

Consumers as Naive Physicists: How Visual Entropy Cues Shift Temporal Focus and Influence Product Evaluations

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Abstract

The current research explores how a fundamental property of entropy established in physics—that entropy can only increase through time—affects consumer behavior. Specifically, we examine the following two questions about the influence of visual entropy cues on consumer cognition and preferences: First, how do visual entropy cues influence consumers' temporal focus—i.e., whether the consumers think about the past or the future? Second, how do visual entropy cues affect consumers' evaluations of products? Five experiments show that consumers use visual entropy cues to construct mental timeline of events, and that high entropy visuals shift consumers' temporal focus to the past, whereas low entropy visuals shift consumers' temporal focus to the future. Consequently, consumers evaluate past-related products more favorably when they are displayed together with high entropy visuals and evaluate future-related products more favorably when they are displayed together with low entropy visuals.

Keywords: *entropy; time; choice*

Track: Consumer Behaviour