

Consumer confidence: When our choices makes the most sense

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Why do we feel confident about some choices while we question others? According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, it's a combination of how easy the choice seems and whether we're thinking concretely or abstractly.

"We found that subjective feelings of ease experienced during [judgments](#) (e.g., choosing a digital camera, art, movie, or [charity](#)) can increase or decrease consumers' confidence in their choice and the amount of donation depending on whether consumers are thinking, respectively, concretely or abstractly," write authors Claire I. Tsai (University of Toronto) and Ann L. McGill (University of Chicago).

The researchers found that abstract thinking and concrete thinking determine the theory consumers adopt to interpret their subjective experiences. "Consider, for example, the feeling of difficulty one experiences when studying for an exam," the authors write. "The subjective experience of difficulty can lead to a feeling of high confidence, providing this difficulty is interpreted as effort put forth to ensure a good grade. On the other hand, the same subjective experience can lead to feeling very low confidence about the grade, if processing difficulty is interpreted as inability to process the study materials."

The authors conducted three experiments using a sample of 750 participants. They tested a variety of product categories: [electronic products](#), art, movies, and charitable giving. They manipulated ease of processing by varying the clarity of print advertisements or the number

of thoughts participants were asked to generate to explain their choices. In addition, they manipulated abstract and concrete thinking by asking participants to consider issues that weren't related to the product categories. "Specifically, we induced abstract thinking (or concrete thinking) by asking participants to focus on the why (or how) aspects of an event," the authors write.

"As predicted, we found that when consumers are thinking more concretely and focusing on details of product information, ease of processing—making a choice based on a clear ad or a few reasons—increases confidence," the authors write. "Difficulty of processing—making a choice based on a blurry ad or having to generate many reasons to explain one's choice—decreases [confidence](#)."

More information: Claire I. Tsai and Ann L. McGill. "The Effects of Fluency and Construal Level on Confidence Judgments." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2010.

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