) or deliberative (high-level construers), and studied their evaluation of expansively versus restrictively framed promotion offers. We also extended our focus to participants' likelihood of availing the offer, identifying how feasibility and precision considerations differentially affect usage across different consumer mindsets.

*STUDY 2: EFFECT OF FRAME AND CHRONIC MINDSET ON USAGE:  
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PRECISION AND FEASIBILITY*

*Participants, Method, and Design*

We paid 168 consumers in the vicinity of a university to complete the survey ( $M_{\text{age}} = 30$  years; 59 % female, 41 % male; modal monthly income = \$1000 - \$2000). Participants read a scenario similar to that of study 1. In this scenario, they are shopping at one of their favorite stores which carries clothes, cosmetics, office supplies, and several other categories. They receive a 50% off coupon for future purchases at the store. The study was a 2 (frame: expansive, restrictive) x 2 (construal level: low, high) design, with the first factor manipulated between subjects and the second factor measured. Approximately half of the participants were randomly assigned to each frame condition. Participants in the expansive [restrictive] frame condition read that they could use the coupon “*anytime [only]* between 12:00 noon and 4:00 pm for a one week period.” The one week period for the promotion started the next day.

All participants rated whether they would use the coupon (1 = no, 11 = yes). They then rated the *feasibility* of being able to use the promotion (composite of two items: is there enough time/is it convenient to use the coupon; 1 = no, 11 = yes;  $r = .55, p < .001$ ), and the *precision* of the time interval (is the time interval precise? 1 = no, 11 = yes). The counterbalanced order of feasibility/precision questions did not significantly affect results. On the next page, participants completed the Behavior Identification Form (BIF, Vallacher and Wegner 1989). The BIF presents the participant with 25 actions (e.g., eating) along with a low-level construal (chewing and swallowing) as well as a high-level construal (getting nutrition) of each action. Participants choose the level of construal they believe to be the most appropriate for that action. Each item is scored as a ‘1’ if a high-level response is chosen and as a ‘0’ if a low-level response is chosen. A participant’s score on the BIF is the total of the 25 items, with a larger score indicating a higher level of construal. We used a median split on the BIF score to classify participants as high- or

low-level construers, and treated this as the second factor (construal level: low, high) in our analyses<sup>1</sup>.

### *Results*

*Usage likelihood.* We expected low-level construers (implemental mindset) to pay more attention to offer feasibility, and be more likely to use the expansive versus restrictive frame. In contrast, we expected high-level construers (deliberative mindset) to pay more attention to offer precision, and thus be less likely to use the expansive versus restrictive frame. The pattern of results displayed in figure 2 supports these expectations. Among low-level construers, those who saw the expansive frame were more likely to use the offer ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 9.33$ ) than those who saw the restrictive frame coupon ( $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 7.31$ ),  $F(1, 164) = 9.96, p < .01$ . In contrast, among high-level construers, those who saw the expansive frame were less likely to use the offer ( $M_{\text{expansive}} = 7.63$ ) than those who saw the restrictive frame ( $M_{\text{restrictive}} = 9.28$ ),  $F(1, 164) = 6.55, p < .05$ . This construal level  $\times$  frame interaction was significant,  $F(1, 164) = 16.36, p < .001$ <sup>2</sup>.

<Insert figure 2 about here >

We also studied the effect of construal level within each frame. With an expansive frame, low-level construers rated themselves more likely to use the coupon than high-level construers,  $F(1, 164) = 6.94, p < .01$ . With a restrictive frame, however, low-level construers rated themselves to be less likely to use the coupon than high-level construers,  $F(1, 164) = 9.54, p < .01$ . This pattern is consistent with the former's focus on feasibility and the latter's focus on precision. We

next explore how expansive/restrictive framing affected feasibility and precision evaluations (these means are reported in table 1).

<Insert table 1 about here>

*Feasibility (time adequacy).* Framing significantly affected feasibility for low-level construers ( $F(1, 164) = 5.02, p < .05$ ), but did not affect feasibility for high-level construers ( $F(1, 164) = 0.66, ns$ ). Feasibility mediated the effect of framing on offer evaluation for low-level construers (see appendix, panel A), but not for high-level construers.

