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The influence of the maximizing mindset on recall: The moderating role of self-construal*

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Maximizers are individuals who search through many alternatives with the intention of gaining the best decisional outcome. Although significant empirical advances have been made in understanding the various characteristics typically associated with maximizers, much less is known about the impact of maximizing on memory. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between maximizing mindset and information recall, moderated by self-construal. We hypothesized that maximizing mindset would predict higher levels of recall of ranking information and that self-construal would moderate the effect. To test these hypotheses, an online study was conducted on Korean college students (N=179), in which the rank of different types of products was shown. They were later asked to recall the rank of the products after completing a filler task. As predicted, results demonstrate that under the maximizing mindset condition, individuals are more likely to recall the ranking information than those under the satisficing mindset condition. Moderation analysis found that higher level of independent self-construal compared to interdependent self-construal strengthened the relationship between maximizing mindset and ranking information recall. Underlying mechanisms and implications, as well as avenues for future research, are discussed.

Key words : maximizing mindset, independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal, ranking information, recall

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Introduction

Maximizers are individuals who search through many alternatives with the intention of gaining the best choices (Schwartz et al., 2002). Abundant literature has documented the characteristics of maximizers: high in regret (Besharat, Ladik, & Carrillat, 2014; Parker, Bruine de, & Fischhoff, 2007; Purvis, Howell, & Iyer, 2011; Roets, Schwartz, & Guan, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2002; Spunt, Rassin, & Epstein, 2009), high in perfectionism (Bergman, Nyland, & Burns, 2007; Chang et al., 2011; Dahling & Thomas, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2002), low in satisfaction (Chang et al., 2011; Dahling & Thomas, 2013; Dar-Nimrod, Rawn, Lehman, & Schwartz, 2009; Roets et al., 2012; Schwartz et al., 2002), and high in neuroticism (Schwartz et al., 2002).

Although great empirical advances have been made in understanding the various characteristics associated with maximizers, much less is known about the impact of this tendency on memory. Because most research has focused on the negative impacts of the maximizing tendency and mindset, we wish to examine the effect of the maximizing mindset on the cognitive aspect of recall memory. Accordingly, we set out to examine how the maximizing mindset might influence recall, especially on recalling ranking information which allows one to make comparisons readily. We hypothesized that those primed with the maximizing mindset would be able to recall ranking information better than those primed with the satisficing mindset.

However, individual differences can interact with the situationally primed maximizing mindset and further influence the recall of ranking information. In examining the relationship between the maximizing mindset and recall on ranking information, we sought to examine self-construal as a possible moderator. While the processing of ranking information is indeed grounded in a cognitive orientation toward differentiation, we propose that the influence of Self-Construal extends beyond this cognitive style. Recent research indicates that maximizers are not solely driven by absolute quality but are deeply concerned with 'relative standing' and social comparison (Weaver et al., 2015). Therefore, we posit that Independent Self-Construal is the most appropriate moderator because it captures not only the cognitive mechanism of differentiation but also the motivational drive for distinctiveness and superiority.

Hypothesis 1: The maximizing mindset increases ranking information recall.

Self-Construal

However, one can question whether the maximizing mindset will always result in an increase in recall of ranking information. We propose that self-construal acts as a key moderator.

Self-construal refers to how individuals define the self and understand themselves in relation to others. Whereas an independent self-construal emphasizes autonomy and distinctiveness, an interdependent self-construal highlights relational connectedness and contextual sensitivity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). Prior research in consumer and advertising psychology has shown that these self-views meaningfully shape judgment, information processing, and decision-making (Bernritter et al., 2017; Hong & Chang, 2015; Ng & Houston, 2006; Polyorat et al., 2005; Sung & Choi, 2011).

In the present research, we posit self-construal as a key moderator in the relationship between the maximizing mindset and the recall of ranking information. While we acknowledge that processing ranking information relies on a differentiation-oriented cognitive style-distinguishing options as separate entities-we argue that cognitive mechanics alone cannot fully explain the maximizer's preference for such information. As noted earlier, maximizers are driven by a desire for relative standing and social comparison (Weaver et al., 2015). This competitive motivational orientation aligns closely with the core attributes of an independent self-construal, which entails a drive for distinctiveness and superiority over others. Accordingly, individuals with a salient independent self-construal should exhibit enhanced recall of ranking information-which explicitly signals hierarchical standing-when a maximizing mindset is activated.

