

Comforted by carpet: How do floors and distance affect purchases?

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Consumers who stand on carpeted flooring feel comforted, but they judge products close to them to be less comforting, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

In the study, authors Joan Meyers Levy (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis), Rui (Juliet) Zhu, and Lan Jiang (both University of British Columbia) explored the feelings evoked by the two most common flooring types in retail environments: hard vinyl tile and carpet.

"We first conducted a study to show that carpeting flooring indeed evokes a greater sense of physical comfort than tiled flooring," the authors explain. "Based on this finding, we addressed a more practical and intriguing question: would these bodily sensations elicited by the flooring transfer to people's assessments of products that they observe while shopping?"

The researchers had participants stand on either soft pile carpet or hard tile and view objects that were either close or moderately far away. (When products were extremely far away, individuals' product judgments were no longer influenced by their bodily sensations.) People who examined items while standing on a plush carpet judged products that were close as being less comforting than products that were moderately far away. "The bodily sensations elicited by the flooring are more likely to be used as a comparison standard, not an interpretive frame," the authors explain.

In contrast, when items were placed moderately far away, their bodily sensations unconsciously guided their product interpretations. Thus, participants perceived those products as comforting when they stood on carpet.

In a final study, consumers could more easily make out the contents of a gift basket from a moderate distance than from a close one.

"Interestingly, the results reversed in this case. When viewed from a moderate distance, the gift basket was judged as more comforting when individuals stood on the hard tile floor rather than the carpeted floor. These results further supported our premise that it is the viewing clarity that ultimately determines the direction of the influence of flooring-induced bodily sensations," the authors conclude.

More information: Joan Meyers Levy, Rui (Juliet) Zhu, and Lan Jiang. "Context Effects from Bodily Sensations: Examining Bodily Sensations Induced by Flooring and the Moderating Role of Product Viewing Distance." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): June 2010 (published online October 21, 2009).

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