*Precision.* Framing did not affect precision for low-level construers ( $F(1, 164) = 0.05, ns$ ), but significantly affected precision for high-level construers ( $F(1, 164) = 4.15, p < .05$ ). Precision partially mediated the effect of frame on usage likelihood for high-level construers (see appendix, panel B), but not for low-level construers.

### *Discussion*

Study 2 used chronic construal level to replicate the precision and feasibility results previously observed in study 1, extending those to focus on offer usage. Low-level construers (implemental mindset) focused on offer feasibility and preferred expansive (vs. restrictive) frames. In contrast, high-level construers (deliberative mindset) focused on offer precision, and preferred restrictive (vs. expansive) frames. Mediation patterns provided additional support for the process. We note that low-level construers in study 2 reported higher feasibility and lower precision scores than low-level construers (implemental mindset) in study 1. Post-hoc, we

speculate these differences may stem from either a difference in samples (study 2 participants were older) and/or from classification on the basis of chronic measures (study 2) versus primes (study 1). We next explored effects of mindset and frame on actual coupon redemption.

*STUDY 3: EFFECT OF FRAME AND CHRONIC MINDSET ON  
ACTUAL COUPON REDEMPTION*

*Participants, Method, and Design*

We asked 222 undergraduate students to complete the survey for a token payment in addition to the price-off coupon. The coupon allowed the participant to save \$1.50 off any purchase at a local coffee shop adjoining campus, and could be redeemed for a one week period starting the day after it was handed out. The study was a 2 (frame: expansive, restrictive) x 2 (construal level: low, high) design. The frame of the redemption window was manipulated between subjects (with 111 participants randomly assigned to each frame condition) and the construal level was measured. Participants in the expansive [restrictive] frame read that the coupon could be redeemed *anytime* [*only*] over the next seven days.

On the next page participants completed the Behavior Identification Form (BIF, Vallacher and Wegner 1989). As calculated for study 2, a participant's score on the BIF is the total of the 25 items, with a larger score indicating a higher level of construal. We used a median split on the BIF score to classify participants as low-level or high-level construers. We treated this as the second factor (construal level: low, high) in the analyses. The dependent measure was whether or not the participant redeemed the coupon in the coffee shop.

## Results

We expected that low-level construers (implemental mindset) would pay relatively greater attention to offer feasibility and would thus be more likely to redeem coupons with an expansive versus restrictive frame. In contrast, high-level construers (deliberative mindset) would pay relatively more attention to offer precision and would be less likely to redeem coupons with an expansive versus restrictive frame. The pattern of results displayed in figure 3 supports these expectations. Among low-level construers, those with an expansive frame were more likely to redeem the coupon ( $X_{\text{expansive}} = 33\%$ ) than those with a restrictive frame ( $X_{\text{restrictive}} = 5\%$ ; Wald  $\chi^2 = 10.64, p < .005$ ). In contrast, among high-level construers, those with an expansive frame coupon were directionally less likely to redeem it ( $X_{\text{expansive}} = 25\%$ ) than those with a restrictive frame coupon ( $X_{\text{restrictive}} = 35\%$ ). This effect did not, however, achieve significance ( $\chi^2 = 1.20, ns$ ). This pattern of results led to a significant construal x frame interaction ( $\chi^2 = 11.17, p < .001$ )<sup>3</sup>.

The main effect of frame was also significant; participants with an expansive frame were more likely to use the coupon ( $X_{\text{expansive}} = 29\%$ ) than those with a restrictive frame ( $X_{\text{restrictive}} = 20\%$ ;  $\chi^2 = 4.69, p < .05$ ). And the main effect of construal level was significant; low-level construers were less likely to redeem the coupon ( $X_{\text{low-level}} = 19\%$ ) than were high-level construers ( $X_{\text{high-level}} = 30\%$ ;  $\chi^2 = 5.63, p < .05$ ). These effects were qualified by the aforementioned interaction. We also studied the effect of construal level within each frame. Among participants with a restrictive frame, high-level construers were more likely to use the coupon than low-level construers ( $\chi^2 = 11.52, p < .001$ ). This is consistent with the former's

focus on precision, and the latter's focus on feasibility. Among participants with an expansive frame, however, construal level did not significantly affect usage ( $\chi^2 = 0.80, ns$ ).

