

Marketers struggle with how best to position innovative products that are incongruent with consumer expectations. Compounding the issue, many incongruent products are the result of innovative changes in product form intended to increase hedonic appeal. Crossing various product categories with various positioning tactics in a single meta-analytic framework, the authors find that positioning plays an important role in how consumers evaluate incongruent form. The results demonstrate that when a product is positioned on functional dimensions, consumers show more preferential evaluations for moderately incongruent form than for congruent form. However, when a product is positioned on experiential dimensions, consumers show more preferential evaluations for congruent form than for moderately incongruent form. Importantly, an increase in perceived hedonic benefits mediates the former, whereas a decrease in perceived utilitarian benefits mediates the latter. The mediation effects are consistent with the view that consumers must first understand a product's functionality before engaging in hedonic consumption.

Keywords: form and function, product incongruity, functional positioning, experiential positioning, product design

Looks Interesting, but What Does It Do? Evaluation of Incongruent Product Form Depends on Positioning

Product positioning is fundamental to marketing strategy, especially for new and innovative products. In new product development, marketers can innovate by adding novel functions, or they can innovate by altering the physical form of the product to increase aesthetic or hedonic appeal. The difficulty is that innovative changes in form are often incongruent with consumer expectations. Toning shoes (shoes that help develop your physique) are a recent example of a new product that, because of a large rounded sole, has a form that is incongruent with consumer expectations. When competing shoemakers Skechers and Reebok first introduced their toning shoes in 2009, they chose very distinct promotional strategies. Skechers promoted how its Shape-ups strengthened users' back, core, and leg muscles

(functional benefits), while in a commercial, Reebok promoted its EasyTone shoes as the route to a "nice booty," stating that it "helps you get better legs and a better butt" (experiential benefits). Despite the substantive implications, research has yet to explore the role of product positioning in shaping consumers' evaluations of new innovative products.

In this research, we support the novel prediction that product form and function are fully integrated such that incongruent form can lead consumers to question a product's functionality and cause asymmetric evaluations depending on how the product is positioned. We find that when a product is positioned on functional dimensions, consumers evaluate moderately incongruent form more favorably than congruent form. Conversely, when a product is positioned on experiential dimensions, consumers evaluate moderately incongruent form less favorably than congruent form. Importantly, at the root of this reversal we find a shift in perceived benefits. Specifically, an increase in perceived hedonic benefits mediates the former, whereas a decrease in perceived utilitarian benefits mediates the latter.

We make several advances in our work. First, we extend existing theory on product incongruity by detailing how

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functional and experiential positioning strategies differentially influence the relationship between form incongruity and consumer evaluations. Second, the marketing literature has offered no clear consensus on whether consumers actually prefer incongruity. Research has shown both positive (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Stayman, Alden, and Smith 1992) and negative (Campbell and Goodstein 2001) consumer evaluations for incongruent products. In this research, we advance both accounts by showing that the benefit of moderately incongruent form is subject to how the product is positioned. Furthermore, we predict and demonstrate a process-based explanation for the observed asymmetries. Last, from a practical standpoint, we answer calls for greater realism and relevance (Reibstein, Day, and Wind 2009), particularly given the strategic importance of product positioning. We do so by combining the disaggregate data from four independent experiments into a single meta-analytic framework. This allows for a rigorous assessment of our results by ruling out alternative explanations, crossing different product categories, and using a range of product positioning techniques. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Marketing scholars have long explored how consumers process incongruent products (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Peracchio and Tybout 1996; Stayman, Alden, and Smith 1992). Consistent with this body of work, we define an incongruent product as a good or service that deviates from a normative expectation. A simple example might be a round (rather than square) digital camera. This stream of research has substantive implications in that new products, especially innovative ones, are often incongruent with consumers' existing mental representations or schemas. A significant amount of research has led to a theory of schema congruity or, more precisely, a moderate incongruity effect (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Peracchio and Tybout 1996; Stayman, Alden, and Smith 1992). The moderate incongruity effect is predicated on the idea that consumers will evaluate a product that is moderately incongruent more favorably than a congruent or extremely incongruent product (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). A moderately incongruent object can be successfully identified with minimal effort, and the act of discovery leads people to enjoy it more (Mandler 1982). Mandler (1982) argues that by successfully identifying an incongruent object, people are able to resolve tensions that originate from not being able to initially make sense of it. Though supported in consumer research, the moderate incongruity effect has been moderated by numerous contextual factors, such as dogmatism (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), prior knowledge (Peracchio and Tybout 1996), prior category affect/processing goals (Goodstein 1993), perceived risk (Campbell and Goodstein 2001), and, most recently, thematic processing (Noseworthy, Finlay, and Islam 2010). As a whole, these factors call into question whether consumers truly prefer moderately incongruent products, particularly given the complexity of real-world consumption. Thus, there is a question of ecological validity when it comes to claims of incongruity enhancing product evaluations.

Compounding the issue is the observation that not all types of incongruity are the same. Products can have incongruent form, making them perceptually incongruent, or

they can have incongruent function, making them conceptually incongruent. Though seldom mentioned in the literature on the moderate incongruity effect, researchers exploring product ambiguity have long acknowledged the difference between perceptual and conceptual product cues (Gregan-Paxton, Hoeffler, and Zhao 2005; Noseworthy and Goode 2011). Conceptual incongruity is almost certainly ambiguous in that the product will typically adopt a known function from more than one product category, and the adoption defies a normative expectation. This type of incongruity is quite common today with the influx of new hybrid or boundary-spanning products. In contrast, perceptual incongruity need not be ambiguous; product form can defy normative expectations by simply being novel. The practice of adjusting product form is typically considered a hedonic alteration, commonly used by marketers to elicit interest (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007). The reason this is important is that changes in product form lead to perceptual incongruity. Unlike conceptual incongruity, perceptual incongruity does not explicitly communicate functionality. The onus is on the consumer to infer it or the marketer to communicate it.

