

Uncovering the Role of Production Contingency: How Production Mode Shapes Consumers' Product Valuation

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Abstract

In this research, we examine production modes, typically viewed as operational choices, as a novel determinant of product valuation. Across multiple domains, including automobile, key holders, photo frame, and furniture, we demonstrate that consumers value made-to-order products more than physically identical made-to-stock products, even in the absence of design configuration. We introduce production contingency, whether a product is created because a specific consumer placed an order, as a previously unrecognized and conceptually distinct determinant that is often conflated with customization. Production contingency inherent in made-to-order production fosters a perceived transfer of the customer's essence into the product from the moment production begins. Therefore, this effect is mitigated when production is not initiated on the consumer's behalf or the product is too short-lived to preserve essence over time. Our findings reveal an undocumented customer-to-product essence transfer that originates in production mode and establish a new source of psychological connection that operates independent of customization.

Track: Consumer Behaviour