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### Uncertainty in flux

*The temporal dynamics of attitudinal ambivalence and risk perception*

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# Summary of the Dissertation

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## Uncertainty in Flux: The Temporal Dynamics of Attitudinal Ambivalence and Risk Perception

A temporal perspective is imperative for understanding the psychological processes involved in uncertainty-related threats and the psychology of a “*homos temporus*” (Hohm et al., 2024, p. 151). In this dissertation, I examine how both micro and macro temporal dynamics shape attitudinal and motivational processes within the realms of attitudinal ambivalence (Part I) and risk perception (Part II). In particular, the dissertation addresses (a) the sequential processes involved in the emergence and resolution of felt ambivalence, (b) the motivational consequences of the frequency with which individuals experience felt ambivalence and risk exposure over time, and (c) potential historical shifts in the roles of the desires for subjective knowledge and personal control in responding to risk.

In the first part of the empirical chapters (Chapters 2 to 4), I focus on the processes involved in the emergence and resolution of felt ambivalence. **Chapter 2** reports three studies (in the domain of meat consumption) examining whether ambivalence motivates people to pursue behavioral change as a coping strategy. The chapter proposes that the pervasive recurrence of felt ambivalence leads individuals to engage in effortful attempts to avert future experiences of ambivalence. In line with this, the results indicate that experimentally induced felt ambivalence motivated people toward behavioral change, with initial support for the proposed mechanisms involved: more effortful information seeking as well as anticipated ambivalence resolution through behavior change.

**Chapter 3** presents two quasi-experimental studies employing a more diverse set of self-chosen attitude domains, directly testing whether felt ambivalence leads to more effortful problem-focused coping if the ambivalence frequently recurs. Results demonstrate that attitude objects substantially varied in the extent to which felt ambivalence recurs over time. Moreover, felt ambivalence and its recurrence interacted as expected in motivating problem-focused coping, albeit with mixed findings regarding the proposed mechanisms involved (i.e., intertemporal cognition and recurrence-induced discomfort).

**Chapter 4** presents a large-scale experience sampling study (in the context of meat consumption) to examine the dynamic processes underlying the situational emergence and resolution of attitudinal conflict (i.e., felt ambivalence and cognitive dissonance reduction). Results elucidate how ambivalence (re)surfed naturally in everyday life and its consequences in real time. Especially the accessibility of potential ambivalence elicited felt ambivalence over time, such as during decision-making. Subsequently, when engaging in dissonant behavior, felt ambivalence decreased sharply but resurges shortly after. Moreover, dissonant behavior was associated with sequential resolution attempts through initial responsibility

diffusion and subsequent evaluative spreading. In sum, Chapter 4 underscores my assertion that temporal dynamics are central to understanding the processes by which felt ambivalence arises and dissolves, especially by (a) demonstrating sequential conflict regulation, (b) highlighting motivational consequences of recurring ambivalence, and (c) connecting the distinct but related constructs of attitudinal ambivalence and cognitive dissonance along a time dimension.

The second part of the empirical chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) investigated the determinants of risk perception with a focus on comparing the roles of subjective knowledge and personal control in moderating the trust-risk association. **Chapter 5** presents three studies in the contexts of the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, and farmed animal suffering. These studies indicate that attributions of governmental benevolence (but not integrity or competence attributions, nor trustworthiness attributions to the industry or consumers) predicted risk responses only when people lack personal control. This interaction effect remained significant even when controlling for subjective knowledge, which yielded no significant interaction with trust attributions.

Given the failed conceptual replication of an interaction between trust and subjective knowledge, which was first reported by Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000), **Chapter 6** attempted a close direct replication of their study across 33 risk domains. Results yield robust evidence against the pattern of findings reported in the original study reported by Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000). Moreover, none of my additional analyses revealed findings consistent with the original study when exploring possible boundary conditions (i.e., psychological distance to a risk and the frequencies of risk exposure over time through experiences and descriptions). Instead, trust again interacted with personal control, particularly for those risk domains that people frequently encounter through experiences. The chapter discusses historical shifts since the original study, which possibly contributed to why personal control deficits, rather than subjective knowledge deficits, motivated people to rely on trust in response to risks. Altogether, Chapters 5 and 6 reconsider and advances a classic line of research on risk perception by indicating that (a) the desire for control rather than knowledge accounts for the trust-risk association, (b) this effect occurs depending on the frequency of personal risk exposure to a risk domain, and (c) one can question whether recent historical changes impact fundamental psychological phenomena related to risk perception.

