

Can consumers use an easy trick to extend wonderful experiences and shorten bad ones?

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Many experiences rarely seem to last the right amount of time. Vacations feel too short, meetings seem too long, and bad dates never seem to end. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* finds that simply categorizing experiences can help consumers extend good experiences and shorten the bad ones.

"Consumers do not just focus on individual [experiences](#). Instead, they categorize and manage experiences in a way that stretches out good experiences and shortens [negative experiences](#). For positive experiences, consumers are reluctant to eliminate categories, while the opposite is true for negative experiences because eliminating categories makes it feel like more of the experience has passed," write authors Anuj K. Shah (University of Chicago Booth School of Business) and Adam L. Alter (New York University).

Consider a tourist traveling to New York City and planning to go to a Broadway musical, a jazz club, a Yankees game, and the US Open. She might consider each event separately or categorize the musical and the jazz club as "music" and the baseball game and tennis match as "sports." If she thinks about each event separately, then she will feel equally closer to the end of her vacation after each event (going to the musical and the baseball game will feel the same as going to the musical and the jazz club).

If she categorizes the events, her vacation will seem shorter if she goes to the baseball game and the tennis match before the musical and the

jazz club because this eliminates an entire category of events (sports) from her vacation agenda. However, her vacation will seem longer if she goes to one event from each category first because she will still have events from each category to look forward to.

Businesses can use these results to find ways to make pleasant experiences seem to last longer or unpleasant experiences seems shorter. "A day at an amusement park might seem less fleeting if rides and games are interspersed so that guests can still look forward to both rides and games. On the other hand, a dental procedure might seem quicker if the dentist breaks the procedure down into two phases, emphasizing when the difficult phase is over and he is moving on to the easier phase," the authors conclude.

More information: Anuj K. Shah and Adam L. Alter. "Consuming Experiential Categories." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2014. F

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