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Designing a Premium Package: Some Guidelines for Designers and Marketers

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ABSTRACT Because a premium image is of critical importance for many A-brands in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) categories, it is important for both designers and marketers to have a comprehensive understanding of the package characteristics that can evoke such a premium perception. The present research integrates knowledge from design research and marketing research to enhance the understanding of the

role of packaging design in shaping consumers' product perceptions. In two studies using water and chocolate as product categories, we demonstrate that designers should consider four premium cues (extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design and authenticity) as important guidelines when designing a premium packaging. When these premium cues are implemented in a packaging design, consumers will recognize the product as a superior, high-quality product that is worth a higher price.

KEYWORDS: packaging design, premium perception, brand image



Fast Moving Consumer Good (FMCG) brands such as Swiss Finest chocolate and OGO mineral water cater to the high-end market by launching premium products.

They design these products to convey an impression of exclusiveness, excellence and luxury. This sense of 'premiumness' of the product helps many A-brands to gain a competitive advantage in comparison to cheaper alternatives. Although a premium product should by definition provide superior intrinsic value, consumers do not base their premium perceptions only on the intrinsic qualities of the new product, such as the superior taste of the Swiss Finest chocolate, or the particular oxygen composition of OGO mineral water.

In addition to the intrinsic quality of the product, consumers frequently use extrinsic cues to form expectations about the 'premiumness' perception of the product (Kirmani and Rao, 2000). The extrinsic cue that has received the greatest deal of research attention in the marketing literature is price. Most studies showed that consumers perceive higher-priced goods as being of higher quality than lower-priced goods, even when the intrinsic qualities were identical (Rao, 2005; Shiv *et al*, 2005). Consumers' expectations evoked by the price thus influence their judgements of this product's quality. Besides price, consumers may also use other extrinsic cues for their perceptions of a product's quality and premiumness, such as the brand image, country of origin and its warranty (Brucks *et al*, 2000; Miyazaki *et al*, 2005). Past research has further shown that the visual product appearance can also serve as a cue for product quality (Creusen and Schoormans, 2005). The effect of the visual product appearance can first of all be explained by a halo effect because consumers tend to associate an attractive appearance with many other positive qualities, such as higher product quality (Page and Herr, 2002). In addition, the visual appearance can also create expectations about specific functional features that cannot be

explained by a Halo effect, such as product size as a signal of power. Consumers naturally incorporate the information that is offered by the visual product appearance in their judgements of the product's performance (Creusen *et al*, 2010; Hoegg and Alba, 2011; Mugge, 2011; Mugge and Schoormans, 2012). When evaluating a product, consumers will thus use both the attractiveness and particular other elements in the design to form expectations about the product's premiumness.

For companies that are interested in launching a premium product, it is crucial to manage all quality cues in a consistent manner. In this respect, Miyazaki *et al* (2005) showed that when a positive price cue is paired with a negative other cue, consumers find the negative cue more salient, and thus, inconsistent cues will negatively affect consumers' quality perceptions. In order to communicate that a specific product is premium, companies should thus move beyond price as a cue for premiumness because other quality cues, such as product appearance, may undo the positive effect of the price cue. For companies launching a premium FMCG, it is especially important that the packaging design clearly communicates the premiumness of the product for three reasons.

First, consumers often choose a FMCG at the point of purchase, where the visual packaging of the product plays a critical role in shaping product perceptions (Fenko *et al*, 2010). Second, when consumers are searching for a premium product, they tend to be promotion focused and explicitly search for products that help them to indulge. Chitturi *et al* (2008) demonstrated that such a promotion focus will enhance the significance of the product's hedonic benefits, such as its packaging design. Third, premium products are generally launched by strong A-brands, for which the impact of aesthetics on consumers' preferences is more important than for weaker brands (Landwehr, 2012). Although past research has proposed that consumers use product appearance as a cue for their quality perceptions (Creusen and Schoormans, 2005; Page and Herr, 2002), no specific guidelines concerning the design of a premium package have been provided thus far. The present research contributes to the extant literature by investigating how designers, design managers and marketers can develop a premium package, and thereby create a consistent premium image to consumers.