<Insert figure 3 about here >

### *Discussion*

This study used participants' chronic construal level and replicated the previous results of usage likelihood with redemption of an actual promotion offer. Consistent with previous studies, low-level construers (implemental mindset), focused on the offer feasibility and were less likely to redeem when presented with a restrictive versus expansive frame. Study 2 had also demonstrated that high-level construers (deliberative mindset) reported higher usage likelihood for restrictive versus expansive frame offers (consistent with their attention to offer precision). Interestingly, while the pattern of actual coupon redemption in study 3 was directionally consistent with this pattern, the difference was not significant. It may be that as the redemption time drew near (within the week available to the participants) chronic high-level construers started paying greater attention to the feasibility of coupon redemption. This would weaken their preference for the precise restrictive frame and would be consistent with the observed pattern of results. We discuss these inter-temporal considerations when we elaborate on the scope of the framing effect in the next section.

### *GENERAL DISCUSSION*

### *Summary of Results*

Across three studies we demonstrate that when consumers focus on offer feasibility (they have an implemental mindset, or low construal level), they are more likely to prefer the expansive (anytime) frame over the restrictive (only) frame. In contrast, when consumers are not focused as much on feasibility (they have a deliberative mindset, or a high construal level), they are more likely to prefer the restrictive (only) frame over the expansive (anytime) frame.

In study 1, we prime participants with an implemental or with a deliberative mindset, the former focusing them more on offer feasibility. Implemental mindset participants perceive the expansive frame to be more *feasible* to avail of than the restrictive frame. Feasibility considerations do not vary by frame for deliberative mindset participants. In contrast, while participants primed with a deliberative mindset perceive the restrictive frame to be more *precise* than the expansive frame, frame does not affect precision for implemental mindset participants.

In study 2 we classify consumers as chronic low-level (implemental mindset) or high-level (deliberative mindset) construers and explore how feasibility and precision mediate the effect of frames on usage. Low-level construers (implemental mindset), paying greater attention to offer feasibility, perceive the expansive frame to be more feasible than the restrictive frame, and are more likely to use expansive versus restrictive frames. In contrast, high-level construers (deliberative mindset) perceive the restrictive frame to be more precise than the expansive frame, and they are more likely to use the restrictive versus expansive frame.

In study 3 we replicate this effect of framing for actual coupon redemption. We find that low-level construers (implemental mindset) are less likely to redeem restrictive versus expansive

frame coupons. In contrast, high-level construers (deliberative mindset) are directionally more likely to redeem restrictive versus expansive frame coupons.

### *The Scope of Expansive versus Restrictive Framing*

While study 1–3 focused on expansive versus restrictive framing of the offer through framing of the promotion redemption window, we now discuss how a similar effect may be achieved through other modes of communication or through selective product availability. In addition, we briefly discuss some results that demonstrate the framing effect to be robust for small discounts. Finally, we highlight how feasibility concerns are likely to vary intertemporally.

*Modalities of expansive versus restrictive frames.* The study of language use indicates that logically equivalent statements may be interpreted differently depending on the implicit meaning conveyed by the choice of words used when a sentence is uttered (Hilton 1995). Research in the context of attribute framing similarly demonstrates that logically equivalent frames implicitly communicate differential attribute information (McKenzie 2004). Furthermore, the verbal structure of a promotional offer influences how the promotion is evaluated (Berkowitz and Walton 1980; Della Bitta et al. 1981). We posit that the expansive (anytime) frame and the restrictive (only) frame might operate similarly, implicitly communicating expansiveness or restrictiveness regardless of how these are used in communication.

In additional empirical work we replicated the effect of expansive/restrictive frames using store names (the *anyone* store vs. the *only you* store), showing that implemental mindset participants were more likely to redeem a promotional offer at the former store in a manner

similar to that for expansive (vs. restrictive) framing of redemption windows<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, expansive/restrictive framing of the store *name* led to differences in perceptions about the *time* available to use the coupon, suggesting that the frame of redemption windows is more than a simple characteristic of the promotion being evaluated by consumers. Rather, the frame appears to act as a cue that affects consumers' perceptions of offer expansiveness or restrictiveness.

