# Advertising with a service's maximum results: the impact of self-image and envy on the purchase intention and perceived value

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Paper from the 50th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, May 25-28, 2021

# Advertising with a service's maximum results: the impact of self-image and envy on the purchase intention and perceived value

**Abstract**

Elements of the socio-cultural environment (reference groups) and the psychological field (envy) in the decision-making process of consumer behavior are contemplated in this article, which proposed to intertwine these two concepts and understand how an advertising focused on the maximum or perfect results of a service can motivate or reject its purchase and increasing (or no) the willing of paying more for it, this being the contribution to both the literature and the management of this article. 49 complete questionnaires were collected and the data were treated via Exploratory Factorial Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling, Cluster Analysis and Analysis of Variance, which validated its 3 hypotheses: 1) the individual's level of self-image in the face of state-of-the-art communication the results of a product or service determines the purchase intention; 2) a self-image closer (distant) to the "state of the art" communicated arouses more (less) envy; 3) the greater the envy, the greater the perceived value of state-of-the-art communication and the individual's willingness to pay more.

**Keywords**: *Advertising; Reference Groups; Envy*

**Track:** *Advertising & Marketing Communications*

## 1. Introduction

It can be a body within the aesthetic standards defined as the state-of-the-art of the results of physical activity. Or, also, the silkier skin achieved by the aesthetic procedures of a clinic or the more aligned teeth from orthodontic techniques. Eventually, it may even be that layout of a living room produced by an interior design studio that resembles Hollywood artists' mansions. Within the strategies adopted by service providers to communicate the possible results in their deliveries, there are those who choose to present, in their advertising material, the state-of-the-art arising from their services, searching to arouse the desire also to obtain such results (envy, perhaps?), the intention to buy and, maybe, demonstrate to them potential consumer that there are more value and more reasons to invest more and have the same results.

This article seeks to intertwine self-image and envy to understand how the state-of-the-art of the results presented in a communication piece, a business strategy showing the maximum effect in the use of a service, can impact the purchase intention and perceived value. Thus, this study contemplates elements of the socio-cultural environment (reference groups) and the psychological field (envy) in the decision-making process of consumer behavior (Colaferro & Crescitelli, 2014).

The implications of self-image and belonging in the sphere of consumption are many (Engel et al., 2000; Hyman, 1942). Among them, the desire to belong to a specific group is a characteristic of this society, with its symbolism of differentiation, status, belonging, and individual gratification (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Both in affectivity in general and in consumption in particular, it is possible to find, in centrality, the desire to be part, be accepted, and have a place in relationships with others. Within consumption, be it of products or services, the individual seeks this feeling of him with himself, deserving, and of him with the other, of welcoming (Munaier & Serralvo, 2019).

Personal values, goals, expectations, prior knowledge, and experiences in the past use of the consumption's object are in the wake of the evaluative elements with which the individual chooses what to consume. The choice items are perspectives framed in terms of gains and losses (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). But such decisions do not necessarily have rationality as a central element. Since Thurstone (1931) defined attitude as affection for or against a psychological object, we have seen theorists using, initially, the term affection in the sense that we use the term attitude, and now the term affection for general moods (happiness, sadness) and specific emotions (fear, anger, envy) (Ajzen, 2001).

Emotions such as envy, self-image and the desire to belong, or the desire not to be confused as belonging to a particular community based on their consumption can reduce the degree of rationality in consumer decision making (Engel et al., 2000; Salerno et al., 2019; Solomon, 2008; Van de Ven et al., 2011). Although ancestrally presented as a feeling to be avoided, as it is classified as a capital sin by religions, envy has been the focus of research in the consumption's act. Already studied in the consumption of goods, envy has different impacts on the consumer decision-making process according to its intensity and how it is expressed (Salerno et al., 2019; Van de Ven et al., 2011). However, it remains to assess whether these impacts are also present in the consumption of services. Whether they are different, the closer or more distant, the consumer sees himself concerning the envied group.

