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Investigating the Role of Aesthetics in Consumer Moral Judgment and Creativity

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**INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS IN CONSUMER MORAL
JUDGMENT AND CREATIVITY**

by

Amita Bhadauria

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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August 2016

ABSTRACT

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS IN CONSUMER MORAL JUDGMENT AND CREATIVITY

by

Amita Bhadauria

**The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor Laura A. Peracchio**

As human beings, we have a profound affinity for beauty, and an overwhelming amount of research recognizes our attraction to high aesthetics. Aesthetics significantly affect consumer behavior, such as purchase intention, product perception, consumer satisfaction, and product evaluation. Leading brands such as Apple are adored and coveted due to the high aesthetics and superior design of their products, which enables them to create and sustain competitive advantage. Because consumers often give more importance to aesthetics than functional attributes when choosing a product, marketers take aesthetics into account in their marketing strategies. This research explores aesthetics' diverse relationships to consumer behavior. Specifically, I examine the relationship of aesthetics to consumers' moral judgment and creativity and consider the moderating roles of individual traits, such as the centrality of aesthetics in one's life and construal level.

In essay I, I start by summarizing the general literature on aesthetics and the literature that is specific to marketing and consumer behavior.

In essay II, I explore the effects of beauty on consumers' moral judgment. Consumers often have to choose between what is right and what is easy, such as in paying more for fair-

trade coffee, purchasing low-carbon footprint products, or recycling. Typically, consumers sacrifice money, time, or effort to make moral choices, and several factors are salient to these decision-making processes. The findings of the initial studies indicate that beauty does affect moral judgment. Additionally, verbal and visual beauty cues have distinct effects on moral judgment. Visual beauty cues overpower moral judgment, making consumers are less willing to forgo beauty to make morally responsible choices. On the other hand, verbal beauty cues induce consumers to make morally sound decisions when visual cues are not present. There is a dearth of research on the effects of product aesthetics on consumers' moral judgment, and I seek to fill this gap.

In essay III, I focus on the relationship between nature scenes and creativity while accounting for the centrality of visual product aesthetics. Additionally, I explore the moderating role of construal level. I posit that consumers who assign higher importance to product aesthetics are more likely to be creative when exposed to nature scenes. Research indicates that spending time in nature has soothing and restorative properties, such as stress relief, lower depression, and overall wellbeing. Moreover, research shows that a soothing natural environment facilitates the mental wellbeing that is conducive to creativity. The results indicate an interaction between scenery and creativity and that this relationship is moderated by the centrality of aesthetics in one's life. Specifically, I observe improved creativity on exposure to nature scenes, and this relationship is significant for individuals who give higher importance to product aesthetics, finding that the centrality of aesthetics in one's life extends to the appreciation of beauty in nature, as anticipated, and enhances creativity. The results also indicate a significant interaction between scenery and construal level; as anticipated, individuals with a low/concrete construal demonstrate a higher propensity toward creativity on exposure to nature scenes when compared

to individuals with a high/abstract construal. This research provides a fresh perspective on the salience of aesthetics and contributes to the scarcity of research into moral judgment and creativity in consumer behavior.

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Dedicated to my father, Dr. Jagvir Singh Bhadauria

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OVERVIEW

Essay I

A review of the literature on aesthetics reveals an overwhelming amount of research that indicates our attraction to beautiful people and beautiful things (Dion et al., 1972; Langlois et al., 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004; Ramsey et al., 2004; Quinn et al., 2007; Andreoni & Petrie, 2008). Our affinity for beauty is deeply rooted and is reflected in all aspects of our behavior, including consumption. Marketers recognize that aesthetics is ubiquitous and carefully consider it during product development and promotion, which implies that aesthetics should be given the status of cultural products in the contemporary era (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006).

Furthermore, the aesthetics of the environment where products or services are rendered and consumed have a profound impact on consumer behavior and satisfaction (Bitner, 1992; Donovan et al., 1994; Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003). Aesthetic aspects such as color (Babin et al., 2003), scent (Chebat & Michon, 2003), and music (Chebat et al., 2001) are capable of swaying consumer preference, shopping duration, arousal, and acquisition. The influence of beauty on consumer behavior is not limited to tangible products and shopping environment but also extends to virtual environments. A website's high aesthetic appeal is related to an enjoyable virtual experience (Van der Heijden, 2003), and website aesthetics are a significant component of perceptions of online service quality, security, and convenience (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Interestingly, highly aesthetic websites garner positive reviews, regardless of their utility (Lindgaard & Dudeks, 2003). In Essay I, I review the literature on aesthetics in general and from the perspectives of marketing and consumer behavior.

Essay II

There is a dearth of research that focuses on comprehension of consumers' moral judgment, especially, from the psychological point of view (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Hughner et al., 2007; d'Astous & Legendre, 2008). Most of the moral judgment studies are conducted on ethical judgment regarding the companies in the field of management (Bray et al., 2010) and relatively little, consideration has been given to the moral choice-making at an individual level (Nicholls & Lee, 2006). Extensive research suggests our affinity towards beautiful people and beautiful things (Dion et al, 1972; Langlois et. al, 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Van Leeuwen & Neil Macrae, 2004; Ramsey et. al, 2004; Quinn et. al, 2007; Andreoni and Petrie 2008). In addition to our innate attraction to beauty, we also equate beauty with goodness that reinforces the famous phrase, "What is beautiful is good?" Society perceives attractive individuals as more intelligent and masters of superior social skills, which is attributed to beauty premium (McArthur, 1982; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). This attitude towards physically attractive individuals can be explicmbridgecated by the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype, which implies that beauty indicates a pleasant personality, and lack of beauty appeal indicates negative personality traits (Dion et. al, 1972).

Taking a cue from the prior literature, we conduct five studies to explore how beauty in products affect moral judgment in consumers. The findings of our initial studies show that beauty does have an effect on moral judgment. Moreover, the verbal and visual prime of beauty have distinct effects on the moral judgment of consumers. Visual beauty prime overpowers the ethical judgment and consumers are less willing to forgo beauty to make an ethical decision. Contrarily, verbal beauty prime evokes consumers to make morally sound decisions when visual

cue is not present. There is a dearth of research on product aesthetics' effect on moral judgment pertaining to consumers, and we seek to fill this gap through our research.

Essay III

In essay III, I focus on the relationship between nature scenes and creativity while accounting for the centrality of visual product aesthetics (CVPA) and construal level. I also explore the moderating influence of construal level in addition to the moderating influence of products' visual aesthetics. I posit that consumers who assign a higher importance to product aesthetics are more likely to be creative when exposed to nature scenes. I use the CVPA scale developed by Bloch et al. (2003) to measure the importance of products' visual appearance, which then moderates aesthetics and creativity. Research indicates that spending time in nature has soothing and restorative properties, such as stress relief, lower depression, and improved overall wellbeing. Moreover, research shows that a soothing natural environment facilitates mental wellbeing, which is conducive to creativity. The results confirm my central hypothesis that there is an interaction between scenery and creativity and that this relationship is moderated by the centrality of aesthetics in one's life. Specifically, I observe improved creativity on exposure to nature scenes, and this relationship is more significant for individuals who give higher importance to product aesthetics. The findings show that an appreciation of aesthetics extends to the appreciation of beauty in nature and enhances creativity.

In study II of essay III, I explore the moderating role of construal level on the relationship between nature scenes and creativity, hypothesizing that people with a low/concrete construal, who focus on the minute details of performing a task, benefit more from the restorative effects of nature scenes and demonstrate higher creativity compared to those with a high/abstract construal.

I employ a two-by-two model to examine the effects of scenery (nature or urban) on creativity while accounting for the moderating role of construal level (high/abstract, low/concrete). The results indicate a significant interaction between scenery and construal level and, as anticipated, that individuals with a low/concrete construal demonstrate a higher propensity toward creativity than individuals with a high/abstract construal.

In conclusion, this research examines the relationships between high aesthetic appeal and aspects of consumer behavior, such as moral judgment (charitable donation, green consumption, and a preference for products associated with corporate social responsibility [CSR]) and creativity. The results are fascinating. An encounter with highly aesthetic products can influence consumers and alter their subsequent behavior by alleviating creativity and moral judgment. Essay I compiles a literature review on aesthetics as they pertain to consumer behavior and marketing, Essay II examines the relationship between product aesthetics and moral judgment, and Essay III explores the relationship between product aesthetics and consumer creativity while accounting for CVPA and construal level.

ESSAY I: AESTHETICS

Introduction

We make decisions based on our automatic responses to aesthetics every day. We choose one phone case over another at the mall because of its color or choose someone on a dating website because of his or her pleasant appearance. Our affinity for beauty is reflected in our actions and is frequently instinctive. Aesthetic considerations are pervasive and are an integral part of our lives, including our consumption. In this highly competitive market environment, there is an increased parity in the functionality of products, which means that each product functions as expected. However, consumer choices are also swayed by the aesthetics of particular product and services. The concept of aesthetics is fascinating due to its omnipresence and its almost automatic effects. Aesthetics play a vital role in our lives and are significant in our decision-making processes. There is ample research on the effects of aesthetics in diverse fields, such as marketing, advertising, education, and consumption. Inspired by the literature, this research explores the role of aesthetics in the areas of moral judgment and creativity from a consumer behavior perspective. First, a literature review provides a better understanding of the research in this area. Then, in essay II, I explore the role of beauty and aesthetics in moral judgment, followed by an examination of the significance of aesthetics in creativity in essay III.

Definition

The Oxford dictionary defines aesthetics as a set of principles associated with nature and the appreciation of beauty. The origin of the word aesthetics can be traced to the Greek verbs *aesthanesthai* and *aesthetics*, which mean the act of perceiving and the sense of perception, respectively. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language describes aesthetics as “a conception of what is artistically valid or beautiful.” According to Dickie, (1997) aesthetics is

the philosophy of beauty. Understandably, aesthetics has been of interest to philosophers, researchers, and scholars for centuries. The ancient philosophers recognized aesthetics to be a source of sheer joy and pleasure, and aesthetics have been studied in diverse fields, including fine art, psychology, English literature, and marketing. Aesthetic appeal is related to the enthralling, beautiful, and luxurious characteristics of a design, which relates to hedonism. Aesthetics is commonly confused with the appreciation of beauty in the arts; however, the study of aesthetics is far more complex. In the field of consumer behavior, the term aesthetics primarily refers to the form or beauty of things, individuals, or settings. Aesthetic phenomena elicit responses on a continuum, which vary from a simple hedonic reward to intense experiences that are almost spiritual in nature. Indeed, marketing focuses on aesthetics related not only to products but also to how they are promoted and consumed (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). Visual beauty is the most apparent aspect of aesthetics; however, aesthetics can also affect other senses. For example, our olfactory sense is affected by pleasant scents (Chebat & Michon, 2003), and our auditory senses are mesmerized by melodies (Chebat et al., 2001). This dissertation focuses primarily on the effects of visual aesthetics.

One of the most simplistic definitions of aesthetics is “the study of human minds and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty” (Palmer, Schloss, & Sammartino, 2013). In this definition, the sense of beauty is related to the subjectivity of the aesthetic response. Something that is beautiful to one person may not be beautiful to another. For instance, volcanoes spewing lava may appear beautiful to a geologist who studies the phenomenon but may seem horrifyingly hazardous to others. That being said, there are conventional and universal benchmarks of aesthetics that the majority will agree upon, such as the laughter of an innocent child; rainbows; artfully presented food; dew-kissed flowers; and a smiling, symmetrical human face.

Facial Beauty

The topic of aesthetics would be incomplete without a discussion of facial beauty. Neuroscience research on facial aesthetics has made interesting discoveries about what makes someone appear beautiful. While the pleasurable aesthetics of facial beauty activate reward centers in our brains (Aharon et al., 2001; O’Doherty et al., 2003), the parameters of beauty have some similarities and differences across cultures. Some of the primary traits that make a beautiful face are a symmetry, averageness, and sexual dimorphism of both sexes; these traits are uniform across cultures. A preference for traits that indicate a beautiful face are developed based on cultural standards during early childhood development (Rhodes, 2006). Facial beauty also facilitates our choice of suitable mates because, from an evolutionary perspective, an attractive face is indicative of glowing health and an excellent partner for reproduction.

However, the adage “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” reaffirms that the perception of beauty is subjective. Interestingly, Pallett and Lee (2009) suggest that, for females, beauty also depends on the ratio between eyes and the distance between the eyes and mouth, finding that most participants preferred the distance between the mouth and eyes to be about 36% of the face’s total length and the eyes to be located about 46% of the face’s total width. According to the ancient Greeks, this ratio of the important facial features is deemed the golden ratio or “divine proportion.”

Measurement

As previously discussed, aesthetics is subjective and the proverb, “beauty lies in the eye of the beholder,” fits most scenarios. Thus, an objective measure is nearly impossible to achieve. Palmer and Schloss (2013) summarize the variations in how to determine aesthetic measurements. The most commonly used measures are a two-alternative forced choice, rank

ordering, rating, indirect measures, production and adjustment tasks. The two-alternative forced choice method requires participants to pick the most attractive alternative. The rank ordering method enables the assessors to rank objects or people according to their preference on a Likert or continuous scale. The more sophisticated techniques for assessing aesthetic responses include physiological measurements such as galvanic skin response, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and event-related electric potentials. The key advantage of these techniques is that their findings are not self-reported; thus, they can be compared to behavioral measures for increased validity.

Individual Differences in Aesthetics

As discussed above, individual differences are an integral part of aesthetic evaluation. What is beautiful to one person may not be beautiful to another. Research shows that people have unique preferences for minute details in a single color (Palmer & Schloss, 2010), hue (Hurlbert & Ling 2007), saturation (Ou et al., 2004), lightness (McManus et al., 1981), and the interaction between hue and lightness (Palmer & Schloss, 2010). Palmer and Schloss (2011) demonstrate interesting gender differences regarding color preferences in that male participants showed a preference for active colors and female participants preferred passive colors. Males also showed a stronger preference for saturated colors than females. The widely acclaimed research by Holbrook (1986) explores individual consumer differences with respect to the evaluation of aesthetics and presents evidence supporting the heterogeneity of aesthetic preferences by comparing distinct individual traits, such as gender differences, romanticism or classicism, motivation levels, and the tendency to visualize or verbalize.

Halo effect

Personal beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of reference - Aristotle

Humans are predisposed to be attracted to beauty, and it would be nearly impossible to find someone who does not have a positive attitude toward beauty. In *The Republic*, Plato also establishes the connection between beauty and goodness, proposing that we have a natural and spiritual attraction to beauty, we love it immediately by nature, and we treat the beautiful as signifying the good. Murdoch (1980) appreciates the work of Plato and comments, “appreciation of beauty is also a completely adequate entry into the good life.” According to Murdoch (1980), beauty and goodness are not contrary to each other but belong to the same structure.

As human beings, we are predisposed to prefer beauty and even to seek it actively. We typically perceive it to indicate quality and superiority, and this phenomenon is known as the beauty premium. Interestingly, the inherent bias for beauty is found even in infants, as they prefer attractive faces over unattractive ones (Langlois et al., 1991; Ramsey et al., 2004; Quinn et al., 2008). Furthermore, due to the beauty premium, attractive individuals are perceived as being more intelligent and as having superior social skills (McArthur, 1982; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). Research shows that the beauty premium is a powerful inherent bias that may at times overshadow logical evidence. For instance, beautiful children are rated as more intelligent than unattractive children, even when their grades are the same (Clifford & Walster, 1973). Similarly, employees with above-average physical attractiveness enjoy the beauty premium regarding higher salaries (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994), and people demonstrate more willingness to help attractive people than unattractive people (Andreoni & Petrie, 2008). Employers are also positively biased toward employees with pleasing personalities and superior grooming (Robins et al., 2011). The extant literature indicates that our affinity for beauty is so deeply rooted that we

equate beauty with goodness (Dion et al., 1972; Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004). In all cultures, gods and deities, who are protagonists of folklore and fairy tales, typically possess glorious beauty, which shows that we instinctively equate beauty with goodness, further implying that our affinity for beauty is innate.

