Designing Culturally Specific Wine Packages: The Case of Visual Harmony

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study examines how self-construal, a key differentiator among cultures, impacts how attractive consumers find wine packages high versus low in visual harmony.

Design/methodology/approach: Psychometric data were obtained via an online experiment from 950 respondents in Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, and Italy.

Findings: The results indicate that a person's self-construal influences attractiveness directly as well as interactively. Specifically, the positive effect of visual harmony in wine packages, logos, and typefaces on attractiveness is more pronounced with an interdependent self-construal. This effect can be observed regardless of the gender or national background of the respondents.

Practical implications: Wine marketers can benefit from the findings by better tailoring the design of entire packages, symbols, and typeface to target audiences

Keywords: Attractiveness; Harmony; Marketing; Self-Construal; Wine Package

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing wine across cultures constitutes a challenge (e.g., Aurifeille et al., 2002) for a diverse group of wine businesses ranging from globally operating multinational corporations to small wine businesses that cater to culturally varied groups of visitors through tasting rooms in popular wine regions.

Among the key means for effectively communicating with buyers is the design of a package (Limon et al., 2009), especially its attractiveness (Orth et al., 2010). Defined as an aesthetically pleasing subjective experience that is directed toward an object, a design's attractiveness increases liking (Cho and Schwarz, 2010), triggers approach behaviors (Orth and Crouch, 2014), and, ultimately, impacts choice (Creusen and Schoormans, 2005). A key influencer of a wine package's attractiveness is its visual harmony which relates positively to viewer evaluations of attractiveness (Orth and Malkewitz, 2008). Furthermore, a key issue in successfully marketing wine across cultures lies with identifying what cultural characteristics drive consumer response to package design (Limon et al., 2009). One particular influence of such responses is the way people define their self by their separateness from or connections with social groups (Singelis, 1994), a construct known in the literature as independentinterdependent self construal. Self-construal is not only an important discriminator among cultures (Trafimow et al., 1991) and nations (Bresnahan et al., 2005), but is also a powerful predictor of consumer behavior in general (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) and response to marketing communications in specifics (Ahuvia, 2005). Adopting an interactionist perspective (Reber et al., 2004), we test the proposition that the attractiveness of wine packages is grounded in consumers' processing experience, a function of stimulus properties (harmony) and individual characteristics (self-construal). We test this prediction on subtle (logos, typeface) and more obvious marketing visuals (whole packages) to aid marketers in better tailoring the visual design of wine bottles to cultural target groups.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Visual harmony influences attractiveness

Gestalt psychology (Koffka, 1935) posits that viewer reactions originate not from any single visual element, but rather from higher-order generic design factors that are rooted in multiple elements. Marketing research has established such effects for generic design factors including the visual harmony of wine packages (Orth and Malkewitz, 2008). Harmony can be defined as "a congruent pattern or arrangement of parts that combines symmetry and balance" (Henderson and Cote, 1998, 16), or the degree to which the visual elements of a design form a coherent, unified pattern (Kumar and Garg, 2010). Key elements of harmonious designs include symmetry, proportion, balance, roundness, and unity.

On the relationship between harmony and attractiveness, Lin (2013) concludes that harmony makes a stimulus aesthetically pleasing. Empirical evidence further emphasises that visual harmony is a key driver of attractiveness for a diverse range of packages of fast-moving consumer goods (Orth et al., 2010). The reasons for attractiveness as a positive evaluative outcome of visual harmony are not fully understood (Hekkert and Leder, 2008), and recent

research suggests that the influence of visual harmony on stimulus attractiveness may not be as universal as previously thought. Specifically, culture-dependent individual variables, such as the centrality of visual product aesthetics (Orth et al., 2010), impact how attractive viewers find stimuli varying in harmony. Relating to an element of the harmony factor, cultural differences have also been reported in viewer preferences for angular versus rounded shapes (Zhang et al., 2006). We suggest that these differences may trace back to people's self-construal, or the view they hold of themselves as either dependent or independent from others.

2.2. Culture and the self

Belk (1988) uses the terms "self" for how a person subjectively perceives who she or he is. According to his theorizing, individuals possess a core self that is expanded to include additional aspects that then become part of the extended self. This social facet of the self is central to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which posits that people define their self-concepts by their connections with social groups to construct and maintain identity. When encountering marketing stimuli, consumers reflexively refer to their self-concept, continuously monitoring and adjusting their behavior and consumption practices (Ahuvia, 2005). Most notably, consumers generally react more positively to brands with characteristics that are congruent with their concept of self (Sirgy, 1982).