At first, this article discusses the theoretical foundation of the dissociation group and envy in the context of consumption and presents the hypotheses and theoretical model to be tested. In the sequence, the results treated and analyzed on an applied scale are presented, where it was possible to maintain that the individual's level of self-image in the face of state-of-the-art communication the results of a product or service determines the purchase intention; a self-image closer to the state-of-the-art arouses more envy than the more distant self-image; and the greater the envy, the greater the perceived value of state-of-the-art communication and the individual's willingness to pay more. Conclusions, limitations, recommendations for further research are the following.

## 2. Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Dissociation Group

The dissociation group is characterized by the group to which the individual is motivated to avoid the association, rejecting him (Engel et al., 2000). In consumer behavior, individuals seek to distance themselves from objects that seem unpleasant or threatening to them as a strategy for self-esteem, in order to protect self-concept, striving to reach internalized standards - to protect the private "self", avoiding negative evaluations of significant others - to protect the strategic public "self", and avoiding the goals of important dissociation groups - to protect the collective "self" (Maraldi, 2014; Munaier, 2019).

When the communication strategies of a service aimed at aesthetic benefits, such as physical activity, nutrition and beauty services, use images and / or descriptions that present the state-of-the-art of the results proposed from their consumption, what is the response of the potential consumer who sees himself distant from the proposed standard - therefore, not

belonging and represented by the group of the communicated model? Hence the first hypothesis that guides this study:

> $H_1$. When potential consumers see themselves more (less) identified with the advertising piece, their impetus for consumption is higher (lower).

*2.2 Envy*

Envy is the result of upward comparisons with superior people in a domain that is important to the individual, and the more similar they are to the other person, the more intense the envy will be if that person is better off (Salerno et al., 2019; Van de Ven et al., 2011). Although, envy is a little praiseworthy feeling, even for religious precepts and even hostile, research credits the act of acting in consumption, with greater clarity on the motivation arising from benign envy, but still with no consensus on the behavior of consumers affected by malicious envy (Salerno et al., 2019; Van de Ven et al., 2011).

Benign envy occurs when people believe that the envied individual deserves the result achieved. Simultaneously, the malignant one comes from a feeling on the part of the envious that the envied does not deserve his advantage. Previous research has shown that benign envy motivates a person to address the discrepancy between themselves through self-improvement, that is, to choose the choices made by the individual who is the object of their envy so that they also achieve the desired results (Salerno et al., 2019). Moreover, even pay more for the product that has a comparison superior to that of the envied (Van de Ven et al., 2011). However, malignant envy presents other responses in the behavior of the envious. Salerno et al. (2019) demonstrate that malignant envy increases the accessibility of the belief that effort does not determine whether people are rewarded, motivates the envious to pursue goals focused on results, and uses products that emphasize improvement regardless of action. Van de Ven et al. (2011) support that malignant envy does not increase the willingness to pay for the product that caused the envy; however, it increases the desire to pay for a related but different product.

Therefore, the consulted literature supports the impact of envy on the consumption of products, however, not on services. It remains to be seen, also in services, whether envy is an incentive for the individual to pay more for a delivery committed to the state-of-the-art of the results. Finally, if the degree of envy will change the closer or more distant, the consumer sees the results communicated there.

> $H_{2a}$. When the potential consumers see themselves close (distant) to the benefits proposed by the advertising, they feel more (less) envy with the result of state-of-the-art materialized in the advertising piece.

H$_{2b}$. The greater the feeling of envy of the potential consumers, the greater the willingness to pay more to obtain the state-of-the-art result materialized in the advertising piece.

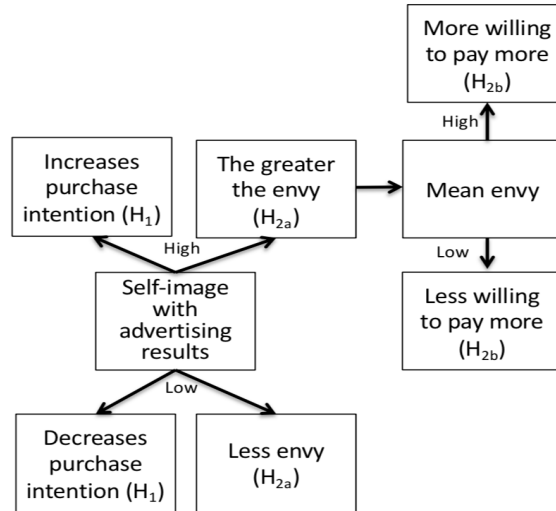Figure 1 shows the theoretical model of this article.



