

Cute Scam: How product cuteness influence consumers' perception in negative ways

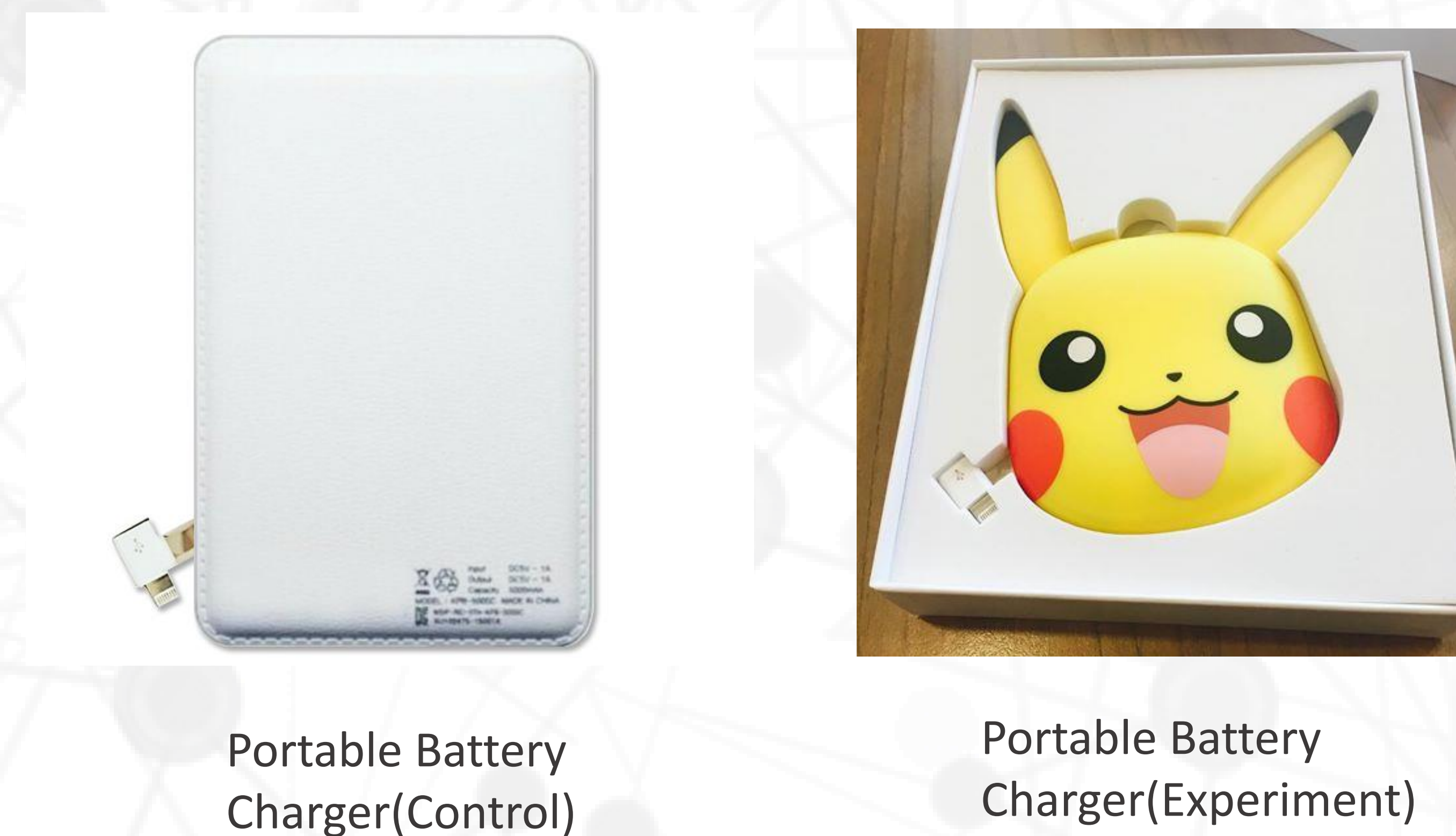
Youn Soo, Kim¹, Kwanho, Suk²

¹ Tippie College of Business, Department of Marketing, University of Iowa, ² Department of Marketing, Korea University

