

# The Effect of Social Exclusion on College Students' Self-control Consumption Behavior: Moderating Effect of Implicit Personality and Self-efficacy

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**Abstract:** *Social exclusion is a common experience among college students. From the perspective of consumers' psychology and behavior, this paper studies the effect of social exclusion on college students' self-control consumption behavior with common social exclusion scenes, and explores the moderating effect of implicit personality and self-efficacy from the perspective of the individual. The results show that compared with consumers without social exclusion, consumers with social exclusion will show a lower tendency for self-control. Implicit personality and self-efficacy play a moderating role in the influence of social exclusion on individual self-control consumption behavior.*

**Keywords:** *Social Exclusion; Self-control Consumption Behavior; Implicit Personality; Self-efficacy*

## 1. Introduction

We often receive feedback, acceptance or rejection, from others or society. Statistics show that 78% of people experience some form of social exclusion at work. [1] College students have richer daily social activities, and social exclusion is more common. Such as being pushed out by roommates in dormitory life, being alone in group work, being ignored in community activities and so on. Due to its universality and great influence, social exclusion is highly valued in the field of consumer behavior and management. Existing studies mainly discuss different psychology triggered by social exclusion and its performance in the result of consumer behavior. For example, the excluded are more likely to trigger low self-control consumption behavior in a negative psychological state and tend to get instant satisfaction, such as choosing unhealthy snacks.[2] However, in daily life, the impact of social exclusion may vary from person to person, and the research on its boundary effect still needs to be further explored. Starting from the consumer's personality characteristics, this paper will focus on the moderating effect of implicit personality and self-efficacy and supplement the research on consumer self-control behavior from the perspective of social exclusion.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### 2.1. Self-controlled Consumption Behavior

Self control refers to the behavior that individuals can overcome their impulses, and consciously control their behaviors to make them more in line with their long-term goals .[3] In terms of consumer behavior, it refers that consumers have a choice tendency to sacrifice short-term benefits to realize long-term benefits when they cannot have both of them.[4] Factors such as emotional , psychological state, situation, etc. will all have an impact on that. For example, after successfully completing the task, consumers will give priority to learning product coupons instead of hedonic product coupons. And consumers who feel uncontrollable self-threat will tend to choose self-hedonic products instead of self-growth products. [5]

### 2.2. The effect of Social Exclusion on Consumer Self-control Behavior

The development of humans can not be separated from external social relations so we are born with the social need of being accepted by others. Social exclusion, as opposed to social acceptance, refers to a social phenomenon in which individuals are ignored, rejected and even isolated by others [6]. Through

literature review, it can be found that social exclusion will threaten the psychological needs of individuals in terms of sense of belonging, self-esteem and sense of self-control, and then affect individual consumption behavior. For example, in order to regain a sense of belonging, individuals who are excluded from society often tend to choose products that symbolize collective identity or obey the public's liking [7]. Social exclusion can also affect consumers' sense of self-control. The theory of "cognitive overload" holds that individuals who suffer from social exclusion have to mobilize some resources in the self-control system to suppress their inner painful feelings, resulting in insufficient resources for the cognitive process, which in turn will reduce their self-control ability. In purchasing products, individuals who have experienced social exclusion are more inclined to choose to get benefits quickly and enjoy *carpe diem* instead of delaying gratification. [8]

H<sub>1</sub>: Compared with consumers without social exclusion, consumers with social exclusion will show a lower tendency to self-control.

### ***2.3. The Moderating Effect of Implicit Personality***

Implicit personality is a kind of personal trait that has an internal guiding function on individual motivation and behavior. Different individuals hold different views on the variability of personal traits, while the substantialists hold the immutability theory, believing that human traits like personality are innate and relatively stable, so it is difficult to change them through acquired efforts. On the other hand, the gradualists hold the incremental theory and are more inclined to improve their sense of control over their goals through their own acquired study and efforts. [9] Based on the theory of implicit personality, this paper further proposes that although social exclusion affects consumers' self-control, different implicit personalities may be affected to different degrees. Substantialism may choose indulgent consumption with more significant short-term benefits after being rejected by society, because individuals hold immutability and have a weak sense of self-control. Gradualists, on the other hand, tend to be more inclined to self-controlled consumption with more significant long-term value, and to achieve self-value improvement through learning and regain social acceptance.

H<sub>2</sub>: Compared with the gradualist, the substantialists show a lower tendency of self-control behavior when consuming after experiencing social exclusion.

### ***2.4. The Moderating Effect of Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's self-confidence and feeling of using his own ability to overcome difficulties and complete tasks. Self-efficacy, as a personal trait and subjective feeling, affects individuals' self-control behavior in the face of difficulties. [10] For example, Scholar Xu Yuanbo [11] found through experimental research that individuals with different self-efficacy showed different self-control abilities. Individuals with high self-efficacy have stronger subjective confidence in overcoming difficulties and believe that they have the ability to change the status quo. So, they often show stronger self-control ability when facing difficulties. Therefore, this study further speculated on its consumption behavior: self-efficacy can regulate the influence of social exclusion on individual self-control consumption behavior.

