Consequences of Perceiving Oneself as Responsible for Obtaining a Discount: Evidence for Smart-Shopper Feelings

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The results of two studies, using different methods, converged to provide evidence for a noneconomic component to the affective consequences of a price promotion. Keeping constant the size of the discount, the consumer's perception of responsibility for obtaining a discount increased positive feelings. Perceived responsibility for a discount also increased the likelihood of behavioral consequences (repurchase and word-of-mouth communication about the product). These results are discussed in the context of better understanding the nature and implications of this noneconomic component of a price promotion's effects.

Discounts, cents-off coupons, and other consumer price promotions are, and have long been, a ubiquitous feature of the interaction between the retailer and the customer. The effects of these price promotions on the consumer are often understood as deriving from the economic value of the money. For example, to illustrate how a price promotion differs from a simple price decrease and to explain when a price promotion should be used, economic theorists use the concept of price discrimination (e.g., Farris & Quelch, 1987; Narasimhan, 1984). This idea holds that whenever segments of a market differ in price sensitivity, price reductions in the form of price promotions direct the discount to only the more price-sensitive segment. Thus, a price promotion gives the lower price to only the segment that is most price sensitive and should be used only when there are sizable segments of the market with differing price sensitivity.

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However, anecdotal evidence that price promotions are capable of generating an extraordinary level of consumer enthusiasm suggests that a price promotion may have a motivational effect on the consumer beyond the economic value of the money saved (Schindler, 1989). For example, cents-off coupons have led to the existence of "coupon queens," frequent-flyer programs have engendered "mileage maniacs," and in-store specials have led to phenomena such as the legendary mayhem in Filene's basement. If there is indeed such a nonmonetary motivational effect, then the purely economic models may not be adequate for understanding the popularity of price promotions or for developing models to guide management in their use. The purpose of this article is to report two studies that provide evidence for a noneconomic appeal of price promotions and to begin the process of understanding the nature of this noneconomic appeal.

DISCOUNT SIZE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR OBTAINING THE DISCOUNT

The economic appeal of a price promotion can be understood in terms of prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). In a credible price promotion, the consumer perceives the price as lower than his or her perceived, or internal, reference price (Klein & Oglethorpe, 1987; Urbany, Bearden, & Weilbaker, 1988; Winer, 1986) and thus regards the difference as something gained. According to prospect theory, the value of this gain—the economic appeal of the perceived discount—monotonically increases as a function of its size.

A means of testing for the existence of a noneconomic component to a price promotion's appeal is to determine if a factor other than the size of the perceived discount affects the positive feelings that the promotion engenders. One such factor is suggested by consumers' reports of perceiving themselves as efficient, effective, and generally as "smart shoppers" following participation in price promotions (Babakus, Tat, & Cunningham, 1988; Mittal, 1994; Shimp & Kavas, 1984). This suggests the importance of consumers' perception of being responsible for obtaining the discount. It is difficult to see how one could feel efficient, effective, and smart from obtaining a discount unless one perceives himself or herself, at least to some degree, as responsible for having obtained the discount. Hence, the ability of perceived responsibility for obtaining a discount to enhance the discount's affective consequences (controlling for discount size) would be evidence of a noneconomic component to a discount's appeal.

MEASURING PERCEIVED RESPONSIBILITY

Perceiving oneself as being responsible for obtaining a discount involves making an attribution about the cause of the discount. Research in social psychology has identified three dimensions of causal attribution: locus (or location) of causality,
controllability, and temporal stability (Meyer, 1980; Weiner, 1986). *Locus of causality* involves the distinction between attributed causes involving factors located within oneself (internal factors) and attributed causes involving factors located outside oneself (external factors). *Controllability* describes the degree to which the causes can be changed or affected by someone (controllable) or are under no one’s control (uncontrollable). *Stability* describes the degree to which the causes are constant over time (stable) or variable (unstable).

All three of these causal dimensions are relevant to the perception of responsibility (Fincham & Jaspars, 1980; Heider, 1958, pp. 113–114). Locus of causality would be considered the most fundamental. Perceiving oneself as responsible for an event must involve seeing internal factors as more important than external factors in causing the event. Controllability and stability are also relevant. If the consumer perceives internal causative factors as also under the consumer’s control and stable over time (i.e., due to voluntary actions), then perceived personal responsibility should be that much greater.

Although there are many contexts in which it is useful to examine separately the consequences of controllability and stability (e.g., Folkes, 1984), these two dimensions are closely related in the context of perceived responsibility for a discount. When the causes of a discount are perceived as internal, it is likely that a discount seen as due to controllable factors would also be seen as stable. Being a positive outcome, a discount that is really under one’s control should be stably so (much as when high grades are under a student’s control, the student is likely to stably exercise this control). Thus, in the investigations reported here, these two dimensions are combined into a single aspect, the degree to which a discount is seen as stably controlled.

Given that internal locus of causality is fundamental and essential to the perception of personal responsibility, the first hypothesis is as follows:

**H1a:** Keeping constant the size of the discount, consumers will experience more positive feelings from that discount the more they attribute the discount’s cause to internal factors.

