

Social Exploration: When People Deviate from Options Explored by Others

Yuji Winet, Yanping Tu, Shoham Choshen-Hillel, & Ayelet Fishbach
University of Chicago, Booth School of Business



<https://uchicago.zoom.us/j/5103830885?pwd=SzN1bCtGSU5wSFNlNHJhUW5DSWdSZz09>

Summary

- People often face choices between known and unknown options (e.g., choosing a familiar vs. new restaurant).¹
- Past research shows that people adopt a **“we”-perspective** with social others—spontaneously combining own & others’ experiences into shared group experiences.^{2, 3}
- Typically, people prefer to diversify their experiences.^{4, 5}
- **We tested whether people explore unknown options more when known info comes from other people (vs. mere info sources) and whether we-perspective drove the effect.**

Method

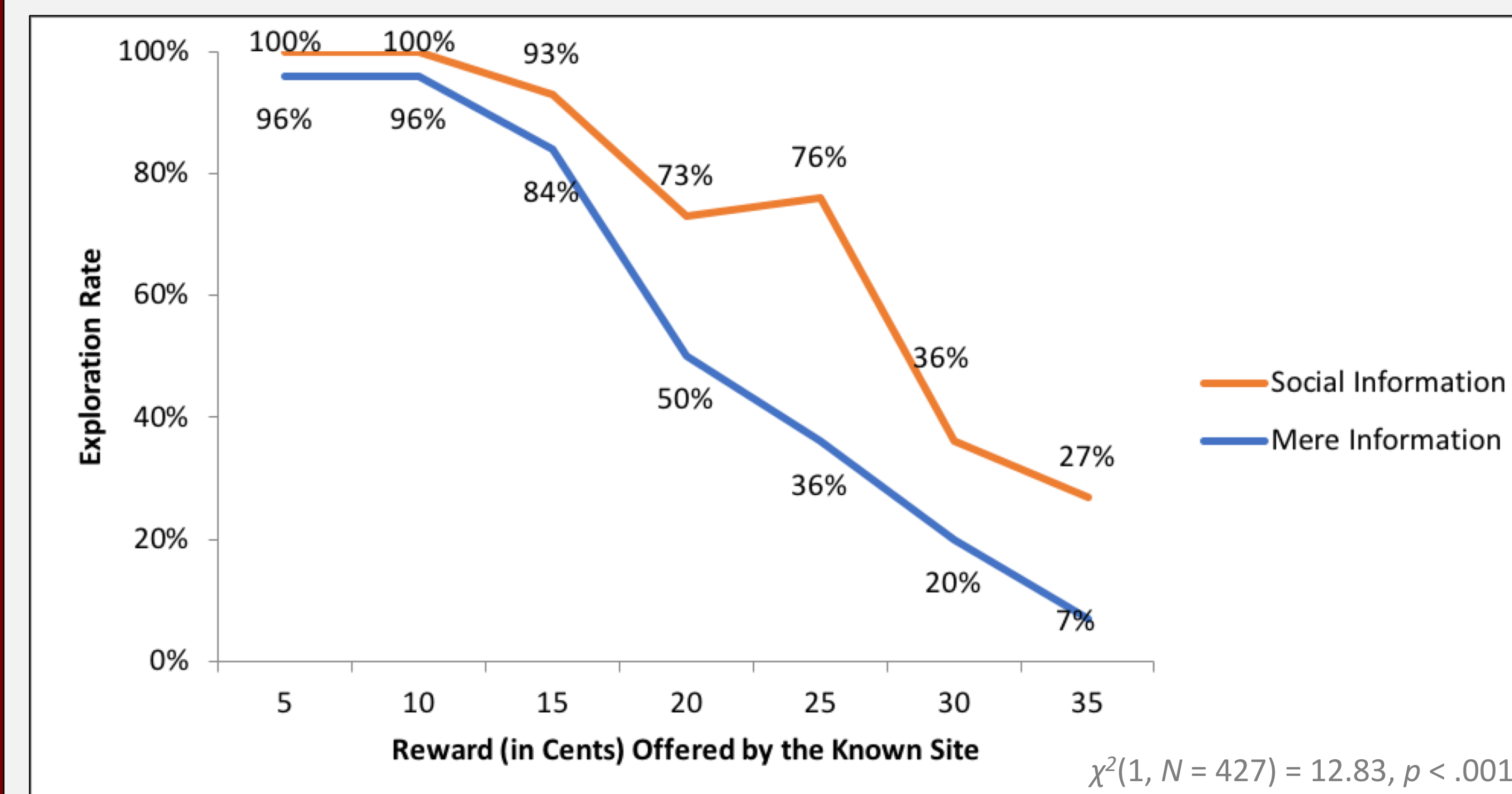
Across all studies, we used a **minimalistic, incentive-compatible paradigm**: Participants saw 4 treasure sites (Sites A, B, C and D). Each contained an unknown monetary amount in a given range (e.g., 1–40¢). One site was revealed (e.g., Site B always returns 20¢). Participants decide whether to choose this known site or one of the unknown sites.

Social-info condition: The info source was a fellow human player.

Mere-info condition: The info source was not mentioned/was a computer choosing randomly.

Experiment 1: Basic Effect

We tested the basic effect by manipulating the known amount between subjects to span almost the entire range of possible values: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 or 35¢.



