

# Marketers should match selling cues to products as well as to customers

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Describing a toothpaste as "limited edition" or a Rolls Royce as a "best-seller" would sound off-key or even confusing to most consumers and could well steer them away from making a purchase. That's because, new research shows, individuals are inclined to have different mindsets depending on their consumption goals, and marketers should tailor their messages accordingly.

In "The Perfect Fit: The Moderating Role of Selling Cues on Hedonic and Utilitarian Product Types," three researchers - Gopal Das of the Indian Institute of Management, Amaradri Mukherjee of Portland State University, and Ronn J. Smith of the University of Arkansas - explore the impact of popularity versus scarcity cues and product types on consumers' perceptions of risk, product uniqueness, and purchase intentions. Their paper is forthcoming in the March issue of the *Journal of Retailing*.

In a series of studies, the authors probe how individuals' inclinations - whether they are more risk-averse or more aspirational—relate to how likely they are to buy a product. Sales cues like "limited edition" or "best-seller" play to these inclinations: limited edition connotes exclusivity to those seeking an achievement of sorts, while a best-seller implies that a product is dependable. As such, these cues are important guardrails in guiding how a product would be most effectively marketed.

In one study, undergraduate participants were surveyed to determine their particular focus, then randomly shown two different print ads for a

digital SLR camera. One ad promoted the camera as a best-seller, the other as a limited edition. How dependable either version was mattered little to individuals more focused on achievement, whereas risk-averse individuals were almost twice as wary of buying the limited-edition camera. However, the reverse was true for the best-seller: risk-averse buyers preferred it by a factor of two compared to the aspirational buyers, who were indifferent to that quality.

Savvy retailers, both online and bricks-and-mortar, might consider mining this insight via data analytics and loyalty programs that decode their customers' mindsets, the authors suggest: "When the selling cues are properly aligned with product types, it leads to better goal fulfillment of the shopper."

**More information:** Gopal Das et al, The Perfect Fit: The Moderating Role of Selling Cues on Hedonic and Utilitarian Product Types, *Journal of Retailing* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jretai.2017.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2017.12.002)

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