

PRODUCT AESTHETICS AND CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCE FOR BODY SPRAY FRAGRANCE AMONG YOUNG CONSUMERS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In today's competitive marketplace, product differentiation based on traditional factors like price and quality has become increasingly challenging. Consequently, aesthetics has emerged as a significant differentiating factor. The study examines the effect of product aesthetics on consumer preference for body spray fragrances among young consumers in Nigeria. The problem addressed is the lack of sufficient research on how aesthetics—particularly color, shape, and scent—affect consumer choices in this demographic, despite companies investing significantly in design. The objective was to investigate the impact of these aesthetic dimensions on students' brand preferences for body spray fragrances. A descriptive survey design was employed to gather data used to test the three hypotheses formulated for the study. Using a structured questionnaire, the research gathers data from 396 respondents, with 285 valid responses analyzed using multiple regression. The findings reveal that all three dimensions—color, shape, and scent—have significant positive effects on consumer brand preference. Scent aesthetics showed the strongest effect on brand preference, followed by shape and color. Students indicated that aesthetically pleasing packaging and sensory elements (such as scent and shape) drive their brand preference. The study recommends that fragrance companies emphasize product design, particularly scent and shape, to align with consumer preferences. The study concludes that product aesthetics are crucial in shaping consumer preferences and recommends that marketers in the body spray industry invest in aesthetic design elements to enhance brand appeal and attract young consumers.

Keywords: product aesthetics, brand preference, product design, product shape

1. Introduction

In today's competitive marketplace, product differentiation based on traditional factors like price and quality has become increasingly challenging. Consequently, aesthetics has emerged as a significant differentiating factor (Simonson & Schmitt, 1997). Consumer responses to visual features such as shape, color, and general aesthetic appeal play a critical role in decision-making (Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2019). Recognizing the power of aesthetics, marketers have shifted their strategies, utilizing attractive designs to influence consumer behavior. Supermarket chains, for instance, display products in aesthetically appealing packages to increase their allure (Wu, Samper, Morales, & Fitzsimons, 2017).

The aesthetics of a product plays a significant role in shaping consumer preferences, especially in the body fragrance market. Three key dimensions—color, shape, and scent—contribute to the overall appeal of body sprays among young consumers. In body fragrance packaging, colors often signal certain qualities or emotions. For example, bright colors such as red and orange may convey energy or passion, while softer hues like pastel blue or pink can evoke calmness and freshness. Research shows that consumers often associate specific colors with particular scents, enhancing the overall fragrance experience even before the product is used (Silva & Mazzilli, 2014). The shape of a body spray bottle also plays a role in consumer preference. Unique or ergonomic designs create a tactile experience that complements the olfactory one. A sleek, modern shape can appeal to young consumers who associate such designs with trends, sophistication, and status (Jarsking Packaging 2023). Scent is the core of body fragrance appeal, but aesthetics also involves how the scent is released. Spray mechanisms, bottle caps, and droplet sizes can affect how the fragrance is perceived and worn, adding to the sensory experience (Schifferstein & Howell 2015).

Despite the growing body of literature on the impact of aesthetics on consumer behavior, there is limited research specifically exploring how product aesthetics influences the purchasing decisions of young consumers in the body

spray fragrance market. This gap is significant given the millions of dollars fragrance companies invest in product design and the importance of aesthetics in the evaluation and differentiation of products (Toufani, 2015; Marisha & Gnanaprakash, 2023). Therefore, understanding the effect of aesthetics on consumer preferences for body spray fragrances is critical for marketers aiming to target young consumers effectively. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the role of product aesthetics in shaping consumer preferences for body spray fragrances among young consumers, with a particular focus on the interplay between color, shape, and scent. Hence, the specific objective of the study is to investigate the effect of the colour, product shape, and scent aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Product Design

Product design is a critical element in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchasing decisions. It is not only a fundamental part of the marketing mix but also the first point of contact for consumers, often creating a lasting impression of the product (Kumar & Garg, 2010). At its core, product design involves the careful combination of a product's individual features—such as shape, color, and material—with broader, holistic dimensions like style, functionality, and symbolism (Bloch, 2011; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). These elements together create a product's overall identity, influencing both its practical use and emotional appeal.

