

What does signing your name mean in the marketplace?

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Signing your name on the dotted line heightens your sense of self and leads to purchase behavior that affirms your self-identity, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. But signing can reduce engagement in consumers who don't identify strongly with a product or category.

"Although there are numerous ways in which people may present their identity to others, signing one's name has distinct legal, social, and economic implications," write authors Keri L. Kettle and Gerald Häubl (University of Alberta). The act of signing also has implications in the marketplace.

In one experiment, [consumers](#) were asked to either sign or print their name (in an ostensibly unrelated task) before visiting a sporting goods store to purchase a pair of running shoes. "For consumers who closely associate their identity with running, compared to printing their name, providing their signature before entering the store caused an increase in the number of running shoes they tried on and in the amount of time they spent in the store," the authors write. Signing their name had the opposite effect on people who did not associate their identity with running; they spent less time in the store and tried on fewer shoes.

In another study, consumers were asked to make a series of product choices after either signing or printing their names. Consumers who signed were more likely to choose an option that was popular with a social group they belong to. The tendency was stronger when consumers

chose in a product category that signaled their identity to others (a jacket) than when they selected in a category that does not signal their identity (toothpaste).

The study has implications for retailers and consumers, the authors explain. For instance, a retailer might ask shoppers to sign their names after completing a survey, to enter a prize drawing, or enroll in a loyalty program, since it is likely to lead consumers who identify closely with the stores' products to become more engaged. "However, such signature interventions should be used cautiously, as signing tends to reduce engagement in consumers who lack such identification.

"Although a signature does not necessarily imply commitment, it does always represent one's identity. Because consumers sign (or can be asked to do so) in many consumption contexts, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of how producing one's signature influences behavior," the authors conclude.

More information: Keri L. Kettle and Gerald Häubl. "The Signature Effect: Signing Influence Consumption-Related Behavior by Priming Self-Identity." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2011. ejcr.org

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