

From Green Luddite to Techspressive: The ideology of consumer technology

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When people line up to buy a new iPhone, what is it that they are really buying? A fascinating new paper in the April issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research* outlines the four main ideologies governing our consumption of technology, revealing that conceptions of technological use introduced hundreds of years ago still influence our adoption of new products and services today.

“Ideologies work like culture: they are mostly invisible and taken-for-granted sources of meaning and identity. They polarize concepts into good versus evil categories, and they demand emotional investments from us as we unconsciously identify ourselves with them,” explains Robert V. Kozinets (York University).

Kozinets points to four main ideologies governing our consumption of technology:

- Techtopian Ideology. Founded in the Renaissance, the techtopian ideology and its gospel of progress tell us that technological development is a form of social betterment.
- Work Machine Ideology. Dating to the Industrial Revolution, this ideology asserts that technology is the key to economic growth and wealth creation. It articulates meanings of industriousness and efficiency onto technology.
- Green Luddite. Also derived from a movement during the Industrial

Revolution. Early luddites were a large organized anti-industrial militia that destroyed early textile mills until brutally suppressed by the British government. Today's green luddites see technology use as destructive of the natural, the traditional, and the authentic.

-- Techspressive Ideology. The most historically recent development, the techspressive ideology casts technology as a source of pleasure, fun, and style.

Kozinets argues that these ideologies are, by necessity, interconnected and have also permeated almost every realm of human endeavor and imagination.

“What is interesting about these ideologies is that, each one promises us a supreme good—progress, economic growth, the natural, or the pleasure—and yet each promise turns out to be unrealizable. This quest for completion drives us from one ideology to another in a ceaseless quest for consummation,” Kozinets writes.

He continues: “People are not just consuming technological gadgets and gizmos, they are consuming the ideology of technology itself.”

Source: University of Chicago

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