The Effect of Choice Difficulty on Consumption of the Selected Alternative

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Research Question

- How does choice difficulty impact people’s consumption behavior (i.e., the extent to which they consume the selected alternative)?
  - What do people infer from choice difficulty?
  - Does choice difficulty always undermine choice confidence?
  - Does choice confidence increase the consumption of the selected alternative?

Background

- Choice difficulty leads to different inferences about the attractiveness of the selected alternative.¹
- Choice difficulty undermines choice confidence (i.e., how good the selected alternative is),²³
- Reduction in choice confidence increases motivation to acquire more information.⁶

Theoretical Framework

Choice Difficulty

Positive Inference

“I carefully considered all information.”

High Choice Confidence

“I made a good choice.”

Negative Inference

“I did not have enough information.”

Low Choice Confidence

“I made a bad choice.”

Choice Difficulty

Inference Making

High Choice Confidence

“I know enough already.”

Reduced Consumption

Low Choice Confidence

“I need to know more.”

Increased Consumption

H1: When choice difficulty signals diligence, it decreases consumption of the selected alternative.

H2: When choice difficulty signals lack of information, it increases consumption of the selected alternative.

Method

- Stimulus: Short animated video
- Manipulation: Choosing from an assortment with a dominant option (low choice difficulty) vs. choosing from an assortment with no dominant option (high choice difficulty)

Key DV: How long participants watch the video

Results: Study 1

- Direct effect: β = -0.8864, p < 0.07
- Indirect effect–positive inference: β = -0.2171; CI [-0.9638, 1.4764]
- Indirect effect–negative inference: β = 14.0978; CI [-1.9491, 35.2006]

Results: Study 2

- Consumption: Positive Inference vs. Negative Inference
- Enjoyment: Positive Inference vs. Negative Inference

Conclusion

- The relationship between choice difficulty and choice confidence is nuanced.
- What people infer from their experience of choice difficulty (i.e., diligence vs. lack of information) affects their choice confidence, which affects their subsequent motivation to acquire more information about the selected alternative.
- This motivation to acquire more information leads to increased consumption of the selected alternative.

References