

Product Pleasure: A Tale of Two Cultures

Fred Han¹, Julian Bowerman²

¹*School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China*

²*School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China*

ABSTRACT: *In today's highly competitive global economy, products that that elicit pleasure are seen as important by retailers and manufacturers; they are also appreciated by consumers. However, knowing what aspects of products elicit pleasure in people of different cultures is poorly understood.*

This study explores product pleasure with respect to two cultures: the culture of Mainland China and the culture of Hong Kong. It employs Jordan's pleasure framework to do this, a framework that divides pleasures into four conceptually distinct types: physio-pleasure (physical pleasure), socio-pleasure (social pleasure), psycho-pleasure (psychological pleasure) and ideo-pleasure (ideological pleasure).

The study finds significant differences in the levels of socio-pleasure, psycho-pleasure and ideo-pleasure pleasure elicited in participants from Mainland China and Hong Kong when they examine the same product. It reveals differences both in the levels of pleasure evoked with respect to shape and in what each cultural group considers aspirational.

KEYWORDS: *Product pleasure, Culture, Design, Hong Kong, China*

I. Introduction

Over the last twenty-five years, manufacturers have become increasingly interested in creating products that elicit pleasure. Arguably, this has occurred principally for three reasons. First, high quality manufacturing is now ubiquitous and cheap; consequently, the opportunities to make competitive gains through traditional routes, such as improving quality and lowering price, have eroded. Second, consumers have started to demand more from the things they buy. Ironically, this has come about due to improvements in manufacturing increasing choice [1]. Consumers now want products to enhance their lives and evoke delight. In effect, they want products that address their suprafunctional needs [2]. Third, companies are starting to understand that product pleasure can be used as a strategic tool to create stronger emotional ties with customers and increase profits [3-5]. However, while manufacturers are becoming ever more interested in producing products that elicit pleasure, there is limited understanding by designers as to how to achieve this and as to whether different aspects of products elicit dissimilar amounts of delight in different populations [1].

In Hong Kong, the need to understand what people from Mainland China find pleasurable with respect to products is becoming more and more important. Tourism is one of the 'four pillar industries' in Hong Kong [6] and the number of Mainland Chinese visitors is on the rise. In 2014 nearly 80% of all visitors to the city were from Mainland China. This figure equated to 47.5 million people, six and a half times the population of Hong Kong itself. Many of these visitors came to Hong Kong solely to shop. In fact, in 2014, 95% of all money spent in Hong Kong by same-day in-town visitors was spent by Mainland Chinese visitors [7].

1.1 Hong Kong and its people

Hong Kong is a territory that lies on the southern coast of the People's Republic of China; 93.6% of its population is ethnic Chinese [8]. However, while most residents can trace their ancestral roots back to China, it was a British Crown Colony between 1842 and 1997. This period of history has left a mark on the people of Hong Kong. For example, they largely follow the British education system, drive on the left, use English common law and speak English (as well as Chinese); indeed, English is an official language in Hong Kong [9].

Politically, Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China with a high level of autonomy; it follows the "one country, two systems" principle formulated by Deng Xiaoping [10]. This level of independence enables the people of Hong Kong to have more opportunities to communicate and exchange ideas with non-Chinese people than people who live in Mainland China. For example, the government of Hong Kong, unlike the government of Mainland China, does not restrict access to websites such as Google, Facebook and YouTube. It also offers visa-free (visa-exempt) entry to nationals of about 170 countries whereas the government of Mainland China offers it to nationals of three [11, 12].

These and others factors, such as different writing systems and rights to worship, have shaped the people of Hong Kong differently to those who live in Mainland China. And have led to the people of Hong Kong having different needs, values, interests, role-models and beliefs to their fellow compatriots in Mainland China [13].

1.2 Pleasure and concerns

Pleasure is intangible; it also seems to behave erratically. For example, the same product can elicit pleasure in one person but not another; and can elicit pleasure one moment but not the next. Because of this, many designers believe that influencing pleasure through design is impossible [14, 15]. However, despite pleasure's peculiarities, a growing number of researchers believe that it is not as intangible as many designers think [14, 16]. Instead, they assert that designers can develop products to elicit pleasure as the conditions that underlie and trigger it are universal.