Instinctively, we consider beauty to be synonymous with goodness, possibly attributed to the fact that innate character reflects on outward appearance. In other words, personality traits have a profound influence on physical appearance, and we can judge a person fairly accurately based on their looks. A calm person may have fewer wrinkles than a perpetually worried and angry one. Furthermore, due to the prevailing stereotype that beauty indicates goodness, ugliness may indicate a bad person. Prior literature on physical attractiveness shows that attractive models are rated more positively than unattractive models on unrelated aspects. Interestingly, people also perceive physical attractiveness as a contributor to life happiness. The general belief is that those with beautiful appearances are happier than those who lack beauty. This stereotype extends to the positive assessment of movie characters and models in advertising, both of which are attributed to the beauty premium (Buunk & Dijkstra 2011). Movies strengthen the stereotype of physical attractiveness by placing the most attractive characters in the roles of the protagonists who are beacons of morality. These characters are also shown to have a more fulfilling romantic lives and to be more vital to movie plots (Smith et al., 1999). The bias toward beauty is not limited to entertainment but extends to the field of criminal justice. Widely acclaimed research shows that the physical attractiveness of the perpetrator and victim has an effect of whether jury finds the perpetrator guilty and or gives them a harsher punishment (Sigall & Ostrove, 1975; Vrij & Firmin, 2001)

In addition to our innate preference for beauty, society encourages a bias toward beautiful people and highly aesthetic objects, passing on these judgments from one generation to another. The society often judges people by the products they own and the disparity in products apparent by the aesthetics at the first glance, which leads to implications about the product and subsequently the owner (Belk et. al, 1981; 1982). Mass media is very influential on society, and it reinforces contemporary cultural norms that shape perceptions of what is acceptable and preferred. Children are more gullible than adults and readily accept the association between beauty and goodness. However, mass media also has an effect on adults themselves (Bessenoff, 2006; Little & Mannion, 2006; Hatoum & Belle, 2004). Movies and advertisements present impossible standards of beauty, ones that are typically related to goodness. From childhood, watching animated movies, including Disney movies, establishes an association between beauty, goodness, and happiness. Movies targeted at children portray an even stronger connection between beauty with intelligence than movies for adults. Because of the repetitive exposure to movies with the same subliminal message of the relationship between beauty, goodness, and happiness, these messages become deeply rooted (Bazzini et al., 2010).

Recent research explores whether beauty affects people's honesty (Wang et al., 2015), showing that people are inclined to be more honest if they are in the presence of facial beauty. The participants were asked to report on how accurately they predicted the coin flips generated by a computer and were rewarded when they reported a high prediction accuracy. The results show that the participants were more honest when there was a photo of an attractive female present. These findings indicate that beauty can even lead to enhanced moral standards.

It is, therefore, no surprise that marketers recognize the importance of beauty in consumer decision-making and deliver marketing that is aesthetically pleasing. The aesthetics of

a product are what we notice at first glance, which then influence our subsequent actions. If a product's aesthetic appeal engages a consumer, they are more likely to approach it and explore it further. Extant research in the field of marketing demonstrates that product, service, and advertisement aesthetics play significant roles in product success (Bloch, 1995).

S-O-R Framework

The stimuli-organism-response (S-O-R) framework proposes that external stimuli conditions individuals' affective and cognitive states, which subsequently regulate their behavioral responses (Eroglu et al., 2001). The S-O-R model proposes a suitable explanation for the cognitive, affective and behavioral responses of consumers elicited by aesthetic stimuli in a given situation. Aesthetic appeal refers to the creativity, overall beauty, and hedonic properties of particular stimuli. Exposure to that stimuli leads to its being judged and experienced, resulting in cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Taking a cue from this research, this paper proposes that highly aesthetic products are likely to generate cognitive and affective responses that promote creativity in consumers.

Aesthetics in Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Marketers appreciate the omnipresence of aesthetics and carefully consider it while making decisions about products and how they are promoted and consumed (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). Additionally, marketers are aware of our affinity for beauty, and they strive to deliver products that attract us by their appearance. The beauty of a product is what we notice at first glance, which influences our subsequent actions. The effect of beauty on consumer behavior is not limited to tangible products and shopping environment but also extends to virtual environments. Websites with high aesthetic appeal induce more enjoyable virtual experiences (Van der Heijden, 2003). Website aesthetics have also been found to be associated with

perceptions of service quality, security, and convenience (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Interestingly, highly aesthetic websites successfully garner positive review regardless of their utility (Lindgaard & Dudek, 2003).

The customers encounter an overwhelming number of choices as they walk down the aisles in stores. If the aesthetic appeal engages a customer, they are more likely to approach it and explore it further. Extant research in the field of marketing demonstrates that aesthetics pertaining to products, services and advertisements play a significant role in the product success (Bloch, 1995). Interestingly, the society emphasizes the ownership of high design products and often judges people by the products they own. For instance, society may look favorably upon a gentleman dressed in a business suit driving a Lexus compared to someone dressed up in cheap clothes driving a beaten up trail wagon.

The extant research demonstrates that the aesthetics of the environment where products or services are consumed or rendered also have a profound influence on consumer behavior and satisfaction (Bitner, 1992; Donovan et al., 1994; Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003). Diverse aesthetic aspects, such as color (Babin et al., 2003), scent (Chebat & Michon, 2003), and music (Chebat et al., 2001) are capable of swaying consumer preference, shopping duration, arousal, and acquisition in a shopping environment. Chebat et al. (2001) demonstrate that music can elicit increased cognitive activity in consumers and may influence their attitudes toward the salespeople and the store itself. Chebat and Michon (2003) also examine the effect of pleasant scent in a retail environment, finding that scent had a significant role in consumer perceptions of the shopping environment, product quality, and spending behavior. The influence of aesthetics on consumer behavior is not limited to tangible products and shopping environment but also extends to virtual environments in addition. Beautifully constructed and highly aesthetic websites

provide enjoyable virtual experiences (Van der Heijden, 2003). Website aesthetics have been found to significantly affect perceptions of service quality, security, and convenience (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Interestingly, highly aesthetic websites garner positive reviews regardless of their utility (Lindgaard & Dudek, 2003). Additionally, aesthetics has even been found to influence the financial sector where the utility of aesthetics is traditionally denied (Townsend & Shu, 2010).

The famous phrase “beauty lies in the eye of the beholder” suggests that the cognitive and affective responses that lead to behavioral outcomes are highly subjective and vary by individual and situation. In the recent years, marketers have begun to acknowledge the value of consumer co-creation, which departs from traditional marketing practices (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Marketers and consumers are now capable of creating improved products and services through mutual collaboration (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, 2004; Jaworski & Kohli, 2006). Similarly, aesthetic value co-creation can be achieved when consumers can customize their experiences according to their preferences, such as through the layout, color, and theme of a website they use for shopping (Wang et al., 2011).

Product and Package Aesthetics

Superior aesthetics enable a company to build competitive advantage through product differentiation. Consumers are captivated by beauty in the highly aesthetic products and use product appearance as significant criteria in decision-making. The widely acclaimed research by Bloch (1995) establishes and emphasizes the significance of design in consumers’ product judgment. Every firm strives to create an ideal product, and Bloch (1995) posits that the holy grail of product design may be achieved through a design that is perceived as superior to that of its competitors. The product design should also elicit positive beliefs, emotions, and responses in potential consumers. The author acknowledges that the quest for the perfect product design is a

challenging task. However, companies must continue to ensure the delivery of high-quality design. Furthermore, the perception of a product is not limited to the aesthetics of the product itself but also to its packaging, as the package is the visual representation of the product. Consumers have to deal with the package before they access the product. For instance, you have to open the cereal box before you can pour the cereal. Therefore, it is not surprisingly that the aesthetics of a cereal box plays a role in the perception of cereal quality. Orth and Malkewitz (2008) define a package as “the various elements chosen and blended into a holistic design to achieve a particular sensory effect.” Companies strive to protect their logos and package designs because they are closely associated with their brands. Google retained the same color scheme when they revamped their logo for strategic reasons because it was an integral part of their identity as a company. When Tropicana completely redesigned their orange juice carton, they lost sales because the redesigned carton was vastly different from the one consumers recognized. The brand faced an identity crisis, and their multimillion-dollar redesign campaign turned into a fiasco. Thus, package design is immensely capable of influencing consumer behavior (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008).

A typical consumer wants a product to fulfill its intended function and to be aesthetically pleasing. Thus, marketers try to strike a delicate balance between aesthetics and function. Chitturi and Mahajan (2007) explore consumer behavior pertaining to functional or hedonic compromises concerning their affective responses, finding that consumers choose a hedonically superior alternative when the minimum criteria for functionality and hedonism are met. The authors attribute this effect to the principle of hedonic dominance, and these results reaffirm that consumers favor a product that functions as it is supposed to; however, once the functional criteria are met, the product is evaluated on its appearance.

Consumers spend considerably more time on products that are aesthetically superior. Moreover, they prefer unknown brands with superior packaging aesthetics over a well-known brand with less attractive packaging (Reimann et al., 2010), which explains the preference for high aesthetics even when other brands are available—it is based on the activation of the reward system in the brain attributed to beauty.

It may seem that consumers would choose very different colors for the products they create. However, most consumers chose not to deviate much from the original color scheme of the product they create (Deng & Hutchinson, 2010). Participants in one study used NikeiD as a tool to create their own pair of sports shoes with virtually unlimited options of combinations for the color scheme. Interestingly, when they chose a color scheme for their shoe, which comprised proximate or exact colors to achieve uniformity, and barely favored any stark contrasts. In other words, consumers prefer harmonic and coherent product aesthetics, and having access to a great variety of colors does not affect this preference.

Prototypicality

Prototypicality is another aspect of product aesthetics that influences consumer behavior. A product that represents a typical product in a product category is considered a prototype. For instance, the iPad is a prototypical product in the category of tablet computers. Marketers have to make a decision regarding whether a new product is going to be representative of a product category or whether they will differentiate that product based on an entirely new design. The current literature posits that the aesthetic utility of a novel product is alleviated if it is prototypical of its category (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998).

Rindova and Petkova (2007) suggest that product form has a significant effect on consumer behavior. Specifically, aesthetic appeal serves as powerful stimuli and elicits both

cognitive and affective reactions. Their findings posit that an integration of high aesthetic appeal is even more essential to novel technologies because it makes it easier for consumers to adapt the product based on its pleasant appearance. New technologies call for an investment from consumers in terms of time, effort, learning, and money. A new technological product with high aesthetics may make this investment pleasant, thereby making for easier adaptation. For instance, a consumer who switches from a Windows laptop to a Mac may enjoy the high aesthetics of the new laptop, even if the interface is distinct from the Windows platform they are familiar with.

We have an automatic and innate preference for beautiful people, and we favor them without being conscious of it. Townsend and Sood (2012) provide a fresh perspective on the significance of aesthetics on consumers' self-perceptions. Their research posits that the halo effect, or beauty premium, applicable to people extends to highly aesthetic products and that these products support consumers' self-affirmation. Interestingly, other product traits, such as function, brand, and even hedonics do not effect self-affirmation. Specifically, the consumers seek high aesthetics, as a product trait, for self-affirmation. Yang, Peracchio, and Zhang (2010) explore the effect of self-concept on appealing traits of images in terms of product evaluation, taking into account different camera angles (upward, downward) for the products' visual images. Their results demonstrate an interaction between self-concept and camera angle, and posit that individuals evaluate a product more favorably when a downward (upward) camera angle is paired with an ideal-self (ought-self). Both of these studies contribute to the literature that confirms a significant relationship between aesthetics and individual traits.

Aesthetics taste

The perception of beauty is highly subjective, and what is beautiful according to one person may not be beautiful to another. The phenomenon of subjective beauty is applicable to

our behavior in general and as consumers. The concept of artistic taste can be defined as “the natural capacity to take pleasure in certain artistic and natural objects by means of one’s own sensory experience” (Cohen, 1998). The key phrase in this definition is “one’s own sensory experience,” which implies that the sensory experiences differ. Thus, consumers’ reactions to aesthetics differ depending on their individual perceptions. The Cambridge Dictionary of English describes taste as “a person’s ability to judge and appreciate what is good and suitable, esp. in art, beauty, style, and behavior.” According to Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer (2012), “consumer aesthetic taste constitutes an individual’s consistent and appropriate response to aesthetic consumption objects through any of the five senses that is highly correlated with some external standard.”

An overwhelming amount of research supports our attraction to beautiful people and beautiful things (Dion et al., 1972; Langlois et al., 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004; Ramsey et al., 2004; Quinn et al., 2007; Andreoni & Petrie, 2008). Our affinity for beauty is deeply rooted and is reflected in all aspects of our behavior, including consumption. Consumers encounter an overwhelming number of choices as they walk down store aisles. If a product’s aesthetic appeal engages a consumer, they are more likely to approach it and explore it further. Extant research in the field of marketing demonstrates that product, service and advertisement aesthetics play significant roles in product success (Bloch, 1995). Indeed, society often judges people at first glance by the aesthetics of the products they own, which leads to assumptions about the product and subsequently the owner (Belk et al., 1981, 1982).

Discussion

The first essay reviews the diverse research on aesthetics and lays the groundwork for the subsequent two essays. I provide an in-depth understanding of aesthetics and compile research to emphasize the significance of aesthetics and their effects on consumer behavior and marketing. The first essay mainly focuses on how aesthetics affect consumer behavior with a special focus on the halo effect, that “what is beautiful is good.” Aesthetic considerations are pervasive and an integral part of our lives, including consumption. In the highly competitive market environment, there is an increased parity in the functionality of products, which means that each product must function as expected. Increasingly, consumer choices are swayed by the aesthetics of a product or service. The extant literature reaffirms our affinity for all kinds of beauty and that beautiful people and beautiful things have a special allure (Dion et al., 1972; Langlois et al., 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Ramsey et al., 2004; Andreoni & Petrie 2008). Given our innate and unconscious preference for beauty, it is inevitable that aesthetics play a significant in our consumption patterns. Marketers place special emphasis on the aesthetics of products, consumption, and promotion, among other facets of marketing, aesthetics are often used for product differentiation. Varied aesthetic aspects, such as color (Babin et al., 2003), scent (Chebat & Michon 2003), and music (Chebat et al., 2001) are capable of swaying consumer preference, shopping duration, arousal, and acquisition. However, I focus on visual aesthetics in this research, as they are the most substantial.

Research shows that aesthetics influence all aspects of marketing. The aesthetics of environment, where the products or services are rendered and consumed, has a profound influence on consumer behavior and satisfaction (Bitner, 1992; Donovan et al., 1994; Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003). The effects of aesthetics are not limited to physical location but also apply to

virtual environments such as websites. For instance, websites with high aesthetic appeal provide more enjoyable virtual experiences than those with low aesthetic appeal (Van der Heijden, 2003; Lindgaard & Dudek, 2003) and influence perceptions of online service quality, security, and convenience (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Humans are predisposed to be attracted to beauty, and it is a nearly impossible task to find someone who does not have a positive attitude toward beauty. Plato's *The Republic* establishes the connection between beauty and goodness, proposing that we have a natural and spiritual attraction to beauty—we love it immediately by nature and treat the beautiful as signifying the good. Murdoch (1980) appreciates the work of Plato and comments that the “appreciation of beauty is also a completely adequate entry into the good life.” According to Murdoch (1980), beauty and goodness are not contrary to each other; instead, they belong to the same structure.

This attitude toward physically attractive individuals can be explicated by the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype, which implies that beauty indicates a pleasant personality and a lack of beauty indicates a negative one (Dion et al., 1972). This stereotype extends to the positive assessment of movie characters and models in advertising, which is attributed to their beauty premium (Buunk & Dijkstra 2011). Research explores the questions of whether beauty affects people's honesty (Wang et al., 2015), providing evidence that people are more inclined to be honest in the presence of facial beauty. These findings clearly indicate that we perceive beauty to equate goodness.

