

Consumers think differently about close and distant purchases

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If you are deciding on a major vacation for next year, you'll use different criteria than if you are planning a trip this weekend, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Authors Kyeongheui Kim (Sungkyunkwan University, Korea), Meng Zhang (Chinese University of Hong Kong), and Xiuping Li (National University of Singapore) examined the way consumers make choices and found that many decisions depend on the interconnected factors of distance—both temporal distance (time) and "social distance," the perceived closeness of the person for whom the purchase is being made.

The researchers found that consumers used "low-level construal" to make those decisions which are close in time or for people close to them. Those decisions relied on more concrete factors like convenience. However, decisions made for a future purchase, or for someone not socially close, put people in a "high-level construal" mode, which considers more abstract factors such as attractiveness.

Researchers found these factors were inter-related in that if the decision was both imminent and for someone close, it would likely focus on convenience and the lower-construal attributes. If the decision were for a purchase farther into the future or for someone not socially close to the consumer, there would be more focus on the higher levels of attractiveness and more abstract values. They recommend that marketers should take distance into consideration when crafting different approaches.

Researchers also found that the person who writes the online reviews was important. The reviews were more persuasive when written by people with names similar to the study participants' own. The authors noted: "Perceived social distance to another consumer who writes a product review may significantly influence a consumer's preference....it may be advisable for marketers to consider the effects of psychological distance dimensions beyond the effects of word-of-mouth narratives."

Source: University of Chicago

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