Researchers have shown that particularly with what are referred to as "artifact categories" (i.e., things built by humans), as opposed to "natural categories" (i.e., naturally occurring objects: birds, dogs, trees, and so on), physical appearance is highly correlated with assumed functionality (Matan and Carey 2001). That is, form and function interact in such a way that functionality can be inferred from an object's physical appearance (Malt and Johnson 1992). Consumer research exploring this interaction has confirmed that perceptual cues dominate functional inferences (Gregan-Paxton, Hoeffler, and Zhao 2005). Indeed, consumers tend to believe that manufactured products are designed for a specific purpose, and rightly so. What this means for the moderate incongruity effect is that incongruent form may cause consumers to question the product's functionality. Although this prediction has yet to be explored in the literature, it is not without merit. Researchers have shown that a lack of typicality can sometimes *decrease* hedonic emphasis (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998) while *increasing* utilitarian emphasis (Malt and Johnson 1992). Coupled with the observation that utilitarianism and hedonism are not polar ends of a unidimensional continuum, but rather two distinct attitude components (Okada 2005; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003), it seems reasonable that form adjustments will differentially influence hedonic and utilitarian attitudes.

In their attempts to combine form (hedonic dimensions) with function (utilitarian dimensions), more researchers are beginning to discover that the two components have differential effects on product evaluations (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2008; Okada 2005; Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). Most notably, there is evidence that consumers attach greater importance to the hedonic dimensions of consumption, but only if the functionality of the product meets their expectations (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007). This observation fits with the idea that utilitarian dimensions dominate until consumers feel they deserve to indulge (Kivetz and Simonson 2002). It also fits with the idea that when functionality is in question, people

will forgo hedonic appeal and opt for a functionally superior alternative (Berry 1994). Thus, if product form adjustments lead to functional uncertainty, and if consumers need to understand a product's functionality before engaging in hedonic consumption, form adjustments may only augment hedonic appeal when functionality is known. This has yet to be considered in the literature on the moderate incongruity effect.

The moderate incongruity effect is predicated on the assumption that incongruity can be arousing if not too severe. A scan of the literature reveals that the most common characteristic among studies that support the moderate incongruity effect is the practice of explicitly conveying the functional features of the product. Yet not all advertisements do this. Instead, when it comes to adjustments in product form, many advertisements promote the hedonic or experiential aspects of products (e.g., fast food, clothing, luxury cars). Why does this matter? The explanation is in Mandler's (1982) original thesis. Mandler argues that the act of discovery (i.e., figuring out what the product is or does) is fundamental to the moderate incongruity effect. This raises a simple question: Would consumers show preferential evaluations for moderate incongruity if the products were not functionally positioned?

To date, the literature on the moderate incongruity effect has been silent on the role of product positioning. Therefore, we aim to extend this research with the proposition that incongruent form will lead to functional uncertainty if functional attributes are not explicitly communicated. Specifically, we predict that when it is experientially positioned, consumers will question the functional benefit of incongruent form and thus evaluate it less favorably than congruent form. However, when it is functionally positioned, consumers will be aware of the functional benefits of incongruent form and thus evaluate it more favorably than congruent form. These predictions underlie the fundamental idea that people must first understand the functionality of a product before engaging in the hedonic dimensions (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007). This is particularly important given that form adjustments are believed to augment hedonic appeal (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998). Thus, we begin Study 1 by testing the fundamental proposition that when it comes to product form, the moderate incongruity effect (i.e., the increase in evaluations for a moderately incongruent product) may be subject to how the product is positioned. Stated formally:

H₁: Consumers will evaluate a moderately incongruent product more (less) favorably than a congruent product when the product is functionally (experientially) positioned.

STUDY 1: POSITIONING EFFECTS ON EVALUATIONS OF INCONGRUENT PRODUCTS

Consistent with prior research in marketing, we define utilitarian benefits as the functional, instrumental, and practical dimensions of a product, whereas hedonic benefits are the aesthetic, experiential, and otherwise enjoyable dimensions (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007, 2008; Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). Although we employ this distinction when operationalizing product positioning, we acknowledge that the two are neither mutually exclusive nor proportionally static. Most products, given

the right context, can be promoted as either experiential or functional (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). Thus, in extending previous work (Böhm and Pfister 1996; Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007; Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003), Study 1 explores the novel proposition that people prefer moderately incongruent form when a product is functionally positioned but prefer congruent form when a product is experiential positioned. Because the discrepancies in the literature focus on congruent versus moderately incongruent products, we make no formal predictions for extreme incongruity.

Method

Participants and design. Participants (N = 150; 52% female; M_{Age} = 26.8) were recruited through newspaper advertisements and public posters and paid \$10 for taking part in the study. The ad manipulation and dependent measures were administered electronically in a behavioral lab. Participants were tested in groups of 10–15 individuals and were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions in a 2 (product positioning: functional brand vs. experiential brand) × 3 (form congruity: congruent vs. moderately incongruent vs. extremely incongruent) between-subjects factorial design.

Stimuli: form congruity. We established the operationalization of product form by first compiling photographs of different containers for soft drinks. We chose the soft drink category for two reasons: First, soft drinks have been featured extensively in the congruity literature (Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Stayman, Alden, and Smith 1992). Second, Campbell and Goodstein (2001, p. 443) not only manipulate the visual form of soft drinks but also offer a precise description of their manipulation of moderate incongruity (e.g., "a plastic single-serving bottle with a drinking valve on the lid"). Thus, we tailored the stimuli in line with prior work.

According to Mandler (1982), perceptions of incongruity are judgments of fit. Thus, we administered a pretest (n = 60) to determine whether participants perceived the selected containers as more (less) typical of their expectations for the general soft drink category. We measured perceived typicality with three seven-point items ("not at all unique/very unique," "very unlikely/very likely," and "[matches expectations] not at all well/very well"; Campbell and Goodstein 2001). We then averaged the pretest items to form an internally consistent measure ($\alpha = .73$). Pairwise comparisons verified that the congruent container was viewed as more typical (M = 6.01) than the moderately incongruent container (M = 3.85; F(1, 57) = 34.88, $p < .001$), which in turn was viewed as more typical than the extremely incongruent container (M = 1.87; F(1, 57) = 73.09, $p < .001$). Posttest analyses confirmed no effects of gender or age on measures of perceived typicality, price perception, or brand favorability (Fs < 1).

Mean differences notwithstanding, we conducted a second pretest (n = 60) to qualify the three-level operationalization. According to Mandler (1982), a hallmark of the moderate incongruity effect is that people can—with some deliberation—successfully figure out what a moderately incongruent object is, whereas extreme incongruity is too severe a violation that the object tends to go unidentified.

To test this, the three soft drink containers were stripped of all category information (e.g., brand names, category label, ad claims, imagery), and a fictitious brand was photo-edited onto the products. Participants were simply asked to identify the products. We used time latencies to explore participants' degree of deliberation.

