

Psychologist studies how product messages influence our willingness to pay

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(PhysOrg.com) -- As retailers bombard holiday shoppers with a blizzard of product bargains and layaway options, they should probably be concerned with the power of the words being used to promote their products to consumers. So says an Iowa State University psychologist who has studied how a product's message influences what consumers are ultimately willing to pay for it.

Kevin Blankenship, an assistant professor of psychology at Iowa State, led two recent studies of 280 student subjects -- 100 from Purdue University and 180 at Fresno State University. He found that those who were given a message that assigned greater value to an alarm clock were willing to pay an average of \$15 more for that clock than the subjects who were given an opposite message.

Blankenship previously presented the study's results at a Division 8 Society for [Personality](#) and Social Psychology conference. He's also co-authored a paper on the results with Duane Wegener, professor of [psychological sciences](#) at Purdue, that is currently under review for publication in a [social psychology](#) professional journal.

"With this study, and some of the other work I've done, we are trying to figure how we can get people to think about their [attitude](#) toward the object," Blankenship said. "If we can get them to think about it, then presumably they'll create a strong attitude about it. And in the consumer domain, a strong attitude means that consumers will be more likely to purchase that kind of product."

Blankenship says researchers tried to get subjects in the study to think about the alarm clock as it relates to important values to them.

"If something is important to a person, they've probably thought about it a great deal, and that's going to guide how they interact with that particular object later on," Blankenship said. "If we can get people to relate important things to initially unimportant things, like an alarm clock, they will hopefully think a lot about that product, which then will guide whether they purchase the product."

Researchers initially pre-tested subjects in the study to determine the values that were important to them. Important values included freedom, loyalty and self-respect. Less important values included unity, social power and wealth.

Half of the participants were then given a message that reflected upon the clock's important values, while the other half were given the information associated with the less important values. Researchers assessed the subjects' overall attitudes toward the clock in light of the message, and then asked them how much they would be willing to pay for it.

"So not only did we measure evaluations, but we also measured behavioral intentions," he said. "And what we found was that when they were asked to consider the clock in light of the important values, they did indeed seem to think more about the product information. This was also reflected in how much they were willing to pay for the clock as well -- and the average was about \$15 more. So it was a good amount considering we tracked amounts between zero and \$100."

Blankenship also has a second study on "word power" -- determining how language can influence a person's processing of information and behavior -- under review with another professional journal.

Provided by Iowa State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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