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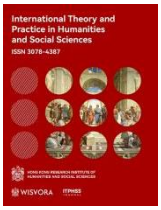

To Be Uniqueness or To Be Conformity? Exploring the Influence of Sense of Power on Consumers' Preference for Uniqueness

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Abstract

Continuously launching new products has become a key strategy for enterprises to enhance their market competitiveness, but this approach is not always effective due to variations in consumers' sense of power, which can influence their preferences for uniqueness. This article investigates the impact of sense of power on consumers' preferences for unique products through three sets of five experiments. The study found that high-power consumers tend to adopt an independent self-construal, which increases their preference for unique products. However, when making decisions for others, their preference for uniqueness decreases. In contrast, low-power consumers tend to adopt a dependent self-construal, which diminishes their preference for uniqueness, and this preference remains unaffected whether they are making decisions for themselves or for others. This article expands the research on uniqueness preferences and offers valuable insights for marketers in areas such as product design, promotion, and packaging.

1.Introduction

Continuous product launches are an effective way to stimulate consumer purchase intentions and have become an important means for enterprises to enhance their market competitiveness(Biao Sun & Yu Liu, 2021). However, simply innovating products is not always effective, as consumers exhibit different preferences based on personal circumstances, social

status, and cultural background(Franke & Schreier, 2008; Hao & Lin, 2023; Lee et al., 2018). These preferences manifest as either a preference for uniqueness or a preference for conformity. Preference for uniqueness refers to consumers' desire to acquire, use, and dispose of goods in ways that enhance their self-perception of being distinct(Lee et al., 2018; Lynn & Harris, 1997). This desire is often driven by the aim to express individuality and highlight distinctive traits. Existing research has largely focused on how consumer preferences for uniqueness play out in specific contexts(Zaggl et al., 2019; Zou et al., 2014). For instance, in mass customization settings, consumers are more likely to pursue entertainment products that reflect their uniqueness(Franke & Schreier, 2008; Zaggl et al., 2019). In social media environments, consumer preference for uniqueness can moderate the influence of peer communication on product attitudes(Wang et al., 2012). Similarly, in brand personification, a reduced preference for uniqueness can make consumers more receptive to brand products promoted by warm, personable advertisements(Henkel & Toporowski, 2023; Liu et al., 2022).

However, less attention has been paid to the antecedents of consumer preference for uniqueness(Anderson et al., 2012; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Davies & Elliott, 2006). Typically, consumers seek uniqueness to assert their importance and express their individuality(Wan et al., 2014; Whitley et al., 2018). One critical factor that influences this preference is the sense of power. Sense of Power(SoP) refers to an individual’s belief in their ability to influence others and is often associated with job status, social class, and power dynamics in the marketplace. It can be categorized into long-term power (rooted in inherent personality traits) and situational power (influenced by external contexts)(Kozinets et al., 2021; M. Lin, 2020; X. Lin et al., 2019). People with a high sense of power tend to be more self-focused, possess more information and resources, and are more motivated to highlight differences, which drives their preference for uniqueness(Anderson et al., 2012; X. Lin et al., 2019; Zou et al., 2014). The sense of power is inherently social, as it can only be understood in relation to others or groups. In social contexts, purchasing decisions often involve either seeking or providing input, which may introduce the pressure to justify choices. This raises the question: when consumers focus on themselves versus others, does their sense of power increase or diminish their preference for uniqueness? Are these shifts in decision focus the underlying mechanism through which power influences preference for uniqueness?

This paper addresses these questions by first examining the impact of long-term power on consumer preference for uniqueness in Experiment 1a, excluding the influence of product characteristics. Experiments 1b and 1c then explore how situational power affects this preference. The study also tests the mediating role of self-construal in Experiment 2 and examines the moderating effect of decision focus in Experiment 3. The objective of this research is to enrich the understanding of how power influences consumer preference for uniqueness, thereby contributing to the literature on this topic and offering theoretical insights for precision and differentiated marketing strategies.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1 The Influence of Sense of Power on Consumers' Preference for Uniqueness

The motivation to maintain a positive social identity influences individuals' perceptions of group uniqueness. When individuals feel too similar to others, they often experience negative emotions, prompting them to seek ways to differentiate themselves(Tian et al., 2001; Zou et al., 2014). As a result, individuals strive to maintain some level of uniqueness while balancing the need to conform to social norms and avoiding excessive assimilation(Henkel & Toporowski, 2023; Tilner & Erb, 2024). This desire for uniqueness is influenced by the need for social belonging and acceptance, as individuals want to avoid social isolation or backlash for standing out too much. Seeking unique products is one way consumers express their individuality and maintain a sense of distinctiveness(Henkel & Toporowski, 2023; Whitley et al., 2018). Preference for uniqueness refers to the tendency of consumers to acquire, use, and dispose of products in a way that enhances their self-perception of being unique. Through this process, consumers aim to highlight their differences from others and cultivate a self-image that emphasizes individuality. Research has shown that this desire to be unique coexists with a need to fit in, and consumers seek products that allow them to balance these competing motivations.

