Trendy or Timeless? The Effect of Need for Uniqueness and Pressure on the Choice of Unique Products

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"This research received partial funding from IE Business School, IE University, as well as from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under REA grant agreement No. 298420"

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Abstract

Consumers trying to satisfy their need for uniqueness (NFU) frequently choose between products with similar degrees but different durations of uniqueness: timeless versus trendy products. These choices are often made under pressure generated by time or product availability constrains, usually controlled by companies. Although NFU and pressure frequently co-exist in choices of unique products, their joint effect is unknown. Our research covers this gap and examines how NFU and pressure interact to affect choices between timeless and trendy products. Three studies show that high-NFU individuals under higher (vs. lower) pressure tend to choose timeless (vs. trendy) products. Pressure does not affect choices of low-NFU individuals. This interaction is mediated by the extent to which individuals focus on duration of uniqueness when making choices. A pilot field-study highlights the managerial relevance and novelty of our investigation. We discuss how managers can shape their marketing appeals to better manage their product portfolio.

Keywords: need for uniqueness, unique product choices, uniqueness duration, pressure

Companies selling unique products are estimated to make more than €250 billion in yearly revenue by the end of 2017 (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2017). These retailers and brands offer not only products with different degrees of uniqueness, but also products that have similar degrees of uniqueness, from which consumers choose and purchase. The number of consumers who purchase these unique products has more than tripled over the past 20 years (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2017). Research suggests that consumers buying unique products usually have high levels of need for uniqueness (hereafter NFU). Indeed, high-NFU individuals prefer unique, customized, and innovative products over common ones (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Lynn & Harris, 1997b; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, given the abundance of unique products in the market, these consumers often choose not between unique and common products, but *between unique products with similar degrees of uniqueness.*

Unique products are those that help to define an individual as positively different from others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Even when unique products are similar in the degree of uniqueness they offer (i.e., how much uniqueness a product offers), they can still differ in other dimensions. One such dimension is *duration of uniqueness* (Pesendorfer, 1995; Sproles, 1981). Duration of uniqueness refers to the future period of time that unique products are expected to be used to project uniqueness, independently from the objective durability of the products (e.g., durable materials). That is, individuals seeking uniqueness would not be willing to use a product that has become commonplace or outdated (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001) even if it is in good condition.

Considering duration of uniqueness, unique products can fall into two categories. Some products can offer uniqueness across fashion cycles, for a long future period of time (Sproles, 1981). We refer to these products as “timeless”. Others, can offer uniqueness during a specific fashion cycle, for a shorter future period of time (Berger & Le Mens, 2009; Nunes,

Drèze, Cillo, Prandelli, & Scopelliti, 2012; Pesendorfer, 1995). Individuals seeking uniqueness will not be motivated to use these products after the fashion cycle has ended (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). We refer to these products as “trendy”. For instance, a consumer may be choosing between two equally unique bags, offered by her favorite brand or retailer: A bag with an iconic classic design that will help to project uniqueness for years; and a bag with the most fashionable design of the season that will likely be common or outdated next season, and thus will help to project uniqueness for a short time. As both bags are equally unique, how is this consumer likely to choose?

Even though these situations are frequent and important, to our knowledge, existing research has solely focused on choices between unique and common products (Table 1). Thus, it is unknown how consumers choose between products that have similar degrees of uniqueness, but may differ in other dimensions such as duration of uniqueness. In that respect, existing studies do not provide guidance to the marketing managers of the vast industry that sells unique products, who want to understand how consumers make such choices (as shown in the pilot field-study). This research aims to address this question, and investigates how individuals choose between unique products that differ in their duration of uniqueness.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Individuals choosing between unique products commonly experience pressure when shopping (Lynn & Harris, 1997a). This pressure can be generated by companies that use time or product availability constraints (Cialdini & Garde, 1987; Lynn, 1991; Snyder, 1992) with appeals such as "limited time only" or "only while supplies last". Thus, as pressure can be controlled directly by managers, and also can impact consumer preferences (Ben Zur & Breznitz, 1981; Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000; Nowlis, 1995), how to apply pressure when consumers choose unique product is important from a managerial perspective.

To sum up, while uniqueness literature suggests that high-NFU individuals would desire and value products that are more unique (Brock, 1968; Lynn, 1991; Snyder and Fromkin, 1980), it has not yet investigated situations in which individuals choose between products that offer a similar degree of uniqueness, but a different duration of uniqueness. In addition, how pressure, which is frequently present in choices of unique products, can affect this choice is relevant but also unknown.

In this paper, we aim to fill this gap. We examine how choices between products providing longer versus shorter durations of uniqueness (i.e., timeless and trendy products) depend on the interaction between NFU (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) and pressure (Dhar and Nowlis, 1999; Dhar, R., Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000). Specifically, we posit that high-NFU individuals under higher (vs. lower) pressure will tend to choose more (vs. less) timeless than trendy products. In line with existing research on pressure (Table 2; Dhar and Nowlis, 1999), we demonstrate that higher pressure increases the extent to which individuals focus on the differentiating factor between timeless and trendy products: their duration of uniqueness. We show that high-NFU individuals focus more (vs. less) on the duration of uniqueness under higher (vs. lower) pressure, and thus tend to choose more timeless (vs. trendy) products.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Theoretically, our research makes two main contributions. First, it broadens our understanding of uniqueness-related choices and consumption by introducing duration of uniqueness as a relevant dimension. More important, it also shows the process via which NFU and pressure interact to affect choices of unique products that differ in duration of uniqueness, but not necessarily in degree of uniqueness. Second, it shows how the effects of pressure (Baumeister, 1984; Cho & Johar, 2011; Lynn, 1991) may depend on chronic or primed motivations such as NFU (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000). In our case, pressure influences the choices of high-NFU individuals, but not of low–

NFU ones. Our research also offers guidance for managers and retailers, who often apply pressure to consumers, especially when marketing unique products (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). This pressure can be used strategically, depending on whether managers want to promote more the sales of timeless or trendy products.

This article starts with developing the theory leading to our predictions. Next, we present a pilot field-study showing that the insights of this research are relevant for managers. We discuss three experiments showing that NFU and pressure interact to affect the choice of timeless versus trendy products, and that the information that individuals process mediates these choices. Specifically, we demonstrate that high, but not low, NFU individuals focus more (vs. less) on the duration of uniqueness under higher (vs. lower) pressure, and thus tend to choose timeless (vs. trendy) products. In the next section, we develop the theory leading to our predictions.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Need for Uniqueness

NFU is the chronic (Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001) or contextually activated (Maimaran & Wheeler, 2008; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) need to be different from others (Snyder, 1977). Differences in the strength of this need influence behavior. For high-NFU (but not for low-NFU) individuals, the choice of unique products is important, as they continuously seek to build and maintain uniqueness through product choices (Lynn, & Snyder, 2012; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Thus, they are interested in acquiring products with high degrees of uniqueness, such as scarce (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), innovative, and customized products (Lynn & Harris, 1997; Tian, Bearden & Hunter, 2001).

