

Why does simply trusting your feelings lead to much better predictions?

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If you trust your feelings you are better able to predict future events—from the weather to the stock market, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Of course, you need to know a little about what you're predicting.

"Will it rain tomorrow? Who will win American Idol? How high (or low) will the Dow Jones be next week? Who will be our next president?" From the mundane to the phenomenal, the ability to predict what will happen in the future is among the most prized of human faculties," write authors Michel Tuan Pham, Leonard Lee (both Columbia University), and Andrew T. Stephen (University of Pittsburgh).

Over the course of eight studies, the authors found that individuals who trusted their [feelings](#) about their knowledge were better able to predict the outcomes of various future events than people who had less trust in their feelings.

This phenomenon, which the authors call the "emotional oracle effect" was proven across a broad range of predictions, including the outcome of the 2008 U.S. Democratic presidential nomination, movie success at the box office, the winner of American Idol, movements of the stock market, the outcome of a national college football championship, and the weather.

For example, in one study, 175 online participants from 46 U.S. states completed a task that induced high or low trust in their feelings. Then

they were asked to predict the weather in their respective zip codes for the next two days. "A comparison between predicted and actual weather conditions revealed that 54 percent of the participants with a high trust in feelings made the correct prediction, more than twice the proportion of participants with a low trust in feelings who predicted correctly (21 percent)."

The effect held true whether the participants' [trust](#) in their feelings was simply measured or manipulated. However, it was limited by background knowledge. When people in the weather study were asked to predict the [weather](#) in far-away locales or two weeks later instead of two days, their predictions lost their advantage.

"We hypothesize that this intriguing emotional oracle effect arises because trusting one's feelings encourages access to a 'privileged window' into the vast amount of predictive information people learn, almost unconsciously, about their environments over time," the authors conclude. "Relying on feelings allows people to tap into all they tacitly know, compared to relying on logical input which only captures partial perspectives of the events."

More information: Michel Tuan Pham, Leonard Lee, and Andrew T. Stephen. "Feeling the Future: The Emotional Oracle Effect." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2012. ejcr.org/

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