

It's Too Pretty to Use! When Aesthetics Discourage Consumption of Nondurable Products

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ABSTRACT

Firms invest a lot of resources in product aesthetics and design, but does this strategy always lead to positive outcomes? While prior research suggests product aesthetics should exert a uniformly positive influence on pre-usage evaluations and choice, we document an inhibiting effect of aesthetics on actual consumption of nondurable products. We show that highly aesthetic products elicit greater perceptions of effort in their creation, and that consumers have an intrinsic appreciation for such effort. Because the consumption process indirectly destroys the effort invested to make the product beautiful, we demonstrate, across a series of field and laboratory studies, that people refrain from consuming such products, as this entails destroying something they naturally appreciate.

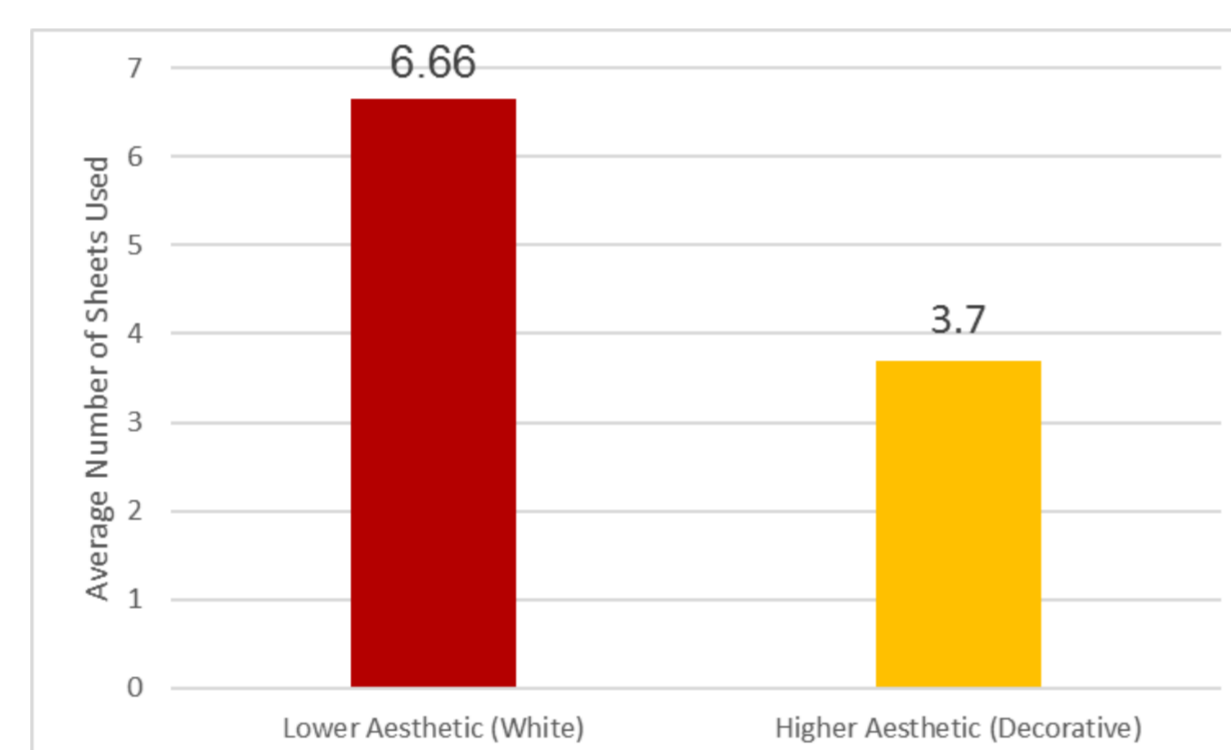
STUDY 1

Goal: Establish inhibiting effect of aesthetics on product usage in the field
Design: 2 (Product Aesthetics: Lower Vs. Higher)



DV: Number of sheets used

Results: Aesthetics reduced the average number of sheets used ($p < .001$)



