Meaningfulness Versus Happiness: the Psychological Impact of High and Low Art

Henrik Hagtvedt, Boston College, USA
Kathleen D. Vohs, University of Minnesota, USA

Five experiments demonstrate that whereas fluently processed art favorably influences consumers’ happiness, art’s capacity to spark interest is more instrumental in encouraging a sense that life has meaning. High-art (vs. low-art) images stimulate integrative complexity, which consumers experience as interesting and which in turn contributes to a sense of meaningfulness.

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New Insights on the Role of Aesthetics in Consumer Behavior
Chairs: Martin Reimann, University of Arizona, USA
C. Clark Cao, University of Arizona, USA

Paper #1: Say It or Show It: Logo Aesthetics and Consumer-Brand Relationship Development
Samuel Carter Morgan, University of Miami, USA
Tatiana Fajardo, Florida State University, USA
Claudia Townsend, University of Miami, USA

Paper #2: Meaningfulness versus Happiness: The Psychological Impact of High and Low Art
Henrik Hagtvedt, Boston College, USA
Kathleen D. Vohs, University of Minnesota, USA

Ngoc (Rita) To, University of Houston, USA
Vanessa M. Patrick, University of Houston, USA

Paper #4: Beauty and Control in Collecting: How Desire for Control Drives the Aesthetic Pursuit of Complete Collections
C. Clark Cao, University of Arizona, USA
Merrie Brucks, University of Arizona, USA
Martin Reimann, University of Arizona, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW
Systematic empirical research on consumer aesthetics used to be “largely ignored by consumer psychologists” (Hoegg and Alba 2008, p. 748), and only emerged in consumer psychology journals in recent years. Aesthetics plays crucial roles in some important aspects of marketing: product creations, package designs, and website layouts, to list a few. As a result, the perception of beauty can serve as an important driver of consumer behavior such as product choices, willingness to pay, quality perception, etc. (e.g., Hoegg, Alba, and Dahl 2010; Page and Herr 2002; Reimann et al. 2010). The purpose of this session is to shed new lights on consumer aesthetics by bringing in new insights and perspectives from recent consumer research. In doing so, we hope to enhance our understanding of how consumers perceive beauty (or the lack thereof) and how they respond to it. The four papers included discuss different aspects of aesthetics and will therefore contribute to a diversified and vivid discussion. The papers are summarized as follows:

In Paper #1, Morgan, Fajardo, and Townsend examine the effect of image-based logos. Contrary to the traditional wisdom that image-based logos should outperform their less aesthetically pleasing and attention-grabbing text-based counterparts, the effect of image-based logos depends de facto on brand-awareness. Before brand-awareness is established, text-based logos outperform image-based logos in brand attitude and the likelihood to purchase. Only when brand-awareness is established are image-based logos more effective than text-based logos. Apart from its theoretical significance, this finding is of great importance to the application of aesthetic designs in marketing practices.

Paper #2 by Hagtvedt and Vohs investigates the appreciation of complex and challenging artworks (i.e., high art) as compared to their less complicated counterparts (i.e., low art). The authors demonstrate that whereas low art provides viewers with happiness via process fluency, high art elicits interestingness, which in turn imbues life with meaningfulness. These findings provide a theory that accounts for the appreciation of both low-art and high-art images, and therefore engender novel insights into our understanding of art appreciation.

In Paper #3, To and Patrick demonstrate the interesting connection between package design and self-brand connections. The authors distinguish between minimalist (clean and simple) and maximalist (ornate and decorative) packaging designs, and argue that while minimalist designs elicit valence-expressive attitudes, maximalist designs can give rise to socially-adjustive attitudes. As a result, high(low)-power consumers experience greater self-brand connection when minimalist (maximalist) packages designs are used for the brand, because the brand is perceived to serve a value expressive (socially-adjustive) function.

