

Feeling Faded: How Social Exclusion Experience Shapes Consumers' Preference for Color Saturation

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Abstract

Saturation is among the most basic properties of a product's color, and on a supermarket shelf it varies far more than hue or lightness does. What is less clear is why a consumer in a given social-psychological state would come to want it. Working from a social-interaction perspective, we propose that social exclusion experience lowers perceived vitality, the felt sense of being alive, energetic, and substantial, and that consumers who have been excluded compensate by reaching for highly saturated products, because saturation is the visual dimension on which living things register their condition. Five experiments (total $N = 2,677$) test the account. Excluded consumers chose high-saturation products more often than included consumers did and paid more for them (Study 1). The effect did not depend on visual density and ran through perceived vitality rather than arousal, positive affect, belonging, control, meaning, or death-thought accessibility (Study 2). Handing vitality back removed the effect, and making vitality salient strengthened it (Study 3). The effect was larger after being ignored than after being rejected (Study 4), and it disappeared once the product was positioned as natural or authentic (Study 5). The findings move sensory compensation from a question of how much to a question of what kind, and they locate a condition under which a single visual cue carries two conflicting meanings.

Keywords

Social Exclusion; Color Saturation; Perceived Vitality; Sensory Compensation; Visual Marketing.

1. Introduction

Retailers now treat sensory design as standard practice. Where a consumer's sensory preferences actually come from gets far less attention. Practitioners frame the question as one of measurement: find out what customers want, then build it. We think the question is psychological. The same shopper wants different sensory properties on different days, and the pattern behind that shift is orderly enough to be studied.

Social exclusion is our case. Nearly every consumer has been left out of something. Communication has widened through digital platforms, and being overlooked has become correspondingly easier to notice: a post that collects no likes, an application nobody answers, a shop assistant who never looks up. Ostracism damages belonging, self-esteem, control, and the sense of a meaningful existence [1][2], and its costs show up in mood, cognition, and self-regulation [3][4]. A substantial literature describes what excluded consumers go on to buy: they spend in ways that purchase affiliation [5], pick conspicuous or unusual goods to mark distinctiveness [6][7], and choose brands that seem to offer reconnection [8]. The newer work asks something slightly different, about what excluded consumers want things to feel like. Softer surfaces [9]. Denser patterns [10]. Warmer hues [11][12][13]. More harmonious color pairings [14].

That turn toward the senses is useful, because it puts compensation somewhere that carries no obvious social message. It also leaves something unexplained. The accounts on offer work either with broad aversive states, self-threat or negative mood, or with an arithmetic of emptiness: the excluded self feels hollow, so it looks for visual material to fill the space [10]. Neither says why one perceptual dimension should be recruited rather than another, or which dimension wins when several are available.

Saturation makes the problem concrete. Marketing has mostly read it as a volume knob: more saturation means more arousal, more attention, and a stronger version of whatever evaluation was already forming [15][16][17]. Read that way, excluded consumers like saturated goods because saturated goods are louder. Saturation also carries a meaning that has been examined less. It is the dimension on which living things register their condition. Ripeness, freshness, health, and liveliness show up as chroma. Rot, drought, and death show up as its absence. A faded photograph, a withered leaf, a drawn face: these share a look, low chroma, and they share an experience, the sense of something no longer alive.

We build the argument from that overlap. Exclusion costs a person more than relatedness. People describe it in the vocabulary of dying [18], and it arrives with numbness, heaviness, and a weakened sense of occupying any real place in the world [19][20]. Suppose exclusion drains perceived vitality, the experience of being alive, energetic, and of some existential weight [21]. Suppose also that saturation is the visual channel on which aliveness is written. Then excluded consumers should want saturated products, and they should want them not for the stimulation but because such products read as more alive.

