

Research suggests daydreaming might push consumers to spend beyond their means

April 8 2015, by Judy Ashton

Life is a constant battle between being engaged with one's surroundings and daydreaming. Research at UC's Carl H. Lindner College of Business explores the notion of that dreamy state-of-mind and whether drifting thoughts affect how people make buying decisions. Researchers found that price played a bigger role in purchase decision-making when consumers were engaged and paying attention to their environment as opposed to when their mind wandered, says Ryan Rahinel, assistant professor of marketing at the Lindner College of Business.

Rahinel's research "Attention Modes and Price Importance: How Experiencing and Mind-Wandering Influence the Prioritization of Changeable Stimuli" with co-author Rohini Ahluwalia, professor of marketing at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, will be published in the August issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Through a series of studies, Rahinel and Ahluwalia tested the price theory of one's state of mind and the importance an attentive mind plays in consumer purchases. In one study, the researchers showed subjects an ad for an office chair with six different product attributes, including price. Through a questionnaire, researchers measured if participants were "experiencers" or "mind-wanderers." Engaged consumers (called experiencers), as opposed to mind-wanderers, said that price was a more important factor in their final buying decision.

"Although their [attention](#) disposition did not affect whether they would

actually buy the product, it did affect the importance of the attributes they used to come up with that decision," Rahinel says.

In other studies, consumers were shown different [prices](#) for the same product. Researchers discovered that patrons in an "experiencing mode" (vs. mind-wandering mode), responded more to different levels of price, but not other attributes. Results of the study imply that having more attention to spread one's attention across a product's many attributes paradoxically makes the mind prioritize attention to specific attributes.

"The possibility that objects in our environment can change tends to be more important when in an experiencing mode, and since price can change, it tends to attract more attention under those circumstances," Rahinel says.

Rahinel says the results can be useful for marketers and consumers alike. For marketers, prices communicated in promotional materials will be favored more while consumers are in "experiencing mode" (such as while participating in sales presentations) versus a mind-wandering mode (such as watching TV or flipping through a magazine). For [consumers](#), the findings suggest that reducing mind-wandering episodes may help one stay within a budget because when the mind roams, price consideration wanes.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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