Results & Discussion

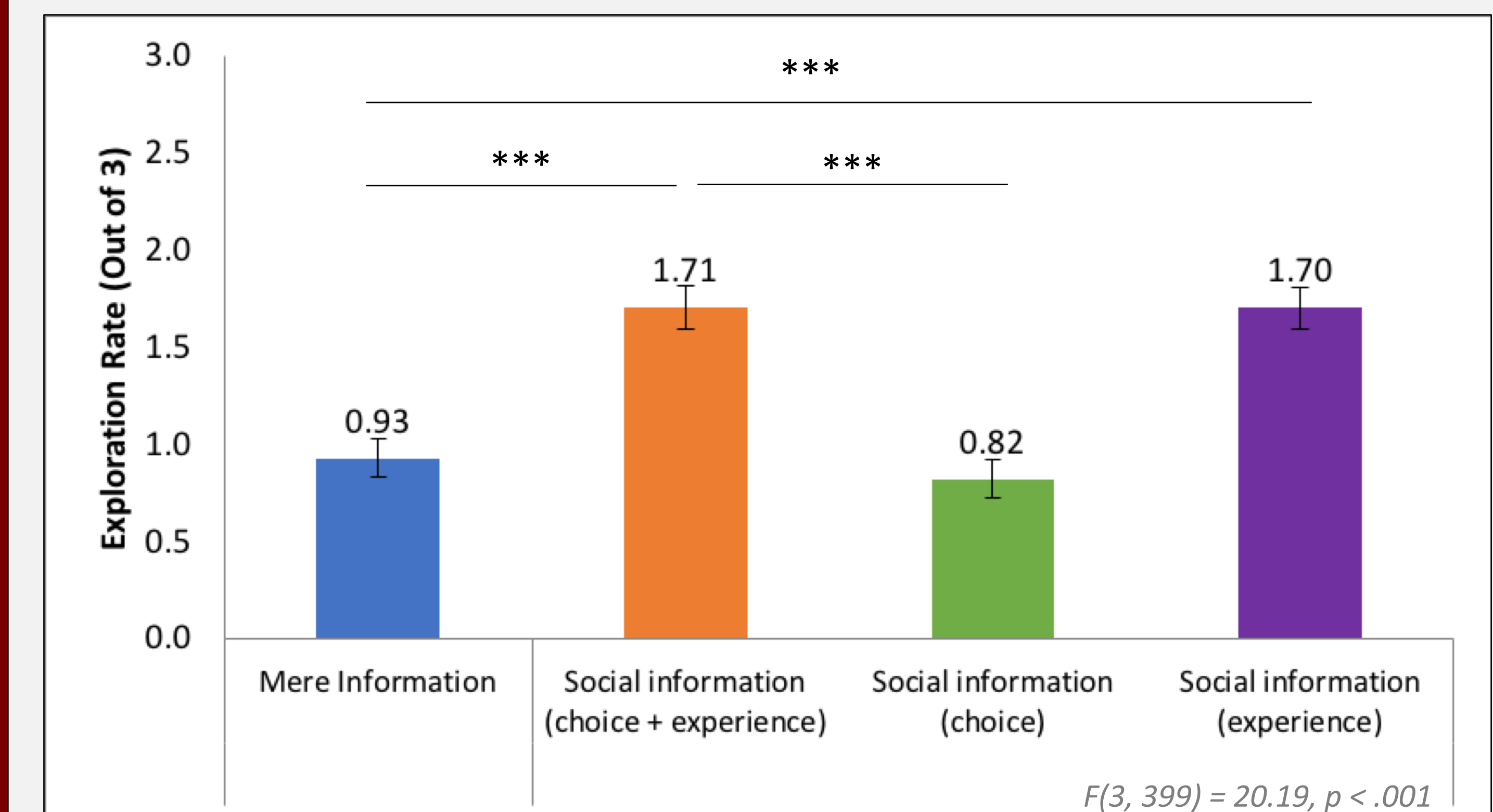
- **Study 1:** There was a higher likelihood of exploring unknown options when known options were revealed by social (vs. mere-info) sources.
- **Study 2:** When social sources had no experience to share (via we-perspective), the effect disappeared. When they made no choice, it remained.
- In sum, when info comes from social (vs. nonsocial) sources, people explore alternative options more.
- We-perspective-taking drives the effect—the tendency to adopt group-level perspective leads to exploration to diversify one’s (shared) experiences.

Experiment 2: Others’ Realized Outcomes

We provide evidence for a we-perspective-taking mechanism by manipulating whether or not social others had experiences and made choices. We included 2 additional conditions that were similar to the social info condition, except...

Choice-without-experience: The other player could only reveal (i.e., choose) a site without earning anything (i.e., no experience).

Experience-without-choice: The other player was randomly assigned a site (i.e., no choice) and earned (i.e., experienced) its contents.



Note: In this study, participants played 3 independent rounds.

References

- [1] Mehlhorn, K., Newell, B. R., Todd, P. M., Lee, M. D., Morgan, K., Braithwaite, V. A., Hausmann, D., Fielder, K., & Gonzalez, C. (2015). Unpacking the exploration–exploitation tradeoff: A synthesis of human and animal literatures. *Decision*, 2, 191–215.
- [2] Fitzsimons, G. M., & Kay, A. C. (2004). Language and interpersonal cognition: Causal effects of variations in pronoun usage on perceptions of closeness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 547–557.
- [3] Tomasello, M., Carpenter, M., Call, J., Behne, T., & Moll, H. (2005). Understanding and sharing intentions: The origins of cultural cognition. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 28, 675–735.
- [4] Hirschman, E. C. (1980). Innovativeness, novelty seeking, and consumer creativity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 7, 283–295.
- [5] McAlister, L., & Pessemer, E. (1982). Variety seeking behavior: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, 311–322.