# When time has a will of its own, powerless consumers don't have the will to wait

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When consumers assign human characteristics to time, it makes it more difficult to wait for things (especially for people who don't feel powerful), according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Consumers often choose between a readily available product and a version of the product that is superior, but requires a wait time. (Should I buy an iPad now or wait for the newer version?) If wait time is perceived to have human mental states such as a will and intentions, consumers may show less patience," write authors Frank May and Ashwani Monga (both University of South Carolina).

The authors call this tendency to assign time humanlike mental states "time anthropomorphism" (thinking that time has intentions or a will of its own). Historical personifications of time such as "Father Time" and phrases such as "killing time" tend to make people think of time as a humanlike agent that must be dealt with.

The authors conducted five studies on the personification of time, examining how consumer feelings of power affected their reactions to wait times. In the first study, grocery store shoppers were offered a choice between a $5 gift certificate valid immediately and a $10 gift certificate valid after one week. Customers who scored high on time anthropomorphism and low on power were less likely to choose the $10 gift certificate. In other studies, participants chose between regular and expedited product shipping, and between inferior and superior versions

of a product.

The authors found that assigning human characteristics to time makes wait times seem even more oppressive, especially for those who think of themselves as powerless rather than powerful.

"Consumer patience might depend on their natural tendency to assign human characteristics to time, even when real money is at stake," the authors write. "Moreover, subtle variations in language (e.g., "Mr. Tyme" instead of "time") can be employed to induce time anthropomorphism and influence patience."

**More information:** Frank May and Ashwani Monga. When Time Has a Will of Its Own, the Powerless Don't Have the Will to Wait: Anthropomorphism of Time Can Decrease Patience." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2014.

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