Five experiments take the predictions in order (Fig. 1). Study 1 establishes the main effect and pushes it onto consequential outcomes. Study 2 separates saturation from visual density and pits perceived vitality against six rival mediators. Study 3 moves vitality itself, in both directions. Study 4 contrasts being ignored with being rejected. Study 5 tests the limit that natural positioning sets.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. Exclusion as an Existential Threat

The temporal need-threat model organizes most exclusion research. It holds that ostracism threatens belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence [1]. Consumer researchers have mostly worked with the first two. Excluded consumers buy their way toward affiliation [5], reach for high-status goods to repair self-worth [6], and use anthropomorphized brands to manage a self under threat [8]. The fourth need tends to be folded into the first, as though having no meaningful existence simply meant having no social recognition.

A separate line of work reads exclusion as an encounter with non-being, and it reads differently. Ostracism has been called a metaphor for death [18]. Its empirical profile resembles the deconstructed state that follows reminders of mortality: flat affect, sluggishness, lowered self-awareness, time dragging, nothing mattering [19][3]. People who have been excluded say life feels less meaningful [20], and diary studies of everyday ostracism repeatedly return reports of invisibility, of being present without being registered [22][23].

That is more than a figure of speech. It says exclusion takes away something narrower than contact with other people: the felt sense of being alive and substantial. We call this perceived vitality, borrowing from subjective vitality, the energy available to the self that is experienced as aliveness rather than mere activation [21]. Vitality in this sense is eudaimonic, tied to how well the self functions, and separable from both hedonic pleasure and physiological arousal. If exclusion drains it, consumers should reach for whatever symbolically puts it back.

2.2. Why Saturation, and Not Hue Or Lightness

Color has three psychophysical dimensions and each carries a different kind of meaning. Hue carries temperature: red and orange read warm while blue and green read cool, which is why consumers who feel socially cold lean toward warm hues [11][12][13]. Lightness carries brightness and, through it, hope and safety [24]. Saturation carries vividness. It separates a ripe fruit from a dried one, clear skin from a sallowness face, a garden in growth from one gone to seed [25][26].

Treating saturation as an aliveness cue rather than a general intensity cue rests on evidence from three directions. Ecologically, chroma tracks ripeness, freshness, and health in natural categories closely enough that saturation and freshness judgments move together [27]. Linguistically, the vocabulary of vividness gets borrowed for vitality in language after language: vivid, alive, vibrant against washed out, faded, drained, while lightness vocabulary goes to hope and hue vocabulary to temperature [28][29]. Perceptually, saturation predicts judged arousal and attention capture better than the other two dimensions do [15][16], which is exactly what would make it available as a stand-in when real vitality is missing.

This yields a test that separates our account from an arousal account. Were saturation only a volume knob, any consumer in a negatively aroused state would reach for it and arousal would carry the effect. If it is an aliveness cue, the effect should appear only where vitality is low, be carried by vitality, and weaken when the cue also suggests artificiality. Saturation does both. Highly saturated packaging makes food look less healthy and more processed [30], and saturated colors read as fitting only where the product frame permits [31][32].

2.3. Perceived Vitality as the Mediating Experience

Why should a product's color do anything for a person's sense of being alive? The substitution is symbolic, not literal, and the mechanism is documented. Compensatory consumption works by finding a symbol for whatever is missing: people without power buy status [33], and people facing a threat pick objects embodying the state they want [34]. Sensory compensation runs the same logic on perceptual properties, which work precisely because they are abstract enough to stand in for an experience. Softness stands in for social warmth [9]. Visual density stands in for inner fullness [10].

Saturation stands in for aliveness the same way, on a mapping that speakers of many languages share, where vivid means alive [28][29]. This is not decoration. Metaphorical transfer changes judgment when the thing itself cannot be had [12][35]. A saturated object therefore does not just look stronger. It looks more alive, and choosing it gives back some of the vitality that exclusion took.

H1: Socially excluded consumers prefer high-saturation products more than included consumers do, and the difference appears in choice, evaluation, and willingness to pay.

H2: Perceived vitality carries the effect of social exclusion experience on saturation preference: exclusion lowers perceived vitality, and lower perceived vitality raises preference for high-saturation products.

