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The ‘Heart-Stealing’ Technique of Typography: Font Effects in Marketing

Authors: Zhipeng Xie, Xiao Tingting, Qin Huanyu, Qin Huanyu

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Abstract

Text constitutes a crucial element of visual communication in marketing, directly shaping consumers’ first impressions of brands. The significance of text extends beyond its content to encompass the influence of typeface design on consumers. Research on typefaces remains substantially underexplored, with existing literature dispersed across disparate disciplines including linguistics, design, and psychology. Numerous contradictory findings currently lack support from a systematic framework; this article provides researchers with a comprehensive framework for investigating typeface effects. Following the definition and classification of typefaces, the paper primarily examines the impact of typefaces on consumer perception and behavior, along with three key psychological mechanisms underlying typeface effects: perceptual consistency, perceptual memorability, and perceptual humanization. Building upon this foundation, it discusses the moderating roles of consumer characteristics, product categories, and external environments on typeface effects. Finally, the paper offers an in-depth analysis of the theoretical and managerial implications of typefaces in marketing, as well as directions for future research.

Full Text

The Persuasive Power of Typeface: Font Effects in Marketing

XIE Zhipeng, XIAO Tingting, QIN Huanyu

(School of Economics and Business Administration, Central China Normal University, Wuhan 430079, China)

Abstract:

Text serves as a crucial element in visual marketing communication, directly shaping consumers’ first impressions of brands. The importance of typography extends beyond textual content to encompass the influence of typeface design

on consumer perception. Despite its significance, research on typefaces remains fragmented across disciplines such as linguistics, design, and psychology, yielding contradictory conclusions that lack systematic theoretical integration. This paper provides a comprehensive research framework for font effects in marketing. After defining and classifying typefaces, we examine their impact on consumer perception and behavior, identifying three core psychological mechanisms: perceived consistency, perceived memorability, and perceived humanization. We further discuss how these effects are moderated by consumer traits, product types, and external environments. Finally, we analyze the theoretical and managerial implications of typography in marketing and propose directions for future research.

Keywords: typeface; font style; consumer perception; consumer behavior

1. Introduction

We live in an era surrounded by diverse typefaces (Liu et al., 2018). Different font styles pervade our daily lives across print media such as books and product manuals, digital platforms including social media, e-commerce, video subtitles, and bullet comments, as well as paper-like electronic devices like Kindle. Marketers frequently leverage typeface selection in advertising videos, images, brand logos, and product descriptions to enhance consumer evaluations and purchase intentions. For instance, handwritten fonts on packaging increase consumers' perception of product humanization, fostering emotional attachment to products or brands, whereas printed fonts convey stability and dignity, generating trust (Schroll et al., 2018).

Major global brands have repeatedly adjusted their corporate typefaces to adapt to evolving consumer preferences. PepsiCo has modified the font in its brand logo more than ten times (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Hilton Hotels switched from a printed typeface to a handwritten style in 1999, but reverted to printed typefaces in recent years to align with the minimalist lifestyle trend (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]). In 2010, GAP, one of America's largest apparel companies, invested \$100 million to replace its classic blue uppercase logo with a lowercase version without background color to create a younger corporate image for social media promotion. However, the change elicited harsh criticism from customers, with many declaring they would no longer purchase the brand's products. Consequently, the new logo was withdrawn after only seven days and replaced with the original classic design (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]). While numerous luxury brands have adopted sans-serif typefaces, fast-fashion retailer ZARA retained its classic serif font in its 2019 logo redesign, shortening the spacing and creating overlapping letters (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]). Intended to appeal to younger consumers with its slender, compact design, the change was instead denounced as uncreative and confusing, sparking online discussions about ZARA's poor customer

service and product quality. As renowned designer Neville Brody observes, typeface is a powerful weapon in the marketplace. When consumers' positive responses to typefaces in marketing communications drive purchase behavior, it demonstrates the subtle yet compelling "silent spell" of fonts.

