

Red Bull logo enough to shape consumer performance

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Video game players put behind the wheel of a Red Bull-branded race car displayed greater aggressiveness and risk-taking, which either resulted in faster times or caused them to crash. It's a result of non-conscious brand priming that's part of the beverage maker's edgy marketing efforts and it has a powerful effect most of us don't recognize, Boston College Carroll School of Management professors S. Adam Brasel and James Gips report in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. Credit: S. Adam Brasel, Boston College

Red Bull's red and gold logo can "give you wings" – for better or worse – even if consumers don't know it, according to a new study by two Boston College professors, who found the brand's edgy marketing efforts have sold a heavy dose of attitude to consumers.

Researchers put subjects at the controls of a car racing video game, supplying each with functionally identical racecars, but each car decorated with a different brand [logo](#) and color scheme.

Players put in control of the Red Bull car displayed the characteristics often attributed to the brand – like speed, power, aggressiveness and risk-taking – and the results were both positive and negative, professors S. Adam Brasel and James Gips of the Carroll School of Management report in the current edition of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. In some cases, the drivers sped around the game course. In others, their recklessness caused them to crash and lose valuable time.

"In a performance context, what we see is that people racing the Red Bull car race faster and more aggressively, sometimes recklessly, and they either do very, very well or they push themselves too far and crash," said Brasel, an assistant professor of marketing. "They tend to do great or they tend to do horrible. There's very little middle ground."

All this took place without the [consumers](#) being aware of their own behavior, said Brasel. These changes are a result of "non-conscious brand priming," according to Brasel and Gips, Egan Professor of Computer Science and chairman of the Carroll School's Information Systems Department. It appears that the personality of a brand can non-consciously "push" or "nudge" a consumer to act in ways consistent with that personality when exposed to brand imagery. The study shows that this priming affect can extend beyond how we think into areas of actual consumer performance, with both positive and negative consequences.

In a world where ambient advertising swaddles buses in wrap-around billboards and product placements in TV, movies, Internet, videogames and other media topped \$3.6 billion last year, the Red Bull effect shows advertising and marketing programs can push beyond simply making a sale. They can have a behavioral influence that consumers don't expect.

Red Bull has built their brand identity by sponsoring promotions such as street luge contests, airplane races, and a full-contact ice-skating obstacle course known as "Crashed Ice." At the website brandtags.net, where

users enter words or phrases they associate with brands, words like "speed" "power" "risk-taking" and "recklessness" occur ten times more frequently for RedBull than the other 14 most common drink brands.

So while the research subjects knew the cars were identical in performance and differed only in paint jobs – also representing prominent brands Guinness, Tropicana, and Coca Cola – Red Bull's brand identity of speed, power, and recklessness worked both for and against the players.

"This highlights some unintended consequences of ambient advertising and product placement," said Brasel. "It's an effect that we as advertisers have not been aware of or have been ignoring. All of these brands that surround us are probably having a greater effect on our behavior than most of us realize."

More information: Red Bull “Gives You Wings” for better or worse: A double-edged impact of brand exposure on consumer performance, [doi:10.1016/j.jcps.2010.09.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2010.09.008)

Provided by Boston College

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