Finding Brands and Losing Your Religion?

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Religion is a powerful force in many lives—but one that may be undermined by brands. We demonstrate in a series of experiments that when brands are salient (versus not), individuals report lower levels of religiosity, especially when brands allow them to express themselves.

Not What I Expected: Unanticipated Consequences of Product Exposure and Use

Chair: Adriana Samper, Arizona State University, USA

Paper #1: Finding Brands and Losing Your Religion?

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Paper #2: The Pride (and the Pain?, USA The Downstream Consequences of Using High End Products in Performance Situations

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Paper #3: It's Smiling at Me: Satisfying Social Needs Through Consumer Products…At the Expense of Genuine Relationships

James A. Mourey, University of Michigan, USA
Jenny Olson, University of Michigan, USA
Carolyn Yoon, University of Michigan, USA

Paper #4: Exposure to Unattainable Luxury: Boomerang Effects on Extrinsic and Materialistic Goals

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Inge Lens, KU Leuven, Belgium
Mario Pandelaere, Ghent University, Belgium

SESSION OVERVIEW

Consumers often seek out products or brands in the service of satisfying personal goals, and marketers may try to stimulate consumption by making these goals salient. For example, consumers may believe that by purchasing specific products or brands, they can express unique aspects of themselves (Berger and Heath 2007), close gaps in identity (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982), affiliate with others (Mead et al. 2011) or even feel more powerful (Rucker and Galinsky 2008) and marketers may strengthen this perceived link through promotional campaigns or messages. In this session, we examine contexts where consumer and marketer intuitions about brand and luxury exposure may boomerang; when seeking out or promoting products may have unintended, and sometimes even deleterious, consequences.

First, Cutright and colleagues demonstrate that by using products and brands to the end of expressing the self, consumers may actually be suppressing their overall religiosity. In this manner, subtle exposure to brands through choice or trial can actually cause people to "lose their religion." Samper, Bettman and Fitzsimons show that consumers, in an effort to put their best foot forward by choosing a higher end item for a high-stakes task(e.g., Armani Suit for a job interview, Odyssey Golf Club for a putting task), may actually polarize their self-perceptions of success and failure. While consumers using a high end branded item who succeed on a task feel significantly more skilled than those using a neutral item, these consumers also feel significantly more frustrated and less skilled when using this branded item if their performance was unsuccessful. Mourey, Olson and Yoon examine this phenomenon in the domain of affiliation, where they show that while social exclusion increases desire for brands that may fulfill interpersonal needs, using these anthropomorphized products can actually lead consumers to be less likely to seek out human connections. Finally, Meert, Lens and Pandelaere examine this phenomenon through a marketer's lens, showing that standard practices of trying to persuade consumers and encourage materialistic goal pursuit by showing images of luxury can actually

backfire when consumers are presented with *unattainable* luxury. Specifically, the salience of unattainable luxury can lead to reduced interest in material goods and even increased prosocial behaviors. The fourth paper facilitates an integration of these unintended consequences across consumer and marketer-related goals.

Given its unique, counterintuitive focus, this session is expected to appeal to a broad segment of ACR members. The four papers, all at advanced stages, are expected to generate interest among individuals with interests in anthropomorphism, branding, goal pursuit and motivation, luxury goods, priming, product use, religion, consumer welfare and marketing applications. All speakers (Cutright, Samper, Mourey and Meert, indicated by asterisk, below) have agreed to serve if the proposal is accepted.

In sum, this session brings together a diverse set of papers examining the unintended effects of brand or product exposure in religious, aspirational, affiliative and luxury contexts. By combining a breadth of papers that address this similar phenomenon, we underscore the importance of understanding the downstream consequences of consumption and shed greater insight into how the goals of consumers and marketers may be undermined by exposure to initially desirable products or brands.

Finding Brands and Losing Your Religion?