One such researcher is Desmet. He argues that pleasure (and other emotions) are not elicited by a product as such, but by a match or disparity of an appraised concern [15]. Thus if a woman is concerned about looking stylish, she will assess a product, such as a coat, with respect to this: she will feel pleasure when wearing a coat she considers stylish and displeasure when wearing a coat she considers unstylish. If the same woman also has a concern for animal welfare, she will feel mixed emotions when wearing a coat that is stylish and made of fur.

Some concerns, such as the concern for subsistence, are universal and based on fundamental human needs [17]. However, most are not. Instead, they are based on beliefs, attitudes and values that are shaped by culture [18-20]. Hekkert and Leder assert that this does mean that pan-cultural principles do not exist, but that such principles do not always lead to universal agreement [21]. For example, all cultures appreciate novelty and typicality but they differ greatly in what they consider novel and typical. Similarly, all cultures appreciate usability; but they disagree as to which components (efficiency, satisfaction and effectiveness etc) are the most important [22].

1.3 Jordan's pleasure framework

In a book about designing pleasurable products, Jordan offers a framework for designers to organise their thoughts about product pleasure [23]. The framework draws on the work of Tiger and describes four distinct types of pleasure that a product can elicit [24]. These pleasures are physio-pleasure, socio-pleasure, psycho-pleasure and ideo-pleasure.

Physio-pleasure pertains to pleasures that derived from the body and its sensory organs. It includes pleasures involving touch, sound and smell and those related to sensual experiences, such as taking a warm bath after a long run. Socio-pleasure relates to relationships. It includes pleasures derived from having friends and loved ones and those experienced from status, glamour and belonging to a desired social group. Psycho-pleasure is do with cognitive and emotional reactions. It relates the enjoyment of stress relief, stimulation, usability and achievement; doing a difficult task well is likely to elicit psycho-pleasure. Ideo-pleasure is related to principles, tastes and aspirations. With respect to products, it includes the values that a product stands for; a recycled product is likely to elicit ideo-pleasure in someone who is concerned about green issues.

A number of researchers have studied product pleasure using Jordan's framework. Manoiu et al. [25] used it to understand pleasures elicited by products in the anthropic environment of Lisbon; and Achiche et al. [26] used it to explore semantic descriptors used by designers and retailers with respect to pleasures evoked by product features. In addition, Porter et al. [27] used the framework to analyse what aspects of people's possessions elicited pleasure with respect to age and gender. Porter et al.'s study later led to the creation of a 'pleasure resource' called RealPeople in which data about people's attitudes towards their possessions were collected and classified using Jordan's framework [28].

It should be noted that a number of researchers have developed similar frameworks to Jordan's. Helander and Khalid [29] offer a framework that has five types of pleasure: physical pleasure, sociopleasure, psychological pleasure, reflective pleasure and normative pleasure. And Hassenzahl [30] offers a framework that has three types of pleasure: those which stimulate, those which communicate identity and those which evoke valued memories. However, arguably, these frameworks contain no more or less pleasures than Jordan's framework, they just divide them differently. In fact, Lucero et al. [31], who offer a framework that consists of 22 types of pleasure, map their pleasures onto Jordan's four pleasures.

1.4 The aim

The aim of this study was to explore product pleasure with respect people from Mainland China and Hong Kong. In particular, it aimed to identify whether different amounts of physio-pleasure, socio-pleasure, psycho-pleasure and ideo-pleasure were elicited by people from Mainland China and Hong Kong when examining the same product. It was hoped that this information will be of use to retailers and product designers and contribute to a better understanding of product pleasure with respect to culture.

II. Method

2.1 Participants

Ninety students of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University volunteered for the experiment. Half of them were from Mainland China and half of them were from Hong Kong. None had lived more than a year in the other's territory. Of the Mainland Chinese students, 23 were male and 22 were female. Of the Hong Kong students, 20 were male and 25 were female. All were aged between 19 and 30 years old ($M=22.06$, $SD=2.38$ years).

2.2 Experiment design

The experiment used a one-factor-at-two-levels between-subjects design. The factor was culture and the two levels were: Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese. The dependent variable was pleasure; it had four factors: physio-pleasure, socio-pleasure, psycho-pleasure, and ideo-pleasure.

