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Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

The Influences of Randomly Displaying a Set of Products on Shopping Evaluations

Tao Tao, Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

Leilei Gao, Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

Five experiments show that a randomly displayed set of products can elicit a higher level of arousal than a categorized set, increasing consumers' emotional reactions and the favorableness of their shopping evaluations. This effect only occurs when shopping is not task-oriented and when consumers' attitude towards shopping is positive.

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New Insights into the Psychology of Product Assortments

Chairs: Sarah Wei, University of Alberta, Canada
Tao Tao, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Paper #1: Choice vs. Search Mindsets and Consumers' Assortment Size Preference

Benedict G.C. Dellaert, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Gerald Häubl, University of Alberta, Canada
Sarah Wei, University of Alberta, Canada

Paper #2: The Role of Abundance Salience in Consumers' Assortment Preference

Yangjie Gu, HEC Paris, France
Yuechen Wu, University of Maryland, USA

Paper #3: The Influences of Randomly Displaying a Set of Products on Shopping Evaluations

Tao Tao, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Leilei Gao, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Paper #4: Global Context: Extremeness Aversion in a Dual Context Setting

Ryan Hamilton, Emory University, USA
Oleg Urminsky, University of Chicago, USA
Gülen Serial-Abi, University of Bocconi, Italy

SESSION OVERVIEW

Is less always more, when it comes to assortment size? Do consumers always prefer well-organized assortments? Can contextual factors overcome extremeness aversion? Despite an abundance of literature in the area of product assortments, the answers to these questions remain contentious. As such, four papers in this session address these questions. In particular, although much is known about the consequences of assortments (e.g., Chernev, Böckenholt and Goodman 2015, Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Mogilner, Rudnick and Iyengar 2008, Simonson 1989), we know much less about what influences consumers' preferences for assortments with different features. These four papers look at situational factors (e.g., processing mindset, global context of the assortment, and shopping motivation) to show how these factors influence the way consumers evaluate assortments of different features and, ultimately, their product selection and decision quality. In doing so, this session provides crucial insight into consumers' evaluation of and reaction towards assortments.

The first two papers speak to how different factors influence the preference for assortment size. Dellaert, Häubl, and Wei demonstrate that consumers prefer smaller assortments in a choice mindset than in a search mindset. Consequently, being in a choice (vs. search) mindset increases choice deferral and reduces decision quality in a large (vs. small) assortment. Employing a different approach, Wu and Gu demonstrate that abundance salience can increase the appreciation of a small assortment by boosting the feeling of control, which offsets the disadvantage of a small set. Consequently, consumers prefer small assortments over large assortments under abundance salience.

Alongside with the discussion about evaluating assortments, Tao and Gao focus on the how an assortment is displayed. Counter to the intuition that a well-categorized assortment tends to benefit consumers, they demonstrate that when the shopping activity is not task-oriented and when it is positively perceived by consumers, a randomly displayed assortment can also lead to more favorable evaluations by eliciting arousal, which intensifies feelings of pleasure.

Moreover, the contextual information of an assortment can also influence the appreciation of it. Hamilton, Urminsky, and Serial-Abi show that a global context (e.g., the reputation of a retailer) can change the evaluation of a local choice set, making the extreme alternative (e.g., the cheapest one) seem more like a compromise option hence reducing extremeness aversion.

In summary, these four papers share a focus on investigating how various situational factors influence the preference for and evaluation of assortments with different features. This session enriches the understanding of product assortments. Consumers prefer a small assortment over a large one when they are in a choice (vs. search) mindset (Dellaert et al.) or when the concept of abundance is made salient (Wu and Gu). And consumers enjoy a consumption experience more in a randomly display assortment (Tao and Gao). Further, the global context of an assortment can reduce extremeness aversion (Hamilton et al.) The complementary findings of these four papers findings gain new insights into understanding the preference and evaluation of product assortments with different features and provide counter-intuitive ideas for marketers to enhance their assortment attractiveness.

