

# The Influence of Scheduling Style on Assortment Size

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**Abstract.** *People use two types of scheduling styles to schedule their daily activities, namely clock-time or event-time. When people use clock time, they organize tasks based on a clock. When they use event-time, they organize tasks based on their order of completion. This research shows that adopting different scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences. We demonstrate, through two studies, that consumers using event-time scheduling style prefer a larger assortment size whereas consumers using clock-time scheduling style prefer a smaller assortment size. We also show that this effect is mediated by desirability-feasibility consideration. Specifically, event-time scheduling style leads consumers to focus on the desirability considerations, which leads them to prefer larger assortment size while shopping. On the other hand, clock-time scheduling style leads consumers to focus on the feasibility considerations, which leads them to prefer smaller assortment size while shopping. We also discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of our research.*

**Keywords:** consumer behavior, scheduling style, event time, clock time, assortment size, desirability, feasibility.

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## Introduction

Consumers often decide to shop in a store based on the assortment of products available in the store. For example, consumers may decide between shopping at a retailer with a smaller assortment of products vs. a retailer with a larger assortment of products. Recent research has investigated different factors that influence consumers' preference for assortment size (Chernev, 2006; Goodman and Malkoc, 2012; Huffman and Kahn, 1998). However, research has not considered whether this preference is dependent on how consumers plan their daily activities. Recent research (Sellier and Avnet, 2014) shows that consumers adopt two scheduling styles to plan their daily activities: clock-time and event-time. Consumers who adopt clock-time use an external clock to help them navigate through their daily activities. They divide time into measurable units and use the external clock to figure out when activities begin and end (Levine, 1997). For example, consumers may plan to work from 9 to 12 pm, have lunch from 12pm to 1pm and finish their work from 1pm to 5pm. On the other hand, consumers who adopt event-time use their internal sense to help them navigate through their daily activities. They plan their activities relative to each other, and

transition from one activity to the other when they think that the previous activity has been completed. For example, consumers may plan on working until they decide to or until they are hungry for lunch, and resume work once lunch is over, working until they decide they have done enough work for the day. In this article, we examine how the different scheduling style consumers adopt for their daily activities influence their assortment size preferences. Since consumers often schedule their lives on a daily basis to make the most of their limited time, understanding the role of scheduling styles on consumer decisions is an important area to explore for marketing researchers. Therefore, explicating how scheduling style influences assortment size decisions helps us advance our understanding of the impact of scheduling style on consumer decisions.

Across two experiments, we show that consumers' scheduling styles influences their preference of assortment sizes. Specifically, consumers who use event-time scheduling prefer large assortments whereas consumers who use clock-time scheduling prefer smaller assortments. Furthermore, the influence of scheduling style on preference of assortment size is mediated by desirability-feasibility considerations. Specifically, event-time influences consumers to focus on desirability considerations, which lead them to prefer larger assortment size while shopping. On the other hand, clock-time influences consumers to focus on feasibility considerations, which lead them to prefer smaller assortment size while shopping.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. First, we review the literature on product assortments and scheduling style. Second, we propose hypotheses that highlight the impact of scheduling style on product assortment. Third, we present two experiments that test our hypotheses and provide evidence for the underlying process. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications.

## **Literature review**

### ***Assortment size***

Research in assortment size shows that consumers first choose a product assortment such as which store to visit and then decides on which product to buy (Broniarczyk, 2008; Chernev, 2006; Goodman and Malkoc, 2012). In this research, we focus on the choice of assortment, particularly the size of the assortments. Recent research has identified different factors that influence consumers' preference for assortment sizes. For example, researchers show consumers prefer to shop in retail stores with larger assortment size (Redden and Hoch, 2009) because large assortments help consumers find the product they like (Chernev, 2003), offer flexibility in making choices (Ratner, Kahn, and Kahnemann, 1999), and decreases preference uncertainty (Lehmann, 1991). Conversely, consumers prefer to shop in retail stores with smaller assortment size when they think about the difficulty of choosing from the assortment (Chernev, 2006; Goodman and Malkoc, 2011; Krizan, Bilková, and Kita, 2014), and when they can't compare the various offerings in the assortment (Gourville and Soman, 2005). We contribute to this literature by identifying individuals' scheduling style as an important factor that influences their preference of assortment size.