In conclusion, spanning five empirical chapters and utilizing a multi-method approach, the findings reported in this dissertation provide novel insight into the temporal dynamics involved in attitudinal ambivalence and risk perception. The dissertation thereby demonstrates that adopting a temporal perspective in examining psychological processes introduces innovative research questions and advances prevailing theories. Additionally, I discuss practical insights offered by a temporal perspective for designing more effective attitude and behavior change campaigns.

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# Nederlandse Samenvatting

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## **Onzekerheid in verandering: De temporele dynamiek van attitudinale ambivalentie en risicoperceptie**

Een temporeel perspectief is essentieel voor het begrijpen van de psychologische processen die betrokken zijn bij onzekerheidsgerelateerde bedreigingen en de psychologie van een "homos temporus" (Hohm et al., 2024, p. 151). In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik hoe zowel micro- als macrotemporele dynamieken attitudinale en motivationele processen vormgeven binnen de domeinen van attitudinale ambivalentie (Deel I) en risicoperceptie (Deel II). In het bijzonder richt het proefschrift zich op (a) de sequentiële processen die betrokken zijn bij het ontstaan en de oplossing van gevoelde ambivalentie, (b) de motivationele gevolgen van de frequentie waarmee individuen gevoelde ambivalentie en risicoblootstelling ervaren in de loop van de tijd, en (c) mogelijke historische verschuivingen in de rollen van het verlangen naar subjectieve kennis en persoonlijke controle bij het omgaan met risico's.

In het eerste deel van de empirische hoofdstukken (Hoofdstukken 2 tot 4) richt ik me op de processen die betrokken zijn bij het ontstaan en de oplossing van gevoelde ambivalentie. Hoofdstuk 2 rapporteert drie studies (in het domein van vleesconsumptie) waarin wordt onderzocht of ambivalentie mensen motiveert om gedragsverandering na te streven als een copingstrategie. Het hoofdstuk stelt dat de wijdverspreide herhaling van gevoelde ambivalentie individuen ertoe aanzet om inspanningen te leveren om toekomstige ervaringen van ambivalentie te voorkomen. In overeenstemming hiermee geven de resultaten aan dat experimenteel opgewekte gevoelde ambivalentie mensen motiveerde tot gedragsverandering, met initiële ondersteuning voor de voorgestelde mechanismen: meer inspannend informatie zoeken en verwachte ambivalentieresolutie door middel van gedragsverandering.

Hoofdstuk 3 presenteert twee quasi-experimentele studies met een meer divers set van zelfgekozen attitudeobjecten, waarbij direct wordt getest of gevoelde ambivalentie leidt tot inspannende probleemgerichte coping als de ambivalentie vaak terugkeert. De resultaten tonen aan dat attitudeobjecten aanzienlijk varieerden in de mate waarin gevoelde ambivalentie in de loop van de tijd terugkeert. Bovendien interacteerden gevoelde ambivalentie en de terugkeer ervan zoals verwacht in het motiveren van probleemgerichte coping, zij het met gemengde bevindingen met betrekking tot de voorgestelde mechanismen (d.w.z. intertemporele cognitie en door terugkeer veroorzaakte ongemak).

Hoofdstuk 4 presenteert een grootschalige ervaringsbemonsteringsstudie (in de context van vleesconsumptie) om de dynamische processen te onderzoeken die ten grondslag liggen aan de situationele opkomst en oplossing van attitudinaal conflict (d.w.z. gevoelde ambivalentie en cognitieve dissonantievermindering). De resultaten verduidelijken hoe

ambivalentie op natuurlijke wijze (opnieuw) opkwam in het dagelijks leven en de gevolgen ervan in realtime. Vooral de toegankelijkheid van potentiële ambivalentie veroorzaakte in de loop van de tijd gevoelde ambivalentie, zoals tijdens het nemen van beslissingen. Vervolgens nam gevoelde ambivalentie scherp af bij het aangaan van dissonant gedrag, maar kwam kort daarna weer terug. Bovendien was dissonant gedrag geassocieerd met sequentiële oplossingspogingen via initiële verantwoordelijkheidsdiffusie en daaropvolgende evaluatieve spreiding. Samenvattend onderstreept Hoofdstuk 4 mijn stelling dat temporele dynamieken centraal staan in het begrijpen van de processen waardoor gevoelde ambivalentie ontstaat en verdwijnt, vooral door (a) het aantonen van sequentiële conflictoplossing, (b) het benadrukken van de motivationele gevolgen van terugkerende ambivalentie, en (c) het verbinden van de onderscheiden maar gerelateerde constructen van attitudinale ambivalentie en cognitieve dissonantie langs een tijdsdimensie.

