

# I'm sticking with my brand: Loyal customers perceive competitor ads differently

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What does it take for marketers to reach customers who are already loyal to a particular brand? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* examines brand loyalty and the way it affects perceptions of advertising.

Authors Sekar Raju (Iowa State University), H. Rao Unnava (Ohio State University), and Nicole Votolato Montgomery (College of William and Mary) discovered that consumer brand loyalty heavily influences responses to marketing from competing brands. "Consumers who are more loyal to a brand seem to search and process competitor brand information very differently than consumers who are less loyal to a brand," write the authors. "When loyalty is high, consumers search for evidence that a competitor brand is not a good brand, contrary to the advertisement information."

In contrast, less loyal customers look for evidence to confirm that the competitor brand is a good brand. "This search manifests in the identification of similarities between their preferred brand and competing brand, resulting in an overall perception that the two brands are alike."

In three related studies, researchers compared people who were very loyal to specific brand-name products: Sony music players, Saucony athletic shoes, and Olympus voice recorders. The researchers succeeded in changing the perceptions of low and high-loyalty participants by asking them to shift their focus from dissimilarities to similarities, or vice versa.

"The change in focus from searching for similarities to dissimilarities has implications for marketers. Advertisements that are targeted toward consumers who are loyal to another brand may have to be structured differently," conclude the authors.

Source: University of Chicago

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