2.3 Materials

The experiment employed the use of a questionnaire and a cup and saucer. A cup and saucer was used as it is an everyday object found in both cultures; it therefore did not need any introduction nor did it need any particular skills for the students to interact with (see Fig. 1).

The questionnaire comprised 16 statements, written in Chinese, about the cup and saucer to which participants were asked to indicate their agreement using a seven-point Likert scale (see Appendix). Four of the statements were on physio-pleasure, four were on socio-pleasure, four were on psycho-pleasure and four were on ideo-pleasure.



Figure1: The cup and saucer used in the experiment

2.4 Procedure

The experiment took place at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. All participants were allowed to handle and examine the cup and saucer for as much time as they wanted. For practical reasons, they were not given the opportunity to drink from it. The participants completed the questionnaire one at a time and were asked not to discuss their answers with anyone. Each participant took less than ten minutes to complete the questionnaire and to fill out a form that collected his/her demographic details.

III. Results

A one-way ANOVA was carried out to evaluate the effect of pleasure elicited in terms of differences in mean scores and Scheffé post-hoc comparison was used to test for differences between the various levels of pleasure elicited. All data undergoing analysis of variance (ANOVA) were tested for the assumption of sphericity. The Levine test was used to test the assumption of homogeneity of variance. For all statistical tests an alpha level of 0.05 was used.

Physio-pleasure

The results showed that the cup and saucer elicited similar amounts of physio-pleasure from the participants from Hong Kong and Mainland China ($M=4.13$, $SD=.55$ and $M=4.29$, $SD=.68$ respectively). That is to say, no significant difference was found between the two participant groups with respect to physio-pleasure, $F(1, 88) = 1.43$, $p=.235$. The mean and standard deviation for the ratings for physio-pleasure are given in Table 1.

While, overall, no significant difference was found between amounts of physio-pleasure elicited by the cup and saucer from the participants from Mainland China and Hong Kong, differences were found when the data were analysed in more detail. For example, while 62% of the participants from Mainland China liked the shape of the cup and saucer, only 4% of the participants from Hong Kong did.

Independent variable	Effects	M	SD	F value	p
Physio-pleasure	Mainland China	4.29	.68	1.43	.235
	Hong Kong	4.13	.55		
Socio-pleasure	Mainland China	4.02	.49	6.42	.013
	Hong Kong	3.76	.54		
Psycho-pleasure	Mainland China	4.39	.45	7.60	.007
	Hong Kong	4.13	.43		
Ideo-pleasure	Mainland China	4.18	.49	5.02	.028
	Hong Kong	3.97	.40		

Table 1. Summary of results for the dependent variables

Socio-pleasure

The results showed that the cup and saucer elicited more socio-pleasure from the participants from Mainland China (M=4.02, SD=.45) than the participants from Hong Kong (M=3.76, SD=.54). The post-hoc comparison revealed that this difference was significant, $F(1, 88) = 6.46, p = .013$.

Further analysis revealed that a greater percentage of participants from Mainland China (60%) thought that the cup and saucer exhibited good taste than participants from Hong Kong (4%).

Psycho-pleasure

With regard to psycho-pleasure, the results showed that the cup and saucer elicited more of it from the participants from Mainland China (M=4.39, SD=.45) than the participants from Hong Kong (M=4.13, SD=.43). The post-hoc comparison revealed that there was a significant difference between the means per participant of the two cultural groups, $F(1, 88) = 7.60, p = .007$.

Looking in more detail, differences could be found with respect to the amount of pleasure elicited by the build quality of the cup and saucer: the majority of the participants from Mainland China liked it (78%) while the majority of participants from Hong Kong did not (71%).

Ideo-pleasure

The participants from Mainland China (M=4.18, SD=.49) felt that the cup and saucer elicited a greater amount of ideo-pleasure than the participants from Hong Kong (M=3.98, SD=.40). Multiple comparisons with the Scheffé test showed that there was a significant difference between the means per participant of the two cultural groups, $F(1, 88) = 5.02, p = .028$.