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ESSAY II: DOES BEAUTY BEGET GOODNESS? THE CASE OF AESTHETICS EFFECT ON MORAL JUDGMENT

Consider the scenario of an art exhibition where highly aesthetic pieces of artwork are displayed. Consequently, the individuals at the venue are asked to make a donation to a charitable cause. Are individuals who are exposed to a beauty cue, such as highly aesthetic art, more likely to oblige when asked to make a donation when compared to others? Could the activation of moral consciousness elicited by beauty prime be accountable for alleviated moral standard such as favorable attitude towards charitable donation? The present research tackles these questions by examining the role of beauty cues in activating the stereotypical mindset “what is beautiful is good” and enhance moral judgment.

Halo effect

Research demonstrates that beauty is a highly influential stimulus that affects many of our responses. Our innate preference for beauty is deeply rooted and is reflected in all facets of our behavior; our natural affinity for beauty is confirmed by an overwhelming amount of research that indicates our attraction toward beautiful people and beautiful things (Dion et al., 1972; Langlois et al., 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004; Ramsey et al., 2004; Quinn et al., 2007; Andreoni & Petrie 2008). Furthermore, we equate beauty with goodness, as suggested by the famous phrase, “what is beautiful is good.” Research shows that society perceives attractive individuals as being more intelligent and having superior social skills, which is attributed to the beauty premium or halo effect (McArthur, 1982; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). This stereotype implies that beauty suggests a pleasant personality and lack of beauty appeal suggest a negative one (Dion et al., 1972).

Significance of aesthetics in marketing and consumer behavior

Research in the field of marketing confirms that aesthetics is ubiquitous in the area of marketing and is a carefully considered variable of products, consumption and promotion among other facets of marketing (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). Diverse aspects of aesthetics such as color (Babin et. al, 2003), scent (Chebat & Michon 2003) and music (Chebat et. al, 2001) are capable of swaying consumer's preference, shopping duration, arousal and acquisition in an environment of purchase. These findings provide ample evidence that aesthetics elicit identifiable responses from consumers. The majority of the prior research on beauty focuses on the effect of integral beauty on consumer judgments. This research, however, examines the incidental effects of beauty. Specifically, I investigate how exposure to beauty cues influences consumers' subsequent moral judgment and decision-making.

Marketers are aware of our affinity for beauty, and they focus on delivering products that are pleasing and attractive. The aesthetics of a product are what we notice at first glance, which influences our subsequent actions. Consumers encounter an overwhelming number of choices as they walk down store aisles, and if aesthetic appeal engages them, they are more likely to approach a product and explore it further. Extant research in the field of marketing demonstrates that the aesthetics of products, services, and advertisements play a significant role in product success (Bloch, 1995). Indeed, society often judges people by the products they own and the disparity in products apparent by their aesthetics, which leads to assumptions about the product and its owner (Belk et al., 1981, 1982).

Extant research demonstrates that the aesthetics of environment, where the goods or services are rendered and consumed, has a profound influence on consumer behavior and satisfaction (Bitner 1992; Donovan et al. 1994; Morrin & Ratneshwar 2003). Taking a cue from

the prior literature, which demonstrates that aesthetics is highly influential antecedent of consumer behavior and beauty in general is considered indicative of goodness, we examine the effect of incidental beauty on moral judgment. Research shows that exposure to high aesthetics has an effect on subsequent cognitive and affective responses of consumers that lead to behavioral outcomes. We posit that consumers exposed to aesthetic appeal in products would show distinctions in moral judgments. The innate appreciation for beauty and tendency to believe “What is beautiful is good” would inspire individuals to appreciate beauty in highly aesthetic products and result in a behavioral response pertaining to moral judgment depending on the valence of aesthetics.

What is Beautiful is Good?

It would be nearly impossible task to find an individual who does not have a positive attitude toward beauty. In *The Republic*, Plato establishes the connection between beauty and goodness, proposing that we have a natural and spiritual attraction to beauty—we love it immediately by nature and treat the beautiful as signifying the good. Murdoch (1980) appreciates Plato’s work and comments that the “appreciation of beauty is also a completely adequate entry into the good life.” According to Murdoch (1980), beauty and goodness are not contrary to each other but belong to the same structure. Our affinity for beauty is so deeply rooted that we equate beauty with goodness (Dion et al., 1972; Van Leeuwen & Macrae, 2004). In all cultures worldwide, gods and deities, the protagonists of folklore and fairy tales, typically possess glorious beauty, which suggests that we instinctively equate beauty with goodness and that our affinity for beauty is innate.

We are predisposed to appreciate beautiful things and even to actively seek beauty. We are typically biased towards beauty and perceive it to indicate quality and superiority. This

phenomenon is referred to as the beauty premium, which implies bias based on appearance alone. The inherent bias for beauty is even found in infants, who show a preference for attractive faces over unattractive ones (Langlois et al., 1991; Ramsey et al., 2004; Quinn et al., 2008). Individuals equate beauty with goodness that reinforces the famous phrase, “What is beautiful is good? Society perceives attractive individuals as more intelligent and masters of superior social skills, which is attributed to beauty premium (McArthur, 1982; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994).). Research shows that the beauty premium is a powerful bias that may even overshadow logical evidence. For instance, beautiful children are rated as more intelligent than unattractive children, even when their grades are at parity (Clifford & Walster, 1973). Furthermore, employees with above average physical attractiveness enjoy the beauty premium through higher salaries (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994), and people demonstrate an increased willingness to help attractive people over unattractive people (Andreoni & Petrie; 2008). Employers are also positively biased toward employees with pleasing personalities and superior grooming (Robins et al., 2011).

Instinctively, we consider beauty to be synonymous with goodness, possibly due to the fact that innate character reflects in outward appearance. In other words, personality traits have a profound influence on the physical appearance and we can judge a person accurately based on their looks. A calm person may have fewer wrinkles than a perpetually worried and angry one. Research on physical attractiveness shows that attractive models are rated more positively than unattractive ones on unrelated aspects. Interestingly, people also perceive physical attractiveness as contributing to life happiness. This stereotype extends to the positive assessment of movie characters and models in advertising, which is attributed to their beauty premium (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2011). Indeed, in the movies, the most attractive characters are usually beacons of morality. These characters are also shown to have more fulfilling romantic lives and to be more

vital to the plot (Smith et al., 1999). The bias toward beauty is not limited to entertainment but extends to the field of criminal justice. Research shows that the physical attractiveness of the perpetrator and victim have an effect of whether jury finds the perpetrator guilty or gives them a harsher punishment (Sigall & Ostrove, 1975; Vrij & Firmin, 2001)

In addition to our innate preference for beauty, society engenders biases toward beautiful people and beautiful objects, passing on these judgments from one generation to another. Mass media is one of the most influential sources in our society, which reinforces contemporary cultural norms shape what is acceptable and preferred. Children are more gullible than adults and readily accept the association between beauty and goodness. However, entertainment also affects adults (Bessenoff, 2006; Little & Mannion, 2006; Hatoum & Belle, 2004). Movies and advertisements contribute to the popularity of impossible beauty standards, which are typically tied to the goodness of those who are beautiful. Moreover, animated media, including the Disney movies watched in childhood, establish the association between beauty and goodness and happiness. Indeed, movies targeted at children portray a stronger connection between beauty and intelligence than movies for adult. Repetitive exposure to movies with the same subliminal message of the relationship between beauty, goodness and happiness becomes deeply rooted (Bazzini et al. 2010).

Moral Judgment

We encounter moral dilemmas frequently in the course of our life and numerous factors affect our responses. Indeed, morality is a topic of interest for researchers in numerous fields. The concept of morality refers to the notion of right or wrong and the sets of guidelines that help us to determine the right behaviors for particular life situations. These guidelines may come from both moral common sense, or they may be formally guidelines in religious or other sources, such

as the ten commandments in the Bible. In general, society has little or no tolerance for unethical actions, and people dissociate themselves from those who exhibit morally deviant behavior (Skitka et al., 2005).

The concept of morality is further related to the similar concepts of moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. Moral reasoning is individual or collective practical reasoning about the most morally sound action in a given situation (Richardson, 2014). Our ethics are determined by our positions and associated roles, whether they be as parents, students, teachers, employees, or citizens. Trevino et al. (2006) refer to ethical decision-making as behavioral ethics, which are “primarily concerned with explaining individual behavior that occurs in the context of larger social prescriptions.” The extant research focuses on understanding moral judgment and its psychological processes. For this reason, the primary aims of this dissertation is to understand how beauty affects moral judgment.

Moral judgment refers to the process of judging the morality of a decision in the presence of a moral dilemma. The notions of right and wrong vary by cultures across the world, but they are present nonetheless. Essentially, the study of moral judgment is a study of what is considered a socially accepted norm. Contemporary research on the topic argues whether moral judgment is based on reasoning or instinct (Haidt & Joseph, 2007; Joyce, 2006). Moral reasoning can be described as the cognitive process that individuals utilize to reach a logical conclusion in an ethical dilemma, which may lead to moral judgment. Haidt (2001) proposes an alternate perspective on the process of ethical decision-making, which implies that it is a process, which is dominated by intuition in lieu of a detailed cognitive framework. He introduced a model of social intuitionist moral judgment, which implies that morally sound decisions are mainly made at an

unconscious level using moral instinct; however, an individual may indulge in moral reasoning after the decision has already been achieved.

Moral Judgment Decision-Making

One of the pioneer models in the field of decision-making process regarding moral judgment are formulated by Rest (1986). This model suggests four stages of the decision-making process pertaining to moral judgment; identification of the moral nature of issue at hand, moral judgment, moral intent formation and ultimately moral behavior. The literature shows that researchers have not reached consensus on the vitality of intuition and cognition in the moral judgment (Rest et. al, 1997; Ferrell and Gresham, 1985; Haidt, 2001).

The critically acclaimed Social Intuitionist Model by Haidt (2001) supports the notion that moral judgment is primarily based on intuition instead of cognition. His research contradicts rationalism of moral judgment being based on moral reasoning and posits that moral reasoning happens subsequent to moral judgment. It is important to note that moral judgment and moral behavior are two distinct concepts. Moral judgment implies the act of judging an issue from a moral perspective, however, does not require taking an action. On the other hand, moral behavior requires acting in accordance with the intended morality. Haidt (2001) posits that moral judgment is essentially intuitive and an automatic process.

Factors that affect moral judgment

Moral judgment and subsequent action is influenced by several factors, such as maturity and age. Kohlberg's (1969) theory of cognitive moral judgment proposes that maturity is salient in the cognitive framework that individuals use to solve moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1969, 1981; Colby & Kohlberg 1987), which implies that people of different ages act differently when posed

with a moral dilemma. The concepts of moral intention (Barnett, 2001) and moral awareness (Singhapakdi et al., 1996) are also associated with moral judgment. Moreover, social consensus and the magnitude of the consequences are also salient to moral judgment (Singer et al., 1998; Valentine & Fleischman, 2003). Specifically, individuals take into account the consequences of their actions when they face moral issues. Intuitively, people may look the other way and indulge in immoral actions when the consequences are small but adhere to the moral code if there are serious consequences to their actions.

Moral Flexibility

In spite of rigid attitudes toward immoral behavior, individuals are often morally flexible. Moral flexibility implies that people are inclined to make moral decisions but that these decisions are highly contextual and subjective, depending on moral principles (Bartels, 2014). People can easily distinguish between right and wrong if the consequences of their actions are severe, favoring the “morally right and difficult” choice. However, they might choose the “desirable but wrong” if the consequences are relatively minor. For instance, most people would agree that lying is wrong but indulge in lying under many circumstances. People may deny eating someone else’s food from the company fridge but not lie if they are a witness in a murder trial.

These decisions can generate tension between innate desires and moral principles, and the outcome depends on whether desire or morality wins in the conflict. Thus, this research focuses on how beauty and aesthetics affect individuals’ moral judgment by exploring internal, external, verbal, and visual beauty.

Moral Judgment in Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Moral Judgment and ethical decision making in general has been studied in marketing from the perspective of marketers, and a few studies have examined moral judgment from the

vantage point of consumers. Consumer behavior has shifted over the past few years, and consumers are more attracted to products that are sustainable and ethical (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008; d'Astous & Legendre, 2008). Research shows that today's consumers are more appreciative of socially responsible products and services; however, that appreciation is not reflected in terms of overall market share (d'Astous & Legendre, 2008; Aertsens et al., 2009; Wilier & Kilcher, 2009; Eckhardt et al., 2010). Clearly, there is a substantial gap between consumer appreciation of ethical consumption and their actual consumption (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

Moral Judgment in Marketing

Marketers are posed with many ethical dilemmas in which there are opportunities to look the other way or conduct unethical behavior, including false advertising, patent encroachment, and predatory marketing practices. Research on understanding ethical decision-making by marketing managers suggests that individual characteristics (values, attitudes, knowledge, and intentions), opportunities to indulge into unethical behavior, and, interestingly, the role of significant others, influence how individuals behave when presented with moral dilemmas at work (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). Ferrell and Gresham (1985) find that marketing managers are more likely to behave ethically if they receive adequate training in ethics and the company incorporates a strict ethics policy with severe consequences for unethical behavior. Marketing managers are also more likely to be lured into crossing the line if there is a lucrative incentive for unethical behavior (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). Moreover, gender differences, education level (Goolsby & Hunt, 1992), and emotions (Dedeke, 2015) also affect employees' moral judgment. Goolsby and Hunt (1992) demonstrate that females and highly educated marketers are more

likely to exhibit superior morality, as they received high scores on the cognitive moral development scale.

Moral and ethical issues have been inseparable from the advertising industry since are frequent instances of grey ethical practices such as exaggeration or false advertising, promotion of harmful goods and service and advertising to children among other known issues. Most often, the advertisers strive to stay within the legal bounds to avoid legal repercussion but they are not as concerned about the ethical sensitivity. Extensive interviews of professionals in the advertising industry revealed moral myopia (avoid noticing or exploring moral issues), moral muteness (avoid discussing sensitive topics) and moral imagination (respond to moral issues in creative ways to avoid blame) to be the primary concerns (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004). These conclusions clearly confirm that ethical sensitivity is an issue in the advertising industry.

Moral Judgment in Consumer Behavior

Ethical, or morally sound, consumption implies that consumers feel responsible toward society, which is then reflected in their consumption (Browne et al., 2000; Carrigan et al., 2004). Borgmann (2000) draws attention to the moral issues around excessive consumption as a society. He acknowledges that robust consumption trends indicate that a society is thriving; however, should we really consume as much as we can? Traditionally, ethical consumption has been limited to issues such as fair trade and fair wages for farmers in underdeveloped nations. However, contemporary ethical consumption also includes concerns about the greenhouse effect, conservation of the rain forests, labor working conditions, local purchasing, and physically capable employment (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Zander & Hamm, 2010). Ethical consumption also refers to the consumption of products and services that are environmentally friendly and

sustainable (Harrison & Shaw, 2005). These findings suggest that consumers are more cognizant of purchasing socially mindful items.

Furthermore, many studies imply a connection between an individual's ethical identity and his/her ethical or unethical actions (Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007; Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Specifically, research demonstrates that ethical identity encourages prosocial behavior, such as involvement in charities, and negatively influence antisocial practices. Additionally, the ethical identity of an individual determines whether they would behave in a socially responsible manner (Shao, Aquino & Freeman, 2008). Because consumers receive the majority of their knowledge of social issues from the mass media, accessibility to this media plays a critical role in their consumption decisions (Hughner et al., 2007). Consumers who are well informed about social issues and firms' corporate social responsibility (CSR) are more likely to make morally sound decisions regarding ethical consumption.

Beauty prime and moral judgment

A recent research explores the questions of whether beauty holds the potential of affecting honesty in people (Wang et. al, 2015). This research provides evidence that people have an inclination to be honest if they are in the presence of beauty, signified by facial beauty in this study. The participants were asked to report how accurately they could forecast the coin flips generated by a computer. A high prediction accuracy was rewarded and was a desirable outcome attractive enough to elicit dishonesty. The results show that more honesty was observed when there was a photo of an attractive female present. These findings indicate that beauty can lead to alleviated moral standard. However, there is a dearth of research on consumers' moral judgment from a psychological point of view (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Hughner et al., 2007; d'Astous &

Legendre, 2008). Most ethical choice-making studies are on business ethics (Bray et al., 2010) and few consider ethical choice-making at the individual level (Nicholls & Lee, 2006).

