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Document Version

Final published version

Citation (APA)

Favier, M., Celhay, F., Pantin-Sohier, G., & Magnier, L. (2025). When more is more: How maximalist packaging and ornament type shape brand perceptions. *Journal of Business Research*, 201, Article 115674. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115674>

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When more is more: How maximalist packaging and ornament type shape brand perceptions

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Packaging
Graphic design
Visual branding
Ornamental pattern
Minimalism
Maximalism
Art history

ABSTRACT

The visual appearance of product packaging plays a key role in brand differentiation and communication. This article examines the branding implications of maximalist versus minimalist packaging styles and the influence of organic versus geometric ornamental patterns in maximalist designs. Based on art history literature, we develop hypotheses and test them across seven studies ($N = 1,561$). Results show that consumers associate maximalist packaging with a cheerful brand identity and minimalist packaging with a serious one. As a result, attitudes toward brands with a cheerful identity are enhanced through perceived congruency when they adopt maximalist packaging. Additionally, we find that organic patterns reinforce perceptions of brand traditionality, while geometric patterns signal modernity. Thus, when a traditional brand uses organic patterns in maximalist packaging, perceived congruency strengthens, which subsequently enhances brand attitude.

1. Introduction

On the shelves, brands only have about seven seconds to create a positive impression before consumers shift to alternative options (Shukla et al., 2022). One of the most crucial elements to that end is the package design. Package design is defined as the various elements chosen and blended into a holistic design to communicate specific brand impressions to consumers and differentiate the brands (Nickel et al., 2020; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Therefore, when designing a product's packaging, brand managers and designers must select design elements to create a style that aligns with the brand's identity (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). One critical decision involves deciding between using a minimalist or a maximalist style. Minimalist style use as few elements as possible, no ornaments, and composition grids structured exclusively by negative space (Pracejus et al., 2006; To & Patrick, 2017; Ton et al., 2023) whereas maximalist style is characterized by richly decorated compositions, structured by elaborate frames, flourishes, or friezes, where negative spaces are filled with ornamental patterns (Anderson et al., 2022; To & Patrick, 2017; Wilson & Bellezza, 2022). For instance, brands such as Aesop, Avril and l'Infuseur are known for their minimalist packaging design while Amika, Soap Folk and Kusmi tea are

known for their maximalist packaging design.

Although the graphic design of packaging is known to greatly influence brand perceptions, the existing marketing literature provides scant guidance to help managers decide which of the minimalist or maximalist style would best fit their brand. While minimalism has recently received increased attention in the marketing literature (Chen et al., 2024; Favier et al., 2019; Hagen et al., 2021; Pracejus et al., 2006; Ton et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Wilson & Bellezza, 2022), its stylistic opposite, maximalism, is seldom mentioned. Prior related research has mainly considered the impact of design complexity on consumer arousal, processing fluency, and liking (Althuizen, 2021; Baek et al., 2023; Chen, Ponomarenko, et al., 2024; Cox & Cox, 2002; Landwehr et al., 2011). While several studies have explored some of the qualitative brand impressions that simplicity in design is likely to elicit in the consumer's mind (Pracejus et al., 2006; Ton et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Wilson & Bellezza, 2022), few have undertaken a similar investigation for complexity. Notable exceptions are the works of To and Patrick (2017), Pleyers (2024) and Min et al. (2025) which explored whether complex versus simple designs are more suitable to elicit perceptions of luxury, prestige, or higher production cost. Finally, although it has been explained that maximalism is characterized by ornamental

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115674>

Received 11 July 2024; Received in revised form 26 August 2025; Accepted 26 August 2025

Available online 13 September 2025

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patterns, no prior research has discussed the different types of ornamental patterns that can be used in maximalist packaging designs and the diverse brand impressions that these patterns are likely to elicit. For instance, the organic ornaments featured on Lindemans Brewery's beer packaging differ substantially from the geometric patterns used by Carlsberg on its Jacobsen beer range, suggesting that pattern type may be a crucial design choice. This research aims to address this gap by investigating four questions related to visual branding and package design: (1) How does a maximalist style (characterized by ornamental patterns), compared to a minimalist style (characterized by the absence of ornamental patterns), affect brand perception? (2) Which brands should benefit from using a maximalist (vs. minimalist) package style? (3) For brands that use a maximalist package style, how is brand perception likely to differ depending on the type of ornamental pattern their package features? (4) Which brands would benefit from using one type of ornamental pattern over another?

To address these questions, we draw on the literature in both consumer behavior and art history, aligning with the recommended approach of marketing researchers such as Schroeder (2005), Pracejus et al. (2006) or Sample et al. (2024). Schroeder (2005) contends that marketers should refer to the categories defined by art historians to classify styles of brand visual expression and to analyze the brand impressions associated with these styles. Similarly, Pracejus et al. (2006) leverage the art history literature to explore the brand impressions that minimalist style conveys in advertising. Finally, Sample et al. (2024) build on century-old design theories to identify relevant dimensions for design assessment.

Given that both minimalist and maximalist styles trace their origins to artistic movements, we find this approach equally pertinent in anticipating the brand impressions that minimalist versus maximalist styles of packages are likely to convey. Furthermore, it enables us to categorize the various types of ornamental patterns that maximalist packages might incorporate and, in turn, anticipate the brand impressions associated with these different types.

From our comprehensive literature review, we derive a set of hypotheses, which we empirically test across a series of seven studies. Finally, we delve into the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings in the final discussion section.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Ornamental patterns matter

In marketing, it is widely acknowledged that packaging serves as a narrative vehicle (Kniazeva & Belk, 2010) that effectively communicates specific brand impressions to consumers, notably through its visual appearance (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Nickel et al., 2020; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Sundar & Noseworthy, 2014; Van Rompay et al., 2014). As a result, packaging plays a pivotal role as a marketing tool, significantly influencing consumer perceptions, experiences, and behaviors (Petit et al., 2020; Sundar et al., 2020).

The visual appearance of packaging encompasses both structural elements (size, shape, texture, transparency of materials) and graphic elements (colors, fonts, abstract shapes, images) (Underwood, 2003). A significant body of research has demonstrated that graphic elements such as color (Mead & Richerson, 2018), typography (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023), and images (Van Rompay et al., 2014) have a profound influence on consumer brand perceptions. Although the marketing literature mentions that a design can be ornamented (Henderson et al., 2004; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Pecot et al., 2022), few studies have focused on the question of ornamentation. Thus, to our knowledge, there are no works proposing a definition of what an ornament is, a classification of the different forms of ornaments, or discussing the possible implications of using ornaments in terms of brand design.

The relative scarcity of research on ornaments in the marketing literature likely stems from the common perception, rooted in everyday

language, that ornaments are defined by their non-utilitarian and purely aesthetic aspects (Dresser, 1977; Fury, 2015). In accordance with this perspective, the *Oxford Dictionary* defines an ornament as “a thing used or serving to make something look more attractive but usually having no practical purpose” (Oxford Dictionary, 2012). Similarly, in the *Cambridge Dictionary*, it is “an object that is decorative rather than useful” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2013).

Yet, authors from various fields offer a different perspective, proposing that ornamentation serves a communicative function similar to other well-studied design elements like color or typography (Criticos, 2004; Glăveanu, 2014; Pecot et al., 2022; Trilling, 2001, 2003). Our research aligns with this perspective and aims to enhance our understanding of the communicative function of ornamentation in package design, with a specific focus on the use of ornamental patterns.

Ornamental patterns are defined as a special type of ornament, comprising the repetition of one or more graphic shapes (i.e., motifs) arranged according to a grid to cover a surface (Hamlin, 1916; Stewart, 2015; Trilling, 2003). Prior literature indicates that the presence of ornamental patterns characterizes a maximalist style of packaging, whereas their absence characterizes a minimalist style of packaging (Anderson et al., 2022; To & Patrick, 2017). Naturally, the presence (vs. absence) of ornamental patterns in a maximalist (vs. minimalist) packaging style contributes to achieving a higher level of visual complexity. However, the level of complexity attained depends on the characteristics of the specific ornamental pattern used. Pieters et al. (2010) propose that the visual complexity of an advertisement (and, by extension, a packaging) depends on six variables. Ornamental patterns can achieve differing levels of visual complexity depending on their characteristics across these six dimensions:

1. Quantity of objects: Ornamental patterns can vary in the number of elements they feature, depending on the size of repeated motifs and the amount of negative space between them.
2. Irregularity of objects: Ornamental patterns can vary in irregularity, depending on whether the motifs are regular or highly irregular in shape.
3. Dissimilarity of objects: Ornamental patterns can vary in dissimilarity, depending on whether they repeat a single motif or multiple motifs.
4. Details of objects: Ornamental patterns can vary in the level of detail, depending on whether the motifs are simple or highly detailed.
5. Asymmetry of object arrangement: Ornamental patterns can vary in asymmetry, depending on whether the motifs are arranged symmetrically or asymmetrically within the grid.
6. Irregularity of object arrangement: Ornamental patterns can vary in irregularity, depending on whether the motifs are arranged according to a regular or irregular grid.

Among the wide variety of ornamental patterns that can be used, art historians distinguish two major opposing groups (Hamlin, 1916; Meyer, 1957; Riegl, 2015). First, there are “organic patterns,” which are composed of curved, nature-inspired shapes. Second, there are “geometric patterns,” which are composed of angular, synthetic-looking shapes.

While organic patterns generally tend to be visually more complex than geometric ones due to their frequent use of irregular and dissimilar motifs, geometric patterns can also achieve high levels of complexity. This occurs when geometric patterns incorporate irregular and dissimilar motifs, as well as asymmetric and irregular arrangements. Thus, it is possible to achieve similar levels of visual complexity with both types of patterns.

