JOURNAL OF CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY, 8(4), 377–406

Effects of an Approaching Group Discussion on Product Responses

Ann Schlosser
Owen Graduate School of Management
Vanderbilt University

Sharon Shavitt
Department of Advertising
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

Three experiments were conducted to assess how an approaching group discussion influences consumers' product thoughts. It was proposed that, in preparation for discussion, people cognitively rehearse product thoughts that appear appropriate for discussion. In each study, participants read a restaurant review and then anticipated either discussing the restaurant in a focus group or responding individually. Across the studies, various cues were manipulated regarding the type of information appropriate for discussion (utilitarian vs. social image information). Compared to those in the individual condition, those anticipating a group discussion were more responsive to appropriateness cues: Their listed thoughts were more consistent with the cue than those in the individual condition. Yet, the group-anticipation effect did not influence product judgments regarding the restaurant. These findings suggest that an approaching discussion causes people to tailor their responses in a strategic manner, as a mental rehearsal for the upcoming discussion, without altering their personal views about the product. A third experiment demonstrated that this group-anticipation effect on listed thoughts carried over to the information shared and the product concerns expressed during discussion, suggesting that responses in actual discussion reflected what people had rehearsed in anticipation of discussion.

Interpersonal communication is a fundamentally important process (cf. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Festinger, 1957; Higgins, 1981; Janis & King, 1954). In the con-

Requests for reprints should be sent to Ann Schlosser, Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203. E-mail: Ann.Schlosser@owen.vanderbilt.edu

sumer behavior arena, there is a substantial literature on group interaction, word of mouth communication, and communication between customers and salespersons (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1990; Childers & Rao, 1992; Fern, 1982, 1983; Fine & Schumann, 1992; Ford & Ellis, 1980; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Park & Lessig, 1977; Thomas, 1992; Ward & Reingen, 1990; Witt & Bruce, 1972). These studies establish the importance of consumers' verbal statements as key criterion variables. Indeed, such statements often influence the perceptions and decisions of other consumers, salespersons, and manufacturers.

However, very little is known about what happens when consumers anticipate interaction with others and the strategies by which they prepare for it. Of course, this, too, is a fundamental aspect of consumption. People routinely consider product information in anticipation of discussing or displaying the product in social (e.g., group) situations (cf. Bearden & Etzel, 1982). In this article, we argue that the anticipation of group discussion can affect what people think about prior to the actual initiation of any discussion. Specifically, we examine how individuals tailor their product responses in cognitive preparation for group discussion and how this translates into what group members express in actual discussion of a product.

In social psychology, several lines of work have examined how individuals respond to the anticipation of discussing their views on an issue with others. Much of this work has focused primarily on the effects of anticipating a discussion on attitudinal shifts and the endurance of such shifts after the anticipation is canceled (Cialdini, Levy, Herman, & Evenbeck, 1973; Cialdini, Levy, Herman, Kozlowski, & Petty, 1976; Cialdini & Petty, 1981). Furthermore, there have been efforts to identify the impact of different situational factors on the positions people espouse when anticipating a discussion (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Petty, 1981; Higgins, 1981; Leippe & Elkin, 1987; Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989). These lines of work have yielded important insights on the role of accountability or impression-relevant involvement (Johnson & Eagly, 1989) on the positions people espouse and the processes by which they adjust or justify those positions in anticipation of interaction.

However, in many group contexts, agreeing on an attitudinal position or solution to a problem is not necessarily the major goal of discussion. The nature of the ideas and thoughts that people bring to the group discussion may be equally important (Fern, 1982, 1983; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Thomas, 1992; Ward & Reingen, 1990). For example, in focus group discussions, commonly used in consumer testing situations, often the goal is to obtain a range of reactions to products, concepts, or advertisements (Fern, 1982, 1983; Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Thus, knowing which product attributes consumers think about as they approach a group discussion can be as important as knowing what they agree with (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN A GROUP CONTEXT

Group contexts have been argued to evoke a number of motives (see Geen, 1991, for a review). For instance, research indicates that the presence of a small group or an audience can heighten the salience of the public aspects of the self or an awareness of oneself as a social object (Buss, 1980) and appears to heighten one's sense of personal accountability (Tetlock et al., 1989), increasing one's concerns over being evaluated by others. In terms of product evaluation, the opportunity for social interaction and public scrutiny can induce motives to be informed about a product, to comply with others' wishes, and to be associated with a group (Bearden & Etzel, 1982).

Moreover, anticipating a discussion with strangers may also focus interest on ensuring a smooth and fluent interaction. People may become concerned about what their discussion partners will expect them to say, whether they will have enough to say, and whether their partners will be able to respond to their statements and keep the discussion going. Indeed, having real-time, interactive conversations is a labor-intensive task in which the participating consumers must process and make inferences from the ongoing discussion content (Thomas, 1992).

In sum, the anticipation of a group discussion probably elicits a variety of social identity motives (see Shavitt, 1989), including goals regarding maximizing one's public image, identifying with a group, and facilitating a smooth and fluent interaction. These goals may motivate participants to tailor their product responses in preparation for discussion. Indeed, Higgins (1981) proposed that communicators are motivated by a variety of goals to modify their discussion contributions to follow certain rules of social interaction (e.g., to deliver an easily understood message appropriate for the audience's characteristics). Prior research has primarily examined how prediscussion thinking and discussion content is evaluatively relevant to the opinion held by the individual, the group, or both (cf. Higgins & Rholes, 1978; Stasser & Titus, 1985; Tetlock et al., 1989; Ward & Reingen, 1990). What is not known is how such goals might influence the type of content people consider as they approach discussion.

One context in which social identity goals are likely to affect responses is in focus group settings. Focus group researchers have recognized the potential difficulties in gaining participants' unedited reactions to the topic at hand. To address this challenge, researchers have advocated having participants list their thoughts and ideas prior to discussion (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther, 1993; Greenbaum, 1993). One such advocated method is the nominal group technique, in which participants list their responses individually prior to any interaction with other group members (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975). Participants then share their listed thoughts publicly.

The unanswered theoretical question is whether the thoughts listed prior to group discussion are influenced by the approaching group discussion. That is,

can one get unbiased responses from individuals anticipating a group discussion that are essentially the same in content as those of individuals not anticipating a group discussion? We argue that social identity motives will influence the thoughts listed prior to discussion. As a result, those responses may be tailored to the perceived demands of the group situation, leading certain thoughts to be under- or overrepresented.

How will the salience of social identity motives influence participants' thoughts as they approach a group discussion? According to functional theories of attitude (e.g., Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956), heightening certain motives or functions over others can shift the individual's focus of attention to goal-relevant information. For instance, situational factors that heighten the salience of social identity motives have been shown to increase thinking about a product's social image characteristics in contrast with its utilitarian characteristics (i.e., the product's inherent quality and quality-related attributes; Shavitt & Fazio, 1991; Shavitt, Swan, Lowrey, & Wanke, 1994).

One might assume, therefore, that if a public setting elicits social identity motives, those anticipating a group discussion will generally become more focused on social image attributes and less on utilitarian attributes of the product. However, social identity motives are also likely to increase interest in the social appropriateness of one's responses and, when information is available implying what might be socially expected in discussion, those anticipating discussion might think about the product in ways consistent with such information. Thus, their product responses will likely focus more on those product attributes perceived to be the most socially appropriate to discuss. We expect, therefore, that the anticipation of group discussion may either increase or decrease the manifest level of thinking about social image characteristics and utilitarian characteristics of the product, depending on how socially appropriate each type of thought seems to be.

Information on the appropriateness of different types of thoughts may be available from various situational cues. For instance, information in a product description itself may provide cues about the potential expectations of discussion partners. If a particular type of product characteristic is given prominent attention in the product description, this may signal the appropriateness or relevance of that type of characteristic as a focus of discussion. Thus, product attributes may be assumed to be more appropriate to discuss if they have been described at greater length or if other persons are described as weighing those attributes heavily in evaluating the product.

We expect that these and other types of cues will affect the cognitive responses of those anticipating a group discussion compared to those not anticipating such discussion. Namely, if a cue implies that, say, the product's utilitarian features are appropriate to discuss, then those anticipating discussing the product with others may list more utilitarian thoughts or fewer social image thoughts than would those not anticipating a discussion.

It should be noted that the effects of cues on those in a group situation need not be specific to the cue-relevant category of listed thoughts. Thinking more carefully about one set of issues may be reflected in the listing of fewer thoughts about other issues, such that the relative degree of cue-relevant thought listing is increased. For example, if a product description implies that utilitarian information is appropriate to discuss, those anticipating a group discussion may respond by listing fewer social image thoughts than those not anticipating a group discussion, and the number of listed utilitarian thoughts remains unchanged.