**Scheduling style and assortment size preference**

Researchers have identified that people use two scheduling styles to plan their daily activities: clock time and event time (Levine, 1997). People with clock time orientation (clock-timers) rely on an external clock to schedule their activities. When planning for activities to take place in the future, clock timers let the clock define when those activities will take place. Conversely, people with event time orientation (event timers) rely on an internal sense to schedule their activities (Sellier and Avnet, 2014). When planning for activities to take place in the future, event timers decide to work on future tasks when they feel that the earlier task they were performing is completed. People either stick to one scheduling style or switch between the two scheduling styles depending on the context. For example, a person may have to rely on clock time when she is in her job because of scheduled meetings, deadlines, etc. However, the same person may decide to rely on event time when she is on vacation where she decides to do activities when she feels like doing them. In other words, people do not use both scheduling styles at the same time. They switch back and forth between the two scheduling styles (Sellier and Avnet, 2014).

Researchers have shown that adopting either scheduling styles influences consumers' goal pursuit strategies. Since event timers transition from one task to the other when they think that the previous task is complete, they focus on performing the task well. Therefore, event timers focus on the effectiveness of their task performance (Avnet and Sellier, 2011). Since clock timers use an external clock to figure out when tasks begin and end, they focus on completing the tasks on time. Therefore, event timers focus on the efficiency of their task performance (Avnet and Sellier, 2011).

Research in goal theories shows that goal-directed action consists of either desirability or feasibility values (Lieberman and Trope, 1998). Desirability values refer to considering the rewards of the action that motivate people to pursue it (Liu, 2008). In other words, it refers to considering the "why" or the value of the end state of an action. Feasibility values refer to considering the "how" or the costs and constraints associated with an action (Vallacher and Wegner, 1989). Therefore, it refers to the ease or likelihood that the action will achieve the desired outcome (Liu, 2008). Any action can be characterized by varying degrees of desirability and feasibility. For example, when considering a shopping trip, consumers are thinking about "why" they are shopping when thinking about the desirability considerations. Since finding the most appropriate product for their use is the value of the end state of the shopping task, thinking about desirability considerations of shopping will lead consumers to focus on finding the most appropriate product for their use. Since consumers will have to perform their shopping task well to find the most appropriate product for their use, we suggest that thinking about the effectiveness of the shopping trip will lead consumers to think about the desirability considerations of a shopping trip. Conversely, when thinking about the feasibility of the shopping trip, consumers will think about "how" of their shopping task. Therefore, when considering the feasibility of the shopping task, consumers will think about the costs and constraints associated with finding the right product. Since consumers will have to think about the constraints associated with finding the right product to complete their shopping task

on time, we suggest that thinking about efficiency of the shopping trip will lead consumers to think about the feasibility considerations of the shopping task. Therefore, we propose that event timers will focus on the desirability considerations of shopping whereas clock timers will focus on the feasibility considerations of shopping.

Research on assortment size has shown that when consumers focus on the desirability of assortment sizes, they seek more variety and prefer large assortment sizes. This is because a large assortment size provides them the opportunity to choose the product that matches their preference (Chernev, 2006; Goodman and Malkoc, 2012). Therefore, we propose that event timers will prefer large assortment size because they focus on the desirability considerations of shopping. However, when consumers focus on the feasibility of assortment sizes, they seek less variety and prefer a smaller assortment size. This is because they think that they will have difficulty in choosing a product from a large assortment (Chernev, 2006; Goodman and Malkoc, 2012). Therefore, we propose that clock timers will prefer a smaller assortment size because they focus on the feasibility of their shopping task (depicted in Figure 1). Formally, we hypothesize:

H1: Consumers' scheduling style influences their preference of assortment size when shopping; event-timers prefer large assortments whereas clock-timers prefer smaller assortments.

