

# Driven to distraction? Taking your mind off a decision can help

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Remember when the answer to a big question came to you in the shower? Is "sleep on it" really good advice for someone making a big decision? A new study *Journal of Consumer Research* examines the way distraction affects consumers' product decisions.

Author Davy Lerouge (Tilburg University) wondered whether distracting people from a decision for some moments helps them to evaluate products. He also set out to identify the specific conditions under which distraction is or is not helpful.

"Suppose you are choosing among several houses for sale," Lerouge writes. "Such a choice typically involves large amounts of information with each alternative having its specific pros and cons. Advice that consumers often receive from others when making such complex decisions is "let the information rest for a while" or "sleep on it." But is such common advice helpful?

Lerouge demonstrates that distraction can help decision-making, depending on the manner in which consumers process the available product information. "I find that distraction only helps consumers who tend to perceive products as coherent entities and typically hold clear good/bad representations of products," write Lerouge. "However, it does not help consumers who typically focus on the specific features of products and hold more mixed product representations."

To arrive at his conclusions, the author created experiments where

participants evaluated four different products. Some participants were induced into a "configural" mindset, meaning that they were told to focus on their overall impression of the items. Another group was asked to form a detailed impression ("featural" mindset) noting positive and negative features. Some participants were distracted with anagram tasks and others were not. The people in the configural mindset made more accurate product evaluations after they were distracted.

"Consumers with a configural mindset differentiate more after distraction because they can rely on mental product representations that are more coherent than those of consumers with a featural mindset," the author explains. "These polarized product representations help consumers to better differentiate between product alternatives."

Davy Lerouge. "Evaluating the Benefits of Distraction on Product Evaluations: The Mindset Effect." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): October 2009.

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