

What do iPhones, Halloween candy, and sushi have in common?

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How people seek to express their uniqueness is played out in many ways - one of the more subtle ways is how they choose products when presented with product-related information in various colors, versus in black and white or a uniform color.

In "The Color of Choice: The Influence of Presenting Product Information in Color on the Compromise Effect," Jungkeun Kim and Roger Marshall of the Auckland University of Technology and Mark T. Spence of Australia's Bond University explore how altering the colors of brand-related information can influence consumers' motivations and choices, based on their apparently universal need to balance uniqueness and conformity. The findings, which hold implications for how online and physical stores display product information, will be published in the March issue of the *Journal of Retailing*.

What sparked the authors' interest was an analysis from a large telecom provider about how Korean consumers chose iPhone memory options when new iPhone color options (red or black) were added to the standard lineup. The authors subsequently explored the phenomenon further, via three laboratory experiments, using computers, cameras, and chocolates, and also two intriguing field studies.

In one field study, conducted in a Japanese sushi store in Auckland, New Zealand, the authors systematically manipulated the background color of the store's sushi display on three successive days. The sushi variety was unchanged; only the paper it rested on varied in [color](#), and only on one

day. The study focused on the sales of only the salmon avocado portion on one "extreme" end and a mini sushi roll on the other, rather than the eight alternative choices in the middle. The authors considered that by selecting the [sushi](#) on either end, the consumers expressed more uniqueness than if they had chosen the middle "conforming" options. While the mini roll sales stayed relatively constant, the salmon avocado sales were higher on the plain-paper day, whereas when the paper was colored, the standard middle pieces sold better - confirming the hypothesis that consumers on average seek just the right amount of differentiation to satisfy their need.

Similar results were obtained on Halloween, when trick-or-treating children were presented with three intensities of sour candy in either all-white or differently colored boxes. They chose the middle (sour) option when the candies were presented in colored boxes, thus balancing their inchoate, competing needs for uniqueness and conformity.

More information: Jungkeun Kim et al, The Color of Choice: The Influence of Presenting Product Information in Color on the Compromise Effect, *Journal of Retailing* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jretai.2018.01.002](#)

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