What people believe about the relationship between their self and others has been conceptionalized as independent-interdependent self-construal (Singelis, 1994). Referring to how an individual thinks, feels and acts about his or her self in relationship to others, self-construal captures the degree to which people see themselves as separate from or connected with others. People with an independent self-construal hold a view of self that emphasises their separateness and uniqueness, whereas an interdependent self-construal is associated with a more relationship-driven self-view that stresses connectedness and interpersonal relationships (Ahluwalia, 2008). Independent-interdependent self-construal is also an important discriminator among cultures as it closely relates to the culture's classification along the individualism-collectivism dimension (Trafimow et al., 1991). Different than individualism-collectivism, however, self-construal represents an individual factor that is influenced by the culture in which individuals are raised, but varies across people and is central to explaining a person's perception, evaluation, and behavior (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Individuals in a collectivist culture construct a self that is far more interdependent than those constructed in an individualistic culture (Hong et al., 2003).

2.3. Self-construal and response to visual harmony

Zhang et al. (2006) suggest that self-construal affects aesthetic preferences for angular versus rounded shapes. This effect is thought to occur because people with an interdependent self-construal value harmonious relationships with the environment, whereas people with an independent self-construal value the free will of individual agency, hereby disregarding harmony, possibly even favoring conflict.

The proposition that self-construal may impact individual response to harmony in marketing visuals is rooted in self congruity (Sirgy, 1982) and cognitive consistency theories (Festinger, 1957). Both theories suggest that individuals strive to resolve disagreeing psychological experiences and maintain cognitive consistency in their beliefs and behaviors. Fundamental to the notion of self-congruity is that material objects and brands can serve as symbols or signs that represent socially constructed meanings and effectively reflect the owner's self-identity and relationship with others (Schembri et al., 2010). Just as the symbolic properties of brands allow them to appeal to the self by projecting meaning we expect the visual design of packages to function in similar ways. Visual harmony in packages may project associations with agreeableness and peace, whereas a lack of harmony may induce evidence in support of this view. For example, the angular (low harmony) design of Lamborghini cars and interiors appeals to drivers seeking the unique (Winterkorn, 2003), whereas the soft and flowing curves of Mazda's (harmonious) Kodo design emerge from the interdependent culture of Japan.

In summary, visual harmony should appeal more to individuals with an interdependent selfconstrual as harmony and its associations are more congruent with interdependents' tendency to seek harmony in their relationships. In contrast, people with an independent self-construal should respond more positively to visuals low in harmony, in line with their tendency to view themselves as unique and to stand out from the crowd. Our central hypothesis thus is:

The influence of design harmony on the attractiveness evaluation is moderated by selfconstrual: Interdependent (independent) self-construal enhances (weakens) the positive influence of visual harmony on attractiveness evaluation.

3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1. Method

The study employed a 3 (marketing visual: logo vs. typeface vs. wine package) x 2 (harmony: high vs. low) x 6 (country: Australia, Brazil, China, France, Italy, and Germany) mixed factorial design. Stimuli scoring high versus low in visual harmony were obtained from previous research on logos (Henderson and Cote, 1998), typefaces (Henderson et al., 2004), and wine packages (Orth et al. 2010), and were pretested by seventy-eight students ($M_{age} = 23.1$ years, 70 percent females) who indicated their impressions of perceived harmony for one randomly selected stimulus for each of the three types of visuals. Table 1 holds final stimuli and their pretest scores on harmony.



TABLE 1STIMULI AND PRETEST SCORES ON HARMONY.

Data for the main study were collected in culturally diverse settings to increase variance in self-construal, as individuals in any culture can have both an independent and interdependent self-construal but one tends to be dominant (Singelis, 1994). Accordingly, countries were selected to represent low and high scores, respectively, on Hofstede's (1983) individualism-collectivism index (IDV). A total of nine hundred and fifty respondents (50 percent between 31 and 50 years, 47 percent females) participated in the main study, with sub-samples originating in Brazil (N = 66; IDV = 38) and China (N = 354; IDV = 20), representing collectivist cultures (N = 420), Australia (N = 147, IDV = 90), France (N = 95, IDV = 71), Germany (N = 136, IDV = 67), and Italy (N = 152, IDV = 76), representing individualistic cultures (N = 530). Upon logging on to the electronic survey site, participants received brief instructions and then they proceeded to view digital images of the stimuli. Immediately next to each stimulus, they indicated their evaluations of harmony (Kumar and Garg, 2010, M = 4.42, SD = 1.60) and attractiveness (Hirschman, 1986, M = 4.20, SD = 1.66). At the end, participants submitted ratings of self-construal (Singelis, 1994, $M_{independent} = 5.12$, $SD_{independent} = .91$) and indicated demographic information.