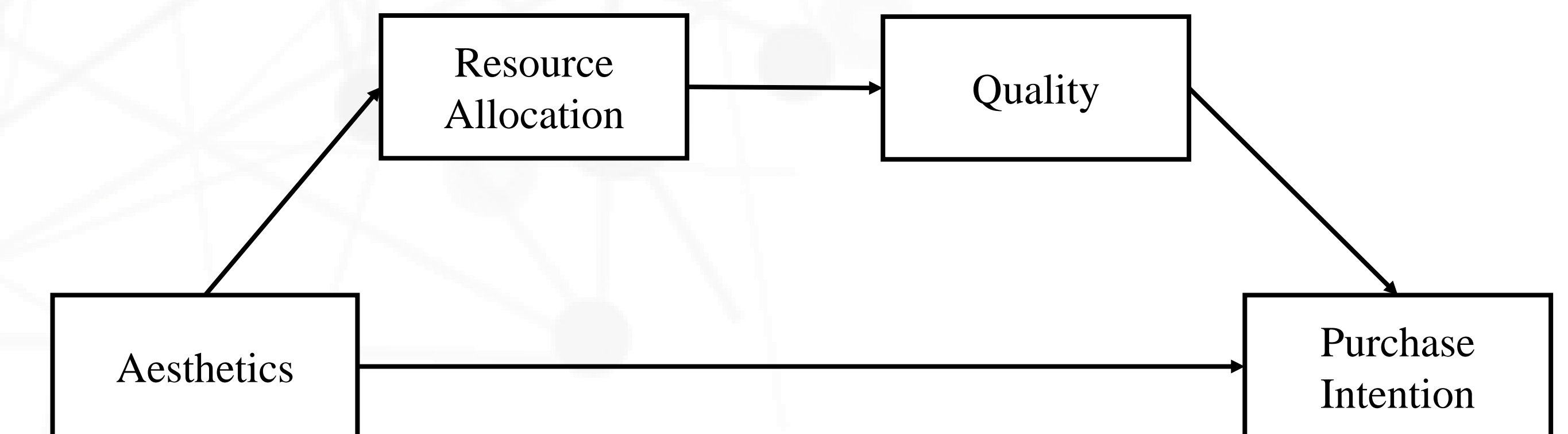
Abstract

Today, many companies have invested their resource in product design. They believe that product design can result in positive result. However, product aesthetics can negatively influence consumers' quality perception and purchase intention. When consumers face cute products, they infer that those products have lower product functionality. This is because of consumers' lay theory of zero-sum heuristics; consumers assume that superiority of one product dimension, cute design, is compensated by inferiority on another dimension, functionality. The double mediation results also support consumers' perception of firm's resource allocation and product attribute trade-off.

Stimuli



Double Mediation Results



	Indirect Effect	SE	95% CI
Predicted Pathway	-.46	.11	-.71 to -.29
Reverse Model	.07	.06	-.02 to .21

Cuteness

Being attractive in adorable or endearing way (Hellen & Sääksjärvi 2011)