In line with Mandler's (1982) work, a congruent object should be identified quickly and successfully, a moderately incongruent object should be identified successfully but with deliberation, and an extremely incongruent object should be identified rarely, regardless of deliberation. A binary logistic regression (0 = incorrect, 1 = correct) revealed that participants were statistically no more accurate at categorizing the congruent soft drink (96% accurate) than the moderately incongruent soft drink (86% accurate; $B = -1.21$, $SE = .94$, $p > .05$). Participants were far more accurate, however, at categorizing both the congruent and moderately incongruent soft drinks than the extremely incongruent soft drink (3% accurate; $B = -5.89$, $SE = 1.43$, $p < .001$ and $B = -4.68$, $SE = 1.20$, $p < .001$, respectively). Participants were faster at categorizing the congruent soft drink than the moderately incongruent soft drink ($M = 1,832$ msec vs. $M = 7,106$ msec; $F(1, 38) = 11.07$, $p < .01$) and faster at categorization the moderately incongruent soft drink than the extremely incongruent soft drink ($M = 7,106$ msec vs. $M = 1,0336$ msec; $F(1, 38) = 7.89$, $p < .05$). Combined, the typicality, categorization, and latency results confirmed the three-level operationalization of product form.

Stimuli: product positioning. We manipulated product positioning through explicit promotional claims. In the experiential condition, the soft drink listed attributes such as "beautiful," "inspiring," and "invigorating." In the functional condition, the soft drink listed attributes such as "fully carbonated," "easy to open," and "priced competitively." Nothing else varied between the two conditions. We pretested the advertisements by having participants ($n = 48$) list their thoughts about the product. Two unaffiliated judges coded participants' thoughts for whether they were experiential (emphasizing the aesthetic or hedonic dimensions of the advertisement) or functional (emphasizing the practical or utilitarian dimensions). The two coders were consistent ($r = .83$). All outstanding disagreements were resolved through discussion. We then constructed a functional-experiential index by subtracting the number of functional thoughts from the number of experiential thoughts and dividing the difference by the total number of thoughts. Zero indicates an equal number of functional and experiential thoughts, a positive number indicates more experiential thoughts, and a negative number indicates more functional thoughts. Overall, participants listed more functional thoughts when the advertisement promoted functional attributes ($M = -.19$) and more experiential thoughts when it promoted experiential attributes ($M = .33$; $F(1, 60) = 34.01$, $p < .001$).

Procedure and dependent measures. We randomly assigned participants to an electronic instrument that consisted of an online magazine with a pop-up web advertisement (see Web Appendix A at <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrdec11>). Participants were told that the purpose of the exercise was to explore the impact of modern soft drink

advertisements and that they were to review the advertisement at their own pace before completing the accompanied ten-item questionnaire. The soft drink category was explicitly communicated before participants viewed the advertisement to activate the appropriate schema (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Of the randomized ten items, seven (anchored by 1 = "not at all," and 7 = "extremely") captured participants' overall attitudes toward the product (left a favorable impression, is likable, is appealing, is desirable, is of good quality, interested in trial, is a high performance product). Three items captured participants' perceived typicality (discussed in the product form pretest). The questionnaire concluded with the thought-listing task discussed in the positioning pretest.

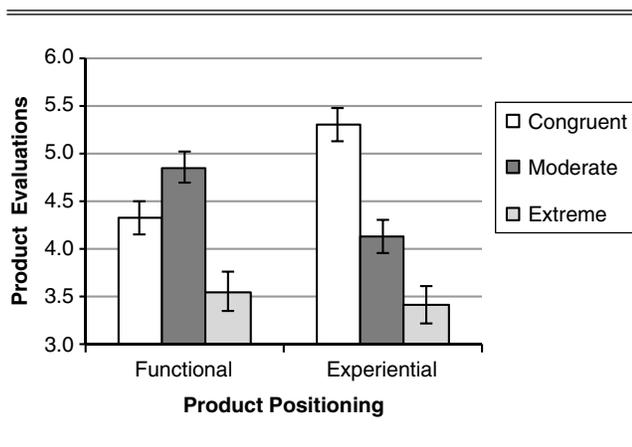
Results

Manipulation check: product form. We averaged the three typicality items to form an internally consistent measure ($\alpha = .76$). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect of product form ($F(2, 144) = 130.98$, $p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons indicated the congruent soft drink was perceived as more typical ($M = 5.41$) than the moderately incongruent soft drink ($M = 3.22$; $F(1, 144) = 101.01$, $p < .001$), which in turn was perceived as more typical than the extremely incongruent soft drink ($M = 1.89$; $F(1, 144) = 83.99$, $p < .001$). There was no effect of product positioning ($F < 1$). More important, the interaction between product positioning and product form on perceived typicality was not significant ($F < 1$). Thus, the product form manipulation was perceived as intended, and it was not influenced by product positioning.

Manipulation check: product positioning. As in the pretest, two unaffiliated judges coded participants' thoughts for whether they were experiential or functional, and then we calculated a functional-experiential index (intercoder reliability, $r = .84$). As we expected, participants listed more functional thoughts when the target advertisement promoted functional attributes ($M = -.08$) and more experiential thoughts when it promoted experiential attributes ($M = .12$; $F(1, 144) = 15.56$, $p < .005$). No other effects were recorded ($F_s < 1.81$).

Product evaluation. We averaged the seven evaluation items ($\alpha = .88$). A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant product positioning \times product form interaction on product evaluations ($F(2, 144) = 12.29$, $p < .001$). As Figure 1 illustrates, the nature of the interaction was such that the moderate incongruity effect occurred when the target soft drinks were functionally positioned. Specifically, participants evaluated the moderately incongruent soft drink more favorably ($M = 5.36$) than the congruent soft drink ($M = 4.32$; $F(1, 144) = 9.22$, $p < .01$) and the congruent soft drink more favorably than the extremely incongruent soft drink ($M = 2.05$; $F(1, 144) = 16.28$, $p < .005$). In contrast, the moderate incongruity effect did not emerge when the soft drinks were experientially positioned. Participants evaluated the congruent soft drink more favorably ($M = 5.11$) than both the moderately incongruent soft drink ($M = 4.43$; $F(1, 144) = 7.18$, $p < .05$) and the extremely incongruent soft drink ($M = 2.41$; $F(1, 144) = 34.78$, $p < .001$). Therefore, consistent with our prediction (H_1), the increase in evaluations for moderately incongruent form seemed contingent on how the product was positioned.