Consumer Responses to Visual Packaging Design

Bloch (1995) discussed in his conceptual model the importance of the form of a product/package for evoking desired consumer responses. Specifically, his model demonstrated that product form can evoke both cognitive (e.g. product beliefs) and affective responses (e.g. positive or negative emotions), that result in a behavioural response. Further, these responses are moderated by individual tastes and preferences (e.g. culture and experience) and situational factors (e.g. social setting and marketing programme). Whereas

Bloch's (1995) model focused on the importance of product form for marketing purposes, Crilly *et al* (2004) expanded his model by taking a designer's perspective when they describe a product/package design as a means of communication between the design team and the consumer. By selecting the geometry, textures, materials, colours, graphics and details of a product/package, designers can purposefully encourage specific consumer responses. More specifically, Crilly *et al* (2004) divided the cognitive responses that the product/package design can evoke into aesthetic impressions, symbolic associations and semantic interpretations. Aesthetic impressions were defined as the sensations that result from perceptions of attractiveness. Symbolic associations were defined as the perception of what a product/package design says about its owner or user. Semantic interpretations were defined as what a product/package design is saying about its function, mode-of-use and qualities. Crilly *et al* (2004) further discuss that the three responses are interrelated. In this respect, we propose that communicating a premium package suggests that the product's intrinsic quality is perceived as superior (semantic interpretation) and that the consumer him/herself is associated with a more elite and prestigious group of people (symbolic association). Finally, Crilly *et al*'s (2004) framework extends that of Bloch's by paying attention to the visual references that influence consumer responses. Consumers compare a product/package design with other visual references (e.g. similar products, stereotypes) to interpret a product.

Based on Crilly *et al*'s (2004) framework, we thus conclude that the visual packaging design of a FMCG is important for consumers' expectations about the premiumness of a product. Whereas Crilly *et al* (2004) presented a conceptual framework on how these relationships come about, other studies aimed to provide more detailed guidelines on how packaging design can influence consumer responses. For example, Deng and Kahn (2009) showed that the location (e.g. top vs. bottom) of a pictorial representation of a product (e.g. image of cookie or snack) on a package influences consumers' perceptions of the product's heaviness, and depending on the desirability of a product's heaviness, either positively or negatively affects consumers' product evaluation. Other studies have demonstrated that specific elements in the packaging design of a FMCG affect consumers' volume perceptions (Chandon and Ordabayeva, 2009; Folkes and Matta, 2004; Wansink and Van Ittersum, 2003) and taste expectations (Ares and Deliza, 2010; Rebollar *et al*, 2012). For example, it is demonstrated that packages that have shapes that attract more attention are perceived as containing more volume than same-sized packages that attract less attention (Folkes and Matta, 2004). In addition, it is likely that the initial perceptions formed by the packaging design in a (pre-)purchase situation persevere during consumption of the product. In this respect, Becker *et al* (2011) demonstrated for a yoghurt packaging that the potency-related

associations portrayed by the shape curvature transfer to consumers' taste experiences if consumers are sensitive for design. Specifically, when yoghurt was presented in an angular package, participants rated its taste after eating the yoghurt as more intense than when the same yoghurt was presented in a rounded package. Correspondingly, the shape, colour, illustrations, text (e.g. font type and size) and material of the packaging are important for achieving specific brand impressions (Orth and Malkewitz, 2008; Underwood, 2003).