Besides degree of uniqueness, research shows that the duration of uniqueness offered by a product is also important for individuals high in NFU. These individuals contemplate the duration of uniqueness of a product, thinking how to maintain their uniqueness or how soon a product might become common or outdated (Heckert, 1989; Ruvio, 2008). As these individuals frequently choose unique products under pressure (Lynn & Harris, 1997a), we turn to discuss this factor next.

Pressure and its effects

Pressure is a subjective psychological state in which individuals feel a sense of increased urgency (Dhar & Nowlis, 1999). This subjective state can be caused by a variety of different sources. For instance, performance demands (Eisenberger & Aselage, 2008), competition (Wankel, 1972), time limitations (Andrews & Farris, 1972; Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Baer & Oldham, 2006; Ben Zur & Breznitz, 1981; Dhar and Nowlis, 1999; Latham & Locke, 1975), and product scarcity (Kristofferson, McFerran, Morales, & Dahl, 2016; Roux, Goldsmith, & Bonezzi, 2015), among others, can put individuals under pressure. These last two sources, time limitations and product scarcity, are often at the discretion of companies offering unique products (Lynn & Harris, 1997b). These companies frequently highlight limitations in time (e.g., "only available for a limited time") or product quantity (e.g., "only a few left") as two ways to put consumers of unique products under pressure (Lynn & Harris, 1997b).

Extensive research suggests that pressure can have important effects on how individuals process information (Dhar, Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000; Maule, Hockey, & Bdzola, 2000) and make decisions (Ben Zur & Breznitz, 1981; Dhar & Nowlis, 1999), as shown in Table 2. Some research suggests that individuals under pressure can simplify the decision by putting less effort (Sevenson, Edland, & Slovic, 1990; Iyer, 1989; Lin et al., 2008), or even

choke in cases of extreme pressure (Baumeister, 1984). Other research finds that individuals under pressure narrow down processing (Suri, Kohli, & Monroe, 2007), filtering (Maule, Hockey, & Bdzola, 2000), and evaluating specific information (Payne, Bettman & Johnson, 1988). Thus, when deciding under pressure, individuals focus on attributes that are relevant for the decision (Bronner, 1982; Svenson & Maule, 1993), and use salient differences between options as a decision rule (Dhar & Nowlis, 1999). On the other hand, individuals under lower pressure evaluate more aspects of the decision task (Ben Zur, & Breznitz, 1980; Wright, 1974).

Pressure and unique product choices

This tendency to focus and to compare relevant information is more likely to occur when pressure is applied to motivated individuals (Andrews & Farris, 1972; Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Baer & Oldham, 2006; Latham & Locke, 1975; Scopelliti et al., 2014; Suri, Kohli, & Monroe, 2007), since they care about the outcomes of the decision more than unmotivated individuals for whom the outcome might be irrelevant. Thus, in our context, pressure should affect only individuals high in NFU, who are motivated to choose between unique products (Tian, et al., 2001), but not individuals low in NFU.

If pressure makes individuals place more emphasis on relevant attributes (Bronner, 1982; Svenson & Maule, 1993) and salient differences between options (Dhar & Nowlis, 1999), then high-NFU individuals choosing between timeless and trendy products under pressure, will focus on their duration of uniqueness—a relevant and differentiating characteristic of these products (Pesendorfer, 1995; Sproles, 1981). Thus, high-NFU individuals under pressure will likely tend to choose more timeless products, which offer uniqueness for a longer time.

Under lower pressure, however, individuals tend to compare more aspects of the decision (Bettman, Johnson, Luce & Payne, 1993). In our setting, this means that duration of uniqueness (which is different between timeless and trendy products) may exert less influence on the decision making of high-NFU individuals, but other aspects might influence the decision too. Specifically, although products that differ in duration of uniqueness may still offer the same degree of uniqueness (something we control for through pre-testing), in direct comparisons only (Epley & Gilovich, 2006) trendy products could be perceived as having higher uniqueness than timeless ones, because they are in-fashion (Pesendorfer, 1995). For the same reason, they might look more novel (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Tian et al., 2001) and distinct (Simmel, 1957). If high-NFU individuals consider the differences in both duration of uniqueness, and degree of uniqueness (created by the direct comparison of the two products; Epley & Gilovich, 2006), the former may be less impactful. Thus, high-NFU individuals choosing between timeless and trendy products under lower pressure, may focus less on the duration of uniqueness, and thus would tend to choose relatively more trendy products, compared to higher pressure conditions.

As unique choices, and by extension the duration of uniqueness, are unimportant to low-NFU individuals (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), pressure should not affect their choice of unique products.

Formally, we hypothesize (summarized in Figure 1):

H1: NFU and pressure interact to affect the choice between timeless and trendy products. High-NFU, but not low-NFU, individuals would tend to choose more (less) timeless (trendy) products under higher pressure, than under lower pressure.

H2: Changes in the focus of evaluation mediates this interaction. High-NFU, but not low-NFU, individuals would tend to focus more on the duration of uniqueness under higher

pressure, than under lower pressure, making the choice of timeless (vs. trendy) products relatively more likely.

Overview of studies

We aim to understand how individuals choose between unique products that differ in their duration of uniqueness. In particular, we examine how the interaction between NFU and pressure—two factors usually present in uniqueness consumption—affects such choices. In this vein, we carried out a pilot field-study that established the novelty and relevance of our hypotheses for sales professionals with large experience in unique products. Study 1 tested H1: whether high-NFU, but not low-NFU, individuals would tend to choose more (less) timeless (trendy) products under higher pressure, than under lower pressure. It was also designed to provide evidence that high-NFU individuals may neglect relevant, differentiating information between options when deciding under lower pressure. We manipulated pressure via time availability and measured chronic NFU (Snyder, 1977).

