

ABSTRACT

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. How do people make choices between hedonic and utilitarian goods? I present a theoretical framework linking hedonic (utilitarian) goods to abstract (concrete) thinking styles and demonstrate that activating abstract (concrete) thinking promotes hedonic (utilitarian) choice.

The literature suggests that simple actions activate abstract thinking, while complex actions activate concrete thinking. Choice is an action, so I present that making the action of choosing simpler should activate abstract thinking and promote hedonic choice. In one study participants completed a choice task and marked their responses on a standard survey. This was the “simple” choice context condition. In the “complex” choice context condition, participants completed the same choice task, but they used their non-dominant hands to mark their responses, thus making the action of choosing more complex. I also use different marketing mix variables to operationalize the simplicity of choice context. In another study I designed the Place as a virtual shop. Virtual shoppers had varying levels of ability to navigate through the

virtual shop, those who had higher abilities to navigate, for whom the choice context would be simpler, purchased more hedonic items. In the last study I presented the Price in a simple versus complex format, and showed that the relative preference was higher for the alternative that excelled in a hedonic attribute when the price was presented simply as an all-inclusive price.

My theoretical contribution is to link hedonic choice to abstract thinking based on the defining characteristic of hedonic goods. I present the managerial implications of my theoretical framework by exploring how businesses can design their marketing mix variables to promote hedonic choice.