Scholars have also found that a sense of power can influence an individual's cognitive and behavioral tendencies, opening new avenues for studying the factors that shape consumer preferences for uniqueness. Anderson (2012) defines the sense of power as an individual's ability to influence others(Anderson et al., 2012). Power is a social relationship concept that can only be fully understood within the context of interactions with others or groups. It is based on the perception of power—whether it is present or absent, high or low—which stems from the asymmetric control of valuable resources in social relationships. This asymmetric control reflects the relative dependence between individuals in power dynamics(Davies & Elliott, 2006). Given this framework, we propose that the sense of power influences consumers' need for unique products, based on two key reasons.

First, according to the Agentic-Communal model of power(Rucker & Galinsky, 2016), individuals with a high sense of power are more likely to adopt an agentic orientation, focusing on self-expression, self-enhancement, and self-protection. High-power individuals are more self-focused, paying greater attention to their own feelings and emphasizing their distinctiveness(Rucker et al., 2011). Conversely, individuals with a low sense of power are more likely to adopt a communal orientation, relying on others for support and taking others' perspectives into account when making decisions. Low-power individuals tend to prioritize social harmony and integration into the group, which leads them to favor homogeneous products over those that emphasize uniqueness.

Second, the asymmetric control of valuable resources results in unequal access to unique products for individuals with high versus low power(Zou et al., 2014). Those with a high sense of power have access to more scarce resources, giving them greater opportunities to encounter and acquire unique or differentiated products. On the other hand, individuals with a low sense of power often rely on social connections and external harmony to acquire the resources they need, making them more susceptible to external influences and interventions(Anderson & Galinsky,

2006). As a result, they have fewer opportunities to access unique products and are more likely to choose homogeneous options that align with their social context. Over time, this reduced exposure to unique products diminishes their preference for uniqueness. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The higher the consumer's sense of power, the stronger the preference for uniqueness.

2.2 The Mediating Role of Self-Construal

Self-construal refers to an individual's perception of the relationship between themselves and others, particularly how much they see themselves as separate from or connected to others(Dogan, 2019; Hong & Chang, 2015; Singelis, 1994). Self-construal plays a significant role in shaping how people respond to products and can be divided into two main types: independent self-construal and dependent self-construal(Hong & Chang, 2015). An independent self-construal emphasizes personal autonomy and individuality. People with this self-view tend to focus on their own desires, preferences, attributes, and abilities. They prioritize self-expression and are more likely to pursue their personal goals, even if that means standing out from the crowd. In contrast, individuals with a dependent self-construal tend to seek harmony with others and integrate themselves into the broader social group. They rely on the opinions and emotions of others, sometimes sacrificing their own interests to maintain positive interpersonal relationships and social cohesion.

Research shows that when making purchasing decisions, people with high power tend to feel threatened if they perceive they are paying more than others, leading to price dissatisfaction(Jin et al., 2014). Meanwhile, low-power individuals may feel similarly dissatisfied or discriminated against if they are paying more than they have in the past. In response to these social dynamics, high-power individuals are more likely to reinforce their self-perception by developing an independent self-construal, which in turn strengthens their preference for unique products. These unique products allow them to assert their importance and distinctiveness(Lynn & Harris, 1997). On the other hand, low-power individuals are more likely to adopt a dependent self-construal, which encourages them to soften their self-image in order to better fit into social groups(Rucker et al., 2011). As a result, they are more inclined to seek homogeneous products that align with social norms and expectations, helping them maintain social harmony and avoid standing out.

Therefore, because consumers with a high sense of power tend to adopt a more self-focused, independent orientation, they are more likely to prefer unique products that highlight their distinctiveness. Conversely, consumers with a low sense of power are more likely to focus on others and adopt a dependent orientation, leading them to prefer homogeneous products that help them blend into the social environment. Based on this reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Self-construal mediates the influence of the sense of power on consumers' preference for uniqueness.

2.3 The Moderating Role of Decision-Making Focus

Decision-making focus refers to whether decisions are made for oneself or for others, and

this distinction can influence the decision-making process(Hong & Chang, 2015). Specifically, decision-making focus can be categorized as for-oneself (decisions made for one's own benefit) or for-others (decisions made on behalf of others). Research suggests that the way power influences consumer behavior—especially in terms of preferences for uniqueness—can be moderated by whether decisions are self-oriented or other-oriented. The agentic-communal model(Rucker & Galinsky, 2016) of power helps explain this dynamic, as individuals with different levels of power exhibit varying behavior depending on their decision-making focus.

