

# Targeting diet products: Why are more independent consumers better at delaying gratification?

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Product benefits that occur later in time are more likely to appeal to more independent consumers than to those who are more group or family oriented, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"More independent consumers think of the future in abstract terms and perceive future events as happening in the more distant future, whereas consumers who are less independent think of the future in concrete terms and perceive future events as happening sooner," write authors Gerri Spassova (Monash University) and Angela Y. Lee (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University).

Perceptions of time are subjective and variable. One day can feel like an eternity, while at other times a day flashes by in an instant. Similarly, a future event can seem really far away, but at other times it's just around the corner.

Our perceptions of time are influenced by whether we view ourselves as independent or more group or family oriented. Consumers who view themselves as independent place high value on self-reliance and [autonomy](#), and strive towards being unique, different, and separate from others. In contrast, those who view themselves as less independent see themselves as part of a [social group](#), and strive toward blending and fitting in.

In one study, consumers were shown advertisements for a Lean Cuisine product. More independent consumers found the ad more persuasive when it was targeted at an individual and its benefits were presented as taking place in the more distant future, while consumers who thought of themselves as less independent found the same ad more persuasive when it was targeted at a family and its benefits were presented as taking place sooner.

"[Advertising](#) targeted at consumers who see themselves as more independent would be more effective when presented in more abstract terms, with product benefits occurring in the more distant future. But ads targeting [consumers](#) who see themselves as less independent would be more effective when framed in more concrete terms, with benefits occurring sooner," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Gerri Spassova and Angela Y. Lee. "Looking Into the Future: A Match between Self-View and Temporal Distance." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2013.

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