Building on Meyer's theory of meaning (L. B. Meyer, 1956), marketing literature has established that aesthetic stimuli such as music (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2005) or color (Labrecque & Milne, 2012) convey two types of meanings: embodied and referential. While embodied meanings are intrinsic to the stimuli and linked to their physical

attributes, referential meanings are cultural associations learned through repeated exposure (Melzner & Raghubir, 2023). In this research, we consider ornamental patterns as an aesthetic stimulus that, like color or music, may convey both embodied and referential meanings. We focus on the referential ones and, in the following sections, delve into art history literature to investigate the meanings that have been associated with the presence or absence of ornamental patterns, the corresponding maximalist or minimalist styles, and the organic versus geometric types of patterns. We subsequently build on this literature to formulate hypotheses about the brand impressions likely to be produced by maximalist versus minimalist package styles.

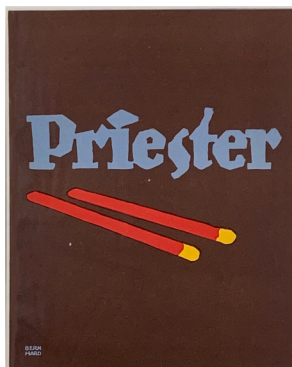
2.2. Meanings and principles of maximalist versus minimalist styles in art history

A tension between minimalist and maximalist styles has often been observed throughout the history of art, and this fundamental difference in style continues to provoke debate today (Anderson et al., 2022; To & Patrick, 2017). One of the main differences between the two approaches is related to the perception of ornaments. For advocates of minimalism, ornamentation “is a crime” for being useless (Loos, 1913). Designs should be functional, and every design element that is not directly related to the object’s function should be removed. On the contrary, for those who advocate the virtue of maximalism, form should not merely be determined by a function but becomes the reason for the design to exist (Höner et al., 2017; Meggs and Purvis, 2016). Far from being useless, ornamentation is regarded as one element of the designer’s vocabulary that complements the design’s function, thanks to its representational, narrative, and symbolic content (Trilling, 2003).

Minimalist styles in graphic design are related to the Sachplakat, Bauhaus, New Typography, and International Style. These historic styles have in common the desire to advocate for simplicity, clarity, mathematical rigor, and functionality. Such an approach can initially be linked to the Sachplakat, a graphic style that emerged in early 20th-century Germany for poster advertising. The Sachplakat style is characterized by a search for visual efficiency through the reduction of graphic language. Posters in this style consistently apply a simple formula: a flat color background, the product name, and a large, focal image of the product (Fig. 1, poster by Lucian Bernhard). Art historians consider this style a benchmark in the history of graphic design, marking an important step toward greater visual simplification and clarity in graphic communication (Meggs and Purvis, 2016). Later, the Bauhaus style further advanced this logic of rationalization and functionalism, aiming to develop a more universal and scientific approach to design (Meggs and Purvis, 2016). Aligned with prevailing architectural principles of

the time (Loos, 1913; Sullivan, 1896), this approach rejected ornamentation and instead adopted composition grids organized along straight invisible lines to structure their layout (Müller-Brockmann, 1981; Walker, 2018) (Fig. 1, magazine cover by Joost Schmidt). According to Daricau (2014), such composition principles are of strong allegorical value and convey impressions of order, rigor, and seriousness. Following the Bauhaus and driven by similar concerns for functionalism and universality, both the new typography (Fig. 1, poster by Jan Tschichold) and later the International Style (Fig. 1, poster by Josef Müller-Brockmann) favored the use of the sans-serif style of typefaces over more elaborate typography as well as minimalist compositions rigorously organized along diagonal and orthogonal lines with large amounts of negative space. In short, studying the considerations that promoted minimalist design principles over the course of art history indicates that this type of design should be associated with impressions of seriousness, rigor, efficiency, and competence (Tolley, 2016).

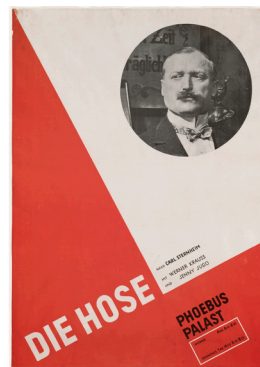
On the other hand, maximalism in graphic design relates to styles such as the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Psychedelic, and Memphis. These styles have in common an extensive use of ornamentation. Such an approach can first be linked to the Arts and Crafts movement, which developed in opposition to the standards imposed by industrial production, in which ornamentation attested to the artist’s craftsmanship and imagination (see Fig. 2 William Morris textile design) (Meggs and Purvis, 2016). Later, the Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Psychedelic, and Memphis styles emerged during historical periods that, despite their own challenges, are retrospectively regarded as cheerful times. Art Nouveau, for instance, flourished in France in 1895 during the Belle Époque (the Beautiful Era), and its most famous posters promote hedonistic activities and products such as theatrical performances or champagne brands (see Fig. 2, Alphonse Mucha poster). As a result, Art Nouveau, with its exuberant “whiplash” motifs, became associated with the notion of hedonism (Daricau, 2014). Similarly, the Art Deco style developed during les Années Folles (the Roaring Twenties), a period of renewal marked by artistic and technological effervescence. Some of the most representative examples of this style, such as Cassandre’s travel posters and Vogue fashion magazine covers (see Fig. 2 Eduardo Garcia Benito Magazine cover), are closely linked to leisure and luxury consumption (Heller & Chwast, 2018). Consequently, Art Deco’s ornamental frames and geometric patterns soon became associated with glamorous upper-class celebrations, as consistently exemplified in film and TV adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*. Later, the Psychedelic style emerged and flourished in the 1960s, a decade marked by the rise of youth culture and the hippie movement, culminating in the 1967 Summer of Love. The most iconic psychedelic designs promoted concerts, festivals, and music albums (see Fig. 2, Wes Wilson poster),



Lucian Bernhard (1905), poster for Priester matches



Joost Schmidt (1929), cover for “bauhaus: magazine for design”, vol. 3, no. 1



Jan Tschichold (1927), Poster for the film Die Hose by Hans Behrendt



Josef Müller-Brockmann (1960), Poster for the Der Film exhibition at the Zürich Design Museum

Fig. 1. Posters from the Sachplakat, Bauhaus, New Typography, and International Style.



Fig. 2. Designs from the Art and Crafts, Art nouveau, Art deco, Psychedelic and Memphis styles.

and their distinctive wavy patterns quickly became emblematic of festivities, freedom, and creativity (Heller & Chwast, 2018). Finally, in the 1980s, the Memphis style emerged during an era of uninhibited mass consumption. Rejecting the minimalist approach of the International Style, designers set the stage for an energetic and cheerful revival, embracing colorful geometric patterns (Daricau, 2014; Meggs and Purvis, 2016). Initially rooted in furniture and interior design, Memphis aesthetics were quickly adopted by television pop culture (see Fig. 2, MTV logo), soon becoming synonymous with fun and entertainment. In short, studying the considerations that promoted maximalist design principles over the course of art history indicates that this type of design should be associated with impressions of cheerfulness, fun, imagination, and exuberance.

Based on this literature review, it appears that brands using maximalist packages (with ornamental patterns) would most likely convey a stronger impression of cheerfulness and a lower impression of seriousness compared to brands using minimalist packages (without ornamental patterns). We thus postulate:

H1_a: A maximalist package with an ornamental pattern conveys a stronger impression of brand cheerfulness compared to a minimalist package without an ornamental pattern.

H1_b: A minimalist package without an ornamental pattern conveys a stronger impression of brand seriousness compared to a maximalist package with an ornamental pattern.

2.3. Which brands should Opt for maximalist versus minimalist package styles?

Previous studies have shown that consumer brand or product evaluations are generally enhanced when a package displays design elements that are congruent together and with the brand identity (Krishna et al., 2010; Littel & Orth, 2013; Pang & Ding, 2021; Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). Perceived congruence is defined as the degree to which the semantic meanings of design elements are perceived as matching each other or as aligning with the brand identity.

To illustrate, Van Rompay and Pruyn (2011) demonstrate that specific package shapes and typefaces can convey impressions of luxury (vs. casualness) and impressions of masculinity (vs. femininity). When these design elements “speak the same language,” that is, when they convey congruent semantic meaning, the brand evaluation is enhanced. Similarly, Littel and Orth (2013) have shown that brand evaluations are more positive when a package’s visual and haptic attributes are congruent. This positive effect of congruence has also been observed between specific package design elements and brand identity traits. Notably, Pang and Ding (2021) have shown that curved-shaped

packages (as opposed to angular-shaped) are perceived as more congruent with feminine (vs. masculine) brands, and that consumer evaluation of a brand is enhanced when the package shape fits the brand’s associated gender.

Thus, if maximalist packages (with ornamental patterns) convey more cheerful brand impressions than minimalist packages (without ornamental patterns), they should be viewed as more congruent with brand identities that emphasize cheerfulness, fun, and imagination. On the contrary, minimalist packages should be viewed as more congruent with brand identities that emphasize seriousness, rigor, and competence. Then, greater congruence between the package maximalist (vs. minimalist) styles and the brand identity should lead to more favorable brand attitudes (Krishna et al., 2010; Littel & Orth, 2013; Pang & Ding, 2021). We thus postulate:

H2_a: A maximalist package with an ornamental pattern increases consumer attitude toward brands that possess cheerful identity traits, because customers perceive these packages as more congruent with such brands.

H2_b: A minimalist package without an ornamental pattern increases consumer attitude toward brands that possess serious identity traits, because customers perceive these packages as more congruent with such brands.

