Converting preference to actual commitment: The role of option presentation order

How does the presentation order of options in a choice set influence consumers' commitment to their chosen option beyond initial preference?

This study by Elina Hur and colleagues, published in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, investigates how the order in which options are presented within a choice set affects consumers' commitment to their chosen option. While prior research has focused on how presentation order impacts initial preferences, this study shifts the focus to post-choice commitment, which is critical for customer retention and long-term satisfaction.

The authors propose that consumers feel greater commitment when their chosen option appears at the end of a sequentially presented choice set, driven by a heightened perception of effort payoff—the belief that the effort spent searching was worthwhile. This effect is weakened when options are presented simultaneously or when consumers learn about options secondhand rather than searching themselves.

Across eight studies spanning real estate, car dealerships, wine selection, AI-driven app recommendations, charitable giving, and home goods, the research consistently finds stronger post-choice commitment when the preferred option appears last. Mediation analyses confirm that perceived effort payoff explains this effect, while moderation analyses reveal that the ability to experience effort payoff is critical for the effect to hold.

The findings expand choice architecture literature by identifying option-presentation order as a lever to bridge the intention–action gap. They offer practical implications for marketers to strategically sequence options to boost consumer commitment and offer insights into how subjective perceptions of effort shape decision satisfaction and follow-through.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

- Consumers show stronger commitment to choices presented last in a sequential choice set due to perceived effort payoff.
- The effect weakens when options are presented simultaneously or when consumers learn about options secondhand.
- Strategic sequencing of options can help marketers close the intention–action gap and increase customer retention.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW:

- Marketers
- Researchers
- Industry Professionals

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