

Value or attention: Why do consumers prefer familiar products?

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Consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they have previously focused their attention on it but are less likely to purchase a product they have previously ignored, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"It's generally assumed that consumers will choose products that provide the greatest value. But prior consideration of a product makes it easier to process the product when it's encountered later and this influences whether or not consumers like the product, regardless of the benefits it provides. The act of attending to a product increases the [likelihood](#) the product will be purchased in the future while not attending to a product decreases the likelihood," write authors Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida), Andrew Kuo (Louisiana State University), and Nader Tavassoli (London Business School).

In an experiment involving various unfamiliar brands of soda, cheese, [shampoo](#), and chocolate, consumers were asked to locate a specific brand in a display of two competing brands. This was repeated for many pairs of brands, with some serving as "selected brands" and others serving as "neglected brands." Others appeared by themselves as "neutral brands" that were neither selected nor rejected. When these consumers were later asked to choose between a selected brand and a neutral brand or between a neglected brand and a neutral brand, they preferred the previously selected brand to the neutral brand, but also preferred the neutral brand to the previously neglected brand.

Situations where selective attention to a product might be arbitrary create opportunities for companies to influence consumers and gain long-term advantage by drawing their attention through coupons, banner advertising, or packaging that stands out in a visually complex shopping environment.

"Every time a consumer searches for a product in a shelf display, the immediately adjacent products receive inattention. This will happen more frequently in high turn-over [product categories](#). Thus, the [inattention](#) that accompanies the [selective attention](#) to frequently purchased products has the potential to influence future consideration of neglected products," the authors conclude.

More information: Chris Janiszewski, Andrew Kuo, and Nader Tavassoli. "The Influence of Selective Attention and Inattention to Products on Subsequent Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2013.

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