Choice vs. Search Mindsets and Consumers' Assortment Size Preference

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Normatively, large assortments should increase the likelihood that consumers can identify their ideal alternatives relative to small assortments (Baumol and Ide 1956; Chernev 2003; Kahn and Lehmann 1991) However, some detrimental consequences (such as choice overload) for consumers when choosing from large assortments are also well documented in the literature (Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Chernev, Böckenholt and Goodman 2015). Despite the substantial amount of prior work on how assortment size affects consumer choice, little is known about what size of assortment consumers would actually prefer for a given purchase decision, and the limited findings to date are mixed (Broniarczyk, Hoyer and McAlister 1998; Chernev 2006).

The present research introduces consumers' choice versus search mindset as an important driver of consumer assortment size preferences. In a *choice mindset*, consumers focus on evaluating alternatives already known to them, and on making comparisons among these alternatives. By contrast, in a *search mindset*, consumers focus on what alternatives they have yet to discover, and on assessing the attractiveness of each individual alternative as they encounter it. These two mindsets are closely connected to the typical task that a consumer faces when making a product choice among a relatively small, predetermined set of alternatives (e.g., buying a grocery product) versus when searching for a product to purchase in a large and relatively unfamiliar category (e.g., booking a hotel in a new city). We suggest that these mindsets can be activated by procedural or situational aspects of the decision process (e.g., whether alternatives in the assortment are presented simultaneously or sequentially, or whether a decision task suggests a choice versus search process to the consumer). Based on the distinct properties of these mindsets, we hypothesize that consumers prefer smaller assortments when they are in a choice mindset and larger assortments when they are in a search mindset.

In our first set of studies (Studies 1a and 1b and Study 2), we examined how a choice versus search mindset affects consumers' assortment-size preferences. In Study 1a, participants ($N=126$) indicated how many alternatives they would like to "choose from" versus "search for" (between-subjects) in five different product categories. Participants in the search mindset preferred more alternatives than participants in the choice mindset across all five different product domains ($p < .001$). In Study 1b ($N=177$), we replicated this effect ($p < .001$) by manipulating choice versus search mindset through descriptions of the decision interface. In the choice condition, participants envisioned having all alternatives presented simultaneously in one large table; and in the search condition, participants envisioned having all alternatives presented sequentially (one at a time), without the opportunity to revisit alternatives.

In Study 2 ($N=196$), we replicated the influence of choice versus search mindset on consumer preferences for assortment size in a highly naturalistic setting, across 50 different product categories. For each product category, we asked participants to indicate whether they would be more likely to employ a "choice" or "search" strategy when selecting a product. We also asked participants how many alternatives they would like to see to identify their preferred alternative. As hypothesized, a search (versus choice) mindset significantly predicted a higher preference for larger assortments ($p < .001$).

Next, in the second set of studies (Study 3 and Study 4), we examined the downstream consequences of a choice mindset versus search mindset in terms of purchase deferral and decision quality in differently sized assortments. In Study 3 ($N=453$) participants received \$0.20 as a bonus pay and could choose to keep it or to use it to buy a lottery from an assortment of 6 (small assortment condition) or 30 lotteries (large assortment condition). In the choice mindset condition all lotteries were presented simultaneously in a table, while in the search mindset condition, they were presented sequentially, one at a time, without the opportunity to revisit alternatives. Moreover, this experiment also introduced an intermediate condition in which participants were presented with alternatives sequentially, but could revisit any alternative that they had already inspected. Thus, Study 3 employed a 2 (assortment size: small vs. large) by 3 (decision strategy: choice vs. search vs. intermediate) between-subjects design. The results showed a significant interaction between decision strategy and assortment size on choice deferral rate ($p=.012$) and objective decision quality – the expected payoff of selected lotteries in cents ($p=.011$). In the choice mindset, a small assortment decreased choice deferral (22.7% vs. 33.3%; $p=.013$) and increased objective decision quality ($M_{\text{Small}}=27$, $M_{\text{Large}}=25$; $p=.033$), while in the search mindset, a small assortment increased deferral (51.4% vs. 35.9%; $p=.024$) and decreased objective decision quality ($M_{\text{Small}}=24$, $M_{\text{Large}}=26$; $p=.05$). Assortment size did not affect choice (29.7% vs. 32.5%; $p=.74$) nor objective decision quality ($M_{\text{Small}}=27$, $M_{\text{Large}}=26$; $p=.13$) in the intermediate condition.