Specifically, individuals with a high sense of power are typically self-centered and tend to emphasize their own importance when making decisions for themselves. They adopt an independent self-construal, which drives their preference for unique products that highlight their individuality. However, when high-power individuals make decisions for others, the decision-making focus shifts from themselves to the needs and preferences of others. In such cases, high-power individuals face social pressure to provide reasonable explanations for their decisions and manage the interpersonal risks associated with making choices on someone else's behalf. This pressure may cause them to adopt a more dependent self-construal, as they shift from prioritizing their own uniqueness to conforming to social norms. As a result, when high-power individuals make decisions for others, they are more likely to rely on social cues and choose homogeneous products that meet socially acceptable standards, thereby reducing the perceived need for uniqueness.

In contrast, individuals with a low sense of power tend to exhibit dependent self-construal regardless of whether they are making decisions for themselves or for others. These individuals are more focused on others' values and attitudes and are more likely to consider others' perspectives in their decision-making process. Whether making decisions for themselves or for others, low-power individuals typically seek to maintain social harmony and avoid standing out. Even when they face the pressure to justify their decisions or mitigate interpersonal risk when making choices for others, low-power individuals remain dependent in their self-construal and continue to prefer homogeneous products that align with social norms.

Therefore, while high-power individuals may shift from an independent to a dependent self-construal when their decision-making focus changes from themselves to others, low-power individuals generally maintain a dependent self-construal across different decision contexts. In conclusion, individuals with high power are more likely to prefer unique products when making decisions for themselves but will shift toward a preference for homogeneous products when making decisions for others. Low-power individuals, on the other hand, consistently show a preference for homogeneity regardless of the decision focus. Based on this reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Decision-making focus (for oneself vs. for others) moderates the impact of the sense of power on preference for uniqueness.

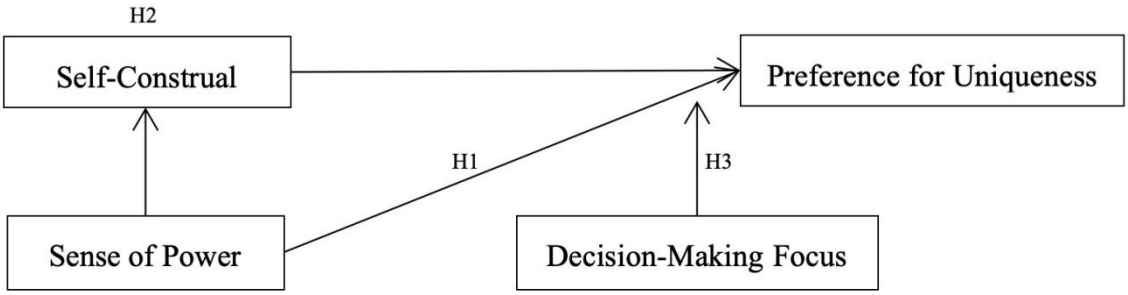

Figure 1. Theoretical Model

3.Experimental Procedure and Data Analysis

3.1 Experiment 1a: The Impact of Long-Term Sense of Power on Consumers' Preference for Uniqueness

This experiment aimed to provide preliminary support for H1, which hypothesizes that a higher sense of power leads to a stronger preference for uniqueness. The experiment measured participants' long-term sense of power and their preference for uniqueness to assess whether consumers with a higher sense of power are more inclined to seek out unique products.

3.1.1 Formal Experiment

The study utilized an online questionnaire to gather data. The questionnaire was composed of three sections, including two attention-check items to filter out inattentive responses. Online surveys have the advantage of accessing a larger and more diverse sample than traditional lab experiments, improving sample representativeness and generalizability. However, the lack of supervision over participants completing the survey can lead to careless responses. To mitigate this issue, attention checks were included to help ensure data quality by excluding participants who did not pay attention to the survey items.

The questionnaire was structured as follows:

Preference for Uniqueness: Participants' preference for uniqueness was measured using five items adapted from previous studies(Tian et al., 2001; Tilner & Erb, 2024; Whitley et al., 2018). Four items measured the dependent variable (e.g., "I like to buy unusual products to express my personality"), while the fifth item was an attention-check question that required participants to select "strongly disagree" to ensure they were paying attention.

Long-Term Sense of Power: Participants' long-term sense of power was measured using a scale adapted from Anderson(Anderson et al., 2012). Items included statements such as "I can get people to listen to what I say," rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.1.2 Experimental Results

Demographic Variables: A total of 195 questionnaires were collected, with 169 valid responses after excluding 26 participants who failed the attention-check items. The sample consisted of 102 men (60.35%) and 67 women (39.65%), with participants ranging in age from 18 to 50 years old.

