

SHARED AESTHETICS:

Increased Preference for Minimalism in Choices for Communal Use



Cary L. Anderson¹
Peggy J. Liu¹
Lauren Min²



¹University of Pittsburgh, Katz Graduate School of Business

²University of Kansas, School of Business

INTRODUCTION / SUMMARY

Although it is well-established that product aesthetics influence choice when products will be used by one individual, it remains unclear how aesthetics influence choice when the decision-maker anticipates use by multiple individuals—an increasingly common situation in the sharing economy (Eckhardt et al. 2019).

Extending beyond the aesthetics literature's focus on aesthetics for individual consumption, we compare aesthetics chosen for individual (vs. shared) consumption. **Five pre-registered experiments (N = 2245)** document the **Inclusive Minimalism Effect**, wherein consumers gravitate towards minimalist (vs. maximalist) aesthetics when choosing for shared (vs. solo) consumption. Moreover, these experiments show when and why the Inclusive Minimalism Effect occurs.

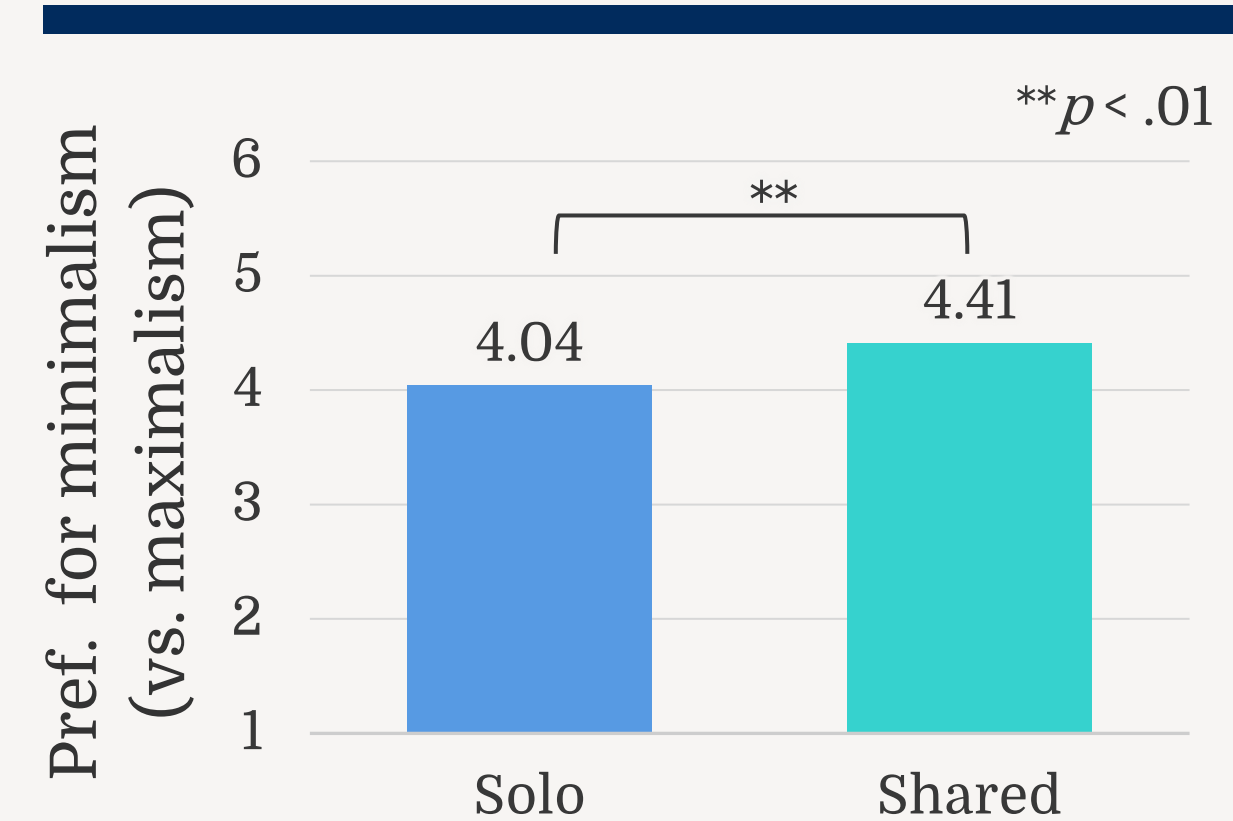
EXP 1: INCLUSIVE MINIMALISM EFFECT

Participants (N = 371) considered shopping for three items—a rug, wallpaper, and throw pillows—for a solo (shared) office; choice type condition between-subjects.