As summarized in essay I, extant research confirms our attraction and preference towards beautiful people and beautiful things (Dion et al, 1972; Langlois et. al, 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Van Leeuwen & Neil Macrae, 2004; Ramsey et. al, 2004; Quinn et. al, 2007; Andreoni and Petrie 2008). We equate beauty with goodness that reinforces the famous phrase, “What is beautiful is good?” Society bestows beauty premium on attractive individuals and perceives them as more intelligent and socially skillful (McArthur, 1982; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). Previous literature concerning physical attractiveness indicates that beautiful models are rated in a more positive manner compared to unattractive models on unrelated aspects. This attitude towards physically attractive individuals can be explicated by the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype, which implies that beauty indicates a pleasant personality, and lack of beauty appeal indicates negative personality traits (Dion et. al, 1972).

Because prior literature demonstrates that beauty implies goodness, I examine the relationship between beautiful or highly aesthetic products and moral judgment. Research shows that exposure to high aesthetics affects consumers’ cognitive and affective responses, leading to distinct behavioral outcomes. While the literature on beauty traditionally focuses on external beauty, our research considers incidental beauty, which has not yet been explored. In this study, I hypothesize that consumers primed with incidental and external beauty cues will exhibit variations in moral judgment, i.e., that their innate appreciation for beauty and tendency to believe that “what is beautiful is good” will inspire them to make superior moral judgments and behavioral responses. Because beauty is deeply rooted in our psyches, this study examines situations in which consumers have to choose between beautiful products and ethical products,

expecting that when exposed to verbal and visual cues of beauty, consumers will exhibit variations in moral judgment. This study includes five such studies to examine the relationships between beauty and moral judgment.

Study I — Incidental Exposure to (Internal/Spiritual) Beauty Cues and Moral Judgment

Method

The first study was designed to explore the relation between beauty and prosocial behavior. Participants were primed with quotes about internal or spiritual beauty, employing between-subjects ANOVA and using incidental beauty as the independent variable and prosocial intentions as the dependent variable. I expected that incidental beauty cues would activate a beauty mindset, leading to more stringent moral judgment. I then collected data from a student sample by administering surveys under two conditions, those with beauty quotes and those with neutral quotes. There were 40 participants in the neutral quotes condition and 33 participants in the beauty quotes condition. This study tested the following hypothesis:

H₁: Incidental beauty (integral/spiritual beauty) will lead to more stringent moral judgments

Having been instructed that the survey consisted of several (ostensibly) unrelated parts, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and completed the survey at their own pace. They were first exposed to the beauty manipulation. Specifically, respondents were told that a local calendar company planned to introduce a special beauty- (epigram-) themed calendar and currently sought feedback from college students about ten candidate quotes. The cover story shared with the participants was:

A local calendar company plans to incorporate them in a special beauty-themed calendar and would like to gather feedback from college students. In the following pages, you will find ten potential quotes they plan to include in the calendar. After you finish reading these quotes (one quote per page), you will be asked to provide your opinions about these quotes.

Examples in the beauty condition include: “The best part of beauty is that which no picture can express,” and “Life is full of beauty. Notice it. Notice the bumble bee, the small child, and the smiling faces. Smell the rain, and feel the wind. Live your life to the fullest potential, and fight for your dreams.” Examples in the control condition include: “Books fall open, you fall in,” and “Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.” To be consistent with the cover story, after reading these quotes, respondents were asked to provide their opinions of the quotes that they had just read using three, seven-point Likert scales (e.g., “these quotes are excellent”).

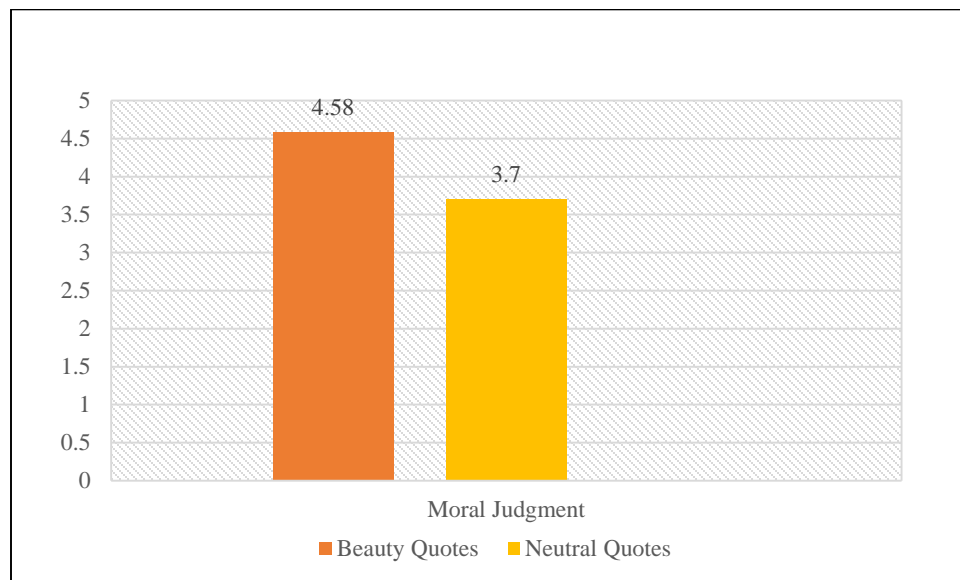
After completing a five-minute filler task, respondents were shown a message from St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, a non-profit organization that treats children cancers, were asked to answer questions pertaining to their interest in volunteering for (“how interested are you in volunteering for the St. Jude Children’s Hospital?”) and/or making a donation to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital (“how interested are you in making a donation to St. Jude Children’s Hospital?”) using seven-point scales (“1= not at all,” to “7 = very much”). The two scales were averaged to form a pro-social tendency index.

Results

Prosocial Tendency: The pro-social tendency scores were submitted to a one-way ANOVA with type of beauty prime as the independent variable. As we hypothesized, there was a significant main effect of beauty prime such that respondents assigned to read through the beauty

quotes were more likely to donate and volunteer than those assigned to the neutral quotes condition ($M_{\text{beauty}} = 4.58$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 3.70$, $F(1, 71) = 5.09$, $p < .03$). Specifically, we found that participants exposed to beauty quotes demonstrated a higher prosocial tendency. The results from the first exploratory study confirmed our expectation that priming with beauty does lead to pro social behavior which indicates enhanced moral standards.

FIGURE 1: Incidental Exposure to (Internal/Spiritual) Beauty Cues Enhance Moral Standard



Study II — Incidental exposure to (external/sensory) beauty cues and moral judgment

Method

To replicate our findings obtained in study I, study II resorted to a different manipulation of beauty exposure. Other than this, the design and procedure of study 2 were identical to those of study 1. Study II utilized the same one-way ANOVA (prime: beauty vs. neutral) between-subjects full factorial design. Eighty-six undergraduates participated in the experiment in exchange for partial course credit. We test the following hypothesis:

H₂: External/sensory beauty will lead to more stringent moral judgments

Similar to Study I, incidental beauty cues in study II were expected to lead to more stringent moral judgment. I collected data from the student sample by administering surveys for two conditions—the beauty cue condition and the neutral cue condition. There were 38 participants in the neutral cue condition and 48 participants in the beauty cue condition.

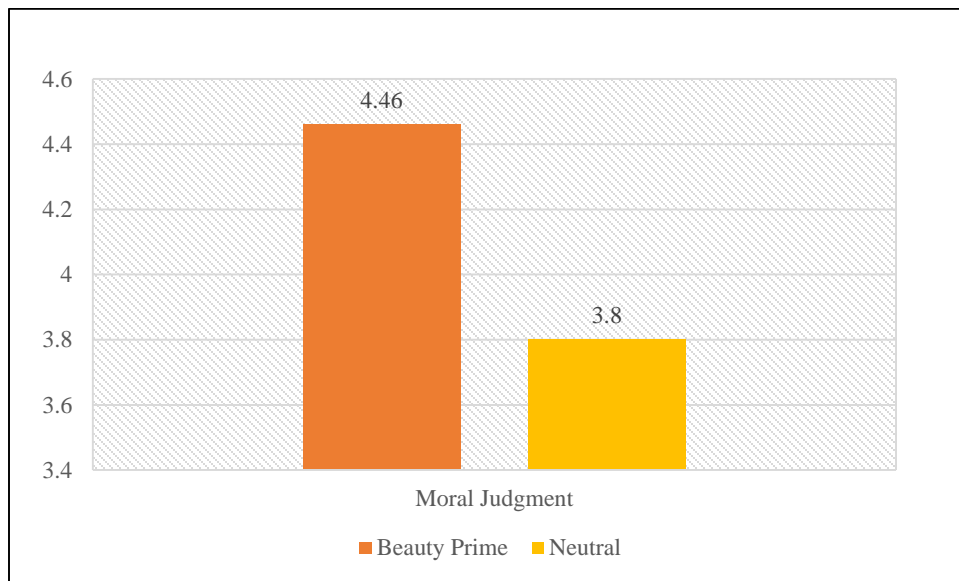
Upon arrival, respondents were informed that the survey consisted of several unrelated parts. They were first exposed to the beauty manipulation which asked respondents to complete a scrambled sentence test, a cognitive task, (Srull & Wyers, 1979), which had been frequently employed in the prior literature to induce momentary mindsets (Chartrand and Bargh 1996; Gino and Ariely 2012). Respondents were asked to construct grammatically correct and coherent, four-word sentences from a list of five, randomly placed words (“exam, that, is, easy, and” à “That exam is easy.”). In the beauty prime condition, respondents were told to work on 15 such sentences, of which 12 sentences contained words related to external/sensory beauty (e.g., beautiful, appealing, stunning, attractive, gorgeous). In the neutral prime condition, however, no words were related to beauty. Following a five-minute filler task, respondents were shown the same message and reported their prosocial tendency using the same measures as in study I.

Results

Prosocial Tendency: The pro-social tendency scores were submitted to a one-way ANOVA with type of beauty prime as the independent variable. As we hypothesized, there was a significant main effect of beauty prime such that respondents who completed the beauty scrambled sentence test were more likely to donate and volunteer than those assigned to the neutral scrambled sentence test condition ($M_{\text{beauty}} = 4.46$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 3.80$, $F(1, 84) = 4.57$, $p < .04$).

The results from study II successfully replicated the results from study I and confirm the expectation that priming with beauty leads to prosocial behavior. The participants primed with beauty cues by unscrambling sentences with beauty-related words demonstrated a higher intent to donate or volunteer, indicating enhanced moral standard. Encouraged by the findings from these exploratory studies, I ran three additional studies to explore the effects of verbal and visual aesthetics on moral judgment.

FIGURE 2: Incidental Exposure to (External/Sensory) Beauty Cues Enhance Moral Standard



Study III — Incidental Exposure to a Highly Aesthetic Product and Moral Judgment

Method

Our first two studies confirmed our premise that beauty leads to superior moral standard. To augment the robustness of the findings of the first two studies, study III exposed respondents to products with different aesthetic levels to manipulate beauty exposure and utilized the same one-way ANOVA (prime: beauty vs. neutral) between-subjects full factorial design. One hundred sixty-seven undergraduates participated in the experiment in exchange for partial course credit. We tested the following hypothesis:

H₃: High product aesthetics will lead to more stringent moral judgments pertaining to ethical consumption intention

Similar to the previous studies, upon arrival respondents were told that the survey consisted of several unrelated parts and that they should complete the survey at their own pace. They were first exposed to the beauty manipulation. Specifically, they were shown a product with either high or average aesthetic appeals and were asked the extent to which they think the product design was “aesthetically appealing/visually pleasant/pretty/ugly” using nine-point scale anchored by (1= Not at all and 9= very much; the last scale was reverse coded; the scales were averaged to form a manipulation check score for the beauty manipulation; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$).

Then respondents were instructed to complete two instruments that were designed to measure their pro-social tendency. The first instrument consisted of six, nine-point Likert scales that assessed respondents’ green consumption likelihood (e.g., “My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment;” Haws et al. 2014; scores were averaged to form

Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Respondents also completed the short form of the ecologically conscious consumer behavior scale, which consisted of twelve, nine-point Likert scales (e.g., "I have switched products for ecological reasons;" Straughan and Roberts 1999; scores were averaged to form Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$)

Results

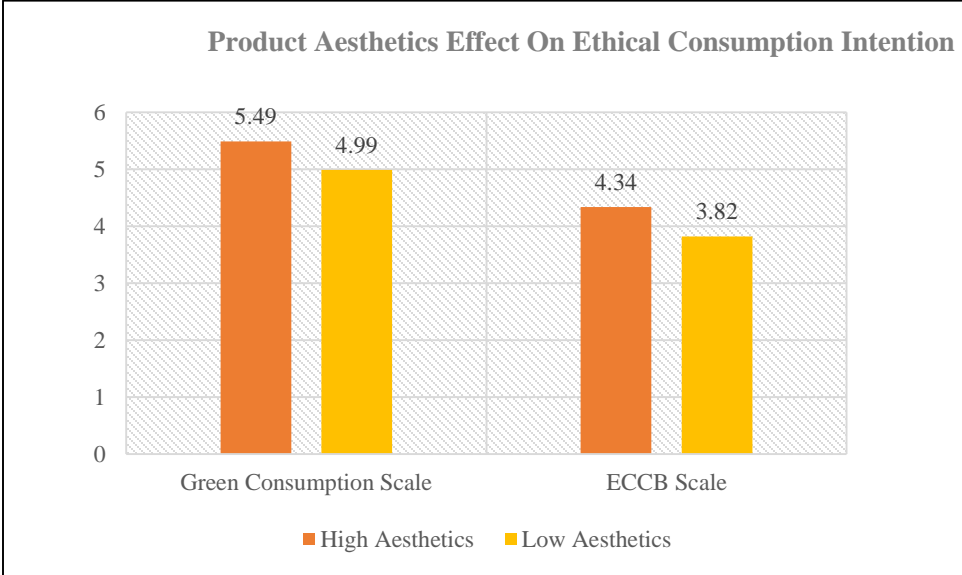
Manipulation Check: To examine whether our beauty manipulation was successful, a one-way ANOVA with the beauty manipulation as the independent variable and the beauty assessment manipulation check scores as the dependent variable was performed. The results revealed a significant main effect of beauty such that respondents shown an aesthetically pleasing product judged the product to be more beautiful than those who were presented with a less appealing product ($M_{\text{high-aesthetics}} = 4.13$ vs. $M_{\text{low-aesthetics}} = 3.19$, $F(1, 165) = 9.80$, $p = .002$).

Prosocial Tendency: The same ANOVA was performed on the green consumption scale and the analysis demonstrated a significant main effect of the beauty manipulation such that respondents who were shown an aesthetically pleasing product were more likely to engage in green consumption activities than those presented with a less appealing product ($M_{\text{high-aesthetics}} = 5.49$ vs. $M_{\text{low-aesthetics}} = 4.99$; $F(1, 165) = 4.30$, $p = .04$). In addition, the same ANOVA conducted on the ecologically conscious consumer behavior scale also revealed a significant of the beauty manipulation and respondents shown an aesthetically pleasing product reported a higher likelihood to engage in ecologically conscious consumer behavior ($M_{\text{high-aesthetics}} = 4.34$ vs. $M_{\text{low-aesthetics}} = 3.82$; $F(1, 165) = 4.70$, $p = .03$).

Study III provides additional evidence that incidental exposure to highly aesthetic products increases moral judgment related to ethical consumption when compared to incidental

exposure to less aesthetic products. Specifically, consumers who were exposed to the highly aesthetic product were more inclined toward green consumption and environmental consciousness than consumers who were exposed to the low aesthetics product. The findings of the study confirm that priming with highly aesthetic products alleviate the moral standards depicted by favorable intentions toward ethical consumption. Thus, study III also provides evidence that beauty promotes moral judgment.