However, existing research on typeface effects remains scattered across management, psychology, and design disciplines, with limited attention from a marketing perspective. This fragmentation necessitates a systematic review and analysis of current findings to advance marketing theory and provide practical guidance for marketers and managers in selecting appropriate typefaces based on consumer characteristics, product/brand types, and marketing contexts. This paper integrates multidisciplinary perspectives to organize the primary categories of typefaces in marketing, their effects, underlying mechanisms, and boundary conditions, while outlining future research directions.

2. Font Classification

With advances in printing technology and the proliferation of electronic devices, text carriers have become increasingly diverse, making typeface design more varied and complex. The number of available fonts has surged from an estimated 44,000 in 1990 to 250,000 in 2014 (Evans, 2014), establishing font design as an effective tool for communicating brand personality (Liu et al., 2019).

Scholars both domestically and internationally have primarily approached font classification by deconstructing typefaces into specific design elements or categorizing them based on inherent characteristics. Henderson et al. (2004), for example, classified fonts into six categories based on primary design elements: elaborate, harmony, weight, flourish, natural, and compressed. King and Koehler (2000) proposed a classification system across six dimensions: size (large/small), writing speed (slow/fast), rhythm (regular/irregular), shape (square/round), spacing (dense/sparse), and slant (ascending/descending). Tett and Palmer (1997) identified 30 dimensions based on handwriting characteristics, including writing position, slant, and pressure. Other researchers have categorized fonts based on inherent features, such as Jiang and Kong's (2007) eight-factor model yielding characteristics like neatness, fluency, pressure, expansiveness, roundness, variability, length, and regularity, while Meng and Zhao (1997) identified five features: pressure, structure, characteristics, font style, and spacing.

Despite these varied classification schemes, no unified standard has emerged in academia. This paper synthesizes relevant research from marketing, psychology, graphology, design, and linguistics to propose a classification system based on visual appearance, organizing fonts into three dimensions: basic features, layout features, and style features.

Table 1 presents this classification framework with examples, categorizing fonts by basic characteristics (size, weight, aspect ratio, line curvature, completeness,

serifs), layout features (spacing, slant, orientation), and style features (handwritten/printed, language-specific, artistic treatment). Note: Example logos include IBM, Lenovo, LA Dodgers, and Hilton Hotels.

2.1.1 Font Size and Weight

Font size, measured in points in printing, is often evaluated using x-height—the distance between baseline and mean line in Western typography (Evans, 2014). Research on font size focuses on text legibility, memory effects, and correlations with gender and personality. Larger fonts enhance legibility and reader preference (Bigelow, 2019), while excessively small fonts cause visual fatigue. When perceptual fluency varies significantly, larger fonts improve memory more than smaller ones (Undorf & Zimdahl, 2018), influencing judgments of learning (Hu et al., 2015; Su et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019). Additionally, font size correlates with personality traits differently by gender: for men, larger fonts correlate positively with suspicion and anxiety, while for women, they correlate negatively with boldness (Jiang & Kong, 2007).

Font weight refers to the amount of ink area relative to white space within a character's boundaries, ranging from light to medium to ultra-bold (Jass, 2002). Weight affects both legibility and salience. Research indicates that bold text is easier to read than light text when content difficulty is equivalent (Dobres et al., 2016), and bold type increases text salience, better capturing consumer attention (Margolin, 2013). Furthermore, weight relates to aesthetic experience: delicate beauty is often expressed through light fonts, while powerful beauty is conveyed through bold fonts. Light fonts evoke softness, whereas bold fonts project strength and vigor (Schroll et al., 2018).

2.1.2 Font Aspect Ratio and Roundness

Font width refers to the ratio of stroke thickness to character height (Liu et al., 2016). Arditi et al. (1990) manipulated Times Roman font width and found that aspect ratio affects reading speed: proportionally spaced fonts read faster at large sizes, while monospaced fonts are superior at small sizes.

Font roundness reflects characteristics of curvature, angularity, and smoothness (Jiang & Kong, 2007). Rounded fonts possess simple, friendly, and imperfect attributes, while moderate and balanced features convey professionalism (Mackiewicz, 2005). Roundness also reflects psychological and age-related traits: cautious, stable, and quiet personality types typically exhibit straight strokes, whereas optimal, flexible, and excitable types show curved strokes. With age, individuals' handwriting increasingly features curved strokes (Zhang & Wang, 2013).

