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Why Does the Week before Your Vacation Seem Longer When You're Going Far Away?

Consumer decision-making is affected by the relationship between time and spatial distance, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“We often think about time in various contexts. But we do not realize how susceptible our judgment of time is to seemingly irrelevant factors like spatial distance,” write authors B. Kyu Kim (University of Southern California), Gal Zauberman (Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania), and James R. Bettman (Duke University).

Imagine that you are in New York today and will be in a different city in one month. Will your judgment of how long that month seems differ depending on where you will be in one month? For instance, will one month in the future seem longer if you expect to be in Los Angeles rather than Philadelphia? Consumers should be aware that spatial distance influences judgment of future time and can impact our decisions.

The authors asked consumers to imagine visiting a post office today and a bookstore in three months. Some were told that the distance between the post office and the bookstore was long, while others were told it was short. When the distance was long, consumers perceived the same three month period to be longer. Similarly, consumers who imagined moving far away when they retire felt their retirement was farther away in time than those who imagined moving near their current location.

These perceptions can affect how patient we are when making choices. Because instant gratification is more attractive, consumers often impatiently opt for inferior but instantly available options over superior choices that require waiting.

“It is hard to realize that our impatient behavior can be influenced by spatial distances. So pay attention when making a decision. Spatial distances can change your perception of future time and make you impatient,” the authors conclude.

B. Kyu Kim, Gal Zauberman, and James R. Bettman. “Space, Time, and Intertemporal Preferences.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2012. For more information, contact B. Kyu Kim (kyu.kim@marshall.usc.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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