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If Consumers Are Close to Their Fitness Goals, Do They Prefer a Larger or Limited Variety of Related Products?

Consumers who believe they are making progress toward their goals are motivated by limited product variety, unlike people who think they are further from their goals, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“Consumers often buy products to help them pursue their goals,” write authors Jordan Etkin and Rebecca K. Ratner (both University of Maryland). “For example, if someone has a goal to be physically fit, the person may buy a variety of protein supplements (bars, powder, shakes) to help achieve a fitness goal. We investigate how the *amount of variety* within a set of goal-related products impacts consumers’ motivation toward pursuing their goals.”

The authors conducted five experiments on a college campus. In each experiment, they varied whether participants evaluated low-variety or high-variety sets of products to pursue goals. For example, in one study, they asked participants to write down a fitness goal and then induced either a high or low sense of progress toward achieving that goal. They next showed the participants a set of six protein bars, differing in flavor only (low variety) or in form (a protein bar, protein shake, etc.; the high-variety set). Finally, they measured participants’ motivation to achieve their fitness goals.

“We found that when goal progress was low, people reported being more motivated to achieve their fitness goal when presented with a high-variety set of six different types of protein supplements rather than the low-variety set of six different flavors of protein bars,” the authors write. The pattern reversed when goal progress was high: Those participants reported that they were more motivated to achieve their goals when they were presented with less variety.

Stores may want to note what kind of customers they cater to when they develop marketing plans, the authors explain; they may want to highlight or minimize the perceived variety among product offerings. “For example, stores like GNC that cater primarily to consumers who have already invested time and energy in being fit may wish to de-emphasize the variety of their product offerings,” the authors write. “Alternatively stores like Walmart that might cater to consumers who have made less progress toward a goal of being physically fit may wish to highlight the variety among their product offerings.”

Jordan Etkin and Rebecca K. Ratner. “The Dynamic Impact of Variety among Means on Motivation.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2012 (published online June 20, 2011). For more information, contact Jordan Etkin

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