3rd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance (WCPCG-2012)

Liquorice or Black? Food or Traditional Labelling and Assessment of Aesthetic Self-concepts

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Abstract

This study explored the effects of food or traditional labelling on assessment of hair colour, self-image satisfaction, mental openness, and Aesthetic Self in customers in hairdressing salons. We used the Aesthetic Image Questionnaire, the sub-scale of Mental Openness, the Semantic Differential Technique for Actual and Future Aesthetic Self and for evaluation of the hair colour with traditional vs. food label. Results indicated that the greater was the importance assigned to the aesthetic appreciations and to be always fashionable; the lower was the openness to culture. The more customers positively connoted their aesthetic image in the future, the more they were mentally open. They considered more positively food-labeled hair colour than the traditionally labeled one. The more customers were satisfied with their aesthetic image, the more positive was the evaluation of hair colour with food labels; the more customers positively valued Actual and Future Self, the more positive was the representation of hair colour with food labels.

1. Introduction

The psycho-social research, applied to multisensory marketing (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006) and focused on the influence of the presence of smells and colours in a product, that recall, for example, fruits, suggests that multi-sensory stimuli influence the customer's choices and preferences (see Chan & Kane-Martinelli, 1997; Zampini et al., 2007; Churchill et al., 2009) more so than what happens to products labelled in the traditional way. In this perspective, individuals direct their purchasing behaviour not only on the basis of the logic centred on "need-purchase-benefit", but also on the emotional experience that is evoked and, therefore, realized through the modality of different presentation of products. In sensory experience, according to Schmitt (1999), five different Strategic Experiential Modules are activated: 1) "sense experience", which involves the sensory perception of customer (sight, hearing, touch, and smell), generating in the user a strong impression; 2) "feel experience", concerning inner emotions and feelings activated in the customer; 3) "think experience", i.e. the cognitive and creative experiences constituting a kind of problem solving experimentation; 4) "act experience", i.e. experiences involving the whole subject (mind and body), pushing him/her to act differently from his/her lifestyle and to try new experiences to

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improve the quality of life; 5) "relate experience", i.e. experiences through which the customers get in touch with the Self-concept, other people and social context.

The model of experiential marketing proposed by Schmitt (1999) can be considered the framework of current exploratory survey in relation to modules of "sense experience" and "relate experience". Regarding the function carried out by the first module, it is possible to understand why the choice of a product may be influenced by the type of label: in fact, as previously noted, the use of colors consistent with customers' expectations with respect to the product (Fenko et al., 2009) and familiar symbols can affect, for example, on the perception of "healthiness" of a food product (Borgmeier & Westenhoefer, 2009). Thus, the choice of a specific beauty product may be influenced not only by its qualitative characteristics but also by sensory stimulation in the label that characterizes the product. Therefore, it is possible to think that the addition of references to food (i.e., shampoo with honey, body cream with blueberries) can move customers toward preferential choices and purchase of product.

Concerning the "relate experience" module, it is possible to hypothesize the existence of relationships among this module and the representation of Actual and Future Self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), in the sense that self-image of customers influence choices and preferences of product and mental openness, that is one of the five personality traits of Big Five Factor Model (Caprara, Barbaranelli & Borgogni, 1993) which seems to be typical of individuals who result more open to new experiences (called "openness to experience") and novelty (called "openness to culture"). Individuals who are strongly characterized by these dimensions present a self-concept marked by the interest toward new experiences, research of contact with others, openness to change and, therefore, desire to know cultures, lifestyles, and habits of other people.

Little empirical evidences about the impact of food or traditional labelling on assessment of hair colour, self-image satisfaction, and mental openness were found and this constituted the rationale for the present study in Italian context.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the present study, carried out with a group of customers recruited from hairdressing salons, was focused on: a) the exploration of the degree of satisfaction for the self-image and the reasons supporting the aesthetic choices; b) the investigation of representation of Actual and Future Aesthetic Self; c) the analysis of mental openness in terms of openness to new experiences and culture; d) the examination about the impact of semantic label linked to food, used for the definition of the hair colour (i.e. liquorice) in opposition to traditional one (i.e. black), on the representation of the product.

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of a group of 120 customers, all women aged 20-60 years, divided in 36 housewives (30%), 58 employees (48,3%), and 26 freelancers (21,7%). Participants were recruited from three hairdressing salons located in different areas in the city of Catania (Sicily), Italy. The frequency of services required by customers was articulated as follows: 10 customers (8,3%) went to hairdressing salons two times a week, 33 customers (27,5%) once a week, 62 customers (51,7%) once or twice a month, and 15 customers (12,5%) from two to three times in one year.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographic information. All participants completed background questions related to age, profession, and frequency of services.