When a consumer makes an internal attribution concerning the cause of a discount, also attributing stable controllability should further increase the perception of personal responsibility. When a consumer makes an external attribution, the stable controllability of that external cause is not expected to increase the perception of personal responsibility. This leads to the hypothesis of the following interaction:

**H1b:** When a discount is seen as internally caused, the attribution that this cause is stably controllable will have a greater effect on positive feelings than when a discount is seen as externally caused.
BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF A DISCOUNT

If a noneconomic component to a discount's appeal exists, then the good feelings that comprise this component could be expected to have behavioral consequences, including word-of-mouth communication and repeat purchasing. Telling others may rekindle the good feelings and enable their reexperience. If the noneconomic component is related to perceiving oneself as efficient and effective, then the proud feelings resulting from such a perception may lead to boasting about one's successes to family members and friends (Folkes, 1988).

Repeat purchase may serve as a reward that reinforces the behaviors that produced them (Nord & Peter, 1980; Rothschild & Gudis, 1981). Thus, the prospect of future good feelings would be expected to increase consumers' intentions to repeat the behavior of purchasing the brand and purchasing at the store where the discount was obtained.

These behavioral consequences of the good feelings of the noneconomic component of a discount's appeal lead to the following two hypotheses:

H2a: Keeping constant the size of the discount, consumers will be more likely to tell others about the purchase and more likely to show repeat-purchase behavior the more the cause of that discount is attributed to internal factors.

H2b: When a discount is seen as internally caused, the attribution that this cause is stably controllable will have a greater effect on communication and repeat-purchase behaviors than when a discount is seen as externally caused.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

These hypotheses concerning the existence and consequences of a noneconomic component to a price promotion's appeal are investigated in two studies. The two studies use differing, but complementary, methods. Study 1 involves an analysis of reports by consumers of actual discount purchases. There is wide natural variation in both the size of the perceived discounts and the causal attributions concerning these discounts. Study 2 consists of an experiment in which a form of projective questioning is used. The size of the discount is held constant between each of the experimental conditions, and aspects of perceived responsibility are systematically varied.

STUDY 1

The approach used in this study is a form of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). Each participant was asked to recall a recent discount purchase
she had made, and all subsequent questioning concerned that event. Four aspects of the participants' reactions to the discount purchase comprised the study's dependent variables: (a) satisfaction with the price paid, (b) number of people told about the price paid, (c) likelihood of purchasing again at that store, and (d) likelihood of purchasing the brand again. The participant's perception of the size of the discount and measures of the two aspects of responsibility for the discount (internal locus and stable controllability) comprised the study's independent variables. A pilot study using other measures of these variables, finding similar results, was reported previously (Schindler, 1988).

Method

Questionnaire. The first page of the questionnaire instructed the participants to think of their most recent purchase of a single item for which they had received a discount. A discount purchase was defined as "a purchase where you paid less than the amount most stores usually charge." The subsequent questions concerning that purchase measured, in this order: price satisfaction, size of the discount, behavioral consequences of the discount, and responsibility for the discount.

The size of the perceived discount was measured by two questions. The first asked the participant to recall the price she had paid, as accurately as possible. The second asked the participant to give her estimate of "the price that most stores usually charge for this item." Responses to this second question served as the measure of the participant's internal reference price for the purchased item. The size of the perceived discount was calculated by dividing the difference between the internal reference price and the price paid by the internal reference price.

The study's two aspects of responsibility for obtaining the discount were measured using Russell's (1982) Causal Dimension Scale. This scale consists of nine 9-point semantic-differential items, three (comprising a subscale) for each of the three dimensions of causal attribution (locus, controllability, and stability). The following three items of the locus subscale comprised the study's measure of internal locus (the response anchors for each item are given in parentheses):

Does the discount that you received reflect an aspect of: (yourself/the situation)
Is the reason you got the discount something: (outside of you/inside of you)
Is the reason you got the discount something about: (you/the store)

The following items of the controllability and stability subscales were combined to form the study's six-item measure of stable control:
Is the reason you got the discount: (controllable by you or by the store/uncontrollable by you or by the store)
Is the discount something: (you intended to get, or the store intended to give/you didn’t intend to get, or the store didn’t intend to give)
Is the reason you got the discount something for which: (neither you nor the store is responsible/either you or the store is responsible)
Is the reason you got the discount something: (permanent, could get the discount again/temporary, probably could not get the discount again)
Is the reason you got the discount something that is: (variable over time/stable over time)
Is the reason you got the discount: (changeable/unchanging)

The nine items were presented to the participants in an order that intermixed the items measuring internal locus and stable control.

Price satisfaction was measured using an eight-item scale. Each item was based on a word or phrase that qualitative preliminary research had determined was appropriate to describe strong positive emotions that could accompany a purchase. Each word or phrase was placed at the end of the sentence, “The price I paid for this item made me feel … .” The words and phrases used were ecstatic, excited, very special, made my day, thrilled, proud, powerful, and like laughing. Response alternatives for each item were provided by a 9-point agree-disagree scale.

The measures of the discount’s behavioral consequences were assessed by three questions. The first asked the participant to provide an open-ended estimate of the number of people she had told about the price she paid for the item. The second asked her to estimate her likelihood of returning to the store where the item had been purchased. The third asked her to estimate her likelihood of repurchasing the brand that had been purchased. Each of these last two questions used a 4-point scale with the points labeled (from left to right): definitely not, probably not, probably would, and definitely would.