H<sub>3</sub>: Compared with those with high self-efficacy, those with low self-efficacy show lower self-control behavior tendency when consuming after experiencing social exclusion

## **3. Experimental Design and Results**

### ***3.1. Pre-experiment: Measurement of Self-Control Consumption Behavior Tendency***

For the measurement of self-control behavior tendency, the subjects can choose short-term income and long-term income after self-control resource consumption. Moreover, it is required that there should be no significant difference in attractiveness and perceived price between the two products, and there should be significantly different in long-term and short-term benefits.[4] The experiment was adapted from the experiment of Mukhopadhyay[12], two kinds of products were selected as the materials for measuring self-control behavior tendency. The first category is books with long-term value for college students, like 《Influence》 and 《The Power of the Present》. The second category is movies with high enjoyment, like 《Mulan》 and 《Shock Wave》. In this pre-test, 33 college students were successfully recruited, and all the subjects were asked to score the perceived attractiveness, perceived price and perceived long-term value of these two kinds of products by a seven-point scale method. No significant

difference was found in perceived attractiveness ( $M_{\text{Books}}=4.272$ ,  $M_{\text{Movies}}=4.515$ ,  $F(1,64) = 1.021$ ,  $p>0.1$ ) and perceived price judgment ( $M_{\text{Books}}=4.091$ ,  $M_{\text{Movies}}=4.33$ ,  $F(1,64) = 1.409$ ,  $p>0.1$ ) between the two types of products.  $F(1,64) = 227.565$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). But the perceived long-term value is significantly different ( $M_{\text{Books}}=5.182$ ,  $M_{\text{Movies}}=1.97$ ,  $F(1,64) = 227.565$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The experimental results meet the expected requirements of dependent variables, so as to determine the measuring materials.

### 3.2. Study 1: The Moderating Role of Implicit Personality

Study 1 adopts an inter-group experiment of 2 social exclusion (no vs. yes) x2 implicit personality (substantialist vs. gradualist). 70 students from Shenzhen University participated in the experiment. There are 32 males and 38 females. Their ages ranged from 20 to 27 years, with an average age of 24.32 years. All the subjects were randomly assigned to the social exclusion group and the control group.

#### 3.2.1. Method

To reduce the possibility of implicit personality being interfered with other factors, the experiment first measured the implicit personality of two groups of subjects. The measurement tool refers to the implicit personality scale of Levy and other scholars [13]. The scale of this experiment has seven items. (For example, "No matter what kind of person a person is, they can always make many changes"), using Likert's seven-point scale for positive scoring (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) ( $\alpha=0.889$ )

The manipulation of social exclusion draws on the memory paradigm of scholars [14]. The subjects in the exclusion group recalled the most recent experience of being rejected by others, and described this experience in detail (no less than 30 words). The control group described an ordinary recent life experience (no less than 30 words). All subjects were required to answer "I don't feel accepted by others/group members" and "I feel ignored by others/group members" on a 7-point positive scoring scale after description, so as to conduct subsequent manipulation tests on social exclusion.

Finally, the subjects are presented with books and movies that have been tested by pre-experiments. Use "If there is a coupon without threshold in 20 yuan, which product would you prefer to buy?" Measure the self-control behavior tendency of the subjects. (1= Very willing to choose movie vouchers, 7= Very willing to choose book vouchers)

#### 3.2.2. Results

Manipulation test: According to the results of two independent samples t test, the mean value of the sense of exclusion felt by the social exclusion group was significantly higher than that of the control group,  $M_{\text{exclusion}} = 5.882$ ,  $M_{\text{control}} = 1.722$ ,  $t(68) = 26.75$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , social exclusion Manipulation succeeded.

Hypothesis testing: To examine the effects of social exclusion and implicit personality on self-control behavior of consumption, this study conducted variance analysis. The results showed that the main effect of social exclusion was significant ( $F(1,66)=7.253$ ,  $p=0.009$ ), and individuals who were socially excluded showed a lower tendency for self-control behavior of consumption. ( $M_{\text{exclusion}}=3.429$ ,  $M_{\text{control}}=3.91$ ); the main effect of implicit personality was not significant ( $F(1,66)=2.214$ ,  $p=0.142$ ). The interaction between the two was significant, ( $F(1,66)=6.714$ ,  $p=0.012$ ). A further two-independent sample t-test analysis of the data found that, compared with gradualists, substantialists showed lower self-control tendency after being socially excluded. ( $M_{\text{substantialists}}=2.857$ ,  $M_{\text{gradualists}}=3.809$ ,  $t(33)=-2.541$ ,  $p=0.016$ ). In the control group, there was no significant difference in the tendency of consumption self-control, whether it was a substantialist or a gradualist. ( $M_{\text{substantialists}} = 4.090$ ,  $M_{\text{gradualists}} = 3.833$ ,  $t(33) = 0.951$ ,  $p = 0.348$ ). Therefore,  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are verified. Compared with gradualists, substantialists show a lower tendency to consume self-control after experiencing social exclusion.