H2: Desirability-feasibility consideration mediates the influence of scheduling style on the preference of assortment size where event-timers focus on desirability considerations whereas clock-timers focus on feasibility considerations.

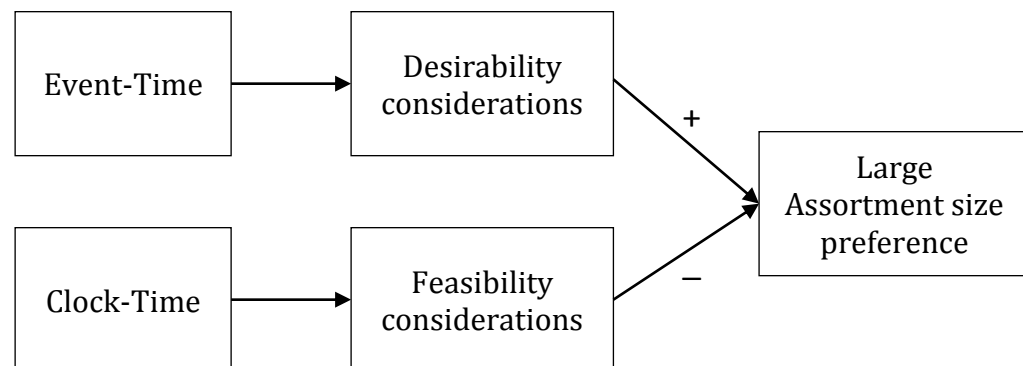


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

Source: Authors' own design.

## Study 1

In study 1, we examined the main effect of scheduling style (event vs. clock time) on participants' preference of assortment size (large vs. small assortments) (H1). We also examined if desirability-feasibility consideration was mediating this effect (H2).

**Method**

Eighty-two Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants from U.S (54% female; Mage = 39) participated in the survey in exchange for a small payment. The MTurk participant pool is considered to be reliable for experimental research. It provides a better representation of the general population than traditional convenience samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema, 2013). Respondents were asked to participate in two unrelated studies. This masked the relationship between the scheduling style task and the subsequent scenario. In the first study, participants completed the 11-item Task Scheduling Questionnaire (Sellier and Avnet, 2014) which measured their chronic reliance on clock-time or event-time. Respondents expressed their agreement to statements reflecting a clock-time scheduling style and an event-time scheduling style. These statements were anchored by a seven-point scale (strongly agree (1)/strongly disagree (7)). Clock-time scheduling style was measured by scale items such as "When I have more than one task to complete at once I usually decide to move on to the next task based on what time it is." Event-time scheduling style was measured by scale items such as "When I have more than one task to complete in a given time frame, I usually decide to move on to the next task only after I am satisfied with the completion of the current task." Participants were then asked to proceed to the second study.

In the second study, participants were told that the owners of two restaurants in their area were offering coupons to increase the patronage to their restaurants. They were provided with the menu of the two restaurants. One of the restaurants, Restaurant A, had less variety (seven items) on its menu. Another restaurant, Restaurant B had more variety (fourteen items) on its menu (adopted from Goodman and Malkoc, 2012). Participants then provided their restaurant preference on a seven-point scale anchored by "strongly prefer restaurant A (1)/strongly prefer restaurant B (7)". Next, we measured participants' desirability-feasibility consideration by asking them "To what extent did you focus on getting a large set with many desirable options than the difficulty of making a choice from such a large set when making the decisions" (adopted from Goodman and Malkoc, 2012). We used a seven-point scale anchored by "1 (not at all)/7 (all the time)." Participants thinking about the desirability considerations would focus on getting the large set with many desirable options. On the other hand, participants thinking about the feasibility considerations would focus on the difficulty of making the choice from a large set of options. Finally, we measured their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and income. Since none of these variables affected the results ( $ps > .10$ ), we will not discuss them further.