Although it is acknowledged that a packaging design influences consumers' product perceptions, only limited guidance has been provided to designers and/or marketers on how to create packages that evoke premium perceptions, whereas such premium perceptions are key to many A-brands in FMCG categories. Furthermore, packages that are intended to enhance a product's premium image may fail to do so in the marketplace. An example of a redesign that proved to be unsuccessful is the packaging of the gin brand Beefeater. In order to improve the premium image of Beefeater gin, the company redesigned the original packaging (see Figure 1a) with a no-label look (Figure 1b). Unfortunately, this redesign failed to improve the gin's premium image. Accordingly, the company went



Figure 1
Beefeater gin packages.
Courtesy of Cartils.

ahead with another redesign (Figure 1c); this time successfully conveying the premium image of the brand. Although designers do not necessarily make the ultimate decision with respect to a new package design for a FMCG company, this example does demonstrate that designers, design managers, as well as marketers could benefit from a comprehensive understanding of the specific cues in the design of a package that can communicate a premium image. These guidelines may also help in the communication between designers and their clients (e.g. when formulating the design brief).

In order to help designers to systematically design packages that communicate specific product attributes and brand values, Schoormans *et al* (2010) presented a three-step design method. By using this method, designers can assess for a specific FMCG category which structural package characteristics (i.e. shape features) are important for the communication of relevant product attributes and brand values. For example, changing the height and rounding of the shoulders of a vodka bottle will give it a more powerful impression. Although we believe that employing the three-step design method has clear value for packaging designers, it also has some limitations. First, the three-step design method only explores the relationships between specific product attributes and structural package characteristics, such as whether the overall package shape is curved, symmetric, static or broad. As a result, designers do not gain insights in the role of graphical (i.e. text and illustrations) and material characteristics of the package to evoke certain perceptions. Second, the method requires the execution of a series of consumer studies, whereas package designers often lack the means or time to perform such consumer studies in practice. Third, the three-step design method focuses on uncovering the relationships between product attributes and structural package characteristics for one particular product category at a time, and thus no generalizable insights are obtained through this method. Nevertheless, certain relationships between design characteristics and perceived product attributes can hold across different product categories (Mugge and Schoormans, 2012; Orth and Malkewitz, 2008). For example, Orth and Malkewitz (2008) demonstrated that natural package designs evoke brand personality impressions of sincerity and sophistication for wines as well as fragrances. This finding suggests that besides category-specific relationships between package design characteristics and product attributes, general guidelines may exist as well.

Because of the centrality of a premium perception for many A-brands, we propose that it is beneficial for designers and marketers to obtain actionable knowledge for designing premium packages. What is thus needed, and what we will present in the present paper, is a set of clear guidelines covering all package elements (e.g. shape, text, illustrations, material and colour) that help designers and marketers to create great FMCG packages that will yield a premium brand image.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we present a qualitative study to uncover the most important premium cues in packaging design. Based on these uncovered premium cues, an experienced packaging designer created three redesigns for an existing chocolate package. In a second quantitative study, we validated the premium cues by testing whether these redesigns increased the premium perception of the chocolate. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and its implications for designers, design managers and marketers.

Qualitative Study to Uncover Premium Cues in Packaging Design

We used focus group sessions in the first study to gain in-depth insights into the packaging cues that evoke a premium image. More specifically, we conducted two focus groups with a total of 14 Dutch consumers, and one focus group with five packaging designers.¹ In order to obtain a set of general premium cues that will hold across various FMCG, we used packaging designs from two different product categories (i.e. water and chocolate). These product categories were selected because they differ in their packaging features. For example, water is generally packed in plastic or glass bottles, whereas chocolate is packed in plastic foils or carton boxes. Furthermore, chocolate packages generally display richer and prominent illustrations than water packages. For both product categories, we selected a set of 15 packages from mid- to high-priced brands.

The focus group session included several parts. First, interviewees collectively arranged the 15 packages of the first product category in several groups in order to uncover overall impressions evoked by the packaging designs. Second, they discussed which characteristics in the packaging designs triggered a more or less premium perception. Subsequently, we asked the participating consumers to individually rank all 15 packages from low to high on their perceived 'premiumness'. Because interviewees were not informed about the products' retail prices, this procedure enabled us to explore the degree to which these packages effectively communicated a premium image. Subsequently, the focus group participants repeated these steps for the 15 packages of the second product category. During the focus group sessions, interviewees were allowed to touch and hold the packages. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

