Should the Devil Sell Prada?

Retail Rejection Increases Aspiring Consumers’ Desire for the Brand

ABSTRACT

In response to consumers’ complaints that they feel rejected in and thus avoid luxury stores, retailers have encouraged sales personnel to be more approachable and friendly. However, prior research on social rejection supports the idea that rejection often encourages people to elevate their perceptions of their rejecters, and even strengthens their predilection to affiliate with them. In four studies we examine the circumstances in which consumers increase their regard and willingness to pay after brand rejection. In a retail context, we show that after such a threat, consumers have more positive attitudes and higher WTP when 1) the rejection comes from an aspirational (versus non-aspirational) brand, 2) the consumer relates the brand to his/her ideal self-concept, 3) s/he is unable to self-affirm prior to rejection, 4) the salesperson delivering the threat reflects the brand, and 5) the threat occurred recently. We discuss the substantive implications of our findings for retailers and identify opportunities for future research.