Hedonic Consumption:
An Empirical Investigation of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Product Cues.

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Abstract
Consumers increasingly value consumption styles and products that provide favorable experiences, enjoyment, fun, or amusement (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000, Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Despite a growing interest of researchers on hedonic consumption, to date, only few studies have investigated factors that affect the evaluation, purchasing process and decision-making of consumers regarding hedonic products.

Cue utilization theory has been widely acknowledged as a rationale for explaining consumers’ evaluation of products and product attributes. The literature distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic cues. Intrinsic product cues (e.g., ingredients) pertain to the product itself whereas extrinsic product cues (e.g., price, brand name, warranty or packaging) belong to the product without being physically a part of it (e.g., Richardson et al. 1994). Previous research provides a rather inconsistent picture on the relative impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic cues. On the one hand, several studies support the notion that intrinsic cues are more influential when evaluating the quality of a product (e.g., Olson and Jacoby 1972). On the other hand, MacInnis and Price (1987) assume that extrinsic cues may be more relevant to consumers when it comes to evaluate hedonic products.

Against this background, this paper aims at investigating the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic cues on the purchase intention for hedonic products. Taking the example of perfumes, a laboratory experiment with 160 subjects, rating their purchase intention on a seven-point scale, is executed. The influences, effect seize, as well as interaction effects of a perfume’s scent as intrinsic and a perfumes’ packaging, or flacon, as extrinsic cue are identified using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings extend research in several ways. First, this paper shows that for hedonic products intrinsic product cues dominate extrinsic product cues when forming a purchase intention. Second, the positive effect of a pleasant scent as intrinsic cue on the purchase intention is enhanced by a pleasant flacon as extrinsic cue. Therefore, intrinsic and extrinsic product cues have to match one another to convey a uniform message.

Implications for researchers and practitioners are discussed.

References