Figure 1
THE EFFECT OF PRODUCT FORM AND PRODUCT POSITIONING ON PRODUCT EVALUATIONS



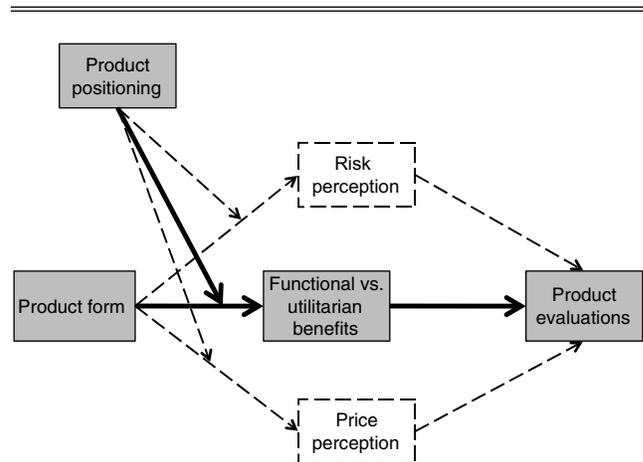
Discussion

We conducted Study 1 to test whether the moderate incongruity effect is robust across different types of positioning. The results suggest maybe not. If the moderate incongruity effect manifests only when a product is functionally positioned, it seems plausible that this type of positioning helps consumers make sense of the product. Again, a key concept of the moderate incongruity effect is that consumers must be able to *figure out* the product. Thus, it follows that when a moderately incongruent product is experientially positioned, consumers struggle to make sense of it. This line of reasoning fits the idea that experiential positioning focuses on contextual ideals instead of product features and thus provides little to no information about the functionality of the product. If this is so, we should be able to find differences in how consumers perceive the product depending on how it is positioned. Specifically, if people are unable to make sense of an incongruent product when it is experientially positioned, they should question the product's functionality (i.e., perceive less utilitarian benefits), leading to lower product evaluations. If, however, people are able to make sense of an incongruent product when it is functionally positioned, they should view incongruent form as an aesthetic alteration (i.e., perceive more hedonic benefits), leading to higher product evaluations. This fits the idea that adjustments in product form are often viewed as aesthetically pleasing (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998). Yet it also fits the idea that people must first understand the functional dimensions of a product before engaging in the hedonic dimensions (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007). In short, we predict that the relationship between product form and positioning on product evaluations is mediated by the perceived functional and hedonic benefits of the product. Stated formally:

H_{2a}: Perceived utilitarian benefits will mediate the relationship between form incongruity and product evaluations when the product is experientially positioned but not when it is functionally positioned.

H_{2b}: Perceived hedonic benefits will mediate the relationship between form incongruity and product evaluations when

Figure 2
RESEARCH MODEL



Notes: Solid arrows represent the theoretical model. The dotted lines represent alternative explanations that we empirically ruled out.

the product is functionally positioned but not when it is experientially positioned.

With that said, an alternative explanation for the observed asymmetries in evaluation might simply be the moderate incongruity effect. Researchers have long explored how moderate incongruity can enhance consumers' extremity of evaluation through the act of discovery (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Peracchio and Tybout 1996; Stayman, Alden, and Smith 1992). Furthermore, research has shown that when perceived risk is high, incongruity can lead to a decline in product evaluations (Campbell and Goodstein 2001). Thus, it could be that this study merely supports the moderate incongruity effect in the functional condition but that perceived risk mitigated the effect in the experiential condition. This is particularly plausible given that an experientially positioned product is often considered more expensive than a functionally positioned product. Thus, in manipulating product positioning, we may have inadvertently manipulated perceived risk. Although this line of reasoning does not negate the importance of the results, there is a need to explore this explanation. Similarly, another explanation that pertains to price perception might simply be that the moderately incongruent soft drink promoting functional attributes was considered more expensive and, thus, more desirable and the moderately incongruent soft drink promoting experiential attributes was considered cheap/gimmicky and, thus, less desirable. Indeed, this would be a fatal confound. Figure 2 depicts both the predicted and the alternative explanations within the core research model.

To explore the prediction that discrete attitude components mediate the observed asymmetries in evaluations for moderately incongruent form, as well to test the alternative explanations of perceived risk and price perception, we designed four replication studies. In an effort to rule out any additional influence of the product category

or positioning technique, each study examined a different product category and adopted a unique product positioning tactic. The core purpose was to offer robust replications while providing additional insight into the underlying mechanisms driving asymmetric evaluations for moderately incongruent form.

META-ANALYSIS: GENERALIZATION OF POSITIONING EFFECTS

We designed Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5 to test our predictions using different product categories and different positioning manipulations. Because we were interested in determining the robustness of the effect, while ruling out alternative explanations, we conducted the four studies with the goal of replication. For the sake of brevity, the methods and results appear together. Because the four studies share the same design, procedure, and dependent measures, we combine the data into a single meta-analytic framework. A meta-analysis serves two objectives. First, the meta-analysis allows us to generalize our findings across alternative positioning tactics and different product categories by treating the study replication as a level-two random effect. Second, it allows us to produce an overall effect size. Although multilevel models are pervasive in the social sciences, they are surprisingly absent in marketing research. Thus, in addition to the theoretical and practical contributions, we also present a multilevel approach to handling replication data. Going forward, we cover the manipulation checks separately and then move into the meta-analysis for the core dependent measures.

Method

Participants and design. Participants took part in Studies 2–5 in exchange for course credit. Because the pilot study confirmed that evaluations for extremely incongruent form did not vary by positioning, only the congruent and moderately congruent manipulations were carried forward from the pretests. This enabled us to keep consistent with prior work, which focuses on whether people prefer moderate incongruent form to congruent form (Campbell and Goodstein 2001). Thus, in all four studies, we randomly assigned participants to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (product positioning: functional vs. experiential) × 2 (product form: congruent vs. moderately incongruent) between-subjects factorial design.

Web Appendixes B and C (see <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrdec11>) present the product positioning manipulations for Studies 3–5 (Study 2 was identical to Study 1 with the addition of new measures). The studies used a combination of real and fictitious brands and varied the product categories. Specifically, we adopted the products chosen for Study 3 from the European automaker Peugeot given its availability of standard models as well as several concept cars that differ from conventional norms. We adopted the products chosen for Study 4 from the German manufacturer Minox because of the breadth of its digital camera line. As in Study 1 (Zija soft drinks), Study 5 adopted a brand name that was unassociated with the product category (Dali wristwatches). We adopted all the products, except for the wristwatches, from a recent article (Noseworthy, Cotte, and Lee 2011). Thus, the stimuli used in the replications were remarkably consistent with prior work. Nevertheless, we

secured the product form manipulations through the same two-stage pretest described in Study 1 (Web Appendix D).

