

“Why Affective Forecasters Overestimate the Influence of Outcome Specifications”

The present research proposes that affective forecasters overestimate the extent to which experienced hedonic responses are influenced by outcome specifications, such as the probability and the magnitude of an outcome. The experience of an outcome (e.g., winning a gamble) is typically more affectively intense than the simulation of that outcome (e.g., imagining winning a gamble) upon which the affective forecast for it is based. As a result, experiencers allocate a larger share of their attention toward the outcome (e.g., winning the gamble) and less to its specifications than do affective forecasters. Consequently, hedonic responses to an outcome are less sensitive to its specifications than are affective forecasts for that outcome. The results of seven experiments provide support for the proposed theory. Affective forecasters overestimated how sensitive experiencers would be to the probability of positive and negative outcomes (Experiments 1 and 2). Consistent with the attentional account, differences in sensitivity to probability specifications disappeared when the attention of forecasters was diverted away from probability specifications (Experiment 3) or when the attention of experiencers was drawn toward probability specifications (Experiment 4). Finally, differences in sensitivity to probability specifications between forecasters and experiencers were diminished when the forecasted outcome was more affectively intense (Experiments 5 and 6). Initial evidence suggests that the findings generalize to magnitude specifications (Experiment 7).