As a preliminary analysis of the data, we compared the individual premium rankings of the interviewees using non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests. These results provided support for our proposition that designing a premium package is not a straightforward task for packaging designers. Interviewees perceived various products in both product categories as 'low premium' based on their visual packaging, whereas they should be considered 'mid to high premium' based on their retail price. For example, interviewees ranked Aquapax (see Figure 2) as a lower premium product than

Spa Reine ($Z = -3.21, p < 0.01$) and Sourcy Pure Blue ($Z = -3.31, p < 0.01$), whereas these latter packages should be considered less premium based on their retail price (€2.50 vs. €0.40 and €2.00 per litre, respectively). We found similar results for the packaging of Tÿ Nant. Even though the retail price suggested a premium positioning (€2.25 per litre), bottled water of Tÿ Nant was perceived as 'low premium' in comparison to the cheaper Spa Reine ($Z = -2.77, p < 0.01$). With respect to chocolate packaging, interviewees ranked Verkade (see Figure 3) as a lower premium chocolate than Côte d'Or Classics ($Z = -3.11, p < 0.01$), whereas their retail prices are equal (both €1.33 per 100 grams). Moreover, Verkade was perceived as 'low premium' in comparison to Swiss Finest ($Z = -3.32, p < 0.01$), whereas the latter is the cheaper alternative (€1.25 per 100 grams).

We analysed the transcripts of the interviewees' responses during the focus group sessions in order to uncover premium cues in packaging design. Specifically, we identified four cues for designing a premium package: extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design and authenticity. The next section will discuss these four premium cues in detail using quotes of the interviewees during the focus groups. We will further illustrate these cues with examples from the product stimuli that we used (see Figures 2 and 3).

Extraordinary differentiation

The first premium cue that was distinguished is extraordinary differentiation. Although most brands aim to differentiate their package design from the competition, this differentiation is more critical for brands that aim to communicate a premium image. In order to be perceived as premium by consumers, differentiation should be realized profoundly. Designers and design managers thus need to create a package that is clearly different from other packages in the category (e.g. special, innovative or out of the ordinary). For example, water is generally sold in bottles with a tall body, straight sides, and a short neck, such as the one by Chaudfontaine (see Figure 2). In contrast, the OGO bottle has an unconventional shape – a short body and rounded sides – that consumers associate with a premium image. The Sourcy Piet Boon water bottle has a prominent long neck, which is typical for wine bottles but an innovative choice in the water market, serving to create a premium image. This finding corresponds and extends the literature on luxury brands that has proposed that exclusivity and rarity are important characteristics for the marketing communications of luxury brands (Beverland, 2004; Catry, 2003; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). This image of exclusivity can thus further be enhanced by using an extraordinary package design that strongly differs from other packages in the product category. When consumers form the semantic interpretation of such a package design, they use the stereotype of the category as a visual reference (Crilly *et al*, 2004), and based on an extraordinary deviation

Highly premium packaging	Low premium packaging
 <p>Sourcy Pure Blue (€2.00 per litre)</p>	 <p>Chaudfontaine (€0.50 per litre)</p>
 <p>OGO (€7.95 per litre)</p>	 <p>Aquapax (€2.50 per litre)</p>
 <p>Sourcy Piet Boon (€2.20 per litre)</p>	 <p>Tý Nant (€2.25 per litre)</p>

Figure 2 Premium packaging cues in water. Courtesy of Cartlis.

Highly premium packaging



Lindt Excellence 99% Cacao
(€4.00 per 100 grams)



Swiss Finest
(€1.25 per 100 grams)



Côte d'Or Classics
(€1.33 per 100 grams)

Low premium packaging



Verkade
(€1.33 per 100 grams)



Ritter Sport
(€0.99 per 100 grams)

Milka
(€0.89 per 100 grams)



Figure 3
Premium packaging cues in chocolate. Courtesy of Cartils.

from the norm expect the FMCG to be more exclusive and premium. Designers thus need to uncover the typical design cues for the category of interest. Which shapes, colours, materials, illustrations and font types are frequently used for packages in the category? Once they have a thorough understanding of these typical design cues, packaging designers can purposefully break away from these codes, and thereby create special and innovative packages that will communicate a premium image. For example, some interviewees said that:

I think it is premium if it is different from the others, [it's] breaking the rules.