N = 772 clients at a fitness studio

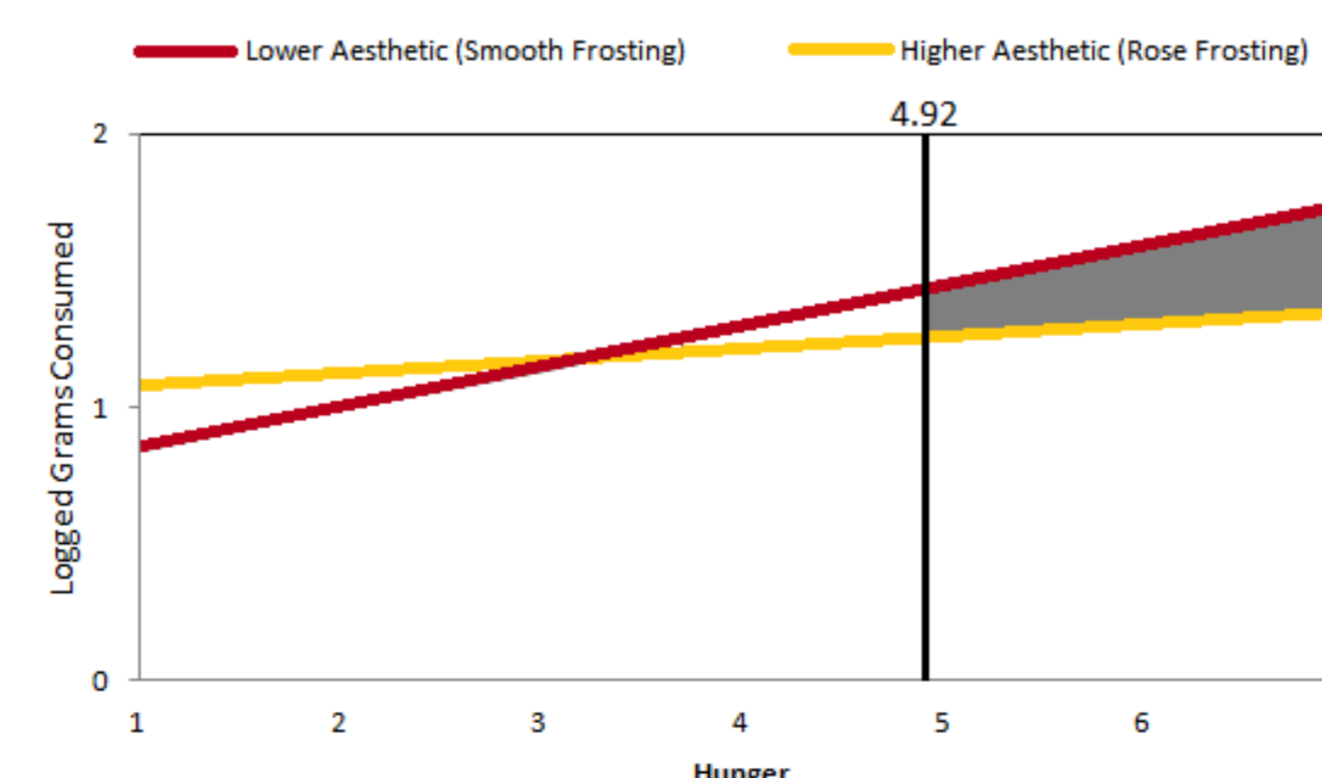
STUDY 2

Goal: Examine the effect of aesthetics on food consumption
Design: 2 (Product Aesthetics: Lower Vs. Higher) x Hunger (Continuous)



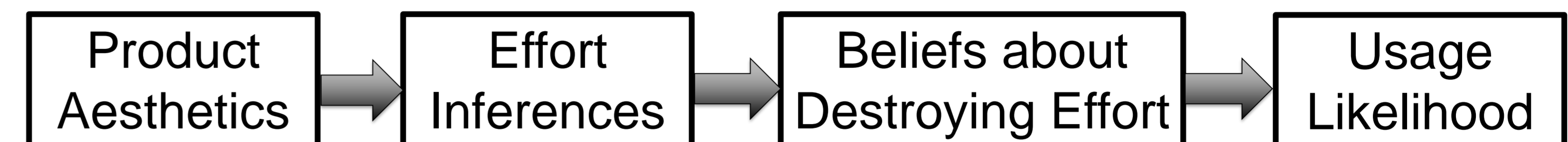
DV: Consumption amount

Results: Aesthetics x Hunger interaction ($p = .03$): aesthetics reduced consumption of the cupcake, primarily among hungry individuals



