

Anticipating Discussion about a Product: Rehearsing What to Say Can Affect Your Judgments

ANN E. SCHLOSSER
SHARON SHAVITT*

This research examines one aspect of the common but relatively understudied consumer behavior context of group interaction. We argue and demonstrate that the mere anticipation of group discussion can influence people's product attitudes. This occurs because anticipating discussion shifts people's focus toward the criteria dominating what they are mentally rehearsing to discuss. Such a shift is important because people commonly refer primarily to less important information when they explain or prepare to discuss their attitudes. Three studies demonstrate that when people are forming an attitude toward a product while anticipating discussion, this focus on less important information substantially affects people's attitudes toward the product. As a result, depending on the evaluative implications of what is rehearsed, anticipating group discussion can lead to attitudes that are more extreme, more moderate, or similar to those of people not anticipating discussion. Moreover, when the criteria predominantly rehearsed for discussion do not represent how consumers typically evaluate the products, attitudes affected by the group-anticipation context do not correspond to product judgments made outside of the group-anticipation context.

The Blair Witch Project, *The Sixth Sense*, Hennessy cognac, Christina Aguilera's debut CD, the Harry Potter book series, and the Lettuce Entertain You restaurants—a common element of these products is that their soaring sales are attributed to the buzz of word-of-mouth communication. Indeed, consuming many products and services often goes hand in hand with talking about the product or service with others. Before people discuss a product with others, they are likely to rehearse mentally what they will say during the discussion. How might this mental preparation influence their attitudes toward the product? In this article, we investigate the extent to which consumers' attitudes are affected by the mere anticipation of group interaction. Our contention is that the expectation of discussing a product with others can alter how consumers evaluate the product.

Anticipating social interaction is a common feature in modern consumption experiences. Indeed, people sometimes actively seek out advertisements and product information in preparation for future social interaction about them (Ritson and Elliott 1999). There are many avenues through which consumers can share their thoughts about products and advertisements. For instance, the internet provides an arena in which consumers can talk about products on a one-to-one or many-to-many basis (Hoffman and Novak 1996), through chat boxes or listservs. Consumers clearly anticipate these interactions by establishing brand communities through their discussions (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Moreover, consumers' expressed judgments, and the expressed reasons underlying such judgments, often have important marketing implications, such as whether a product makes it into a consideration set; whether it is purchased (cf. Bearden and Etzel 1982; Grandbois 1968); or, in the case of marketing research, how a product is conceptualized, modified, and further tested (cf. Fern 1982; Urban and Hauser 1993). In short, the expectation of talking with others about products and consumption experiences is commonplace. Because of this, and because of the significant impact of such interaction on consumers' and marketers' subsequent product judgments, it is important to understand how and when the anticipation of group interaction might influence product attitudes.

*Ann E. Schlosser is assistant professor of marketing at the School of Business, University of Washington, Box 353200, Seattle, WA 98195-3200 (aschloss@u.washington.edu). Sharon Shavitt is professor of business administration at the College of Commerce and Business Administration, University of Illinois, 350 Wohlers Hall, Champaign, IL 61820-6980 (shavitt@uiuc.edu). The authors are especially grateful to Carrie Joniak, Bennet Kim, Pamela Lowrey, Michelle Nelson, and Chris Riegel for assistance with data collection and coding, and to David Mick, the associate editor, and the reviewers for their helpful feedback and suggestions.

The Disrupting Effect of Anticipated Discussion on Product Attitudes

Consumers often need to provide reasons for their product evaluations, both for themselves and for others (Simonson and Nowlis 2000). Yet, what people think about or intend to articulate with respect to a product is not necessarily what matters most to them when evaluating the product. In fact, research in individual judgment contexts has shown that, for a variety of reasons, when explaining their attitudes, people often refer to attributes that they normally would consider less important to the evaluation (Millar and Tesser 1986; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Wilson et al. 1993). Furthermore, in such contexts, attitudes may be affected in the direction of what is salient when explaining one's attitudes (cf. Millar and Tesser 1986; Shavitt and Fazio 1991; Wilson et al. 1989; Wilson, Hodges, and LaFleur 1995; Wilson and Schooler 1991). This can have important marketing implications, for example, by leading to preference reversals (Sengupta and Fitzsimmons 2000) and postchoice dissatisfaction (Wilson et al. 1993). There are many factors that can cause people to focus on less important attributes (cf. Hutchinson and Alba 1991; Schwarz 1998; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Wilson et al. 1993). We begin with the premise that, in a variety of contexts, people will often (although not always) refer to less important attributes when explaining their attitudes. The objective here is to examine when such a focus disrupts attitudes. As in individual contexts when people are asked to give reasons for their evaluations, people mentally preparing for group discussion may focus primarily on less important attributes. Thus, their attitudes may be influenced in the direction of what they are rehearsing to discuss.

Previous research on anticipating group discussion focused on differences in what people think about as a function of whether they anticipate discussion (Schlosser and Shavitt 1999). However, although there can be differences in thought content as a function of group anticipation, we contend that when people are asked to describe their reactions to a product, their responses are often dominated by attributes that are less important, regardless of whether they anticipate discussion. The present work addresses the implications of this thinking for attitudes.

The main purpose of our article is to identify when and why anticipating discussion affects attitudes. To address the first question (when?), we argue that group anticipation is most likely to affect product attitudes when people evaluate the product at the time they anticipate discussion. In contrast, when people have had the opportunity to evaluate the product before anticipating discussion, they are more likely to maintain this prior attitude than to reformulate it in preparation for discussion. Thus, the attitudes of people who have already evaluated the product may be relatively unaffected by the social context of anticipated discussion (Schlosser and Shavitt 1999).

To address the second question (why?), we argue that those forming an attitude toward the product while antici-

pating discussion will be influenced by what is salient at the moment, that is, what they are rehearsing to discuss. Prior research has demonstrated that information that is accessible is not always used to form a judgment (Feldman and Lynch 1988; Snyder and Kendzierski 1982; Stayman and Kardes 1992). Although both those who do and do not anticipate discussion will likely focus on the same (often less important) attributes when asked to explain the reasons underlying their attitudes, we argue that these accessible attributes will be weighed more heavily in the judgments of those who are rehearsing these attributes in preparation for discussion. We call this the "rehearsal-weight explanation." According to this account, people mentally rehearse in preparation for discussion, and this process makes the attributes being rehearsed particularly salient. Product attitudes formed in this context will weigh heavily the attributes that predominate during rehearsal even though, as noted earlier, these attributes are not necessarily important to people for evaluating the product. When the rehearsed attributes do not correspond with the criteria typically deemed important for judging such products, the attitudes of those who evaluate the product while anticipating discussion will differ from those of people not anticipating discussion.

As mentioned earlier, prior research in individual contexts has demonstrated that people's attitudes can be influenced by the reasons they provided for their attitudes even when they do not anticipate discussion. Yet, in this prior research, individuals were put in the position of justifying their attitudes, which likely made the less important thoughts particularly salient and created more commitment to the reasons provided. In the present research, participants who do and do not anticipate discussion are asked to collect their thoughts, which in itself should not elicit commitment to the thoughts generated. Rather, the expectation of an approaching discussion should affect whether these accessible thoughts are used when making a judgment. Thus, for all participants, the unimportant attributes should be salient when people are asked to collect their thoughts about the product. According to the rehearsal-weight account, however, those anticipating group discussion will use these salient (albeit unimportant) attributes and those not anticipating discussion will not use these salient attributes.