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Whether you consider it to be a source of deadly extremism or the pathway to humanity's highest potential (Pargament, 2002), few will deny the power of religion. In this research, however, we ask whether religiosity (i.e., the centrality of religion in one's life) can be undermined by the presence of brand name products. We reason that when brands are salient, religion will be devalued, given that people often use brands to satisfy similar self-expressive needs as religion (e.g., Shachar, Erdem, Cutright, & Fitzsimons, 2011). However, we expect that the salience of brands will lead to lower levels of religiosity only when individuals are able to incorporate the brands as meaningful extensions of themselves. When brands do not allow individuals to communicate a part of "self", they are unlikely to be viewed as acceptable substitutes for religion.

Study 1 tested our basic hypothesis that the salience of brands leads to lower levels of religiosity. The experiment contained two between-subject conditions: high brand salience versus low brand salience. In the high brand salience condition, participants chose between two branded products, 10 different times. For example, in one choice, they decided between a red Adidas shirt and a green Adidas shirt. In the low brand salience condition, participants chose between the same pairs of products except the brand names were removed. After making their choices, participants completed the Religious Commitment scale (Worthington et al., 2003, e.g., "My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life"). Consistent with hypotheses, results indicated that the high brand salience condition reported significantly lower religious commitment than the low brand salience condition.

In Study 2, we explored the breadth of the hypothesized effect by investigating how brand salience would impact items indirectly related to religion. In particular, we were interested in how brand salience would influence attitudes towards malls that resembled churches versus those that did not. We expected that high brand salience would cause people to devalue religion and apply these at-

titudes towards malls that resembled churches. The experiment's design was a 2(brand salience: high vs. low; between subjects) x 2(mall type: high church resemblance vs. no church resemblance; within subjects).

Participants were randomly assigned to a high brand salience condition or low brand salience condition as in Study 1. After making their choices, participants evaluated a series of six malls, half of which strongly resembled churches while the others did not. Participants then indicated how much they liked each mall (7pt scales).

Results revealed no significant main effects, but there was a significant interaction of brand salience and mall type on liking. When evaluating the malls that resembled churches, the high brand salience condition liked the malls less than the low brand salience condition. When evaluating the malls that did not resemble churches, the two conditions did not differ from one another. This study therefore suggests that brands not only impact basic reports of religiosity, but even color individuals' perceptions of objects that are loosely associated with religion.

In the studies reported thus far, we have used an inherently self-expressive context to reveal the hypothesized effect of brands: choice exercises that allowed people to express themselves with the brands to which they were exposed. In the next study, we wanted to more explicitly demonstrate that the relationship between brands and religiosity exists only when brands are incorporated into one's expression of self. Thus, Study 3 was designed to manipulate the degree to which products are incorporated into the self by altering individuals' physical relationship with the product. We hypothesized that wearing a brand would provide a strong opportunity for individuals to incorporate the brand into one's expression of self (e.g., Gino, Norton, & Ariely, 2010), while simply looking at a product would not. Accordingly, we expected that when individuals wore a branded product (versus a non-branded product), religiosity would decline. We did not expect this relationship to exist when individuals simply looked at the brand. In other words, we expected "wearing" a brand to have similar effects as "choosing" a brand since each of these contexts allows people to say something about themselves with brands. We expected that simply "looking at" a brand would be less likely to aid self-expression.

The design was a 2(brand salience: high vs. low) x 2(self-expressive context: high vs. low). In half of the sessions participants came into the lab and were given an Apple-branded lanyard (high brand salience). In the remaining sessions, participants were given a plain black lanyard (low brand salience). After receiving their lanyards, half of the participants were told to wear and evaluate the lanyard (high expression). The remaining participants were told NOT to wear it; just to look at it and evaluate it (low expression). Participants then completed the Religious Commitment scale.

There were no main effects of brand salience or self-expressive context on religious commitment. However, a significant interaction of the two conditions emerged. In the high self-expression condition (i.e., wearing the lanyard), individuals in the high brand salience condition (Apple) reported lower religious beliefs than individuals in the low brand salience condition. Within the low self-expression condition (i.e., looking only), the high and low brand salience groups were not significantly different from one another. This study therefore reiterates the notion that brands only lead to lower levels of religiosity when incorporated into expressions of the self.

