
The brand-name ego boost

By Kevin Lewis

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Pay attention, marketers. If any study validates what you do, this one does. Researchers found that using a generic (vs. brand name) product undermines self-esteem. In one experiment, university students were asked to type out a resume, ostensibly for a recruiting event. Students used an Apple iMac to type their resumes and were told that the keyboard and mouse were new. Some students, though, were told that the keyboard and mouse were generic parts — to save money. The students who used the generic keyboard reported expecting a lower salary. A similar effect was found in an experiment on single men. The men were presented with a set of dating profiles for women, one of whom the men could choose to call. The researchers then provided the woman's phone number and an Apple iPhone to make an introductory call. The phone had a dead battery; the researchers then offered either a generic or brand-name replacement battery. Men who received the generic battery expected women to find them less attractive than men who received the brand-name battery.

Chao, Y.-H. & Chiou, W.-B., "Genuineness Matters: Using Cheaper, Generic Products Induces Detrimental Self-Evaluations," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (forthcoming).

Lower stress through writing

When it comes to boosting student achievement, the hot debate these days seems to revolve around the book "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" by Amy Chua. Yet, while she prefers ultra-strict parenting, there are less overbearing strategies that get results, too. Researchers at the University of Chicago have shown that expressive writing before a test can boost scores. College students were given a math test in both low-pressure and high-pressure situations. Before taking the high-pressure test, some of the students were asked to write for 10 minutes expressing their feelings about the test. The students who wrote about their feelings did better on the high-pressure test than those who did not. The researchers also conducted an experiment with ninth-grade students' first final exam of their high-school careers. Before the exam, some students were asked to write for 10 minutes expressing their feelings about the exam, while the other students were asked to write for 10 minutes speculating on a topic that would not be covered on the exam. For low-anxiety students, it didn't matter what they wrote about, but high-anxiety students averaged a B+ if they wrote about their feelings, compared to a B- otherwise.

Ramirez, G. & Beilock, S., "Writing About Testing Worries Boosts Exam Performance in the Classroom," *Science* (January 14, 2011).

Dow down, bling up!

Based on news reports since the start of the Great Recession, one couldn't be blamed for thinking that the rich were less conspicuous in their consumption, if only out of respect for the rest of us. But, according to researchers at USC and UCLA, that may be a dream that didn't come true. The researchers compared handbags that were sold by Louis Vuitton and Gucci

in January 2008 with the handbags they sold in May 2009. Both brands gutted their product lines during that period but, instead of opting for low-key handbags, they increased the brand prominence (and prices) of their newly introduced handbags. The researchers also examined advertisements in *Vogue* magazine during 2008 and 2009 and found that none of the seven major luxury brands toned down their product lines or advertising.

Nunes, J. et al., "Conspicuous Consumption in a Recession: Toning It Down or Turning It Up?" *Journal of*

Consumer Psychology (forthcoming).

Higher ground

Everyone assumes that heaven is high above the ground somewhere, while hell is down below. But why can't heaven be below us, and hell high above? According to a new study, our brains seem to automatically link elevation with goodwill. In one experiment in a mall in mid-December 2009, researchers set up Salvation Army kettles in three locations: the top of an escalator, the bottom of an escalator, and away from any escalators. Shoppers contributed more often at the top of the escalator and least often at the bottom of the escalator. Likewise, in two experiments in an auditorium, people randomly assigned to sit on stage were more helpful and less malicious toward another person than people assigned to sit at floor level and especially more than people assigned to sit in the orchestra pit. People were also more cooperative after watching a video clip looking out the window of an airplane, compared with looking out the window of a car.

Sanna, L. et al., "Rising Up to Higher Virtues: Experiencing Elevated Physical Height Uplifts Prosocial Actions," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (forthcoming).

Explaining Willow and Trig

Let's call it the Sarah Palin effect, in honor of Track, Bristol, Willow, Piper, and Trig. A new analysis suggests that parents living on the frontier tend to give their kids unusual names. Babies were more likely to be given a popular name in New England than in the Mountain West or Pacific Northwest. This pattern also held up when using year of statehood as a proxy for frontier status, with newer states having more unusually named babies. The same pattern was found in Canada, where babies were given more unusual names in western provinces. And, relative to Europe, popular names were less likely to be used in newer countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States to which Europeans migrated. These differences seem to be explained by the greater individualistic culture of the frontier.

Varnum, M. & Kitayama, S., "What's in a Name? Popular Names Are Less Common on Frontiers," *Psychological Science* (forthcoming).

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