It should also be noted that the experiments reported here examined the effects of a group discussion context on the activation and use of knowledge already in memory, not the effects on the encoding and interpretation of subsequently presented information. Participants received information about a focal product prior to learning about the group discussion. Thus, the results reflect the type of knowledge that people activate from memory in cognitive preparation for group discussion.

EFFECTS OF ANTICIPATED DISCUSSION ON OTHER JUDGMENTS

Evaluative Judgments

We have argued that consumers anticipating a group discussion tailor their cognitive responses to meet the perceived requirements of the communication situation. As noted earlier, this may reflect a variety of social identity concerns. However, some of these concerns imply different processes than others. For instance, group-anticipation effects may reflect a calculated or strategic process for facilitating a fluent interaction rather than, say, a desire to identify with a reference group's purported attitudes. If so, then thoughts pertinent to the discussion may be modified, whereas evaluative judgments may remain unaffected by anticipated group discussion.

A secondary issue in our research was to explore whether those anticipating a group discussion would change the way they evaluate the focal product to match the perceived opinions of others. We also examined the effects on participants' perceptions of the importance of utilitarian and social image criteria in evaluating such products.

Actual Discussion

If the thought lists reflect participants' mental preparation of their contribution to the discussion, then the discussion content should reflect a pattern similar to that of

the thoughts listed. Moreover, social identity motives influencing prediscussion thinking should be at least as salient during the actual discussion. Consequently, both prediscussion thought lists and actual discussion content may reflect a concentration on those types of product attributes that people believe are appropriate for discussion. Moreover, if thought lists represent participants' mental rehearsal of what to contribute to discussion, then these thoughts should play a significant role in predicting what participants discuss beyond what is explained by appropriateness cues alone.

The set of experiments described here examined how people tailor the content of their responses in cognitive preparation for group discussion. The experiments investigated whether anticipating discussion heightens reliance on cues regarding what type of product content is appropriate to discuss, thereby affecting the amount of social image versus utilitarian responses when compared to the responses of people not anticipating discussion. Experiments 1 and 2 examined the effects of anticipating group discussion on the types of thoughts listed and the way the product is evaluated. Experiment 3 explored the implications for the content and results of actual group discussion.

EXPERIMENT 1

In the first experiment, participants received a product description in which utilitarian attributes were given prominent attention: There was twice as much utilitarian as social image information presented. Moreover, the utilitarian information always preceded the social image information. After receiving this information, half of the participants were led to anticipate an upcoming group discussion of the product before listing their thoughts. To provide a basis for tracking group-anticipation effects on evaluative judgments, the product description also incorporated variations in the valence of the restaurant information.

Method

Participants. Seventy-three undergraduates participated in exchange for extra credit in an advertising course. The two sessions to which participants came were arbitrarily assigned as either the group ($n = 35$) or individual ($n = 38$) session.

Materials. Participants received an excerpt from a fictitious restaurant review that contained two paragraphs of utilitarian information and one paragraph of social image information, with each paragraph containing four sentences (see Appendix). For everyone, the first paragraph contained favorable utilitarian information describing the food (e.g., "The dessert menu also offers innovative and award-winning desserts"). The second utilitarian paragraph contained information

about the price. The valence of this paragraph was manipulated to provide a basis for tracking any group-anticipation effects on attitudes. That is, for half of the participants, this information was favorable (e.g., "Daily lunch and dinner specials offer additional inexpensive meals"), and for the other half, it was unfavorable (e.g., "Lunch and dinner specials are rare and are still costly"). For everyone, the last paragraph contained negative social image information. It described the atmosphere and the patrons (e.g., "The 'regulars' are an older, local clientele or families with young children"). In addition, it stated that college students surveyed said they would not go to the restaurant, but did not explain the basis for their negative attitudes. A pretest confirmed the intended valences of these paragraphs.[1]

If an approaching discussion affects evaluations as well as listed thoughts toward the restaurant, one would expect attitude ratings to reflect the valence of the information on which listed thoughts were based. For instance, if the social image information is the only negative information in the review, and those anticipating a discussion list fewer social image thoughts than those not anticipating a discussion do, then they might also report more favorable attitudes than those not anticipating a discussion do.

Procedure. There were a group session and an individual session, each run on the same day by the same experimenter. Those in the group session were randomly assigned to a seat to reduce the chances of friends being in the same group.

Participants began by reading the restaurant review and then reporting their attitudes toward the restaurant on a scale ranging from 1 (*dislike very much*) to 9 (*like very much*). These materials were then collected, and the group–individual manipulation was introduced. Those in the individual condition received written instructions that they would be asked further questions about the restaurant as well as some demographic questions. Meanwhile, those in the group condition were placed into 4- or 5-person focus groups and given name tags. Participants were asked to move their seats to face their other group members, then to write their first names on their name tags and put them on. The written instructions were the same as those for the individual condition, except participants were informed that they would later be sharing their thoughts and opinions about the restaurant with those in their group and that a facilitator would be arriving to assist each group in its discussion. Participants in both the individual and group conditions then listed their thoughts about the restaurant on a sheet that contained eight boxes. No one was asked to put their names on their thought list or was led to expect that anyone else would see it.

---

[1]Nineteen undergraduate students rated each paragraph on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*unfavorable*) to 7 (*favorable*). The ratings were higher for the favorable paragraphs about the food ($M = 6.25$) and the prices ($M = 5.75$) than were the ratings for the unfavorable paragraphs about the prices ($M = 1.95$) and the decor and patrons ($M = 3.55$; all $t(17)$s > 7, $ps < .0001$).

To determine whether participants' attitudes changed after the introduction of the group manipulation, all participants then rated the restaurant on three 9-point scales anchored with *good–bad, desirable–undesirable,* and *pleasant–unpleasant.* They then completed some other measures.

For the group condition, an assistant to the experimenter left the room and returned with a written message. The experimenter verbally announced that the facilitator was delayed and could not come and that the focus group discussion would thus be canceled. Participants were asked to continue with the last questionnaire. Those in the individual condition also continued with the last questionnaire at this point. This questionnaire included a third attitude rating of the restaurant, a 7-point scale anchored with *unfavorable–favorable.* Participants also rated the importance of three criteria—atmosphere (a social image criterion), food (a utilitarian criterion), and prices (a utilitarian criterion)—in evaluating a restaurant. All were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*). Finally, they were asked for any comments they had about the study. Comments revealed that 3 participants were suspicious about the group manipulation, and these participants' data were deleted from all analyses.

Thought coding. Judges subsequently coded each listed thought into a utilitarian, social image, multiple-functioned, or uncodable category using Shavitt's (1990) procedures for coding the attitude functions reflected in listed thoughts. The utilitarian category included references to product quality, thoughts about attributes intrinsically associated with the restaurant (e.g., food, price), and references to rewards and punishments associated with the restaurant (e.g., "The food sounds delicious"). Social image thoughts included thoughts about the restaurant's image, references to others' attitudes (and patronage) toward the restaurant, and what the attitude symbolizes or communicates to people (e.g., "Too old of a crowd," "middle-class"). An example of a multiple-functioned thought capturing both the utilitarian and social identity function is "Too expensive for college students." An example of an uncodable item is "I'm completely neutral." See Shavitt (1990) for further description and validation of these coding categories.

Judges were blind to the group–individual condition of the writer. Two judges independently coded 372 thoughts with 85% agreement. A third coder resolved disagreements. Due to the low number of uncodable and multiple-functioned thoughts (10% of thoughts fell into these two categories), only the number of social image and utilitarian thoughts were analyzed.

Results

Number of social image versus utilitarian thoughts. A 2 (group manipulation: individual vs. group condition) × 2 (information in the second paragraph:

favorable vs. unfavorable) × 2 (thought type, a within-subjects factor: social image vs. utilitarian) repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the Group Manipulation × Thought Type interaction was significant, $F(1, 65) = 10.91$, $p < .005$. As shown in Figure 1, those in the group condition listed fewer social image thoughts than those in the individual condition did, $F(1, 65) = 8.76$, $p < .005$, and more utilitarian thoughts than those in the individual condition did, $F(1, 65) = 5.83$, $p < .05$. No other effects were significant.

