

Fear or romance could make you change your mind, study finds

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Each day people are confronted with innumerable pieces of information and hundreds of decisions. Not surprisingly, people seldom process each piece of information deeply, instead relying on quick mental shortcuts to guide their behaviors. For example, people often use the conformity-based mental shortcut of following the crowd. This hasn't gone unnoticed by advertisers, who often tout that specific products are best-sellers or are particularly popular.

But new research from Vladas Griskevicius, professor of marketing at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, suggests that the effectiveness of such common [persuasion tactics](#) can be dramatically altered by two [primal emotions](#) - fear and romantic desire.

In the forthcoming paper "Fear and Loving in Las Vegas: Evolution, Emotion, and Persuasion," Griskevicius and his co-authors find that the emotion we are currently feeling has a strong effect on whether we decide to conform or to go against the grain "Being afraid especially leads [people](#) to go along with the crowd, activating a 'safety-in-numbers' psychology," said Griskevicius. "A feeling of lust, however, motivates people to go it alone, activating a desire to be seen as unique. Feeling scared or amorous can greatly change the way people make decisions."

To test the idea, the researchers had people watch a short clip from a frightening or a [romantic film](#). Afterward, people viewed ads for Las Vegas that contained commonly used persuasive appeals either rooted in conformity ("over a million sold") or rooted in uniqueness ("stand out

from the crowd"). After watching a [scary film](#), people were especially persuaded by conformity-based appeals that presented the trip as a popular option. In contrast, after people watched a romantic film clip, they were not only less persuaded by the same conformity-based appeal, but such appeals were counter-persuasive. The romantically minded individuals especially did not want to visit Las Vegas if they knew that many others are already going. Instead, people in a romantic state were much more persuaded by appeals that presented the trip as a unique, unusual, or exotic choice that others might not make.

The fact that emotions can dramatically influence people's tendency to go with or go against the group should not be overlooked by marketers. For example, advertisements often use persuasive appeals depicting products or ideas as being particularly popular or top sellers. The well-established tendency to conform makes such appeals generally quite effective. But when people view such ads on television, advertisers rarely consider that these viewers have often just been taken on an [emotional roller coaster](#) by the program they are currently watching. Indeed, Griskevicius and colleagues find that different types of commonly used persuasion appeals are differentially effective depending on the emotion that a viewer is feeling.

"The effects of this study extend to everyday activities like watching the nightly news," Griskevicius said. "Much of the news is full of fear invoking material. Advertising during that news show should focus on collective, 'everyone's doing it' messages rather than individual or unique messages that might work better during a romantically themed show like 'Sex and the City'."

More information: Vladas Griskevicius's teaching and research utilizes theoretical principles from evolutionary biology to study consumers' often unconscious preferences, decision processes, and behavioral strategies. The paper "Fear and Loving in Las Vegas: Evolution Emotion

and Persuasion," forthcoming in the Journal of Marketing Research, was co-authored by Noah Goldstein (UCLA), Jill Sundie (University of Houston), and Chad Mortensen, Robert Cialdini and Douglas Kenrick (University of Arizona). The paper and more information on Professor Griskevicius can be found at www.carlsonschool.umn.edu/marketing-institute/vgriskevicius .

Source: University of Minnesota ([news](#) : [web](#))

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