2.3. Hypothesis Development

Over the past years, the importance of the self in shaping behavior and cognition has been well documented (Cross et al., 2011; Leary & Tangney, 2003). Building on Markus and Kitayama's (1991) argument, research has shown that the independent self is associated with a differentiation mindset (focusing on differences), while the interdependent self is associated with an assimilation mindset (focusing on similarities) (Stapel & Koomen, 2001).

This distinction is critical for ranking information recall. Ranking is inherently a differentiation tool-it separates the "best" from the rest. However, beyond mere differentiation, ranking implies a "winner." The independent self-construal, which values achievement and being unique, is motivationally congruent with the maximizing mindset's goal of finding the absolute best option to achieve status.

Therefore, when a maximizing mindset is primed (triggering a desire for the best), those with a high independent self-construal will be most responsive to ranking information because it satisfies both their cognitive need for differentiation and their motivational need for superiority. In contrast, for those with a high interdependent self-construal, the drive for harmony and assimilation conflicts with the hierarchical nature of ranking, thereby

attenuating the effect of the maximizing mindset.

Hypothesis 2: Self-construal moderates the relationship between the maximizing mindset and ranking information recall. Specifically, the positive effect of the maximizing mindset on ranking recall will be stronger for individuals with a high independent self-construal compared to those with a high interdependent self-construal.

Methods

Participants

A total of 180 Korean participants were recruited via an online research company. Of the recruited participants, data of 179 (85 males and 94 females) were used in the final analysis, with one omitted due to incomplete responses to the study. All participants were college students aged between 20 and 29 years (age M = 22.46, SD = 1.94). They received US$5 for their participation, and their informed consent was collected through the online survey.

Data acquisition and general procedure

In our online experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of two priming mindsets: the maximizing mindset or the satisficing mindset. Participants in the maximizing mindset were asked to pick the best out of the five available choices in different domains. They were also asked to write down their favorite product in certain domains as open-ended questions. The satisficing mindset participants were asked to choose good enough or reasonably satisfactory options within the same domains as the maximizing mindset condition. They were also asked to write down a product that they had consumed recently within the same domains as the maximizing mindset condition.

After collecting their basic demographic information such as sex and age, they were given three sets of stimuli-sandwich, festival, and debit card in a counterbalanced order. Each set included a ranking of five products. After they saw the ranking of products, they were given a distraction task followed by a spontaneous recall task. Finally, after completing the Self-construal scale and the Need for Cognition scale, they were debriefed.

Measures

Ranking information and recall task

Participants were given three sets of stimuli each differing in the product category. The three product categories included a flower fair held in different cities of South Korea, debit cards

offered in different banks, and different types of sandwiches offered from a menu. To ensure generalizability, we selected three distinct categories-sandwiches (tangible/food), festivals (experiential), and debit cards (utilitarian/financial) -that are highly relevant to general consumers. Each set included a fictitious ranking of five products, presented as being based on consumer popularity. These rankings were created for experimental purposes to control for participants' prior knowledge and real-world preferences. The order of the three stimuli was counterbalanced.

After viewing the stimuli for as long as they wanted, they were given a distraction task involving five multiple choice questions requiring simple mathematical skills. Following this, participants were given a spontaneous recall task, which asked them to write the exact names of the products ranked in the first, second, and fifth places. Only these three places were asked for the following reasons. Asking the first place would be the most important for those primed with the maximizing mindset because maximizers seek only the best. Asking the second place would also be meaningful because the maximizing mindset induces one to be sensitive to alternatives and the second place is the most attractive alternative compared to the first. Lastly, the fifth place was asked because we were curious whether those primed with the maximizing mindset would be sensitive to other less attractive alternatives as well. The third and fourth rankings were omitted from the recall task due to the time limit of the entire experiment.

The names of products were all formed to consist of two words. For the flower fair, the name of the city was followed by the name of the flower (e.g., "Busan Lily" Festival). For the debit card, the name of the bank came first and either master or visa followed (e.g., "Citi Master" Card). For the sandwich, two ingredients made up the name of the sandwich (e.g., "Chicken Avocado" Sandwich). Participants received 1 point for each word correctly recalled. They could receive up to a total of 6 points for each set. (range: 0 = none of products' names correctly recalled; 6 = all products' full names correctly recalled). In total, they could have received 18 points if they had gotten all the questions correct for all three sets.

