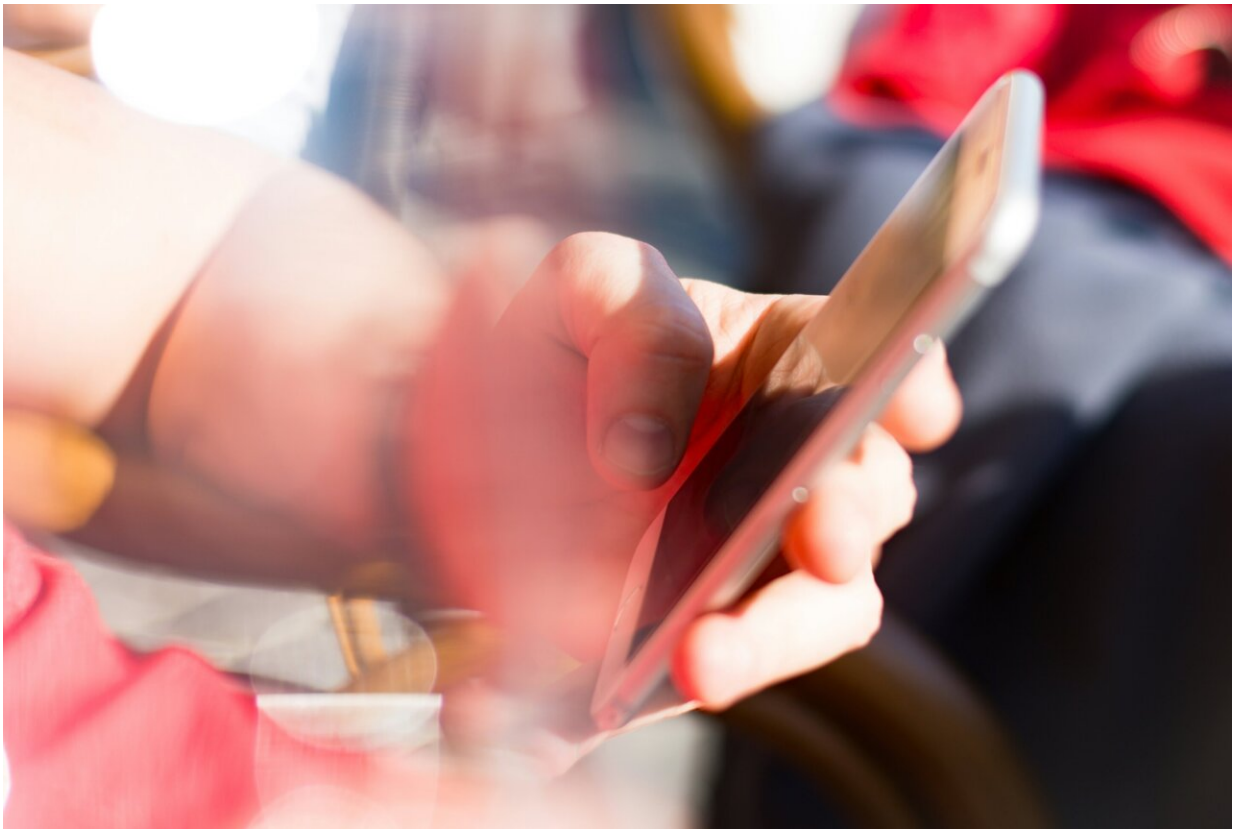


Research connects happy keywords to happier shoppers

August 29 2024, by J. Merritt Melancon



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[New research](#) from the University of Georgia Terry College of Business shows consumers use "happier" words to search for products when they are in a good mood. Researchers have connected those positive search

terms with an increased likelihood of clicking on search engine ads.

The study connects marketing's more traditional research into how marketers manipulate and react to consumers' emotions and behavior at brick-and-mortar retailers to today's digital realities.

"There's a lot of research about how you feel when you're in a store, how you feel when you see a product, but now people begin the shopping process online before they step foot in a store," said Sarah Whitley, an assistant professor of marketing in UGA's Terry College. "They may operate differently in this online space, and we need to understand how emotions play a role."

Whitley and her co-authors—Terry College Dean's Advisory Council Distinguished Professor of Marketing Anindita Chakravarty and fellow associate professor Pengyuan Wang—published their findings on what motivates shoppers to click online search ads in "Positive Emotions During Search Engine Use: How You Feel Impacts What You Search For and Click On" in the *Journal of Marketing*.

Positive search terms may lead to more ad clicks

The research team analyzed a set of more than 5 million archived searches and ran experiments with 6,800 participants.

The team found people who were primed to be in a better mood by being shown pictures of positive things (e.g., babies, bubbles, sunshine, etc.) were significantly more likely to use cheerful words to describe their desired product in their online search. When search engine ads were presented in response to these more positive search terms, they were about 50% more likely to generate site visits than the same search terms without a "happy" modifier, regardless of product category.

For instance, [test subjects](#) who used positive emotion search terms—such as joyful, cheerful, playful and inspiring—to describe a [water bottle](#) were more than twice as likely to click on ads at the top of their search results than people who used non-emotion descriptors such as clear, metal and lightweight. Other [products](#) such as books and posters showed similar effects.

"The positive feeling has nothing to do with the product they are searching for; it's just something they are feeling at the moment," said Anindita Chakravarty, co-author of the study and Terry Dean's Advisory Council Distinguished Professor.

"When it happens they're feeling happy and need to search for a product at the same time, they are going to use more positive words when they type in their search query. And that's when the practical implications come in."

Marketers may want to target happier shoppers early in the buying process

The difference between ad clicks generated by cheerful and neutral searchers is connected to happy consumers' reduced skepticism about ads.

"When people are in a positive mood and experiencing [positive emotions](#), they have rose-colored glasses on," Whitley said. "Every person carries around this knowledge in their head that allows them to see how marketers are trying to persuade them—persuasion knowledge."

"When you're in a positive mood, it dampers down that tendency to use your persuasion knowledge to avoid ads. You're less skeptical and view advertising content more positively."

Online marketers have long known more precise search terms and price-oriented search terms are clues that online consumers are closer to completing a purchase and more willing to click on an ad.

So they spend money to have their ads shown when consumers search for specific product characteristics, logistics or deals that generate more return for their ad money.

In light of this new research, marketers may want to reserve some ad dollars to reach shoppers in a positive mood earlier in the buying process.

"Instead of just thinking about deal-based search terms, marketers might want to consider some of these positive emotion words in search terms that can indicate how the consumer is feeling at that moment," Whitley said. "Because if they're feeling positive, they may be less suspicious of your ads and more likely to click on them, and you'd have a larger ROI on your ad spending."

More information: Sarah C. Whitley et al, EXPRESS: Positive Emotions During Search Engine Use: How You Feel Impacts What You Search for and Click On, *Journal of Marketing* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429241263012](https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429241263012)

Provided by University of Georgia

Citation: Research connects happy keywords to happier shoppers (2024, August 29) retrieved 29 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-08-happy-keywords-happier-shoppers.html>

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