High Hopes and Letdowns: the Influence of Self-Esteem on Expectations and Product Failure

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This research explores how consumers with different levels of self-esteem respond to inferior products and their eventual failure. We find that low self-esteem consumers have higher expectations of lower quality products than do high self-esteem consumers (study 1). These high expectations influence subsequent evaluations of product performance, leading low self-esteem consumers to feel more let down when a lower quality product performs poorly than do high self-esteem consumers (study 2). These findings suggest that consumers may differ dramatically in their responses to product failure and that management of expectations is particularly important when dealing with various levels of self-esteem.

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Her “carpe-diem” Rebound acknowledges a new perspective on enjoying life that she and her entire family have adopted. She often consciously reinforces her hedonic consumption, for instance by going on enjoyable outings, allowing herself impulsive purchases of expensive clothes. She visits relatively expensive bars or restaurants from time to time and also bought a new car that satisfies aesthetic criteria more than utilitarian needs.

As the world continues its accelerated innovative path, consumers are exposed more and more to losses of known paths. The speed of change cannot immediately be comprehended by consumers who generally live at a slower speed. This requires “mundane” consumption experiences to compensate for the profound loss of familiarity.

References

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Self-esteem, defined as how worthwhile one perceives him or herself to be, plays an important role in one’s self-concept (Swann et al. 2007). Marketing researchers have explored self-esteem in the context of consumer behavior, showing that it can affect overconsumption (Mandel and Smeesters 2008), perceptions of models (Smeesters and Mandel 2006), brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2003), and materialism (Chaplin and Roedder-John 2007).

In our research, we explore how product expectations differ by self-esteem. Specifically, we explore the impact of self-esteem on a consumer’s expectations of product performance, particularly given other consumers’ and professionals’ ratings of the product. Our central proposition is that high and low self-esteem consumers will react differently to recommendation information because they differ in their ability to adjust their expectations. Because people with high self-esteem (HSE) are more effective at adjusting their expectations, when they have information (e.g., ratings by other consumers and/or by product experts) indicating lower quality, they adjust their expectations accordingly. However, low self-esteem (LSE) consumers are not as good at making such adjustments. As such, these consumers end up with high hopes for a low quality product. Hence we predict: