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Another Day Older and Deeper in Debt: Why Do Events Seem More Important When Consumers Think About Weight?

Toting a heavy item around may cause you to judge an issue to be more important, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#). But, interestingly, so does thinking about the *concept* of weight.

“Prior research has shown that the physical experience of carrying weight can influence people’s judgment in unrelated domains such as the importance of an event,” write authors Meng Zhang (Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Xiuping Li (National University of Singapore). “In this research we investigate how such an influence happens and when it will happen.”

In their research the authors measured consumer responses to actually carrying weight as well as their reactions to being primed to think about the concept of weight. The authors found that the metaphorical associations people form are just as important as the physical weight they carry.

In one study, the authors asked some participants to hold shopping bags full of water bottles. Others read a paragraph that described a heavy-duty crane, which included weight-related terms (“heavy,” “tons,” and “loaded”). They asked participants to give an opinion on an unrelated topic: whether it was important to list nutritional information on products. The participants who were primed to think about weight responded much like the people who actually carried weight. They thought the issue was more important than participants who weren’t weighed down—metaphorically or literally.

In another experiment, participants who carried heavy loads were instructed to think about light objects, like balloons and feathers. When they did so, the effect of the physical weight experience on their judgment was eliminated.

“The physical experience can directly cause the mental state or abstract judgment,” the authors write. “The results of our five experiments, however, show that weight experience relies on people’s subjective inference to exert its effect.”

Meng Zhang and Xiuping Li. “From Physical Weight to Psychological Significance: The Contribution of Semantic Activations.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2012 (published online July 18, 2011). For more information, contact Meng Zhang at (zhangmeng@baf.msmail.cuhk.edu.hk) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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