We test this rehearsal-weight explanation against two alternate predictions. These predictions are similar to those identified in previous research on why explaining one's attitudes has a disruptive effect on attitudes in an individual context (Levine, Halberstadt, and Goldstone 1996). The predictions are also relevant to strategies people may use to prepare for group discussion (cf. Tetlock, Skitka, and Boettger 1989). One possible account holds that those who evaluate a product while anticipating discussion may attempt to provide the most relevant input possible to the discussion and, thus, focus primarily on the criteria that they typically consider to be most important in evaluating such products. Consequently, they may overweigh the more important criteria at the expense of the less important criteria. This is referred to as the "importance-weight explanation." From

this explanation, one would expect group anticipation to elicit attitudes that reflect the evaluative implications of the criteria deemed most important for such products.

An alternate account is that those who evaluate the product while anticipating discussion will consider more product attributes, perhaps in an attempt to be objective or broad-minded. This is the “distribute-weight explanation.” Applying this account, anticipated discussion should increase the number of attributes considered. As people consider more criteria from different angles (both the positive and negative aspects), there is a greater likelihood that a moderate attitude will be adopted (Linville 1982) by those anticipating discussion compared to those not anticipating discussion.

To summarize, we argue that whether anticipating group discussion affects attitudes depends on (1) whether those anticipating discussion are likely to have a prior attitude toward the product and (2) which criteria are dominating their thoughts as they rehearse for discussion. When people have formed an attitude before learning of an approaching discussion, they are likely to retain the attitude rather than reformulate it in the direction of the rehearsed criteria. In contrast, when people form an attitude while anticipating group discussion, product attitudes will correspond to the valence of the criteria dominating their rehearsed thoughts. Consequently,

H1: When less important attributes dominate people’s thoughts, the attitudes of those who anticipate discussion while evaluating the product will be more reflective of the valence of the less important attribute information provided than will the attitudes of those who do not anticipate discussion while evaluating the product.

Product Judgments Held Within versus Outside the Group-Anticipation Context

When anticipating group discussion affects attitudes, what will be the relation between these attitudes and the evaluative judgments made in a different context, such as an individual context? We argue that attitudes impacted by the anticipation of group discussion will differ from evaluations made in another context. Indeed, empirical evidence in nongroup-anticipation contexts suggests that judgments made when less important attributes are salient are unlikely to predict future attitudes and intentions toward the target (e.g., Millar and Tesser 1986; Shavitt and Fazio 1991; Wilson et al. 1989, 1995). Thus, once outside the group-anticipation context, judgments of a target product should be guided by attributes one normally considers more important. Therefore,

H2: When attitudes are based on less important attributes rehearsed during anticipation of discussion, judgments made within the group-anticipation context will not correspond to judgments made outside of that context.

In the present research, we focused on attributes linked

to two contrasting categories of goals or attitude functions that may vary in their salience across contexts: the “utilitarian” and “social identity functions.” These functions are among the primary ones likely to underlie product judgments (Lutz 1981). The utilitarian function refers to maximizing rewards and minimizing punishments inherent in the product (e.g., food quality would be a utilitarian attribute for a restaurant). The social identity function refers to facilitating self-expression and social interaction, as well as communicating one’s desired identity (e.g., atmosphere or clientele would be social identity attributes for a restaurant; see Katz 1960; Smith, Bruner, and White 1956).

To illustrate hypothesis 2, if people rehearse, say, social identity attributes in preparation for discussion, then attitudes formed in that group-anticipation context will likely reflect the valence of those social identity attributes rehearsed. However, if people normally would evaluate the target product primarily on utilitarian criteria, then once outside the group-anticipation context, they will likely evaluate this product more on the basis of its utilitarian than social attributes.

Design of Experiments 1–3

To test our hypotheses, three experiments were conducted. All three included a group/individual manipulation, where people anticipated either discussing a product in a group or evaluating it individually. After being told about the upcoming context, but while still working individually, the participants listed their thoughts toward the focal product and then reported their attitudes toward it. This thought-listing task provided a measure of attribute salience. At the end of each experiment, after the discussion had ended in the group condition, participants predicted their likelihood of consuming the focal product or service. We compared these behavioral predictions reported outside of the group-anticipation context to the attitudes reported in anticipation of discussion. As in prior research (e.g., Shavitt and Fazio 1991), the correlation between attitudes and behavioral predictions provide a measure of the degree to which salient attributes were used when making attitudinal judgments.

In experiment 1, we tested the rehearsal-weight account with experimental materials for which the type of attribute that is likely to be predominantly listed in all conditions would differ from the criteria typically used to evaluate the focal product. According to the rehearsal-weight account, attitudes formed in anticipation of discussion should reflect the predominant attributes listed (here, attributes that are less important). In contrast, according to the importance-weight account, attitudes formed in anticipation of discussion should reflect the more important attributes. A second goal of experiment 1 was to investigate whether having the opportunity to evaluate the product before anticipating discussion might lead attitudes to be relatively unaffected by what was rehearsed for discussion. To test this, we varied whether people knew of the upcoming group/individual task when they first had the opportunity to evaluate the product.

The second and third experiments focused only on con-

ditions in which attitudes were formed in anticipation of an approaching group/individual task. In experiment 2, to assess the robustness of the rehearsal-weight hypothesis and test it more rigorously against both alternate accounts, the experimental materials were designed such that the attribute dominating thoughts would be more important for one product but less important for another. According to the rehearsal-weight account, the attitudes of those who did and did not anticipate discussion should differ only for the product where the rehearsed attribute was less important. According to the importance-weight account, the attitudes of those who did versus those who did not anticipate discussion should be more reflective of the more important attributes for each product. According to the distribute-weight account, the attitudes of those who did versus those who did not anticipate discussion should be more moderate for both products.

In experiment 3, we directly tested the rehearsal-weight account by manipulating the salience of the more important attributes at the time of rehearsal for group discussion. When important attributes are made particularly salient, they are more likely to dominate rehearsed thoughts, and, according to the rehearsal-weight account, this should make attitudes formed in a group-anticipation context more similar to attitudes formed in an individual context.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Participants. Participants were 84 undergraduates at a midwestern university who completed the study as partial fulfillment of an introductory course requirement. Group and individual conditions were conducted in separate sessions of approximately 20 persons each.

Materials and Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to either a group discussion or individual condition. All participants received a review about a fictitious family restaurant called "Aunt Mary's." This review began with favorable utilitarian information about the food (e.g., "The tempting dinner entrees are seasoned and cooked to perfection"), followed by unfavorable social identity information about the atmosphere (e.g., "The 'regulars' are an older, local clientele or families with young children"). The favorability and functional relevance of similar materials were validated in previous research, while the order of appearance of the utilitarian versus social identity information in the review had little effect on the type of thoughts listed (Schlosser and Shavitt 1999). It is important to note that, in that previous research, a similar review elicited more social identity than utilitarian thoughts regardless of group versus individual condition. Furthermore, all participants in that previous research rated a utilitarian criterion (food) as most important in evaluating restaurants in general. Thus, as in previous research, the review was expected to predominantly elicit thoughts about the social identity information, which was expected to be less important for participants.