In a manner similar to the framing of redemption windows, expansive/restrictive considerations could be primed through the geographic availability of a product (a product advertised as being available at any major store/only at major stores), through the eligibility of consumers to buy a product (for all veterans/only for veterans) or through the terms of use (with the purchase of any entrée/only with the purchase of an entrée). These examples highlight an avenue by which sellers could influence consumer perceptions of a product or promotion by using expansive/restrictive communication cues without changing to the promotion offer per se.

*Discount magnitude.* How large must a discount be for consumers to pay attention to feasibility or precision considerations cued by expansive/restrictive frames? We note that study 1 results indicated that discount level (30% vs. 60% off) does not moderate the effect of mindset and expansive versus restrictive frames on perceptions of offer feasibility and precision (although the coupons offering a 60% discount were perceived to be more attractive, on average, than those that offered a 30% discount). It is possible that there was no difference in consumers' evaluation because of the relatively deep discount in both cases. However, it may also be that the frame interacts with mindset to affect consumers' evaluation of offer feasibility regardless of the level of discount. This would indicate a more robust effect that cues expansive/restrictive considerations in an implicit manner, as suggested by the preceding discussion on varying modalities of framing. To explore this possibility we replicated study 1 using a 10% discount,

and found a significant mindset x frame interaction effect on usage likelihood, suggesting that the framing effect persisted even for this small magnitude. This attention paid to small discounts is also consistent with prior research suggesting that even small promotions may be used as a signal or cue for value (Inman, McAlister, and Hoyer 1990), and that consumers often receive non-price benefits from participating in promotions (Chandon et al. 2000).

*Temporal horizon.* Liberman and Trope (1998) present the idea of temporal construal, that is, consumers process events in the near future at a lower, more concrete level (implemental mindset), while processing those in the distant future at a higher, more abstract level (deliberative mindset). Indeed, Zhao, Hoeffler, and Zauberan (2007) demonstrate that a concrete mindset does highlight feasibility-related concerns relative to an abstract mindset. Research on temporal preferences correspondingly indicates that consumers' discounting of future payoffs is usually greater for time/effort than for money (Soman 1998). Consumers also believe that they have more time in the future and may be less affected by feasibility constraints than they are in the present (Zauberan and Lynch 2005). Malkoc and Zauberan (2006) demonstrate that the level of construal of future events mediates the effect of temporal delay on discounting. Thus, construing future events at a lower (i.e., implemental) level makes consumers discount them less. This research suggests that feasibility considerations will be mitigated when evaluating a promotion that is farther in the future compared to one in the present.

We find empirical support for this conjecture in two ways. First, in an additional study we find that the effect of expansive/restrictive frames on feasibility and reported likelihood of usage is attenuated when the promotion starts two weeks from the next day (compared to when the promotion starts the next day). Second, it may be likely that feasibility concerns are highlighted for all consumers (regardless of mindset) as the time to avail of a promotional offer

draws near, and consumers start paying greater attention to the feasibility concerns associated with the offer. Indeed, we find in study 3 that high-level construers are only directionally more likely to redeem a coupon with a restrictive (more precise) versus expansive frame. Tellingly, in a smaller study where we handed out coupons identical to the ones used in study 3 and asked consumers to evaluate how likely they were to use the coupons, this effect of precision was significant for high-level construers. We found that among high-level construers, consumers with restrictive frame coupons reported significantly higher usage likelihood than did consumers with expansive frame coupons. These differences between actual usage and self-reports suggest that as consumers get closer to using the coupons, feasibility concerns get highlighted (and precision concerns are correspondingly mitigated).

