

"A man is
great by
deeds, not by
birth"
-Chanakya

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Attraction Effect:

Does detection of asymmetric dominance always leads to the effect

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Abstract:

The attraction effect is a well-documented context effect in which the introduction of an asymmetrically dominated alternative (decoy) increases the choice share of a target option relative to a competitor. Although widely studied across marketing, psychology, economics, and other disciplines, recent large-scale replications have questioned the robustness and ecological validity of the attraction effect. Prior research suggests that a key condition for the effect to emerge is the decision maker's ability to detect the asymmetric dominance relationship between the target and the decoy. When this dominance relationship is not clearly recognizable—particularly in visually or pictorially presented choice sets—the attraction effect may disappear or even reverse. Building on this literature, the present research examines situations in which even an increased ability to detect asymmetric dominance may fail to produce the attraction effect. Specifically, we propose that contextual features of the choice display can alter the perceptual structure of the choice set. When the target and the decoy are visually grouped together (e.g., within a box), the dominance relationship becomes easier to detect, but this grouping may simultaneously increase the perceptual salience of the competitor. As a result, the competitor may become the focal option, attenuating the attraction effect or producing a repulsion effect. The findings highlight that not only the detection of asymmetric dominance but also the context in which it is displayed plays a crucial role in shaping context-dependent choice.

Key Words: Attraction Effect, Asymmetric Dominance, Grouping



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