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P90X? Why Consumers Choose High-Effort Products

Stuck in traffic? On hold for what seems like an eternity? Consumers often face situations that undermine their feelings of control. According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), when a person's sense of control is threatened, they are more likely to seek out products that require hard work.



“Intuitively, it would seem that feeling a loss of control might cause consumers to seek out a product that does NOT require them to exert very much effort. But we find that consumers actually look to products that require hard work to restore their belief that they can drive their own positive outcomes,” write authors Keisha M. Cutright (Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania) and Adriana Samper (Arizona State University).

Across five studies the authors observed how feelings of control influence selection of products that require either high or low effort. In one study, basketball players who had either just won or lost a game were asked their opinions about a new basketball shoe. Players saw a photo of a shoe with either the tagline “Work less, Jump higher” or “Work harder, Jump higher.” The players who had just lost the game were more likely to purchase the shoe with the “Work harder, Jump higher” tagline. Players who had just won did not favor one shoe over the other.

However, when progress feels too slow for someone already in a low-control situation, they are likely to switch their product preferences toward lowering effort—succumbing to things like “get rich quick” schemes and “lose weight without trying” campaigns.

“With the plethora of low-effort products on the market today, a brand’s intuition might be to provide consumers with the easiest, most high-tech routes to achieve their goals. However, our research reveals that the more consumers experience threats to their sense of control with respect to health or fitness goals, the more desirable a structured, high-effort program where consumers drive their own outcomes,” the authors conclude.

Keisha M. Cutright and Adriana Samper. “Doing It the Hard Way: How Low Control Drives Preferences for High-Effort Products and Services.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2014. For more information, contact Keisha Cutright (kcut@wharton.upenn.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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