

# Too much information: Process thinking can lead to difficult choices

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Choosing among products can be more difficult if you tend to think more about the process of using an item rather than the outcome of the purchase, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Marketers often try to tempt consumers to buy their products by encouraging them to imagine themselves using the product," write authors Debora Viana Thompson (Georgetown University), Rebecca W. Hamilton (University of Maryland, College Park), and Petia K. Petrova (Dartmouth College). But this "process-oriented" thinking can lead to confusion.

"In this research, we show that when consumers are choosing among products, focusing on the process of using a product (versus on the outcomes) can increase decision difficulty and hinder consumers' motivation to subsequently implement their choices," the authors explain.

Consumer decisions often involve trade-offs between means and end benefits, such as weighing quality versus price, rewards versus risks, or enjoyment versus effort. Process-oriented thinkers tend to focus on both ends and means, making decisions more difficult.

For example, in one experiment, participants were asked to choose between a small apartment that required a short commute and one that was larger but required a longer commute. The researchers instructed participants to either think about how living in the apartment would

affect their daily routine and habits (process-oriented thinking) or to think about what they would gain from living in the apartment (outcome-oriented thinking). "Process-oriented participants thought about both the size of the apartment and the length of the commute, were less likely to choose the larger apartment, and experienced more difficulty making the choice," the authors write.

"This experience of difficulty can have various [negative consequences](#) for consumers. It can lower consumer satisfaction with the decision process, increase willingness to postpone choices, increase the likelihood they will change their minds later and switch to a different option, and reduce motivation to implement the decision," the authors conclude.

More information: Debora Viana Thompson, Rebecca W. Hamilton, and Petia K. Petrova. "When Mental Simulation Hinders Behavior: The Effects of Process-Oriented Thinking on Decision Difficulty and Performance." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): December 2009 (published online April 9, 2009).

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