

Home away from home: What makes consumers support their favorite businesses?

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When a shop is authentic and the workers are friendly, it can feel like a second home for consumers, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"People often feel strongly attached to particular places. Such places typically include their homes, but can also include commercial places such as stores and restaurants," write authors Alain Debenedetti (Université Paris Est – IRG), Harmen Oppewal (Monash University), and Zeynep Arsel (Concordia University). "How do people develop and experience place attachment when the place concerns a commercial setting, where they are just customers, and the place is owned or controlled by someone else?"

Consumers form strong emotional bonds with locations when they experience familiarity. Consumers also value authenticity and personal relationships. "It also helps if it is a place where one can feel safe and secure, protected from not only physical intrusions but also from the aggressions of market forces posed by intrusive staff or aggressive promotional tactics," the authors write. "The place does not have to be an extravagant flagship store. People can build attachments with quite ordinary and even mundane places, as long as the place meets the above criteria of familiarity, [authenticity](#) and security."

The authors gained these insights from interviews with a sample of French consumers who talked about their experiences with the places they most treasure: cafés, restaurants, department stores, concert halls,

and libraries. The final phase of the study focused on patrons of a particular French wine bar.

The authors also found that once consumers bond with a commercial space, they are willing to make efforts or sacrifices to support it. Satisfied customers may pay higher tips, volunteer to help the business, and serve as ambassadors, linking other [consumers](#) to the business.

"Consumers treat their special place as a treasured gift and in return want to support the establishment beyond what is expected of them as customers," the authors conclude.

More information: Alain Debenedetti, Harmen Oppewal, and Zeynep Arsel. "Place Attachment in Commercial Settings: A Gift Economy Perspective." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2014.

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