Preference for Uniqueness: A linear regression analysis was conducted, with the sense of power as the independent variable and preference for uniqueness as the dependent variable. The results showed that the sense of power had a significant effect on consumers' preference for uniqueness ($b = -0.377$, $t(169) = 1.968$, $p = 0.005$). This indicates that as consumers' sense of power increases, so does their preference for unique products.

3.1.3 Discussion and Analysis

The results of Experiment 1a support the hypothesis that consumers with a higher sense of power have a stronger preference for uniqueness compared to those with a lower sense of power. Specifically, the findings indicate that as the sense of power decreases, consumers' preference for uniqueness also diminishes.

It is important to note that Experiment 1a relied on self-reported measures of long-term sense of power and preference for uniqueness, using an online questionnaire format. While this method provided valuable initial insights, it only assessed the effect of long-term sense of power. To build on these findings, Experiments 1b and 1c will manipulate participants' sense of power in controlled settings to explore whether power influences preference for uniqueness in more dynamic, real-world decision-making scenarios.

3.2 Experiment 1b: Effect of Situational Power on Consumer Product Preference (High-Involvement Product)

To enhance the generalizability of the study's conclusions, we conducted a behavioral experiment to induce a consumer's sense of power through music(Hsu et al., 2015) and tested their actual product choices as the dependent variable. Following existing studies(Wang et al., 2012; Zaggl et al., 2019), the stimuli in this experiment were laptops.

3.2.1 Pre-test Experiment

To verify the effectiveness of the stimuli, we conducted a pre-test to examine the validity of the laptop's uniqueness and conformity attributes. Following the principles outlined by Zaggl(Zaggl et al., 2019), we used six attributes to describe the laptop. Three of these attributes were functional (hard disk storage size, battery life, and screen size), while the other three were hedonic (customizable color, screen flipping, and touch screen functionality).

3.2.2 Formal Experiment

In the formal experiment, Notebook A was designed to emphasize functional attributes (disk storage size, battery life, and screen size), while Notebook B emphasized hedonic attributes (customizable color, screen flip, and touch screen functionality). See Appendix B2.

Building on previous studies, this experiment was conducted in a laboratory setting. We used music with heavy or light bass to manipulate participants' sense of power(Hsu et al., 2015). Participants were randomly assigned to either the heavy bass or low bass group. Before the experiment, participants were asked whether they had heard the music clip before. They were then informed that the computer would select a piece of music, and they would answer a series of

questions. Participants listened to the music clip by pressing a play button on the computer.

In the heavy bass group, the bass was set to +15dB to induce a high sense of power, while in the low bass group, the bass was set to -15dB to induce a low sense of power. The volume for both groups was set to 50%, and the instruments were identical in both clips. Participants were instructed not to adjust the volume of their headphones during the two-minute music clip, which they listened to once.

After the music, participants were shown images of two laptops priced the same and were asked to choose one, imagining they were going to purchase it. Notebook A had strong functional attributes, while Notebook B had strong hedonic attributes, consistent with the pre-test descriptions.

3.2.3 Experimental Results

Demographics: A total of 36 participants took part in the experiment, with 7 men (19.45%) and 29 women (80.55%). The participants were between the ages of 18 and 25, and they were randomly divided into two groups of 18 participants each.

Manipulation check: The mean power score for the high-power group was 5.01 (SD=1.02), and for the low-power group, it was 2.22 (SD=1.09). This difference was statistically significant ($F(1,34)=207.44$, $p<0.001$, Cohen's $d=3.32$), indicating a substantial difference in perceived power between the two groups.

Notebook selection: A chi-square test revealed a significant main effect of power perception on notebook selection ($\chi^2(1)=17.45$, $p<0.001$). As expected, participants with a high sense of power were more likely to choose Notebook A (83.33%), which emphasized functional attributes, while those with a low sense of power preferred Notebook B (72.22%), which emphasized hedonic attributes. See Figure 2.