#### *Directions for Future Research and Implications*

*Effect of mood.* The role of consumer mood in the evaluation of promotions has received some attention in the literature (e.g., Heilman, Nakamoto, and Rao 2002). Based on the extant literature we would expect that consumer mood would influence how communication with expansive/restrictive frames is evaluated. Positive mood tends to be more expansive (as reflected by an increase in helping behavior, variety seeking, and divergent thinking) and thus participants in a positive mood would under normal circumstances prefer a restrictive versus expansive frame (the former being perceived to be more precise than the latter). However, if feasibility was highlighted, positive mood consumers would adapt to this concern, resulting in a preference for expansive versus restrictive frames. On the other hand, negative mood tends to be more restrictive (as reflected by an increase in risk-aversion, and lesser divergent thinking) and

concerns about feasibility would likely increase in importance. Thus, negative mood is likely to result in an expansive frame evaluated more favorably than a restrictive frame.

*Retailer perceptions.* Promotion offers such as the ones used in this paper also have significant impact on consumers' perception of the exchange. For instance, Darke and Dahl (2003) show that discounts increase the perceived fairness of the offer and the satisfaction with the exchange. While the present research did not study retailer and exchange perceptions, preliminary results of a set of follow-up studies indicate that retailers offering promotions with restrictive frames are perceived to be more responsible and professional than retailers offering promotions with expansive frames.

*Implications.* Thus far, managers have used expansive/restrictive framing of promotions without an understanding of the differential impact these frames have on promotion evaluation and redemption. The present research gives managers the opportunity to use this framing tool strategically depending on the nature of the promotional offer and the desired consumer response. Importantly, understanding *when* an expansive frame might work better than a restrictive frame is a key issue that this research has uncovered. We find that consumers who are in an implemental mindset are focused on the feasibility of availing the promotion offer and prefer expansive (vs. restrictive) frames. Implemental mindsets are more likely when the consumption is in the near future, or when the purchase decision has already been made. In contrast, consumers in a deliberative mindset focus more on offer precision and prefer restrictive versus expansive frames. Deliberative mindsets are more likely when the consumption is farther into the future, or prior to a purchase decision having been made.

The promotions studied in the present research offer participants a certain percent off their next purchase in the store. As such, these promotions are similar to *in-pack* coupons that

consumers receive only after they have purchased the product. Redeeming in-pack coupons requires additional effort, such as visiting the store again and/or purchasing a specific product. In addition to in-pack coupons, our results directly speak to two other promotion mechanisms. First, these results are applicable to *on-pack* coupons, which consumers see when buying a product but that can be redeemed only at a subsequent purchase occasion. On-pack coupons are often more profitable than *peel-off* coupons (that can be used for the same purchase occasion) because a) they can lead to higher market share in the long run, and b) consumers may fail to redeem these coupons at a later stage (Raju, Dhar, and Morrison 1994). Our results suggest that restrictive framing of on-pack coupons may increase evaluation during the first visit (when consumers are more likely to be in a deliberative mindset), but may discourage redemption at a subsequent visit (when consumers are more likely to be in an implemental mindset).

Second, these results are applicable to mail-in rebates that appear attractive at the point-of-purchase but which are often not redeemed. At the time of redemption consumers may focus more on offer feasibility, and “hate collecting all the paperwork, filling out the forms, and mailing it all in to claim their \$10 or \$100,” resulting in almost 40% of mail-in rebates (a total of approximately \$2 billion) not being redeemed (Grow 2005, p 34). Thus, increasing the perceived restrictiveness of these rebates would be one possible way to improve the evaluation of the rebate at the time of purchase (when consumers are more likely to be in a deliberative mindset) without the concomitant increase in promotion expenses (fewer people redeem coupons when the time comes to do so as they are more likely to be in an implemental mindset). However, if consumers feel that they have been unfairly taken advantage of, such a practice may lead to dissatisfaction and increased regulatory oversight in the longer term.

*Conclusion*

There is immense scope for using expansive versus restrictive framing in brand names, brand slogans, and marketing communications like advertising and direct mailers, to achieve specific marketing objectives. The present research takes a first look at how mindsets moderate the effect of restrictive versus expansive frames on perceptions and behavior. Additional investigation in this domain, focused on the effects of mindsets and different communication frames, is likely to yield valuable insights for researchers and marketers.

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*FOOTNOTES*

<sup>1</sup> We use a dichotomous rather than a continuous construal level variable as the BIF has been previously validated as a two-level construct (Vallacher and Wegner 1987). Using the continuous variable does not change results.

<sup>2</sup> Continuous construal level measures reveals a similar construal level x frame interaction,  $F(1, 164) = 8.14, p < .01$ .