FIGURE 3: Incidental Exposure to Highly Aesthetical Product Enhances Ethical Consumption Intention



Study IV — Beauty Prime and Evaluations of Ethical Products (when they are ugly)

The prior three studies establish that beauty enhances moral judgment and confirm the hypotheses that exposure to highly aesthetic products leads to consumers’ superior moral judgment. This study examines what would happen if moral judgment, as assessed by the corporate social responsibility (CSR) associated with a product, and external beauty are in conflict.

H4: High product aesthetics will bestow beauty premium leading to halo effect, which will lead to flexible moral judgments

Consumers are frequently posed with moral dilemmas in which they can make an easy choice or a right choice regarding ethical consumption. Thus, this study examines consumers' purchase intention when they are given a choice between a highly aesthetic but low CSR product and a product with low aesthetics and high CSR. In other words, the consumers could choose a beautiful product associated with moral issues or an ugly product whose purchase would benefit society. This study explores whether consumers are willing to forgo beauty for moral judgment, i.e., whether the halo effect leads consumers not to forgo beauty in favor of ethical consumption (leading to results that oppose earlier studies).

Method

This study was administered to 103 undergraduate students, who received credit for participation. I employed a two-by-two, between-subjects design with beauty cues (the same beauty quotes used in study I). The two conditions were a product with high CSR and a low aesthetic or a product with low CSR and a high aesthetic; purchase intention was the dependent variable. The two conditions were represented by pictures of bathroom scales and toasters, and the respondents were asked to indicate their purchase intention based on the pictures and descriptions. Purchase intentions were measured on a nine-point Likert scale on three dimensions (unlikely/likely, impossible/possible, improbable/probable).

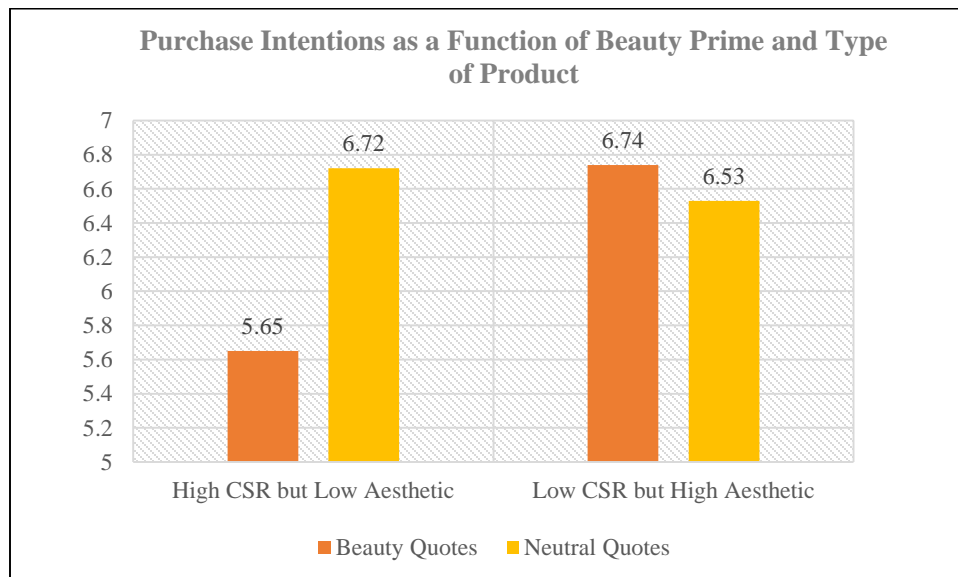
Results

We took an average of the purchase intentions across bathroom scale and toaster for our findings. The results of this study were significant and fascinating. Participants who were primed

with beauty cues showed a higher purchase intention for highly aesthetic products even when CSR was low. However, participants in the control condition showed a higher purchase intention for low aesthetic products with high CSR. However, the difference between these intentions was minimal. Consumers are often in situations where morality and aesthetics conflict, such as the option to purchase a beautiful birthday card by a company or an ugly card made by children in an orphanage.

Ironically, these findings suggest that beauty cues (even quotes related to internal beauty) increase the salience of external beauty (product appearance) over moral judgment (CSR). This contradicts earlier findings that beauty cues increase moral judgment and thus the evaluations of high CSR products. In other words, attraction to a beautiful product proved to be stronger than the desire to make a morally conscious choice but be stuck with an aesthetically inferior product. Thus, these results suggest that halo effect prevails in such situations.

FIGURE 4: Beauty Prime Decreases Evaluations of Ethical Products (when they are ugly)



Study V - Beauty Prime Decreases (Increases) Evaluations of Low Aesthetic, Ethical Products if Product Aesthetics Information is Visually (Verbally) Depicted

The first three studies confirm the assumption that exposure to highly aesthetic products enhances consumers' moral judgment. However, study IV demonstrates that beauty cues (even with quotes that activate internal beauty) increase the salience of external beauty (product aesthetics) over moral judgment (CSR). Study V aims to tie the previous studies together.

H₅: High product aesthetics that are depicted visually will bestow a beauty premium, leading to the halo effect and flexible moral judgment.

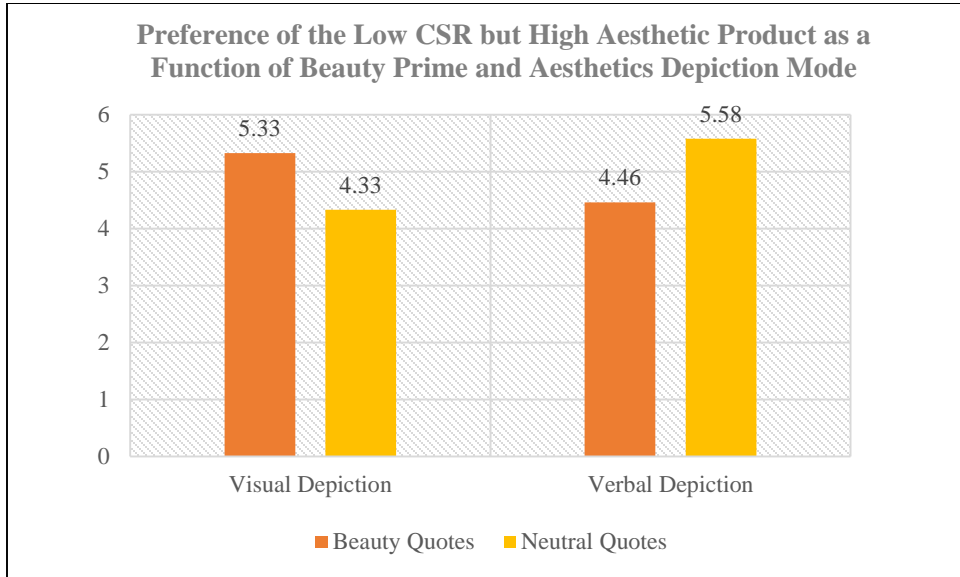
H₆: High product aesthetics that are depicted verbally will lead to stringent moral judgment and ethical consumption.

Specifically, this study examines the effect of product aesthetics according to whether they are depicted verbally or visually. I posit that incidental beauty cues increase moral judgment when product aesthetics are depicted verbally and that incidental beauty cues decrease moral judgment when product aesthetics are depicted visually, due to the halo effect.

Method

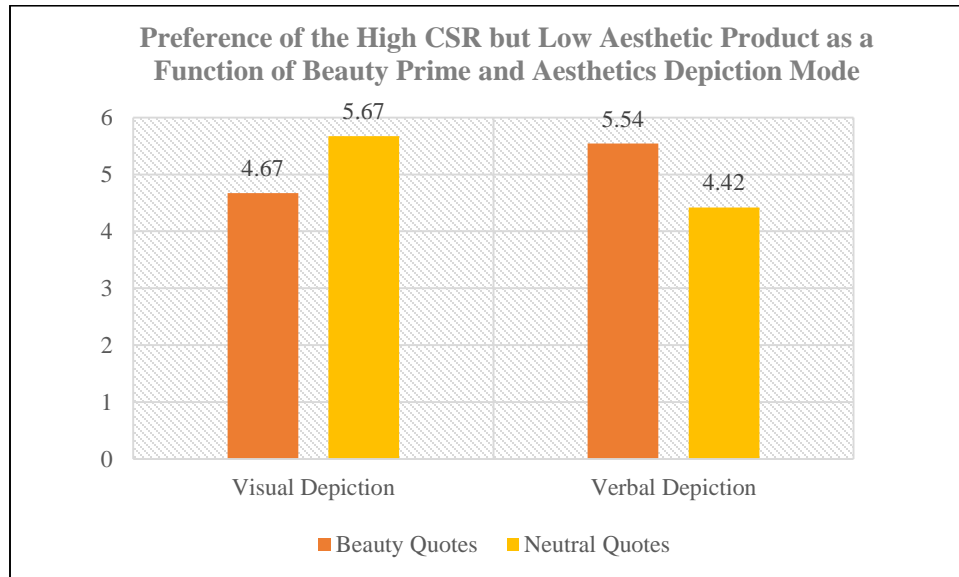
Study V was administered to 187 undergraduate students, who received credit for participation. It employed a two-by-two, between-subjects design with beauty cues (beauty quotes and control quotes) and aesthetics depiction mode (visual and verbal) as the two conditions and product preference between a high CSR, low aesthetic product and a low CSR, high aesthetic product as the dependent variable. The visual and verbal conditions were represented by pictures and verbal description of bathroom scales, about which the respondents were asked to indicate their preferences. Product preference was measured on a nine-point Likert scale between products A and B in both visual and verbal conditions.

FIGURE 5: Preference of the Low CSR but High Aesthetic Product as a Function of Beauty Prime and Aesthetics Depiction Mode



Beauty x Aesthetic Depiction Mode
 $p < .03$

FIGURE 6: Preference of the High CSR but Low Aesthetic Product as a Function of Beauty Prime and Aesthetics Depiction Mode



Beauty x Aesthetic Depiction Mode
 $p < .01$

Results

The fifth study aims to tie the findings of previous two studies together. The results of this study are consistent with the results of the prior three studies. Our results indicate that if product aesthetics is depicted verbally which implies incidental beauty prime, there is an increase in moral standard resulting in higher moral judgement, which supports the results from study I. However, when product aesthetics is depicted visually, the last study is replicated such that incidental beauty prime decreases moral judgments attributed to the halo effect.

Discussion

Most of the moral judgment studies are conducted on ethical judgment regarding the companies in field of management (Bray et al., 2010) and relatively little, consideration has been given to the moral choice-making at an individual level (Nicholls & Lee, 2006). Extensive research suggests our affinity towards beautiful people and beautiful things (Dion et, al, 1972; Langlois et. al, 1991; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Van Leeuwen & Neil Macrae, 2004; Ramsey et. al, 2004; Quinn et. al, 2007; Andreoni and Petrie 2008). Our research provides a unique perspective on how beauty affects moral judgment from a consumer's perspective. The consumers often encounter the opportunity of choosing between the right and the easy. They often face the dilemma of making the right choice such as paying more for fair trade coffee, purchasing low carbon footprint products, and recycling responsibly. Typically, the consumer sacrifices money, time or effort to make a moral choice and several factors are salient to the decision making process. Our research explores how aesthetics in general and in products effect moral judgment in consumers. The findings of our initial studies indicate that beauty does have an effect on moral judgment. Additionally, verbal and visual prime of beauty have distinct effects on moral judgment. Visual beauty prime overpowers the moral judgment and consumers

are less willing to forgo beauty to make a morally responsible choice. Contrarily, verbal beauty prime instigates consumers to make morally sound decisions when visual cue is not present. There is a dearth of research on product aesthetics' effect on moral judgment pertaining to consumers and we seek to fill this gap through our research.

Essay II takes its cue from prior literature, which demonstrates that beauty is considered indicative of goodness and examines the relationship between beautiful or highly aesthetic products and individuals' ethical decision-making or moral judgment. Research shows that exposure to high aesthetics affects consumers' subsequent cognitive and affective responses, leading to behavioral outcomes. Studies I–III confirm the assumption that exposure to beauty affects moral judgment. Specifically, incidental beauty cues activate a beauty mindset, which leads individuals to make more stringent moral judgments. Study II replicates the findings of the study I, showing that external/sensory (vs. internal/spiritual) beauty cues leads to more stringent moral judgment. In relation to product aesthetics, study III finds similar results. Study IV demonstrates that beauty cues (even with quotes that activate internal beauty) increase the salience of external beauty rather an increase in moral judgment. This contradicts earlier findings that beauty cues increase moral standards and thus the evaluations of high CSR products. These findings essentially suggest that the halo effect prevails when a product image is shown. Finally, study V aims to ties together the outcomes of studies II and III, indicating that if product aesthetics are depicted verbally, which represents as incidental beauty cue, consumers make more stringent moral judgments, just as in study I. However, when product aesthetics are depicted visually, study V shows that incidental beauty cues decrease moral judgment, which is attributed to the halo effect.

These findings show that beauty does have an effect on moral judgment. Additionally, verbal and visual prime of beauty have different effect on moral judgment of consumers. Visual beauty prime overpowers the ethical judgment and consumers are likely to be less willing to forgo beauty to make an ethical decision. There is a dearth of research on product aesthetics' effect on ethical decision making pertaining to consumers and we seek to fill this gap through our research.

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ESSAY III: DO CREATIVE JUICES FLOW ON EXPOSURE TO NATURAL SCENES?

We often hear about writers, painters, or composers going to serene natural havens, such as mountains, beaches, or cabins in forests to find inspiration or to overcome creative blocks. Timeless creative expressions, such as *Water Lilies* by Monet, *Starry Night* by Van Gogh, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain were all inspired by the enchanting beauty of nature. Henry Rousseau, the extraordinary French painter who took pleasure in painting beautiful landscapes said, “Nothing makes me so happy as to observe nature and to paint what I see.” Brilliant scientists are also inspired by nature. Sir Isaac Newton formulated his law of gravitation after gazing upon an apple that fell from a tree and Einstein uncovered the laws of nature by being inspired by naturally occurring events. Indeed, creative genius is not limited to notable creative icons but affects all of humankind, who learned to hunt from animals, seek shelter, and solve others problems essential for survival. Seeking inspiration from the universal fascination with nature, this essay explores the effect of nature scenes on creativity while accounting for the centrality of aesthetics in one’s life and construal level.

Everyone has had an aesthetic experience while looking at magnificent nature scenes, such as majestic snowcapped mountains, enchanting beach sunsets, and beautiful meadows. These natural wonders provide relief from the chaos of our lives and make us feel serene and peaceful. It is a widely accepted opinion that nature scenes have a positive effect on psychological wellbeing, with both physical and cognitive benefits (Berman et al., 2008; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1983). Indeed, nature scenes are ubiquitous in most vacation commercials promising relaxation, rejuvenation, and tranquility. Vacations in general are characterized by the scenic natural landscapes and magnificent scenery that are considered vital

to escaping from our daily lives and connecting with nature. Furthermore, windows with views of nature also have a positive impact on our physical and psychological wellbeing (Kaplan, 1995; Purcell et al., 1994). These studies support the conventional wisdom that people feel better when in the presence of views of nature. Bond et al. (2002) investigate the effects of a lakefront view on the value of a home, suggesting that view is the most important determinant of home value, in addition to square footage and lot size. Thus, overall, research supports the idea that views of nature have a restorative effect on people.

Attention Restoration Theory

Kaplan conducts research on the restorative effects of nature (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Kaplan, 1995, 2001; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1998; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008) and formulated the widely acclaimed attention restoration theory (ART) (Kaplan, 1995). ART postulates that directional attention is an exhaustible resource that is depleted by executive functioning and that exposure to nature has restorative effects on directional attention. The urban environments where we live and work constantly require our directional attention, resulting in what is called attention fatigue. Directional attention fatigue can lead to lack of attention and concentration, in addition to irritability (Kaplan, 1995). Interestingly, directional attention fatigue is also a result of activities that we seek for pleasure (Parsons, 1991), such as watching television. Kaplan (1995) suggests that interacting with nature elicits bottom-up processing and soft fascination, which provides humans with the optimum stimulation without considerable cognitive effort and gives our attentional resources a chance to replenish. Conventional wisdom suggests that a tired brain that lacks attention is not fertile ground for creative ideas. However, a rejuvenated mind is more likely to be conducive to creativity, which is why creative geniuses often seek out nature for creative inspiration.