The aesthetic dimension of product design plays a crucial role in how consumers perceive and relate to a product. As Veryzer (1995) notes, aesthetics is key to product identification and usability, affecting how consumers interact with and experience the product. Beyond aesthetics, product design also drives functionality and symbolic meaning, making it a multidimensional concept that enhances consumer engagement on multiple levels (Homburg, Schwemmler, & Kuehnl, 2015). Moreover, product design has the potential to create emotional value for consumers. By crafting products that not only fulfil functional needs but also evoke positive emotional responses, companies can foster long-term relational outcomes such as loyalty and brand commitment (Homburg et al., 2015). Effective product design serves as a powerful tool for both functional differentiation and emotional value creation. It adds value by enhancing the user experience, creating competitive advantage, and fostering deeper consumer connections that drive long-term success. Research by Bertagnolli (2022) suggests that consumer aesthetic experiences in product design can further influence product perception and purchase intention.

2.2 Product Aesthetics

Product aesthetics, which encompass elements such as color, shape, and design, are pivotal in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. According to Blijlevens et al. (2012), aesthetic appeal arises from certain design properties that engage consumers both affectively and cognitively, as well as through sensory experiences like involuntary physical responses (Wagner, 1999). These aesthetic features can significantly contribute to a product's market success, allowing companies to leverage higher pricing strategies (Kristensen et al., 2012) and ultimately boosting profitability.

Aesthetic experiences in consumer products extend beyond art and nature, influencing everyday consumption behaviors like purchasing or recycling (Patrick & Hagtvædt, 2019). Aesthetically appealing products are often perceived as special or beautiful, sparking emotional and cognitive engagement. However, consumers' bias toward aesthetically beautiful products may sometimes override rational decision-making (Wu et al., 2017). Interestingly, while enhanced aesthetics can elevate pre-purchase evaluations, they may reduce consumption enjoyment. Consumers may hesitate to use highly aesthetic products due to concerns about "destroying" the effort and beauty perceived in their design (Wu et al., 2017).

Ultimately, aesthetics can significantly influence how consumers appraise and engage with products, whether through perceived beauty or emotional responses. This interplay of aesthetics with both functional and emotional responses highlights its importance in product design and marketing strategies.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Products Aesthetics

Shape

The shape of a product is a critical dimension of aesthetics, significantly influencing consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. It conveys attributes like luxury, attractiveness, and harmony, especially in products such as smartphones (Han et al., 2004). As a distinguishing element, product shape enhances customer satisfaction and plays a crucial role in differentiating products from competitors (Swilley, 2012).

Product shape is vital in perfume fragrance marketing as it influences consumer perception and purchasing decisions. Firstly, the shape of the perfume bottle contributes to the product's visual appeal, helping it stand out and establish brand identity. Unique bottle designs can capture consumer attention and enhance product

differentiation. Secondly, the shape of the bottle creates emotional connections with consumers, evoking specific feelings such as sophistication or boldness based on design elements (Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2021). Finally, it plays a key role in market positioning by aligning with the brand's target audience and the desired image, whether it is luxury or mass-market appeal.

Research shows that certain shapes can evoke specific associations. For example, circular shapes often suggest softness, while angular ones convey hardness, which can influence how consumers perceive the product and the brand (Jiang et al., 2016). The shape of packaging also affects brand personality, with symmetrical designs associated with stability and asymmetrical ones with excitement (Bajaj & Bond, 2017).

Color

Color is a critical dimension of product aesthetics, playing a significant role in influencing consumer behavior and perception. Alongside shape, color is one of the most noticeable elements that contribute to a product's visual appeal. Research has shown that color can impact consumer responses in various contexts, from website design to advertising (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). For instance, saturated colors can increase attention and arousal, influencing consumers' willingness to pay based on their perception of product size or usage goals (Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2017).

The psychological effects of color are well-documented. For example, the color red is linked to aggression, affecting price negotiations and auction behavior (Bagchi & Cheema, 2013). Color can also influence perceptions of quality, with studies showing that male consumers perceive greater savings when prices are displayed in red (Puccinelli et al., 2013). High-chroma colors stimulate excitement, while lighter tones evoke relaxation, making color a strategic tool in marketing (Gorn et al., 1997). Additionally, specific colors like blue are universally associated with high-quality products, although cultural variations in color meaning, such as with purple, must be considered (Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014). Color also affects product packaging and design. As a communication tool, it conveys cues about product quality and functionality, shaping initial consumer expectations and overall experience (Spence & Velasco, 2018).

In perfume marketing, color is crucial for conveying the essence of a fragrance and evoking emotional responses. It helps communicate scent characteristics: fresh scents use vibrant colors like green or yellow, while floral fragrances favor soft pinks, and warm, spicy scents use deep reds or browns. Color also targets specific demographics, with feminine scents often in soft hues and masculine ones in darker tones. It strengthens brand identity, aids in product differentiation, and signals luxury when using elegant colors like gold or black. Ultimately, color enhances the emotional and sensory appeal of a perfume, influencing consumer choice.

