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The Influence of Purchase Motivation on Assortment Size Preferences

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We examine how hedonic and utilitarian purchase motivations influence the number of options consumers consider. Across seven studies, consumers prefer larger assortments for hedonically motivated purchases and comparatively smaller assortments for utilitarian motivated purchases. Perceptions of preference uniqueness and difficulty in preference matching underlie this difference in preferred assortment size.

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The Influence of Purchase Motivation on Assortment Size Preferences

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers' decisions to purchase a product are often driven by different motivations. Personal pleasures (i.e., hedonic motivations) trigger consumption in some cases and functional needs (i.e., utilitarian motivations) drive consumption in others (Botti and McGill 2011; Choi and Fishbach 2011) — even when the product is the same. In the present research, we ask a novel question: do consumers prefer different assortment sizes when choosing a product for a hedonic versus a utilitarian motivated purchase?

We argue that the number of alternatives consumers plan to review for a purchase is influenced by whether their motivation for that purchase is hedonic versus utilitarian. More specifically, we believe that consumers exhibit different perceptions about the uniqueness of their ideal product preferences under hedonic versus utilitarian purchase motivations, which in turn affect the number of products they review. We argue that consumers believe that their product preferences for hedonic purchases are inherently more unique and different from those of other consumers, due to the idiosyncratic nature of hedonic purchase preferences. Consequently, consumers believe they will have a more difficult time finding a product matching their preferences under a hedonic purchase motivation, leading them to consider a larger assortment of product alternatives. In contrast, consumers with utilitarian purchase motivations tend to perceive their product preferences as less unique compared to others and thus anticipate less difficulty in preference matching, resulting in an inclination to choose from smaller assortments.

Across 7 studies, we find that consumers with hedonic purchase motivations prefer larger assortments than those with utilitarian purchase motivations. Our results show that consumers exhibit differences in their perceptions of preference uniqueness and the level of anticipated difficulty in preference matching between the hedonic and utilitarian purchase motivations, and these two variables underlie the effect of purchase motivation on preferred assortment size.

Our research contributes to the literature in three important ways. We extend the literature on hedonic and utilitarian purchases by uncovering how these two purchase motivations influence consumers' preference for assortment size. Second, we add to the literature on the determinants of consumers' preferences for large and small assortments. Lastly, a major contribution of our research is our finding that hedonic and utilitarian purchase motivations have different implications for consumers' perceptions of uniqueness about their ideal product preferences.

Study 1A serves as an initial test for the effect of purchase motivation on assortment size preference. Similar to Botti and McGill (2011), we manipulate the purchase motivations for the same product, but emphasize the hedonic or utilitarian nature of the end-goal of the purchase. Since hedonic and utilitarian purchases are motivated by a desire to experience affective pleasure and by a desire to fulfill a need or accomplish a task (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Pham 1998; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998), respectively, we characterize hedonic and utilitarian purchase motivations in our scenarios as pleasure-seeking and task-driven. Participants were assigned to either a utilitarian or hedonic purchase motivation condition and asked their preference between a small (6) or large (24) assortment of product alternatives. Participants were told to imagine they taking a class on Classical music; those in the utilitarian motivation condition imag-

ined purchasing a CD to listen to for a class assignment while those in the hedonic condition considered purchasing a CD to listen to for pleasure. 56% of participants in the hedonic motivation condition preferred to choose from a large (versus small) assortment, whereas only 24% of participants in the utilitarian purchase motivation condition preferred the large assortment ($\chi^2(1) = 9.17, p < .01$). Study 1B uses a similar class-based manipulation, design, and assortment size measure for the purchase of a book. 65% of participants purchasing the book to read for pleasure (hedonic) preferred the large assortment, whereas only 27% of participants purchasing the book for a class assignment (utilitarian) felt similarly ($\chi^2(1) = 18.89, p < .01$). Studies 1C and 1D replicate this main effect of purchase motivation on assortment size using computers and paint colors, respectively.

In study 2, participants imagined selecting a song to listen to as part of an online study (utilitarian) or as break between studies (hedonic). Participants the number of songs they would like to choose from (between 2-24), before being presented with a selection of songs matching that size. Participants then selected a song, listened to it, and rated their satisfaction with the song and the song assortment. In addition to replicating our main effect of hedonic versus utilitarian motivation on assortment size ($M_H = 8.76, SD = 7.03$ vs. $M_U = 5.43, SD = 5.62$; $F(1, 149) = 10.31, p < .01$) using real choice, there were no differences in satisfaction with the song or the assortment. This null effect on satisfaction provides confidence that our pre-choice assortment size scenarios accurately reflect consumers' real preferences.

Lastly, we argue that consumers with hedonic purchase motivations tend to perceive their preferences as unique (compared to others' preferences) to a greater extent than consumers with utilitarian purchase motivations. As a result, consumers with hedonic versus utilitarian purchase motivations anticipate greater difficulty in finding a product that matches their preferences, resulting in predilection for larger assortments. In study 3A, we measure both perceived preference uniqueness and anticipated difficulty in preference matching to evaluate our sequential process model (purchase motivation \rightarrow perceived preference uniqueness \rightarrow anticipated difficulty in preference matching \rightarrow assortment size). Participants were randomly assigned to a hedonic utilitarian or motivation for the book purchase, analogous to study 1B. Participants then indicated their perceptions of preference uniqueness as agreement (7-point Likert) with the following statement: "I believe my preferences for books are unique and different from others' book preferences." Participants subsequently indicated how difficult they felt it would be to find a book that satisfies their goal (1=Not at all Difficult, 7=Very Difficult). Lastly, participants stated how many books they would like to review in an assortment. The effect of purchase motivation on assortment size was replicated ($F(1, 208) = 4.96, p < .05$). Additionally, participants in the hedonic condition felt their preferences were more unique ($F(1, 208) = 10.32, p < .01$; $M_H = 4.58, SD = 1.28$ vs. $M_U = 3.96, SD = 1.51$) and perceived finding a preference matching product to be more difficult ($F(1, 208) = 5.95, p < .05$; $M_H = 4.07, SD = 1.73$ vs. $M_U = 3.50, SD = 1.66$) than participants in the utilitarian condition. Bootstrapping results from a serial multiple mediator analysis (Model 6; Hayes 2013) confirmed a positive and significant indirect effect ($\beta = .13$; 95% CI = (.05, .35)) verifying our full mediation pathway. We replicated our process model in study 3B using the same paint color manipulation