Study 2 tested H1 with a consequential choice task, a different manipulation of pressure (i.e., time pressure perception), and a different measure of NFU – Consumers Need For Uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001). Finally, Study 3 tested the process proposed in H2: whether high-NFU individuals under higher (vs. lower) pressure focus more (vs. less) on the duration of uniqueness, and whether this focus makes the tendency to choose the timeless (vs. trendy) product more likely. In this study, we manipulated NFU through an established priming task (Maimaran & Wheeler, 2008), pressure via product availability, and recorded participants' thoughts while deciding, in order to test for mediation. Across all studies, the products used in the choice tasks were pre-tested to ascertain that duration of uniqueness varied as intended, but other related dimensions (e.g., degree of uniqueness) did not. These pre-tests are detailed in the Appendix 3.

Pilot field-study

This pilot study tested whether H1 is relevant and novel for unique products professionals. In addition, this study shows that professionals consider timeless products a better investment for consumers of unique products compared to trendy products.

Method

Participants. Thirty-one sales professionals (67.7% women, M_{age} = 32.10) from unique-product stores like Dior, Versace, and Prada that sell both timeless and trendy products, participated in a single-factor (higher vs. lower pressure) between-subjects experiment.

Procedure. Participants were approached at work during low-traffic shopping hours. They completed a five-minute questionnaire about a high-NFU consumer in their store, choosing between timeless and trendy products. For half of the participants, this consumer was under higher pressure (i.e., had to decide *now*). For the other half, the consumer was under lower pressure (i.e., had to decide *now or later*; *Appendix 1*). After reading about this hypothetical consumer, professionals predicted the consumers' choices (timeless, trendy, don't know), rated how useful this prediction was for their business (seven-point scale), indicated which product was a better investment (timeless, trendy, equal), and provided background information (e.g., experience, gender). Surveys were completed uninterruptedly at participants' own pace.

Results and discussion

Predicted choice shares did not differ between the higher- and lower-pressure conditions (higher-pressure: timeless = 33.3%, trendy = 53.3%, don't know = 13.3%; lower-

pressure: timeless = 50.0%, trendy = 37.5%, don't know = 12.5 %; $p > .62$), even when controlling for experience and gender. Interestingly, the direction of those results shows that professionals considered that the choice of timeless products would be more likely under lower pressure than under higher pressure–opposite to our hypothesis. Also, professionals thought timeless products were better investments (timeless = 67.7%; trendy = 25.8%; equal = 6.5%; $\chi^2(2) = 18.26$, $p < .001$), and that predicting such choices would be useful for their business (M = 5.50 > 4-mid-point-, SD = 1.53; t(25) = 5.00, $p < .001$).

Although inferences from null effects are risky, the direction of these results runs opposite to our predictions. Thus, if our predictions were supported, they would be novel to specialized professionals. Given that they rated our investigation as relevant to them, these results could provide managerial guidance about using pressure for the marketing of unique products. Next, we proceed to test our hypotheses.

Study 1

This study tested the interaction between chronic NFU (Snyder, 1977) and pressure on the choice between timeless and trendy products (H1). Specifically, in this study we ask participants to choose between two products that differ in their duration of uniqueness: timeless vs. trendy. The timeless product was pretested to provide longer duration of uniqueness, being thus naturally the best option for high-NFU individuals, who want to maintain their uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008). In addition, this product was purposely pre-tested to be better in other relevant dimensions. This provided a test on whether high-NFU participants tend to neglect differentiating and relevant choice dimensions when deciding under lower pressure.

We predict that, because pressure favors focusing on the salient, relevant and differentiating factors, high-NFU participants under pressure would focus on the advantages

of the timeless product and prefer it. On the contrary, if they neglect these differentiating factors under lower pressure, their preferences may switch in favor of the (pre-tested to be) inferior trendy product.

Pretest - Stimuli Development

Ninety-eight participants (52.44% women, M_{age} = 35.97) were recruited online in exchange for monetary compensation, and evaluated the picture and description of a dress shirt, in a two-cell between-participants design. The timeless (vs. trendy) dress shirt was described as providing uniqueness for "many years" (vs. "the current season"; *Appendix 2*). Each dress shirt was pre-tested for duration and degree of uniqueness, liking, purchase likelihood, difficulty in obtaining, commonness, status, and willingness to pay (*Appendix 3*). Analyses showed that the timeless dress shirt exhibited significantly higher duration of uniqueness (seven-point scale; $M_{timeless}$ = 2.91; M_{trendy} = 2.08, $p < .02$), difficulty in obtaining it ($M_{timeless}$ = 2.55; M_{trendy} = 1.94, $p < .04$), and status ($M_{timeless}$ = 3.55; M_{trendy} = 2.67, $p < .002$). No other significant differences occurred.

Method

Participants. We recruited 218 participants (45.90% women, M_{age} = 36.04) from an online panel and assigned them randomly to a two-cell between-subjects design (higher vs. lower pressure).

Procedure. Participants saw the pre-tested dress shirts stimuli next to each other in random order. Participants in the higher-pressure condition had 40 seconds to choose (1 standard deviation more than the mean pre-tested time), and were told that this was "just enough" time to decide. Participants in the lower-pressure condition had 60 seconds (2 standard deviations more than the mean pre-tested time), and were told that this was "enough" time to decide. Participants in both conditions had adequate time to decide based

on the pre-test. After choosing, participants completed a manipulation check (seven-point scale; "To what extent did you feel time pressure while you were choosing the dress shirt?"), and the NFU scale (Snyder, 1977; $\alpha = .85$).

Results

Manipulation check. Participants in both conditions felt moderate pressure, but those in the higher-pressure condition felt higher pressure (seven-point scale; $M_{Higher\text{-}pressure} = 4.07$) than those in the lower-pressure ($M_{Lower\text{-}pressure} = 3.09$; $p < .001$) condition.

Hypotheses testing. A logistic regression with pressure (0 = lower; 1 = higher), NFU, and their interaction as independent variables, on choice (0 = trendy; 1 = timeless) revealed significant main effects of pressure ($\beta = -4.79$, $t = -2.29$, $p < .03$) and NFU ($\beta = -0.96$, $t = -2.19$, $p < .03$), qualified by a significant interaction effect ($\beta = 1.58$, $t = 2.42$, $p < .02$). A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean NFU score showed that, as predicted, high-NFU participants chose more often the timeless (vs. trendy) product under higher than under lower pressure (choice of timeless product: higher pressure = 65.7%, lower pressure = 42.1%; $\beta = .97$, $t = 2.34$, $p < .02$; Figure 2). Choice of low-NFU participants were unaffected by pressure (choice of timeless product: higher pressure = 52%, lower pressure = 63.4%; $p > .24$).

