

## **Affect as a Decision Making System of the Present**

Michel Tuan Pham  
Columbia University

The purpose of this research is to highlight and substantiate an important characteristic of the affective system of judgment and decision making. We argue that the affective system is inherently anchored in the present. We first review a variety of empirical findings that are consistent with this general thesis. We then offer a novel proposition that derives from the general thesis that affect is a decision system of the present. Specifically, we propose that affective feelings are relied upon more (weighted more heavily) in decisions whose outcomes are closer to the present than in decisions whose outcomes are more distant in time, whether future or past. Consistent with this proposition, results from five experiments involving a variety of decision domains and tasks show that outcome proximity to the present (a) amplifies the relative preference for options that are affectively superior, and (b) increases the effects of incidental affect on evaluations. These effects are observed when compared to both a more distant future and a more distant past. Additional results suggest that (c) these effects are linked to a greater perceived information value of affective feelings in decisions whose outcomes are closer to the present. Results from another four experiments further show that a classic affective judgment bias—the scope insensitivity bias—is more pronounced in decisions anchored in the present than in decisions anchored in the future or in the past. Taken together with previous empirical findings, our results point to a specific orientation of the affective system toward the present.