

Aesthetic consistency: How a product's symbolic and formal consistency affects its sales performance

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Abstract

Prior research emphasizes the importance of a visual connection between a product and its brand. So far, the conceptualization of aesthetic consistency has only encompassed formal elements, such as a product's shape, dimensions, and proportions. Drawing from categorization theory, we argue that symbolic associations evoked by a product's aesthetics should be relevant for consistency perceptions as well. We expect that both dimensions of aesthetic consistency are related to a product's sales performance. Based on identity and social signaling theory, we propose that products, whose aesthetics evoke symbolic associations highly consistent with other brand members should outperform less consistent products. For formal consistency, however, we argue based on preference-for-prototype and arousal theory that moderate levels of consistency should be optimal. The results of a comprehensive econometric model using data from the German automotive industry confirm our expectations.

Keywords: *design consistency; visual brand identity; product performance*

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