In summary, these studies have demonstrated that beliefs about God waver when brands take center stage in individuals' minds. We've found that this is most likely to be true when brands are incorporated into the self and serve as a tool for self-expression. This

research offers not only an understanding of the power of brands in shaping individuals' most sacred beliefs, but also sheds light on the value that many individuals assign to religiosity. It seems that what many consider sacred is often treated as merely a means to an (expressive) end.

Rolling the Dice with Premium Products: Using a High End Product Polarizes Self-Perceptions of Performance

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Phrases like "dress for success," or "you've got to look the part" suggest that having the right accoutrements for a performance task (fancy golf equipment on the course; a new tailored interview suit) can be beneficial to success. Importantly, while we may purchase elite branded products in the hopes that these products will help us perform well, sometimes we may succeed, while other times we may still fail. In the current research, we examine how a performance outcome interacts with the type of product used to influence self-perceptions. That is, if we use products to pose as the ideal self that we have not quite arrived at, how does this affect how we feel when we succeed or fail?

We draw from work on priming and self-concept (DeMarree, Petty and Wheeler 2005) to examine this question. Research has shown that objects can serve as primes to increase the accessibility of related aspects in self-concept (Kay et al. 2004). In this sense, the use of a high end golf club may make the construct of a skilled golfer more accessible. Success with a high end golf club assimilates to this construct, thereby strengthening the link between the self and elite golfer, resulting in greater self-perceptions of skill and talent. However, if the construct of "skilled golfer" was initially accessible through choice of a high end club, failure with a high end club contrasts even more starkly against this construct, thus making self-perceptions seem even poorer. In this manner, individuals should feel more skilled following success with a high-end (vs. low-end) product, and importantly, they should also feel even less skilled following failure with this same high-end (vs. low-end) product. This should be particularly pronounced for individuals who are more reliant on accessible inward beliefs to guide their self-perceptions, specifically, for low self-monitors (Snyder & Tanke 1976). Thus, we suggest that there may be both pride and pain associated with posing, and test this across three studies.

Study 1 used a two-cell design to test the basic effect of product type in a failure situation. Twenty-eight undergraduates read a first-person scenario about purchasing a new interview suit in which they were randomly assigned to choose an Armani or Dockers suit. Depending on condition, participants were then told that their interview was successful (unsuccessful). Participants then rated their self-perceptions of how skilled they would feel at interviewing. Results revealed that individuals who had chosen the high end Armani (vs. low end Dockers) suit felt less qualified for the interview position. Thus, this study reveals preliminary evidence that using a high end product can make failure feel more extreme.

In Study 2, we tested this effect in an actual golfing performance context, looking at the effects of product use on both failure and success, and examining the role of the self by comparing situations in which one is assigned to (non self-relevant) vs. chooses (self-relevant) to use a high end product. Four hundred and twenty eight participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (product: high end Odyssey club vs. low end Basic club) x 2 (selection: choice vs. assignment) design. Participants were informed that they would be evaluated on their putting skills from a distance of 4.25 ft. and presented with two clubs: the high end Odyssey or the

low end Basic. Participants were either assigned to use a high (low) end Odyssey (Basic) putter, or were allowed to choose their putter. Participants completed one putt, and either succeeded or failed. Neither the choice vs. assignment of a putter nor the use of a Basic vs. Odyssey putter influenced success or failure. As such, we crossed these two factors with success vs. failure to yield a 2 (product: high end vs. low end) x 2 (selection: choice vs. assignment) x 2 (success vs. failure) between-subjects design. All cells had at least 21 participants. Participants then rated their self-perceptions of how skilled they felt at putting. Results revealed a significant selection x club x outcome interaction and showed that for individuals assigned to a putter, there was no difference in self-perceptions across putters following failure, and no difference across clubs following success. In the choice conditions, however, following failure, individuals felt more negative self-perceptions of skill if they had chosen the Odyssey vs. Basic putter. Following success, individuals felt more positive self-perceptions if they had chosen the Odyssey vs. Basic putter. Thus, high end (vs. low end) product choice makes one feel even more skilled after success, but even less skilled after failure. Importantly, the role of choice suggests that the linking of the product to one's self-concept must be present for these effects to hold. In Study 3, we probe the role of self-concept more deeply by examining the impact of self-monitoring.

