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When Does Rude Service at Luxury Stores Make Consumers Go Back for More?

For many people, the idea of purchasing a luxury product in a high-end boutique comes with the stigma of snobbery and rude salesclerks. But when they are rejected in real life, a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#) reveals that a person's desire for brand affiliation and willingness to purchase and display the item actually increases.



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“Our research highlights the fact that we are profoundly attuned to social threats and are driven to buy, wear, and use products from the very people who are disrespectful to us,” write authors Morgan K. Ward (Southern Methodist University) and Darren W. Dahl (University of British Columbia).

In a series of four studies conducted in retail environments, the authors examined the circumstances in which consumers increase their regard and willingness to pay after brand rejection. Results showed that people are more responsive to rejection from salespeople who represent luxury brands than from salespeople who represent less-aspirational brands that are both more affordable and accessible to most consumers. Study participants were also more willing to make a purchase when they related the brand to their ideal self-concept, the salesperson delivering the threat reflected the brand, and the threat had occurred recently.

In one study, participants experienced an actual rejection from a luxury-brand salesperson. The authors observed that the act of affirming a person's self-concept prior to rejection could help mitigate the impact of being rejected. In other words, it's people's uncertainty in their self-concept relative to a brand that leaves them vulnerable to the threat of rejection.

Offering insight into the disarming effects of rejection, luxury brands can use this information to improve the customer experience. “Our findings also shed some light on a potential explanation for why an increasing percentage of aspirational products are purchased online rather than in intimidating retail stores designed to display these products. While many consumers may purchase online for convenience, shopping online also may enable them to avoid threatening encounters with intimidating salespeople,” the authors conclude.

Morgan K. Ward and Darren W. Dahl. “Should the Devil Sell Prada? Retail Rejection Increases Aspiring Consumers' Desire for the Brand.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2014. For more information, contact Morgan Ward (mkward@smu.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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