BRAND IMITATION STRATEGY, PACKAGE DESIGN AND CONSUMER RESPONSE:
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon visual semiotics and creativity theories, this study investigated the effectiveness of brand imitation strategy on the package design of three different products among millennials. The products were male-targeted, female-targeted and gender-neutral. Three 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial experiments were conducted with three independent variables: shape (relevant vs. divergent), color (relevant vs. divergent) and icon (relevant vs. divergent) on three products: an energy drink (a male-targeted product), hair spray (a female-targeted product) and a breakfast cereal (a gender-neutral product). Participants’ attitude toward the leading brands served as a control variable. Dependent variables consisted of participants’ attitude toward the brand (A_b), attitude toward the product (A_p) and purchase intention (PI).

The findings raised three theoretical implications. First, rather than iconography that imitated that of a leading brand, a similar color scheme was more powerful in influencing participants’ A_b, A_p and PI. Second, a more holistically similar design showed more impact on participants’ attitudinal and behavioral changes than a less similar design. Nevertheless, some “divergence” or distinctive design elements did positively influence participants’ brand and product attitudes, as well as their purchase intention, in relationship to the female-targeted product. More detailed theoretical implications are further discussed in the study. In addition, a conceptual model is proposed to better define brand imitation. Practical implications and study limitations are also included.
DEDICATION

To my mom, Jiang Yuan, and my dad, Qiao Ping for your unconditional love. Without you, I could never have come this far.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>$A_{tb}$</td>
<td>Attitude toward the brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$A_{tp}$</td>
<td>Attitude toward the product</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>Analysis of variance</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Brands differentiate themselves by their unique features, with their brand names, icons, packaging, etc. (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). For example, “KFC” reminds consumers of crispy fried chicken and the image of golden arches reads as “McDonald’s.” These distinctive features contribute to consumers’ knowledge and perceptions of brands, with the ultimate goal of fostering consumers’ brand loyalty.

Since the 1980s, markets in the United States and around the globe have entered a period of exponential product growth (Weiss, 2014). As the intensity of brand competition in nearly every product category increases, products with similar brand names, colors, shapes, icons, etc., have become unavoidable and ubiquitous. For instance, Aveda and Aveeno share sound-alike brand names and their shampoo products carry a lookalike design (see Figure 1). Dove and Nivea recently battled over ownership of “Blue Pantone 280 C,” a unique dark blue adopted by both brands in their package design (Partnerschaft & Partnerschaft, 2015) (see Figure 1). Even Gucci, a luxury Italian brand, accused Guess, an American brand, of copying its famous “GG” iconic pattern in their sneakers (Fernandez, 2015) (see Figure 1).
Figure 1

Examples of copycat brands

Similar brand names: Aveda (left) vs. Aveeno (right)

Similar colors: Dove (left) vs. Nivea (right)

Similar patterns: Gucci (left) vs. Guess (right)
As a strategy to position themselves in a highly competitive product market, lesser-known brands often imitate the packaging and identities of leading brands by using similar brand names, colors, icons, etc. (Aribarg, Arora, Henderson, & Kim, 2014; Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). This strategy is called *brand imitation* (Holston, 2011). Brand imitation is primarily used to achieve two strategic goals: brand confusion and brand connection. On one hand, lesser-known brands tend to imitate unique features of leading brands in an effort to convince consumers that these lesser-known brands are equivalent (Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990). Lesser-known brands also use the brand imitation strategy as a way to create a connection with leading brands, increasing consumers’ brand awareness and encouraging consumers to purchase their products (Fazio, 1986). In sum, the imitation strategy serves as a shortcut for influencing consumers’ attitudes and purchase behaviors.

“Copycat brand” is a term used to refer to lesser-known brands that employ an imitation strategy (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2007). Economic recessions across the globe have contributed to the growth of copycat brands. Private labels and me-too brands are the two main categories of copycat brands. Private labels, also known as store brands, are products sold under retailers’ own label (Paché, 2007). For example, Great Value is one of the private labels of Walmart. Me-too brands, which compete in the same product category as leading brands for market share, are defined as brands that very closely imitate those leading brands (Parker & Gatignon, 1996; Quintal, Phau, & Sims, 2009). For example, RC cola is a me-too brand that adopts the same colors as Pepsi, a leading brand in the cola category. Both *The Economist* (“Make it Your Own,” 1995) and *Harvard Business Review* (Quelch & Harding, 1997) report that sales of private label brands increase tremendously during recessions and dip when the economy recovers. However, private label brands perform well enough on average to keep them viable.
Copycat brands are especially well-received by millennials, people born between 1982 and 2000 (United States Census Bureau, 2015). As the first generation of “store brand natives,” millennials “have grown up with store brands as true competitors to national brands and need to be convinced that a product is worth their loyalty — whether it is a national brand or a store brand” (Escobar, 2015, para. 5). In other words, as long as store brands demonstrate value and quality, millennials are inclined to remain loyal to them independent of economic conditions. Correspondingly, copycat brands have begun to divert revenue and profits from manufacturer brands, or national leading brands, to retailers (see Kumar & Steenkamp, 2007, p. 35). For example, CVS, one of the leading drugstore chains in the U.S., carries more than 4,600 private label products and obtained 18% of its sales from private labels in 2013 (Trefis Team, 2013), compared with 7-8% 10 years ago (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2007). In addition, according to a 2015 Mintel report, 94% of all shoppers in the U.S. buy store brand products and 97% of millennials are likely to purchase private labels (Watrous, 2015). Among these millennial shoppers, approximately 42% perceive brand names of copycat products to be more creative than well-known national brands. In addition, more consumers tend to believe the quality of store brands is no longer inferior to that of national leading brands, with 63% of all shoppers and 70% of millennials perceiving the quality of copycat brands to be greatly improved (Watrous, 2015). Millennial consumers, the largest generation in U.S. and world history, will wield the greatest “wallet power” in global markets in the near future (see Solomon, 2014, para.1). Hence, exploring the nature of millennials’ relationship with copycat brands is of value, enabling researchers and marketing practitioners to better understand and appreciate the perceptions and consumption practices of this demographic segment.
Brand imitation manifests itself at different levels of similarity (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). Some lesser-known brands may imitate the color scheme of a leading brand’s package design, while others may mimic the shape of an icon or other visual feature. It seems likely, therefore, that consumers may respond to brand imitation at varying levels and of various types in different ways. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) assumes that individuals employ either central or peripheral routes to process persuasive messages and form attitudes (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Individuals who are highly involved with a particular product, for example, are inclined to adopt a central route for processing information about it, while individuals who are less involved with a product tend to process persuasive messages via peripheral routes. According to Petty, Briñol and Priester (2009), one of the most important elements to determine involvement is self-relevance. In order to test the persuasive power of messages between individuals with different involvement levels, researchers usually divide all participants into high-involvement and low-involvement groups. For example, in the classic study conducted by Petty and Cacioppo (1979), one group of college undergraduates was told that their university would adopt a new regulation that would influence their daily lives. This group was labeled as the high involvement group. Another group of students was told that a distant university would implement a new regulation. This group was labeled as low involvement group. The results showed that students for whom the regulation was more relevant better recalled the messages than those for whom the regulation did not seem relevant. In other words, the high involvement group was more likely to be influenced than the low involvement group.

This method for grouping people according to their assumed involvement is criticized by some researchers. Stiff (1986) argued that ELM was based on the problematic assumption that “message recipients are forced to choose between one of two information processing strategies”
It is proposed that the central and peripheral routes for processing information may not be mutually exclusive, as some may use both in certain circumstances (Choi & Salmon, 2003).

As ELM is applied in advertising research, it is argued that central cues carried within an ad or on a product package, such as persuasive copy or nutrition facts, induce consumers to employ the central route to process the ad or product information, forming more enduring attitudes toward the ad, the product or even purchase intention (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 2012; Xie, Grebitus, & Davis, 2015). On the other hand, peripheral cues, such as photos or colors in the design of a product’s package, prompt consumers to process the information through the peripheral route, influencing attitudinal and behavioral changes (Gierl & Huettl, 2011; Lancendorfer, Atkin, & Reece, 2008). More research is needed to explore which types of peripheral cues exert the strongest influence on consumers’ attitudes toward products and brands and their purchase intentions.

Gender differences or other variables could also play a role in how consumers respond to brand imitation, given that some products are intended for use by a particular gender. Witkin (1978) proposes that men and women demonstrate different cognitive approaches, namely field-independent vs. field-dependent styles. A field-independent cognitive style describes an individual’s reliance on internal references to make decisions. Conversely, a field-dependent cognitive style describes an individual’s dependence on external references to make decisions. Individuals’ cognitive styles may evolve over time. For example, in nomadic society, males were more field-independent during a hunt, relying on themselves to make judgments, while females were more field-dependent as they cared for children and engaged in social activity (Witkin, 1978). In today’s ecocultural society, gender roles have undergone dramatic changes. Women no longer need to depend on men to survive and can work independently, making them more field-
independent when making decisions (Witkin, 1978). For men, as the survival burden decreased, a more field-dependent style emerged. Today, these differences between men and women might help explain differences in how they make purchase decisions.

Because different product package design elements may influence attitudes and purchase intention by gender, it’s important to examine how various imitative combinations in package design may have an impact. The purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of three product package elements — color, shape and icon — on consumers’ attitude toward the brand, the product and purchase intention. This study will involve three different products: one male-targeted, one female-targeted and one that is gender-neutral, in three 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects experiments with three independent variables.

**General Research Questions**

Drawing upon semiotics and creativity theory, the current study examines two main issues. First, how closely can one brand imitate another and achieve the most positive consumer attitude toward the brand, the product and purchase intention? Second, are there any differences in the way male and female consumers may view products that employ the brand imitation strategy at varying levels?

This study attempts to fill two gaps in advertising and brand development literature. First, few studies examine the brand imitation strategy at varying levels of implementation. The present study applies relevant theory to dissect the brand imitation strategy, identifies how it can be employed at different levels and tests its effects on consumers. Second, we know very little about how gender differences may influence the effectiveness of the brand imitation strategy. The present study examines whether or not products that imitate leading brands elicit different responses from male versus female consumers. It is hoped that the findings of this study will
assist branding professionals in determining the most effective ways to employ the brand imitation strategy and build understanding of how gender may influence consumer response.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of the current study is to examine the effectiveness of the brand imitation strategy at varying levels and of various types. The following review of literature covers four main subject areas: brand imitation strategy, visual semiotics theory, creativity theory and gender differences among consumers.

Brand Imitation Strategy

Implementation of the Strategy

*Brand imitation among private labels.* Brand imitation is a common practice among private labels (Aribarg et al., 2014). Private labels refer to “products that encompass all merchandise sold under a retailer’s brand” (Paché, 2007, p. 176). The purpose of brand imitation for most store brands is to “mimic the leading brand packaging as closely as possible” (Holston, 2011, p. 130). By imitating the brand name, icons and package design of the leading brands in the market, private labels have gained share in the market (Lamey, Deleersnyder, Steenkamp, & Dekimpe, 2012). In the U.S., private labels held 17.7% of the market share by the end of 2015 (PLMA, 2015), and outperformed leading national brands during the most recent recession (Lamey et al., 2012). Retailers are more inclined to promote private labels because they generate higher profit margins (Ailawadi & Harlam, 2004; Lamey et al., 2012), enhance consumers’ store loyalty (Ailawadi, Pauwels, & Steenkamp, 2008; Lamey et al., 2012), and compete effectively with national brands (Lamey et al., 2012; Meza & Sudhir, 2010).
Undoubtedly, the brand imitation strategy adopted by private labels is controversial. In recent years, several national brands have filed lawsuits against private-label companies, arguing private labels’ infringement of their trademarks via the imitation of packaging or visual features make it difficult to distinguish products from one another (Aribarg et al., 2014; Cunningham & Witkow, 2007). For example, Procter & Gamble filed a trademark infringement lawsuit against Blue Cross Laboratories, a cosmetics store in California, for its imitation of P&G’s packaging in 2008 (Gile, 2008) (see Figure 2). The court ruled in favor of P&G and the national brand acquired the intellectual property rights to the package design of its products. On the other hand, even though private labels have intentionally imitated (or copied) leading brands in the market, national brands have struggled to win lawsuits. For example, one of the most cited cases involves Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion, a leading brand, which sued Conopco, a private-label retailer, for its deliberate imitation in 1994 (Cunningham & Witkow, 2007). A federal court unexpectedly rejected Vaseline’s claim and ruled in favor of Conopco (Cunningham & Witkow, 2007). In its ruling, the court asserted that “[t]he retailer packages its product in a manner to make it clear to the consumer that the product is similar to the national brand, and is intended for the same purpose. At the same time, the retailer clearly marks its product with its private logo, and expressly invites the consumer to compare its product with that of the national brand, by name” (Cunningham & Witkow, 2007, p. 1). Similar case law illustrates that the employment of a brand imitation strategy by private-label brands constitutes a “gray area” within the law.
Brand imitation among me-too brands. Brand imitation among competing brands within the same product category, but outside the private label realm, is called a “me-too” brand approach. One major advantage of imitation for “me-too” brands is that the strategy decreases the expense of branding (Quintal & Phau, 2013). “Me-too” brands are usually launched after leading brands, with the intent to elicit consumers’ recognition, awareness and acceptance of similar products already promoted and positioned in the market for a short period of time (Centaur Communications Limited, 2007; Quintal & Phau, 2013). In addition, if “me-too” brands manage to maintain their presence in the market, they can also be more nimble than leading brands by changing their package designs or mimicking the leading brands’ marketing strategies on the fly (Carson, Jewell, & Joiner, 2007).
Consumers may be more willing to accept “me-too” brands in order to differentiate themselves from other buyers or to show rebellion against established norms (Quintal & Phau, 2013). In addition to consumers’ need for uniqueness, brand confusion created by “me-too” brands might play a role in consumers’ purchase behaviors in different shopping contexts (Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990). For example, if shopping in a hurry, a consumer might not notice the difference between “Aveda” and “Aveeno” because of their lookalike colors and sound-alike brand names. If consumers are satisfied with a “me-too” brand, they may shift brand preference from a national leading brand to a “me-too” brand and gradually develop brand loyalty (Fazio, 1986). Therefore, “me-too” brands are able to thrive in the marketplace against leading brand competition (Quintal & Phau, 2013; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

**Current Research on Brand Imitation**

The current scholarly research on brand imitation observes the phenomenon from two perspectives (Chen & Cheng, 2012; Grossman, 1981; Perzanowski, 2010). First, brand imitation is explored from a legal perspective. These studies investigate whether brand imitation (especially by private labels) infringes on copyright of the leading brands. Second, brand imitation is explored from a marketing perspective (Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, & Young, 2009; Lambkin & Tyndall, 2009; Robinson & Doss, 2011). These studies emphasize the marketing impact of brand imitation on manufacturers, retailers and consumers. A limited number of studies tend to explore how lesser-known brands tend to imitate leading brands as well as discuss the differences between different types of imitation. The most recent studies to explore this topic are conducted by Van Horen and Pieters (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). In their studies, brand imitation involves two subcategories: feature imitation and theme imitation (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). Feature imitation refers to the “direct imitation of
distinctive perceptual features such as letters, colors, shapes and sounds…” (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a, p. 247). Most feature imitation focuses on creating a “literal” similarity between the new brand and the existing brand. For example, the brand name “Nire” is very similar to the well-known brand name “Nike” (Mitchell & Kearney, 2002). Theme imitation refers to the semantic similarity between a new brand and the existing brand, via the use of similar packaging, etc. (Bruce, 1981; Job, Rumiati, & Lotto, 1992; Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). Compared to feature imitation, theme imitation is more “abstract” because the goal is to build a connection by creating a similar brand atmosphere for consumers.