In Study 3, we examined the role of self-monitoring in this phenomenon to further understand the process by which product use drives changes in self-concept and hence self-perceptions. Because we wanted to look at a domain that was particularly important to undergraduate business students, we returned to the interview scenario. One hundred and seventy-six undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (product: high end vs. low end) x 2 (outcome: success vs. failure) x self-monitoring (measured) design. Participants read a scenario in which they were debating whether to purchase an Armani or H&M suit for a highly anticipated job interview. Participants were randomly assigned to "ultimately decide" on the Armani (H&M) suit and read a short passage describing their interview as highly successful or highly unsuccessful. Participants then rated their self-perceptions of interviewing skills and completed the revised self-monitoring scale (Lennox and Wolfe 1984), which was unaffected by the manipulations. Results revealed that as before, following failure, using a high end (vs. low end) suit made people feel worse about their interviewing skills, while following success, using this high end (vs. low end) suit made people feel better about their interviewing skills. Measures of positive and negative emotion also parallelled these results. Most importantly, these effects were driven by low self-monitors, suggesting that low self-monitors' greater reliance on the mental contents associated with the high end suit, as well as the success or failure that may assimilate or contrast to this content, likely drives changes in self-perceptions.

Thus, these results suggest that using high end products can have unanticipated consequences on self-perceptions. While individuals typically gravitate toward choosing higher end goods to emulate the individuals they aspire to be, their use may have polarizing effects resulting in sweeter success, but sourer failure.

It's Smiling at Me: Satisfying Social Needs Through Consumer Products…At the Expense of Genuine Relationships

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Beginning with imaginary friends and teddy bears in childhood, human beings demonstrate a fundamental need for belonging that continues across the lifespan (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Although social needs are often fulfilled through contact with other people, it seems plausible that consumer products could fulfill similar needs. For example, consumers might purchase goods and services hoping to attain love, affection, and emotional pleasure. Seeking social need fulfillment through products may, paradoxically, serve as a detriment to interpersonal relationship development and maintenance. The objective of the current research is to explore how the consumption of products, in general, can come at the cost of social relationships when products satisfy the needs customarily fulfilled by other people.

Just how far people supplement human interactions with product interactions is a matter warranting careful study. Research suggests the possibility of consumers developing relationships with nonsocial objects that mirror interpersonal relationships (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). Further evidence indicates that individuals readily perceive objects as gendered (Guthrie, 2007), brands as having personality (Aaker, 1997), and brand-related characters as human (Rook & Levy, 1999). Social exclusion may play a role in these findings, however, such that those craving human contact may more readily "see" people in their products. Research by Epley, Waytz, Akalis, and Cacioppo (2008) shows that people who feel more chronically disconnected from others anthropomorphize more than those who feel more connected. Indeed, individuals who are well integrated in their social networks are less likely to seek additional bonds relative to their more deprived counterparts (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

We propose that when a social need exists, products may satisfy it in a way similar to people, which reduces the likelihood of seeking interpersonal fulfillment. Baumeister and Leary (1995) propose, but never empirically test, that social relationships "…should substitute for each other, to some extent, as would be indicated by effective replacement of lost relationship partners and by a capacity for social relatedness in one sphere to overcome potential ill effects of social deprivation in another sphere." We seek to demonstrate that consumers who perceive a void in affiliative bonds may be able to derive similar social benefits from product consumption.

Study 1 involved a 2(words: control, negative social) x 2(Roomba: anthropomorphized, non-anthropomorphized) between-subjects design. Undergraduate students completed a computerized word task where they identified the number of syllables in words flashed on the screen. Participants viewed 40 randomly presented words: 20 control words (e.g., guitar, banana, lampshade) and either 20 negative social words (e.g., excluded, unaccepted, unloved) or 20 neutral words. Following this priming task, participants completed an ostensibly unrelated task in which they were told a company was interested in the shopping behavior of young adults. Participants were shown a Roomba vacuum, but half were randomly assigned to see a version in which the product's features resembled a smiling face (anthropomorphized) while the other half saw the same Roomba turned 90-degrees clockwise so that the product was identical but did not resemble a smiling face (non-anthropomorphized). Participants then answered several questions regarding their impressions of the Roomba including their familiarity with the product, willingness to pay, how attached or dependent they might become on the product, and a series of ratings regarding the following characteristics: attractive, desirable, efficient, high-maintenance, reliable, stylish, unsafe, and has a mind of its own.