as study 1D. Alternative explanations of maximizing/satisficing, anticipated enjoyment of choosing, efficiency of choosing, intrinsic motivation, and goal importance were explored but not supported.

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Gifts of Consolation: Gifts as Substitutes for Emotional Support

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Most research on gifts has examined celebratory gifts, or gifts that are given in response to others' positive events, such as birthdays or holidays. However, consumers also give gifts in response to others' negative life events, such as a loved one's death or a break-up. In this research, we introduce the term "gifts of consolation" to refer to gifts given in response to negative events and examine when and why consumers give them.

We propose that gifts of consolation are a form of social support and thus that giving a gift can be a substitute for providing someone with emotional support. People have the existing psychological ability to substitute a product for a psychological construct (Chen, Wan, and Levy 2017), and we argue that giving gifts and providing emotional support both satisfy a person's obligation to provide social support to close others (Clark 1987). Therefore, if givers are unable to provide emotional support, they should be more likely to give a gift and vice versa.

Studies 1a and 1b test the basic effect, examining whether givers spend more on gifts when have not provided emotional support. Participants ($n_{\text{Study1a}} = 208$; $n_{\text{Study1b}} = 209$) were asked to imagine that their friend's mother died and that they were able or unable to provide them with emotional support. Then in study 1a, participants chose between giving their friend one of three arrangements of sympathy flowers (small—\$40, medium—\$60, and large—\$80) or not sending flowers, and in study 1b they chose how much they wanted to donate to a memorial fund for their friend's mother. Participants who provided less emotional support condition spent more on gifts, than did those who provided more support ($p_{\text{Study1a}} = .006$; $p_{\text{Study1b}} = .029$), suggesting that givers use gifts to compensate for not providing emotional support.

Prior research (Clark 1987) has found that people feel less obligated to provide social support to people they are distant from, so in study 2 we examine whether the givers' closeness to the support recipient moderates the effect. Participants ($n = 414$) first read that a friend's (close condition) or coworker's (distant condition) mother had died, and they attended (did not attend) the funeral. Then they were asked how much they would donate to a memorial fund. There was an interaction between the level of emotional support provided and closeness ($p = .06$). Participants in the friend condition donated significantly less money (\$54) when they attended the funeral than when they did not ($p < .0001$), but the effect was marginal in the coworker condition ($\$21$; $p = .1$). When feelings of obligation are low, givers do not compensate for a lack of emotional support with a gift.

Study 3 tests whether givers substitute gifts for emotional support in celebratory situations or whether this effect is unique to gifts of consolation. Participants ($n = 415$) read about a friend's positive event (another friend was throwing them a birthday party) or negative event (their mother died), and that they did or did not attend the birthday party (funeral). Then they indicated how much they would spend on a gift for their friend. There was a significant interaction between gift giving occasion and level of emotional support provided ($p < .0001$) such that participants said they would spend more on a gift when they did not attend their friend's mother's funeral than when they did ($p < .0001$), but whether or not they had attended their friend's birthday party did not influence how much they chose to spend on a gift ($p = .36$), showing that givers substitute more for negative than positive events.

Study 4 examines whether the substitution effect works in reverse: If a giver gives a gift, are they then less likely to provide the recipient with emotional support? Participants ($n = 203$) first read that a friend's (coworker's) mother had died and that they decided to send flowers and a sympathy note or just a note. Then they were asked to write the note they would send. These notes were coded for how emotionally supportive they were. Participants who gave flowers wrote significantly less supportive notes than did those who did not give flowers ($p < .0001$). This effect was moderated by a marginal interaction ($p = .09$) such that giving a gift led to less supportive notes in the friend condition ($p < .0001$) but only marginally less supportive ones in the coworker condition ($p = .07$). This shows that givers compensate for not giving a gift by providing more emotional support.

Study 5 looks at *when* givers prefer to give gifts rather than provide emotional support. We propose that when a giver wants to support someone who they think will be difficult to support (e.g., someone who is negative or has low self-esteem; Forest, Kille, Wood, and Holmes 2014), they will give a gift to fulfill their obligation to provide support while avoiding an unpleasant interaction. We test this idea in a lab study. Participants ($n = 48$) were told that they would provide another participant with social support and were shown the profile of the person they would support. The profile was actually not from another participant but manipulated how easy the person was to support by varying how pessimistic and low in self-esteem they were. Then participants were asked if they wanted to spend five minutes talking to the person about their break-up (i.e., provide emotional support) or pay \$1 to give the person a cookie and avoid the conversation (i.e., give a gift). Participants were significantly more likely to provide support by giving a gift when the support recipient sounded hard to support (54%) than easy to support (25%, $p = .039$), showing that gifts of consolation are an appealing way to support difficult people.

In conclusion, we show that givers give gifts of consolation and treat them as substitutes for emotional support. Our findings suggest that thinking about gifts as a form of social support may be a fruitful direction for future research.

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