

UNDERSTANDING UNIQUE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: INSIGHTS FROM SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Due to the growing wealth in increasingly urbanized societies more and more consumers have the financial capability and sense the social need to individualize their lifestyle, behavior, and possessions. Therefore, companies strive to offer customized products, use exclusive distribution channels and promise a unique brand image. While unique consumer behavior has been addressed by social-psychological research since the 1970s the findings have not been sufficiently integrated into business and marketing approaches so far. This paper surveys relevant theories on the phenomenon of unique behavior. Conformity research provides evidence that unique behavior can have both, a private and public function. Following social identity theory, uniqueness in social groups also contributes to establish an individual identity. Notably, it is expected that people, who focus on extending self-esteem, drive to be unique in social and private life (self-esteem hypotheses). Finally, uniqueness theory and optimal distinctiveness theory attribute unique behavior to an individual's need for uniqueness which can be measured and used in consumer research. To sum it up, understanding unique consumer behavior is a vital topic for business and marketing research.

Keywords: *Unique Consumer Behavior, (Consumer's) Need for Uniqueness, Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, Conformity Research, Social Identity Theory, Self-Categorization Theory, Self-Esteem Hypotheses*