*Figure 1. Theoretical model. Source: the authors.*

## 3. Method

The research carried out was of a quantitative nature (Creswell, 2007). The data treatment methods were Exploratory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling, and One-way ANOVA. Outlier tests via Mahalanobis distance, and tests of normality and homogeneity of the data were performed. The statistical software SPSS, version 22, and Smart PLS, version 2.0, were used.

*3.1 Scales*

Previously validated scales were used, which underwent expert reviews and validation in two rounds of pilot collections, testing them for reliability and validity, making it possible to propose 3 hypotheses. A 6-point Likert scale was used, with 1 "totally disagree" and 6 "totally agree" or other forms of agreement always in the same direction, where 1 represented the lowest score and 6, the highest. The self-image scale (Grewal et al., 2004) obtained Cronbach's $\alpha$ = 0.86, AVE = 0.7 and Composite Reliability (CR) = 0.9. Purchase intention (Chandran & Morwitz, 2005) with $\alpha$ = 0.94, AVE = 0.9 and CR = 0.96. Envy (Richins, 2004) with $\alpha$ = 0.61, AVE = 0.5 and CR = 0.7. Value (Lichtenstein et al., 1993) with $\alpha$ = 0.77, AVE = 0.6 and CR = 0.85. All fulfilled the scale's reliability assumptions (Hair et al., 2009).

*3.2 Data Collection*

Respondents were taken, via a link published on the authors' social media, to a website containing information about the fictional gym. "XptoFit is a gym that combines the most modern infrastructure and technologies with a service focused on the excellence of the result, for 15 years offering the best services in physical activity. We have a unit near you!". A situational prime sought to activate their self-image. Each individual accessed a prime with a piece of communication containing the state-of-the-art of the result of the practice of physical activity: two men and two women, one man and one woman of the Caucasian race and one man and woman of Afro-American descent, and the words: "Maximum results. The best of your body. Near you". The responses collection took place online through access via a link to a questionnaire hosted on the Google Docs platform (Hair et al., 2018). The questions were randomized within the collection platform.

*3.3 Sample Selection*

Respondents were selected who answered two filter questions: 1) do you work or have you worked in a gym? The respondent who marked "yes" in the questionnaire did not proceed to the next session, being excluded due to either expertise or contagion effect; 2) respondents should be 18 years of age or older. The sampling method is non-probabilistic due to the adherence of respondents. 50 complete questionnaires were collected, of which one was removed once identified as an outlier. Of the remaining, 67.3% were male, and 93.9% of respondents had already had some physical activity experience in the gym. As the collection took place during the quarantine resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it was asked whether the respondent was consuming physical activity in a gym until the beginning of the forced social distance. 61.2% stated that yes, they were attending a gym until the beginning of quarantine. In total, respondents were between 25 and 59 years old, 51% between 25 and 39 years old. Finally, 71.4% of respondents received 5 Brazilian minimum wages or more.

## 4. RESULTS

In the exploratory factor analysis, the construct self-image returned the 4 variables with extraction greater than 0.5, with the $KMO_{SELF} = 0.76$ and 70.4% of all the variance explained in a single main component. purchase intention returned its 3 variables with extraction greater than 0.5, with the $KMO_{PURCHASE} = 0.75$ and 89.1% of all the variance explained in a single main component. Envy returned its 3 variables with extraction greater than 0.4, with the $KMO_{ENVY} = 0.6$ and 56.8% of all variance explained in a single main component. And value returned its

4 variables with extraction greater than 0.5, with the $KMO_{VALUE} = 0.73$ and 59.7% of all the variance explained in a single main component.

