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Aesthetics in Marketing

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Aesthetics in Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This work reviews aesthetics research in marketing. The account highlights central characteristics of this domain, situates it among related domains such as art, design, and sensory effects, and introduces additional constructs for consideration (e.g., functional- and conceptual aesthetics). A literature review is organized in terms of aesthetics principles, outcomes of these principles, and contexts in which these principles operate. Promising avenues for future research are integrated into the review. A subsequent section revisits the literature with an in-depth discussion of one of the principles: ambiguity. This latter section serves not only to spotlight an important aspect of aesthetic experience, but also to illustrate the interconnectivity between different parts of the aesthetics literature. Different principles and types of aesthetic elements figure—often simultaneously—in current contexts such as branding and product design. Better understanding of their respective roles may aid marketers in the use of aesthetics as a strategic tool.

Keywords: aesthetics; review; art; design; luxury; sensory marketing; visual marketing; principles; ambiguity.

1

Introduction

Aesthetic design is pervasive in the marketplace, where it influences consumer behavior, endows products with value, and differentiates between brands (Bloch, 1995; Hoegg and Alba, 2008; Orth and Malkewitz, 2008; Patrick and Peracchio, 2010; Townsend and Sood, 2012). In fact, research suggests that aesthetic appeal drives sales across most product categories (Liu *et al.*, 2019; see also Luchs *et al.*, 2016). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, if marketing scholars are affording this topic an increasing amount of attention, albeit still not as much attention as one might expect based on its role in the marketplace (Hagtvedt, 2022).

The time thus appears ripe for taking stock of the state of research in this domain. Because the literature on aesthetics has become vast and varied, however, some choices must be made in presenting it. The current account begins with a characterization of this domain of research, and then organizes extant literature in two ways: First, it provides an overview of aesthetics principles, outcomes stemming from these principles, and contexts in which these principles operate. Second, it zooms in on the principle of ambiguity in specific, to provide a detailed discussion of ambiguous vs. accessible aesthetic elements. These are certainly not the only or inevitable lenses that a scholar must adopt, but

they seem useful for highlighting relationships both within the aesthetics domain and between this domain and other areas of consumer research, as well as for generating future research questions.

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