Self-construal scale

The self-construal scale (Singelis, 1994) consists of two parts-independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal. The independent subscale consists of 12 items that measure how much an individual values the separateness and the uniqueness of the self in determining one's thoughts, feelings, and actions (e.g., "My personal identity independent of others is very important to me."). The interdependent subscale consists of 12 items that measure how much one is connected to others in terms of determining one's self (e.g., "It is important for me to maintain harmony within

my group."). Participants rated 24 items each on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The coefficient alpha was .799 for the independent subscale and .779 for the interdependent subscale.

For each individual, we obtained a single self-construal score by subtracting the person's Interdependent from the Independent self-construal. We obtained a combined self-construal score because our interest in this research was in the relative salience between the independent and the interdependent self-views within each individual, rather than in the absolute strength of each self-construal score (Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008, p. 7). In other words, a higher score on this measure indicated greater salience of the independent rather than the interdependent self.

Control variables

According to the literature review, we identified three variables that could confound our main variables: age, need for cognition, and product familiarity. We controlled for age because it has been found that age and recall have a positive correlation (Craik & McDowd, 1987). We controlled for the need for cognition, which is the motivation for cognitive challenge, because Verplanken, Hazenberg, and Palenewen (1992) report that subjects with a high need for cognition engage more in information search and related cognitive responses than those with low need for cognition. This variable was measured using the 15-item scale adapted from Kim (2007) (= .78). We also controlled for product familiarity because it has been known to affect the learning of new information (Johnson & Russo, 1984). Product familiarity for festivals and debit cards was assessed with the question "How well do you know about festivals/debit cards?" Answers were collected on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = I know almost nothing; 7 = I know it very well), and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .81 and .80, respectively. For the sandwich, participants responded to "How often do you buy sandwiches?" on the following 7-point scale (1 = every day; 7 = almost never) (= .84). To create a single construct for product familiarity for three sets of products, the means of the three scores were calculated after reverse coding the score for the sandwich.

Results

The main effect of the maximizing mindset

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare recall for ranking information in the maximizing mindset and the satisficing mindset conditions. Confirming Hypothesis 1, the maximizing mindset produced greater recall in ranking information than the satisficing mindset. There was a significant difference in the recall scores for the maximizing mindset (M = 5.89, SD = 3.47) and the satisficing mindset (M =

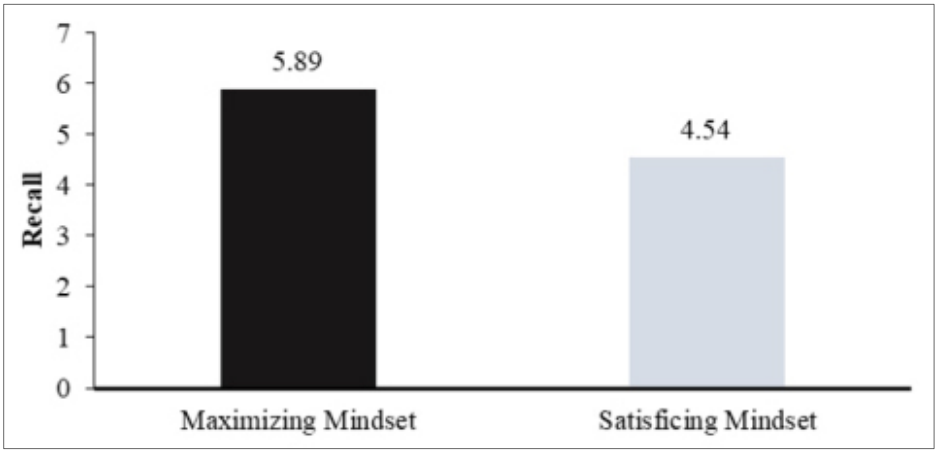

Figure 1. The effect of the mindset condition (maximizing vs. satisficing) on recall.

4.54, SD = 3.06; t(277) = 2.74, p = .007; see Figure 1).