Two consequences of this account set it apart from the alternatives. The mediator should be vitality, and not arousal, positive affect, belonging, control, or meaning. And because the logic is compensatory, the sign on the indirect path should be negative: the less vitality people report, the more they should want saturation. An intensity account expects the reverse, on the grounds that an already aroused consumer should want less stimulation rather than more.

If vitality is what matters, moving it should move the effect. Hand it back before the choice and excluded consumers have nothing left to compensate for. Make it salient in consumers who were never excluded and they should shift toward saturation the way excluded consumers do, because the shortfall drives compensation rather than the exclusion episode.

H3: Restoring perceived vitality weakens the effect of social exclusion experience on saturation preference, and priming vitality directly strengthens it.

2.4. When the Effect Should Weaken

Being ignored is not the same event as being rejected. Rejection delivers a verdict: you are told, more or less directly, that you are not wanted. Being ignored withholds recognition: you are there, and you are not registered. Rejection hits belonging, and people answer it by seeking affiliation. Being ignored hits meaningful existence, and people answer it by insisting that they exist and count [1][36]. If saturation puts aliveness back, the effect should be larger after being ignored, since that is the version of exclusion that denies aliveness most directly. An account built on belonging expects no asymmetry here, and one built on self-threat expects the reverse, given that explicit rejection is the harsher evaluation.

H4: The effect of social exclusion experience on saturation preference is larger when exclusion takes the form of being ignored than when it takes the form of being rejected.

Positioning creates a second kind of limit. Saturation tells you something, but what it tells you is ambiguous, because the chroma that signals ripeness is also the chroma that signals processing. Put the same saturated color on a product sold as natural, pure, or authentic and both readings switch on together, and the artificiality reading eats into the aliveness gain [30]. The damage happens downstream, at the level of what the product is taken to be rather than how the color feels. That is why we expect the effect to shrink rather than flip.

H5: The effect of social exclusion experience on saturation preference weakens when the product is positioned as natural or authentic, because saturation then signals artificiality as well.

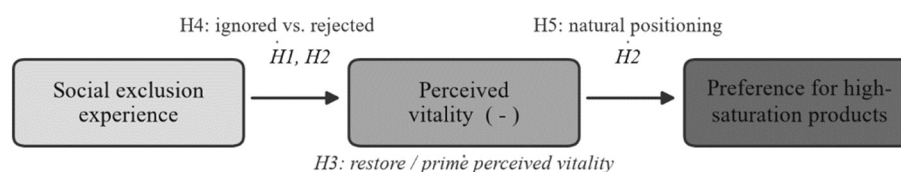


Fig. 1 Research model.

3. Study 1: The Main Effect of Social Exclusion Experience

Self-reported liking is a poor test of a compensatory account, so Study 1 used outcomes that cost something: a real binary choice and an incentive-compatible measure of willingness to pay.

3.1. Method

Two experiments, both two-cell between-subjects (exclusion versus inclusion), differed in paradigm, product, and sample culture. Study 1a drew 242 Chinese adults from a national online panel (Mage = 31.4, SD = 8.2; 54.5% female) and used a recall paradigm with an insulated bottle. Study 1b drew 301 adults from the United States and Britain through Prolific (Mage = 34.7, SD = 10.6; 51.2% female) and used Cyberball [37] with a scented candle. Sample sizes came from an a priori power analysis in G*Power [38] for $d = 0.40$ at 80% power, inflated by 15% against exclusions; both were preregistered [39][40]. Each product appeared in two colorways matched on hue and lightness and differing only in saturation. A pretest ($N = 32$) confirmed the versions differed in perceived saturation, $t(31) = 14.82$, $p < 0.001$, while lightness, hue, and attractiveness stayed put (all $p > 0.35$). After the manipulation, participants viewed

both together, chose one, rated it on three semantic differential items ($\alpha = 0.91$), and stated willingness to pay under a Becker-DeGroot-Marschak procedure [41]. The check used four items on felt rejection, being ignored, being excluded, and being left out ($\alpha = 0.94$).