In Paper #4, Cao, Brucks, and Reimann examine a particular form of aesthetics-pursuing consumer behavior: collecting. Using this context, the authors show that seeking beauty can be more than a form of leisure or entertainment. Specifically, completing a collection can satisfy the very fundamental human desire for control, because collecting’s pattern-seeking nature -- also a contributor to the aesthetic experience in collections -- helps satisfy desire for control. This finding identifies a major motive of collecting, and contributes to bridge aesthetic experience and very basic human needs.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
One of the most fundamental decisions for a brand is whether to have a primarily text- or image-based logo. Aesthetics research suggests that image-based logos should perform better than text-based logos as images are more aesthetically pleasing, attention-grabbing, and easier to process than text (Hsee and Rottenstreich 2004; Carr et al. 1982; Lee, Amir, and Ariely 2009; Townsend and Kahn 2013). However, we find a surprising moderator to the positive benefits of images over text in the brand logo context, brand name awareness.

Brand logos contribute to a distinct corporate image (Henderson and Cote 1998) and create brand equity (Bharadwaj and Menon 1993; Park et al. 2013). Broadly, positive customer-based brand equity (CBBE) develops when consumers acquire two types of brand knowledge: brand awareness and brand image (Agarwal and Rao 1996; Keller 1993; Mackay 2001). Brand awareness involves cognitive knowledge of the brand’s core identity (e.g., brand name; Tolba and Hassan 2009). While brand image refers to unique brand associations that determine the overall valence of brand attitude and affect (Aaker 1991; Agarwal and Rao 1996; Keller 1993). Importantly, CB-BE-models propose a sequential order to the development of these knowledge types wherein consumer acquisition of brand awareness precedes the formation of brand image (Aaker 1991, 1996; Keller 1993).

Prior research suggests that text provides knowledge central to acquiring brand awareness better than images. For example, compared to images, text provides more cognitively-based information about a brand’s identity (Carr et al. 1982; Lieberman et al. 2002) by offering less ambiguous and more certain meaning than images (Scott 1994). As such, we hypothesize that, in the absence of brand name awareness, consumers will (a) respond more favorably to text-based than to image-based logos, and (b) this effect will be mediated by perceptions of brand name certainty. Conversely, research sug-
gests that, compared to text, images more effectively evoke personal feelings that contribute to a positive brand image. Images do so by offering a more emotional response than text (Aron et al. 2005; Mikulincer and Shaver 2003). Of note, brand attachment occurs when a brand feels personal (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Thomson, Macinnis, and Park 2005; Malár et al. 2011). We therefore hypothesize that, in the presence of brand name awareness, consumers will (a) respond more favorably to image-based logos than to text-based logos, and (b) this effect will be mediated by feelings of brand attachment. We tested our predictions in six studies: five laboratory experiments and an analysis of independently collected secondary data on real-world brand performance.

Using a real brand, study 1 examined actual consumer purchase behavior. Consumers reviewed an advertisement for a real product – Kicker’s Energy Spray – and were given a chance to purchase it. As predicted, sales results revealed a significant interaction \((W ald \chi^2(1) = 6.90, \ p = .01)\) whereby consumers without brand name awareness were more likely to make a purchase when shown the ad with a text-based logo \((36.7\%\) ) than an image-based logo \((16.1\%); \chi^2(1) = 3.32, \ p = .06)\), while those with brand name awareness were more likely to purchase in response to an ad with an image-based \((42.5\%\) vs a text-based logo \((20\%); \chi^2(1) = 3.93, \ p = .04)\).

Studies 2A and 2B used a joint versus separate evaluation design (Hsee et al. 1999). In the separate evaluation mode, when text- and image-based logos were rated individually and without explicit brand name information provided, the text-based logo \((M = 3.11, \ SD = 1.43)\) was rated higher than the image-based logo \((M = 2.42, \ SD = 1.32); t(79) = 2.23, \ p = .03)\). However, in the joint evaluation task, participants chose the image-based \((75.6\%\) more than the text-based logo \((24.4\%); \chi^2(1) = 10.76, \ p < .01)\). Presumably, in joint evaluation mode, the simultaneous display of both logo formats for the same brand increased choice of the image-based logo because the text-based logo ensured brand name awareness amongst all participants. Study 2B replicates these results on a different population (students rather than Mturk workers), using a different (fictitious) brand name and corresponding logos.