In addition to varying the product category, we varied the positioning tactics. Specifically, Study 2 manipulated product positioning through promotional claims ($N = 112$; 53% female; $M_{Age} = 20.9$); in the functional positioning condition, the advertisement promoted aspects such as “fully carbonated,” “easy to open,” and “priced competitively,” and in the experiential condition, the advertisement promoted aspects such as “beautiful,” “invigorating,” and “inspiring.” Study 3 manipulated product positioning through associative imagery ($N = 100$; 55% female; $M_{Age} = 21.1$); in the functional positioning condition, the advertisement accompanied images of the vehicle from different angles, the interior, and a picture of the dashboard, and in the experiential condition, the advertisement accompanied images of a sunset highway, a luxury resort, and diamonds. Study 4 manipulated product positioning through explicit benefit statements ($N = 92$; 50% female; $M_{Age} = 22.3$); in the functional positioning condition, the advertisement emphasized the utilitarian, instrumental, and practical dimensions of the product, and in the experiential positioning condition, the advertisement emphasized the aesthetic, hedonic, and enjoyable dimensions. Finally, Study 5 manipulated product positioning through brand association ($N = 100$; 53% female; $M_{Age} = 27.3$); in the functional positioning condition, the advertisement associated the product with common brands such as Timex, Seiko, and Casio, targeted to everyday consumers, and in the experiential positioning condition, the advertisement associated the product with luxury brands such as Rolex, Cartier, and Armani, targeted to affluent consumers. We secured the product positioning manipulations through thought-listing tasks (see Web Appendix E at <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrdec11>). Across all studies, there was no effect of gender or age on perceived typicality, price perception, brand awareness, or brand favorability ($F_s < 1$).

All replications followed the exact same procedures as in Study 1. The only difference was that we expanded the 10-item questionnaire to 24 items. Specifically, to explore the prediction of discrete attitude components, we adopted 10 seven-point semantic differential items from Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003). Five of the items captured participants’ perceived utilitarian benefits (“effective/ineffective,” “helpful/unhelpful,” “functional/not functional,” “necessary/unnecessary,” and “practical/impractical”), and the other five captured participants’ perceived hedonic benefits (“fun/not fun,” “dull/exciting,” “not delightful/delightful,” “not thrilling/thrilling,” and “enjoyable/unenjoyable”). To explore the alternative explanation of perceive risk, we included 4 seven-point items (“not at all risky/extremely risky,” “not at all concerned/highly concerned,” “very unimportant/very important,” and “not at all worried/very worried”; Campbell and Goodstein 2001). To explore the potential confound of price perception, the randomized questionnaire was followed by an open-ended question that asked participants to estimate the price of the target product. The only exception was Study 2, in which the retail price was given to participants at the beginning of the study and they were subsequently asked to recall it at the end. We administered this approach to offer a scenario in which price was known before evaluation and to determine whether knowing the price would render different

results from those in Study 1. All studies concluded with a thought task to test whether the positioning manipulation was perceived as intended.

Results

Manipulation check: product form. The internal consistency of the typicality items ranged from $\alpha = .76$ to $.83$. All four studies observed a main effect of product form. In Study 2, participants perceived the congruent Zija soft drink as more typical ($M = 5.21$) than the moderately incongruent Zija soft drink ($M = 3.37$; $F(1, 108) = 75.06, p < .001$). In Study 3, participants perceived the congruent Peugeot car as more typical ($M = 5.24$) than the moderately incongruent Peugeot car ($M = 3.62$; $F(1, 96) = 78.36, p < .001$). In Study 4, participants perceived the congruent Minox camera as more typical ($M = 5.39$) than the moderately incongruent Minox camera ($M = 3.19$; $F(1, 88) = 104.46, p < .001$). Finally, in Study 5, participants perceived the congruent Dali wristwatch as more typical ($M = 5.34$) than the moderately incongruent Dali wristwatch ($M = 3.38$; $F(1, 96) = 143.86, p < .001$). In all four studies, there was neither a main effect of product positioning on perceived typicality ($F_s < 1$) nor an interaction between product positioning and product form ($F_s < 1$). Thus, the product form manipulations were perceived as intended.

Manipulation check: product positioning. The intercoder reliability across replications ranged from $r = .81$ to $.94$. All studies observed a main effect of product positioning on the functional-experiential index. In Study 2, participants recorded more functional thoughts when the advertisement listed attributes such as “fully carbonated,” “easy to open,” and “priced competitively” ($M = -.34$) and more experiential thoughts when the advertisement listed attributes such as “beautiful,” “invigorating,” and “inspiring” ($M = .14$; $F(1, 108) = 14.06, p < .001$). In Study 3, participants recorded more functional thoughts when the advertisement accompanied images of the vehicle from different angles, the interior, and a picture of the dashboard ($M = -.09$) and more experiential thoughts when the advertisement accompanied images of a sunset highway, a luxury resort, and diamonds ($M = .20$; $F(1, 96) = 6.21, p < .05$). Similarly, in Study 4, participants recorded more functional thoughts when the advertisement emphasized the instrumental and practical dimensions of the camera ($M = -.04$) and more experiential thoughts when the advertisement emphasized the aesthetic and enjoyable dimensions of the camera ($M = .06$; $F(1, 88) = 9.54, p < .01$). Finally, in Study 5, participants recorded more functional thoughts when the advertisement associated the wristwatch with brands such as Timex, Seiko, and Casio, targeted to everyday consumers ($M = -.08$) and more experiential thoughts when the advertisement associated the wristwatch with brands such as Rolex, Cartier, and Armani, targeted to affluent consumers ($M = .16$; $F(1, 96) = 5.99, p < .05$). There was neither a main effect of product form on the index ($F_s < 1$) nor a product form \times product positioning interaction across the four studies ($F_s < 1.85$). Therefore, the product positioning manipulations were perceived as intended.

