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Power Play: Empowered Consumers Are More Likely to Switch Brands

As consumers, we form favorite brands and select services providers from a plethora of choices. According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), how powerful we feel in our daily lives may impact our likelihood of switching favorites, trying something new, or both.

“Our research examines the impact of a person’s perceived sense of power on their likelihood to switch products or brands,” write authors Yuwei Jiang, Lingjing Zhan (both Hong Kong Polytechnic University), and Derek D. Rucker (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University).

Over six experiments, the authors artificially heightened participants’ sense of power and then immediately measured how engaged they were in the idea of switching products or brands. When participants felt powerful, they were more likely to express an interest in switching to a new Internet service provider or changing the flavor of ice cream they wanted to eat. Importantly, the researchers only measured this type of behavior when participants were provided with an opportunity to take action.

Brands interested in both drawing more customers and preventing customer loss might consider measuring the level of empowerment of their consumer base and also looking for situational triggers that might make consumers feel more (versus less) powerful. As such, luxury brands with a rich and powerful customer base may benefit from diversifying their current product line.

Similarly, brands targeting new customers might seek to temporarily empower people in an effort to increase their propensity to switch. For example, by beginning sales calls with “We know you have the power to select your own phone service,” telephone companies may generate new business.

“Many companies have succeeded by empowering consumers. Old Spice Swagger deodorant went from being the brand’s worst performing scent to their best after the company advertised its empowering effect by demonstrating how Swagger helped Brian Urlacher transform from a small ‘little nerd person’ to a ‘colossal man mountain of awesomeness.’ Similarly, Hummer’s H3 ad campaign told consumers how their brand would give them the respect and power they deserved. Thus, a brand deciding to target other consumers to switch might follow these examples by focusing on the empowered consumer,” the authors conclude.

Yuwei Jiang, Lingjing Zhan, and Derek D. Rucker. “Power and Action Orientation: Power as a Catalyst for Consumer Switching Behavior.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2014. For more information, contact Yuwei Jiang (yuwei.jiang@polyu.edu.hk) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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