Scarcity (versus popularity) cues for rejected customers: The impact of social exclusion on cue types through need for uniqueness

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how customers' psychological situation influences their responses to two promotional cue types. More specifically, we propose that rejected customers are more likely to choose products promoted by a scarcity cue (this product is a limited edition) compared to a popularity cue (this product is popular among customers). Also, we propose that rejected customers indicate an increased need for uniqueness, which in turn entices customers to choose a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity one). The results of Study 1 show that rejected customers display a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue, and need for uniqueness underlies the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice. Study 2 provides further evidence that rejected (compared to accepted) customers display an increased need for uniqueness, which entices customers to choose a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue).

1. Introduction

Imagine that you see an advertisement for wine. The wine is a limited edition, and the ad copy says, "this product is limited edition." Conversely, the wine is a best seller, and the ad copy says, "this wine is a best seller among consumers." How would you react to these promotions? What factors influence your reaction toward these promotions? Does your current psychological condition (e.g., social exclusion) affect your response, and choice decision accordingly? More specifically, would your reaction be different if you felt rejected or accepted at the time when you are exposed to these promotions? Would you display more (less) favorable reaction toward the wine promoted by a scarcity cue (the wine is limited edition) or a popularity cue (the wine is a best seller)? If so, what would be the underlying factor in your reaction? Answering these questions would help managers create an effective promotional campaign and targeting.

To date, a plethora of studies have examined how consumers react to scarcity, and popularity cues (e.g., Gierl, Plantsch, & Schweidler, 2008; Wu & Lee, 2016), but these studies have not taken into account customers' psychological condition at the time when customers are exposed to promotional cue types. For example, Wu and Lee (2016) find that when consumers purchase a product for themselves, they seek to be unique. Scarcity (vs. popularity) cues satisfy consumers' need to feel different (Wu & Lee, 2016). However, this study does not take into

account customers' psychological conditions (e.g., social exclusion) at the time the customers are exposed to promotional cues. Doing so is important because social exclusion happens in almost every aspect of social life; such as being excluded at a party, not being invited to a friend's birthday party, or being deprived of having a community. It not only causes aversive psychological reactions (e.g., Geller, Goodstein, Silver, & Sternberg, 1974; Leary, 1990) and negative behavioral consequences (e.g., Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), but it also plays an influential role in individuals' shopping behaviors (e.g., Su, Jiang, Chen, & DeWall, 2017) and decision making (Wan, Xu, & Ding, 2013). Thus, without considering individuals' psychological condition at the time when they are exposed to promotional cues may prevent marketers from seeing the whole picture, and lead them to utilize inadequate promotional techniques to target customers. Thanks to digital advancement, however, marketers can understand customers' psychological states better by tracking and analyzing customers' activities through an online and mobile social network (Moe & Schweidel, 2014). For example, recent immigrants, or those who suffer setbacks in a romantic-relationship or complain about workforce exclusion or ostracism are consumers who may feel socially rejected (Chen, Wan, & Levy, 2017). Marketers may obtain information about these consumers through social network platforms (e.g., Facebook Analytics, Google Analytics, Twitter Analytics, etc.) and implement appropriate promotional techniques to entice them.

Being rejected is clear, direct, and discouraging, and threatens relational needs, such as the need for belonging (Molden, Lucas, Gardner, Dean, & Knowles, 2009). Rejected individuals could primarily feel that their social status in their existing relationship is diminished or lost (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Molden et al., 2009). Thus, rejected individuals are less likely to seek social acceptance within the group from which they are rejected. They may prefer to differentiate themselves from that group. This is because to attain an optimal state between inclusion and distinctiveness, need for uniqueness and need for belonging tend to balance each other, but under some circumstances, one motive dominates the other to shape decision making (Brewer, 1991, 2003). Social exclusion may be one of these circumstances as social exclusion threatens the need for belonging (e.g., Molden et al., 2009; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Thus, we propose that rejected individuals may display an increased desire for uniqueness because of diminished or lost the need for belonging to the existing group. When need for uniqueness dominates need for belonging, individuals are more likely to purchase products that allow them to differentiate themselves from other people (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012). Because product-scarcity cues are closely associated with uniqueness (Wu & Lee, 2016), we propose that rejected individuals (relative to accepted ones) are more likely to seek need for uniqueness, which, in turn, leads them to display an increased preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue).

