

How do consumers achieve self-affirmation when purchasing products?

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People who feel good about themselves are less likely to choose an attractive product than a functional one, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. But choosing highly aesthetic products may make people more open-minded.

"Today's marketers are keenly aware that the way a product looks significantly impacts its commercial success," write authors Claudia Townsend (University of Miami) and Sanjay Sood (UCLA). "In this research we demonstrate one way in which aesthetics impacts the choice decision differently than more functional attributes and then propose an explanation for this behavior."

Drawing on literature showing that people equate beauty with goodness, the authors found that the choice of a highly aesthetic product is "self-affirming," meaning that it can reinforce a person's belief that they are a good person. The authors suggest that good [aesthetics](#) bestow a beauty premium on products, much like the benefit that good looks provide a person.

The authors looked at the relationship between self-esteem and product choice (among lamps and calculators) when one option is more physically attractive and the other more functional. The authors found that participants who had completed a prior self-affirming task were less likely to choose the highly aesthetic option, but instead chose based on function.

On the other hand, another study showed that after choosing good-looking products, people were more open to other perspectives. They also discovered that choosing a handsome object made people less likely to spend more money subsequently. "It is well known that [decision makers](#) often 'throw good money after bad,' meaning that there is a [tendency](#) to continue investing in [products](#) that are not paying off," the authors write. "Interestingly, choosing a good-looking product reduced this tendency to escalate commitment."

Advertisers might want to be aware that affirming potential customers' sense of self may backfire. "It may, in fact, be disadvantageous if the product is highly aesthetic," the authors conclude.

More information: Claudia Townsend and Sanjay Sood. "Self-Affirmation Through the Choice of High Aesthetics." Journal of Consumer Research: August 2012. ejcr.org/

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