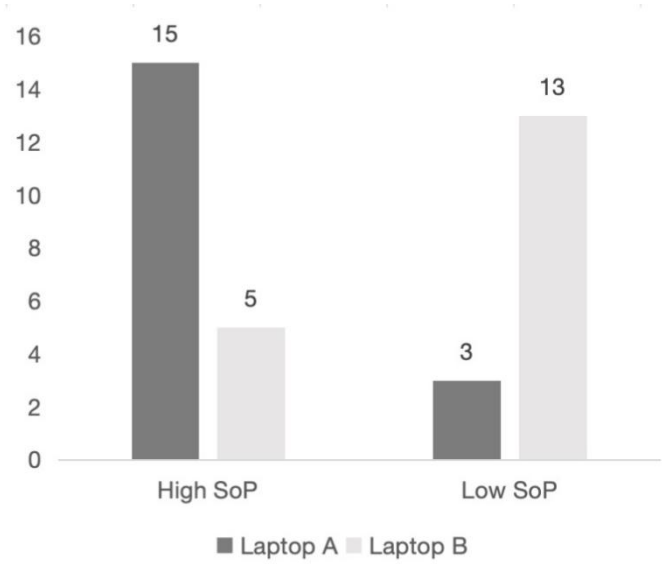

Figure 2: Effect of situational power on high-involvement product preference (Experiment 1b).

3.2.4 Discussion and Analysis

The results of Experiment 1b support Hypothesis 1: consumers with a high sense of power are more likely to prefer products that offer uniqueness, while consumers with a low sense of

power are less likely to seek uniqueness. In Experiment 1b, the sense of power was manipulated using bass levels in music, and product preference was measured by the intention to purchase a high-involvement product (a laptop). To mitigate the impact of product involvement on the results, Experiment 1c will use a low-involvement product (cups) to measure consumers' preference for uniqueness.

3.3 Experiment 1c: Effect of Situational Power on Consumer Product Preference (Low-Involvement Product)

In Experiment 1b, a high-involvement product (a laptop) was used as the stimulus. To eliminate the influence of product involvement, Experiment 1c used a low-involvement product, a cup(Franke & Schreier, 2008; Zaggl et al., 2019), to explore how the sense of power affects consumer decision-making preferences.

3.3.1 Pre-test Experiment

To verify the effectiveness of the experimental stimulus, we conducted a pre-test to examine the validity of the cup's uniqueness and conformity attributes. Following the principles of Zaggl(Zaggl et al., 2019), we used six attributes to describe the cup. Three were functional (easy to carry, large capacity, wear resistance), and three were hedonic (wide mouth cup, creative design, night-time use).

3.3.2 Formal Experiment

We used a word search task(Fast et al., 2009) to manipulate participants' sense of power. The word search involved presenting participants with a matrix of Chinese characters that included 13 target words, 8 of which were power-related (e.g., "control," "boss," "influence" for the high-power group; "dependence," "attachment," "obedience" for the low-power group) and 5 neutral words (e.g., "flowers," "buildings"). Participants were asked to circle the words in the matrix. In addition, they were presented with 16 words under the matrix (some added to enhance the sense of power), and were asked to select the ones they had seen in the matrix.

Next, participants were asked to imagine they were about to buy a cup. They were shown images of two cups priced the same, from the same platform, but with randomly generated virtual brands. Cup A emphasized functional attributes (easy to carry, large capacity, wear resistance), while Cup B emphasized hedonic attributes (wide mouth cup, creative design, night-time use).

Participants then rated the cups on a 7-point scale for three items (1 = very bad quality/very unreliable/very untrustworthy; 7 = very good quality/very reliable/very credible).

3.3.3 Experimental Results

Demographics: A total of 40 participants were involved in this experiment, with 15 men (37.50%) and 25 women (62.50%), all aged 18-25. Participants were randomly assigned to two groups of 20 each.

Manipulation check: The mean power score for the high-power group was 5.55 (SD=1.31), and for the low-power group, it was 3.10 (SD=1.08), with a significant difference between the two groups ($F(1,39)=204.31$, $p<0.001$, Cohen's $d=2.09$), indicating a large difference in perceived power between the groups.

Cup selection: The chi-square test revealed a significant main effect of power on cup choice ($\chi^2(1)=35.10$, $p<0.001$). Individuals with a high sense of power preferred Cup B with hedonic attributes (85.0%) over Cup A (15.0%), while those with a low sense of power preferred Cup A (90.0%) over Cup B (10.0%).

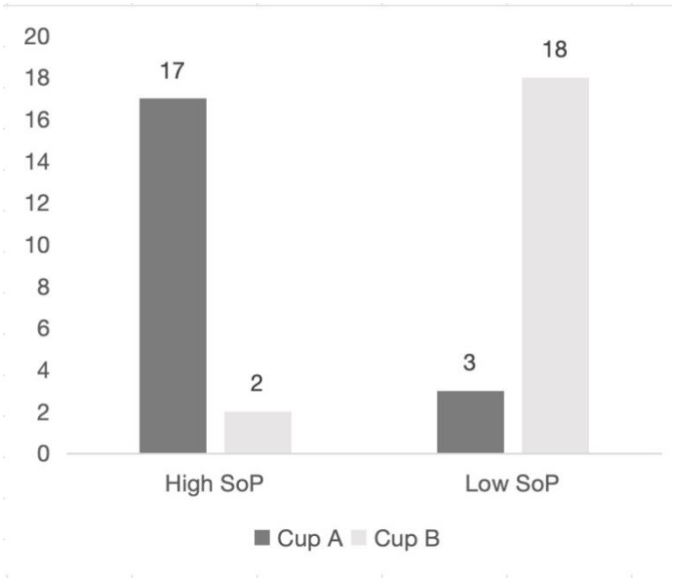

Figure 3: Effect of situational power on low-involvement product preference (Experiment 1c).