On arrival, those in the information-read-during-anticipation condition were given written instructions about the group or individual assignment followed by the review to read, whereas those in the information-read-before-anticipation condition were just given the review. After everyone read the review, it was collected, and those in the information-read-before-anticipation condition were given instructions about the approaching task (to evaluate the restaurant in a group discussion or individually). Thus, those in the during-anticipation condition read about and formed an impression of the product while anticipating the group or individual task, whereas those in the before-anticipation condition read about and could form an impression of the product before learning of the group/individual task. In both group conditions, participants were told that they would participate in a focus group discussion during which each member was "expected to share [his/her] thoughts and opinions about Aunt Mary's restaurant with the rest of [the] group." At the time participants received the group instructions, they were assembled into five-person groups, were asked to arrange their seats so that they faced their other group members, and were given name tags. Those in the individual conditions were told that they would "answer some further questions about this restaurant."

From this point, participants in all conditions received the same experimental materials. While working individually, everyone was instructed to "collect your thoughts about Aunt Mary's restaurant." Participants listed their thoughts using a standard cognitive-response measure (Cacioppo and Petty 1981). The thought list served as a measure of what those in the group conditions were rehearsing to discuss and what those in the individual conditions were thinking about in response to the review. Next, participants were asked to judge how favorable each listed thought was toward the restaurant on a +2 (very favorable) to -2 (very unfavorable) scale. Participants then reported their overall attitudes toward the restaurant on three nine-point semantic differential scales (anchored with like-dislike, positive-negative, favorable-unfavorable), which ranged from +4 to -4.

Those in the group conditions then discussed the product. One member from each group was randomly assigned to begin the discussion by introducing him- or herself followed by his or her thoughts and opinions about the restaurant. The group was instructed to continue this in a clockwise order. The discussion took approximately five minutes. After discussion, group members rearranged their seats to face forward rather than face each other. Everyone completed the remaining questionnaires individually.

In the final set of questionnaires, all participants rated the importance of food, atmosphere, and price in evaluating family restaurants in general. This was to check which criteria were more important for this sample. Participants then completed some additional measures, after which they rated "the likelihood of performing each of the following behaviors" described in six consumption scenarios (e.g., "Imagine that you just missed dinner at your place of residence. How likely would you be to go to Aunt Mary's?") Participants

responded using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (“I would definitely *not* do it”) to 5 (“I would definitely do it”). Because participants were no longer in the group-anticipation context at this point in the experiment, we expected that everyone would evaluate the restaurant based on the criteria they normally use to judge family restaurants (see Shavitt and Fazio [1991] for similar uses of behavioral scenarios). By averaging each participant’s likelihood estimates across the six consumption scenarios, a behavior predictions index was calculated, $\alpha = .74$.

Coding. Two judges independently coded each listed thought as reflecting social identity, utilitarian, multiple-functioned, or uncodable attributes according to Shavitt’s (1990) coding manual. A social identity thought captures the image and impression the product conveys to others (e.g., “casual atmosphere” and “a good place to take your parents”), whereas a utilitarian thought captures the quality and intrinsic rewards and punishments of the product (e.g., “hometown cooking” and “fast and efficient”). A multiple-functioned thought taps both the social identity and utilitarian function (e.g., “attractive while affordable”). Thoughts that do not say anything about product attributes or functions are uncodable (e.g., “it sounded good”). Judges were blind to experimental condition. They independently coded 567 thoughts about the products with 89% agreement. A third judge resolved disagreements.

Results

Thoughts Listed prior to Discussion. As we expected, on the basis of prior research with similar stimuli, participants overall listed more social identity than utilitarian thoughts (M ’s = 3.56 vs. 2.15, $t(83) = 6.36$, $p < .01$). Across conditions, over half of participants’ listed thoughts were social identity thoughts; the means were between 57% and 67%.¹ Also as anticipated, the social identity criterion was not rated as most important when typically evaluating the product. Examining participants’ importance ratings of various criteria for evaluating restaurants indicated that food (a utilitarian criterion) was perceived overall as more important than atmosphere (a social criterion) in forming a judgment toward family restaurants in general (M ’s = 6.65 vs. 5.73; $F(1, 84) = 52.55$, $p < .01$). The thought-listing and importance-rating data together indicate that, across conditions, participants were primarily listing thoughts about less important attributes.

¹Across all three experiments, those in the group conditions listed significantly fewer social identity thoughts than those in the individual conditions: $F(1, 80) = 5.45$, $p < .05$ in study 1; $F(1, 114) = 3.18$, $p < .05$ in study 2; and $F(1, 36) = 2.67$, $p = .05$, one-tail, in the nonsalient condition of study 3. However, the main focus of this research and of the rehearsal-weight account is the type of product attributes that dominates participants’ listed thoughts as opposed to the relative number of social identity (or utilitarian) thoughts listed in each condition. Across experiments, the type of criteria dominating participants’ listed thoughts—and the importance of such criteria—was similar between those who did and did not anticipate discussion.

Attitudes Reported prior to Discussion. According to the rehearsal-weight explanation, those forming their product attitudes at the time of rehearsal for discussion should report attitudes that reflect the valence of the information dominating their thoughts (here, social identity), whereas the attitudes of those in the other conditions should be closer to the valence of the more important (utilitarian) information. Because the social identity information was less favorable than the utilitarian information, the attitudes of those in the group/during-anticipation condition should be less favorable than the attitudes of those in the other conditions. Because our predicted effect occurs in only one of the four cells rather than in the crossover contrasts compared in a 2×2 ANOVA test, planned contrasts are the appropriate tests of our hypotheses (Rosenthal and Rosnow 1985). Planned contrasts supported hypothesis 1: those in the group/during-anticipation condition held significantly less favorable attitudes ($M = 1.05$, $SD = 1.30$, $n = 20$) than those in the group/before-anticipation and individual conditions ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.57$, $n = 63$; $F(1, 81) = 4.01$, $p < .05$).

If, as expected, those in the group/before-anticipation condition formed an attitude prior to learning of the approaching discussion, then their attitudes should be relatively unaffected by the approaching discussion and therefore similar to the attitudes of those in the individual conditions. In support of this expectation, an omnibus test comparing the attitudes of those in the group/before-anticipation condition ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 1.48$, $n = 20$), individual/before-anticipation condition ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.47$, $n = 20$), and individual/during-anticipation condition ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 1.71$, $n = 23$) yielded no significant differences ($F(1, 60) = 2.08$, NS). Consistent with the rehearsal-weight account, although everyone thought primarily about less important product attributes, only those who formed product attitudes in anticipation of discussion held attitudes that reflected this focus on less important information.

