

Set Composition Induces Overbuying

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Abstract

Sets of items are ubiquitous in the marketplace. In this research, we identify a set equalization tendency, a preference for owning equally over unequally distributed sets of items, even if the latter more accurately reflect one's differential preferences and consumption rates for the individual set members than the former. Specifically, we demonstrate that inequality in the distribution of a set of possessions increases consumers' desire to even it out by purchasing more of the less numerous items. Such effect occurs because in sets distributed unequally, the most numerous items become a new reference point, triggering a perception of 'not having enough' (and therefore needing more) of all the items owned in lower quantities, ultimately resulting in greater acquisitions. This heuristic can lead consumers towards redundant, suboptimal acquisitions.

Subject Areas: *Cognition; Consumer Behaviour; Decision-Making*

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