Discussion

Study 1 supported our main hypothesis considering a timeless product that was better than its trendy counterpart not only in duration of uniqueness, but also in other relevant dimensions such as perceived product status. In these conservative conditions, one could expect that high-NFU individuals would generally tend to choose the timeless rather than the trendy option. We find that this was the case only under higher pressure. Under lower

pressure, high-NFU individuals chose the trendy product relatively more often than the timeless one. Interestingly, 23.6% more high-NFU participants chose the inferior trendy product under lower-pressure than under higher-pressure conditions. This suggests that high-NFU participants evaluate options differently depending on the pressure level. Under higher pressure, they may evaluate relevant dimensions of the choice set and place emphasis on the salient differences between choices, and thus end up considering the duration of uniqueness of the timeless product when choosing. Under lower pressure, they may neglect differences between options, and thus fail to consider important attributes (e.g., duration of uniqueness) of the timeless product. In Study 2, we further examine this by pre-testing a different set of choice options in separate and comparative settings. In Study 3, we directly test the aforementioned mechanism.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Study 2

Study 2 tested H1 with four modifications relative to study 1. First, we used a consequential choice between two women's cross-body bags with only female participants. Second, we manipulated time pressure perception (instead of time availability), keeping available time constant for all participants. Third, for generalizability, we used a different measure of NFU: Consumer's Need for Uniqueness (CNFU; Tian et al., 2001), and specifically one of its dimensions that most closely describes the behavior of individuals interested in the duration of uniqueness of a product: avoidance of similarity. This dimension captures whether individuals lose interest in outdated products (Tian et al., 2001). Finally, we conducted pre-tests using both separate and comparative evaluations to show that (a) the duration of uniqueness advantage of timeless products persists in both settings, whereas (b)

trendy products may be perceived as more unique only when directly compared to timeless products, since one serves as an anchor for the other (Epley & Gilovich, 2006). We expect high-NFU individuals to choose based on the objective duration advantage under higher pressure, but shift away from this advantage under lower pressure.

Pretest - Stimuli Development

Separate evaluations pre-test. Eighty-two female participants (M_{age} = 35.21) evaluated the description of a cross-body bag, in a two-cell between-participants design. The timeless (vs. trendy) bag was described as providing uniqueness for many years (vs. for the current season; *Appendix 4*). Each bag was evaluated for duration and degree of uniqueness, liking, purchase likelihood, difficulty in obtaining, commonness, status, and willingness to pay. The timeless bag was rated as having significantly higher duration of uniqueness (seven-point scale; $M_{timeless}$ = 4.51; M_{trendy} = 3.67, $p < .02$). No other significant differences emerged.

Comparative evaluations pre-test. Sixty-eight female participants (M_{age} = 33.29) directly compared the two cross-body bags in the same dimensions as the separate evaluations pre-test, on seven-point scales (later coded from -3 to 3), with the trendy and the timeless bags as the low and high anchors, respectively. The duration of uniqueness advantage of the timeless product persisted in comparative evaluations, as participants considered the timeless product to offer longer duration of uniqueness, with the average of the comparative measure being greater than zero ($M = .49 > 0$; $t(67) = 2.11$; $p < .04$). Moreover, the trendy product was perceived as more unique than the timeless one, with the average of the comparative measure being lower than zero ($M = -.51 < 0$; $t(67) = -2.37$; $p < .03$), although this difference was not significant in separate evaluations. Thus, while in both evaluations the timeless product was perceived to offer longer uniqueness, in comparative evaluations only, a perceived advantage in uniqueness degree emerged. If high-NFU

individuals choose according to this inference under lower pressure, then they will tend to choose more the trendy option.

Moreover, in comparative evaluations, the timeless product was more liked and rated as a more likely purchase than the trendy one ($p < .05$). Thus, systematic shifts of choice away from timeless products could indicate an inferior decision.

Method

Participants. We recruited 342 female participants ($M_{age} = 35.94$) from an online panel and assigned them randomly to a two-cell between-subjects design (higher vs. lower pressure).

Procedure. Participants read the description of the two bags presented in random order next to each other. After reading, they chose one of the bags knowing that two randomly selected participants would actually get the bag of their choice at the end of the study. Everyone had 80 seconds to choose (1.5 standard deviations above the pre-test mean time). Only time pressure perception, not actual time, was manipulated using an established procedure (Briley & Aaker, 2006): participants in the higher- (vs. lower-) pressure condition were told that "Most people take about 120 (vs. 80) seconds to read the descriptions and choose." Participants completed the manipulation check (seven-point scale; "To what extent did you feel time pressure while you were choosing the bag?"). Then participants completed the CNFU scale (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001; $\alpha = .97$). Finally, participants completed the social dimension of the Risk-attitude scale (Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002; $\alpha = .73$), to control for the impact of risk-taking behavior on choices as an alternative explanation.

Results

Manipulation check. The manipulation check confirmed that participants in both conditions felt moderate pressure, but those in the higher- ($M_{Higher\text{-}pressure}$ = 4.45) felt more pressure than those in the lower- ($M_{Lower\text{-}pressure}$ = 3.77; $p < .001$) pressure condition.

Hypotheses testing. A logistic regression with pressure (0 = lower pressure; 1 = higher pressure), CNFU measures (as described in the introduction of this study), and their interaction as independent variables on choice (0 = trendy; 1 = timeless) showed a significant main effect of CNFU ($\beta = -0.50$, $t = -2.75$, $p < .01$), qualified by a significant interaction effect between pressure and CNFU ($\beta = .49$, $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$). A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean of CNFU score showed that high-CNFU participants tended to choose more the timeless product under higher than under lower pressure (choose of timeless product: higher pressure = 69%, lower pressure = 52%; $\beta = .72$, $t = 2.23$, $p < .02$; Figure 3). Choices of low-CNFU participants were unaffected by pressure (choice of timeless product: higher pressure = 69%, lower pressure = 74%; $p > .48$).

As a robustness check, these results remain qualitatively similar when the full CNFU scale is used in the analyses. Similarly, including the risk-taking attitude as a covariate showed identical results. Both the interaction between pressure and CNFU ($\beta = .49$, $t = 2.03$, $p < .05$), and the effect of pressure on choice for high-CNFU participants ($\beta = .72$, $t = 2.23$, $p < .03$) remained significant. Risk-taking attitudes did not affect our findings ($\beta = -.02$, $t = -.10$, $p > .91$).