It is also chic because it has an extraordinary shape.

On the other hand, designers should be careful when designing such a highly differentiating packaging design. If a package goes 'over the top', this may give consumers the impression that the product quality is only mediocre and that the company is using the packaging design as a 'cover-up'. Then, a differentiating package may fail to express the product's 'premiumness':

I believe that there is a clear borderline between premium and over the top, and this one (Sourcy Pure Blue) is exactly in the middle ... An expression that it is better and more chic than the others but not too much.

Over the top gives the impression that the quality is compensated by the packaging.

High quality of packaging materials

Premium brands aim to communicate that they deliver products with superior intrinsic qualities. We acknowledge that many FMCG brands strive for positive quality perceptions. However, in order to be truly perceived as premium, commitment to quality should be of utmost importance to these companies. In this respect, past research has demonstrated that luxury brands have a fanatic dedication to product/production integrity (Beverland, 2004; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). This finding implies that these companies organize their production processes (e.g. winemaking techniques of luxury wines) in such a way that the product's intrinsic quality will be exceptional, and that such companies pay great attention to details, even when this may increase costs. Our findings extend these results by suggesting that premium brands should not only pursue a fanatic dedication for aspects that are directly related to the intrinsic product quality (such as production processes), but also to extrinsic factors, such as the packaging design. Specifically, it is proposed that when the materials used in the packaging are of

exceptional quality, consumers will perceive this material as a cue for the brand's uncompromising commitment to delivering a superior quality. Following the framework of Crilly *et al* (2004), both seeing and touching such high quality packaging materials will trigger a premium impression with consumers. For example, our interviewees felt that cardboard chocolate packages (e.g. Lindt Excellence 99% cocoa) were more premium than packages made from plastic (e.g. Milka and Ritter Sport) or foil (Verkade):

Plastic is a lot cheaper, a cheap feeling.

Cardboard as a material makes it premium.

You really feel that they have devoted attention to it, that they put effort in it.

Similarly, they considered that glass water bottles are more premium than the ones made out of plastic (e.g. Chaudfontaine and Tÿ Nant) or cardboard (e.g. Aquapax), materials that consumers associate with lower costs and lower quality. Of course, there are clear advantages of using plastic or cardboard because these materials are lighter and there is only a small risk of breaking, which is beneficial for distribution. Nevertheless, consumers appreciate the extra effort that using a less practical material demands. For consumers, this effort demonstrates that the company is dedicated to delivering superior quality throughout the entire production and distribution process, despite the challenges that this may bring. Our interviewees also indicated that heavy proprietary water bottles with a metal cap and an embossed stamp or logo (e.g. Sourcy Pure Blue) are more premium than lighter bottles with a plastic cap or stickers (e.g. Tÿ Nant):

It is made of glass and it has a beautiful cap. And the embossed Sourcy is very chic.

It should communicate effort ... embossing, rather than a sticker.

I am concerned about the plastic; that is why I would group it much lower.

Minimalistic design

The third packaging design cue that can communicate a brand's commitment to quality and premiumness is the use of a minimalistic design. Interestingly, the interviewees associated flamboyant and ornate packaging designs with a lack of intrinsic quality. Designers should thus strive for a minimalistic design by favouring the use of basic shapes, reducing the amount of illustrations and text on the package, and ensuring the 'harmoniousness' of the various elements in the packaging design.