Note that these findings are inconsistent with an importance-weight explanation. According to this alternate account, the attitudes of those in the group/during-anticipation condition should reflect the evaluative implications of the criteria rated as most important. However, their attitudes were more reflective of the less important (less favorable) information than were the attitudes of those who evaluated the product without anticipating discussion. We are unable to rule out the distribute-weight explanation, however. In addition to being reflective of the less important information, the attitudes of those in the group/during-anticipation condition were closer to the midpoint than in the other conditions. We address this directly in experiment 2.

Relation between Attitudes Reported Within versus Outside the Group-Anticipation Context. According to hypothesis 2, if those in the group/during-anticipation condition based their original attitudes on the less important information they were rehearsing to discuss, then there should be a low correlation between their judgments made in anticipation of discussion (their attitudes, where the less important information was weighed heavily) and those

made outside of the group-anticipation context (their behavioral predictions, where the more important information—reflecting criteria they typically use for evaluation—would be weighed heavily). However, there should be a high correspondence between attitudes and behavioral predictions for those in the other conditions because they likely formed their attitudes based on criteria they typically use to evaluate restaurants. The attitude-behavioral prediction correlations support hypothesis 2: the correlation for those in the group/during-anticipation condition was near zero, whereas the correlations for those in the other conditions were above .60 (see table 1). Using calculations applied in previous research to test overall planned comparisons between correlations (Snyder and Kendzierski 1982), this effect was significant ($F(1, \infty) = 10.36, p < .05$).

To further test the rehearsal-weight account, we conducted idiographic correlational analyses. Participants' own thought content and importance ratings were used to classify participants according to whether the attributes dominating their listed thoughts were consistent with the criterion they rated as most important in evaluating such products. When the attribute dominating people's thoughts was inconsistent with the criterion rated as most important to them (i.e., when thoughts reflected personally less important criteria), their attitudes were far less consistent with their subsequent judgments when attitudes were formed in anticipation of discussion versus the other conditions ($r = -.18$ vs. $.50 \leq r \leq .75$; $F(1, \infty) = 11.01, p < .05$; see table 1, part B).

The results of both correlational analyses are inconsistent with the importance-weight account, which would predict that evaluative judgments within and outside the group-

anticipation context should be based on the more important information and thus should correlate highly in all conditions, perhaps even more highly for those who evaluate the product while anticipating discussion. Yet, the correlation between attitudes reported within and outside the group-anticipation context was much lower for those who evaluated the product while anticipating discussion. However, the overall correlational analysis is unable to distinguish between the rehearsal-weight account and the distribute-weight account because, according to both, attitudes formed in the group-anticipation context are based on information not typically considered in an individual context. Thus, both would predict the correlation to be lowest in the group/during-anticipation condition. However, the idiographic analysis provides some support for the rehearsal-weight account. According to the distribute-weight account, basing attitudes on more attributes than usual should result in low correlations between evaluations in the group/during-anticipation condition regardless of whether the attribute dominating thoughts is personally more important. Yet, when the attribute dominating thoughts is personally more important, the correlation is higher ($r = .47$) than when it is personally less important ($r = -.18$). Caution is needed when interpreting this finding, however, because one key cell size is very small ($n = 4$ for those whose predominant thoughts reflected personally more important attributes).

Conclusions

The results of the first experiment indicate that simply anticipating a group discussion can shift how consumers

TABLE 1
EXPERIMENT 1: CORRELATION BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORAL PREDICTIONS
OVERALL AND IDIOGRAPHICALLY

Anticipated context	When information was read	Correlation	<i>n</i>
A. Overall:			
Group ^a	Before anticipation	.73 _b	20
	During anticipation	-.08 _a	20
Individual ^a	Before anticipation	.64 _b	20
	During anticipation	.65 _b	23
B. Idiographic analysis:			
Attribute dominating an individual's listed thoughts is:			
Personally less important:			
Group	Before anticipation	.74 _b	15
	During anticipation	-.18 _a	16
Individual	Before anticipation	.50 _b	16
	During anticipation	.65 _b	22
Personally more important: ^b			
Group	Before anticipation	.73	5
	During anticipation	.47	4
Individual	Before anticipation	1.00	3
	During anticipation	. . .	1

NOTE.—For part A, the planned contrast is $F(1, \infty) = 10.36, p < .05$, and for the personally less important cell of part B, it is $F(1, \infty) = 11.01, p < .05$. Different subscripts indicate significant differences at $p < .05$.

^aAccording to product function, the attributes dominating listed thoughts are less important.

^bBecause of small sample sizes in this condition, only the cells for the less important attribute—the most relevant group for testing the key predictions—were analyzed statistically.

evaluate a product. When attitudes were formed while anticipating discussion, the attitude was affected by the criteria that people were rehearsing to discuss, even though rehearsed criteria did not necessarily correspond to the evaluative criteria normally used. However, those learning of an approaching discussion after having an opportunity to evaluate the product were less likely to be influenced by the anticipation of discussion. Instead, their attitudes were similar to the attitudes of those in the individual conditions.

When attitudes were affected by group anticipation, these attitudes did not necessarily correspond to evaluative judgments made outside of the group-anticipation context. Instead, those judgments were closer to the criteria typically used by participants to evaluate restaurants. Specifically, judgments made within versus outside the group-anticipation context were uncorrelated when the primary criteria people were rehearsing for discussion differed from the typical evaluative criteria.

Although the data support the rehearsal-weight rather than the importance-weight account, the results do not conclusively distinguish between the rehearsal-weight and distribute-weight accounts. In the second study, therefore, we broadened the set of stimuli to investigate in a number of ways the explanatory mechanisms proposed. First, we expanded the set of target products investigated and designed a new set of product advertisements such that the attributes dominating people's rehearsed thoughts would be more important for one product and less important for another. According to the rehearsal-weight account, when the criteria dominating listed thoughts differ from the criteria typically used to evaluate a particular product, the attitude formed by those anticipating discussion should differ from the attitudes of those not anticipating discussion (hypothesis 1) and should not correspond to evaluative judgments made outside of the group-anticipation context (hypothesis 2). However, when the criteria dominating listed thoughts are consistent with the product's typical evaluative criteria, attitudes formed in that context should be similar to the attitudes of those not anticipating discussion (hypothesis 1) and should be related to judgments made outside of the group-anticipation context (hypothesis 2). The distribute-weight account would lead to a different set of predictions, however. If people considered more of the utilitarian and social identity attributes that were presented when forming attitudes in anticipation of discussion, their attitudes should be more moderate for both products than the attitudes of those not anticipating discussion.

The findings from the first experiment do not allow us to rule out a potential boundary condition on the rehearsal-weight account: people may base their attitudes on their rehearsed thoughts only when they are based on negative or critical information, which in our stimulus set would lead to a shift toward moderation. Thus, in experiment 2, product descriptions were designed such that the less important information prominent in people's thoughts was favorable and should lead to the formation of more extreme as opposed to more moderate attitudes. Furthermore, to examine

whether similar effects would be obtained when a different category of attributes dominates participants' thoughts, adjustments were made to the product descriptions to increase the likelihood of participants thinking more about the utilitarian than social identity information, regardless of whether utilitarian information is consistent with the typical evaluative criteria. This would rule out the possibility that anticipating group discussion simply heightens social identity goals and thereby increases the impact of social identity attributes on attitudes.

