

A variety of choices

Background

Variety matters. You don't like eating the same food for every meal all month long, and you don't like stores that carry only a very selective choice. You want variety – especially if you haven't already decided exactly what it is you want.

But a study, which included more than 150 consumers, found that it isn't really how much variety a store has, it's how it's perceived*. Most consumers think analytically (the way mathematicians think, focusing in on the details) as opposed to holistically (the way artists think, taking in the whole picture). This affects how they shop. In fact, for analytical thinkers it doesn't matter if two stores have exactly the same items – if one is more organized consumers will perceive it as having more variety to choose from.

For most consumers, variety ranks right up there with price, location and convenience. Consumers don't want to have to make a choice from one or two options, they want to take everything in and then make a decision. And, the store that offers the variety of assortment is a lot more likely to rank at the top of the customers' list.

Key Teaching Point

- ❑ People value variety of assortment right behind location and price when giving reasons why they patronize their favorite stores.
- ❑ Consumers value a variety of assortment, they want to have a lot to choose from when they walk in a store.

* This study was conducted at the University of Illinois, former location of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab.

Student Demonstration

Start the session out by explaining the difference between holistic and analytical thinkers. Explain:

The ways someone thinks about the world around them greatly affects their daily life – from life decisions to simple shopping. There are two types of thinkers: analytical thinkers and holistic thinkers.

Someone who thinks about things analytically is focusing in on the details. This is someone who thinks about things systematically, even mathematically. A mathematician would think analytically.

Someone who thinks about things holistically thinks about the whole picture. They take it all in. These are people who think like artists.

Ask the students what type of person they think they are and ask them to explain why they think that. Now, have the students apply this to a store. If someone is thinking analytically what will they focus on? The whole picture/store, or one product?

Make sure to explain that the way someone thinks influences how they see things – an analytical thinker wouldn't like the same things a holistic thinker would.

Hoch, Stephen J., Eric T. Bradlow and Brian Wansink (1999), "The Variety of Assortment." *Marketing Science*, Vol. 18:4, 527-546.