3.2. Results

The manipulation worked. Excluded participants in Study 1a reported more felt exclusion ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.08$) than included participants ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(240) = 14.32$, $p < 0.001$, and the same gap appeared in Study 1b ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.21$ versus $M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(299) = 13.21$, $p < 0.001$. H1 predicted the choice data, and the choice data agreed: 71.9% against 54.5% chose the high-saturation version in Study 1a, chi-square(1, $N = 242$) = 8.02, $p = 0.005$, and 66.7% against 51.7% in Study 1b, chi-square(1, $N = 301$) = 6.94, $p = 0.008$. Ratings moved the same way (Study 1a, $M = 5.24$ versus $M = 4.62$, $t(240) = 3.82$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.49$; Study 1b, $M = 4.98$ versus $M = 4.41$, $t(299) = 3.75$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.43$), as did what they would pay: 79.6 CNY against 68.1 CNY in Study 1a, $t(240) = 3.19$, $p = 0.002$, a premium of 16.9%, and 18.42 USD against 15.87 USD in Study 1b, $t(299) = 3.57$, $p < 0.001$, a premium of 16.1% (Fig. 2).

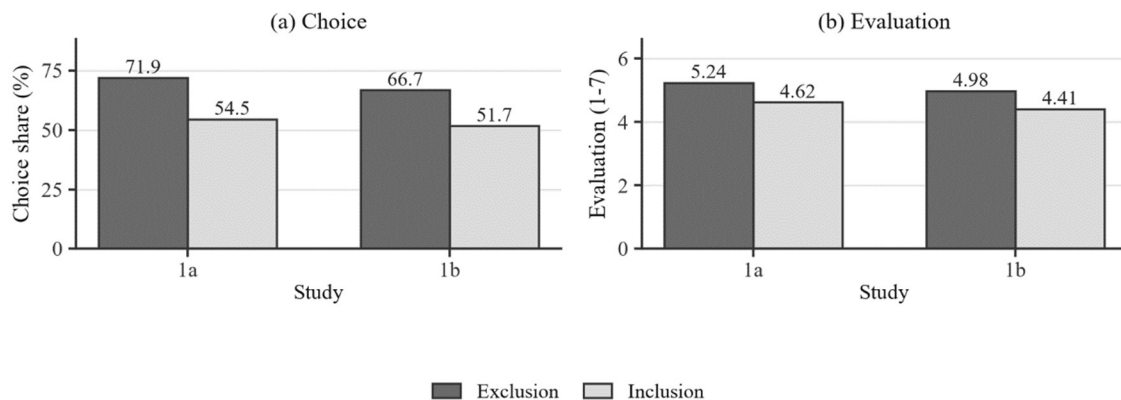


Fig. 2 Choice share and evaluation of the high-saturation product by condition in Study 1.

4. Study 2: Ruling Out Density, Arousal, and Other Rivals

Study 2 did three things at once. It crossed saturation with visual density so the two could be told apart, it tested the mediation in H2, and it put perceived vitality up against six rival mediators in a single model.

4.1. Method

Four hundred and two Chinese adults ($M_{age} = 29.8$, $SD = 7.6$; 56.2% female) were assigned at random to a 2 (saturation: high versus low) by 2 (visual density: high versus low) between-subjects design, roughly 100 per cell, after an exclusion or inclusion recall. Density varied through the number of decorative motifs on a notebook cover, twelve or three, at constant ink coverage per element. Saturation varied at fixed hue ($H = 210$ degrees) and lightness ($V = 70\%$), at $S = 87\%$ versus 29% . A pretest ($N = 48$) showed each manipulation moved its own perception and left the other alone, $F(1, 44) = 88.3$ and 41.6 , both $p < 0.001$, against $F(1, 44) = 1.87$, $p = 0.178$, and $F(1, 44) = 0.42$, $p = 0.521$. Participants then completed a state version of the Subjective Vitality Scale (six items adapted from Ryan and Frederick [21]; $\alpha = 0.89$), rated the product on the Study 1 items ($\alpha = 0.92$), completed measures of arousal, positive and negative affect, belonging, control, meaning in life, and a death-thought accessibility word-fragment task [42], and chose between the two saturation versions.