EXPERIMENT 2

In this study, we tested hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 with products that are either thought of predominantly in utilitarian terms ("quality-based product": fast-food restaurant) or predominantly in social identity terms ("image-based product": sports car). Participants evaluated both products, either in a group-anticipation context or individually (in an essay). Note that, in all conditions, product information was read during anticipation of the upcoming group or individual task.

Method

Participants. One hundred thirty-five undergraduate students at a midwestern university participated in partial fulfillment of an introductory course requirement. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental condition within a 2 (group/individual manipulation; a between-subjects variable) \times 2 (product order; a within-subjects variable: reviewing the image-based or quality-based product first) design.

Materials and Procedure. The materials and procedures for experiment 2 were similar to those of experiment 1 with a few exceptions. It was important to have stimuli that predominantly evoked thoughts about utilitarian attributes across experimental conditions. The stimuli were an ad for a fictitious fast-food restaurant (quality-based product) and an ad for a fictitious sports car (image-based product). Each had two paragraphs, with the first paragraph containing utilitarian information (e.g., safety of the sports car, efficiency of the fast-food restaurant) and the second containing social identity information (e.g., appearance of the car, décor of the restaurant). Both paragraphs were favorable. However, the utilitarian paragraph was more favorable than the social identity paragraph.² The primary functions associated with

²We anticipated that predominantly utilitarian thoughts would be elicited in response to these target ads for a number of reasons. In the first experiment, encountering negative social identity information in a review was novel and likely made this dimension particularly salient, thereby causing social identity thoughts to outnumber utilitarian thoughts. However, encountering favorable social identity (and utilitarian) information in an advertisement is not novel. Thus, in experiment 2, other factors likely influenced the relative salience of these criteria, such as the desire to explain one's attitudes by referring to factual, concrete, and easy-to-articulate criteria (cf. Millar and Tesser 1986; Wilson et al. 1993). This should enhance the salience of utilitarian attributes.

these two products and the favorability of the information in the ads were validated by a pretest.

Both those in the group and individual conditions completed the same thought-listing measure and attitude measure as were used in experiment 1. Afterward, those in the individual condition wrote an essay regarding their thoughts and feelings toward the product for five minutes, while those in the group condition discussed and evaluated the product for five minutes, using a similar procedure as in experiment 1.³ The essay-writing task was used to compare participants' individual product evaluations with their discussion contributions. In all conditions, a tape recorder was prominently displayed during this discussion/essay-writing stage. The group condition tapes were coded to assess whether the criteria dominating listed thoughts would also dominate discussion contributions. After completing the discussion/essay-writing task, the same procedure used for the first product was repeated for the second product.

On completion of all of these tasks, as in experiment 1, those in the group condition sat at individual seats that faced forward. To further reduce the salience of the group experience, all participants completed a five-minute filler task. Next, participants were asked to imagine four behavior scenarios involving each product and to predict their likelihood of performing each behavior on the same scale as in experiment 1. An example for the sports car is "imagine that you are at a car dealership where the Sumatra XS is shown. How likely would you be to ask to take the Sumatra XS for a test drive?" Participants' likelihood estimates were averaged to create a behavior prediction index for each product ($\alpha = .77$ for the sports car and $\alpha = .74$ for the fast-food restaurant). Participants then rated the typical importance of four criteria (two social and two utilitarian criteria) in evaluating sports cars and fast-food restaurants.

Coding. Two judges independently coded the thought lists, individual essays, and group-discussion transcripts using methods described in experiment 1. They independently coded 3,468 thoughts and 5,318 items from the essays/discussion transcripts with 89% and 82% agreement, respectively. Disagreements were resolved through a third judge or discussion.

Results

Thoughts Listed and Discussed. The numbers of social identity and utilitarian thoughts listed were compared

³Each group was instructed to reach a collective opinion about the product. This tests the rehearsal-weight account in a more stringent group decision-making context: one in which the expressed attitude must be reconciled with others' attitudes in order to reach group consensus. One might expect that in order to facilitate the reaching of group consensus people would prefer to adopt a flexible (i.e., neutral) rather than an extreme stance prior to discussion. The implications of rehearsing primarily non-criterial attributes for the sports car (i.e., the more favorable utilitarian information should lead to the adoption of a more extreme/favorable stance) run counter to the implications about adopting more neutral attitudes in order to facilitate consensus formation, thereby providing a more stringent test of our hypothesis.

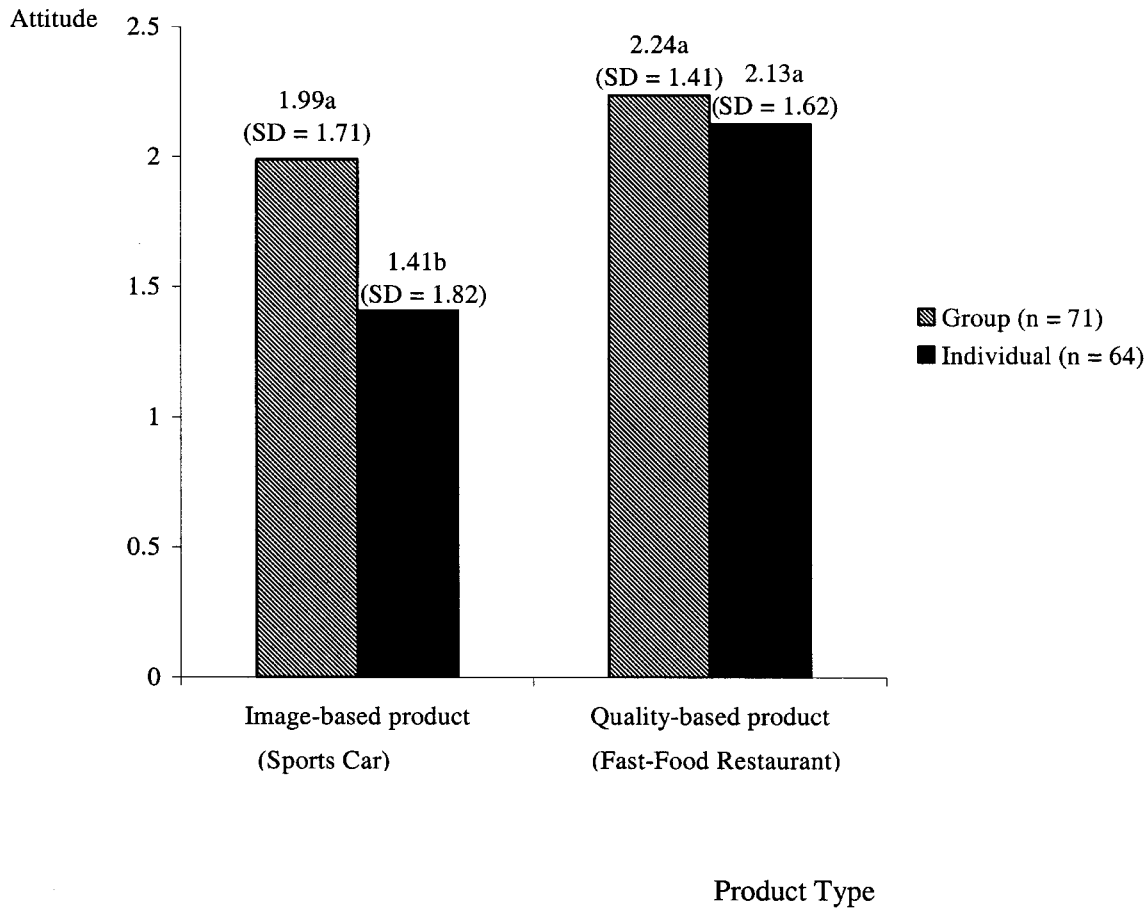
with a 2 (group manipulation: individual vs. group) \times 2 (product type; a within-subject variable: image vs. quality based) \times 2 (thought type; a within-subject variable: social identity vs. utilitarian) ANOVA. As anticipated, participants overall listed significantly more utilitarian than social identity thoughts in response to both product ads (M 's = 3.18 vs. 1.58; $F(1, 129) = 149.51, p < .01$). According to the results of a pretest, these thoughts are less important for the sports car but more important for the fast-food restaurant.⁴