Cognitive benefits and overall well-being induced by natural over urban environment

Berman et al. (2008) demonstrate the cognitive benefits of interacting with nature over urban environments based on ART (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, 1995), which posits that directional attention is in limited supply and needs to be replenished. The urban environment requires our constant attention, such as during driving, watching television, working on a computer, running errands, and completing chores, all of which require top-down processing. On the other hand, nature presents us with pleasant and soothing stimuli and does not require constant directional attention and gives us times to replenish our resources. This study shows that being in nature has clear benefits, such as improving cognitive function. The participants who were primed with nature scenes show significantly higher cognitive performance than those who were primed with urban scenes.

According to Kaplan (2001), a view of nature from a window contributes significantly to a resident's satisfaction with their neighborhood and positively affects various aspects of their wellbeing. On the other hand, views of man-made structures do not affect wellbeing. Chang and Chen (2005) suggest that even a brief view of the natural environment from an employee's desk is more important to his wellbeing than expensive landscape design at the entrances to office buildings. Raanaas et al. (2011, 2012) find that having a view of a natural environment from a bedroom contributed positively to the wellbeing of patients in a residential rehabilitation program. Interestingly, they also find that blocked windows negatively influence women's physical health and men's mental health. While the effects of views of nature varied by gender and health condition, windows with views had restorative effects overall. Studies also show that

urban environments increase stress levels (Lederbogen et al., 2011) and that proximity to nature promotes healthy levels of cortisol and lower levels of stress (Thompson et al., 2012)

Natural scenes in marketing

Nature scenes are frequently used in marketing to elicit positive responses (Gunster, 2004; Messaris, 1997). Marketers try to establish a connection between nature and their products because consumers perceive natural products to be better than those laden with chemicals. Organic products are sold at a premium price because consumers are willing to pay to get closer to nature. Two famous products that are associated with nature are Windows XP and the Toyota Prius. Windows XP's default background is of a green meadow and blue sky, which consumers instantly associate with Microsoft, and Prius has become an obvious choice for the ecologically conscious consumers. The recurrent use of nature scenes in advertising was prompted by evolutionary psychology, which shows that humans have an affinity for nature (Colarelli & Dettman, 2003). Retail environments are also often created with nature scenes to elicit desirable responses from consumers (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Eroglu et al., 2003). Additional research in marketing shows that consumers have a more positive attitude toward advertisements that contain nature landscapes than those with urban landscapes (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2010).

Extant research suggests that nature does have a positive effect on the wellbeing of individuals in a variety of settings such as the workplace, residential buildings, hospitals and rehabilitation facilities. Inspired by previous research, we examine the effect of natural views on consumer creativity. We use pictures of natural views to manipulate natural scenes and city scenes to manipulate the mundane condition. We anticipate that natural views would enhance creativity in consumers compared to mundane scenes.

Creativity

Creativity has long fascinated researchers due to its requiring both cognitive and affective components. Guilford (1950) is recognized as the pioneer of creativity research, and since then, disciplines including psychology, education, economics, marketing, and the arts have all contributed research on creativity. A discussion of creativity would be incomplete without mentioning the most creative minds in history, such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Einstein, Picasso, Van Gogh, and Newton. These figures often leave us wondering what they have in common and how their creativity differs from that of common people. Mumford and Gustafson (1988) suggest that creativity is a complicated phenomenon and is likely to combine heterogeneous psychological attributes, and Burroughs and Mick (2004) find that creativity is determined by characteristics of both the individual and environment.

Another notable contribution to the field of creativity is from Maslow (1970, 1971), who proposed primary and secondary creativeness as the two stages of creativity. Primary creativeness comes out of an individual's unconscious and facilitates unique discoveries. On the other hand, secondary creativeness is based on the knowledge and skills we use on a daily basis, such as logical reasoning and common sense.

To some degree, the literature on creativity agrees on a definition of creativity that is one's capacity to generate work that is both novel and useful (Runco, 2004; Sternberg, 2001), such helping to solve a problem, creating entertainment, or communicating with others. Conventional wisdom recognizes that creativity is doing something that has not been done before. However, novelty is not the only criteria for creativity; the output should also be valuable, useful, and functional. It is important to keep in mind that altering something that preexists is not creative. For example, the first generation of iPhone was a novel creation from

Apple, but its successors are merely improvements on the preexisting phone. We can observe creativity on a continuum, which ranges from small acts of creativity that help us come up with new ideas for efficiency and problem-solving to large acts that represent significant breakthroughs. In addition to intelligence, the ability to view things from a unique perspective is critical for being creative (Terman, 1920).

Guilford (1956) contributes to understanding human creativity by describing creativity as thinking that implies the capability to produce cognitive content. He was the first researcher to challenge the norm of intelligence as measured by IQ (intelligence quotient) and proposes that creativity is vital to the assessment of intelligence on other dimensions (Guilford, 1950, 1956). The ability to think divergently is also perceived to be an important part of creativity and human intelligence. People recognize creativity and show a positive attitude toward creative objects or creativity in other forms. I will explore the creative thinking domain of creativity which will be measure by the Remote Associates Test (Mednick, 1962)

Factors affecting creativity

Many aesthetic aspects affect creativity. Ehrlichman and Bastone (1992) demonstrate that consumers show more creativity when exposed to pleasant odors than unpleasant odors and that females' cognitive performance is heightened in the presence of pleasant scent. The extant research shows that products' aesthetic appeal affects consumer perception, as humans are programmed to have an affinity for beauty.

Creativity is recognized as a personality trait and researchers strive to understand its associated cognition and personality traits. A myriad of individual characteristics is found to affect creativity, such as the personality traits of having general interests, tolerance for

ambiguity, a preference for complexity, intelligence, and artistic values. Other aspects of personality facilitate creative accomplishment are independence, autonomy, confidence, energy, and an inclination to work (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). External factors include an environment that promotes curiosity and provides intellectual stimulation (Getzels & Jackson, 1962) and formal education that inspires creativity (Simonton, 1984). Furthermore, situational priming such as promotion and prevention cues (Friedman & Foster, 2001) and pondering the future (Forster et al., 2004) influence creative behavior. Subjects who were primed with the task of thinking about the distant future exhibited higher creativity, which may be attributed to ambiguity around the distant future. Personality traits such as independence, uniqueness, confidence, unconventionality, intolerance for ambiguity, and approaching tendencies also impact creativity (Barron & Harrington, 1981; McRae, 1987; Dacey, 1989). A person's creativity-linked traits and level of creativity are likely to vary depending on different situational and environmental dynamics.

Creativity in Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Prior research suggests that situational factors impact consumer creativity. Burrough and Mick (2004) find that involvement with consumption events leads to a higher inclination toward creative consumption behavior. Additionally, lacking control over consumption is considered to be conducive to creativity. Similarly, feedback and time restrictions influence creative cognition and the associated solutions pertaining to product design (Moreau & Dahl, 2005).

Creativity is an integral part of marketing, and the majority of the creativity research in marketing relates to new product innovation (Dahl & Moreau, 2002; Im & Workman, 2004), management innovation, and advertising (West, 1993; Delorme et al., 1998). Interestingly, there is a dearth of research on consumer creativity, and few studies investigate the reasons why

consumers act creatively and the means by which they express this creativity. Consumers are the end users of highly innovative and creative products, and they engage in creative activities while assessing products, brands, and advertisements. They also come up with novel ways to make product choices. For this reason, contemporary marketing is no longer limited to product information; instead, it involves artwork, creative logos, advertisements, and other novel approaches to lure consumers. It is virtually impossible for consumers to remain unaffected by these trends. Nonetheless, consumers are expected to show a disparity in their creativity in response to the same stimuli, attributed to their personality traits.

Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics

There is a dearth of studies pertaining to consumer creativity, and we seek to fill this gap in the literature by our research. Our research focuses on exploring natural scene's effect on consumer creativity and examine the role of centrality of aesthetics in as a moderator. We use Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics (Bloch et. al, 2003) as a measure of centrality of aesthetics in life. We posit that consumers who assign higher importance to product appearance in the overall assessment are more likely to be creative when exposed to highly aesthetic products. We anticipate that individuals who give high importance to beauty in products, depicted by a high score on the CVPA scale, would be more affected by beauty in natural scenes as well. Research shows that natural landscapes are preferred to urban landscapes in general (Kaplan, 2001; Berman et. al, 2008) and in marketing (Gunster, 2004; Messaris, 1997; Colarelli & Dettman, 2003). Natural scenes are frequently used in marketing to elicit positive responses in advertising (Gunster, 2004; Messaris, 1997). Moreover, research in marketing shows that consumers show a more favorable attitude towards beautiful natural landscapes compared to urban environments. Specifically, consumers show a more positive attitude towards

advertisements that consist natural landscapes compared to urban environment in general (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibañez, 2010). We posit that a consumer who appreciate beauty in products and consider it an important attribute would show high appreciation for beauty in nature compared to a consumer who does not give much importance to beauty in products. Moreover, high appreciation for high aesthetics in nature and products would inspire such individuals to show improved creativity.

We use the CVPA (Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics) scale developed by Bloch et. al, (2003) to measure the importance of the visual appearance of products for participants. Specifically, CVPA scale measures the association between products and the significance of product aesthetics in a consumer's life. Apparently, the construct of CVPA is subjective as it is a self-assessed consumer measure, however, research demonstrates that consumers with a high CVPA have greater appreciation and purchase intention for aesthetically superior products, when compared to consumers with a low CVPA (Bloch, et. al, 2003). CVPA scale comprises of four dimensions; value, acumen and response with separate questions for each dimension. Consumers rating high on the CVPA scale are inclined to believe that superior design is an asset to the society attributed to the fact that the quality of life is affected by surrounding designs. Apparently, all individuals do not share a similar taste for aesthetics, similarly, there is a disparity in how individuals process aesthetics. Some individuals show a clear preference for visual over verbal processing, and they also give more importance to visual aesthetics of products in making choices (Childers et. al, 1985; Holbrook, 1986). Objects with a high aesthetical appeal capture our attention and majority of impulse purchases are motivated by attraction to its high design. However, these highly aesthetic objects do not elicit a uniform response from consumers and the difference in levels of response can be intense and disparate.

The reactions for the same product can range from extremely favorable from one consumer to extremely negative responses. Highly fascinated consumers show tangible behavior such as increasing proximity to the product, prolonged viewing, seeking tactile experience by touching and eventually possessing it (Bloch, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson 1990). Individuals who rate highly on visual aesthetics centrality are like to be inclined towards products with superior designs and acknowledge the significance of aesthetics in how they evaluate products and brands.

As previously demonstrated, aesthetics plays a significant role in consumers' cognitive and affective responses, which lead to behavioral outcomes. Exposure to nature scenes is a stimuli that affects consumer behavior, depending on how salient aesthetics are to the individual. Just as in prior literature, this study proposes a two-by-two model, which includes different scenes (nature, urban) and the effects of CVPA scores (high, low) on creativity.

Study I: Exposure to Nature Scenes and Creativity in Individuals with High CVPA

Study I investigates the relationships between scenery and creativity while taking responses to the CVPA scale into account and using the same variables as in the first study, with the exception of using CVPA scores as a moderator. A survey was administered for two conditions exposure to nature or urban scenes. Individuals who placed importance on highly aesthetic products were anticipated to show a greater appreciation for beauty in nature scenes and to show elevated creative potential.

Study I tests the following hypotheses:

H₁: Individuals exposed to nature scenes will demonstrate higher creativity compared to individuals exposed to urban scenes, and this relationship will be moderated by their scores on the CVPA scale.

H₂: Individuals with high scores on the CVPA scale will demonstrate higher creativity compared to individuals with low scores, after exposure to nature scenes.

Method

A student sample was recruited in exchange for course credit. There were 185 participants in the natural scenes condition and 183 participants in the mundane scenes condition. The respondents were informed that we would like to get some ideas about how consumers engage in thinking and make decisions and that this study consists of several unrelated parts. We show them six pictures each for natural and mundane conditions and asked them to imagine themselves to be in the places captured by those pictures followed by some filler questions. We next presented them with the Remote Associates Test and explained it to be a word association exercise. The participants completed a short form of (RAT) Remote Associates Test (Mednik, 1962) as a measure of creativity, subsequent to scenes exposure. Remote Associates Test is a widely accepted valid scale of creative potential. The RAT questions present three words that are associated with a fourth word which is the accurate answer. For instance, paint doll cat is closely associated with the fourth word house which is the accurate answer. The Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics was determined by the CVPA scale (Bloch, 1995; Bloch, Brunel & Arnold, 2003). The concept of CVPA refers to the aggregate level of importance that a consumer gives to visual aesthetics pertaining to products. CVPA scale comprises three dimensions; value, acumen, and response. Consumers with a high preference for superior aesthetics in products are classified

as “aesthetes” and indifference or low preference for superior aesthetics in products are classified as “users” (Loewy, 1951). Both RAT and CVPA are continuous measures.

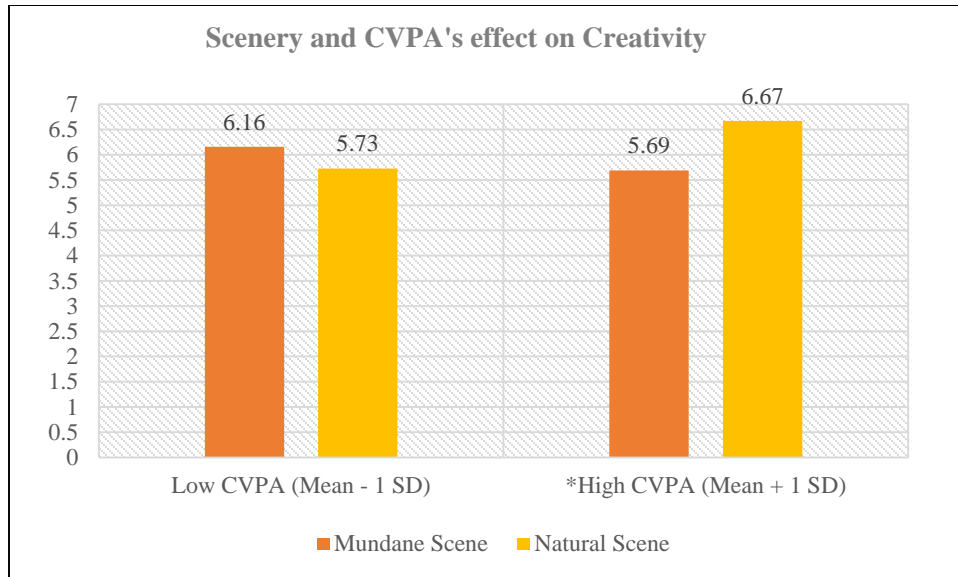
Results

We conducted regression analysis to examine the interaction between scenery (nature, mundane) and CVPA (high, low) on creativity as a dependent variable.

We found a significant interaction between scenery and CVPA ($t = -2.04, p = 0.0418$). Our results indicate that when the CVPA is high implied by one standard deviation above the mean, exposure to natural scenes led to significantly more creativity than mundane scenes (at High CVPA= 48.87: $M_{\text{natural scene}} = 6.67, M_{\text{mundane scene}} = 5.69, t = -2.00, p = 0.046$). However, when the CVPA is low indicated by one standard deviation below the mean exposure to city scenes led to more creativity, but the difference did not reach significance (at Low CVPA= 27.30: $M_{\text{natural scene}} = 5.73, M_{\text{mundane scene}} = 6.16, t = 0.89, p = 0.37$). The results demonstrate that higher creativity is achieved when individuals with high CVPA are exposed to natural scenes when compared to individuals with low CVPA exposed to mundane scenes.

This study confirms the assumption that exposure to nature scenes enhances creativity and that this relationship is moderated by the centrality of aesthetics in one’s life. As anticipated, individuals who consider aesthetics to be an integral part of product evaluation were more affected by beauty in nature scenes and demonstrated higher creativity.