Importance of restaurant criteria. To assess whether those in the group versus individual conditions differed in their perceptions of how important atmosphere, food, and prices were to evaluating a restaurant, their importance ratings

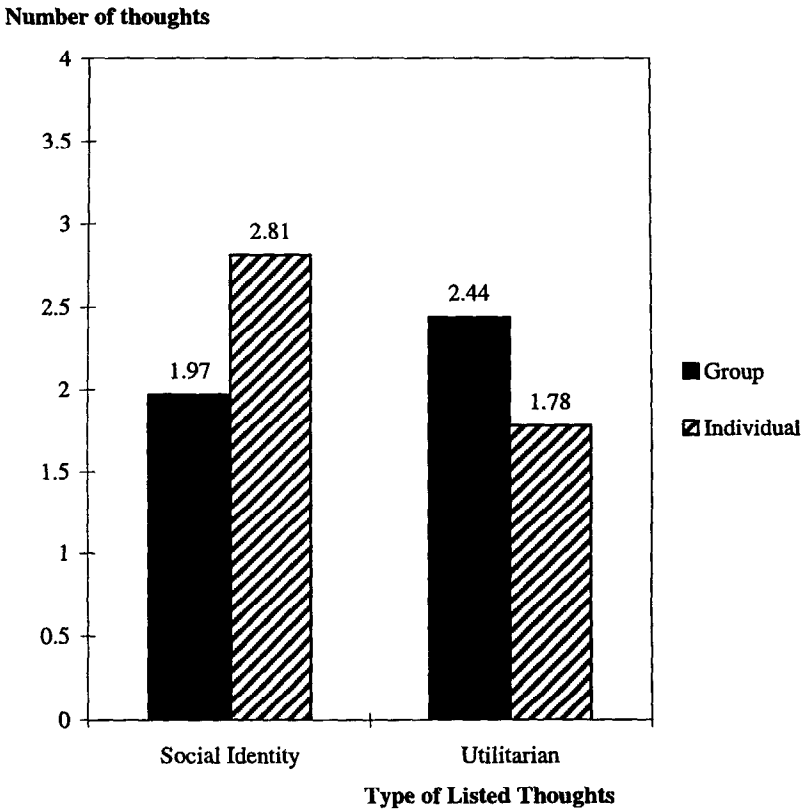

FIGURE 1 Experiment 1: Effect of approaching group discussion on the number of social identity and utilitarian thoughts listed.

were analyzed using a 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (information in the second paragraph) × 3 (restaurant criteria: atmosphere, food, vs. prices) repeated measures ANOVA.

Overall, participants rated food (M = 6.53) as more important than atmosphere (M = 5.58) and prices (M = 5.64) in evaluating a restaurant, $F(2, 66) = 19.32$, $p < .0001$. Those in the group versus individual condition did not differ in what they perceived to be important criteria in evaluating a restaurant (all Fs involving the group manipulation factor < 1). Thus, the group manipulation did not affect the perceived importance of the social image versus utilitarian criteria in evaluating a restaurant.

Attitude ratings. Because the three attitude measures used different scales (i.e., either 7- or 9-point scales), attitude ratings of the restaurant were standardized before conducting a 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (information in the second paragraph) × 3 (time of attitude rating, a within-subjects factor: before the group–individual manipulation was introduced, during the anticipation of a group discussion for those in the group condition or the anticipation of further questions for those in the individual condition, vs. after the group expectation was canceled) repeated measures ANOVA. The group manipulation had no effect on any of the attitude ratings (the first attitude rating: Group $M = .01$, Individual $M = .03$; the second attitude rating: Group $M = -.03$, Individual $M = -.02$; the third attitude rating: Group $M = -.09$, Individual $M = .04$), $F(1, 64) < 1$.

As expected, a main effect of valence of the second utilitarian paragraph emerged, indicating that the attitudinal measures were sensitive to the utilitarian valence manipulation: The review with the favorable second paragraph elicited more favorable attitudes (overall $M = .43$) than the one with the unfavorable second paragraph (overall $M = -.45$), $F(1, 64) = 18.82$, $p < .0001$.[2]

[2]To assess whether the attitudinal and the importance criteria measures were sensitive enough to capture judgments toward the focal restaurant and restaurant-going criteria, respectively, the attitudes of those who indicated that price is important in evaluating a restaurant were compared to the attitudes of those indicating that price is unimportant with a 2 (information in the second paragraph) × 2 (price important in evaluating a restaurant: yes vs. no) × 3 (time of attitude rating) ANOVA. If these measures are valid, the opinions of those indicating that price is important (rather than unimportant) should be significantly affected by the valence manipulation of price in the product description. This was supported by an Information × Price Importance interaction, $F(1, 64) = 4.40$, $p < .05$. Among those indicating that price is unimportant in evaluating a restaurant, there was little difference between those who received the favorable versus unfavorable price information (Ms = 5.52 vs. 4.84, respectively), $F(1, 23) = 1.35$, *ns*. Among those indicating that price is important in evaluating a restaurant, those who received the favorable price information rated the restaurant more favorably than those receiving the negative price information (Ms = 6.42 vs. 4.46), $F(1, 43) = 28.05$, $p < .0001$.

One might expect a greater difference in attitudes between those in the group and individual conditions after the group manipulation was introduced and when the utilitarian and the social image information in the review differed in valence (i.e., when both utilitarian paragraphs were favorable and the social image paragraph was unfavorable). Because those in the group condition listed proportionally more utilitarian thoughts than those in the individual condition did, one might expect their attitudes to be significantly more favorable given the evaluative implications of the content on which their listed thoughts were based. Yet, their attitudes were nearly identical to those in the individual condition ($M = 6.73$ for the group condition and $M = 6.69$ for individual condition), $F < 1$. In sum, then, the group manipulation was not associated with any differences in restaurant evaluations.

Conclusions

Those anticipating a group discussion listed more utilitarian and fewer social image thoughts than did those in the individual condition. This may be because, in mental preparation for the approaching discussion, people relied on appropriateness cues in the review to guide their thinking. There was twice as much utilitarian as social image information in the review. In addition, utilitarian information preceded social image information in the review. These features may have cued participants that utilitarian information was more appropriate to discuss. The second experiment was designed to examine whether cues in the product description could also elicit a greater focus on certain types of thoughts.

It did not appear that the differences between the thoughts listed by those in the group versus individual conditions represented differences in what they considered important criteria in evaluating a restaurant. Those in both conditions rated food as most important. Similarly, the attitudes reported were nearly identical between those in the group and individual condition, before and after the group anticipation manipulation was introduced, and after the group anticipation was canceled. Moreover, the attitudes held by those in the group and individual conditions were similar even when the valence of the information on which their listed thoughts were based differed.

It should also be noted that the product information stated that other college students surveyed reported disliking the restaurant (see Appendix). If group anticipation resulted in greater sensitivity to this evaluative information, one might expect those in the group condition to report more negative attitudes. However, those in the group and individual conditions did not differ in their attitude ratings after the manipulation was introduced. This may be because, for the group condition, the two salient sources of evaluative information (valence of the utilitarian information and the purported attitudes of other students) sometimes appeared to conflict. In the second experiment, the salient sources of evaluative information were kept

consistent (i.e., the purported attitudes of others were equally consistent with the social image and utilitarian information in the review).

The similarity in attitudes between those in the group and individual conditions may also be due to the salience of the attitude rating made prior to the group–individual manipulation. That is, having provided their attitudes initially, participants may not have wanted to appear inconsistent by reporting changes in their attitudes later. In the second experiment, attitudes were not measured before the group manipulation was introduced.

EXPERIMENT 2

In this experiment, the review included an additional cue about what was appropriate to discuss: It stated that other college students had based their attitude toward the restaurant on a social image characteristic. Normative information (e.g., information about the types of product characteristics weighed heavily by other people) may serve as a particularly important cue to the potential expectations of discussion partners. Such information may be especially influential because it directly addresses social identity motives to facilitate the upcoming social interaction. In addition to the normative cue, the order and valence of the utilitarian and social image information in the restaurant review were manipulated to isolate the individual and interactive effects of these different cues on the type of thoughts listed. Moreover, the amount of social image and utilitarian information given was kept equal.

Method

Participants. A total of 143 undergraduate students participated in exchange for extra credit in an advertising course. Sessions were arbitrarily assigned as either a group ($n = 75$) or individual ($n = 68$) session. Due to suspicion about the group manipulation, one participant's data were deleted. In addition, due to a shortage of participants in one group session, 6 participants were placed into three-person groups instead of four- or five-person groups. For the sake of consistency across studies, these participants' data were deleted.

Materials. To isolate the effects of order and valence on the types of thoughts listed, the following changes were made to the restaurant review:

1. The review contained two paragraphs of social and two paragraphs of utilitarian information (each paragraph containing three sentences), thereby controlling for the relative amount of information.

