



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Food Quality and Preference

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/foodqual

Evoking premiumness: How color-product congruency influences premium evaluations

Sarah Joy Lyons^{a,*}, Anders Hauge Wien^b

^a Department of Consumer Marketing, Muninbakken 9-13, 9291 Tromsø, Norway

^b The Arctic University of Norway, the School of Business and Economics, Department of Marketing, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Framing effects
Hedonic-utilitarian
High quality
Functional positioning
Experiential benefits
Congruency

ABSTRACT

Green is commonly used in marketing to evoke utilitarian and environmental cues, whereas red is regularly found on food logos to induce arousal and excitement. This paper investigates how these colors may contribute to consumer evaluations of premiumness through congruence and incongruence between the marketing message and color on product packages. The literature suggests that, although congruence between product elements and the marketing message often is evaluated as more appropriate, a “moderate incongruence effect” may result in consumer preferences for a moderate incongruence between design elements. Two between-subject experiments suggest that the premise of congruity or incongruity applies to explaining how colors may evoke higher premium evaluations. Study 1 demonstrates that for a product of hedonic nature, consumers will evaluate the product as more premium when the color and product framing are congruent (e.g., red on a package framed as “tasting delicious” or green on a package sold as “healthy”). Study 2 demonstrates the opposite effect by suggesting that when a product is primarily utilitarian, it will be perceived as more premium when the framing of the product and the color are incongruent (e.g., green on the package marketed for its “delicious taste” or red on the package sold as “healthy”). The study adds a novel understanding of how the mechanism of congruence and incongruence between color and a hedonic versus utilitarian marketing message can lead to premium associations. It also has practical implications for marketing managers as to how one can enhance the premium evaluations through color and marketing message.

1. Introduction

With the food marketers increasingly aiming at product differentiation based on premiumness (The Nielsen Company, 2015), it is critical to understand how colors add to consumer perceptions of premium value. Color choice is an important part of the visual equity of a product, which is the value derived from the visual form of the product (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). Although a few studies indicate that darker colors will lead to higher price and quality perceptions (Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Ares & Deliza, 2010; Labrecque & Milne, 2013; Loose & Szolnoki, 2012), there remains a gap in the literature as to how color can influence consumer perceptions of premiumness.

We define premium products as those products that intend to generate overall higher quality and price perceptions through additional attributes and selective distribution (Quelch, 1987; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), yet also are associated with extrinsic aspects such as the product’s uniqueness or social image (Anselmsson, Vestman Bondesson, & Johansson, 2014). Based on the notion that packaging serves as an extrinsic cue for product quality, signaling to the

consumer if it is justifiable to pay a premium price (Bredahl, 2004), we investigated specifically how the color of the product can lead to perceived premiumness by consumers.

Color research on food packaging in a retail environment first and foremost has focused on identification of flavor and the color of the food itself, and it is a matter of general consent that color contributes to correct flavor identification (Garber, Hyatt, & Starr, 2000; Moir, 1936). In recent years, researchers have started to acknowledge the importance of the color of the package as well as of the food itself (Becker, van Rompay, Schifferstein, & Galetzka, 2011). Color in the context of food is important for various reasons: It enables the consumer to create expectations about the perceived taste (Hoegg & Alba, 2007); it influences the perceived texture of the food (Chylinski, Northey, & Ngo, 2015); and it may assist consumers in making healthier food choices (Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, Kamm, Rohr, & Wentura, 2012). In particular, red and green are relevant in this case because green may evoke environmental cues (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Russell, 2015), whereas red is a color that creates arousal and excitement (Labrecque & Milne, 2012).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: sarah.lyons@nofima.no (S.J. Lyons).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2017.10.006>

Received 4 April 2017; Received in revised form 9 October 2017; Accepted 10 October 2017
0950-3293/ © 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Although some studies rely on color preference and appropriateness as dependent variables (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006; Miller & Kahn, 2005), other studies show that color preference does not necessarily do justice to explaining consumer choice (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Given that color has been shown to affect price perception and perceived quality (Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Ares & Deliza, 2010; Labrecque & Milne, 2013; Loose & Szolnoki, 2012), this study combines the impression of high price and quality by investigating premiumness as the dependent variable in an exploratory manner.

In our examination of how red and green may benefit premium products, the literature suggests it is necessary to consider simultaneously the type of product in question and its positioning, and whether the product design elements should match or mismatch (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). Thus, we turn to the literature on hedonic versus utilitarian consumption and congruent and incongruent color choice in that respect.

1.1. Hedonic versus utilitarian product types and framing

Consumption is motivated by hedonic or utilitarian factors, and products often are categorized accordingly as primarily hedonic or primarily utilitarian (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Examples of primarily hedonic products are a hot fudge sundae and a movie pass, whereas toothpaste and a spiral notebook are primarily utilitarian (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Hedonic benefits are multisensory, experiential, and joyful benefits, whereas utilitarian benefits offer a practical and instrumental advantage (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). There is a fundamental difference in the type of goal that hedonic and utilitarian benefits help to achieve (Chernev, 2004). Consumers expect the fulfillment of prevention goals on the utilitarian dimension and the fulfillment of promotion goals on the hedonic dimension (Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2007). Understanding the hedonic versus utilitarian nature of the product is critical in a marketing sense, as the nature of the good may be important for consumer reactions such as willingness to pay for organic products (van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011).

