

Editorial Note

“Curating” the JCP special issue on aesthetics in consumer psychology: An introduction to the aesthetics issue

This is the age of Aesthetics, Beauty, and Design. Newly available product innovations from the Apple i-phone to the latest Dyson vacuum reflect aesthetic values. Indeed, Apple's success has been attributed to the infusion of aesthetics into product design. This model of product creation has resulted in Apple becoming one of the largest and most profitable corporations in the United States. Accentuating this point, Daniel Pink (2005) in his recent book, *A Whole New Mind*, designated the coming decade the Conceptual Age, the age of creativity and empathy. This moniker signifies the increasing importance of aesthetics, design, and conceptual values for organizations, individuals, and products. Pink advocates the importance of “soft skills” and suggests that what our economy needs to progress and prosper is a generation of creators and empathizers. In the same spirit, Thomas Friedman (2005) in his best-selling book, *The World is Flat*, discusses how the success of the Western world hinges on creativity, aesthetics, and design in the service of maintaining a competitive edge essential for individuals and companies to stay ahead of cost-based competition from the East.

There is no doubt when we look at the world around us, the world as it is today, that aesthetics is everywhere and impacts everything. Aesthetics has always been of importance; the appreciation of beauty, in whatever manner beauty may be defined, is a human value. An interest in the psychology of aesthetics has been reflected in the consumer literature for some time; however, in recent years there has been a burgeoning call for a richer understanding of how, when, where, and why aesthetics operates (Hoegg & Alba, 2008; Holbrook, 1980). Hence, this special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* focuses on Aesthetics.

In our role as the Aesthetics Special Issue editors, we were influenced by a recent article in the *New York Times* (Williams, 2009). This article observes that the word “curate,” which was “lofty and once rarely spoken outside exhibition corridors or British parishes, has become a fashionable code word among the aesthetically minded, who seem to paste it onto any activity that involves culling and selecting.” Borrowing this term, we, the curators of this Aesthetics Special Issue, provide in this introductory article an overview of the special issue. We present a summary of the state of the aesthetics literature in consumer

psychology, introduce the articles that constitute this Aesthetics Special Issue, and raise a number of research questions that are viable areas for future investigation in the domain of aesthetics.

What is aesthetics?

Derived from the Greek verb *aesthanesthai* (to perceive) and *aisthētikos* (of sense perception), the term ‘aesthetic’ was, until fairly recently, used in connection with the philosophy of sensation and perception. A myriad of definitions for aesthetics exist, most of which pertain to beauty and an appreciation for beauty. For instance, the *Philosophy Dictionary* describes aesthetics as, “the study of the feelings, concepts, and judgments arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime.” The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines aesthetics as, “of, or relating to, or dealing with aesthetics or the beautiful,” “artistic,” and “pleasing in appearance.” In consumer psychology, aesthetics has been used largely to describe the form or beauty of objects, people, or consumption environments.

What do we know about aesthetics in consumer psychology?

- Aesthetics matters in consumer psychology. The design and aesthetics of products and services have long been recognized as key determinants of marketing and sales success (Bloch, 1995; Miller & Adler, 2003; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997).
- In a marketplace where consumers often take product quality and competitive pricing for granted, aesthetics has become an important criterion by which consumers evaluate and differentiate between product and service offerings to make purchasing decisions (Jordan, Thomas, & McClelland, 1996; Kalins, 2003; Postrel, 2003).
- Most research in psychology, marketing, and even philosophy has centered on what is or is not aesthetically pleasing and what characteristics make an object seem more attractive or beautiful to the beholder (Berlyne, 1971, 1974; Bloch, 1995; Martindale, 1988; Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998). For instance, it is relatively well established that moderately complex aesthetic stimuli are preferred over those that are

very simple or very complex (the ubiquitous inverted U-curve; [Berlyne, 1971](#)).

- Consumers often base their consumption choices on aesthetic versus functional values. We know, for instance, that the form of a product elicits an affective response while the quality of the product is based on a more cognitive evaluation ([Page & Herr, 2002](#)). [Norman \(2004\)](#) has proposed that product design can elicit stimulus-based affect (mood) as a result of its form or as a consequence of its perceived beauty.
- Aesthetics is everywhere. The importance of aesthetics is no longer applicable only to the arts. A large proportion of aesthetics research in consumer psychology has focused on advertising and product design, especially for product categories where aesthetics has traditionally served as a central product feature. Aesthetics has been studied in service environments ([Bitner, 1992](#)), consumer home environments ([Patrick & Hagtvedt, in press](#)), and even museums ([Joy & Sherry, 2003](#)).
- Aesthetics has predominantly been investigated in the visual domain, but other senses, for example, smell and taste, and importantly the interaction of these senses, do constitute aesthetic experiences ([Krishna, Elder, & Caldara, 2010](#)).