2.1.3 Font Integrity

Font integrity primarily manifests through serifs and incompleteness. Serif typefaces contain decorative hooks at stroke ends and can be classified historically as

Old Style, Transitional, and Modern. Old Style serifs are relatively thick with gradual transitions, while Modern serifs are thin with strong contrast (Eliason, 2015). Despite being just one design element, serifs significantly impact legibility. Serif fonts may be more recognizable, facilitating faster reading and providing decorative artistic effects (Kaspar et al., 2015). They also improve legibility at small sizes, creating harmonious perception that enhances consumer liking (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). Moreover, serif presence influences personality perception: serif fonts are perceived as more elegant, charming, beautiful, interesting, novel, distinctive, high-quality, vibrant, and readable, while sans-serif fonts appear more masculine, powerful, intelligent, upscale, readable, and loud (Tantillo et al., 1995). Sans-serif fonts (e.g., Helvetica, Gill Sans, Futura) seem friendlier and more personalized, whereas serif fonts (e.g., Times New Roman, Chinese Songti) appear more professional and formal (Mackiewicz & Moeller, 2004). However, sans-serif fonts' block-like appearance can create monotony (Gump, 2001).

Font incompleteness refers to the intentional omission or concealment of character components in marketing materials (Hagtvedt, 2011). Incomplete logos negatively affect overall corporate attitude, reducing perceived trust and credibility (Hagtvedt, 2011). Paradoxically, they enhance perceived innovativeness. This effect varies by individual differences, as consumers' responses to incomplete logos and perceptual ambiguity may differ, much like responses to aesthetic stimuli (Bloch et al., 2003).

2.2.1 Font Spacing and White Space

Font spacing refers to the space between letters or characters, also known as "negative space" in design, encompassing both internal stroke distances and surrounding white areas (Bigelow, 2019). Spacing significantly affects legibility: increased letter spacing improves readability (Arditi & Cho, 2005), with Zorzi et al. (2017) demonstrating that extra-large letter spacing enhances reading speed and accuracy for dyslexic individuals. Conversely, insufficient spacing reduces legibility by making letters difficult to distinguish (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). Chung (2002) identified a "critical letter spacing" threshold: below it, reading speed increases with spacing; above it, speed plateaus then gradually decreases.

Spacing also influences advertising design aesthetics (Kaspar et al., 2015). Increased spacing expands text area, enhancing perceived text volume (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Additionally, left margin spacing correlates positively with introversion and constancy but negatively with independence and anxiety. For men, right margin spacing correlates negatively with excitability and sensitivity (Fan & Sun, 1992).

2.2.2 Font Slant and Relative Position

Font slant measures the vertical orientation of characters, with italic fonts exhibiting pronounced slant (Jass, 2002). Slant affects legibility: Punik et al. (2016) found italic fonts showed above-average recognition rates, though Cai et al. (2008) noted that despite greater width, italics are less legible than upright fonts. Dyson and Beier (2016) confirmed that italics reduce legibility for text blocks and letters, with significant effects primarily at the word level.

Slant also expresses emotion: left slant conveys coldness and secrecy, while right slant expresses warmth and extroversion (Bunker, 1979). For emphasis, italics prove more effective than bold type (Dyson & Beier, 2016). Regarding relative positioning, fonts can be arranged horizontally or vertically, with positions categorized as centered, upper-left/lower-right, or upper-right/lower-left. Western letters comprise vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and curved strokes. First-order relational properties (spatial relationships between similar parts) differentiate letters—for example, the angle connecting vertical strokes distinguishes H from N. Second-order relational properties (same elements in different positions) also differentiate letters: L and T each contain one horizontal and one vertical line, but the horizontal line's position differs (Dyson & Stott, 2012).