**Sample and procedure.** The sample consisted of 202 members of women’s social groups affiliated with churches in middle-income neighborhoods of a large metropolitan area. A small monetary contribution was made to each group in return for the participation of its members.

The questionnaires were administered to the participants in a group setting. The researcher was present to provide instructions and answer questions.

**Results**

**Description of reported purchases and measures.** The discount purchases reported by the participants included a wide variety of both consumable and durable items, with prices paid ranging from $0.10 to $21,000. The median price
paid was $24.25, and the interquartile range was $41.12. The perceived discounts ranged from 3.4% to 90.0%. The mean discount size was 34.2% ($SD = 18.2$).

The three-item measure of locus of causality showed a marginal level of reliability ($\alpha = .65$). The mean value was 3.9 ($SD = 2.2$) on the 1–9 scale. The six-item measure of stable control showed a slightly lower level of reliability than the measure of locus ($\alpha = .57$), most likely because the measure of stable control is the combination of two scales (stability and controllability) designed to be separate. No item’s deletion would have increased the alpha for this measure. The mean value of stable control was 5.9 ($SD = 1.5$). There was modest correlation between the locus and stable control measures, $r(198) = .37, p < .001$.

The eight-item price-satisfaction scale showed a high level of reliability ($\alpha = .92$). The item asking about the specific feeling of pride was highly correlated with the aggregate of the other seven items, $r(198) = .82, p < .001$. The mean of the eight 9-point items comprised the price-satisfaction measure used in the study; the mean value of this measure was 5.7 ($SD = 1.8$).

The reported number of other people told about the price paid ranged from 0 to 30 people, with a mean of 2.5 people ($SD = 3.4$). Because this variable was not normally distributed, several possible transformations were investigated. Examination of the residuals in the regression analyses described later indicated that with the untransformed others-told variable there was a unimodal distribution of residuals with long tails at each end. By contrast, the residuals from using a log, reciprocal, or square root transformation showed markedly bimodal distributions. Thus, the others-told variable was left untransformed.

For the two 4-point repeat-purchase measures, the vast majority of the responses (96% for the store-again question, 97% for the brand-again question) were approximately evenly divided between the probably would and definitely would responses. Thus, the two repeat-purchase measures were virtually dichotomous variables. This restricted range of these variables may have been responsible for the poor performance of these two behavioral variables in the regression analyses described next.

**Regression analyses.** Each of the four dependent variables was regressed on discount size, the two aspects of responsibility (locus and stable control), and all interactions. (Discount size, locus, and stable control were standardized to minimize the impact of scale differences.) Each of the variables and interactions was entered separately. Those whose addition increased the amount of variation accounted for, as indicated by a statistically significant increase in $R^2$, were considered to have an effect. Locus was entered after discount size so as to test Hypothesis 1. To test Hypothesis 2, the Locus × Stable Control interaction term was entered after locus and stable control were entered individually. The $R^2$ changes for each of these analyses are displayed in Table 1.
TABLE 1

$R^2$ Changes From Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Study 1 Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Price Satisfaction</th>
<th>Others Told</th>
<th>Store Again</th>
<th>Brand Again</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discount size (D)</td>
<td>.0839****</td>
<td>.0708****</td>
<td>0334**</td>
<td>0106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal locus (L)</td>
<td>0600****</td>
<td>.0048</td>
<td>0034</td>
<td>0070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D × L</td>
<td>.0023</td>
<td>.0041</td>
<td>0127</td>
<td>0189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable control (S)</td>
<td>0002</td>
<td>.0153</td>
<td>.0200*</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L × S</td>
<td>0000</td>
<td>.0079</td>
<td>0009</td>
<td>.0108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D × S</td>
<td>0022</td>
<td>.0220*</td>
<td>.0049</td>
<td>.0030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D × L × S</td>
<td>0115</td>
<td>0010</td>
<td>0038</td>
<td>0058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ of full model</td>
<td>160****</td>
<td>126****</td>
<td>079*</td>
<td>056</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01. ***p ≤ .005. ****p ≤ .001

**Price satisfaction.** The first column of Table 1 shows the results for price satisfaction. The discount-size variable alone produced a significant $R^2$, larger discounts being associated with greater price satisfaction, $F(1, 198) = 18.14, p < .001$. The addition of the locus of causality variable led to a highly significant increase in $R^2$, $F(1, 197) = 13.80, p < .001$. This indicates that, even when the size of the perceived discount is controlled (through its earlier entry into the model), the participants reported more price satisfaction as their attribution of internal cause increased. Thus, Hypothesis 1a is supported by the data.

On the other hand, the lack of a statistically significant interaction between locus and stable control, $F(1, 194) < 1$, indicates that there was not a greater effect of stable controllability when the discounts were perceived as internally caused. Thus, Hypothesis 1b is not supported by the data.

It is worth noting that there is no statistically significant interaction between the effect of internal locus on price satisfaction and the size of the perceived discount, $F(1, 196) < 1$. Although negative results must be interpreted with caution, it should be noted that in this study the statistical power for observing an effect as large as the effect found for the locus of causality variable is very high (0.93); in fact, the power to observe an effect even 25% smaller is still considerable (0.73). What makes this lack of interaction interesting is that it suggests that perceived responsibility leads to as much increased satisfaction for a small discount as for a large one.