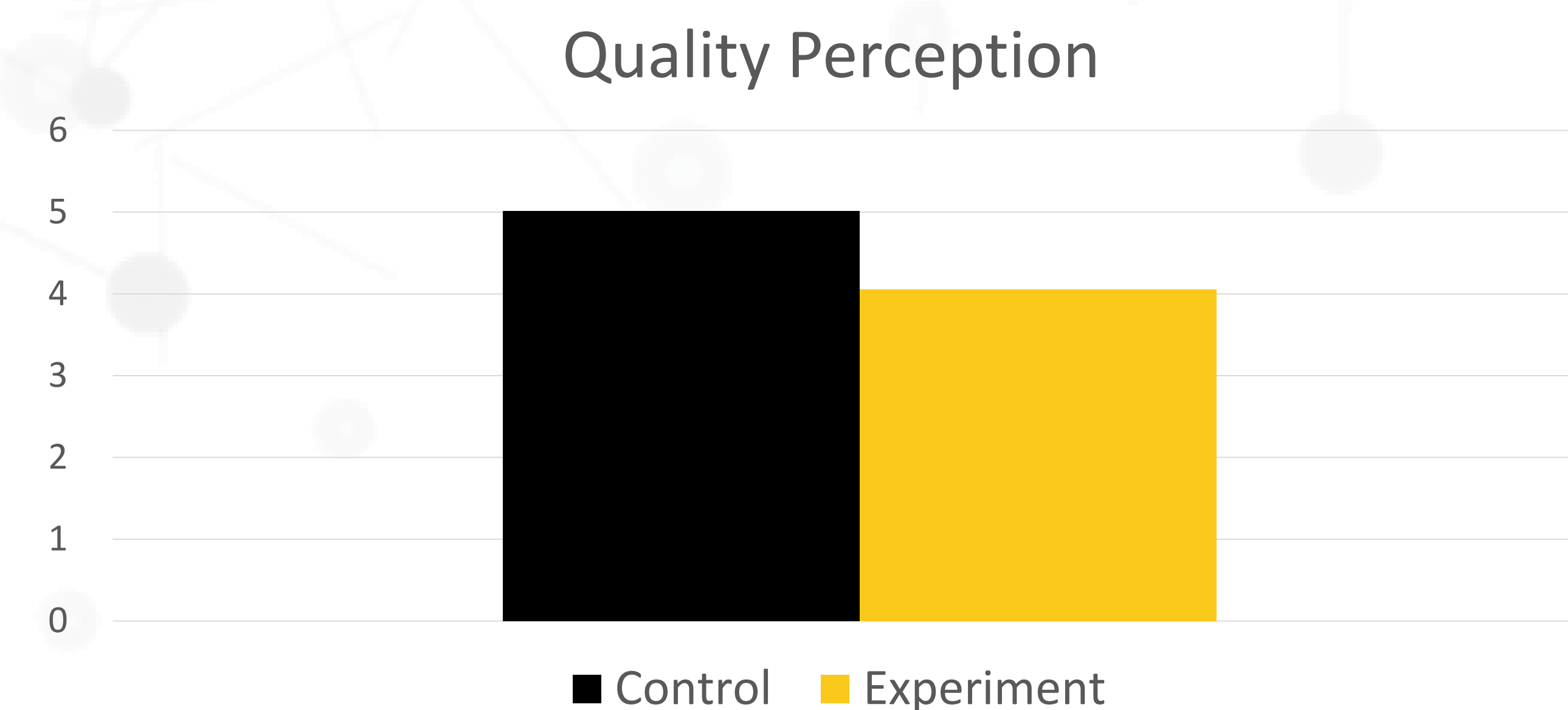
- **kindchenschema (baby schema)** collection of cute features of newborns such as bulging forehead, large eyes, and rounded cheeks
- **Whimsical Cuteness** (Nenkov and Scott 2014) cuteness associated with fun and playfulness

Results

N=202 (M=36.7, Female=94)

Manipulation Check:

Control (M=3.39, SD=1.59) < Experiment (M=5.34, SD=1.57)



	Purchase Intention	Quality Perception
Control	4.57 (1.33)	5.01 (0.95)
Experiment	3.5 (1.75)	4.06 (1.05)

Zero-sum heuristics

Consumers have a lay theory that firm resources are zero-sum; the superiority on one product dimension is compensated by inferiority on other dimension

- **Chernev (2007)** Toothpaste cavity-fighting ability vs. tartar control
- Newman, Gorlin, and Dhar (2014) Environmental friendly vs. washing capability

References

- Newman, G. E., Gorlin, M., & Dhar, R. (2014). When going green backfires: How firm intentions shape the evaluation of socially beneficial product enhancements. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(3), 823-839.
- Nenkov, G. Y., & Scott, M. L. (2014). "So cute I could eat it up": priming effects of cute products on indulgent consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(2), 326-341.
- Chernev, A. (2007). Jack of all trades or master of one? Product differentiation and compensatory reasoning in consumer choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(4), 430-444.

Acknowledgements

Extend irrationality of human being
Expand literature on effect of cuteness
Demonstrate negative effect of product design on purchase intention
Propose underlying mechanism of reverse product design effect