<sup>3</sup> Continuous construal level measures also revealed a similar construal x frame interaction,  $\chi^2 = 9.20, p < .005$ .

<sup>4</sup> Brief discussions of additional studies are presented here to highlight the moderating variables of interest. Details of the procedures and results are available from the authors on request.

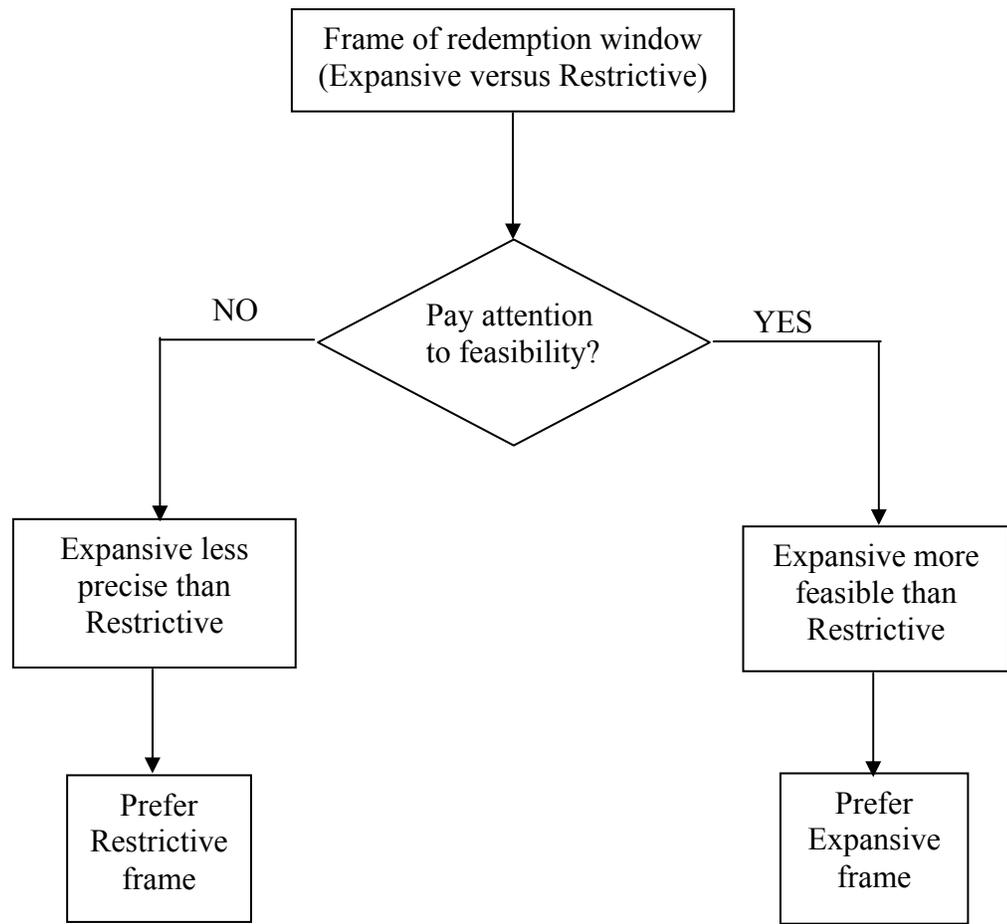
<sup>5</sup> We present simple mediation tests within each of the two levels of the moderator as the mediating variable is proposed to be different for each of the two levels of the moderator. Precision mediates the effect of frame on usage for high-level construers, but not for low-level construers. Feasibility mediates the effect of frame on usage for low-level construers, but not for high-level construers. This could be considered a mediated moderation (we thank a reviewer for this insight). That is, mindset (high- versus low-level construal) moderates the effect of frame on usage, and this moderation is mediated by precision and feasibility, respectively. Typical tests of moderated mediation, however, assume *one* variable mediates the moderation (e.g., Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt 2005, p 855). As an approximation, including both mediators in the analyses suggested by Muller et al. does significantly weaken the interaction effect of mindset and frame on usage.