Results revealed a significant interaction between prime and Roomba condition showing that participants primed with negative social words and shown an anthropomorphized Roomba were willing to pay more and become attached to the product. Interestingly, these participants were also more likely to see the product as both

more attractive and as having a mind of its own, suggesting greater sensitivity to the product's humanistic attributes.

To see whether this sensitivity would influence consumption decisions, Study 2 utilized a 2(social exclusion, non-social negative control) × 2(anthropomorphized, non-anthropomorphized product) between-subjects design. Undergraduates were randomly assigned to one of two essay conditions: social exclusion ("a time you felt very excluded by other people") or a nonsocial negative control ("a time you did worse than expected on an academic assignment"). Participants were then presented a version of iRobot's Roomba as done in Study 1. A series of rating scales followed the Roomba presentation to assess product perceptions.

Results revealed a significant interaction between the two independent variables for purchase likelihood, after controlling for Roomba ownership: the anthropomorphized version was preferred among socially excluded individuals but not control participants. More importantly, socially excluded participants expressed a greater likelihood of buying the anthropomorphized Roomba over its non-anthropomorphized counterpart. Additionally, results replicated the finding in Study 1 showing that socially excluded participants were willing to spend more money on an anthropomorphized Roomba than the control group.

Study 3 replicated Study 2 with a more heterogeneous sample and focused on social behaviors rather than product perceptions. A similar design was used: 1) individuals wrote about a time they felt either socially included or excluded (no control group), 2) viewed either an anthropomorphized or nonanthropomorphized Roomba, and 3) responded to a series of items including whether they wanted to wait alone or with others for subsequent tasks. Results yielded a significant interaction between the two independent variables in desire for social contact. Means indicate that those made to feel excluded were more likely to prefer waiting alone when presented with an anthropomorphized version of the Roomba compared to those also made to feel excluded who were presented with a nonanthropomorphized version. Presumably, the excluded individuals were able to "fill the void" when presented a humanlike product.

In sum, we find initial evidence for the idea that perceptions of social exclusion 1) make consumers more sensitive to humanistic attributes of products, 2) influence the kinds of products they might buy, and 2) those products influence social behavior. We hope future results will further support our central argument: If social needs can be satisfied through products, consumers may not seek fulfillment through other people and, therefore, increase their risk of negatively impacting real social relationships.

Exposure to Unattainable Luxury: Boomerang Effects on Extrinsic and Materialistic Goals

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

While ample research has investigated consumers' motives to buy luxury products (e.g., Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), it is less clear whether exposure to luxury influences people's values and goals. As luxury consumption is related to materialism (e.g., Belk & Pollay, 1985), it seems obvious to assume that exposure to (images of) luxury increases materialistic and related extrinsic (Kasser, 2002) goal pursuit. Indeed, advertising exposure – which frequently displays images of luxuries – is linked to materialism (e.g., Paek & Pan, 2004); however, studies are correlational or quasi-experimental at best, precluding causal inferences. In addition, results of our pilot study show that people generally think that exposure to luxury induces materialism.

At first sight, one may expect that exposure to *unattainable* (i.e. unaffordable) luxury produces a similar outcome. A second pilot study confirmed this. However, based on goals literature, we propose that the influence of exposure to luxury is much more complex than is usually assumed.

People tend to commit to a goal that is likely to be achieved and to disengage from goals that are difficult to attain (Kruglanski et al., 2002). When the likelihood of attainment is deemed too small, one may even abandon the goal (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2008). We propose that the affordability of consumer goods serves as a signal of the likelihood that one may successfully attain one's extrinsic and material goals. Hence, we propose that exposure to attainable luxuries might strengthen the endorsement of extrinsic and materialistic goals while exposure to unattainable luxuries might decrease it.

