



How Weather and Temperature Shape our Shopping Choices

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1 The Subconscious Science of "Variety-Seeking"

Have you ever noticed that on a bright, sunny morning, you're more likely to swap your usual coffee for a new seasonal blend, but on a drizzly afternoon, you stick strictly to your regular order? It turns out this isn't just a coincidence. A new study published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* reveals that the weather outside has a profound, subconscious influence on our desire to try new things, what researchers call "variety-seeking".

Dr Wanyue Li, Senior Lecturer at Hong Kong Metropolitan University, and her team analysed over 326,000 real-world transactions from a major Chinese watch retailer, alongside consumer surveys, and uncovered a simple but powerful insight: *the weather outside is quietly shaping variety-seeking in ways most of us never realise.*

2 The Hidden Pattern in Our Shopping Cart

The secret behind this behaviour lies in a concept called "**Arousal**", which is essentially our internal "energy meter" or level of stimulation. **Sunny weather** acts as a natural booster, heightening our arousal and making us feel more vitalised. When our internal energy is high, we naturally seek more stimulation from our environment, often leading us to explore a wider variety of products or brands. Conversely, **rainy days** tend to lower our arousal, making us feel more lethargic and less likely to venture away from our usual choices.

Temperature also plays a surprising role, but it doesn't follow a simple "hotter is more" rule. Instead, the researchers discovered a "U-shaped" relationship between the temperature and our desire for variety. We are least likely to seek out new options when the temperature is a comfortable 23°C. This is the "Goldilocks zone" where our arousal is at a steady, neutral baseline. However, as the temperature moves toward extremes, becoming either freezing cold or sweltering hot, our internal stress and arousal levels rise. To manage this increased internal energy, we start looking for more variety in what we buy.

3 Online vs Offline shopping

Perhaps most interestingly, the study found that these weather-driven urges are even stronger when we shop on our phones or computers than when we visit physical stores. While walking through a physical mall, you are bombarded with "noise" - the smell of the food court, the music in the background, or a pushy salesperson, which can drown out the subtle psychological effects of the weather.

Online, however, these distractions vanish. Without the sensory "clutter" of a physical store, your internal state, shaped by the sun or rain outside your window, has a much clearer path to influence your clicks and purchases.

Online shopping



VS

Offline shopping



4 The Future of Weather-Wise Shopping

These findings offer a blueprint for a new kind of "**weather-wise**" shopping experience. **By staying in sync with the forecast, businesses can anticipate shifts in consumer behaviour**, perhaps featuring a vibrant, diverse selection of new arrivals on sunny days when shoppers are primed to explore, or highlighting familiar, comforting favourites when the rain sets in. Online platforms, in particular, are uniquely positioned to leverage real-time weather data to personalise our shopping feeds, matching product recommendations to our internal "energy meter."

On a broader level, this article invites us to reflect on how often our environment quietly guides our hand. It reminds us that we are never truly isolated from the world around us; whether we are browsing for a new watch or just picking up groceries, we are in a constant, silent conversation with the elements. The next time you find yourself reaching for something bold and unexpected, take a quick look at the sky; you might just find that your curiosity is being written in the clouds.

For more details, please refer to the following publication generated from the research project:

Sui, J., Hu, J., Zhang, X., & Li, W. (2026). Weather, temperature, and variety-seeking: When arousal turns environment into choice. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 89, Article 104590. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2025.104590>

Berlyne, D. E., & Crozier, J. B. (1971). Effects of complexity and prechoice stimulation on exploratory choice. *Perception & Psychophysics*, 10(4), 242-246. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03212812>

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