3.2. Results

Closely following Dawson (2014), we tested the predicted moderating role of self-construal by conducting a series of hierarchical regression analyses. The results provide empirical evidence that an interdependent self-construal moderates the influence of design harmony on attractiveness across cultures and across marketing visuals: harmony has a significant main

Notes: on a seven-point semantic differential scale ranging from not at all harmonious (1) to harmonious (7).

effect on attractiveness (b = 1.26, t = 64.09, p < .001) as does an interdependent self-construal (b = .16, t = 6.93, p < .001). More important, the harmony x interdependent self-construal interaction term is significant (b = .09, t = 4.41, p < .001). The interaction effect of independent self-construal and design harmony is not significant (p > .05). To shed further light on the nature of the significant interaction between design harmony and interdependent self-construal, results of floodlight analysis (Spiller et al., 2013) over a range of interdependent self-construal from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree confirms that harmony has a strong positive effect at high levels of interdependent self-construal, whereas the effect becomes less pronounced when interdependent self-construal is low (see figure 1).

IGURE 4 FLOODLIGHT ANALYSIS ILLUSTRATION OF THE HARMONY X INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL INTERACTION EFFECT. 20



Important to note, the moderating effect of self-construal remains robust when a more elaborate model is tested, including additional main and interactive effects. In Model 2, additional predictors include the dummy variables for culture (collectivism-individualism) and sex, their two-way interactions with harmony and self-construal, and their three-way interactions with self-construal and harmony. Culture (b = .33, t = 7.67, p < .001) and sex (b = .09, t = -2.22, p = .026) have significant main effects on attractiveness. Additionally, culture has a significant effect with harmony (b = .08, t = 3.71, p < .001), suggesting that the positive effect of harmony on attractiveness is enhanced in a collectivist culture. The interdependent self-construal x harmony interaction effect, however, remains significant and robust (b = .06, t = 2.44, p = .015), despite the additional predictors in the model. This finding rules out the possibility that the moderating effect of self-construal is rooted in, or dependent on, a person's collectivism or sex. Taken together, the findings provide the desired evidence that an individual's interdependent self-construal interacts with visuals' harmony to influence evaluation of a design's attractiveness across different cultures.

4. DISCUSSION

Our study examined how a person's self-construal, a cultural discriminator, impacts the effect of wine marketing visuals, specifically, their harmony, on consumer evaluation of attractiveness across cultural settings. Our results provide strong evidence that the view individuals hold of self, emphasising either their separateness from or connectedness with others, impacts their evaluation of relatively benign marketing visuals. This finding has several important implications.

First, we extend research on the configural-elemental distinction in wine package design. The finding that the influence of visual harmony on viewer evaluation of attractiveness depends on a person's self-construal corroborates reports that examining configural design properties can provide better insights into consumer response than elemental approaches (Kumar and Garg, 2010) because human aesthetic appreciation of visual artifacts is a holistic experience (Hekkert, 2006).

Second, our study extends the emerging stream of research that has adopted an interactionist perspective on consumer response to marketing visuals. Our finding that consumers evaluate wine packages as more attractive when high design harmony coincides with a more interdependent self-construal corroborates that accounting for interaction effects between generic properties of marketing visuals and viewer characteristics increases the explanatory power over stimulus-only or viewer-only approaches.

From a managerial perspective, wine marketers may benefit from our findings by better tailoring package designs to target audiences varying in self-concepts, a proxy for ethnic, country, and national markets. Viewing self-construal as a discriminator among cultures (Trafimow et al., 1991), wine marketers could employ our findings to tailor the visual design of entire packages, symbols, and typefaces to cultural contexts in order to make offers more appealing. Given that growth in consumption of most consumer goods now and in the future will not be led by traditional western markets, but rather by emerging economies likely to be dominated by a more interdependent level of self-construal amongst consumers (e.g., China has become the eighth largest wine consumer market in the world and the demand in Asia is continuing to grow; Camillo, 2010), the findings of this research can be also be employed to invent new, and adapt existing, wine packages accordingly in order to maximize their attractiveness to those consumers. Moreover, given that self-construal can be viewed as a temporary state that varies across people (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) but can also be activated (Mandel, 2003), marketers could make use of our findings by priming either independent or interdependent self-construals (e.g., to make use of singular (plural) firstperson pronouns to prime independence (interdependence); Gardner et al., 1999) to make them more consistent with the level of harmony inherent to their marketing visuals.

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