

Public Abstract

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A Consumer Perspective on Mass Customization

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Individual differences among consumers are an important way for marketers and consumer researchers to divide consumer markets and predict the behavior of consumers with respect to marketing stimuli. This dissertation investigates individual differences in the perceived value of mass customized products. Specifically, I explore the influence of individual differences in need for optimization (NFO), centrality of visual product aesthetics (CVPA), and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) on perceived value of customized product alternatives for four product categories. The fundamental question addressed in this study is, do differences in trait levels of NFO, CNFU, and CVPA lead to differences in the perceived value of mass customized products? A conceptual model grounded in involvement theory, the functional theory of attitudes, and theories on the desirability of uniqueness is proposed and empirically tested. The empirical part of the dissertation consisted of two studies using survey methodology. Study one identified product categories appropriate for the mass customization context. Study two tested the hypotheses. Two hundred forty undergraduate business students participated in the main study. Generally, the data support significant relationships between the three individual differences and the perceived value of mass customized products. That is, individuals high in NFO, CVPA, and CNFU report higher perceived value for mass customized products than individuals low in those characteristics. Further, support is provided for the mediating role of involvement in the functional and symbolic benefits for a given product category. Results of the study extend consumer research on individual differences into a new domain of consumer behavior and hold implications for segmenting mass customization markets.