Meta-Analysis

We first analyzed Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5 independently. We conducted all ANOVAs on a 2 (product positioning) \times 2

(form congruity) between-subjects design. Table 1 reports treatment means for the core dependent measures for Studies 2–5. As Table 1 shows, the results from the four studies demonstrate the same pattern observed in Study 1. Thus, we have effectively replicated the results using different product categories and different positioning tactics. After establishing the studies as replications, we now turn to the meta-analysis.

To conduct the meta-analysis, we estimated a mixed linear model (restricted maximum likelihood; Studies 2–5; $N = 404$). Table 2 presents the descriptives, correlations, and average reliability estimates for each variable used in the replications. It is worth noting that the aggregated correlation between perceived utilitarian benefits and perceived hedonic benefits was $.21$. The correlation fits with the idea that hedonism and utilitarianism are not polar ends along a unidimensional continuum (Okada 2005; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003).

Product evaluations. Table 3 presents the mixed linear model results for product evaluations. The model was specified such that study replication served as a level-two random effect and product form ($-1 =$ congruent; $1 =$ moderately incongruent) and product positioning ($-1 =$ functional; $1 =$ experiential) served as level-one fixed effects. Specifying the model at two levels allowed for a random coefficient at both the study level and the individual level. Overall, the variance component corresponding to the random intercept was $.29$ and not significant. This indicates that the variance in product evaluations did not significantly vary by study. However, when the variance components were partitioned across model levels, the intraclass correlation coefficient was $.27$, meaning that roughly 27% of the variance in product evaluations was attributed to study characteristics. This is not surprising given the use of different product categories, but it does necessitate ruling out treatment effects.

As Table 3 illustrates, product positioning and product form did not significantly affect product evaluations. However, the interaction term was significant ($B = -.94, SE = .09, p < .001$). The interaction accounted for a significant increment in variance in product evaluations beyond the effects of product positioning and product form ($\Delta R^2 = .17, \Delta F(1, 400) = 88.23, p < .001$). Because it is possible that the interaction varied by study replication, we modeled a second model in which we treated the interaction term as a random effect. Both the random study-level intercept (τ_{00}) and the random interaction coefficient (τ_{01}) were not significant. Therefore, the interaction between product positioning and product form was consistent across replications. The meta-analysis clearly conveys the generalizability across replications with an overall effect size (adjusted R^2) of $.18$. As a whole, participants evaluated the congruent products more favorably when they were experientially positioned ($M = 5.32$) than when they were functionally positioned ($M = 4.29$; $F(1, 400) = 52.02, p < .001$). Conversely, participants evaluated the moderately incongruent products more favorably when they were functionally positioned ($M = 5.05$) than when they were experientially positioned ($M = 4.19$; $F(1, 400) = 36.86, p < .001$).

Table 1
TREATMENT MEANS AND CELL COUNTS FOR CORE MEASURES IN STUDIES 2–5

	<i>Functional Positioning</i>		<i>Experiential Positioning</i>	
	<i>Congruent</i>	<i>Moderately Incongruent</i>	<i>Congruent</i>	<i>Moderately Incongruent</i>
<i>Study 2: Soft Drinks</i>				
Product evaluation	4.31 (.92)	5.65 (.94)	5.06 (.86)	4.29 (.98)
Utilitarian benefits	2.89 (.78)	2.84 (.88)	2.61 (.75)	1.64 (.74)
Hedonic benefits	3.06 (.81)	5.38 (1.01)	4.42 (.96)	4.41 (1.13)
Perceived risk	1.77 (.83)	2.58 (.91)	2.02 (.82)	3.10 (.95)
Cell size	28	28	28	28
<i>Study 3: Cars</i>				
Product evaluation	4.99 (.84)	5.77 (.78)	5.78 (.85)	4.73 (.91)
Utilitarian benefits	3.87 (.94)	3.98 (.87)	3.92 (.86)	2.46 (.95)
Hedonic benefits	5.24 (.80)	6.11 (.76)	5.68 (.81)	5.35 (.82)
Perceived risk	3.88 (.86)	4.11 (.83)	4.30 (.87)	4.88 (.86)
Cell size	25	25	25	25
<i>Study 4: Digital Cameras</i>				
Product evaluation	3.49 (.85)	4.48 (.72)	4.46 (.83)	3.56 (.77)
Utilitarian benefits	4.61 (.84)	4.54 (.87)	4.59 (.84)	3.45 (.79)
Hedonic benefits	3.52 (.72)	4.55 (.73)	4.16 (.80)	3.81 (.73)
Perceived risk	2.39 (.87)	3.79 (.93)	3.02 (.89)	4.53 (.92)
Cell size	23	23	23	23
<i>Study 5: Wristwatches</i>				
Product evaluation	4.32 (.81)	4.85 (.83)	5.29 (.83)	4.13 (.82)
Utilitarian benefits	4.62 (.72)	4.89 (.71)	4.36 (.71)	3.38 (.69)
Hedonic benefits	3.75 (.86)	5.20 (.83)	4.66 (.83)	4.36 (.81)
Perceived risk	2.80 (.92)	3.73 (.96)	2.92 (.80)	4.15 (1.03)
Cell size	25	25	25	25

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 2
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, CORRELATIONS, AND AVERAGE RELIABILITY ESTIMATES FOR THE AGGREGATED VARIABLES

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
1. Form congruity	—	—	—							
2. Product positioning	—	—	—	—						
3. Perceived typicality	4.25	1.25	-.78***	-.02	(.78)					
4. Utilitarian benefits	4.13	1.07	-.24**	-.28**	.30**	(.84)				
5. Hedonic benefits	4.60	1.26	.24**	.01	-.12*	.21*	(.89)			
6. Product evaluations	4.70	1.11	-.01	-.04	.08	.27**	.67***	(.88)		
7. Estimated price	20.78	48.35	.03	.15*	.04	-.10	-.09	-.07	—	
8. Perceived risk	3.69	1.15	.38**	.19**	-.21**	-.30**	.24**	.02	.11	(.79)

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

****p* < .001.

Notes: Values in parentheses are aggregated reliability estimates. Mean price is in thousands of dollars.

Mediation analysis: utilitarian benefits. Given that we replicated the asymmetric evaluations for moderately incongruent form, we then switched our focus to testing the underlying mechanism. We conducted mediation analyses for each individual study independently. The results were again consistent. For the sake of brevity, we only report the meta-analysis mediation results. Individual mediation results are available in Web Appendix F (<http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrdec11>).

