

Are you promotion- or prevention-focused and what does this mean when considering choices?

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When consumers make choices, their style of pursuing their goals changes the way they search and decide what to purchase, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

A large number of consumer alternatives are arranged hierarchically, the authors explain. For example, a [restaurant menu](#) is typically organized by courses (appetizers, entrees) and by types of dishes within courses (soups, salads). "This research examines how consumers' style of goal pursuit influences the way they search for information and form their consideration sets in such decision environments," write authors Michel Tuan Pham (Columbia University) and Hannah H. Chang (Singapore Management University).

When consumers have a promotion focus, a style of goal pursuit that is often used in the pursuit of dreams and aspirations, they tend to search for information in a more global, big-picture manner, devoting more time and effort to higher levels of information hierarchies (soups, appetizers, and other categories). "In contrast, when consumers have a prevention focus, a style of goal pursuit that is avoidance-oriented and often used in the fulfillment of duties and obligations, they tend to search for information in a more local, detail-oriented manner, such as specific descriptions of individual dishes," the authors write.

Promotion-focused consumers tend to consider larger numbers of alternatives before making their final choices than do prevention-focused consumers. In one study, for example, participants who were put into a promotion or prevention focus were asked to make dinner selections from a restaurant's prix-fixe menu. Promotion-focused participants searched the menu in a more global manner, devoting a greater share of their efforts to higher levels of the menu hierarchy, whereas prevention-focused participants searched the menu in a more local manner, devoting a greater share of their efforts to lower levels of the menu hierarchy.

In a subsequent study, the authors found that participants were willing to pay about 17 percent more when the restaurant menu was structured in a way that "fit" their search inclinations. "Prevention-focused participants were willing to pay significantly more when the menu was presented in a listing format, which presumably fits a 'detailoriented' search better," the authors explain.

More information: Michel Tuan Pham and Hannah H. Chang. "Regulatory Focus, Regulatory Fit, and the Search and Consideration of Choice Alternatives." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2011.

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