In Study 4, participants were asked to select an apartment with the lowest rent per square foot (no choice deferral allowed). Study 4 employed the same design as Study 3, and extended the finding of an interactive influence between assortment size and mindset from objective decision quality – rent per sf of selected apartments ($p=.006$) to subjective decision quality -- decision satisfaction ($p < .001$). Increased assortment size decreased both objective ($M_{\text{large}}=1.93$ vs. $M_{\text{small}}=1.89$; $p=.020$) and subjective decision quality ($M_{\text{large}}=7.58$ vs. $M_{\text{small}}=8.72$; $p=.002$) in the choice mindset, and increased objective ($M_{\text{large}}=1.94$ vs. $M_{\text{small}}=1.97$; $p=.033$) and subjective decision quality ($M_{\text{large}}=6.40$ vs. $M_{\text{small}}=5.28$; $p=.003$) in the search mindset. Again, no effect was found in the intermediate condition (objective: $p=.33$; subjective: $p=.12$).

This research shows that consumers' assortment-size preference depends critically on whether they approach a purchase decision in a choice mindset or a search mindset. Consumers prefer smaller assortments when they are in a choice mindset than in a search mindset (Studies 1a, 1b and 2). Moreover, consumers' choice versus search mindset also affects choice deferral and decision quality in differently sized assortments (Studies 3 and 4).

The Role of Abundance Salience in Consumers' Assortment Preference

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the marketplace retailers often pride themselves on their large product assortments to their customers even at the expenses of increasing operational costs. However, recent research shows that although consumers generally prefer larger product assortments (e.g., Iyengar and Lepper 2000), there does not exist a positive relationship between assortment size and category sales (Broniarczyk et al. 1998; Chernev 2003b). To offset these disadvantages of having large assortments, the current research examines whether abundance generates the benefits that would substitute for the advantages offered by a larger assortment. Will consumers like the smaller assortment more when the product inventory is abundant (vs. baseline), or in general, when they are put in an abundant mindset?

Most prior research on product supply focuses on whether the scarce availability of a particular product in a given assortment impacts consumers' evaluation of the product (Gierl and Huettl 2010; Inman, Peter and Raghuram 1997). Relatively little research in marketing has examined whether and how abundant product supply impacts consumers' choices among assortments prior to selecting a particular option from one of the available assortments. Building on prior literature that consumers prefer large (vs. small) assortments because large assortments satisfy the need for control (Averill 1973; Lefcourt 1973; Zuckerman et al. 1978), and a possible link between abundance and a replenishment of control (Mehta and Zhu 2015; Mittal and Griskevicius 2014; Vohs, Mead and Goode 2006), we propose that abundance boosts feelings of control, consequently increasing consumers' relative preference for smaller (vs. larger) assortments. We tested these propositions in four studies.

