Facing Dominance: Anthropomorphism and the Effect of Product Face Ratio on Consumer Preference

By

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Abstract
Drawing upon prior research on anthropomorphism, face perception, and symbolic self-completion, we propose that people react to product faces in much the same way as they react to human faces. Results of five studies demonstrate that high width-to-height ratio (fWHR) of a product face leads to the product being perceived as highly dominant, much like the high fWHR of human faces does. However, while a higher level of dominance associated with human faces leads to the faces being liked less, high perceived dominance associated with product faces leads to the products being liked more, as revealed by greater consumer preference and willingness to pay. Consistent with the symbolic self-completion account which suggests that people prefer dominant looking products to enhance and signal their own dominant status, this effect of fWHR on product preference is mediated by perceived dominance and moderated by type of goal as well as product-usage context.

Prof. Pankaj Aggarwal is a Professor of Marketing in the Department of Management at University of Toronto-Scarborough, with a cross-appointment to the Marketing area at Rotman. His research uses the metaphor of brands-as-people, and examines consumer behaviour in the context of consumer-brand relationships, including anthropomorphism. His research has appeared in the Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Marketing Research, and Psychological Science. He is an Associate Editor at the Journal of Consumer Research. He has served on the editorial board of the Journal of Consumer Psychology and former Associate Chair of the Department of Management at the University of Toronto-Scarborough. Pankaj has received outstanding reviewer awards from the Journal of Consumer Research. He is ranked as one of the pre-eminent marketing scholars in Consumer Behavior (1st in Canada, 4th in non-US schools, top 25 in the world including the US) in a recent paper published in the Journal of Marketing Education which ranked and benchmarked outstanding marketing scholars based on research impact during the 10-year period 2003-2012 (Elbeck and Vander Schee 2014).

All interested are welcome.