We provided participants with descriptions of minimalist and maximalist aesthetics; participants indicated their aesthetic preference for each item (1 = definitely maximalist aesthetic, 6 = definitely minimalist aesthetic).

Results:
No choice type × item interaction; collapsed across items.

Participants in the shared condition expressed greater preference for minimalist (vs. maximalist) aesthetics than participants in the solo condition, $t(369) = 2.75$, $p = .006$.



EXP 2: THE SHARING ECONOMY

Participants (N = 368) considered choosing an aesthetic to decorate a personal (vs. shared (i.e., rented via Airbnb)) vacation home; between-subjects.

DV: Choice of one of six room aesthetic images, pre-defined as minimalist (e.g., left) or maximalist (e.g., right) by design experts.

Results:
Participants were more likely to chose a minimalist aesthetic when choosing a décor style for a shared (90%) vs. solo (64%) home, $B = 1.66$, $\chi^2(1) = 38.00$, $p < .001$.



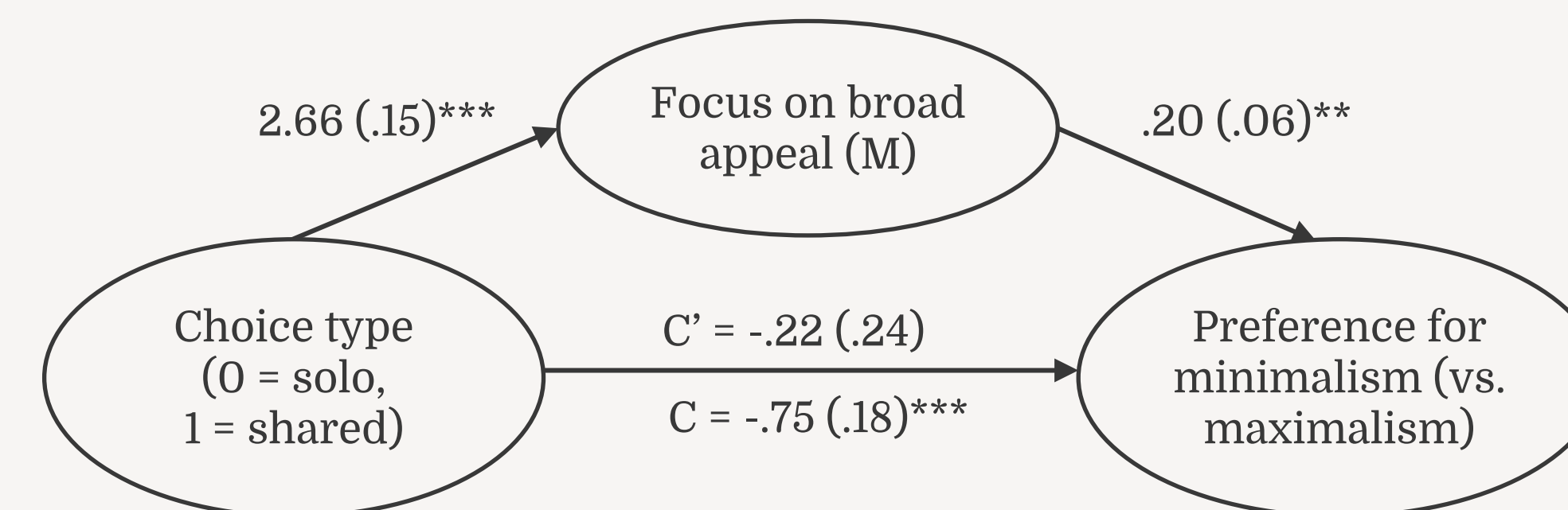
EXP 3: MINIMALISM = BROAD APPEAL

Participants (N = 387) considered choosing a rug to decorate a solo (shared) office; between-subjects.