2. The social information either preceded or followed the utilitarian information.
3. Both the social and utilitarian information were entirely unfavorable (the unfavorable condition) or half of the social and utilitarian information was favorable and the other half was unfavorable (the mixed favorability condition).

Thus, for any given participant, the valences of the social image and utilitarian information provided were similar.

As before, the content of the paragraphs described the food, prices, and atmosphere. The added social paragraph in this review contained the normative cue: It stated that other college students surveyed either liked or disliked the restaurant based on its social atmosphere. Others' purported attitudes, whether favorable or unfavorable, were equally evaluatively consistent with the utilitarian and social image information in the review. In the mixed favorability condition, in which the social image "stated basis" of others' attitudes was favorable, other students were said to like the restaurant because it was a good place to go with friends. In the unfavorable condition, other students were said to dislike the restaurant because they felt observed and talked about by the regulars. A pretest confirmed the intended valences of these and the other paragraphs.[3]

Procedure. There were two group and two individual sessions with 33 to 39 participants per session. The sessions were run on the same day by the same experimenter. The procedure was similar to Experiment 1 except that the first and third attitude measures were omitted. The only attitude measure appeared after the introduction of the group–individual manipulation and thought listing task. This was the same attitude measure with the three 9-point semantic differential scales used in Experiment 1.

Thought coding. The same criteria and procedures from Experiment 1 were used to code thoughts. Two judges independently coded 776 thoughts with 87% agreement.

[3]Twenty-eight undergraduate students rated each paragraph on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*unfavorable*) to 7 (*favorable*). The ratings were higher for the favorable paragraphs describing the food (M = 5.97) and the social atmosphere (M = 6.18) than for the unfavorable paragraphs describing the prices (M = 1.36), the food (M = 1.86), the decor and patrons (M = 3.63), and the social atmosphere (M = 1.68), all $t(26)$s > 6, ps < .0001.

Results

Number of social image versus utilitarian thoughts. A 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (order: social vs. utilitarian information first) × 2 (information given: all negative vs. mixed favorability) × 2 (thought type, a within-subjects factor: social image vs. utilitarian) repeated measures ANOVA yielded a significant Group Manipulation × Thought Type interaction, $F(1, 128) = 4.28, p < .05$. Reversing the findings of Experiment 1, those in the group condition listed more social image thoughts than those in the individual condition did, $F(1, 128) = 3.35, p < .05$, one-tailed, and listed slightly fewer utilitarian thoughts than those in the individual condition did, $F(1, 128) = 2.37, p = .07$, one-tailed, as shown in Figure 2.[4]

The only other significant finding was a thought type main effect, indicating that, overall, participants listed more social image than utilitarian thoughts ($M = 3.09$ and $M = 1.68$, respectively), $F(1, 128) = 58.58, p < .0001$. Neither the order of the information nor the valence of the information interacted with the group manipulation factor to influence the type of thoughts listed, all Fs < 1.

Thus, as in Experiment 1, the content of participants' thought lists differed as a function of anticipating discussion. However, it appears that the cue regarding the purported social image basis of others' attitudes reversed the direction of the effect: The thought lists of those in the group condition were more focused on social image and less on utilitarian considerations than the thought lists of those in the individual condition.

Importance of restaurant features. Participants' importance ratings were analyzed using a 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (order) × 2 (information given) × 3 (restaurant criteria: atmosphere, food, vs. prices) repeated measures ANOVA. As in Experiment 1, both those who did and did not anticipate a group discussion rated food ($M = 6.44$) as more important than atmosphere ($M = 5.52$) and prices ($M = 5.88$) in evaluating a restaurant, $F(2, 128) = 35, p < .0001$. The only other signifi-

[4]Note that when the F test is used for planned contrasts (as it is here), the F value is equivalent to the square of t. Because the F test and t test are interchangeable under such circumstances, using one-tailed p values for the F test is appropriate provided the results support the predicted direction of the contrast (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985), as they do here.

Moreover, it should be stressed that our formulation does not predict the appropriateness cue to have a significant effect on both the number of social thoughts and the number of utilitarian thoughts listed. Because thinking more carefully about one set of issues may be reflected in the listing of fewer thoughts about other issues, it is the relative degree of cue-relevant thought listing that we expect will increase. Analyzing each thought type separately (i.e., disaggregating the relative effect), although it provides more information about the pattern of effects, constitutes a very conservative test of our hypothesis.

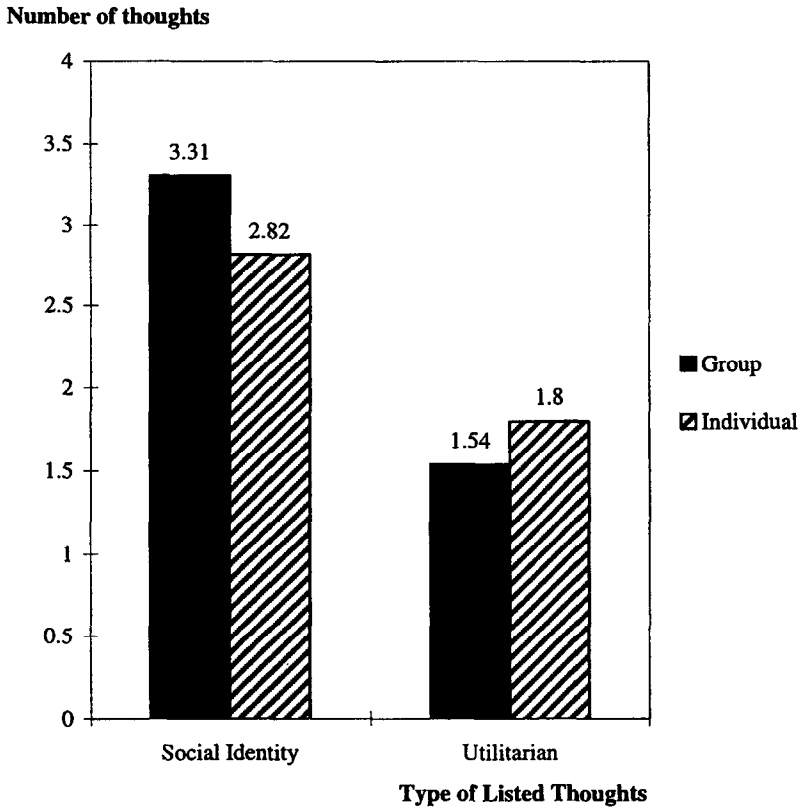

FIGURE 2 Experiment 2: Effect of approaching group discussion on the number of social identity and utilitarian thoughts listed.

cant finding was an order effect: Participants rated price as more important if they received price information toward the end of the review ($M = 6.11$) than if they received it toward the beginning ($M = 5.62$), $F(2, 128) = 4.05$, $p < .02$. These results suggest as before that group-anticipation effects on the type of thoughts listed did not represent changes in the perceived importance of social image versus utilitarian criteria in evaluating a restaurant.

Attitude ratings. A 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (order) × 2 (information given) repeated measures ANOVA revealed a nonsignificant group manipulation main effect, $F(1, 127) = 1.32$, *ns,* and Group Manipulation × Information Given in-

teraction, $F(1, 127) < 1$. In fact, the only significant effect was that, as expected, those receiving an entirely negative review held less favorable attitudes toward the restaurant ($M = 3.98$) than did those receiving a mix of unfavorable and favorable information ($M = 6.40$), $F(1, 127) = 86.22$, $p < .0001$. Thus, the attitudinal measure was sensitive to the nature of the information provided in the review. However, as in Experiment 1, group anticipation did not affect attitude ratings.

Conclusions

The results of this experiment indicate that mental preparation for group discussion can lead to either an increase or decrease in the relative amount of thinking about social image and utilitarian issues, depending on the appropriateness cues available. When the product description stated that other college students evaluated the product in terms of a social image feature (as in this study), those anticipating a group discussion listed somewhat more social image thoughts and fewer utilitarian thoughts than those in the individual condition did, a significant interaction. This effect was not influenced by the order or the valence of the information, suggesting that knowing what others use as evaluative criteria influenced the thoughts of those approaching a group discussion more than subtler, less normative cues.

Taken together with Experiment 1, these results suggest that cues implying that certain product attributes (whether social image or utilitarian) are appropriate to discuss led those anticipating a group discussion to mentally rehearse more thoughts that were consistent with the cues than those in the individual condition did. However, to establish definitively that an approaching group discussion can either increase or decrease the amount of social image or utilitarian thinking depending on which is cued as appropriate, a direct manipulation of cue direction within the same study is needed. Experiment 3 was designed to do that.