Scent

Scent is a critical dimension of product aesthetics, especially for perfumes, as it connects deeply with consumers' emotions, identities, and behaviors. Fragrances can evoke strong psychological responses, making individuals feel good, fresh, or even sensual, as they perceive the scent as part of their personal identity (Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2021). Unlike other senses, scent is directly linked to the limbic system, which governs emotions and memory. This connection allows fragrances to trigger spontaneous emotions and transport individuals to pleasant memories or experiences.

The impact of scent extends beyond immediate sensory perception—it shapes consumers' moods, influences their behavior, and can even improve their wellbeing. In retail environments, a well-chosen fragrance can create a positive atmosphere, encouraging customers to stay longer and return. Scent's powerful emotional appeal also contributes to brand identity, enhancing customer loyalty by linking positive experiences to a product or brand. Moreover, perfumes offer more than functionality. They provide emotional benefits, and consumers often select fragrances based on how well they align with their personal preferences, whether fresh, floral, fruity, or sweet (Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2021). Ultimately, scent serves as a "gateway to the soul," influencing both product perception and consumer behavior at a deeply emotional level.

2.3 Brand preference

Brand preference refers to a consumer's tendency to consistently choose one brand over others within the same product category. This preference is shaped by cognitive beliefs and emotional experiences, as outlined by Ebrahim et al. (2016), who links it to the Fishbein Model of Attitude. According to this model, brand preference results from consumers' mental evaluations of a brand's attributes. Psychological theories suggest that preference is learned through experience and information processing. Howard and Sheth (1969) argue that brand preference

is influenced by how consumers mentally process brand stimuli, while Bettman, Capon, & Lutz (1975) emphasize the central role of cognitive structures in shaping attitudes, preferences, and choices.

This transition from cognitive perception to purchase intention forms the core of brand preference. Bagozzi (1982) notes that brand preference links internal information processing with external consumer choices. Key factors influencing brand preference include product quality, brand image, emotional connections, and customer satisfaction. Positive experiences with a brand reinforce consumer loyalty and reduce the likelihood of switching to competitors. As a result, brand preference not only drives individual purchase decisions but also contributes to long-term market share and brand success. Developing strong brand preference is essential for building customer loyalty and maintaining a competitive edge.

2.4 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This research is anchored on the Gestalt theory. Gestalt theory deals with how people perceive objects and postulates that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. That is, people perceive the unitary whole of an object (the so-called gestalt) rather than analyzing its separate constitutive elements (the parts). These types of perceptions are called holistic or gestalt processing on the gestalt level and atomistic processing on the parts level (Koffka, 2013). Gestalt theory helps clarify on which level product design should be measured: either on the atomistic level, to measure the design elements such as color and shape, or on the holistic level, to measure the design of the product through consumers' holistic perception of it. We chose the second option and measured product design through consumers' holistic perception because "one cannot visually recognize objects without perceiving the whole although one can still recognize objects without perceiving the parts" (Jia, Shiv, and Rao 2014, p. 343). This reasoning suggests that holistic processing is mandatory, whereas atomistic processing is optional. Thus, relating the measurement of a scale to the mandatory process is appropriate (Homburg et al., 2015).

2.4.1. Colour and Brand Preference

Colour plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions of perfume fragrances, acting as a visual representation of the scent and influencing purchasing decisions. Silva and Mazzilli (2020) explored the correlation between colour and scent, finding that companies use specific colours to represent fragrance families, while consumers associate lighter colours with softer scents. This alignment between packaging colour and perceived scent intensity can guide consumer expectations and enhance product appeal. Zellner et al. (2007) demonstrated that the colours chosen for fragrances are often influenced by perceptions of masculinity or femininity. For instance, consumers select different colours for male and female fragrances, highlighting the role of gender in scent-colour associations. Kim (2013) extended this idea, showing that consumers consistently match fragrance families with specific colour tones, and that the hue (warm or cool) and tone (light or dark) of a colour influence perceptions of the fragrance. Further, Porcherot et al. (2013) noted that while colour can influence emotional responses, its impact is secondary to the perfume itself. Their findings emphasized that colour-perfume congruency can enhance positive emotions, but the perfume's scent remains the primary driver of affective response. Schifferstein and Howell (2015) similarly found that while colour congruence may be appreciated, consumers primarily base purchasing decisions on their liking of the fragrance itself.

H₁: There is a positive and significant effect of the colour aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers.