DV: Aesthetic preference (as in Exp. 1).

Mediator: Focus on broad appeal ($r(387) = .80$, $p < .001$);
(1) *I was thinking about what would have broad appeal*,
(2) *I was thinking about what would appeal to a universal set of tastes* (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

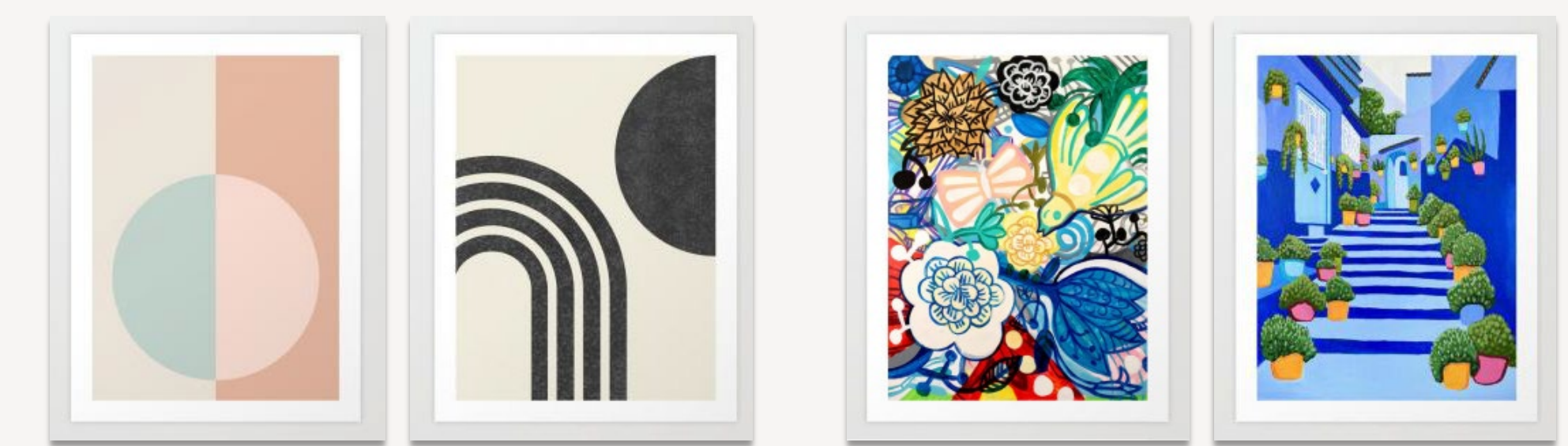
Results:
Replicated the Inclusive Minimalism Effect, $t(385) = 4.15$, $p < .001$. Focus on broad appeal mediated the relationship between choice type and aesthetic preference (95% CI: .14, .92).



