Are My Dog’S Treats Making Me Fat? the Effects of Choices Made For Others on Subsequent Choices For the Self

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Do making choices for others in a goal relevant domain affect our subsequent goal pursuit? We show that making personal goal-consistent (inconsistent) choices for close others—such as friends, children, and pets—liberates (reinforces) subsequent personal goal-relevant choices for the self. We identify competitiveness in relationships as a boundary condition.

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The Social Context of Consumption
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Paper #1: Are My Dog’s Treats Making Me Fat? The Effects of Choices Made for Others on Subsequent Choices for the Self
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Paper #2: Mindful Mimicry of Food Choices: Vertically versus Horizontally Differentiated Attributes
Peggy Liu, University of Pittsburgh, USA
Brent McFerran, Simon Fraser University, Canada
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Paper #3: The Social Path To Satiation: Satisfying Desire Vicariously via Other’s Consumption
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SESSION OVERVIEW
Consumer choices and consumption are rarely solitary. They often involve others in an array of ways, from choosing for others, to co-consuming with others, to viewing others’ consumption, or even just thinking about others. While decision-making research has taught us much about how people make choices for themselves (e.g., Bettman, Luce, and Payne 1998), less is known about how this rich social context affects consumption decisions for the self.

Therefore, it is important for both researchers and practitioners to understand the nuances of the array of roles that others play in consumers’ choices. How do the consumption choices made by and for others affect subsequent choices for oneself? How does thinking about others’ consumption and others’ perceptions of us affect our own consumption choices?

In this symposium, four papers explore these questions by considering the multitude of roles that others play in affecting our consumption choices. The four papers address various social aspects of consumption: choosing for others, consuming with others, considering others’ consumption and considering others’ perceptions of the self.

The first paper (Gullo, Liu, Zhou, Fitzsimons) considers how choosing for others affects subsequent choices for the self. Specifically, the authors examine how choices for others in the domain of a personal goal affect subsequent goal-relevant choices for the self. Three studies show that making a personal goal consistent (inconsistent) choice for a relationally close other—such as one’s child, friend, or even pet—liberates (reinforces) a subsequent goal-relevant choice for the self, but only if the chooser also views the relationship as non-competitive.

The second paper (Liu, Haws, McFerran) considers how co-consuming with others affects concurrent choices for the self. Specifically, the authors propose a new conceptual basis based on product attributes for predicting when and why consumers match their co-consumers’ choices. Six studies show that consumers are more likely to match their own choices with their co-consumers’ choices on vertically-differentiated attributes (e.g., price or portion size) than on horizontally-differentiated attributes (e.g., flavor).

The third paper (Tu and Fishbach) considers how viewing others’ consumption affects one’s own consumption. Specifically, the authors propose that people can satiate on what other people eat vicariously. Five studies demonstrate that, when the other is similar to the self, people experience lower desire to consume food that is similar (rather than dissimilar) in taste to what they have viewed others consume.

Finally, the fourth paper (Cutright, Srna, Samper) considers how thinking about others’ perceptions of oneself affects choices for the self. Specifically, the authors propose that believing that others will view their decisions positively (i.e., having social confidence) leads to greater purchase intent. Four studies demonstrate that consumers feel more socially confident when wearing formal clothing (vs. casual clothes), which causes them to be less hesitant about their purchases, ultimately increasing purchasing.

Across four papers and 18 studies, this session investigates decisions in a wide array of “others” contexts. This session is directed at a wide audience including those interested in social influences on choice, choices for others, and interpersonal goal pursuit.

Are My Dog’s Treats Making Me Fat? The Effects of Choices Made for Others on Subsequent Choices for the Self

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Consumers often make choices for others intermixed with choices for themselves—parents choose activities for their children, coworkers grab lunch for each other, and pet owners choose snacks for their pets. Do choices made for someone else’s consumption affect subsequent choices for our own consumption?

Prior research has shown that preceding choices for the self can impact subsequent choices (Fishbach and Dhar 2005; Huber, Goldsmith, and Mogilner 2008; Khan and Dhar 2006) Even thinking about refraining from indulging or being in the presence of healthy options can license indulgent subsequent decisions (Fitzsimons, Nunes, and Williams 2007; Wilcox et al. 2009). These prior findings suggest that making a choice for someone else may have the potential to affect a subsequent choice for oneself. However, little research has examined whether, when, and how choices for others affect subsequent choices for the self.

Across three studies, we show that when a consumer makes a personal goal consistent (inconsistent) choice for someone else’s consumption—such as for children, friends, and even pets—it liberates (reinforces) a subsequent goal inconsistent (consistent) choice for the self. We identify two important boundary conditions: the extent to which the target other is perceived as included in the self and the competitiveness of the relationship with the target other. We theorize that, when the other is close and non-competitive, people encode the choices they make for others as progress (or lack of progress) toward their own goals. We argue that this falsely perceived progress towards one’s own goals liberates (reinforces) the goal in a subsequent choice for the self.

