

The “Emperor’s New Clothes” Effect: Consumers’ First-Order versus Second-Order Valuations of Aesthetic Minimalism by High-Status Brands

Sona Klucarova
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Niek Althuisen
Montpellier Business School

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Abstract

The story of the emperor’s new clothes tells the tale of how the public was led to believe that a nonexistent product was in fact a luxury product but only visible to the educated and trained eye. A successful branding story until an innocent child broke the spell by declaring that the emperor wore no clothes. Luxury products, at times, can appear minimalistic or simplistic in terms of their aesthetic design, arguably defying consumers’ expectations, which may influence product appreciation. This article investigates the effect of high-status cues on consumers’ first- and second-order valuations of aesthetically minimalistic product designs, that is, the assessment of one’s own and others’ willingness to pay, respectively. We also investigate a mediator (i.e., second-order luxury perceptions) and two boundary conditions (i.e., perceived superiority of others’ design knowledge and first-order impression management goals) of the “emperor’s new clothes” effect.

Subject Areas: *Branding, Consumer Behaviour*

Track: Product and Brand Management