Discussion

In support of H1, these results complemented those of Study 1 showing that high-CNFU participants chose the timeless product more under higher, than under lower pressure. Pressure had no effect on choices of low-CNFU participants. Study 2 also indirectly examines what information participants rely on to make their choice. Consistent with our

theory, choices of high-CNFU participants under higher pressure are consistent with the duration of uniqueness advantage of timeless products, suggesting that decisions rely on this dimension. However, choices of high-CNFU participants under lower pressure shift away from the duration of uniqueness advantage. The next study explicitly examines the thoughts participants had while choosing.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

Study 3

Study 3 established theoretical mechanisms in three ways. We primed uniqueness instead of measuring chronic NFU, we manipulated pressure via product availability (Lynn, 1991), and we tested our theory by coding participants' thoughts about duration of uniqueness. Research suggests that if a product attribute is considered when making a choice, then it is also more likely to be recalled easily (Higgins, 1996; Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). If duration thoughts received relatively more weight than non-duration thoughts when decisions were made under pressure (i.e., under low product availability), participants should recall more duration thoughts in this condition.

Method

Participants. We recruited 312 female participants (M_{age} = 35.7) from an online panel and assigned them randomly to a 2 (prime: uniqueness vs. homogeneity) x 2 (product availability: higher vs. lower) between-subjects experiment.

Procedure. First, following an established procedure, participants were primed with either uniqueness or homogeneity (Maimaran & Wheeler, 2008). They saw a series of eight shapes. For the uniqueness priming, one shape in each sequence was different (e.g.,

OOOO□OO). For the homogeneity priming, all shapes were identical (e.g., OOOOOOO). Participants had to count and report the number of circles and squares in each sequence. Next, to enhance the priming, participants saw four pairs of letter strings, each pair consisting of a word and a non-word. Participants had to press "F" or "J" if the word was on the left or right, respectively. For the uniqueness priming, letter strings were uniqueness-related (i.e. "distinctive" vs. "dostinctive"). For the homogeneity priming, they were homogeneity-related (i.e. "uniform" vs. "aniform"). Next, we introduced our pressure manipulation via product availability. Participants were told verbally and graphically that the two bags were "almost out of" (vs. "in") stock to manipulate higher (vs. lower) pressure, respectively. Then, participants engaged in the same potentially consequential choice task as Study 2, but this time without any mention of time. Finally, participants wrote down the thoughts they had while choosing and completed a manipulation check (seven-point; "To what extent did you feel pressure while you were choosing a bag, given the available stock for the two bags?").

Results

Manipulation check. Participants felt moderate pressure in both conditions, but those in the higher- ($M_{Higher\text{-}pressure}$ = 3.09) felt more pressure than those in the lower- ($M_{Lower\text{-}pressure}$ = 2.57; $p < .002$) pressure condition.

Hypotheses testing. The purpose of this study was to establish the underlying mechanism. Thus, participants' thoughts were coded as related to duration of uniqueness when mentioning the product's duration of uniqueness, either explicitly (e.g., "I want something timeless but unique") or implicitly (e.g., "I like to pick items that can be used often"). When there were no such mentions (e.g. "I like cross-body bags"), thoughts were coded as unrelated to duration of uniqueness.

Participants listed a similar number of thoughts between pressure conditions (3.44 thoughts, on average; $M_{Higher\text{-}Pressure}$ = 3.40 vs. $M_{Lower\text{-}Pressure}$ = 3.49; $p > .60$). As thoughts that

influence decisions tend to come up first (Higgins, 1996; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981), two independent coders coded participants' first two thoughts, agreeing on 97.5% of the cases (κ = .93, $p < .001$). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

A moderated mediation analysis tested for the indirect effect of the interaction between pressure and uniqueness on choice, via number of thoughts related to duration of uniqueness. Pressure (0 = lower-pressure; 1 = higher-pressure) was the independent variable, priming (0 = homogeneity; 1 = uniqueness) the moderator, number of thoughts related to duration of uniqueness the mediator, and choice (0 = trendy; 1 = timeless) the dependent variable. Results showed a significant interaction effect between pressure and priming on the number of thoughts related to duration of uniqueness (β = .27, t = 2.03, $p < .05$; Table 3) and a significant effect of the number of thoughts related to duration of uniqueness on choice (β = 1.00, t = 3.65, $p < .001$). The confidence interval (CI) of this moderated mediation excluded zero (95% CI: .018 to .660, index = .27), indicating a significant indirect effect.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Next, we examined conditional indirect effects. The CI of the indirect effect for participants primed with homogeneity included zero (95% CI: −0.171 to .215). These participants' thoughts related to the duration of uniqueness did not differ between the pressure conditions ($M_{Higher\text{-}Pressure}$ = .43 vs. $M_{Lower\text{-}Pressure}$ = .41; $p > .85$). However, as predicted, the CI of the indirect effect for participants primed with uniqueness excluded zero (95% CI: .085 to .612). Specifically, participants primed with uniqueness listed relatively more thoughts related to the duration of uniqueness under higher versus lower pressure ($M_{Higher\text{-}pressure}$ = .62 vs. $M_{Lower\text{-}pressure}$ = .33, $p < .01$; β = .29, t (148) = 2.86, $p < .01$). Then, more (vs. fewer) thoughts related to the duration of uniqueness increased likelihood of choosing the timeless (vs. the trendy) product (β = .16, t (148) = 2.96, $p < .01$).

Discussion

Study 3 extends the earlier findings and supports H2 in a context in which we manipulated both uniqueness and pressure. As argued earlier, this study shows that participants primed with uniqueness recalled duration of uniqueness more under higher than under lower pressure. Product attributes are more likely to be recalled easily if considered when making a decision (Higgins, 1996; Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Thus, participants of this study were likely to consider the duration of uniqueness more when deciding under higher than under lower pressure, making it more likely to choose the timeless product which offers higher duration of uniqueness.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our article closely examines consumers deciding under different degrees of pressure between equally unique products that differ only in the duration of uniqueness they offer. In this relevant setting for consumers and companies (as our pilot field-study indicates), we performed three studies showing that high-NFU individuals tend to choose more timeless products than trendy ones under higher pressure. However, these choices seem to shift towards trendy products under lower pressure. Focus on duration of uniqueness mediates this interaction. Results were replicated with three different pressure operationalizations (time availability, time pressure perception, and product availability), two chronic measures of NFU (NFU, CNFU), and a uniqueness priming task. Moreover, careful pre-tests for each of our studies as well as robustness checks, ensured the quality of our findings. Study 1 supported these results even with a timeless product purposely pre-tested as superior. The higher tendency to choose the trendy product under lower pressure suggests that individuals

neglect relevant differentiating dimensions in this condition, and potentially compare other aspects of the decision. A pre-test for Study 2 confirmed that, indeed, direct comparisons can make a trendy product be perceived as more unique (Epley & Gilovich, 2006). Moreover, Study 2 confirmed the findings of Study 1 with a consequential task. Choices of individuals seeking uniqueness aligned with the duration advantage of timeless products under higher pressure, but shifted towards trendy products under lower pressure. Study 3 corroborates that the extent to which duration of uniqueness is evaluated during the decision mediates the proposed interaction. These findings provide important theoretical and managerial implications for understanding uniqueness consumption and managing marketing appeals in unique product choices.