The effect of a minimalistic design can partly be explained by a greater attractiveness of the package. Prior studies in the field of aesthetics have shown that symmetric and unified designs are more aesthetically appealing (Berlyne, 1971; Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998). Following a halo effect, this greater aesthetical appeal will positively affect the product's perceived quality (Page and Herr, 2002) and premium perceptions. However, we believe that the positive effect of a minimalistic design goes beyond a mere halo effect. In contrast to more flamboyant designs, minimalistic designs are associated with purity and a lack of commerciality. Consequently, our findings correspond and extend the literature on luxury brands that has proposed that luxury wine brands put more emphasis on producing a top-quality wine than on suiting a particular market segment (Beverland, 2004). Such a 'de-marketing strategy' can thus be intensified through a minimalistic design.

An example from our interviews is the Sourcy Pure Blue bottle. This bottle is minimalistic and thus premium because it has a basic shape and does not feature any superfluous visuals or text. In contrast, interviewees associated the extensive illustrations on the Aquapax package and the complex shape of Tÿ Nant with less premium water brands.

We found the same pattern in the chocolate category. For example, the chocolate packaging design of Lindt Excellence 99% cocoa includes a few carefully selected illustrations, colours that are implemented in a harmonious manner and a 'chic' font, resulting in a clear and subtle design. In contrast, Verkade uses many illustrations and colours in its chocolate packaging, resulting in a less harmonious design that consumers associate with lower quality and less premium brands.

With the premium chocolate bars, there are almost no illustrations left, but it still follows the rules of chocolate.

It is especially less obtrusive than the others. As a result, it attracts a different kind of attention.

But it has a premium expression as a result of the brand name that is placed so organized.

Authenticity

The last premium cue that was recognized in our study as important for packaging design is authenticity. In the marketing and branding literatures, authenticity has been recognized as an important positioning device across a broad range of product categories (Beverland, 2005, 2006). Whereas these studies have discussed how authenticity can be communicated through marketing promotions, our research extends these findings by demonstrating that authenticity can also be reinforced through the design of the product packaging. First of all, authenticity is often related to perceptions of

craftsmanship (Beverland, 2006). Craft production methods are labour-intensive, which reflects a brand's uncompromising dedication to deliver the highest possible quality. In this respect, many brands make reference to craft production techniques in their promotions. Consistent with this, the design literature often links craft techniques with creating authentic experiences in products (Kälviäinen, 2000; Kettley and Smyth, 2004). Although all water and chocolate packages that we studied are mass-produced and thus lacked true craftsmanship, some of them had been designed to embody a sense of craftsmanship. By selecting specific materials, shapes, graphics and textures for the package design, designers can give consumers the impression that the product was created using craft production techniques, thereby enhancing the sense of authenticity and premiumness of the product. For example, interviewees noted a strong sense of craftsmanship with respect to the Côte d'Or Classics packaging due to the usage of the particular paper wrapping and graphics in the design:

This is virtually wrapped at the farm.

Funny that in contrast to water, cardboard is more chic here, because it looks more authentic.

In contrast, interviewees complained about the 'artificiality' of other packages. For example, they felt that the Tÿ Nant bottle was overly commercial and over the top, and thus insincere and not authentic:

They try too hard, it is over the top, due to which you have the feeling that it will be nothing.

It is too much Photoshop, and not real.

Authenticity can also be related to a long brand heritage. Consequently, the history of a brand is often advertised through marketing promotions (Beverland, 2005). In addition, designers can communicate the brand heritage through the package design. For example, the Côte d'Or Classics packaging prominently displays the year in which the company was founded (1883). Such a heritage has value because it indicates that the brand has 'paid its dues' and has been committed to deliver a high quality for decades:

It looks as if they have been making chocolate for years.

The package can also testify the authenticity of the product by referring to its 'realness'. For example, chocolate packages can include the percentage of cocoa (e.g. Lindt Excellence 99% cocoa) as an indicator of realness:

The higher the cocoa percentage, the more expensive it is.

In addition, the country of origin can enhance the perceived 'realness' of a product, and thereby enhance trust. For example, interviewees evaluated the packaging design of the chocolate brand Swiss Finest as premium because it prominently features a Swiss flag to highlight its connection to that country, which is renowned for the quality of its chocolate:

The Swiss flag gives me the feeling that it is good chocolate.