Overall, our purpose is fourfold. First, we aim to examine the effect of social exclusion on customers' choice of products promoted by different cue types. More specifically, we examine whether socially rejected (vs. accepted) consumers display a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue). Second, we examine whether socially rejected (vs. accepted) consumers display an increased need for uniqueness. Third, we investigate whether the need for uniqueness underlines the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice.

We make some noteworthy contributions to the cue and social exclusion literature (e.g., Castro, Morales, & Nowlis, 2013; Molden et al., 2009; Wan et al., 2013; Wu & Lee, 2016). First, to the best of our knowledge, we are the first to examine promotional cue types (scarcity and popularity cues) in a social exclusion context. Doing so helps managers better understand customers and develop more persuasive or cogent promotional techniques to target customers. Second, our research sheds light on the complex interplay between social exclusion, need for uniqueness, and customers' product choice. Third, our study shows that even though social exclusion affects two fundamental human needs, belongingness and self-esteem, and mood, those factors do not play a significant role in customers' product choice. Fourth, this study contributes to uniqueness theory (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980) by revealing the relationship between need for uniqueness, and social exclusion and cues. Finally, this study provides some noteworthy recommendations for marketing managers.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: First, we discuss the theoretical framework and present the research hypotheses. Then, we describe our methodology. Subsequently, the results of our studies are discussed. Finally, we conclude by discussing theoretical and practical implications and future research directions.

1.1. Social exclusion

Exclusion, the act of rejecting and ostracizing, has been widely discussed across disciplines (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Lee & Shrum, 2012; Lee, Shrum, & Yi, 2017; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007; Williams et al., 2000). People often experience instances of being excluded or rejected in their relationships with family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues (Baumeister et al., 2005; Williams, 2007). Exclusion or rejection can happen in almost every aspect of social life, such as not being invited to a friend's birthday party or not being invited by your friends to a concert.

Research on social exclusion shows that it causes a number of psychologically aversive reactions, such as depressed mood, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, helplessness, and invisibility (Geller et al., 1974; Leary, 1990; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Social exclusion also causes negative physical consequences (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003) and interpersonal and intrapersonal antisocial behaviors (Twenge et al., 2001). The threat of exclusion impairs self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 2005) and thwarts logical reasoning (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002). Also, people who are frequently socially ostracized are likely to experience depression (Dewall & Richman, 2011) and feelings of unworthiness (Allen & Badcock, 2003). In addition, rejected individuals display more aggressive behaviors (Twenge et al., 2001), decreased helping activities (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), and switching behaviors (Su et al., 2017).

Being rejected comes from the apparent presence of negative feedback, which discourages further social contact (Molden et al., 2009). Thus, rejected people could primarily feel that their social status in the existing relationship is diminished or lost, threatening relational needs such as self-esteem and belonging (Lee & Shrum, 2012). Because "being rejected" is explicit, direct, discouraging, and threatens the need for belonging (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Molden et al., 2009), rejected individuals are less likely to seek social acceptance with the group from which they are rejected and are more likely to differentiate themselves from that group. This is because need for uniqueness and need for belonging play an important role in individuals' everyday social interactions (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001; Wu & Lee, 2016), and under some situations, one need overrides the other to shape decision making (Brewer, 1991, 2005). Social exclusion may be deemed as an example of such a situation because of the diminished need for belonging.

We define need for uniqueness as "an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others that is achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity" (Tian et al., 2001, p. 50). Because product-scarcity appeals are closely associated with uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001; Wu & Lee, 2016), it is possible that rejected individuals will display a greater preference for the product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue) as this would satisfy their need for uniqueness.

