Choice in the Age of Opinion

How Opinion Voicing Reconfigures the Psychological Meaning of Choosing

by

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To be sure, some people still want knowledge, but it turns out that what the citizenry really craves is an open microphone. The Internet has provided that opportunity. Every day is ‘open-mike’ night in America. The premium isn’t on facts, but on attitude. In the early years of the 21st century, the Information Age has morphed into the Age of Opinion.

– Cannon & Malone, 2007
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Note. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were co-authored with Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kühnen and have been submitted for publication as individual papers.
Declaration

I herewith declare that this PhD thesis is my own work and that I have used only the sources listed. No part of this PhD thesis has been accepted or is currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification at this university or elsewhere.

Michail Kokkoris

Bremen, August 31, 2012
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ONE

General introduction

KEY CONCEPTS AND HYPOTHESES
1.1 OVERVIEW

A few generations ago, people didn’t have a way to share information and express their opinions efficiently to a lot of people. But now they do. Right now, with social networks and other tools on the Internet, all of these 500 million people have a way to say what they’re thinking and have their voice be heard.

– Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Facebook (Heussner, 2010)

The Google web search engine gives around 2,680,000 results for the phrase “voice your opinion”, 3,650,000 for “express your opinion”, and 4,580,000 for “give your opinion”. Another 3,640,000 links result from searching for the phrase “your opinion counts”. These figures illustrate the remarkable abundance of opinion voicing opportunities characterizing contemporary societies, as well as the evaluative appraisal and encouragement of this practice in certain cultural contexts. The freedom of speech, alongside the freedom of choice, constitutes the cornerstone of Western individualism, also referred to as expressive individualism (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Speaking one’s mind materializes values that are sanctified within this cultural context, such as individuality, autonomy and self-actualization (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Maslow, 1943).

Scientists and legislators alike converge in their appreciation of the positive outcomes of opinion expression. Ingrained in social science theory and research is the idea that vocalizing one’s thoughts and opinions is beneficial or even therapeutic for the individual (Baraldi, 2008; Frattaroli, Thomas, & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Freud, 1923/1961; Friedman & Booth-Kewley, 1987; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Krause, 2007; Pennebaker, 1999; Swanbon, Boyce, & Greenberg, 2008). Similarly, the freedom of speech, that is, the political right to communicate one’s opinions and ideas via speech, is amongst the most fundamental human rights. United Nations’ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), signed by the majority of
countries, stipulates under article 19 that “[e]veryone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference” (“International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”, n.d.). Many countries entrench the freedom of speech and expression constitutionally, like the United States for example, where this right is recognized in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. The notion of unconstrained opinion voicing and participation in public discourses is a central pillar of civil society (Habermas, 1962/1989, 1981/1987), whereas for others “conversation is the soul of democracy” (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999, p. 362). Democratic systems rely strongly on the free flow of knowledge and information to ensure that the electorate is adequately knowledgeable and informed (Barber, 1984; Milner, 2002). Moreover, the freedom of expression is a core component for assessing the quality of democracies, such as the Freedom House index (“Freedom House”, n.d.) or the World Bank’s Voice and Accountability indicator (“Worldwide Governance Indicators”, n.d.). Constraints imposed on the expression of ideas almost equal threats to democracy. Hence, in such a political system related rights, such as the freedom of press, the freedom of religion and the freedom of association, are also protected.

Although the freedom of speech has been in principle long acknowledged and legislatively established, the ways to substantiate it have recently grown drastically. In the last decade, rapid technological advances coupled with cultural, social and economic changes have revolutionised the landscape of self-expression. Novel avenues for opinion voicing have emerged, enabling people to externalize their thoughts and broadcast their views in previously unconceivable ways. Today, the means to voice an opinion are quantitatively more than ever before and qualitatively far more easily accessible. At the same time, this proliferation of opinion voicing opportunities can be thought of as a reinforcement of the significance of opinion voicing and self-expression in general. In fact, the Internet is overwhelmed with a variety of self-expression outlets to the extent that it has been conceptualized as a platform for opinion expression and as a new public sphere (Debatin, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002). The eruption of blogs, discussion forums, message boards, peer-to-peer networks and social media has
expanded the settings where people can make their voices heard (Barlow, 2008; Ketzan, 2002).

It is estimated that every day 75,000 new blogs are created and 1.2 million new posts are posted (Kim, 2006). Users of social media – more than 500 million active users of Twitter.com (Dugan, 2012) and more than 900 million active users of Facebook.com as of 2012 (Hachman, 2012) – also enjoy the opportunity to express their opinions in real time. In addition, a section dedicated to users’ opinions on a wide range of issues has become commonplace for most websites. The majority of newspapers and news websites have succumbed to the allure of opinion voicing, running daily polls on current topics and hosting readers’ comments (Richardson & Stanyer, 2011). To illustrate, BBC features a Have your say section, inviting readers to write their own views on various issues, while CNN encourages readers to actively engage in shaping the news in iReport. Opportunities to express opinions are not limited only to the realm of politics and news, but extend to any possible topic, such as entertainment and culture. For example, popular websites like the Internet Movie Database (http://www.imdb.com) give people the chance to act as amateur critics and post their reviews on movies they have seen, as well as participate in message boards and interact with other users, share opinions, discuss and debate. Amazon.com is another example of a website that hosts thousands of reviews of books, along with evaluations of the helpfulness of these reviews. Similar opportunities exist to review hotels, restaurants, stores, consumer goods, and the list goes on. Of course, this tendency is not reflected only on the Internet, but has also expanded to traditional media. For example, reality TV shows grant people a voice, asking them to vote for their favourite contestants and therefore determine the course of the show based on their preferences. From singing to cooking to dancing, viewers are trained to express themselves and constantly have their own say. Both in online and offline environments, opinion expression has become a much more tangible reality; in fact, an indispensable part of our lives.

A comparable profusion has also been evidenced in the last decades in another form of self-expression, choice. From careers to dating partners to entertainment to consumer goods, the number of options that individuals
have available to choose from has reached an unprecedented high. Either at the grocery store or on the Internet, individuals have a plethora of options to choose from and find the perfect match for their personal preferences. In fact, this development has attracted much more vivid attention from researchers than the respective development in opinion voicing, and has prompted flourishing research over the psychological consequences of choice overload (e.g., Chernev, 2003; Desmeules, 2002; Hsee, Hastie, & Chen, 2008; Huffman & Kahn, 1998; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Mick, Broniarczyk, & Haidt, 2004; Schwartz, 2004). However, these two radical developments have been treated in the literature separately. Prior research has not adequately investigated how these two concepts, opinion and choice, can be related and particularly how opinion voicing can affect choice. Is it possible that all this proliferation of opportunities to express ourselves through opinions changes the way we relate to our choices? Can opinion voicing undermine how committed we feel to the decisions we make? Is the self-expressive role of choice limited when people are reminded that they can also express themselves through articulating their opinions? And also, can different perceptions of opinion voicing also affect how much we stick to our preferences when making choices?

Past literature has mostly focused on the effect of opinion voicing on choice from an interpersonal perspective: How publicizing opinions can influence others’ decisions. For example, how a consumer’s choice about which hotel to book might be influenced by previous guests’ reviews and ratings (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011), or how a voter’s decision about which party to vote for might be influenced by others’ intentions as expressed in the results of political polling (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2002; Morwitz & Pluzinski, 1996; Restrepo, Rael, & Hyman, 2009). Evidence that opinions are influential abounds (e.g., Asch, 1956; Festinger, 1954). As shown by research on word-of-mouth communications, people have always been interested in sharing their opinions with others and seeking information from others before making any decisions (Arndt, 1967; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 1983; Swan & Oliver, 1989; Whyte, 1954). With the development of the Internet, attention to word-of-mouth dynamics has revived, especially in its new, electronic forms (Berger,
Sorensen, & Rasmussen, 2010; Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Dellarocas, 2003). There is growing evidence that opinions posted online influence consumers’ decisions, especially in experience goods (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas, 2003; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2004; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Schindler & Bickart, 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). For example, research shows that movie ratings, both from amateurs and experts, can exert significant influence on movie revenues and new movie ratings (Moon, Bergey, & Iacobucci, 2010). In general, consumers are more motivated by like-minded consumers’ opinions than by marketer-generated information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

In information science, a core endeavour in the last couple of years has been opinion mining and sentiment analysis, which in broad terms deal with gathering, systematizing and analyzing data about what people think derived from sources like social media or blogs (Pak & Paroubek, 2010; Pang & Lee, 2008; Wu, Zhang, Huang, & Wu, 2009). The forecasting power of opinions has been demonstrated in several domains in the marketplace, from the stock market to consumer behaviour. For example, postings in financial message boards on the Internet can affect stock prices (Tumarkin & Whitelaw, 2001), whereas assessments of mood states based on large-scale Twitter feeds can predict the value of the Dow Jones Industrial Average (Bollen, Mao, & Zeng, 2010). Similarly, social media content, such as tweets, has been found capable of predicting real-world outcomes, such as box-office revenues for movies, and even better so than other market-based predictors (Asur & Huberman, 2010). But it is not only in the marketplace that opinion voicing can be a decisive force. The role of opinion expression through social media and Internet can also foster civic engagement, breed political mobilization and fuel political change (Dahlgren, 2000; McLeod et al., 1996; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; White, 1997). It has been argued that this has been the case with the Arab Spring uprisings (Joseph, 2011; Khondker, 2011) and the Occupy Wall Street movement (Skinner, 2011). In both cases, the Internet has proven a catalyst in circulating political content and mobilizing citizens to take action.

The approach put forth in the present research, however, stands in striking contrast to this reasoning. The emphasis here is on how one’s own
opinions can affect one’s own choices at a basic psychological level. Thus, this research adopts a unique perspective, shifting focus from interpersonal influences, typically studied in prior research, to intrapersonal influences. It is suggested that such an intra-individual interaction between opinion and choice is to be expected, because they both represent core parts of one’s self-expression repertoire. Based on empirical data from seven experiments outlined in the following three chapters, this dissertation attempts to fill this gap in the literature by assessing the effect of opinion voicing on choice through an experimental social psychological perspective. It is proposed that opinion can affect choice, because they both share a common underlying motivational background, the need to express the self. Extensive literature conceptualizes opinion and choice as distinct acts of self-expression (for reviews, see Kim & Chu, 2011; Kim & Ko, 2007). On the basis of this psychological affinity, the main research hypotheses are developed. The overarching goal of the current research is to show that different aspects of opinion voicing reconfigure the psychological meaning of choice for the self. To this end, well-established phenomena associated with choice, such as post-choice rationalization and preference-choice consistency, are examined through the prism of opinion voicing.

This research identifies two possible ways in which opinion can affect choice. The first one refers to the availability of opinion voicing opportunities. The basic proposition here is that the mere opportunity to express an opinion can mitigate the subjective importance of choice for the self. This proposition draws on the assumption that opinion and choice are functionally equivalent, because they both serve as vehicles for self-expression. Following that, it is argued that opinion can substitute for choice in expressing the self. Choice self-expressiveness is measured through post-choice rationalization processes, that is, the tendency to view a chosen option in a more positive light after choosing. It is further proposed that the psychological importance of choice is decreased not only when opinion voicing is actualized prior to choosing; instead, even the prospect of an opinion voicing opportunity should be enough to symbolically satisfy self-expression needs and hence undermine choice. Therefore, whenever individuals are given the opportunity to express an
opinion or anticipate such an opportunity in the immediate future, they should be less likely to invest psychologically in their subsequent choices.

The second way in which opinion can affect choice concerns the subjective construal of opinion voicing. The basic proposition here is that conceiving that it is good to have an opinion about a variety of issues reduces preference-choice consistency. Faced with an ever-widening range of opinion voicing opportunities and an escalating cultural emphasis on self-expression, it is assumed that people might become increasingly sensitized to the idea that they would benefit from having a personal opinion on a variety of issues, irrespective of their personal relevance. To account for this tendency to have an opinion on a variety of issues, the term opinionation is coined. Depending on how people construe the utility of opinionation, the degree to which they choose according to their preferences could vary considerably. More specifically, construing opinionation as beneficial, as opposed to detrimental, should reduce consistency in domains where inconsistency can be afforded, such as consumer choices, but not in domains where inconsistency can be psychologically taxing, such as value choices. That is, thinking that it is beneficial to have opinions on a variety of issues should make people rely less on their personal preferences and choose less preferred options in the domain of consumer goods. Therefore, different views of opinionation can moderate the extent to which preferences can predict choices.

To summarize, this research postulates that choice can be a function of two separate aspects of opinion voicing: The subjective meaning and significance of choice for the self can be contingent upon the availability of opinion voicing opportunities, be it actual or symbolic, whereas the content of choices and their alignment with preferences can be contingent upon the subjective construal of opinionation as either beneficial or detrimental. When opportunities to voice an opinion are salient, the tendency to enact identities through choices might be less pronounced, resulting in decreased post-choice liking or commitment to the chosen option compared to simply choosing without any salient opinion opportunity. Additionally, when the advantages of holding opinions about a variety of issues are considered, the tendency to make choices driven by one’s personal preferences might be attenuated,
resulting in lowered consistency compared to considering the downsides of opinionation.

These propositions could make several theoretical contributions. Opinion and choice, two fundamental concepts in psychology and social sciences in general, are studied in conjunction and their interplay is investigated experimentally at a basic psychological level, allowing for conclusions to be drawn about their causal relation. This investigation focuses specifically on the one direction of this interaction and highlights the importance of opinion voicing as a factor mitigating well-known phenomena in choice literature and constructing the meaning of choice on the spot. The studies on the availability of opinion voicing opportunities could make a contribution to literature on contextual effects on choice (Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 1998; Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000; Huber, Payne, & Puto, 1982; Kuhberger, 1998; Slovic, 1995; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986; Tversky, & Simonson, 1993), indicating that the presence of opinion opportunities in the choice-making context moderates the relevance of choice for the self. At the same time, by suggesting that choice can be subject to opinion voicing, these studies add to a growing body of literature that questions the meaning and the importance of choice for the individual (Botti & Hsee, 2010; Botti & Iyengar, 2004; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999, 2000, 2002; Markus & Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz, 2000, 2004). Although it is usually taken for granted that choice is unambiguously self-defining, the current studies advance a different approach. The exclusivity of choice in catering for self-expressive needs might be compromised when these needs can alternatively be met by opportunities to voice an opinion. Additionally, the studies on the construal of opinionation contribute to a longstanding tradition in social and cognitive psychology on mental construal processes informing decisions and judgments (Ross, 1987; Schwarz, 2009; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Following suit basic assumptions of this research stream, it is proposed that how people view opinionation and what they think about opinion holding can also shape the content of the choices they make. The next sections outline the conceptualization of opinion voicing and choice as distinct means of self-expression, which lead to the central research hypotheses of this dissertation about the interplay between the two.
1.2 SELF AND OPINION VOICING

*It is not possible to view a social object or a social act without at the same time making an assessment on dimensions closely corresponding to good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, etc.*

— Markus & Zajonc, 1985

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines opinion as “a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter”, which is “stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge” (“Opinion”, n.d.). From this linguistic definition two basic components of opinions become apparent. The first is their inherent subjectivity, and the second is their evaluative nature. Opinions are subjective because they are the outcome of an individual’s idiosyncratic interpretation of an object. Different people may have different or even opposing opinions about the same object. It is usually said that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, acknowledging the tight link between opinions and individuality. Opinions are also evaluative because they typically involve automatic assessments of an object that roughly correspond to varying degrees of favourability. Individual differences in perceptions, goals and motivations lead to different evaluations of any given object.

From this aspect, opinions seem to bear a striking resemblance to attitudes. In fact, Fishbein and Ajzen (1972) have noticed before long that “most investigators are not concerned with distinctions between beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and intentions”, the reason for that being mostly that “these distinctions are not warranted since these variables have not been shown to behave differently” (p. 492). Although opinions and attitudes have been widely used interchangeably or with little substantial differentiation, there have been considerable attempts to distinguish between these terms. In early writings on the theory and measurement of attitudes and opinions, it has been noted that “practically all writers explicitly or implicitly admit a distinction between ‘attitudes’, however used, and ‘verbal attitudes’, or
opinions” (Bain, 1930, p. 361). The problem with such a definition of opinions as verbal expressions of attitudes is that it does not recognize that opinions do not necessarily have to be exposed in public, but may also be held in private. Related to that, Eagly and Chaiken (2007) have recommended that a distinction should be made between an attitude itself, as an inner tendency, and the expression or manifestation of an attitude, as an evaluative response. A more systematic configuration of beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and their interrelations has been provided by Van Dijk (1982). In his view, beliefs are “a specific kind of personal knowledge” (p. 38) that is non-consensual and non-certain; opinions are “personal, subjective evaluative beliefs” that “embody the individually variable assignment of values to objects, persons, states, events and actions” (p. 39); and finally, attitudes are higher-level schema-like “organizational packages of (socially relevant) opinions” (p. 48). Additionally, ideologies are defined as complex systems of attitudes with systematic coherent relations that underlie social interactions. This conceptualization of attitudes as organizations of opinions helps differentiate between the two, without confounding the essence of each construct with its expression.

In this research, opinions are treated as subjective evaluative beliefs. Critically, the emphasis is on opinion voicing, that is, the verbal articulation of opinions. Opinions are not exclusively expressed via speech. Displaying a bumper sticker with a certain message on a car or wearing a T-shirt with a specific slogan can also be means to communicate one’s opinions. However, voicing one’s opinions is a more direct means of opinion expression, because speech in general is “perhaps the most effective way to express one’s thoughts” (Kim & Ko, 2007, p. 331). At the same time, opinion voicing is a powerful means of self-expression overall. Self-expression refers to the “expression of one’s own personality; assertion of one’s individual traits” (“Self-expression”, n.d.). From the above outlined description of opinions as subjective evaluations, it is obvious that opinion voicing is closely connected to the self. Externalizing one’s own opinions reveals the unique way in which a person perceives, interprets, evaluates and responds to the outer world. It projects thoughts and feelings that reside in one’s mind, and makes inner states observable by others. Simply put, it reflects one’s self.
Research on the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) exemplifies the consequences opinion voicing might have for the individual. This theory predicts that when individuals realize that their opinions are not shared by the majority, they are less willing to express them. Opinion expression is avoided in this case because it could jeopardize social inclusion. As the need to belong is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), people would rather refrain from expressing their opinions under an unfavourable opinion climate in order to maintain harmonious social relationships and secure their group memberships. The idea that people holding minority opinions might not speak out, along with contextual factors or individual differences moderating this effect, has been tested by numerous studies both in face-to-face and in computer-mediated communications (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997; Glynn & Park, 1997; Hayes, 2005; Ho & McLeod, 2008; McDevitt, Kiousis, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2003; Morrison & Miller, 2008; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004; Oshagan, 1996; Petric & Pinter, 2002; Scheufele, 1999; Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009; Wu & Huberman, 2010). The core underpinning of this argumentation is that minority opinions endanger the self, because they irrevocably expose the self to others and reveal its deviance from what is perceived to be the social norm. In a way, there is assumed to be a one-to-one correspondence between opinions and the self, so that opinions determine one’s position within the social matrix. Thus, findings deriving from this theory could be seen as supportive evidence for the argument that opinions express and substantiate the self.

The functional approach to attitudes has generated useful insights about the self-defining role of opinion expression. According to this line of research, attitudes, besides serving knowledge, adaptive and ego-defensive functions, also help people express who they are and assert their individuality (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Herek, 1987; Katz, 1960; Olson & Zanna, 1993; Prentice, 1987; Shavitt, 1990; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Therefore, opinion expression can be incited when the goal is to express the self, but it can be deterred when the goal is to avoid public exposure of inner aspects of the self. By communicating their attitudes about various topics, individuals in Western societies substantiate their selves and establish their uniqueness and differentiation from others (Kim, 2002; Kim & Markus, 1999, 2002; Kim &
Sherman, 2007). Gal and Rucker (2011) suggest that individuals “may have a need to express themselves through their attitudes just as they have a need to express themselves through their possessions” (p. 186). As an effect, when respondents in surveys are not given the chance to adequately express their opinions about certain issues that they consider important, they might use unrelated questions as a platform for self-expression, in order to convey the opinions they want (Gal & Rucker, 2011). This so-called response substitution bias rests on prior research showing that engaging in behaviors that express one’s attitudes is a function of the importance of these attitudes for the individual (Visser, Krosnick, & Simmons, 2003). Related research has also shown that the attitude-behavior link is stronger for attitudes serving self-expression functions compared to other functions (Gregory, Munch, & Peterson, 2002; Maio & Olson, 1994). The self-expressive function of attitudes is further validated by research showing that expressing core values is self-affirming and can even buffer against self-threats (e.g., Steele & Liu, 1983).

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) also showcases how tightly opinion expression is linked to the self. In the frame of the induced-compliance paradigm, participants are asked to write a counterattitudinal essay in exchange for some money, by furnishing arguments in favour of (against) a topic with which they personally disagree (agree). The typical finding of research with this paradigm is that, after writing the essay, individuals paid only a small amount of money for this task are more likely to change their opinions in line with the opinions they expressed in the essay compared with individuals paid a larger amount of money (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). This is explained as an effort to reduce cognitive dissonance arising from the awareness of an apparent discrepancy between one’s real and expressed opinions. When monetary reward is so little that cannot serve as sufficient justification for this discrepancy, people seek to reduce the tension they feel by adjusting their opinions to the opinions they were asked to express, so that their behaviour does not contradict their attitudes. Inherent in this interpretation is the assumption that opinion voicing defines the self. People are expected to voice opinions that express themselves. Therefore, even incidental expression of opinions that are contrary to one’s true beliefs can lead to the internalization of these opinions, in the absence of external factors.
to sufficiently justify counterattitudinal behaviour. The tendency to reduce dissonance by changing opinions in the direction of adopting counterattitudinal opinions has been shown to be stronger when individuals initially express the counterattitudinal opinions in situations of high public self-awareness, such as being recorded by a camera (Scheier & Carver, 1980). In that case, the symbolic presence of others raises individuals’ self-presentation concerns and increases commitment to overt behavior.

Similarly, other studies have also shown that expressing an attitude in public increases commitment to that attitude (Kiesler, Roth, & Pallak, 1974). Research on the saying-is-believing effect (Higgins & Rholes, 1978) has found that when people adapt a message to the specific characteristics of an audience, they end up distorting their memories and representations so what they eventually remember and believe is what they said and not what they knew about the topic (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Groll, 2005; Hausmann, Levine, & Higgins, 2008). Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) offers a related interpretation of the effect of opinion voicing on the self-concept. According to this theory, people shape their attitudes by observing their behaviour and inferring their attitudes from their actions (Snyder & Cunningham, 1975). Thus, expressing an opinion should reinforce one’s certainty about the validity of this opinion. Again, prior research has demonstrated that it is the public (vs. private) nature of behaviour that has a stronger effect on the self-concept and leads to internalization (Tice, 1993). Therefore, having expressed a certain opinion in the presence of others enforces commitment to this opinion. But the self-defining power of expressed opinions is supported not only by research on how voicing an opinion affects one’s own self, but also by research on how people use this as information to make inferences about others’ personalities. Turning from the actor’s to the observer’s perspective, a similar pattern appears. Research on the correspondence bias indicates that people overemphasize dispositional factors in making inferences about others (for a review, see Gilbert & Malone, 1995). On this ground, it has been shown that people tend to take others’ expressed opinions at face value and make generalized inferences about others’ personalities on the basis of these opinions, disregarding relevant situational constraints (Jones & Harris, 1967).
Apparently, expressed opinions are consistently taken as a guide for inferring others' enduring dispositions or individual traits.

