

How to choose among presidential candidates you don't particularly like

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This election season, we're finding out that some choices are indeed tougher than others. Say you're a die-hard Kucinich supporter or a Republican but now find yourself for practical reasons having to choose between Hillary and Obama. A new study from the February issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research* reveals that sometimes asking people to "reject" an option – rather than "choose" an option – makes it easier for consumers to decide among options that they don't particularly like.

"If both the alternatives are attractive, then both provide reasons to choose, and therefore are compatible with the choose task," explain Anish Nagpal (University of Melbourne) and Parthasarathy Krishnamurthy (University of Houston). "If both the alternatives are unattractive, neither one provides reasons to choose, and are therefore incompatible with the choose task."

Thus, if a choice is difficult, it might not be the options that are causing the indecisiveness, but the way the decision is framed. The researchers argue that it is difficult to choose among undesirable options because none of the items offers a reason to choose it.

Indeed, asking people to choose among undesirable things leads to greater experienced conflict and greater decision difficulty, which may manifest as longer decision times. The researchers show that people tend to have an easier time choosing among things they like than among things they hate. In one study, choices were made almost 20 percent quicker between desirable alternatives (an average of 70.09 seconds)

than between undesirable alternatives (an average of 86.93 seconds).

The reverse was true when consumers were asked to reject an option. Decisions involving unattractive alternatives were more than 20 percent quicker (an average of 69.50 seconds) than attractive alternatives (an average of 88.57 seconds) when consumers were asked to “reject” – as opposed to “choose” – an unappealing option.

“This suggests that consumers can control the level of difficulty that they experience by changing their decision task,” the researchers write, pointing out that consumers faced with a difficult choice have been known to give up and defer the decision to a later date.

Source: University of Chicago

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