Het tweede deel van de empirische hoofdstukken (Hoofdstukken 5 en 6) onderzocht de determinanten van risicoperceptie, met een focus op het vergelijken van de rollen van subjectieve kennis en persoonlijke controle in het modereren van de vertrouwen-risico associatie. Hoofdstuk 5 presenteert drie studies in de contexten van de coronaviruspandemie, klimaatverandering en het lijden van gefokte dieren. Deze studies geven aan dat attributies van overheidswelwillendheid (maar niet attributies van integriteit of competentie, noch vertrouwensattributies aan de industrie of consumenten) risicoreacties voorspelden alleen wanneer mensen geen persoonlijke controle hadden. Dit interactie-effect bleef significant, zelfs wanneer werd gecontroleerd voor subjectieve kennis, wat geen significante interactie met vertrouwensattributies opleverde.

Gezien de mislukte conceptuele replicatie van een interactie tussen vertrouwen en subjectieve kennis, die voor het eerst werd gerapporteerd door Siegrist en Cvetkovich (2000), probeerde Hoofdstuk 6 een nauwkeurige directe replicatie van hun studie over 33 risicodomeinen. De resultaten leveren robuust bewijs tegen het patroon van bevindingen dat in de oorspronkelijke studie werd gerapporteerd door Siegrist en Cvetkovich (2000). Bovendien onthulden geen van mijn aanvullende analyses bevindingen die consistent waren met de oorspronkelijke studie bij het verkennen van mogelijke grensvoorwaarden (d.w.z. psychologische afstand tot een risico en de frequentie van risicoblootstelling in de loop van de tijd door ervaringen en beschrijvingen). In plaats daarvan interacteerde vertrouwen opnieuw met persoonlijke controle, vooral voor die risicodomeinen waarmee mensen vaak worden geconfronteerd door ervaringen. Het hoofdstuk bespreekt historische verschuivingen sinds de oorspronkelijke studie, die mogelijk hebben bijgedragen aan waarom tekorten aan persoonlijke controle, in plaats van tekorten aan subjectieve kennis, mensen motiveerden om te vertrouwen op vertrouwen in reactie op risico's. Alles bij elkaar genomen heroverwegen en ontwikkelen Hoofdstukken 5 en 6 een klassieke onderzoekslijn over risicoperceptie door aan te geven dat (a) het verlangen naar controle in plaats van kennis verantwoordelijk is voor de vertrouwen-risico associatie, (b) dit effect optreedt afhankelijk van de frequentie van persoonlijke risicoblootstelling aan een risicodomein, en (c) men zich kan afvragen of recente historische veranderingen invloed hebben op fundamentele psychologische fenomenen met betrekking tot risicoperceptie.

Concluderend, over vijf empirische hoofdstukken en met behulp van een multimethodebenadering, bieden de bevindingen in dit proefschrift nieuw inzicht in de temporele dynamieken die betrokken zijn bij attitudinale ambivalentie en risicoperceptie. Het proefschrift toont daarmee aan dat het aannemen van een temporeel perspectief bij het onderzoeken van psychologische processen innovatieve onderzoeksvragen introduceert en bestaande theorieën vooruithelpt. Bovendien bespreek ik praktische inzichten die een temporeel perspectief biedt voor het ontwerpen van effectievere attitude- en gedragsveranderingscampagnes.

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# Contributions to Empirical Chapters and Funding

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## Chapter 2

Pauer, S., Rutjens, B. T., Ruby, M. B., Perino, G., & van Harreveld, F. (2022). Meating Conflict: Toward a Model of Ambivalence-Motivated Reduction of Meat Consumption. *Foods*, 11(7), 921. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods11070921>

SP and FvH proposed the research question under the supervision of BR and FvH. SP, BR, GP, FvH contributed to the conceptualization and investigation. SP analyzed the data and wrote the original manuscript. All authors revised the manuscript.

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## Chapter 3

Pauer, S., Rutjens, B. T., & van Harreveld, F. (2023). Torn again: Repeated experiences of ambivalence motivate effortful problem-focused coping. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/de8qm>

SP proposed the research question under the supervision of BR and FvH. All authors contributed to the conceptualization and investigation. SP analyzed the data and wrote the original manuscript. All authors revised the manuscript.

SP received funding from the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung).

## Chapter 4

Pauer, S., Rutjens, B. T., Hofmann, W., & van Harreveld, F. (2024). The Temporal Dynamics of Attitudinal Conflict in Daily Life: An Experience Sampling Study of Conflict Emergence and Resolution. <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/utp46>

SP proposed the research question under the supervision of BR and FvH. SP, BR, FvH acquired funding for this study. All authors contributed to the conceptualization and

investigation. SP programmed the study, collected the data, programmed the data analysis, and wrote the original manuscript. All authors revised the manuscript.

The study was funded by the Animal Advocacy Research Fund. SP received funding from the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung).

