

The consumer mindset: When is a year different than 365 days?

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Consumers react differently to units of measurement—depending on whether they are thinking concretely or abstractly, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Consider a furniture store manager who offers two tables of different lengths, and wants a consumer to buy the larger one, perhaps because it offers a higher profit margin. To magnify the length of the larger table relative to the smaller one, should the manager convey the table lengths using small units (inches: 42 vs. 60), or using large units (feet: 3.5 vs. 5)?" write authors Ashwani Monga (University of South Carolina) and Rajesh Bagchi (Virginia Tech). According to the authors, it depends on whether the consumer has a "concrete" mindset or an "abstract" one.

"[Consumers](#) have a concrete mindset in some situations, such as when they are about to make a purchase, but an abstract mindset in other situations, such as when they are shopping for a future purchase," the authors write. In the case of the table, if the manager wants to push the bigger table by magnifying the length difference, it would be better to use inches in concrete settings but feet in abstract settings.

In a series of studies, the authors looked at consumers' perceptions of the height of buildings, the time of maturity of financial products, the weight of nutrients, and the length of tables. They found that a concrete mindset made people more tuned in to the sizes of numbers (numerosity), while people in the abstract mindset were more tuned in to units (unitosity).

"Consider a consumer being told about a delay in delivery time. Numerosity suggests that a delay from seven days to 21 days seems larger than a delay from one week to three weeks because people use the size of the numbers to infer the size of the change: a change from seven to 21 seems bigger than a change from one to three," the authors write. But people in the abstract frame of mind would be more likely to tune into the fact that a delay of weeks seems greater than a delay of days, the authors explain.

More information: Ashwani Monga and Rajesh Bagchi. "Years, Months, and Days versus 1, 12, and 365: The Influence of Units versus Numbers." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2012 (published online September 1, 2011). ejcr.org/

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