3.3.4 Discussion and Analysis

The results of Experiment 1c complement those of Experiments 1a and 1b. Across all three experiments, individuals with both long-term power (Experiment 1a) and situational power (Experiment 1b for high-involvement products and Experiment 1c for low-involvement products) demonstrated a stronger preference for uniqueness. Conversely, individuals with a reduced sense of power showed a diminished preference for uniqueness.

It’ s important to note that Experiments 1a, 1b, and 1c did not examine the mediating mechanisms by which power influences consumers' preference for uniqueness. Therefore, the intrinsic mechanism through which the sense of power affects consumer preference for uniqueness remains unclear. Experiment 2 will introduce self-construal as a mediating variable to explore the underlying mechanisms by which the sense of power influences consumers' preference for uniqueness.

3.4 Experiment 2: The Mediating Role of Self-Construal

3.4.1 Formal Experiment

To begin, participants' sense of power was manipulated using a role imagination task(Jin et al., 2014). Participants were randomly assigned to either a high or low power condition. In the high-power condition, participants were asked to imagine themselves as a department manager and read a paragraph outlining the responsibilities of that role, helping them immerse in the scenario. In the low-power condition, participants imagined themselves as ordinary employees and read a description of the responsibilities of a regular staff member.

After reading the role descriptions, participants' sense of power was measured using a 7-point

scale. Additionally, self-construal was measured using four items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.4.2 Experimental Results

Demographics: A total of 28 participants took part in this experiment, consisting of 5 men (17.85%) and 23 women (82.15%), aged between 18 and 25. They were randomly divided into two groups of 14 participants each.

Manipulation Check: Power levels were first calculated, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of power. A linear regression analysis, with power level as the independent variable, found that individuals with a high sense of power (versus low power) had a stronger preference for hedonic product attributes (β =1.783, $p<0.001$), consistent with the results of Experiment 1.

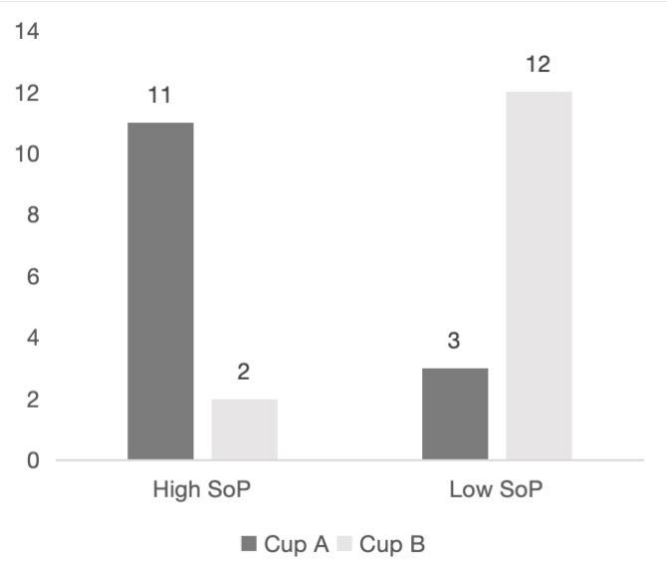

Figure 4: The Mediating Role of Self-Construal (Experiment 2).

Mediation Analysis: A linear regression analysis, using long-term power as the independent variable, revealed that participants with a high sense of power exhibited greater independence in their self-construal (β =1.112, $p<0.001$). Additionally, individuals with higher self-construal scores were more likely to prefer unique products (β =1.583, $p<0.001$).

Next, we conducted a regression analysis incorporating participants' long-term sense of power, self-construal, and preference for uniqueness. The results showed that the effect of long-term power on preference for uniqueness was weak (β =-1.992, $p=0.02$), while self-construal had a significant impact on preference for uniqueness (β =1.105, $p<0.001$).

To verify the mediation effect, Hayes' s Bootstrapping method [36] was applied. The confidence interval for the mediation effect of self-construal did not contain 0 (95% CI=1.22-1.98), indicating a significant mediation effect (see Figure 5).

