

You deserve it! Are consumers more likely to buy unique products when made to feel special?

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Graduating from college is an important life event often attributed to being smart and working hard. Many people celebrate this milestone achievement by buying themselves an expensive gift or taking a dream vacation. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* shows that consumers who attribute their successes to internal character traits rather than hard work are more likely to select unique products.

"We found that consumers who attribute feelings of [pride](#) to their unique character traits—rather than how hard they worked to accomplish something—are more likely to feel 'special.' As a result, these consumers are more likely to seek out unique options rather than conform to the choices of others," write authors Xun (Irene) Huang (Sun Yat-sen University), Ping Dong (University of Toronto), and Anirban Mukhopadhyay (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology).

Over six experiments, the authors studied the influence of internal and external pride on consumer choices. In one study, some participants were made to feel proud based on either who they are, what they had done, or just because it was a nice day. All of the participants were then asked to select from one of four t-shirts, three of which were white and similar and a fourth that was identical in design but red in color. The participants made to feel proud based on who they are were more likely to select the red t-shirt than the other participants.

The authors suggest that brands offering unique products use terms like "you're special" to emphasize consumer uniqueness. On the other hand, brands with more mainstream products can use taglines like "you've worked hard" to appeal to feelings of achievement and accomplishment. On a personal level, these results can help [consumers](#) identify their source of pride and recognize why they might be spending too much money on luxury products.

"By extending the understanding of the factors driving conformity, we deepen our knowledge about the causes and consequences of pride. We show that what seem to be subtly different types of pride can actually produce very different outcomes," the authors conclude.

More information: Xun (Irene) Huang, Ping Dong, and Anirban Mukhopadhyay. "Proud to Belong or Proudly Different? Lay Theories Determine Contrasting Effects of Incidental Pride on Uniqueness Seeking." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2014.

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