

You're One in a Million: Uniqueness of Mass-Customized Products

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Abstract

Companies increasingly involve consumers in the product creation process via mass customization (MC) systems. This paper investigates extensions of MC systems that highlight the uniqueness of the product a consumer has configured. It examines the behavioral consequences of informing consumers that they are the first to have created a particular product configuration (uniqueness feedback) and in addition assuring them that their product configuration will remain unique (uniqueness blocking). We hypothesize that both uniqueness feedback and blocking add value for customers translating into higher willingness to pay and higher purchase intentions. We also propose that the effect of uniqueness feedback and blocking is increased for conspicuous (vs. non-conspicuous) product attributes but cancelled out for some product categories, namely those that are a matter of objective quality (vs. subjective taste). Evidence from a large-scale field experiment and three controlled lab and online experiments provides compelling support for this theorizing. This research offers a novel and highly effective managerial intervention to create value in MC systems.

Keywords: *mass customization; product uniqueness; conspicuousness*

Track: Innovation Management & New Product Development