Study 1 had a 2 choice for other: healthy vs. indulgent between-subjects design. Participants (N = 312) were MTurk workers who reported having a health goal and as being a parent of a child...
between the ages of 8 and 12 years old. To activate their health goal, all participants edited an article about healthy eating (adapted from Haws and Winterich 2013). Then, participants imagined registering their child for a summer day camp. As the manipulation of choice for other, the registration process had participants choose between either two healthy (e.g., whole wheat pita sandwich) or two indulgent (e.g., bacon cheese burger) lunch choices for their child to eat while at camp. Then, participants were informed that one participant would actually be randomly selected to receive an Edible Arrangement fruit basket of their choice. The dependent variable was whether they chose a healthy (all fruit) or indulgent (chocolate-covered fruit) basket as their drawing prize. As predicted, parents were more likely to choose an indulgent prize for themselves if they chose a healthy lunch for their child (M = 45.16%) than if they chose an indulgent lunch for their child (M = 35.67%, p = .088).

Study 2 explored the moderating role of closeness with other. In this field study, we recruited dog owners (N = 109) at a 50-acre off-leash dog park where visitors must hike through uphill trails to get to the main area of the park. Thus, visitors are likely to have a health or active lifestyle goal, and simply being at the park should activate this goal. All participants then completed an incentive-compatible grocery shopping task in which they chose between pairs of products (of importance, one choice was randomly selected to be real for each participant). The manipulation was whether participants were randomly assigned to choose between two healthy treats or two indulgent treats for their dog. The dependent variable was whether participants then subsequently chose a healthy apple or an indulgent chocolate bar as a snack for themselves. We also measured the extent to which the dog was included in the self (Inclusion of Other in Self, “IOS”, Aron et al., 1992). As predicted, a logistic regression on snack choice for self (apple vs. chocolate) by IOS and manipulated choice for other (healthy vs. indulgent) revealed a significant 2-way interaction (p < .05). To decompose this interaction, we used the Johnson-Neyman technique to identify the range of IOS for which the simple effect of the manipulated choice for other was significant. There was a significant effect of choice for other on the likelihood to choose chocolate as a snack for the self for any dog owner who has an IOS score of 6.62 or higher (B9 = -1.18, SE = .5998, p = .05), but not for dog owners with an IOS score less than 6.62.

Study 3 explored competitiveness as a boundary condition. Participants (N = 426) were MTurk workers who reported having a health goal. All participants completed the same health goal activation task as in Study 1 and provided the first name of a close, same gendered friend. Then, they imagined picking up lunch for their friend as a favor. Choice for other was manipulated via choosing between either two healthy (e.g., salad) or two indulgent (e.g., fries) side options to go along with their friend’s entree. Then, all participants completed the dependent variable as Study 1 and the same measure of closeness with their friend as Study 2. Finally, participants completed a measure of relational competitiveness (item 15 from Ryckman et al. 1990).

As predicted, a logistic regression on prize choice for self (fruit vs. chocolate) by IOS, relational competitiveness, and choice for other reveals a significant 3-way interaction (p = .019). Follow-up simple-effects analyses revealed the following pattern of results: with a low IOS other (i.e., less than 4), there was no simple 2-way interaction between CFO and competitiveness (p = .20). However, with a high IOS other (i.e., greater than 6), there was a significant simple 2-way interaction between CFO and competitiveness (p < .05) such that at low competitiveness, the choice for other led to the same basic effect as in the prior studies whereas at high competitive-

ness, the basic effect was reversed (i.e., choosing healthy for other led to decreased likelihood of choosing indulgent for self).

Across three studies, we demonstrate that, when consumers choose for close “others,” such choices can affect subsequent choices for the self.

Mindful Mimicry of Food Choices: Vertically versus Horizontally Differentiated Attributes

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Much consumer behavior occurs in a social context involving co-consuming alongside others (Etkin 2016; Gorlin and Dhar 2012; Liu et al. 2013; Lowe and Haws 2014; McFerran et al. 2010). For instance, friends may have ice cream together, and co-workers may each have a glass of wine after dinner. Prior research in the eating/drinking domain has produced divergent findings on whether consumers match their co-companions’ consumption choices. On the one hand, mimicry research suggests that consumers match (McFerran et al. 2010; Tanner et al. 2008). For example, McFerran et al. (2010) found that consumers matched companions’ portion size selections. On the other hand, other research suggests that consumers sometimes do not match (Ariely and Levav 2000). For instance, Ariely and Levav (2000) found that consumers did not match their co-consumers’ beer selections.

We propose a new conceptual basis for predicting when matching is more (and less) likely to occur, based on product attributes. This framework helps reconcile these apparently divergent findings and also generates new predictions. Specifically, we distinguish between attributes that are perceived to be more vertically versus horizontally-differentiated. These terms are commonly used in economics and quantitative marketing to indicate ranked/objective (vertical) versus unranked/subjective (horizontal) attributes (Lauga and Ofek 2011; Randall, Ulrich, and Reibstein 1998; Sutton 1986). We propose that consumers match co-consumers on vertically-differentiated attributes, but not horizontally-differentiated attributes.