Study 3 provided evidence of our proposed processes. As predicted, there was a significant interaction between brand name awareness and logo format on consumers’ brand attitude \((F(1, 185) = 11.96, \ p < .01)\). Additionally, we found that in the absence of brand name awareness, consumers’ positive response to text-based logos was mediated by brand name certainty \((95\% \ BC bootstrap CI of .01 to .36). Brand feelings of attachment, conversely, mediated the positive effect of image-based logos on brand attitudes when the brand name awareness was present \((95\% \ BC bootstrap CI of -.64 to -.02). Study 4 replicated the results from study 3 (interaction effect, \(F(1, 169) = 7.78, \ p < .01\), while controlling for the abstractness of logos; ruling out alternative explanations and expanding managerial implications.

Finally, Study 5 generalized our findings using a secondary dataset (Brand Finance 2016) of 441 existing brands. On a composite brand attitude measure \((a(4) = .87)\), we found a significant interaction between brand familiarity (a conservative proxy of brand name awareness) and logo format \((F(1, 436) = 5.84, \ p = .02)\). At one SD below the mean of brand familiarity, firms with primarily text-based logos received higher consumer brand attitude ratings than firms with primarily image-based logos \((b = -.13, SE = .08, t(436) = -1.71, \ p = .09)\). At one SD above the mean, firms with image-based logos received higher consumer brand ratings than firms with text-based logos \((b = .12, SE = .07, t(436) = 1.74, \ p = .08)\).

This research is the first to consider text versus image-based logos, and their differential impact on consumer-brand relationship. We offer a surprising moderator, brand name awareness, to common empirical findings that images evoke a more beneficial response than text, and in doing so, we validate a critical assumption in branding and advertising research which suggests that brand awareness precede the development of brand image and attachment. Moreover, our findings provide brand managers specific recommendations on how to optimize logo design and use throughout the consumer-brand relationship.

### Meaningfulness versus Happiness:
The Psychological Impact of High and Low Art

#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Art has been a central component of human cultures around the world throughout recorded history (Dutton 2009). Today, governments and private citizens alike expend time, effort, and money on the creation and presentation of artworks. Consumers support a flourishing art business, and school children are even taught about art and brought to art museums, with the apparent notion that these activities provide some special value.

But how does art contribute value to people’s lives? Specifically, what is the value of complex, ambiguous, or challenging art (Belke, Leder, and Carbon 2015; Berlyne 1971; Zeki 2001) if ease of processing determines aesthetic preference (Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman, 2004)? We propose that processing fluency encourages happiness but that the interest sparked by challenging art engenders a sense that life has meaning.

Although happiness and meaningfulness may have substantial overlap, there are also clear differences between them (Baumeister et al. 2013; Diener 2000). Meaningfulness depends less on pleasure than it does on growth and learning, often through the interpretation of culturally significant stimuli. As such, the concept of interest—central in work on the psychology of art (Tan 2000; Silvia 2006)—may be particularly relevant to meaningfulness.

People assess art as interesting when they feel they understand the work’s complexity (Silvia 2005). This notion is related to integrative complexity, which is defined in terms of two cognitive structural variables: differentiation and integration (Tetlock, Bernzweig, and Gallant 1985). At the simple end of the integrative complexity continuum, people rely on rigid, one-dimensional thinking, whereas at the complex end, they combine disparate pieces of information into unified, higher-order representations. We predict that integrative complexity associated with art determines the degree to which the art is deemed interesting, which in turn encourages a sense that life is meaningful. Last, while we expect processing fluency to engender happiness, we also expect that the rewarding nature of an interesting art experience (Lacey et al. 2011) may contribute to a sense of happiness (Baumeister et al. 2013; Silvia 2006).

To test our hypotheses, we took advantage of a distinction known in the art world as high versus low art. High art contains challenging, complex qualities, whereas low art tends to be simple, straightforward depictions (Levine 1988; Shrum 1996). Consistent with prior work, images (depicting the same subject matter) were evaluated by study participants as high versus low art (Hagtvedt and Patrick 2008a; Lacey et al. 2011).

