

Hard-wired for chocolate and hybrid cars? How genetics affect consumer choice

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Clues to consumer behavior may be lurking our genes, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"We examine a wide range of consumer judgment and decision-making phenomenon and discover that many—though not all of them—are in fact heritable or influenced by [genetic factors](#)," write authors Itamar Simonson (Stanford University) and Aner Sela (University of Florida, Gainesville).

The authors studied twins' consumer preferences to determine whether or not certain behaviors or traits have a [genetic basis](#). "A greater similarity in behavior or trait between identical than between fraternal twins indicates that the behavior or trait is likely to be heritable," the authors explain.

The authors discovered that people seem to inherit the following tendencies: to choose a compromise option and avoid extremes; select sure gains over gambles; prefer an easy but non-rewarding task over an enjoyable challenging one; look for the best option available; and prefer utilitarian, clearly needed options (like batteries) over more indulgent ones (gourmet chocolate). They also found that likings for specific products seemed to be genetically related: chocolate, mustard, hybrid cars, science fiction movies, and jazz.

The researchers also found that some tendencies did not seem to be heritable—for example, a preference for a smaller versus larger product

variety or likings for ketchup and tattoos.

"The current research suggests that heritable and other hard-wired inherent preference components play a key role in behavior and deserve much more attention in marketing and decision-making research," the authors write.

The authors believe their work may reveal some important information on the genetics of "prudence." "Some people may be born with a tendency to 'be in the mainstream' whereas others tend to 'live on the edge," the authors conclude.

More information: Itamar Simonson and Aner Sela. "On the Heritability of Consumer Decision Making: An Exploratory Approach for Studying Genetic Effects on Judgment and Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2011. A preprint of this article (to be officially published online soon) can be found at journals.uchicago.edu/jcr .

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