N = 172 undergraduates
Effects held controlling for perceived cost

CONCEPTUAL MODEL



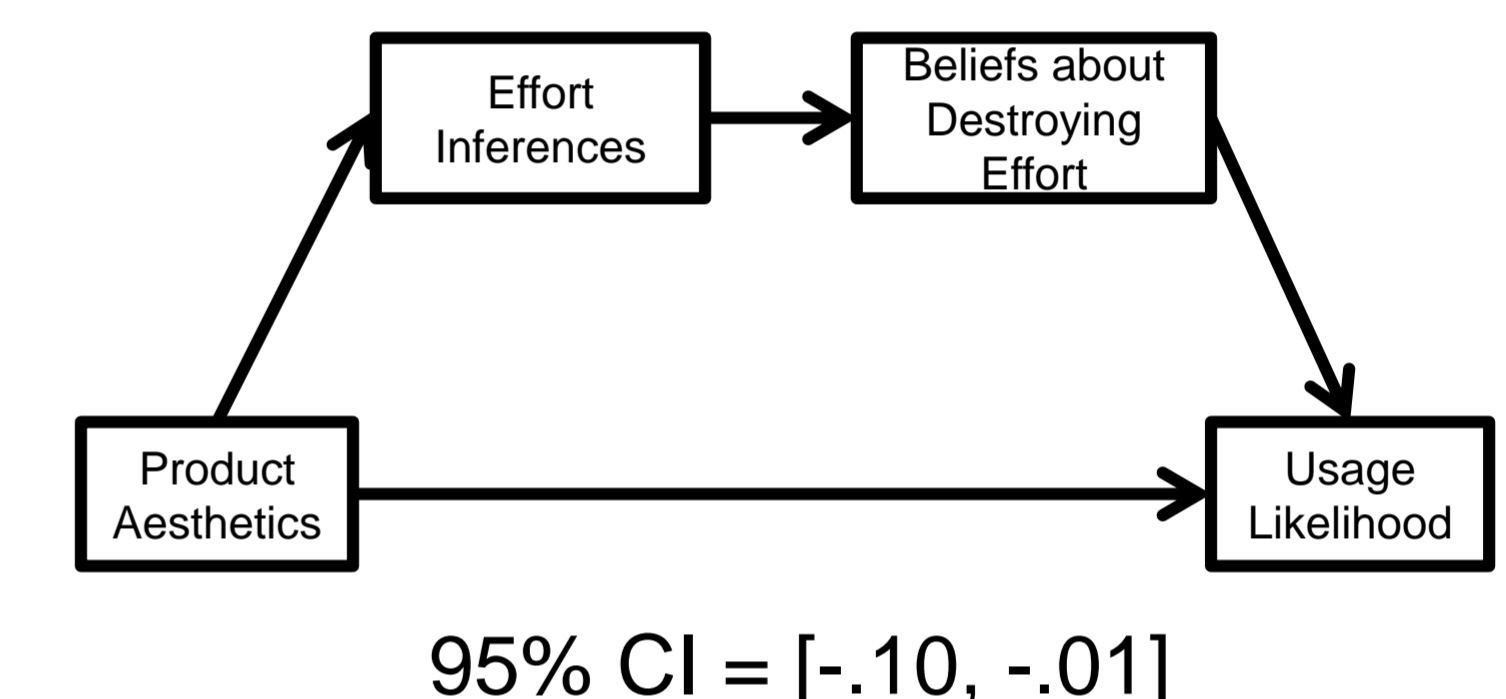
STUDY 3

Goal: Examine the mediating role of effort inferences and beliefs about effort destruction
Design: 2 (Product Aesthetics: Lower Vs. Higher)



DV: Usage Likelihood, Effort Inferences, and Beliefs about Effort Destruction

Results: Aesthetics reduced usage likelihood ($p < .001$), increased perceptions of effort ($p < .001$), and increased beliefs about effort destruction ($p < .001$).

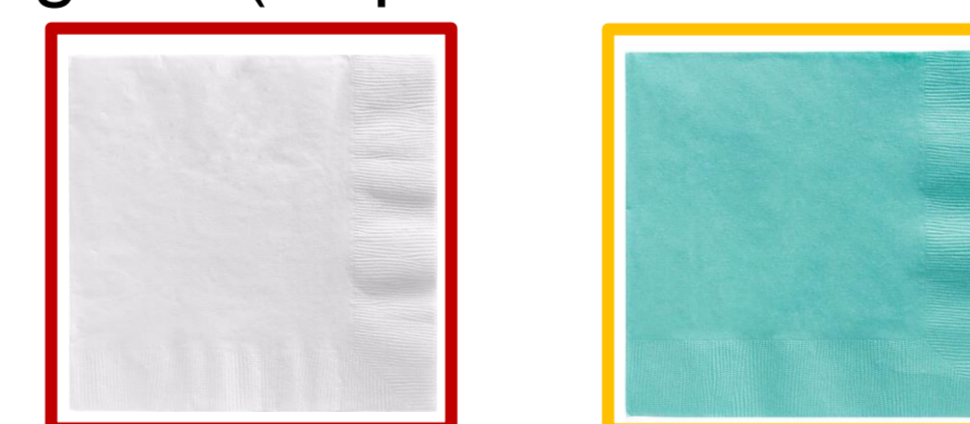


95% CI = [-.10, -.01]