Psychotherapy also typically approaches the verbalization of thoughts and feelings as a way to discover the “true” self or as a therapeutic tool on its own right (Freud, 1923/1961; Rogers, 1951). For example, expressive writing has been extensively used in the clinical context as a way to improve mental health (Frisina, Borod, & Lepore, 2004; Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth, 1998; Smyth, Nazarian, & Arigo, 2008). The beneficial effects of expressive writing have been documented in various domains, such as coping with job loss (Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994), cancer (Corter & Petrie, 2011), eating disorders (East, 2010), or post-traumatic stress disorder (Smyth, Hockemeyer, & Tulloch, 2008). It has been further shown experimentally that expressive writing reduces chronic avoidance and stress-related physical symptoms (Swanbon, Boyce, & Greenberg, 2008). Moreover, opportunities for self-expression have been associated with fewer depressive symptoms in late life (Krause, 2007). Emotional expression has also been shown to impact positively physical health (Friedman & Booth-Kewley, 1987; Gross & Levenson, 1993). The benefits of expressive writing have not been exploited only in a clinical setting, but in education, too. Encouraging self-expression in the classroom is considered to be a factor improving students’ interactions (Baraldi, 2008), whereas expressive writing in particular can boost students’ performance in graduate school entrance exams (Frattaroli, Thomas, & Lyubomirsky, 2011). However, it is worthwhile to note that the privileged role conferred to opinion voicing is not culturally invariant. Rather, it is the by-product of specific individualistic cultural contexts, where self-actualization values prevail and self-expression is encouraged (Kim, 2002; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). In this sense, the emphasis laid on the expression of opinions, thoughts and feelings in the classroom setting is part of a broader mind orientation of Western cultures towards learning, which focuses on critical thinking and questioning authorities, and which is not the prevalent learning orientation in more collectivistic cultures (Kühnen et al., 2009; Kühnen et al., 2012). Similarly, expressive writing has been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms of illness among European Americans, but not among Asian Americans (Knowles, Wearing, & Campos, 2011). In the current
research, the examination of opinion voicing and choice as manifestations of the self is carried out from the perspective of a Western cultural context (for limitations of this view as well as possible extensions of this research in other cultural contexts see discussion in Chapter 5.3).

Finally, the self-expressive nature of opinion voicing is practically manifested by Internet users’ activity. On the one hand, individuals might post their opinions online in order to disseminate first-hand knowledge about products and services and assist potential consumers in their future decisions, or to influence others in the direction of gaining support for one’s ideas or discrediting opposing views. On the other hand, online opinion voicing also serves a substantially self-expressive function. Thus, the primary goal is not necessarily to inform or to influence others, but also to project a certain image of the self (Schau & Gilli, 2003). This can be evidenced in many websites and social media applications (e.g., Like and Comment on Facebook). Another indication for the self-expressive function of posting opinions online is that “by contributing her own opinion to an existing opinion pool, a person affects the average or the distribution of opinions by a marginal amount that diminishes with the size of that pool” (Wu & Huberman, 2010, p. 52). Even though each individual contribution does not seem very likely to affect substantially the opinion climate in the desired way, people still post their opinions online and invest considerable effort in doing that. For example, the average length of a product review on Buzzilions.com – a website with over 16.5 million reviews as of 2011 – is 289 characters (Hsu, 2011). Therefore, online opinion voicing is not always utilitarian, but in some cases it might well be predominantly self-expressive.

In short, findings from different research streams and theories converge to the idea that opinion voicing has powerful implications on the self-concept, because it serves as a direct means of self-expression. Voicing an opinion substantiates one’s individuality, making internal aspects of the self, such as preferences, beliefs or attributes, observable by others. The next section delineates literature suggesting that choice serves a similar psychological function for the self.
1.3 SELF AND CHOICE

Choice is the only tool that we have to go from who we are today to who we want to be tomorrow.

– Sheena Iyengar, 2010

Choice can be defined as a “contemplation of alternatives and selection among them” (Vohs et al., 2008, p. 884). Although choice in essence concerns selecting among options, it further serves two distinct psychological functions: control and self-expression (Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002). The focus of this research is on the self-expressive function of choice. An indisputable fact of our lives is that we constantly have to make choices. From the moment we wake up and choose what to have for breakfast to the moment we go to bed and choose which book to read before falling asleep, our lives are full of countless choices. Some of them are rather mundane and inconsequential, like the ones mentioned above, while others are far more profound and life-changing, such as deciding whom to marry or which career to pursue. According to some schools of thought, our lives do not just contain choices; our lives are our choices. This view has been advanced by existential philosophers like Albert Camus, who argued that life is the sum of all our choices, or Søren Kierkegaard, who criticized the Cartesian idea that thinking defines existence and proposed instead that choice defines existence, as it “individuates and is the act by which an individual may become a person” (Stack, 1973, p. 112). Choices determine the trajectories of our lives, which path we are going to follow at any given point of time and which one we are leaving behind. The sequence of all these smaller or bigger choices eventually shapes who we are and where we stand today. Therefore, the freedom and the obligation to choose lay the foundation of the human condition. As philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre declared: “Man is free. It is he who makes there be a world. It’s by his choice that he decides its meaning. He cannot refuse to choose, because this refusal is itself a choice” (Grisoli, 1945/2009, p. 16). This assumption is supported by mounting empirical evidence that individuals are
biologically programmed to choose as a means to exercise control over the environment (Leotti, Iyengar, & Ochsner, 2010).

This reifying force of choice implies that choosing is a blessing and a curse at the same time. The benefits of choosing pertain obviously to the opportunity to autonomously determine our lives based on our own volition. The provision of choice, no matter how trivial or even illusory, has been associated with a host of positive outcomes on intrinsic motivation and on physical and psychological well-being (Brickman, 1987; Cordova & Lepper, 1996; deCharms, 1968; Deci, 1981; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002; Dember, Galinsky, & Warm, 1992; Langer, 1975; Langer & Rodin, 1976; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman 1975; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Zuckerman, Porac, Lathin, Smith, & Deci, 1978). Among others, the costs of choosing refer to the anxiety arising from the desire to make the right choices and avoid the wrong ones. Inevitably, every choice involves a loss, because choosing one direction entails losing another (Brehm, 1956; Festinger, 1957; Salecl, 2010). In essence, whenever we make an irreversible choice, we part with the vision of an alternative possible future that will never come. Since life as a whole is constructed as a matter of personal choices, people are constantly driven by “making good choices, only good choices and even better choices” (Bauman, 1992, p. 4). But trying too hard to always make the best choice, or maximizing, rather than just making the choice that is good enough, or satisficing, can impair happiness, optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, and lead to regret and depression (Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2002). Research has investigated several aspects of the psychological pains of choosing, such as regret and counterfactual thinking (Chua, Gonzalez, Taylor, Welsh, & Liberzon, 2009; Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Inman, Dyer, & Jia, 1997; Kahneman, 1992; Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Landman, 1993; Reinderman et al., 1998; Simonson, 1992; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007; Zeelenberg, Van Dijk, Manstead, & Van Der Pligt, 1998), and more recently choice overload (Botti & Iyengar, 2006; Chernev, 2003; Desmeules, 2002; Diehl & Poynor, 2010; Gourville & Soman, 2005; Hsee, Hastie, & Chen, 2008; Inbar, Botti, & Hanko, 2011; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006; Mick, Broniarczyk, & Haidt, 2004; Sagi & Friedland, 2007; Salecl, 2010; Schwartz, 2004).
More than just matching our preferences with available options, choice is an act of meaning (Bruner, 1990). It is a basic cultural assumption in Western societies that people are defined through their choices (Iyengar, 2010; Kim & Drolet, 2003, 2009; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Tafarodi et al., 2002). Our dressing styles, our homes, our jobs, our bodies, our partners, our cars, our votes, all convey messages about ourselves and predicate how we are to be regarded and understood by others. In this cultural context, the act of choosing materializes the ideal of freedom (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Choice is a means for individuals to assert their individuality and celebrate their differentiation from others (Ariely & Levav, 2000; Kim & Markus, 1999, Ratner & Kahn, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Rose (1999) notes that choices are “realizations of the attributes of the choosing person – expressions of personality – that reflect back upon the person who made them” (p. 87). For example, much research has shown that consumer choices, such as choices of products or brands, are acts of communication of the self (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Kokkoris, Kühnen, & Yan, in press; Levav & Zhu, 2009; Levy, 1959; Lisjak, Lee, & Gardner, in press; Morrison & Johnson, 2011; Sirgy, 1982). Choice draws its self-expressive power from the fact that it is not a solitary act, but is always embedded in socially bound systems of representations and meanings (Bruner, 1990; Moscovici, 1984). Importantly, it is not only highly consequential choices that shape the self, but even small, everyday choices. For example, research has shown that consumer choices made while shopping at the stores are enough to drain mental energy and deplete self-control resources (Vohs et al., 2008). Thus, every single choice requires a certain amount of personal investment, because in any case it projects inner aspects of the self to others.

Supportive evidence for the self-expressive function of choice can be found in numerous theories in psychology. Perhaps one of the most representative demonstrations of choice self-expressiveness is offered by cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Original illustrations of this theory can be traced back to Ancient Greece and Aesop’s fable of the fox and the grapes: After failing to reach the grapes, the fox decides that they should
have been sour anyways. A long list of studies using the free-choice paradigm (Brehm, 1956; Steele, Spencer & Lynch, 1993) confirms that after making a difficult choice individuals tend to rationalize their chosen option by reevaluating the chosen option more favorably and/or the rejected option less favorably compared to how they viewed the same options before choosing. In recent years, neuroimaging studies have shed light on the neural basis of rationalization processes (Izuma et al., 2010; Sharot, DeMartino, & Dolan, 2009; Van Veen, Krug, Schooler, & Carter, 2009). Although several explanations have been proposed for dissonance phenomena, a dominant view relates dissonance arousal with the self-concept (e.g., Steele, 1988; Tesser, 2000). Choice has been found to induce emotional arousal and psychological discomfort (Devine, Tauer, Barron, Elliot, & Vance, 1999; Elliot & Devine, 1994; Galinsky, Stone, & Cooper, 2000; Harmon-Jones, 2004). Individuals try to relieve this tension by fostering the subjective liking of the option they chose, thereby convincing themselves and others that they made the right choice. In this respect, post-choice rationalization can be seen as an effort to assert one’s global sense of self-integrity and maintain a positive self-regard (Steele, 1988; Steele & Liu, 1983; Steele, Spencer & Lynch, 1993; Tesser, 2000; Tesser, Crepaz, Collins, Cornell, & Beach, 2000). Illustrations of this effect have been found in various domains, from consumer goods to voting. For example, people tend to rate their candidate more favorably and his or her chances to win as higher after voting than before voting (Beasley & Joslyn, 2001; Frenkel & Doob, 1976; Mullainathan & Washington, 2006; Regan & Kilduff, 1988). Likewise, consumer products such as appliances (Brehm, 1956) or CDs (Steele, Spencer & Lynch, 1993) appear more attractive once they have been chosen.

Similarly, reactance theory attests the importance of choice for the self-concept by looking into the consequences of restricting the freedom of choice. According to this theory, when individuals feel that some of their alternatives are limited or eliminated, they seek to reestablish their freedom by longing for the eliminated or threatened option even more (Brehm, 1966; Pennebaker & Sanders, 1976). This theory echoes the common saying “the grass is always greener on the other side”, suggesting that people tend to idealize what is out of reach. Reactance has been used to account for several phenomena, such as
patient noncompliance (Fogarty, 1997), rape and sexual coercion (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002), or negative attitudes towards taxes (Kirchler, 1999). Implications of this theory have also been used extensively in marketing in the form of the scarcity principle (Cialdini, 1993; Fromkin, 1970; Lynn, 1989; Petty & Brock, 1976; Worchel, Lee, & Adewole, 1975), whereby a product looms more attractive if it is positioned as being scarce (e.g., special editions, limited distribution, etc.). Self-perception theory offers further insights about the self-defining role of choice. This theory posits that people infer their preferences from observing their own behaviors (Bem, 1972). Thus, choice does not only reflect preferences but also creates preferences (Ariely & Norton, 2008), since individuals might assume that what they have chosen is in fact what they liked the most in first place. A recent research stream on choice blindness offers an intriguing new outlook at the behavioral impact of the act of choosing on preferences by using a novel methodology (Hall, Johansson, Tärning, Sikström, & Deutgen, 2010; Johansson, Hall, & Gardenfors, 2011; Johansson, Hall, Sikström, & Olsson, 2005; Johansson, Hall, Sikström, Tärning, & Lind, 2006). These studies show that people can provide reasons why they chose options they have not in fact chosen, as long as they are led to believe that these are their choices. In one of these studies (Johansson, Hall, Sikström, & Olsson, 2005), participants are asked to choose between pairs of people's face pictures. Then, using a magician's sleight of hand their choices are swapped outside their awareness and they are asked to explain why they “chose” a specific picture. In fact, the choice they are asked to justify is a choice they never made, as it is in reality the picture they rejected. Yet, the majority of people confabulate reasons for their “choice” without taking notice of mismatches. Along these lines, research on the choice-supportive bias observes that people distort their memories of past choices in a systematic way, so that they remember their choices as more positive than the options they rejected (Mather & Johnson, 2000; Mather, Shafir, & Johnson, 2000). The same is true even when they are “reminded” of choices they have not actually made (Henkel & Mather, 2007).

In trying to explain why people try so hard to rationalize their choices, scholars have assumed that it might “serve an adaptive purpose by increasing an individual’s commitment to the action taken” (Sharot, DeMartino, & Dolan,
Such a mechanism would significantly improve our daily function, because it could efficiently hinder the interference of regret and second thoughts with our choices. In a similar vein, research based on the action-based model of dissonance proposes that reducing dissonance through rationalization can be seen as an effective way to engage successfully in action without wavering over one’s decisions (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2002; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Fearn, Sigelman, & Johnson, 2008). As goal and motivation theories suggest, an action needs to be protected against competing actions until it is successfully executed (Kuhl, 1984, 2000) and concrete implementation plans have to be activated to ensure achievement of the desired goal and inhibition of conflicting ones (Gollwitzer, 1990). By contrast, if dissonant cognitions persist and dissonance is not resolved through rationalization (or other dissonance reduction) processes, then effective action is likely to be impeded and decisions may not be implemented. Moreover, recent research found that failing to commit to a choice runs at the expense of satisfaction with choice (Sparks, Ehrlinger, & Eibach, 2012). Post-choice rationalizations may serve the function of assisting individuals to effectively put their decisions in action by increasing the motivation to commit to these decisions (Beckmann & Irle, 1985). From this perspective, “the distal motivation is the need for effective and unconflicted action” (Harmon-Jones et al., 2008, p. 1). In short, the act of choosing might yield so intensive cognitive efforts to defend the selected alternative probably because this is an adaptive mechanism that limits decision ambivalence and ultimately facilitates our day-to-day functionality.

To summarize, the literature reviewed in this part suggests that making a choice is an act of meaning that shapes the identity of the chooser and expresses inner aspects of the self, such as one’s preferences. Building on the assumption that both opinion and choice are core parts of one’s self-definition, the remainder of the introduction articulates the two concepts in a theoretical framework and outlines the research hypotheses of the main studies.
1.4 HOW OPINION VOICING AFFECTS CHOICE

One night at home I had nothing to do, and I saw that Hair was on t.v. later. I was curious about it, I mean I had no idea what to expect. I had heard people make fun of it, and I had heard people praise it. So I had to watch, I had to have an opinion.

– ashley_2_2-1, 2003

The present thesis brings to the fore opinion voicing as a factor affecting the psychological meaning of choice. The quote above, taken from a comment posted on the Internet Movie Database, depicts one of the possible ways in which opinions might guide choices through the need to have a personal opinion. Going beyond this rather obvious influence, the studies presented in this thesis detect more subtle influences. Unlike prior research that has largely focused on the interpersonal influence of expressed opinions on others’ choices, this research proposes an intrapersonal approach. Insofar as opinion and choice are parts of the self-concept, one’s opinions can interact with one’s own choices. In view of groundbreaking technological developments and societal changes that render opinion voicing at once all the more accessible and all the more valued, a timely topic is addressed. A central premise is that the interplay between opinion and choice may as well take place within the same individual, and one’s choices may be influenced by different aspects of the same person’s opinions. Extensive literature in social influence has shown that people can be influenced by personal information, such as observations of past behaviours or attitudes (for a review, see Iyengar & Brockner, 2001). Another long tradition in psychology consistently demonstrates that choice is a powerful act of meaning that defines the individual and has significant implications such as shaping preferences (for a review, see Ariely & Norton, 2008). However, no prior research has investigated how the psychological meaning of choice might be influenced by opinion voicing through intra-individual processes. To fill this void in the literature, this thesis proposes that opinion voicing reconfigures the meaning...
and the significance of choice for the self-concept through the availability of opinion voicing opportunities and the subjective construal of opinionation. The first examines how the mere provision of opinion opportunities can limit post-choice rationalization, whereas the second examines how a positive view of opinionation can limit preference-choice consistency in some choice domains. All hypotheses are tested with experimental research designs. The effect of availability of opinion voicing on liking of choice is tested in four experiments (Chapter 2 and 3), whereas the effect of construals of opinionation on choice consistency is tested in another three experiments (Chapter 4). The overarching goal of this research is to provide evidence that opinion voicing reconfigures the psychological meaning of choice for the self. The following section outlines the hypothesis generation process for the studies (for an overview of all studies, see Table 1.1).

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<tr>
<th>Chapter 2 (Studies 1 &amp; 2)</th>
<th>Main independent variable</th>
<th>Main dependent variable</th>
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<td>Availability of opinion voicing (actual)</td>
<td>Choice favoritism</td>
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| Chapter 3 (Studies 1 & 2) | Availability of opinion voicing (prospective) | Spread of the alternatives |

| Chapter 4 (Studies 1a, 1b, & 2) | Subjective construal of opinionation | Preference-choice consistency |

1.4.1 Availability of opinion voicing opportunities

The first research question is how the availability of opinion voicing opportunities affects choice, and specifically post-choice rationalization. Table 1.2 offers an overview of the propositions upon which the hypotheses are built.
Research reviewed in Chapter 1.3 shows that making a choice is a self-defining act (Proposition 1, Table 1.2). As such, choice leads to a reevaluation of the choice options that favors the chosen option and devalues the rejected one. Even though choice substantiates the self and establishes one’s individuality to others, yet other self-expression means, such as opinion voicing or artistic creation, can alternatively meet the same self-expression needs (Proposition 3, Table 1.2). Thus, choice is not irreplaceable, at least as far as its self-expressive potential is concerned. Recently, Chernev, Hamilton, and Gal (2011) provided empirical evidence that the need for self-expression is satiable (Proposition 2, Table 1.2). Therefore, given that opinion voicing is also a way to express the self (Chapter 1.2 reviewed research in support of Proposition 3, Table 1.2), it is proposed that post-choice rationalization should be reduced when opportunities to express the self through opinions are available in the choice context (Chapter 2). Furthermore, it is argued that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities should decrease post-choice rationalization not only when these opportunities are actualized prior to choosing, but also when they are imagined as a viable prospect for the immediate future (Chapter 3). Research reported in Chapters 2 and 3 uses various theories and research paradigms to test these assumptions from different theoretical angles and to identify mediators and moderators of the postulated effect.

The basic proposition underlying these studies is that opinion voicing can substitute for choice in expressing the self (Proposition 4, Table 1.2). The substitutability proposition builds on prior research suggesting that different means can be equally effective in satisfying the same motivation. Theorists have argued that the self-system has at its disposal a variety of strategies to meet its needs (e.g., Steele, 1988; Tesser, 2000). Even strategies that might look on the surface as completely different or unrelated, in substance do converge in serving common goals, such as maintaining a positive view of the self. This mechanism has been extensively demonstrated in compensatory self-regulation, whereby “an individual attempts to make up for some negative internal or external event by creating a positive change in the self” (Chernev & Hamilton, 2008, p. 132). For example, individuals can compensate for sensory handicaps by developing increased physical sensitivity in other sensory modalities (e.g., Adler, 1924; James, 1918), or individuals with cognitive
constraints in their learning abilities might overcome their deficiency in written and verbal communication by developing extraordinary abilities in self-expression through painting or music (Schulman, 1986). Research on hedonic adaptation has found similar compensatory effects in response to negative emotions. After experiencing a negative life event, such as a loss of a loved one, individuals tend to focus on other positive aspects of life in order to effectively recover from the traumatic experience (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999). Additionally, individuals might employ compensatory strategies to reduce discrepancies between their actual self and their desired self, like in the case of less experienced business students who tend to get dressed in a more formal way to compensate for their lack of experience (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982).

Self-affirmation theory has further advanced the idea that the self is quite resilient in using seemingly unrelated means to buffer against self-threats. Instead of assuming that individuals can cope with self-threats only by confronting directly the respective cause, self-affirmation theory suggests that restoring a global sense of self-integrity or self-esteem is an alternative way to effectively protect the self. An affirmed self is capable of dealing with threatening situations in an efficient way, because it can draw resources from alternative domains of the self that have not been affected (for reviews, see Harris & Epton, 2010; McQueen & Klein, 2006; Sherman & Hartson, 2011). In fact, research shows that mobilizing resources from self-domains unrelated to the threatened self-domain is even more efficient in affirming the self than using the same self-domain (Tesser, 2000). Self-affirmation methods have a series of positive consequences on the self. Among others, self-affirmation has been found to reduce alcohol consumption (Armitage, Harris, & Arden, 2011), body dissatisfaction (Armitage, 2012), cognitive dissonance (Steele, 1988; Steele & Liu, 1983), defensiveness (Critcher, Dunning, & Armor, 2010), prejudice (Fein & Spencer, 1997), reactive devaluation in the context of conflict negotiations (Ward, Atkins, Lepper, & Ross, 2011), ego-depletion (Schmeichel & Vohs, 2009), and terror management effects (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). Furthermore, a study on the health benefits of expressive writing (Creswell et al., 2007) provided evidence that self-affirmation might be the mechanism underlying the beneficial effects of expressive writing.
Chapter One

mentioned earlier (Chapter 1.2). Therefore, self-affirmation theory exemplifies the compensatory mechanisms employed by the self-system and the substitutability of various tools in addressing common overarching goals.

Recently, research showed that self-expression needs can also be satisfied through different, mutually competitive means (Chernev et al., 2011). If that is the case, then the behavioural impact of choice on the self, as outlined in the post-choice rationalization literature reviewed above (Chapter 1.3), should be limited in occasions where individuals can additionally express their opinions. Granted, in most real-life situations choice is not the only means available to express the self, but rather co-exists with alternative opportunities to express the self through articulating one’s opinions (Chapter 1.2 offered an overview of the ways opinions can express the self). In the face of a dramatic expansion of relevant opportunities (Chapter 1.1), the question that rises is whether the psychological meaning of choice remains unaffected by opinion voicing opportunities. Can the salience of opinion voicing influence people’s choices? Is it likely that people invest in their choices less when they are reminded that they can also voice their opinions? Can the consideration of opinion voicing opportunities block post-choice rationalization processes and disengage choice from the self? And furthermore, can this occur even if people do not express their opinions prior to choosing, but are led to believe that they will have such an opportunity in the near future? The studies reported in Chapters 2 and 3 address this question by suggesting that people are less motivated to identify with their choices when they are given the alternative to express their opinions. This proposition is based on the assumption that choice and opinion can interchangeably serve the same self-expression needs (see Chapters 1.2 and 1.3). Therefore, if situational cues render opinion voicing opportunities salient, this should be enough to satisfy the need for self-expression and reduce subsequent investment in choice.

Chapter 2 tests this hypothesis with two experiments (Proposition 4a, Table 1.2). Study 1 asks participants to make a choice among four desktop wallpapers. Some participants are additionally given the chance to express their opinion about each one of these wallpapers in writing. As a dependent variable, a measurement of choice favoritism is introduced, which reflects the discrepancy in ratings between the chosen option and the rejected option.
General Introduction

Higher choice favoritism should denote a greater tendency to treat the chosen option as superior to the other options. It is hypothesized that participants who have the opportunity to express their opinions before making a choice will display less choice favoritism, that is, less of a tendency to idealize their choice, compared to those who only choose without an opinion voicing opportunity. Moreover, it is hypothesized that this difference in the subjective liking of choice will be mediated by differences in the subjective construal of choice self-expressiveness. More specifically, it is predicted that participants who write their opinions before choosing should construe choice as less self-expressive compared to participants who do not have this chance. This difference in the construal of choice is expected to account for the reduced choice favoritism effect following opinion voicing. Study 2 of this chapter aims at providing a more stringent test of the self-expressive interpretation proposed in Study 1, while at the same time ruling out an alternative explanation based on option attachment (Carmon, Wertenbroch, & Zeelenberg, 2003). In this study, it is proposed that if self-expression motivation is driving the effect of Study 1, then this effect should be moderated by public vs. private occasions of opinion expression and by individual differences in the value of expression (Kim & Sherman, 2007). It is assumed that, for individuals highly valuing self-expression, opinion will effectively substitute for choice in expressing the self only if it is publicly communicated. In the opposite case, private opinion voicing without any recipient of one's expression will not be enough to satisfy self-expression needs and will not suffice to substitute for choice. This hypothesis would be qualified by an interaction between the public or private nature of opinion voicing and the individual value of expression.

