

# Study: How much you're willing to pay depends on what you were just doing

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Your shopping buddy turns to you and asks, “Which one of these would you get?” Or, you’re talking with your spouse about which candidate you’d like to vote for before switching on the nightly news. Turns out simply being asked to make a choice— especially if you’re in a hurry or have something on your mind – will make you like the next thing you see more, says a new study from the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

The researchers found that asking people to choose among things primed them to think about positive attributes – and caused them to be in a positive frame of mind when evaluating the next item they saw.

“Simply asking participants to decide if they would buy (vs. reject) each of a set of products disposed them to search for favorable attributes before unfavorable ones in an unrelated product evaluation situation,” explain Hao Shen and Robert S. Wyer, Jr. (both of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology). “As a result, they evaluated the product they considered in the second situation more favorably than they otherwise would.”

The study expands our understanding of “memory priming.” As the researchers explain, our knowledge about a product or service usually involves norms – such as typical prices, typical amenities, and brand reputation associated with, say, a hotel. However, the researchers also reveal that this prior knowledge can be influenced by “procedural knowledge priming,” or, by introducing consumers to an activity that affects what they evaluate.

In another experiment, the researchers had participants in Hong Kong rank the prices of hotel rooms in three cities either from high-to-low or low-to-high. They were then asked to indicate how much they would pay for a hotel room, among other questions. When a lot of information was presented, those who ranked the prices from most expensive to least expensive were willing to pay an average of \$19 more than those who had been asked to rank the hotels from lowest to highest priced.

In addition, “participants estimated the average price of hotel rooms in a city to be higher if they had rank[ed] prices from highest to lowest in a prior task than if they had ranked them from lowest to highest,” the researchers explain.

They continue: “Unrelated experiences can activate a search process that governs the order in which favorable and unfavorable product descriptions are identified and the evaluations that are made on the basis of them.”

Source: University of Chicago

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