2.4. Types of ornamental patterns: Geometric versus organic

Ornamental patterns are a defining feature of maximalist design styles. Notably, two distinct types of ornamentation are commonly employed: organic and geometric patterns. Here, insights from art history literature are particularly valuable, offering cultural insights into the likely associations of ideas attached to these two pattern types. Throughout the history of graphic design, organic patterns have been emblematic of historic styles such as the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau. In contrast, geometric patterns have been more closely associated with styles like Art Deco and Memphis. Although all these styles are historical, and thus “retro,” those favoring organic patterns (such as the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau style) drew inspiration from prior times, embraced the idea that the beauty of design lies in harmony with nature, and placed a high value in craftsmanship. Conversely, styles favoring geometric patterns (such as Art Deco and Memphis styles) attempted to capture the “Zeitgeist,” or the spirit of their time. These styles were inspired with the modern cityscape, new technologies, and sought to integrate art with modern means of production and mass consumption (Heller & Chwast, 2018; Meggs and Purvis, 2016). Surveying art history therefore suggests that organic ornamental patterns tend to be associated with the past, tradition and

craftmanship and geometric ornamental patterns tend to be associated with modernity, innovation and technology.

Recently, several studies have examined the impact of perceiving a brand as either traditional or modern (Cowan & Kostyk, 2024; Wilcox et al., 2024). Recognizing that a traditional or modern brand personality is a key aspect of brand identity (Cowan & Kostyk, 2024), these studies demonstrate that perceptions of traditionality or modernity influence consumer responses (Cowan & Kostyk, 2024; Wilcox et al., 2024). Our literature review complements this body of research by identifying a design element capable of shaping these perceptions. It suggests that brands using maximalist packaging with organic ornamental patterns are likely to convey a stronger impression of traditionality and a weaker impression of modernity compared to those that use geometric ornamental patterns. We thus postulate:

H3_a: A maximalist package with an organic ornamental pattern conveys a stronger impression of brand traditionality compared to a package with a geometric ornamental pattern.

H3_b: A maximalist package with a geometric ornamental pattern conveys a stronger impression of brand modernity compared to a package with an organic ornamental pattern.

Considering the congruence effect we previously exposed, we can further postulate that:

H4_a: A maximalist package with an organic (vs. geometric) pattern increases consumer attitude toward brands that possess traditional identity traits, because customers perceive these packages as more congruent with such brands.

H4_b: A maximalist package with a geometric (vs. organic) pattern increases consumer attitude toward brands that possess modern identity traits, because customers perceive these packages as more congruent with such brands.

3. Overview of studies

To test our research hypotheses, we conducted seven studies across seven different product categories. Each category was selected because of the co-existence of the two investigated styles in these specific categories, thus ensuring the managerial relevance of our research. We first conducted two pilot studies, using free word association tasks (FWATs), to explore the impressions spontaneously associated with minimalist packages, maximalist packages with organic patterns, and maximalist packages with geometric patterns. Then, we conducted five experiments. Studies 1_a and 1_b examine the effect of maximalist versus minimalist styles on the perception of brand cheerfulness and brand seriousness (H1_a and H1_b). Study 2 examines the types of brands that might benefit from using a maximalist (vs. minimalist) packaging style (H2_a and H2_b). Study 3 examines more precisely whether an organic (vs. geometric) ornamental pattern in maximalist packages has an impact on the perception of brand traditionality and brand modernity (H3_a and H3_b). Finally, Study 4 examines the types of brands that might benefit from using a maximalist package with an organic (vs. geometric) ornamental pattern (H4_a and H4_b).

4. Pilot studies: Exploration of the brand impressions associated with maximalist (vs. Minimalist) packages

Two pilot studies were conducted to explore the brand impressions associated with a package using a maximalist style (with ornamental patterns) in comparison to a package using a minimalist style (without ornamental patterns). Since our literature review indicates that maximalist packages can use two distinct types of ornamental patterns, a second objective of our pilot studies was to investigate the brand impressions associated with organic (vs. geometric) patterns.

4.1. Stimuli

Chocolate bar packages were used as stimuli in Pilot Study 1, and

wine bottles were used in Pilot Study 2. For each study, three package versions were created: a minimalist version without a pattern and two maximalist versions, one with an organic pattern and one with a geometric pattern.

As in all subsequent studies, we used professional visual resources (i.e., Yellow Images package mockups and Adobe Stock ornamental patterns) and software (i.e., Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and Substance 3D Stager) to design realistic package stimuli. Adding ornamental patterns to the maximalist conditions could make the maximalist packages more colorful than their minimalist counterparts. Because this research specifically focuses on ornamental patterns (and not color) as an attribute of maximalism, all ornamental patterns were rendered in monochrome, using a single hue with variations in lightness. This ensured that, for each experiment, the package versions displayed not only the same textual content, layout, and typography but also the same monochromatic color palette (see Figs. 3, 5, 7, 10 and 12).

4.2. Protocol

We selected 122 respondents ($M_{\text{age}} = 50$ years; 55 % women) for Pilot Study 1 and 123 respondents ($M_{\text{age}} = 51$ years; 53 % women) for Pilot Study 2 from a panel of Dutch consumers. For each study, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions and asked to complete a FWAT: “When you see this package of chocolate/wine bottle, what comes to your mind? Please write down the words and the association of ideas, feelings, emotions, tastes, and flavors that come to mind when you look at this chocolate package/wine bottle.” This method is regularly used in marketing and sensory sciences to collect the feelings, images, and ideas spontaneously associated with visual stimuli (Celhay & Luffarelli, 2024).

4.3. Data preparation

We utilized the lexical analysis software, Sphinx Quali, to analyze the collected data. The software has automatic and semi-automatic functions for the removal of stop words, stemming, and lemmatization. This enabled the grouping of words that either share the same lexical root (e.g., *celebrate*, *celebration*) or are synonyms (e.g., *complex*, *elaborate*). Following this, two researchers manually inspected these lexical categories to identify and correct any grouping errors. For each study, these preparatory steps enabled us to identify the 25 most frequent lexical categories that came to participants’ minds when they saw one of the packages. Once the grouping procedure was validated by all co-authors, the software generated a new variable to code the presence or absence of the 25 most frequent lexical groups in each participant’s response. For the two studies, we used this new variable to generate a 3×25 contingency table, where the columns represent the three packages used as stimuli and the rows represent the 25 most frequent lexical categories in the collected answers. In the two resulting contingency tables, each cell shows the percentage of respondents who associated a lexical theme with a given package version. We then performed a correspondence analysis on each study’s contingency table.

4.4. Analysis and results

A correspondence analysis graphically represents the rows and columns of a contingency table in a two-dimensional map (Hoffman & Franke, 1986). The map reads as follows: the position of each set of points (i.e., the triangles for package condition and the circles for lexical theme) reveals the nature of the similarities and differences within the set. The joint display shows the correspondence between sets (i.e., between the package conditions and the elicited lexical themes). Packages that appear far from each other on the map elicit different lexical themes, whereas packages that appear close to each other elicit similar lexical themes. Lexical themes that appear close to a package version are more frequently associated with that package, while those that appear



Fig. 3. Stimuli used in Pilot Studies 1 & 2.

far from a package are less frequently associated. When several lexical themes are associated with the same point on the map, it means they share the same coordinates. Fig. 4 presents the results of the correspondence analyses performed on the data collected in Pilot Studies 1 and 2, respectively.

Our literature review suggested that maximalist (with an ornamental pattern) versus minimalist (without an ornamental pattern) package styles should communicate different brand impressions. Similarly, it suggests that maximalist packages using organic (vs. geometric) ornamental patterns should convey different brand impressions. The results of the two pilot studies (Fig. 4) show that in both studies, the three packages were well differentiated, appearing in a different quadrant of the map.

More importantly, both pilot studies provide initial support for H1_a, H1_b, H3_a and H3_b. In the two maps (Fig. 4), the minimalist packages (without an ornamental pattern) appeared closer to lexical themes such as serious or rigorous. Conversely, the maximalist chocolate package with a geometric pattern appeared closer to lexical themes such as cheerful, imaginative, and celebration. Similarly, the maximalist wine package with a geometric pattern was associated with imaginative and celebration, while another maximalist wine package with a geometric

pattern was linked to cheerful. In line with H1_a and H1_b, these results indicate that maximalist packages tend to elicit more frequently impressions related to cheerfulness while minimalist packages tend to elicit more frequently impressions related to seriousness. These spontaneously evoked impressions will be examined in Studies 1_a and 1_b.

Moreover, in the two maps, the maximalist packages with organic patterns appear closer to the lexical theme 'old-fashioned,' while the maximalist packages with geometric patterns appear closer to the lexical theme 'modern.' In line with H3_a and H3_b, these results indicate that organic ornamental patterns elicit more frequently impressions related to brand traditionality while organic ornamental patterns elicit more frequently impressions related to brand modernity. These spontaneous impressions will be examined in Studies 3_a and 3_b.

5. Studies 1_a and 1_b: Impressions of cheerfulness and seriousness

The purpose of Studies 1_a and 1_b is to examine whether maximalist packages can make brands appear more cheerful and less serious than minimalist packages.

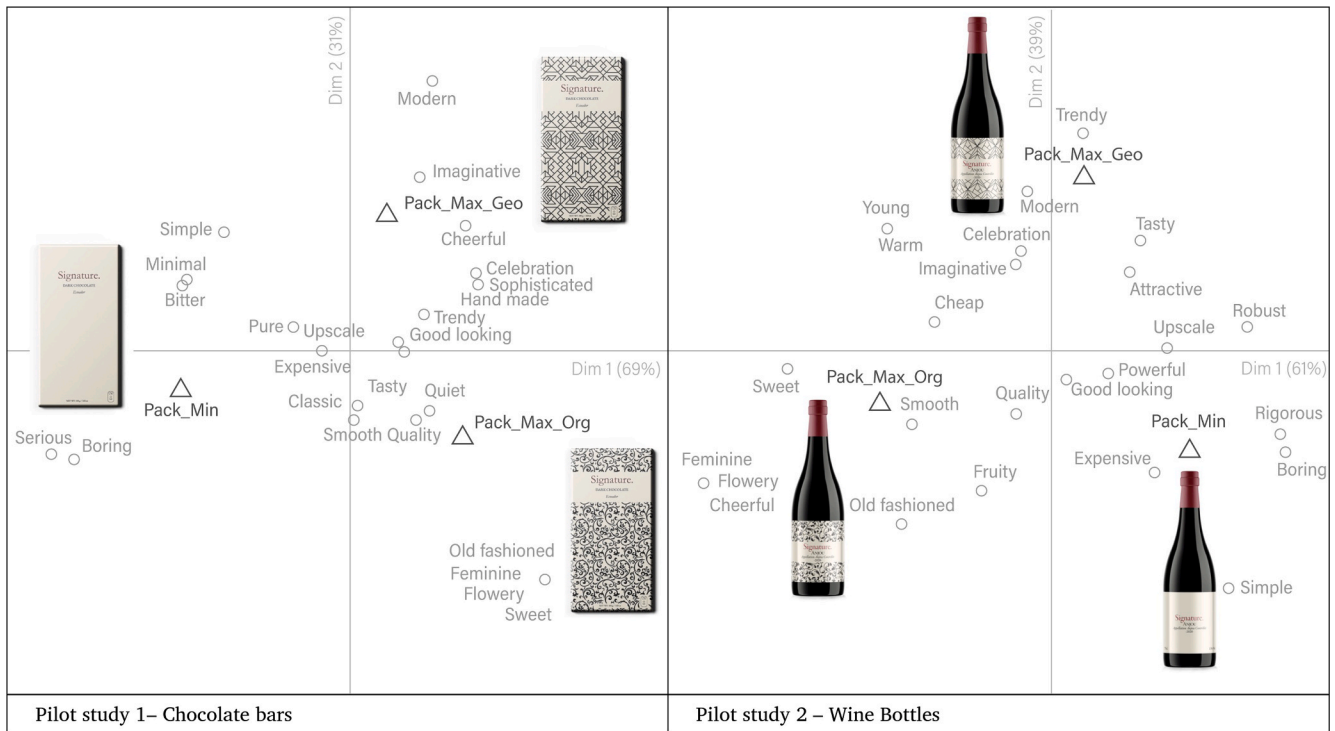


Fig. 4. Results of the correspondences analysis, Pilot Studies 1 & 2.

5.1. Stimuli

Coffee packages were used as stimuli in Study 1_a and hand soap packages in Study 1_b. For each study, two package versions were created: a minimalist version without a pattern and a maximalist version with an ornamental pattern (see Appendix 1 for the results of stimuli pretest). The maximalist condition differs in the two studies in that we used a geometric ornamental pattern for Study 1_a, and an organic ornamental pattern for Study 1_b (Fig. 5).

5.2. Protocol

For Study 1_a, a sample of 136 Prolific respondents ($M_{age} = 41$; 57 % women) successfully passed an attention check and completed the questionnaire. For Study 1_b, a sample of 157 respondents from Prolific ($M_{age} = 40$; 56 % women) who had not participated in the previous study and who passed the same attention check as in Study 1_a completed the questionnaire.

For both studies, participants were randomly assigned to one of the



Fig. 5. Stimuli used in Studies 1_a & 1_b.

two conditions, a minimalist package with no pattern versus a maximalist package with an ornamental pattern, following a between-participant experiment. Participants viewed their assigned package design and rated the extent to which it elicited impressions that the brand was ‘serious’ and ‘cheerful’ using a 2-item, 9-point Likert scale: ‘Please indicate the extent to which you think each of the adjectives below describes the brand whose packaging is shown above: 1 (Not at all descriptive) to 9 (Very descriptive).’ For each study, the two items were negatively and moderately correlated (Pearson’s $r = -0.320$ for Study 1a and Pearson’s $r = -0.326$ for Study 1b). Finally, participants provided demographic information.

5.3. Analysis and results

For both studies, a MANOVA was conducted with packaging design (minimalist vs. maximalist) as the independent variable and brand seriousness and cheerfulness as the dependent variables.

In Study 1a, the covariance matrices’ equality assumption was not violated (Box’s $M = 3.516, p = 0.325$). Furthermore, the Levene’s tests indicate that error variances were equal across groups for both dependent variables ($p > 0.05$), supporting the assumption of homogeneity. Regarding the multivariate results, results indicate that packaging type significantly affects the combined dependent variables (Pillai’s Trace = 0.372, $F(2, 150) = 44.393, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.372$). Specifically, the coffee brand with minimalist packaging was perceived as more serious than the coffee brand with maximalist packaging ($M_{Minimalist} = 5.91; SD = 2.09; M_{Maximalist} = 4.08; SD = 1.93; F(1, 151) = 31.587, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.173$) and the coffee brand with maximalist packaging was perceived as more cheerful than the coffee brand with minimalist packaging ($M_{Minimalist} = 3.50; SD = 1.93, M_{Maximalist} = 6.00; SD = 1.83; F(1, 151) = 67.428, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.309$) (Fig. 6).

Similarly in Study 1b, the covariance matrices’ equality assumption was not violated (Box’s $M = 5.042, p = 0.174$). Furthermore, the Levene’s tests indicate that error variances were equal across groups for both dependent variables ($p > 0.05$), supporting the assumption of homogeneity. Regarding the multivariate results, they confirm the results of study 1a and indicate that packaging type significantly affects the combined dependent variables (Pillai’s Trace = 0.336, $F(2, 154) = 38.954, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.336$). Specifically, the hand soap brand with minimalist packaging was perceived as more serious than the hand soap brand with maximalist packaging ($M_{Minimalist} = 6.59; SD = 1.67;$

$M_{Maximalist} = 4.82; SD = 2.01; F(1, 155) = 35.95, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.188$) and the hand soap brand with maximalist packaging was perceived as more cheerful than the hand soap brand with a minimalist packaging ($M_{Minimalist} = 3.62; SD = 2.01, M_{Maximalist} = 5.85; SD = 1.83; F(1, 155) = 52.96, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.255$) (Fig. 6).

Consistent with the pilot studies, Studies 1a and 1b show that maximalist packages (either with geometric or organic patterns) convey a stronger impression of brand cheerfulness, whereas minimalist packages (without any pattern) convey a stronger impression of brand seriousness. These findings provide further support to H1a and H1b while using different package formats, ornamental patterns, product categories, and ways to capture impressions.

6. Study 2: Perceived congruence between package style and brand identity

The purpose of the Study 2 was to measure whether brand attitude is improved when the minimalist (vs. maximalist) style of package is congruent (vs. incongruent) with the brand identity.

6.1. Stimuli

We created two versions of packaging from a fictitious brand of tea and infusions called “Bloom.” One package was designed in a maximalist style and displayed an ornamental pattern; the other was designed in a minimalist style without any ornamental pattern (see Appendix 1 for the results of stimuli pretest). As pilot studies 1 and 2 and studies 1a and 1b established that both organic and geometric ornamental patterns are suitable to elicit cheerful brand impression, we used only one maximalist package version in this experiment (Fig. 7).

We then created two versions of a text describing the fictitious brand Bloom that manipulated the brand identity. One version described Bloom as a cheerful brand, based on fantasy and inspiration. The other described Bloom as a serious brand, based on expertise and technical know-how:

“Bloom is a brand of teas and infusions that defines itself as a cheerful (serious) brand whose products are based on fantasy and inspiration (expertise and technical know-how). Bloom creates playful (makes rigorous) selections of herbal blends and teas. Because creativity and imagination (reliability and precision) are particularly important values for the creators of Bloom, the blend collections are based on inventive (strict) processes. The

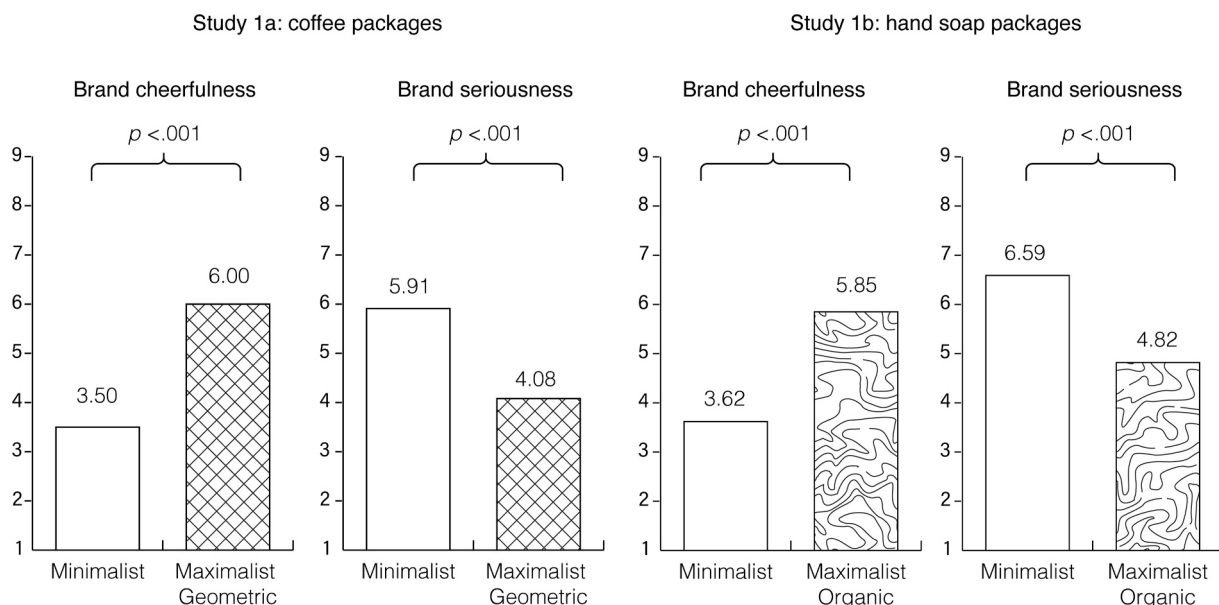


Fig. 6. Effect of packaging style on brand cheerfulness/seriousness (Studies 1a & 1b).