Chapter 3 takes this theorizing a step further (Proposition 4b, Table 1.2). The aim of the studies reported in this chapter is twofold. First, to show that it is not only actual engagement in opinion voicing that can undermine post-choice rationalizations, but also the anticipation of such an opportunity. Second, to demonstrate that the effect of opinion voicing on choice proposed in Chapter 2 can also mitigate the well-known spread-of-the-alternatives effect described by cognitive dissonance theory. To this end, the free-choice paradigm is used in these studies (Brehm, 1956). In this paradigm,
participants have to rank a set of options twice, once before making a choice and once after. As a manipulation of dissonance induction, participants are offered a choice between two almost equally attractive options. Typically, individuals resolve post-choice dissonance by spreading their alternatives, that is, increasing liking for the chosen option and/or decreasing liking for the rejected option. However, in the present studies an opinion voicing condition is introduced in this paradigm. In this condition, participants are told that they will later on have the opportunity to express their opinion about the choice they make. This way, the availability of a prospective opinion voicing opportunity is manipulated. The hypothesis is that participants in the opinion voicing condition will experience less post-choice dissonance and therefore will spread their alternatives less than participants in the standard choice condition. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that opinion can alternatively express the self, hence reducing self-expressive investment in subsequent choice. Study 2 in the same chapter aims at providing stronger support to this hypothesis by ruling out alternative explanations. Specifically, in Study 1 participants are asked to make choices and express their opinions about the choices they make. To ensure that the proposed mechanism is indeed based on the satisfaction of self-expression needs through the prospective opinion voicing opportunity and not based on the mere fact that choice is perceived as reversible, Study 2 manipulates choice and opinion in two separate domains. If the prospect of opinion voicing in a domain unrelated to the choice can still reduce post-choice dissonance, then this would be a much stronger argument in support of the hypothesis put forth.

In sum, the first two chapters present four experiments that advance understanding of how opinion voicing might impact choice. It is suggested that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities might undermine the potential of choice to express the self. The result of this proposition is that individuals should rationalize their choices less if they have the opportunity – actual or symbolic – to voice their opinions. The theorized effect of opinion voicing availability on choice rationalization can have theoretical and practical implications. At a theoretical level, this research underscores the importance of opinion voicing as a factor mitigating the self-expressiveness of choice. Implications could extend beyond cognitive dissonance theory to other related
theories that tap the effects of choice on the self-concept, like reactance or self-perception. At a practical level, this research suggests that the proliferation of opinion voicing opportunities characterizing contemporary societies might change the way people relate to their choices. If such opportunities are made salient while choosing, for example by expressing opinions on the Internet, individuals might be psychologically dissociated from their choices. Implications of these studies and directions for future research are discussed thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Table 1.2
Overview of Propositions (Availability of Opinion Voicing Opportunities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposition 1</td>
<td>Choice is more than a deliberate selection among alternatives; it is an act of self-expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposition 2</td>
<td>The need for self-expression is satiable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposition 3</td>
<td>Voicing an opinion and making a choice can interchangeably serve the same self-expressive function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposition 4</td>
<td>Because the need for self-expression is satiable (Proposition 2) and opinion and choice serve the same function (Proposition 3), opinion voicing can substitute for choice in expressing the self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposition 4a</td>
<td>Rendering the availability of an opinion voicing opportunity salient is enough to satisfy the need for self-expression and hence undermines subsequent psychological investment in choice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposition 4b  The mere anticipation of an opinion voicing opportunity is enough to satisfy the need for self-expression and hence undermines subsequent psychological investment in choice.

1.4.2 Subjective construal of opinionation

Studies in Chapters 2 and 3 predict that the availability of opportunities to voice opinions undermines commitment to choice. Studies in Chapter 4 approach the opinion-choice relation from a different standpoint. It is suggested that the unprecedented growth of opinion voicing opportunities coupled with an accelerating cultural emphasis on self-expression has given rise to an opinion culture. People are constantly urged or even conditioned to express their opinions on a variety of topics, regardless of personal involvement or expertise. The importance of individual opinion is glorified and everyone is considered to be entitled to their own opinion. Therefore, individuals might often face a dilemma whether they should give in and seek to have an opinion on everything, or limit their opinions only to whatever concerns them personally. The term *opinionation* is introduced to portray the propensity to have an opinion on a variety of topics irrespective of their personal relevance (Proposition 1, Table 1.3). Individuals may hold different construals of opinionation (Proposition 2, Table 1.3). Some might believe that having an opinion about a variety of topics is beneficial for a number of reasons, for example because that would make them savvy, knowledgeable and up to date. By contrast, other individuals might believe that having an opinion about a variety of topics is detrimental because that would make them superficial, arrogant and know-it-all. Research reported in Chapter 4 examines how these different perceptions of opinionation can affect the way people make choices, and specifically how much they stick to their preferences (Proposition 3, Table 1.3). When opinionation is construed as beneficial, individuals might be more likely to consider the advantages of all available
options and thereby end up choosing less preferred options compared to when opinionation is construed as detrimental. However, this effect is expected to depict only consumer choices, which can afford inconsistency to some extent, and not value choices, which safeguard consistency more strictly (Proposition 4, Table 1.3). Thus, it is hypothesized (Proposition 4a, Table 1.3) that construing opinionation as beneficial rather than detrimental will reduce preference-choice consistency in high inconsistency-tolerant domains, like consumer choices (Studies 1a and 1b), but not in low inconsistency-tolerant domains, like value choices (Study 2). Table 1.3 summarizes the basic propositions upon which these studies are built.

The general idea underlying these studies is that construal processes can affect how people make choices. How individuals perceive and interpret the world around them has been shown to affect drastically the way they feel, think, and act (e.g., Ross, 1987; Schwarz, 2009; Trope & Liberman, 2010). For example, applications of construal level theory in consumer behavior and decision making indicate that consumers might arrive at strikingly different choices depending on the construal they adopt (Trope & Liberman, 2010). When a choice situation is construed from a temporal distance (high-level construal), consumers are more likely to choose based on desirability considerations, whereas as distance decreases, they are more likely to choose based on feasibility considerations (Dhar & Kim, 2007; Fiedler, 2007; Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007). Along similar lines, Gilovich (1990) provided evidence that the false consensus effect, that is, the cognitive bias whereby people overestimate the extent to which others agree with them, can be partly interpreted as people’s failure to recognize that their choices are to a large extent determined by their subjective construal of the choice options. But it is not only the construal of the choice situation that affects choosing. Other studies have also shown that different construals of the self as either independent or interdependent can also have a great impact on cognitive processes in general (Kühnen, 2009; Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001) and choice in particular (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim & Drolet, 2003, 2009; Kim & Markus, 1999; Kim & Sherman, 2007;
Chapter 4 focuses on the construal of opinionation and investigates its effect on choice. The basic proposition here is that preference-choice consistency hinges on different construals of opinionation. Although conventional wisdom would assume that people most of the times choose according to clearly predefined preferences, much research in psychology and decision making shows that in many cases this is not entirely true. Several factors, such as primes, cognitive constraints, framing of choice, and consideration sets, can affect the relation between preferences and choices (e.g., Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000; Dhar & Simonson, 2003; Grace, 1993; Kivetz & Simonson, 2000; Lee, Amir, & Ariely, 2009; Slovic, 1995; Tsetsos, Chater, & Usher, 2010; Tversky & Shafir, 1992). In this research, construals of opinionation are proposed as another factor that can moderate preference-choice consistency. Specifically, it is hypothesized that focusing on the benefits (as opposed to the detriments) of opinionation will encourage individuals to consider the advantages of all available options and enlarge the spectrum of possible choices, thereby resulting in reduced preference-choice consistency. This proposition builds on prior research on the outcomes of inclusion and exclusion screening strategies (Chernev, 2009; Huber, Neale, & Northcraft, 1987; Levin, Jasper, & Forbes, 1998; Meloy & Russo, 2004; Park, Jun, & MacInnis, 2000; Yaniv & Schul, 1997; Yaniv, Schul, Raphaelli-Hirsch, & Maoz, 2002), which shows that inclusive strategies expand consideration sets and decrease preference-choice consistence (Irwin & Naylor, 2009; Kogut, 2011; Laran & Wilcox, 2011). In other words, it is argued that inconsistency might be viewed as advantageous if opinionation is construed as beneficial. Individuals are more willing to forego their preferred options and opt for less preferred ones, if they consider the benefits of having an opinion about a variety of issues. However, insofar as different choice domains can afford inconsistency to varying degrees, it is further proposed that this effect will only be observed for consumer choices, where the notion of consistency can be more easily compromised, and not for value choices, where consistency is more vital for the self-concept and thus less easily sacrificed.
To this end, an experimental design that allows to measure preference-choice consistency is used (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008). In their research, Savani and his colleagues showed that North Americans are more likely than Indians to choose according to their preferences, indicating that in an individualistic cultural context choice is a manifestation of internal attributes of the self, such as preferences. The same design is used here to test the hypothesis that construing opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental) makes people less likely to choose according to their preferences in consumer domains. This design consists of three stages. Firstly, participants are asked to rate several items on scales indicating their preferences. Secondly, participants are randomly assigned either to the benefits or the detriments condition, where they are asked to write down in which occasions having an opinion about a variety of issues can be beneficial or detrimental. Lastly, participants in both conditions are given random combinations of all previously rated items in sets of three or four and are asked to choose one each time. The dependent variable is an estimation of how consistently participants will choose the item they rank as highest among all items in the choice-set. The first two studies (Study 1a and 1b) test this hypothesis in the domain of consumer choices with a wide range of consumer goods (Study 1a) and types of restaurants (Study 1b). The last study (Study 2) tests the interaction hypothesis that the effect of the construals of opinionation on preference-choice consistency is contingent upon the choice domain by comparing consumer choices (specifically chocolate choices) with value choices (adapted from Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987).

Table 1.3
Overview of Propositions (Subjective Construal of Opinionation)

| Proposition | Proposition 1 | Opinionation is defined as the tendency to have an opinion on a variety of issues irrespective of personal relevance. |
**Proposition 2**  
Opinionation can be subjectively construed as positive or negative.

**Proposition 3**  
Depending on how individuals construe opinionation, the degree to which they choose according to their preferences varies considerably.

**Proposition 4**  
The consequences of different construals of opinionation on preference-choice consistency are moderated by the choice domain.

**Proposition 4a**  
Construing opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental) reduces preference-choice consistency in consumer choices, but not in values choices.

In sum, the studies presented in Chapter 4 highlight another aspect of the effect of opinion voicing on choice. It is suggested that the construal of opinionation can mitigate preference-choice consistency. Specifically, if individuals construe opinionation as beneficial rather than detrimental, they will be more likely to choose less preferred options in the domain of consumer choices, but not in the domain of value choices. These studies can have both theoretical and practical implications. At the level of theory, these studies contribute to research on factors that affect the link between preferences and choices by identifying opinionation as an additional variable. These studies can also have practical implications in consumer research and marketing, suggesting that situational cues manipulating the construal of opinionation could combat consumer inertia and encourage change.
When a choice is just a choice

OPINION AS A DETOUR TO SELF-EXPRESSION
Research in this chapter identifies a boundary condition of choice self-expressiveness by proposing that pre-choice opinion expression can sufficiently satisfy self-expressive needs, thus superseding the use of subsequent choice as a self-expressive resource. This proposition is based on the assumption that opinion expression can psychologically substitute for choice, because the two represent alternative routes to self-expression. Study 1 showed that after articulating their opinions about the choice options, participants were less likely to idealize their choices, because they saw themselves less in their choices. Study 2 further showed that this effect is moderated by public vs. private occasions of opinion voicing and by individual differences in the value of expression. Together, findings support that opinion is enough to express the self, and if such an opportunity is made available prior to choosing, the privileged role of choice is drastically limited.


2.1 INTRODUCTION

Abundant research asserts that choice is an act of self-expression (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Gawronski, Bodenhausen, & Becker, 2007; Kim & Drolet, 2003, 2009; Kim & Markus, 1999; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Kokkoris, Kühnen, & Yan, in press; Morrison & Johnson, 2011; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002). A typical demonstration of the self-expressive potential of choice common in many social psychological theories is the tendency to increase liking of the chosen option after making a choice (Bem, 1967; Brehm, 1966; Festinger, 1957). But how self-expressive is choice in situations where people express their opinion prior to choosing? Can opinion adequately express the self and hence reduce self-expressive investment in choice? In this paper we address a boundary condition of choice self-expressiveness by proposing that opinion voicing can limit subjective liking of subsequent choice.

It has been long acknowledged that opinions fulfill a self-expressive role (Aaker, 1999; Herek, 1987; Katz, 1960; Prentice, 1987; Shavitt, 1990; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). The internalization of expressed opinions, demonstrated by cognitive dissonance theory, illustrates how strongly opinions are believed to be corresponding to enduring internal aspects of the self (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Thus, “speaking one’s mind” is a reflection of one’s self just like choosing. Yet, despite their apparent functional equivalence, choice and opinion have been largely studied separately in the literature. This research examines choice in conjunction with opinion. Building on compensation literature, which suggests that common overarching motivations can be serviced by seemingly disparate tools (Chernev & Hamilton, 2008; Kruglanski, Piero, & Sheveland, 2011; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 2000), we argue that opinion can substitute for choice in expressing the self.

We predict that once an opportunity to express an opinion about the choice options is made available before making a choice, the tendency to bolster the subjective perception of the chosen option after choosing should be attenuated. This proposition draws on previous research suggesting that self-expression is satiable, such that a self-expressive act can temporarily satiate
the need for self-expression (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011; Gal & Rucker, 2011; Kim & Drolet, 2003). In this paper, we extend this research by investigating the implications of this identity saturation effect on the behavioral impact of choice. We further propose that the effect of opinion voicing on liking of choice is mediated by the subjective construal of choice (Study 1) and moderated by individual differences in the value of expression as well as private vs. public occasions of opinion voicing (Study 2).

2.2 STUDY 1

This study tests the general hypothesis that expressing an opinion about the choice options before actually choosing reduces liking of the chosen option. This is expected to be the case, because under this circumstance choice is construed as less self-expressive. Overall, it may be true that people construe choice as a means of self-expression. However, we suggest that if individuals have successfully satisfied their need for self-expression by having expressed their opinion about the given options before making a choice, they should be less likely to construe choice as a self-expression means, and hence less likely to like their chosen option. To test this hypothesis, we asked participants to choose one of four wallpaper images and to rate all of them according to their liking. Some participants additionally received the chance to voice their opinion about those options in an open-ended fashion. Critically, we manipulated the order in which these measures were taken between participants. First, in order to replicate previous findings regarding the behavioral impact of choice, some participants were asked to choose one of the four options and subsequently rated their liking of each of them (choice condition), while others rated their liking first and only then made a choice (control condition). In line with prior research suggesting that simply the act of choosing changes the mental representation of the chosen option in a more positive direction, we predicted that liking for the chosen option should be higher in the choice condition than in the control condition (hypothesis 1). To investigate the role of opinion voicing, we added two further conditions to the design. In an opinion-after-choice condition, participants were asked first to
choose one of the four options, next received the chance to voice their opinion about all options in an open-ended way and finally rated their liking of all options. Since in this condition the construal of choice is not affected by the sequent opinion voicing, we expected liking of the chosen option to be as high as in the choice condition, where participants simply chose and then rated their liking. Therefore, we predicted that liking of the chosen option in this opinion-after-choice condition should also be higher than in the control condition, in which liking ratings were assessed before choice (hypothesis 2).

In the most crucial opinion-before-choice condition, participants started by expressing their opinions about each one of the four alternatives, then made a choice, and at the end rated all four options. We consider this to be the critical condition for our conceptualization, because the opportunity to express an opinion is provided before making a choice, so that it could psychologically substitute for choice.

Therefore, we predicted that participants in the opinion-before-choice condition, who expressed an opinion about the choice options before choosing, should like their choice less either compared with participants in the opinion-after-choice condition, who expressed an opinion after choosing (hypothesis 3), or compared with participants in the choice condition, who simply chose without the opportunity to express an opinion before (hypothesis 4). Additionally, we predicted that participants in the opinion-before-choice condition, who expressed an opinion before choosing, should construe choice as less self-expressive compared with participants in the choice condition, who chose without previously expressing an opinion (hypothesis 5). Finally, we predicted that the above difference in the construal of choice as low self-expressive should mediate the effect of opinion voicing on liking of choice, so that the tendency to construe choice in the opinion-before-choice condition as less self-expressive than in the choice condition should account for the lower liking of the chosen option in the opinion-before-choice condition relative to the choice condition (hypothesis 6).

2.2.1 Method
2.2.1.1 Participants

Sixty-four graduate students (52 females, mean age = 28.81, $SD = 3.44$) took part in an online study.

2.2.1.2 Procedure

The study was introduced as examining aesthetic preferences for visual stimuli. The material was a set of four wallpapers used to personalize computer desktops. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. In the control condition, participants were presented with the four wallpapers in randomized order and were first asked to rate how much they liked each wallpaper on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). At the next step, they were asked to choose one. We consider this condition control, because ratings of the options are not affected by the act of choosing, but represent how much participants liked the image they chose before committing to this option through choice. In the choice condition, participants did the same tasks in the reverse order. That is, participants were first presented with all four wallpapers and were asked to choose one, before being asked to rate how much they liked each one separately in randomized order. We call this condition choice, because choosing precedes rating, allowing us to trace the behavioral impact of choice on the attractiveness of the alternatives. In a third opinion-after-choice condition, the order was the same as in the choice condition, but opinion voicing was introduced after choosing. That is, participants were first instructed to choose one wallpaper and then, they were asked to express their opinion about each one of the four wallpapers in writing. Each image appeared on the computer screen in randomized order with the caption “Your opinion” under the image and empty space below where they could insert their comments. After commenting all four options, ratings of all wallpapers followed. Note that this is not the critical experimental condition, because opinion voicing follows choice, so that according to our theorizing it cannot substitute for choice in expressing the self. Finally, in the critical opinion-before-choice condition, participants first
expressed their opinions about each wallpaper, then they chose one, and finally rated all four. An overview of the order of the tasks for each condition can be found in Table 2.1. After these tasks, participants in all conditions answered three questions tapping choice confidence (“The wallpaper I chose expresses my taste”, “I would like to have the wallpaper I chose for personal use”, “For me, the wallpaper I chose is much better than the other ones”). Finally, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with an item operationalizing the construal of choice as low self-expressive (“My choices do not necessarily reveal who I really am”).

Table 2.1
Order of Tasks per Experimental Condition in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Order of tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Rating – Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Choice – Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion after choice</td>
<td>Choice – Opinion – Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion before choice</td>
<td>Opinion – Choice – Rating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
Rating: Participants are asked to indicate their liking of all four wallpapers on a 10-point scale (1 – not at all, 10 – very much)
Choice: Participants are asked to choose one out of four wallpapers
Opinion: Participants are asked to write their comments on each one of the four wallpapers in open-ended questions

2.2.2 Results and discussion

2.2.2.1 Preliminary analyses

Our main dependent variable was a measure of choice favoritism operationalized as the liking of the chosen option relative to the liking of the rejected options. To compute this measure, we subtracted the average rating
of the three rejected options from the rating of the chosen option and obtained a single score of the chosen-rejected average rating difference\(^1\). Thus, higher scores on choice favoritism denote larger distance of the chosen option from the foregone options, or put another way, more favorable perception of the chosen option. This measure has three advantages compared to a conventional measure of choice satisfaction. First, it controls for individual differences in response styles, as some people might consistently use higher (lower) ratings than others, even for their least (most) preferred options. Second, it captures a snapshot of intrapersonal choice justification, assuming that the higher the subjective significance of choice, the larger the discrepancy between the ratings of the chosen and the rejected options. And third, it is much more subtle and unobtrusive compared with scale items explicitly tapping liking of choice. The correlation between choice favoritism and the three items measuring choice confidence combined in a single index \(\alpha = .71\) was significant and positive, \(r = .64\), \(p < .001\), validating the assumption that larger difference in ratings between chosen and rejected options represents higher liking of the chosen option relative to the foregone options.

### 2.2.2.2 Choice favoritism

To test our first four hypotheses, we submitted choice favoritism to an ANOVA with condition as the independent variable. Results revealed a significant effect of condition on choice favoritism, \(F(3, 58) = 4.05\), \(p = .011\), \(\eta^2_p = .17\) (Figure 2.1). Post-hoc comparisons\(^2\) further showed that participants in the choice condition \((M = 3.37, SD = 1.52)\) scored higher on choice favoritism than participants in the control condition \((M = 2.26, SD = 1.09)\), \(p = .031\) (hypothesis 1). Additionally, we found that participants in the

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1 For the calculation of our dependent variable we used the following formula: Choice favoritism = \([\text{RatingChosen} - ((\text{RatingRejected}_1 + \text{RatingRejected}_2 + \text{RatingRejected}_3) / 3)]\).

2 For all post-hoc comparisons reported in this paper, we used least significant difference (LSD) tests.
**Figure 2.1.** Choice favoritism as a function of condition in Study 1.

*opinion-after-choice* condition ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.48$) also displayed higher choice favoritism compared with controls, $p = .010$ (hypothesis 2). This is in line with our prediction that expressing an opinion after choosing should not decrease liking of choice, because choice is already made and the individual has already committed to it. In that case, opinion is more likely to justify choice rather than substitute it. There was no significant difference between *choice* and *opinion-after-choice* conditions, $p > .4$, implying that once the self has been expressed through choice, additional self-expression means, such as opinion, do not offer any added value beyond this threshold. However, there was a significant difference in choice favoritism between the *opinion-after-choice* condition ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.48$) and the *opinion-before-choice* condition ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.53$), $p = .009$, indicating that expressing an opinion undermined the subjective liking of choice only when the opinion preceded choice, and not when it followed (hypothesis 3). This finding
confirms our prediction that because both choice and opinion can interchangeably express the self, whichever means becomes accessible first succeeds in fulfilling self-expression goals and undermines the relevance of the other means. By far, the most decisive test for our theorizing is the comparison between opinion-before-choice and choice conditions. In line with our prediction, results show that participants in the opinion-before-choice condition ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.53$) scored lower on choice favoritism than participants in the choice condition ($M = 3.37, SD = 1.52$), $p = .028$, supporting our argument that articulating an opinion before choosing suffices to express the self and subsequently weakens the psychological importance of choice (hypothesis 4). No significant difference between opinion-before-choice and control condition was found, $p > .9$, implying that voicing an opinion before making a choice renders choice as inconsequential for the self as no-choice. Taken together, these findings confirm that when individuals have the opportunity to express their opinions about the choice options before choosing, they invest in their choices less and view them less idealized.

2.2.2.2 Choice construal

We argued that expressing an opinion before making a choice affects the subjective construal of choice. To test this, we submitted the responses to the item assessing the construal of choice (low self-expressiveness of choice) to an ANOVA with condition as the independent variable. The effect of condition on choice construal was significant, $F(3, 59) = 2.73, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .12$. Consistent with our hypothesis, post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants in the opinion-before-choice condition ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.29$) construed choice as less self-expressive than participants in the choice condition ($M = 3.05, SD = 1.43$), $p = .009$ (hypothesis 5). In other words, pre-choice opinion expression sufficiently satisfied self-expression needs, reducing the subjectively perceived capacity of choice to express the self. Therefore, the opportunity to voice an opinion before choosing did not only affect the subjective attractiveness of choice (choice favoritism), but also its subjective
meaning (choice construal). Further, we examined whether this difference in how choice is construed can account for the difference in how favorably choice is perceived. For the following mediation analysis we only included the two experimental conditions that are critical to our theorizing, that is, the *control* and the *opinion-before-choice* conditions.