In terms of the relationship between feature and theme imitation, some argue that feature imitation is more readily recognizable, since it mimics the look of leading brands. Theme imitation, on the other hand, can be harder to detect because it parallels the “abstract” priming effects of leading brands. Priming refers to “the effect of some preceding stimulus or event on how we react, broadly defined, to some subsequent stimulus” (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002, p. 97). In advertising research, the priming effect is studied in two dimensions: cognitive and affective (Yi, 1990). Cognitive priming suggests that consumers can interpret the same product information in different ways (Yi, 1990). For example, a large, luxury automobile may be perceived as comfortable and prestigious, representing a positive evaluation, or as highly inefficient in fuel consumption, constituting a negative evaluation. On the other hand, affective priming describes how advertising can elicit emotional reactions (Yi, 1990). For example, consumers’ positive attitudes toward an ad can translate to positive attitudes toward the product being advertised. Essentially, consumers’ attitudes can be transferred from one context to another context (Herr, 1989). Copycat brands’ ubiquitous footprint in the marketplace and use of similar packaging designs are intended to prompt consumers to connect
copycat brands with their leading brand counterparts, achieving both cognitive and affective priming effects. For example, Surf and Tide, two detergent brand names with similar meanings, both evoke thoughts of clean and fresh laundry. The use of both theme and feature imitation to create priming effects is clearly related (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a).

Based on the brand imitation research conducted by Van Horen and Pieters (2012a; 2012b), Qin, Wen and Dou (2015) propose perceptual and conceptual similarities as parallel concepts to feature and theme imitation. Qin et al. (2015) argue that perceptual similarity is consistent with feature imitation, describing the visual similarity between the packaging of copycat brands compared to leading brands. Additionally, conceptual similarity is consistent with theme imitation, referring to semantic similarities (such as sound-alike brand names) used by copycat brands to connect them to their leading brand counterparts. Their research suggests that perceptual similarities are more likely to prompt consumers’ brand knowledge than conceptual similarities because perceptual similarities provide a more direct association between copycat brands and leading brands (Qin et al., 2015). However, conceptual similarities can be effective in attracting consumers’ attention because processing them requires more mental effort (Qin et al., 2015).

Previous research on brand imitation leads to two conclusions. First, from a practical perspective, feature imitation is an easy way to leverage the success of leading brands (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). Compared to theme imitation, feature imitation can be achieved by simply changing a few letters in a brand name, using the same colors or adopting a similar-sounding brand name, all of which are quick and effective “copycat” strategies. For instance, the copycat brand “KLC” in China copies the brand leader “KFC,” and the copycat brand “King Burger” in Kazakhstan uses the same colors as “Burger King” (Gregory, 2010). Second, from a
theoretical perspective, feature imitation is a more direct way to connect a new brand to an existing brand, prompting consumers to associate a new brand with an existing brand and to influence their evaluation of a new brand (Finch, 1996). Consumers’ positive perceptions of an existing brand are believed to affect their evaluations of a new brand (Finch, 1996; Loken, Ross, & Hinkle, 1986). If an existing brand is perceived to be of good quality, then a brand imitating its features might also be perceived that way. For example, an increasing number of private label products provided by CVS, a leading drugstore chain in the U.S., are perceived as premium (Mohan, 2014) (see Figure 3). Previous studies do suggest that positive emotional responses can transfer from an existing brand to a new brand because imitation makes consumers feel familiar and comfortable (Jacoby, Kelley, Brown, & Jasechko, 1989; Moreland & Zajonc, 1982).

Figure 3

CVS copycat examples

CVS cleanser (left) vs. Clean & Clear cleanser (right)

CVS cleanser (left) vs. Neutrogena cleanser (right)
Criticism of Current Brand Imitation Studies

Van Horen and Pieters are among the first researchers to employ experimental methods to study brand imitation. However, neither feature imitation nor theme imitation are clearly defined terms. The line between feature and theme imitation remains unclear, as the stimuli used in their studies do not readily identify theme imitation. For example, the authors define stimuli with more than one or two feature imitations as theme imitation, despite operationalizing the latter term as imitating the entire design of the product.

According to Van Horen and Pieters, feature imitation can be subdivided into three categories: “high similarity copycats,” “moderate similarity copycats” and “low similarity copycats,” based on the level of imitation employed (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012b). According to the study that introduced these categories, even though “high similarity copycats” can achieve better imitative effects, “moderate similarity copycats” can elicit more positive brand evaluation, raising questions about how the strategy is best implemented (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012b). However, the distinctions between “high-,” “moderate-,” and “low similarity copycats” are not clearly explained or defined.

Consistent with Van Horen and Pieters’ conceptualization, Qin et al. (2015) operationalize perceptual similarity into two groups: high similarity versus low similarity. Likewise, conceptual similarity is categorized as high similarity versus low similarity. The researchers then use HPHC (high perceptual similarity with high conceptual similarity), HPLC (high perceptual similarity with low conceptual similarity), LPHC (low perceptual similarity with high conceptual similarity) and LPLC (low perceptual similarity with low conceptual similarity) to represent different copycat brands. This conceptualization advances Van Horen and Pieters’ categorization of copycat brands, however, two main issues arise from Qin et al.
(2015)’s model. First, the researchers fail to precisely define the distinction between “low” or “high” similarity. Second, the researchers’ premise that every copycat brand exhibits forms of both conceptual and perceptual imitation is problematic. Not all copycat brands incorporate both types of imitation. For example, while Surf and Tide detergent brands are both perceptually and visually similar to each other, some copycat products may be similar to competitors in one way or the other.

The current study uses visual semiotics theory to lend greater clarity to the construct of brand imitation in the context of a more systematic experimental design. The research in semiotics offers additional variables and constructs that can, when considered in tandem with the existing work on brand imitation, help us more precisely analyze how the strategy is most effectively employed.

**Visual Semiotics Theory**

**Overview**

Semiotics theory explores the way people perceive “signs” and how they make sense of them (Hoopes, 1991; Moriarty, 2005). In semiotics, a sign “stands for an object or concept” and could also, for purposes of this study, describe a consumer product (Moriarty, 2005, p. 228). A sign consists two components: the *signifier*, which refers to visual and/or semantic information that carries meaning and the *signified*, which refers to “the concept (or content) for which it stands” (Moriarty, 2005, p. 228; Saussure, 1966). For example, the brand name “Acura” and its accompanying logo (both signifiers) are intended to elicit associations with “accuracy” and precision automotive technology (the signified) (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). Interdependently, signifiers express the signified and the signified connect back to signifiers.
In relating semiotics theory to the field of advertising, scholars tend to believe that ads do not sell products but sell symbols instead (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). The images of products are constructed by symbols, and those symbols express the personalities of the products. Based on the semiotics theory stated above, the physical attributes of brands and their packaging constitute the signified and brand names are their signifiers (Beasley & Danesi, 2002).

In terms of the relationship between signifiers and the signified, different researchers offer different interpretative perspectives. Saussure explores the relationship from a linguistic perspective, referring to the relationship between the signifier and the signified as a *signification system* that shapes our perceptions of objects (Saussure, 1966). From an advertising perspective, Beasley & Danesi (2002) argue that consumers form their perceptions of products via “various signifiers … with implicit signifieds relating to personality, lifestyle, desires, etc.” (p. 23). Consumers may derive brand meanings based on this signification system every time they see a brand (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). Signifiers are the “face” of the brand and they can foster consumers’ connection to deeper, more implicit feelings about the brand names they accompany.

In addition to Saussure’s perspective, Peirce’s (1932) earlier work proposes another way to connect the signifier and signified, employing a triad to interpret this relationship (Peirce et al., 1932).

**Peirce’s Theory of Semiotics**

In Peirce’s semiotics theory (1932), signs can summon three distinct types of associations: iconic, indexical and symbolic (Beasley & Danesi, 2002; Moriarty, 2005). An iconic association between a sign and its meaning is the most obvious or literal (APPLE = FRUIT), an indexical association between a sign and its meaning is associative (APPLE = PIE) and a symbolic
association between a sign and its meaning may be arbitrary and/or culturally derived (APPLE = COMPUTER) (Peirce et al., 1932, p. 275).

Researchers in advertising apply Peirce’s semiotics theory in analyzing ads (Beasley & Danesi, 2002; Moriarty, 2005; Moriarty & Sayre, 2005). In this context, iconic associations may include the brand name or a spokes character (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). For example, the Marlboro Man was an iconic sign for Marlboro cigarettes (Moriarty & Sayre, 2005). Indexical associations are often used in advertising to illustrate a product’s relationship to other concepts (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). For example, nearby mountains and rough terrain in an ad for Marlboro cigarettes link the brand to the spirit of the untamed West (Moriarty & Sayre, 2005). Symbolic associations in the advertising often leverage social or cultural conventions (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). For example, the American cowboy portrayed by the Marlboro Man embodies independence and “rugged male individualism” (Moriarty & Sayre, 2005).

Apple Computer’s iconic 1984 television spot can serve as a representative example for applying Peirce’s semiotics theory to advertising. The ad depicts a young, female athlete being chased by guards into a dark room filled with “vacant-eyed workers” who toss a sledgehammer “into the image of a menacing voice” (Scott, 2012, p. 1). Both Berger (1989) and Scott (2012) incorporate the expert-reading approach and Peirce’s semiotics theory to analyze this commercial. They argue that the rebellious athlete represents Apple while the “menacing voice” represents IBM, both indexical associations. Through the juxtaposition of these two symbols, the commercial successfully communicates that Apple Computer is a hopeful, positive alternative to IBM (Berger, 1989).

Moriarty and Sayre (2005) conducted a similar study via employing a viewer-reading approach and Peirce’s semiotics theory to the 1984 spot. They found that viewers made both
iconic and indexical associations, describing the female character as an iconic “runner” (indexed with Apple) and the menacing voice as an iconic “talking head” (indexed with IBM). One company is dynamic and on the move, compared to the other which is static and oppressive (Moriarty & Sayre, 2005).

The previous studies apply Peirce’s semiotics theory to the analysis of advertisements. Danesi (2013) connects semiotics with brand building, identifying five signifiers in brand building: name, icons, slogan, textualization and design. Brand names are strong and powerful icons and sometimes double as generic terms that describe an entire product category (Vaseline, Scotch Tape, Xerox). Icons, such as the golden arches of McDonald’s, represent brand names and the products that carry them. Slogans articulate and reinforce how consumers should think about brands/products. Textualization is achieved by the use of advertisements that incorporate brand names, icons and slogans and provide further detail, offering consumers with different cultural and societal backgrounds the opportunity to decode messages. The design of a product’s packaging should capture the brand’s essence via “physical structure or appearance” (Danesi, 2013, p. 465). For example, even if the brand name is removed from a glass Coca-Cola bottle, most consumers will still recognize the brand by simply noting the shape of the bottle.

Application of Peirce’s Semiotics Theory to Brand Imitation

The present study links Peirce’s semiotics theory to the practice of brand imitation (the imitation of one product by a competing product). As Danesi (2013) describes, brands incorporate five signifiers (brand name, icons, slogan, textualization and design). Product packaging, considered in particular, usually involves three of these signifiers: brand name, icon and design (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). While brand names are one of the most durable features of the leading products in every category, “copycat” brand names developed for lesser-known
competitors are a common feature of brand imitation strategies (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). Additionally, slogans and textualization are more commonly associated with the campaigns used to promote packaged goods and are likely to change with the times more often than product packaging itself (Danesi, 2013).

**Brand Names**

Brand names serve as iconic signs (Moriarty & Sayre, 2005). The brand name, the soul of a product, directly reflects the attributes of the product, serving as an influential element in brand management (Danesi, 2013). According to Danesi (2013; 2011), seven major strategies are used by marketers to name their brands. These strategies include manufacturer names, fictitious character names, descriptor names, hyperbolic names, iconic names, alpha names and suggestive names (see Table 1). Some brand names even evolve from attribute description to generic terms representing products of certain categories, such as Vaseline. Suggestive names facilitate consumer association of the product names with certain functions of the product. For example, cleansing products are commonly named to associate them with natural phenomena (think: Surf or Tide), creating a clean, fresh feeling in consumers’ minds. The imitation of a brand name is a straightforward way to trigger consumers’ memory of a leading brand and achieve an imitative effect. As previously discussed, the detergent brand name “Surf” is an imitation of the brand name “Tide” within the same product category (see Figure 4).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturer Names</td>
<td>Represent products’ manufacturers</td>
<td>Kraft (cheese), Folgers (coffee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictitious character Names</td>
<td>Reflect certain attributes of the products</td>
<td>Mr. Clean (cleaning supplies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptor Names</td>
<td>Directly depict the benefits of products</td>
<td>Bug Off (insect repellent), Air Fresh (air freshener),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prompt consumers to associate the brands with superiority or excellence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbolic Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>PowerAde (sports drink)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iconic Names</td>
<td>Employed to mimic certain features of the products</td>
<td>Ritz Crackers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>iPod’s unusual capitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestive Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>Surf or Tide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Icons serve as symbolic signs (Danesi, 2013). Icons provide visual information that can reflect the unique features or personality of brands (Van den Bosch, De Jong, & Elving, 2005). For example, the Nike “swoosh” is widely recognized by consumers across the world. Several lesser-known brands use a similar icon to facilitate consumers’ association of their brand with Nike. For example, the athletic brand Brooks adopted a similar icon (an inverted “swoosh”), ostensibly to imitate Nike (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Nike vs. Brooks
Design

Package designs serve as indexical signs (Danesi, 2013). Consumers may associate distinctive packaging with particular brands. Color scheme and shapes are considered two of the most important constitutive elements in package design (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Both color scheme and shapes serve as visual indicators, helping consumers to better remember the brand. For example, most consumers would still recognize a Campbell’s soup can even if the brand name was removed. Lesser-known brands’ imitation of indexical signs serves as a trace that can prompt consumers to associate lesser-known brands with leading brands. For example, Stride gum’s packaging adopts both similar color schemes (green and black) and shapes (an “S” shape) as Wrigley’s “5” brand (See Figure 6).