FIGURE 7: Exposure to Natural Scenes Lead to Creativity When Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics Is High



* $p < 0.05$

Construal

Construal level theory (CLT) explains the phenomenon of psychological distance, which implies that individuals can perceive an object, event, or individual as being close or far away from them and that they behave according (Fujita et al., 2005; Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010). For instance, people prepare differently for a wedding that is six months away than one that is six days away and experience different sentiments for a tragedy in their own towns than one in a town far away. CLT posits that distant entities have a high, or abstract, construal and that proximal entities have a low, or concrete, construal. Essentially, CLT proposes that whether an entity is perceived as near or affects perception and behavior. Moreover, a high/abstract construal is characterized as simple, decontextualized, primary, superordinate, and goal-relevant. In contrast, a low/concrete construal is characterized as complex, contextualized, secondary, superfluous, subordinate, and goal-irrelevant. In addition, psychological reactions vary among by

dimension, such as spatial, social, temporal, or hypothetical, and these dimensions play significant roles in many decision-making processes (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010). Moreover, the primary proposition of CLT is that distant entities, which imply a high/abstract construal, are based on a bird's-eye view and are concerned with comprehensive, categorical information. A low/concrete construal, however, is associated with specific details and represents a worm's-eye view. A high/abstract construal answers the question of "why" an action is performed, while a low/concrete construal answers the question of "how" an action is performed.

Construal level can be manipulated to observe associated behaviors, such as self-control (Fujita et al., 2006), goal congruence and wellbeing (Freitas et al., 2009), self-esteem (Arndt & Schlegel, 2011), and the association of concrete prosocial goals with joy in life (Norton, 2014). Interestingly, individuals show increased levels of happiness if they describe prosocial goals concretely, with clear physical activities, rather than abstractly (Norton, 2014).

Construal and Consumer Behavior

Marketing researchers recognize that construal level affects many facets of consumer behavior. Recent research finds that temporal distance significantly affects the consumer response to consumer relationship management: consumers who focused on the future have a preference for the needs of society and, thus, future corporate responses, and consumers who focus on the present have more favorable attitudes toward present corporate responses (Tangari et al., 2010). Similar findings by Martin et. al (2009) showed that consumer future centric consumers favor advertisements that emphasize on product attributes released in a considerably far future but consumers with a present focused disposition, favored advertisements which were perceived to release benefits in the near future. Research shows that construal levels affect whether consumers prefer or a desirable or feasible option for different temporal distances

(Liberman & Troupe, 1998) Specifically, consumers picked an innovative, fast but difficult to learn technological product in the distant future over an old, slower but easier to learn product in the near future. The new, fast and tough to learn product represented desirability aspect, which was favored by abstract construal. On the other hand, old, slower and easier to learn option was associated with feasibility preferred by low construal (Liberman & Troupe, 1998). Interestingly, consumers are willing to forgo desirability for convenience for a proximal task or event.

The majority of research on the antecedents of construal level focuses on four primary dimensions: spatial, social, temporal, and hypothetical. Aggarwal and Zhao (2014) also suggest that physical height or perception of height are antecedents of construal level, which then affects consumer behavior in the perceived tradeoffs between desirability and feasibility. As anticipated, alleviated sense of height activated a high/abstract construal and sense of low-height triggered a low/concrete construal. Mehta, Zhu, and Meyers-Levy (2014) explore the possibility of whether a high/abstract construal alleviates or diminishes the tendency to indulge. This research attempts to explain the discrepancy in the literature, which shows that a high/abstract construal can both increase (Kieran & Kivetz, 2008) and decrease (Fujita et al., 2006) indulgence. Their findings posit that self-focus urges individuals to evaluate themselves when an opportunity to indulge is presented. Indulgence is increased if a high/abstract construal is adopted, and indulgence is decreased if a low/concrete construal is adopted. In other words, self-focus and a low/concrete construal enable hyperopic vision and increase the motivation to focus on the present and avoid indulgence (Mehta, Zhu, & Meyers-Levy, 2014).

Different construal levels are also associated with different behaviors (Tangari et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2009; Fujita et al., 2006; Freitas et al., 2009; Arndt & Schlegel, 2011; Norton, 2014). This research adds to the literature by exploring how construal level moderates

the effect of nature scenes on creativity. Inspired by prior research, I anticipate that nature scenes will enhance creativity in consumers more than urban scenes. Moreover, I expect that individuals with a low/concrete construal will experience a stronger connection to nature scenes, as it provides them with a much-needed break from their perpetual focus on complex and specific details of daily life. I anticipate that nature scenes will have a higher restorative effect on individuals with a low/concrete construal, which then enhances their creativity. Specifically, a low/concrete construal is proximal to less psychological distance, which requires exhausting mental behavior, such as analytical thinking (Friedman & Forster, 2005; Ward, 1995). Thus, mental exhaustion is expected to be higher for a low/concrete construal compared to a high/abstract construal, implying more of an opportunity to be restored by nature. ART posits that directional attention, which is essential for executive functioning, is an exhaustive resource that can be depleted by daily tasks and that nature has a restorative effect can replenish this resource (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Kaplan 1995, 2001; Kaplan & Kaplan 1998; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008).

Study II – Exposure to Nature Scenes and Creativity with a Low/concrete Construal

Study II explores the relationship between scenery and creativity while accounting for the centrality of aesthetics in one's life. Study II investigates the relationships between scenery and creativity while accounting for construal level. Scenery is the independent variable, creativity is the dependent variable, and construal level is the moderator. Students were recruited to participate in this study in exchange for course credit, and a survey was administered for two conditions: exposure to nature scenes and urban scenes. The nature scenes were of mountains, meadows, and beaches that depict the beauty of nature that most people do not have access to on a daily basis. The urban scenes were of city skylines, buildings, and a bird's-eye view of a city,

views that most people see daily and are therefore ordinary. I expected that individuals with a low/concrete construal would have stronger reactions to nature scenes and demonstrate higher creativity after exposure.

Thus, this study hypothesizes that:

H₃: Exposure to nature scenes will demonstrate higher creativity compared to exposure to urban scenes, and this relationship will be moderated by construal level.

H₄: Individuals with a low/concrete construal will demonstrate higher creativity compared to individuals with a high/abstract construal on exposure to nature scenes.

Method

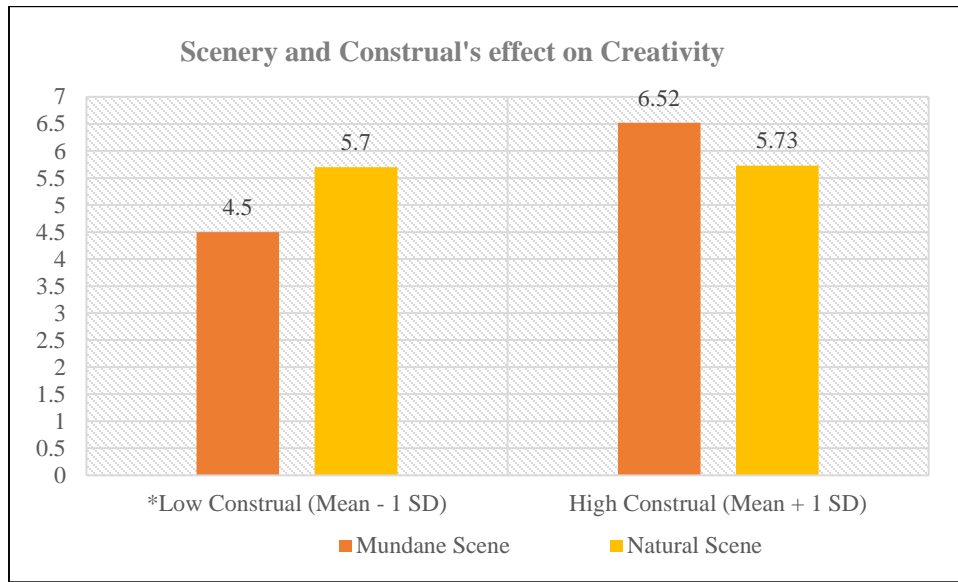
I conducted regression analysis to examine the interaction between scenery (nature, urban) and construal (high/abstract, low/concrete) as a continuous measure on the dependent variable of creativity. The procedure and instructions for Study II is same as Study I with the exception of construal level as a moderator instead of CVPA. There were 154 participants in the nature scenes condition and 150 participants in the urban scenes condition, all of whom completed RAT (Mednik, 1962) as a measure of creativity, subsequent to scene exposure. We utilize widely used Behavior Identification Form (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) to measure construal level in the participants in our study. The behavior identification form (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) assesses participants' construal level by classifying the tendency to favor specific details or abstract representation of a given activity based on 25 items. Favoring specific details to describe an activity indicates a low/concrete construal, and favoring abstract representation indicates a high/abstract construal. For instance, the action of "reading" is presented to the participants, who were asked to pick whether "following lines of print" or "gaining knowledge" as the best description of the activity of reading.

CLT explains the association between abstract and concrete thinking and psychological distance. A high/abstract construal implies that an individual indulges primarily in abstract thinking by focusing on the big picture instead of mundane details. In contrast, individuals who think in a concrete manner and focus on mundane details have a low/concrete construal.

Results

We found a significant interaction between scenery and construal level ($t = 2.16, p = 0.015$). To interpret the interaction effect, when the construal level is one standard deviation below the mean (i.e., construal level was concrete [assuming the lower the number the more concrete]), exposure to natural scenes led to significant more creativity than mundane scenes (at Low Construal = 5.97; $M_{\text{natural scene}} = 5.73, M_{\text{mundane scene}} = 4.53, t = -2.28, p = 0.023$). However, when the construal level is one standard deviation above the mean (15.6) (i.e., construal level was abstract), exposure to city scenes led to directionally more creativity (at High Construal = 15.58; $M_{\text{natural scene}} = 6.52, M_{\text{mundane scene}} = 6.93, t = 0.78, p = 0.44$), but the difference has not reached significance. Specifically, higher creativity is demonstrated when individuals with concrete construal are exposed to natural scenes when compared to individuals with abstract construal exposed to mundane scenes.

FIGURE 8: Exposure to Natural Scenes Lead to Creativity When Construal is Low



* $p < 0.05$

Discussion

Based on the review of the prior literature, I examine the effect of high aesthetic appeal of nature scenes on consumer creativity while accounting for the centrality of aesthetics in one's life and construal level as moderators. A tremendous body of research support nature's positive and restorative effects on individuals' wellbeing in a variety of settings, such as workplaces, residential buildings, hospitals, and rehabilitation facilities (Berman et al., 2008; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1983; Kaplan, 1995; Purcell et al., 1994). We acknowledge that creative geniuses such as Monet, Van Gogh and Mark Twain turn to beautiful landscapes in nature for inspiration, which implies that nature scenes are a prominent source of inspiration and enhance creativity. Exposure to high aesthetics such as magnificent landscapes results in subsequent cognitive and affective responses that evoke disparate behavioral outcomes. These findings confirm the hypothesis that consumers who assign higher importance to product appearance in the overall assessment show enhanced creativity when exposed to nature scenes. Specifically, the participants with a high CVPA score appreciate high aesthetics in product and apparently in

general. I use the CVPA scale developed by Bloch et al., (2003) to measure the importance of the visual appearance of products for participants and use it as a moderator between scenery and creativeness. This research contributes to the literature by identifying a significant construct of aesthetics as a moderator of the relationship between nature scenes and creativity.

Additionally, we explore the moderating function of construal between natural scenes and creativity. Extant evidence shows that diversity in construal levels are associated with diverse behavior ((Tangari et. al, 2010; Martin et. al, 2009; Fujita et' al, 2006; Freitas et. al, 2009; Arndt & Schlegel, 2011; Norton, 2014). Our research aims to add to the current literature and explore how construal modulates the effect of natural scenes on creativity. Our findings confirm our assumption that natural views enhance creativity in consumers compared to mundane scenes. Specifically, concrete construal implies proximal psychological distance, which requires strenuous cognitive tasks such as analytical thinking (Friedman & Forster, 2005 & Ward, 1995). Hence, mental exhaustion is expected to be higher for concrete construal compared to abstract construal in general, thus, an increased opportunity to experience restoration on exposure to nature. Attention Restoration Theory posits that directional attention which is essential for executive functioning is an exhaustive resource and our mundane tasks deplete them. However, nature's restorative effect helps us replenish this resource (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Kaplan 1995, 2001; Kaplan & Kaplan 1998; Berman, Jonides & Kaplan, 2008). We posit that individuals with a low/concrete construal experience a stronger connection to nature scenes because it gives them a break from the perpetual focus on the complex and specific details of daily life. Thus, these findings suggest that nature has a greater restorative influence on those who have a low/concrete construal.

General Discussion

Human beings have a deeply rooted affinity for beauty, and an overwhelming amount of research recognizes our attraction to high aesthetics; this attraction affects diverse facets of consumer behavior, such as purchase intention, product perception, consumer satisfaction, and product evaluation. Consumers often give more importance to aesthetics over functional attributes while choosing a product. Thus, it is not surprising that marketers recognize the pervasiveness of aesthetics and take them into account in marketing strategies. This research explores aesthetics' diverse relationships to consumer behavior. Specifically, it examines the relationships of aesthetics to moral judgment and creativity while considering the moderating roles of individual traits such as the centrality of aesthetics in one's life and construal level.

Essay I integrates the literature on aesthetics in general and its relationships to marketing and consumer behavior. Essay II explores the effects of beauty on consumers' moral judgment. Consumers have many opportunities to choose between what is right and what is easy, such as paying more for fair-trade coffee, purchasing low-carbon footprint products, and recycling responsibly. Typically, consumers sacrifice money, time, or effort to make moral choices, and several factors are salient to the decision-making process. The studies in essay II show that beauty does have an effect on moral judgment. Additionally, verbal and visual cues of beauty have distinct effects on moral judgment. Visual beauty cues overpower moral judgment, making consumers less willing to forgo beauty to make morally responsible choices. On the other hand, verbal beauty cues induce consumers to make morally sound decisions, when a visual cue is not present. These studies fill the gap in the research on how product aesthetics affect consumers' moral judgment.

Finally, essay III focuses on the relationship between nature scenes and creativity while accounting for the centrality of visual product aesthetics in a person's life, positing that

consumers who assign higher importance to product aesthetics are more likely to be creative when exposed to nature scenes. Research indicates that spending time in nature has soothing and restorative properties, such as stress relief, lower depression, and increased overall wellbeing. Moreover, research shows that a soothing natural environment facilitates mental wellbeing that is conducive to creativity. The results indicate that scenery and creativity affect each other, moderated by centrality of aesthetics in one's life. Specifically, creativity significantly improves on exposure to nature scenes for individuals who place greater importance of product aesthetics. Because the centrality of aesthetics in one's life extends to the appreciation of beauty in nature, as anticipated, it also enhances creativity.

Study II of essay III explores the moderating role of construal level in the relationship between nature scenes and creativity. The literature indicates that construal level affects behavior, including consumption (Tangari et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2009; Fujita et al., 2006; Freitas et al., 2009; Arndt & Schlegel, 2011; Norton, 2014). This research contributes to the current literature by exploring how construal level moderates the effect of nature scenes on creativity, confirming the hypothesis that nature scenes enhance creativity more than urban scenes. Furthermore, individuals with a low/concrete construal experience a stronger connection to nature scenes because they relieve them from their continuous focus on the complex and specific details of daily life. Thus, nature appears to have greater restorative influence on those with a low/concrete construal. Specifically, having a low/concrete construal implies proximal psychological distance, which requires draining cognitive tasks such as analytical thinking (Friedman & Forster, 2005; Ward, 1995). ART posits that directional attention, which is essential for executive functioning, is an exhaustive resource depleted by daily tasks. However, nature's restorative effects can replenish this resource (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Kaplan 1995,

2001; Kaplan & Kaplan 1998; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008). Nature's restorative effects on those with a low/concrete construal can replenish directional attention and manifest in enhanced creativity. Thus, this research provides a fresh perspective aesthetics and addresses the lack of research on moral judgment and creativity in consumer behavior.