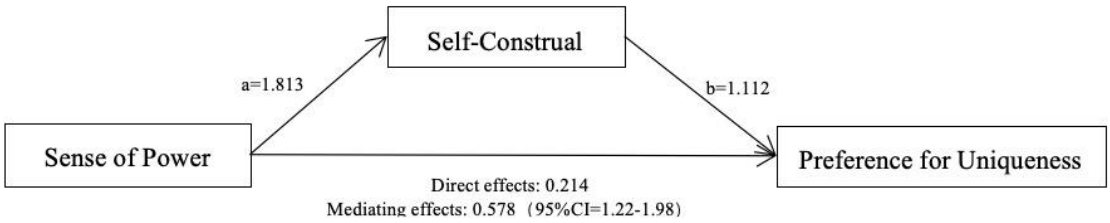

Figure 5: Analysis of the Mediation Effect of Self-Construal.

3.4.3 Discussion and Analysis

Experiment 2 examined the mediating role of self-construal in the relationship between the sense of power and consumers' preference for uniqueness. The results supported Hypothesis 2 and further validated the findings from Experiments 1a, 1b, and 1c. This suggests that consumers with a high sense of power (versus low power) are more self-focused (versus others-focused) and tend to have a more independent (versus dependent) self-construal. Consequently, high-power consumers are more likely to prefer unique (Vs. homogenous) products.

In the next phase of the study, Experiment 3 will test the regulatory effect of decision focus to further clarify how the sense of power influences consumers' preference for uniqueness.

3.5 Experiment 3: The Moderating Effect of Decision Focus (For Oneself vs. For Others)

3.5.1 Formal Experiment

The experimental procedure was similar to that of Experiment 2, with one important change:

In the "decision for oneself" condition, participants were asked to imagine that they were looking for a laptop and had found two laptops at the same price. In the "decision for others" condition, participants were asked to imagine that "a friend is about to go to university, has found two laptops at the same price, and needs your opinion on which one to choose." The two laptop images used in Experiment 2 were presented again. Participants' product preference was the dependent variable, and they had to indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = "Laptop A" and 7 = "Laptop B") which laptop they would choose (for themselves) or recommend to their friend (for others).

3.5.2 Experimental Results

Laptop Preference: As in Experiment 2, participants' sense of power was calculated, with higher scores indicating a higher sense of long-term power. To test the hypothesis, a regression analysis was conducted with individual long-term power, decision focus (1 = decision for oneself, -1 = decision for others), and the interaction between the two as independent variables, and laptop preference as the dependent variable. The results showed that decision focus had a significant impact on laptop preferences: participants showed a much stronger preference for hedonic options when making decisions for themselves (β =1.99, t(25)=6.73, p<0.001) than when making decisions for others.

Analysis of the Moderating Effects: The regression analysis also revealed that the interaction

between long-term power and decision focus significantly affected laptop preference (β =0.74, t(25)=7.21, p<0.001), supporting the study’ s hypothesis.

Since power is a continuous variable and decision focus is categorical, we used the "Spotlight" analysis method suggested by Spiller to examine the interaction(Spiller et al., 2013). High power and low power were defined as ±1SD from the mean. As expected, individuals with a high sense of power had a significantly stronger preference for products with prominent emotional attributes when deciding for themselves compared to deciding for others (β =1.05, t(25)=9.45, p<0.001). However, for individuals with a low sense of power, there was no significant difference in product preference when making decisions for themselves or for others (β =0.05, t<1, p=0.830 > 0.5).

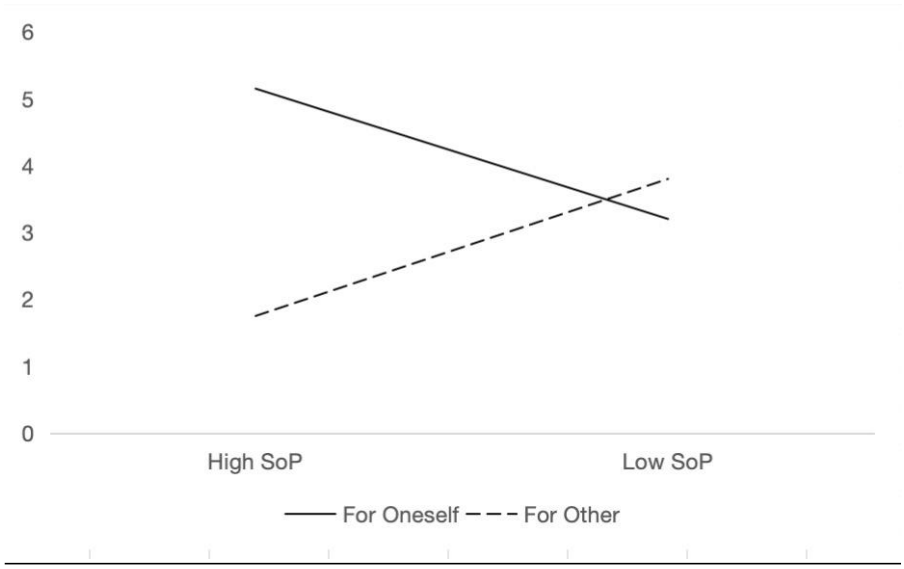

Figure 6: Regulatory effects of decision focus (for oneself vs. for others) (Experiment 3).

