

Not All Bad Apples Spoil the Bunch: Group Members Labeled “First” Appear Diagnostic of the Group

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Cite as:

Steinmetz Janina, Toure-Tillery Maferima, Fishbach Ayelet (2019), Not All Bad Apples Spoil the Bunch: Group Members Labeled “First” Appear Diagnostic of the Group. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 48th, (6275)

Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.



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Abstract

Consumers often make judgments about a group (e.g., employees of a company; products from a brand) based on information about a single group member (one employee or product). We found in three studies (N = 599) that consumers expect the performance or quality of an ordered group to match that of the group member in the first position more closely than that of group members in other positions (e.g., middle or last). We show this pattern of judgment for groups of people, animals, or objects, and whether the focal member performs poorly or well. We term this effect the “first-member heuristic,” and demonstrate that it occurs because the first (vs. middle or last) member is seen as more diagnostic of the group—that is, more informative for drawing inferences about the group. Furthermore, we show that the first-member heuristic has downstream behavioral consequences for consumers’ willingness to join the group.

Keywords: *diagnosticity; group perception; sequence effects*

Track: Consumer Behaviour