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Should Consumers Trust Their Feelings as Information?

Consumers who trust their feelings are more likely to make choices based on what “feels right” even when feelings are irrelevant to their decision, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“Certain individuals have a stronger belief that their feelings will generally point them in the right direction. These individual differences in trust in feelings are not fixed personality traits, but rather recurring tendencies that arise from the person’s history of success or failure in reliance on feelings, as well as from surrounding social and cultural norms,” write authors Tamar Avnet (Yeshiva University), Michel Tuan Pham (Columbia University), and Andrew T. Stephen (University of Pittsburgh).

Should I buy a shirt based on how it makes me feel or based on its price? Should I buy a house because it makes me feel good or because it’s well priced? Should I get married because I feel like it is the right thing to do or because my spouse is a good provider? Consumers can rely on their feelings to make various decisions but what determines whether or not they will use their feelings as information?

The authors found that trust in feelings influences the degree to which people believe that their feelings provide trustworthy information. They studied consumers who played the classic ultimatum game in which two players have to split a sum of money based on one of the players making an offer and the other accepting or rejecting that offer.

High trust in feelings amplified the tendency to reject unfair offers—an emotionally driven response that is considered rationally inferior—but did not affect the probability of accepting fair offers. “High trust in feelings encourages choices that ‘feel right’ even in the presence of compelling information that favors an opposite response,” the authors write.

“For feelings to be relied upon, either a high trust in feelings or a high relevance of feelings seems sufficient. Trust in feelings and relevance of feelings are therefore distinct and equally important determinants of the perceived information value of feelings,” the authors conclude.

Tamar Avnet, Michel Tuan Pham, and Andrew T. Stephen. “Consumers’ Trust in Feelings as Information.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2012. For more information, contact Tamar Avnet (avnet@yu.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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