

What a coincidence! Personal connections improve sales

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If a salesperson shares a birthday or a birthplace with you, you're more likely to make a purchase and feel good about it, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"This research examines how the fundamental human need to connect with others plays a role in sales encounters," write authors Lan Jiang, JoAndrea Hoegg, Darren W. Dahl (all University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC), and Amitava Chattopadhyay (INSEAD, Singapore).

In one of the studies, a personal trainer introduced participants to a fitness program. People who discovered that they shared the same birthday with the trainer reported that they liked the program better and were more interested in purchasing a membership.

In another study, patients who learned that they were born in the same place as a dentist reported a more favorable attitude toward the dental care they received and showed a higher willingness to book their next appointment with that same clinic.

"Across individuals, we found that naturally social people are more responsive to such coincidences," write the authors. "On the other hand, people who tend to isolate themselves from the outside world are less sensitive."

The researchers concluded that revealing personal information helps service providers create connections and initiate conversations with

customers. When information is provided on nametags (as Disney does with employees' hometowns) or on websites (as many health organizations and fitness centers do), most consumers react positively. However, when service providers exhibit negative behavior, like rudeness, the shared similarity loses its positive influence.

Finally, faking a connection is not an effective sales tactic. "Creating misleading or fake similarities with a customer as a persuasion technique could lead to negative outcomes if the similarities are found to be disingenuous," write the authors. "To mitigate the chances of this outcome, salespeople must be careful not to falsely claim similarities."

More information: Lan Jiang, JoAndrea Hoegg, Darren W. Dahl, and Amitava Chattopadhyay. "The Persuasive Role of Incidental Similarity on Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in a Sales Context." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): February 2010 (published online June 26, 2009).

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