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Go Ahead, Tell Me What to Buy: Happy Consumers Like It (Most of the Time?)



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Consumers apparently don't mind taking orders, when it comes to slogans for pleasurable products or services, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#). But banks and insurance agencies should mind their manners.

"In interpersonal communication, as well as in advertising, polite language elicits higher compliance, compared to more assertive language, which uses the imperative tone," write authors Ann Kronrod (MIT), Amir Grinstein (Ben-Gurion University), and Luc Wathieu (Georgetown University). But a fair amount of marketing communication is worded assertively (Nike's "Just Do It."). The authors wondered when consumers respond to direct commands.

People who are in a good mood tend to use more direct language, the authors explain, so messages that induce a positive mood can be more assertive. "When thinking of the pleasure of hedonic goods, such as chocolate, spa, or vacation, the consumer is usually in a positive mood and therefore she may expect to be addressed with more assertive language," the authors write. Consequently, "love yourself a little" would persuade more than "you could love yourself a little." In contrast, consumers do not have positive feelings about utilitarian consumption, such as banking and insurance, and don't respond as well to assertive messages from such companies.

The authors found that only 8 percent of utilitarian products (banking, diapers, real estate) have assertive slogans. Meanwhile, 24 percent of hedonic products (ice cream, designer jeans, beer) have assertive slogans. In an experiment where participants read messages encouraging them to try chocolate or to open a bank account, respondents reported better moods when they were thinking of chocolate, and higher purchase intentions when the language was assertive ("you must try our chocolate!"). However, participants who were thinking of a bank account did not report positive moods and had higher purchase intentions following a non-assertive message ("you could open a bank account with us.").

"An important implication of this research for campaigners and for composers of public messages is that assertive messages *can* be effective and non-assertive messages can be counter-productive, depending on how they meet consumers' communications expectations," the authors conclude.

Ann Kronrod, Amir Grinstein, and Luc Wathieu. "Enjoy! Hedonic Consumption and Compliance with Assertive Messages." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2012 (published online September 2, 2011). For more information, contact Ann Kronrod (Kronod@mit.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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