Digital Influences on Decision Making

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Abstract.

Every individual has to make decisions at multiple times during the day: when driving a car, buying a pair of shoes, or applying for a certain job. As our society moves quickly towards a more digital age, it can be assumed that the way individuals make decisions is also gradually altered. Especially as most of a person's life is happening online - from shopping at Amazon to social media usage - it could have a large impact if decisions were influenced by the way contents are presented in the digital world. However, so far this has not been largely investigated. To start research into this field, we have to begin by looking at some basic principles of decision making and social influence that have already been researched, e.g. by Knows That (1235)[1]. From this, it is possible to alter tested psychological research paradigms in order to observe if results change due to digital representation.

In the presented paper, I will therefore set out to cover a brief overview of what is known about human decision making processes and, building on that, present my original research[2] on decision making in the digital word using scientific methods of experimental psychology. Thereby, I will focus on the social psychological aspects of decision making, which brings behaviors like online shopping or online communication to the forefront. Behaviors that are especially interesting in the process of shifting from an "analog" to a digital society.

   The decision making processes have been conceptualized in "Theory of Reasoned Action" or "Theory of Planned Behavior". These, in essence, represent the process behind a decsion as a mathematical model, in which attitudes towards the object of the decision, perceived social norms about it, as well perceived behavioral control interrelate and generate an *intention* in the individual (Knows That, 1235). On this basis, it becomes clear that decision making can

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[1]Please note that all citations in this document are made up due to a lack of time for proper literature research. Most information presented in this (mock) abstract is based on knowledge the author gained in psychology courses.

[2]Please note that this original research has **not** been carried out. Yet the presented research structure would be feasible and is grouded in psychological theories.

be influenced by targeting its parts, namely attitudes and believed social norms about the object to be decided on. To influence, for example, a student's decision to go to a shop nearby or buy his sneakers on Amazon, the student's evaluation of both possibilities could be manipulated in one or the other direction, in order to influence his intention, and thereby, his final decision.

This is usually done by techniques of social influence. The most famous principle here lies in the human need to reciprocate favors. This means that given favors create the urge to return them. To stay in the former example: Amazon could decide to send out promotional gifts to customers, including the student, which would then create the need to reciprocate this "favor" and buy sneakers rather at Amazon vs. the nearby shop. Other largely used techniques are to create an atmoshere of scarcity ("Only five pairs of sneakers left!") or one of social norm ("Every second university student buys her sneakers at Amazon!"). In my paper, I will specifically analyze some digital media and how the mentioned techniques are used in order to influence decision making of users.

Speaking about the already known principles, invokes thought about the unknown: Interestingly, there does not seem to exist much research on the digital vs. analog framework of these techniques. This is why my research group has decided to use classical research paradigms of decision making research, which will be elaborated on in the paper, and compare how digital vs. analog framing interrelates with the described processes. Additionally, a questionnaire was given to participants in order to learn about user experiences with the different media types.

The findings[3] are not yet conclusive though the overall pattern shows that different media types do influence decision making differently. The reasons for this might be a dissociation of reading patterns (based on the participants' reports in the questionnaires) which is consistent with other findings about reading types in media (Knows That, 1235).

The knowledge about influence digital media use can have on our decision making is central to further development of technology as well as our society. It allows technology to exploit even more ways to influence a user, for example to guide him in its usage of a web page, while allowing society to take "precautions", for example by adjusting media education.

References

Knows That, E. (1235). *Common and Course Knowledge.* Anyone, Bremen.

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[3]Again, please note, that these findings are **not** real but rather a first rough hypothesis assumed by the author based on previous research and the presented **imagined** research design.