

New research shows how familiarity encourages people to support their favorite businesses

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Why put a big comfy couch in the corner of the local bookshop? Why provide stacks of board games free of charge at the corner café? Why give out complimentary backstage passes after the show? Because by making people feel at home in a commercial space, marketers can turn their own clients into salespeople.

A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* takes a closer look at this new trend in marketing and proves that a sense of homeyness results in a fierce loyalty in customers, who in turn demonstrate an enthusiasm and sense of commitment that goes beyond the norms. These emotionally attached customers pay higher tips, volunteer to help the business and serve as ambassadors—convincing friends and family that a certain enterprise is particularly worthwhile.

"People start to feel at home in a commercial place when they experience that place as familiar," says study co-author Zeynep Arsel, an assistant professor in the Department of Marketing at Concordia's John Molson School of Business. "But for that homeyness to work as a marketing tool, the sense of the familiar needs to be coupled with authentic decor, employees who are genuinely interested in what they do, high product quality and a feeling of security in the place. It also helps if consumers feel like they won't be bothered by intrusive staff or aggressive promotional tactics. For this type of marketing to work, people almost need to feel like they're not in a commercial space at all."

The sense of domesticity in the commercial space leads customers to believe they are experiencing something different, something unique to that store, restaurant or given experience. Consumers in these spaces believe they are receiving a personal gift or individual attention from the proprietor, a feeling that allows them to become intimately acquainted with the place.

To conduct the research, Arsel and co-authors Alain Debenedetti of Université Paris Est – IRG and Harmen Oppewal of Monash University interviewed people in France. Participants were asked to talk about their experiences with the commercial places they most cherish, such as cafés and restaurants, as well as department stores, concert halls and libraries.

"Responses showed that people treat their special place as a treasured gift. In return, they want to support the establishment beyond what is expected of them," says Arsel.

"As people become attached to a commercial setting, they interpret their experiences with the place through the same ideals they would apply to private and domestic areas of their lives. As a result, the commercial characteristics of their interactions in these spaces become less important than that special bond they believe to have with the [commercial space](#)."

Provided by Concordia University

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