

# Connecting to place, people, and past: How products make us feel grounded

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Researchers from Vienna University of Economics and Business and Cornell University published a new paper in the *Journal of Marketing* that examines how marketers can cater to consumers' need to feel grounded by offering products that connect to place, people, and past.

The study is titled "Connecting to Place, People, and Past: How Products Make Us Feel Grounded" and is authored by Isabel Eichinger, Martin Schreier, and Stijn M.J. van Osselaer.

Consumers are increasingly seeking products that are local, made by individually identified people, traditional, or remind them of their childhood and family growing up. This is evidenced by the ever-increasing popularity of farmers markets, hand-cut soap, artisanal bread, the locavore movement, and the return to familiar grocery brands during the COVID-19 pandemic. Locally rooted microbreweries, for example, were at the forefront of this renaissance of artisan, indie, and craft production. In 2019, craft beer accounted for 13.6% of total U.S. volume sales, a 4% increase even while overall beer sales dropped by 2%. Similar trends can be found beyond the food and beverage sector. They are surprising given modern society's aspirations to globalize, automate, and digitize. Why is this happening now and what drives these shifts in demand?

As Eichinger explains, "It is consumers' need to feel grounded—which we define as a feeling of emotional rootedness. We argue that the dual forces of digitization and globalization have made social and work lives increasingly virtual, fast-paced, and mobile, leaving many consumers feeling like trees with weak roots at risk of being torn from the earth.

Marketers can cater to the need to feel grounded by offering products that help consumers connect to place, people, and past." A series of studies involving thousands of participants across the U.S. and Europe shows that groundedness increases product attractiveness and consumers' willingness to pay. Schreier says that "Our research points out how marketers can strategically leverage groundedness for their products, for example by emphasizing local origin or by choosing traditional product designs.

Marketers can also improve their targeting by identifying consumers with a higher need for groundedness." The researchers conducted a survey with a representative U.S. consumer panel. Their idea is that consumers whose everyday work and lives are more affected by major trends like digitization, urbanization and [global change](#) will also experience a higher need to feel grounded. Indeed, they found higher levels in need for groundedness with consumers who perform a lot of desktop work at their computer; who have a higher socio-economic status; who more strongly perceive COVID-19 to have put their life in a state of flux; and who indicated living in a big city. These consumers were also more interested in purchasing products that connect them to their place, people, and past. Feelings of groundedness are not only relevant for business; they are also important for consumer welfare.

In particular, the studies show positive psychological downstream effects of groundedness on consumers' happiness and feelings of strength and stability. "Participants who felt more grounded from the use of local rather than nonlocal apples in a homemade pie also reported feeling stronger, safer, more stable, and better able to withstand adversity. Consistent with the notion of being securely anchored and having a strong foundation, feeling grounded improves self-perceptions related to resilience," says van Osselaer.

Feelings of groundedness are worthy of both managers' and policy

makers' attention. Products are more attractive when they provide consumers with the feeling of groundedness; for example, because they are locally made (connected to place), by producers consumers can relate to (connected to people), and according to traditional methods (connected to the past). Marketers can leverage groundedness by adapting their marketing mix accordingly and strategically target customer segments with a higher need for groundedness. Policy makers should consider groundedness as a driver of consumer well-being, a topic that becomes ever more acute in a time that is fast-paced, digital, and marked by changes that can make [consumers](#) feel adrift in the world.

**More information:** Isabel Eichinger et al, EXPRESS: Connecting to Place, People, and Past: How Products Can Make Us Feel Grounded and Why Marketers Should Care, *Journal of Marketing* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429211027469](#)

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