Next, we examined whether this greater recall produced by the maximizing mindset was due to other variables such as age, need for cognition, or product familiarity. Even after controlling for the three variables mentioned above using a hierarchical regression analysis, those in the maximizing mindset condition still produced higher recall than those in the satisficing mindset condition (F(6,172) = 3.77, p = .008; see Table 1). Thus, the maximizing mindset influenced recall over and above the three control variables.

Table 1. Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing the effect of the maximizing mindset on recall after controlling for age, need for cognition, and product familiarity.

Step	Recall				
	B	SE B	β	R^2	△
Step 1				.015	
Age	-.171	.130	-.099		
Need for Cognition	.283	.307	.070		
Product Familiarity	-.100	.267	-.029		
Step 2				.032*	.017*
Maximizing Mindset	1.320	.492	.198**		

Notes: * p <.05, ** p <.01

The moderating effect of self-construal

In order to verify the hypothesis that self-construal has a moderating effect on the relationship between mindset and recall, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. To incorporate the independent variable, a categorical variable, into the hierarchical regression analysis, the variable was dummy coded (satisficing mindset = 0, maximizing mindset = 1). In order to minimize the effects of multicollinearity, the continuous moderating variable self-construal was mean-centered. Specifically, in Step 1, the control variables (age, need for cognition, and product familiarity) were entered and controlled for. In Step 2, the maximizing mindset, the independent variable, and self-construal, the moderating variable, were entered. Finally, in Step 3, in order to see the moderating effect of self-construal, the interaction term of mindset and self-construal was entered. The results can be seen in Table 2.

According to the results in Table 2, none of the control variables included in Step 1 significantly predicted recall. In Step 2, the main effect of the maximizing mindset was significant (β = .197, p = .009) but the main effect of self-construal was not (β = .037, p = .628). Lastly, in Stage 3, when the interaction term of maximizing mindset and self-construal was entered, increased significantly ($\triangle$ = .023, p = .003). Specifically, the effect of the interactive term of mindset and self-construal was significant (β = .317, p = .001), which demonstrates that the relative salience of independent self-construal moderates the

Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing the moderation effect of self-construal on the relationship between the maximizing mindset and recall.

Step	Recall				
	B	SE B	β	R^2	△
Step 1				.015	
Age	-.171	.130	-.099		
Need for Cognition	.283	.307	.070		
Product Familiarity	-.100	.267	-.029		
Step 2				.055*	.040*
Maximizing mindset	1.309	.493	.197**		
Self-construal (IND-INT)	.124	.254	.037		
Step 3				.078**	.023**
Maximizing mindset x Self-construal	1.573	.487	.317**		

Notes: * p <.05. ** p <.01. IND = Independent; INT = Interdependent

relationship between the mindset and the recall of ranking information. To determine the pattern of the moderating effect of self-construal, self-construal was divided into when the difference between independent and interdependent selves are high (M + 1SD) and when the difference is low (M − 1SD) (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991). To test the moderating effect and simple slopes, the PROCESS macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2013) was used with 5,000 bootstrap samples. As seen in Figure 2 and Table 3, when the relative salience of the independent self was low (i.e., the interdependent self was relatively dominant), the effect of the maximizing mindset on recall was not significant. However, when the relative salience of the independent self was high, the positive effect of the maximizing mindset on recall was significant. This suggests that the moderation is driven by the degree to which independence is salient relative to interdependence. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

Table 3. Simple slopes analysis according to the level of self-construal (IND-INT).

	Level	B	SE	T	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
Self-construal (IND-INT)	Low	-.270	.685	-.394	-1.622	1.08
	Mean (0)	1.303	.480	2.713**	.355	2.251
	High	2.88	.683	4.214***	1.429	4.224

Notes: ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$. IND = Independent, INT = Interdependent