EXP 4: TASTE HOMOGENEITY

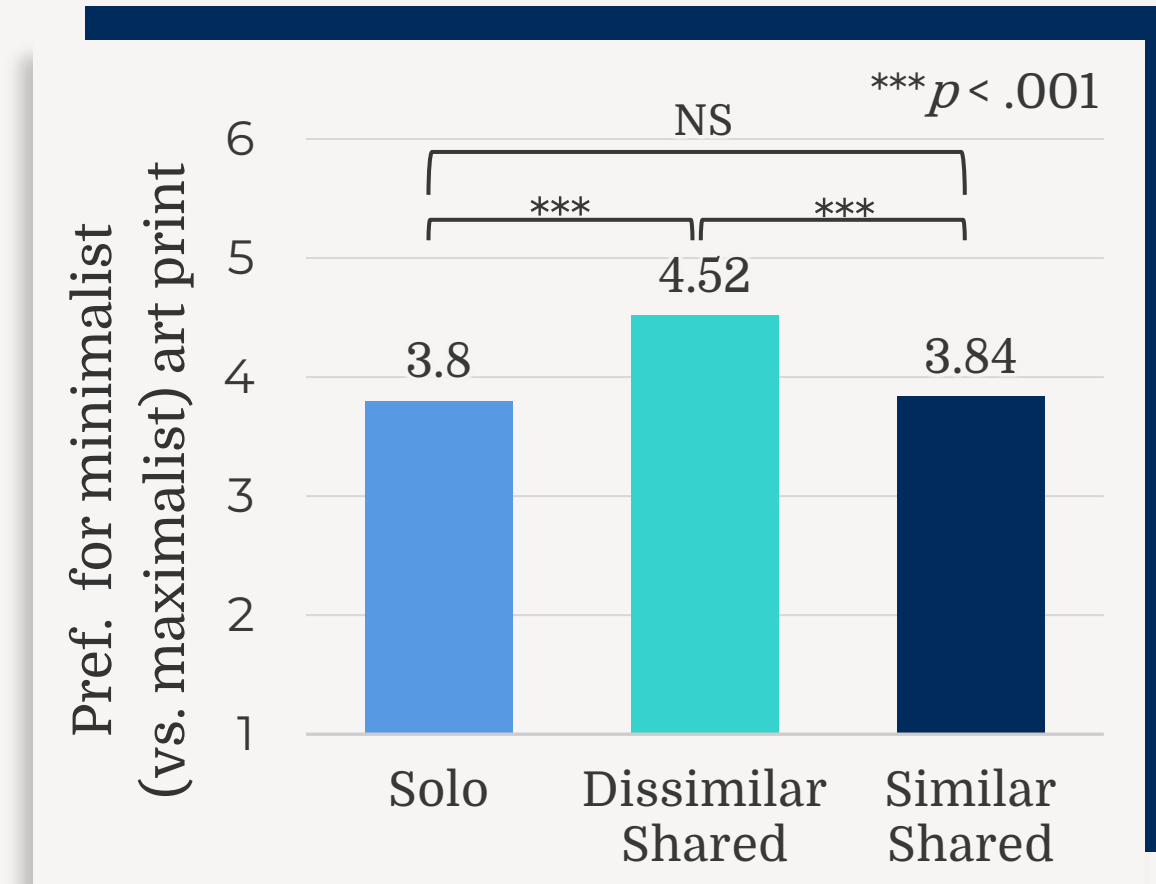
Participants (N = 555) considered choosing wall art to decorate an office in a 3 condition (solo, shared with others with similar aesthetic tastes, shared with others with dissimilar aesthetic tastes) between-subjects design.

DV: Aesthetic preference (as in Exp. 1, 3).



Selected art print examples: minimalist (left) versus maximalist (right).

Results:
The Inclusive Minimalism Effect replicated when choosing for shared consumption with others with dissimilar (but not similar) tastes. This finding indicates that the effect is driven by aiming to appeal to varying tastes, not by simply choosing for more than one person.



EXP 5: SHARING & SELF-INVOLVEMENT

Participants (N = 564) considered choosing a wall clock in a 2 (choice type: solo, shared) × 2 (self-as-consumer: yes, no) between-subjects design. DV: Aesthetic preference (Exp. 1, 3, 4).

Selected wall clock examples: minimalist (left), vs. maximalist (right).



Results:
A 2 × 2 ANOVA on aesthetic preference revealed no significant interaction ($p = .10$) and no main effect of self-as-consumer ($p = .71$). There was only a main effect of choice type, replicating the Inclusive Minimalism Effect ($p < .001$), showing that the effect is driven by the desire to accommodate multiple consumers' possibly differing preferences, rather than by whether the chooser will take part in the consumption of the product.

CONCLUSION

Whereas a large literature on aesthetics examines choices for the self, we examine how choices differ for more than one person. We find an **Inclusive Minimalism Effect** (Exp. 1-5), wherein people select more minimalist (vs. maximalist) aesthetics for shared (vs. solo) consumption. Focus on a design's broad appeal underlies the effect (Exp. 3). Thus, the effect is eliminated when co-consumers are presumed to have similar aesthetic tastes to oneself (Exp. 4). Additionally, the effect does not depend on the chooser's own consumption involvement (Exp. 5) and is driven instead by whether the choice is for one or multiple people.