**Behavioral consequences.** The second through fourth columns of Table 1 show the regression results for the behavioral variables. For number of others told about the discount, the discount-size variable alone produced a significant $R^2$, larger discounts being associated with greater word-of-mouth communication, $F(1, 198) = 15.09, p < .001$. However, the addition of the locus-of-causality variable did not
lead to a significant increase in \( R^2 \), \( F(1, 197) = 1.03, p > .3 \). For likelihood of returning to the store, the discount-size variable alone produced a significant \( R^2 \), \( F(1, 198) = 6.84, p \leq .01 \) (larger discounts being associated with greater likelihood), but the locus-of-causality variable did not lead to a significant increase in \( R^2 \), \( F(1, 197) < 1 \). For likelihood of repurchasing the brand, neither discount size nor the addition of locus of causality produced a significant \( R^2 \), \( F(1, 198) = 2.03, p > .1 \) and \( F(1, 197) = 1.34, p > .2 \), respectively. The data also fail to show the presence of a statistically significant Locus \( \times \) Stable Control interaction for any of the three behavioral variables: others told, \( F(1, 194) = 1.70, p > .1 \); store again, \( F(1, 194) < 1 \); brand again, \( F(1, 194) = 2.09, p > .1 \). Thus, neither Hypothesis 2a nor Hypothesis 2b is supported by the data.

The regression analyses of the behavioral variables also indicate two results that were not hypothesized. There appeared to be a positive effect of attribution of stable control on the store-again variable, \( F(1, 195) = 4.20, p < .05 \), and a more negative effect of stable control on the others-told variable when the discount size was large, \( F(1, 193) = 4.86, p < .05 \). These results suggest that the behavioral consequences of a discount may be affected by factors in addition to those that influence the affective consequences of a discount.

One such factor, the size of the purchase, may help explain why an effect of internal attribution was observed for price satisfaction but not for the behavioral variables in the study. For those variables, the good feelings resulting from a discount may have been outweighed by the behavioral implications of the amount of money involved. For example, perceiving oneself as responsible for obtaining a discount on a small purchase may create satisfaction, but the small amount of money involved may make it an inappropriate event to describe to others.

To test this possibility, analysis was restricted to the larger half of the reported purchases (i.e., purchases over $24.25) and the behavioral variables were again regressed on discount size, locus, stable control, and all interactions. For the store-again and brand-again variables, these regressions failed to indicate an effect of internal locus or any other new effects. In fact, with this data restriction, the unpredicted effect of stable control on the store-again variable was no longer statistically significant.

For the others-told variable, this data restriction also removed the statistical significance of an unpredicted effect, the Stable Control \( \times \) Discount Size interaction. However, unlike the store-again and brand-again variables, the use of data from only the larger purchases indicated two effects that were not apparent in the whole sample. There was a statistically significant effect of internal attribution, \( F(1, 98) = 6.90, p \leq .01 \), and a significant tendency for this locus effect to be larger as discount size increased, \( F(1, 97) = 8.78, p < .005 \). These two effects both support the possibility that it is the inappropriateness of telling others about saving small amounts of money that prevented the hypothesized effect of internal attribution on word-of-mouth communication from being visible in the whole sample.
To determine if this effect of locus on the others-told variable in the larger purchases is mediated by feelings of price satisfaction, several additional regressions were run in accord with Baron and Kenny’s (1986) mediation analysis procedure. Price satisfaction was significantly influenced by internal attribution (unstandardized $B = .213$), $t(99) = 2.17, p < .05$, as was the others-told variable (unstandardized $B = .937$), $t(99) = 2.45, p < .02$. When the others-told variable was regressed on both internal attribution and price satisfaction, the regression coefficient for internal attribution was smaller than when the others-told variable was regressed on internal attribution alone but was still statistically significant (unstandardized $B = .774$), $t(98) = 2.01, p < .05$. This lower coefficient indicates mediation by price satisfaction; however, the statistical significance of this coefficient indicates that this mediation by price satisfaction is only partial.

STUDY 2

The evidence from Study 1 for a noneconomic component to the appeal of a discount is based on correlations between measured aspects of naturally occurring purchases. Because these purchases differ in numerous respects, it is possible that a relation between a measure of perceived responsibility and price satisfaction could be due to some unconsidered third variable that happens to be correlated with both variables. Study 2 addressed this limitation by using a procedure in which perceived responsibility for obtaining a discount was manipulated experimentally.

This manipulation was accomplished by creating a set of scenarios that described a person receiving a discount of constant size under various circumstances. The circumstances were chosen so that they led to differing perceptions of responsibility for obtaining the discount. However, in all scenarios, potential extraneous variables such as the type of product and price level were held constant. The participants’ reactions to each scenario were measured by asking them to judge how the consumer protagonist of the scenario would react. This projective method relies on the tendency for people to use their own feelings and reactions as a guide to judging the feelings and reactions of others (e.g., Hoch, 1988).