Minimalist infusion & tea package with no pattern

Maximalist infusion & tea package with geometric ornamental pattern

Fig. 7. Stimuli used in Study 2.

result is a selection of teas and infusions revealing unexpected and cheerful (perfectly balanced and exact) flavors that will delight tea lovers (connoisseurs). An explosion of flavors creates celebration (Structured flavors enhance serenity)".

We conducted an online test to verify whether the two text descriptions effectively manipulated perceptions of brand identity. Prolific respondents ($N = 120$) were randomly assigned to one of the two text descriptions and rated their perception of the corresponding brand on a 9-point semantic differential scale (serious/cheerful). The results confirmed that participants inferred a more cheerful brand from the cheerful text condition ($M = 7.46$, $SD = 1.47$) and a more serious brand from the serious text condition ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 2.34$; $t(95.30) = -10.011$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = -1.86$).

6.2. Protocol

A sample of 359 respondents from Prolific ($M_{age} = 41$ years; 58 % women) who had successfully passed the same attention checks as in Studies 1a and 1b, as well as an additional attention check at the end of the questionnaire were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of a 2 (package style: minimalist without pattern vs. maximalist with pattern) \times 2 (brand identity: serious vs. cheerful) between-participant study. We manipulated the package style and the brand's identity using the stimuli described previously. After we showed participants their assigned packaging and brand description, they rated the extent to which the packaging and the brand were congruent on four Likert scales: "The packaging visual aspect fits the brand description well/is congruent with the brand description/matches the brand description/is relevant to the brand description"; 1 = "totally disagree," 9 = "totally agree". Next, participants rated the extent to which their attitude toward the brand was favorable on three 9-point Likert scales: "I think the brand Bloom is likable"; "my attitude toward the brand bloom is positive/favorable"; 1 = "totally disagree," 9 = "totally agree". Both scales were adapted from previous works (Celhay & Luffarelli, 2024). We averaged these scales into single measures of perceived package-brand congruence ($\alpha = 0.978$) and of brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.949$).

6.3. Analysis and results

To investigate whether the perceived congruence between the package style and the brand identity enhanced consumer attitudes toward the brand ($H2_a$ and $H2_b$), we conducted a moderated mediation regression analysis (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes, 2017; Fig. 8). The independent variables were package style (minimalist vs. maximalist), brand identity description (cheerful vs. serious), and their interaction. The mediator was the perceived package-brand congruence, and the dependent variable was the attitude toward the brand.

Consistent with $H2_a$, the confidence intervals (CI) of the conditional indirect effects of package style revealed that when the brand displays cheerful identity traits, the maximalist package style had a positive effect on brand attitude through perceived package-brand congruence (95 % CI: [0.58, 1.27]). Consistent with $H2_b$, the confidence intervals (CI) of the conditional indirect effects of package style revealed that when the brand displays serious identity traits, the minimalist package style had a positive effect on brand attitude through perceived package-brand congruence (95 % CI: [-0.82, -0.18]). The index of moderated mediation was significant (95 % CI [-1.91, -0.93]), indicating that the two conditional indirect effects differed significantly.

These results corroborate $H2_a$ by showing that maximalist (vs. minimalist) package styles increase evaluations of brands that display cheerful (vs. serious) identity traits. Considering both the conditional indirect and direct effects indicates a full mediation in the cheerful condition. Maximalist (vs. minimalist) packages are more congruent with cheerful (vs. serious) brands and thus increase evaluations of those brands.

For $H2_b$, however, the results are more nuanced. Considering both the conditional indirect and direct effects indicates partial mediation in the serious condition. Consistent with $H2_b$, the indirect effect of package style through perceived congruence on brand attitude is negative. Minimalist (vs. maximalist) packages are more congruent with serious (vs. cheerful) brands and thus increase evaluations of those brands. Interestingly, however, the direct effect of package style on brand attitude is positive (95 % CI: [0.07, 0.88]). Contrary to what we had anticipated ($H2_b$), minimalist packages (as opposed to maximalist) does not enhance consumer attitudes towards serious brands. Although

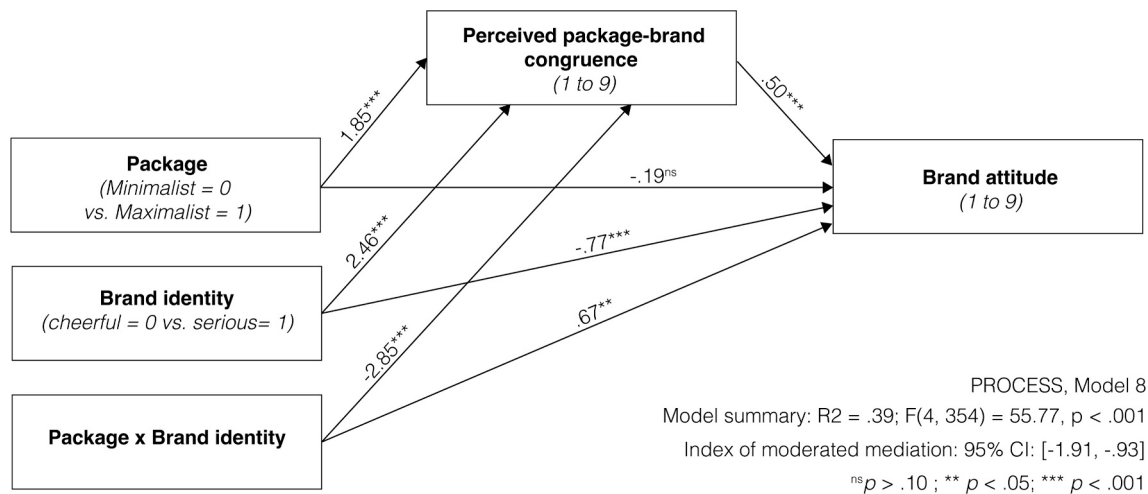


Fig. 8. Moderated mediation analysis in Study 2.

minimalist packages are more congruent with serious brands, the indirect effect of perceived congruence on attitude is offset by a positive direct effect of the maximalist style.

To further illustrate these conditional effects, we conducted two additional analyses.

First, we conducted a two-way ANOVA with package style (minimalist vs. maximalist) and brand identity (cheerful vs. serious) as independent variables, and perceived package–brand congruence as the dependent variable. The main effect of the package style was marginally significant ($F(1, 355) = 3.63$, $p = 0.057$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.010$), and the effect of brand identity was significant ($F(1, 355) = 21.68$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.058$). More importantly, the interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 355) = 41.32$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.104$). Consistent with H2_a and H2_b, the maximalist style of package (with a pattern) was perceived as more congruent with the cheerful brand identity, whereas the minimalist style of package (without a pattern) was perceived as more congruent with the serious brand identity (see the pairwise comparisons in Fig. 9).

We then conducted a similar ANOVA with brand attitude as the dependent variable. The main effect of the package style ($F(1, 355) = 3.84$, $p = 0.051$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$), as well as the interaction effect ($F(1, 355) = 4.30$, $p = 0.039$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$) were significant while the effect of brand

identity was not ($F(1, 355) = 0.16$, $p = 0.689$). Consistent with H2_a, the pairwise comparisons (Fig. 9) show that maximalist (vs. minimalist) package styles increase evaluations of brands that display cheerful (vs. serious) identity traits. However, the opposite is not true. These results suggest that, although incongruent with serious brands, maximalist packages are not necessarily detrimental to consumer attitudes toward serious brands.

7. Study 3: Organic versus geometric ornamental patterns and impressions of brand traditionality and modernity

The purpose of Study 3 was to examine whether the type of ornamental pattern (organic vs. geometric) used in maximalist packages had an impact on impressions of brand traditionality and brand modernity.

7.1. Stimuli

Two package versions of a fictitious rum were created. The two packages were designed in a maximalist style but one featured an organic ornamental pattern and the other featured a geometric ornamental pattern (Fig. 10). Stimuli tests indicate that the two packages

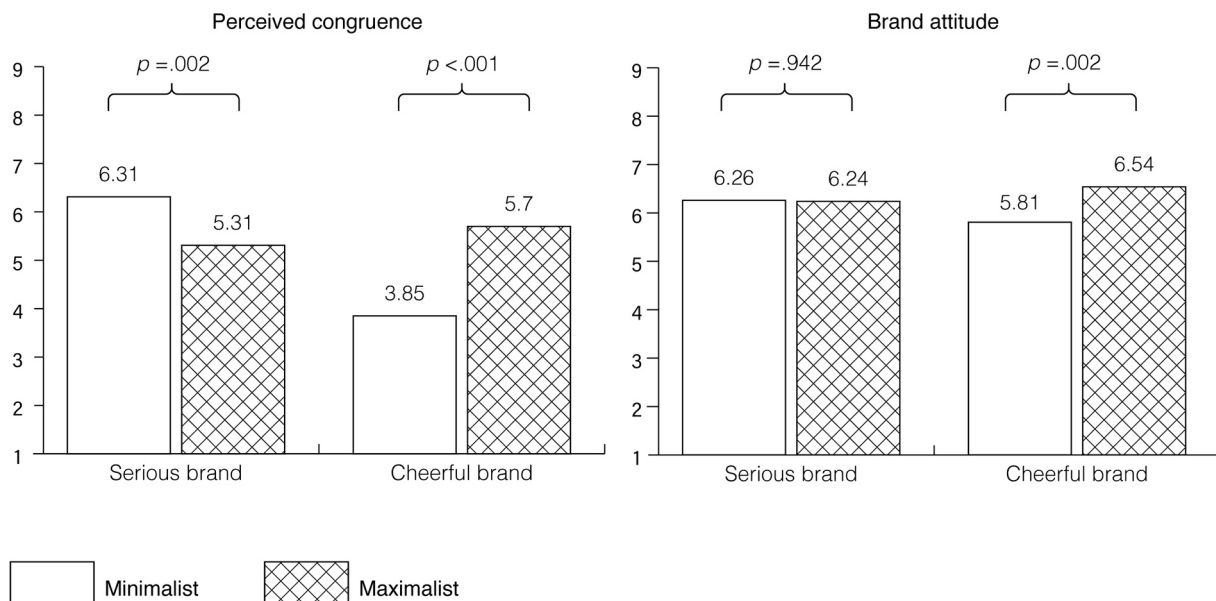


Fig. 9. Packaging style × brand description on perceived congruence and brand attitude.