### 2.2.2.3 Mediation analysis

We conducted a set of hierarchical linear regression analyses to test the hypothesis that the construal of choice mediates the effect of condition on choice favoritism. At Step 1 we entered dummy-coded condition (-1 for *choice* and 1 for *opinion-before-choice*) as predictor of choice favoritism, and at Step 2 we entered the choice construal. At Step 1, there was a significant effect of condition on choice favoritism, \( \beta = -0.34, t(34) = 2.12, p = .041 \). At Step 2,

![Diagram of mediation analysis](image)

*Figure 2.2. Mediation of the effect of condition on choice favoritism via choice construal in Study 1.*

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients (total effect in parentheses).

\*\( p < .05 \)

\**p < .01**
choice construal was a significant predictor of choice favoritism, $\beta = -0.38$, $t(33) = -2.18$, $p = .037$. However, after the construal of choice was entered, the effect of condition decreased from statistically significant at Step 1 to insignificant at Step 2, $\beta = -0.17$, $t(33) = -0.96$, $p > .3$ (Figure 2.2). The Sobel test for the effect of condition on choice favoritism via choice construal was significant, $z = -1.80$, $p = .037$ (1-tailed). Thus, mediation analysis confirmed that expressing an opinion prior to choosing reduces liking of subsequent choice via changing the mental representation of choice in general (hypothesis 6). Once the self is expressed through opinion, choice is no longer seen as a means to express the self to the same extent, resulting in decreased post-choice satisfaction.

2.3 STUDY 2

Study 1 provided evidence for our central assumption that opinion voicing as one means of self-expression alters the subjective construal of subsequent choice as being less self-expressive and consequently reduces liking of the chosen option. However, before we draw this conclusion, we need to rule out an alternative account of the findings from Study 1. The diminished liking of choice following opinion expression might be due to closer consideration of options, which leads to stronger attachment with the foregone options and lower satisfaction with the chosen option (Carmon, Wertenbroch, & Zeelenberg, 2003). While this alternative explanation is plausible, the results of Study 1 provide already some evidence against it. First, if opinion expression can be considered as identical to deliberation on the choice options, then the same effect should be found not only in the opinion-before-choice condition, but also in the opinion-after-choice condition; as shown, that was not the case. Second, this effect was fully mediated by a change in the construal of choice as less self-expressive. Nevertheless, to further corroborate our proposed self-expression mechanism, in Study 2 we explicitly manipulated the private vs. public status of opinion expression and measured individual differences in the value of expression.
Previous research has shown that the effects of self-expression through opinion or choice are more pronounced in public than in private, because the presence of others raises self-presentational concerns and commits the self to the choice made or the opinion voiced (Baumeister & Tice, 1984; Higgins & Rholes, 1978; Kiesler, Roth, & Pallak, 1974; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Scheier & Carver, 1980). In that sense, every self-expressive act can be seen as an act of communication, because through self-expression individuals “make their private thoughts and feelings concrete, tangible, and socially recognizable” (Kim & Sherman, 2007, p. 2). To paraphrase the renowned existentialist quote, we posit that if one expresses an opinion but there is no one around to witness it, this is not sufficient to validate one’s identity. To operationalize public and private opinion expression, we created one public and one private variation of the critical opinion-before-choice condition. In the public condition, participants expressed their opinions before making a choice, exactly as in Study 1. Opinion in this condition can be regarded as publicly expressed because participants knew that their opinions were recorded and publicized to the researchers. In the private condition, however, participants encountered a “technical problem” after expressing their opinions and were led to believe that everything they had written had not been saved. Therefore, in both conditions participants did express their opinions before making a choice, the only difference being that in the private condition these opinions were not supposed to be known to anyone else. Additionally, we used a scale to measure individual differences in the value people attribute to self-expression (Kim & Sherman, 2007).

We suggest that when opinion is expressed in private (without recipient), it does not suffice for individuals highly valuing expression to fulfill their self-expression goal; thus, instead of limiting choice favoritism, private opinion expression further enhances it, because choice is the only means available to express the self in this case. Obviously, this should not hold when opinion is expressed in public. We therefore predicted an interaction between public/private opinion expression and the value of expression on choice favoritism, such that higher value of expression should lead to higher choice favoritism only in the private condition, but not in the public condition (hypothesis 7). An additional hypothesis pertains to perceived similarity
among the choice options. Prior research has shown that increased option similarity (or decreased option differentiability) reduces commitment to choice (Brehm, 1956; Dhar, 1997) and satisfaction with choice (Botti & McGill, 2006). Accordingly, increased self-expressive investment in choice translates in perceptions of lower option similarity (Chernev et al., 2011). Based on this reasoning, we propose that because private opinion expression is not enough for individuals highly valuing expression to express themselves, they should perceive choice options as less similar under private than under public opinion expression. Thus, we predicted an interaction between public/private opinion expression and the value of expression on perceived similarity, such that higher value of expression will lead to lower perceived similarity only in the private condition, but not in the public condition (hypothesis 8).

2.3.1 Method

2.3.1.1 Participants

Fifty undergraduate students (27 females, mean age = 19.48, SD = 1.40) took part in a lab study in exchange for course credit.

2.3.1.2 Procedure

As in study 1, the cover story presented this experiment as examining aesthetic preferences for visual stimuli. Upon arriving at the lab, participants were taken to the testing rooms individually and were randomly assigned either to the public or to the private condition. The procedure was exactly the same as the opinion-before-choice condition of Study 1 with only one modification. In the public condition, after writing their opinion on each one of the four wallpapers, participants proceeded normally with choosing the one they liked the most. In the private condition, however, right after writing their opinion about all four wallpapers, participants encountered an “error” page. They would then typically call the experimenter to report the problem and ask
for help. The experimenter asked them which questions they had answered last and left the room supposedly to check what the problem was. Shortly after, the experimenter returned and explained that unfortunately none of the participants’ previous answers had been saved due to some unresolved technical issue. Then, the experimenter apologized for the inconvenience, closed the window with the current study, and opened a new window with an allegedly new study. In reality, this was the continuation of the same study with the same questions as in the public condition. Participants in the private condition would then proceed with choosing the wallpaper they liked the most. Following that, participants in both conditions were presented with the three questions measuring choice confidence used in Study 1, and two additional questions measuring perceived similarity of the choice options (“All four wallpapers are equally attractive to me”, “I do not see any big differences among the four wallpapers”). Next, participants answered three items used as manipulation check. The first one (“My self is expressed better through my opinions than through my choices”) tapped preference for self-expression through opinion rather than through choice (1 – strongly disagree, 8 – strongly agree). The other two items (“How important do you think that your choices in general are for your self-expression?” and “How important do you think that your opinions in general are for your self-expression?”) measured the subjective importance of opinion and choice for self-expression on an 11-point scale (0% – not at all important, 100% – extremely important) and were presented in randomized order. Finally, participants filled out the Value of Expression Questionnaire (VEQ, Kim & Sherman, 2007) comprised of 11 items on an 8-point scale (1 – strongly disagree, 8 – strongly agree) measuring the extent to which participants value self-expression in their beliefs and their behaviours.

2.3.2 Results and discussion

2.3.2.1 Manipulation check
Participants in the public condition ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.72$) agreed more than participants in the private condition ($M = 4.12, SD = 1.74$) that opinions express the self better than choices, $t(48) = -1.88, p = .033$ (1-tailed), $d = 0.54$. Moreover, choice was perceived as more important for self-expression in the private condition ($M = 8.88, SD = 1.64$) compared with the public condition ($M = 7.84, SD = 1.82$), $t(48) = 2.12, p = .020$ (1-tailed), $d = 0.61$, whereas opinion was perceived as marginally more important for self-expression in the public condition ($M = 8.56, SD = 1.67$) compared with the private condition ($M = 7.76, SD = 2.40$), $t(48) = -1.36, p = .09$ (1-tailed), $d = 0.39$. Together, manipulation checks indicate that our manipulation was successful in making participants in the private (as opposed to the public) condition rely less on their opinions to express themselves.

### 2.3.2.2 Choice favoritism

The main dependent variable, choice favoritism, was estimated as in Study 1. The correlation between choice favoritism and the three items tapping choice confidence ($\alpha = .63$) was significant and positive, $r = .41, p = .003$, whereas the correlation between choice favoritism and the two items tapping perceived similarity of the choice options ($r = -.38, p = .006$) was significant and negative, $r = -.58, p < .001$. Individual VEQ scores ($\alpha = .67$) were also estimated.

Next, we conducted a set of hierarchical linear regression analyses to test the hypothesis that the interaction between condition and VEQ has a significant effect on choice favoritism. At Step 1, we entered condition dummy coded (-1 for private, 1 for public) and VEQ as predictors of choice favoritism. At Step 2, we entered their interaction. At Step 1, neither VEQ, $p > .7$, nor condition, $p > .3$, was a significant predictor of choice favoritism. At Step 2, as predicted, the two-way interaction between condition and VEQ was a significant predictor of choice favoritism, $\beta = -2.49, t(45) = -2.10, p = .042$. As can be seen from the plot of the interaction (Figure 2.3), higher value of expression led to higher choice favoritism in the private condition, but lower choice favoritism in the public condition (hypothesis 7). Moreover, the main
effect of condition was a significant predictor of choice favoritism, $\beta = 2.33$, $t(45) = 2.21, p = .032$, and so was the main effect of VEQ, $\beta = .92$, $t(45) = 2.08$, $p = .043$. Thus, results confirm our hypothesis that choice favoritism is a function of the interaction between the public or private status of opinion expression and individual differences in the value of expression.

\[\text{Figure 2.3. Choice favoritism as a function of opinion expression (private vs. public) and the value of expression (mean centered) in Study 2.}\]

2.3.2.3 Perceived similarity

We conducted another set of hierarchical linear regression analyses to test the hypothesis that the private and the public condition also differ in the relationship between the levels of VEQ and perceived similarity of the choice options. At Step 1, we entered condition dummy coded (-1 for private, 1 for public) and VEQ as predictors of perceived similarity. At Step 2, we entered the interaction. At Step 1, neither VEQ, $p = .075$, nor condition, $p > .8$, was a significant predictor of perceived similarity. At Step 2, as predicted, the two-way interaction between condition and VEQ had a significant effect on
perceived similarity, $\beta = 2.80$, $t(45) = 2.46$, $p = .018$. Moreover, both the main effect of condition, $\beta = -2.50$, $t(45) = -2.47$, $p = .018$, and the main effect of VEQ, $\beta = -1.24$, $t(45) = -2.95$, $p = .005$, were significant predictors of perceived similarity. As can be seen from the plot of the interaction (Figure 2.4), high-VEQ (vs. low-VEQ) participants perceived lower similarity among the choice options in the private condition, but higher similarity in the public condition (hypothesis 8). Thus, results confirm our hypothesis that perceived similarity of the choice options is a function of the interaction between the public or private status of opinion expression and individual differences in the value of expression.

![Figure 2.4](image)

*Figure 2.4.* Perceived similarity as a function of opinion expression (private vs. public) and the value of expression (mean centered) in Study 2.

### 2.4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

We tend to cherish our choices, because after all “we are what we choose”. But is that always the case? In this paper we identify a boundary
condition of this well-established assumption. We demonstrated how the
common tendency to bolster the subjective perception of the chosen option
after choosing can be undermined by simply providing an opinion voicing
opportunity prior to choosing. We argued that opinion can psychologically
substitute for choice, because opinion and choice represent two alternative
routes to self-expression. Critically, this effect is possible only if the chance for
opinion voicing is provided before a choice is to be made. Study 1 confirms
that the opportunity to express an opinion about the choice options before
making a choice reduces liking of the chosen option. A mediation analysis
reveals that this effect is due to a change in the mental construal of choice:
Expressing an opinion before choosing reduces the tendency to perceive
choice more favorably via making choice look less self-expressive. Study 2
rules out an option attachment interpretation of findings of Study 1 by
showing that the effect of opinion expression on liking of choice is moderated
by public/private opinion expression and individual differences in the value of
expression. In particular, opinion expression in private is not adequate to
express the self, making it more likely for individuals highly valuing
expression to resort to choice for self-expression. In addition, expressing an
opinion privately decreases perceived option similarity for individuals highly
valuing expression. Thus, we believe that our self-expression account is a
much more sound interpretation of the presented findings than option
attachment.

It is worthwhile also to note that the effect we describe is different from
introspection about reasons (Wilson et al., 1993). One could argue that
opinion expression attenuates liking of choice because when people are asked
to provide reasons for their preferences, they tend to focus on attributes that
are easy to verbalize, leading to suboptimal choices and therefore reduced
post-choice satisfaction (Wilson et al., 1993). However, this account does not
hold for our findings because, even if we suppose that expressing opinions is
identical to explaining preferences, the aversive consequences of introspection
on post-choice satisfaction emerge over time (e.g., one month later), and not
immediately after the choice is made, when choice is still rated rather
favorably. As our research found reduced liking of choice immediately after
choosing, the effect of introspecting about reasons does not seem to be a plausible interpretation of our results.

Our research advances prior research on self-expression and identity saturation (Chernev et al., 2011) in at least two ways. First, it uncovers a cognitive factor (construal of choice) that underlies the proposed motivational effect. Second, it identifies two boundary conditions of this effect in terms of situational factors (public vs. private occasions) and individual differences (value of expression). Furthermore, the current research makes significant contributions to a growing body of literature that broadly questions the meaning of choice (e.g., Markus & Schwartz, 2010). At the theoretical level, our findings raise the intriguing possibility that the sanctified role of choice found in many studies may be to some extent attributable to studying choice disconnected from alternative self-expression avenues. In that case, what is interpreted as evidence for the psychological significance of choice might be not unique about choice, but rather a confound with the global need to self-express through any means available. At the methodological level, our findings suggest that research designs offering participants a multitude of self-expression alternatives, such as the chance to verbalize their thoughts prior to choosing, might depict much more accurately the value and the function of choice for the self.
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AS DISSONANCE REDUCTION
xtensive literature demonstrates that choice is a self-defining act that increases commitment to the chosen course of action. Research in this chapter explores a boundary condition of this well-established effect. Building on cognitive dissonance theory and compensation mechanisms, we propose that the mere prospect of an opinion voicing opportunity is enough to decrease commitment to choice, because opinion can substitute for choice in expressing the self. We base this prediction on the assumption that opinion and choice are functionally equivalent. Results from two experiments using the free-choice paradigm confirm that anticipatory opinion voicing reduces post-choice dissonance as reflected in the spread of the alternatives. Theoretical and practical implications of the potential of opinion expression to psychologically disengage choice from the self are discussed.
3.1 INTRODUCTION

A large body of literature shows that making a choice is an act of meaning that serves to “define, express, and reify the distinct individual” (Markus & Schwartz, 2010, p. 345). One typical demonstration of the self-defining power of choice is the well-documented tendency to commit to a certain course of action after choosing (Brehm, 1956; Festinger, 1957; Steele, Spencer & Lynch, 1993). In this paper we identify a boundary condition of this effect. We suggest that the anticipation of opportunities to voice opinions might license individuals to psychologically disengage from their choices, because opinion can satisfy the same underlying self-expression need also served by choice. Despite a remarkable growth of opportunities to express opinions in recent years (e.g., Richardson & Stanyer, 2011), surprisingly little is known about how this development can affect choice. To illustrate, reality TV shows for everything from dancing to cooking ask viewers to vote for their favorite contestants, news websites encourage readers to comment the news, Twitter and Facebook offer the possibility to publicize every single thought at real time, YouTube videos can be rated with thumbs up or thumbs down, and so on. The focus of this research is to establish a conceptual link between this opinion voicing proliferation and the subjective relevance of choice for the self. We argue that as individuals find themselves all the more often in contexts granting them voice, this abundance of opinion voicing cues might run at the expense of commitment to choice, because opinion can substitute for choice as an alternative means of self-expression.

Extending research on the identity saturation effect (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011), which postulates that “a self-expressive act results in a lower subsequent need for self-expression” (p. 78), we hypothesize that the mere thought of opinion voicing, activated by situational cues rendering prospective opinion voicing opportunities salient, is sufficient to fulfill self-expression needs and hence reduce commitment to choice. We test this hypothesis in the frame of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) using the free-choice paradigm (Brehm, 1956; Steele et al., 1993). Over fifty years of research on this paradigm have consistently demonstrated that making a choice increases commitment to the chosen option, so that post-choice
attitudes (preferences) are in line with past behaviors (choices). However, research on the motivational basis of dissonance phenomena has also highlighted the resilience of the self-system in fulfilling needs through different means (e.g., Steele, 1988; Tesser, 2000). If opinions represent such an alternative way to express the self, then anticipatory opinion voicing should mitigate post-choice dissonance by means of compensatory mechanisms. In the remaining part of the introduction, we will first review evidence from the literature supporting the self-expressive function of both opinion and choice, before we outline basic assumptions from which our predictions derive.

### 3.1.1 Choice as self-expression

One of the most fundamental findings in psychology is that choices are constitutive of identities. Choice serves a self-expressive function which extends beyond simply matching personal preferences with available alternatives. Classic psychological theories like cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), reactance (Brehm, 1966), or self-perception (Bem, 1967) concur that choice has such a pervasive psychological impact on the self that it typically influences evaluations of one’s own preferences in the direction of subjectively bolstering the perception of a chosen course of action. Accordingly, extensive research in consumer behavior elucidates how the choice of consumption symbols such as products and brands can enact consumer identities (e.g., Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Kokkoris, Kühnen, & Yan, in press; Levav & Zhu, 2009; Lisjak, Lee, & Gardner, in press; Morrison & Johnson, 2011; Sirgy, 1982). The act of choosing connects strongly the mental representation of the chosen object to the self (Strack, Werth, & Deutsch, 2006), transfers implicit self-evaluations to the chosen object (Gawronski, Bodenhausen, & Becker, 2007), and gives rise to “a form of emotional excitation that is distinct from simple control” and relates to self-expression (Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002, p. 656). Personal identification with choice is further strengthened when choice is made in public, because choice is assumed to expose the self to others (Baumeister &
Moreover, people can go to great lengths to justify their choices and hence assert themselves, such as distort their memories of past choices by attributing more positive features to the chosen options (Mather, Shafir, & Johnson, 2000), or confabulate reasons why they choose what they choose, even if the option they were asked to justify is not in reality their choice, but had been replaced with the option they rejected through a trick (Hall, Johansson, Tärning, Sikström, & Deutgen, 2010; Johansson, Hall, Sikström, & Olsson, 2005). In sum, research from various theoretical perspectives supports that making a choice is making a statement about who we are.

### 3.1.2 Opinion as an alternative means of self-expression

However, choice is just one means to fulfil self-expression needs. Opinion can be another. Indeed, considerable literature on the functional approach to attitudes has long acknowledged that forming and expressing opinions serves a self-expressive function (for a review, see Watt, Maio, Haddock, & Johnson, 2008). Among other functions, attitudes provide a vehicle for expressing one’s self and broadcasting one’s personal values or individual attributes to others (Herek, 1987; Katz, 1960; Prentice, 1987; Shavitt, 1990; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). For example, individuals might express themselves by holding positive attitudes toward brands that match their personality traits (Aaker, 1999), affirm a positive view of the self by expressing personally important values (Steele & Liu, 1983), or avoid expressing their opinion to protect themselves from social isolation, if they perceive their opinions as not being shared by many people (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Moreover, attitudes serving value-expressive functions seem to be stronger predictors of behavior than attitudes that do not serve the function of value expression (Gregory, Munch, & Peterson, 2002; Maio & Olson, 1994). Furthermore, the psychological significance of self-expression through opinion voicing lays the foundation for cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Research using the induced-compliance paradigm has shown that people tend to internalize an opinion they have expressed, even if it is not
consistent with their own (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Using this paradigm, Scheier and Carver (1980) showed that individuals reported attitudes more consistent with their counterattitudinal behavior in the presence of self-presentation concerns (e.g., being recorded by a camera). Along that line, research indicates that public expression of attitudes enforces individuals’ commitment to them (Kiesler, Roth, & Pallak, 1974), whereas verbal expression leads to agreement even with incidental attitudes (Higgins & Rholes, 1978). Using opinions as a means to express the self also has broad implications on survey research and response biases. A recent study revealed that respondents in surveys might use questions for self-expressive purposes, even if a question does not explicitly ask for the specific opinion they want to convey (Gal & Rucker, 2011). All in all, prior research suggests that opinions are self-defining because they are seen as explicit manifestations of identity, externalizing inner aspects of the self.

### 3.1.3 Anticipatory opinion voicing as a substitute for choice

The literature we reviewed indicates that opinion and choice represent two important routes to self-expression. In the present article we suggest that commitment to choice can be undermined by opportunities to voice an opinion. Our proposition holds that opinion voicing, as one means that can satisfy the need to self-express, can lead to diminished motivation to use choice as another means of self-expression. This proposition builds on compensation literature (Chernev & Hamilton, 2008; Kruglanski, Piero, & Sheveland, 2011; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 2000), which predicates a relative flexibility in the resources people can use to restore motivational deficits. A plethora of studies investigating different phenomena in different domains demonstrate that, consistent with the property of equifinality of goals (Heider, 1958), distinct and seemingly unrelated means can successfully service the same goal, such as belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), meaning (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), control (Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2011), order (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008), self-esteem (Tesser, Crepaz, Collins, Cornell, & Beach, 2000), self-expression
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This compensatory reasoning has two important implications for our theorizing. First, we assume that opinion and choice can interchangeably satisfy the same self-expressive motivation, because they are functionally equivalent, and “if two behaviors serve the same goal, then these behaviors should be substitutable for one another” (Tesser, 2000, p. 292). Second, we assume that once the self-expressive motivation is satisfied through any means available, it does not drive behavior any longer (Chernev et al., 2011), just as “beyond the point of satisfaction or comfort, increments in self-esteem are no longer of great value” (Tesser et al., 2000, p. 1477). To summarize, because a) opinion and choice are substitutable means of self-expression, and b) the need for self-expression is finite and can be satiated, we propose that using opinions to express the self should be enough and any further self-expressive investment in choice should be psychologically redundant.

Although derived from different theoretical frameworks, there are already some studies available that can be interpreted as supportive evidence for the assumption that the availability of any alternatives to express the self might undermine the self-expressiveness of choice. From a self-affirmation theoretical standpoint, research on cognitive dissonance has shown that when people have the opportunity to affirm an unrelated but valued aspect of the self before making a choice, such as stating personally important values (e.g., Steele & Liu, 1983) or enhancing self-esteem via bogus personality feedback (e.g., Steele et al., 1993), they manage to affirm themselves and hence experience less post-choice dissonance. Another study tapping self-expression more explicitly showed that asking participants to recall and list choices they had made before coming to the lab reduced variety-seeking tendency in subsequent choices, because it successfully satisfied their self-expression need (Kim & Drolet, 2003, Study 3). Similarly, informing respondents in a survey that they will have the opportunity to express their personal opinions in open-ended questions at a later stage of the survey prevented them from committing the response substitution bias, that is, using unrelated questions in order to express themselves (Gal & Rucker, 2011). And most notably, a
recent study directly testing the effect of alternative self-expression means on brand preferences supports that expressing preferences even in unrelated domains, such as listing favourite books and television shows, or engaging in self-expressive activities, such as customizing the design of a T-shirt, reduces preference for self-expressive brands in the immediate future (Chernev et al., 2011).

Yet, unlike previous research, we propose that the self-expressiveness of choice can be undermined even if the opportunity to voice an opinion is not actualized prior to choice-making, but made salient as a future prospect. Prior research has focused on how engagement in self-expressive acts or recall of past self-expressive acts that are already part of one’s self-concept can give rise to satiation effects. Our research extends this research stream by testing the idea that the mere prospect of expressing an opinion at a later time suffices to temporarily satiate the need for self-expression and subsequently disengage individuals from their choices. In other words, we propose that the expectation of opinion voicing invokes a symbolic satiation effect, which allows individuals by simply envisioning opinion voicing as a viable future prospect to satisfy self-expression and thereby minimize all subsequent efforts to express the self through choice.