In Studies 1a and 1b, participants rated the high-art versus low-art images on ease of processing and interestingness, as well as the degree to which they perceived their life to change in terms of happiness and meaningfulness from seeing that type of image. As predicted, we found that low (vs. high) art contributed more to happiness, but high (vs. low) art contributed more to meaningfulness. In both studies, interest mediated the effect of artwork on life’s meaningfulness, whereas both interest and fluency mediated the effect of artwork on happiness.
In Studies 2a – 3, we focused on deepening our understanding of the influence of art on meaningfulness. As discussed, the role of complex, challenging art in imbuing life with meaning is arguably the least well understood aspect of the current investigation. In Study 2a, we demonstrated the capacity for high (vs. low) art to stimulate integrative complexity. In Study 2b, we demonstrated a three-step mediational process, in that integrative complexity stimulated by high (vs. low) art leads to the experience of interest, which in turn encourages a sense that life has meaning. Study 3 followed up these findings by testing the notion that appreciation of the artwork may depend on the viewer’s capacity to generate complex, integrative thought patterns. This experiment demonstrated that participants with high (low) need for closure—encouraged via a time-constraint manipulation—exhibited a preference for the high art (low-art) image.

Taken together, these results shed light on how and why both high-art and low-art images are appreciated. Further, this research reconciles seemingly contradictory perspectives on fluency, interest, and features such as novelty and complexity, while providing detailed insights into how art contributes meaning to consumers’ lives.


EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent research in consumer behavior has identified a broad set of aesthetic features in packaging design that impact consumption experiences (Haghtvedt and Patrick 2008; Deng and Srinivasan 2013; Sundar and Noseworthy 2014). The current research investigates how a specific design style—how simple (minimalist) or ornate (maximalist)—can influence consumer self-brand connection (SBC).

We define minimalist and maximalist designs as follows. Minimalist design (Meyer 2000) is characterized by simplicity through basic geometric shapes, limited decoration, and abundant white space. In contrast, maximalist design (Rivers 2007) is characterized by richness and a profusion of decorative patterns with minimal white space. Although their visual elements diverge, some of the most successful brands have utilized minimalist and maximalist designs to convey luxury appeal. For instance, Apple’s minimalist design represents a brand image of luxury and high fashion, as does Versace, whose brand image is epitomized by ornate decorative patterns.

Why is it that some people adore gilded ornate objects, while others can only find comfort in nearly empty blank canvas? We propose that certain types of aesthetics, such as minimalist vs. maximalist, arouse distinct functional attitudes. Functional theories of attitudes (Katz 1960) suggest that people hold attitudes because they are useful. Certain attitudes serve important social functions, including allowing people to express their own values (value-expressive attitudes) and facilitate self-presentation (social-adjustive attitudes).

We posit that minimalist design elicits more value-expressive attitudes. When people view minimalist art, the “traditional gallery-going experience” is often transformed into one where the viewer can engage with the work by suppling their own interpretation (Kleiner and Mamiya 2005). Similarly, when minimalist design is used in brand communication, consumers supply their own meaning of the brand instead of simply receiving a message. For instance, the Japanese retail brand MUJI employs the concept of “emptiness” in its marketing which emphasizes simplicity and white space. Thus, MUJI creates a capacious vessel that consumers can fill with their own beliefs and perceptions of the brand, from “simplesness” to “refinement” (Hara 2011). Given the freedom of self-expression inherent in its visual aesthetics, we predict that minimalist design enhances SBC through facilitating value-expressive attitudes.

In contrast, we hypothesize that maximalist design elicits more social-adjustive attitudes. We draw from people’s direct experience with maximalist aesthetics, which often occur in social settings that make self-presentation-related goals salient. For instance, people often encounter intricate pattern moldings when going to cathedrals or extravagant decor in a five-star hotel. Thus, consumers seem to have developed the predisposition for maximalist designs when they seek to present desirable self-image. Further, people tend to associate maximalist design with impression-management motives, such as signaling social prestige. Throughout history, authoritative figures often use astounding creations to represent their stature, such as the grandiose exterior of Saint Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City or the ornate interior in the Palace of Versailles (Kleiner and Mamiya 2005). Given that maximalist aesthetics are frequently used for gaining social approval, we predict that maximalist design enhances SBC through eliciting social-adjustive attitudes.

