

Who Regrets More After a Choice? The Role of Dialectical Thinking: An Abstract

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Abstract The feeling of regret after a choice can have a prolonged impact on consumer subsequent choices (Patrick, Lancellotti, & Hagtvædt, 2009; Tsiros, 2009). While ample research has investigated antecedents of post-decision regret, most studies have focused on features of choices (Sagi & Friedland, 2007; Tsiros & Mittal, 2000). In this research, we examine how cognitive style (i.e., dialectical thinking) influences information processing strategies and post-purchase regret in a context characterized by trade-offs among decision alternatives.

Dialectical thinking is characterized by a high tolerance for contradictions, a tendency to regard things as changeable, and a tendency to view things in the world as connected (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). These characteristics of dialectical thinkers significantly influence how they process information. Highly dialectical thinkers automatically seek out and process both positive and negative information. They are more accepting of contradiction, while low dialectical thinkers tend to avoid contradictions. We propose that this advantage may actually negatively influence post-decision experiences. Thinking more comprehensively can lead to more regrets when contradictory information (the strengths and weaknesses of options in a trade-off) is present. We demonstrate this negative effect of thinking dialectically in five studies by manipulating dialectical thinking (study 1) or measuring chronicle dialectical thinking tendency (studies 2, 4, and 5). The effect exists in both the lab setting (studies 1–2, 4–5) and everyday shopping experience (study 3). We also find that confidence in the decision drives this effect (studies 4 and 5). Attention to both strengths and weaknesses of an alternative makes the tradeoff salient and the weakness more memorable. Highly dialectical thinkers tend to process and use more product attributes in their decision-making, are more likely to recall weak attributes, and tend to experience lower decision confidence. As a result they feel more regretful.

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The research contributes to the literature of dialectical thinking and decision-making. We provide direct evidence for how highly dialectical thinkers differ from low dialectical thinkers in the processing of trade-off information and demonstrate that comprehensive knowledge of a non-dominated option leads to lower confidence and more regret.

References Available Upon Request