**Results**

We averaged participants' responses to the clock-time scale items to create their clock-time score ( $\alpha > .65$ ). We averaged their responses to the event-time scale items to create their event-time score ( $\alpha > .65$ ). We then created a composite scheduling style score to capture the dominance of one scheduling style over the other by subtracting participants' clock-time score from their event-time score. Higher scores indicate a greater reliance on event-time (i.e., event-timer) whereas lower scores indicate a greater reliance on clock-time (i.e., clock timer).

### *Main Effect Analysis*

We tested H1 by running a multiple linear regression with the scheduling style measure as the independent variable, the demographic variables as the control variables, and the participants' preferences for the two restaurants as the dependent variable. Results show that event-timers preferred the restaurant with a larger selection on its menu whereas clock-timers preferred the restaurant with a smaller selection on its menu ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $t = 2.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This shows that event-timers prefer large assortments than event-timers. Thus, our results support H1.

### *Mediation Analysis*

A linear regression with the scheduling style measure as the independent variable and the desirability-feasibility consideration as the dependent variable showed that clock-timers focused on desirability considerations whereas event-timers focused on feasibility considerations ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $t = 1.84$ ,  $p = .07$ ). A bootstrapping analysis (Model 4; Hayes, 2013) with 5000 bootstrapped samples tested if desirability-feasibility consideration mediated the effect of scheduling styles on the participants' restaurant preference. Bootstrapping test (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen, 2010) revealed that event (vs. clock) timers' preference of restaurants was mediated by their desirability-feasibility consideration ( $ab = .11$ , 95% CI = .002 to .31 excluded 0). In the indirect path, a unit increase in scheduling style increases desirability-feasibility consideration by .35 units ( $a = .35$ ), suggesting that event time led to an increased focus on desirability than feasibility considerations. Holding scheduling style constant, a unit increase in desirability consideration increases preference for the restaurant with a larger menu selection by .33 units ( $b = .33$ ). The direct effect  $c$  (.26) is not significant ( $p = .14$ ), which reveals the indirect-only mediation (i.e., holding the mediator constant, scheduling styles no longer influenced the preference for larger assortments option). Overall, the mediation test revealed that event (clock) timers focused on greater desirability (feasibility) consideration and consequently preferred the larger (smaller) assortments option. Therefore, the results provide support for H2.

### *Discussion*

This study shows that scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences. Specifically, event (clock) timers prefer the option with large assortments (smaller assortments), providing support for H1. We find that desirability-feasibility consideration mediates this effect. Specifically, event-timers focus on desirability considerations and clock timers focus on feasibility considerations, providing support for H2.

Although this study provides initial evidence that scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences, it is not without limitations. First, this study measured participants' scheduling styles. Therefore, we examined spontaneous interpretations of assortment size preferences as a function of scheduling styles. However, this could have allowed for unobservable confounds to affect our results. We address this limitation in Study 2 by manipulating participants' scheduling styles instead of measuring them. Additionally, we employed a different assortment choice

scenario featuring a store shopping experience to test the generalizability of our findings.

## Study 2

This study extends the findings of Study 1. First, to test the robustness of the results and explicate the causality of the prediction, we manipulated scheduling styles instead of measuring them. Second, this study used a different choice scenario to generalize our findings.

### Method

Sixty-nine MTurk participants from U.S (56% female;  $M_{age} = 41$ ) participated in the survey in exchange for a small payment. Participants were assigned to either a clock-time or an event-time scheduling style condition in a single factor design. Participants were first asked to take part in two ostensibly unrelated studies. The first study consisted of priming participants with a clock-time or an event-time scheduling style. Specifically, participants were exposed to recommendations in favor of either the clock-time scheduling or the event-time scheduling (modified from Sellier and Avnet, 2014; see Appendix). Specifically, they were told that the recommendations were backed by professionals and researchers aimed at improving readers' scheduling skills. Participants in the clock-time scheduling style condition read statements such as "To do lists are evil, schedule everything" and "Want to stop procrastinating. Schedule everything." Participants in the event-time scheduling style condition read statements such as "Schedules are evil, to do lists make things easy" and "What to get things done well? Create to do lists!" They were then asked to write an essay supporting the article's viewpoint. Participants then answered the same scheduling styles measure as they did in Study 1, which served as manipulation checks. Participants then proceeded to the second part of the study.