2.3.1 Handwritten vs. Printed Fonts and Fluency

Handwritten fonts typically feature curves, slant, and irregularity, whereas printed fonts exhibit straight lines, squareness, and regularity (Liu et al., 2019; Mackiewicz, 2005; Schroll et al., 2018). The term “handwritten font” refers not to actual handwriting but to printed fonts with handwritten characteristics. As modern life becomes increasingly intelligent, automated, and digital, human perception is gradually diminishing, making handwriting a valuable carrier of human traits (King & Koehler, 2000; Schroll et al., 2018). Handwritten fonts can convey warmth in products (goods or services), strengthening consumer-product connections as consumers perceive greater human presence (Ren et al., 2018; Tassiello et al., 2018). Consumers infer that handwritten logos require more effort from creators, fostering psychological intimacy between businesses and customers (Ren et al., 2018). Packaging with handwritten fonts indeed enhances perception of human presence, strengthening emotional attachment and improving product evaluations (Schroll et al., 2018).

Regarding fluency, English fonts feature simple structures and unidirectional linear writing, creating smooth, continuous lines with distinct quality characteristics. In contrast, Chinese characters are logographic, with strokes as basic elements, representing the world's only non-alphabetic writing system with relatively complex structures (Zhang & Wang, 2013). Font fluency reflects writing flexibility and coherence (Jiang & Kong, 2007) while also indicating individual psychological processing speed and efficiency.

2.3.2 Font Neatness and Artistic Treatment

Font neatness encompasses clarity, conscientiousness, and recognizability (Jiang & Kong, 2007). Artistic treatment affects neatness by modifying overall or component structures based on original neat fonts. A prime example is Chinese cursive script. Research shows correlations between cursive handwriting and introversion/extroversion, though this relationship is less pronounced in men's handwriting. Simple, unmodified letters are recognized more efficiently than complex forms, yielding stronger reading fluency (Pelli et al., 2006). However, Bragg et al. (2017) created a novel pixelated color font that enables readers to learn unfamiliar symbols, enhancing font learnability and legibility. They subsequently introduced "Livefonts" combining animation, color, and simple geometric shapes, which improve reading ability for low-vision individuals. These represent effects achieved through artistic font treatment.

3. The Impact of Typefaces

As a powerful marketing tool, typefaces warrant systematic organization of their effects on consumer perception and behavior to provide accurate guidance for managers and researchers.

3.1.1 Legibility

Font recognition relies on readers' perception of typeface characteristics including spacing, serif size, stroke width, x-height, and width-to-height ratios (Kaspar et al., 2015). These features significantly influence legibility and recognition processes.

Serifs affect legibility: early researchers (Moriarty & Scheiner, 1984) found no difference between serif and sans-serif fonts. However, quantitative studies revealed that at consistent sizes, different 设计风格 evoke distinct emotional responses, with sans-serif fonts perceived as clearer (Tantillo et al., 1995). Research shows shorter reaction times to sans-serif text, recommending it for electronic screens (Moret-Tatay & Perea, 2011). Yet when reading speed is sufficiently high, serifs improve small-font legibility, enhancing comprehension of advertising copy (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). These contradictory findings arise because serifs add visual noise, potentially confusing visual information (Zhao et al., 2017), while simultaneously serving as cues that focus attention on text, thereby improving perceived legibility among skilled readers (Rubinstein, 1988).

Beyond serifs, case, weight, width, and slant also enhance legibility. For visually challenging text (e.g., very small fonts), uppercase improves legibility over lowercase (Arditi & Cho, 2007). However, with fluent presentation (appropriate or large sizes), case does not affect legibility, though bold type offers advantages (Dobres et al., 2016). Generally, readers prefer lowercase as uppercase reduces

reading speed. Cai et al. (2008) found wide fonts more recognizable than narrow ones, though wide italics are less legible than upright fonts.

3.1.2 Credibility

Product credibility refers to the perceived truthfulness and believability of brand information (Liu et al., 2019). Research confirms that typefaces in marketing materials substantially influence brand and product credibility—a critical factor for business survival.

Printed fonts enhance brand credibility by conveying professionalism, whereas handwritten fonts appear less mature (Schroll et al., 2018). For example, the logo of a prestigious international legal rating agency uses printed typefaces to project simplicity, stability, and trustworthiness (see Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper]). Similarly, brands for precision instruments, pharmaceuticals, and electronic components benefit from printed fonts that emphasize professional quality and inspire trust.