2.4.2 Shape and Brand Preference

The role of shape as an aesthetic element in perfume design is vital for creating a unique brand identity and influencing consumer behavior. Chen, Chang, and Huang (2017) demonstrated that a well-designed perfume bottle shape not only helps the product stand out from competitors but also creates initial impressions that evoke emotional and aesthetic responses. Zhang, Feick, and Price (2006) explored how self-construal influences shape preferences, revealing that individuals with independent self-construals are drawn to angular shapes, which they associate with confrontation. Conversely, those with interdependent self-construals favor rounded shapes, linked to compromise. Sato and Oda (2013) revealed that consumers perceive beauty, pleasantness, and liking based more on shape than on color. Although their focus was on architecture, the findings are applicable to product design, showing that the shape of a structure (or product) is a key factor in how it is perceived aesthetically. Efer (2017) extended this discussion by examining the broader role of aesthetics, including shape, in product branding. The study emphasized that a product's shape, along with other elements such as color and typography, contributes to its overall brand image, influencing marketability and profitability.

H₂: There is a positive and significant effect of the product shape aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers.

2.4.3 Scent and Brand Preference

Scent, as a design aesthetic in the perfume industry, plays a critical role in shaping the perception and identity of fragrances. Numerous studies have explored various dimensions of scent and its relationship with consumer behavior, emotional response, and brand identity. Schilling et al. (2010) investigated the biochemical processes involved in body odors and how olfactory receptors in the human nose process scent stimuli. These insights emphasize the complexity of scent creation, both from a biological and chemical perspective, establishing a scientific basis for scent design. Barbosa et al. (2023) examined how visual cues (such as color and images) can complement verbal descriptions to evoke olfactory associations. Interviews with consumers from Brazil, Iran, and Portugal indicated that certain color-scent associations (e.g., light colors for fresh scents or darker colors for oriental fragrances) are consistent across cultures, which can help in designing more effective marketing strategies for e-commerce. Kovačević et al. (2022) confirmed that certain visual cues were strongly associated with specific scents. For instance, a lemon pattern evoked expectations of a fresh smell, while an image of a rose was linked to floral scents. Also, gender and age influence scent associations, with younger participants being more sensitive to design variations and associating abstract visuals with a wider range of smells.

H₃: There is a positive and significant effect of the scent aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers.

3. Research Method

3.1 Design and Sample

Descriptive research design was used in this study to understand the correlation between aesthetics and consumer preferences. A sample of 396 young consumers were drawn from students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State who shop online. The simple random sampling techniques was used to select them.

3.2 Measurement Instrument

Questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The questionnaire was designed in the Likert-type scale statements. The questionnaire comprised of two sections: Section A, to obtain personal information of the respondent and, Section B to obtain information on items related to the study objectives. The response options were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Indifferent (I), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The scores were weighted as follows (SA: 5), (A: 4), (I: 3), (D: 2), and (SD: 1) respectively. To ensure content validity of the instrument employed senior academic and Professors in the Faculty of Management Sciences helped to face validate the instrument while Cronbach's alpha was used to establish reliability following Hinton et al. (2004) four cut-off points for reliability, which includes excellent reliability (0.90 and above), high reliability (0.70-0.90), moderate reliability (0.50-0.70) and low reliability.

4. Results

The data generated from the survey was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics comprised the mean and standard deviation. The inferential statistics was performed using multiple regression analysis. Multiple Regression Analysis was used to determine the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables). The decision criteria is such that when p is less than 5%, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted and vice versa. From the 396 copies of questionnaires 72% were returned completed and valid. From the responses, 62 % were male while 38. % were female. 7 % were less than 18 years, 60 percent were between 18-23 years, while 21% were between 24-27 years of age and only 6% are above 27 years. 73% are single while 27% are married. The summary of the respondent's demographic is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Response	Frequency	%
Male	177	62
Female	108	38
Age		
< 18	37	13
18-23	171	60
24 - 27	60	21
27 and above	2	6
Marital	Frequency	%
Single	208	73
Married	77	27
Total	285	100

Source: field survey 2024.

