

Social Validation and Marketing

Certainly a huge part of advertising is to make a product seem very popular. Marketing professor Max Sutherland explained:

“The more a brand is advertised, the more popular and familiar it is perceived to be. We as consumers somehow infer that something is popular simply because it is advertised. When people are buying gifts for others, social proof is one of the most effective tactics that a salesclerk can use.”

Many salespeople find great success in telling clients that a particular product is their “best-selling” or “most popular” on hand because such a tactic increases the social validation of the product in the mind of the buyer. When customers feel like something is more popular, they spend more money to acquire it, even if there is no proof other than the salesperson’s word. So it is with advertising: Simply asserting that a product is in super high demand or that it is the most popular or fastest selling, etc., seems to provide proof enough! When consumers *think* a product is popular, that’s often all they need to go out and buy it.

The creation and use of social validation is rampant: Clubs make their spots look like “the place to be” by allowing huge waiting lines to congregate outside their facilities, even when the place is practically empty inside. Salespeople often recount the many other people who have purchased the item in question. Sales and motivation consultant, Cavett Robert, said it best when he stated: “Since 95% of the people are imitators and only 5% initiators, people are persuaded more by the actions of others than by any proof we can offer.”

Making Social Validation Work

The power of Social Validation can be used to your benefit in any persuasive situation. If your product or service is socially validated, people are most likely to use it or to switch over to it. People are always looking around and comparing themselves to see if they line up with everyone else. If they feel a discrepancy between where they are and where everyone else is, they will most likely conform to the group standard. Consider the following ways you can enhance the effects of social validation to your benefit:

1. The larger the group, the better.

The larger the group, the more people will conform. Social theory shows us that when a group grows, so does conformity to that group.

2. The greater the familiarity, the better.

The more a person can identify with the group, the more that person will be influenced to change their behavior and/or opinions. Social validation is more powerful when we observe people we consider to be just like us.

3. The clearer the principle of social validation, the better.

Find the best use of social validation in your product or service. Is it the best selling, the most popular, used by the elite, the fastest growing? Is it part of a trend or is it the industry standard? Who uses it? Do you have testimonials from other clients or users?

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