More detailed analysis revealed that there were differences between participants from Mainland China and Hong Kong with respect to the values that they felt the cup and saucer had. Around half of the participants from Mainland China felt that the cup and saucer embodied aspirational values (49%) whereas most of the participants from Hong Kong (80%) did not.

IV. Conclusion

This study used Jordan's four pleasures framework [23] to investigate the relationship between culture and product pleasure with respect to people from Mainland China and Hong Kong. It used a questionnaire to gather data on the levels of pleasure elicited when handling and inspecting a cup and saucer.

The results revealed that, overall, the cup and saucer elicited greater levels of pleasure in participants from Mainland China than Hong Kong. Indeed, the only pleasure that was not elicited at a greater level by the participants from Mainland China was physio-pleasure. Statistically, this was elicited at a similar level in both participant groups.

It was clear from the results that different shape preferences and aspirational values existed between the two cultures. The majority of the participants from Mainland China indicated that they liked the shape of the cup and saucer and found them aspirational. This was unlike the participants from Hong Kong who predominantly either disliked or felt indifferent about the shape of the cup and saucer and did not feel the product was something they aspired to. With respect to retailers in Hong Kong, these results suggest that, in some cases, it may be prudent to stock different versions of the same product if they wish to sell to locals and people from Mainland China. The study offers a valuable contribution to the field of product pleasure and culture. That said, caution should be exercised when generalising its findings. First, it involved the assessment of one product only. Second, Mainland China is, in reality, a territory of many cultures. Clearly, further research is needed with different products and Chinese populations to gain a better understanding of product pleasure within the People's Republic of China. The study does, nonetheless, call attention to the importance for retailers and designers to have a good understanding of the culture(s) to which their products are to be sold. Indeed, the study reveals that some aspects of products that elicit pleasure in one culture elicit displeasure in another.

