

# The Effect of Serif and San Serif Typeface of Luxury Fashion Logotype on Chinese Consumers' Brand Perception

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## Abstract

An appropriate and well-designed logotype is essential to create brand awareness and positive brand perception. The effect of different typefaces has not been well researched in the luxury fashion sector. This paper expands on previous findings on typeface applications, in which two studies test the impact of Serif and San Serif typefaces, and three experiments test the effects of San and Serif typefaces on brand perception. Study 1 (N = 102) tests the visual complexity of Serif and San Serif typefaces; study 2 (N = 134) further investigates the visual simplicity and perceived luxury; and study 3 (N = 92) studies the brand gender of the two typefaces. The results of these three studies suggest that Serif typeface is more complex in structure than San Serif typeface. However, it does not have too much impact on the perceived luxury. Male consumers have greater gender cognitive differences than female consumers, and the San Serif typefaces are considered to be more masculine than Serif typefaces.

**Keywords:** Brand gender perception, Chinese luxury fashion, serif and san serif, typeface complexity, perceived luxury,

## 1. Introduction

Due to the increase in sales and demand for luxury goods, research on the luxury industry has increased. China, in particular, is one of the fastest growing countries in the world, and has a huge demand for luxury items. According to Statista, China is the world's second largest luxury consumer in 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2021). Appropriate and strong brand perception provides meaning and value to consumers, especially for luxury products, which depend on charging premium prices consumers are willing to pay (Hutton, 1997). One of the marketing strategies that stands out from the competition is to develop a unique visual appearance. Researchers and scholars have long been interested in design elements, for instance, complexity, unity and proportion (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997; Creusen et al., 2010).

There is no doubt that the selection of typeface in branding or advertising has a key impact on the overall brand perception. Throughout the current luxury fashion market, most of these brands are applied with wordmarks as their identity. By definition, typefaces are being considered to be different from fonts, but sometimes they can be used interchangeably (Lee & Shin, 2020). A typeface refers to a collection of related fonts, such as Times New Roman. Typefaces can evoke emotions and associations, as well as cognitive responses, to a product or brand. Owing to the unique semantic relationship caused by the visual attribute of font, it produces perceptual and connotative meaning. (Childers & Jass, 2002). Recently, several of the top-selling luxury fashion brands have redesigned their identities, the most obvious part of which is that most brands have abandoned Serif logotypes in favor of San Serif typefaces (Figure 1).

Previous researches focused on the psychological association from typefaces, as well as emotional responses (e.g., gentle-rough, interesting-boring, joyful-sad) (Geohman, 2016; Juni & Gross, 2008). Typeface is also one of the most critical elements of psychological distance and symbolic association (Leeuwen, 2005).

For example, San Serif typefaces are associated with competence and authority, while script typefaces evoke a sense of friendliness and warmth. Other studies have also shown that luxury fonts are considered more appropriate when consumers deal with classic, formal luxury goods (Grohman, 2016). On the contrary, if consumer feel that the

typeface is more casual and informal, they will think the brand is more harmonious and emotional.



Figure 1. Examples of recent luxury fashion rebranding. Source: Twitter

Visual complexity refers to the degree of structural complexity and the number of elements in an image (Hanna, 2004). It is a critical factor influencing consumers' preferences and perceptions of brands and items (Lee et al., 2018). However, when dealing with the visual complexity and brand perception of luxury fashion, this is subject to deliberation. Some researches have suggested that high visual complexity is positively correlated with brand preference (Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 2005), while others have given a negative answer (Michailidou et al. 2008; Tuch et al. 2009). In addition, Mulken (2014) pointed out the U-shape relationship between the two factors: excessive simplicity and complexity will damage the perception of luxury brands, therefore the moderation is the best. Kim & Lim (2019) conducted a survey on visual complexity and its influence on luxury fashion advertising. The study suggested that if the luxury brand had a high degree of familiarity, it was better to adopt simple styles, which helped increase perceived luxuriousness. On the other hand, if the degree of familiarity was low, the more complex the image, the better the effect. In this research, Jung limits his study to the advertising materials of two classic fashion brands.

Some previous researches aimed to understand the connotation of typefaces and explore the interrelation between meanings. The angularity and sharp shapes of the San Serif typeface are associated with the highest level of strength (Grohman 2016). One noteworthy contribution of Kim's (2020) study was that it showed the psychological perception based on the warmth and competence evaluation of representative typefaces (i.e., Serif, San Serif and handwriting). His research also extended to perception, engagement and attitude. His study confirmed that typographic elements are essential for conveying information and brand attitudes. Typeface gender cue is one of the key elements that influences psychological perception (Hess & Melnyk, 2016). Gender stereotypes contribute to manifesting underlying warmth or competence.

This research aims to explore and understand the interaction between typefaces (Serif and San Serif) and consumer perception of luxury fashion brands, and to reveal the two potential factors: visual complexity and gender cues and how they interact with perceived luxuriousness and psychological associations. Furthermore, the research also examines the impact of these factors on brand perception. If marketers and practitioners can comprehend the interrelation between typefaces related to logotype or other visual elements in the luxury fashion branding, they can take better action in selecting an appropriate typeface to improve brand equity (Pillai, Katsikeas, & Presi, 2012).

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Luxury Fashion Brand

The concept of luxury has already been discussed by researchers, yet there is no general consensus (Kapferer and Laurent, 2016). Luxury goods have different meanings for different people in different times and cultures ((Turunen, 2017). Currently, researchers agree that the basic term for understanding luxury fashion brands is conspicuous consumption, which helps consumers demonstrate their social status, wealth and class (Veblen, 1899), and achieve their social goals (Becker et al., 2018). Chinese consumers have a growing interest in and appetite for luxury goods, according to Xu & Wang (2011). The top selling luxury fashion brands, such as Chanel, Burberry and Hermes, are particularly popular with Chinese consumers because of their high prices and quality.