

# That friendly car is smiling at me: When products are perceived as people

November 12 2007

---

A forthcoming study from the *Journal of Consumer Research* looks at how consumers anthropomorphize products, endowing a car or a pair of shoes with human characteristics and personalities. The researchers, from the University of Toronto and the University of Chicago, find that people are more likely to attribute human qualities or traits to inanimate objects if the product fits with their expectations of relevant human qualities – and are also more likely to positively evaluate an anthropomorphized item.

“We sometimes see cars as loyal companions going so far as to name them. We argue with, cajole, and scold malfunctioning computers and engines,” explain Pankaj Aggarwal (University of Toronto) and Ann L. McGill (University of Chicago). “We find that if the product has a feature that is typically associated with a human prototype, then people are more likely to humanize the product, and also evaluate it more positively.”

For example, the researchers found that people are more likely to buy into the idea of a “family” of products if all the products are differently sized, with some products representing “parents” and others representing a teenager and a small kid.

Similarly, non-identical products presented as “twins” fared worse in evaluations than identical objects presented as twins. The researchers also found that products with positive traits were better liked than products with rebellious or negative traits. In the study, identical looking

objects presented as “good twins” were better liked than the same products presented as “evil twins.”

As the researchers explain: “Efforts by marketers to anthropomorphize products may be viewed as shifting the category of evaluation from product to human, and more specifically, to particular human categories such as friends, helpers, families, or spokespeople.”

Citation: Pankaj Aggarwal and Ann L. McGill, “Is That Car Smiling at Me” Schema Congruity as a Basis for Evaluating Anthropomorphized Products.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2007.

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

Citation: That friendly car is smiling at me: When products are perceived as people (2007, November 12) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2007-11-friendly-car-products-people.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.