

Does everything look the same from a distance? A meta-analysis of construal level's effect on similarity perceptions

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Cite as:

Adler Susanne (2024), Does everything look the same from a distance? A meta-analysis of construal level's effect on similarity perceptions. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 53rd, (119406)

Paper from the 53rd Annual EMAC Conference, Bucharest, Romania, May 28-31, 2024



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Abstract

Construal level theory suggests that an abstract mindset leads people to neglect situation-specific details and idiosyncratic differences. Abstract (vs. concrete) thinkers therefore consider categories as more inclusive and perceive objects as more similar. Several individual studies tested this construal-similarity link (CSL) but are fragmented across different research contexts. Consolidating their results, this meta-analysis considers 173 effect sizes from 59 articles and identifies a small to medium-sized but heterogeneous positive CSL for non-egocentric measures (i.e., objects appear more similar in abstract, high construal levels), while testing egocentric measures yields a negative CSL (i.e., higher similarity perceptions in concrete, low construal levels). The CSL helps explain why people disregard or overvalue differences between choice options and holds implications for academic research and practical challenges that arise from biased information processing.

Subject Areas: *Cognition, Consumer Behaviour, Decision-Making, Information Processing*

Track: Consumer Behaviour