

Using identity theory and Zeitgeist effects to argue for the coexistence and longevity of design styles

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Abstract

Products whose aesthetics capture the Zeitgeist of a time are often said to be more successful. Empirical studies providing insights on topicality and relevance of design styles, however, are lacking. The few existing studies suggest that only one style is dominant at a certain period and ceases to exist as other styles gain prominence. We use identity theory to argue that design styles should coexist and endure due to the persisting demand of consumers with different, relatively stable identities. We also argue for joint effects of consumer identities and Zeitgeist to explain shifts in the prominence of different design styles. In our empirical study, we analyze 1998 cover pages of design magazines to track the development of eight influential design styles over 60 years. Our observations confirm the coexistence and longevity of design styles. Managers can use our insights as a basis to deliberately decide for zeitgeisty aesthetics that still satisfy identity-related consumer needs.

Keywords: *design styles; identity theory; Zeitgeist*

Track: Consumer Behaviour