

Context is everything: New research uncovers key to consumer preferences

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When consumers shop for televisions or cereal, what makes them prefer one option to another? Which brand will they purchase again and tell their friends about?

New research in the *Journal of Consumer Research* reveals that a product's attractiveness can shift depending on the other choices that are available at the time. Authors Song-Oh Yoon (Korea University Business School) and Itamar Simonson (Stanford University) demonstrate that if consumers perceive they're choosing the best item from a set of options, they are more likely to feel good enough about choosing the product again next time.

"These findings show that the choice process and the configuration of the choice set have long-term effects on the strength, stability, and attribution of the resulting preferences and can even influence product satisfaction," write the authors.

The research found that the configuration of the choice set mattered greatly when it came to creating consumer preference. In the studies, participants were presented with products (food processors, lawn mowers, portable grills, binoculars, cars, cordless phones, etc.). The products were presented in three types of choice sets: asymmetric dominance (where one choice was clearly superior to the other two), compromise (where one choice was intermediate to the other two), or control (two options that were somewhat equivalent).

After participants made choices, they rated the products and their satisfaction with their choices. In five different studies that shifted the products and choice sets, the researchers found that the strength of preference for one option over another can be affected by the context of the choice in ways people don't realize.

Source: University of Chicago

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