In the second study, participants were asked to imagine that two chocolate stores were opening in their area. Additionally, they were told that the owners of the two stores were offering coupons for free chocolate on opening day to encourage shoppers to visit the store. Participants viewed the chocolate options for these stores and decided which store they wanted to visit (adopted from Goodman and Malkoc, 2012). One of the stores carried 14 items (small assortment), whereas the other carried 42 items (large assortment). Participants indicated their relative preference between the stores anchored by "1 (store with small assortment)/ 7 = (store with large assortment)". Participants then reported their agreement with statements associated with desirability and feasibility considerations. We measured participants' desirability consideration with the following statement: "I decided to shop in the particular store because I would be able to pick the best product from the products available in the store." We measured their feasibility consideration with the following statement: "I decided to shop in the particular store because the amount of effort involved in finding the product would be low in that store". We used a seven-point scale anchored by "1 (strongly disagree)/7 (strongly agree)". Finally, we measured their demographic variables (age, gender, and income). Since none of these variables affected the results ( $ps > .10$ ), we do not discuss them further.

## Results

### *Manipulation check*

We averaged the responses to the clock-time and event-time items to create two separate scores (clock  $\alpha = .69$ , event  $\alpha = .65$ ). We subtracted participants' clock-time score from their event-time score to create an overall scheduling style score. Higher score indicated a stronger belief in event time whereas a lower score indicated a stronger belief in clock time. We conducted an independent sample t-test on the overall scheduling style measure between participants who were exposed to the event-time manipulation and those who were exposed to the clock-time manipulation. Results showed that participants in the event time condition agreed with statement regarding event time scheduling style more than those in the clock time condition ( $M_{\text{event}} = 1.16$  vs.  $M_{\text{clock}} = -.13$ ;  $t = -3.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, results show that our manipulation for the event-time and clock-time worked.

### *Main effect analysis*

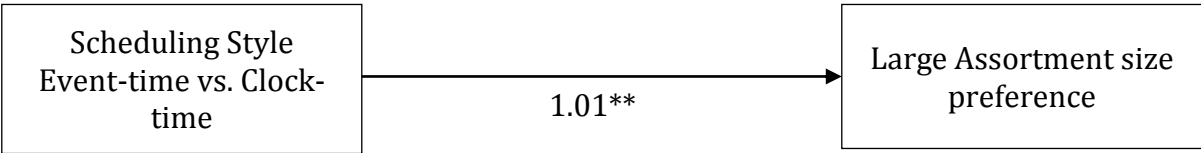
A one-way ANOVA on store preference revealed that participants in the event-time condition preferred the store with large assortments than the participants in the clock-time condition ( $M_{\text{event}} = 5.71$  vs.  $M_{\text{clock}} = 4.71$ ;  $F(1, 67) = 11.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, our results provide support for H1.

### *Mediation analysis*

The participants' feasibility consideration score was subtracted from their desirability consideration score to create a composite measure. A higher score reflected a stronger desirability consideration whereas a lower score reflected a stronger feasibility consideration. A one-way ANOVA revealed that participants in the event-time condition focused more on desirability consideration whereas participants in the clock-time condition focused more on feasibility consideration ( $M_{\text{event}} = 1.23$  vs.  $M_{\text{clock}} = -.62$ ;  $F(1, 67) = 23.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Mediation model using the PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2013, see Figure 2) revealed that the effect of scheduling styles on store preference was mediated by desirability-feasibility consideration ( $ab = .32$ , 95% CI = .02 to .70 excluded 0). In the indirect path, a unit increase in scheduling style increased the desirability consideration by 1.85 units ( $a = 1.85$ ), suggesting that event-timers reported a higher desirability than feasibility consideration. Thus, holding scheduling styles constant, a unit increase in desirability consideration increased the preference for option with large assortments by .17 units ( $b = .17$ ). The direct effect  $c$  (.69) was also significant ( $p < .05$ ); when scheduling style is event-time, the preference for larger assortments option increases by .69. Since  $a \times b \times c$  is positive, the results reveal complementary mediation. In other words, desirability-feasibility consideration mediated the effect of participants' event- (vs. clock-) time scheduling style on the preference for large (vs. small) assortments. Therefore, results provide support for H2.



