

When joint ownership threatens object care

Bernadette Kamleitner¹, Anna Rabinovich²

1 Marketing, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

2 Psychology, University of Exeter, UK

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Many goods are owned by more than one person. Yet, the effect of joint ownership on consumer behavior is not well understood. This paper investigates the effect of ownership mode (joint vs. individual) on the care consumers extend towards objects. We hypothesize that a sense of ownership over an object increases object care and that the presence of co-owners holds a two-fold influence on perceptions of ownership. Compared to individual ownership we assume that joint ownership decreases individual psychological ownership but that an experience of collective psychological ownership can mitigate these effects. We further propose that collective psychological ownership reflects primarily the relationship between co-owners. Situated in two different field settings, studies 1 and 2 document the predicted decrease in object care in response to joint ownership. They also pinpoint a reduction in individual psychological ownership (perception of an object as “mine”) as underlying process. Studies 3 and 4 manipulate the relationship between co-owners and find that it moderates the effect because it influences collective perceptions of ownership. Results suggest that it is mostly bad news for an object to be owned jointly. Not only will it be handled by multiple people, each of them is also less likely to exert care. This holds in particular if the co-owners are not extremely close. Fostering a sense of collective or individual ownership may mitigate the detrimental effect of joint ownership on object care.