Incomplete fonts reduce corporate and product credibility (Hagtvedt, 2011). While Chinese aesthetics sometimes embrace incompleteness as artistic expression, its application in marketing proves double-edged. Incomplete logos may signal creativity but also suggest deficient design, creating incomplete and ambiguous brand images that undermine reliability (Hagtvedt, 2011). IBM's incomplete font logo exemplifies this risk (see Figure 6 [Figure 6: see original paper]).

Font slant also affects credibility: italic fonts on restaurant menus enhance perceived credibility, making consumers view restaurants as more upscale and capable of providing superior service (Kim et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2016), thereby generating trust.

3.1.3 Consumer Emotions

Different typeface designs evoke distinct emotional responses. Bold fonts convey solemnity and sadness, while light fonts express cheerfulness, dreaminess, and calm. Curved fonts associate with positive emotions, whereas angular fonts relate to negative emotions (Kastl & Child, 1968). Round fonts influence taste perception: rounded typefaces better convey sweetness, while angular fonts communicate sourness (Velasco et al., 2014). These patterns offer valuable insights for product sales and brand building, enabling companies to highlight product features through packaging and brand font modifications.

Font color also significantly impacts emotions. Bertrams et al. (2019) found that red fonts trigger more negative emotions than neutral black fonts, affecting acceptance of teacher feedback. Using red fonts in consumer complaint responses may reduce message acceptance and foster negative attitudes toward the company.

3.2 Impact on Consumer Behavior

Typeface selection in branding materials profoundly influences consumer behavior and brand positioning. Font type primarily affects brand evaluation, word-of-mouth, and purchase intention.

Larger font sizes improve brand memorability, stimulating purchase intention and repurchase rates (Halamish, 2018). Font size on packaging also affects specific consumer groups: for elderly and Black female consumers, smaller 12-point fonts on packaging receive more favorable evaluations (Lo et al., 2017), promoting product selection among these segments.

Font type influences word-of-mouth communication. The choice between handwritten and printed fonts shapes brand effectiveness and gender-differentiated cognition, affecting brand recommendation likelihood. Handwritten fonts increase preference among female consumers, while printed logos appeal more to male consumers (Grohmann, 2016), triggering corresponding recommendation behaviors.

Font type also impacts purchase intention through the concept of social reciprocity—the desire to reciprocate help received (Regan, 1971). Handwritten fonts signal corporate effort, and consumers reward such companies with higher evaluations and purchase intentions as a form of generalized reciprocity accompanied by guilt and gratitude (Morales, 2005; Palmatier et al., 2009).

4. Psychological Mechanisms of Font Effects

Psychological research has extensively examined font effect mechanisms. This paper adapts these mechanisms to marketing contexts, exploring how typefaces influence consumers through three pathways: perceived consistency, perceived memorability, and perceived humanization.

4.1 Perceived Consistency

Perceived consistency occurs when consumers perceive alignment among brand names (text meaning), product categories, and font types (Doyle & Bottomley, 2004), leading to higher product selection frequency (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006).

First, font type must match textual meaning—semantic association or consistency (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002). Consumers' packaging design preferences are driven by symbolic meaning alignment, linking packaging symbols with product information (Creusen & Schoormans, 2004). This means object perception can be altered by the emotional meaning conveyed by typeface, and consistency between packaging font information and font type significantly impacts psychological feelings (Doyle & Bottomley, 2009). Rompay and Pruyn (2011) further demonstrate that consistency between marketing mix elements and symbolic meaning positively affects consumers. Aligning font meaning with

text meaning enables consumers to identify product origins (Liu et al., 2019) and creates assimilation effects where stimuli from the same category mutually influence each other (Schiano et al., 2001), increasing selection likelihood.

Second, font-product type consistency influences brand credibility perception (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006). Packaging design communicates specific product attributes and prepares consumers for consumption experiences. Consumers expect certain products and services to use particular fonts (Spence, 2012). Inconsistent information increases distrust and damages brand relationships, whereas consistent packaging meets expectations and enhances experiences. Liu et al. (2019) found that handwritten fonts' curved, active characteristics align with hedonic products like food, increasing purchase frequency. Consumers selecting chocolates prefer packaging with congruent fonts (Doyle & Bottomley, 2004). Conversely, semantic mismatches reduce trust, though font effects remain powerful even when brand names are rich in connotation (Doyle & Bottomley, 2004).