Because of the differences in attitudes elicited by minimalist and maximalist designs, we propose power as a moderator for our effects. Defined as “asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations” (Rucker et al. 2012), power can foster agentic or communal orientations. Feeling powerful leads people to become more agency-oriented (i.e. focus on one’s self) because being higher in social hierarchy gives people the freedom to pursue their own values. In contrast, feeling powerless makes people more communal-oriented (i.e. focus on others) because being lower in social hierarchy means people need to depend on others for valued resources. As such, we predict that minimalist design will enhance SBC for high-power consumers, while maximalist design will enhance SBC for low-power consumers.

We tested our hypotheses across five studies. Packaging design was manipulated by varying only the decorative elements while keeping all other features constant. In study 1, participants evaluated the minimalist versus maximalist packaging design of a fictional tea brand and assessed their value-expressive and social-adjustive attitudes. As predicted, we found that minimalist design elicits more value-expressive attitudes while maximalist design elicits more social-adjustive attitudes. Interestingly, both packaging designs are perceived as equally attractive and luxurious. We also found that value-expressive attitudes mediated the effect of minimalist packaging design on SBC (95% CI: [-1.65, -.22]), whereas social-adjustive attitudes mediated the effect of maximalist packaging design on SBC (95% CI: [.03, 1.32]).

In study 2, we found evidence for the moderating effect of power. We found significant interaction effect ($F(2,227) = 27.93, p < .001$) where high-power participants felt stronger SBC to minimalist design while low-power participants felt stronger SBC to maximalist design. Study 3 replicated the interaction effect using a different product category (laptop cover) and also provided evidence for our proposed processes. As predicted, there was a significant interaction ($F(2,227) = 29.77, p < .001$). Additionally, our moderated mediation analysis revealed that value-expressive attitudes explained why high-power participants experienced greater SBC for minimalist design (95% CI: [-1.81, -.70]), while social-adjustive attitudes explained why low-power participants experienced greater SBC for maximalist design (95% CI: [1.79, 4.13]). Study 4 bolstered our findings by manipulating participants’ value-expressive and social-adjustive attitudes.

Finally, Study 5 extended the observed effects of minimalist and maximalist designs into the service settings (hotels) and tested...
a boundary condition in which high-power consumers might prefer maximalist design when impression-management (IM) motives are made salient. Participants were given a choice between minimalist and maximalist hotel suite after having read a high IM vs. low IM scenario. As expected, we found 61% (39%) of the high-power participants chose the maximalist (minimalist) room in the high-impression condition, compared to 16% (88%) of the high-power participants in the low-impression condition. IM conditions did not have an effect on low-power participants (p=.25).

In sum, the current research demonstrates the complexity of brand aesthetics by identifying how minimalist versus maximalist designs elicit different attitudes towards the brand. Further, we contributed to the aesthetics literature by providing some insights into the influence of power on consumer responses to aesthetic elements.

**Beauty and Control in Collecting:**

**How Desire for Control Drives the Aesthetic Pursuit of Complete Collections**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Collecting is a well-observed consumer behavior that is often related to aesthetic experience, and the completion of a collection serves as a representative moment of beauty (e.g., Danet and Katryl 1989; Pomian and Wiles-Portier 1990). However, little is known about why consumers crave the beauty of complete collections. In this research, we propose a novel hypothesis that completing a collection – the fulfillment of the aesthetic experiences in collecting – serves to restore personal control, the sense that consumers can successfully manage the events and outcomes in their lives.

Desire for control (DC henceforth) is a crucial human motivation. To affirm that important aspects of their lives are under control, consumers need to be convinced that outcomes are not generated randomly. Therefore, consumers high in DC tend to reject the idea of a random/chaotic world (Kay, Moscovitch, and Laurin 2010; Legare and Souza 2014) and favor structured items/patterns (Cutright 2012; Whitson and Galinsky 2008).

Aesthetic literature has documented the relationship between beauty and structure. Structured items’ nature of being easy to process (i.e., processing fluency) gives rise to aesthetic pleasure (e.g., Forster, Leder, and Ansorge 2013; Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman 2004). Of relevance here, completing a collection is a human endeavor creating a structure that both produces aesthetic experience and repels chaos and randomness. This characteristic of collection completion should render a complete collection more desirable for individuals high (vs. low) in DC.