a) Direct Path



b) Mediated Path

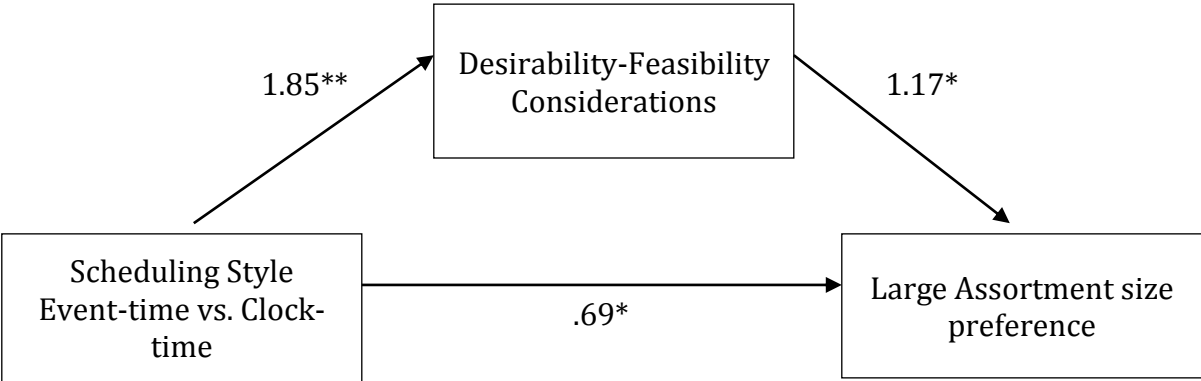


Figure 2. Mediation Analysis

\* indicates that  $p$  value < .05 and \*\* indicates that  $p$  value < .01

Source: Authors' own design.

**Discussion**

The above findings show that scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences. We find that event timers prefer the store with large assortment size whereas clock timers prefer the store with smaller assortment size. Furthermore, we find that desirability-feasibility considerations mediate this effect. Specifically, event-time scheduling styles increases consumers focus on desirability considerations of shopping, which in turn increases their preference for large assortment size. Conversely, clock-time scheduling style increases their focus on feasibility considerations of shopping, which in turn increases their preference for smaller assortment size.

**Conclusions**

In this research, we investigate the impact of different scheduling styles on shopping behavior of consumers. Specifically, we show that event-time consumers focus on the desirability considerations of shopping. This leads them to seek more variety and prefer large assortment sizes. This is because larger assortments provide consumers the opportunity to find the product that matches their preference. On the other hand, clock-time consumers focus on the feasibility considerations of shopping. This leads

them to seek less variety and prefer smaller assortment size. This is because smaller assortments reduce the constraints of shopping and helps consumers find the product they want easily.

### ***Theoretical and managerial implications***

Our research offers several contributions. Research in construal level theory has identified a host of antecedents that lead to shifts in desirability and feasibility considerations (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Our findings add to this research by identifying scheduling styles as an antecedent leading to these shifts in desirability-feasibility considerations. We show that clock time orientation leads consumers to focus on feasibility considerations whereas event time orientation leads them to focus on desirability considerations. Additionally, our findings add to the research on assortment size by showing that scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences.

Our research provides important practical implications for marketers. First, our findings suggest that marketers need to recognize that having a one-size fits all approach when it comes to the assortment of products may not be successful. Marketers need to recognize that event timers and clock timers prefer different assortment sizes for optimal shopping experience. Therefore, marketers can improve the effectiveness of their communication strategies by customizing assortment sizes based on scheduling styles of different consumers. Additionally, since event time orientation and clock time orientation can be situationally primed (Avnet and Sellier, 2011), marketers can use this to their advantage. Specifically, retailers who have smaller assortment of products in their stores can prime clock time orientation in their promotion messages to motivate consumers to shop in their store. On the other hand, retailers who have large assortment of products in their stores can prime event time orientation in their promotion messages to motivate consumers to shop in their store.