1.2. Cue types: scarcity and popularity cues

Scarcity and popularity cues are two pervasively-used promotional techniques (Wu & Lee, 2016). Scarcity cues imply high exclusivity and value (Deval, Mantel, Kardes, & Posavac, 2012; Balachander & Stock, 2009; Brown, 2001), helping increase a product's perceived value, and influencing consumers' purchase intentions (Aggarwal, Jun, & Huh, 2011). Marketers induce scarcity in various forms (e.g., limited quantity, limited time, limited edition, temporarily available, only available until…) (Gierl et al., 2008). Gierl et al. (2008) classify scarcity cues as supply versus demand and quantity versus time. While limited quantity (e.g., only three left) is classified as a demand-side form of scarcity, limited edition (e.g., this product is a limited edition) is deemed as a supply-side form of scarcity (Gierl et al., 2008). Limited edition cues are exclusivity based on the limited number of products produced, which differentiates this scarcity type from others, such as limited quantity (Gierl et al., 2008). Because limited edition appeals suggest exclusivity and trigger uniqueness (Wu & Lee, 2016), the current study focuses on that particular type of scarcity cue.

Previous research shows that limited edition products have a positive effect on brand profits and also cause price competition between brands (Balachander & Stock, 2009). Many brands use limited edition products to increase customer desire and entice them to purchase (Wu, Lu, Wu, & Fu, 2012). Limited edition products imply that customers must purchase the products immediately, as they will not be able to buy them in the future (Wu et al., 2012).

Popularity cues (e.g., "bestseller" "75% of customers who saw this product bought it") have also been used extensively by many online retailers, such as Amazon.com and Overstock.com (Wu & Lee, 2016). Prior research shows that when a product is widely available, it implies high utility, low exclusivity and worth (Deval et al., 2012). Because a number of people prefer and have purchased the popular product, this implies that it must be good (Deval et al., 2012). These findings indicate that customers are sometimes motivated to purchase what others have bought, but under some situations, they may prefer products that allow them to differentiate themselves from others (Steinhart, Kamins, Mazursky, & Noy, 2014; Tian et al., 2001). Social exclusion may be considered one such instance where people may seek a higher desire for uniqueness.

Being rejected signals that disagreement or dissimilarity exists between rejected people and the social entity from which they are rejected (Wan et al., 2013). Because being rejected is clear, direct and discouraging, and threatens individuals' need for belonging (Molden et al., 2009), rejected individuals are less likely to seek social acceptance with the group from which they are rejected and are more likely to differentiate themselves from that group. Individuals can differentiate themselves from other people through acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods (Tian et al., 2001). Because product-scarcity cues are closely associated with uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001; Wu & Lee, 2016), we propose that rejected customers (relative to accepted ones) may display a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to popularity cue) to express their need for uniqueness. Also, because social exclusion causes a number of aversive psychological reactions, ranging from depressed moods to loneliness and to anxiety (Geller et al., 1974; Leary, 1990), accepted people (compared to rejected ones) may avoid engaging in any activity that may cause aversive reactions. For example, displaying a high need for uniqueness may endanger a person's belonging to the social entity which, in turn, may result in exclusion. Thus, we propose that socially accepted (relative to rejected) individuals are less likely to indicate an increased need for uniqueness, which leads them to display a lower preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (compared to a popularity cue). Thus, we hypothesize (visualized as Fig. 1):

H1. Rejected (vs. accepted) customers display a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity (vs. popularity) cue.

Need for uniqueness and need for belonging play an important role in a person's everyday social interactions (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Tian et al., 2001; Wu & Lee, 2016). To attain an optimal state between inclusion and distinctiveness, these two need motives tend to balance each other, but under some situations, one motive dominates the other to shape decision making (Brewer, 1991, 2003). Social exclusion may be an example of such situations where need for uniqueness dominates need for belonging. This is because social exclusion threatens a person's belonging to the group from which the person is excluded (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Molden et al., 2009). Thus, it is reasonable to expect need for uniqueness to dominate need for belonging in a social exclusion situation. Therefore, we propose that socially rejected customers (relative to socially accepted ones) display an increased need for uniqueness. As outlined above, because of the negative consequences associated with social exclusion, accepted individuals are less like to indicate an increased need for uniqueness to avoid engaging in any activity that may damage their relationship with the social entity with which they feel accepted. Thus, we proposed that accepted customers (compared to rejected ones) display a decreased need for uniqueness. Overall, we postulate:

H2. Rejected (vs. accepted) customers exhibit an increased need for uniqueness.

