

# What does 'happiness' mean to consumers? Does age matter?

February 14 2012

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Happiness means different things to different consumers, depending on whether they're focused on the future or the present, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"[Consumers](#) want to be happy, and marketers are increasingly trying to appeal to consumers' pursuit of [happiness](#)," write authors Cassie Mogilner (University of Pennsylvania), Jennifer Aaker (Stanford University), and Sepandar Kamvar (MIT). "Coca-Cola encourages consumers to 'Open Happiness' in their most recent campaign; Nesquik advertises, 'You can't buy happiness, but you can drink it.'" The authors wanted to examine how consumers experience happiness, and whether the promise of happiness drives [consumer choice](#).

In studies including blog-based data, surveys, and [laboratory experiments](#), the authors found that people experience happiness in two main ways—through excitement and calmness. Consumers who associate happiness with excitement tend to be younger and more focused on the future than the "here and now." But across the life course, people increasingly associate happiness with calmness and being present in the moment.

The experiments revealed that consumers who were more focused on the future chose "exciting" products when they were offered tea, music, or bottled water. In contrast, the more present-focused participants tended to choose calming brands and products. "The specific meaning of happiness individuals adopt determines the choices they make—such as

the music they listen to, the type of tea they drink, and the brand of water they buy," the authors write.

Although age is a good indicator of future versus present focus, the authors learned that people can be primed to enter either a future- or present-related focus with words, or through meditation.

Marketers looking to connect with consumers by promising happiness should consider that happiness doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. "Two people who say, 'I feel happy' can be feeling very distinct things," the authors write. "Whereas one's face might twinkle with excitement, the other's face could exude calm contentment. These two experiences play out in the choices each individual will make."

**More information:** Cassie Mogilner, Jennifer Aaker, and Sepandar Kamvar. "How Happiness Impacts Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2012 (published online December 13, 2011). [ejcr.org/](http://ejcr.org/)

Provided by University of Chicago

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