

To each his own: Consumers and self-designed products

August 25 2009

From running shoes to ceiling fans, consumers are becoming the designers of their own products. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* looks at the ways consumers compare their creations to those designed by professionals.

"When [consumers](#) choose to take on the designer role, they are essentially rejecting the professionally designed alternatives offered by the manufacturer, " write authors C. Page Moreau and Kelly B. Herd (both University of Colorado). "In doing so, they are also implicitly relinquishing the professionals' expertise and talent, a move which may have some subtle but significant effects on the evaluations of their self-designed products."

The authors conducted three studies to examine the ways consumers compare their own talents, skills, and designs to those of the professional designers. In the first two studies, the authors found that amateur designers had lower self-evaluations of their products when they compared themselves to professionals.

But a third study found that consumers enjoy intentionally competing against professionals. Participants undertook a real online design task (at [MyTego.com](#)) where they designed their own "skins" for [MP3 players](#) or cell phones, placed orders, and received their products several weeks later. They were also given an opportunity to enter their designs into a contest hosted by the website.

"Our findings show that those who were informed of the contest prior to designing their own skins were almost twice as likely to enter the contest when competing against professional rather than amateur designers," the authors write. Consumers' evaluations of their self-designed skins showed a similar pattern: when they knew about the contest before designing their products, their self-evaluations were more favorable.

"By enabling consumers to compete intentionally against professionals, firms may be able to maximize consumer involvement and participation in self-design," write the authors.

More information: C. Page Moreau and Kelly B. Herd. "To Each His Own? How Comparisons to Others Influence Consumers' Evaluations of their Self-Designed Products." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): February 2010 (will be published online this week).

Source: University of Chicago ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: To each his own: Consumers and self-designed products (2009, August 25) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-consumers-self-designed-products.html>

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