References

- [1] V. Kumar and P. Whitney, Daily life, not markets: Customer centered design. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 28(4), 2007, 46–58.
- [2] B. Watson and D. McDonagh, Design and emotion. *Engineering Designer*. 30(5), 2004, 8–11.
- [3] R. Chitturi, R. Raghunathan, and V. Mahajan, Delight by design: The role of hedonic versus utilitarian benefits. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(3), 2008, 48–63.
- [4] S. Evans and A. D. Burns, An investigation of customer delight during product evaluation: Implications for the development of desirable products. *Journal of Engineering Manufacture*, 221(11), 2007, 1625–1638.
- [5] J. Fulton Suri, Design expression and human experience: Evolving design practice. In D. McDonagh, P. Hekkert, J. van Erp and D. Gyi (Eds.) *Design and Emotion* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004) 13–17.
- [6] Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, (2015), *Four pillars and six industries in Hong Kong: Review and outlook*. Available at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1415rb03-four-pillars-and-six-industries-in-hong-kong-review-and-outlook-20150209-e.pdf>
- [7] Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2015, *A Statistical Review of Hong Kong Tourism 2014*. Available at http://securepartnet.hktb.com/filemanager/intranet/dept_info/private_20/paper/StatReview/StatReview2014/Stat_Review_2014_0.pdf
- [8] Census and Statistics Department, 2011, *Nationality and ethnicity: 2011*, Hong Kong Population census. Available at: <http://www.census2011.gov.hk/flash/dashboards/nationality-and-ethnicity-db-203-en/nationality-and-ethnicity-db-203-en.html>.
- [9] The Basic Law, 1990, *The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China*. Available at: http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/images/basiclaw_full_text_en.pdf
- [10] The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 2002, One country, Two systems. Available at: <http://www.info.gov.hk/info/sar5/e12.htm>
- [11] The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 2015. *General visa requirements*. Available at: <http://www.gov.hk/en/nonresidents/visarequire/general/>
- [12] The People's Republic of China Government, 2008, *Visa-free entry into Mainland China*. Available at: <http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/ls/vfc/t1038742.htm>
- [13] G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede and M. Minkov, *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.) (New York, USA: McGraw-Hill, 2010).
- [14] P. M. A. Desmet, From disgust to desire: How products elicit emotions. In D. McDonagh, P. Hekkert, J. van Erp and D. Gyi (Eds) *Design and Emotion* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004) 8–12.
- [15] P. M. A. Desmet, Product emotion. In H.N.J. Schifferstein and P. Hekkert (Eds) *Product Experience* (San Diego, California, USA: Elsevier, 2008) 379–397.
- [16] D. A. Norman, *Emotional design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things* (New York, USA: Basic Books, 2004).
- [17] M. A. Max-Neef, *Human scale development: Conception, application and further reflections* (New York, USA: The Apex Press, 1991).
- [18] M. Kälviäinen, Product Design for Consumer Taste. In W. S. Green and P. Jordan (Eds.) *Pleasure with products: Beyond usability* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002) 77–95.
- [19] H. M. Khalid, Embracing diversity in user needs for affective design. *Applied Ergonomics*, 37(4), 2006 409–418.
- [20] A. Macdonald, Aesthetic intelligence: A cultural tool. In M. A. Hanson, E. J. Lovesey, and S. A. Robertson (Eds.), *Contemporary Ergonomics 1999* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999) 95–99.
- [21] P. Hekkert and H. Leder, Product aesthetics. In H. N. J. Schifferstein and P. Hekkert (Eds.) *Product experience* (San Diego, California, USA: Elsevier, 2008) 259–285.
- [22] O. Frandsen-Thorlacius, K. Hornbæk, M. Hertzum and T. Clemmensen, Non-universal usability?: A survey of how usability is understood by Chinese and Danish users. *CHI'09 Proc. SIGCHI Conf. on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, New York, USA, 2009, 41–50.
- [23] P. W. Jordan, *Designing Pleasurable Products* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2000).
- [24] L. Tiger, *The Pursuit of Pleasure* (Boston, Massachusetts, USA: Little, Brown and Company, 1992).
- [25] V-M. Manoiu, R. Costache and R-M. Spiridon, The pleasure factor in the anthropic environment and the geography of beauty. *European Scientific Journal*, July Special Edition, 2015, 299–310.
- [26] S. Achiche, A. Maier, K. Milanova and A. Vadean, Visual product evaluation: Using the semantic differential to investigate the influence of basic geometry on user perception. *ASME 2014 International Mechanical Engineering Congress and Exposition*, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 2014, 14–20.
- [27] S. Porter, S. Chhibber, and J. M. Porter, Towards an understanding of pleasure in product design. In D. McDonagh, P. Hekkert, J. van Erp and D. Gyi (Eds.) *Design and Emotion* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004) 13-17.
- [28] S. Chhibber, *Towards an understanding of product pleasure*. Doctoral thesis (Department of Design and Technology, Loughborough University: United Kingdom, 2007).
- [29] G. H. Helander and H. M. Khalid, Affective pleasurable design. In G. Salvendy (Ed.) *Handbook of Human Factors and Ergonomics* (3rd ed.) (New Jersey, USA: John Wiley and Sons, 2006) 543–572.
- [30] M. Hassenzahl, The thing and I: Understanding the relationship between user and product. In M. Blythe, C. Overbeeke, A. F. Monk and P. C. Wright (Eds.) *Funology: From Usability to Enjoyment* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003) 31–42.
- [31] A. Lucero, E. Karapanos, J. Arrasvuori and H. Korhonen, Playful or gameful? Creating delightful user experiences, *Interactions*, 11(3), 2014, 34–39.

Appendix

The following is the list of 16 statements, translated from Chinese, that formed the questionnaire. For each statement, the participants were asked to indicate their agreement using a Likert scale. The Likert scale had seven levels: strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree.

Statements on physio-pleasure

1. I like the colours used in this product
2. I like the feel of this product when I handle it
3. I like the shape of this product

4. I like the sound that this product makes when I handle it

Statements on socio-pleasure

5. I like the level of status that this product conveys

6. I think this product would show that I have discerning taste to others

7. I like what this product would say about me if I owned it

8. I would feel comfortable using this product in the company of others

Statements on psycho-pleasure

9. I like the build quality of this product

10. I feel this product helps me relax

11. This product makes me feel happy

12. This product has a 'friendly personality'

Statements on ideo-pleasure

13. I like this product as it reflects my tastes

14. I like this product as it reflects my lifestyle

15. I like this products as it reflects my aspirations

16. I like this product as it reflects my personal ideologies