



Short Communication

Taste moral, taste good: The effects of Fairtrade logo and second language on product taste evaluation ☆

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ABSTRACT

Moral issues surrounding products are attracting attention of researchers. Fairtrade products bear logos that communicate moral information, which indicates justice for the poor. Studies found that products tagged with Fairtrade logos were believed to taste better. Furthermore, people tend to judge moral acts as more virtuous while moral violations as less condemnable when information is presented in their second languages. Built on these findings, the present study aims to examine how interaction of Fairtrade logos and second languages influences consumers' taste evaluation of products. It suggests that, mediated by positive affects, Chinese green tea bearing a Fairtrade logo is judged to taste better than the same tea without a Fairtrade logo. More importantly, interaction of a Fairtrade logo and use of second language significantly enhanced the reported product taste. Lastly, limitations and possible applications of our findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, consumers are responding to global trade with their purchase behavior, which prefers products that are produced respecting economic, environmental, and social standards (e.g. Lee & Yun, 2015). Moral consumerism has arisen alongside this trend, referring to consumption that takes moral considerations into account. The sphere of moral consumerism entails issues such as fair prices for farmers, prevention of child labor, and animal trade (e.g. Zander & Hamm, 2010). In both global and local markets, there are an increasing number of products communicating moral values with consumers through their logos, such as the Fairtrade logo. Fairtrade is an indication of justice. Studies found that Fairtrade logo and its underlying moral values could significantly alter consumers' perception of products (Lotz, Christandl, & Fetchenhauer, 2013; Poelman, Mojet, Lyon, & Sefa-Dedeh, 2008; Rousseau, 2015).

The trend of globalization also strengthens connections between diverse lingual communities, so that more and more individuals can speak a second language. Psychological research has

shown that use of a second language impacts our moral judgments and behavior (Cipolletti, McFarlane, & Weissglass, 2016).

In line with above theories, our research aims to examine the effect of Fairtrade logos on Chinese consumers' reported taste of green tea. Furthermore, this study explores how the use of a second language influences taste ratings of products with "moral logos". Will consumers favorably judge "moral products"? Will the use of second language enhance the taste of the "moral product"? Answers to these questions have significant theoretical and applied values.

1.1. Morality and product perception

Since the concept of moral consumption was proposed in the 1980s, there has been a growing body of research on moral issues surrounding consumption (e.g. Langen, 2011; Zander & Hamm, 2010). Especially, some scholars are interested in how products with moral cues affect consumers' perception of the products.

Consumption can be closely connected to morality. Studies on embodied cognition found that moral judgments are influenced by physical sensations. For instance, participants who drink bitter beverages tend to make harsher moral judgments on moral transgressions (Eskine, Kacinik, & Prinz, 2011). The mere exposure to pictures of ecological products rather than conventional products makes participants act more altruistically in an anonymous

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dictator game (Mazar & Zhong, 2010). In turn, products with moral values also tend to influence individuals' physical sensations.

The psychological mechanism underlying such phenomena can be the pursuit of consistency. As consumers are motivated to search for consistency between their expectations and real experiences of products, their judgments on products tend to be influenced by their beliefs and expectations (Shiv, Carmon, & Ariely, 2005; also see Cardello, 1995, for a review). In particular, consumers are likely to base their expectations of products on their extrinsic cues, such as price, appearance, and labels (See Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence, 2015, for a review). The labeling effect refers to consumers base their judgments of products on their labels (Pohl, 2004). For instance, fruits are believed to taste better when they are labeled as eco-friendly (Sörqvist et al., 2015). Moral labels – labels that communicate moral values – also have positive effects on taste experience. Consumers might unconsciously rate coffee and chocolates with a Fairtrade logo to have a better taste than their conventional counterparts (Lotz et al., 2013). Although purchasing such products helps suppliers from developing countries to earn a decent wage and thus live better lives, neither does this logo really imply higher quality nor better taste of the products. Therefore, the increased taste ratings tend to result from the moral value behind the Fairtrade logo.