2.2.2. Aesthetic Image Questionnaire. It is a questionnaire useful to measure the degree of satisfaction for one's own aesthetic image and the importance attributed to the reasons related to attention to the aesthetic aspects ($\alpha =.$ 72). Participants answered to each of six items on a scale ranging from 1 (=*strongly disagree*) to 7 (=*strongly*

agree): we asked the customers to indicate how much they considered important: item1) to receive aesthetic appreciations by the others; item2) to feel always "fashionable"; item3) to hide the signs of passing time; item4) to care about aesthetic appearance on special occasions and anniversaries; item5) to be always tidy. High mean scores express high levels of attention to aesthetic image.

2.2.3. Semantic Differential Technique for Aesthetic Self Representation (Osgood et al., 1957). It is a measure consisting of 36 pairs of bipolar adjectives used for the exploration of subjective representation of Actual ("As I consider my actual aesthetic image") and Future Aesthetic Self ("As I think my aesthetic image will be in future") (respectively, α =.84, and .83).

2.2.4. Semantic Differential Technique for Hair Colour (Osgood et al., 1957). It is composed by 11 pairs of bipolar adjectives referred to the multi-sensory characteristics associated with a commercial product (i.e., delicious-disgusting, bitter-sweet, rough-smooth, pleasant-unpleasant), used to measure subjective evaluation of the hair colour. Eight strands of hair were employed into four pairs each of which were constituted by two identical strands of hair but showed to customers with different labels: the first with a "traditional label" (α =. 60) and the second with "food label" (α =. 71), that evoked a multi-sensory stimulation (i.e., black *vs.* liquorice, red *vs.* cherry, brown *vs.* marron glacé, blonde *vs.* honey). High mean scores expressed a positive representation of hair colour in relation to each label (traditional vs. food).

2.2.5. Mental Openness (Caprara et al., 2008). It is a part of *Big Five Questionnaire for Adults*, consisting of 24 statements with 5-point scale, useful to analyze mental openness trait and the two sub-dimensions of openness to experience and openness to culture.

2.3. Data analyses

The analysis of the statistical significance of results was carried out using the SPSS 15 with the following tests: One Way ANOVA, t for paired samples, and Pearson's bivariate correlations.

3. Results

3.1. Attitudes toward aesthetic image: degree of satisfaction and reasons of aesthetic choices

Participants showed a good degree of general satisfaction for their own aesthetic image (M = 5.46, sd = 1.3), without significant differences for the type of profession and frequency of services requested by customers. For the specific reasons toward the aesthetic care ($F_{(4,116)}$= 46.91, $p < .001$), customers considered more important: 1) to "be always tidy" (M = 6.56, sd = .82); 2) to "care about aesthetic appearance on special occasions and anniversaries" (M = 6.06, sd = 1.4); 3) to "receive aesthetic appreciations by the others" (M = 5.12, sd = 1.8), with significant differences for age ($F_{(3,116)}$ = 4.94, $p = .003$), in the sense that the younger customers (20-30 yrs: M = 5.76, sd = 1.4) considered particularly important to be appreciated than the others; 4) to "feel always fashionable" (M = 5.00, sd = 1.8) with significant differences for age ($F_{(3,116)}$ = 4.89, $p = .003$), that is the younger customers (20-30 yrs: M = 5.59, sd = 1.6) valued more important to be fashionable than the others; 5) to "hide the signs of passing time" (M = 4.57, sd= 2.0): this last finding was influenced by age ($F_{(3,116)}$ = 4.20, $p = .007$), because the older customers (50-60 yrs: M = 5.33, sd = 1.8) considered very important to cover the signs of time compared to the remaining customers.

3.2. Actual and Future Aesthetic Self and degree of satisfaction

Customers expressed a positive representation of Aesthetic Self, attributing to Future Self, with statistically significant differences ($t_{(119)}$= -5.48, $p <.001$), higher means (M = 5.78, sd = .78) than those of Actual Self (M = 5.43, sd = .68). Future Aesthetic Self was affected by the customers age ($F_{(3,116)}$ = 3.30, $p = .023$), because with the increasing of age the positive evaluation referred to one's own aesthetic image projected to the future decreased.

Significant positive relations were found among the degree of general satisfaction for one's own aesthetic image, the reasons of aesthetic choices, and the Actual and Future Self representation. This result meant that the more the customers were satisfied with their aesthetic image, the more positive was the self-representation in the present ($r = .36$, $p < .001$) and in the future ($r = .26$, $p = .005$); in particular, the more the customers considered important to be always "fashionable" and to "care about aesthetic appearance on special occasions and anniversaries", the more positive were the Actual (respectively, $r = .22$, $p = .016$; $r = .27$, $p = .003$) and the Future Self representations ($r = .28$, $p = .002$).

3.3. Mental openness: relation with the reasons of aesthetic choice and dimensions of Self

The sample obtained means on mental openness equal to $M = 44.6$ ($sd = 10.5$) and openness to experience and culture, respectively, equal to $M = 45.4$ ($sd = 9.3$) and $M = 45.6$ ($sd = 11.6$), with noticeable differences only for age: with regard to the "openness to experience" ($F_{(3,116)} = 3.10$, $p = .029$), the younger customers obtained higher means (20-30 yrs: $M = 47.7$, $sd = 8.3$) compared to the older (50-60 yrs: $M = 42.9$, $sd = 8.1$); the opposite was in relation to the "openness to culture" ($F_{(3,116)} = 3.47$, $p = .019$) in which the older customers obtained higher means ($M = 50.1$, $sd = 11.5$) than the younger ($M = 42.4$, $sd = 12.6$).