As in Experiment 1, the group manipulation did not influence what people perceived to be important criteria in evaluating a restaurant. It should also be noted that, although both those in the group condition and those in the individual condition listed more social image than utilitarian thoughts, they did not rate the social feature (atmosphere) as most important in evaluating restaurants in general. Consistent with Experiment 1, both those in the group condition and those in the individual condition perceived food to be most important in evaluating restaurants. We return to this issue in the General Discussion.

Consistent with Experiment 1, those in the group and individual conditions also did not differ overall in their attitude ratings. Note also that, in this experiment, the restaurant review reported that other students surveyed either liked or disliked the restaurant: If cognitive preparation for an approaching discussion resulted in greater reliance on this evaluative information, one might expect those in the

group condition to report attitudes more consistent with this information than would participants in the individual condition. However, no such interaction emerged between the group manipulation and the evaluative information given, $F(1, 127) = .01$, *ns*.[5]

In sum, then, the group-anticipation effects appeared to be specific to the content of participants' listed thoughts as in Experiment 1. That is, despite changes from Experiment 1 in the type of cues available in the review and the timing of the first attitude measure relative to the group manipulation, the effect of group anticipation was limited to cognitive (not evaluative) responses. These results suggest that participants who expected to interact with a group tailored the content of their listed thoughts in a somewhat calculated or strategic manner without altering their own product judgments.

It is expected that if listed thoughts in the group condition represent what members are mentally rehearsing to discuss with the group, then group members should show evidence of being influenced by appropriateness cues in their discussion with each other. Indeed, research has shown that information that is held by all members prior to discussion is more likely to enter the discussion (Stasser & Stewart, 1992; Stasser, Taylor, & Hanna, 1989). If most members are rehearsing thoughts that are consistent with the cue, then these types of thoughts are most likely to enter the discussion. Hence, the content of the group discussion should reflect (or even magnify) the pattern of the listed thoughts. Experiment 3 was designed to address these issues.

EXPERIMENT 3

One of the primary goals of this experiment was to test whether the tailoring of product thoughts we have observed in anticipation of group discussion would carry over to (a) the information shared during the actual group discussion and (b) the product concerns that participants express during discussion and, as a group, agree are important.

Another key goal was to replicate and extend the group-anticipation effects of Experiments 1 and 2 by demonstrating that a cue can either increase or decrease the relative amount of social image versus utilitarian thinking. In this experiment,

[5]One might suggest that this result contradicts previous research showing strategic attitude shifts in the direction of an audience's known view (cf. Tetlock et al., 1989). After all, the review stated the purported attitudes of other college students. However, these stated opinions were those of an unknown set of students and not necessarily the views of their discussion group members. Strategic attitude shifts have been shown when individuals are told explicitly the views of their "audience" (Cialdini & Petty, 1981; Tetlock et al., 1989).

the normative cue indicated that other college students based their evaluations of the restaurant either on its utilitarian features or on its social image features.

Method

Participants. A total of 107 undergraduates participated in exchange for extra credit in an advertising course. Experimental sessions were arbitrarily assigned as either a group ($n = 62$) or individual ($n = 45$) session.

Materials. The materials were similar to the mixed-favorability condition of Experiment 2: For everyone, the restaurant review contained a paragraph each of unfavorable and favorable utilitarian information and a paragraph each of unfavorable and favorable social information. In the middle of the review was a sentence containing the stated basis cue manipulation: For the utilitarian stated basis condition, the sentence read: "In a college poll, students cited quality and convenience as most important when deciding whether or not to go to this restaurant." For the social stated basis condition, "quality and convenience" was replaced with "feel of the place."[6] The product information relevant to the cue appeared immediately after the cue (e.g., for the utilitarian condition, the social image information appeared first in the review followed by the utilitarian stated basis cue and then the utilitarian product information).[7]

Procedure. There were two group sessions (with 28–34 participants per session) and two individual sessions (with 20–22 participants per session), all run by the same experimenter.

The procedure was identical to the previous experiments, except that after the thought listing and rating task, participants were asked to list what they personally considered to be the two most important issues regarding the restaurant. Those in the group condition were told that they would share these listed issues with the group.

---

[6]Forty undergraduate students listed thoughts in response to the sentence containing the social image stated basis and the sentence containing the utilitarian stated basis (the order was counterbalanced). Participants listed mostly social image and few utilitarian thoughts in response to the social image stated basis ($M = 3.68$ and $M = .55$, respectively), $t(38) = 12.84$, $p < .0001$, and listed primarily utilitarian thoughts and few social image thoughts in response to the utilitarian stated basis ($M = 3.17$ and $M = .53$, respectively), $t(38) = 10.21$, $p < .0001$.

[7]Order was not manipulated because the results of Experiment 2 and a pretest indicated that it did not significantly affect the type of thoughts listed.

Those in the group condition then went clockwise around the group, each member discussing the issues they had personally listed. When they finished, participants were instructed to "list the two most important concerns you think [this restaurant] should address" to assess members' product concerns after this initial group discussion. As participants then continued their group discussion of the product, they received a sheet with five blank lines and were instructed to identify the concerns that the group as a whole believed the restaurant management should address (i.e., group-level recommendations). On completion, participants were asked to arrange their desks facing forward rather than toward their group members. They were then handed a sheet on which to check those features they personally talked about during the discussion. This sheet contained five utilitarian features (food quality, food variety, food portions, convenience, price) and five social image features (friendliness of service, clientele, decor, social climate, who to bring to the restaurant). Participants in both group and individual conditions then completed some additional measures before being dismissed.

Coding of thoughts and concerns. The coding procedures were the same as those used previously. Two judges coded 615 thoughts and 423 product issues and concerns with 93% to 97% agreement.

Results

Number of social image versus utilitarian thoughts. A 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (stated basis: social vs. utilitarian) × 2 (thought type, a within-subjects factor: social image vs. utilitarian) repeated measures ANOVA yielded a significant Thought Type main effect, $F(1, 103) = 11.35, p < .01$, which was qualified by a significant Thought Type × Group Manipulation × Stated Basis interaction, $F(1, 103) = 4.38, p < .05$. Replicating the findings of the first two experiments, those anticipating a group discussion listed more thoughts consistent with the appropriateness cue than those not anticipating a group discussion did (see Figure 3). When the cue stated that others evaluated the restaurant in terms of its utilitarian features, those in the group condition listed somewhat more utilitarian thoughts and somewhat fewer social image thoughts than those in the individual condition did (although all Fs < 1). Similarly, when the cue stated that others evaluated the restaurant in terms of its social image features, those in the group condition listed somewhat more social image thoughts and fewer utilitarian thoughts than those in the individual condition did, $F(1, 59) = 2.38$, $p = .07$, one-tailed, and $F(1, 59) = 3.53, p < .05$, one-tailed, respectively. This extends the findings of the first two experiments by demonstrating that the direction of the group-anticipation effect on

