The Handmade Effect: What’s Love Got to Do with It?

Despite the popularity and high quality of machine-made products, handmade products have not disappeared, even in product categories in which machinal production is common. The authors present the first systematic set of studies exploring whether and how stated production mode (handmade vs. machine-made) affects product attractiveness. Four studies provide evidence for the existence of a positive handmade effect on product attractiveness. This effect is, to an important extent, driven by perceptions that handmade products symbolically “contain love.” The authors validate this love account by controlling for alternative value drivers of handmade production (effort, product quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and pride). The handmade effect is moderated by two factors that affect the value of love. Specifically, consumers indicate stronger purchase intentions for handmade than machine-made products when buying gifts for their loved ones but not for more distant gift recipients, and they pay more for handmade gifts when purchased to convey love than simply to acquire the best-performing product.