Referring to the degree of satisfaction for aesthetic image and the reasons of aesthetic choice, it was possible to note that the greater the importance assigned by customers to the aesthetic appreciations by the others and to be always fashionable, the lower the interest for cultural information (respectively, $r = -.20$, $p = .030$; $r = -.21$, $p = .02$).

From linear correlation analysis among representation of Actual and Future Aesthetic Self, mental openness, and sub-dimensions, the more customers positively connoted their aesthetic image projected in the future, the more they were mentally open ($r = .21$, $p = .024$) and, in particular, to new experiences and novelty ($r = .20$, $p = .027$).

3.4. Effect of product label

The analysis of the evaluation referred to hair colour presented with traditional and food semantic labels indicated that the latter was significantly higher than the first ($t_{(119)} = -2.84$, $p = .001$), in the sense that customers considered more positively the colour defined by food labels ($M = 5.04$, $sd = .81$) compared to traditional labels ($M = 4.81$, $sd = .66$). In particular, the colour with food label was considered as more dynamic ($t_{(119)} = -3.46$, $p = .001$), deeper ($t_{(119)} = -2.09$, $p = .04$), more innovative ($t_{(119)} = -6.48$, $p < .001$), and rougher ($t_{(119)} = 2.32$, $p = .022$) than traditional one.

Significant positive relations between general satisfaction and food labels ($r = .25$, $p = .006$) were found; in fact, the more the customers were satisfied with their aesthetic image, the more positive was the evaluation of hair colours marked by labels that evoked multi-sensory stimuli.

About the linear correlation between representation of Actual and Future Aesthetic Self and typology of hair colour labels (traditional *vs.* food), the more the customers positively valued Actual ($r = .28$, $p = .002$) and Future Self ($r = .27$, $p = .003$), the more positively considered was the representation of the colour defined by food labels. No statistically significant differences in relation to the socio-demographic variables were observed.

4. Conclusion

This survey permitted to note that interviewed customers were satisfied with their aesthetic image and indicated as reasons to care about their aesthetic image overall the importance to be tidy, also on anniversaries' occasions, followed by the pleasure to receive appreciations by the others and to feel always fashionable (mainly, for the youngest customers). Hiding the signs of passing time constituted, instead, a less important reason, more typically reported by customers from 50 to 60 years old. These results could be explained on the basis of the "customer satisfaction", according to which the more the customers tested the satisfaction of own needs and expectations connected to the care of aesthetic image, the more they felt a general condition of subjective and relational well-being.

In relation to Actual and Future Aesthetic Self, findings indicated that the customers expressed a more positive representation of self-image projected in the future than that in the present, even though this datum was significantly

higher in the youngest customers who presumably have the possibility of self-changing and self-improvement chronologically superior to that of the oldest customers. The quality of Selves was linked to degree of satisfaction for one's own aesthetic image: in fact, the more the customers were satisfied the more they represented positively themselves in the present and future, and vice versa, confirming the relevance of "relate experience" hypothesized by Schmitt (1999).

With reference to openness to new experiences and change, the youngest customers were more open to novelty and to possibility of innovation, whilst the oldest ones were characterized by cultural interests. In addition, the more positive was representation of future aesthetic image, the more the customers were mentally open to new experiences and novelty, and vice versa. To verify the impact of food label in opposition to the traditional one on the representation of hair colour, we found that the evaluation of hair strands' colour (identical but showed to customers with different labels) was affected by the type of used label: in fact, customers assessed more positively the colour of hair with food labels (i.e., cherry) than the one with traditional labels (i.e., red), with characteristics mainly linked to four of the five brand personality dimensions reported by Aaker (1997): innovative trait for dimension of "competence", dynamic trait for "excitement", deep trait for "sophistication", and rough trait for "ruggedness". This meant that the subjective judgement expressed toward a product could be influenced by experiential stimulation activated by labelling, in terms of "sense experience" according the Schmitt model (1999).

Future researches will be carried out to deepen the impact of multi-sensory labels and the relation of the same with dimensions of Self, traits of personality, and feeling of subjective well-being of clients in other fields of marketing, such as the clothing, the furniture, etc., in Italian context. This address of research could allow a psycho-social reading of choosing behaviour of a product based on subjective-relational factors and not just on environmental elements, such as type of lighting and presence of olfactory stimuli, as noticed in studies realized in other contexts by Baker et al. (1992) and Sprangerberg et al. (1996). In addition, scholars could explore the relations between Self-concepts (in terms of Actual, Ideal, Social, and Future Aesthetic Selves) and food-labeled product and brand preferences, according to Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982, 1986), hypothesizing that the more similar the perceived brand image is to one's own self-concept, the more likely individual is to prefer that brand.

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