Figure 6

Stride vs. Wrigley

Stride vs. Wrigley products
Creativity Theory

Scholars tend to agree that divergent thinking ability (or the capacity to consider many different options) is an indispensable creative skill, even though it is one of many thinking styles that creative people may draw upon (Runco, 2014). Correspondingly, the associative theory of creativity describes how diverse concepts may be combined to yield novel solutions to real world problems (Mednick, 1962; Runco, 2014). Some divergent ideas may be considered too “far fetched” to be practical, diminishing their value. In some cases, an impractical solution can be combined with a practical one to enhance its viability. For example, someone gave an ostensibly useless flat tire a second look, hung it from a tree and converted it into a swing for a child. When two solutions converge, the sum may be greater than its parts. Therefore, scholars propose that creative thinking benefits from both divergence (divergent thinking ability) and convergence (associative thinking ability) (Runco, 2014).

Smith, Chen, and Yang (2008) apply this notion to the analysis of advertising. The scholars argue that the advertising creativity involves two key characteristics: divergence and relevance. Divergence in advertising creativity describes the imperative for ads to employ different, unexpected and original ideas. On the other hand, relevance in advertising creativity means that divergence must exist in a context that is relatable to consumers. Essentially, divergence and relevance are interdependent characteristics: one is of little use without the other. They employ a “divergence x relevance” approach to identify creative ads. In other words, the interaction between divergence and relevance constitutes the creativity of an advertisement. Their work shows a relationship between “divergence x relevance” and consumers’ attention towards an ad, their brand awareness, message acceptance, brand liking and brand intention. The “wow factor” created by divergence enables the ad to cut through advertising clutter and attract
consumers’ attention. An ad that contains useful messages about the product that resonate with the consumer is relevant, prompting consumers’ motivation to process its information content (Smith, Chen & Yang, 2008). The presence of both divergence and relevance as characteristics in an advertisement is believed to generate an optimal attitudinal effect among consumers. In other words, the interaction effects of divergence and relevance are said to prompt consumers’ most positive attitudes toward the ad as well as the brand (Smith, Chen & Yang, 2008).

**Application of Creativity Theory to Brand Imitation**

Brand imitation does not always involve playing “copycat” to a leading brand, it may also include original elements (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012b). When a lesser-known brand imitates a leading brand, similarities make it relevant while divergent characteristics ensure that consumers can still distinguish one brand from another. The practice of brand imitation therefore considers both relevance and divergence as strategic factors.

As previously discussed, copycat brands may adopt similar brand names to those of leading brands (Van Horen & Pieters, 2012a). Based on previous branding research (Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998), most brands prefer to adopt “inherently meaningful” words to describe their product attributes. For example, a brand’s name can reflect its product category, such as Lean Cuisine. Also, brands can name their products by focusing on their primary selling points, such as Mop & Glo floor cleaner (Keller et al., 1998). Brands use similar strategies to name their products, resulting in the use of similarly names within the same category (Klink, 2003; Qin et al., 2015). Brand names can be easily imitated both conceptually (Surf vs. Tide) and perceptually (Nire vs. Nike).
Gender Differences Among Consumers

Gender plays an essential role in visual perception because men and women present different cognitive styles (Witkin, 1978). Two distinct cognitive styles are identified by psychologists: *field-independent vs. field-dependent*. A field-independent cognitive style refers to the primary use of internal referents to make decisions. In other words, field-independent individuals tend to make up their own minds using primarily their own judgments. Conversely, a field-dependent cognitive style describes the primary use of external referents to make decisions. Essentially, field-dependent individuals are inclined to rely on others or outside factors to make their judgments (Witkin, 1978).

Foxman et al. (1990) relate these cognitive styles to the ways consumers may react to brand imitation. Compared with field-dependent individuals, field-independent individuals are more likely to attend to “relevant features of brands (packages) and to structure these visual stimuli, and therefore … are more able to discern one brand’s package from another” (Foxman et al., 1990, p. 176). In other words, field-independent individuals are more likely to notice the subtle differences between lesser-known brands and leading brands in the imitation of package design or labels (Foxman et al., 1990). On the other hand, field-dependent individuals are less likely to discern the brand imitation strategies used by lesser-known brands.

According to Witkin (1978), women tend to adopt field-independent cognitive styles while men are more likely to use field-dependent cognitive styles to process information. Therefore, we can extrapolate that (compared to men) women may be more likely to notice indexical signs (i.e. package design). This logical extension is supported by Kuvykaite, Dovaliene, and Navickiene (2015) who propose that women are more likely than men to pay
attention to the visual elements of product packaging. In other words, women are suggested to be more engaged by visual images.

In contrast, men may be more likely to take a practical approach in their purchase decisions. Men may give more weight to other factors, such as price (Deaux, 1985; Xu, 2009). This purchase model is consistent with the male’s field-dependent cognitive style. Men are inclined to use external referents to make their determinations while women may tend to involve more emotion in purchase decisions (Deaux, 1985; Xu, 2009).

Nevertheless, while Kuvykaite et al. (2015) point out that women are more inclined to notice changes in visual elements, no attitudinal valence is measured. Thus, the current study attempts to examine the valence of attitudes as well as behavioral intentions of consumers of different genders.

**Attitudes and Purchase Intention**

Package design can be viewed as the most proximal strategy for attracting consumers’ attention and delivering information, playing a fundamental role in influencing consumers’ buying behavior (de DS Carneiro, Minim, Deliza, Silva, Carneiro, & Leão, 2005). Purchase intention is a significant indicator for actual purchase behavior (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010; Morrison, 1979), the ultimate effect desired by most brands. On the other hand, purchase intention is not an isolated judgment and it is primarily influenced by consumers’ attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Bruner & Kumar, 2000).

Based on the advertising hierarchy-of-effects model (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Bruner & Kumar, 2000), attitude toward the brand has a linear relationship with purchase intention, meaning that positive (negative) attitude toward the brand leads to positive (negative) purchase intention. In addition, based on the application of balance theory to advertising effectiveness,
positive (negative) attitude toward the brand is consistent with positive (negative) attitude toward the product, leading to positive (negative) purchase intention (Gresham & Shimp, 1985). These three types of attitudes, measured most by advertising researchers, are interdependent, providing a holistic measurement for practitioners to better understand consumers’ reaction to their brands.

Various products are designed to appeal to different genders, while some can be described as gender-neutral (Debevec & Kyer, 1986). Different gender-typed products target different audiences. Male-targeted products are mainly relevant to males and try to cultivate positive attitudes among males. Likewise, female-targeted products are mainly relevant to females and try to cultivate positive attitudes among females. Gender-neutral products target both genders and will typically try to cultivate appeal independent of that variable. Therefore, in the current study, three different gender-typed products will be used to examine the influence of brand imitation strategies (a) directed specifically to men, (b) directed specifically to women or (c) that are gender-neutral.

**Other Persuasion Theories**

Advertising effectiveness is frequently examined by scholars using a variety of theories of persuasion. For example, Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM) was influenced by Sherif, Sherif and Nebergall (1981)’s social judgment theory.

Social judgment theory, proposed by Sherif et al. (1981) holds that ego involvement is closely related to attitudinal changes (Sherif et al., 1981). Three core concepts are included in social judgment theory: the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of rejection and the latitude of non-commitment. The latitude of acceptance includes the positions on an issue that are considered most acceptable. The latitude of rejection includes the positions on an issue that are
considered most unacceptable. The latitude of non-commitment includes the positions on an issue that are considered neither accepted nor rejected (Sherif et al., 1981).

Advertising research primarily adopts two methods to measure involvement (Lee & Youn, 2008; Zaichkowsky, 1985). One way is to examine involvement from the consumer perspective. In this case, involvement refers to the brand’s relevance to consumers. The more consumers perceive a brand is relevant, the more they are involved with the brand. In other words, involvement is measured via consumers’ subjective self-report of the brand’s relevance. The second method is investigated from the product perspective. For example, for most consumers, an automobile is considered a high-involvement product and candy is considered a low-involvement product. The involvement level associated with a product can impact the way it is positioned in the market (Lee & Youn, 2008). Also, the brand imitation strategy is primarily observed among low-involvement and convenience products (d’Astous & Gargouri, 2001). This is because low-involvement and convenience products are associated with a lower perceived purchase risk than high-involvement products (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). In other words, consumers are less likely to sustain a huge economic loss if they are not satisfied with a low-involvement purchase. Also, when purchasing low-involvement products, most consumers follow Ehrenberg’s awareness-trial-reinforcement model, by first making a trial purchase and repeating it if they are satisfied with the product (Ehrenberg, 2000). Accordingly, the current study examines the effectiveness of the brand imitation strategy with low-involvement products.

Consistent with social judgment theory, the heuristic-systematic model and self-monitoring theory also link the relationship between consumers’ involvement, their attitudes and purchase behaviors. The heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken, 1980 & 1987; Mandrik, 1996), a similar marketing model to the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), assumes that there are two
distinctive information processing routes for consumers: systematic and heuristic. Systematic processing is defined as a “comprehensive, analytic orientation in which perceivers access and scrutinize all informational input for its relevance and importance to their judgment task” (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989, p. 212). This route requires consumers to invest a great amount of cognitive effort and knowledge to make a purchase decision, therefore, consumers who adopt this in-depth information route tend to focus more on the “objective quality” of the product. For example, they might read a product’s nutrition label carefully to form their judgment. On the other hand, heuristic processing focuses on “the subset of available information that enables [consumers] to use simple inferential rules, schemata, or cognitive heuristics to formulate their judgments and decisions” (Chaiken et al., 1989, p. 213). Unlike the systematic processing route, consumers adopting the heuristic route are inclined to use less cognitive elaboration to make a purchase decision, paying more attention to a product’s extrinsic attributes, such as brand name, packaging, etc. Because the selection of a processing route is contingent upon circumstances (e.g., price, product scarcity, etc.), product packaging elements (e.g., color, shape, etc.) serve as heuristic cues for consumers to make their decisions (Heslop, Gray, & Armenakyan, 2010; Silayoi & Speece, 2007). However, few studies have investigated which types of heuristic cues most impact consumers’ attitudinal perception and purchase behaviors.

To some extent, heuristic-systematic theory is consistent with self-monitoring theory, which presumes that individuals can be categorized into two groups: high self-monitors and low self-monitors (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors are sensitive to all the ways they present themselves and strive to satisfy behavioral expectations (Lammers, 1991). Low self-monitors focus more on their internal disposition and care less about how others appraise their behaviors.
Self-monitoring theory is widely used in advertising research and brand development (Graeff, 1996; Hogg, Cox, & Keeling, 2000; Becherer, Morgan, & Richard, 1979). One classic study conducted by Becherer and Richard (1978) suggests that high self-monitors prefer leading brands while low self-monitors prefer store brands. Also, high self-monitors prefer social products (e.g., cologne, mouthwash, alcoholic beverages, etc.) while low self-monitors are more associated with nonsocial products (e.g., non-alcohol beverages, food, personal-hygiene products, etc.) (Becherer & Richard, 1978). However, self-monitoring theory fails to differentiate by gender.

These theories suggest that involvement levels exert influence on individuals’ brand information processing, leading to attitudinal changes. However, these theories do not address attitudinal changes among male versus female consumers as they evaluate low-involvement products.

**Hypotheses**

This exploratory study examines the effectiveness of copycat brands at different imitative levels of three key elements in package design: shape, color and icon. The current study draws upon (a) visual semiotic theory (to form the three independent variables representing indexical and symbolic signs) and (b) creativity theory (to form the imitation levels: relevance and divergence). The study also considers the potential influence of gender differences on consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed based on different gender-targeted products.

H1a: In a copycat male-targeted package design, relevant or divergent (a) shapes, (b) colors, and (c) icons will have a main effect on influencing male consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.
H1b: In a copycat male-targeted package design, there will be interactions among shape, color and icon on male consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.

H2a: In a copycat female-targeted package design, relevant or divergent (a) shapes, (b) colors, and (c) icons will have a main effect on influencing female consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.

H2b: In a copycat female-targeted package design, there will be interactions among shape, color and icon on female consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.

H3a: In a copycat gender-neutral package design, relevant or divergent (a) shapes, (b) colors, and (c) icons will have a main effect on influencing consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.

H3b: In a copycat gender-neutral package design, there will be interactions among shape, color and icon on consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Overview

The study conducted three 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial experiments with three independent variables: shape (relevant vs. divergent), color (relevant vs. divergent) and icon (relevant vs. divergent) on three different low-involvement product categories, including: a) an energy drink, a male-targeted product, b) hairspray, a female-targeted product and c) breakfast cereal, a gender-neutral product.