| Structural path (hypotheses) | Hypothesis | β | T-Stats | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SELF-IMAGE -> PURCHASE | $H_1$ | 0,4 | 2,51 | <.001 |
| SELF-IMAGE -> ENVY | $H_{2a}$ | 0,36 | 4,54 | <.001 |
| ENVY -> VALUE | $H_{2b}$ | 0,41 | 6,42 | <.001 |

**Table 1.** Quality of the links proposed in the article and hypotheses testing

The Structural Equation Modeling technique was used to analyze the betas and the T-statistics corresponding to each relationship formulated in the hypotheses. The results are observed in Table 1 and statistically support the significance of the proposed connections. In other words: the greater the identity arising from the state-of-the-art communication of the result offered by a service, the greater the purchase intention and the greater the envy. The greater the envy, the greater the individual's willingness to pay more for the service in focus.

To observe the individuals' behavior with greater (less) identification with advertising and their intention to buy and envy, as well as the impact of envy on the desire to pay more for the advertised product, two procedures were performed: 1) analysis of conglomerates in self-image and envy constructs, via K-means cluster, separating them into 2 groups each. 2) tests of variance (One-Way ANOVA) to analyze whether the groups had statistical differences between them when comparing their averages of purchase intention, envy and the desire to pay more. Normality tests via Shapiro-Wilk and Levene were performed as premises for the technique used. As the sample is over 30 participants, there is no need for the two conditions - normality and homogeneity - to be presented, one of them being sufficient (Hair et al., 2009). The criteria were met. Table 2 shows the results of the performed clustering.

| Construct | Low | High |
|---|---|---|
| Self-image | 6 (M=1.57) | 43 (M=4.57) |
| Envy | 23 (M=1.94) | 26 (M=3.4) |

**Table 2**. K-means clusters with Self-image and Envy constructs

The two groups of the self-image construct were used to analyze the behavior of consumption impetus in a One-way ANOVA. With $F_{(1, 47)} = 9.04$; $p = 0.00$, it is possible to maintain that the purchase intention changes according to the individual's self-image. Figure 2 illustrates the difference in purchase intention according to the self-image, supporting hypothesis 1. Likewise, self-image groups were used to analyze their averages regarding the envy construct. A One-way ANOVA returned with $F_{(1, 47)} = 6.71$; $p = 0.01$, sustaining that people with greater identification with advertising have a higher average of envy than people less identified. Figure 3 graphically translates this difference and supports hypothesis 2.
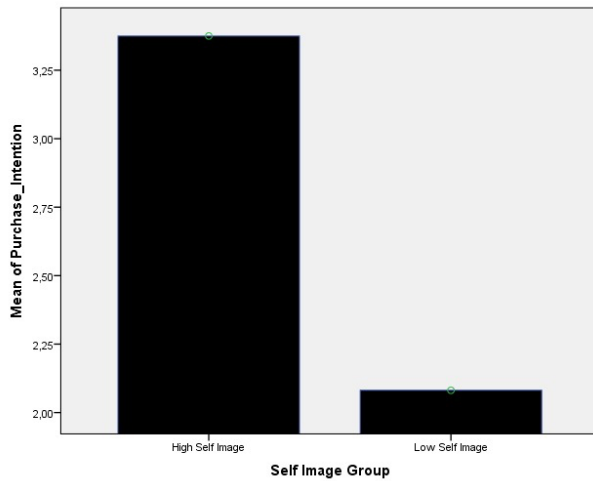
*Figure 2*. ANOVA Self-Image X Mean of Purchase intention
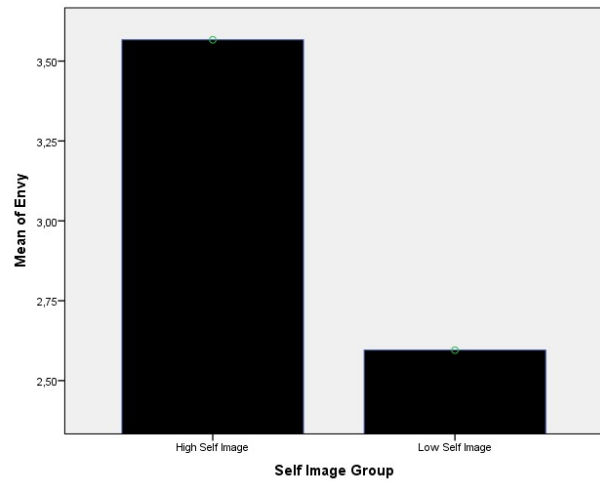