When need for uniqueness dominates need for belonging, individuals are more likely to purchase products that allow them to distinguish themselves from other people (Chan et al., 2012). As outlined above, we expect rejected individuals (compared to accepted ones) to
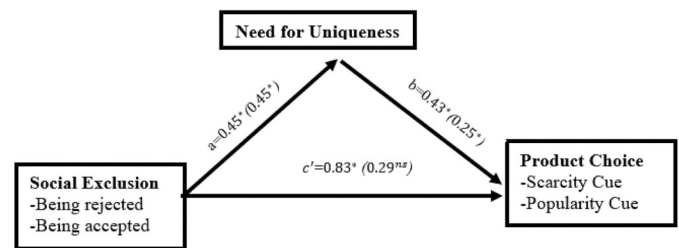

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework-Study 1 (Study 2).
Note: *Significance at the 0.05 level.

display an increased need for uniqueness, which in turn entices rejected individuals to display a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity one). In a similar vein, we propose that accepted customers (relative to rejected ones) display a decreased need for uniqueness, which in turn leads them to display a lower preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue). Overall, we hypothesize:

H3. Need for uniqueness mediates the effect of social exclusion on consumers' product choice.

2. Study 1

2.1. Design and manipulations

In Study 1, we investigated the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice. A total of 94 (53 males and 41 females, $M_{age} = 22$) undergraduate students participated in the experiment in exchange for partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (social exclusion: being rejected vs. being accepted). Social exclusion was manipulated by asking participants to put themselves in the role of the person in the scenario in which participants sent out emails inviting three classmates to form a group to discuss class assignments. They are either rejected (being rejected condition) or accepted (being accepted condition) by three classmates (see Appendix A for manipulations details).[1] This scenario and procedure were adapted from Lu and Sinha (2017). As a manipulation check, after reading this scenario, participants were asked to indicate how rejected they felt during the experience depicted (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Lynn & Harris, 1997; Wan et al., 2013).

2.2. Measure

After completing the social exclusion manipulation, participants were asked to indicate their need for uniqueness through the use of three items adapted from Wan et al. (2013) and Lynn and Harris (1997). The reliability of this scale is $\alpha = 0.75$, exceeding the recommended cutoff point for alpha (Churchill Jr, 1979; see Appendix B for items).

2.3. Product choice

In the final section of the experiment, participants were told that they were looking to buy a bobblehead for themselves from an online retailer store. They were asked to indicate whether they would choose a product promoted by a scarcity cue (this bobblehead is very unique and rare) or a popularity cue (this bobblehead is very popular among consumers). We coded the product promoted by a scarcity cue as "1," and the product promoted by a popularity cue "0" This product choice scenario and coding were adapted from Wu and Lee (2016).

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[1] We coded the "being rejected" condition as "1" and the "being accepted" condition as "0".

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Manipulation check

The results of an independent samples *t*-test revealed that participants who were assigned to the rejected condition feel more rejected (M = 5.25, SD = 1.53) than those who were assigned to the accepted condition (M = 2.12, SD = 1.78); t (92) = 9.14, p < .001, indicating the success of the social exclusion manipulation.

3.2. Hypothesis testing

To test H1, we used the Chi-square (X^2) test. The test revealed a significant positive relationship between social exclusion and cue type (X^2(1) = 5.138, p < .05). In addition, the results showed that 71.7% of participants who were in the rejected condition chose the booblehead promoted by a scarcity cue whereas 51.2% of participants who were in the accepted condition chose the booblehead promoted by a popularity cue. That is, rejected participants (vs. accepted ones) chose the product promoted by a scarcity (relative to a popularity) cue, thus providing support for H1.

