

Doctoral Dissertation Committee's Report on Doctoral Candidate Yoshiko Ishikawa

Satoshi Akutsu

Shingo Oue

Patricia Robinson, adviser

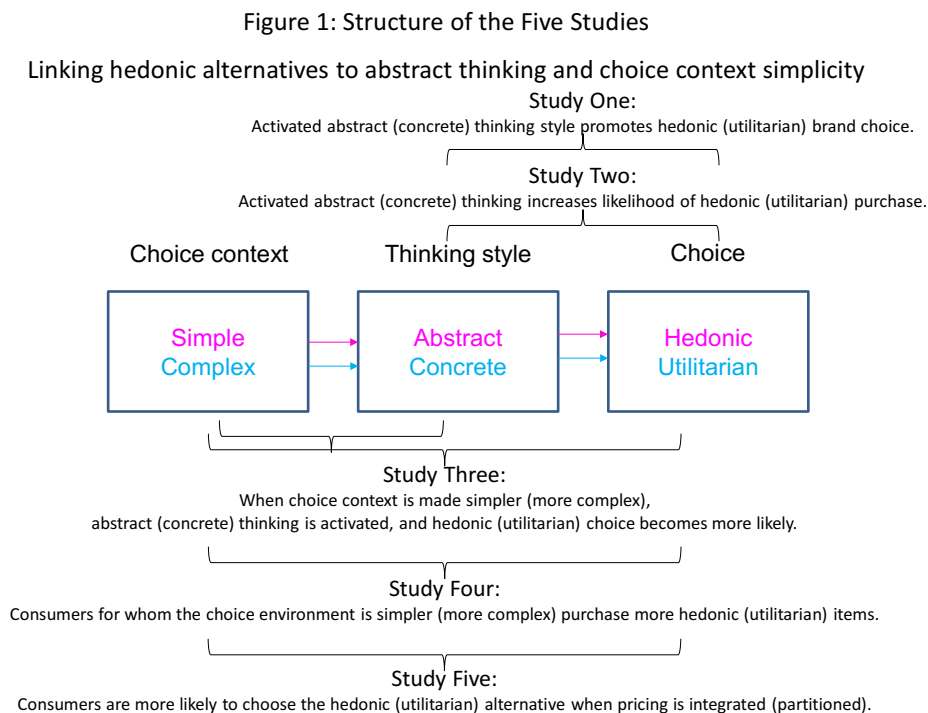
Doctoral candidate Yoshiko Ishikawa successfully defended her doctoral dissertation on May 10, 2019. The doctoral dissertation committee comprised of Professor Satoshi Akutsu, Professor Shingo Oue, and Professor Patricia Robinson as adviser, unanimously approved her doctoral dissertation submission on May 31, 2019, and now respectfully asks the faculty to grant Yoshiko Ishikawa the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

Ishikawa's dissertation examines how people make choices between hedonic and utilitarian goods. Items that are consumed primarily for the experiential and/or sensory enjoyment are called "hedonic" goods, and those that are consumed primarily for the practical and/or functional utility are called "utilitarian" goods. Ishikawa explores the research questions: "What makes consumers more likely to choose hedonic items?" and with that understanding, "How can marketers shape the choice context to promote hedonic purchases?" Her research examines those questions through the lens of the construal level framework.

Ishikawa makes a theoretical contribution by building on the defining characteristics of hedonic versus utilitarian goods. The goal of experiential and sensory enjoyment is more abstract, while the goal of practical and functional utility is more concrete. She presents a theoretical framework linking hedonic goods to abstract thinking styles, and utilitarian goods to concrete thinking styles, and demonstrates that activating abstract thinking promotes hedonic choice, while activating concrete thinking promotes utilitarian choice.

Activating differential construal in a separate task first, then seeing the effect in a subsequent choice task is a useful experimental methodology for understanding the causality between constructs. But it may not be practically relevant when marketers reach their consumers. Ishikawa makes a substantive contribution by integrating the activation of differential construal levels into the choice context. She demonstrates that simplifying the marketing mix of Product, Price, Place, and/or Promotion would streamline the choice context, activate more abstract thinking, and promote hedonic choice.

