

Researchers study why we buy so much for Christmas

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The mindset of shoppers can be divided into two groups, say researchers: those focused on avoiding risk and opportunity-seekers who respond to messages about maximising pleasure.

The risk avoiders are described as responding well to messages about 'prevention' while opportunity seekers are 'promotion' oriented consumers. Matching marketing initiatives and messages to the prevailing [mindset](#) of customers is what shops try to do in their advertising campaigns.

A new research paper co-authored by the Saïd Business School at Oxford University offers new insights into the decision-making process of shoppers and examines the importance of the fit. 'Fit has a significant impact on each stage of consumer decision-making, from the evaluation of a message to the consumer's actual choice,' said Professor Nancy Puccinelli, Associate Professor in Marketing and one of the authors of the paper. 'We often see brands communicating in ineffective or even counter-productive ways, whereas sometimes small inexpensive changes to campaigns which take into account the importance of fit have very positive results.'

'Some seasonal campaigns have almost instinctively understood this connection. So "Back to School" campaigns often have undertones of "avoiding the risk" of your children not being fully equipped for their school activities. As the new school year approaches, certain consumers are particularly susceptible to this type of messaging and want the security of having bought everything necessary. For this group, messages that focus on the uses of a product resonate most.

'At Christmas, when messages are about promoting indulgence, consumers who want to maximise pleasure are more open to the idea of switching to premium brands and to spending more to get the most out of their purchases.'

The research shows that if shops align the right message with the consumer's prevailing mindset, they can increase their chance of completing the purchase by 186%. 'For instance, for some consumers sun cream is best promoted by messaging on avoiding the risk of sunburn, for others it is best promoted by focusing on the positives of the appearance of an even suntan.

Cosmetics can be promoted with an emphasis on anti-aging for the 'prevention' consumers but with 'look your best' messages for the

'promotion' oriented consumers. The same product can be made to appeal to different consumers who have two different types of mindset through appropriate messaging, explains Professor Puccinelli.

Awareness of the impact of our orientation and the importance of fit can help marketers avoid unnecessary promotions. The research suggests that at Christmas, retailers often do not need to offer price promotions, multi-buys or discounts, adding that this can actually undermine the celebratory mindset of target [consumers](#). By tapping into a more 'prevention' mentality, such campaigns send mixed [messages](#) and there is the risk that they could actually reduce sales, says the research.

Although individuals have a tendency to one of these orientations, marketers can influence and change this orientation with minimal input and switch a consumer from one mindset to the other in specific circumstances.

'Our research suggests that advertisers can create the desirable orientation within just one advert. Put simply, an appreciation of the importance of "fit" for consumer decision-making means that small, typically low-cost changes to messaging, packaging and communications can have a profound impact on consumer choice,' said Professor Puccinelli.

Provided by Oxford University

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