

Decision Processes Colloquium

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“Complicating Choice”

“No question is so difficult to answer as that to which the answer is obvious”

~ *George Bernard Shaw*

A great deal of research in consumer decision-making and social-cognition has explored consumers' attempts to simplify choices by bolstering their tentative choice candidate and/or denigrating the other alternatives. The present research investigates a diametrically opposed process, whereby consumers complicate their decisions. The authors demonstrate that, in order to complicate their choices, consumers increase choice conflict by over-weighting small disadvantages of superior alternatives, converging overall evaluations of alternatives, reversing the ordinal value of attributes, and even choosing less preferred alternatives. Further, the results from five studies support a unifying theoretical framework, namely the effort-compatibility principle. Specifically, it is argued that consumers strive for compatibility between the effort they anticipate and the effort that they actually exert. When a certain decision seems more difficult than initially expected, a simplifying process ensues. However, when the decision feels easier to resolve than was anticipated (e.g., when consumers face an important, yet easy choice), consumers artificially increase their effort.