Study 1 employed an incentive-compatible test to examine our main proposition that abundance increases consumers' evaluations of small (vs. large) assortments. Participants ($N=290$) were provided with toothpaste catalogs from two supermarkets. To manipulate abundance, half of the participants read that both supermarkets had great quantities of each type of toothpaste and they were always able to get the toothpaste listed on the catalog ("abundant-condition"), while the other half read that the toothpastes listed on both catalogs may or may not be in stock ("baseline-condition"). Participants were then told that the two catalogs had 24 and 48 options, respectively, and were asked to select one catalog to choose a tube of toothpaste from. To make the decision consequential, participants were informed that 50% of them would win the toothpaste they chose. As predicted, more participants in the abundant (vs. baseline) condition chose the smaller assortment (39% vs. 27.8%; $p=0.04$). Participants in abundant (vs. baseline) condition also liked the smaller assortment catalog to a greater degree ($M_{\text{abundant}}=4.49$ vs. $M_{\text{baseline}}=4.96$; $p=0.026$).

Study 2 ($N=160$) tested whether the observed findings in study 1 can be generalized beyond a category-level abundance manipulation to a broader sense of abundance manipulation. We manipulated abundance by instructing half of the participants to recall situations where they felt they had plenty of resources ("abundant-condition") and the other half to recall things they did in the past week ("base-

line-condition"; Fischhoff et al. 2003). Participants were then asked to imagine purchasing a bottle of wine, and choosing between two stores with either 12 or 36 options. Replicating previous findings, participants in the abundant (vs. baseline) condition liked the smaller assortment more ($M_{abundant}=5.09$ vs. $M_{baseline}=5.68$; $p=0.025$).

Study 3 has two purposes. First, it tested whether the observed effect was driven by a decrease in liking for larger assortments or an increase in liking for smaller assortments. Second and more importantly, it examined the mediating role of control. Study 3 ($N=160$) adopted a 2 (abundance: abundant vs. baseline) X 2 (assortment: large vs. small) X 2 (selection type: fruit, gym) mixed-model design with selection type as a within-participants factor. Participants imagined purchasing a type of fruit from a selection of 8 or 24 items and buying a gym membership at a gym that offered 5 or 10 equipment (counterbalanced order). Abundance manipulation was identical to study 1. We measured participants' evaluations of the store and feelings of control regarding the purchase situations (Chen et al. 2016). Results showed that in the "baseline" condition, participants liked the larger assortment more ($M_{large}=5.77$ vs. $M_{small}=5.14$; $p=0.004$). However, the liking of large and small assortments was comparable in the "abundant" condition ($M_{large}=5.71$ vs. $M_{small}=6.00$, NS), suggesting that the effect was driven by a boost in liking for the smaller assortment. Moderated-mediation analysis showed that feelings of control mediated this effect in the small condition but not in the large condition (small: $CI=[0.14, 0.54]$; large: $CI=[-0.2, 0.21]$).

If abundance serves as another source of control, increasing consumers' liking towards the smaller assortment, this effect of abundance should be mitigated when feelings of control are experimentally threatened. To test this possibility, study 4 ($N=290$) used a 3 cell (baseline/no-control-threat vs. abundance/no-control-threat vs. baseline/no-control-threat) between-subjects design. Participants were first asked to do a scrambled-sentence task in which they were asked to form 20 seven-word sentences, each out of a list of eight words (Bargh et al. 1996; Wang et al. 2013). In the "no-control-threat" conditions, the target sentences were unrelated to the concept of lacking control (e.g., "Michael Jordan is a great basketball player") while in the "control-threat" condition, the target sentences were associated with control-threat concepts (e.g., "I am unable to control many outcomes"). The abundance manipulation was identical to study 1. As predicted, when control was not threatened, participants in the abundant (vs. baseline) condition liked the smaller assortment more ($M_{abundant/no-control-threat}=4.4$ vs. $M_{baseline/no-control-threat}=5.4$; $p<0.001$); however, the positive effect of abundance on the evaluation of smaller assortment was mitigated when participants' feelings of control were threatened. Specifically, participants' relative preference for smaller assortment in the "abundant/control-threat" condition was lower than that in the "abundant/no-control-threat" condition ($M_{abundant/control-threat}=4.98$ vs. $M_{abundant/no-control-threat}=4.4$; $p=.03$) and similar to that in the "baseline/no-control-threat" condition ($M_{abundant/control-threat}=4.98$ vs. $M_{baseline/no-control-threat}=5.4$; $p=.14$).