As in Study 1, both affective and behavioral reactions were investigated, but there were several differences in the specific measures used. The measure of positive feelings resulting from a discount purchase consisted of a single question that used general wording to ask about “good feelings” rather than Study 1’s eight-item price-satisfaction measure. To begin exploring the emotional tone of the feelings evoked by receiving a discount, questions concerning pride and gratitude were included as additional dependent variables in the experiment. The behavioral consequences of a discount were measured by two questions, one asking the likelihood of telling people about the discount and the other asking about repeat-purchase likelihood. To avoid the limits of the 4-point scales used in the repeat-purchase questions of Study 1, all of the measures in Study 2 used 9-point response scales.
Method

**Design and questionnaire.** Three different questionnaires, each concerning a different product, were randomly assigned between participants. Each questionnaire included scenarios that represented internal causes stably controlled, internal causes not stably controlled, external causes stably controlled, and external causes not stably controlled. Thus, the two within-subjects variables (internal locus and stable control) and the between-subjects variable (product) were fully crossed, yielding a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ experimental design.

Each questionnaire began with a cover page containing written instructions and two sample questions to familiarize the participants with use of the 9-point scale. Each of the following eight pages presented one of eight variations of a scenario. Below each scenario on the page were five questions that measured the dependent variables. The order of the eight scenario pages was randomized for each questionnaire. The last page included a question asking the participant to guess the purpose of the study.

**Development of the scenarios.** Design of the scenarios began with a series of qualitative interviews that resulted in a set of three basic discount situations and ideas for altering each situation so as to result in differing degrees of perceived responsibility. Each basic discount situation involved a product and an explicit statement of the discount received. The basic discount situation was described in the scenario’s first sentence or two. The three basic situations were as follows:

1. Ashley just got a hamburger, fries, and a Coke for $1.50. The regular price is about $2.50.
2. Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80.
3. Alyce just paid $425 for a new television set that regularly sells for $600.

The remaining material in a scenario existed for the purpose of manipulating the degree to which the scenario’s protagonist was perceived to be responsible for having obtained the discount. Eight variations of each of the three basic discount situations were constructed so that the three dimensions of causal attribution—internality, controllability, and stability—were systematically varied. In several waves of preliminary interviews, consumers rated, using the nine-item Causal Dimension Scale used in Study 1, the degree to which they perceived the protagonist of the scenarios to be responsible for the discount. After each wave of data collection, the wording of the scenarios was modified so that each scenario better represented the intended high or low values on the three attribution dimensions.

To combine the controllability and stability dimensions, a scenario was considered to represent stable control if it was calibrated to be high in both controllability and stability. A scenario that was low on either of these two causal attribution dimensions was considered to represent causes that were not stably controlled. An
example of a set of eight variations of a scenario and how each variation was classified can be seen in the Appendix.

**Dependent variables.** For each scenario, five questions asked the participant how she imagined the protagonist of the scenario felt and how the protagonist responded after having received the discount. Each question was answered using a 9-point scale. The scale for the first question, which asked about the protagonist’s good feelings, was anchored at 1 *(felt ok, but not especially good)* and 9 *(felt really good)*. The scales for the other four questions were anchored by the words *yes* and *no*. For two of these questions *yes* was the left anchor (1), and for the other two questions *yes* was the right anchor (9).

The wording of the five questions is illustrated by the following example of the questions asked after each variation of the dress scenario:

1. **Good feelings.** How good do you think that Janice felt about having paid only $55 for that dress?
2. **Pride.** Do you think that Janice felt proud that she paid only $55 for that dress?
3. **Gratitude.** Do you think that Janice felt gratitude to the store for having had to pay only $55 for that dress?
4. **Tell others.** Do you think that Janice will tell a lot of people that she paid only $55 for that dress?
5. **Repeat purchase.** Do you think that Jamee would go to that store again the next time she was looking for a dress?

**Sample and procedure.** The sample consisted of 148 members of women’s social groups affiliated with churches in middle-income neighborhoods of a large metropolitan area. A small monetary contribution was made to each group in return for the participation of its members.

The questionnaires were administered to the participants in a group setting with the researcher present to provide instructions and answer questions. The women who served as participants in this study had not participated in the previous study, had not been involved in the scenario-development phase of this study, and were told in advance only that this was a study of consumer behavior. Review of answers to the last question on the questionnaire, “What do you think we were trying to find out in this study?,” failed to reveal any participants who had guessed the nature of the hypothesis being tested.

**Results**

The means for each of the five dependent variables for each product and each of the four responsibility conditions are displayed in Table 2. A three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out for each of the five dependent variables. The results of these analyses are displayed in Table 3.
### TABLE 2
Means of the Dependent Variables in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario Type</th>
<th>Good Feelings</th>
<th>Pride</th>
<th>Gratitude</th>
<th>Tell Others</th>
<th>Repeat Purchase</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All products</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I-SC</td>
<td>8.01&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>7.86&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.27&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.34&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>7.52&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-not SC</td>
<td>6.84&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.55&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.02&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.21&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.94&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>E-SC</td>
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<td>6.36&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.51&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>E-not SC</td>
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<td>5.42&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.78&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.14&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td><strong>Fast food</strong></td>
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<td>I-SC</td>
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<td>5.37&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>6.06&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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</table>

*Note: Each dependent variable is measured on a 9-point scale. Means (within a group of four) with different subscripts differ significantly at p < .05. I = internal, SC = stably controlled; E = external.

