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The Geometry of Persuasion: How Do Seating Layouts Influence Consumers?

Consumers seated in circular arrangements feel a greater need to belong than those seated in angular layouts, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“The geometric shape of a seating arrangement can impact consumers by priming one of two fundamental needs: a need to belong or a need to be unique. Consumers will be most favorable toward persuasion material (advertising) that is consistent with the primed need,” write authors Rui (Juliet) Zhu (University of British Columbia) and Jennifer J. Argo (University of Alberta).

Seating arrangements matter in a wide variety of contexts. There are websites that provide tips on seating etiquette, guidelines on institutional seating policies, information on maximizing educational benefits through classroom chair layouts, and even software designed to create ideal seating arrangements for events such as weddings, political functions, and executive meetings.

In a series of studies, consumers were asked to sit in either a circular or an angular seating arrangement. They were then asked to evaluate various advertisements. Circular shaped seating arrangements led consumers to evaluate persuasive material more favorably when it conveyed belonging (family- or group-oriented, majority endorsement). In contrast, consumers seated in an angular arrangement responded more favorably to persuasive material related to uniqueness (self-oriented, minority endorsement).

It is important to understand how seating arrangements influence consumers in a wide range of settings such as restaurants, hotel lobbies, public transit, or waiting areas in airports and doctors’ offices.

“Circular shaped seating arrangements prime a need to belong while angular shaped seating arrangements prime a need to be unique. The shape of a seating arrangement, a subtle environmental cue, can activate fundamental human needs, and these needs in turn affect consumer responses to persuasive messages,” the authors conclude.

Rui (Juliet) Zhu and Jennifer J. Argo. “Exploring the Impact of Various Shaped Seating Arrangements on Persuasion.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2013. For more information, contact Juliet Zhu (Juliet.zhu@sauder.ubc.ca) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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