

Is the iPad Creative? It depends on who's buying it

5 March 2013

Encouraging consumers to feel ownership of products they haven't yet purchased can backfire because consumers tend to see themselves in the products they own, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Companies assume that consumers who are made to feel ownership of a product prior to purchase will prefer it over competing products, but this can actually have the opposite effect and lead consumers to judge the product less favorably," write authors Liad Weiss and Gita V. Johar (both Columbia University).

Companies encourage us to feel a sense of ownership of their products even before we buy them. For example, Nike allows consumers to customize sneakers online before buying them, while Apple promotes a feeling of iPad ownership through ads that give consumers a "driver's seat" perspective of an iPad owner.

Consumers, however, tend to project their personal traits onto the products they own. For instance, when a consumer who is not very creative owns (or feels she owns) an [Apple computer](#), she may associate her own lack of [creativity](#) with the computer.

The authors identified a flip side to this. In a series of studies, consumers perceived products they did not own as different from themselves because they projected their "anti-self" onto them. This was especially true when consumers were made aware of not owning a product (while shopping for it). When consumers who felt they were uncreative were made aware of not owning an Apple computer, they perceived the computer as more creative.

"Products we are attracted to prior to ownership may become less appealing once we feel that they are ours. Companies seeking to induce [consumers](#) to feel ownership of products prior to purchase

should verify that [prospective customers](#) have positive self-regard on relevant [personality traits](#) before they induce them to feel product ownership. By doing so, they can reduce the likelihood that this will backfire," the authors conclude.

More information: Liad Weiss and Gita V. Johar. "Egocentric Categorization and Product Judgment: Seeing Your Traits in What You Own (and Their Opposite in What You Don't)." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

APA citation: Is the iPad Creative? It depends on who's buying it (2013, March 5) retrieved 19 November 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-03-ipad-creative.html>

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