It gives confidence, the Swiss flag ... then it should be good.

Quantitative Study to Validate the Four Premium Cues

We used the four identified premium cues (i.e. extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design and authenticity) to redesign the Verkade chocolate packaging. Verkade is a well-known and relatively expensive Dutch brand of chocolate, but as discussed, our interviewees in the focus groups did not perceive the Verkade chocolate to be premium. Accordingly, we believed that this package would be a good candidate to assess whether redesigning a packaging in line with the four identified premium cues can change consumers' premium perceptions of a product.

To give the original Verkade chocolate packaging (see Figure 4a) a more premium look, we asked an experienced packaging designer who had been working for a renowned packaging design agency for several years to create three redesigns following the four premium cues. These three redesigns progressively implemented these cues – extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design, and authenticity – in the packaging, resulting in an evolutionary (Figure 4b), progressive (Figure 4c), and revolutionary (Figure 4d) packaging design. More specific, the evolutionary packaging design (Figure 4b) had a more minimalistic design than the original packaging (Figure 4a). This evolutionary design was achieved by removing various illustrations, such as the second logo, award ribbon and caloric information. In addition, the designer tweaked the colours of the packaging to achieve greater harmony. To more clearly communicate the 'realness' of the product, the designer enlarged the text indicating the chocolate's percentage of cocoa. Despite these changes, the evolutionary packaging still resembled other chocolate packages, and thus, differentiation remained relatively low.

In the progressive packaging design (Figure 4c), the packaging designer 'boosted' the premium cues. This progressive packaging design featured thick folded paper (rather than foil) thereby improving the quality of the packaging materials. In addition, the designer took a more minimalistic approach to the progressive packaging design than to the evolutionary design by further removing several illustrations, such as the tree and rays of sunlight in the background, and by reducing the size of the images of chocolate pieces.



Figure 4

Verkadé packaging. From top to bottom: (a) the original Verkadé packaging; and three redesigns: (b) evolutionary, (c) progressive and (d) revolutionary, in which the premium cues are increasingly implemented. Courtesy of Cartils.

The packaging designer implemented all four premium cues to their fullest in the revolutionary packaging design (Figure 4d). To this end, the designer chose light beige as the main colour, thereby differentiating this revolutionary chocolate packaging profoundly from other chocolate packages whose traditional palette favours dark brown or black. The revolutionary design was highly minimalistic and contained no visuals of pieces of chocolate. Furthermore, the designer turned the fair trade logo into a seal, and added it to the packaging to communicate authenticity. The revolutionary design also included an autograph of the company's founder, which served to further express the product's authenticity. Finally, the designer chose a new paper material for the chocolate packaging, which further improved the quality of the packaging materials and the chocolate's communication of authenticity.

We conducted an experiment to test consumers' premium perceptions of the three redesigns in comparison to the original Verkade packaging. In an online questionnaire, 66 participants (58 per cent males) were presented with a high-quality colour picture of one of the four Verkade packaging designs, and they were asked to indicate the expected price of the chocolate on a seven-point scale (1 = low; 7 = high) to assess the perceived premium level.

We performed a one-way ANOVA with polynomial contrasts to test whether the redesigns were perceived as more premium than the original package. We expected that the more extensively the Verkade package was redesigned according to our guidelines, the more likely it would be that participants perceived the package as premium. Polynomial contrasts are therefore used to test for the presence of a linear trend across the four conditions (Field, 2009). Polynomial contrasts confirmed that the participants perceived the redesigned packages as predicted. The expected price of the chocolate packaging linearly increased along the four packaging designs ($M_1 = 2.22$; $M_2 = 3.18$; $M_3 = 3.69$; $M_4 = 4.67$; $F(1, 62) = 33.82$, $p < 0.001$), with the revolutionary packaging design (Figure 4d) rated most expensive, and thus the most premium. These findings show that the packaging designer successfully implemented the four premium cues in the three redesigns, suggesting that these four premium cues offer an actionable set of guidelines for how designers can create a premium package. These findings provide further support for the importance of extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design and authenticity as prominent design cues for the design of premium packaging.

