

Why we prize authenticity, but buy something else

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In 2012, Michel Hazanavicius' movie *The Artist* won more than 100 awards, including the Oscar for best picture, but grossed as much as *Ice Age: Continental Drift* grossed in its first weekend. In 2015, the Best Album of the Year Grammy Award went to Beck's *Morning Phase*, an album that, in one year, sold two thirds of the copies the runner-up,

Beyoncé, sold in its first day of release.

In both cases, the awarded work is the brainchild of a single artist, while the commercially successful one is the fruit of a collective effort, note Andrea Ordanini (Bocconi's Department of Marketing), Joseph Nunes (Marshall School of Business and Bocconi University) and Francesca Valsesia (Marshall School of Business) in "What Wins Awards Is Not Always What I Buy: How Creative Control Affects Authenticity and Thus Recognition (But Not Liking)," forthcoming in *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Creative control ("the extent to which the same entity takes responsibility for the entire creative process") seems to play a role in a product's recognition, but not in its commercial success. In their paper, Ordanini, Nunes and Valsesia substantiate this intuition through five studies, using both real-world data and lab experiments concerning the music and food and beverage industries.

The effect of creative control on recognition is confirmed both by three music industry datasets and an experiment. Everyday consumers exposed to the same song are more likely to deem it worthy of recognition when it is presented as the product of a single artist, and the same is valid for mildly creative activities as beer brewing and ethnic restoration.

Another lab experiment allows the authors to detail the relationship between creative control and recognition. We prize creative control because we consider it a signal of creative authenticity, but only when we trust the creator, they conclude.

Certain information, it turns out, is more or less meaningful when individuals engage in two different types of evaluation: recognition versus liking. "When deciding how much they enjoy something, consumers tend to focus on the experiential components of consumption,

largely ignoring more peripheral information including details about how the product was created," the authors write. But a recent study shows that there is a noteworthy exception: when consumers are unfamiliar with the product category. When they are presented unfamiliar ethnic dishes, consumers rely more on peripheral cues such as the perception of creative control which has, in this case, an impact both on recognition and liking.

"It is crucial for marketers to understand when and how different information is integrated in the consumer decision-making process," the scholars conclude, and they provide two tips related to their results. First, it's likely that purchases are driven by consumer's like only in goods that are hedonic in nature – "Future research could look at more functional products to see if our model applies," they advise. Second, they concede that their results hold when the purchase of one product does not cause the consumer to forego the purchase of a different product in the same category – "For significantly more costly purchases, the notion of value is expected to loom larger in the decision-making process."

More information: Francesca Valsesia et al. What Wins Awards Is Not Always What I Buy: How Creative Control Affects Authenticity and Thus Recognition (But Not Liking), *Journal of Consumer Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/jcr/ucv093](https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucv093)

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