

# Hummer owners claim moral high ground to excuse overconsumption

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Authors Marius K. Luedicke (University of Innsbruck, Austria), Craig J. Thompson (University of Wisconsin-Madison), and Markus Giesler (York University, Toronto) researched attitudes toward owning and driving Hummers, which have become symbols to many of American greed and wastefulness.

The researchers first investigated anti-consumption sentiments expressed by people who oppose chains like Starbucks and believe they are making a moral choice by shunning consumerism. To these critics, Hummers represent the ills of contemporary society. As one extreme example, on [www.fuh2.com](http://www.fuh2.com), people have posted thousands of photographs of middle fingers directed at Hummer vehicles.

They investigated various Internet expressions of anti-Hummer sentiment, but they were equally interested in the ways Hummer owners framed themselves as "moral protagonists" in the ongoing debate over consumer values. They conducted in-depth interviews with twenty U.S.-born and raised Hummer owners and found among these [consumers](#)

an equally strong current of moralism.

"As we studied American Hummer owners and their ideological beliefs, we found that they consider Hummer driving a highly moral consumption choice," write the authors. "For Hummer owners it is possible to claim the moral high ground."

The authors explain that Hummer owners employ the ideology of American foundational myths, such as the "rugged individual," and the "boundless frontier" to construct themselves as moral protagonists. They often believe they represent a bastion against anti-American discourses evoked by their critics.

"Our analysis of the underlying American identity discourses revealed that being under siege by (moral) critics is an historically established feature of being an American," write the authors. "The moralistic critique of their consumption choices readily inspired Hummer owners to adopt the role of the moral protagonist who defends American national ideals."

More information: Marius K. Luedicke, Craig J. Thompson, and Markus Giesler. "Consumer Identity Work as Moral Protagonism: How Myth and Ideology Animate a Brand-Mediated Moral Conflict." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2010 (published online September 18, 2009).

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