

# Researcher finds that flooring can affect how consumers make purchase decisions

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From teachers to hairdressers, people who stand on their feet all day will tell you that the flooring beneath them can be the difference between a good day and a bad one. But can the difference between carpet and hard tile flooring affect how you make decisions? Research published this month by Joan Meyers-Levy, a professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, and author of the famed ceiling height study, suggests that the way people judge products may be influenced by the ground beneath them.

In the study, published in the June 2010 issue of the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), authors Meyers-Levy and Juliet Zhu and Lan Jiang (University of British Columbia) explored the feelings evoked by the two most common flooring types in retail environments: hard vinyl tile and carpet. "When a person stands on carpeted flooring, it feels comforting," says Meyers-Levy. "But the irony is that when people stand on carpet, they will judge products that are close to them as less comforting."

The authors first conducted a study to show that carpeting truly does evoke a greater sense of physical comfort than tiled flooring. "Given this finding, we then tackled a more practical and intriguing question," says Meyers-Levy. "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 products that were either close to them or moderately far away. When the products were a moderate distance away, people's judgments of them were unconsciously guided by their bodily sensations. That is, if they were standing on soft carpet and viewed a product that was moderately far away, they judged that item's appearance to be comforting. However, people who examined products while standing on this same plush [carpet](#) judged items that were close by as being less comforting than they did if the products were moderately far away. "When we look at objects that are close by, the bodily sensations elicited by the flooring are more likely to be used as a comparison standard, not an interpretive frame," states Meyers-Levy.

These findings have important implications for all brick and mortar retailers and service providers. Elements of interior décor such as flooring are more than matters of function or style. They may be directly tied to how a consumer perceives products, and that can determine whether or not the consumer purchases the good. Standing on solid ground with your consumers has always been important, but this research suggests that it may be the difference between a sale and failure to close the deal.

**More information:** "Context Effects from Bodily Sensations: Examining Bodily Sensations Induced by Flooring and the Moderating Role of Product Viewing Distance." is forthcoming in the Journal of Consumer Research in June 2010.

Provided by University of Minnesota

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