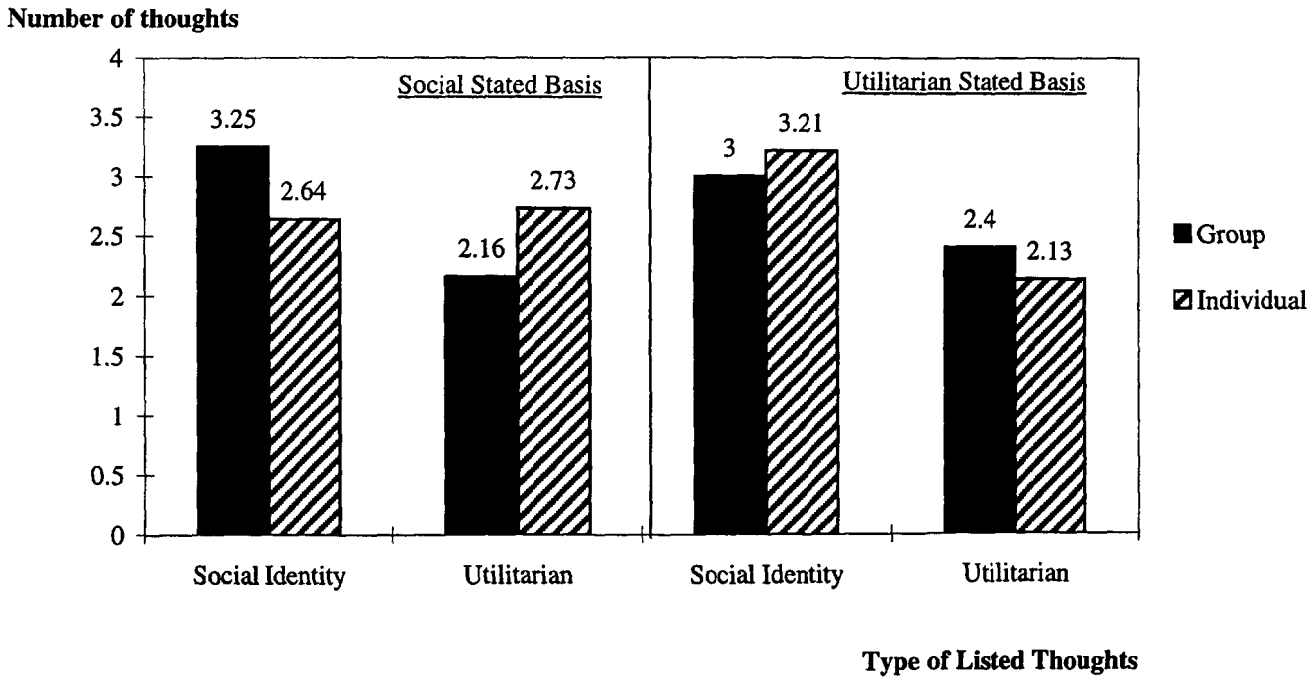

FIGURE 3 Experiment 3: Effect of approaching group discussion on the number of social identity and utilitarian thoughts listed.

the amount of social image versus utilitarian thinking depended on what was cued as appropriate to discuss.[8]

Prediscussion listed issues. Recall that those in both the group and individual conditions listed product issues they considered important, but those anticipating discussion expected to share these issues with the group. The issues listed were compared with a 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (stated basis: social vs. utilitarian) × 2 (issue type, a within-subjects factor: social image vs. utilitarian) repeated measures ANOVA. As with the thought list findings, there was a significant Issue Type main effect, $F(1, 103) = 18.00, p < .0001$, qualified by a significant Issue Type × Group Manipulation × Stated Basis interaction, $F(1, 103) = 4.68, p < .05$. Prior to discussion, those in the group condition listed relatively more issues consistent with the stated basis cue than those in the individual condition did (see Figure 4).

Concerns listed during discussion. The concerns listed by those in the group condition during discussion were also compared to the issues listed as most important by participants in the individual condition with a 2 (group manipulation) × 2 (stated basis: social vs. utilitarian) × 2 (concern type, a within-subjects factor) repeated measures ANOVA. The results yielded a significant Concern Type main effect, $F(1, 103) = 35.51, p < .0001$, qualified by a significant Concern Type × Group Manipulation × Stated Basis interaction, $F(1, 103) = 12.07, p < .001$. During discussion, the concerns listed by group members were more consistent with the stated basis cue than were the issues deemed important by those in the individual condition (see Figure 4).

Discussion content. After discussion, those in the group condition reported which product features they had personally talked about with the group. Summing

[8]Whereas those in the group condition listed thoughts that were somewhat consistent with stated basis cues, those in the individual condition listed thoughts that contrasted with those cues. One possible explanation is that people responding as individuals (rather than gearing up for a group discussion) may strive to be distinct from the norm and avoid being influenced by others. As a result, those in the individual condition may have put somewhat more effort into listing thoughts that contrasted with the evaluative criteria purportedly used by their peers. This explanation is consistent with research indicating that under certain circumstances, individuals will attempt to correct (and sometimes overcorrect) their responses to adjust for the presumed influence of concepts that have been primed (Martin, 1986; Martin, Seta, & Crelia, 1990). In any event, the key finding is that those anticipating a group discussion consistently responded more in accord with the appropriateness cues provided than did those in the individual condition.

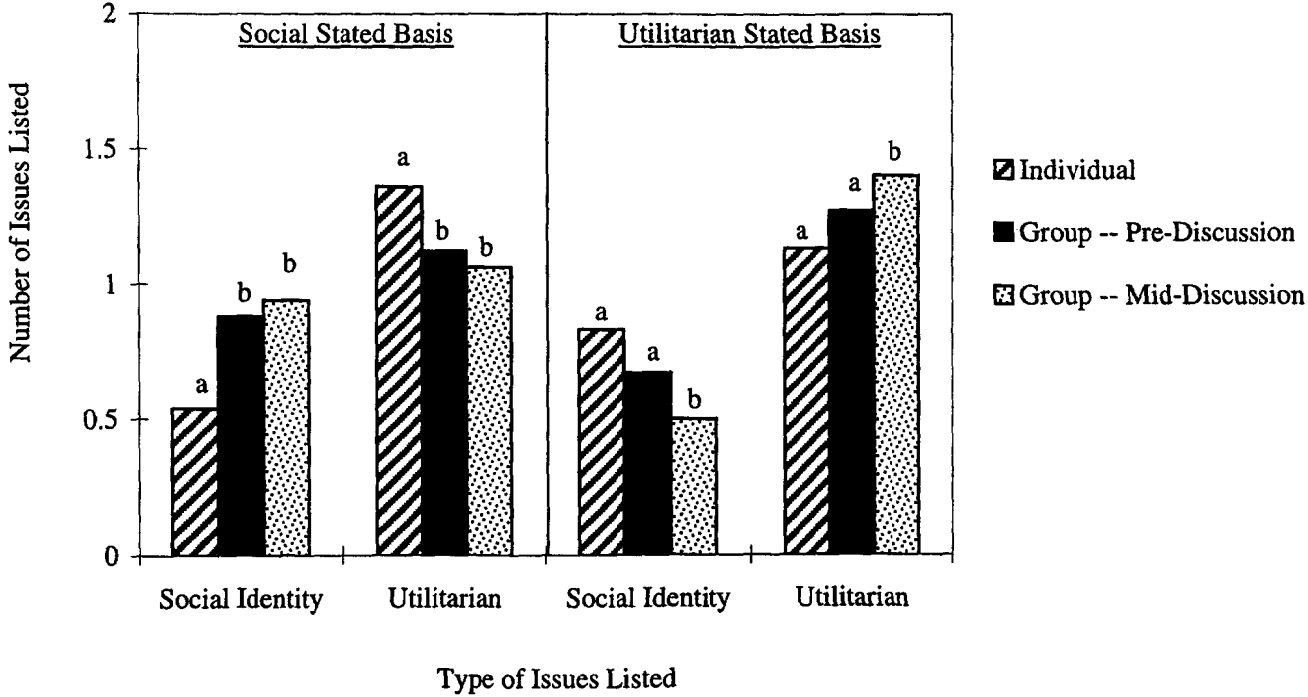

FIGURE 4 Product issues listed as a function of stated basis and group manipulation. Different letters represent significant differences between the individual and group conditions within type of issue listed and stated basis, $p < .05$, one-tailed.

across social image features and utilitarian features, a 2 (stated basis: social vs. utilitarian) × 2 (discussion content, a within-subjects factor: social image vs. utilitarian) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted, yielding a marginally significant Discussion Content × Stated Basis interaction, $F(1, 59) = 2.80, p < .10$. Those in the utilitarian stated basis condition reported discussing significantly more utilitarian features than those in the social image stated basis condition did (Ms = 2.40 vs. 1.81), $F(1, 59) = 6.60, p < .01$, although there was no difference in the reported number of social image features discussed ($M = 1.81$ for the social stated basis vs. $M = 1.77$ for the utilitarian stated basis), $F < 1$. Overall, then, the stated basis cue increased the relative number of cue-relevant features that group members discussed with each other.[9]

Group-level recommendations. Those in the group condition were also given the collective task of listing up to five product concerns that the group as a whole believed the restaurant should address. Despite the small sample size (n = 7 groups per cell), a 2 (stated basis: social vs. utilitarian) × 2 (concern type, a within-subjects factor: social image vs. utilitarian) repeated measures ANOVA yielded a Concern Type main effect, $F(1, 12) = 22.56, p < .001$, as well as a marginally significant Stated Basis × Concern Type interaction, $F(1, 12) = 3.06, p = .10$. Groups given a social stated basis cue recommended the restaurant address somewhat more social image concerns and somewhat fewer utilitarian concerns than groups given a utilitarian stated basis did (Ms = 1.57 vs. 1.14 for social image concerns), $F(1, 12) = 1.69, p = .11$, one-tailed; (Ms = 2.42 vs. 3.00 for utilitarian concerns), $F(1, 12) = 1.78, p = .10$, one-tailed. Thus, the stated basis cue influenced individual group members' judgments and statements as well as their group-level recommendations.