To test H2, we conducted an independent samples *t*-test, which revealed that rejected participants indicate a higher need for uniqueness (M = 4.59, SD = 1.06) than accepted participants (M = 4.15, SD = 0.93); t (92) = 2.13, p < .05, providing support for H2.

3.3. The mediating role of perceived uniqueness

We used PROCESS (V2) Model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to evaluate the indirect effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice through need for uniqueness (Hayes, 2013). The results revealed a significant indirect effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice through need for uniqueness (IE = 0.1911; CI [0.0272, 0.5384]). The absence of zero in the confidence interval suggests that need for uniqueness serves as a mediator (Hayes, 2013). Thus, H3 is supported.

4. Discussion

The results of Study 1 showed a significant relationship between social exclusion and customers' product choice. More specifically, the results showed that rejected customers (vs. accepted ones) exhibit a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue). Our results also provided additional evidence that rejected (vs. accepted) participants display an increased need for uniqueness. Furthermore, as hypothesized, need for uniqueness serves as a mediator in the current study, such that rejected (vs. accepted) customers display an increased need for uniqueness; the increased need for uniqueness, in turn, entices customers to choose a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue). Although all our hypotheses are supported, to improve the generalizability of our findings, we further investigated whether the findings would be supported when using a different sample and a different product.

5. Study 2

5.1. Design and manipulations

In Study 2, we recruited a total of 110 adult subjects from Amazon Mechanical Turk (56 males and 54 females, M_{age} = 36.7). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (social exclusion: being rejected vs. being accepted). We manipulated being rejected or accepted by asking participants to recall an experience that made them feel rejected or accepted. Specifically, participants in the being rejected (being accepted) sample described in writing an experience during which they felt rejected (felt accepted) (Maner et al., 2007; Lu & Sinha,

2017; see Appendix A).[1] After completing the task, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they felt rejected (accepted) on a seven-point scale for a manipulation check (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) (Lu & Sinha, 2017).

5.2. Measure

After completing the social exclusion manipulation, participants were asked to indicate their need for uniqueness through the use of the same three items used in Study 1. The reliability of this scale is α = 0.86, exceeding the recommended cutoff point for alpha (Churchill Jr, 1979).

5.3. Product choice

In the final section of the experiment, participants were told that they were looking to purchase a bottle of wine for themselves from an online retailer. They were asked to indicate their choice of the product promoted by either a scarcity cue (this wine is very unique and rare) or a popularity cue (this wine is very popular among consumers). We coded scarcity cue as "1" and popularity cue as "0". This product choice scenario and coding were adapted from Wu and Lee (2016).

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Manipulation check

The results of an independent samples *t*-test revealed that participants who were assigned to the rejected condition felt more rejected (M = 5.97, SD = 1.39) than those who were assigned to the accepted condition (M = 1.82, SD = 0.98); t (108) = 17.72, p < .001, indicating the success of the social exclusion manipulation.

6.2. Hypothesis testing

To test H1, we used the Chi-square (X^2) test. Contrary to our expectation, there was not a direct relationship between between social exclusion and cue type (X^2(1) = 1.02, p < .16). In addition, 51.7% of participants in the rejected condition chose the wine promoted by a scarcity cue whereas 58% of participants who were in accepted condition chose the wine promoted by a popularity cue. Thus, H1 is not supported.

To test H2, we conducted an independent samples *t*-test, which revealed that rejected participants indicate a higher need for uniqueness (M = 4.84, SD = 1.29) than accepted participants (M = 4.40, SD = 1.34; t (108) = 1.77, p = .04, providing the support for H2.

6.3. The mediating role of perceived uniqueness

We used PROCESS Model 4 (V2) with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals to evaluate the indirect effect of social exclusion on product choice through need for uniqueness (Hayes, 2013). The results revealed a significant indirect effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice through need for uniqueness (IE = 0.1108; CI [0.0052, 0.3544]). The absence of zero in the confidence interval suggests that need for uniqueness serves as a mediator (Hayes, 2013). That is, rejected customers (relative to accepted ones) display an increased need for uniqueness, in turn, the increased need for uniqueness entices customers to choose the product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue). Thus, H3 is supported.

