

Social exclusion and consumer product preference: Drink Pepsi to fit in, but fly American to stand out?

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Social networks are commonplace in this day and age, and how we fit in may depend on anything from political affiliation, to religion, to even our own personality traits. According to a new study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, consumers who are okay with being rejected from a group are more likely to purchase things that set them apart from the norm.

"We examined when and why exclusion from social networks might lead consumers to prefer distinctive products," write authors Echo Wen Wan (University of Hong Kong), Jing Xu (Peking University), and Ying Ding (Renmin University of China).

In their research, the authors proposed that consumers who were excluded from social networks would select unique products when they felt that the cause of their exclusion was stable. In other words, when they felt like the reason for exclusion was not because of a personality flaw or something beyond their immediate control, people would interpret choosing a unique product as an extension of their distinctive personalities.

In two different studies, consumers were either accepted or rejected into a social network or a desired brand community. In both cases, the authors found that when participants were rejected due to an unstable cause (such as a personal character flaw or a changeable company

policy), they were more likely to select products already accepted within the group than choose something that set them apart from the norm.

For brands using a popularity appeal to promote their product line, the authors' findings offer insight into how consumers' psychological states of belongingness influence their spending habits. "For [consumers](#) who feel excluded from a brand, using a 'uniqueness' appeal might elicit a more positive response than emphasizing the popularity of the product," the authors conclude.

Consider Pepsi's slogan "Something for Everyone." People feeling rejected due to their lifestyle habits might drink a Pepsi in an attempt to fit in. On the other hand, American Airlines' "Something Special in the Air" campaign might work well for people who have recently broken up with their girlfriend or boyfriend.

More information: Echo Wen Wan, Jing Xu, and Ying Ding. "To Be or Not to Be Unique? The Effect of Social Exclusion on Consumer Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2014.

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