More formally, we hypothesize that consumers are more likely to complete a collection when they are high (vs. low) in DC. This theoretical lens provides insights on how aesthetic pursuit such as completing a collection can serve consumer needs as fundamental as DC. Across five experiments, we provide convergent evidence supporting this hypothesis. We also explore key psychological processes underlying this central effect.

Experiments 1A and 1B examine the moderating role of DC in the tendency of completing a collection in real choice sets. In Experiment 1A, 177 undergraduates were endowed with a three-place holder and an incomplete set of magnetic clips. Participants in the experimental condition were endowed with two clips that were thematically related while the control participants were endowed with unrelated clips. All participants were then offered a third clip (to fill in the three-place holder) from a choice set including a target item and three thematically unrelated clips. Choosing the target item would create a thematic set of three clips for the experimental group, but not the control group. DC was measured as a personality trait on a scale adapted from Burger and Cooper (1979). As predicted, the interaction between trait DC and experimental condition was significant ($B = 1.89, SE = 0.76, Wald = 6.15, p < .05$). A floodlight analysis indicates that as trait DC increases, participants in the experimental condition become more likely to choose the target item to complete their sets, compared to controls (Johnson-Neyman Point = 4.60, $B = 1.06, SE = 0.54, p = .05, CI = [0, 2.11]$). Experiment 1B replicated this finding with three important differences: (1) DC was experimentally manipulated (rather than measured) and (2) a collection set of four rather than three items; (3) stamp collecting served as the context. Data from 178 student participants replicate the interaction ($B = 1.33, SE = 0.67, Wald = 3.92, p < .05$) and pattern reported for Experiment 1A.

In Experiment 2, we simultaneously manipulated (as a state) and measured (as a trait) DC to further test the role of DC. Undergraduates ($N = 296$) collected seashells that were framed as a completeable set. Apart from the significant main effects of both state ($B = 3.49, t(292) = 3.15, p < .01$) and trait DC ($B = 0.36, t(292) = 2.33, p < .01$) that replicate the findings from Experiment 1A and 1B, a significant interaction ($B = -0.67, t(292) = -3.18, p < .01$) between state and trait DC reveals DC as the process underlying the found effect. Specifically, consumers whose DC was experimentally manipulated high demonstrated an increased desire to complete their collections as their trait DC increases. When the state DC was low, however, this pattern was reversed. This experiment shows that DC is the process underlying the tendency to complete a collection.

Experiment 3 examines the link between collecting and aesthetics, namely the structure underlying collections. mTurkers ($N = 184$) were asked to imagine that they were hypothetically collecting of €1 euro coins. They manipulated theme (present, absent) and appearance of set completeness (yes, no) and measure DC as a trait. As predicted, the three-way interaction was significant ($B = 1.72, SE = 0.87, Wald = 3.87, p < .05$). Results show that the opportunity to merely extend the collection (theme condition) does not affect choice when the collection was depicted as only partially complete in size. High DC participants chose the “matching” item only when it was possible to fully complete the collection.

Experiment 4 supports the process underlying previous experiments with real collectors and their collections of experiences. For consumers collecting experiences with US national parks, DC indeed predicted how many parks they checked off a list ($N = 324, B = 4.06, t(323) = -2.62, p < .005$).

In sum, across five studies, we demonstrate that the structure underlying complete collections, which is also a source of aesthetic experiences in collecting, can satisfy DC. As a result, DC becomes a crucial motivator for the aesthetic pursuit of collection completion. This conclusion is robustly obtained via various contexts, set sizes (from three to 60), two ways to operationalize DC (measure and manipulation), and three ways to operationalize collections (hypothetical, actual endowment, and collections that collectors already possess). Together, our findings contribute to aesthetics literature by demonstrating that the pursuit of beauty can serve to fulfill very fundamental human needs such as DC. Also, contributing to literature of collecting, we identify control as an important motivation of collecting (more specifically, the complete thereof), adding to other established motivations such as justification (Gao, Huang, and Simonson 2014) or productivity (Keinan and Kivetz 2011).

**REFERENCES**