In concert with prior research on the motivating power of conscious thoughts (for a recent review see Baumeister, Masicampo, & Vohs, 2011), we posit that the expectation of opinion voicing can shift self-expressive investment away from choice and channel it towards prospective opinion voicing, just as the actual practice of opinion voicing would do. Research maintains that the pursuit of a desired goal can be fulfilled not only following actual attainment of that goal, but even following mental simulation and prefactual experience of the future positive outcomes related with that goal through fantasy (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002). Similarly, a recent study suggests that mere imagination of consumption can make people desire a food less, just like actual consumption of that food would do (Morewedge, Huh, & Vosgerau, 2010). By asking participants to repeatedly imagine eating foods such as cheddar cheese or M&M’s, Morewedge and his colleagues found that mental imagination alone was enough to reduce consumption of the respective food. In a similar vein, Wilcox, Vallen, Block, and Fitzsimons (2009) showed that
the goal of healthy eating can be vicariously fulfilled simply by considering a healthy option that is present in a choice set, suggesting that “goal fulfillment can occur by merely having the opportunity to behave in line with a goal” (p. 381). In keeping with the proposition that “the difference between actual experience and mental representations of experience may be smaller than previously assumed” (Morewedge et al., 2010, p. 1533), we suggest that simply invoking the expectation of opinion voicing might be equivalent to the actual practice of opinion voicing and hence enough to reach the required self-expression threshold. To summarize, we are putting forward the following proposition: We argue that the mere thought of opinion voicing, through the situational activation of prospective opinion voicing opportunities, is enough to satiate the need for self-expression resulting in reduced commitment to choice.

3.2 STUDY 1

To investigate this prediction experimentally we created a variation of the classic free-choice paradigm (Brehm, 1956, Steele et al., 1993) adding an opinion voicing condition. In the standard choice condition, participants rank ordered a list of movies, then chose which movie they would like to watch between two rather equivalent options taken from the middle of their list, and finally rank ordered all options once more. The opinion voicing condition differed only in that before choosing a movie, participants were told that they would have the opportunity to write a review about the movie of their choice after watching it. The key measurement is the change in evaluations of the alternatives before and after choosing, that is, the spread of the alternatives. According to cognitive dissonance theory, after making a choice between two equally attractive alternatives, people experience psychological discomfort because they become aware of a trade-off between possible merits of the option they rejected and possible flaws of the option they chose (Festinger, 1957). To reduce this tension, people tend to rationalize their choice by spreading their alternatives: They increase their liking for the chosen option and decrease their liking for the rejected option compared to their evaluations.
of the same options before making a choice (Brehm, 1956; Steele et al., 1993). By using this spreading-of-alternatives measure, we aimed at capturing how strongly people identify with and commit to their choices. Higher spread represents a stronger motivation to reduce dissonance by justifying choice, and hence greater self-expressive investment in choice. If the prospect of writing a review satisfies self-expression needs so that further investment in choice is not required, this should lead to smaller spread of the alternatives. Therefore, we predicted that individuals in the opinion voicing condition (compared to the standard choice condition) would display a reduced spread of the alternatives effect (hypothesis 1). Further, if picturing a future opinion voicing opportunity sufficiently covers the need for self-expression, then this should also be reflected in increased motivation to express this opinion to others after making the choice. Refraining from investing in choice in the present because of an expectation to express an opinion in the future should translate in stronger desire for the upcoming opinion voicing opportunity. Therefore, we predict that individuals in the opinion voicing condition will report higher intention to share their opinions than individuals in the standard choice condition (hypothesis 2).

3.2.1 Method

3.2.1.1 Participants

Forty four university students (24 females, \(M_{\text{age}} = 21.42, SD = 2.71\)) participated in a lab study in exchange for a free ticket to the movies.

3.2.1.2 Procedure

The experimental procedure was closely modeled after Steele et al. (1993, Study 1). Participants were scheduled to come to the lab individually. They were directed to individual cubicles and randomly assigned to either the standard choice or the opinion voicing condition. As a cover story, the study was presented as a marketing research ostensibly sponsored by a local movies
theater with the aim to better understand people’s movie preferences and improve repertoire selection. Participants knew in advance that they would receive a free ticket to the movies as compensation for their participation, so that choice was as realistic and engaging as possible. At first, participants were presented with 20 movies currently playing at a local theater. Each movie was presented on a separate sheet, half the size of an A4 paper, including a small colored picture of the poster, the title, the director, the leading actors and actresses, genre, brief description of plot, tagline, country, and runtime. We consulted both the local movie theater website (http://www.cinemaxx.de) and the Internet Movie Database website (http://www.imdb.com), so as to closely simulate the kind of information that people usually retrieve when they look for movies. The order in which movies were presented was created once with a random generator, and was thereafter the same for all participants in both conditions. The experimenter would then ask participants to sort out any movies they might have already watched, and choose out of the remaining ones the 10 movies they would most like to watch. Then, they were asked to rank their top 10 in the order of their preference, by putting them one after the other from the most to the least liked. Once participants finished ranking, the experimenter took all the movies back and handed in an alleged marketing questionnaire about movies. The experimenter then went to the adjacent room to write down the titles of the top 10 movies in the order ranked by participants and prepare the next part of the study. After a few minutes, she returned to the testing room only with their 5th- and 6th-ranked movies. She explained that these were the only movies from their top 10 that were available and that our sponsor could offer at the moment. She apologized for that and asked participants to make a choice between the two movies. After participants made their choice, they were given a coupon to keep, ostensibly to be used at the tickets counter, and were asked to write down on it their name, the title of the movie they chose, and the date.

At this point, before participants made a choice, our experimental design varied from the classical free-choice procedure and the manipulation of opinion voicing was introduced. Prior to making a choice, participants in the opinion voicing condition were told that they would be asked to write their opinion about the movie of their choice after they finally go to the theater and
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watch it. In the standard choice condition no such addition was made; participants were only asked to choose which movie they would like to watch. In order to make the manipulation of opinion voicing more tangible, a differentiation between conditions was also introduced on the above mentioned coupon. In the opinion voicing condition the coupon additionally included a standardized form for the viewer’s feedback. A variety of review formats were offered, as frequently found on the Internet. Note that this form was never filled out. Its aim was simply to enhance the salience of the opinion voicing manipulation and make participants believe that they would really have the opportunity to express their opinion after having watched the movie. Then, participants were left alone to fill out some demographics and filler questionnaires for 10 minutes, because several minutes are required for people to justify their choice (Walster & Festinger, 1962). Moreover, to ensure that participants in the opinion voicing condition remembered that they would have the opportunity to express their opinion later on, they were once more reminded of the opinion voicing manipulation by being asked to rate how helpful they considered reviews in each one of several formats (stars, scores, thumbs up/down, etc.). After 10 minutes had passed, the experimenter returned to the testing room with a list of all 20 movies, and asked participants to rank them once again from 1 to 10 by inserting a number before each movie title. The experimenter had marked with an asterisk on the list their top 10 movies from the first rank. Participants were explicitly told that this was not a memory test, so they should not try to remember and reproduce their previous rankings. Instead, they were encouraged to evaluate the movies as they felt that very moment. The difference between the first and the second ranking in the chosen and the rejected movie constituted our main dependent variable.

Finally, participants filled out some irrelevant questionnaires, were probed for suspicion, and debriefed. All participants received a voucher for a local movies theater to watch any movie they wanted, independent of their previous choice. Moreover, it was made clear to participants in the opinion voicing condition that they were not required to write any review after watching the movie, because this was just part of the manipulation aiming at inducing the expectation of opinion voicing. To test whether there was any
effect of the material on the dependent variable the experiment was conducted with three different sets of movies. For this reason, we conducted the experiment in three separate phases to allow enough time for movies playing in theatres to change. Moreover, after the first data collection round, one additional question was asked only in the subsequent two rounds. Right after the second ranking the intention to share opinions was assessed by a single item: “How much would you like to share your opinion about this movie, after you watch it, with others?” (1 = not at all to 7 = very much).

3.2.2 Results

The main dependent variable was the spread of the alternatives (SA), which is the degree to which participants justified their choice by increasing liking for the chosen movie and decreasing liking for the rejected movie. The SA was estimated as the change between the first and the second ranking for the two movies participants had to choose from. Thus, to obtain a single SA measure we added the change in ranking for the chosen movie plus the change in ranking for the rejected movie. We submitted the SA to a t-test with condition as the independent variable. As predicted by our first hypothesis, participants in the opinion voicing condition ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 1.61$) spread their alternatives significantly less than participants in the standard choice.

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3 The SA score was calculated based on the following formula: $SA = (1^{st} \text{Ranking Chosen} - 2^{nd} \text{Ranking Chosen}) + (2^{nd} \text{Ranking Rejected} - 1^{st} \text{Ranking Rejected})$. We first subtracted the second ranking of the chosen option from the first ranking of the chosen option to get a SA score for the chosen option. We then subtracted the first ranking of the rejected option from the second ranking of the rejected option to get a SA score for the rejected option. Finally, we added the two scores to get a total SA score expressing upward movement of the chosen option and downward movement of the rejected option. For example, if a participant ranked the chosen movie fifth in the first ranking and fourth in the second ranking, and at the same time ranked the rejected movie sixth in the first ranking and seventh in the second ranking, this participant would get a total SA score of two, $(5-4) + (7-6) = 2$. Note that SA scores can also get negative values, if participants rank their rejected options in the second ranking more favorably than in the first ranking and/or accordingly, if participants rank their chosen options in the second ranking less favorably than in the first ranking.
condition \((M = 2.28, SD = 1.99)\), \(t(42) = 3.04, p = .002\) (1-tailed), \(d = 0.94\). A Condition x Material ANOVA showed neither a main effect of the three choice sets on the SA, \(F < 1\), nor a two-way interaction, \(F(2, 38) = 1.49, p > .2\). Further supporting our first hypothesis, \(t\) tests against zero showed that the SA differed significantly from zero in the standard choice condition, \(t(24) = 5.73, p < .001, d = 2.34\), but not in the opinion voicing condition, \(t(18) = 1.57, p = .14\). Next, we examined whether the prospect of opinion voicing apart from reducing dissonance also enhances the intention to share opinions (hypothesis 2). To do so, we submitted answers to the question “How much would you like to share your opinion about this movie, after you watched it, with others” to a \(t\)-test with condition as the independent variable. Consistent with our second hypothesis, participants in the opinion voicing condition \((M = 5.22, SD = 1.20)\) were more likely to express an interest in sharing their opinion about the movie compared with participants in the standard condition \((M = 3.27, SD = 1.27)\), \(t(18) = -3.49, p = .002\) (1-tailed), \(d = 1.65\).

### 3.2.3 Discussion

Our findings lend empirical support to the proposition that commitment to choice is contingent upon the salience of opinion voicing opportunities. Using a variation of the classic free-choice paradigm, we showed that rendering the prospect of opinion voicing salient prior to choosing reduces post-choice dissonance, as measured by the spreading-of-alternatives effect, while at the same time increases the intention to share opinions with others. Although choice typically leads to post-choice rationalization of the chosen option in the absence of other means of self-expression, this effect is weakened when people have in mind before choosing that they will also have the opportunity to express their opinion about their choice.

However, before actually drawing this conclusion, we need to rule out one alternative explanation. It is conceivable that in the opinion voicing condition participants experience less post-choice dissonance not because of having satisfied their self-expression need through alternative means, but
rather because of construing choice as less binding. Cognitive dissonance theory postulates (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Festinger, 1957) and prior research confirms (e.g., Frey, 1981; Frey, Kumpf, Irle, & Gniech, 1984) that irreversible choices induce more dissonance than reversible ones. If choice can be reversed, it is not sufficiently committing to mobilize choice justification. Recent research also shows that individuals who are less inclined to commit to their choices experience less post-choice dissonance (Sparks, Ehrlinger, & Eibach, 2012). In our study, if participants in the opinion condition perceived the instruction to write a review as a chance to revisit their choice in the future in a non-self-threatening way, this might have relieved them from the psychological necessity to irreversibly commit to their choice. As such, in the opinion condition a wrong choice could have rather easily been afforded without aversive consequences on the self, because of a presumably low-stake representation of choice. This possibility is fundamentally different from the motivational account we propose. However, this alternative account, according to which participants in the opinion condition construed their choice as reversible, presupposes that participants indeed get the prospect to later on voice their opinion on that particular object they have chosen. Not so, by contrast, our motivational account: We argue that the satiated need for self-expression is the crucial factor through which the prospect of opinion voicing reduces dissonance. Therefore, according to our theorizing, but in contrast to the described alternative interpretation, we predict the same dissonance reduction effect, even if participants get the prospect of opinion voicing on another issue, different from their object of choice. This hypothesis was tested in Study 2.

3.3 STUDY 2

In Study 2 we manipulated opinion and choice in different domains: Participants chose a chocolate bar having in mind that they would also review a movie at a later stage. Moreover, to ensure that choice was indeed established as an irreversible act (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Festinger, 1957), we introduced the manipulation of opinion voicing right after choice was made.
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Past research contends that self-expression satiation can occur across domains (Chernev et al., 2011), whereas substitution across domains can also resolve dissonance, and in some cases even more effectively than substitution within the same domain (Tesser, 2000). Based on our symbolic satiation theorizing that the mere prospect of opinion voicing can adequately meet self-expression needs, we hypothesize that individuals should have reduced motivation to justify their choice (chocolate), even if the prospective opinion voicing opportunity rests in a completely unrelated domain (movies). Formally, we predict that participants will spread their alternatives less in the opinion condition than in the standard condition (hypothesis 3).

However, it could be argued that this manipulation of anticipating another questionnaire at a later point in time might reduce dissonance not because it satiates self-expression, but rather because it simply distracts participants from rationalizing their choice. Prior research has shown that distraction is a factor that can reduce dissonance (Crano & Messe, 1970; Steele & Liu, 1983; Zanna & Aziza, 1976). To demonstrate that our results are attributable to the specific self-expressive nature of our manipulation and not to simple distraction, we complemented our design with a control condition identical to the opinion condition, but of non-self-expressive content. Whereas participants in the opinion condition anticipated to write a movie review later on (self-expressive task), participants in the control condition anticipated to solve a word search puzzle (non-self-expressive task). If dissonance is indeed reduced due to the hypothesized self-expressiveness of the movie review task, then there should be a significant difference between the opinion condition and the control condition (for a similar manipulation, see also Burris, Harmon-Jones & Tarpley, 1997). Formally, we predicted that participants will spread their alternatives less in the opinion condition than in the control condition (hypothesis 4).

3.3.1 Method

3.3.1.1 Participants
Sixty university students (41 females, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.82$, $SD = 2.16$) took part in a larger lab study in exchange for 5 euros.

### 3.3.1.2 Procedure

The procedure was the same as in Study 1 with the following three differences. First, regarding the choice domain, participants in all conditions had to choose among chocolate bars. Second, regarding the manipulation of opinion voicing, right after choosing a chocolate bar participants in the opinion condition were led to believe that they would be given the opportunity to express their opinion about a movie at a later stage of the experiment. Third, a control condition closely modeled after the opinion condition but without self-expressive content was introduced. In all three conditions, participants were taken individually to the testing rooms. The cover story was that we were conducting a consumer research about individual preferences in several domains, such as chocolate. Participants were presented with 15 different Ritter Sport chocolate flavors and had to select the 10 they liked most. Then, they were asked to rank order their top 10 from the most to the least liked. After the ranking, participants were left alone to fill out an alleged consumer behavior questionnaire. The experimenter returned to the room after a while holding only two chocolate bars and told them they could get one as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. The two chocolate flavors the experimenter offered were essentially participants’ 5th- and 6th-ranked choices. Participants had to make a choice between the two and would then immediately get the one they chose as a gift. At this point, the manipulation of prospective opinion voicing opportunity was introduced. In the standard condition, participants continued with a filler task for around 10 minutes. In the opinion voicing condition, participants were told that we were also interested in preferences in other domains and that we would now like them to write a review about any movie they wanted. The same movie review form as in Study 1 was used. However, just as participants had finished reading the instructions and were about to start writing the review, the experimenter interrupted them pretending that she made a mistake and
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...gave them this form in the wrong order. The experimenter would then apologize and ask them to skip this task and do it later, when “correctly” instructed to do so. Next, the experimenter would put the movie review form aside, somewhere that could still be seen by the participants, and ask them to proceed with the same filler task as participants in the standard condition. Thus, the movie review task was postponed for a later stage of the experiment due to the experimenter’s ostensible carelessness. By means of this manipulation, we wanted to induce in our participants a strong anticipation of opinion expression as a prospective opportunity in a domain completely unrelated to the choice domain. To ensure that this manipulation did not act as a distraction capable of reducing dissonance on its own right, a control condition identical to the opinion condition but without self-expressive content was added. Specifically, participants in this condition were given an animal word search puzzle and were asked to identify the names of 10 animals in it. Exactly like in the opinion condition, the experimenter interrupted participants before they started solving the puzzle and told them that they would continue with it at a later stage because that was not in the correct order. Therefore, the opinion condition and the control condition were comparable in their potential to distract participants, but differed only in the self-expressiveness of the required task. Ten minutes later, the experimenter returned to the room with a list of all 15 chocolate flavors. With the excuse that we were also interested in how consumers feel about the options after they have left the store, the experimenter asked participants in both conditions to rank order once more their top 10 choices from the most to the least liked. The difference between the two rankings for the chosen and the rejected chocolate bar was our dependent variable. Before the end of the experiment, participants in the standard and the opinion condition were given the movie review form and were asked to write a short review about a movie they wanted to comment on, whereas participants in the control condition were given the animal word search puzzle. Finally, participants were probed for suspicion and led to another room to continue with a separate study. All participants were debriefed via email after the final completion of the study.
3.3.2 Results

The dependent variable (SA) was calculated as in Study 1. We submitted the SA to an ANOVA with condition as the independent variable. Results showed a significant effect of condition on the SA, $F(2, 59) = 3.36, p = .042, \eta^2_p = .11$ (Figure 3.1). Planned contrasts further showed that, as predicted by hypotheses 3 and 4, participants in the opinion condition ($M = -0.25, SD = 2.22$) spread the alternatives significantly less than participants in either the standard condition ($M = 1.39, SD = 2.83$) or the control condition ($M = 1.59, SD = 2.38$), $t(57) = 2.56, p = .013, d = 0.68$. Additionally, $t$-tests against zero showed that the SA differed significantly from zero for participants in the standard condition, $t(17) = 2.08, p = .054, d = 1.01$, and for participants in the control condition, $t(21) = 3.13, p = .005, d = 1.36$, but not for participants in the opinion condition, $t(19) = -0.50, p > .6, d = 0.23$.

![Spread of alternatives](image)

*Figure 3.1.* Spread of the alternatives as a function of condition in Study 2. Error bars represent standard errors of the means.
3.3.3 Discussion

Using the same free-choice paradigm, Study 2 replicates the findings of Study 1 and confirms that the prospect of opinion voicing can reduce post-choice dissonance. Critically, by manipulating opinion and choice in separate domains, Study 2 extends the findings of Study 1 in a very important way: It shows that the need to justify choice can be reduced even when people expect to express their opinion about something other than their choice. Specifically, we found that anticipating opinion expression in the form of writing a movie review reduced participants’ tendency to rationalize their choice of a chocolate bar. What is more, keeping opinion and choice domains apart and asking participants to make a choice before inducing the anticipation of an opinion voicing opportunity, we can safely rule out a possible alternative explanation, which suggests that choice might have been perceived as reversible and not enough self-committing to begin with. In addition, with the inclusion of a control condition similar to the opinion condition but without self-expressive content, we can also rule out distraction as another possible explanation of the obtained results. After dealing with these possible confounds, the observed dissonance reduction in the opinion condition is more likely to be attributed to the net effect of self-expression satiation via the anticipated opinion voicing opportunity. In short, Study 2 provides a more stringent test to our hypothesis that the prospect of opinion voicing suffices to undermine commitment to choice. Furthermore, findings of Study 2 support our argument that the underlying mechanism of dissonance reduction under opinion voicing salience is grounded on how efficiently a global sense of self-expression has been achieved irrespective of the means utilized.

3.4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Together the two reported studies support our general theorizing (see Table 1 for a summary of the critical results). We have argued that choices often coexist with opinions and together the two belong to an individuals’ self-
expression repertoire. Since either of them can independently express the self, they can substitute for one another in their self-expressive function. Results from two experiments using a variation of the classic free-choice paradigm support our prediction that the mere thought of opinion voicing, through situational cues rendering the prospect of opinion voicing salient, is sufficient to satiate the need for self-expression and reduce commitment to choice as reflected in post-choice dissonance reduction.

Table 3.1
Mean (SD) Spread of the Alternatives as a Function of the Standard Choice Condition and the Opinion Voicing Condition in Study 1 and Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard choice condition</th>
<th>Opinion voicing condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1</td>
<td>2.28 (1.99)</td>
<td>0.58 (1.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2</td>
<td>1.39 (2.83)</td>
<td>-0.25 (2.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.1 Theoretical contribution

This research advances literature on self and choice in at least three ways. First, by shedding more light on boundary conditions that decrease the relevance of choice for the self, our research adds to a growing body of literature that challenges the assumption that choice is unconditionally meaningful, important or beneficial for the individual (e.g., Markus & Schwartz, 2010). In particular, our studies extend research on identity saturation (Chernev et al., 2011) by examining the interplay between two important self-expression means, opinion and choice, and its consequences on commitment to choice. Most importantly, our account is informed by classic social psychological theories and demonstrates how well-established phenomena like cognitive dissonance can be moderated by identity saturation, even at a symbolic level. We find that when individuals anticipate opinion voicing, they tend to enact their identities less through choice, because
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opinion can substitute for choice in expressing the self. That is, choice tends to be dissociated from the self when opportunities for opinion expression are made salient. As such opportunities to express the self are ever-widening (e.g., Richardson & Stanyer, 2011), it is conceivable that the signal value of choice should not be taken for granted; choice might become increasingly contingent on contextual factors associated with salient opinion voicing cues in the choice-making environment. Therefore, our study contextualizes the psychological importance of choice for the self and suggests that studying choice in relation to other self-expression means can more accurately capture the meaning of choice in different everyday occasions.

Second, our research furnishes novel ways in which self-expressive motivation can be satiated. Going beyond previous research, which shows that actual engagement in self-expression practices can undermine subsequent self-expressive offerings (Chernev et al., 2011; Gal & Rucker, 2011; Kim & Drolet, 2003), we propose that the mere prospect of opinion voicing is enough to temporarily satiate the need for self-expression and lead to the same consequences as actual self-expression. Our results indicate that manipulating opinion voicing as a prospective opportunity without any actual engagement in opinion voicing activities before choosing can still satisfy the need for self-expression. This finding is in agreement with previous work on the effects of imagination on behavior (e.g., Morewedge et al., 2010; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002) and on vicarious goal fulfillment (Wilcox et al., 2009), and further points to a fruitful direction that future research on the self-concept could exploit, by investigating how and to what extent mental representations of motivational resources might be as effective as relevant actual experiences in satiating motivational drives. Moreover, if situational cues reminding individuals of potential self-expressive opportunities are enough to symbolically satiate self-expression and disengage from commitment to choice, as our study shows, then consequences for consumer behavior should be considered, given the prevalence of such cues in the contemporary marketplace.

Third, our study contributes to literature on cognitive dissonance by advocating a self-concept view of the processes underlying dissonance phenomena. In line with several researchers conceptualizing the self as a
resilient system that uses a common resource of self-integrity (Steele, 1988) or self-esteem (Tesser, 2000) maintenance mechanisms, we claim that seemingly disparate strategies can serve the common overarching goal of restoring self-threats and maintaining a positive self-regard. From this perspective, it is the end (self-expression) that matters and not the specific means (opinion or choice) employed to reach this end. Thus, self-expression through opinion voicing can substitute for dissonance reduction through post-choice justification. In our view, the reason why a vast amount of previous studies based on the free-choice paradigm ascribe paramount psychological importance to choice is because individuals in the laboratory are typically given only this means to resolve the dissonance induced by the experimental task. Choice is a means to express the self, but not the only one. If alternative self-expression avenues, such as opinion voicing, are made available even symbolically, the psychological prominence of choice might be attenuated.

