

Nuanced Effects of Decision Effort in Matters of Quality versus Matters of Taste

How Exerting Decision Effort Influences Consumers' Decision Confidence and Product Appraisals

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Abstract

We propose and test a conceptual model that sheds light on the nuanced effects of decision effort on decision confidence. We find that exerting more (vs. less) effort in the decision process **diminishes confidence** when decisions are considered “**matters of quality**,” whereas it **increases confidence** when decisions are considered “**matters of taste**.” These nuanced effects can be explained by the wide divergence in **consumers’ effort-sensitivity** (i.e., the strength of the relationship between exerted decision effort and metacognitive difficulty) in quality versus taste domains, which differentially activates **two distinct but related inferential systems** – **preference clarity and preference correctness**.

Theoretical Framework

Consumers have **different goals** when making decisions in quality versus taste domains.

- In **quality domains**, consumers believe that the alternatives can be rank-ordered based on their objective superiority, and therefore, they are more attuned to enhancing their **preference correctness** – whether their choices can be validated or justified by some form of collective consensus (“I chose what most other people prefer”).
- In **taste domains**, consumers believe that the alternatives cannot be rank-ordered based on their objective superiority, and therefore, they are more attuned to enhancing their **preference clarity** – whether their choices reflect their true feelings and thoughts (“I chose what I truly prefer”) [1,2].

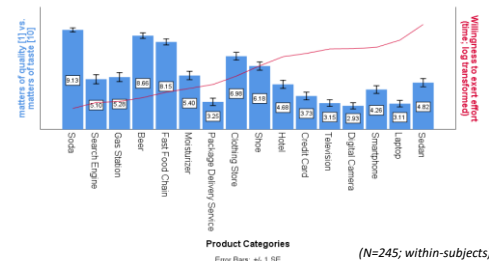
The amount of effort exerted in the decision process signals **how likely they are to achieve these goals**, which in turn affects their **decision appraisals**.

Hypotheses: Consumers’ **effort-sensitivity** is **higher** (i.e., tolerance for decision effort is lower) in quality domains than in taste domains:

- Due to **greater effort-sensitivity in quality domains**, exerting more (vs. less) effort **lowers consumers’ preference correctness**, in turn **reducing decision confidence**.
- Due to **less effort-sensitivity in taste domains**, exerting more (vs. less) effort **boosts consumers’ preference clarity**, in turn **increasing decision confidence**.

STUDY 1: Consumers’ predicted effort-sensitivity (i.e., willingness to exert effort) in quality versus taste domains

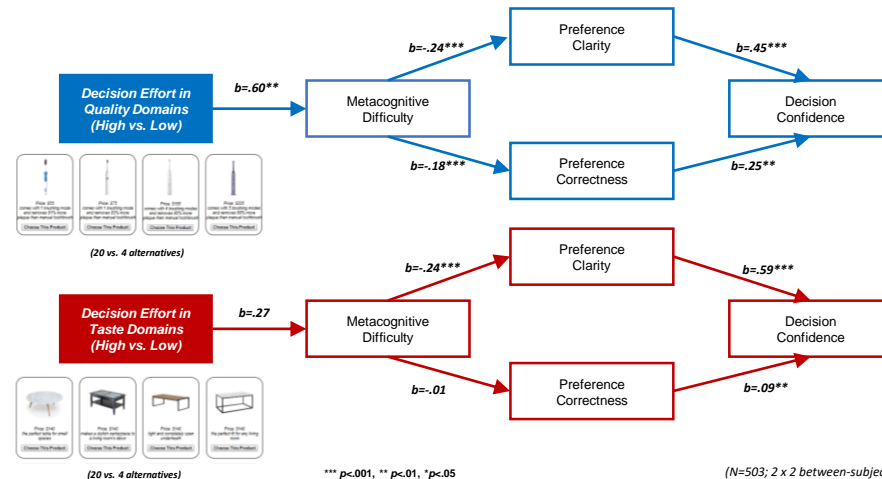
Across **16 different product categories**, consumers revealed their **predisposition toward exerting more (vs. less) effort** in domains they considered “matters of quality” than in domains they considered “matters of taste” ($b = .09$, $SE = .003$, $t = 21.96$, $p < .001$), potentially due to the high economic significance of these decision domains [3,4].



- We tightly controlled for the economic significance of decision domains in subsequent studies.

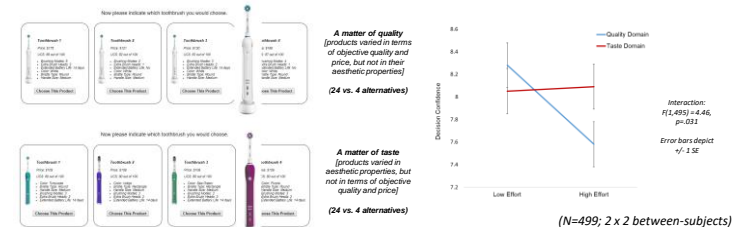
STUDY 2: Consumers’ actual effort-sensitivity in quality versus taste domains and its effect on decision confidence

Consistent with our theorizing, exerting greater (vs. less) effort **reduced decision confidence** in the **quality domain**, but it **increased decision confidence** in the **taste domain**.



STUDY 3: Controlling for the hedonic versus utilitarian nature of the decision domain

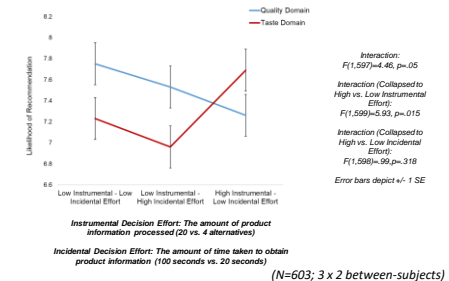
Whether consumers consider decisions to be “matters of quality” versus “matters of taste” can vary within the same product domain.



STUDY 4: The role of instrumental versus incidental decision effort and WOM potential

Instrumental decision effort as opposed to incidental decision effort plays the **pivotal role** in driving these effects.

- The nuanced effects of decision effort on decision confidence in turn affects consumers’ product appraisals and their likelihood of recommending their chosen alternatives to others in quality versus taste domains ($b = -.25$, $SE = .13$, 95% CI: $-.512, -.003$ vs. $b = .09$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI: $-.062, .262$).



Implications

- This research sheds light on the conditions under which exerting more (vs. less) decision effort leads to favorable downstream consequences.
- It reconciles the mixed findings in prior literature with regard to when having more versus less choice is better [5,6].
- It informs strategic decisions regarding choice architectures – in particular, when they should encourage versus restrain exertion of decision effort.

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 [6] Chernev, A., Bockenholt, U., & Goodman, J. (2016). “Choice overload: A conceptual review and meta-analysis”. *Corrigendum. Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 26(2), 312.