To examine whether the content of listed thoughts was predictive of the criteria dominating discussion/essay content, we calculated the percent of thought-list content and discussion/essay content that was social versus utilitarian and analyzed an arcsine transformation of these data with a 2 (group manipulation) \times 2 (product type) \times 2 (task; a within-subject variable: thought-listing vs. discussion/essay task) ANOVA. As expected, there was no significant difference between the content of listed thoughts and that of the discussion/essays; both were predominantly utilitarian (M 's = 69% vs. 70%, respectively; $F(1, 114) < 1$). Thus, the degree to which the utilitarian information dominated people's listed thoughts carried over to their contributions to the group discussion/essay.

Attitudes Reported prior to Discussion/Essay Writing. Participants thought more about the utilitarian information. For the image-based product, this information was less important as well as more favorable than the social identity information. Thus, those in the group condition should hold more favorable attitudes toward the image-based product than should those in the individual condition. However, for the quality-based product, the utilitarian focus of the listed thoughts reflected the more important criteria, and thus, attitudes of those in the group and individual conditions for this product should be similar. Consistent with these hypotheses, planned pairwise comparisons yielded a significant group-individual difference for the image-based product ($F(1, 133) = 3.64, p < .05$, one-tailed) but not for the quality-based product ($F(1, 133) < 1$; see fig. 1). This finding is consistent with a rehearsal-weight account and inconsistent with both the importance-weight and distribute-weight accounts. Instead of attitudes reflecting the most important criterion or greater moderation for both products, those in the group condition appear to have based their attitudes on the criteria dominating their thoughts. Further-

⁴Ninety-nine undergraduates were asked to think about how they typically judge sports cars and fast-food restaurants and, ignoring price, to identify "the most important thing determining how I feel about [the target product]." Product order was counterbalanced. Two judges coded the attributes listed using the procedures described in experiment 1 and had 89% agreement for the sports car and 93% agreement for the fast-food restaurant. A third judge resolved disagreements. The results confirm the product classification: for the sports car, the majority of participants listed a social identity as opposed to a utilitarian criterion (56% vs. 36%), whereas for the fast-food restaurant, 99% of participants listed a utilitarian criterion, and no one listed a social identity criterion.

FIGURE 1
EXPERIMENT 2: ATTITUDES HELD PRIOR TO DISCUSSION



NOTE.—Means with different letters are significantly different at $p < .05$, one-tailed. According to product function, the attributes dominating listed thoughts are less important for the image-based product and more important for the quality-based product.

more, they based their attitudes on their rehearsed thoughts even though this led to more extreme attitudes toward the image-based product.

Product Judgments Reported Within versus Outside the Group-Anticipation Context. Because the image-based product would normally be evaluated on the basis of social identity criteria, attitudes formed in anticipation of discussion (i.e., based on the utilitarian criteria) were not expected to correspond to behavioral predictions made outside of the group-anticipation context. The results are consistent with hypothesis 2, replicating the pattern in experiment 1 (see table 2). However, significant differences only emerged when comparing participants' attitudes toward the first product evaluated with their subsequent behavioral predictions. There was a significantly lower correlation for the image-based product between judgments reported at the beginning and end of the study for those in the group condition

($r = .22$) than for those in the individual condition ($r = .69$). Also, as expected, attitudes toward the quality-based product correlated strongly with behavior predictions for those in both the group and individual conditions (r 's = .68 vs. .67, respectively). It should be noted that significantly more time had separated the evaluative judgments of the first product than the evaluative judgments of the second. Moreover, an interpolated task (i.e., the evaluation of the second product) also occurred between the two judgment measures for the first product. These factors likely reduced the salience of the group discussion when predicting one's behavior toward the first product, making those judgments more likely to reflect typical evaluative criteria.

As in experiment 1, we also tested hypothesis 2 idiosyncratically for the first product evaluated by categorizing participants according to whether the criteria dominating their listed thoughts reflected what they rated as most im-

TABLE 2
 EXPERIMENT 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORAL PREDICTIONS
 OVERALL AND IDIOGRAPHICALLY

Anticipated context	Product type (within-subject)	Correlation	n
A. Product type as within-subjects variable:			
Between subjects:			
Group	Fast-food restaurant ^a	.66	71
	Sports car ^b	.31	
Individual	Fast-food restaurant ^a	.57	64
	Sports car ^b	.49	
B. First product evaluated (longest time lapse between judgments):			
Between subjects:			
Group	Fast-food restaurant ^a	.68 _b	40
	Sports car ^b	.22 _a	35
Individual	Fast-food restaurant ^a	.67 _b	38
	Sports car ^b	.69 _b	37
C. Idiographic analysis for the first product evaluated:			
Attribute dominating an individual's listed thoughts is:			
Personally less important:			
Group	. . .	.19 _a	46
Individual	. . .	.60 _b	45
Personally more important:			
Group	. . .	.74 _b	25
Individual	. . .	.65 _b	17

NOTE.—For part B, the planned contrast is $F(1, \infty) = 9.12$, $p < .05$, and for part C, it is $F(1, \infty) = 9.54$, $p < .05$. Different subscripts indicate significant differences between correlations at $p < .05$. "Product type" is within subject in part A and between subjects in B.

^aAccording to product function, the attributes dominating listed thoughts are more important.

^bAccording to product function, the attributes dominating listed thoughts are less important.

portant to them in evaluating such products. The results replicate those of the first experiment (see table 2, part C).

Conclusions

According to the rehearsal-weight account, the attitudes of those who evaluate the product while anticipating discussion will differ from those of others when their thoughts are dominated by criteria not typically seen as most important for making the judgment. This is exactly the result observed, and our account explains why this difference in attitudes emerged only under specific conditions (e.g., for the sports car but not the fast-food restaurant).

Moreover, once the group discussion of a product was no longer salient, people evaluated the product according to the criteria they normally use for similar products. When these criteria differed from what had been rehearsed for discussion, product judgments made within and outside the group-anticipation context were unrelated, but when these criteria matched the rehearsed attributes, product judgments were highly related. These findings emerged regardless of whether the typical evaluative criteria were defined based on (1) a priori expectations about the functional goals typically associated with the product or (2) each individual's rated criterion importance.

