

# Retailers should referee customer conflict

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A new study by UBC's Sauder School of Business says retailers should consider admonishing queue jumpers and thoughtless store browsers to ease aggression between shoppers.

"Our study shows that [retailers](#) can play a key role in mitigating conflict by calling shoppers on bad shopping etiquette," says Lily Lin, a recent graduate of the Sauder PhD program about her study published in June's *Journal of Consumer Research*. "This is important because research shows retailers can get part of the blame for their badly behaved customers."

In an experiment, the researcher set up a shop display of neatly folded clothing to test if consumers would punish planted shoppers who left it in disarray and how reprimanded messy shoppers are treated.

The researchers had their "shoppers" knock over a large stack of paper after browsing the clothing. Those who left the clothing tidy and those who left it untidy but were reprimanded received the same amount of help picking up the paper from fellow customers. But the messy shoppers who received no reprimanding received almost no help at all.

"The study indicates that if someone acts badly in a shopping environment and their behaviour goes unchecked, they're more likely to receive ill treatment from fellow consumers," says Lin. "Managers need to think about how they can alleviate this friction."

This means ensuring there is enough room for customers to browse and

that lineups are orderly and obvious, says Lin. "But retail managers also need to consider empowering their staff to step in when the rules of shopping are broken."

The study, *Do the Crime, Always Do the Time? Insights into Consumer-to-Consumer Punishment Decisions*, co-authored by Sauder marketing Professor Darren Dahl and University of Alberta Professor Jennifer Argo, also found that consumers are less likely to punish rude [shoppers](#) who suffer from a physical ailment or who are perceived to be of a higher status.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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