

Variety-Seeking in Consumer Behavior: A Unified Framework Based on Neural Mechanisms

Author: Flavia Tinner

Abstract:

In the consumer behavior literature, numerous motives and mechanisms have been proposed to explain variety-seeking behavior, often leading to conflicting outcomes. When such inconsistencies arise at higher levels of analysis, it is effective to investigate the proposed mechanisms at lower levels, as these foundational mechanisms can clarify and potentially reconcile competing explanations. By analyzing variety-seeking behavior at the level of neural structures and processes, we identify a convergence of distinct mechanisms into a unified framework. Specifically, we conceptualize variety-seeking behavior as a cost-benefit analysis process and hypothesize that it is driven by serotonergic modulation of activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, thereby altering the cost-benefit balance to favor perceived benefits. To test this hypothesis, we suggest conducting a randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind experiment in which the experimental group is administered a 5-HT_{1A} receptor agonist. Participants perform a Cost-Benefit Decision-Making Task, varying cognitive effort and variety in choice sets, to measure the trade-off between rewards and costs. Our findings aim to provide a deeper understanding of the neural underpinnings of variety-seeking behavior and its implications for consumer decision-making. In doing so, we propose an overarching framework that integrates the various mechanisms driving variety-seeking behavior into a coherent model.