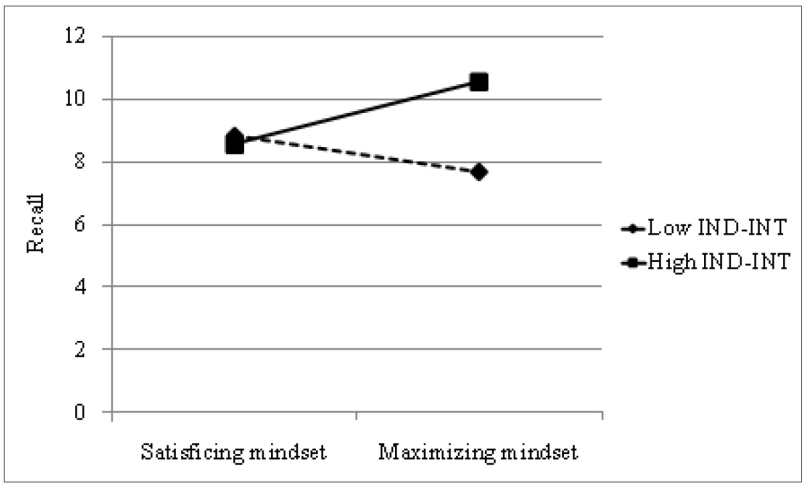

Figure 2. Interaction of Mindset and Self-construal (IND:Independent-INT: Interdependent)

General discussion

The aim of this study was to test the effect of maximizing mindset on recalling ranking information and the moderating effect of the self-construal. Results show that both expected hypotheses were supported. For the first hypothesis, participants in the maximizing mindset condition recalled more words from the ranking information than those in the satisficing mindset condition. These results were found even after controlling for age, need for cognition, and product familiarity, which are known to affect recall. To test the second hypothesis, the interaction term of mindset and self-construal was entered into the hierarchical regression analysis and the interaction was significant. According to the results, a more salient independent self-construal strengthened the positive relationship between the maximizing mindset and recall in that among those with a more salient independent self-construal, individuals primed with the maximizing mindset recalled more words than those primed with the satisficing mindset. However, for those with a more salient interdependent self-construal, there was no significant difference between individuals primed with maximizing and satisficing mindsets. They recalled a similar number of words regardless of the mindset.

Contrary to our expectations, the moderating effect of interdependent self-construal was not significant. This null finding might be attributed to the mismatch between the cognitive style associated with interdependent self-construal and the nature of the experimental task. Prior research suggests that individuals with high interdependent self-construal tend to engage in holistic processing, focusing on relationships and the overall context (Nisbett et al., 2001). However, the task in this study required participants to rank options, which demands analytic processing to compare specific attributes and establish a hierarchy. Consequently, the analytic demands of the ranking task may not have aligned with the holistic cognitive strengths of interdependent individuals, potentially attenuating the interaction effect.

Despite the burgeoning literature on the maximizing tendency and mindset, no study yet has delved into the effect of the maximizing mindset on recall. By focusing not on a general type of recall of random information but on the spontaneous cued recall of ranking information, this study shows how the maximizing mindset works when given a specific type of information which allows one to make comparisons of options easily. It is in line with previous findings which state that maximizers prefer more of options and actually engage in more comparisons when comparing alternatives (Schwartz et al., 2002; Turner et al., 2012).

Instead of measuring one's maximizing tendency through a self-report measure, by manipulating the mindset into the two conditions of maximizing and satisficing, this

study is able to directly look at the effects of the mindset, having higher implications than a correlational study. By also examining the moderating effect of self-construal on the relationship between the maximizing mindset and recall of ranking information, this study is able to further give a better understanding of consumer psychology by incorporating individual cultural differences.

In addition to the theoretical implications, practical implications can be found in the area of advertising. This study suggests how information should be presented to consumers depending on their individual differences in personality and self-concept. Especially in the era that targeted advertising and personality-matched advertising is possible (Iyer, Soberman, & Villas-Boas, 2005; Jansen, Moore, & Carman, 2013), this study shows which consumers might be sensitive to certain kinds of information. To maximizing consumers, information should be given in the form of ranking, such that comparisons could be made for lasting impressions, as they are more likely to recall ranking information. However, for consumers who are satisficers, this type of information might not make a memorable impression. The findings of this study offer possibilities of offering different types of advertisements or information based on one's maximizing tendency or self-construal.

Although this study may have important implications, it is not without limitations. While the mindset was manipulated, self-construal was measured using self-report scales. Other than self-report, there are other ways to operationalize self-construal, such as by priming (Cross et al., 2011). It would be intriguing to see the results of manipulating the self-construal and dividing subjects into two conditions of independent and interdependent separately, instead of measuring them together. Another way of possible future research would be to see the self-construal at a cultural level instead of the individual level. By collecting samples from two different countries of differing cultures of individualism and collectivism, one can see the effect of self-construal on cognition and recall (Hofstede, 1983).