## **Chapter 5**

Pauer, S., Rutjens, B. T., & van Harreveld, F. (2024, forthcoming). Trust is good, control is better: The role of trust and personal control in response to threat. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/dvb5x>

SP, BR, FvH proposed the research question under the supervision of BR and FvH. All authors contributed to the conceptualization and investigation. SP analyzed the data and wrote the original manuscript. All authors revised the manuscript.

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## **Chapter 6**

Pauer, S., Rutjens, B. T., Brick, C., Lob, A., Buttlar, B., Noordewier, M. K., Schneider, I., & van Harreveld, F. (2024, forthcoming). Is the Effect of Trust on Risk Perceptions a Matter of Knowledge, Control, and Time? An Extension and Direct Replication Attempt of Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000). *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

SP proposed the research question under the supervision of BR and FvH. SP, BR, CB, FvH contributed to the conceptualization and investigation. SP, BB, MN, IS contributed to data collection. SP and AL programmed the data analysis. SP wrote the original manuscript. All authors revised the manuscript.

SP received funding from the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung).



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## List of Publications

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- \***Pauer**, S., Rutjens, B. T., Brick, C., Lob, A., Buttlar, B., Noordewier, M., Schneider, I., & van Harreveld, F. (2024, forthcoming). Is the effect of trust on risk perceptions a matter of knowledge, control, or time? A direct replication attempt and extension of Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000). *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241263884>
- Pauer**, S., Linne, R. M., Erb, H.-P. (2024, forthcoming). From the Illusion of Choice to Actual Control: Reconsidering the Induced-Compliance Paradigm of Cognitive Dissonance. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/25152459241265002>
- \***Pauer**, S., Rutjens, B. T., & van Harreveld, F. (2024, forthcoming). Trust is good, control is better: The role of trust and control perceptions in response to threat. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.13058>
- Buttlar, B., **Pauer**, S., & van Harreveld, F. (2024, forthcoming). The Model of Ambivalent Choice and Dissonant Commitment: An Integration of Dissonance and Ambivalence Frameworks. *European Review of Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2024.2373547>
- Buttlar, B., **Pauer**, S., Ruby, M., & Sherrer, V. (2024). Two Sides of the Same Fence: A Model of the Origins and Consequences of Meat-Related Conflict in Omnivores and Veg\*ans. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 94, 102241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102241>
- Buttlar, B., & **Pauer**, S. (2024, under review at *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*). Disentangling the Meat Paradox: A Comparative Review of Meat-Related Ambivalence and Dissonance. PsyArXiv. <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/6kse4>
- Buttlar, B., **Pauer**, S., Scherrer, V., & Hofmann, W. (2024, under review at *Motivation Science*). Attitude-Based Self-Regulation: An Experience Sampling Study on the Role of Attitudes in the Experience and Resolution of Self-Control Conflicts in the Context of Vegetarians. PsyArXiv. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/mvzrn>
- Finkhäuser, M., Sherrer, V., **Pauer**, S., & Buttlar, B. (under review at *Social Psychological and Personality Science*). Feeling Pushed and Feeling Pulled: A Panel Study on the Temporal Dynamics of Meat-Related Ambivalence, Morality, and Behavioural Consequences.
- \***Pauer**, S., Rutjens, B. T., Hofmann, W., & van Harreveld, F. (2024). The Temporal Dynamics of Attitudinal Conflict in Daily Life: An Experience Sampling Study of Conflict Emergence and Resolution. PsyArXiv. <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/utp46>
- Aczel, B., Szaszi, H., Clelland, B., Kovacs, M., Schulz-Kümpel, H., Holzmeister, F., ..., **Pauer**, S., ..., & Nosek, B. A. (submitted to *Nature*). Investigating the analytical robustness of the social and behavioural sciences.

- Yang, X., Schulz, J., Schmidt, K., Kenny, A. R., Pfuhl, G., Gjoneska, B., ... **Pauer, S.**, ... Pfattheicher, S. (2024, in-principle acceptance). Large-scale cross-societal examination of real- and minimal-group biases. *Nature Human Behaviour*.  
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<https://psyarxiv.com/de8qm>
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- \***Pauer, S.**, Rutjens, B. T., Ruby, M. B., Perino, G., & van Harreveld, F. (2022). Meating Conflict. Toward a model of ambivalence-motivated reduction of meat consumption. *Foods*, 11(7), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods11070921>
- Krebl, H.<sup>1</sup>, **Pauer, S.**<sup>1</sup>, & Pehlke, S.<sup>1</sup> (Eds.). (2015). *SYN. Magazin für Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft* (Vol. 10). Münster/Wien: LIT. ISBN: 3643506902.

\* Empirical chapters reported in this dissertation

<sup>1</sup> Shared-first authorship with alphabetical order

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