Eight conditions are created for each product category, representing different levels of brand imitation (see Figure 7, 8 and 9). In the current study, all brand names in treatment conditions are relevant (closely related to a leading brand), reflecting common practice in brand imitation strategy. Shape refers to the secondary design elements of the packaging, color refers to the color(s) used primarily to represent the brand and icon refers to the visual(s) used primarily to represent the brand. Each condition is created according to this scheme, representing varying levels of brand imitation:

1. Shape: Relevant; Color: Relevant; Icon: Relevant
2. Shape: Relevant; Color: Relevant; Icon: Divergent
3. Shape: Divergent; Color: Relevant; Icon: Relevant
4. Shape: Divergent; Color: Relevant; Icon: Divergent
5. Shape: Relevant; Color: Divergent; Icon: Relevant
6. Shape: Relevant; Color: Divergent; Icon: Divergent
7. Shape: Divergent; Color: Divergent; Icon: Relevant

8. Shape: Divergent; Color: Divergent; Icon: Divergent

Figure 7

Stimuli for Creature energy drink (a copycat of Monster energy drink) and leading brand Monster

1. Shape, color, and icon are relevant.

2. Shape and color are relevant while icon is divergent.

3. Color and icon are relevant while shape is divergent.

4. Color is relevant while shape and icon are divergent.

5. Shape and icon are relevant while color is divergent.

6. Shape is relevant while icon and color are divergent.

7. Icon is relevant while color and shape are divergent.

8. Icon, color and shape are divergent.
Monster energy drink
1. Shape, color, and icon are relevant.
2. Shape and color are relevant while icon is divergent.
3. Color and icon are relevant while shape is divergent.
4. Color is relevant while shape and icon are divergent.
5. Shape and icon are relevant while color is divergent.
6. Shape is relevant while icon and color are divergent.
7. Icon is relevant while color and shape are divergent.
8. Icon, color and shape are divergent.
Pantene hairspray
Figure 9

Stimuli for Sweet Crunches of Oats breakfast cereal (a copycat of Honey Bunches of Oats)

1. Shape, color, and icon are relevant.
2. Shape and color are relevant while icon is divergent.
3. Color and icon are relevant while shape is divergent.
4. Color is relevant while shape and icon are divergent.
5. Shape and icon are relevant while color is divergent.
6. Shape is relevant while icon and color are divergent.
7. Icon is relevant while color and shape are divergent.
8. Icon, color and shape are divergent.
Honey Bunches of Oats breakfast cereal
Participants

The three product categories are commonly used by millennials. A power analysis conducted by G*Power (parameter: f [effect size] = 0.25, α [probability level] = 0.05, 1-β[power] = 0.8) indicated that a minimum of 480 participants (18-34 years of age) would be needed. Within that group, 160 male participants would view a copycat brand of a male-targeted product (energy drink), 160 female participants would view a copycat brand of a female-targeted product (hairspray) and 80 participants of each gender would view a copycat brand of a gender-neutral product (breakfast cereal).

After deleting invalid data entries, a total of 572 participants were obtained, more than satisfying the requirement of the power analysis. Among the total number of participants, 187 male participants were recruited to view the male-targeted copycat brand, 181 female participants were recruited to view the female-targeted copycat brands and 204 participants of both genders (including 108 male and 96 female participants) were recruited to view the gender-neutral copycat brand. For each product category, participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions.

Stimuli Selection

Energy drinks are primarily targeted to males, consumed by 62% of males and 38% of females ages 18 and above in the U.S. market (Mintel, 2015a). Hairspray is a primarily female-targeted product in the U.S., used by 52% of females and 14% of males ages 18 and above (Mintel, 2011). Most breakfast cereals are marketed as gender-neutral products, consumed by 50% of males and 49% of females ages 18 to 34 in the U.S. (Mintel, 2014). The three products selected for imitation conditions fall into the same price range ($3 to $5), to ensure that consumers’ perceived purchase risk for these products is similar.
According to the marketing database Mintel, *Monster* energy drink is in the non-alcoholic beverage category, *Pantene* hairspray is in the beauty category and *Honey Bunches of Oats* cereal is in the food category (Mintel 2011, 2014, & 2015a). By selecting products from different categories (all within the same price range and targeted to different groups) differences across product types and between genders can be observed.

Each of the three products selected for the study is a top-ranked brand in the U.S. according to Mintel market research (2011, 2014a, & 2015a). *Monster* energy drink claims 37.7% of the market share in its category. *Pantene* is a leading hairspray brand with 3.6% of the market share (Mintel, 2015b). Among breakfast cereals, *Honey Bunches of Oats* claims a 4.0% market share. As leaders in their respective product categories, they represent likely targets for brand imitation.

**Manipulation Checks**

Three fictitious, “copycat” brand names are used in this study to imitate the leading brand names: *Creature (Monster)*, *Stylene (Pantene)* and *Sweet Crunches of Oats (Honey Bunches of Oats)*. To confirm that these “copycat” brands have the capacity to be associated with the leading brands, a series of manipulation checks were conducted with 20 participants of both genders (a total of 40 participants), 18-34 years of age. Twenty male participants viewed both the male-targeted product and the gender-neutral product and twenty female participants viewed both the female-targeted product and the gender-neutral product. Subjects were first shown one treatment of each product, and then they were asked to write down the names of the leading brands with which they immediately associated that product (see manipulation check questionnaires in Appendix A).
A total of 20 participants of both genders were recruited to test the validity of the copycat treatments. The manipulation checks showed that 70% of male participants identified *Creature* as a copycat brand of *Monster* energy drink, 70% of female participants identified *Stylene* as a copycat brand of *Pantene* and 80% of the participants identified *Sweet Crunches of Oats* as a copycat brand of *Honey Bunches of Oats*. The results demonstrate that the three fictitious copycat brand names developed for the current study are valid.

**Independent Variable**

The independent variables of the study involve two indexical signs and one symbolic sign. The first indexical sign is defined as the *shape* in packaging design. The second indexical sign is defined as the *color* scheme in packaging design. Shape has two levels: relevance and divergence. Likewise, color has two levels: relevance and divergence.

The symbolic sign is defined as the *icon* of the product, reflecting visual features of the brand. Icons include two levels: relevance and divergence.

**Dependent Variable**

For purposes of this study, three dependent variables were tested.

**Attitude toward the brand**

Attitude toward the brand (how consumers feel about a brand name) was measured with three five-point semantic differential scales (bad/good; positive/negative; favorable/unfavorable) (Muehling & Laczniak, 1988).

**Attitude toward the product**

Attitude toward the product (how consumers feel about a particular product) was measured with six five-point semantic differential scales (bad/good; harmful/beneficial;
Purchase intention

Purchase intention (a consumer’s likelihood to purchase a product) was measured with four five-point semantic differential scales (likely/unlikely; probable/improbable; certain/uncertain; definitely/ indefinitely) (Bearden, Lichtenstein, & Teel, 1984).

Control Variable

Consumers’ attitude toward the leading brands imitated by the treatments is the study’s control variable. A key rationale for brand imitation is that it helps consumers associate lesser-known brands with leading brands. If consumers report a positive attitude toward a leading brand, that positive attitude might transfer to a lesser-known brand. If consumers have a negative attitude toward a leading brand, that negative attitude might transfer to a lesser-known brand.

Therefore, participants’ attitude toward the leading brands might influence their attitude toward the “copycat” brands at varying imitation levels. On the other hand, participants’ attitudes toward the national brands might be different depending on when this question is asked.

Therefore, in the current study, participants’ attitudes toward the leading brands were measured twice: before and after they viewed the treatments. In order to prevent consumers from guessing the purpose of the study, the attitudinal questions asked before they viewed any treatments included all three brands tested in the study: Monster, Pantene and Honey Bunches of Oats. The attitudinal questions asked after they viewed the treatments included only the brand they were assigned to view.

Attitude toward the leading brand was measured with three five-point semantic differential scales (bad/good; positive/negative; favorable/unfavorable). In case the participants
had no knowledge of the leading brand, one item, “I’m not familiar with the brand,” was included. If a participant indicated unfamiliarity with the brand, this participation was deleted.

**Experimental Procedure**

A total of 572 millennials, ages 18 to 34, were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Each participant was paid 50 cents as compensation. Data were collected via the use of an online experiment using Qualtrics survey software. After providing their consent to participate, participants indicated their gender and answered some demographic questions, such as their educational level, etc. Males were randomly assigned to view the male-targeted ($N = 187$) or the gender-neutral product ($N = 108$). Females were randomly assigned to view the female-targeted ($N = 181$) or the gender-neutral product ($N = 96$). All treatments for each gender-targeted product were randomized. Then, each participant reported his or her attitude toward three leading national brands. Each participant viewed one treatment (“copycat”) condition for one product. After viewing the treatment condition, participants responded to questions on all dependent variable measures. Upon viewing the treatment, they reported their attitude toward the leading brand (the subject of the “copycat”) and answered several additional questions, such as how many times they shop in grocery stores, etc. (see questionnaire sample in Appendix B). The online experiment took 10-15 minutes to complete.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Statistical Analyses

SPSS 21.0 was used for data analysis. Invalid values (including disqualified age and unfamiliarity with the leading brands) were deleted as a method to purify the raw data. The significance alpha level was examined at .05 for all analyses.

The current study consists of three 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects experiments with three independent variables, each with two levels: color (relevance vs. divergence), shape (relevance vs. divergence) and icon (relevance vs. divergence). One control variable relates to three gender-typed products including an energy drink (male-targeted), a hairspray (female-targeted) and a breakfast cereal (gender-neutral). Three dependent variables include attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention. Nine factorial ANCOVA analyses were conducted.

In addition, in order to explore the differences between participants’ pre- and post-brand attitudes toward the leading national brands, a series of paired-samples t-tests were conducted.

In order to explore the differences between male and female participants regarding their shopping behaviors (see additional questions in Appendix B), a series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted.

Male-Targeted Product

After data purification, a total of 187 male participants responses were analyzed. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions of Creature energy drink,
with each condition viewed by 20-25 participants. The average participant’s age was 28.4 years ($SD = 4.27$) and 93.3% of the participants had completed some college or a higher level of education.

Cronbach’s alpha was employed to examine the overall reliability coefficient for dependent variables. The Cronbach’s alpha for attitude toward the brand was .95, for attitude toward the product, .97 and for purchase intention, .96, demonstrating that the sets of scales used to measure the dependent variables for male-targeted products were highly reliable.

The skewness values of the standardized residuals of attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention were -.03, .14, and .14, respectively, which were greater -1 and less 1. The kurtosis values of the standardized residuals of these variables were 2.0, 1.4 and .40, respectively, which were greater than -1 and less than 2. The Q-Q plot, histogram as well as both skewness and kurtosis values displayed that the data were normally distributed. Also, based on the Levene’s tests, the significance values of error variance of these dependent variables were .21, .24, and .24, respectively, which were greater than .05, indicating that all dependent variables had equal variance. The normal distribution and equal variance satisfied the criteria of conducting factorial ANOVA tests.

In current study, consumers’ attitude toward the leading brand was the main covariate and their attitudes toward the leading brand were examined through a pre and post-test. A paired-samples t-test was calculated to compare the mean of male participants’ attitude toward Monster before viewing the stimuli (pretest mean) to the mean of their attitude toward Monster after viewing the stimuli (posttest mean). The mean on the pretest was 3.08 ($SD = 1.28$) and the mean on the posttest was 3.14 ($SD = 1.31$). No significant difference from pretest to posttest was found ($t (186) = -.86, p > .05$). In other words, the exposure to copycat brand had no significant
influence on male participants’ attitudes toward Monster. Therefore, the mean of every male participant’ pretest and posttest scores on their attitude toward Monster was used as the covariate in the statistical analyses. Three independent variables (shape, color and icon), three dependent variables (attitude toward the brand, the product and their purchase intention) and one covariate were involved in the analyses. Hence, the factorial ANCOVA test was conducted on the male-targeted product.

The factorial ANCOVA was calculated examining the effect of shape (relevance vs. divergence), color (relevance vs. divergence) and icon (relevance vs. divergence) on male participants’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and their purchase intention (see Tables 2 & 3).
Table 2

Male-Targeted Product Marginal Descriptive Statistics: Attitude toward the Brand (AB), Attitude toward the Product (AP) and Purchase Intention (PI)

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<td>AP</td>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>96</td>
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<td>.08</td>
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<td>91</td>
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<td>.08</td>
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<td>.79</td>
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Table 3

Male-Targeted Product ANCOVA Test: Main Effects and Interactions on Attitude toward the Brand (AB), Attitude toward the Product (AP) and Purchase Intention (PI)

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<td>Icon</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.83</td>
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<td>1.20</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.00</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Icon</td>
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<td>2.85</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shape x Color x Icon</td>
<td>1, 178</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.00</td>
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</table>
No significant main effect of shape was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = 1.11, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = 1.20, p > .05) \) and purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = .05, p > .05) \). No significant main effect of color was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = .41, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = 1.84, p > .05) \) and purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = .02, p > .05) \). No significant main effect of icon was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = 1.45, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = .99, p > .05) \) and purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = 2.85, p > .05) \).

No significant three-way interaction among shape, color and icon was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = 1.04, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = .15, p > .05) \), and their purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = .01, p > .05) \).

No significant two-way interaction between shape and color was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = .73, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = 1.46, p > .05) \) and their purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = 2.38, p > .05) \). No significant two-way interaction between shape and icon was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = .41, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = .03, p > .05) \) and their purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = .02, p > .05) \). No significant two-way interaction between color and icon was found on attitude toward the brand \( (F(1, 178) = 1.50, p > .05) \), attitude toward the product \( (F(1, 178) = .80, p > .05) \) and their purchase intention \( (F(1, 178) = 2.26, p > .05) \).

Therefore, neither interaction nor main effect of color, shape, and icon was found on influencing male participants’ attitude toward the copycat brand, attitude toward the energy drink and their copycat purchase intention.
Female-Targeted Product

After data purification, a total of 181 female participants were obtained. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions of Stylene hairspray, with each condition viewed by 20-25 participants. Average participant age was 28.0 years ($SD = 4.43$) and 95.2% of the participants had completed some college or higher level of education.

Cronbach’s alpha was employed to examine the overall reliability coefficient for dependent variables. The Cronbach’s alpha for attitude toward the brand (.96), attitude toward the product (.94) and purchase intention (.94) demonstrated that the sets of scales used to measure the dependent variables for female-targeted products were highly reliable.