To determine whether an emphasis on perceived utilitarian benefits accounted for the decrease in evaluations for moderately incongruent products that are experientially positioned, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt 2005; Preacher, Rucker,

and Hayes 2007). In keeping with the meta-analysis, we conducted three separate mixed linear models to test for moderated mediation. Again, study replication served as the level-two random effect and product form and product positioning served as level-one fixed effects. In the first model, product form and product positioning interacted to predict product evaluations (the proposed outcome variable; *B* = -.69, *SE* = .11, *p* < .001). The second model showed a product form × product positioning interaction on perceived utilitarian benefits (the proposed mediator; *B* = -1.21, *SE* = .09, *p* < .001). Finally, in the third model, when we reran the product form × product positioning interaction on product evaluations controlling for perceived utilitarian benefits, the interaction term

Table 3

MIXED LINEAR MODEL WITH STUDY NUMBER AS A LEVEL-TWO RANDOM EFFECT AND PRODUCT POSITIONING, PRODUCT FORM, AND THEIR INTERACTION AS LEVEL-ONE FIXED EFFECTS

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Fixed Effects</i>		
Intercept γ_{00}	4.18* (.28)	4.18* (.28)
Product positioning γ_{01}	.08 (.09)	.08 (.09)
Product form γ_{02}	.02 (.09)	.03 (.10)
Product positioning \times product form γ_{03}	-.94* (.09)	-.94* (.10)
<i>Random Effects</i>		
Intercept τ_{00}	.29 (.24)	.29 (.24)
Product positioning \times product form τ_{01}		.01 (.02)
Residual σ^2	.81* (.05)	.80* (.06)

* $p < .001$.

Notes: N = 404. Standard errors are in parentheses. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

dropped to nonsignificance ($B = -.03$, $SE = .11$, $p = .97$), while the relationship between perceived utilitarian benefits and product evaluations remained ($B = .58$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$). Importantly, the random study coefficient was not significant in any of the three models ($ps > .10$). To further the interpretation, we conducted a bootstrapping analysis to examine the conditional indirect effects of product positioning (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007; Model 2). As we predicted, perceived utilitarian benefits mediated the relationship between product form and product evaluation when the products were experientially positioned (indirect $B = -.21$, $SE = .06$, $z = -3.59$, $p < .001$) but not when they were functionally positioned ($z = -.01$, $p = .83$). This finding supports the prediction (H_{2a}) that when products are experientially positioned, moderately incongruent form can cause people to question the utilitarian benefits of the product, which in turn can lead to lower product evaluations.

Mediation analysis: hedonic benefits. We conducted a second moderated mediation analysis to determine whether an emphasis on perceived hedonic benefits accounted for the increase in evaluations for the moderately incongruent products that were functionally positioned. Again, study replication served as the level-two random effect and product form and product positioning served as level-one fixed effects. As previously, there was a product form \times product positioning interaction on product evaluations ($B = .66$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$). The second model showed a product form \times product positioning interaction on perceived hedonic benefits ($B = .96$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$). Finally, when we controlled for perceived hedonic benefits, the interaction became nonsignificant ($B = .13$, $SE = .10$, $p = .19$), while the relationship between perceived hedonic benefits and product evaluations remained ($B = .56$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$). Again, the random study coefficient was not significant in any of the three models ($ps > .10$). We again examined the conditional indirect effects of product positioning (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007; Model 2). As we predicted, perceived hedonic benefits mediated the positive relationship between product form and product evaluation when the products were functionally positioned (indirect $B = .83$, $SE = .10$, $z = 7.93$, $p < .001$) but not when they

were experientially positioned ($z = -.14$, $p = .13$). This finding supports the prediction (H_{2b}) that when products are functionally positioned, moderately incongruent form can cause people to focus on the hedonic benefits of the product, which in turn can lead to higher product evaluations.

Alternative explanation: perceived risk. Although the mediation analyses support the prediction that discrete attitude components underlie the observed asymmetries in product evaluations, an alternative explanation is that the manipulation of experiential positioning might have inadvertently manipulated perceived risk. Research has shown that an increase in perceived risk can lead to a decline in evaluations for moderately incongruent products (Campbell and Goodstein 2001). Thus, it was important for any meaningful interpretation to account for this effect. Overall, a mixed linear model revealed that participants perceived the moderately incongruent products as more risky than the congruent products ($B = 1.09$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$). Similarly, participants perceived the experientially positioned products as more risky than the functionally positioned products ($B = .61$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$). The product form \times product positioning interaction was not significant ($B = -.25$, $SE = .18$, $p = .16$), nor was the random study coefficient ($B = .61$, $SE = .50$, $p = .23$). When we added risk to the final model in the product evaluation analysis (Model 2), the interaction between product positioning and product form on product evaluations remained ($B = -.86$, $SE = .31$, $p < .001$), independent of risk ($B = -.03$, $SE = .06$, $p = .59$) and independent of the interaction between risk and product form ($B = -.02$, $SE = .08$, $p = .77$). Finally, a bootstrapping analysis confirmed that perceived risk did not mediate the relationship between product form and product evaluations regardless of whether the target products were functionally positioned ($z = 1.22$, $p = .22$) or experientially positioned ($z = 1.24$, $p = .21$). Thus, not only were the study replications consistent, but perceived risk also could not account for the observed asymmetries in product evaluations.

Confound check: price perception. Finally, we conducted an analysis of price perception to rule out the potential confound that people considered the functionally (experientially) positioned moderately incongruent products more (less) expensive and, thus, more (less) desirable. We conducted a mixed linear model, with study replication as the level-two random effect and estimated price (normalized), product form, and product positioning as level-one fixed effects. Not surprisingly, participants perceived the experientially positioned products as more expensive than the functionally positioned products ($B = 9,665.11$, $SE = 4,531.61$, $p < .05$). The main effect of product form was not significant ($B = 2,110.95$, $SE = 4,531.61$, $p = .64$), nor was the product form \times product positioning interaction on price ($B = -2,757.84$, $SE = 6,408.66$, $p = .67$). The exaggerated coefficients are obviously being driven by Study 3 (cars). When broken down by replication, the only study that did not show a main effect of product positioning on price was Study 2, in which price was given to participants and they were asked to recall it ($F = 1.16$). Importantly, this did not change the observed asymmetries in evaluations. When we added price to the final model in the product evaluation meta-analysis (Model 2), the product positioning \times product form interaction remained significant ($B = -.92$, $SE = .14$, $p < .001$), independent of price ($B = .01$, $SE = .01$, $p =$

.92) and independent of the interaction between price and product form ($B = .01$, $SE = .01$, $p = .30$). Importantly, the random study coefficient was not significant ($B = .26$, $SE = .22$, $p = .25$). Thus, price perception did not account for the pattern of effects in product evaluations.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the meta analysis was to further the unique observation that people favor experientially positioned products with congruent form but favor functionally positioned products with moderately incongruent form. The secondary purpose was to explain why this occurs. The results from four replications confirmed the observations in Study 1 using different product categories and various means of product positioning. We left Study 1 with the cautionary observation that the manipulation of product positioning may have inadvertently manipulated perceived risk. This was of particular concern because prior research has shown that perceived risk can attenuate the moderate incongruity effect (Campbell and Goodstein 2001). Evidence from the four replications suggests that this was not the case.