She conducted five studies for the research. Figure 1 summarizes Ishikawa's theoretical framework, and how her studies were designed and conducted to examine it.



In Studies One and Two, she tested the theoretical link between thinking style and choice, which is the basic building block of her new theoretical framework. Study One experimentally

activated abstract versus concrete thinking styles and measured the effect on the choice of a hedonic versus utilitarian alternative, respectively. Study Two experimentally activated abstract versus concrete thinking using a different methodology of asking *why* versus *how* and measured the effect on the likelihood of choosing a more hedonic versus utilitarian alternative in a binary choice set. Studies One and Two tested the hypothesis:

H1: Activated abstract thinking should increase the likelihood of hedonic choice, while activated concrete thinking should increase the likelihood of utilitarian choice.

In Study Three, she examined the entire theoretical framework and introduced choice context simplicity/complexity. She also integrated the activation of abstract versus simple thinking into the choice context. In Study Three, she created a simple choice context by giving study participants a choice task in a standard format. In contrast, she created a complex choice context by giving the participants the same choice task, but by having them use their non-dominant hands for marking their choices, thus making the action more complex. She demonstrated that the simpler choice context activated more abstract thinking and promoted hedonic choice, while a more complex choice context activated more concrete thinking and promoted utilitarian choice. Study Three tested the hypotheses:

H2: A simpler choice context should activate more abstract thinking, while a more complex choice context should activate more concrete thinking.

H3: A simpler choice context should promote hedonic choice, while a more complex choice context should promote utilitarian choice.

To enhance the managerial relevance of her proposed theoretical framework, she introduced the marketing mix variables as tools for making the choice context simpler versus

more complex in Studies Four and Five. In Study Four, she designed the Place as a virtual store. Shoppers had different levels of ability to navigate through the virtual shopping trip. The shopping trip should have been simpler for those with higher navigating abilities, and they purchased more hedonic items. The same shopping trip should have been more complex for those with lesser navigating abilities, and they purchased more utilitarian items. In Study Five, she designed the Price. She presented the same total price either more simply as an all-inclusive price, or in a more complex manner as partitioned into pre-tax price, taxes, fees, and other components. When the price was presented more simply, the alternative that excelled in hedonic attributes gained choice share. In contrast, when the price was presented in a more complex manner, the alternative that excelled in utilitarian attributes gained choice share. Studies Four and Five tested the hypothesis:

H4: A set of simpler marketing mix variables should promote hedonic choice, while a set of more complex marketing mix variables should promote utilitarian choice.

The managerial implications of Ishikawa's work center on how businesses can practically promote hedonic choice by designing the marketing mix variables. Her studies give some insight into how businesses can design the marketing mix to differentially promote hedonic choice. For example, in online shopping streamlining the steps from product selection to purchase may promote hedonic choice. For brick and mortar stores, it may be to declutter the product shelves and streamline SKU's. Marketers can design their marketing mix variables to help simplify the choice context. The current research examined the Place and Price elements, but the findings here should generalize to Product and Promotion as well. Simpler product names and/or brands that are descriptive of the product should increase the preference for hedonic items. For example, “午後の紅茶” may be more suitable than “venti macchiato” for

hedonic beverages like tea and coffee that are consumed primarily for the taste and aroma. Promotion about the product, such as the description of the ingredients, should likewise be simpler for hedonic beverages. For example, sugar should be labeled simply “sugar,” rather than “sucrose.”

She also discussed an extension of her theoretical framework from hedonic choice and abstract thinking, to greater psychological distances. Combining the findings of the current research that links hedonic (utilitarian) choice to abstract (concrete) thinking, with the literature that links abstract (concrete) thinking to greater (lesser) psychological distances, she suggests that hedonic (utilitarian) choice should be promoted when the focus shifts to greater (lesser) psychological distances. Separately from the doctoral dissertation, she has conducted a preliminary study, which suggests that more heterogeneous groups, in terms of gender and approximate age groups mixes, tended to order more hedonic beverages and snacks. This is consistent with the framework that she proposes in this research. The focus shifts to greater social distances in more heterogeneous groups, which activates abstract thinking and promotes hedonic choice.