3.4.2 Practical implications

In Western societies, individuals are assumed to be defined by their choices (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim & Sherman, 2007). This cultural assumption implies that choice represents at the same time an opportunity for self-expression and a source of anxiety for the self, because wrong choices might create wrong impressions and have negative consequences. However, as our research indicates, opinion voicing opportunities can reduce commitment to choice. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the proliferation of opportunities to express opinions in recent years might alleviate the psychological costs of choosing. Especially as individuals both in online and offline environments are constantly encouraged to comment, judge, rate, evaluate, vote, discuss, debate, share, these practices might relieve from the responsibility to choose what best reflects the self and leave identity intact from choice-related self-presentation concerns. Considering that “people today, in growing numbers, are ‘testing the waters’ in different modes of living and consuming, not willing to be stuck in a single one” (Firat, 2005, p. 217), channelling self-expressive investments in the direction of opinion voicing
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might be an effective way to circumvent commitment to choice. We propose that situational cues encouraging people to express their opinions, such as Facebook Like application, opportunities to post a comment or give feedback, etc., might weaken self-choice associations. One domain where this idea could be practically applied is marketing. We suggest that marketing strategies giving consumers a say might additionally be effective in resolving post-choice dissonance and buffering against self-threats induced by choice. In other words, symbolic satiation of self-expression by means of opinion voicing might be capable of rendering choice asymbolic and thus less costly for the self. This might allow consumers to be less concerned about what their choices convey about themselves, and feel free to resolve dilemmas of choosing “this or that” with a more relaxed “this and that” attitude (see also Firat, 2005).

3.4.3 Limitations and further research

We discuss four ways in which our findings might be limited, suggesting at the same time respective avenues for future research. For one, it could be argued that we operationalized choice in domains (consumer choices) that do not implicate the self as deeply as other domains might do (e.g., financial, political, relationships, or career choices). Is it possible that the prospect of opinion voicing suffices to undermine commitment to choice in more consequential domains, too? Further research should address whether the relative significance of the choice domain for the individual mitigates the proposed symbolic satiation effect. Second, in this research we manipulated opinion voicing by explicitly telling participants that they would have the opportunity to express an opinion later. However, in most real-life situations, opinion voicing opportunities are not flagged in such an overt way, but are rather implied more subtly. Further research could investigate whether the same symbolic satiation effect occurs when participants are unobtrusively reminded of the mere existence of opinion alternatives, such as being primed with contemporary emblems of opinion voicing like logos of Facebook or Twitter. If subliminal manipulations of this kind could replicate this effect, this would mean that the profusion of opinion voicing opportunities might
yield even greater impact on choice than suggested in this paper. Third, our study focused only on one main dependent variable, the spread of the alternatives. Although this is perhaps the most suitable behavioral measure of the way people relate to their choices, future research could feature other measures to test whether the prospect of opinion voicing influences also other aspects of choosing. For example, we predict that by weakening the self-choice link, the availability of opinion voicing might make people choose options that are not characteristic of themselves. That is, we propose that except for affecting the relevance of choice for the self, opinion voicing might also affect the content of choices. Finally, in this paper we examined how opinion can substitute for choice. Further research could test the opposite direction of our substitutability proposition: Opportunities to express the self through choices might undermine the significance of opinions for the self. Along that line, we assume that (actual or symbolic) opportunities to express the self through choices might reduce the tendency to align attitudes with counterattitudinal behaviors in the frame of the induced compliance paradigm.
Is choice a matter of opinion?

The effect of opinionation on preference-choice consistency
The proliferation of opportunities to express opinions has given rise to an opinion culture. However, the potential impact of this development on the way people make choices has not been yet addressed. Research in this chapter examines the effect of having an opinion about a variety of issues (opinionation) on preference-choice consistency. We propose that when individuals construe opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental), they choose less preferred options in choice domains justifying inconsistency. In three experiments, we manipulate experimentally the subjective construal of opinionation (beneficial, detrimental) and the choice domain (consumer choices, value choices) and find that a positive construal of opinionation reduces consistency in consumer choices, but not in value choices. We conclude that if individuals cherish opinionation, their choices are less likely to be driven by their preferences in domains where inconsistency can be psychologically afforded. Directions for future research, as well as theoretical and practical implications are discussed.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, opportunities to express opinions have reached an unprecedented high. Take as an example the explosion of technological advancements facilitating real-time communication and social interaction via innumerable opinion expression avenues (social media, message boards, blogs, forums, etc.). This increase in opportunities to express opinions coincides with an increase in the subjective desire to actually express opinions about a great variety of issues (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004; Stanyer, 2005). Yet, surprisingly little is known about the psychological consequences of this development. In this paper, we suggest that opinionation, defined as the propensity to express opinions on a variety of issues, can affect the way people make choices. Critically, it is the construal of opinionation that we propose to affect choices. We contend that expressing opinions about many issues might be construed as either beneficial or detrimental. Our basic proposition is that when opinionation is construed as beneficial, it reduces preference-choice consistency. Building on research on the differential choice outcomes of inclusion and exclusion screening strategies (Chernev, 2009; Huber, Neale, & Northcraft, 1987; Levin, Jasper, & Forbes, 1998; Meloy & Russo, 2004; Park, Jun, & MacInnis, 2000; Yaniv & Schul, 1997; Yaniv, Schul, Raphaelli-Hirsch, & Maoz, 2002), we assume that construing opinionation as beneficial directs attention to the advantages of all available options, therefore increasing the attractiveness of less preferred options (Shafir, 1993) and leading to inconsistent choices (Irwin & Naylor, 2009; Kogut, 2011; Laran & Wilcox, 2011). However, we expect that construing opinionation as beneficial should reduce consistency only in choice domains where inconsistency can be afforded, such as consumer choices, and not in domains where inconsistency can be psychologically taxing, such as personal values. Hence, we predict that conceiving opinionation as beneficial decreases preference-choice consistency for consumer choices more than for value choices.

4.1.1 Opinionation
We use the term *opinionation* to describe the propensity to voice a personal opinion on a variety of issues irrespective of their personal relevance. People have always wanted to express opinions about many issues. Research has long shown that evaluative judgment is one of the most dominant human responses and assessing the positive and/or negative qualities of attitude objects is intrinsic to thinking (Jarvis & Petty, 1996; Osgood, Suci, & Tennenbaum, 1957). Individuals can report attitudes automatically on mere exposure to a stimulus and they often do that with remarkable ease about an enormous array of objects (Bargh, Chaiken, Govender, & Pratto, 1992) even about unfamiliar ones (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). Furthermore, opinion expression serves several important functions, such as defining and expressing the self, enhancing self-esteem, or facilitating social interactions (Herek, 1987; Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1990; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956).

However, what differentiates our time from earlier ones in history is a notable growth of opinion voicing opportunities. Technological advances have empowered individuals all over the world to share opinions and interact in real time. This increase in the number of means available to express opinions has been accompanied by an escalating emphasis on opinion expression. From reality TV shows asking for viewers’ votes to websites hosting users’ comments on products and services, a common thread is that opinion expression is both valued and encouraged. To illustrate, online interactive features for discussing and debating have spread dramatically in recent years and to date the majority of newspapers and news media run daily polls and host readers’ comments (Richardson & Stanyer, 2011). Moreover, it has been argued that news outlets are now more willing to be outspoken and express clear positions instead of being neutral in an effort to satisfy the increasing desire of the audience for opinion-based news and compete with the rise of opinion on the Internet (Murphy & Auter, 2012). Therefore, an opinion culture seems to emerge (cf. Bennett, 2003; Coleman, 2004; Dalton, Cain, & Scarrow, 2003), “where public attitude expression is continually encouraged, enabled and facilitated by a series of individuals and organizational actors via new repertoires and communication technology” (Stanyer, 2005, p. 20). This accelerating upsurge in opinion expression has been also documented in large-scale representative
longitudinal surveys manifesting global value change toward self-expression values (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Therefore, although commenting, judging, and evaluating have always been part of human history, never before have the opportunities been so extended and has the cultural emphasis laid on opinion voicing been so intense. In the next section we theorize how differences in the subjective construal of opinionation can affect choices.

4.1.2 Opinionation and consistency across domains

Opinionation can be construed in sharply different ways. Having an opinion about a variety of issues might be seen as beneficial, for example because it makes people savvy, sociable, competent, and up to date, or detrimental, for example because it makes people stressed, superficial, know-it-all, and arrogant. In this paper, we propose that how people construe opinionation (as either beneficial or detrimental) can affect how they make choices (consistent or not with their preferences), because each construal of opinionation instigates different decision making processes. We draw this general hypothesis from prior research showing that people might arrive at strikingly different choice outcomes depending on how a choice is framed (to select or to reject) and which screening strategy (inclusion or exclusion) is used to assess the alternatives (Chernev, 2009; Huber, Neale, & Northcraft, 1987; Levin, Jasper, & Forbes, 1998; Meloy & Russo, 2004; Park, Jun, & MacInnis, 2000; Yaniv & Schul, 1997; Yaniv, Schul, Raphaelli-Hirsch, & Maoz, 2002). When decision-makers use an inclusion strategy, they decide which options from a choice set to retain based more on the advantages of each option, whereas when decision-makers use an exclusion strategy, they decide which options from a choice set to eliminate based more on the disadvantages of each option (Shafir, 1993). Additionally, an inclusion screening strategy is less normative and gives more flexibility and freedom to individuals to violate their preferences, whereas an exclusion screening strategy is more restrictive and dictates decision-makers to stick to their preferences (Kogut, 2011). As an effect, it has been shown that inclusion strategies result in lower preference-

Building on the above research, we suggest that the construal of opinionation as beneficial prompts the use of an inclusion screening strategy, whereas the construal of opinionation as detrimental prompts the use of an exclusion screening strategy. Thus, these two construals of opinionation can be considered as cues entailing different considerations of the available options and directing focus either on choosing the best options or rejecting the worst options (Ordóñez, Benson, & Beach, 1999). When individuals construe opinionation as beneficial, that is, think about the benefits of having opinions about many issues, they are more likely to carefully consider the advantages of all available options before choosing in order to enhance their opinion expression competence. Much like an inclusion strategy, a construal of opinionation as beneficial might involve “a more favorable reevaluation of the options (i.e., greater focus on advantages), which may enhance the attractiveness of alternatives that initially received lower ratings” (Kogut, 2011, p. 131). Therefore, construing opinionation as beneficial should increase the attractiveness of less preferred options and hence lead to choices that are not consistent with preferences. In contrast, when individuals construe opinionation as detrimental, that is, think about the detriments of having opinions about many issues, they are more likely to carefully consider the disadvantages of all available options before choosing. Much like an exclusion strategy, a construal of opinionation as detrimental should not increase the attractiveness of alternatives, because enhancing one’s opinion competence is not construed as a valued goal; instead, options for which people do not have an initially high preference should be immediately eliminated from the choice set. Thus, when people construe opinionation as detrimental, they are expected to make choices that are in line with their preferences.

In other words, our main proposition holds that how people construe opinionation can affect preference-choice consistency. A construal of opinionation as beneficial should reduce preference-choice consistency compared with a construal of opinionation as detrimental. Yet, this prediction might be at odds with one of the most fundamental motives driving judgment and decision making, the need for consistency (e.g., Bem, 1972; Brehm, 1956;
Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Higgins, 1987). Therefore, the question arises under what circumstances a positive construal of opinionation can reduce preference-choice consistency. Prior research has shown that inconsistent choices can be acceptable and positively experienced, if there is a strong justification for inconsistency (Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2005) or if nonconscious cues activate a favorable construal of inconsistency (Fishbach, Ratner, & Zhang, 2011). As choice domains may vary in their intrinsic ability to justify inconsistency, we expect choice domain to moderate the effect of opinionation on consistency. Thus, we further argue that the benefits of opinionation should decrease consistency, only if the choice domain permits inconsistency to begin with. Of particular relevance in this research is the difference between two choice domains: personal values versus consumer choices. We argue that personal values have a lower threshold of inconsistency tolerance compared with consumer choices, because the former are high-level, abstract construals, with high trade-off difficulty. Based on this assumption, we make different predictions about how opinionation can affect preference-choice consistency in different domains.

Value choices represent relatively enduring predispositions with paramount importance for the self. Research in attitudes in general has shown that, although contextual cues might influence the expression of attitudes (Schwarz, 2007), “the inner tendency or latent construct that constitutes attitude may often be relatively stable” (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p. 588). Especially in core attitudes such as values, inconsistency may be undesirable because individuals see their values as central to their identity (Maio & Olson, 1998; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Verplanken & Holland, 2002) and resist to trade-offs in choice attributes linked to these values and the moral rules of behavior these values prescribe (Luce, 1998). According to construal level theory, values are “decontextualized, superordinate cognitive structures and as such constitute high-level construals” (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2009, p. 79). Research in the frame of this theory shows that thinking about one’s values increases self-concept clarity and shifts focus away from conflicting characteristics and contradictions to more coherent and schematic representations of the self with an emphasis on stable, core traits (Waksalak & Trope, 2009). Consequently, if inconsistency in the values domain is most
likely a threat to identity rather an opportunity for self-expansion, the psychological costs of inconsistency should override the benefits of opinionation and hinder divergence from preferred values.

On the other hand, consistency in the domain of consumer goods is less lenient. First of all, the consumption of commodities oftentimes reaches satiation and motivates individuals to deviate from their typical preferences in order to seek stimulation (Raju, 1980) through variety (Ratner, Kahn, & Kahnemann, 1999), exploration (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1996), or novelty (Hirschman, 1980). Second, consumer goods are more ephemeral in nature and do not incite the same amount of psychological investment and commitment as values, because they are not always an end in themselves, but in some cases might be instrumental in achieving other superordinate goals (Botti & McGill, 2011; Choi & Fishbach, 2011). For example, individuals might make choices that enable them to satisfy their curiosity, learn about products and gather information for future use (Bloch, Sherrell, & Ridgway, 1986), collect vivid memorable experiences (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011), or experience fun and pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). And third, consumer goods can be considered as low-level construals, usually represented at a concrete, tangible and specific level, offering immediate gratification. This narrowed focus on choices from a proximal perspective might result in a more detailed and nuanced view of the choice task, thus permitting more inconsistencies and contradictions (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

If our assumption that values have a lower threshold of inconsistency tolerance compared with consumer choices is valid, it also follows that highlighting the benefits (vs. the detriments) of opinionation should have different psychological consequences in those two domains. We hypothesize that when people construe opinionation as beneficial (as opposed to detrimental), they are less likely to rely on their preferences in making consumer choices and thus more likely to be inconsistent, because they are prompted to consider the opinionation advantages of all available alternatives, even of less liked ones. We limit this prediction to the domain of consumer choices, because in this domain preference-choice inconsistency can be occasionally advantageous. In the domain of values, however, it is consistency that is rewarding. Therefore, when people construe opinionation as beneficial,
they should be alerted of the potential costs of inconsistency and hence display higher preference-choice consistency in value choices (as opposed to consumer choices) in an attempt to avoid those costs.

4.1.3 The present research

In three experiments we examine the effect of construing opinionation as beneficial or detrimental on preference-choice consistency across choice domains. We predict that decreased preference-choice consistency after thinking about the benefits (rather than the detriments) of opinionation should be more pronounced in the domain of consumer choices rather than in the domain of values. We first report a pilot study testing the assumption that values have a lower threshold of inconsistency tolerance compared with consumer choices, before we present three studies in which we experimentally manipulated the subjective construals of opinionation as either beneficial or detrimental and examined their consequences on preference-choice consistency. To this end, we employed a research design which operationalizes consistency as the extent to which individuals choose according to their preferences (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008). In all three studies, the procedure consists of three parts. First, participants were asked to express their preferences for certain items. Then, we manipulated the subjective construal of opinionation by asking participants to think of either the benefits or the detriments of opinionation. And finally, participants were asked to choose among the same items they previously rated. Consistency between preferences and choices is the dependent variable. In Study 1a and Study 1b we investigated preference-choice consistency in consumer goods. In Study 2 we tested the interaction hypothesis that the effect of opinionation on consistency is moderated by choice domain by contrasting consumer goods with values within-subjects.

4.2 PILOT STUDY
To establish the hypothesized lower threshold of inconsistency tolerance in the domain of values compared with consumer choices we conducted a pilot study. We asked 46 graduate students (26 females, mean age 28.73 years) to rate how justifiable inconsistency is per domain (1 – not at all justifiable, 7 – very justifiable). We included four domains presented in randomized order (political attitudes, consumer goods, free-time activities, personal values), so that participants could not guess which domains exactly were of interest to us. A paired samples t test confirmed our prediction that inconsistency in consumer goods ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.54$) is rated as significantly more justifiable than inconsistency in personal values ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.78$), $t(45) = 7.91, p < .001, d = 2.36$. Results support our assumption that choice domains differ in their capacity to afford inconsistency. Therefore, the effect of construing opinionation as either beneficial or detrimental on preference-choice consistency should be contingent upon the choice domain.

### 4.3 STUDY 1a

The first two studies examine whether opinionation can reduce preference-choice consistency in a wide range of consumer products (Study 1a) and types of restaurants (Study 1b). We measured consistency by asking participants to make choices out of options they had previously rated independently. The number of times they consistently chose the item that they had previously rated the highest among the options of each choice set was the dependent variable. We expected that construing opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental) should reduce preference-choice consistency.

#### 4.3.1 Method

##### 4.3.1.1 Participants

Fourty-six university students (31 females, mean age 23.20 years) took part in a larger lab study in return for monetary compensation of €5.
4.3.1.2 Procedure

The research design was closely modeled after Savani, Markus, and Conner (2008). First, participants were presented on the computer screen with 64 items one at a time. We used eight items for each one of eight product categories (cups, chairs, umbrellas, shirts, pens, tiles, watches, plants). Participants had to rate how much they liked each item on a 4-point scale (1 – not at all, 4 – very much). The order of the 64 items was randomized for each participant. Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions manipulating the construal of opinionation as either beneficial or detrimental. In the benefits condition, participants read: “Having an opinion about everything is in many cases necessary and beneficial. It increases our self-esteem and sense of achievement, facilitates our social interactions, and makes us more sociable, well-informed, and up to date”. In the detriments condition participants read: “Having an opinion about everything is in many cases unnecessary and detrimental. It increases our stress and anxiety, hinders our social interactions, and makes us more arrogant, ‘know-it-all’, and superficial”. Then, participants were instructed: “Please take a moment to think about the (dis)advantages of always having our own opinions on various topics. Now, please write down three situations that come to your mind in which having a personal opinion about a variety of issues is beneficial (detrimental)”. After that, participants had to make choices. The same stimuli used in the previous round were now presented in groups of four items of the same product category. In total, there were 16 choice sets with four options each. For each choice set, participants were instructed to indicate which item they would choose if they could get one for themselves. The order of the 16 choice sets was randomized for each participant. Finally, as a manipulation check, participants were presented with three items measuring how beneficial and necessary opinionation is according to them (“Do you think that having an opinion about everything is overall more beneficial or more detrimental?”, 1 – More detrimental, 7 – More beneficial, “How often should people try to have a personal opinion about a variety of topics?”, 1 – Never, 7 – Always,
“How much do you seek to have a personal opinion about everything?”, 1 – Not at all, 7 – Very much).

4.3.2 Results and discussion

The manipulation check (α = .79) shows that the manipulation was successful, as participants in the benefits condition (M = 5.76, SD = 0.92) perceived opinionation as more beneficial and necessary than participants in the detriments condition did (M = 5.06, SD = 1.00), t(43) = 2.50, p = .008 (1-tailed), d = 0.77. The dependent variable, preference-choice consistency, was estimated as the extent to which participants chose in each choice set the item with the highest rating among the four options. By adding the preference-choice consistency scores of the two choice trials for each one of the eight product categories, we obtained 16 scores of preference-choice consistency for each participant, which could take any value from 0 to 2. We then submitted these preference-choice consistency scores to an ANOVA with condition (benefits vs. detriments) as the between-subjects factor and domain (chairs vs. cups vs. pens vs. umbrellas vs. shirts vs. tiles vs. watches vs. plants) as the within-subjects factor. This ANOVA yielded the predicted main effect for condition, F(1, 42) = 4.82, p = .034, ηp² = .10, indicating that participants in the benefits condition scored lower on preference-choice consistency (M = 4.19, SD = 0.34) than those in the detriments condition (M = 5.37, SD = 0.41). Moreover, there was a significant main effect of domain, F(7, 36) = 8.13, p <

Table 4.1
Mean Preference-Choice Consistency per Product Category as a Function of Condition (Study 1a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Chairs</th>
<th>Cups</th>
<th>Pens</th>
<th>Plants</th>
<th>Shirts</th>
<th>Tiles</th>
<th>Umbrellas</th>
<th>Watches</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detriments</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
.001, $\eta_p^2 = .61$, which shows that overall, some domains like chairs, umbrellas and tiles yielded higher consistency than other domains like plants, cups and watches (Table 4.1). We found no interaction between condition and domain, $F(7, 36) = 1.23, p > .3$. Thus, using a wide range of commodities as stimuli, results of Study 1a confirm our prediction that thinking about the benefits of having an opinion about various issues makes people more likely to choose consumer goods that are not their favorites.

4.4 STUDY 1b

To extend the generalizability of the findings of Study 1a to other consumer choices, Study 1b examines the same hypothesis with different types of restaurants as material. Again, we predicted that construing opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental) should reduce preference-choice consistency.

4.4.1 Method

4.4.1.1 Participants

Thirty-eight university students (14 females, mean age 23.68 years) took part in a paper and pencil study in exchange for a chocolate bar.

4.4.1.2 Procedure

The research design was the same as in Study 1a with few modifications. The experimenter approached students at the university cafeteria and asked for participants in a study about individual preferences. Participants were first asked to rate how much they liked 13 different types of restaurants (Italian, Mexican, Greek, Chinese, etc.) on a 10-point scale (1 – not at all, 10 – very much). Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of
the two conditions manipulating the construal of opinionation as either beneficial or detrimental. A shorter version of the manipulation of Study 1a was used: “Please take a moment to think about situations where having an opinion about everything (i.e., personally relevant as well as less personally relevant issues) is (un)favourable. Now, please write down one such situation”. Next, participants had to make choices. The same restaurants used in the previous preference round were now presented in random groups of three. In total, there were 20 choice sets with three options each. For each choice set, participants were instructed to indicate which restaurant they would choose if they could only choose one each time.

4.4.2 Results and discussion

Preference-choice consistency was again estimated as in Study 1a, but in this study it could take any value from 0 to 20. We then submitted preference-choice consistency to a t test with condition (benefits vs. detriments) as the independent variable. Results show that participants in the benefits condition ($M = 15.11, SD = 2.52$) showed significantly lower consistency than participants in the detriments condition ($M = 16.74, SD = 2.58$), $t(35) = -1.94, p = .031$ (1-tailed), $d = 0.66$. Thus, using a different type of consumer choices, results of Study 1b converge with results of Study 1a in confirming that construing opinionation as beneficial reduces preference-choice consistency in consumer choices.

4.5 STUDY 2

The main aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that the effect of opinionation on preference-choice consistency is moderated by choice domain. Studies 1a and 1b indicate that thinking about the benefits of opinionation is likely to make people less consistent in their consumer choices. However, we expect this effect to be limited only to consumer choices, and not to be applicable in value choices. To test this hypothesis, we
manipulated the two different domains, consumer choices and value choices, within the same participants. We expected a Domain x Condition interaction, such that thinking about the benefits of opinionation should reduce preference-choice consistency in consumer choices more than in value choices. We expected no significant difference between chocolate and values consistency in the detriments condition. Overall, this study employed a 2 (domain: chocolate, values) by 2 (condition: benefits, detriments) mixed factorial design. Domain was manipulated within-subjects, whereas condition between-subjects. An additional aim of this study was to rule out an alternative explanation that these results might be due to differences in affect induced by our manipulation. Thinking about the benefits (detriments) of opinionation might induce more positive (negative) affect, thus resulting in lower (higher) reliance on preferences while choosing. To rule out this interpretation, we included a measure of positive and negative state affect (PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

4.5.1 Method

4.5.1.1 Participants

Thirty-eight university students (15 females, mean age 19.24 years) participated in a short paper and pencil study in exchange for a chocolate bar.