Maximalist rum package with organic pattern

Maximalist rum package with geometric pattern

Fig. 10. Stimuli used in Study 3.

were perceived as organic or geometric, respectively, with no significant difference in perceived visual complexity (Appendix 1).

7.2. Protocol

In Study 3, a sample of 158 Prolific participants ($M_{age} = 43$ years; 56 % women) who successfully passed an attention check were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions, a maximalist package with an organic pattern versus a maximalist package with a geometric pattern following a between-participant experiment. After participants had seen their assigned packaging, they were asked to rate impressions of traditionality (“This brand looks related to the past.”) and of modernity (“This brand looks modern.”) on a 9-point scale (1 = “Totally disagree” and 9 = “Totally agree”). The two items were negatively and moderately correlated (Pearson’s $r = -0.561$). Finally, participants provided demographic information.

7.3. Analysis and results

A MANOVA was conducted with pattern design (organic vs. geometric) as the independent variable and impressions of brand traditionality and modernity as the dependent variables. The covariance matrices’ equality assumption was not violated (Box’s $M = 1.720$, $p = 0.638$). Furthermore, the Levene’s tests indicate that error variances were equal across groups for both dependent variables ($p > 0.05$), supporting the assumption of homogeneity. Regarding the multivariate results, results indicate that packaging type significantly affects the combined dependent variables (Pillai’s Trace = 0.049, $F(2, 155) = 3.961$, $p = 0.021$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.049$). Specifically, the rum brand with packaging featuring an organic pattern was perceived as more traditional than the rum brand with packaging featuring a geometric pattern ($M_{max_organic} = 5.24$; $SD = 2.06$; $M_{max_geometric} = 4.55$; $SD = 2.37$; $F(1, 156) = 3.779$, $p = 0.054$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.024$). Conversely, the rum brand with maximalist packaging with a geometric pattern was perceived as more modern than the rum brand with maximalist packaging with an organic pattern ($M_{max_geometric} = 6.65$; $SD = 2.10$, $M_{max_organic} = 5.73$; $SD = 2.14$; $F(1, 156) = 7.576$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.046$). These results support H3a and

H3b. Pairwise comparisons are shown in Fig. 11.

8. Study 4: Perceived congruence between pattern style and brand identity

The purpose of Study 4 was to measure whether brand attitude is improved when the organic (vs. geometric) pattern style of package is congruent (vs. incongruent) with the brand identity.

8.1. Stimuli

Two package versions of a fictitious brand of cosmetics called “Lotion Studio” were created. The two packages were designed in a maximalist style but one featured an organic ornamental pattern and the

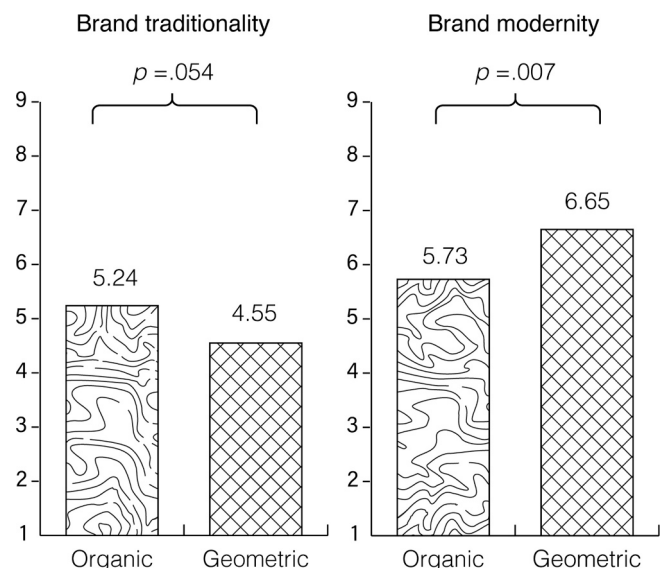


Fig. 11. Pairwise comparisons Study 3.

other featured a geometric ornamental pattern (Fig. 12). Stimuli pretests indicated that the two packages were perceived as organic or geometric, respectively, with no significant difference in perceived visual complexity. Additionally, the results confirmed that the package with an organic pattern was perceived as more traditional and the pattern with geometric pattern as more modern providing further support to H3_a and H3_b (see Appendix 1 for the detailed results of stimuli pretest).

We then created two versions of a text describing the fictitious brand Lotion Studio, each manipulating the brand identity. One version presented Lotion Studio as a traditional brand, while the other depicted it as a modern brand:

Lotion Studio is a cosmetics brand with a traditional (modern) approach to care and beauty. Its products are crafted from time-honored recipes (developed through cutting-edge research) and trusted formulas (state-of-the-art techniques). The brand does not follow trends (does not rely on tradition) but emphasizes a timeless sense of beauty (focuses instead on contemporary beauty) and the preservation of ancient knowledge (exploration of emerging trends). Every formulation is created with artisanal methods (designed with advanced systems) and a deep reverence for age-old practices (an avant-garde vision).

We conducted another online pretest to verify whether the two text descriptions effectively manipulated perceptions of brand identity. Prolific respondents (N = 122) were randomly assigned to one of the two text descriptions and rated their perception of the corresponding brand on two 9-point likert scales: “This text describes a brand that is traditional(reversed)/modern”; 1 = totally disagree, 9 = totally agree. The two items were then averaged to create a score of brand modernity. The results confirmed that participants perceived the brand as more traditional in the traditional text condition (M = 3.24, SD = 1.44) and as modern in the modern text condition (M = 7.70, SD = 1.37; $t(120) = -17.52, p < 0.001$; Cohen’s $d = -3.17$).

8.2. Protocol

A sample of 506 respondents (M_{age} = 42 years; 62 % women) who had successfully passed an attention check and who reported they were using lotion at least several times a year completed the questionnaire. They were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of a 2 (package style: with a geometric pattern vs. an organic pattern) × 2 (brand identity: traditional vs. modern) between-participant study. After viewing their assigned packaging and brand description, participants rated the extent to which the packaging and brand were

congruent, as well as their attitude toward the brand (using the same measurement scales as in Study 2). We averaged these scales into single measures of perceived package–brand congruence ($\alpha = 0.983$) and of brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.956$).

8.3. Analysis and results

Similarly to Study 2, we conducted a moderated mediation regression analysis (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes, 2017; Fig. 13) to investigate whether the perceived congruence between the pattern design and the brand identity enhanced consumer attitudes toward the brand (H4_a and H4_b). The independent variables were package style (with a geometric pattern vs. an organic pattern), brand identity description (traditional vs. modern), and their interaction. The mediator was the perceived package–brand congruence, and the dependent variable was the attitude toward the brand.

Consistent with H4_a, the confidence intervals (CI) of the conditional indirect effects of pattern design revealed that when the brand displays traditional identity traits, the maximalist package with an organic pattern had a positive effect on brand attitude through perceived package–brand congruence (95 % CI: [1.77, 1.39]). Consistent with H4_b, the confidence intervals (CI) of the conditional indirect effects of pattern design revealed that when the brand displays modern identity traits, the maximalist package with a geometric pattern had a positive effect on brand attitude through perceived package–brand congruence (95 % CI: [-1.09, -0.38]). The index of moderated mediation was significant (95 % CI [-2.29, -1.34]), indicating that the two conditional indirect effects differed significantly.

These results corroborate H4_a by showing that a maximalist package with an organic (vs. geometric) pattern increase evaluations of brands that display traditional (vs. modern) identity traits. Considering both the conditional indirect and direct effects indicates a full mediation in the traditional condition. Maximalist packages with an organic (vs. geometric) pattern are more congruent with traditional (vs. modern) brands and thus increase evaluations of those brands.

For H4_b, however, the results are more nuanced. Considering both the conditional indirect and direct effects indicates partial mediation in the modern condition. Consistent with H4_b, the indirect effect of package style through perceived congruence on brand attitude is negative. Maximalist packages with a geometric (vs. organic) pattern are more congruent with modern (vs. traditional) brands and thus increase evaluations of those brands. Interestingly, however, the direct effect of



Fig. 12. Stimuli used in Study 4.

