

# What was I doing? Interruptions can change purchase decisions

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You're on your computer, about to buy a vacation package when the phone rings. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, when you return to the computer after the interruption, you may have a completely different mindset—and make a different decision.

The study's author, Wendy Liu of UCLA, examined the effects of interruption on purchase decisions and the preferences of decision-makers. She found that even brief interruptions caused startling changes.

"This body of work forwards the view that people's decisions are often a result of cognitions and information processing made on the spot, rather than simply reflecting their innate likes and dislikes. Thus seemingly innocuous events such as an interruption may affect decisions by changing the thought process," Liu explains.

Liu conducted four different studies where participants made purchase choices for high-priced luxuries, high-risk investments, or hikes. She discovered that people who are interrupted in a decision-making process shift their focus from a bottom-up, detail-oriented, and price-conscious process to one that is more top-down, goal-oriented, and price-insensitive. After interruptions, people focus more on quality, satisfaction, and desirability than on feasibility and price.

"By taking a break from processing a decision, when the person resumes he/she is able to attend to information in a more selective and organized

manner. Consequently, the person focuses on his/her primary goals in the decision," writes Liu.

In today's low-attention-span world, interruptions are a way of life. Liu's study has implications for consumers and the companies that market to them. "Whether you choose to have an exotic vacation, invest in high-risk stocks, or buy that big plasma TV may depend on whether you were interrupted when making the decision," writes Liu.

Source: University of Chicago

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