4.5.1.2 Procedure

The procedure was the same as in Study 1b. Participants rated a list of 20 values (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) on a 10-point scale (1 – not at all important to me, 10 – very important to me) as well as a list of 20 chocolate flavours (1 – do not like it at all, 10 – like it very much), presented in counterbalanced order between participants. Each value included a short explanation in parentheses, for example, SOCIAL JUSTICE (care for weak), PLEASURE (gratification of desires), SOCIAL POWER (control over others),
INNER HARMONY (at peace with myself), and so forth. For chocolate, the names of 20 Ritter Sport chocolate flavours were used. Then, participants were randomly assigned either to the benefits or to the detriments condition, where the same manipulation as in Study 1b was used. Following that, participants were given 10 adjectives describing positive affect and 10 adjectives describing negative affect (PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and were asked to assess their current affective state on a 5-point scale (1 – very slightly or not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – moderately, 4 – quite a bit, 5 – extremely). Finally, 20 choice sets for values and 20 choice sets for chocolate flavours, counterbalanced between subjects, were presented with random combinations of three of the previously rated values or chocolate bars. Participants were instructed to choose one of the three available items each time.

4.5.2 Results and discussion

Preference-choice consistency was estimated as in Studies 1a and 1b. We conducted a mixed between-within repeated-measures ANOVA with condition as the between-subjects factor (benefits, detriments) and domain as the within-subjects factor (chocolate, values). As predicted, the interaction between condition and domain was significant, $F(1, 36) = 5.40, p = .026, \eta^2_p = .13$ (Figure 4.1). Paired sample $t$ tests further indicated that in the benefits condition, participants were more consistent in their value choices ($M = 16.79, SD = 2.82$) than in their chocolate choices ($M = 15.45, SD = 3.21$), $t(17) = -1.76, p = .049$ (1-tailed), $d = 0.85$. In the detriments condition, participants’ consistency did not differ significantly between their chocolate choices ($M = 16.45, SD = 2.67$) and their value choices ($M = 15.25, SD = 2.98$), $t(19) = 1.55, p = .14, d = 0.71$. Therefore, results confirm our prediction that thinking about the benefits of opinionation attenuates preference-choice consistency in consumer choices (chocolate flavors) more than in value choices. Moreover, a MANOVA with condition as the independent variable and the measures of
positive affect (α = .84) and negative affect (α = .68) as the dependent variables showed a significant effect of condition neither on positive affect, $F(1, 34) = 1.70, p > .2, \eta^2_p = .05$, nor on negative affect, $F(1, 34) = 2.21, p = .15, \eta^2_p = .06$, thus ruling out the alternative explanation that this pattern of results is due to differences in affect caused by the manipulation. Furthermore, a mixed between-within repeated-measures ANCOVA showed that after controlling for positive and negative affect the interaction between condition and domain remained significant, $F(1, 32) = 7.30, p = .011, \eta^2_p = .19$. In sum, these results extend results from Studies 1a and 1b by showing with a within-subjects design that the effect of opinionation on preference-choice consistency is contingent upon the specific choice domain, whereas affect does not seem to be a plausible interpretation of these findings.

4.6 **GENERAL DISCUSSION**
This research provides empirical support to the proposition that preferences predict choices less when opinionation is construed as beneficial. Moreover, we demonstrate that this effect does not apply to value choices, but is limited only to consumer choices. In three studies, we manipulated experimentally the subjective construals of opinionation and examined how they affect preference-choice consistency across different choice domains. Studies 1a and 1b show that thinking about the benefits (vs. the detriments) of opinionation reduces preference-choice consistency in a wide range of consumer choices. Study 2 further shows that the effect of opinionation on consistency is domain specific, by comparing consumer choices with value choices within subjects. The interaction between domain and condition supports that construing opinionation as beneficial reduces preference-choice consistency in consumer choices more than in value choices.

Although the literature suggests several factors capable of disrupting the link between preferences and choices (e.g., Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000; Dhar & Simonson, 2003; Grace, 1993; Kivetz & Simonson, 2000; Lee, Amir, & Ariely, 2009; Slovic, 1995; Tsetsos, Chater, & Usher, 2010; Tversky & Shafir, 1992), opinionation has so far escaped attention. Our research highlights the construal of opinionation as an additional factor mitigating preference-choice consistency and identifies boundary conditions of this effect in terms of choice domains. Moreover, our findings converge with prior research suggesting that if choices are framed in ways that provide justification for inconsistency, individuals might diverge from their preferences and behave in a less consistent manner (Fishbach, Ratner, & Zhang, 2011; Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2005). Framing choice with a positive (vs. a negative) view of opinionation might be another way to legitimize preference-choice inconsistency, at least in some choice domains. Specifically, we argued that thinking about the benefits of opinionation might make individuals consider the advantages of all possible alternatives (Shafir, 1993) and thus increase the likelihood to choose less preferred options (Irwin & Naylor, 2009; Kogut, 2011; Laran & Wilcox, 2011) in consumer choice domains.

Additionally, our study provides some causal empirical evidence to the co-occurrence of opinionation and all-encompassing taste documented in
some previous, seemingly unrelated studies. For example, a significant positive correlation has been found between the need to evaluate and openness to experience from the Big Five (Tuten & Bosnjak, 2002). In the frame of sociology of consumption, research on dining out has shown that having an opinion about everything relieves from the responsibility to choose the best option and directs attention to acquiring a broad knowledge of all possible alternatives (Warde, Martens, & Olsen, 1999). Precisely, Warde and colleagues note that “a veneer of knowledge about all things, permitting cultural awareness and a capacity to comment” (p. 123) might be “a strategic solution, or resolution, to the problem of selection among the huge array of items in the contemporary market place” (p.120). Along these lines, relevant sociological research argues that the motivation to appreciate and critique everything in terms of aesthetic understanding results in cultural consumption choices that are highly inclusive without exclusionary barriers (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Other scholars have linked the desire to have wide cultural knowledge with omnivore cultural choices, because such a consumption practice increases the chances to find something to discuss with everyone and thus facilitates communication (Erickson, 1996). On another note, it has been suggested that individuals may switch away from their preferred options when they expect to tell others about their choices; in this case, they may incorporate variety strategically in order to convey a more interesting and exiting image of themselves (Ratner & Kahn, 2002). Together, what all the above studies, each stemming from a different theoretical standpoint, point out is that a heightened motivation to discuss, comment, or communicate, can influence one’s choices at the expense of one’s preferences. Such choices, although they might seem suboptimal as they do not accurately reflect stated preferences, provide conceptual utility (Ariely & Norton, 2009) as they can better actualize opinionation goals.

In view of the phenomenal profusion of opportunities to express opinions and the subsequent emergence of a cultural encouragement to do so, this paper also has important implications for research on decision making and the self-concept. As indicated by our findings, under some situations the self might be driven more by a desire to outreach the self, rather than be the self. The modern way of living, “life in overdrive”, often imposes revisiting
constants and being open to complexity, pluralism, and diversity, what Bauman (2000) calls a liquid stage of modernity, whereby change has turned into a permanent condition of human life. The metaphor of liquid as a substance that cannot keep its shape for long genially captures the continuous pursuit of change which characterizes modern societies. As individuals are increasingly exposed to conditions that underscore the fragmentation of the metanarratives (Firat & Vekantesh, 1995), we assume that essentialist beliefs about a stable core self (Haslam, Bastian, & Bisset, 2004) might be gradually undermined and the excess of one’s limits might instead rise as a new way of being that actualizes all desired possible selves (cf. Markus & Nurius, 1986). A challenge for future research would be to identify conditions where the traditional conceptualization of the self as seeking identification through consistency gives its place to a new model of the self as more tolerant of – or even celebrating – inconsistency (see also Gergen, 1991).

In more applied terms, our research suggests that opinionation can be used as an effective marketing tool to propel change in consumer behaviour. Influencing consumers’ preferences and choices is the ultimate goal of every advertising and marketing campaign. Our findings indicate that one way to achieve that is by urging consumers to think about the benefits of having an opinion about everything. Inducing a positive view of opinionation by means of manipulating situational cues might make consumers less likely to persist with favourite options and be more open to change. Therefore, our research proposes a novel way to combat consumer inertia by leveraging consumers’ propensity to switch, to experiment and to try new products.

Finally, a considerable limitation of our research could be the fact that we do not distinguish between two possibly different aspects of opinionation: holding an opinion and expressing an opinion (for a discussion, see Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). Whereas forming an opinion in private is more intrapersonal, voicing an opinion in public is more interpersonal. Even though we do not address this distinction explicitly, we regard the way we manipulate opinionation as public, because at any rate the experimenter constitutes a symbolic “audience” of participants’ opinion articulation. To some extent, the open-ended questions of the construal manipulation task can give us some insights about the way participants conceptualized opinionation. A qualitative
content analysis uncovered four main themes that participants typically mentioned: autonomy and independence (as opposed to conformity and compliance), self-enhancement and self-presentation, communication and exchange of ideas, and democracy and voting. From the above categories, it appears that participants mostly have opinion expression in mind when they write about the benefits or the detriments of opinionation. Moreover, an analysis of the domains of application revealed almost exclusively references to opinions in interpersonal contexts, such as social gatherings (e.g., small talk at parties), education (e.g., classroom culture), politics (e.g., voting, protesting), workplace (e.g., job interview), cultural and/or religious issues (e.g., suppression of expression). Consequently, the effect we identified in this research is most probably driven by an interpersonal understanding of opinionation (expressing an opinion rather than forming an opinion). Future research could explicitly manipulate the private vs. public nature of opinionation and examine whether the proposed effect appears only under public scrutiny or extends also to private settings.
General discussion

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES
5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The aim of this thesis was to study how opinion voicing can affect choice at a basic psychological level. Seven experiments lend empirical support to the premise that opinion voicing reconfigures the psychological meaning of choice through two different ways. First, it was argued that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities can undermine choice self-expressiveness and hence reduce post-choice rationalization (Chapters 2 and 3). Second, it was suggested that the subjective construal of opinionation can reduce preference-choice consistency (Chapter 4). As a whole, the overarching idea informing all studies is that opinion voicing affects the psychological function of choice, as studied through well-established effects associated with the relation between preferences and choices.

Embarking from the first research question, studies in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 tested the general hypothesis that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities can attenuate post-choice rationalization. A key finding in previous research is that choice is an act that defines the self and has significant behavioural implications, such as shaping preferences (e.g., Bem, 1967; Brehm, 1956; Festinger, 1957; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002). Thus, after making a choice, individuals tend to view the option they chose more favourably than the option they rejected. This tendency has been interpreted as an attempt to justify one's choices and maintain a positive view of the self as a competent decision maker. No matter how mundane or trivial, choice implicates the self deeply and stirs rationalization processes. Nevertheless, this thesis argued that this effect might be moderated by the availability of opportunities to express the self through opinions. This hypothesis draws on the assumption that opinion can substitute for choice in expressing the self, because opinion and choice can interchangeably satisfy self-expression needs. Building on recent research showing that the need for self-expression can be satiated after engagement in self-expressive acts (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011), it was proposed that if individuals have the opportunity to voice their opinions, they will be less motivated to invest psychologically in their subsequent choices. Moreover, it was argued that it is both actual engagement in opinion voicing
(Chapter 2) and the anticipation of such an opportunity at a later time (Chapter 3) that can impinge the importance of choice for the self. To investigate this hypothesis, dependent variables that manifest the self-expressive potential of choice were chosen. Chapter 2 introduced a measurement of choice favoritism, based on the discrepancy in liking ratings between chosen and rejected options as a reflection of post-choice rationalization (Studies 1 and 2); in addition, measurements of choice self-expressiveness (Study 1) and perceived choice similarity (Study 2) were used. Chapter 3 (Studies 1 and 2) used as the main dependent variable the spread of the alternatives (Brehm, 1956), which is a measurement of pre-choice and post-choice changes in the rankings of chosen and rejected options deriving from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957).

Chapter 2 examined the hypothesis that the availability of an opinion voicing opportunity prior to choosing reduces choice favoritism. Choice favoritism was operationalized as the extent to which the chosen option was rated more positively than the average rating of the rejected options. In Study 1, all participants were asked to rate four desktop wallpapers and choose one. Additionally, some participants were also given the chance to express their opinions about each option in writing. Of note, the order in which participants rated, made choices, and expressed opinions was the critical manipulation resulting in four experimental conditions. In the control condition, participants first rated all four options and then made a choice, so that the ratings of their chosen option were not affected by the act of choosing. In the choice condition, participants first made a choice and then rated all options, so that the rating of their chosen option could be used as a means to rationalize choice. In the opinion-after-choice condition, participants chose one option, then wrote their opinions about each option, and at the end rated all four options. Finally, in the opinion-before-choice condition, participants first wrote their opinions about each option, then chose one, and at the end rated all four options. It was hypothesized that, first of all, choice favoritism would be lower in the control condition than either in the choice condition or in the opinion-after-choice condition. Second, it was hypothesized that choice favoritism in the opinion-before-choice condition would be lower than either in the choice condition or in the opinion-after-choice condition. Results
confirmed the first hypothesis, resonating findings from previous research that the act of choosing can create preferences (e.g., Ariely & Norton, 2008), regardless of whether opinion voicing follows (opinion-after-choice condition). Results also confirmed the second hypothesis. Importantly, compared to merely making a choice without an opinion voicing opportunity (choice condition), opinion voicing can reduce choice favoritism only if it precedes choice (opinion-before-choice condition) and not if it follows choice (opinion-after-choice condition). A mediation analysis further corroborated the postulated mechanism. Specifically, it was found that choice was construed as less self-expressive in the opinion-before-choice condition than in the choice condition. That is, after expressing themselves through writing their opinions, participants were less likely to construe choice – in general, and not only the specific choice in the experiment – as a means for self-expression. What is more, this difference in the construal of choice as self-expression explained the effect of opinion voicing on choice favoritism. Taken together, these findings advocate the self-expression account proposed in this research. Opinion voicing can undermine the self-expressive role of choice as long as such an opportunity is provided before making a choice. Since the need for self-expression is satiable, one means is enough to satiate this need, and additional means do not provide any significant increments in self-expression.

However, an alternative explanation of these results could be that voicing an opinion prior to choosing reduces liking of the chosen option, because this task can be considered as similar to introspection about reasons. Prior research has shown that providing reasons for one’s preferences reduces post-choice satisfaction (Wilson et al., 1993). However, introspection about reasons does not seem to be a plausible interpretation of these findings, because this effect is typically not found immediately after a choice is made, but only at a later point in time, whereas in the present study choice favoritism was measured right after choosing. Another alternative explanation of these findings could be option attachment (Carmon, Wertenbroch, & Zeelenberg, 2003). According to that research, careful consideration of the choice options might lead to attachment with the foregone options and subsequently reduce satisfaction with the chosen one. If the opinion voicing manipulation is viewed
as a task ensuing option attachment, this could explain why opinion voicing diminished choice favoritism. Closer inspection of results from Study 1 provides two counterarguments to this rival interpretation. The first is that reduced choice favoritism is observed only in the opinion-before-choice condition, and not in the opinion-after-choice condition, even though participants in both conditions had the chance to elaborate on the choice options before rating. Contrary to option attachment, which would predict the same effect in both conditions, the proposed self-expression theorizing can account for this difference. The second counterargument is that the effect of opinion voicing on choice favoritism was fully mediated by the construal of choice as less self-expressive. Nevertheless, in order to overly detect the self-expression mechanism underlying the proposed effect, Study 2 examined the effect of opinion voicing on choice favoritism exclusively in the critical opinion-before-choice condition by measuring individual differences in the value of expression and by manipulating private vs. public occasions of opinion voicing. Individual differences were measured with Kim and Sherman’s (2007) Value of Expression Questionnaire (VEQ). The private status of opinion voicing was manipulated by making participants believe that their opinions were not saved on the computer due to some technical problem, so they had to continue with the next parts of the research. For the public status of opinion voicing, the same procedure as in Study 1 was followed, assuming that opinions were in any case made public to the experimenters or the researchers. It was hypothesized that the more that participants value expression, the higher the choice favoritism they would display in the private condition, but not in the public condition. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that for individuals highly valuing expression, private opinion voicing would not suffice to express the self and hence would not be able to substitute for choice. In addition to choice favoritism, perceived choice similarity was also measured. Prior research has shown that perceiving choice options as dissimilar indicates self-expressive investment in choice (e.g., Chernev et al., 2011). It was hypothesized that the more that participants value expression, the less they would perceive the options as similar in the private condition, but not in the public condition. Results confirmed both hypotheses, suggesting that for individuals highly valuing self-expression, opinion voicing
can adequately express the self and therefore substitute for choice, only if it is
publicly expressed. Study 2 strengthened the self-expressive account proposed
by Study 1 and helped rule out option attachment as an alternative explanation.

Whereas results of Chapter 2 showed that the opportunity to voice an
opinion before choosing undermines post-choice rationalizations, Chapter 3
sought to demonstrate that anticipating an opinion voicing opportunity can
also have a similar effect on choice. Specifically, Chapter 3 investigated the
hypothesis that the mere prospect of opinion voicing can reduce post-choice
dissonance as reflected in the spread of the alternatives. Two studies using the
classic free-choice paradigm (Brehm, 1956) examined how individuals
rationalize their choices after choosing between two equally attractive options,
both in the presence and in the absence of a prospective opinion voicing
opportunity. In Study 1, participants were first asked to rank order ten movies
according to their preferences; then they had to choose for which movie they
would like to get a free ticket between their 5th and their 6th ranked options –
allegedly the only ones available at that moment; and finally they were asked
to rank order all ten movies once more ten minutes later. The procedure was
the same in both the standard choice condition, which was the classic
cognitive dissonance condition, and in the opinion voicing condition, which
was introduced for the purpose of this study. The only difference was that in
the opinion voicing condition participants were additionally told before
choosing a movie that they would also have to write a review about the movie
of their choice after watching it. The main dependent variable was the spread
of the alternatives, that is, how much the ranking of the chosen option moved
up and/or the ranking of the rejected option moved down after choosing. This
is a standard way to measure dissonance reduction through the reevaluation
of choice alternatives. Additionally, participants were asked how much they
would like to share their opinions with others after watching the movie.
Regarding the main dependent variable, the spread of the alternatives, it was
hypothesized that participants making a choice with the prospect of writing a
review (opinion voicing condition) would experience less dissonance and
hence spread their alternatives less than participants simply making a choice
without being asked to write a review (standard choice condition). It was
further hypothesized that the intention to share opinion with others would be higher for participants in the opinion voicing condition than for participants in the standard choice condition. Results confirmed both hypotheses, indicating that the prospect of opinion voicing decreases self-expressive investment in choice, as captured by the spread of the alternatives, and increases instead self-expressive investment in opinion voicing, as captured by the intention to share opinions. However, an alternative account for these findings could be that the reason why opinion voicing reduced post-choice dissonance compared to the standard condition was not because it beforehand satiated the need for self-expression and therefore reduced the motivation to commit to choice, but rather because it gave participants the impression that choice was not irreversible and could be revisited in the future. Indeed, cognitive dissonance theory postulates that only irreversible choices induce dissonance (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Festinger, 1957). Based on this reasoning, if the opportunity to write a review about the movie made choice look non-committing to begin with, then this would be a serious threat to the proposed self-expression theorizing. The aim of Study 2 was to rule out this alternative explanation.

To this end, Study 2 used the same free-choice paradigm as Study 1, but the manipulation of opinion voicing was introduced after participants made a choice. In that way, choice could be first established as an irreversible act before any means to facilitate rationalization were made available. Furthermore, to enhance the perception of choice as irreversible even more, choice and opinion were manipulated in two separate domains. Choice involved ranking and choosing among chocolate flavors, whereas opinion voicing involved writing a review about a movie. By asking participants to write their opinions on a domain different from the domain in which they made a choice, the possibility that opinion voicing might make choice look reversible can be safely ruled out. More practically, the prospect of opinion voicing in this study was operationalized as a “mistake” the experimenter made by handing in the movie review task in the wrong order. The experimenter apologized and took back the review, letting the participants know that they would continue with it later. This manipulation aimed at inducing the anticipation of an opinion voicing opportunity in a domain other
than the choice domain. Nevertheless, as this new manipulation could be alternatively considered a distraction capable of reducing dissonance (Crano & Messe, 1970; Steele & Liu, 1983; Zanna & Aziza, 1976), a third condition was added to ensure that it was the specific self-expressive content of the opinion voicing condition that reduced dissonance, and not distraction. For this reason, a control condition was added, where the experimenter made the same “mistake” to hand in a form in the wrong order, although this time the content of the task did not require writing a review, but only finding names of animals in a world search puzzle. It was hypothesized that the spread of the alternatives in the opinion voicing condition would be lower than either in the standard choice condition or in the control condition. Results confirmed the hypothesis, lending strong support to the claim that anticipating an opportunity to voice an opinion in the near future is enough to reduce post-choice dissonance, because it successfully satisfies the need to express the self through an alternative way. Overall, Study 2 corroborated the findings of Study 1 by ruling out alternative explanations based on the perception of choice as reversible or on the perception of opinion voicing as distraction. Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 reveal that opportunities to express the self through opinions, even if not actualized prior to choosing but made salient as a future prospect, can undermine the self-expressiveness of choice and thwart post-choice rationalization processes.

Chapter 4 approached the issue of the opinion-choice relationship that informs the whole thesis from a different angle. The three experiments reported in this chapter answer the second research question, namely whether different construals of opinionation can impact preference-choice consistency. Generally speaking, choice is a means to achieve what one wants or needs (e.g., Iyengar, 2010). Therefore, choice is expected to be driven by one’s inner attributes, such as personal preferences, beliefs and thoughts (e.g., Kim & Sherman, 2007). Similarly, people value consistency between their attitudes and their behaviors and seek to act in ways that are in line with what they deem important, desirable or valued (Bem, 1972; Brehm, 1956; Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Higgins, 1987; Van Kerckhove, Geuens, & Vermeir, 2012). This is particularly true in individualistic cultural contexts such as West Europe or North America, where through their choices people are encouraged
to pursue their aspirations and reach their “true” selves (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008). Yet, research has identified conditions under which people do not consistently choose what they want (e.g., Slovic, 1995; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986; Tversky & Simonson, 1993). For example, additions or eliminations of options in a consideration set or slight variations in the way a choice is framed can drastically influence choice and lead to strikingly different choice outcomes. Chapter 4 proposed that how people view opinion voicing might also affect the degree to which their preferences predict their choices. The current project proffered the term opinionation to describe the propensity to have an opinion on a variety of topics irrespective of their personal relevance. This is an important aspect of opinion voicing, because as technological innovations make opinion voicing all the more accessible, people often feel encouraged or even obliged to utter an opinion on all possible topics. The basic proposition of these studies was that if people perceive it as beneficial (vs. detrimental) to have an opinion on a variety of issues, they will be less likely to choose according to their preferences. This prediction rests on the assumption that construing opinionation as beneficial should incite an inclusive screening strategy, which has been shown to lead to lower preference-choice consistency, whereas construing opinionation as detrimental should incite an exclusive screening strategy, which has been shown to lead to greater preference-choice consistency (Irwin & Naylor, 2009; Kogut, 2011; Laran & Wilcox, 2011). In addition, it was proposed that this effect should only be limited to consumer choices and should not extend to value choices, because of differences in inconsistency tolerance between these two domains.

Three experiments tested these predictions using a research paradigm designed to operationalize preference-choice consistency (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008). In all studies, participants first rated a list of options, then were randomly assigned to either the benefits or the detriments condition, and finally had to choose among the previously rated options. The manipulation was to write down occasions where having an opinion about a variety of issues can be beneficial or detrimental respectively. The dependent variable was preference-choice consistency, measured as the number of times participants chose the highest ranked option. In other words, the dependent
variable reflected to what extent participants chose what they liked best, as expressed in their initial ratings. The hypothesis in the first two studies was that construing opinionation as beneficial should lead to lower preference-choice consistency in consumer choices compared to construing opinionation as detrimental. Study 1a tested this hypothesis across a wide range of consumer goods (watches, plants, pens, chairs, etc.). Study 1b tested the same hypothesis with different kinds of restaurants (Indian, Italian, French, Thai, etc.). Results from both studies confirmed the hypothesis. Therefore, a positive view of opinionation is likely to decrease the extent to which individuals choose what they like. Study 2 tested the hypothesis that this effect is bound only to consumer choices by contrasting two different choice domains: consumer choices (operationalized in this study through chocolate flavors) and value choices (operationalized through a values questionnaire developed by Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987). A mixed between-within design was used to examine how choice domain moderates the effect of the construal of opinionation on choice consistency. It was hypothesized that construing opinionation as beneficial will reduce preference-choice consistency for consumer choices more than for value choices. Results confirmed the hypothesis, showing that the effect found in Studies 1a and 1b is moderated by different choice domains.