Overall, these findings showed that the abundance satisfies consumers' feelings of control and substitutes for the sense of control provided by large assortments, which manifests itself in an increase in the relative preference for smaller assortments.

The Influences of Randomly Displaying a Set of Products on Shopping Evaluations

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Although the literature has documented the negative influences of not categorizing products (Mogilner, Rudnick, and Iyengar 2008; Kahn and Wansink 2004), consumers often report enjoyment and

satisfaction when they shop in a store in which the products are randomly displayed, such as flea markets and daily sale websites (Abrahamson and Freedman 2007; Hudson 2007). The present research aims to examine when and why a randomly displayed set can lead to more favorable shopping evaluations.

In a categorized display, products are organized into subgroups according to products' dominant features or functions. Consumers can quickly form a general impression of the set by processing category labels and several featured products in each category (Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991; Sujan and Bettman 1989). In contrast, products in a randomized set are displayed without an a priori order and thus consumers need to process more options (Hoch et al. 1999). Hence, compared to a categorized set, a randomized set signals to consumers that a greater amount of information needs to be processed, which makes them experience greater arousal (Berlyne 1971; Mehrabian and Russell 1974). Based on the conclusion that arousal can magnify people's affective responses and evaluative judgments (Reisenzein 1983; Russell and Mehrabian 1976), we propose that greater arousal elicited by a randomized set will intensify the pleasantness associated with a shopping activity and subsequently result in greater choice satisfaction and more enjoyable shopping experiences.

The occurrence of this positive randomization effect, however, requires two prerequisites. First, the shopping activity should not be task-oriented. When consumers go shopping out of necessity to obtain needed products (Kaltcheva and Weitz 2006) and thus engage in selective processing (i.e., screening off unrelated products and processing target product's information; Janiszewski 1998), they are less likely to be aroused by a randomized set because it would not significantly increase the amount of information needs to be processed (Mehrabian 1977). In addition, since category labels facilitate product searching and enhance perceived variety when consumers engage in task-oriented shopping (Hoch et al. 1999; Mogilner et al. 2008), we should observe a positive categorization effect. Second, shopping should be considered as a pleasant activity (Bloch and Richins 1983; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). When shopping is unpleasant, the polarizing effect of arousal (Reisenzein 1983) will intensify the negative feelings, leading to lower shopping evaluations. Many factors determine whether consumers' attitude towards a shopping activity is positive, such as consumers' initial preference for the offered products, and promotions which can spontaneously induce a positive affect among consumers (Naylor et al. 2006).

Five experiments were conducted. Experiment 1 determined whether a randomized display increases individuals' arousal level relative to a categorized display. Participants were invited to browse products sold in an online store. Sixty-four stationery products were arranged in four columns and 16 rows and were either sorted into 16 sub-categories or randomly displayed. Their feelings of arousal were measured (Havlena and Holbrook 1986) both before and after browsing the choice set. Results showed that participants reported greater arousal in the randomized condition than in the categorized condition after browsing the products (5.03 vs. 4.25; $t(95) = 2.63$, $p < .01$), but not before (3.90 vs. 3.88; $t < 1$).

Experiment 2 examined the randomization effect. To fulfill the prerequisite conditions, participants were induced to consider a leisure shopping situation by reading a short paragraph (Kaltcheva and Weitz 2006) and then browse 64 stationery products that were either categorized or randomized. Then they rated their feelings of arousal and pleasure. After that, participants saw the same product set again and indicated the products they would like to buy. Then, they rated choice satisfaction and shopping experience. Results showed that participants reported greater choice satisfaction when the set was

randomized than categorized (6.81 vs. 5.70; $t(69) = 2.61, p < .05$). Similar results were detected on shopping experience (6.53 vs. 5.66; $t(69) = 2.09, p < .05$), arousal (5.50 vs. 4.86; $t(69) = 2.06, p < .05$) and pleasure (6.61 vs. 5.86; $t(69) = 2.60, p < .05$). Mediation analyses revealed that arousal and pleasure sequentially mediated these randomization effects.