Despite the effect of Fairtrade logos on product taste enhancement found by Lotz and colleagues, their study was only conducted in a Western setting. Therefore, the present study aims to explore whether the Fairtrade logo has a similar effect on taste evaluation in Chinese culture.

1.2. Moral judgment and second language

Moral judgments can reflect one's moral beliefs, which are thought to be unaffected by irrelevant factors such as the use of language. Provided that one understands a moral violation scenario correctly, the judgment should remain consistent, no matter in which language the story is presented. However, it was demonstrated that people's judgments on moral violations are influenced by whether these scenarios are described in their first or second languages (Costa et al., 2014; Geipel, Hadjichristidis, & Surian, 2015). In Germany and Italy, when scenarios regarding to several private violations, such as consensual incest, are printed in participants' second languages, participants tend to judge them as less condemnable. Furthermore, using second languages also elicit less harsh judgments on violations of everyday social and moral norms in community, such as taking the last seat on a crowded bus, and cutting in line when in a hurry (Geipel et al., 2015). Therefore, using a second language promotes less harsh moral judgments than using one's first language does.

Several explanations of such second language effects on moral judgments are plausible. Research has shown that a second language can attenuate emotional response to words and phrases (Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009), thus facilitating less harsh moral judgments. Furthermore, individual moral judgments could be influenced by the psychological distance of moral acts. People tend to judge moral acts as more virtuous when they are psychologically distant (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008). Since second languages are more psychologically distant than first languages to speakers, they are likely to reduce the criteria of moral judgment-making. Lastly, as moral and social rules are learned and experienced through interactions involving first languages, second languages might lead to a reduced activation of these norms and rules, and thus result in less strict moral judgments.

Although many moral psychologists are investigating the effect of second languages, research so far has focused on judgments of fabricated moral scenarios. It has not been extended to more

applicable fields, and its implication in marketing has yet to be explored.

2. Overview of the current research

Based on previous findings, we conducted empirical research to test the influence of both the Fairtrade logo and a second language on product taste evaluation. In an experiment, we used Maofeng green tea, a popular type of drink among Chinese, as test material. The first language for our participants is Chinese, while the second language is English.

We first propose that the appearance of the Fairtrade logo can improve taste experience of the green tea among Chinese consumers. Furthermore, as a second language can promote less harsh moral judgment, we expect taste ratings for the tea to be enhanced by the interaction of the Fairtrade logo and the use of English.

In this study, we ensured participants' correct understanding of the Fairtrade logo by a manipulation check. We also controlled their English proficiency. Because all our participants are students from Tsinghua University, their average English test score is above 140/150 in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. Considering the little variance of participants' objective English test scores, we used their self-reported English proficiency as a control variable. Furthermore, as previous research found that the Fairtrade logo effect was mediated by positive affects (Lotz et al., 2013), we also measured the positive affects participants experienced, and examined their mediating effect.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Seventy-four undergraduate students of Tsinghua University (41 females; 19.32 ± 1.35 year-old representing various majors) participated in the experiment for course credit. Our study only recruited local students whose first language was Chinese and second language was English.

3.2. Experiment design

To measure the effect of the Fairtrade logo and a second language on reported taste experience, a 2 (logo: Fairtrade logo vs. No Fairtrade logo) $\times 2$ (language: first vs. second) between-subject design was adopted.

We put the same amount of tealeaves in four identical transparent plastic bags to avoid additional information about the product. In the Fairtrade-logo condition, we tagged the plastic bags with Chinese and English versions of Fairtrade logo respectively (See Figs. 1a and 1b). Throughout the experiment, Chinese was used in all experimental instructions and materials in the first-language condition, while English was used in the second-language condition. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions by drawing.

3.3. Procedures

The lab, equipped with soundproof cubicles, was located at the Department of Psychology, Tsinghua University. Each participant was seated in a cubicle, and the experiment was conducted at a constant room temperature of 25 °C. Upon arrival, all participants were told that they needed to taste the forthcoming Chinese green tea produced by a local factory and then completed a questionnaire. With the clarification that the product came from a local factory, participants, especially those in English condition, were unlikely to confuse the origin of the product.

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