

Social Exclusion and Switching Behaviour of Green Products: The Mediating role of Control Demand

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Abstract. This study examined the impact of social exclusion and green product conversion behaviour. One study has conducted the result showed that consumers who experienced social exclusion showed more switching behaviour of green product than those who not feel excluded. This effect is mediated by the control demand, while the individual's self-construction type plays a moderate role.

1 Introduction

In the era of modern marketing, the differences between products of the same type are gradually narrowing. The cost of consumers in the process of product switching is gradually reduced and the days of complete customer loyalty are over, more and more consumers change their buying norms by buying different products or brands.

Consumer switching refers to the tendency of consumers to stop using or purchasing a certain brand of products or services that are being used, and instead using another brand of products or services. Because of the narrowing of differences between products, consumers' product choices are not only to meet the needs of functional attributes, but also to meet the corresponding social and psychological needs, which are often difficult to explain with traditional consumer demand theory.

Social exclusion refers to the phenomenon and process in which an individual is rejected by a certain social group or others, and the relationship needs and efficiency are impaired. With the continuous development of network, social exclusion has gradually become a common social phenomenon, which has a great impact on people's basic needs and self-perception.

This study focuses on the impairment of efficacy requirements caused by social exclusion. The reduced sense of control caused by social exclusion leads to compensatory secondary control, and the switching behavior helps to improve the individual's sense of control because thinking the result is caused by one's own behavior is an important source of control. Therefore, this study pays attention to the characteristics of consumer brand switching behavior and deeply explores its internal mechanism.

2 Theoretical Model and Research Hypothesis

2.1 Social exclusion, brand switching behavior and control demand

Social exclusion refers to the phenomenon that individuals are rejected by others or groups[1] and has multiple manifestations such as rejection, isolation, disregard, etc. The demand-threat model suggests that social exclusion threatens the basic needs of humans in four aspects, including the sense of belonging, sense of control, self-esteem and presence. Social exclusion reduces the individual's performance perception by reducing the individual's perception of the external environment and the maintenance of self-concept. As an increasingly common social phenomenon, social exclusion will cause changes in the individual's internal basic needs, thus affecting individual cognition and behaviour.

Perceived control refers to the degree to which an individual perceives that he or she can predict, interpret, influence, and change the external environment. It is one of the basic needs of human beings and the driving force of behaviour. An individual's sense of control is normally operationalized in two dimensions: personal mastery and perceived constraints. Personal ability refers to the extent to which people feels that they can influence and control the external environment. Individuals experiencing social exclusion are rejected or neglected, thus feeling that their influence on the surrounding environment is weakened, thereby reducing their personal mastery. Perceived constraints refer to the degree to which an individual perceives harm or negative impact on oneself. Because social exclusion limits the individual's development, it perceives more constraints and limitations[2].

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Compensatory control theory believes that a sense of control can give individuals more dynamism and competence, and can help individuals to be less psychologically uncomfortable[3]. Because social exclusion causes damage to the sense of control, to resist this psychological discomfort, individuals will hope to restore the sense of control through some behaviours and to meet this control demand; individuals try to change the environment or change themselves to adapt to the ground to meet their needs.

Brand Switching is the tendency of consumers to buy brands that are different from the brands they have previously purchased. Researches on consumer switching behaviour mainly focus on how to increase the expected utility of new brands through various marketing methods and reduce the expected utility of the original brand to promote brand switching.

Drolet[4] proposes a utility-driven theory that is independent of the expected utility theory. Consumers change existing choices only to show their flexibility in decision-making. This theory pays more attention to the internal factors of consumers' brand transformation. Individuals change their psychological needs due to external stimuli, thereby driving individuals to produce specific switching behaviours.

Stating these hypotheses formally:

H1: Social exclusion has a positive relation with consumer switching behaviour.

H2: consumers' sense of control mediates the effect of social exclusion on consumers' switching behaviour

2.2 Self-construal

Self-constructed is the way in which individuals self-recognize. Individuals consider themselves to be related to each other or independent to each other. At present, the self-constructed classification method is mainly divided into independent self-constructed and interdependent self-constructed. The self-categorization theory states that individuals tend to choose the same behavioral and behavioral characteristics as their own perceived identity to cope with the external environment and external stimuli[5]. Independent self-constructed individuals are more likely to focus on their own interests and personal abilities, while interdependent self-constructing individuals pay more attention to group interests and others' perceptions. Compared with interdependent self-constructed individuals, independent self-constructed individuals tend to be self-centered and more sensitive to the sense of control. After experiencing social exclusion, they are more likely to feel the sense the damage of existence and control. To alleviate the impact of the sense of control, such groups may have more brand switching behaviors. Formally, this leads to our hypothesis:

H3: Individual's self-construction moderates the relation between social exclusion and consumer switching behavior: the positive relation is stronger when individual is independent self-constructed.

H4: Individual's self-construction moderates the relation between social exclusion and control demand.