3.5.3 Discussion and Analysis

The results of Experiment 3 support Hypothesis 3: decision focus (for oneself vs. for others) moderates the effect of power on consumer preference for uniqueness. When making decisions for themselves, individuals with high power tend to prefer unique products. However, when making decisions for others, this preference is reduced. In contrast, decision focus does not have a significant moderating effect for individuals with low power.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

4.1Research Conclusions

This paper examined the effect of power perception on consumer preference for uniqueness through three groups of five experiments. Experiment 1a tested the influence of long-term sense of power on consumer preference for uniqueness. To control for the influence of product involvement, Experiments 1b and 1c investigated how situational sense of power affects consumer preference for uniqueness, using a high-involvement product (laptop) and a low-involvement product (cup), respectively. The findings revealed that regardless of the level of

product involvement, consumers with a higher long-term or situational sense of power are more likely to prefer unique products. Conversely, as the sense of power decreases, the preference for uniqueness diminishes as well.

Experiment 2 showed that consumers with a high sense of power tend to favor unique products due to the establishment of an independent self-construal, while consumers with a low sense of power tend to form attachment-based self-construals, which reduces their preference for uniqueness. In Experiment 3, decision focus was introduced as a moderating variable. It was found that when making decisions for others, consumers with high power tend to reduce their preference for uniqueness compared to when making decisions for themselves. However, decision focus did not significantly impact the decision-making of consumers with low power.

In summary, consumers with a high sense of power develop a preference for uniqueness through independent self-construal, but this preference decreases when they make decisions for others. Meanwhile, consumers with a low sense of power are more likely to establish attachment-based self-construals, which reduces their preference for uniqueness, whether they are making decisions for themselves or for others.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

First, this study introduced the sense of power as a antecedent variable influencing consumer preference for uniqueness, enriching the research on the antecedents of preference for uniqueness(Tian et al., 2001; Whitley et al., 2018). Existing research often focuses on specific contexts—such as mass customization, social media, or brand personification(Liu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2012; Zaggl et al., 2019)—and examines how consumer preference for uniqueness affects purchase intentions. However, less attention has been paid to which factors influence this preference. By introducing the sense of power as an antecedent, this study provides a new perspective on how consumer traits affect their preference for uniqueness(Jin et al., 2014).

Second, this study expands the understanding of the mechanisms by which power influences consumer preference for uniqueness, specifically through self-construal(Dogan, 2019). The research found that consumers with a high sense of power tend to be more self-focused and aim to highlight their uniqueness and individuality. As a result, they are more likely to adopt an independent self-construal, making them less influenced by others and more inclined to prefer unique products(Dogan, 2019; Wong et al., 2022). In contrast, consumers with a low sense of power focus more on others, prioritize harmonious relationships, and tend to adopt an attachment-based self-construal, reducing their preference for uniqueness to align with others.

Finally, the study confirmed that decision focus (for oneself vs. for others) moderates the relationship between sense of power and consumer preference for uniqueness. It was found that when making decisions for others, individuals with a high sense of power significantly reduce their preference for uniqueness(Hong & Chang, 2015), possibly to avoid the pressure of rational explanation or the risk of appearing self-serving. In contrast, for individuals with low power, decision focus did not significantly affect their already low preference for uniqueness.

4.3 Managerial Implications

First, in product design, brands should offer a variety of products for consumers to choose from. This assortment should include heterogeneous products with unique designs and functions to satisfy consumers who want to express their individuality, as well as homogeneous products with standard features and appearances to meet the needs of consumers who wish to reduce decision-making risks and interpersonal conflict.

Second, in sales, marketers should accurately assess consumers' power levels based on their personal circumstances, social status, and cultural background. By identifying the size of a consumer's perceived power, sales personnel can recommend products that align with their preferences and use appropriate language to stimulate purchase intentions, while also highlighting the product's uniqueness.

Finally, in product packaging, companies can incorporate elements such as "suitable for gifting" or "appropriate for all occasions" to help reduce the interpersonal and rationalization risks that may arise from consumers' purchasing decisions. In short, companies should conduct targeted market research based on the sense of power in different consumer groups to tailor their offerings and improve their competitiveness in the market.

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