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Impulse Spending? Save Money by Getting Organized

Reality television has turned the spotlight on to people with excessive behaviors like hoarding and stockpiling. According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), controlling the chaotic environment may be one of the biggest factors in helping people stop.

“We propose that people in a disorganized environment experience a threat to their sense of personal control—and being surrounded by chaos ultimately impairs their ability to perform other tasks requiring ‘brain’ power,” write authors Boyoun (Grace) Chae (University of British Columbia) and Rui (Juliet) Zhu (Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business).

Through a series of four studies, the authors observed people’s behavior when placed in a disorganized environment versus an orderly environment. They were looking for changes in behavior like impulse spending as well as poor mental performance or reduced stamina on tasks that require advanced thinking skills.

In one study, participants were placed in a room that was either well organized or poorly organized. All participants were asked how they felt about paying for a variety of products ranging from an HDTV to movie tickets. The authors found that people in the cluttered room said they were more likely to purchase the products compared to the people placed in the organized room.

In another study, the researchers placed participants in rooms that were either confined (tight) or a normal office size. The rooms were either cluttered or organized. Participants in all four rooms were asked to answer questions on a computer screen. The authors found that participants in the organized spaces performed better than those in the cluttered rooms and that room size was less of a factor than environmental disorder.

“Our research has crucial practical implications concerning public health and consumer well-being,” the authors conclude. “Participants in our studies were exposed to disorganized environments set by us. We expect that if an individual creates a messy environment, their surroundings would be more mentally depleting and lead to an even lower sense of personal control.”

Boyoun (Grace) Chae and Rui (Juliet) Zhu. “Environmental Disorder Leads to Self-Regulatory Failure.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2014. For more information, contact Juliet Zhu (rzhu@ckgsb.edu.cn) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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