7. Discussion

The results of Study 2 revealed that rejected customers (vs. accepted ones) display an increased desire for uniqueness. Such desire entices customers to choose a product promoted by a scarcity cue. Contrary to

our expectation, there is not a significant direct relationship between social exclusion and customers' product choice, but there is a significant indirect relationship between social exclusion and customers' product choice through need for uniqueness. In other words, in Study 2, need for uniqueness serves as a mediator, such that rejected customers indicate an increased need for uniqueness; increased need for uniqueness, in turn, affects customers' product choice.

The results of both studies show that need for uniqueness plays an important role in explaining customers' product choice. That is, it serves as a mediator in Study 1 and 2. However, as outlined above, when people are rejected, relational human needs, such as belongingness, and self-esteem, are threatened (Molden et al., 2009). Also, extant research shows that social exclusion leads to negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration (Geller et al., 1974; Leary, 1990; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Thus, one could infer that individuals' mood, sense of belongingness, or self-esteem might explain the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice. To rule out alternative explanations, we conducted additional analyses.

7.1. Mood, belongingness, and self-esteem

In Study 2, in addition to need for uniqueness, we asked participants to indicate their mood, perceived belongingness, and self-esteem. All these scales were adapted from previous studies (Williams et al., 2000; Su et al., 2017; Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012; Cohen & Garcia, 2005; see Appendix B for all items). The reliabilities of mood, belongingness, and self-esteem are $\alpha = 0.97$, $\alpha = 0.95$, and $\alpha = 0.73$, respectively, exceeding the recommended cutoff point for alpha (Churchill Jr, 1979).

As we expected, an independent samples *t*-test revealed that rejected customers had a more negative mood (M = 2.64, SD = 1.66) than accepted ones (M = 6.18, SD = 1.04); $t(108) = 13.05$, $p < .001$). However, the mediation analysis test with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals revealed that mood does not serve as a mediator in the current study (IE = −0.5594; CI [−1.5127, 0.3565]) because of the presence of zero in the confidence interval (Hayes, 2013).

The results of another independent samples *t*-test showed that rejected customers display a lower sense of belongingness (M = 4.11, SD = 1.36) than accepted customers (M = 5.12, SD = 1.27; $t(108) = 3.99$, $p < .001$). However, as expected, there is not an indirect effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice through perceived belongingness (IE = 0.1321; CI [−0.1081, 0.4164]), since the CI contains zero (Hayes, 2013).

Lastly, we tested whether customers' self-esteem explains our findings. The results of an independent samples *t*-test showed that rejected customers display lower self-esteem (M = 4.29, SD = 0.92) than accepted customers (M = 4.91, SD = 0.81; $t(108) = 1.70$, $p < .001$). Nevertheless, customers' self-esteem does not serve as a mediator in the current study (IE = −0.1639; CI[−0.4135, 0.0535]) because its CI includes zero (Hayes, 2013). These additional analyses provide further evidence for our findings.

8. General discussion

We conducted two experimental studies to examine the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice. Also, we investigated the mechanism that underlies the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice. Overall, our results showed that rejected customers display a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (this product is a limited edition) compared to a product promoted by a popularity cue (this product is popular among customers). Also, the results indicated that need for uniqueness mediates the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice. In addition, further analyses revealed that even though social exclusion has a significant effect on customers' mood, sense of belongingness, and self-esteem, these factors do not underlie the effect of social exclusion on customers' product choice.