The meta-analysis results support our theorizing; an increase in perceived hedonic benefits mediated the increase in product evaluations for moderately incongruent form when the product was functionally positioned, whereas a decrease in perceived utilitarian benefits mediated the decrease in product evaluations for moderately incongruent form when the product was experientially positioned. The reversal in product evaluations fits recent findings that consumers must first establish a product's functionality before engaging in the hedonic dimensions of consumption (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007, 2008). Consider that for most functional goods, consumers have preconceived notions of functionality and thus indulge in cosmetic or aesthetic novelty, whereas for experiential goods, they are not driven by functionality but rather by higher-order aspirations of pleasure, aesthetics, or esteem. This is not to suggest that form adjustments are not aesthetic but simply to caution that there are situations—particularly when functionality is uncertain—when they may cause confusion. Thus, although experiential positioning is a valuable tactic to increase hedonic appeal, as are alterations in product form, combining the two may not be good practice for marketers.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This work builds on existing research that suggests that utilitarianism precedes hedonism until functional expectations are met (Berry 1994; Böhm and Pfister 1996; Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007). We are the first, however, to explore how this pertains to incongruent product form. In particular, evidence emerged to suggest that the moderate incongruity effect might be contingent on how a product is positioned. Indeed, not all positioning strategies share the same objective. We find that when a product is positioned on functional dimensions, consumers show more preferential evaluations for moderately incongruent form than for congruent form. This is consistent with the moderate incongruity effect. Unique to this research, however, we find that when a product is positioned on experiential dimensions, consumers prefer congruent to moderately

incongruent form. The effect was robust across four studies using four different product categories and four distinct positioning strategies.

Although research has illustrated that moderate incongruity can augment product evaluations (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989) and some subsequent studies have attenuated the effect (Campbell and Goodstein 2001; Peracchio and Tybout 1996), the literature on incongruity has been mute on the role of product positioning. This is rather surprising given that positioning strategy significantly affects how a product is evaluated (Kalra and Goodstein 1998) and informs the type of inferences that can be made (Pham and Muthukrishnan 2002).

Furthermore, although research has questioned the ecological validity of the moderate incongruity effect by showing that perceived risk can cause preferential evaluations for a congruent option (Campbell and Goodstein 2001), our research is unique in that the asymmetries resulting from product positioning could not be attributed to perceived risk. Instead, we found that when a product is positioned on functional dimensions, moderately incongruent form causes consumers to perceive more hedonic benefits, whereas when a product is positioned on experiential dimensions, moderately incongruent form causes consumers to perceive less utilitarian benefits.

As a whole, not only does this work answer calls for greater realism (Reibstein, Day, and Wind 2009) by testing form adjustments within the actual advertising context, but it also answers recent calls to highlight the mechanisms underlying causal inferences through “careful validation over multiple studies” and by highlighting the specific effects of one variable while ruling out others (Bullock, Green, and Ha 2010, p. 554). Thus, this work contributes to literature on consumer behavior by illustrating that when consumers know how a product functions, they will show preferential evaluations for moderately incongruent form. The observation that an increase in perceived hedonic benefits mediated this relationship is consistent with the idea that when functionality is known, people prefer the hedonically superior option (Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan 2007). This work also contributes by showing that when consumers are unsure of a product's functionality, they will show preferential evaluations for congruent form. The observation that a decline in perceived utilitarian benefits mediated this relationship is consistent with the idea that when functionality is in question, people prefer a functionally superior option (Berry 1994).

The findings from this research also extend understanding of the conditions under which preference reversals for functional versus hedonic options may occur. Kivetz and Simonson (2002), as well as Okada (2005), demonstrate that preference reversals are possible through the manipulation of both the mode of preference elicitation and the mode of presentation. Chitturi, Raghunathan, and Mahajan (2007) advance this observation by illustrating that varying only the mode of preference elicitation is sufficient. Our research illustrates that there are certain circumstance when varying only the mode of presentation is sufficient. This finding is important because it illustrates that the way an innovative (incongruent) product is presented can lead to preference reversals.

The findings of our research suggest some general guidelines for the positioning of new products with incongruent

form. Marketers who have a product with innovative form can use product positioning to help resolve the functional uncertainty that results from the form adjustment. If an incongruous product is positioned on its functional benefits, and functional uncertainty is resolved, consumers can then focus on the hedonic benefits of the product. If, however, a marketer positions an incongruent product on its experiential benefits, consumers may question the product's functionality, and this can go unresolved. Consequently, consumers may prefer a congruent alternative because they can infer its functionality from memory. Thus, if incongruity can elicit functional uncertainty, and if function precedes aesthetics in consumer choice, marketers should take care to inform consumers of product functionality whenever form adjustments are used for hedonic purposes. Despite the popular belief that experiential positioning is a more sustainable positioning strategy (Pine and Gilmore 1999), it is important for marketers to realize that this type of positioning does little to infer functional inference. Thus, any degree of functional uncertainty may override the objectives of experiential positioning.

Implicit in this research is a cautionary note for scholars examining the effects of product incongruity. Incongruent form has different implications for product preference than incongruent function. Though not explicitly contrasted in this work, form incongruity can call functionality into question, whereas functional incongruity does not necessarily elicit functional uncertainty but merely causes an expectancy violation that may result in skepticism or confusion. Further research should explore the difference between the two in greater detail. Furthermore, although our study exposes variables that are consistent with a more realistic consumption environment, it is difficult to reliably simulate the true risk involved in having to actually purchase a good. Thus, although we remained relatively consistent with prior work exploring risk (in that an actual purchase was not elicited), the question remains whether asymmetric evaluations translate into asymmetric choice. Additional research is clearly needed in this area.

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