4.1 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses formulated were tested using multiple regression analysis and the p-value was set at a 5% level ($p < 0.05$). In other words, we accept the alternate and reject the null when p is less than 0.05 and *vice versa*. Before testing the hypotheses, we tested for model fit and multi-collinearity as a prerequisite for multiple regression analysis. The ANOVA result showed that the overall model is a good fit ($F = 18.3$, $p < 0.001$). The Variance Inflation Factor was all below the threshold of 3. Which suggests that the data is free from multi-collinearity problems. Also, the model summary result shows that the r -square is 43% and the adjusted r -square is 41%. All the measures have a reliability score above 0.70. All the analysis was performed with the aid of the computer software, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 25.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2		
1	.658 ^a	.432	.408	2.62369	.432	18.088	4	95	.000	1.745

a. Predictors: (Constant), CAE, SAE, SCAE

b. Dependent Variable: BP

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	498.045	4	124.511	18.088	.000 ^b
	Residual	653.955	95	6.884		
	Total	1152.000	99			

a. Predictors: (Constant), CAE, SAE, SCAE

b. Dependent Variable: BP

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance VIF
1	(Constant)	-3.472	2.797		-1.241	.218	
	Shape	.405	.108	.317	3.757	.000	.838 1.193
	Scent	.741	.147	.429	5.028	.000	.820 1.219
	Color	.188	.094	.155	1.997	.049	.987 1.014

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

In the first hypothesis, positive and significant effect of the colour aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers was tested. The result found support for H1. Colour aesthetics has a positive and significant effect on brand preference ($\beta = .74$, $t = 5.02$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, consumers care about the colour of body spray perfume, prefers colours that are aesthetically pleasing and would buy body spray fragrance based on the colours they like. Hypothesis 2 predicted that there is a positive and significant effect of the product shape aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers. The result showed a significant positive effect of product shape aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers ($\beta = .45$, $t = 3.76$, $p < .05$). Thus, the result support the H2. The p value is less than 0.05 so the null is rejected and the alternate accepted. Therefore, we conclude that there is a positive significant effect product shape aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers. In other words, when buying Perfume fragrances, I pay attention to the shape. The shape of Perfume Packaging should be pleasing to the eye. Third, according to H3 there is a positive and significant effect of the scent aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers. The p value is less than 0.05 so the null is rejected and the alternate accepted. Therefore, there positive, and significant effect of scent aesthetics on consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers. ($\beta = .71$, $t = 5.03$, $p < .005$). In conclusion, scent aesthetics predicts consumer brand preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers. Therefore, consumers buy body spray fragrance that is consistent with their personality, engages sense of smell when buying perfume fragrance, and search for perfume fragrance mainly by scents.

5. Conclusion

The study on the effect of product aesthetics on consumer preference for body spray fragrance among young consumers at UNIZIK demonstrates that aesthetics play a significant role in shaping brand preferences. Specifically, color, shape, and scent aesthetics have a positive and significant effect on consumer choices. The findings reveal that scent aesthetics, in particular, is the strongest predictor of brand preference, emphasizing its central role in driving consumer engagement and purchase decisions. The study confirms that consumers are highly influenced by the visual and sensory appeal of products, including the color and shape of the packaging, but ultimately, scent remains the most important factor in determining their preferences. This highlights the need for fragrance companies to focus not only on the sensory experience of the product but also on its visual presentation to appeal to young consumers effectively.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Marketers of fragrance companies should focus on creating scents that resonate deeply with their target audience, ensuring that each fragrance aligns with consumers' emotional preferences and personal identities. Conduct consumer research to identify popular scent profiles and use this data to guide fragrance creation.
2. Body Fragrance marketers should also invest in the development of visually appealing packaging. The shape of the bottle should be both functional and aesthetically pleasing, with designs that are modern, sleek, and attractive to young consumers. Collaborate with design experts to create ergonomic and stylish packaging that stands out on store shelves.
3. Marketers of body fragrance should use color schemes that evoke the desired emotional response from consumers. For example, use vibrant colors for energetic and bold fragrances, and softer tones for calming and fresh scents. Ensure that the color of the packaging reflects the scent inside to enhance product perception and appeal.
4. Finally, before launching new products, conduct aesthetic testing with focus groups to assess the impact of design elements such as color, shape, and scent. Gather feedback to fine-tune packaging and scent to better align with consumer preferences. They should highlight the aesthetic features of your products in promotional materials, emphasizing the unique scent, color, and packaging design. Create visually appealing advertisements that align with the brand's identity and resonate with young consumers.

6. Suggestion for further studies

The suggestion for further studies opens the door for richer, more comprehensive research into product aesthetics and consumer behavior. First, future studies could involve a more diverse population in terms of age, occupation, and geographic location to improve the generalizability of the findings. Second, future research could incorporate additional aesthetic elements such as texture, packaging materials, or even brand name appeal, to provide a more holistic view of consumer preferences. Third, conducting a longitudinal study could help understand how aesthetic preferences change over time, especially with evolving market trends and shifting consumer behaviors. Finally, comparative studies across different cultures and regions could reveal how cultural differences affect aesthetic preferences, particularly for fragrances.

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