N = 252 MTurk participants
Effects held controlling for perceived cost

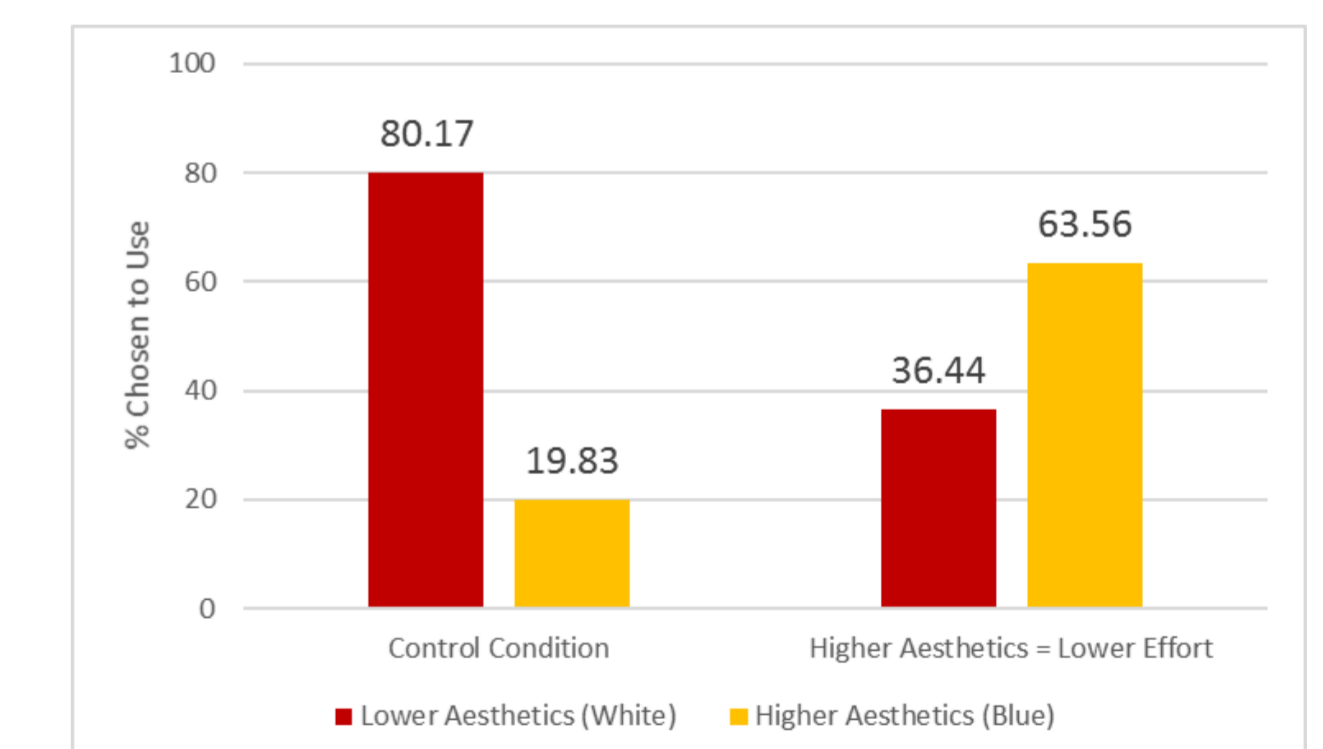
STUDY 4

Goal: Directly manipulate effort inferences to show process by moderation
Design: 2 (Napkin Info: None Vs. Higher Aesthetics Required Lower Production Effort)



DV: Choice of Napkin to Use

Results: 80.2% chose the lower aesthetic napkin to use in the control condition ($p < .001$), but this effect was reversed when the higher aesthetic napkin was described as requiring less effort to produce (63.6% chose the higher aesthetic napkin to use)



N = 239 MTurk participants
Effects held controlling for perceived cost

CONCLUSION

Our work not only provides new insight into the relationship between aesthetics and effort, but also challenges the commonly-held assumption that (high) aesthetics or design always leads to positive consumer outcomes. More broadly, we add to the emerging body of research that explores when and why the drivers of predicted and experienced utility might diverge.



Feedback Welcome! Email: freemanw@asu.edu