The skewness values of the standardized residuals of attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention were -.25, -.26, and -.28 respectively, which were greater than -1 and less than 1. The kurtosis values of the standardized residuals of these variables were .12, .43 and -.01 respectively, which were greater than -1 and less than 2. The Q-Q plot, histogram and both skewness and kurtosis values indicate that the data were normally distributed. Also, based on the Levene’s tests, the significance values of error variance of these dependent variables were .93, .45, and .08 respectively, which were greater than .05, indicating that all dependent variables had equal variance. The normal distribution and equal variance satisfied the criteria for conducting factorial ANOVA tests.

Consumers’ attitude toward the leading brand was the main covariate and their attitudes toward the leading brand were examined through a pre- and post-test. A paired-samples t-test was calculated to compare the mean of female participants’ attitude toward Pantene before viewing the stimuli (pre-test mean) to the mean of their attitude toward Pantene after viewing the stimuli (post-test mean). The mean on the pretest was 3.63 ($SD = 1.04$) and the mean on the
posttest was 3.57 ($SD = 1.17$). No significant difference from pre-test to post-test was found ($t(180) = .911, p > .05$). In other words, exposure to the copycat brand (*Stylene*) had no significant influence on female participants’ attitudes toward *Pantene*. Therefore, the mean of every female participant’s pre-test and post-test scores on their attitude toward *Pantene* was used as the covariate in the statistical analyses. Three independent variables (shape, color and icon), three dependent variables (attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention) and one covariate were involved in the analyses. Hence, the factorial ANCOVA test was conducted on the female-targeted product.

The factorial ANCOVA was calculated examining the effect of shape (relevance vs. divergence), color (relevance vs. divergence) and icon (relevance vs. divergence) on female participants’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention (see Tables 4 & 5).
Table 4

Female-Targeted Product Marginal Descriptive Statistics: Attitude toward the Brand (AB), Attitude toward the Product (AP) and Purchase Intention (PI)

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<tr>
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Table 5

Female-Targeted Product ANCOVA Test: Main Effects and Interactions on Attitude toward the Brand (AB), Attitude toward the Product (AP) and Purchase Intention (PI)

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<td>.03*</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shape x Color</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shape x Icon</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>3.77</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Shape x Color x Icon</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01
No significant main effect for shape was found on female consumers’ attitude toward the brand \((F(1, 172) = .83, p > .05)\), attitude toward the product \((F(1, 172) = .55, p > .05)\) and purchase intention \((F(1, 172) = .94, p > .05)\).

A significant main effect for color was found on female consumers’ attitude toward the brand \((F(1, 172) = 9.99, p < .05)\). The effect size of color on the attitude toward the brand was .06, meaning that 6% of the variance in female participants’ brand attitudinal changes could be explained by color. A relevant color \((M = 3.61)\) generated significantly more positive influence on females’ attitude toward the brand than a divergent color \((M = 3.28)\). In other words, the more relevant the color, a better attitude toward the brand was observed among female participants.

A significant main effect for color was found on female consumers’ attitude toward the product \((F(1, 172) = 8.92, p < .05)\). The effect size was .05, meaning that 5% of the variance in female participants’ product attitudinal changes could be explained by color. A relevant color \((M = 3.62)\) generated a significantly more positive influence on females’ attitude toward the product than a divergent color \((M = 3.33)\). In other words, the more relevant the color, a better attitude toward the product was observed among female participants.

Additionally, a significant main effect for color was found on female consumers’ purchase intention \((F(1, 172) = 4.90, p < .05)\). The effect size of color on female participants’ purchase intention was .03, meaning that 3% of the variance in female participants’ purchase intention was able to be explained by color. A relevant color \((M = 3.11)\) generated a significantly more positive influence on females’ purchase intention than a divergent color \((M = 2.82)\). However, based on the results, color also had a significant interaction with shape (discussed in
the following paragraphs). Therefore, the main effect of color had to be interpreted in the context of its interaction with shape.

No significant main effect of the icon was found on attitude toward the brand \((F(1, 172) = 2.62, p > .05)\), attitude toward the product \((F(1, 172) = .78, p > .05)\) or purchase intention \((F(1, 172) = 1.84, p > .05)\).

No significant three-way interaction was found on attitude toward the brand \((F(1, 172) = .07, p > .05)\), attitude toward the product \((F(1, 172) = .04, p > .05)\) or purchase intention \((F(1, 172) = 2.73, p > .05)\).

No significant two-way interaction between shape and color was found on attitude toward the brand \((F(1, 172) = .44, p > .05)\) or attitude toward the product \((F(1, 172) = .61, p > .05)\). A significant two-way interaction between shape and color was found on female participants’ purchase intention \((F(1, 172) = 3.90, p = .050)\). The effect size was .02, meaning that 2% of the variance in female participants’ purchase intention could be explained by the interaction between shape and color. In order to determine which shape and color combination showed significant differences in purchase intention, a series of Bonferroni tests were conducted.

A total of six comparisons were calculated (three comparisons when shape was kept constant and three comparisons when color was kept constant). According to the results (see Tables 6 & 7), the significance value between a) a relevant shape with a relevant color and b) a relevant shape with a divergent color was .55, greater than .47, its Bonferroni value. A relevant shape with a relevant color \((M = 3.17)\) generated significantly more positive influence on females’ purchase intention than a relevant shape with a divergent color \((M = 2.62)\). In other words, the selection of color made a significant difference on female participants’ purchase
intention when shape was relevant. When shape was relevant and the color was relevant, the female participants reported greater purchase intention.

A significant two-way interaction between shape and icon was found on female participants’ attitude toward the brand (\(F(1, 172) = 7.42, p < .05\)), attitude toward the product (\(F(1, 172) = 5.05, p < .05\)) and purchase intention (\(F(1, 172) = 3.77, p = .05\)) (see Tables 4 & 5). The effect sizes were .04, .03 and .05 respectively, meaning that 4% of the variance of female participants’ attitude toward the brand, 3% of the variance of female participants’ attitude toward the product and 5% of the variance of female participants’ purchase intention could be explained by the interaction between shape and icon. In order to determine which shape and icon combinations yielded significant differences in females’ attitude toward the brand, the product and purchase intention, a series of Bonferroni tests were conducted.

A total of six comparisons were calculated (three comparisons when shape was kept constant and three comparisons when icon was kept constant) (see Tables 6 & 7).

In terms of females’ attitude toward the brand, the significance value between a) a relevant shape with a relevant icon and b) a relevant shape with a divergent icon was .46, greater than .33, its Bonferroni value. A relevant shape with a relevant icon (\(M = 3.63\)) generated significantly more positive influence on attitude toward the brand among females than a relevant shape with a divergent icon (\(M = 3.16\)). In other words, the icon made a significant difference in females’ attitude toward the brand when the shape was relevant. When the shape was relevant and the icon was relevant, greater attitude toward the brand was measured among female participants.

Additionally, the significance value between a) a divergent shape with a divergent icon and b) a relevant shape with a divergent icon was .39, greater than .32, its Bonferroni value. A
divergent shape with a divergent icon ($M = 3.55$) generated a significantly more positive influence on females’ attitude toward the brand than a relevant shape with a divergent icon ($M = 3.16$). In other words, when the icon was divergent, the selection of shape made a difference in female participants’ attitude toward the brand. When the icon was divergent and the shape was divergent, greater attitude toward the brand was measured among female participants.

In terms of females’ attitude toward the product, similar patterns were found (see Tables 6 & 7). The significance value between a) a relevant shape with a relevant icon and b) a relevant shape with a divergent icon was .32, greater than .31, its Bonferroni value. A relevant shape with a relevant icon ($M = 3.60$) generated significantly more positive influence on females’ attitude toward the product than a relevant shape with a divergent icon ($M = 3.28$). In other words, the selection of icon made a significant difference in females’ attitude toward the product when shape was relevant. When the shape was relevant and the icon was relevant, greater attitude toward the product was measured among female participants.

Additionally, the significance value between a) a divergent shape with a divergent icon and b) a relevant shape with a divergent icon was .30, greater than .29, its Bonferroni value. A divergent shape with a divergent icon ($M = 3.58$) generated significantly more positive influence on females’ attitude toward the product than a relevant shape with a divergent icon ($M = 3.28$). In other words, when the icon was divergent, the selection of shape made a difference in females’ attitude toward the product. When the icon was divergent and the shape was divergent, greater attitude toward the product was measured among female participants.

In terms of purchase intention among females, the significance value between a) a relevant shape with a relevant icon and b) a relevant shape with a divergent icon was .43, greater than .41, its Bonferroni value. A relevant shape with a relevant icon ($M = 3.11$) generated
significantly more positive influence on females’ purchase intention than a relevant shape with a divergent icon ($M = 2.68$). In other words, the selection of icon made a significant difference in females’ purchase intention when the shape was relevant. When the shape was relevant and the icon was relevant, greater purchase intention was observed among female participants (see Tables 5 & 6).

Table 6

**Female-Targeted Products Significant Two-Way Interaction**
a) Shape x Color on Purchase Intention (PI)

![Estimated Marginal Means of PI](image)

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: covariate = 3.6022
b) Shape x Icon on Attitude toward the Brand (AB)

Estimated Marginal Means of AB

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: covariate = 3.6022
c) Shape x Icon on Attitude toward the Product (AP)

Estimated Marginal Means of AP

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: covariate = 3.6022
d) Shape x Icon on Purchase Intention (PI)

Estimated Marginal Means of PI

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: covariate = 3.6022
Table 7

**Bonferroni Results of Significant Two-Way Interactions for the Female-Targeted Product**

a) Shape x Color on PI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1 . \bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant color ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent color ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant color ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with divergent color ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant color ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with relevant color ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.04</td>
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<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with relevant color ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with divergent color ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with relevant color ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent color ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with divergent color ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent color ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The calculation was based on Bonferroni formula: $B = t_{0.05/2C} \cdot \text{errordf} \cdot \sqrt{\text{MSE} \left( \frac{1}{ni} + \frac{1}{nj} \right)}$
b) Shape x Icon on AB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1 \cdot \bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
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<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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<td>3.43</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c) Shape x Icon on AP

<table>
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<th>$B$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>$\bar{x}_1 \bar{x}_2$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. divergent shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
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<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent shape with relevant icon ($\bar{x}_1$) vs. relevant shape with divergent icon ($\bar{x}_2$)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Gender-Neutral Product

After data purification, the responses of 204 participants, including 108 males (52.9%) and 96 females (47%), were analyzed. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions of *Sweet Crunches of Oats* breakfast cereal, with each condition viewed by 24-28 participants. The average participant’s age was 28.2 years ($SD = 4.16$) and 95.8% of the participants had completed some college or a higher level of education.

Cronbach’s alpha was employed to examine the overall reliability coefficient for dependent variables. The Cronbach’s alpha for attitude toward the brand (.92), attitude toward the product (.93) and purchase intention (.92) demonstrated that the sets of scales used to measure the dependent variables for gender-neutral products were highly reliable.
The skewness values of the standardized residuals of attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention were -1.02, -1.13, and -.78 respectively. The skewness values for attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product were slightly less than -1. The kurtosis values of the standardized residuals of these variables were 1.91, 1.61 and .21 respectively, which were greater than -1 and less than 2. The Q-Q plot, histogram and skewness and kurtosis values showed that the data were normally distributed. Also, based on Levene’s tests, the significance values of error variance for these dependent variables were .42, .18, and .81 respectively, and greater than .05, indicating that all dependent variables had equal variance. The normal distribution and equal variance satisfied the criteria for conducting factorial ANOVA tests.

Attitude toward the leading brand was the main covariate and examined through a pre- and post-test. A paired-samples t-test was calculated to compare the mean of all participants’ attitude toward Honey Bunches of Oats before viewing the stimuli (pre-test mean) to the mean of their attitude toward Honey Bunches of Oats after viewing the stimuli (post-test mean). The mean on the pre-test was 4.09 (SD = .89) and the mean on the post-test was 4.08 (SD = .95). No significant difference from pre-test to post-test was found (t (204) = .05, p > .05). In other words, exposure to the copycat brand (Sweet Crunches of Oats) had no significant influence on participants’ attitude toward Honey Bunches of Oats. In addition, based on the results of GLM repeated measures, males’ pre-test mean was 4.14 (SD = .85) and their post-test mean was 4.16 (SD = .93). Females’ pre-test mean was 4.02 (SD = .93) and their post-test mean was 3.99 (SD = .97). No significant gender effect was found (F (1, 202) = 1.29, p > .05). In other words, the breakfast cereal is a valid, gender-neutral product and gender did not influence the results. Therefore, the mean of every participant’s pre-test and post-test scores on their attitude toward
Honey Bunches of Oats was used as the covariate in the statistical analyses. Three independent variables (shape, color and icon), three dependent variables (attitude toward the brand, the product and their purchase intention) and one covariate were involved in the analyses. Hence, the factorial ANCOVA test was conducted on the gender-neutral product (see Tables 8 & 9).

Table 8

**Gender-Neutral Product Marginal Descriptive Statistics: Attitude toward the Brand (AB), Attitude toward the Product (AP) and Purchase Intention (PI)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>N (Total N = 204)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SDE</th>
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<td>103</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.10</td>
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Table 9

Gender-Neutral Product ANCOVA Test: Main Effects and Interactions on Attitude toward the Brand (AB), Attitude toward the Product (AP) and Purchase Intention (PI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
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<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>sig</th>
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<td>.001**</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td>.91</td>
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<td>.74</td>
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<td>.59</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Color X Icon</td>
<td>1, 178</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shape X Color X Icon</td>
<td>1, 178</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01
A significant main effect for shape was found on participants’ attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 204) = 4.26, p < .05$). A relevant shape ($M = 3.93$) generated significantly more positive influence on participants’ attitude toward the brand than a divergent shape ($M = 3.73$). The effect size was .02, meaning that 2% of the variance of participants’ brand attitudinal changes was explained by shape. In other words, the more relevant the shape, a stronger purchase intention was observed among study participants.

No significant main effect for shape was found on participants’ attitude toward the product ($F (1, 204) = .05, p > .05$) or purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = .81, p > .05$).

A significant main effect for color was found on participants’ attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 172) = 10.95, p < .05$). The effect size was .05, meaning that 5% of the variance of participants’ brand attitudinal changes was explained by color. A relevant color ($M = 3.99$) generated significantly more positive influence on attitude toward the brand than a divergent color ($M = 3.67$). In other words, the more relevant the color, greater attitude toward the brand was observed among the study participants.