Aesthetics remains an area of interest to researchers across diverse disciplines, and additional research is needed to understand its multidimensional effects. Future research could focus on how specific product aesthetics influence consumer purchase intentions and ethical consumption practices, such as recycling or buying products with low-carbon footprints.

The area of consumer creativity is currently under-researched, so more studies are required to understand the antecedents of creativity in consumers. Future research could explore diverse nature scenes to discover which scenes have the most significant effects on creativity.

Furthermore, different dimensions of construal level could be manipulated to explore consumer creativity.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENTS AND SCALES

Appendix A - Study I – Beauty Manipulation

Beauty Quotes

1. Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.
2. The beauty of a woman is not in a facial mode but the true beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul.
3. The beauty of a woman grows with the passing years.
4. Life is full of beauty. Notice it. Notice the bumble bee, the small child, and the smiling faces. Smell the rain, and feel the wind. Live your life to the fullest potential, and fight for your dreams.
5. Beauty is whatever gives joy.
6. Beauty is power; a smile is its sword.
7. Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful, for beauty is Gods handwriting.
8. The best part of beauty is that which no picture can express.
9. Real beauty is to be true to oneself. That's what makes me feel good.
10. Love of beauty is taste. The creation of beauty is art.

Neutral Quotes

1. Happiness depends upon ourselves.
2. Education begins a gentleman, conversation completes him.
3. Books fall open, you fall in.
4. Confidence is 10% hard work and 90% delusion.
5. I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.
6. The secret of being boring is to say everything.
7. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.
8. Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.
9. The secret of being boring is to say everything.
10. The important thing is not to stop questioning.

Appendix B - Study I – Moral Judgment Manipulation



	Not at all (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Very Much (7)
How interested are you in volunteering for the St. Jude Children's Hospital? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How interested are you in making a donation to St. Jude Children's Hospital? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix C - Study II – Beauty Manipulation

Scrambled Sentenced Task



Beauty Prime

1. brooch, Brittany's, is, beautiful, why
2. are, totally, views, appealing, lake
3. stunning, the, when, stadium, is
4. looks, the, charming, museum, her
5. college, we, students, are, their
6. people, graceful, love, does, designs
7. looks, the, city-hall, when, attractive
8. is, Picasso's, paintings, are, beautiful
9. do, Tom's, are, cute,kids
10. exam, that, is, easy, and
11. dresses, Amy's, and, elegant, are
12. stopped, the, has, rain, does
13. looks, her, garden, theirs, gorgeous
14. Daisies, flowers, are, its, pretty
15. captured, her, him, beauty, do.

Neutral

1. brooch, Brittany's, is, small, why
2. are, totally, views, blurry, lake
3. new, the, when, stadium, is
4. feels, the, spooky, museum, her
5. college, we, students, are, their
6. people, functional, love, does, designs
7. is, the, city-hall, when, packed
8. is, Picasso's, painting, are, ambiguous
9. do, Tom's, are, naughty,kids
10. exam, that, is, easy, and
11. dresses, Amy's, and, awkward, are
12. stopped, the, has, rain, does
13. is, her, garden, theirs, small
14. trees, are, useful, Willows, do.
15. captured, her, him, boldness, do

Appendix D - Study III – Aesthetics Manipulation

High Aesthetics	Low Aesthetics
	

Appendix E – Green Consumption Scale

DVI = Green consumption scale (Haws et al. 2014)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree):

1. It is important to me that the products I use do not harm the environment.
2. I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions.
3. My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment.
4. I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet.
5. I would describe myself as environmentally responsible.
6. I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly.

Appendix F – Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior

DV II - Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) Items (Straughan & Roberts, 1999) (short-form)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree):

1. If I understand the potential damage to the environment that some products can cause, I do not purchase these products.
2. I have switched products for ecological reasons.
3. I make every effort to buy paper products made from recycled paper.
4. I have convinced members of my family or friends not to buy some products which are harmful to the environment.
5. I have replaced light bulbs in my home with those of smaller wattage so that I will conserve on the electricity I use.
6. Whenever possible, I buy products packaged in reusable containers.
7. I buy toilet paper made from recycled paper.
8. I buy Kleenex made from recycled paper.
9. I buy paper towels made from recycled paper.
10. I will not buy a product if the company that sells it is ecologically irresponsible.
11. I have purchased light bulbs that were more expensive but saved energy.
12. I buy high-efficiency light bulbs to save energy.

Appendix G – Study IV – Aesthetics Manipulation

Low CSR but High Aesthetic

- Toasts up to four slices of bread or bagels at a time
- Possesses six browning settings that give you the power to cook your toaster just the way you like it
- Equipped with button controls that allow you to reheat, defrost, and toast bread or bagels



High CSR but Low Aesthetic

- Toasts up to four slices of bread or bagels at a time
- Possesses six browning settings that give you the power to cook your toaster just the way you like it
- Equipped with button controls that allow you to reheat, defrost, and toast bread or bagels
- In addition, the store claims that it will donate some of the profits to a charity cause that strives to reduce environmental footprint.



Imagine that you want to buy a **bathroom scale**. The scale you are considering has a desirable feature set.

Low CSR but High Aesthetic

- LCD screen provides easy-to-read results
- Step-on Activation feature eliminates the need to tap the scale before stepping on
- Multiple memory function that allows you to track your weight changes





High CSR but Low Aesthetic

- LCD screen provides easy-to-read results
- Step-on Activation feature eliminates the need to tap the scale before stepping on
- Multiple memory function that allows you to track your weight changes
- In addition, the retailer claims that it will donate 2% of the sales to charity organizations.



Appendix H – Aesthetics Manipulation - Study V

Visual depiction

Choice A (Left)	Choice B (Right)
Bathroom Scale	Bathroom Scale
Big LCD Screen	Big LCD Screen
Multiple Memories Function	Multiple Memories Function
Price: \$20	Price: \$20
Company promises that it uses only sustainable material in its products	Company does not specify the sustainability of the material it uses in its products
	

What is your preference between these two options?
(1= Strongly prefer scale A; 9 = Strongly prefer scale B)

Verbal depiction

Choice A (Left)	Choice B (Right)
Bathroom Scale	Bathroom Scale
Big LCD Screen	Big LCD Screen
Multiple Memories Function	Multiple Memories Function
Price: \$20	Price: \$20
Company promises that it uses only sustainable material in its products	Company does not specify the sustainability of the material it uses in its products
Product appearance is not very attractive	Product appearance is very attractive

What is your preference between these two options?
(1= Strongly prefer scale A; 9 = Strongly prefer scale B)

Appendix I – Natural Scenes Manipulation

Essay III

Natural Scenes Manipulation









Appendix J – Mundane Scenes Manipulation

MUNDANE SCENES MANIPULATION











Appendix K – Remote Associates Test

RAT: Remote Associates Test

For this part of the survey, you will work on a word association exercise (10 questions).

For each question, you will be shown three words and your task is to find a fourth word is that related to all three words.

An example:

You will see “paint doll cat”

The answer is "house" (house paint, dollhouse, and house cat).

cottage	swiss	cake	
cream	skate	water	
loser	throat	spot	
show	life	row	
night	wrist	stop	
duck	fold	dollar	
rocking	wheel	high	
dew	comb	bee	
fountain	baking	pop	
preserve	ranger	tropical	

Appendix L – CVPA SCALE - Centrality of Visual Product Aesthetics

Please read each question carefully and provide answers that correspond most closely to your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Owning products that have superior designs makes me feel good about myself.					
I enjoy seeing displays of products that have superior designs.					
A product's design is a source of pleasure to me.					
Beautiful product designs make our world a better place to live.					
Being able to see subtle differences in product designs is one skill that I have developed over time.					
I see things in a product's design that other people tend to pass over.					
I see things in a product's design that other people tend to pass over.					
I have a pretty good idea of what makes one product look better than its competitors.					
Sometimes the way a product looks seems to reach out and grab me.					
If a product's design really "speaks" to me, I feel that I must buy it.					
When I see a product that has a really great design, I feel a strong urge to buy it.					

Appendix M – Behavior Identification Form

Please choose the option that best describes the behavior.

1. Making a list

a. Getting organized

b. Writing things down

2. Reading

a. Following lines of print

b. Gaining knowledge

3. Joining the Army

a. Helping the Nation's defense

b. Signing up

4. Washing clothes

a. Removing odors from clothes

b. Putting clothes into the machine

5. Picking an apple

a. Getting something to eat

b. Pulling an apple off a branch

6. Chopping down a tree

a. Wielding an axe

b. Getting firewood

7. Measuring a room for carpeting

a. Getting ready to remodel

b. Using a yard stick

8. Cleaning the house

a. Showing one's cleanliness

b. Vacuuming the floor

9. Painting a room

a. Applying brush strokes

b. Making the room look fresh

10. Paying the rent

a. Maintaining a place to live

b. Writing a check

11. Caring for houseplants

a. Watering plants

b. Making the room look nice

12. Locking a door

a. Putting a key in the lock

b. Securing the house

13. Voting

a. Influencing the election

b. Marking a ballot

14. Climbing a tree

- a. Getting a good view
- b. Holding on to branches

15. Filling out a personality test

- a. Answering questions
- b. Revealing what you are like

16. Tooth brushing

- a. Preventing tooth decay
- b. Moving a brush around in one's mouth

17. Taking a test

- a. Answering questions
- b. Showing one's knowledge

18. Greeting someone

- a. Saying hello
- b. Showing friendliness

19. Resisting temptation

- a. Saying "no"
- b. Showing moral courage

20. Eating

- a. Getting nutrition
- b. Chewing and swallowing

21. Growing a garden

a. Planting seeds

b. Getting fresh vegetables

22. Traveling by car

a. Following a map

b. Seeing countryside

23. Having a cavity filled

a. Protecting your teeth

b. Going to the dentist

24. Talking to a child

a. Teaching a child something

b. Using simple words

25. Pushing a doorbell

a. Moving a finger

b. Seeing if someone's home

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

Publications

- Bhadauria, A., Bhatnagar, A., & Ghose, S. (2014). Role of Geography in the Relative Salience of the Antecedents of Cruise Passengers' Satisfaction. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 6(2).
- Bhadauria, A., Bhatnagar, A., & Ghose, S. (2014). Demographic Segmentation of the Cruise Industry. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 14(3).

Manuscript in Progress

- Role of Consumer Demographics and Psychographics in Product Reviews and Ratings (Coauthors – Dr. Purushottam Papatla & Nima Jalali) (*Target – Journal of Marketing/Journal of Marketing Research*)
- How Physical Attributes Impact Service Experience: An Analysis of The Cruise Industry (Coauthors – Dr. Amit Bhatnagar & Dr. Sanjoy Ghose)
- The Influence of Locus of Control on Product Information Search Behavior in a Retail Setting (Coauthor – Dr. Amit Bhatnagar)
- Does Beauty Beget Goodness? The Case of Aesthetics Effect on Moral Judgments (Coauthors – Dr. Xiaojing Yang & Dr. Xiaoyan Deng) (*Target – Journal of Consumer Research*)
- Do Creative Juices Flow on Approaching Highly Aesthetical Products? (Coauthor – Dr. Xiaojing)
- Investigating the Relationship Between Thin Slices of Advertising and Product Judgment

Dissertation - Investigating the role of aesthetics in consumer moral judgment and creativity

- Explores the effect of product aesthetics on consumer behavior pertaining to moral judgment, elicited by incidental beauty.
- Investigates how creativity varies in consumers on exposure to natural scenery, while accounting for moderating role of centrality of visual product aesthetics and construal

Other Research Interests

- Identify and analyze factors that affect consumer perception of products, decision-making and user generated word of mouth.
- Explore the effect of aesthetic appeal of products, advertisements and endorsers on consumer behavior such as relationship between body image and product assessment.
- Marketing strategy research pertaining to improving product offerings and improving marketing effectiveness for diverse segments utilizing social media marketing.

TEACHING INTERESTS

- Social Media Marketing
- International Marketing
- Brand Management
- Management of Promotion
- Consumer Behavior
- eBusiness Marketing and Search Engine Optimization
- Internet Marketing
- Sales Management
- Marketing Seminars on current topics
- Online Advertising
- Marketing Research
- Marketing Strategy
- Retail Management
- Principles of Marketing

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Instructor

2015 – 2016

Principles of Marketing
Consumer Behavior
Seminar in Social Media Marketing

- Develop instruction material including power point presentations, audio visual multimedia, and class notes
- Assess student performance with quizzes and exams
- Facilitate learning of marketing concepts through stimulating case discussions
- Mentor students and provide practical guidance for their marketing endeavors
- Cultivate and maintain close rapport with students to induce rewarding learning experience

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Teaching Assistant – Principles of Marketing (Online & Classroom)

2014

- Conduct discussion sessions and facilitate learning through case studies in marketing
- Prepare case study material including power point presentation and digital media
- Provide assistance in conducting exams, grading and record keeping
- Set up online student portal (D2L) for the course
- Mentor students and answer queries to facilitate learning and successful completion of course

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Research Assistant

2013

- Conduct research involving data collection, analysis, literature review and paper writing with a focus on cruise industry pertaining to consumer preferences and antecedents of satisfaction
- Develop skills at utilizing statistical software package including SAS and SPSS and paper writing skills

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

Vice President – Marketing Research Society

2013 – 2015

- Facilitate and encourage student research initiatives to advance research in the field of marketing through education, training, and collaboration between students, marketing scholars and professionals.
- Write travel grants to secure funding for conferences for marketing doctoral students and encourage conference presentations

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

STATISTICS

Advanced Experimental Design and Analysis
Analysis of Cross-Classified Categorical Data
Multivariate Methods
Structural Equation Modeling
Doctoral Seminar in Behavioral Research Methods in Management
Data Analysis for Management Applications

PSYCHOLOGY

Information Processing
Seminar in Social Psychology
Seminar in Mediated Communication

MARKETING

Doctoral Seminar in Marketing: (Marketing Models I)
Doctoral Seminar in Marketing: (Consumer Research)
Doctoral Seminar in Marketing: (Marketing Research)
Strategic Marketing Issues in eBusiness
Marketing Research
Strategic Product and Brand Management
Marketing Strategy: Concepts and Practice
International Marketing

OTHER GRADUATE COURSES

Doctoral Orientation to Teaching and Research
Business Mathematics
Financial Accounting
Strategic Cost Management I
Information Technology for Competitive Advantage
Managing in a Dynamic Environment
Accounting Analysis and Control
Corporate Finance
Strategic Management
Economic Analysis for Managers
Competitive Operations Strategy

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

AT&T, MILWAUKEE, WI

Retail Sales Consultant

2010 – 2011

- Research and recommend products to meet customer needs by gathering information through consultation.
- Meet aggressive monthly sales quota by functioning as subject matter expert (SME) for both new and existing customers. Completed extensive technical and customer– centric training on wireless and wireline telecom products.

GOOGLE.COM, GURGAON, INDIA (ONLINE ADVERTISING DIVISION)

2007 – 2008

Senior AdWords Representative

- Managed 20– 30 members workflow team of advertisers’ support for online advertising division that catered to US market.

- Recognized for outstanding productivity, consistently performing at 95th percentile and won an award for best performance in training
- Provided focused account management including providing recommendations for *Search Engine Optimization* and *Website Optimization*, working with a portfolio of advertiser accounts.
- Mastered Google AdWords product to drive revenue and customer satisfaction as *certified Google Advertising Professional*.
- Advised clients on ways to maximize their advertising budgets by developing and executing strategic approaches to clients' needs, optimizing keyword lists and improving their ROI.

EVALUESERVE.COM PVT. LTD., GURGAON, INDIA

Business Analyst

2005 – 2007

- Performed market segment studies for industries in North American and Europe, data collection and validation, and evaluation of prospective partners and customers.
- Projects encompassed emerging telecom technologies, HR consulting, market players profiling, sector monitoring and analysis and competitive research.
- Identified and recommended suitable business partner for client entering Southeast Asian market.
- Expanded company's knowledge database by developing e-learning modules □ Trained, mentored and monitored performance of team members.

AFFILIATION

American Marketing Association
Association for Consumer Research
Society for Consumer Psychology