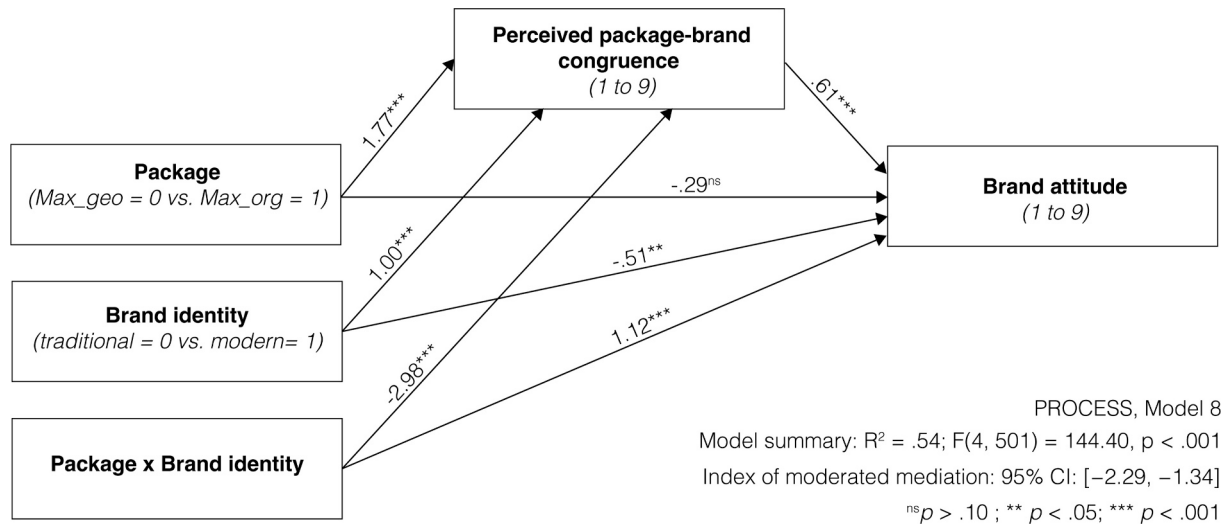


Fig. 13. Moderated mediation analysis in Study 4.

package style on brand attitude is positive (95 % CI: [.52, 1.14]). Contrary to what we had anticipated (H4_b), maximalist packages with a geometric (vs. organic) pattern do not enhance consumer attitudes towards modern brands. Although maximalist packages with a geometric pattern are more congruent with modern brands, the indirect effect of perceived congruence on attitude is offset by a positive direct effect of the maximalist packages with organic patterns.

To further illustrate these conditional effects, we conducted two additional analyses.

First, we conducted a two-way ANOVA with package style (maximalist geometric vs. maximalist organic) and brand identity (traditional vs. modern) as independent variables, and perceived package–brand congruence as the dependent variable. The main effect of the package style was not significant ($F(1, 502) = 2.10$, $p = 0.148$), but the effect of brand identity was significant ($F(1, 502) = 6.45$, $p < 0.011$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.013$). More importantly, the interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 502) = 59.90$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.107$). Consistent with H4_a and H4_b, the maximalist organic package was perceived as more congruent with the traditional brand identity, whereas the maximalist geometric package was perceived as more congruent with the modern brand identity (see the pairwise comparisons in Fig. 14).

We then conducted a similar ANOVA with brand attitude as the dependent variable. The main effect of the package style ($F(1, 502) = 7.45$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.015$), as well as the interaction effect ($F(1, 502) = 4.43$, $p = 0.036$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.009$) were significant while the effect of brand identity was not ($F(1, 502) = 2.37$, $p = 0.124$). Consistent with H2_a, the pairwise comparisons (Fig. 14) show that maximalist organic package styles increase evaluations of brands that display traditional (vs. modern) identity traits. However, the opposite is not true. These results suggest that, although incongruent with modern brands, maximalist organic packages are not necessarily detrimental to consumer attitudes toward modern brands.

9. Discussion

9.1. Summary of results

Across seven empirical studies, this article investigated the branding implications of opting for a maximalist (with an ornamental pattern) versus minimalist (without ornamental pattern) style in package design. It showed that a maximalist (vs. a minimalist) package style conveys a more cheerful (vs. serious) brand impression. This implies that

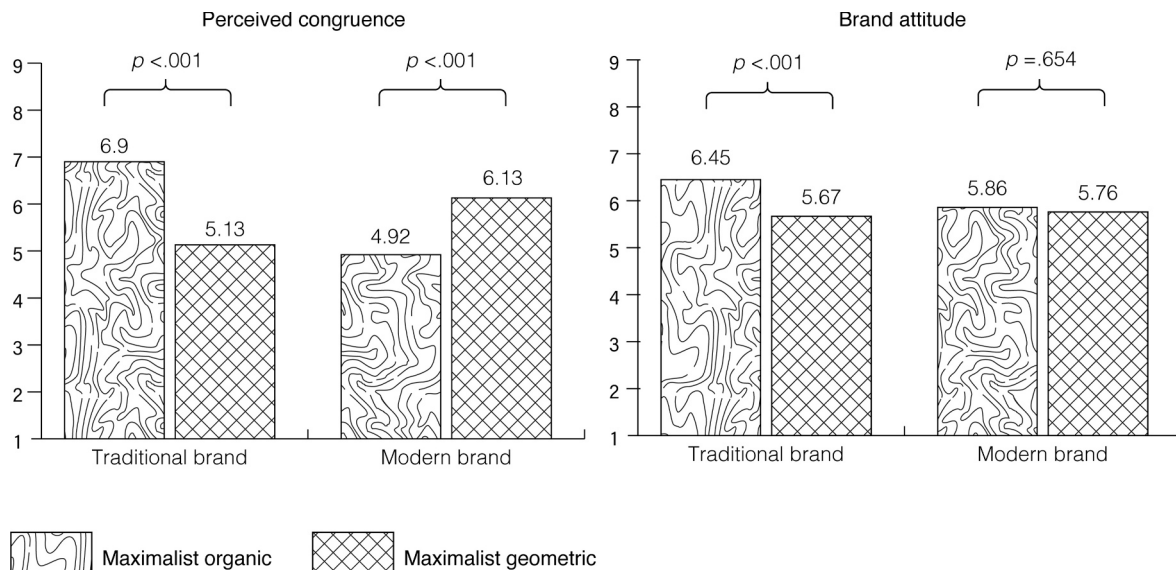


Fig. 14. Packaging style × brand description on perceived congruence and brand attitude.

maximalist (vs. minimalist) packages are more consistent with cheerful (vs. serious) brand identities, and this could subsequently enhance consumer attitudes toward such brands. In addition, this article builds on art historians' classifications to investigate the impact of two distinct types of ornamental patterns commonly used in maximalist packages. It showed that a maximalist package using an organic (vs. geometric) ornamental pattern conveys a stronger impression of brand traditionality (vs. modernity). It also implies that maximalist packagings with an organic (vs. geometric) pattern are more consistent with traditional (vs. modern) brand identities, and this could subsequently enhance consumer attitudes toward such brands. These results contribute to the literature on visual branding, and more particularly on package design, in several ways.

9.2. Contributions to visual branding literature

A large body of marketing research has been devoted to better understanding how the visual aspects of brands communicate specific brand impressions. A significant amount of marketing research has already focused on the impact of a design's level of simplicity (vs. complexity) on brand perceptions (Favier et al., 2019; Hagen et al., 2021; Pleyers, 2024; Pracejus et al., 2006; Ton et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Our approach differs from these works in that it relies on art history to study minimalist and maximalist styles through their historical origins. This approach offers a fresh perspective on the topic. It allows to realize that the descriptors "simple" or "complex" do not fully capture the essence of the "minimalist" and "maximalist" styles, respectively. Art history suggests that these two styles were historically opposed to each other, not merely by their level of visual complexity but also by their differing stances on the question of ornamentation. In this context, the present work provides historical foundations for prior definitions, which define the two styles, not only according to a global level of visual simplicity/complexity but also based on their ornate or decorated nature (To & Patrick, 2017; Wilson & Bellezza, 2022). Consequently, our approach questions the strict equivalence that is sometimes proposed in the marketing literature between simplicity and minimalist styles and answers a call from prior research to better examine how the two concepts are correlated and yet different (Wang et al., 2023).

Beyond this conceptual contribution, this work complements the existing literature on minimalism by primarily focusing on the maximalist style and the use of ornamental patterns. It is striking to observe that, contrary to minimalism, the notion of 'maximalism' is seldom mentioned in the marketing literature. The only exceptions we found are the works by To and Patrick (2017) and Anderson et al. (2022), which were presented at the 45th and 50th Association for Consumer Research conferences, respectively, as well as a recent book chapter that investigates the implications of using minimalist versus maximalist web interfaces for online retailing but manipulates the minimalist/maximalist styles through color palette rather than ornamentation (Emmermacher et al., 2024). Similarly, although there are numerous articles defining concepts related to colors (Labrecque & Milne, 2012) and typography (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023), there are no equivalent works that define what an ornament, or an ornamental pattern, is. This gap in visual branding literature likely stems from the prevailing perception of ornaments as superfluous and meaningless. This article proposes an alternative viewpoint through a definition and typology of ornamental patterns based on art history literature, highlighting their connection to maximalism, and demonstrates that, far from being useless, these design features serve a communicative function.

In addition, this article is the first to our knowledge to complement To and Patrick's (2017) initial findings on maximalism in package design. While these authors investigate the respective ability of minimalist and maximalist packages to produce luxury brand impressions, here we investigate the implications of adopting one of the two styles on other facets of brand perception. In line with prior research (Baek et al., 2023; Emmermacher et al., 2024; Hagen et al., 2021), our research

demonstrates that maximalist packaging conveys impressions of fun, creativity, and celebration, and minimalist packages convey impressions of seriousness, rigor, and boredom. Our research shows that maximalist packaging, therefore, is suitable for brands that display a cheerful brand identity and can enhance the appreciation of such brands through a mechanism of perceived congruency. In this regard, this article aligns with prior findings on the positive outcomes of perceived congruency in visual branding (Krishna et al., 2010; Littel & Orth, 2013; Luffarelli et al., 2019; Pang & Ding, 2021).