A significant main effect for color on consumers’ attitude toward the product was observed ($F (1, 204) = 6.24, p < .05$). The effect size was .03, meaning that 3% of the variance of participants’ product attitudinal changes was explained by color. A relevant color ($M = 3.85$) generated a significantly more positive influence on attitude toward the product than a divergent color ($M = 3.61$). In other words, the more relevant the color, a better attitude toward the product was observed among the study participants.

A significant main effect for color was found on participants’ purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = 4.97, p < .05$). The effect size was .03, meaning that 3% of the variance of participants’ purchase intention was explained by color. A relevant color ($M = 3.63$) generated a significantly
more positive influence on purchase intention than a divergent color ($M = 3.34$). In other words, the more relevant the color was, a stronger purchase intention was observed among the study participants.

No significant main effect for the icon was found on participants’ attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 204) = .01, p > .05$), attitude toward the product ($F (1, 204) = .08, p > .05$) or purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = 2.14, p > .05$).

No significant three-way interaction was found between attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 204) = .09, p > .05$), attitude toward the product ($F (1, 204) = .03, p > .05$) and purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = .34, p > .05$).

No significant two-way interaction between shape and color was found on attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 204) = .11, p > .05$), attitude toward the product ($F (1, 204) = .12, p > .05$) or purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = .03, p > .05$).

No significant two-way interaction between shape and icon was found on attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 204) = 1.99, p > .05$), attitude toward the product ($F (1, 204) = .30, p > .05$) or purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = .02, p > .05$).

No significant two-way interaction between color and icon was found on attitude toward the brand ($F (1, 204) = .10, p > .05$), attitude toward the product ($F (1, 204) = 1.15, p > .05$) or purchase intention ($F (1, 204) = .00, p > .05$).

**Effects of Covariate**

The covariate of the current study was participants’ attitudes toward the national brands. As stated above, no differences were found between pre- and post-test attitudes toward the national brands for male participants, female participants and participants of both genders.
Therefore, the covariates used for the resulting analyses were the means of participants’ pre- and post-test attitudes toward the leading brands.

For the male-targeted product, even though the independent variables failed to generate either significant main effect nor interactions on the dependent variables, the covariate exerted significant effects on male participants’ attitude toward the brand ($F(1, 178) = 201.51, p < .01$), attitude toward the product ($F(1, 178) = 179.22, p < .01$) and their purchase intention ($F(1, 178) = 163.04, p < .01$). These results demonstrated that the covariate was valid, meaning that male participants’ attitudinal and behavioral changes toward the copycat brand (read: *Creature*) were influenced by their attitudes toward the national leading brand (read: *Monster*).

Furthermore, the effect size of covariate on male participants’ attitude toward the brand was .53, meaning that 53% of the variance in male participants’ attitude toward the copycat brand (read: *Creature*) could be explained by their attitude toward the national leading brand (read: *Monster*). Also, the effect size of covariate on male participants’ attitude toward the product was .50, meaning that around 50% of the variance in male participants’ product attitude toward *Creature* could be explained by their attitude toward *Monster*. In addition, the effect size of covariate on male participants’ purchase intention was .48, which showed that about 48% of the variance in male participants’ purchase intention toward *Creature* could be explained by male participants’ attitude toward *Monster* (see Table 10).

For the female-targeted product, the covariate generated significant effects on female participants’ attitude toward the brand ($F(1, 172) = 106.25, p < .01$), attitude toward the product ($F(1, 172) = 117.61, p < .01$) and their purchase intention ($F(1, 172) = 154.38, p < .01$). Likewise, these results showed that the covariate was valid, revealing that female participants’
attitudinal and behavioral changes toward the copycat brand (read: Stylene) were influenced by their attitudes toward the national leading brand (read: Pantene).

In terms of their effect sizes, the covariate on female participants’ attitude toward the brand was .38, meaning that around 38% of the variance in female participants’ attitude toward the copycat brand (read: Stylene) could be explained by their attitude toward the national leading brand (read: Pantene). The effect size of covariate on female participants’ attitude toward the product was .41, meaning that around 41% of the variance in female participants’ product attitude toward Stylene could be explained by their attitude toward Pantene. Also, the effect size of covariate on female participants’ purchase intention was .47, which showed that about 47% of the variance in female participants’ purchase intention connected with Stylene could be explained by female participants’ attitude toward Pantene (see Table 10).

For the gender-neutral product, the covariate had significant effects on participants’ attitude toward the brand ($F(1, 195) = 137.16, p < .01$), attitude toward the product ($F(1, 195) = 121.63, p < .01$) and their purchase intention ($F(1, 195) = 78.88, p < .01$). Again, these results proved that the covariate was valid, demonstrating participants’ attitudinal and behavioral changes toward the copycat brand (read: Sweet Crunches of Oats) were influenced by their attitudes toward the national leading brand (read: Honey Bunches of Oats).

The effect size of the covariate on participants’ attitude toward the brand was .41, meaning that around 41% of the variance in participants’ attitude toward the copycat brand (read: Sweet Crunches of Oats) could be explained by their attitude toward the national leading brand (read: Honey Bunches of Oats). The effect size of covariate on female participants’ attitude toward the product was .38, meaning that around 38% of the variance in participants’ product attitude toward Sweet Crunches of Oats could be explained by their attitude toward Honey
Bunches of Oats. Also, the effect size of covariate on participants’ purchase intention was .29, which showed that about 29% of the variance in participants’ purchase intention toward Sweet Crunches of Oats could be explained by female participants’ attitude toward Honey Bunches of Oats (see Table 10).

Table 10

Results of Covariates for Male-Targeted, Female-Targeted and Gender-Neutral Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covariate</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male-Targeted Product Attitude</td>
<td>Monster AB</td>
<td>1, 178</td>
<td>201.51</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>1, 178</td>
<td>179.22</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>1, 178</td>
<td>163.04</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-Targeted Product Attitude</td>
<td>Pantene AB</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>106.25</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>117.61</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>1, 172</td>
<td>154.38</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Neutral Product Attitude</td>
<td>Honey Bunches of OatsAB</td>
<td>1, 195</td>
<td>137.16</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>1, 195</td>
<td>121.63</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>1, 195</td>
<td>78.88</td>
<td>.00**</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Differences in Consumer Behavior

After viewing the stimuli, all participants responded to a set of questions dealing with their behavior as consumers, including a) how often they shop in grocery stores, b) how often they try new brands, c) how often they compare different brands before purchase, d) how often they buy products based on recommendations of family and friends and e) whether they consider
price as an important factor. In order to identify any differences between male and female responses, a series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted (see Table 11).

Table 11

T-Test on Daily Behavioral Differences between Consumers of Both Genders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping Frequency</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying New Brands</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing Brands</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase on Recommendation</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Consideration</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01

Male participants’ responses following exposure to the male-targeted product or the gender-neutral product were collapsed into one group and female participants’ responses following exposure to the female-targeted product or the gender-neutral product were collapsed into another group. This resulted in one group of 293 male responses and another group of 276 female responses.

With regard to shopping frequency, a significant difference was found between males and females 

\( t (567) = 3.91, p < .05 \). The mean for females’ shopping frequency was significantly higher than that for males.
higher ($M = 4.24, SD = .76$) than for males ($M = 3.99, SD = .78$). In other words, females reported shopping more often than males.

When asked whether or not they like to try new brands, a significant difference was found between males and females ($t (567.07) = 2.42, p < .05$). The mean for females’ trial of new brands was significantly higher ($M = 3.61, SD = .95$) than for males ($M = 3.43, SD = .84$). In other words, females reported a greater tendency to try new brands than their male counterparts.

More females indicated that they compare brands before purchase than male participants reported. A significant difference was found between males and females ($t (566) = 2.21, p < .05$) and the mean for females’ brand comparison was significantly higher ($M = 3.92, SD = .88$) than among males ($M = 3.75, SD = .90$).

A significant difference was found between males and females with regard to how much the recommendations of friends or family influence their purchase decisions ($t (566) = 3.27, p < .05$). The mean for females was significantly higher ($M = 3.70, SD = .88$) than males ($M = 3.46, SD = .88$), indicating that females are more likely to purchase brands based on the recommendation of others than males.

With regard to price sensitivity, a significant difference was found between male and female consumers ($t (563) = 3.23, p < .05$). The mean for females was significantly higher ($M = 4.13, SD = .91$) than males ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.01$), suggesting that females consider price as a more important factor than males do.

**Results Summary**

This section summarizes the statistical results discussed above by incorporating specific conditions of all three gender-typed stimuli, providing more direct and straightforward description of the findings.
When male study participants considered the male-targeted copycat product, *Creature*, neither a main effect nor an interaction was found among shape, color and icon related to their attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.

When female study participants viewed conditions of the female-targeted product, *Stylene*, relevant colors were correlated with better attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product than divergent colors. Conditions 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the *Stylene* product were associated with better attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product than conditions 5, 6, 7 and 8 (refer to Figure 8 to review all conditions of this product). Also, based on the interaction results, conditions 1 and 2 of the *Stylene* product were associated with stronger purchase intention than conditions 5 and 6. Conditions 1 and 4 were associated with better attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product than condition 2. Condition 1 yielded stronger indicators of purchase intention than condition 2. Therefore, among all conditions of the *Stylene* product, condition 1 (relevant shape, relevant color and relevant icon) generated the best overall attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention. Condition 4 (divergent shape, relevant color and divergent icon) generated the second best attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product, but exerted no influence on females’ purchase intention. Condition 2 (relevant shape, relevant color and divergent icon) generated the second best purchase intention among females.

For the neutral-gender product, *Sweet Crunches of Oats*, a relevant shape generated better attitude toward the brand than a divergent shape among both males and females. Conditions 1, 2, 5 and 6 generated greater consumers’ attitude toward the brand than condition 3, 4, 7 and 8 (refer to Figure 9 to review all conditions of this product). A relevant color was associated with better attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention than a divergent
color among participants of both genders. In other words, conditions 1, 2, 3 and 4 generated greater attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention than conditions 5, 6, 7 and 8. Among all conditions, conditions 1 and 2 generated the best attitude toward the brand. For the gender-neutral product, color was a more influential package design factor than shape because color was able to exert influence on all three dependent variables while shape influenced only the participants’ attitude toward the brand.

In terms of their daily purchase behaviors, females reported a) shopping more often, b) enjoying trial of different brands, c) more brand comparison, d) heeding recommendations and being sensitive to price, all in contrast to their male counterparts.
Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the present study from both theoretical and practical perspectives. It begins by exploring the study’s findings in terms of their contribution to the current scholarship. A conceptual continuum model of the brand imitation strategy is proposed, incorporating both semiotics and creativity theory and providing guidance for future studies on this topic. Practical implications of the brand imitation strategy for both leading and lesser-known brands are also discussed. The chapter closes with limitations of the current study and conclusions.

Findings and Theoretical Implications

This study examined a subset (millennials, ages 18 to 34) of consumers’ responses to copycat brands at different imitative levels, with emphasis upon three key elements in package design: shape, color and icon. Drawing upon visual semiotic theory and creativity theory, the study also considered the potential influence of gender differences on consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes as they encountered package designs that were more similar or less similar to those of leading brands. This study’s hypotheses were posed in relationship to (a) a male-targeted copycat product, (b) a female-targeted copycat product and (c) a gender-neutral copycat product. Findings relating to these questions are detailed here along with their theoretical implications.
**Consumer Response to Copycat Branding of a Male-Targeted Product**

The study’s first set of hypotheses (Hs 1a and 1b) sought to determine whether or not relevant or divergent (a) shapes, (b) colors, and (c) icons in the package design of a male-targeted copycat product would have a main effect on influencing male consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention. Additionally, tests were conducted for any interactions among shape, color and icon on male consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention.

None of the eight treatment conditions of the copycat energy drink (*Creature*) generated any significant attitudinal or behavioral changes among male consumers. This finding is consistent with Kuvykaite et al. (2015)’s recent study, which suggests that men are less likely to pay attention to the visual elements of product packaging than women, a notion borrowed from Witkin’s (1978) theory of cognitive styles. According to Witkin (1978), men are more likely to adopt field-dependent cognitive style to process information, relying on external referents to make their purchase decisions and decreasing their appreciation of product package design in comparison to women. Additionally, the *Creature* energy drink stimuli did not reveal any changes in male consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product or purchase intention, providing more supportive evidence for Witkin’s theory of cognitive styles.

Although studies conducted by Deaux (1985) and Xu (2009) suggest that men are more likely to focus on the price of a product than its packaging or other features, male participants in this study reported less price sensitivity than their female counterparts. While this finding seems contradictory to previous research, it should be noted that this study used a sample of millennials (ages 18 to 34), a subgroup of the consumer population. It is possible that unique economic conditions and changes in the marketplace during millennials’ lifetimes could explain variations...
in their price sensitivity (Fromm, 2014). However, recent market research suggests that 95% of millennials are highly sensitive to price (Gasca, 2015), so the fact that this study involved low-involvement products may help explain this unexpected finding. It is possible that males are less concerned about the price of energy drinks because they are relatively inexpensive and that they responded to the price sensitivity question with this type of product in mind. Nevertheless, it may be important to question whether Witkin’s decades-old theory (1978), as it relates to a construct like price sensitivity among men versus women, is as relatable to millennial consumers.

Male consumers who participated in this study reported a fairly neutral attitude toward the Monster brand (the leading brand imitated by Creature) (3.1 out of 5), a markedly less favorable attitude than they reported in connection to the gender-neutral product, Honey Bunches of Oats (4.2 out of 5). This relative indifference to the Monster brand may also help explain why males’ attitudes or purchase intention was not moved by the Creature stimuli. By comparison, female consumers reported a more favorable attitude toward the female-targeted brand Pantene (3.6 out of 5) and their positive attitude toward Honey Bunches of Oats (4.0 out of 5). Positive attitudes toward brands are often correlated with high familiarity and greater attention to stimuli that imitate them (Ares, Giménez, & Deliza, 2010; Robinson, Borzekowski, Matheson, & Kraemer, 2007).