4.2. Results

A 2 by 2 ANOVA on evaluation returned the predicted main effect of saturation, $F(1, 398) = 12.06$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2p = 0.029$, with high-saturation versions rated higher ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.28$) than low-saturation ones ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.31$). Density produced a smaller main effect in the same direction, $F(1, 398) = 3.94$, $p = 0.048$, $\eta^2p = 0.010$. The two did not interact, $F(1, 398) = 0.06$, $p = 0.807$, $\eta^2p < 0.001$, so they behaved as separate cues (Fig. 3). Excluded participants reported less perceived vitality than included ones ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.03$ versus $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(400) = 6.35$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.63$, and vitality predicted preference for the high-saturation version negatively ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). Bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples [43][44] gave an indirect effect of exclusion on saturation preference through vitality of $ab = 0.21$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.32], alongside a smaller direct effect ($c' = 0.24$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.029$), which is partial mediation. Of the six rivals, none carried a significant indirect effect. Arousal rose among excluded participants ($a = 0.22$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = 0.031$) without predicting preference ($b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.212$). Positive affect, belonging, control, and meaning each fell as expected, and none predicted preference once vitality was in the model. Death-thought accessibility did not move with the manipulation ($a = 0.03$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = 0.741$), which closes off the reading of these results as mortality salience under another name.

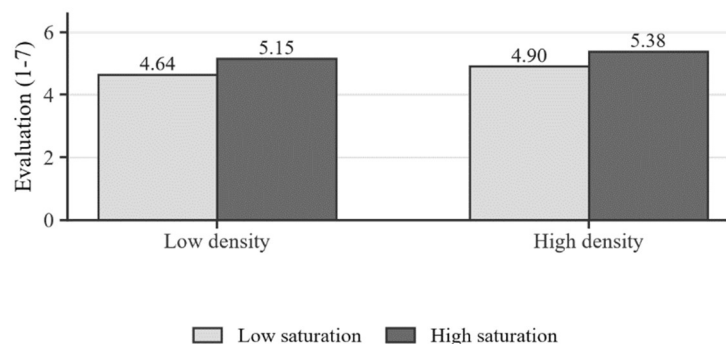


Fig. 3 Product evaluation by saturation and visual density in Study 2.

5. Study 3: The Mediating Role of Perceived Vitality

Study 3 came at the mediator from the other side and moved vitality directly. If excluded consumers want saturated products because their perceived vitality has been knocked down, then handing vitality back should undo the effect, and making vitality prominent should produce it.

5.1. Method

Study 3a assigned 404 Chinese adults ($M_{age} = 30.2$, $SD = 8.1$; 53.7% female) to a 2 (social exclusion versus inclusion) by 2 (vitality restoration versus no restoration) between-subjects design, with exclusion induced through the recall paradigm. Restoration asked participants to recall and write about a recent moment when they had felt energetic, active, and fully themselves, then to hold two expansive postures for a minute each. Those in the no-restoration condition wrote about a neutral daily routine and held two constrictive postures for the same length of time. Study 3b assigned 203 Chinese adults ($M_{age} = 28.9$, $SD = 7.3$; 55.2% female), with no exclusion manipulation at all, to a vitality-priming or a neutral-priming condition. The prime was a scrambled-sentence task in which 8 of 12 sentences contained vitality words such as alive, energetic, vigorous, and spirited. Dependent measures were evaluation of the high-saturation product ($\alpha = 0.91$ and 0.90) and a binary choice.