Theoretical contributions

This paper contributes to research on uniqueness-related choice and consumption (Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001) in several ways. First, it adds to the conceptual development of uniqueness, by identifying duration of uniqueness as a factor with important consequences. Previous research on uniqueness has focused mostly on choices between more versus less unique products (Lynn & Harris, 1997b; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). We focus on choices between unique products that do not necessarily differ in their degree of uniqueness, and demonstrate that differences in duration of uniqueness can predict patterns of choice. This way we complement the limited research on choices between products with similar degrees of uniqueness that differ in other dimensions (Berger & Ward, 2010; Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). Together with previous research, our results suggest that uniqueness is a multidimensional construct and its duration is an

important dimension, alongside its degree (Lynn & Harris, 1997a), and the strength of conspicuous uniqueness-related signals (Berger & Ward, 2010; Han et al., 2010).

Second, we consider how factors that co-exist in unique consumption settings, such as NFU of consumers and pressure created by marketers, may interact. Thus, our study adds to uniqueness research (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), by combining it with the relevant research stream of choice under pressure (Dhar and Nowlis, 1999; Dhar, R., Nowlis, & Sherman, 2000). We demonstrate that NFU interacts with pressure to affect choices related to duration of uniqueness.

Our work also contributes to research on pressure. Previous investigations suggest that pressure can lead to choking (Baumeister, 1984), but also to more objective and better outcomes (Eisenberger & Aselage, 2009; Locke & Bryan, 1967; Scopelliti, Cillo, Busacca, & Mazursky, 2014), as it can trigger greater deliberation (Andrews & Farris, 1972) and make individuals focus on specific information (Bronner, 1982). Moreover, previous studies suggest that motivated individuals under pressure might make better choices than unmotivated individuals (Baer & Oldham, 2006; Latham & Locke, 1975). In unique-product choices, such motivation can be NFU, which indeed interacts with pressure to affect choices in our studies. Pressure affects the choices of high-NFU individuals only. Thus, we add to literature showing that positive versus negative effects of pressure may depend on how relevant is the task for individuals.

Finally, our findings contribute to connecting research on pressure and choices with a temporal focus (Soman et al., 2005). They suggest that pressure can shift the decision focus of individuals to trade-offs involving the duration of the product benefits.

Managerial and practical implications

Unique products offer an opportunity to consumers who want to establish and maintain their uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). However, our pilot field-study suggested that unique products professionals may not be aware of how to satisfy consumers' need for uniqueness through the choice of unique products. Our findings provide guidance on how companies offering unique products (e.g., exclusive branded stores) can satisfy this need. They suggest that for people motivated to project uniqueness, pressure can highlight the duration advantage of timeless products (boosting sales) but obscure the attributes of trendy products (hindering sales). Thus, for instance, companies that offer unique products, must decide when to engage in pressure-based appeals, as this can increase the sales of timeless, but decrease those of trendy unique products. Similarly, retailers of unique products can be strategic regarding when to use limited time or limited product availability promotions. Pressure stemming from these promotions could shift consumers' attention to the duration of uniqueness – an unfavorable outcome for the sales of trendy products.

In our pilot field-study, we found that unique products professionals consider timeless products as better investments. In the pre-tests of Study 2 (separate and comparative), we found that consumers considered the timeless product to offer longer lasting uniqueness than the trendy one. These results together suggest that timeless products can be a better option for shoppers of unique products, which goes in line with literature suggesting that high-NFU individuals seek to maintain their uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008). Timeless products can satisfy uniqueness needs for longer periods, potentially saving money for consumers compared to repeated trendy products purchases. Thus, purchasing unique products under pressure (e.g., right before stores close) might be a smart self-control strategy that consumers can use to advance choices of timeless products.

Limitations and future directions

The findings of this study suggest different avenues for future research. For instance, more studies are needed to understand how context-specific motivations may moderate the effects of pressure on consumers' choices. Our research tests the interaction between pressure and NFU on individuals' focus on the duration of uniqueness, and as a result, on the choice of unique products. Other uniqueness related motivations such as the perceived importance of decisions between unique products, or the projection of a specific type of uniqueness (e.g., being an expert), might also moderate the effects of pressure. Relatedly, it could be interesting to examine consumers' involvement and effort put in choosing between unique products, as a function of pressure and NFU.

We used three manipulations of pressure, focusing on sources of pressure that could be manipulated by companies through appeals related to limited time or product availability. Other important sources of pressure (e.g., social pressure or competition) can be investigated by future research, adding to the generalizability of our results. Also, to avoid unwanted confounding effects, we did not examine branded products. As brands can be important in symbolizing uniqueness, future research could offer a deeper understanding of our results using brands as a source of uniqueness.

Lastly, given the relevance of the duration of uniqueness for consumers choosing between unique products, future studies could examine how this dimension may influence consumers' post-choice behaviors and evaluations, such as their satisfaction with the product. In addition, future investigations could examine the impact of relevant factors (e.g., pressure) on choices involving other dimensions of uniqueness consumption, such as the strength of conspicuous signals, the purpose of consumption (to project status vs. knowledge), audience (in-group vs. out-group), or the means of projecting uniqueness (e.g., price vs. brand). We believe that this variety of research possibilities, highlights the potential of this research to open up fruitful future research avenues.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Pilot field-study with luxury industry professionals—experiment conditions

Some people enjoy being different from others. They like being original, and do not feel uncomfortable for being perceived as "different". These people just want to be unique.

Imagine that such a person enters your store to purchase a product (e.g., a dress shirt, a bag, or something else) in order to express his/her uniqueness. Specifically, this person is deciding between two high-status and unique products. One is **classic or timeless**, and is expected to provide high status now, and for the longer run. The other is **in-fashion or trendy**, and is expected to provide high status while the fashion lasts, but less afterwards. This person needs to decide **immediately *(vs. now or later)***, because these products will soon be unavailable. Which product do you think this person will choose?

