

Does mood matter? How you feel influences what you'll buy, says study

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Sure, you're more likely to give things a favorable evaluation when you're happy, and a negative evaluation when you're sad. But how does mood influence your choices among items?

A new study in the February issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research* people finds that consumers in a good mood are more likely than unhappy consumers to choose the first item they see, especially if all the choices are more or less the same.

“It is surprising that little research has been done to examine how affect influences comparisons and choices,” say Cheng Qiu (University of Hong Kong) and Catherine W. M. Yeung (National University of Singapore). “Our research fills this gap by demonstrating a systematic influence of mood on choice, which contrasts with the general assumption that mood is unlikely to influence choice.”

Participants were first asked to write about either a happy or a sad event in their lives, to help establish their mood. They were then presented with several mango-flavored desserts, and 69 percent of happy participants chose the first option they saw, compared to only 38.5 percent of unhappy participants.

The researchers also found that when happy consumers were asked to withhold judgment until all options were presented, they tended to prefer the last option they saw. In another study, three dessert options – blueberry, almond, and plum pie – were presented sequentially, and

consumers were explicitly asked to withhold judgment until all options had been presented. Happy consumers chose the last item 48 percent of the time, compared to just 26 percent of unhappy participants.

“If consumers are exposed to multiple options that differ only in global aesthetic aspects, they tend to evaluate each option spontaneously at the time they first encounter it,” explain the researchers. “On the other hand, if consumers are exposed to multiple options that differ in important descriptive features, they may withhold their evaluation until they have seen all the options available and evaluate the last presented (most recent) option first.”

They conclude: “Altogether, these findings suggest that the influence of mood on comparison depends on which alternative in a choice set is the one being evaluated first.”

Source: University of Chicago

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