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Sharing Isn't Always Caring: Why Don't Consumers Take Care of Their Zipcars?

Consumers who access products in the short-term instead of owning them show greater indifference toward these products and identify less with the brand and other consumers, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“Our study represents the first look at how consumers think, feel, and act when they are accessing rather than purchasing products, and we discovered that the nature of access-based consumption is inherently different from ownership,” write authors Fleura Bardhi (Northeastern University) and Giana M. Eckhardt (Suffolk University).

The authors interviewed users of the Zipcar car sharing service and found that consumers do not feel any psychological sense of ownership. Although Zipcar is attempting to build a brand community, consumers currently do not want this type of engagement. Their lack of trust and their perception of the brand as enforcer lead them to engage with the brand solely as a service provider.

“Zipcar uses a strict style of governance to maintain compliance with the rules of car sharing to make sure cars aren't brought back late, the gas tank is filled, etc. Consumers like and even want more of this surveillance, as they feel it is the only way the system can work effectively, since they don't trust each other to obey the rules without Zipcar's heavy handed enforcement,” write the authors.

“Our study challenges the romanticized view of access understood as a form of collaborative consumption and altruistically motivated. Instead, we show it to be the reverse, with everyone looking out for their own best interest and not connecting to the objects they are accessing, other consumers, or the company,” the authors conclude.

Fleura Bardhi and Giana M. Eckhardt. “Access-Based Consumption: The Case of Car Sharing.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2012. For more information, contact Giana Eckhardt (geckhardt@suffolk.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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