### 3.3. Study2

Study 2 adopted a between-group experimental design of 2 social exclusion (no vs. yes) x2 (low self-efficacy vs. high self-efficacy). A total of 62 Shenzhen University students were recruited to participate in the experiment. Among them, 32 were female and 30 were male. The age distribution ranges from 20 to 25 years old, with an average age of 22.32 years. All subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the control group,

#### 3.3.1. Method

Similarly, study 2 first measured the self-efficacy of the subjects. The measurement tool mainly refers

to the revised College Students' Self-efficacy Scale (GSES) [15], and adjusts the problems according to the reality. The main problems involve the self-confidence of individuals when they encounter setbacks or difficulties, and there are 8 items in total. The Likert Scale is used to score 7 points positively ( $\alpha=0.907$ ).

Then, the social exclusion of the subjects was manipulated. This experiment refers to the manipulation method of scenario substitution [16]. The reading materials of the experimental group are as follows: At the beginning of this semester, you received a notice of a course: Welcome to take this course. I am your lecturer. This course requires you to get the final course results by freely forming teams and completing teamwork. You are very happy to send the application for team formation to your selected five classmates, but after a day's waiting, you still haven't received any positive reply, and you haven't received any application for team formation with you. Unfortunately, no one wants to team up with you! The reading materials received by the control group are as follows: At the beginning of the semester, the teacher issued a notice: Welcome to take this course. I am your lecturer, and the assessment method for this course will be released. All the subjects were asked to describe their inner feelings carefully, and then answered the manipulation test items of social exclusion: "I feel that I have not been accepted by others/group members" and "I feel that I have been ignored by others/group members". Finally, the propensity of consumption self-control behavior of the two groups of subjects was measured. This operation is the same as study 1.

### 3.3.2. Results

Manipulation test: According to the results of two independent samples t test, the mean value of the sense of rejection felt by the social exclusion group was significantly higher than that of the control group,  $M_{\text{exclusion}} = 5.833$ ,  $M_{\text{control}} = 1.750$ ,  $t(60) = 24.331$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . The social exclusion manipulation succeeded.

Hypothesis testing: To examine the effects of social exclusion and self-efficacy on consumer self-control behavior. Analysis of variance was performed in this study. The results showed that the main effect of social exclusion on consumer self-control behavior was significant ( $F(1, 58)=7.845$ ,  $p=0.007$ ), and individuals who were socially excluded showed lower self-control behavior tendency. ( $M_{\text{exclusion}}=3.419$ ,  $M_{\text{control}}=4.000$ ); the main effect of self-efficacy was not significant ( $F(1,58)=2.577$ ,  $p=0.114$ ). The interaction between the two was significant, ( $F(1,58)=5.274$ ,  $p=0.025$ ). A further two-independent sample t-test was performed on the data, and it was found that compared with those with low self-efficacy, people with high self-efficacy showed a higher tendency to self-control after being socially excluded. ( $M_{\text{low-efficiency}}=3.111$ ,  $M_{\text{high-efficiency}}=3.846$ ,  $F(1,29)=8.780$ ,  $p=0.006$ ). In the control group, regardless of the level of self-efficacy, there was no significant difference in consumers' self-control tendency. ( $M_{\text{low-efficiency}}=4.071$ ,  $M_{\text{high-efficiency}}=3.941$ ,  $F(1,29)=0.211$ ,  $p=0.649$ ). Therefore,  $H_1$  and  $H_3$  are verified. Compared with those with low self-efficacy, those with high self-efficacy will show a higher tendency of self-control consumption after experiencing social exclusion.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Research Significance

This study further verified and enriched the cognitive overload theory, further explored the moderating effect of personal characteristics, extended implicit personality and self-efficacy to the field of self-control consumer behavior, and provided practical suggestions for the currently popular Internet digital marketing field. Marketing practitioners should realize that different consumers have different preferences for hedonic products and self-improvement products. Through social media and big data, we can analyze and master the long-term social situation of consumers, whether they have just experienced sudden changes, and their personal characteristics, so as to achieve higher-precision product recommendations. For example, we should recommend self-improvement products to those who have just lost love but hold a gradual change theory.

### 4.2. Research limitations and future research directions

Although the related assumptions deduced in this study can be tested by empirical data, there are still some limitations. There are two main points: Firstly, different types of social exclusion, such as neglect and rejection, may have different influence mechanisms and results. This study only starts from the social exclusion scenes that college students are familiar with, without distinguishing different types of social exclusion. Secondly, this study mainly discusses the influence of social exclusion on consumers' self-

control consumption behavior and its adjustment mechanism, but it lacks in-depth exploration of possible intermediary variables, such as sense of control and emotion. In future research, it is necessary to further study the influence process of intermediary variables.

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