Appendix 2: Stimuli study 1—dress shirt

Trendy product description and picture

This contemporary men's dress shirt has become the latest fashion trend this season. Many men would like to have this shirt these days, as it can be worn in many occasions. Also, since printed fabrics are among the best choices this season, this shirt is the best option for the distinguished man. Anyone who wears it will stand out from his social circle during this season.

Timeless product description and picture:

This stylish dress shirt is the all-time favorite shirt. Year after year, many men would like to have this shirt because they can wear it in many situations. Likewise, since printed fabrics have always been among the best choices, this shirt is the best option for the distinctive man. Any man wearing this dress shirt will stand out from his social circle for many years to come.

Appendix 3: Pre-test: Dress-shirt (vs. Cross-body bag)—pre-tested questions

- For how long do you think that the person who buys this dress-shirt (vs. bag) will feel unique? *(from 1= For a very short period of time; to 7= For a very long period of time)*
- How unique do you think this dress-shirt (vs. bag) is? *(from 1= Not unique at all; to 7= Very unique)*
- To what extent do you think that the person who buys this dress-shirt (vs. bag) feels unique? *(from 1= Not unique at all; to 7= Very unique)*
- Do you like this dress-shirt (vs. bag)? *(from 1= No, I do not like it at all; to 7= Yes, I like it very much)*
- How likely would you be to buy this dress-shirt (vs. bag)? *(from 1= Very unlikely; to 7= Very likely)*
- How difficult do you think it would be to get this dress-shirt (vs. bag)? *(from 1= Very easy; to 7= Very difficult)*
- How common do you think this dress-shirt (vs. bag) is? *(from 1= Very uncommon; to 7= Very common)*
- How popular do you think this dress-shirt (vs. bag) is? *(from 1= Very unpopular; to 7= Very popular)*
- To what degree do you think this dress-shirt (vs. bag) conveys the following benefits?

	Very low 1	2	3	Somewhat 4	5	6	Very high 7
Status	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Prestige	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Exclusiveness	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

- Cross body bags (vs. dress-shirt) similar to this one cost between US$20 and US$100 (vs. US$50 and US$200). How much would you be willing to pay for this bag?

Appendix 4: Stimuli studies 2 & 3—cross-body bag

Trendy product description

This ultimate fashion cross body bag is made from unique fabric. Its original floral pattern makes the bag trendy for the coming spring season. This chic model is only being offered in a few stores. Definitely, this is the choice of a woman who wants to express her individuality this spring.

Timeless product description:

This all-time stylish cross body bag is produced using distinctive material. Its unusual brownish lining makes it fashionable season after season. This classic item is only being offered at a few retailers. Nobody can doubt that this is the bag for a woman who continuously displays her uniqueness.

Figure 1: Conceptual model

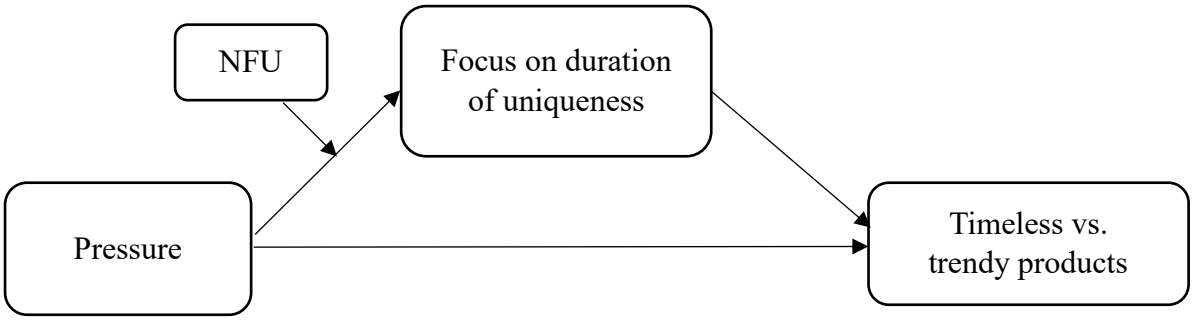

Figure 2: Study 1: dependent variable—percentage of participants choosing the timeless (vs. trendy) product

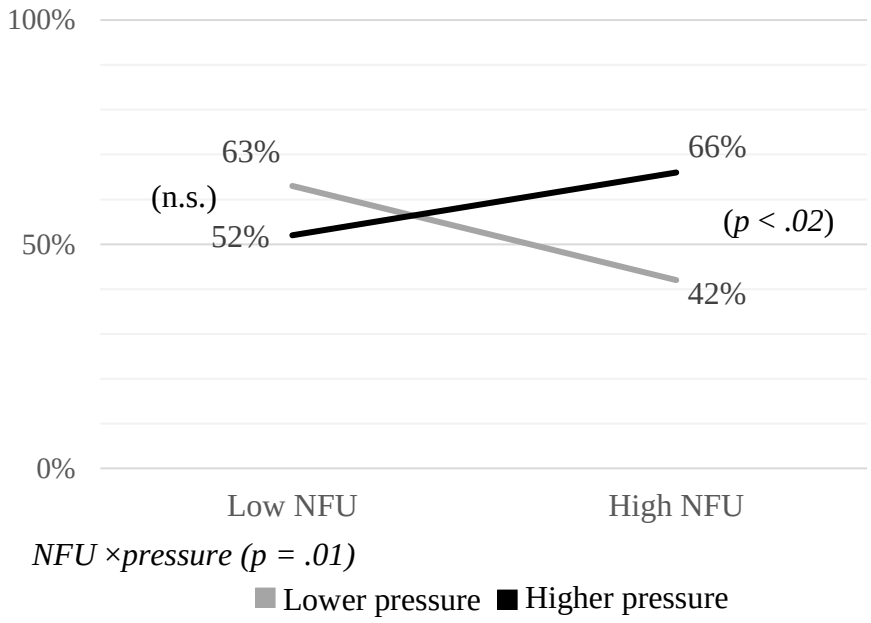

Figure 3: Study 2: dependent variable—percentage of participants choosing the timeless product