### TABLE 3
F Ratios From Study 2 Analyses of Variance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Good Feelings</th>
<th>Pride</th>
<th>Gratitude</th>
<th>Tell Others</th>
<th>Repeat Purchase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product (P)</strong></td>
<td>9.14****</td>
<td>10.54****</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>4.01*</td>
<td>4.43*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal locus (L)</td>
<td>39.55****</td>
<td>76.76****</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>16.59****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable control (S)</td>
<td>46.21****</td>
<td>65.02****</td>
<td>10.43***</td>
<td>39.66****</td>
<td>24.82****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L × S</td>
<td>6.82**</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>P × L</td>
<td>4.97**</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P × S</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.19*</td>
<td>5.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P × L × S</td>
<td>5.24**</td>
<td>3.38*</td>
<td>4.70**</td>
<td>3.54*</td>
<td>20.50****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .05 **p ≤ .01 ***p ≤ .005 ****p ≤ .001.
**Affective measures.** As is predicted by Hypothesis 1a, the good-feelings measure is significantly affected by internal locus. Consumers who obtained discounts for reasons internal to themselves were judged to experience more good feelings from these discounts than those whose discounts were due to factors external to themselves. Although the significant Product × Internality interaction indicates that the size of the effect differs between products, separate ANOVAs for each product indicate that the enhancement of good feelings by internality is a robust effect that exists for all three products: fast food, $F(1, 47) = 34.72, p < .001$; dress, $F(1, 50) = 6.50, p < .02$; television, $F(1, 48) = 5.10, p < .03$.

The prediction of Hypothesis 1b, a positive interaction between internal locus and stable control, is also statistically significant. However, this interaction is not robust—it is statistically significant for only one of the three products: fast food, $F(1, 47) = 10.76, p \leq .002$; dress, $F(1, 50) = 2.48, p > .10$; television, $F(1, 48) = 0.71, p > .40$. For the dress and television products, stable control enhanced good feelings for the external as well as the internal scenarios, thus leading to a significant main effect of stable control for those products rather than the hypothesized Locus × Stable Control interaction.

A clue to the source of the between-products differences in these results can be found by examining the means in the first column of Table 2. The three products share the following pattern: The internal, stably controlled discounts led to the highest level of good feelings; the internal, not stably controlled discounts led to a lower level; and the external, not stably controlled discounts led to a still lower level. These three products do not, however, share the relative level of the good-feelings mean for the external, stably controlled discounts. The between-products differences in this mean, which in fact could have caused all of the product interactions in the good-feelings results, may have been due to the particular scenario that represented this type of discount cause. This scenario describes the lower price as being due to the seller finding a way to lower costs. Knowing that a retailer is lowering costs may appeal more to consumers who are purchasing goods (such as a dress or television) than to those purchasing a product with a high service component (such as a fast-food meal).

Although this possibility seems plausible, it involves only one of many differences that exist among the three products used in this study. Because of this, the criterion for evidence for a hypothesized effect should be whether or not the effect is robust over all three of the study's products. The finding of an effect of internal attribution on good feelings for all three products thus provides support for Hypothesis 1a. The failure to find the hypothesized Locus × Stable Control interaction for all three products indicates that the study has not produced firm support for Hypothesis 1b.

In addition to supporting Hypothesis 1a, these data provide two pieces of evidence that the positive feelings evoked by the internal attribution of a discount
have more the tone of pride than of gratitude. The first is that pride is more highly correlated with the good-feelings measure than is gratitude: pride, good feelings, \( r(152) = .57 \); gratitude, good feelings, \( r(152) = .32 \). This difference is significant by Hotelling’s test for the difference between correlations that involve nonindependent samples (Johnson & Jackson, 1959, p. 354), \( t(151) = 3.47, p < .001 \).

The second piece of evidence concerns the effects of internal attribution on the study's measures of pride and gratitude. Pride shows the same robust enhancement due to internal attribution that is shown by the good-feelings measure (see Table 3): also, fast food, \( F(1, 48) = 25.09, p < .001 \); dress, \( F(1, 49) = 19.95, p < .001 \); television, \( F(1, 48) = 35.42, p < .001 \). Gratitude does not show an internal locus effect, even though the study's statistical power for observing an effect even half as large as the effect shown for pride is quite high (0.99). That gratitude does not also show an internal locus effect not only indicates that pride is more closely associated with the good-feelings measure, but also suggests that it is more the pride component of good feelings than the gratitude component that increases with perceived responsibility.

**Behavioral measures.** The prediction of Hypothesis 2a, an effect of internal locus on behavior, was supported for only one of Study 2’s two measures of the behavioral consequences of a discount. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a highly significant effect of internal locus on the repeat-purchase measure. This indicates that consumers who obtained discounts for reasons internal to themselves were judged more likely to return to that store for a future purchase. This effect was robust over products: fast food, \( F(1, 49) = 5.75, p \leq .02 \); dress, \( F(1, 48) = 4.71, p < .04 \); television, \( F(1, 46) = 6.23, p < .02 \). On the other hand, the hypothesized effect of internality on the tell-others measure did not quite reach statistical significance, \( F(1, 145) = 3.60, p \leq .06 \). However, separate ANOVAs for each product indicated that internal attribution did significantly increase the tell-others measure for one of the three products, the television, \( F(1, 48) = 7.26, p \leq .01 \).

