

Predicting consumer preferences? Do not walk a mile in their shoes

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Salespeople have long believed that by imagining themselves as the customer, they can steer clear of their own personal preferences and make decisions that will appeal to consumers in general. According to a new study in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, the reality is exactly the opposite.

"Ironically, putting oneself in the customer's shoes makes managers even more likely let their own feelings get in the way," write authors Johannes D. Hattula (Imperial College London), Walter Herzog (Otto Beisheim School of Management), Darren W. Dahl (University of British Columbia), and Sven Reinecke (University of St. Gallen). "Envisioning oneself as a consumer who is making personal choices causes the manager's true personal preferences to kick in."

The authors conducted four separate studies in which they asked marketing managers to consider a particular model of car from a consumer's point of view. Six of the car's features were chosen for special attention, with the managers attempting to rate the car based on how a typical consumer might feel about these features. The study found that they overwhelmingly judged the car according to what the managers wanted. In fact, the harder they worked to envision themselves as the customer, the more drastically their own preferences interfered. The effect was so strong that it trumped research they had in hand showing what consumers stated they preferred. The final study in the series found, however, that by being aware of this problem, managers could adjust their view back toward that of the consumer.

"Every day, marketers try to predict [consumer preferences](#) in order to develop new products, design advertisements, and make pricing decisions. Surprisingly, the long-established habit of putting themselves in the customer's place seems to make marketers even more vulnerable to letting their personal preferences interfere. The good news is that when marketers are aware of this fact, they are finally able to set aside their personal likes and dislikes and truly see things through a customer's eyes," the authors conclude.

More information: journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jmr.13.0296

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