A descriptive multi-attribute utility model
for everyday decisions

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Abstract   We propose a descriptive version of the classical multi-attribute utility model; to that end, we add a new parameter, momentary salience, to the customary formulation. The addition of this parameter allows the theory to accommodate changes in the decision maker's mood and circumstances, as the saliencies of anticipated consequences are driven by concerns of the moment. By allowing for the number of consequences given attention at the moment of decision to vary, the new model mutes the criticism that SEU models call for an omniscient decision maker. Use of the model is illustrated with a large-scale longitudinal study showing that adolescent smokers have higher utility for smoking than nonsmokers. We also propose to use the model hierarchically to describe everyday decisions that people deal with repeatedly. Big decisions, which set policy, guide a host of nested little decisions, which in turn lead

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