With respect to visual semiotics theory and creativity theory, the findings suggest that the relevant and divergent signs cannot be applied to prompt male consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes with regard to the copycat energy drink product. The reason can be explored from two perspectives: those of male participants themselves and the product itself. As stated above, based on Witkin (1978)’s theory, it may be that males, who are more associated with a field-dependent cognitive style, simply do not care about product package design. However,
male participants’ attitudinal and behavioral changes toward the gender-neutral product, the breakfast cereal, indicate that male participants are sensitive to indexical signs, which will be further discussed in the following section pertaining to consumers’ responses to the gender-neutral copycat product. Therefore, the potential reason for male consumers’ indifference to the energy drink may relate to the product itself.

Energy drinks are considered to be a utilitarian product, or a product that “has a specific function and … will fulfill a practical purpose [mitigating] the risk associated with its purpose” (McKay-Nesbitt & Ryan, 2015, p. 642). Energy drinks provide caffeine and facilitate concentration, improving their working efficiency (Webb, 2013). On the other hand, the high market penetration of energy drink products may increase the cognitive priming effect for male consumers, prompting them to associate energy drinks with higher performance. Consequently, brand and package design may be less important factors as long as the product fulfills their needs. Therefore, the use of different signs and the employment of different imitation levels may fail to exert any influence on male consumers.

**Consumer Response to Copycat Branding of a Female-Targeted Product**

Hypotheses 2a and 2b attempted to explore whether relevant or divergent signs including (a) shapes, (b) colors and (c) icons in package design of a female-targeted product, hairspray, produced any significant main effects or interactions on female consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and their purchase intention. The stimuli that generated significant results are listed in Figure 10.
As mentioned above, one of the findings of the current study is that women pay more attention to the package design than men, which is consistent with Kuvykaite et al. (2015)’s research. In addition, the current study further identifies the specific elements in product packaging that can attract female consumers’ attention, providing a complementary theoretical contribution to the previous research.

First, female consumers are more likely to notice changes in color. This finding is consistent with Silayoi and Speece’s (2004; 2007) finding that color is one of the most obvious and noticeable elements in package design. Consumers associate different colors with different attributes of the product, such as product quality or their expected satisfaction levels (Silayoi & Speece, 2007). The results of the current study further show that relevant colors are able to generate better attitudes toward the brand and attitudes toward the product among female consumers. 

Figure 10
Stimuli for Stylene that generated significant results
consumers. Relevant colors used by copycat brands serve as a peripheral cue for female consumers to connect these copycat brands to the national leading brands, greatly increasing their favorability toward the copycat brands as well as improving their brand and product attitudes. In other words, adopting a similar color scheme to a leading brand helps copycat brands compete with their better-known counterparts.

Second, based on the results of this study, Condition 1 of Stylene, the copycat brand incorporating a relevant shape, colors and icon, generated the most a) positive attitude toward the brand, b) attitude toward the product and c) purchase intention for female consumers. This finding contradicts Van Horen and Pieters (2012b)’s results showing that moderate-similarity copycat brands produce the best brand evaluation. One possible reason for the discrepancy is that their study drew participants from a nationwide sample, with an average age of 43, who overwhelmingly viewed copycat brands as unethical (i.e., infringing the copyright of leading brands). Yet, in the current study, 181 millennials between 18-34 years of age constituted the sample. Millennials, a generation native to the copycat brand era, attach less emphasis to copyright or other relative ethical problems of copycat brands and believe quality is of most importance, whether they are considering a copycat brand or a leading brand (Escobar, 2015). The relevant shape, color and icon is able to provide the most obvious peripheral cues for female millennials to associate the copycat brand with the leading brand, prompting them to perceive the copycat brand as capable of meeting their expected quality standard. Therefore, the employment of relevant peripheral cues in a package design improves the recognition level of the copycat brand, further enhancing its capacity to compete in the marketplace.

Third, another notable finding is that Condition 4 of Stylene, the copycat brand incorporating a divergent shape, a relevant color scheme and a divergent icon, generated the
second best attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product. However, it failed to generate more positive purchase intention. On the other hand, Condition 2 of Stylene, the copycat brand incorporating a relevant shape, relevant color scheme and a divergent icon, did generate the second best purchase intention while failing to prompt female consumers’ positive attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product.

This finding could be attributed to cognitive dissonance, a psychological discomfort that can arise from the introduction of new information or events that cause inconsistency or conflict between the new information and an individual’s existing information (Festinger, 1962; Wilkins et al. 2016). Changes in behavior are common among individuals seeking to cope with such psychological discomfort (Festinger, 1962). For example, an individual may stop smoking when he obtains the new knowledge that smoking is bad for his health. In the current study, even though the stimuli are designed with manipulations of three core elements of package design (shape, color and icon), consumers are less likely to process the corresponding brand information separately. Instead, they are more likely to process and evaluate the product package holistically. When viewing the stimuli as a whole, it can be easily observed that Condition 4 of Stylene (relevant color, divergent shape and divergent icon) looks less like the original Pantene product design than Condition 2 of Stylene (relevant color, relevant shape and divergent icon). The less familiar design of Condition 4’s packaging may induce cognitive dissonance for female consumers, decreasing their likelihood to purchase the product. Conversely, the more familiar design of Condition 2 (relevant color, relevant shape and divergent icon) may increase their tendency to purchase the product. Hence, compared to Condition 2, Condition 4 failed to generate significant positive purchase intention among female study participants.
Condition 4 of Stylene is more likely to stand out in comparison with the others, providing a refreshing and creative product appearance for female consumers. Previous studies suggest that advertising that is more creative (read: different) can positively influence audiences’ ad awareness, attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand (Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz, & Darley, 2007; Smith et al., 2008). Extending this premise, it is logical to assert that a more creative (different) product design may have more capacity to increase consumers’ brand awareness, attitude toward the brand as well as attitude toward the product. Condition 4 generated the second best brand and product attitudes among female consumers, demonstrating this logical extension of previous research.

It is also possible that Condition 4 of Stylene, given its more dissonant and creative elements, was perceived by study participants to be priced differently than Pantene hairspray, decreasing their inclination to purchase the copycat brand. On the other hand, female consumers were likely to perceive Condition 2, a product package with a more imitative design, as similarly priced to Pantene hairspray, making them more likely to purchase it. Based on the low-involvement hierarchy of effects (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010), consumers’ attitudes toward products can be formed after they purchase them. If consumers have limited knowledge of the brand, they may purchase it first and form their brand and product evaluations after use (Solomon et al., 2010). In other words, their attitudes are based on their experience (Solomon et al., 2010). The study participants’ evaluation of Condition 2 seems consistent with low-involvement hierarchy. Female consumers may rely on Condition 2’s similar design elements to Pantene hairspray, leading them to perceive that this copycat brand is also similarly priced. Therefore, it is possible that female consumers felt more inclined to purchase the copycat brand represented by Condition 2 and to form their brand and product attitudes later. This would
explain why Condition 2 generated significant positive purchase intention while it failed to have any influence on female consumers’ attitudes toward the brand or the product.

With regard to visual semiotics and creativity theory, the participants’ reaction to the Stylene conditions seem to indicate that relevant indexical signs (read: shape and color), generate better attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product for female consumers than symbolic signs (read: icon). One potential reason is that, compared to symbolic signs, indexical signs may serve as more recognizable peripheral cues, attracting female consumers’ attention to the product. Furthermore, color exerts a greater impact on female consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes than shape. In other words, when female consumers employ a heuristic model to process the information carried by a package design, color can be considered the most influential element of the message.

In addition, when both indexical and symbolic signs are relevant, the best attitudes toward the brand, attitudes toward the product and purchase intention are generated among female consumers. In other words, copycat brands with similar design elements as leading brands are more likely to prompt female consumers’ positive brand and product attitudes as well as their purchase intention.

On the other hand, when one indexical sign (read: color) is relevant while another indexical sign (read: shape) and the symbolic sign (read: icon) are divergent, the second best attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product are generated among female consumers. When both indexical signs (read: color and icon) are relevant while the symbolic sign (read: icon) is divergent, the second best purchase intention is prompted among female consumers. In other words, copycat brands with packaging of various levels of similarity show different levels of effectiveness among female consumers.
Consumer Response to Copycat Branding of a Gender-Neutral Product

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were proposed to investigate whether relevant or divergent signs including (a) shapes, (b) colors and (c) icons in package design of a gender-neutral product generated any significant main effects as well as any interactions on consumers’ attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and their purchase intention. The stimuli that generated significant results are listed in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Stimuli for Sweet Crunches of Oats that generated significant results
Based on the results of the current study, color and shape are the two design elements that most successfully influenced attitudinal and behavioral changes among consumers of both genders. Regardless of gender, relevant colors were able to generate more positive attitudes toward the brand, attitudes toward the product and purchase intention than divergent colors. This finding is consistent with this study’s findings for the female-targeted product, again demonstrating that relevant colors serve as an obvious peripheral cue (Silayoi & Speece, 2004; 2007). Relevant colors prompt consumers to associate copycat brands with the leading brand, enhancing their attitudes toward the brand, attitudes toward the product and purchase intention. In other words, using similar colors in the package design of copycat brands enables them to more effectively compete with their leading brand counterparts.

Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that relevant shapes generate better attitudes toward the brand than divergent shapes among consumers of both genders. As illustrated in Figure 11 (Conditions 1-4 of Sweet Crunches of Oats), when consumers evaluate a product package holistically, copycat brands with relevant shapes look more like the original brand. Based on cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), copycat brands with relevant shape are more familiar and can increase consumers’ likelihood to form positive brand attitudes.

The results also reflect that compared to shape, color is a more influential design element because relevant colors generated a more positive attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention on consumers while relevant shapes merely affected consumers’ attitudes toward the brand. Most previous research identifies the essential elements in product design, such as shape, color, size, etc. (Creusen, & Schoormans, 2005; Labrecque, Patrick, & Milne, 2013) while failing to differentiate the degree of importance among these elements in inducing consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes. Hence, this finding serves as a
complementary theoretical contribution to the previous research. Also, this finding is consistent with Labrecque and Milne (2012)’s findings that color effectively activates consumers’ memory, facilitating an association between color and certain brand knowledge. Relevant colors used by copycat brands help consumers retrieve knowledge pertaining to the similar leading brand, laying a foundation for further development of attitudes and behaviors.

As mentioned in the results section, gender did not influence study participants’ evaluations of Sweet Crunches of Oats, the copycat product, which is noteworthy. Although package designs for the male-targeted product, Creature (the energy drink), failed to generate any attitudinal and behavioral changes, package designs for Sweet Crunches of Oats (the breakfast cereal) showed that color and shape exerted influence among male consumers. One potential reason for this difference in response is that while both energy drinks and breakfast cereals are both considered to be low-involvement products, the evaluation of a breakfast cereal’s nutritional value and taste may involve more attention and cognition than an energy drink, as millennial male consumers tend to consider these factors when making purchase decisions (Conklin, Cranage, & Lambert, 2005). Therefore, it is possible that the breakfast cereal generated more cognitive involvement than the energy drink among male consumers.

In applying the perspectives of visual semiotics and creativity theory to interpret these findings, relevant indexical signs (read: color and shape) exerted significant influence on attitudinal and behavioral intent among consumers of both genders. On the other hand, symbolic signs (read: icon) failed to generate any significant changes to consumers’ attitudes toward the brand, the product or their purchase intention. Additionally, consistent with the findings of the female-targeted product, color served as a more influential indexical sign in changing consumers’ brand and product attitudes as well as their purchase intention compared to the indexical sign
(read: shape). In other words, color is the most obvious peripheral cue in affecting consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes.

**General Discussion**

The findings of this study help to bridge semiotics theory and creativity theory as they relate to package design. As mentioned in the literature review, color and shape serve as indexical signs and icons serve as symbolic signs within semiotics theory (Peirce, 1932). Relevance and divergence are two dimensions scholars use to evaluate the creativity of a work (Smith, Chen & Yang, 2008).

Based on the study participants’ reactions to both female-targeted and gender-neutral products, indexical signs, especially color, make a greater contribution to the holistic perception of a product design than symbolic signs. In relationship to the brand imitation strategy, the adoption of relevant indexical signs is therefore likely to help facilitate consumers’ association of the copycat brands with their leading brand counterparts, further enhancing attitudes toward the brand, the product and purchase intention.

Furthermore, this study’s results suggest that relevance plays a powerful role in establishing a copycat brand’s legitimacy in the minds of millennial consumers. When indexical and symbolic signs are all relevant, better attitudes toward the brand are generated. Especially among female consumers, the best attitudes toward the brand, attitudes toward the product and purchase intentions can be generated when all signs are relevant.

Based on the interaction results observed for *Stylene*, the female-targeted copycat product, divergence can prove to be effective if used appropriately. Adopting a divergent symbolic sign and both relevant indexical signs can induce cognitive dissonance among female consumers, enhancing purchase intention without influencing brand or product attitudes. On the other hand,
the adoption of a divergent symbolic sign and one relevant indexical sign (read: color) and one divergent indexical sign (read: shape) can provide a refreshing exterior appearance of the product for female consumers, enhancing their brand and product attitudes, but without influencing their purchase intention.

Lastly, as mentioned in the literature review, researchers Van Horen and Pieters (2012b) proposed high, moderate and low similarity categories to define different levels of imitation among copycat brands. However, their definitions lacked clarity. In response, the following conceptual continuum is proposed (based on the findings of this study), incorporating semiotics and creativity theory and providing a clearer and more systematic method for delineating brand imitation levels.

A Proposed Conceptual Continuum of Brand Imitation

The following conceptual continuum of brand imitation is developed on two antecedents arising from the results of the current study. The first antecedent is that color, one indexical sign, remains relevant, and the second antecedent is that shape, another indexical sign, exerts more influence on the holistic perception of the product design than symbolic sign.

Figure 12

Conceptual Continuum of Brand Imitation
Based on this model, the package designs of copycat brands with High Relevance are characterized by the relevance of both indexical and symbolic signs while those with High Divergence are characterized by the divergence of both indexical and symbolic signs. Moderate Relevance is characterized by a relevant indexical sign (read: shape) and a divergent symbolic sign (read: icon) and is more imitative, while Moderate Divergence is characterized by a divergent indexical sign (read: shape) and a relevant symbolic sign (read: icon) and is less imitative. Package designs of copycat brands exhibiting different degrees of similarity exert different impact on attitudes toward the brand, attitudes toward the product and purchase intention among millennial consumers of both genders.