9. Theoretical contributions

This study makes several noteworthy contributions. First, although both promotional cue types (scarcity and popularity cues) have been examined in previous research (e.g., Castro et al., 2013; Wu & Lee, 2016), to the best of our knowledge, we are the first to examine these cue types in a social exclusion context. This is an important contribution because previous research shows that customers are more likely to choose a product promoted by a scarcity cue when purchasing the product for themselves because of need for uniqueness (Wu & Lee, 2016). Our results show that customers' responses to scarcity or popularity cues are affected by customers' psychological states. That is, the experience of being rejected or accepted affects customers' responses to scarcity and popularity cues. Our results suggest that rejected customers (vs. accepted ones) are more likely to display an increased need for uniqueness; the increased need for uniqueness, in turn, leads rejected customers to indicate a greater preference for a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity cue).

Second, our research contributes to the uniqueness theory by revealing a relationship between need for uniqueness and social exclusion. According to uniqueness theory (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980), people want to distinguish themselves from others at a certain level to eliminate the negative reactions derived from being too similar to others. People who possess a higher desire for uniqueness prefer products that allow them to differentiate themselves from others (Tian et al., 2001), helping them reduce the threat to their identity (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Our studies reveal that people seek to be unique not only for identity purposes but also to differentiate themselves from the group from which they are excluded to alleviate the negative consequences caused by social exclusion.

Third, our research further extends social exclusion literature by shedding additional light on the relationship between social exclusion, need for uniqueness, and customers' product choice. Our studies do not examine customers' choice of different products but examine customers' choice of products promoted by different cues. That is, we test how customers respond differently to the same product promoted by different cue types. Our results suggest that customers perceive the same product differently if different cues promote the product.

Further, our results show that although social exclusion affects relational human needs (belongingness and self-esteem) and mood, those factors do not play a significant role in customers' product choice. The results suggest that rejected customers desire to differentiate themselves from the social entity from which they are rejected. Rejected customers can achieve this by choosing a product promoted by a scarcity cue (relative to a popularity one).

10. Managerial implications

Some noteworthy implications can be derived for marketing and advertising managers. Primarily, managers should consider the psychological state of their target consumers when employing different cues as part of their promotional techniques. Thanks to digital advancements, managers can understand customers' psychological conditions by tracking their activities online and on social media networks (Moe & Schweidel, 2014). Managers may benefit from social networks to analyze these consumers' activities and promote their products using different cue types. Alternatively, when a product is already promoted by a scarcity cue, marketers may consider inducing the feeling of social exclusion in their promotions or advertisements.

Our results also suggest that marketers may entice different customer types by changing product descriptions. In other words, our results show that customers respond differently to the same product when it is introduced by a different cue type. Marketers may reach different customer segments by selling the same products, or similar, using different cue types. In addition, it is important for marketers to attempt to capture customers' psychological condition. That is, whether customers

feel rejected (or accepted) when shopping impacts whether they are more likely to choose products promoted by a scarcity or popularity cue. Also, it is important to understand customers' need for uniqueness. Different analytics platforms (e.g., Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, Twitter Analytics, etc.) may help marketers understand customers' psychological state and their need for uniqueness. More specifically, companies can use social media analytics to gather customers' search terms on social media platforms. With the help of social sentiment analysis tools (e.g., Wordstat), they may reveal keywords or search terms associated with social exclusion or uniqueness from the search terms gathered by this tool. Doing so should allow firms to create and display more relevant ads or promotions to customers. For example, a company can identify a number of keywords associated with social exclusion or uniqueness with Google Analytics and a sentiment analysis tool. Then, it can use these keywords on its Google search ads' texts. Moreover, the company can dynamically update its ads' text to include one of the previously gathered keywords that matches a customer's search terms/keywords by utilizing one of Google advanced ads features, such as dynamic key insertion (Google, 2018). That is, whenever a customer uses one of the company's identified keywords in their research, the existing ads' keywords replace the customer's, which allows the company to reach different customers with few ads depending on the customers' search items, making its ads more useful and relevant for its target customers (Google, 2018). All in all, companies can benefit from social media analytics tools to identify customers' psychological state and need for uniqueness, and then use this information to create more effective and relevant ads or promotions, which should be expected to increase sales.

