

# No pain, no gain? Concrete thinking increases consumer confidence

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The confidence you feel when making a choice might depend on whether you're thinking concretely or abstractly, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"In three experiments across a sample of 750 participants, we found that subjective feelings of ease experienced during [judgments](#) (choosing a digital camera, art, movie, or charity) can increase or decrease 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 authors use the example of studying for an exam. The experience of difficulty can lead to a feeling of high confidence, if the difficulty is interpreted as effort put forth to ensure a good grade. This aligns with conventional wisdom such as "no pain, no gain." On the other hand, the same experience can lead to feeling of low confidence if processing the material is interpreted as inability to process the study materials ("Since I had to work so hard, I am probably not very good at this subject.")

The authors tested their hypothesis in a number of product categories including electronics, art, movies, and charitable giving. They manipulated ease of processing by varying clarity of ad messages or the number of thoughts generated to explain participant choices. They induced abstract (or concrete) thinking by asking participants to focus on the why (or how) aspects of an event.

"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. "No Pain, No Gain? How Fluency and Construal Level Affect Consumer Confidence." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2011. A preprint of this article (to be officially published online soon) can be found at [journals.uchicago.edu/jcr](http://journals.uchicago.edu/jcr)

Provided by University of Chicago

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