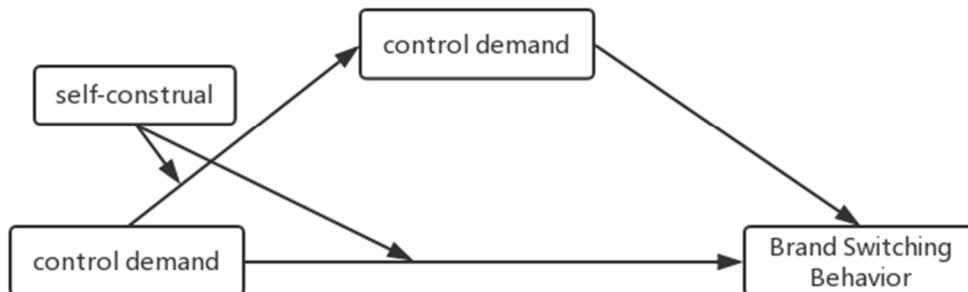


Figure 1 Theoretical model of this paper

3 Study

3.1 Method

Social exclusion: By random assignment, the task recall an event that they feel excluded or included. The guidance of the social exclusion group is: "Please recall the experience you have been rejected by others in this experience, and write down this experience in 100 words."

The guidance of the social acceptance group is: "Please recall the experience you have been accepted by others in the past, and write down this experience in 100 words."

After subjects completed the recall task, the subjects were tested for manipulation.

Control demand: The sense of control is measured using the control sensibility meter compiled by Lachman and Weaver (1998).

Switching behavior: Participants were asked to imagine the following: "Because the old environmentally friendly air condition is old, you need to buy a new one."

Now you want to choose from two brands which are similar with price and quality, you should decide whether “continuing to purchase the previous brand A” or “switching to brand B”. Next, they report their brand switching intent options by indicating their preference for two brands (1 = I want to stick to the A brand, 7 = I want to convert the brand B).

Self-construction: using the Chinese version of the Self-Building Scale (CSC) compiled by Wang Yuhao et al. (2008).

3.2 Result

Manipulation Check: The results of the manipulation test showed that after the different recalls, the rejection group had a significantly higher rejection than the acceptance group ($M_{\text{exclusion}}=4.63 > M_{\text{inclusion}}=1.62$, $p < 0.05$), thus social exclusion manipulation is effective.

In this study, self-construction was measured by using a self-construction scale. The results of the independent sample T test for each dimension indicate that the differences between the different groups are significant ($p < 0.001$).

Switching Behavior: The ANOVA analysis of the consumer brand switching behavior showed that the main effect of social exclusion was significant ($p < 0.001$). Compared with the inclusion group, the exclusion group had a higher willingness to convert the brand ($M_{\text{exclusion}}=4.08 > M_{\text{inclusion}}=3.71$, $p < 0.05$). Besides, the analysis also shows of interaction between control demand and social exclusion ($p < 0.001$). Compared with the acceptance group, the control needs of the exclusion group were higher ($M_{\text{exclusion}}=4.28 > M_{\text{inclusion}}=3.95$, $p < 0.01$).

Moderate mediation: In this study, we use Bootstrap procedures to test the mediating effects mediation. The results indicated a significant indirect effect of social exclusion on switching behavior via control demand (LLCI=0.2575, ULCI=0.0321).

Further contrasts indicated that when consumers were independent self-constructed types, the willingness of them in the social exclusion group was significantly greater than that of the social inclusion group ($F=10.415$, $p < 0.01$). When consumers were interdependent self-construction type, the effect of social exclusion on switching behavior was not significant ($F=0.206$, $p > 0.05$). In addition, the PRODCLIN results indicated that the 95% confidence interval of the mediating effect was [0.0099, 0.3399], which excluded zero.

4 Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that social exclusion positively affects consumers' switching behavior of green products by changing the individual's control needs. Specifically, when individuals suffer from social exclusion, their compensatory control demand causes the individual to produce switching behavior. Compared with the interdependent consumers, independent consumers are more concerned with themselves and feel

more control is impaired, resulting in more switching behavior to meet their control needs.

4.1 Theoretical Implication

This research enriches the research field of consumer switching behavior. The marketing literature on consumer switching behavior focuses on factors that may influence the functional trade-off between new and old brands. Unlike these external influences, this paper focuses on the internal influence factors of consumer switching behavior. This research shows that for socially excluded consumers, they may generate more switching behaviors of green products, thereby further improving and developing research on consumer conversion behavior.

4.2 Managerial Implication

With the advancement of science and technology, the sense of alienation between people has gradually increased, social exclusion has become a common phenomenon, such as divorce, unemployment, etc. Studies have shown that social exclusion may be related individuals' income. People with low income levels and low education backgrounds tend to experience more exclusion, so marketers can consider providing more choices for these consumers.

Besides, marketing activities should pay attention to the self-construction. Nowadays, we are in a Big Data Age, managers should try to judge consumers' self-construction type through their past shopping experiences, and design different marketing schedules to achieve precise marketing.

4.3 Limitations and Areas of future Research

Firstly, this article only studies the low-involvement products, further in-depth research can study the mechanism of other different types of product switching behavior. Another limitation is that this study failed to verify whether the consumer performed the switching behavior can reduce the damage of the inner control. Finally, it should also be noted that this paper fails to explore the difference between the effects of different types of social exclusion on switching behavior. According to existing research, the type and extent of social exclusion may have different effects on consumer behavior and these differences also need in-depth research.

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