5.2. Results

The restoration task lifted state vitality ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.06$ versus $M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.11$), $t(402) = 6.44$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.64$. On evaluation, the 2 by 2 ANOVA returned the predicted interaction, $F(1, 400) = 7.86$, $p = 0.005$, $\eta^2p = 0.019$. Where vitality was not restored, exclusion raised preference for the high-saturation product, $F(1, 400) = 13.94$, $p < 0.001$ ($M = 5.41$ versus $M = 4.72$). Where it was restored, the effect was gone, $F(1, 400) = 0.19$, $p = 0.663$ ($M = 4.68$ versus $M = 4.61$). Choices tracked this: 73.3% against 53.5% in the no-restoration cells, chi-square(1, $N = 202$) = 8.41, $p = 0.004$, and 55.4% against 52.5% in the restoration cells, chi-square(1, $N = 202$) = 0.17, $p = 0.680$. In Study 3b the prime raised state vitality ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.01$ versus $M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(201) = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.72$, and raised preference for the high-saturation product ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.19$ versus $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(201) = 3.31$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.46$ (Fig. 4). What sets compensation going is the perceived gap between where a person is and a standard they care about, and both a depleted state and a primed, contrasted state open it. Study 3b therefore supports vitality rather than the exclusion episode as the operative variable, without settling the point.

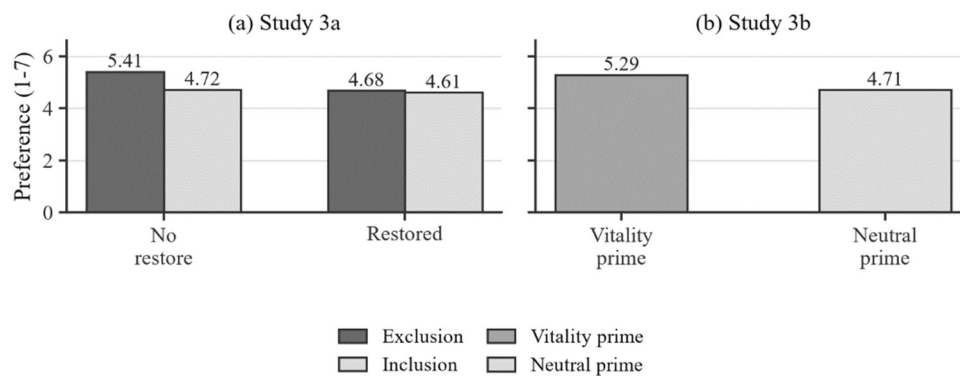


Fig. 4 Effect of restoring and priming perceived vitality on saturation preference in Study 3.

6. Study 4: Being Ignored Versus Being Rejected

An aliveness account and a belonging account disagree on one point, and Study 4 tested it: whether the effect is larger after being ignored or after being rejected.

6.1. Method

Four hundred and eighty-three Chinese adults ($M_{age} = 30.6$, $SD = 8.4$; 52.8% female) were assigned at random to one of three conditions, being ignored, being rejected, or being included, with 161 in each. All three wrote to a typed recall prompt. Those in the ignored condition described a time when others treated them as though they were not in the room. Those in the rejected condition described a time when they were plainly told they were not wanted. Those in the included condition described a time when they felt fully accepted. A pretest ($N = 96$) established that the two exclusion prompts produced the same amount of felt exclusion ($M = 5.12$ versus $M = 5.19$, $t(62) = 0.52$, $p = 0.605$) while differing on felt invisibility ($M = 5.34$ versus $M = 4.28$, $t(62) = 4.61$, $p < 0.001$), so intensity cannot explain any difference between them. Dependent variables were the binary choice, evaluation of the high-saturation product ($\alpha = 0.92$), and state vitality ($\alpha = 0.88$).

6.2. Results

Choice of the high-saturation product varied by condition, chi-square(2, $N = 483$) = 15.90, $p < 0.001$: 74.5% after being ignored, 63.4% after being rejected, 53.4% after inclusion. Evaluation ordered the same way, $F(2, 480) = 22.60$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2p = 0.086$, with ignored highest ($M =$

5.58, SD = 1.21), then rejected (M = 5.09, SD = 1.28), then included (M = 4.66, SD = 1.33). The ignored-versus-rejected contrast was significant, $t(480) = 3.35$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.39$, as was rejected versus included, $t(480) = 2.94$, $p = 0.003$. Vitality ran in the opposite direction, $F(2, 480) = 31.80$, $p < 0.001$: lowest after being ignored (M = 3.62, SD = 1.02), then rejected (M = 3.98, SD = 1.07), then included (M = 4.55, SD = 1.10), with the ignored-versus-rejected contrast significant, $t(480) = 3.02$, $p = 0.003$. A moderated mediation model put an index of 0.09 (SE = 0.04, 95% CI [0.02, 0.17]) on the ignored-versus-rejected contrast (Fig. 5). A belonging account would have predicted the reverse, rejection being the plainer statement that one is not wanted. The data line up instead with the need each form takes away, and being ignored is the one that takes away a person's standing as a presence.

