

The Less-Than-Average Effect in Purchasing: When and Why Consumers Think They Buy Products Less Frequently Than Other Consumers

Begum Celiktutan

Erasmus University

Robert Smith

Tilburg University

Niels van de Ven

Tilburg University

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Abstract:

Eight studies document that consumers typically think they buy products less frequently than others. Experiments and actual purchase data reveal that this bias occurs because of nonmotivated reasons. Consumers think of a relatively heavy buyer of the products and egocentrically focus on how infrequently they buy specific products themselves without sufficiently considering that other consumers also buy these products infrequently. Consequently, they overestimate how frequently an average other consumer buys a product, and in turn underestimate their own relative purchase frequency. Furthermore, we find that the less-than-average effect is stronger for infrequently bought products, for individual products or narrow product categories, and for products that are perceived more negatively by consumers. Importantly, this less-than-average effect has consequences for loyalty program participation and sustainable consumer behavior.

Keywords: comparative evaluation biases, loyalty programs, sustainable consumer behavior

Track: Consumer behavior