Goals and motivation for the special issue

Research addressing the interface between aesthetics and consumer psychology, especially those using different methodologies, ranging from fMRI to eye-tracking studies, from experimental design to qualitative research, appear in a wide range of publications across diverse disciplines. There is a concern that the scattered nature of these publications may dilute, and even delay, the potential for the conceptual development of aesthetics within consumer psychology.

With this in mind, the Special Issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* on Aesthetics was conceived. The call for papers specified that “consistent with its tradition of publishing consumer psychology research that is cutting-edge, conceptually and theoretically important, and advances knowledge, the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* solicits academic papers (on Aesthetics) to emphasize its continuing interest in promoting such research and increasing its impact.” It suggested that the following areas would define the scope of the Aesthetics Special Issue:

- Principles/themes/elements that underlie design and aesthetics regardless of consumption domain
- Interplay between aesthetics and hedonics
- Role of sensory input in aesthetic experiences
- Conceptual properties of aesthetic experiences and the measurement of aesthetic experiences
- Unique characteristics of aesthetic experiences that are distinguished from other hedonic/affective experiences, and
- Unique effects of aesthetic experiences on consumer information processing and judgments that are distinguished from the effects of other affective/hedonic experiences

Overview of the special issue

Following a rigorous review process, twelve articles were accepted for publication in the Special Issue on Aesthetics. These articles include a variety of topics within aesthetics including multisensory aesthetic experiences, conceptual processing of aesthetics, aesthetic design preferences, and individual differences in evaluating aesthetics. The research methods employed include observations and interviews as well as lab and quasi-experiments. Next, we introduce the articles that comprise the Special Issue on Aesthetics.

Multisensory aesthetic experiences

The article by [Madzharov and Block \(2010\)](#) “Effects of Product Unit Image on Consumption of Snack Foods” opens the special issue with multisensory aesthetic research relevant to the obesity epidemic. [Madzharov and Block \(2010\)](#) provide evidence that consumers unwittingly use packaging aesthetics to determine how much to eat. In a series of three studies, they demonstrate that the visual aesthetics of the product package, specifically the number of snack items depicted on the package, acts as an anchor, influencing consumers’ judgments of the quantity of items in the package. More importantly, these researchers demonstrate that this anchoring effect crosses from the visual modality to impact the amount of snack items consumed from the package. When a product package displays a greater number of snack items (i.e., 15 pretzels versus 3 pretzels), consumers eat more of this snack.

[Krishna et al. \(2010\)](#) “Feminine to Smell but Masculine to Touch?: Multisensory Congruence and its Effect on the Aesthetic Experience” explore cross-sensory interactions between the aesthetics of smell and touch. In two experiments that move beyond the exploration of visual aesthetics, [Krishna et al. \(2010\)](#) find that multisensory congruence between smell and touch interact to enhance product evaluations and the aesthetic experience. These studies explore the impact of product-infused scents on haptic perceptions of texture and temperature and provide evidence that the congruence of multisensory aesthetic inputs contributes to more pleasurable experiences.

Conceptual processing of aesthetics

The article by [Hoegg, Alba, and Dahl \(2010\)](#) “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Influence of Aesthetics on Product Feature Judgments” debunks the conventional notion that, “what is beautiful is good.” Across a series of three studies, [Hoegg et al. \(2010\)](#) examine the influence of design on feature performance when aesthetics clashes with performance. Their research reveals a negative aesthetic effect, a bias favoring unattractive products when aesthetics and feature functionality conflict. This effect challenges the assumption that an attractive product will be universally more appealing than an unattractive product.

[Reimann, Zaichkowsky, Neuhaus, and Weber \(2010\)](#) “Aesthetic Package Design: A Behavioral, Neural, and Psychological Investigation” examine the aesthetics of package design from behavioral, neural, and psychological perspectives. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), these

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882303>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882303>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)