The prediction of Hypothesis 2b, a positive Locus x Stable Control interaction, was not supported for either of Study 2’s measures of the behavioral consequences of a discount. A possible reason for this failure to support Hypothesis 2b can be seen by examining the means in the rightmost two columns of Table 2. As was the case for the good-feelings measure, the scenarios representing external, stably controlled discounts seem to have led to higher than expected levels on both the tell-others and repeat-purchase measures, at least for the two tangible products, the dress and television. These higher than expected levels for the external, stably controlled condition create an effect of stable control that is as large for internally caused discount situations as for externally caused ones (i.e., a main effect of stable
control) rather than the hypothesized tendency for stable control to have a greater
effect when the discount is seen as internally caused.

Because there is some support for Hypothesis 2a in the Study 2 results—the
effect of internal locus on the repeat-purchase measure—there should be some
consideration of why an effect of internal locus for the tell-others measure did not
occur consistently over all three products. Two factors appear to be involved. The
first is that consumers may have been judged unlikely to tell others about discounts
on a product (such as the dress product) that is style-related and often used to
impress others with one’s elegance and sophistication. The second factor is, as
suggested by the results of Study 1, that consumers may be judged unlikely to tell
others about a discount when there is only a small amount of money involved (as
in the fast-food product). It can be seen from again referring to the means in Table
2 that the tell-others levels for both the fast-food and dress products tend to be
relatively low. Thus, it may have been only for the television product that there was
judged to be enough tendency to tell others about the discount that it became
possible to observe a greater likelihood of such word-of-mouth communication for
discounts with internally attributed causes.

DISCUSSION

The results of the two studies converge to indicate the importance of the perception
of responsibility for obtaining a discount in the discount’s affective consequences.
Both studies demonstrated strong effects of internal locus, the most fundamental
aspect of perceived responsibility. In both studies, discounts that were attributed to
internal causes resulted in more positive affect than discounts attributed to external
causes, even though the size of the discount was controlled. In addition, Study 2’s
demonstration of this responsibility effect under conditions where an individual’s
perception of discount responsibility is manipulated within a single product con­
 firms that the effect is due to aspects of the situation rather than differences among
consumers or products. Thus, these studies provide consistent evidence for a
noneconomic component to the affective appeal of a price promotion: A discount
feels better to consumers when they view themselves as responsible for having
obtained the discount.

In addition to the evidence concerning a price promotion’s affective appeal, it
appears that the behavioral consequences of the discount are also enhanced by the
perception of responsibility. In Study 2, there was a strong effect of internal
attribution on likelihood of repeat purchase. In both studies there was evidence, at
least for some products, that attributing a discount to internal causes increases the
likelihood of word-of-mouth communication about the discount. Although there
were also negative results for the behavioral measures, plausible explanations exist
for each of them. The failure in Study 1 to observe an effect of internal attribution
on repeat purchase may have been due to the insensitivity of the measures used (the
participants tended to use only two scale points in responding to Study 1’s repeat-purchase questions). The failure to observe an effect of internal attribution on word-of-mouth communication for the lower priced products in Study 1 and for the fast-food and dress products in Study 2 may have been due to the lower likelihood of telling others about discounts on fashion-related products and in situations where the savings consists of only a small amount of money.

Both studies were consistent in providing very little evidence for the interaction between locus and stable controllability that was hypothesized to represent an aspect of perceived responsibility beyond the aspect of internal locus. Study 2’s finding of stable controllability effects for the external scenarios as well as for the internal scenarios suggests a possible reason for this. In the context of consumer discounts, many external causes that are stably controlled, such as Study 2’s scenarios in which the seller found a new way to lower costs, may paradoxically lead consumers to see themselves as responsible. The consumer would not perceive responsibility for the current discount itself, but might feel some responsibility for having learned where to obtain discounts in the future. Such a phenomenon would complicate the relation between stable controllability and perceived responsibility, and thus perhaps lessen the value of stable controllability for measuring perceived responsibility for obtaining a discount.

Nature of the Noneconomic Appeal: Smart-Shopper Feelings

The evidence for the existence of a noneconomic component to the positive feelings resulting from obtaining a discount raises questions concerning the nature of these positive feelings. Consistent with past research (Babakus et al., 1988; Mittal, 1994; Shimp & Kavas, 1984), the present studies point to involvement of the emotion of pride. Given the close association that has been found between locus of causality and pride (Weiner, 1986, pp. 128–130), the effects of internality on affect found in the present studies are in themselves evidence for the pridelike nature of the noneconomic appeal of a discount. This pridelike nature was further confirmed by correlational evidence from both studies. In Study 1, the item asking about pride was highly correlated with the other price-satisfaction items. In Study 2, the pride measure was more closely correlated to the measure of good feelings than was the study’s measure of gratitude and also showed responsibility effects similar to those of the good-feelings measure.

The source of these pridelike feelings can be explored by considering their relation to the economic component of a discount’s appeal. Two possibilities are apparent. The first, the added-weight explanation, is that the pride of obtaining a discount may increase the value of the discount by adding weight, or importance, to the good feelings that accrue from the economic aspects of the discount (see Schindler, 1994). This explanation would predict that the amount of positive affect
created by seeing oneself as responsible for a discount would be proportional to the size of the perceived gain.

