Moving Forward, Falling Back: How Perceptions of Motion Mask the Dangers of Unhealthy Consumption

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We demonstrate that dynamic logos increase the consumption of vices. This effect is mediated by perceptions of consumption justifiability and moderated by directionality, consumers’ time-orientation, and their concern with future consequences. Results suggest that dynamic logos license consumers to indulge in the present by triggering an expected increase in well-being.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Logos (whether visual or verbal) can be designed to suggest motion (Luca, Krishna, and Elder 2014). In general, motion generates a sense of aesthetic excitement and interest (Freyd 1993). In line with this, logos comprised of dynamic images typically increase consumer engagement. They may also lead to more favorable brand evaluations if there is a perception of fit between the associations of motion and brand characteristics. Specifically, Luca, Krishna, and Elder (2014) demonstrate that dynamic logos lead to more favorable brand attitudes than static logos when paired with modern (as opposed to traditional) brands, and this effect is driven by a perception of fit between motion and modernization.

Beyond this, little is known about the downstream consequences of utilizing dynamic logos. In this research, we examine the effect of logo dynamism in the context of self-control dilemmas. We propose that the perception of motion in a logo triggers thoughts of the future. Consumers generally exhibit an optimism bias, such that they associate the future with an increase in their well-being. We hypothesize that this perceived increase in their future well-being will lead consumers to indulge more in the present. This suggests that dynamic logos will increase the consumption of vices. We tested this hypothesis across four studies.

We first examined whether perceptions of logo motion could influence actual consumption. In Study 1A, we demonstrated that participants’ likelihood of selecting an unhealthy snack (e.g., chocolate chip cookies) over a healthier alternative (e.g., raisins) was significantly increased when the snacks were associated with a dynamic logo (i.e., a swinging pendulum vs. a still pendulum). In Study 1B, we demonstrated that participants would consume more of an unhealthy snack (e.g., chocolate) when it was paired with a dynamic logo rather than a static logo (i.e., a leaping horse vs. a still horse). Logo type, however, had no influence on how much of a healthy snack (e.g., granola) participants would consume. Having demonstrated that dynamic logos increase vice consumption, in the next studies we examined the mechanism underlining this effect.

According to our conceptualization, dynamic logos create the perception of motion. The perception of motion leads to an expected increase in future well-being. Consumers use this expected increase in future well-being to justify potentially harmful consumption in the present, leading to an increase in vice consumption. Whether motion leads to an expected increase in future well-being should depend on the direction in which the motion is perceived to be traveling (Chae and Hoegg 2013; Topolinski and Sparenberg 2012). In Study 2, we employed two types of dynamic logos, one with motion towards the right (i.e., a horse leaping towards the right) and one with motion towards the left (i.e., a horse leaping towards the left). The expectation being that a dynamic logo with motion towards the left would not influence vice consumption because it would not lead to an expected increase in future well-being that could be used to justify vice consumption in the present.

The results of Study 2 supported this theorization. When the dynamic logo featured the perception of forward motion (i.e., motion towards the right) purchase likelihood for a vice product significantly increased. However, when the logo featured the perception of backward motion (i.e., motion towards the left) purchase intent for the vice product (marginally) decreased. Logo type and direction of perceived motion had no effect on purchase intent when consumers considered a relatively virtuous product. Importantly, these results rule out several alternative explanations which would attribute our effect to an increase in arousal or a perception of fit between vice products and motion.

In Study 3, we extended these results by directly manipulating participants’ time orientation. Under control conditions, we saw a replication of earlier results. A dynamic logo significantly increased purchase intent when a product was presented as a relative vice; logo type did not influence purchase intent when a product was presented as a relative virtue. When participants were primed to think about their future, there was only a significant main effect of product type. Regardless of whether the ad featured a dynamic logo or a static logo, purchase likelihood increased when the product was presented as a vice. Any effect of logo type and/or product type was eliminated when participants were primed to think about their past.

Our theorization suggests that if consumers did not perceive the future optimistically or were unwilling to use an expected increase in future well-being to justify unhealthy consumption in the present, dynamic logos would not benefit vice products. We tested this idea in Study 4. In Study 4, we measured participants’ concern of future consequences (CFC). CFC is a personality trait defined as the extent to which an individual considers the future outcomes of their current behavior and the extent to which they are influenced by these imagined outcomes. Consumers high in CFC are less likely to use an expected increase in future well-being to justify unhealthy consumption in the present (Adams and Nettle 2009; Kovac and Riese 2007). Among participants low in CFC (below the mean CFC index rating), there was a significant product type by logo motion interaction, the pattern of which replicated earlier results. Furthermore, as we expected, the positive effect of a dynamic logo on vice consumption was mediated by perceptions of how justifiable consumption of the product would be. Among participants high in CFC (above the mean CFC index rating), the product type by logo motion interaction was not significant. Purchase intent among these participants was not influenced by logo type, regardless of whether the product was presented as a vice or a virtue.

A substantial body of literature has focused on these strategies consumers use to control their short-term consumption impulses in order to secure long-term interests. In other words, this literature has focused on how consumers consciously or unconsciously limit their choice of vices. In this research, we examine how an external marketing cue, the brand’s logo, may threaten consumers’ ability to control their consumption of vices.

REFERENCES