TABLE 1  
EFFECT OF CONSTRUAL LEVEL AND FRAME ON PRECISION, FEASIBILITY,  
AND OFFER EVALUATION – STUDY 2

Frame	Low-level construal (implemental)		High-level construal (deliberative)	
	Expansive	Restrictive	Expansive	Restrictive
Number of participants ( <i>n</i> )	42	42	41	43
Likelihood of using promotion	9.33	7.31	7.63	9.27
Offer precision	8.67	8.79	9.10	10.14
Offer feasibility	8.01	6.62	6.10	6.60

FIGURE 1

OVERVIEW: FEASIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS MODERATE THE EFFECT OF  
FRAME ON OFFER EVALUATION



**Deliberative mindset (Study 1)**

**High-level construal (Study 2 & 3)**

**Implemental mindset (Study 1)**

**Low-level construal (Study 2 & 3)**

FIGURE 2

EFFECT OF FRAME AND CHRONIC CONSTRUAL LEVEL ON USAGE – STUDY 2

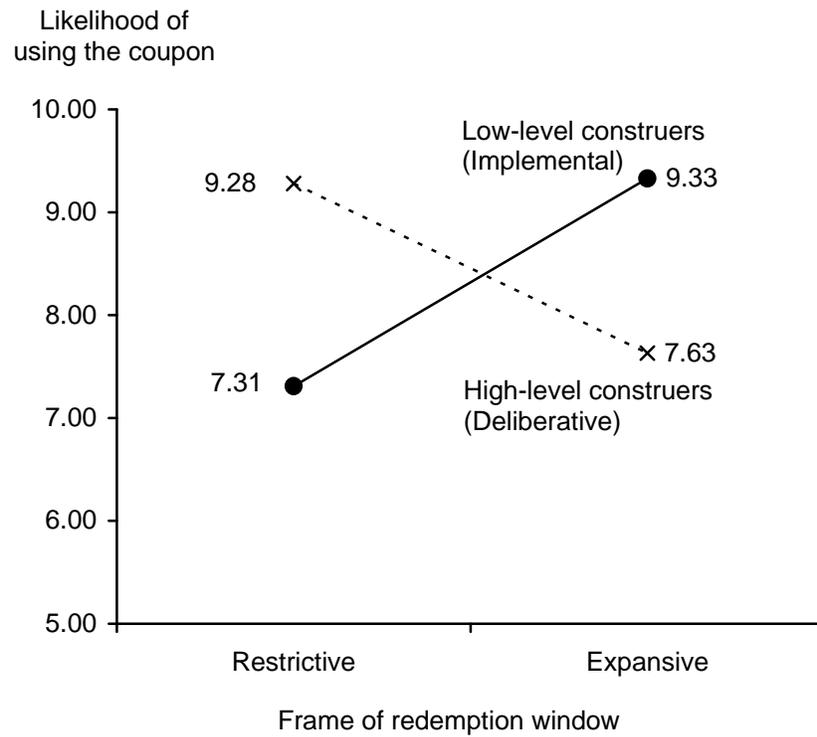
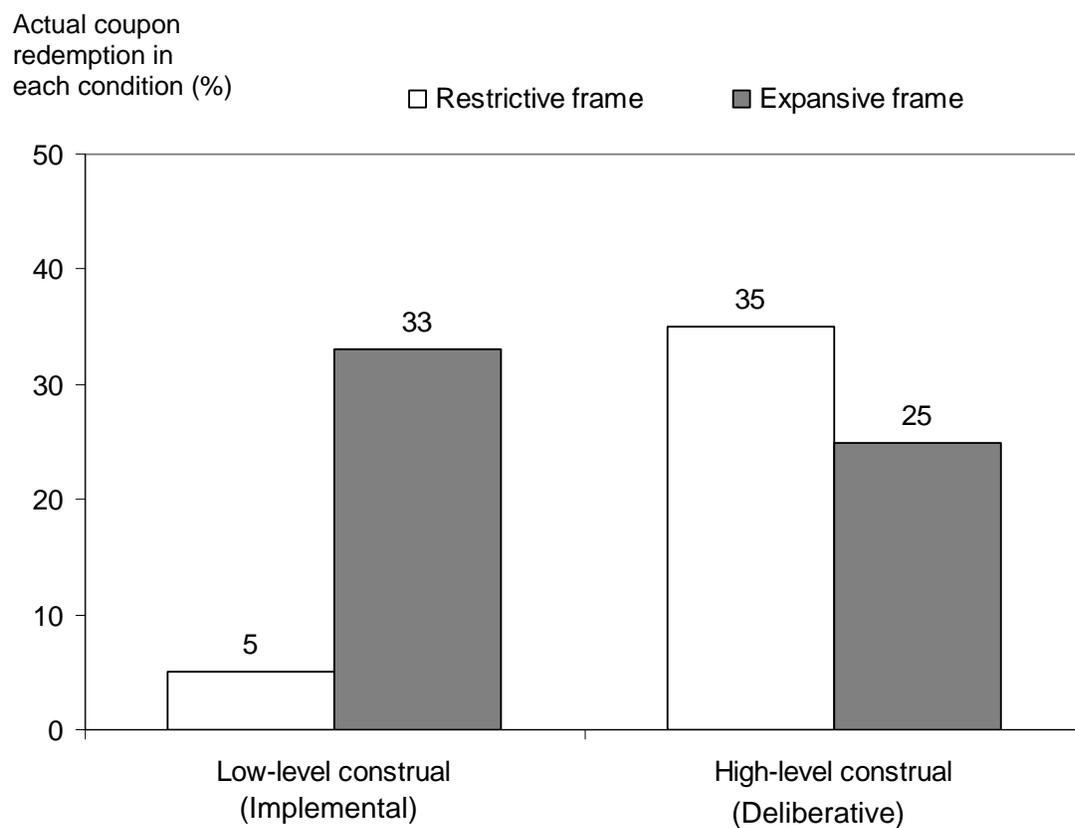