Using 54 chocolates and 64 stationery products, Experiment 3 and 4 investigated the moderating role of task orientation by manipulating a specific shopping target (Chernev 2003b) and a general task orientation (Choi and Fishbach 2011), respectively. Experiment 3 showed that compared to a categorized set, a randomized set increased choice satisfaction when participants did not indicate their chocolate preference (7.95 vs. 8.60; $F(1, 135) = 4.14, p < .05$), but decreased satisfaction when they indicated their chocolate preference and hence was expected to shop for that target (8.41 vs. 7.74; $F(1, 135) = 5.22, p < .05$). Similar results were detected in Experiment 4. Choice satisfaction was higher in the randomized condition than in the categorized condition when shopping was experience-oriented (6.94 vs. 5.97; $F(1, 132) = 4.55, p < .05$) but lower when shopping was task-oriented (6.22 vs. 7.14; $F(1, 132) = 4.64, p < .05$). Experiment 4 further demonstrated that arousal and perceived variety mediated the randomization and categorization effect, respectively.

Employing either 40 good-looking or creepy-looking endangered animals, Experiment 5 tested the moderating role of ‘shopping’ valence. Results showed that regardless of the shopping valence, participants reported a greater feeling of arousal after browsing a set of randomly displayed animals than a set of categorized animals (6.22 vs. 5.65; $F(1, 139) = 7.43, p < .01$). However, shopping valence moderates the influences of display method on choice satisfaction ($F(1, 139) = 7.77, p < .01$). Specifically, for attractive animals, participants reported greater satisfaction when the set was randomized than categorized (7.31 vs. 6.45; $F(1, 139) = 4.90, p < .05$); the effect was reversed for unattractive animals (4.16 vs. 4.84; $F(1, 139) = 2.99, p = .09$).

This research demonstrates a positive effect of product randomization. Our findings enrich the extant knowledge about the impacts of display method (Diehl et al. 2015; Kahn and Wansink 2004; Mogilner et al. 2008) and also provide useful marketing implications for store arrangements.

Global Context: Extremeness Aversion in a Dual Context Setting

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research on extremeness aversion has typically defined extremeness in terms of the local consideration set (Prelec, Wernerfelt, and Zettlemeyer 1997; Neumann, Bockenholt, and Sinha 2016; Simonson 1989). For example, in one demonstration of extremeness aversion, study participants tended to choose the middle of three drink options, regardless of the sizes of the three drinks offered (Sharpe, Staelin, and Huber 2008). These studies have demonstrated that consumers often avoid extreme options, where extremeness is a function of the local context.

But consumer choice rarely occurs in the completely isolated contexts used in laboratory experiments. When making real consumption decisions, consumers typically have several layers of context available to them to inform their evaluations and decisions. Consider a consumer choosing from among three brands of pasta sauce, ranging from a high priced, high quality sauce down to a low priced, low quality option. Extremeness aversion predicts that in such a situation, consumers will be attracted to the compromise or middle option.

But how would that consumer’s choices change if an additional, “global” context were introduced? What if consumers were told that this set of pasta sauces was being sold at Whole Foods, a store with a reputation for high prices? Would the preferences change if consumers evaluated exactly the same option set, with exactly the same prices, but at Walmart instead of Whole Foods?

In this research, we propose that both global and local context jointly determine consumers’ evaluations of attribute extremity, and therefore both affect how extremeness aversion influences choice. Specifically, we argue that consumers interpret the local context (e.g., the set of pasta sauces being considered) through the lens of the global context (e.g., the store in which the pasta sauces are seen). The global context can shift the “extremity” of one or more of the attributes being evaluated.