The second possibility, the \textit{joy-of-winning explanation}, is that perceiving oneself as responsible for a gain of any perceptible size leads to the pridelike satisfaction of having won in an implied game against the seller (Rose, 1988), and perhaps also against other consumers. This possibility would predict that the noneconomic component of the positive affect created by seeing oneself as responsible for a discount would be independent of the size of the perceived gain. To help imagine this possibility, consider that the joy-of-winning explanation would also predict that a perceived loss would result in a pain of losing that would be independent of the size of the perceived loss. When the loss is small, the consumer might attempt to explain this seemingly unjustified pain of losing with the often-heard phrase, “It’s not the money, it’s the principle.”

Although this investigation was not designed to distinguish between these two explanations, the results concerning affective consequences are suggestive of the joy-of-winning explanation. In Study 1, the enhancement of price satisfaction by internal attribution did not increase with discount size. In Study 2, there was no tendency for the more expensive products to show a larger internality effect. This suggestiveness is intriguing because the joy-of-winning explanation may help account for coupon queens, mileage maniacs, and the other examples of the high degree of excitement that some consumers experience from the often relatively small gains obtained from price promotions. A monetary gain, even if small, could serve as a token of a consumer victory and could represent the pridelike feelings of competence and effectiveness that winning evokes. Thus, in the joy-of-winning explanation, the noneconomic component of the appeal of a discount would have an independence from the economic component that would justify conceptualizing the distinct phenomenon of \textit{smart-shopper feelings}.

\textbf{Implications and Conclusions}

The affective and behavioral consequences of perceiving oneself as responsible for obtaining a discount suggest the benefits to the seller of considering perceived responsibility in the design of price promotions. A price promotion designed to evoke attributions of responsibility could be expected to appeal to consumers more than one that does not evoke such attributions, and thus have a greater ability to create product trial. In addition, such a price promotion appears associated with an increased likelihood of repurchase and, at least for large purchases, it may increase the likelihood of highly credible word-of-mouth product communication.

Consideration of this noneconomic component of a discount’s effect might also lead to more accurate guidance concerning when price promotions would be most appropriate. The price-discrimination view of price promotions counsels the man-
EVIDENCE FOR SMART-SHOPPER FEELINGS

ager to look for segments of differing price sensitivity. However, the finding of evidence for smart-shopper feelings, a situational component to a promotion's appeal, suggests that a deal can create a price-sensitive segment. Thus, rather than looking for groups of differing price sensitivity, the manager might work to design promotions that lead consumers in targeted segments to see themselves as responsible for the discounts. This underlines the importance of future work to identify the specific aspects of price promotions that lead to an attribution of personal responsibility.

Overall, the evidence provided in this investigation for an effect of perceived responsibility on the consequences of a discount indicate the limits of attempting to understand price promotions in terms of economic factors alone. The consumer's perception of responsibility for obtaining a discount can evoke powerful feelings and have important behavioral consequences. The implications of these feelings and behaviors for the effective use of price promotions suggest the value of further research on the nonmonetary factors that contribute to the motivational power of a consumer discount.

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APPENDIX

Example of a Set of Eight Scenario Variations

The mean ratings given by the final wave of preliminary participants (n = 33) on the two aspects of perceived responsibility are shown after each heading.

Internally Caused, Stably Controlled (Internal Locus: 7.61; Stable Control: 6.20)

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. This is because Janice always shops around and does not buy until she finds a good deal. As
usual, she checked out all the ads and the stores until she found a dress that was just what she wanted and was also on sale.

Internally Caused, Not Stably Controlled (Internal Locus: 5.17; Stable Control: 4.75)

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. Janice rarely shops for sales but this time she was shopping for her sister, using her sister’s money. So today she decided to shop around to find the best possible price she could get.

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. Janice got this discount because she has an uncanny knack for finding the good deals. Even though she does not look through ads and rarely shops, she always seems to run into the good deals. She probably could not pay full price for something even if she wanted to.

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. Because of her work, Janice usually cannot spend time shopping. But sometimes terribly bad moods come over her, and when she is in a bad mood, she cannot get any work done, so she shops. Today one of these bad moods occurred, so she shopped around and found these dresses on sale.

Externally Caused, Stably Controlled (Internal Locus: 1.78; Stable Control: 5.43)

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. While wrapping the dress, the manager told Janice that she got that price because the store has just hired a very shrewd buyer who is able to get quality clothes at very low costs. Thus, the store is now able to have sales very frequently.

Externally Caused, Not Stably Controlled (Internal Locus: 1.69; Stable Control: 3.39)

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. The salesclerk explained that, just for that day, the store decided to have a sale because the owner just got married and he wanted to celebrate. Usually the owner does not like to have sales.

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. This occurred because the manufacturer lowered the prices the store had to pay for that line of dresses. Their contract required that the store pass these lower prices on
to the consumer. The manager told Janice this after she had purchased the dress.

Janice has just paid only $55 for a dress that was regularly $80. This was because one of the workers accidentally put the wrong price label on the dress. Janice did not realize this until she had the dress at home.