Furthermore, our research contributes to a deeper understanding of maximalism by investigating the different impacts of maximalist packaging according to the use of two main types of ornamental patterns referenced in art history. It complements extant knowledge on maximalism by making a distinction between organic and geometric ornamental patterns and demonstrates that, although the two types are suitable to elicit an impression of brand cheerfulness, the former elicits a stronger impression of brand traditionality and the latter a stronger impression of brand modernity. These results complement prior findings on the visual expression of the past. Pecot et al. (2022) notably report that designers associate ornaments with the past and that their use in advertisements can help to position a brand as traditional. In this study, we elaborate on this finding by detailing how the perception of brand traditionality might be affected by the type of ornament used.

9.3. Managerial Contributions

The relative disinterest in the prior literature concerning maximalism (compared to minimalism) is both surprising and expected. It is surprising because many brands are now adopting this style of packaging and because maximalism has been repeatedly cited as a strong trend in the design press these past five years. It is expected because maximalism is associated with ornaments, and ornaments are commonly perceived, at best, as useless, at worst, inauthentic, distasteful, or decadent (Baek et al., 2023; Loos, 1913; Wang et al., 2023). By studying some of the implications of choosing a maximalist (vs. minimalist) style for a brand's packaging, as well as studying the implications of choosing an organic (vs. geometric) ornamental pattern, this research offers actionable insights and guidelines for both designers and managers in crafting appropriate packages.

If practitioners aim to communicate fun or imaginative brand impressions and position their brands as cheerful, they should favor a maximalist style of packaging. Conversely, they should consider employing minimalist styles of packaging if they intend to position their brand as serious and rigorous. Interestingly enough, and aligned with the criticisms of postmodern designers (Budde, 2020), both pilot studies indicate that the impressions of seriousness and rigor come along with an impression of boredom, a potential concern that brand managers might want to consider.

Our findings also suggest that brand managers should use package styles that are consistent with the lexicon they use to describe their brand identity verbally on various communication materials, such as websites or ads. This can be seen with the brand Kusmi Tea, which describes itself as "revolutionary, optimistic, eclectic, and vibrant" (Kusmitea.com) and features various patterned packaging designs. However, some brands, such as Happy People Foods, have opted for minimalist packaging despite seemingly aiming to be perceived as cheerful given their brand name or description. Based on our findings, we would recommend that such brands adopt a maximalist approach by incorporating ornamental patterns into their packaging. This is important because perceived congruence could enhance consumer attitudes toward the brands.

Finally, for those brand managers who consider adopting a maximalist style, our research reveals that two main categories of ornamental patterns are suitable: organic and geometric. While both are suitable to elicit cheerful brand impressions, organic patterns appear more suitable to communicate impressions of brand traditionality while geometric

patterns are more suitable to communicate impressions of brand modernity. We would recommend brands wishing to appear more modern add a geometric pattern, as done by the Jacobsen brand (Carlsberg group), which wanted to convey a fresher and future-thinking image.

9.4. Limitations and directions for further research

This research presents some limitations that could constitute directions for further research. Given the scarcity of prior research investigating the perception of maximalist packages, we initiated our research with two pilot studies that collected free association of ideas. Although we centered the rest of the research on impressions of brand cheerfulness (vs. seriousness) and impressions of brand traditionality (vs. modernity), our two pilot studies suggested other directions of research. Indeed, both studies revealed that organic patterns were more strongly associated with impressions of femininity, sweetness, and smoothness, and Pilot Study 2 revealed that geometric patterns were more strongly associated with impressions of robustness and strength. Investigating whether organic (vs. geometric) patterns communicate a more feminine (vs. masculine) brand image would nicely complement recent findings from Pang and Ding (2021), who show that a feminine (vs. masculine) brand leads to a higher preference for curved-shaped (vs. angular-shaped) package. Similarly, investigating whether organic (vs. geometric) patterns communicate smoother (vs. stronger) taste would bring further support to the cross-modal correspondence theory (Velasco et al., 2016). Both pilot studies also revealed that the tested packages could elicit associations of prestige (e.g., “upscale,” “expensive”); however, no clear pattern of results emerged. Ornate maximalist designs have long been used to symbolize power, wealth, and prestige (Trilling, 2003). However, art history indicates that the association between ornamentation and prestige has evolved over time, with periods when ornamentation was seen as a sign of bad taste and vulgarity (Heller & Chwast, 2018), while minimalism emerged as the new symbol of prestige (Pracejus et al., 2006). Today, anecdotal evidence illustrates that some of the most prestigious brands adopt either one style or the other (To & Patrick, 2017), suggesting that both styles may be equally suitable for conveying impressions of prestige. Thus, another promising research direction would be to further investigate the underlying processes and boundary conditions shaping such perceptions.

Second, in Study 2 we showed that maximalist packages were less congruent with a serious brand identity but were not detrimental to the consumer attitude toward serious brands. The mediation analysis revealed both a negative indirect effect through perceived congruence and a positive direct effect of the maximalist style of package on consumer brand attitude in the case of a serious brand description. Similarly in Study 4, the mediation analysis revealed both a negative indirect effect through perceived congruence and a positive direct effect of the maximalist organic package on consumer brand attitude in the case of a modern brand description. Further investigation would be necessary to explain these positive direct effects. It is possible that the maximalist tea package and the maximalist organic lotion package were respectively perceived as more congruent with the infusion and lotion product category, thus mitigating the consequences of perceived incongruence with, respectively, the serious and modern brand description. An interesting direction for future research would be to replicate these experiments while controlling for the package’s perceived congruence with the product category.

This research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of

maximalism on brand perception by making a distinction between two broad types of ornamental patterns: organic and geometric. However, other classifications are available that might link to other aspects of brand perception. Although we have regrouped historic ornament styles in the organic versus geometric categories it would be interesting to detail the difference of perception produced by each individual style. For instance, although both Art Deco and Memphis patterns are geometric, they most likely elicit different brand impressions. Similarly, although both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau patterns are organic, they most likely elicit different brand impressions. Thus, an interesting direction of research would be to capture the similarities and differences in the brand impressions produced by each specific design style incarnated in ornaments. Similarly, ornamental patterns could be classified according to their geographic origin (e.g., Celtic, Asian, Maghrebian, Amerindian, Indian, etc.). Building new experiments on such classifications would enable verifying whether ornamental patterns could work as an icon of local authenticity (Buschgens et al., 2024).

Finally, a growing body of research has recently investigated what minimalism means to consumers as a lifestyle, socially, and in terms of consumption values (Chen et al., 2024; Gong et al., 2023; Pangarkar et al., 2021; Wilson & Bellezza, 2022). Conducting similar research on maximalism would be of high value. This research investigated the values that have been associated with a maximalist style in art history. Although such an approach is informative, it is also possible that maximalism and ornamentation will take new meanings in contemporary society. To illustrate, Anderson et al. (2022) report that maximalism (vs. minimalism) is associated with inclusion (vs. exclusion) but found that in the context of the contemporary shared economy, minimalist interior design appears to be more inclusive. Moreover, minimalism is associated with well-being and relaxation, especially for busy people, so Chen et al. (2024) encourage managers and policymakers to avoid complex designs and favor minimalist designs. Nevertheless, the use of organic ornaments related to nature in maximalist packaging could contribute to well-being, given the inherent tendency of human beings to connect with nature (Kumar et al., 2020). Investigating what maximalism stands for in the contemporary consumer’s mind would therefore help us to get a better understanding of the implication of adopting a maximalist style for brands. The results presented in this article represent a first step in this direction.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Manon Favier: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Franck Celhay:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Gaëlle Pantin-Sohier:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Lise Magnier:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Methodology, Investigation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix 1. Results of Stimuli pretest

Stimuli test pilot study 1a (chocolate packages N = 176).

	Minimalist		Max_geo		Max_org		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	1.34	0.626	5.19	2.46	5.31	2.43	76.39	Min/Max_geo < 0.001 Min/ Max_org < 0.001 Max_geo/Max_org 0.744
Pattern design (1 = geometric; 9 = organic)			1.68	0.880	6.05	2.39	172.64	<.001

Stimuli test pilot study 1b (wine packages, N = 181).

	Minimalist		Max_geo		Max_org		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	1.98	1.18	4.09	1.85	4.37	2.03	33.40	Min/Max_geo < 0.001 Min/ Max_org < 0.001 Max_geo/Max_org 0.376
Pattern design (1 = geometric; 9 = organic)			2.08	1.40	6.04	2.06	159.14	<.001

Stimuli test study 1a (coffee packages, N = 121).

	Minimalist		Maximalist		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	1.61	0.796	5.16	2.15	138.11	<.001

Stimuli test study 1b (soap packages, N = 114).

	Minimalist		Maximalist		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	2.15	1.36	4.91	2.07	71.21	<.001

Stimuli test study 2 (infusion & tea packages, N = 143).

	Minimalist		Maximalist		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	2.46	1.42	4.75	1.70	77.21	<.001

Stimuli test study 3 (rum packages, N = 120).

	Max_geo		Max_org		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	4.02	1.73	4	1.64	0.003	0.957
Pattern design (1 = geometric; 9 = organic)	3.05	2.281	5.65	1.885	46.332	<.001

Stimuli test study 4 (lotion packages, N = 124).

	Max_geo		Max_org		F	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Visual complexity (1 = simple; 9 = complex)	4.27	2.11	4.91	2.09	2.884	0.092
Pattern design (1 = geometric; 9 = organic)	2.37	1.57	4.77	1.86	60.44	<.001
Perceived traditionality	3.18	1.63	6.23	1.58	110.58	<.001
Perceived modernity	6.93	1.67	4.84	1.93	41.37	<.001

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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