Finally, font-consumer trait consistency affects marketing effectiveness. Specific fonts align with particular consumer traits. Hagtvedt (2011) found that complete versus incomplete fonts affect consumers differently based on individual traits: complete fonts benefit credibility-focused consumers, while incomplete fonts appeal to innovation-focused consumers. When font and consumer traits align, meaning transcends literal content. For female consumers, italic, non-bold, smaller fonts convey elegance and refinement, while for male consumers, non-italic, bold, larger fonts express strength and masculinity (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006). This consistency determines interaction quality—whether corporate brand images and product meanings are accepted by consumers (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006).

4.2 Perceived Memorability

Perceived memorability refers to impressions formed during consumer experiences with products or brands (Henderson et al., 2004), influencing consumers through three pathways: experience quality, product/brand perception, and experiential dimensions.

First, memorability directly enhances experience quality—the depth of consumer impressions. Larger fonts create stronger impressions than smaller ones (Undorf & Zimdahl, 2018), giving brands with larger logos and packaging competitive advantages. Decorative font designs that integrate characters with images also create memorable impressions by conveying information vividly (Zhang et al., 2015).

Second, memorability optimizes product/brand perception by improving consumer affection. Increased spacing expands text area, enhancing perceived text volume (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) and legibility (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002), creating smoother, more comfortable experiences. Perceptual fluency influences various judgments: greater fluency implies better comprehen-

sion (Rhodes & Castel, 2008) and memory confidence (Rawson & Dunlosky, 2002), strengthening memorability and benefiting marketing efforts.

Third, memorability expands experiential dimensions to influence decision-making. Incomplete font logos create ambiguous experiences that deepen impressions (Hagtvedt, 2011). Ambiguous information introduces uncertainty, potentially reducing perceived reliability (Vignovic & Thompson, 2010; Yakovleva et al., 2010). However, perceptual ambiguity also stimulates interest and creativity (Hagtvedt, 2011). Faced with incomplete designs, the visual system prompts information-seeking to complete the picture (Long & Toppino, 2004), generating positive evaluations. Artists frequently use incomplete designs to motivate gap-filling, as seen in Michelangelo's unfinished sculptures that attract widespread attention (Hagtvedt, 2011; Semir, 2001). Hagtvedt (2011) further demonstrated that incomplete fonts stimulate interest, which encourages creativity perception (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). Additionally, perceptual disfluency effects enhance behavior by prompting higher-level information processing that strengthens associations among visual, semantic, and acoustic information, improving memory (Connor et al., 2011; Rhodes & Castel, 2008).

4.3 Perceived Humanization

Humanized products create a sense of human presence—the feeling that a product is touched by human hands, making consumers sense human existence (Schroll et al., 2018). In the digital age, media increasingly enhance humanization perception through images, audio, video, and personalized greetings (Kumar & Izak, 2006). Because consumers possess well-developed cognition of human-related elements, their presence in non-human objects activates humanization perception, which is then applied to target products/brands (Epley et al., 2007). Handwritten fonts can be viewed as human self-extension (Chen et al., 2008), generating humanization perception (Schroll et al., 2018).

When consumers perceive human presence in products, they experience warmth (Gefen & Straub, 2004), developing intimacy, responsibility, and connection (Yim et al., 2008). Tam et al. (2013) demonstrated that referring to “nature” as “Mr. Nature” strengthens consumer-nature connections and protective behaviors. Similarly, brand and advertising typography influences humanization perception (Gunasti & Ross, 2010). Handwritten fonts enable consumers to infer human-like emotions from non-human objects (Epley et al., 2007), perceiving signals of human touch, sensitivity, or warmth (Gefen & Straub, 2003, 2004). Compared to standard designs, handwritten fonts generate more favorable evaluations by humanizing products and strengthening consumer-product relationships and emotional attachment.

The stronger the perceived humanization, the stronger the consumer-product connection (Schroll et al., 2018). While interpersonal relationships may develop rapidly in the short term (Dunn & Hoegg, 2014), long-term connections produce emotional attachment, with stronger bonds yielding more intense attachment

(Whan Park et al., 2010).