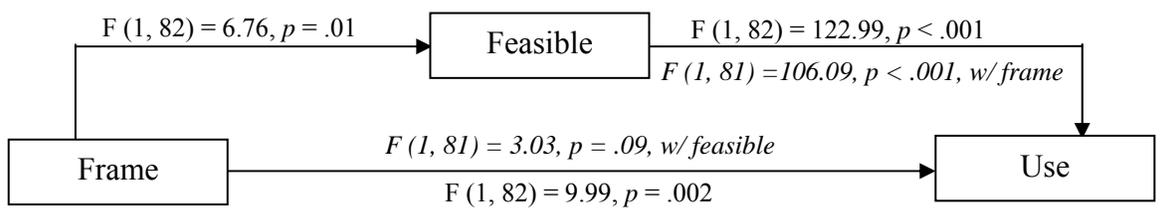
FIGURE 3  
EFFECT OF FRAME AND CHRONIC CONSTRUAL LEVEL ON  
ACTUAL COUPON REDEMPTION – STUDY 3



APPENDIX

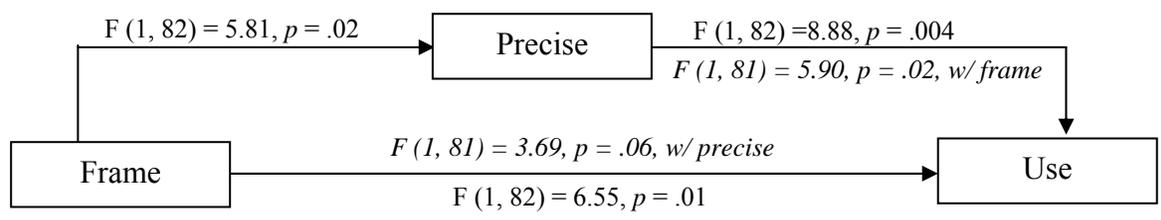
EXPLORING MEDIATING EFFECTS OF FEASIBILITY AND PRECISION<sup>5</sup> – STUDY 2

**A. Feasibility mediates effect of frame for low-level construers (implemental)**



Sobel test:  $z = 2.52, p < .05$ ; Goodman test:  $z = 2.53, p < .05$

**B. Precision mediates effect of frame for high-level construers (deliberative)**



Sobel test:  $z = 1.71, p < .10$ ; Goodman test:  $z = 1.79, p < .10$