*Figure 3*. ANOVA Self-Image X Mean of Envy

Finally, the two groups of the envy construct were used to analyze, via One-way ANOVA, the desire to pay more for the service proposed in the advertisement. The $F_{(1, 47)} = 10.63$; $p = 0.00$ and Figure 4 support hypothesis 3, demonstrating that the group that shows greater envy also shows a greater propensity to pay more for the service in focus.
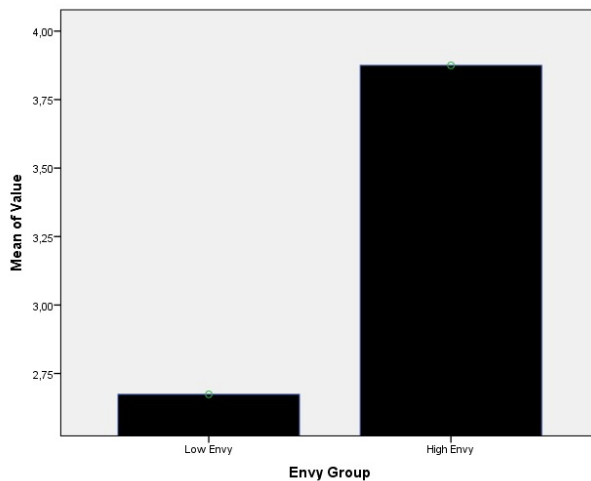


*Figure 4*. ANOVA Envy X Mean of Value

## 5. Conclusions, Suggestions and Limitations

This study proposed an intertwining, from the point of view of the consumer decision process, between self-image, purchase intention, envy, and willingness to pay more in the face of value perception. The hypotheses proposed in this regard were supported statistically.

Self-image is predominant for consumption. After all, in addition to your interpretation of how that product or service can help you achieve your goals, there is still the impact of your choice on the image that your reference groups will have of it (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Munaier, 2019; Pollis, 1968; Solomon, 2008). Choosing a communication strategy where the state-of-the-art of the results proposed by his service is evidenced, the manager must be aware that only the self-identified portion with those results, who feel that they belong to that group of people

capable of reaching the maximum results, it will positively demonstrate the purchase intention. Given the number of respondents who identified themselves with the state-of-the-art in this article (approximately 10%), it seems to be a better strategy to develop campaigns that encourage those who do not feel close to the results with another approach.

Self-image is also determinant for the feeling of envy at a service, which is what the results of the present manuscript point out. The closer the individual feels to the state-of-the-art results presented in the communication, the greater their feeling of envy. Apparently, the individual who does not identify with the results presented there does not want them. And in not wanting them, the consumer does not envy those who have reached them.

Therefore, much attention should be paid to the communication strategies of companies. The objective of showing the maximum results of a service seems to sharpen the desire or envy only in those who, in a certain way, already feel close to the results. This study demonstrates that this type of communication does not arouse the greed or envy of those who feel distant from the results presented. If the intention is to stimulate the non-self-identified individual's desire with the maximum results proposed by the service, management will have to seek other actions. Finally, envy proves to be an ally in strategies to maximize the perception of value and actions to increase a service's price. The more envy, the more willing to pay more.

In the envy construct, the EN1 variable returned with an external load less than 0.7, which is one of this article's limitations. It was decided to keep it since the construct presented all the solid reliability indicators. A recommendation for studies based on this is to use more variables to extract the variable in question eventually. The authors of this article applied the survey to the fitness market. The possibilities of replicating this same study in other services, such as aesthetics clinics, nutrition and orthodontic practices, and even with clients of interior design studios and their state-of-the-art projects.

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