

# Zero-Sum Beliefs in Autonomy Influence Consumer Perception and Use of Autonomous Products

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## **Abstract**

Consumers increasingly interact with new products that possess high levels of autonomy, so-called autonomous products. How do consumers perceive their own autonomy when interacting with these products? To answer this question, we introduce the concept of zero-sum beliefs (ZSBs) in autonomy: the perception that a product's gain in autonomy comes at a loss in consumer autonomy. In autonomous products, autonomy is a key enabling factor directly linked to important benefits, which increase objective consumer autonomy (e.g., via time savings, freeing from chores). We hypothesize and show, however, that consumers' subjective evaluation of this matter differs from objective reality. Across six studies, including a large representative consumer panel, we find that consumers endorse ZSBs in autonomy, with detrimental consequences for autonomous products. The studies not only uncover a novel phenomenon impeding new product adoption but also offer a managerially relevant remedy. This research introduces ZSBs to research in innovation management and new product adoption, enhancing our understanding of autonomy tradeoffs in technology-mediated consumption.

**Subject Areas:** *Consumer Behaviour, Information Processing, New Product Development and Launch, Product Management*

**Track:** Innovation Management & New Product Development