5. Boundary Conditions of Font Effects

Research on font effects remains incomplete, with limited investigation of boundary conditions. Existing literature primarily examines three moderating factors: consumer traits, product/brand types, and external environments.

5.1 Consumer Trait Factors

Font effects vary by consumer characteristics. Gender influences font perception: non-bold, italic, regular, and small fonts express feminine qualities like politeness, beauty, and delicacy, while bold, non-italic, expanded/condensed, and large fonts convey masculinity, strength, and security (Schroll et al., 2018). Consequently, products targeting female consumers typically employ feminine fonts, while male-oriented products use masculine fonts.

Aesthetic preferences also moderate font effects. Individual aesthetic differences cause varied responses to identical typefaces (Velasco et al., 2014). Consumers value product appearance for its own reward, preferring aesthetically congruent products when functional and price attributes are similar (Creusen & Schoormans, 2004). Aesthetic value not only determines consumer choice but also drives commercial success by enhancing brand value perception (Creusen & Schoormans, 2004).

5.2 Product/Brand Type Factors

Font effects differ by product category. Packaging typography signals product type: elegant, hedonic products typically use blackletter, regular, and uppercase fonts, while accessible, utilitarian products employ serif and sans-serif fonts (Liu et al., 2020). For hedonic products representing entertainment, incomplete fonts increase perceived playfulness (Hagtvedt, 2011) and handwritten fonts strengthen emotional attachment (Schroll et al., 2018). For utilitarian products, incomplete fonts suggest hidden information, reducing trust (Hagtvedt, 2011), while handwritten fonts appear unprofessional, impairing functional evaluations (Schroll et al., 2018). Thus, utilitarian products like building materials benefit from complete, heavy black fonts (bold or printed). Interestingly, weight effects are more pronounced for simple than ornate product types (Kastl & Child, 1968).

Brand type also moderates preferences for slanted versus regular fonts. Kim et al. (2016) found that italic menu fonts make restaurants appear more upscale and capable of superior service. Modern brands benefit from slanted designs, while traditional brands suit regular fonts (Wei et al., 2018). For example, Nike (founded 1972) uses italics in its logo, while century-old fashion houses like

PRADA employ more regular typefaces. Companies must select appropriate fonts based on product attributes to maximize positive marketing effects.

5.3 External Environmental Factors

Environmental context influences font effects. Hagtvedt (2011) noted that although incomplete fonts harm overall product evaluation, their impact varies by display environment—for instance, retail store versus website presentation. Cultural background also shapes font responses, as typefaces develop within long-term cultural and political contexts (Szydłowska, 2019). Different languages possess unique systems and cultural backgrounds, yielding substantial typographic differences. English letters and Chinese characters belong to different language families, differing in composition, style, and meaning interpretation. Aesthetic and evolutionary evidence suggests humans are particularly sensitive to specific visual features related to long-term survival environments (Gerardo et al., 2016; Makin et al., 2012; Palumbo et al., 2015), leading to cross-cultural differences in font cognition.

In summary, font effect research has formed a preliminary framework, but significant gaps remain, particularly regarding Chinese fonts and moderating variables. Marketing-focused exploration of how brand typography affects consumer cognition, attitudes, and purchase behavior remains insufficient. Figure 7 [Figure 7: see original paper] illustrates this research framework.

Figure 7 [Figure 7: see original paper] Font Effect Research Framework

Selecting appropriate fonts in marketing helps companies compete effectively and build long-term consumer relationships. Despite substantial research, several limitations persist. First, classification research focuses on basic, layout, and style features, yet evolving design elements and interactions—such as font-color combinations, font-sensory interactions, and cross-cultural font combinations—require deeper investigation. Second, “cute marketing” represents a contemporary hotspot deserving attention regarding how cute font elements affect consumers. Third, since single font designs produce multiple effects, experimental research should identify optimal usage contexts. Finally, contradictory findings—such as legibility differences between serif and sans-serif fonts—indicate substantial room for theoretical and practical development. This paper aims to guide future researchers and practitioners.

6. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

Emphasizing typographic design in brand marketing enhances consumer attention and first impressions, maintains positive corporate and product image perception, and fosters consumer dependence. Despite extensive exploration from various perspectives, technological development, social transformation, and disciplinary limitations leave many areas unexplored. This paper systematically

reviews font classification, effects, and mechanisms from a marketing perspective, aiming to provide managerial reference and promote sales and business development.

Future research can proceed in the following directions:

6.1 Research on Font Classification and Effects

As reviewed, we have categorized fonts by basic, layout, and style features. However, limitations exist: evolving design elements create diverse forms (Jass, 2002), and research on interactions among elements remains insufficient. Many font features exist in design but lack comprehensive study, particularly in marketing. Future research should address three aspects.

First, frequently mentioned elements like handwritten/printed fonts (Mackiewicz, 2005) and size (Rhodes & Castel, 2008) have been studied extensively, but other elements like internal negative space (stroke spacing and surrounding white areas), stroke thickness ratios, artistic treatment of local components, and character-background contrast (Eliason, 2015) remain unexplored in marketing.

Second, existing literature predominantly features Western alphabetic research, while Chinese characters—logographic and structurally distinct—have received limited marketing research beyond visual design. With increasing international communication and internet integration, investigating Chinese font effects on psychological and physical aspects holds unique academic significance. Mixed Chinese-English font combinations also warrant study.

Third, the combined effects of multiple design elements and their interactions deserve attention. Holzl (1997) found interactions between weight and serifs, with uniform-weight sans-serif fonts being more readable, but most literature merely describes phenomena without deeper investigation. Few studies examine interactive effects of font and packaging colors on consumers (Ko, 2017), despite their marketing relevance. Recent research on font-taste interactions (Velasco, 2017; Spence et al., 2016) suggests other font elements may also associate with taste, offering valuable insights for food and beverage branding.

6.2 Research on Font Effect Mechanisms and Moderating Effects

First, future research should deepen analysis of perceived humanization mechanisms. Humanization plays a crucial role in marketing communication, as consumers use product humanization attributes to reinforce self-identity. For instance, infant-like features (e.g., round headlights) trigger cuteness perception (Xie et al., 2018), and different fonts create varied perceptions (Liu et al., 2018). We hypothesize that “chubby, rounded” fonts in brand logos activate humanization perception by incorporating cute infant elements, strengthening brand-consumer relationships and interaction (Glocker et al., 2009) or increasing entertainment activity intentions (Nenkov & Scott, 2014). Emotional attachment to humanized products leads to favorable evaluations (Mackiewicz,

2005; Mackiewicz & Moeller, 2004), including attitudes, loyalty, and purchase intention (Hadi & Valenzuela, 2014; Jiménez & Voss, 2014).

Second, research should examine moderating effects across contexts. Incomplete fonts enhance innovation perception but reduce trust (Hagtvedt, 2011). However, this trust deficit may be mitigated in certain contexts, such as different cultural backgrounds or industries. For stability-oriented consumers, complete fonts match aesthetic preferences, while incomplete fonts may better capture attention in turbulent environments. For innovative companies, incomplete fonts highlight distinctive features, whereas stable companies benefit from complete fonts. Beyond differential effects on innovation and trust, how incomplete fonts affect other brand image dimensions and how to quantify and adaptively manage these differences in practice merit further exploration.

Recent internet technology developments have created novel font applications: video bullet comments, interactive video text options, paper-like reading (e.g., Kindle), and dynamic PowerPoint presentations. Among younger consumers, phenomena like onomatopoeic text, emoticon-like fonts, mixed Chinese-English usage, and text-symbol combinations are increasingly common. For example, Bilibili's homepage features numerous bilingual titles and advertisements. Theoretically, these new text carriers and personalized usage patterns reflect consumer attitudes toward future text use, representing manifestations of font effects. Practically, font modifications and combinations can enhance reading experiences and brand perception. As an auxiliary communication method, fonts increasingly facilitate brand-consumer communication. Brands can create appealing forms and accurately convey corporate appeals through serif treatment, artistic component modification, special combinations, size/weight adjustments, roundness, and color differences. This reveals a substantial gap between font effect theory and practice, which this paper aims to address for future researchers and managers.

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Corresponding author: QIN Huanyu, E-mail: qinhuanyu@foxmail.com

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