Central to the separation of hedonic and utilitarian products is that the distinction is not absolute, as hedonic products may possess utilitarian benefits and utilitarian products may possess hedonic benefits (Okada, 2005). Thus, although products essentially fall into one category, marketers can frame their offerings based on their hedonic or utilitarian benefits. For instance, one can position a dessert hedonically as the “Bailey’s Irish Cream Cheesecake” or in a more utilitarian fashion as “Cheesecake deLite” (Okada, 2005), or a cellphone and a laptop can be described with superior hedonic and utilitarian benefits (Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2008). Framing a good hedonically or in relation to its utilitarian qualities triggers different consumer reactions (Raghunathan, Naylor, & Hoyer, 2006).

1.2. Congruence versus incongruence for product design and color

Heckler and Childers (1992) conceptualize congruency with the dimensions relevancy and expectancy. Relevancy refers to the degree to which the information provided by the stimuli aids to or hinders the audience in identifying the communicated message, and expectancy refers to the degree to which the information or item is in line with a determined structure or schema. In sum, relevancy and expectancy contribute to the notion of congruence from the consumers’ perspective, whereas the lack of relevance and expectancy lead to perceived incongruence (Fleck & Quester, 2007).

The literature offers various perspectives on the benefits of applying congruence versus incongruence in product design and marketing communication. Some scholars support the notion that congruence may enhance the perceived brand or product value (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004). In contrast, a body of work supports the moderate incongruity effect, which implies that consumers view moderately incongruent

products more favorably than those that are congruent or extremely incongruent (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Peracchio & Tybout, 1996; Stayman, Alden, & Smith, 1992). For example, Fleck and Quester (2007) found in their study of congruency for sponsorship that a certain level of mismatch between the sponsor and the event contributes to an unexpectedness or surprise that enhances positive evaluations. They conclude, however, that the associations will fail to make an impact if the sponsor is unsuccessful in communicating a certain level of relevancy.

In the current research, we are interested in the congruence between the communicated product benefit and the packaging color. Prior studies have suggested that there is a link between the attributes of a product and the affective reactions or symbolic meanings attached to a particular color (Huang & Lu, 2016). The underlying psychological mechanism of color reactions often are found in the division of warm and cold colors. Warm colors are those with long wavelengths such as red, orange, and yellow, whereas cool colors are those with short wavelengths such as blue, green, and white (Chebat & Morrin, 2007). The opposite effect of colors with long and short wavelengths has been established in studies across the domains of psychology, advertising, and marketing (Bellizzi, Crowley, & Hasty, 1983; Bellizzi & Hite, 1992; Madden, Hewett, & Roth, 2000; Puzakova, Kwak, Ramanathan, & Rocereto, 2016). Cool colors have a calming effect on individuals and warm colors have an arousing effect (Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999).

The division of warm and cool colors is not absolute, as Crowley (1993) suggested that all colors have an arousal component and an evaluative component. Color associations are context dependent and depend on the product (Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999; Holmes & Buchanan, 1984). On this note, Grossman and Wisenblit (1999) suggested that the twofold component of color may be seen in the view of associative learning; consumers create attitudes through a belief formation of a cognitive process and through an emotional process in terms of an affect transfer (Kim, Allen, & Kardes, 1996). Due to the typical marketing practice of using green to promote utilitarian benefits, such as ecological (Parguel et al., 2015), and red to promote hedonic benefits, such as excitement and stimulation (Labrecque & Milne, 2012), it is reasonable to assume that consumers have learned to associate green with utilitarian and red with hedonic. Indeed, Bottomley and Doyle (2006) found that red is more strongly associated with hedonic products and green more strongly associated with utilitarian products.

With this backdrop, we argue that consumers would consider packaging colors as either congruent or incongruent with a marketing message. Two streams of research on colors and package design shed light on how consumers react to congruence and incongruence, and indicate how perceptions of premiumness may be a function of either. The first stream of research suggests that consumers prefer package design elements that are congruent with the product type and positioning (Ares & Deliza, 2010). For example, Bottomley and Doyle (2006) found that consumers prefer congruence between product type and logo color (i.e., utilitarian colors enhance consumers’ perception of utilitarian products and hedonic colors enhance consumers’ perception of hedonic products).

A proposed explanation for the positive effect of congruence on consumer evaluations is brand credibility (Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). When consumers experience congruence between different marketing mix elements, they consider the brand or product as more credible (Reber & Schwarz, 1999), which enhances their evaluations of product quality (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004). Given the view of premiumness as an evaluation based on a utilitarian quality component (Quelch, 1987), it seems likely that color-product congruence would have a positive effect on perceived premiumness.

The other stream of research suggests that consumers prefer product design elements that are moderately incongruent with the product type and positioning (Blijlevens, Carbon, Mugge, & Schoormans, 2012). An

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8838573>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8838573>

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