Study 1 tests this prediction. 152 students were asked to either decorate a highly expensive villa (i.e. unattainable luxury) versus a mainstream house. Specifically, participants received a floor plan of a villa versus smaller house and sets of photos with possible interiors per room to choose from (luxurious versus common interiors). Participants placed the pictures of their choice on the floor plan. A pretest measured the attainability of the villa/mainstream house (i.e., the likelihood of living in the decorated type of home within ten years from now). As expected, participants believed that the villa would be significantly less attainable within ten years than the mainstream house.

As an additional manipulation of attainability, participants were encouraged (versus not) to imagine themselves owning the home they decorated (the imagination procedure aims to render the luxurious villa less unattainable). Overall, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (type of home: expensive villa vs. mainstream house; simulation: imagination vs. no imagination). Subsequently, we measured materialism (Richins & Dawson 1992) and extrinsic goal pursuit (Aspiration Index; Kasser & Sheldon 2000).

For both dependent variables, type of home interacted significantly with simulation. In contrast to prior intuitions (cf. pilot study), participants were significantly *less* materialistic after decorating the expensive villa versus the mainstream house in the condition without explicit imagination. However, imagining (versus not) owning the villa significantly increased materialistic values, while no such effect was found with regard to the mainstream house. A fairly similar data pattern was found for extrinsic goal pursuit.

These results suggest that consumers try to cope with their inability to own the exposed luxuries by downplaying the importance of material wealth. After all, participants only indicate attaching less importance to materialistic and extrinsic values when being exposed to *unattainable* luxuries, not when the same luxuries seem less unattainable as a result of simulating owning them.

Study 2 tests this assumption more explicitly by also assessing the role of self-esteem. Rather than manipulating attainability, we now measured participants' perception of their own ability to afford the advertised products. Forty-two students either saw six print ads for moderately expensive products (to allow for variation in participants' feelings of affordability; e.g., Hugo Boss clothing) or no ads (control condition). Next, we measured extrinsic goal pursuit (like in Study 1) and self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965). After a number of unrelated tasks, participants in both conditions judged for each ad whether they could afford the advertised product. An index of perceived affordability was computed. Affordability was measured at the end of the experiment to assess whether these concerns affected self-esteem and goal pursuit without being actively cued (as in Study 1).

Both for extrinsic goal pursuit and for self-esteem, we found a significant interaction between condition and perceived affordability. Advertising exposure increased extrinsic goal pursuit and self-esteem of participants who believed they could afford the promoted luxuries, but decreased it for participants who felt they could not afford them. Finally, a mediated moderation analysis showed that self-esteem partially mediated the effect of condition and affordability on extrinsic goal pursuit.

These results raise the question whether exposure to unattainable luxuries merely causes people to *say* that materialism and extrinsic goal pursuit are less important, or whether they also *intend to act* upon this belief. Hence, study 3 examines the impact of luxury consumption on prosocial behavior in the context of a dictator game (Hoffman et al., 1994). Fifty-seven respondents were exposed to either 30 exclusive luxury pictures (e.g., private jet; unaffordable luxury condition), 30 photos depicting functional products (e.g., cal-culator; functional condition) or to no pictures (control condition). Next, all respondents evaluated different organizations and indicated their favorite charity. Subsequently, participants were asked to allocate €10 between themselves and their favorite good cause.

Consistent with the previous studies, the amount of money donated to a good cause was significantly higher after exposure to unattainable luxury than after exposure to functional products or in the control condition.

In sum, common intuition (cf. pilot study) suggests that *any* exposure to luxury would increase materialism. However, our results show that exposure to extreme and *unattainable* luxury (e.g., through reruns of *MTV Cribs*) may decrease how important consumers find such luxury, and extrinsic goals, more generally. Interestingly, exposure to unattainable luxury may potentially even instigate prosocial behavior. To conclude, our results may contribute to the debate on advertising exposure and increased materialism.