For example, if the consumer was shopping at Whole Foods, a store with a notoriously high price image, he or she might assume that all the prices in the set were high, relative to what is available on the market. This could shift the assessment of what is considered extreme. If all the options are thought to be relatively expensive based on the global context, the cheapest option in the set might seem more like a compromise option. Extremeness aversion in this context would lead to a preference for the least expensive option, rather than the middle option.

We tested this prediction in a series of studies. First, we replicated Prelec, Wernerfelt, and Zettlemeyer’s (1998) iconic poncho study, in which participants were asked to imagine it had started raining and so chose a length of poncho to buy: 38”, 40”, or 42”. As might be expected, people tended to choose a poncho length based on their height: with short people choosing the 38” and tall people choosing the 42” option. The global context in this case was manipulated by changing the location of the poncho vendor. Some participants were told that they were on vacation in the Netherlands, where “residents are among the tallest people in the world,” and others were told that they were vacationing in Indonesia, where “residents are among the shortest people in the world.” Changing the global context shifted preference in poncho length.

Converting the lengths to a 3-point scale, participants in the control condition (no additional global context), the average poncho length was 2.38. When participants were told they were shopping in the Netherlands, there was a significant shift toward the shorter poncho (2.38 vs. 2.05; $p < .01$). Likewise, there was a significant shift toward the taller poncho when participants were told they were shopping in Indonesia (2.38 vs. 2.58, $p = .05$). And the preferences in the Netherlands and Indonesia conditions were, of course, significantly different from each other (2.05 vs. 2.58; $p < .001$).

Additional experiments supported the influence of global context on how extremeness aversion manifests in choice. One study asked participants to take a virtual grocery shopping trip. They were shown 4 national-brand options from each of 4 categories: frozen pizza, pasta sauce, maple syrup, and tuna. The participants were shown the same set of options, at the same prices, but were told that the options they were considering came either from a store with a reputation for high prices (e.g., Whole Foods) or low prices (e.g., Walmart).

Across the four product categories, 29.4% of choices were for the lowest priced brands when participants were shopping in the low price image store. In the high price image store, the choice share of the lowest-priced brands increased to 41.7%—this despite the fact that the prices and products were the same in both conditions. This pattern held across all four product categories: frozen pizza (27.7% vs. 35.7%), pasta sauce (44.7% vs. 54.5%), maple syrup (30.4% vs. 50.0%), and tuna (14.9% vs. 26.8%).

In another study, we replicated the findings in the field. We conducted the study in three different restaurants in Milan, which all serve the same penne arrabbiata pasta (i.e., spicy pasta). The restaurants were Calabrese (known for spicy dishes), traditional Italian, and American. We had a total of two hundred and ninety-six participants (167 male; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.72$, $SD = 14.65$). Participants were asked to imagine they wanted to order arrabbiata pasta from the restaurant they were currently dining in, and had the option of telling the chef how spicy to make it on a 7-point scale. We predicted that those who were in the Calabrese restaurant would order the least spicy pasta because the global context was a very spicy restaurant. In contrast, those in the American restaurant would order the spiciest pasta because there the global context was a restaurant with non-spicy food. The results supported our prediction. Those in the American restaurant ordered their pasta to be spicier ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.39$) than those in the traditional ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.61$; $p < .01$) and the Calabrese ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.13$; $p < .001$) restaurant. Moreover, those in the Calabrese restaurant ordered their pasta to be less spicy than those in the traditional Italian restaurant ($p < .001$).

Across experiments (including others not summarized here in the interest of brevity), we found consistent support for a dual-context explanation of how extremeness aversion influences consumer choice. Our data support the idea that consumers are averse to extremes. However, we find that extremeness is not limited to the local consideration set, but is in fact jointly determined by the local context and the global setting, including the reputation of the retailer in which the consumer is shopping.

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