

DIRECTING CONSUMER PRICE EXPECTATION THROUGH PACKAGE DESIGN

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Extended Abstract

Packaging appears to be an overlooked or forgotten promotional vehicle – not only in marketing wine. Although the design of a package is one of the few point-of-sale tools available to inform and persuade consumers, it is often an afterthought in how it affects consumer response. This research integrates studies on consumer formation of price expectation with central-peripheral information-processing and package design. Based on an identification of generic wine package design factors comprised of basic design elements, it shows how these factors influence consumer price expectation via two processing routes, one through quality and another through attractiveness. It also examines the moderating impact of two individual differences, namely centrality of visual product aesthetics (CVPA) and product category involvement.

A series of studies identifies six generic design factors comprised of various package design elements, examines consumer affective response (attractiveness) and cognitive response (quality) as mediators of design influences on consumer price expectation, and determines how CVPA and involvement affect consumer processing.

Based on input from a set of design professionals we selected a set of 160 wine bottles. These packages were purchased from various retail sources, and represented the full range of the 62 design elements. Actual stimuli were produced by taking high-resolution digital images of the packages. A set of professional designers rated the stimuli's design elements. Members of a consumer panel assessed design-evoked impressions and individual characteristics.

Results indicate consumers process package design through a central route via quality (for those highly involved in the category), and through a central route via attractiveness (for high CVPA consumers). This divergent processing leads to different price expectations. In addition, consumers who value aesthetics (high rather than low CVPA) base their price expectation more strongly on the package's attractiveness, whereas consumers highly involved with wine infer price expectation more strongly from quality perceptions.

The identification of generic design factors, their relations to perceived wine quality and attractiveness, and to consumer price expectation has significant practical implications. Given the established effects, managers can better use package design in two different ways. Most importantly, our findings assist managers in better synchronizing consumer price expectation with actual offer prices in order to minimize expectation-disconfirmation effects. Further, just as the introduction of the dual-process model produced significant changes in the advertising industry by forcing managers to consider varying levels of involvement when communicating with target markets, managers should additionally examine the level of their target market's CVPA before making package design decisions. Product offerings carefully tailored to individuals high on CVPA should lead to greater success.