

Consumers: Why do you like what I like, but I don't like what you like?

April 19 2010

When we like a product, do we think others will like it, too? And when we believe others like a product, do we like it as well? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says these two questions are fundamentally different.

"The answer to the first question (Will others like it?) requires people to start with their own product preferences, which we call projection," write authors Caglar Irmak (University of South Carolina), Beth Vallen (Loyola University), and Sankar Sen (Baruch College). The second question (If others like it, do I?) makes people think first about others' preferences and then decide whether they like the product or not, which is called "introjection."

"We show that different psychological processes underlie projection and introjection," the authors write. "In particular, we demonstrate that providing our own opinion about a product before thinking about others' preferences, as in projection, affirms one's unique concept." This, in turn, weakens uniqueness motivations and leads [consumers](#) to predict others will like what they themselves like.

On the other hand, thinking about others' preferences before our own (introjection) threatens our sense of uniqueness. "As a result, those who are in high need for uniqueness don't like what other people like," the authors explain.

In their studies, the authors showed participants advertisements for one

of two novel technology products that had not yet been introduced to the market. One group of participants, assigned to the projection condition, stated their own preferences for the product and then estimated those of others. Another group, which was assigned the introjection condition, estimated the preferences of others and then reported their own preferences. Then they measured the participants' need for uniqueness.

"If we learn others' preferences before forming our own, we tend to preserve our uniqueness by altering our product preferences accordingly," the authors write. "If, however, we already have an opinion about a product, we are okay with others following us."

More information: Caglar Irmak, Beth Vallen, and Sankar Sen. "You Like What I Like but I Don't Like What You Like: Uniqueness Motivations and Product Preferences." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2010.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Consumers: Why do you like what I like, but I don't like what you like? (2010, April 19) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-04-consumers-dont.html>

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