[9]Recall that just prior to the discussion (and after the usual thought listing measure), participants were asked to list the two most important issues regarding the restaurant that they planned to share with the group. This was done to track what people planned to discuss in addition to measuring later what they did discuss. However, this prediscussion measure may explain the effect of cues on what was discussed by the group. To address this, we assessed the overlap between the prediscussion issues and what participants later actually reported having talked about with the group. Results showed that the majority (52%) of the features or topics participants reported actually discussing differed from the issues they listed prior to discussion. These new or nonoverlapping features discussed were found to be influenced by the stated basis cue in the same way as was found in the data overall: Namely, in the utilitarian stated basis condition, 50% of the new features discussed were utilitarian in nature, whereas in the social stated basis condition, only 31% of the new features discussed were utilitarian. Thus, the prediscussion instructions and procedures cannot sufficiently account for what happened during discussion. Most of the features that group members discussed were new or nonoverlapping, and this new content showed the same pattern of effects as the data set as a whole.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Social interaction has proven to be a powerful force in consumer, retailer, and manufacturer decision making. Despite this, a largely unexplored area is how anticipation of discussion might affect the product attributes that consumers consider. The research reported here focused on how group members respond to appropriateness cues as they mentally prepare for an approaching discussion. Some have assumed that prediscussion thoughts are unaffected by an approaching discussion (e.g., Albrecht et al., 1993; Greenbaum, 1993). The results of these three experiments demonstrate that an approaching group discussion systematically influences consumers' thoughts about a focal product. Specifically, the direction of this effect depends on the nature of the cues that are present about what is appropriate to discuss. Those anticipating a group discussion consistently listed more thoughts in accord with what was cued as appropriate to discuss than individuals did, regardless of whether the cues favored utilitarian or social image product features. Moreover, this group-anticipation effect carried over to the content of the actual discussion and the product concerns expressed and agreed on by the group.

Overall, the results of Experiment 3 suggest that the impact of group anticipation went well beyond the initial thought list to influence the content of participants' subsequent discussion about the restaurant. The groups were responsive to the stated basis cue, both in terms of the recommendations they made and what individual members reported discussing.

Evidence on Mediating and Moderating Processes

Although the studies were not designed to definitively determine the processes driving these effects, the results of all three experiments suggest that the change in thoughts as a function of group anticipation was not driven by a desire to identify with others' views. Moreover, the effect does not appear to reflect apprehension about being evaluated by others. Instead, the data are consistent with the notion of a strategic process of mental rehearsal in preparation for discussion, wherein members tailored their responses to facilitate the fluency of the approaching communication situation. A number of results suggest this conclusion.

The effects of anticipating a group discussion were consistently limited to the content of listed thoughts. There were no significant differences as a function of discussion anticipation in the criteria that participants rated as important when evaluating a restaurant or participants' attitudes toward the focal restaurant (even though both measures evidenced validity in other respects [see footnote 2], and attitude ratings were strongly influenced by the valence of the information presented). The absence of group anticipation effects on attitudes was particularly telling in Experiment 1, where attitudes did not differ in the group versus individual conditions despite the differing evaluative implications of the content on which

listed thoughts were based. Also, in Experiment 2, information regarding similar others' attitudinal stance did not influence the attitudes of those approaching a group discussion any more than it did those not approaching a discussion.

Additional analyses were conducted to examine whether heightened anxiety induced by an approaching social interaction was responsible for the shift in listed thoughts. Certain social contexts, especially novel ones, can temporarily induce social anxiety (Buss, 1980). An example is being in a group of strangers, which is common in group discussion contexts. Heightened feelings of social anxiety would be associated with greater worry over being evaluated by one's discussion partners. If the group anticipation effects we consistently obtained reflect apprehension about being evaluated by others, then individuals who are feeling more socially anxious may be more likely to tailor the content of their responses to the perceived expectations of their discussion partners.

Social anxiety was measured in the first two experiments by a revised version of the Profile of Mood States (POMS; Shacham, 1983). Although the POMS was not designed to measure social anxiety per se, it was anticipated that social anxiety would be reflected in higher scores on the POMS anxiety index (with the items including *uneasy, nervous,* and *anxious*). Supporting the convergent and discriminant validity of this assumption, anxiety as measured by the POMS was significantly correlated with a validated measure of social anxiety as a trait (Leary, 1983; included in Experiment 2; $r = .27, p < .01$) and not with self-monitoring ($r = .09$). Across these experiments, anxiety did not mediate the effects of the group manipulation on the type of thoughts listed.

In other analyses, we examined potential moderators reflecting individual differences in concern or anxiety about being evaluated by others. In Experiments 1 and 2, we assessed participants' level of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974). In Experiment 2, a 12-item fear of negative evaluation scale was also included (Leary, 1983). Again, if the group anticipation effect is due to impression management concerns, then those in the group condition who are chronically concerned with being evaluated favorably by others may be more responsive to appropriateness cues. All personality scales were administered at the end of the study, and median splits were used to classify participants as high or low on a given trait. In neither of the experiments did these traits play a significant role in moderating the effects of group anticipation on the types of thoughts listed (all interactions involving personality type, thought type, and the group manipulation factor, Fs < 1.90, *ns*). Those inherently concerned with meeting others' expectations were no more affected by the appropriateness cues than were others when anticipating a group discussion. Both tailored their thoughts in accord with those cues to a similar degree. This finding is consistent with past research on the next-in-line effect (Walker & Orr, 1976) that demonstrated that participants' chronic fear of negative evaluation (see Watson & Friend, 1969) does not moderate the effects on memory of gearing up for a public performance.

In a separate experiment using a related paradigm, further evidence was obtained that the process is indeed strategic (Schlosser, 1997). When participants completed a recall task shortly after cognitively and evaluatively responding to the target product, there were no significant differences as a function of group manipulation in recall of social image and utilitarian product information. It should be noted that in this experiment, respondents processed the product information after the group manipulation was introduced (not before as in the studies reported here). This makes these data a particularly strong test of the process involved: If those anticipating group discussion had attended more carefully to the appropriate type of information while reading it, they should have recalled more of it. The fact that they did not (even though their listed thoughts differed as expected) points to a consciously strategic process of mental rehearsal.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the shift in listed thoughts as a function of group anticipation was not driven by concerns about identifying with, or being evaluated by, others. Those who anticipated interacting with a group tailored their listed thoughts without altering their own views on the topic. Moreover, differences in chronic or acute levels of concern with being evaluated by others played no role in mediating or moderating the group anticipation effects. Finally, recall data from a related experiment suggests that those anticipating discussion were equally able to access all types of information as those not anticipating discussion, even though their listed thoughts were tailored in the direction of the "appropriate" type of information (see Schlosser, 1997). These findings are consistent with a strategic process of mental rehearsal, although further research is needed on this issue.

Relative Importance of Utilitarian and Social Image Considerations

It should be noted that participants across Experiments 1 and 2 consistently rated a utilitarian criterion, food, to be most important in evaluating a restaurant, more important than the social criterion of atmosphere. Yet, this result seems paradoxical in light of the distribution of thoughts participants actually listed in response to the target restaurant. Social image thoughts outnumbered utilitarian thoughts in virtually every study and every comparison, often significantly. Why would participants overall list more social image thoughts, yet rate these types of thoughts and the criteria on which they are based as relatively less important?

One possible reason is that information that deviates from the conventional criteria for evaluating restaurants may have attracted a disproportionate share of participants' attention. Information on food and prices is normative in restaurant reviews, but statements about the types of patrons the restaurant attracts may have seemed relatively unexpected and novel. Yet, in many cases, this type of information was quite prominent in the restaurant review that participants read. Perhaps

for this reason, participants overall focused more on the social image information when listing their thoughts.

Limitations

For the sake of consistency across studies, only one focal product was employed in our research. However, several studies have indicated the importance of product type in reference group influence and purchase decisions (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Childers & Rao, 1992; Ford & Ellis, 1980; Park & Lessig, 1977; Witt & Bruce, 1972). Hence, the influence of an approaching group discussion on product thoughts and discussion content may differ depending on whether the product is a public necessity, private necessity, private luxury, or public luxury (see Bourne, 1957, for a description of this typology) or whether the product serves primarily a utilitarian or social identity function (see Shavitt, 1990).