Application of the Continuum to the Female-Targeted Product

This conceptual continuum can be applied to explain the effectiveness of package designs of the female-targeted product *Stylene*, as follows.

Figure 13

Conceptual Continuum of Brand Imitation Applied to the Female-Targeted Product

*Attitude toward the Brand.* As shown on this continuum, only package designs with High Relevance, High Divergence and Moderate Relevance exert significant influences on
female consumers’ attitude toward the brand. Package designs of High Relevance and High
Divergence generate better attitudes toward the brand than package designs of Moderate
Relevance. However, package designs of Moderate Relevance generate less favorable attitudes
toward the brand. Female consumers’ attitudes toward the package designs of copycat brands
with Moderate Relevance are a little less than neutral.

**Attitude toward the Product.** A similar pattern can be observed for female consumers’
attitude toward the product. Package designs of copycat brands with High Relevance, High
Divergence and Moderate Relevance have a significant impact on female millennials’ product
attitude. Compared to package designs of Moderate Relevance, package designs of High
Relevance and High Divergence prompt better attitude toward the product. Again, package
designs of Moderate Relevance induce attitudes toward the product that are a little below neutral.

**Purchase Intention.** In terms of its impact on female consumers’ purchase intention, only
package designs with High Relevance and Moderate Relevance generate significant influence.
Package designs of copycat brands with High Relevance prompt stronger purchase intention than
those with Moderate Relevance among female consumers. Package designs with Moderate
Relevance show an effect on purchase intention that is largely neutral.

**Application of the Continuum to the Gender-Neutral Product**

This conceptual continuum can be applied to explain the effectiveness of package designs
of the gender-neutral product *Sweet Crunches of Oats*, as follows.
**Attitude toward the Brand.** As mentioned in the introduction of the conceptual continuum of brand imitation, one antecedent of the model is that color, one important indexical sign, remains relevant. Therefore, when applying the conceptual model to illustrate the effectiveness of consumers’ attitude toward the brand, all four imitation strategies exert significant influence on consumers’ attitude toward the brand because relevant colors generate a significant main effect on consumers’ brand attitude. Furthermore, relevant shapes facilitate the formation of consumers’ positive attitude toward the brand. Hence, package designs of copycat brands with High Relevance and Moderate Relevance induce better attitude toward the brand than those with Moderate Divergence and High Divergence.

**Attitude toward the Product.** As illustrated in the above continuum, package designs of copycat brands with High Relevance, Moderate Relevance, Moderate Divergence and High Divergence exert very similar significant influence on consumers’ attitude toward a gender-neutral product. Consumers’ responses to these different levels of brand imitation are alike.
**Purchase Intention.** A similar pattern is observed here. Package designs of copycat brands with High Relevance, Moderate Relevance, Moderate Divergence and High Divergence generate similar significant influences on consumers’ purchase intention. The differences among consumers’ responses to these different levels of brand imitation are very minor.

**Practical Implications**

The findings of the current study not only provide theoretical contributions to the previous research on brand imitation, but also offer some practical implications to advertising practitioners for brand development and the successful implementation of this particular strategy. The following section discusses several suggestions related to these areas as they relate to competition between leading brands and their lesser-known counterparts.

**Leading Brands**

Regardless of gender, consumers’ attitudes toward leading brands remain similar even after they are exposed to copycats of those brands, suggesting that their attitudes toward the leading brands are relatively durable. Once consumers’ attitudes toward leading brands are established, the influence of copycat brands is limited, reflecting consumers’ brand loyalty.

In addition, as discussed in the results section, the covariate, consumers’ attitudes toward the national leading brands, generate great effect sizes in explaining consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral changes toward all three different gender-typed copycat brands. In other words, consumers’ attitudes toward the copycat brands, attitudes toward the copycat products and their purchase intention connected to copycats are positively influenced by their attitudes toward leading brands. These results should inspire leading brands to react confidently when facing challenges from copycat brands. Leading brands should not be intimidated by the emergence of
copycat brands, because consumers’ attitudes toward the copycat brands are actually derived and developed from their attitudes toward their more familiar counterparts.

However, this does not mean that leading brands immune to threats from copycat brands. For example, female millennials are clearly interested in purchasing some copycat brands when presented with imitative package designs and consumers of both genders may react to some copycat brands with stronger brand and product attitudes. Therefore, leading brands still need to pay attention to the emergence of copycats and work to understand millennials attitudinal and behavioral characteristics to establish, maintain or improve any advantage they may hold in the market. For example, based on this study’s findings, female millennials like to a) try new brands, b) compare brands, c) purchase brands on recommendation and d) are sensitive to price changes. As a result, leading brands could pursue the following management tactics:

- Increase product diversity/line extensions to attract female consumers to try and compare new products.
- Encourage female consumers to share brand information on social media, enhancing opportunities for purchase recommendations between established consumers and their peers.
- Utilize pricing strategies that will best position their brands when faced with competition from copycat brands.

**Lesser-Known Brands**

Based on the results of the current study, the brand imitation strategy is shown to be effective in influencing millennial consumers’ attitudes and purchase intention for certain products. For lesser-known brands, employing the brand imitation strategy offers a means for competing in the marketplace, but should also be used with caution.
For products targeted to women, the colors used in a package design play an important role in brand imitation. Using colors similar to those of leading brands can prompt female consumers to connect copycat brands with leading brands. Shape also contributes to female consumers’ purchase intention. Using relevant shapes with relevant colors in a copycat package design generates positive purchase intention among female millennials. The effect of icons used on copycat package designs depends on the selection of shape. Divergent icons and divergent shapes generate positive brand and product attitudes toward lesser-known brands. Given these considerations, the following tactics for developing package designs for female-targeted copycat brands are proposed:

- The adoption of similar colors, shapes and icons in copycat package designs serves as the most effective way to achieve positive attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention among female millennials.

- The adoption of similar colors and shapes but different icons in copycat package designs can enhance purchase intention. In other words, when the creative icon complements but does not interfere with the holistic product design, this element of divergence can activate a purchase-and-experience motivation, leading women to purchase lesser-known brands prior to establishing any brand and product attitudes.

- The adoption of a similar colors but divergent shapes and icons in copycat package designs can enhance female consumers’ attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the product. These design attributes can offer a refreshing aesthetic and attract attention, but may also create cognitive dissonance among women, negatively impacting purchase intention. Therefore, this design approach should be used with
caution. It might be recommended for lesser-known brands for which the primary marketing goal is to increase brand awareness.

For products targeted to both men and women alike, color also plays an essential role in any package design. Using a similar color scheme as the leading brand can help a copycat increase attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the product and purchase intention for consumers among consumers of both genders. As an element of package design, shape can successfully influence consumers’ attitude toward the brand and the incorporation of similar shapes by a copycat can enhance consumers’ attitude toward the brand. Therefore, the following package design tactics are suggested for gender-neutral products:

- The adoption of similar colors to the leading brand in a copycat package design is highly recommended.
- The adoption of similar shapes to the leading brand in a copycat package design is highly recommended.

For male-targeted products (at least those described as low-involvement products), the current study finds no influence of shape, color or icon on male consumers’ attitudes or behaviors. Therefore, package design recommendations in this category will rely upon findings of future studies in this area.

Limitations and Future Studies

This exploratory study examined the effectiveness of the brand imitation strategy at eight different levels via an experimental design. Although the study reveals valuable insights regarding the way millennial consumers view copycat package designs based on three leading brands, the following limitations are important to consider.
One main limitation is that the study data was collected via an online experiment. A major disadvantage of an online experiment examining a topic like brand imitation is that it does not provide a realistic shopping environment for consumers, decreasing the external validity of the study to some extent. The attitudes and behavioral intentions reported by study participants are, at least in part, based on the imagined experience and/or recollection of shopping in a grocery store. Future studies could employ more advanced computer technologies, such as 3-D simulation, to generate a more realistic shopping environment for consumers to experience and make their choices. It is important to note that most consumers are exposed to product packaging on crowded store shelves, view many different products side-by-side and are enabled with the ability to touch and examine them. The online experiment format does not replicate these circumstances and instead presents products one at a time for their evaluation.

Secondly, the current study tested three representative products for targeted to three distinct consumer segments. While energy drinks and hairspray are considered utilitarian products, providing different expected functions for consumers (McKay-Nesbitt, & Ryan, 2015), breakfast cereal can be considered separately as a food item, adding the dimensions of nutrition and health as considerations. The products selected as the subjects of the copycat conditions might influence consumers’ attention and perception toward the stimuli. Future studies could test more products within one category, increasing study validity.

Finally, the current study tested different brand imitation strategies among millennial consumers, ages 18 to 34. Even though millennials are predicted to become the most powerful consumer segment in the near future (Solomon, 2014), the attitudes and behaviors characteristic of other demographics are also of great importance and beneficial for advertising practitioners to consider as they design and manage brands targeted to a wide variety of consumers. In addition,
the sample used in the current study cannot completely reflect the spectrum of millennials, as 93.3% to 95.8% of the participants reported completion of some college or a higher level of education. Therefore, future studies should include a wide variety of consumer markets with a varied educational and cultural background.

**Conclusion**

Brand imitation is an unavoidable phenomenon in today’s highly competitive product market. In particular, copycat brands have become more ubiquitous and acceptable among millennial consumers. By incorporating theories related to creativity and semiotics to establish a deductive theoretical grounding, the current study investigated the effectiveness of the brand imitation strategy at different imitative levels. Based on the findings and insights provided here, a conceptual continuum of brand imitation is proposed to better define its various levels in a more systematic way, enriching the scholarship in the field of advertising and branding. Furthermore, several practical implications suggested by the current study can assist product managers as they consider the potential benefits and pitfalls of using the brand imitation strategy in the development and marketing of new products.

A richer understanding of brand imitation can be achieved through analysis of the conceptual continuum proposed by the current study and the investigation of numerous issues identified herein that await further examination. It is hoped that this study can encourage more work in this topic area and provide some guidance for additional research questions and areas of inquiry within the topic of brand imitation.
REFERENCES


Centaur Communications Limited. (2007). Challenger brands, are you up to the challenge? Brand Strategy(216), 44.


APPENDIX A

MANIPULATION CHECK QUESTIONNAIRES

Manipulation check for male participants

Is there another product that you immediately associate with this product? If so, please indicate the brand name ___________________.

![Creature Energy Drink](image-url)
Manipulation check for female participants

Is there another product that you immediately associate with this product? If so, please indicate the brand name ________________.
Manipulation check for participants of both genders

Is there another product that you immediately associate with this product? If so, please indicate the brand name ___________________.

![Sweet Crunches of Oats cereal box](image)
APPENDIX B

EXPERIMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Your gender is ___. (1) Female   (2) Male

Your age is ____.

Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed:
  Some High School
  Some College
  Bachelors Degree
  Masters Degree
  Doctoral Degree
  Other (please indicate) __________

Section I:

1. What’s your attitude toward Monster energy drink?
   (Good) 5 4 3 2 1 (bad)
   (Favorable) 5 4 3 2 1 (Unfavorable)
   (Positive) 5 4 3 2 1 (Negative)
   I’m not familiar with the brand.

2. What’s your attitude toward Pantene hairspray?
   (Good) 5 4 3 2 1 (bad)
   (Favorable) 5 4 3 2 1 (Unfavorable)
   (Positive) 5 4 3 2 1 (Negative)
   I’m not familiar with the brand.

3. What’s your attitude toward Honey Bunches of Oats cereal?
   (Good) 5 4 3 2 1 (bad)
I’m not familiar with the brand.

**Section II**

Please indicate your perception, opinion and behavioral intention after viewing each product (use the first condition of Creature energy as an example).

[Randomly assigned to view one treatment of a product]

4. Creature is a **brand** that I feel_______ about after viewing the product on the screen.

   (Good)  5  4  3  2  1  (Bad)

   (Favorable)  5  4  3  2  1  (Unfavorable)

   (Positive)  5  4  3  2  1  (Negative)

5. After viewing the brand on the screen, I feel _____about the **product**.
(Good)  5 4 3 2 1  (Bad)
(Beneficial)  5 4 3 2 1  (Harmful)
(Desirable)  5 4 3 2 1  (Undesirable)
(Pleasant)  5 4 3 2 1  (Unpleasant)
(Superior)  5 4 3 2 1  (Inferior)
(Nice)  5 4 3 2 1  (Awful)

6. After viewing the product on the screen, it is _____ for me to purchase Creature energy drink.
   (Likely)  5 4 3 2 1  (Unlikely)
   (Probable)  5 4 3 2 1  (Improbable)
   (Certain)  5 4 3 2 1  (Uncertain)
   (Definitely)  5 4 3 2 1  (Not Definitely)
Section III Additional Questions

1. How often do you shop in grocery stores?
   Never  rarely sometimes often very often
   1  2  3  4  5

2. How often do you like to try new brands of products you consume?
   Never  rarely sometimes often very often
   1  2  3  4  5

3. How often do you like to compare different brands before you buy them?
   Never  rarely sometimes often very often
   1  2  3  4  5

4. How often do you buy a grocery brand that your family or your friends recommend?
   Never  rarely sometimes often very often
   1  2  3  4  5

5. When I purchase [energy drink; hairspray; breakfast cereal], price is an important consideration
   Strongly disagree  disagree  neither agree  agree  strongly agree nor disagree
   1  2  3  4  5

6. What’s your attitude toward Monster energy drink?
   (Good)  5  4  3  2  1  (Bad)
   (Favorable)  5  4  3  2  1  (Unfavorable)
   (Positive)  5  4  3  2  1  (Negative)

I’m not familiar with the brand.
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

May 25, 2016

Fei Qiao
Office for Graduate Studies
College of Communication & Information Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box #70172

Re: IRB # 16-OR-165 (Revision) “Brand Imitation Strategy, Package Design and Consumer Response: What does it take to make a difference?”

Dear Ms. Qiao:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has reviewed the revision to your previously approved expedited protocol. The board has approved the change in your protocol.

Please remember that your approval period expires one year from the date of your original approval, April 18, 2016, not the date of this revision approval.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the assigned IRB application number. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carrieanne T. Myles, MSM, CCM, CIP
Director of Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance