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Deciding on a Purchase: Does It Matter If You Look Up or Down while Shopping?

Next time you look up at a higher shelf in a store or down at your phone when making a purchase, think about how the direction you are looking could influence your decision. According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), consumers choose different products when looking up versus down.



“Consumers may be so used to paying detailed and focused attention when they are looking down that they might also do this when selecting a product from a low shelf. Similarly, consumers may be so used to taking a broader perspective when looking up that they will also do this when selecting a product from a higher shelf,” write authors Anneleen Van Kerckhove, Maggie Geuens, and Iris Vermeir (all Ghent University).

In one study, consumers were asked to look either down or up when choosing between two printers. One printer was described as very reliable (a specific feature) and the other was described as high quality (a more general description). Consumers who looked down were more likely to select the reliable printer, whereas consumers who looked up were more likely to select the high quality printer.

Knowing how looking up or down impacts consumers can help businesses manage product displays. A product placed on a low shelf in a store may be evaluated in terms of specific features, cost, or the likelihood that the product will deliver on its promises. On the other hand, a product placed on a high shelf is more likely to be evaluated in terms of the general purpose it serves.

“Consumers pay attention to different aspects of products depending on whether they are looking down or up when choosing between available products. People are used to paying detailed attention when looking down because everything that happens close to them could be important or dangerous. However, people are more likely to think about the big picture when looking up because they are used to looking at things from more of a distance (to get the full picture),” the authors conclude.

Anneleen Van Kerckhove, Maggie Geuens, and Iris Vermeir. “The Floor Is Nearer than the Sky: How Looking Up or Down Affects Construal Level.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2015. For more information, contact Anneleen Van Kerckhove (anneleen.vankerckhove@ugent.be) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.