### ***Limitations and future research***

Even though this research has important implications for theory and practice, it is not without limitations. This research shows that scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences. However, this research investigated assortment size preferences in only two domains, namely variety seeking in the food menu of restaurants and variety seeking in the purchasing chocolates from a store. Future research could test the generalizability of our findings by investigating if scheduling styles influence consumers' assortment size preferences in other consumption domains. Future research also needs to investigate the boundary conditions to this influence. For example, since time scarcity could discourage consumers' preference for larger assortment size (Zauberman and Lynch, 2005), we expect our results for event-timers to be mitigated as the level of time scarcity increases. Future research could investigate how time scarcity could moderate the impact of scheduling style on consumers' preference for different assortment sizes. Pursuing these lines of inquiry could provide further insights into the role that scheduling styles play in influencing consumer behavior.

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## **Appendix**

### **Event-time scheduling style manipulation**

#### **1. Schedules Are Evil. To do lists make things easy.**

Schedules by themselves are useless. They are not effective. You have to create to do lists. Why?

It keeps you organized. It allows you to be more effective on tasks because you can focus on something until it is done.

Here's Cal Bregman, the author of a best seller "Manage your Time, Manage your Life": "To do lists force you to complete one task before starting another. You become much more effective this way. Now that you look at each task separately, you're able to concentrate and get things done."

#### **2. Want to get things done well? Create to do lists!**

Want to get things done well? Make lists. Here's Cal:

"Working on one task at a time will help you get things done well. You are no longer thinking about the clock. You complete one task prior to going on to the next."

Research shows that it's always a good idea to complete one task prior to starting another. This helps manage any free time you may have and increases quality of life. "This study was designed to identify the relationship between free time-management and quality of life, exploring whether the amount of free time or the way people using their free time relates to their quality of life. The result has found a positive relationship between free time management and quality of life."

#### **3. Use technology to your advantage.**

Doing things well, means that you give them your attention. To do this, it is important to finish one task prior to starting the next. You should use a to-do list app on your phone to keep a list of things that you need to do in order of importance. Do the most important things first, once you have completed one task, mark them off in your to-do

list app, and then move on to the next task. Do not worry about the next task until the current task is completed. Use the app to keep track of what task you need to focus on to get things done more effectively.

### **Clock-time scheduling style manipulation**

#### **1. To Do Lists Are Evil. Schedule Everything.**

To do lists by themselves are useless. They're just the first step. You have to assign them time on your schedule. Why?

It makes you be realistic about what you can get done. It allows you to do tasks when it's efficient, not just because it's numbered. Until it's on your calendar and assigned an hour, it's just a list of wishful thinking.

Here's Cal Bregman, the author of a best seller "Manage your Time, Manage your Life": "Scheduling forces you to confront the reality of how much time you actually have and how long things will take. Now that you look at the whole picture you're able to get something productive out of every free hour you have in your workday. You not only squeeze more work in but you're able to put work into places where you can do it best. "

#### **2. Want to stop procrastinating. Schedule Everything.**

Want to stop procrastinating? Schedule. Here's Cal:

"Assigning work to times reduces the urge to procrastinate. You are no longer deciding whether or not to work during a given period; the decision is already made. Research shows that it's even a good idea to schedule what you do with your free time. It increases quality of life:

This study was designed to identify the relationship between free time-management and quality of life, exploring whether the amount of free time or the way people using their free time relates to their quality of life... The result has found a positive relationship between free time management and quality of life."

#### **3.) Use technology to your advantage.**

Being on time and getting things done well and efficiently require you to manage your time well. To do this, you must always be aware of the time. You should wear a watch or carry a cell phone with an alarm clock feature. For each activity, estimate the amount of time it should take you, it is better to overestimate than underestimate so that you give yourself enough time to complete the task. Use the alarm clock feature if you need to help you keep track of time.