Finally, understanding customers' psychological state may not only allow marketers to develop adequate promotion techniques, but it may also allow them to attract customers without unnecessary price competition. Previous research shows that offering limited edition products has a positive effect on brand profits, and also leads to price competition between brands (Balachander & Stock, 2009). As mentioned earlier, identifying customers' behaviors and psychological state should

allow firms to create more adequate and relevant promotions or ads. For example, instead of randomly choosing ads' texts to promote products, companies can identify appropriate keywords or text after involving in-depth text analysis.

11. Limitations and future research

Although our study makes some noteworthy contributions, it is not free from limitations. First, our scenario manipulations are in the context of an online retailer, not a brick and mortar store. Future research should study whether the results hold true for in brick and mortar settings. Second, according to the literature, there are two distinct instances of exclusion, namely being rejected and being ignored (e.g., Lee & Shrum, 2012; Molden et al., 2009). In our studies, we only investigate the effect of being rejected on consumers' product choice promoted by different cues through consumers' need for uniqueness. Future research should investigate the effect of being ignored on consumers' product choice promoted by different cues. Because being ignored is implicit and indirect (Molden et al., 2009), consumers who are being ignored may display greater interest in a product promoted by a popularity cue to seek reaffirmation from the group from which they are ignored. Third, we used binary outcomes for our studies. Future research should use more than two options or use a continuous variable to test whether the results hold. Fourth, we only reveal the underlying mechanism between social exclusion and consumers' product choice. However, the strength and direction of the underlying effect may vary across different variables. Thus, future research should investigate whether the mediating effect of need uniqueness on consumer cue choice is moderated by any other factors. Fifth, we only used two types of products (wine and bobblehead) for our manipulations. Future research should try to use different products to increase the generalizability of our findings. Finally, we took into account a particular scarcity cue (limited edition). Future research should investigate the relationship between social exclusion and other types of scarcity cue (e.g., limited time, limited quantity).

Appendix A. Social exclusion manipulations

Study 1 (adapted from Lu & Sinha, 2017)	It is the beginning of the new semester, and you do not know many people in your class. You are taking a marketing class in which you have to work on multiple assignments in groups. You have to find 3 students to form a group. After a couple of classes, you decide to ask 3 students, because you have some conversations with these 3 students during/after the class and they are seemingly friendly. You then send an email request to each of these 3 students and ask whether they would like to work together with you for the group assignments. A day later, you receive emails from them, and all students reject (accept) your requests to work in a group together.
Study 2 (adapted from Maner et al., 2007; Lu & Sinha, 2017)	We would like you to spend a few moments trying to recall as vividly as possible an experience you have had in your past. Specifically, we wish for you to remember an experience during which you felt rejected (accepted). In the space below, please write as detailed a memory as you can, describing the event and how it made you feel. Please spend at least 2 min thinking and writing about your experience.

Appendix B. Dependent variables, scales, and reliabilities

Variables (reliability)	Scale	Source
Need for uniqueness Study 1 (α) = 0.75 Study 2 (α) = 0.86	- Being distinctive is important to me. - I intentionally do things to make myself different from those around me. - I have a need for uniqueness. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)	Lynn and Harris (1997); Wan et al. (2013)
Belongingness (α = 0.95)	- I feel like an outsider (R). - I feel as if people do not care about me (R). - Because I do not belong, I feel distant during the holiday season (R). - I feel isolated from the rest of the world (R). - When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger (R). - Friends and family do not involve me in their plans(R). - When I am with other people, I feel included. - I have close bonds with family and friends. - I feel accepted by others. - I have a sense of belonging. - I feel connected with others. - I have a place at the table with others. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree	Malone et al. (2012)

Moods (α = 0.97)	Based on the scenario you just read, please indicate how you felt: - Bad (1)-Good(7) - Sad(1)-Happy(7) - Tense(1)-Relaxed(7)	Williams et al. (2000); Su et al. (2017)
Self-esteem (α = 0.73)	- I am confident in my abilities. - I feel smart. - I feel concerned about the impression I am making - I feel that other others respect and admire me. - I am worried about what other people think of me(R). - I feel good about myself. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree	Cohen and Garcia (2005); Heatherton and Polivy (1991)

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