These findings replicate the findings of experiment 1 and support the rehearsal-weight account in a new stimulus context. In experiment 2, materials were designed so that a

different type of criterion would dominate prediscussion thoughts and rehearsal (unfavorable social identity criteria in experiment 1; favorable utilitarian criteria in experiment 2). We also employed a different set of products, ones that are typically evaluated more in terms of either social criteria (sports car) or utilitarian criteria (fast-food restaurant). Note also that, across experiments, products from the same product class (a family vs. a fast-food restaurant) evaluated on the same basis (utilitarian criteria) were examined. Yet, because in experiment 1 the social criteria primarily rehearsed were considered less important in evaluating the product, whereas in experiment 2 the utilitarian criteria primarily rehearsed matched the primary basis for product evaluation, the group-anticipation context affected attitudes in the first experiment but not the second. Thus, the results of experiment 2 illustrate the generalizability of the rehearsal-weight account, demonstrating that the effects are not dependent on the target product or the nature or favorability of the criteria rehearsed for discussion.

These findings also counter the predictions of two alternative process accounts. Although the rehearsal-weight account best explains the data, experiment 3 was conducted to test this account directly by experimentally manipulating whether the more important attributes are salient during anticipation of discussion. According to the rehearsal-weight account, making more important attributes salient should lead them to dominate rehearsed thoughts, thereby reducing

TABLE 3

EXPERIMENT 3: ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORAL PREDICTIONS

Condition	Product attitude summary statistics			<i>n</i>
	Mean	SD	Correlation with behavioral predictions	
Group/nonsalient	.98 ^a	1.25	.39	22
Group/salient	1.62 ^b	1.39	.60*	26
Individual (control)	2.08	1.42	.66*	16

^aSignificantly different from control condition at $p < .05$.

^bNot significantly different from control condition at $p < .05$.

* $p < .05$.

or eliminating the effect of group anticipation on attitudes formed in that context.

EXPERIMENT 3

The materials and procedures of experiment 1 were used, with the exception that the salience of the more important attributes was manipulated when people anticipated discussion. When the more important attributes are not made salient at the time of group anticipation (group/nonsalient condition), findings should replicate the during-anticipation condition of experiment 1. In contrast, when the more important attributes are made salient at group anticipation (group/salient condition), rehearsal should focus more on that information and, according to the rehearsal-weight account, this should reduce or eliminate the effect of group anticipation on attitudes formed in that context. Furthermore, as in the individual condition, judgments reported within and outside the group-anticipation context should be highly related.

Method

Participants. Sixty-four undergraduate students at a northwestern and a midwestern university participated in partial fulfillment of an introductory course requirement. Participants were randomly assigned to the group/salient, group/nonsalient, or individual (control) condition.

Materials and Procedures. The same restaurant review described in experiment 1 was used here. The procedures for both group conditions were similar to those in experiment 1 for the group/during-anticipation condition, with the exception that those in the group/salient condition received the following instructions before listing their thoughts: "Think about how you typically evaluate a restaurant—what characteristic is most important to you? On the line below, write the one attribute that stands out as most important to you when evaluating a restaurant in general." To reinforce this focus, the thought-list instructions continued, "As you collect your thoughts, it is important for you to focus on the restaurant attribute that matters most to you when evaluating a restaurant. That is, in order to make sure

your responses represent your typical reactions to restaurants, it is important to focus on how you typically evaluate restaurants."

For the individual (control) condition, the materials and procedures were similar to those used in experiment 1 for the individual/during-anticipation condition.

Coding. Two judges independently coded the thought lists as in experiment 1, coding 490 thoughts with 77% agreement. Disagreements were resolved through a third judge.

Results

Thoughts Listed. As in experiment 1, a utilitarian attribute (food) was rated as significantly more important than a social identity attribute (atmosphere) in evaluating restaurants in general (M 's = 6.30 vs. 5.75; $F(1, 61) = 9.97$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, when asked as part of the saliency manipulation which attribute is most important to them when evaluating restaurants, 73% of people in the group/salient condition identified a utilitarian criterion. Thus, it was expected that people in this condition would list fewer social identity (less important) thoughts and more utilitarian (more important) thoughts than those in the other conditions. The number of social identity and utilitarian thoughts listed were analyzed with a 2 (thought type; within-subject: social vs. utilitarian) \times 2 (planned contrast: group/salient vs. group/nonsalient and control conditions) ANOVA and a significant interaction emerged ($F(1, 62) = 7.83$, $p < .01$). Those in the group/salient condition listed significantly fewer social identity (less important) thoughts than those in the group/nonsalient and control conditions (M 's = 2.04 vs. 3.34; $F(1, 62) = 12.00$, $p < .01$) and slightly more utilitarian (more important) thoughts than those in the group/nonsalient and control conditions did (M 's = 2.58 vs. 2.21; $F(1, 62) < 1$).

Attitudes Reported prior to Discussion/Essay Writing. According to the rehearsal-weight explanation, because those in the group/salient condition listed primarily more important information, their attitudes should be similar to the attitudes of those in the individual condition. Furthermore, because those in the group/nonsalient condition listed primarily less important information, which was less favorable than the more important information, their attitudes should be less favorable than those in the other conditions. Planned contrasts supported these predictions. Attitudes in the group/nonsalient condition were significantly less favorable than in the group/salient and individual conditions (M 's = .98 vs. 1.79; $F(1, 62) = 4.96$, $p < .05$). Moreover, attitudes in the group/nonsalient condition were significantly less favorable than in the individual condition (M 's = .98 vs. 2.09; $F(1, 36) = 5.96$, $p < .05$), whereas attitudes in the group/salient and individual conditions were similar (M 's = 1.62 vs. 2.09; $F(1, 40) = 1.05$, NS; see table 3).

Product Judgments Within versus Outside the Group-Anticipation Context. As expected in the group/nonsalient condition, and replicating the previous studies, product judgments within versus outside the group-anticipation context were not significantly correlated at $p < .05$, $r = .39$. In contrast, consistent with the prediction that those in the group/salient condition would base their attitudes within and outside the group-anticipation context on more important information, product judgments were significantly correlated for those in the group/salient condition at a level similar to that in the control condition ($r = .60$ and $r = .66$, respectively; for both, $p < .01$).

Although these results are in the predicted directions, the planned contrast between the group/nonsalient condition and the group/salient and control conditions was not significant (r^2 s = .39 vs. .64, $z = 1.24$; $p = .11$, one-tailed). There was a procedural difference between this study and the others that may have caused the group experience to remain somewhat salient when making the second product judgment. Due to a different lab configuration, participants in the third study completed the final set of questionnaires individually while sitting in the same place they did during discussion, instead of being able to sit facing the front of the classroom (as in the other studies). As a result, the group experience (and thus the criteria rehearsed) may still have been salient when participants completed the behavioral-predictions measure.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The context of group discussion is a relatively understudied topic in consumer behavior despite the evidence that such contexts have powerful effects on product judgments. We suggest that the effects of group discussion on consumer behavior are not limited to the discussion alone; merely expecting to talk with others about a product can affect product attitudes. When will the mere anticipation of discussion disrupt consumers' attitudes, and why does this occur?

