

Study by University of Michigan researcher shows font to be a really big deal

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Before you get frustrated with that next furniture assembly project, take a look at the typeface on those instructions.

According to a recent [University of Michigan](#) study, the ease of reading the font on directions has a big impact on how easy, or difficult, consumers believe a project will be.

The study is planned to run in October's issue of [Psychological Science](#), but could have big implications for business marketing, said Hyunjin Song, a U-M doctoral psychology student who conducted the study with marketing professor Norbert Schwarz at the [Stephen M. Ross School of Business](#).



Hyunjin Song

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Companies wanting to keep clear communication with customers would do well to pick clean, easy-to-read fonts, she said.

"The easiest to read is the Arial (font)," Song said.

But if a business wants customers to think their product takes extra skill to produce, they might consider a font that's more difficult to read, she said.

Q: What's the most interesting thing you found about the impact of font style?

A:
It's kind of interesting that very small differences, small perceptual differences in reading instructions in everyday life, can change important judgments people make. It's not only the content of the information, but it's also the feelings of processing it.

Q: It seems like a company like [IKEA](#) might benefit from this

A:
Yes. If marketers want to give the impression that products - like the furniture in IKEA - is easier to assemble, then they'd want to make the font deeper and easier to read.

Q: Why would a company want to make directions that are harder to read?

A:
In the restaurant version of my studies, (the subjects) thought the easy-to-read font would take less skill for the chef ... When (customers) think a dish made by the restaurant is more complex, they'd be willing to pay more.

Q: How'd you get involved with projects like this?

A:

I'm interested in how feelings affect people's judgments in the marketing domain because feelings seem to influence people's judgments in a lot of ways In another study, I look at how people perceived ingredients in their food. People perceived hard-to-pronounce names of food additives as more dangerous.

Q: How will this change the way you look at instructions?

A:

If people are aware of where those difficulties come from, if they understand the reason something is difficult to read might be because of a difficult-to-read font, they might perceive the project as less complex If I go to a French restaurant with hard to pronounce names, I won't be deceived by their intention to charge me more.

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