5.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Stemming from the observation that opinion voicing opportunities have become ubiquitous in recent year, this PhD thesis addressed the question how opinion voicing can affect the psychological meaning of choice. In doing so, this research makes several theoretical contributions. Most importantly, a link is established between opinion and choice – two fundamental concepts in psychology and social sciences more broadly – and their interplay is studied experimentally from an intra-individual perspective. In recent years, phenomenal technological advancements and concomitant societal changes have radically reformed the way people express themselves. Prior research has mostly examined how others’ opinions influence individuals’ choices from an
interpersonal perspective. However, the possibility that opportunities to voice opinions or different construals of opinion voicing might intrapersonally affect one’s own choices has thus far escaped attention. This research proposed that these two concepts can interact with each other, because they engender distinct means of self-expression that make up one’s self. Findings shed light on one direction of this link, namely how opinion voicing affects choice, and provide empirical evidence for this causal relation.

Next, this research stresses the significance of opinion voicing for the self and discovers new areas where its impact can extend. Findings show that opinion voicing is a forceful self-expression means, which can psychologically substitute for choice, moderate the importance of choice for the self, and under some circumstances limit preference-choice consistency. Although prior research has acknowledged the prominence of opinions in the self-system, no research has explored how this might affect another major means of self-expression, choice. Chapter 2 and 3 suggest that expressing an opinion is as effective in expressive the self as choice. Thus, in situations where both means are available, if opinion voicing opportunities are made salient, choice is psychologically undermined. Chapter 4 further shows that construing opinionation as beneficial vs. detrimental makes preference-choice consistency more lenient and allows for choices to deviate from individual preferences. Although through different mechanisms and facets, in both cases opinion voicing seems to be strong enough to impact the role of choice for the self. Furthermore, as research in Chapter 3 indicates, opinion voicing might even buffer against self-threats superseding post-choice rationalization processes. Along that line, the mere opportunity to voice an opinion turns out to be as efficient in protecting the self and accommodating its self-expressive needs as the well-documented effect of post-choice dissonance.

Moving from opinion to choice, findings invite reconsidering the psychological meaning of choice in light of the recent opinion voicing proliferation. By studying choice in context, where opinion voicing might also be present, choice might not be as self-expressive or as strictly deriving from preferences as it would be assumed. Overall, we tend to believe that we are what we choose, and assign choice paramount psychological importance for our self-definition. Yet, this study suggests that we might come to this
assumption, because we forget that we are not only our choices, but we also have our opinions as another means to define and express our selves. Once this becomes salient, choice is no longer conferred such a privileged role. Therefore, this research proposes a nuanced approach of choice self-expressiveness, contending that studying the dynamics of choice in conjunction to opinion can offer more accurate insights about the meaning of choice in people’s everyday lives. By default, people in individualistic cultural contexts have been socialized to construe their choices as substantially self-expressive, and hence to be particularly anxious about choosing and what that might imply for their self-image. However, if people are reminded of opportunities they have to voice their opinions, this biased view of self-expressive choice essentialism can be considerably diminished. These findings may have implications on the way people make choices in technologically advanced societies, where opinion voicing opportunities abound. With the rise of the Internet, innumerable ways to externalize one’s opinions have become readily available, such as blogs, message boards, forums, polls, social media, etc. People express their opinions constantly – or at least know that they can any minute they want. What does that mean for their choices? How can that affect the way they choose? This project offers an exploration of this critical issue. Findings imply that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities might disengage individuals from their choices. In addition, findings of this research also suggest that considering the benefits of having an opinion about a variety of topics might make people diverge from their preferences and choose not always in line with what they like. In sum, different aspects of opinion voicing seem to influence drastically both how much people see themselves reflected in their choices and how much of themselves people put in their choices. At any rate, bringing opinion voicing into play seems to run counter the self-choice link.

Furthermore, the current research adds to a growing body of literature that questions the importance of choice for the self (e.g., Markus & Schwartz, 2010). Past research has identified culture as one factor that moderates the psychological meaning of choice (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim & Markus, 1999). In cultures where the self is construed as interdependent (as opposed to independent), people are less likely to perceive choice as a means of self-
expression, at least as long as choice corresponds to internal and not to social aspects of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003, 2010). For this reason, well-established phenomena such as post-choice rationalization (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Imada & Kitayama, 2010; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus & Suzuki, 2004) or preference-choice consistency (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008) are less pronounced among East Asians compared to North Americans. Other studies have additionally proposed that contextual factors can also mitigate the importance of choice for the self, even among members of individualistic cultures who share the same cultural assumptions about choice. For example, with increasing number of options, cognitive complexity also increases and satisfaction with choice decreases (e.g., Botti & Iyengar, 2006; Chernev, 2003; Hsee, Hastie, & Chen, 2008; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz, 2004). Moreover, the psychological benefits of choice autonomy seem to be specific only to choices among attractive options (e.g., Botti & Iyengar, 2004). Thus, characteristics of the consideration set, such as assortment size or attractiveness of the options, play an important role in how positively choice is perceived. This dissertation proposes that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities can be another factor moderating the psychological meaning of choice. In situations where opportunities to voice opinions are salient, people commit less to their choices, because they construe their choices as less self-expressive compared to choosing without expressing any opinions. Therefore, the meaning of choice may be constructed on the spot and contingent upon the availability of opinion voicing opportunities in the choice context. Similarly, consistency between choices and preferences may also be conditioned by different construals of opinionation. At the same time, these findings contribute to literature on contextual effects on choice (e.g., Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 1998; Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000; Huber, Payne, & Puto, 1982; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986; Tversky, & Simonson, 1993). As individuals do not make choices in a vacuum, it is argued that different aspects of opinion voicing that might be part of the choice context can decrease the psychological weight carried by choice.

Finally, findings of Chapters 2 and 3 make a significant contribution to a broad research area unfolding the resilience of the self-system. Studies in
this area fall into different research topics, such as confluence of self-esteem mechanisms (Tesser, 2000), self-affirmation (Steele, 1988), meaning maintenance (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), substitutability (Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2011), or compensatory control (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008). The common idea informing all these studies is that the self-concept can use different means to satisfy common goals. This view of the self, reminiscent of Freud’s hydraulic model, is espoused by the present thesis, too. Results advocate a notion of self-expression plasticity, whereby opinion voicing can substitute for choice in serving the same underlying function, to express the self. Thus, regardless of the high self-expressive potential of choice, self-expression is not locally confined to one form of self-expression, but can be serviced by alternative, functionally equivalent means. Furthermore, the current findings showcase a novel way of dissonance reduction. Chapter 3 shows that choice-induced dissonance can be reduced not only through post-choice attitude change, but also through the mere prospect of an opportunity to express an opinion. An interesting issue that rises is what the implications of these findings are for cognitive dissonance theory and more specifically if and how the proposed mechanism relates to self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988). If we assume for a moment that these are not two independent processes, two possibilities seem plausible about the way they might connect with each other. One is that the proposed mechanism of resolving dissonance through opinion voicing is a subcategory of self-affirmation. Expressing one’s opinions might serve a self-affirming function similar to expressing one’s important values. However, considering that individuals in these studies were not asked to write their opinions about highly self-relevant topics, it seems rather unlikely that opinion voicing played a self-affirming role in the way defined by self-affirmation theory. Another possibility is that self-expression offers a broader prism through which self-affirmation phenomena can be interpreted. Expressing one’s values might affirm a positive view of the self and protect the self against self-threats not because of the self-relevance of the expressed content, but mainly because of its self-expressive nature. In other words, it could be that it is the act of self-expression that underpins self-affirmation phenomena, rather than how valued what is expressed is for the self. The validity of this argument could be
tested by a study discerning between self-relevance (high vs. low) and self-expression (private vs. public). If affirmation phenomena are indeed driven by self-expression, then expressing one’s self publicly should be enough to reduce dissonance, irrespective of high or low self-relevance of the expressed content.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

In what follows, limitations of the present research are discussed. A first limitation concerns the type of choices studied. In all studies the stimuli used as choices, although in most cases realistic and not hypothetical ones, cannot be considered as highly consequential for people’s lives (with the exception of Study 2 of Chapter 4, which also included value choices). As a reminder, both studies in Chapter 2 used desktop wallpapers, in Chapter 3 the first study used movies and the second one chocolate flavors, whereas in Chapter 4 the first two studies used a wide range of consumer goods (commodities such as chairs, pens, shirts, etc., and types of restaurants, such as Indian, Italian, Mexican, etc.), and the third one used chocolate flavors and values. This is not an issue per se for the validity of the tested predictions, because ample research using similar material shows that even mundane choices implicate the self considerably. Yet, inevitably it remains unclear whether these findings can generalize to other spheres, or their scope is limited only to the specific domains. For example, it could be argued that the availability of opinion voicing opportunities might not be that effective in substituting choices in more consequential domains, such as romantic relationship or career choices. As the proposed theorizing postulated, opinion can substitute for choice because both are functionally equivalent. As such, a prerequisite of this effect is that opinion voicing is indeed equivalent to choice. In the case of great imbalance in the valence or the self-relevance of the choice or the opinion domains, it could be expected that the substitution mechanism might fail to operate. Additionally, almost all choices used in the experiments concerned experience goods (Nelson, 1970), that is, goods that one cannot fully observe their features before consumption (e.g., movies, chocolate bars). However, these kinds of goods were purposefully selected for these studies,
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exactly because of the uncertainty preceding their consumption experience and the higher flexibility they permit to be used as means of self-expression and projection of aspects of the self on them.

A second limitation is that, as pointed out at several parts of the thesis, the concepts of opinion voicing and choice have been approached exclusively from a Western perspective. However, research has shown that there is considerable cross-cultural variation in the meaning of self-expression and the specific means used to express the self, such as opinion and choice (for reviews, see Kim & Chu, 2011; Kim & Ko, 2007). In more collectivistic cultures, choice is not expected to reflect preferences to the same extent as in individualistic cultures, because choice is embedded in different models of agency (Kim & Markus, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003). In a collectivistic context, choice is considered to be responsive to social norms, obligations, and expectations from others. As an effect, choice is not expected to consistently express inner aspects of the self. Similarly, research on verbal expression of thoughts via speech has found that speech impairs performance for East Asians compared with North Americans, because for East Asians verbal expression is not so tightly linked to thinking (Kim, 2002). These differentiated dynamics between opinion and choice in other cultures might moderate the effect proposed in the present research. Unpublished data from some preliminary studies comparing West and East Europeans provide some support to the idea that opinion voicing impacts post-choice dissonance differently for members of different cultures.

Finally, a third limitation of this research is that only one direction of the link between opinion voicing and choice is examined, namely how opinion voicing affects choice. The emphasis of the thesis was on this specific direction, because from the beginning the aim was to study how choice can be affected by the proliferation of opinions. Thus, choice was in the centre of attention as the core dependent variable throughout the project. However, if opinion and choice are substitutable, as it is assumed, then the substitution should also work in the reverse way. That is, opportunities to make choices should undermine psychological investment in voicing opinions. In a similar vein, different construals about choice could also affect opinions. The current research is mute on whether these hypotheses also hold. Although such an
examination clearly did not fall in the scope of this research, without doubt this would offer a much more complete image of the interaction between opinions and choices. This point leads us to the next section of the general discussion, which identifies directions for future research based on the present thesis.

5.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current work lays the ground for future research and flags several opportunities for possible extensions. As mentioned above in the last of the limitations of the thesis (Chapter 5.3), the most obvious extension of this research would be to investigate whether substitutability operates also in the reverse direction. Based on the assumption informing Chapters 2 and 3, opportunities to make a choice before expressing an opinion could undermine the psychological investment in subsequent opinion. One possible way to test this causal relationship experimentally could be by using the induced compliance paradigm of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). The hypothesis is that opportunities to express the self through choices might reduce the tendency to align attitudes with counterattitudinal behaviors. Therefore, if participants in a classic induced-compliance experiment are given the opportunity to make choices before expressing their attitudes, they should experience less dissonance.

Going back to the present findings and the assumption of opinion voicing as a substitute for choice, an interesting question for further research would be to identify potential moderators of this effect. For example, representing the two means of self-expression at different levels of abstraction could be one factor moderating this effect. Based on the reasoning of construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), it could be argued that activating high-level construals should facilitate substitution, because individuals would “zoom out” and perceive both opinion and choice holistically as interchangeable means to satisfy the same overarching need. In contrast, focusing on low-level construals should hinder substitution, because individuals would “zoom in” and emphasize details that make opinion and
choice look as two different, unique and irreplaceable means of self-expression. A second moderator could be the subjective relevance of each self-expression means. For some, one of the two means may have a higher personal significance for self-expression than the other. If such individual differences in preferences for forms of self-expression exist, then it would be reasonable to assume that these could also determine the outcome of the substitution. Specifically, if a subjectively weaker or less preferred means of self-expression is made available prior to exercising self-expression through a subjectively stronger or more preferred means, then substitution is likely to fail. A third moderator of this effect could be the significance of the domain itself. As mentioned earlier in the limitations of this study (Chapter 5.3), self-expression either through opinions or through choices might be subjectively valued in some domains more than in others. For example, expressing opinions on movies might be for some more engaging than expressing opinions on politics. Thus, substitution also depends on whether opinion and choice are exercised in equally weighted domains. In the case of imbalance, it could be hypothesized that opinion voicing can substitute for choice only if the domain in which opinions are first asked is assigned a greater weight than the domain in which choices are to be made subsequently.

Another route for future research would be to study extensions of self-affirmation theory in the direction of incorporating the concept of self-expression. As already proposed (Chapter 5.2), one could argue based on the present findings that the self might also be affirmed through mere self-expression, regardless of the self-relevance of the content expressed. Self-expression might be self-affirming, because it asserts one’s individuality and establishes one’s uniqueness and differentiation from others through externalizing personal preferences, attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, or attributes (see Chapters 1.2 and 1.3). This proposition could be tested through various experimental designs. One is based on cognitive dissonance theory. Creative activities, painting for example, could be used as a manipulation of self-expression to examine if it can reduce dissonance. For example, in the frame of the classic free-choice paradigm, half of the participants could be randomly assigned to a condition where before ranking the choice options for the second time, they are offered the chance to draw a picture or perform a comparable
task, such as customize a picture. If self-expression can indeed protect the self against self-threats, drawing a picture should reduce post-choice dissonance. Additionally, the same proposition could be tested through many other paradigms, like self-affirmation bias or self-defensiveness. For example, participants provided with self-expression avenues should be less likely to be self-serving or to process threatening information in a defensive way compared to participants that were not given such an opportunity.

The above reasoning may also have implications for research on creativity. If the need to self-express is satiable and alternative means can serve the same need, then creativity, as a form of self-expression, might also be contingent on the availability of self-expression means. In keeping with this proposition, it is hypothesized that the fewer the alternative means of self-expression available, the more creative one will become. This idea remotely echoes the myth of the “isolated artist” (Oates, 1974), whereby artists need to withdraw to their own world and minimize interactions and stimulations from the external world in order to be creative. Although this is usually interpreted as an introspective process that allows artists to immerse in their work, an alternative explanation based on the findings of this research could be that in this way artists save self-expressive energy from trivial, non-artistic activities in order to channel it to the fullest to their artwork. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from famous artists’ lives demonstrates that intense moments of artistic creation are accompanied by prolonged periods of silence, minimal human interaction and abstinence from social activities. Instead of simply being an effort to concentrate, this practice might also be seen as an energy-saving strategy to avoid mindless waste of limited – and thus valuable – self-expression resources.

Symbolic satiation is a concept put forth in the present thesis (outlined in Chapter 3), which could also form the basis of future research. According to the proposed theorizing, even the symbolic availability of self-expressive acts, for example as a future prospect, can satiate the need for self-expression. As it has been shown, anticipating an opportunity to voice an opinion can attenuate investment in subsequent choice. A recent study on the way past experiences can undermine the enjoyment of future pleasures could be seen as evidence for the proposed mechanism. Specifically, a field experiment conducted with
visitors at Boston’s Old North Church found that reminding tourists of their previous travels and thus experimentally making them feel well-travelled reduced the time (spent in the church) and the money (spent in buying souvenirs) they invested in experiencing their current visit (Quoidbach, 2012). The concept of symbolic satiation might have far-reaching consequences and future research could explore its application range. Cultural participation is one domain where this concept could be applied. For example, is it likely that for people residing in metropolitan areas, where cultural offerings abound, the mere thought of all these opportunities to do something on a Saturday night eventually decreases the chances to go to the theater or to a concert? Can a simple reminder of these alternatives substitute for actual choice? Numbers seem to be pointing to the opposite direction, as in urban areas with the most cultural venues people also seem to be more culturally active and participative (e.g., Friedberg, 2003). But it could be that several factors, such as cognitive load or individual differences in motivation, moderate the proposed effect at the individual level and lead to different results at a more aggregate level. For instance, rendering the availability of all these possibilities salient might encourage actual participation for individuals highly interested in the arts in general, but might be symbolically satiating for individuals less interested in those activities.

Building on the concepts of both symbolic and actual satiation of self-expression needs, future research could extend current findings in the domains of computer-mediated communication and media psychology. Apparently, the Internet upheaval offers the ideal context to test predictions derived from the present theorizing. For example, it could be tested whether online opinion voicing activities, like blogging, posting a comment on a forum, writing a review of a product or a service, commenting a news article, taking part in a poll, or posting a comment on Facebook, can have the undermining effects on choice described in this thesis. It could be hypothesized that online activities like the ones outlined above would reduce post-choice dissonance in experiments with the free-choice paradigm. A related issue is individual concerns about privacy. In relation to self-expression, privacy on the Internet can be considered as the other side of the same coin. Whereas many people enjoy the multitude of opportunities to publicize their thoughts, others are
more skeptical towards these practices and seek privacy and protection of their identities in online environments (e.g., Cranor, Reagle, & Ackerman, 2000). It would be interesting for further research to take into account these individual differences in sensitivity to privacy issues and examine how they might moderate the effect of opinion voicing on choice in combination with anonymous or eponymous opinion voicing. On another note, it is usually taken for granted that opportunities for opinion voicing should always be viewed positively by Internet users. Notwithstanding, building on the recent research stream on choice overload (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 2000), it could be similarly proposed that there is a limit as to how many opinion voicing opportunities users welcome as desirable. After a certain threshold, it might be that opinion voicing becomes burdensome and poses cognitive constraints. Therefore, a critical question would be, can there be opinion overload? How many opinions are too many opinions? And if there is such a thing as too much opinion, what are the consequences for self-expression in general and for choice in particular? On a speculative basis, it could be argued that opinion overload could have two consequences. One is that after being bombarded with overwhelmingly many opportunities to voice their opinions, Internet users might relinquish self-expression in general and prefer to keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves. Another possibility is that individuals would not relinquish the idea of self-expression in general, but turn their back only to opinion voicing in specific. That would leave room for increased interest in alternative self-expression means, and choice could be a possible candidate in that case.

An additional suggestion for further research is to examine the same effect of opinion voicing on choice from the observer’s perspective. All studies in this dissertation focused on the actor’s perspective, as the main topic under investigation was how individuals make choices. However, it would be interesting to look at this issue by shifting the perspective from the first to the third person, because this would reveal whether the effects described form general principles that guide perception and interpretation of others’ choices, too. A way to examine that would be through research on the correspondence bias (e.g., Gilbert & Malone, 1995). One hypothesis could be that if individuals are reminded of opinion voicing opportunities as alternative means of self-
expression, then they might be less prone to attribute a person’s choice to dispositional factors and underestimate situational factors. Put differently, if opinion voicing is made salient as a self-expressive alternative, individuals might be less likely to associate choice with self-expression, and hence solely with internal aspects of the self. In addition, it could be hypothesized that for hypothetical persons described as construing opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental), individuals might infer that their choices do not emanate directly from their preferences. This would imply that a novel remedy for the correspondence bias may be to emphasize the plasticity of self-expression and the variety of means people have at their disposal to express themselves. Such an emphasis might render choice less diagnostic for making inferences about one’s self, even from the observer’s perspective.

Finally, another direction for future research would be to explore how affective and social comparison processes mediate the effect of opinionation on preference-choice consistency described in Chapter 4. These findings could be linked to the recently introduced construct of fear of missing out or FOMO (Miranda, 2011). This term refers to the fear that one might miss out on something very interesting and exciting others are experiencing. That can be anything from parties to career choices. Although this fear is not new, today it is experienced with unparalleled intensity, because of the heightened awareness of what others are doing. Technology, and social media in particular, fuel this fear, because people are more than ever before aware of all the possible alternatives available, as well as of information about other people’s choices. One interesting route for future research would be to investigate how FOMO might be one factor explaining the effect of opinionation on choice consistency. It could be hypothesized that construing opinionation as beneficial (vs. detrimental) should induce FOMO, because people become more sensitized to the perils of not being adequately informed and opinionated; in turn, increased FOMO should lead to reduced preference-choice consistency, because FOMO should direct attention to the advantages of all available options, thus promoting change and favoring divergence from typical preferences. Another potential mediator of the effect of opinionation on choice consistency could be regulatory focus (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Higgins, 1997). An opinionation-as-beneficial mindset should yield a
promotion focus, because focusing on the benefits of opinionation directs attention to possible gains, whereas an opinionation-as-detrimental mindset should effectuate a prevention focus, because focusing on the detriments of opinionation directs attention to avoiding possible losses. As an effect, these two self-regulatory foci should instigate different screening strategies, which in turn should lead to differences in consistency.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARK: THE DARK SIDE AND THE BRIGHT SIDE

Choice is a powerful tool to express ourselves, get what we want or what we need, and move from the present to the future. It would be no exaggeration to say that choice creates our sense of self. Søren Kierkegaard argued that it is choice rather than the Cartesian idea of thought that consolidates existence (Stack, 1973), whereas Jean-Paul Sartre encapsulated the self-defining essence of choice in the aphorism “I choose myself perpetually” (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 502). Crossing the boundaries of cognitive science, psychology and neuroscience, contemporary philosophers espouse the existential preeminence of choice by calling human beings “choice machines”, that is, machines that do not act upon predetermined situation-action rules, but can predict the value of different possibilities and choose based on the anticipation of the speculated outcomes (Dennett, 2003; Drescher, 1991). Research presented in this thesis suggests that some aspects of opinion voicing under certain conditions may dissociate choice from the self. Especially as individuals all the more often encounter environments that provide them with ample opinion voicing opportunities and encourage them to be opinionated, the occasions where choice might be disconnected from the self will probably rise. The dark side of this effect could be that people lose a valuable ally in their daily function: post-choice rationalization. Rationalizing one’s choices is an adaptive strategy that helps implement decisions (Beckmann & Irle, 1985; Harmon-Jones et al., 2008; Sharot, DeMartino, & Dolan, 2009). But what if the availability of opinion voicing opportunities can so easily disturb this function? Possible consequences could be inertia, indecisiveness,
ambivalence, and a host of other inaction-related negative outcomes that stem from lack of commitment and detachment from choice. By impeding post-choice rationalization processes, opinion voicing may sabotage an essential component of human functioning that translates decisions into actions.

Yet, one could also see a silver lining in the effect postulated in this research. The bright side could be that opinion voicing may help individuals deal with choice in times of choice overload. Every choice is also a choice of what kind of a person one wants to be (Iyengar, 2010). As choices grow exponentially, the task of finding the right choice that conveys the right message about one’s self becomes more and more demanding. Opinion voicing might release from this tyranny of choice (Schwartz, 2000) and appease choice-induced anxiety by toning down self-choice associations. By means of expressing themselves through their opinions, individuals may circumvent identification with choice and relieve themselves from the responsibility to choose optimally. Viewed this way, opinion voicing may counteract the pitfalls of choice related to identity construction. But there is also another positive side in the proposed effect, albeit not explicitly highlighted in the current research. It has been recently argued that a choice mindset may be an obstacle to social change and a justification of social inequalities, because it prompts individuals to internalize the ideology of personal responsibility for whatever happens in their lives (Savani & Rattan, in press; see also Salecl, 2010; Savani, Stephens, & Markus, 2011). By attenuating the prominence of choice for the self-definition, opinion voicing might help limit the aversive consequences of this choice mentality. Although further research is required to address this intriguing possibility more directly, the current project hints that opinion voicing may unblind us from choice myopia by showing us that there are alternative paths to define ourselves.
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