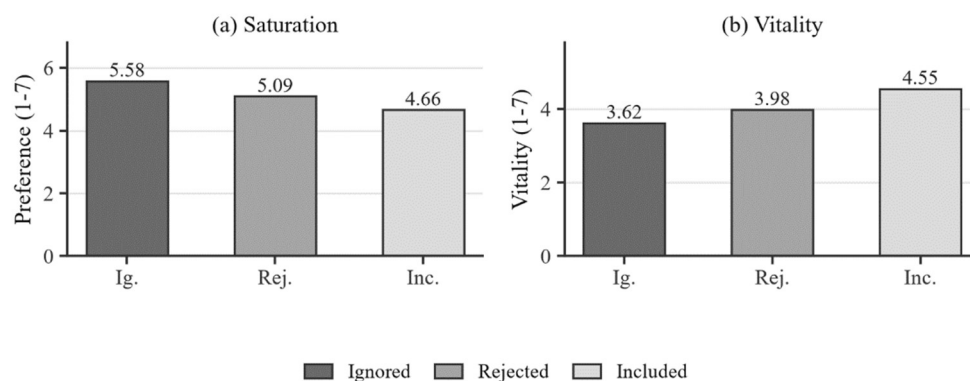


Fig. 5 Saturation preference and perceived vitality by condition in Study 4.

7. Study 5: When Saturation Also Signals Artificiality

Study 5 examined the limit that cue conflict creates. Position a product as natural or authentic and high saturation starts signalling artificiality as well, which should eat into the aliveness benefit.

7.1. Method

Six hundred and forty-two Chinese adults (Mage = 31.1, SD = 8.6; 54.1% female) were assigned to a 2 (exclusion versus inclusion) by 2 (saturation: high versus low) by 2 (positioning: natural or authentic versus functional) between-subjects design, 80 or 81 per cell. The product was a packaged fruit drink, chosen because saturation reads there as both aliveness and processing. Positioning came from label copy: the natural version said cold-pressed, nothing added, 100% fruit, the functional version vitamin C fortified, refreshing, ready to drink. Hue and lightness were held constant as before. Dependent variables were product evaluation ($\alpha = 0.92$), perceived naturalness (three items, $\alpha = 0.89$), perceived vitality ($\alpha = 0.88$), and a binary choice.

7.2. Results

The three-way interaction on evaluation was significant, $F(1, 634) = 4.72$, $p = 0.030$, $\eta^2p = 0.007$. Under functional positioning, exclusion raised preference for the high-saturation version, $F(1, 634) = 20.60$, $p < 0.001$ (M = 5.44 versus M = 4.63). Under natural positioning it did nothing, $F(1, 634) = 0.38$, $p = 0.538$ (M = 4.82 versus M = 4.71). Choices followed: 72.8% against 51.9% under functional positioning, $\chi^2(1, N = 321) = 14.82$, $p < 0.001$, and 56.8% against 50.6% under natural positioning, $\chi^2(1, N = 321) = 1.24$, $p = 0.265$. Where the conflict sits is informative. High saturation raised perceived vitality under both positionings (M = 4.52 versus M = 3.88), $F(1, 634) = 22.40$, $p < 0.001$, and vitality showed no three-way interaction, $F(1, 634) = 0.31$, $p = 0.578$. Perceived naturalness moved instead. Under natural positioning the high-

saturation version looked far less natural ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.31$) than the low-saturation one ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.24$), $F(1, 634) = 48.20$, $p < 0.001$, while under functional positioning the two barely differed ($M = 4.31$ versus $M = 4.44$), $F(1, 634) = 0.96$, $p = 0.327$. The color kept reading as alive. It stopped reading as natural (Fig. 6).