Summary of Key Findings

Previous research as well as the findings presented here indicate that when attempting to explain an attitude, people often think about less important attributes. The results of three experiments show that such a focus on less important attributes influences attitudes when the attitudes are formed while anticipating discussion. To examine why anticipating discussion can disrupt attitudes, we proposed and tested a rehearsal-weight account. According to this account, people mentally rehearse in preparation for discussion, and this process makes salient the attributes being rehearsed. Whatever criteria predominate during rehearsal will be heavily weighed in product attitudes formed in this context, regardless of their relevance to the typical criteria for evaluating such products. The results from three experiments indicate that those anticipating discussion can therefore hold attitudes that are more extreme (experiment 2), more moderate (ex-

periments 1 and 3), or the same (experiments 2 and 3) as those who do not anticipate discussion, depending on the valence of the predominant criteria they had mentally rehearsed to discuss. Furthermore, across all three experiments, when the attribute dominating thoughts was less important, those judging the product while anticipating discussion reported attitudes within the group-anticipation context that were relatively poor predictors of judgments reported outside of the group-anticipation context.

In addition to providing empirical support for the rehearsal-weight account, the data rule out two alternate accounts: (1) people anticipating discussion will consider a broad range of information, thereby holding more moderate product attitudes, and (2) people anticipating discussion will concentrate on the most important criteria, thereby holding similar or more extreme attitudes than those who do not anticipate discussion.

Why Do People Focus on Less Important Attributes?

Research has shown that people sometimes focus on, and cannot always dismiss, irrelevant attributes and that situational factors can affect the salience of such attributes (e.g., Hutchinson and Alba 1991). Our results are consistent with the robust finding that a situation that requires people to provide reasons for their attitudes often leads them to mention attributes that are typically less important to their attitudes (Millar and Tesser 1986; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Wilson et al. 1993). Multiple reasons have been identified for this tendency. For instance, when explaining their attitudes or making choices in front of others, people often want to appear unique in their criteria or selections (Ariely and Levav 2000; Simonson and Nowlis 2000). In addition, being asked to identify the reasons underlying an attitude can cause people to focus on criteria that are easy to articulate (e.g., Millar and Tesser 1986; Wilson et al. 1993).

In the present research, when less important criteria dominated people's thoughts, this criteria influenced people's judgments only when group discussion was anticipated. This may be because conversational norms dictate that people provide nonredundant, nonobvious, factual information (Grice 1975, 1978; Schwarz 1998). Thus, those anticipating discussion with others may have been especially influenced by criteria that were unique, concrete, and/or easy to articulate.

In prior research (cf. Wilson et al. 1989), in contrast to our findings, the listed thoughts of those working individually did influence their attitudes. However, it is difficult to compare our individual condition to Wilson's directly. In Wilson's "reasons analysis" task, participants are put in the position of justifying their attitudes, whereas we asked subjects simply to collect their thoughts. Wilson's task may therefore have made the less important thoughts more salient to individuals and created more commitment to those thoughts by the participant. This may explain why reasons analysis can affect attitudes even without group anticipation.

Theoretical and Applied Contributions to Consumer Behavior

This research sheds light on the importance of the social context of anticipated discussion in consumer judgments. Whereas prior research has demonstrated that group-level processes can be biased by members' prior judgments (e.g., Schulz-Hardt et al. 2000), the present research demonstrates important individual-level prediscussion effects: Consumers' own mental preparations for discussion can disrupt their attitudes, compromising the generalizability of attitudes formed in anticipation of discussion to judgments held in other contexts. Thus, one contribution of this work is the demonstration that anticipated discussion is an important consumption context that can have a significant and unrecognized impact on product attitudes.

Empirical support for the rehearsal-weight account is consistent with theorizing that attitude change in anticipation of social interaction is often the result of cognitive processing rather than being an automatic and heuristic shift (Tetlock et al. 1989). Yet, the present research differs from previous studies in critical ways, most notably that prior research often involved attitudes toward controversial social issues (e.g., capital punishment). Pratkanis (1989) argues that attitudes toward such topics tend to be bipolar, where people adopt positions ranging from anti to neutral to pro. However, in the consumer domain, product attitudes are often much less controversial. Noncontroversial targets (such as those studied here: restaurants and cars) tend to be unipolar and typically range from neutral to pro (or anti; Pratkanis 1989). Consequently, findings regarding the effect of a group-anticipation context on controversial attitudes may not hold in the product domain because of fundamental differences in attitude structure.

Indeed, according to social contingency theory, in the absence of explicit information about audience's beliefs, people adopt a flexible, moderate stance (Tetlock et al. 1989), which would be the safest position when others' attitudes could range from anti to pro. The present findings, however, demonstrate that consumers in a group-anticipation context construct attitudes on the basis of the criteria dominating what they rehearsed for discussion, leading to attitudes that could be more extreme, more moderate, or similar to those in an individual context. Thus, this research suggests that the unique features of the product domain may limit the generalizability of previous work on anticipated interaction effects.

These results also have implications for managerial decisions, especially those based on focus group discussions. Great pains are often taken to ensure that focus group participants feel comfortable discussing the focal topic (Fern 1982). Interestingly, one recommended technique for gaining "unbiased" responses is to have participants list their thoughts prior to group discussion (the Nominal Group Technique; see Delbeq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson 1975). Such efforts are recommended when the focal topic deals with sensitive issues (e.g., smoking, condoms) rather than

everyday items. However, the present research suggests that such techniques may be ineffective. A group-anticipation context can influence evaluations of everyday items and can do so even before the discussion begins.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the present research is that the groups were made up of strangers who were assembled to complete a task. Although this is reflective of certain groups such as focus groups, additional research is needed to examine whether the findings reported here would generalize to group-anticipation contexts that reflect ongoing relationships among people. The effects shown here may in fact be stronger for recurring social interactions because people would have more opportunity and motivation to anticipate and prepare for such discussions. Furthermore, in the present research, groups were made up of people with equal status who were equally informed about the new products. Perhaps the present effects would be more pronounced among those with lower status or those who are not experts in the product category. Such persons might be more motivated to prepare mentally for discussion and might be more likely to generate reasons that are less important. A person's anticipated role in the conversation is also important to consider (cf. Zajonc 1960). For example, due to differences in the degree of preparation for discussion, the rehearsal-weight effect might be stronger for those whose anticipated role is to influence others rather than be influenced by them.

The finding that product attitudes influenced by the group-anticipation context do not necessarily reflect product judgments held outside of the group-anticipation context is worthy of further study, especially in the area of consumer satisfaction. Research in individual contexts has demonstrated that when attitudes are affected by what is salient at the moment rather than what typically matters to the individual, decisions based on these attitudes can lead to later dissatisfaction (Wilson et al. 1993). Because social-interaction situations can alter how consumers judge a product, choices based on these attitudes may also lead to consumer dissatisfaction. This is especially likely if the context at the time of judgment (e.g., a group-anticipation context) mismatches the context at the time of consumption (e.g., an individual context). Such consumption situations as shopping with others or interacting with salespeople might impact the formation of attitudes toward products when they are being considered for purchase and influence the likelihood of long-term purchase satisfaction.

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