

Need to move soon? Don't trust your emotions

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Consumers are more likely to make emotional instead of objective assessments when the outcomes are closer to the present time than when they are further away in the future, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"The proximity of a decision's outcome increases consumer reliance on feelings when making decisions. Feelings are relied upon more when the outcome is closer in time because these feelings appear to be more informative in such situations," write authors Hannah H. Chang (Singapore Management University) and Michel Tuan Pham (Columbia University).

From which [snack](#) to buy to which apartment to rent, we base many of our decisions on either feelings or objective assessment. The option that appeals more to our feelings is often not the one that "makes more sense." When do consumers rely more on their feelings than objective assessments? And how does the proximity of the decision outcome influence [consumer decision](#)-making? For example, when looking for an apartment to rent, some consumers may decide which apartment to rent only a week before moving in, while others may decide several months in advance.

In one study, college students were asked to imagine that they were about to graduate, had found a well-paying job, and were looking for an apartment to rent after [graduation](#). They were then given a choice between an apartment that appeals more to their feelings (a smaller,

prettier apartment with better views) and an option that is objectively better (a bigger, more conveniently located apartment). Compared to college juniors and those who imagined graduating a year later, college seniors and those who imagined graduating and moving into an apartment next month were more likely to choose the former option.

"Companies should consider the time between consumer decision-making and consumption. When consumers will be deciding immediately prior to [consumption](#) (choosing an entrée at a restaurant or a mobile phone plan), companies should focus on messages that appeal to consumers' [feelings](#). When they will be deciding well in advance (choosing a retirement plan or booking flights), companies should focus less on emotional appeals and instead emphasize messages that appeal to objective assessments," the authors conclude.

More information: Hannah H. Chang and Michel Tuan Pham. "Affect as a Decision-Making System of the Present." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2013.

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