Another limitation of this study is that it did not control for the time participants spent looking at the ranking information stimuli. Previous studies indicate that maximizers naturally spend more time in their search process and make more comparisons before making decisions (Ferrari & Dovidio, 2001; Iyengar et al., 2006; Mao, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2002; Turner, Rim, Betz, & Nygren, 2012; Rassin et al., 2008). While increased processing time may be an inherent characteristic of the maximizing mindset, we acknowledge that without controlling for time, we cannot rule out the possibility that time-on-task served as an alternative explanation for the improved recall. Future studies should measure or limit the time participants spend looking at the ranking

information to isolate the cognitive effect of the mindset from the simple duration effect.

Furthermore, several factors limit the generalizability of our findings. The study was conducted in an online experimental setting, which may not fully reflect real-world consumption environments where various external stimuli exist. Additionally, the sample was restricted to specific demographics and cultural backgrounds, limiting the broader applicability of the results to the general population. Furthermore, while we utilized three distinct product categories-sandwiches (food), festivals (experience), and debit cards (financial service)-to enhance external validity, these specific domains may not fully represent the entire spectrum of consumer goods. Thus, caution is required when generalizing these results to other product categories or consumption contexts.

Through this study, it was found that maximizers are better at recalling ranking information, but we have not found out how recalling more information might affect other factors such as product likeability or purchase intention. A possible topic to delve into would be whether maximizers, by remembering more information about products, are increasing their likability of the products or their intention to purchase the products. As past research has shown that liking leads to related recall (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994) and that positive relationships are found between liking and recalling (Du Plessis, 1994), this is a probable explanation that should be further explored.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to find out how the cognitive effects of the maximizing mindset leads to regret. Because it was shown that maximizers are more likely to remember not only the first ranking product but also the other alternatives in other ranks (second and fifth), it is possible that better memory for other alternatives is the reason behind maximizers experiencing higher regret and less satisfaction with their choice (Chang et al., 2011; Dahling & Thomas, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2002). Examining this hypothesis would be helpful in understanding the mechanisms of the maximizing mindset and tendency, incorporating into the future research, and application in consumer psychology.

Despite these limitations, the current research yields novel insights into the cognitive consequences of the maximizing mindset and self-construal. Our findings contribute to the field of psychology by combining a key concept in the human decision-making with the cultural concept of self-construal. The conceptual integration of these two areas in psychology is expected to promote innovative findings regarding the processes underlying human judgment and behavior.

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극대화 사고방식이 정보 회상에 미치는 영향: 자기 해석 수준의 조절 효과*

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극대화자(maximizer)란 최고의 결정을 내리기 위해 다양한 대안을 탐색하는 사람들을 말한다. 극대화자와 관련된 다양한 특성에 대한 실증적 연구는 상당히 진전되었지만, 극대화 성향이 기억에 미치는 영향에 대해서는 상대적으로 알려진 바가 적다. 본 연구는 극대화 사고방식과 순위 정보 회상 간의 관계를 살펴보고, 이 관계에서 자기 해석(self-construal)이 조절 변수로 작용하는지를 검증하고자 하였다. 구체적으로, 본 연구에서는 극대화 사고방식이 순위 정보의 회상 수준을 높일 것이라고 가정하였으며, 자기 해석이 이 효과를 조절할 것이라고 예상하였다. 이를 검증하기 위해 한국의 대학생 179명을 대상으로 온라인 실험을 실시하였다. 참가자들은 다양한 유형의 제품에 대한 순위 정보를 제시 받은 후, 주의 분산 과제를 수행한 뒤 해당 순위를 회상하였다. 예측한 바와 같이, 극대화 사고방식 조건에 있는 참가자들이 만족화 사고방식 조건보다 순위 정보를 더 잘 기억하는 경향을 보였다. 이에 더하여, 상호의존적 자기 해석보다 독립적 자기 해석 수준이 높을수록 극대화 사고방식과 순위 정보 회상 간의 관계가 강화되는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구는 이러한 결과에 대한 작동 메커니즘과 이론적 및 실무적 함의를 논의하고, 향후 연구 방향을 제시한다.

주요어 : 극대화 사고방식, 독립적 자기 해석, 상호의존적 자기 해석, 회상

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