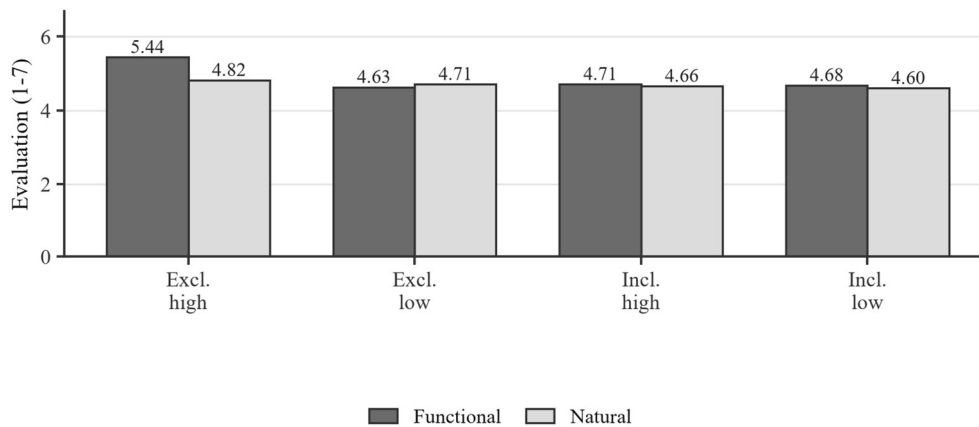


Fig. 6 Effect of exclusion on saturation preference by product positioning in Study 5.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Summary of Findings

Two questions drove this work: does being excluded change what consumers want from a product's color, and if so, through what. Our answer starts from the temporal need-threat model and from the way exclusion gets described as a form of social death. Denied any substantial place in the social world, a person registers the loss as lowered vitality and reaches for the visual dimension on which aliveness is written. Five experiments hold that line. Excluded consumers chose saturated products more often and paid more. The effect survived being pulled apart from visual density, ran through perceived vitality rather than arousal, affect, belonging, control, meaning, or death-thought accessibility, went away when vitality was restored, came out stronger after being ignored than after being rejected, and disappeared once the product was sold as natural.

8.2. Theoretical Contributions

Three points matter for the sensory marketing literature. The first concerns what saturation means. Moving it from intensity to aliveness opens a qualitative branch in a compensation literature that has so far counted quantity: the field has asked how stimuli act on consumers and how consumers differ in what they like, but less often where the liking comes from. The second is that the social-death metaphor survives being turned into a measured mechanism, with mortality salience ruled out, so it earns its place as explanation rather than rhetoric. The third is that one cue can cut both ways. The chroma that says ripe also says processed, and positioning rather than the physics of color decides which reading wins.

8.3. Managerial Implications

Sensory marketing is widespread and uneven, because the same environment does not work the same way on everyone. Three practical points come out of this. Service recovery is one: a saturated gift or voucher carries something beyond its cash value, since a modest saturation increase produced roughly a 16% premium in willingness to pay in Study 1. Product lines are another. Settings where exclusion is common, waiting rooms, complaint channels, platforms where posts go unanswered, do better with saturated palettes than with muted ones, but only

where vividness will not be read as artificial. The third follows from Study 4. The question worth asking is not whether a customer was treated poorly. It is whether the customer was noticed.

8.4. Limitations and Future Research

A few things are unresolved. One attribute of one product image changed at a time, while real products differ at once in hue, material, gloss, and setting. Two cultures were sampled, which is not enough to say anything firm about cultural moderation, particularly as color meanings shift between markets. The outcomes were consequential inside the session and not outside it, and Study 3b will not bear much weight until it is repeated with a cleaner design. Later work might ask whether the effect appears for saturation in rooms rather than in objects, whether it fades with repeated exposure, and whether the aliveness mapping travels to other channels that carry vitality, gloss and motion and timbre among them.

Acknowledgments

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