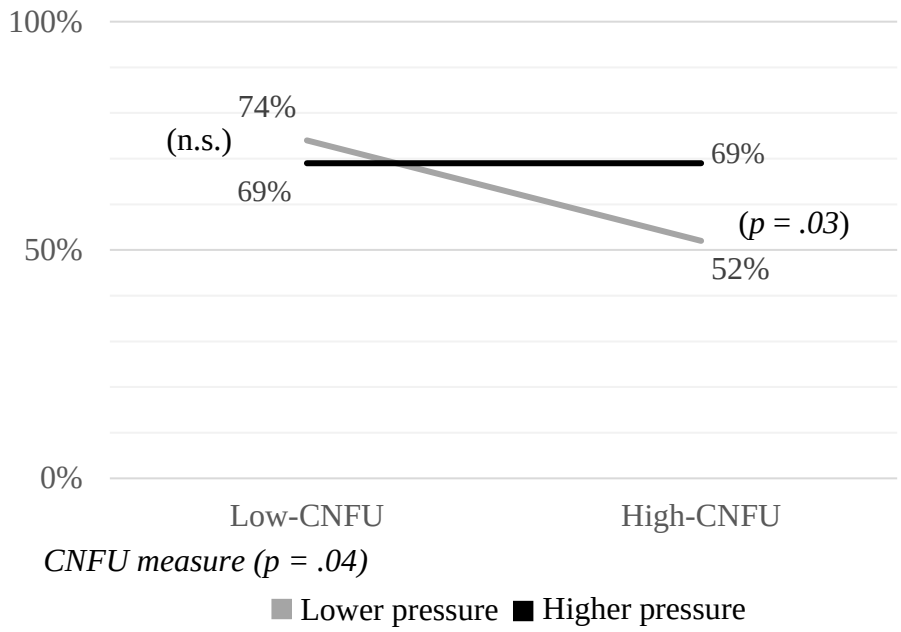

Table 1: Empirical contributions on choices involving a unique product, revealing a gap in the study of choices between unique products.

Study	Contextual and/or chronic uniqueness	Dependent variable	Key findings
Fromkin (1970)	• Contextual NFU, *manipulated through* feedback from a test	Preference for scarce vs. plentiful experiences	• Individuals high in NFU prefer scarce over plentiful experiences
Simonson & Nowlis (2000)	• Chronic NFU[1] (Snyder, 1977)	Preference for unconventional vs. conventional choices	• Individuals high in NFU who explain their decisions, tend to make less conventional choices
Tian, Bearden, & Hunter (2001) *Scale development*	• Chronic CNFU[2]	Preference for unique vs. common exterior designs	• Individuals high in CNFU prefer unique over common exterior designs
Lynn & Harris (1997) *Scale development*	• Chronic DUCP[3]	Preference for scarce, new, and customized vs. non-scarce, outdated, and massive products	• Individuals high in DUCP prefer scarce, new, and customized products over non-scarce, outdated, and massive products
Maimaran & Wheeler (2008)	• Contextual NFU, *manipulated through* geometrical shape arrays • Chronic CNFU (Tian, et. al. 2001)	Preference for unique versus common objects	• Individuals high in CNFU or primed with uniqueness tend to choose more unique objects
Chan, Berger & Van Boven (2012)	• Contextual NFU, *manipulated through* geometrical shape arrays (Maimaran & Wheeler,2008) • Chronic CNFU (Tian, et. al. 2001)	Preference for more vs. less popular options among social groups	• Individuals high in NFU prefer less popular options over more popular ones, among those options that are associated with their social group
Huang, Dong, & Mukhopadhyay (2014)	• Chronic DUCP*** (Lynn & Harris, 1997)	Preference for more vs. less distinctive option	• Individuals who perceive themselves as higher in uniqueness prefer more distinctive over less distinctive options

[1] NFU: Need for Uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977)

[2] Consumer's Need for Uniqueness (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001)

[3] DUCP: Desire for Unique Consumer Products (Lynn & Harris, 1997)

Table 2: Empirical contributions on effects of pressure and information processing, revealing that pressure makes individuals focus on specific information

Study	Type of pressure	Dependent variable	Key findings on information processing
Wright (1974)	• Time pressure • Distraction	Positive vs. negative dimensions	• Under pressure, individuals focus on less dimensions than under low pressure
Worchel, Lee, & Adewole (1975)	• Supply scarcity	Value	• Under pressure, individuals put more attention into the decision than under low pressure
Ben Zur, & Breznitz (1980)	• Time pressure	Risky choices	• Under pressure, individuals focus more on relevant dimensions than under low pressure
Payne, Bettman & Johnson (1988)	• Time pressure	Processing of information	• Under pressure, individuals initially evaluate a limited number of attributes of all alternatives
Svenson, Edland, & Slovic (1990)	• Time pressure	Choices of partially described alternatives	• Under pressure, individuals focus on positive attributes • Under low pressure, individuals focus on common attributes
Bozzolo, & Brock (1992)	• Message unavailability	Amount of content processed	• Under pressure, individuals are more motivated to scrutinize the message than under low pressure
Cialdini (1993)	• Scarcity appeals	Compliance	• Under pressure, individuals do a less thoughtful analyses of the situation than under low pressure
Dhar, & Nowlis (1999)	• Time pressure	Choice deferral	• Under pressure individuals focus more on unique differences between options than under low pressure
Maule, Hockey, & Bdzola (2000)	• Time pressure	Choice of risky or safe option	• Under pressure, individuals filter and accelerate information processing
Suri, Kohli, & Monroe (2007)	• Product temporal scarcity	Motivation to process information	• Under pressure, motivated individuals process less information than unmotivated individuals

Table 3

Study 3: Moderated mediation analysis showing a significant interaction effect between pressure and priming on the number of duration thoughts, and then on choice[1]

1. Mediator variable model: dependent variable—number of duration thoughts

Predictor	β	Lower CI	Upper CI
Pressure	.02 (.09)	−.17	.20
Priming	−.08 (.09)	−.26	.10
Pressure ×Priming*	**.27 (.13)**	**.008**	**.54**

2. Dependent variable model: dependent variable—choice (0 = trendy; 1 = timeless)

Predictor	β	Lower CI	Upper CI
Number of duration thoughts***	**1.00 (.27)**	**.46**	**1.53**
Pressure	−.16 (.38)	−.90	.57
Priming	−.26 (.37)	−.98	.47
Pressure x Priming	−.02 (.53)	−1.07	1.02

3. Conditional indirect effect of pressure on choice at values of the priming

Mediator	Priming	β	Lower CI	Upper CI
Number of duration thoughts**	**Uniqueness**	**.28 (.13)**	**.085**	**.612**
Number of duration thoughts	Homogeneity	.02 (.10)	−.171	.215

4. Dependent variable model: dependent variable—number of duration thoughts at values of priming

Predictor	Priming	β	Lower CI	Upper CI
Pressure	**Uniqueness****	**.29 (.10)**	**.09**	**.49**
Pressure	Homogeneity	.18 (.09)	−.16	.19

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. [1]Information in bold shows that thee moderated mediation path is significant as predicted. Standard errors are shown in parentheses next to coefficient estimates