

Pick your poison: Attribute trade-offs in unattractive consideration sets

Tatiana Sokolova
Tilburg University
Aradhna Krishna
University of Michigan

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Abstract

Consumers often have to make trade-offs between desirable, “more is better”, and undesirable, “less is better”, attributes. What drives whether the desirable or the undesirable attributes will be weighed more heavily in decisions? We argue that the extent to which consumers focus on desirable versus undesirable attributes depends on the overall attractiveness of their consideration sets. The less attractive the options under consideration, the more weight is allocated to undesirable attributes, such as price. Four experiments set in the contexts of elections (studies 1a-b), lottery ticket purchasing (study 2), and hotel booking (study 3), demonstrate that unattractive sets lead to increased selection of options superior on “undesirable” attributes (e.g. level of corruption of a presidential candidate; price of a product), consistent with increased weighting of these attributes. Study 3 further supports our theorizing by demonstrating that the effect of set attractiveness on choice is driven by changes in attribute weights.

Keywords: *attribute trade-offs; choice and rejection; elections*

Track: Consumer Behaviour