Furthermore, in our experiments, all of the participants were undergraduates who learned about the purported decisions or decision criteria of their peers. Previous research has suggested, however, that age (Park & Lessig, 1977) and type of reference group (Childers & Rao, 1992) can affect group influence. For instance, it has been demonstrated that undergraduates are more susceptible to reference group influence than housewives (Park & Lessig, 1977). Hence, the effects we have observed might be weaker in an older population. Moreover, the effect of a normative cue such as the stated basis cue we employed may depend on whether the reference group is familial rather than peer based (Childers & Rao, 1992). Future research is needed to investigate the roles of type of product, reference group, and respondent population in moderating the effects of group anticipation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Michelle Nelson, Chris Riegel, Aimee Hansen, Siamak Bonshahi, Winnie Au, Brad Belden, and Rebecca Perez for their input and for their assistance in data collection and coding, and Janas Sinclair; the University of Illinois Social Cognition Group; and Social, Organizational, and Individual Differences Seminar Group for their valuable input on this research. We are also grateful to the James Webb Young Fund of the Department of Advertising at the University of Illinois for support of this research.

REFERENCES

Albrecht, T. L., Johnson, G. M., & Walther, J. B. (1993). Understanding communication processes in focus groups. In D. L. Morgan (Ed.), *Successful focus groups: Advancing the state of the art* (pp. 51–64). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Bearden, W. O., & Etzel, M. J. (1982). Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9,* 183–194.

Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1990). Further validation of the consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Advances in Consumer Research, 17,* 770–776.

Bourne, F. S. (1957). Group influence in marketing and public relations. In R. Likert & S. P. Hayes (Eds.), *Some applications of behavioral research* (pp. 207–257). Basil, Switzerland: UNESCO.

Buss, A. H. (1980). *Self-consciousness and social anxiety.* San Francisco: Freeman.

Childers, T. L., & Rao, A. R. (1992, September). The influence of familial and peer-based reference groups on consumer decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 19,* 198–211.

Cialdini, R. B., Levy, A., Herman, C. P., & Evenbeck, S. (1973). Attitudinal politics: The strategy of moderation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 25,* 100–108.

Cialdini, R. B., Levy, A., Herman, C. P., Kozlowski, L. T., & Petty, R. E. (1976). Elastic shifts of opinion: Determinants of direction and durability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34,* 663–672.

Cialdini, R. B., & Petty, R. E. (1981). Anticipatory opinion effects. In R. E. Petty, T. M. Ostrom, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Cognitive responses in persuasion* (pp. 217–235). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Delbecq, A. L., Van de Ven, A. H., & Gustafson, D. H. (1975). *Group techniques for program planning.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Fern, E. F. (1982). The use of focus groups for generating idea generation: The effects of group size, acquaintanceship, and moderator on response quantity and quality. *Journal of Marketing Research, 19,* 1–13.

Fern, E. F. (1983). Focus groups: A review of some contradictory evidence, implications and suggestions for future research. *Advances in Consumer Research, 10,* 121–126.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fine, L. M., & Schumann, D. W. (1992). The nature and role of salesperson perceptions: The interactive effects of salesperson/customer personalities. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 1,* 285–296.

Ford, J. D., & Ellis, E. A. (1980). A reexamination of group influence on member brand preference. *Journal of Marketing Research, 17,* 125–132.

Geen, R. G. (1991). Social motivation. *Annual Review of Psychology, 42,* 377–399.

Greenbaum, T. L. (1993). *The handbook for focus group research.* New York: Lexington.

Herr, P. M., Kardes, F. R., & Kim, J. (1991). Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: An accessibility-diagnosticity perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research, 17,* 454–462.

Higgins, E. T. (1981). The "communication game": Implications for social cognition and persuasion. In E. T. Higgins, C. P. Herman, & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *Social cognition: The Ontario Symposium* (pp. 343–392). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Higgins, E. T., & Rholes, W. S. (1978). Saying is believing: Effects of message modification on memory and liking for the person described. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 14,* 363–378.

Janis, I. L., & King, B. T. (1954). The influence of role-playing on opinion change. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 49,* 211–218.

Johnson, B. T., & Eagly, A. H. (1989). Effects of involvement on persuasion: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 106,* 290–314.

Katz, D. (1960). The functional approach to the study of attitude. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 24,* 163–204.

Leary, M. R. (1983). A brief version of the fear of negative evaluation scale. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 9,* 371–375.

Leippe, M. R., & Elkin, R. A. (1987). When motives clash: Issue involvement and response involvement as determinants of persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52,* 269–278.

Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communication research. *Journal of Communication, 46,* 79–97.

Martin, L. (1986). Set/reset: Use and disuse of concepts on impression formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51,* 493–504.

Martin, L., Seta, J. J., & Crelia, R. A. (1990). Assimilation and contrast on people's willingness and ability to expend effort in forming an impression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59,* 27–37.

Morgan, D. L., & Krueger, R. A. (1993). When to use focus groups and why. In D. L. Morgan (Ed.), *Successful focus groups: Advancing the state of the art* (pp. 3–19). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Park, C. W., & Lessig, V. P. (1977). Students and housewives: Differences in susceptibility to reference group influences. *Journal of Consumer Research, 4,* 102–110.

Rosenthal, R., & Rosnow, R. L. (1985). *Contrast analysis: Focused comparisons in the analysis of variance.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Schlosser, A. (1997). *Examining the instrumentality of attitudes: The interactive effect of social context, medium and product type on product responses.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign.

Shacham, S. (1983). A shortened version of the Profile of Mood States. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 47,* 305–306.

Shavitt, S. (1989). Operationalizing functional theories of attitude. In A. R. Pratkanis, S. J. Breckler, & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), *Attitude structure and function* (pp. 311–337). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Shavitt, S. (1990). The role of attitude objects in attitude functions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 26,* 124–148.

Shavitt, S., & Fazio, R. H. (1991). Effects of attribute salience on the consistency between attitudes and behavior predictions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17,* 507–516.

Shavitt, S., Swan, S., Lowrey, T. M., & Wanke, M. (1994). The interaction of endorser attractiveness and involvement in persuasion depends on the goal that guides message processing. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 3,* 137–162.

Smith, M. B., Bruner, J. S., & White, R. W. (1956). *Opinions and personality.* New York: Wiley.

Snyder, M. (1974). The self-monitoring of expressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 30,* 526–537.

Stasser, G., & Stewart, D. (1992). Discovery of hidden profiles by decision-making groups: Solving a problem versus making a judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63,* 426–434.

Stasser, G., Taylor, L. A., & Hanna, C. (1989). Information sampling in structured and unstructured discussion of three- and six-person groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57,* 67–78.

Stasser, G., & Titus, W. (1985). Pooling of unshared information in group decision making: Biased information sampling during discussion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48,* 1467–1478.

Tetlock, P. E., Skitka, L., & Boettger, R. (1989). Social and cognitive strategies for coping with accountability: Conformity, complexity, and bolstering. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57,* 632–640.

Thomas, G. P. (1992). The influence of processing conversational information on inference, argument elaboration, and memory. *Journal of Consumer Research, 19,* 83–92.

Walker, B. S., & Orr, F. E. (1976). Anxiety and the next-in-line effect. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 68,* 775–778.

Ward, J. C., & Reingen, P. H. (1990). Sociocognitive analysis of group decision making among consumers. *Journal of Consumer Research, 17,* 245–262.

Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969). Measurement of social-evaluative anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 33,* 448–457.

Witt, R. E., & Bruce, G. D. (1972). Group influence and brand choice congruence. *Journal of Marketing Research, 9,* 440–443.

Accepted by Paul Herr.

APPENDIX

The following is an excerpt of a restaurant review out of a small-town newspaper:

> If you believed being in a small town and eating well do not go together, you will be amazed as I was when I visited Aunt Mary's for the first time. The menu turns old favorites into new delights. The large varieties of sandwiches are made with freshly made bread. The tempting dinner entrees are seasoned and cooked to perfection. The dessert menu also offers innovative and award-winning desserts.
>
> The meals are surprisingly inexpensive. A delicious sit-down lunch or dinner for the price you would pay at a fast-food restaurant. Daily lunch and dinner specials offer additional inexpensive meals. The lunch buffet is reasonably priced, and the menu also offers some discounted meals for seniors and children under 12.
>
> Although this is part of a new chain of restaurants, it has a timeworn feeling, with old plaid-and-plastic decor and fluorescent lighting. The "regulars" are an older, local clientele or families with young children. On weekend nights, it's a popular place for high-school students who come for the ice cream and dessert specials. In a college poll, most college students reported that neither they nor their friends would go there.

Those receiving the unfavorable second paragraph read instead:

> The meals are surprisingly expensive. A sit-down lunch or dinner for the price you would pay at an elegant dining restaurant. Lunch and dinner specials are rare and are still costly. Even the lunch buffet is pricey, although the menu does offer some discounted meals for seniors and children under 12.