

# Selling something? Tap into consumer arrogance

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Deny it you might, but even modest consumers brag about their purchases every once in a while. But can marketers leverage our tendency to brag about our buys to market products or services more successfully?

A new study from Michigan State University published in *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* shows that leveraging consumer [arrogance](#) might be marketers' most effective strategy for promoting their brands and products.

"Arrogance is when you broadcast your superiority to others, whereas consumer arrogance is broadcasting your superiority to others via [consumption](#)," said Ayalla Ruvio, professor of marketing at MSU and the lead author of the study. "Whether it's, 'I got a better deal on a product than you,' or, 'Look at my new car,' it's all about showing others how great a consumer you are, better than them."

Companies spend millions of dollars advertising products, services and experiences, but Ruvio explained that word-of-mouth—the information [consumers](#) share about products, deals, brands or anything that is consumption related—is an invaluable promotion tactic that is driven by consumer arrogance.

"It is predicted that in 10 years, the conventional world of marketing will disappear and will rely only on word-of-mouth marketing—especially for those of the younger generation who do not trust marketing messages from companies, and rely on influencers, recommendations and other forms of word-of-mouth communication," Ruvio said. "This is why the social phenomenon of consumer arrogance is critically important to understand."

In an era of oversharing one's consumption practices and triumphs, Ruvio and colleagues Tomas Hult and Richard Spreng from MSU and Richard Bagozzi from the University of Michigan wanted to find out what role consumer arrogance played in word-of-mouth sharing—for better or worse.

In five studies, they showed how consumer arrogance drives word-of-mouth communication.

"We found that if you can trigger people's sense of consumer arrogance, they're more likely to engage in word-of-mouth communication," Ruvio said.

But, is that always good for marketers?

It depends.

The study found that such a tendency might be a double-edged sword for marketers.

"While most consumers prefer to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication and talk about their consumption triumphs, we found that consumer arrogance fuels both positive and negative word-of-mouth communication," Ruvio said.

Consumers brag about their consumption triumphs out of self-enhancement motives. Such triumphs portray them in a positive light as successful consumers to others. And, if their sense of consumer arrogance is triggered, they will brag significantly more; however, triggering this sense of arrogance will also lead consumers to share negative information if they regard their consumption experience as a failure. In such cases, negative word-of-mouth communication will help them reaffirm their sense of superiority, especially if the failure occurred in the presence of others.

The "bragging culture" in which we live rests upon consumer arrogance—showing others what you have that they don't, how you got it or where you're doing it. This culture is shifting how companies reach their consumer bases.

"Our research emphasizes the uniqueness of consumer arrogance as a social phenomenon that drives word-of-mouth [communication](#)," Ruvio said. "The findings provide marketing managers with a strategic mechanism to add to their arsenal of managerial options for how to engage in the marketplace, particularly on social media."

**More information:** Ayalla Ruvio et al. Consumer arrogance and word-of-mouth, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s11747-020-00725-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-020-00725-3)

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