Conclusion

Crilly *et al* (2004) proposed in their framework that product/package design serves as process of communication. When consumers encounter a product/package design, they use their senses to interpret the design, and consequently, the design elicits cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Although the framework by Crilly *et al*

(2004) has provided designers with useful knowledge concerning the general process by which product/package design evokes consumer responses, no detailed insights were offered to designers for the communication of particular product perceptions. By integrating knowledge from design research and marketing research, this paper helps to further expand the understanding of the role of packaging design in shaping consumers' product perceptions. More specifically, the present research examined in two studies the effect of packaging design on the premium perception of FMCG. Although a premium image is of critical importance for the success of many A-brands, prior research did not provide guidelines for designers and/or marketers on how to design a premium packaging. Our research contributes to the literature by uncovering and validating four premium cues (extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design and authenticity) as a set of guidelines that designers and/or marketers can employ when their aim is to design a premium packaging. When these premium cues are implemented in a packaging design, consumers will recognize the product as an exclusive, extraordinary and superior high-quality product that is worth a higher price. Although our research suggests that the more extensive a FMCG package is redesigned according to the guidelines, the more premium it will be perceived, it is not always possible to implement revolutionary changes in a single redesign. In most cases, a packaging designer's task is to create a packaging redesign for a product that is already on the market. The product should remain recognizable so that loyal consumers can still find it on the shelf. Furthermore, consumers may fail to categorize a highly differentiating package design as belonging to a particular product category, and therefore, may exclude it from their consideration set. Our results show how the premium perception of a packaging design can be improved over time by following a step-by-step and actionable approach.

An important aspect that designers and marketers need to consider when implementing the premium cues is the brand and its unique values for which the packaging design is created. In some cases, the brand values may partly be in conflict with the four premium cues. For example, a highly minimalistic and subtle design may be less desirable for a brand that stands first and foremost for fun and excitement, such as Coca Cola. Then, it is likely that together with the premium cues extraordinary differentiation and authenticity, a moderate level of minimalism may be sufficient to create a premium packaging design.

Because vision is the dominant modality in a purchase situation (Fenko *et al*, 2010), we limited the quantitative validation study to the visual aspects of the packaging design by presenting respondents with only a picture. As a consequence, the effect of the superior material qualities of the packaging design could only partially be tested. Specifically, participants could see that the progressive and

revolutionary designs used thick folded paper rather than a foil, but they were unable to feel its tactile properties. We expect that consumers will perceive these redesigns as even more premium when they are confronted with the actual package.

Our research was limited to two product categories. We selected these product categories with great care in order to achieve generalizable cues that would result in a premium packaging for many FMCG categories. Nevertheless, although the product categories water and chocolate differ with respect to their packaging design cues, they are both food products. Accordingly, the question remains whether the premium cues will also hold for packaging designs of non-food products, such as laundry detergents, shampoos and cleaners. It may well be that the premium cue authenticity is less appreciated for non-food products that have a non-natural, synthetic foundation because new and advanced technologies have improved these products considerably. Then, a connection with authenticity and craftsmanship may be less desirable. Future research should explore which of the uncovered premium cues are not only generalizable to the package designs of different food products, but also to those of non-food products.

Finally, designers and marketers should consider that communicating a premium perception through packaging is a continuous challenge. Private labels are often trying to copy the packaging designs of A-brands. So, it is likely that a packaging can only realize the desired premium image for a limited time period. After some time, the packaging's extraordinary differentiation may decrease because private labels have adapted their packages based on the premium packaging designs of the A-brands. It is thus important for design managers to be proactive by regularly changing the packaging design thereby taking into account the four premium cues of extraordinary differentiation, high quality of packaging materials, minimalistic design and authenticity as their main guidelines.

Note

1. This research was conducted in the Netherlands. We acknowledge that cultural differences may influence how consumers perceive products and packages. Future research could thus explore to what extent the presented premium cues are also applicable in other countries.

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