Our rationale is that mismatching on vertically-differentiated (vs. horizontally) attributes represents a greater social norm violation. Namely, people are highly attuned to relative rank/performance (Duesenberry 1949; Festinger 1954; Frank 1985). Furthermore, people both dislike being lower rank (Kuziienko et al. 2014) and dislike being a target of upward social comparison (Exline and Lobel 1999). We thus propose that in the consumption context, consumers match co-consumers on vertically-differentiated attributes because occupying different positions generates discomfort. In contrast, occupying different positions on horizontally-differentiated attributes does not convey relative rank/performance differences and thus consumers need not match (and may even mismatch for various reasons).

Our conceptualization can thus help explain apparently divergent prior findings, which has frequently shown mimicry of others’ portion sizes (vertically-differentiated attribute) and has also shown non-mimicry but typically examined flavor selections (horizontally-differentiated attribute). A pre-test and six studies tested our novel conceptualization.

For the pre-test, participants (N = 154) were provided with definitions of horizontal and vertical differentiation and rated food-related attributes (1 = completely horizontally differentiated to 7 = completely vertically differentiated). Portion size (M = 4.27) and price (M = 5.37) were deemed more vertically-differentiated, whereas flavor (M = 3.31) was deemed more horizontally-differentiated, as one-sample t-tests indicated that the mean ratings for portion size and price were both greater than the scale midpoint (portion size: p = .086; price: p < .001), whereas flavor was less than the midpoint (p < .05 for dog owners with an IOS score less than 6.62. However, for example, McFerran et al. (2010) found that consumers matched companions’ portion size selections. On the other hand, other research suggests that consumers sometimes do not match (Ariely and Levav 2000). For instance, Ariely and Levav (2000) found that consumers did not match their co-consumers’ beer selections.

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.001). Studies 1 and 3-6 thus operationalized the vertically-differentiated attribute using portion size (Study 2 used price), and all studies operationalized the horizontally-differentiated attribute using flavor.

Study 1 had a 2(friend’s portion size: small, large)×2(friend’s flavor: chocolate, vanilla)×1(control: friend’s order not specified) between-subjects design. Undergraduate participants (N=205) first provided some same-gender friend’s name and imagined arriving at an ice creamery together. Participants viewed a four-option menu: 1 scoop chocolate, 2 scoops chocolate, 1 scoop vanilla, and 2 scoops vanilla. Depending on random assignment, participants were told that their friend ordered one of these four options. Participants then chose an option for themselves. First, regarding portion size, participants were significantly more likely to choose a large portion size themselves if their friend chose a large versus small portion size (68.8% vs. 51.2%; p = .028). Second, regarding flavor, participants were similarly likely to choose the chocolate flavor if their friend chose chocolate versus vanilla (56.6% vs. 53.6%; p = .703). There were no interactions between the friend’s portion size and the friend’s flavor on the participant’s portion size choice (p = .767) or flavor choice (p = .643). Study 2 replicated these effects with actual food choices.

Study 3 had a 2(friend’s price: low, high)×2(friend’s flavor: fruity, earthy)+1(control: friend’s order not specified) between-subjects design. MTurk participants (N = 315) provided a same-gender friend’s name and imagined arriving at a wine bar with their friend. Participants viewed a menu with four glass-of-wine options: Grenache–fruit-flavored ($4), Malbec–fruit-flavored ($8), Syrah–earthy-flavored ($4), and Chianti–earthy-flavored ($8). Depending on randomly-assigned condition, participants were told that their friend ordered one of these four options. Participants then chose an option for themselves. Study 3 results generally replicated Study 1-2’s. Participants were significantly more likely to choose a higher-priced glass of wine if their friend chose a higher-priced versus lower-priced glass (40.9% vs. 24.8%; p = .007). However, participants were marginally less likely to choose the fruity flavor if their friend chose a fruity versus earthy flavor (60.0% vs. 71.7%; p = .052), reflecting some mis-matching. There were no interactions between the friend’s price and the friend’s flavor on the participant’s price choice (p = .758) or flavor choice (p = .342).

In Studies 1-3, participants knew their friend’s standing on both the vertically-differentiated and horizontally-differentiated attributes. Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer 1991) thus raises the alternative explanation that people may match on just one attribute because of optimal distinctiveness reasons. Our account, however, is that matching is dependent on the attributes themselves. Accordingly, our findings should hold even when consumers only have information about their friend’s standing on one attribute (vertical or horizontal). Study 4 (N = 378) thus only provided participants with one piece of information about their friend’s order (either size or flavor). Study 4 found matching on the vertical attribute but not the horizontal attribute, providing further support for our account.

Finally, Studies 5-6 used different approaches to show that matching on vertically-differentiated attributes occurs because consumers anticipate, and want to decrease, social discomfort associated with mismatching on such attributes.

In sum, consumers match co-consumers on vertically-differentiated attributes (portion size, price) but not horizontally-differentiated attributes (flavor). These findings extend the social influences literature by offering a broad conceptual basis for predicting which attributes are matched.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers frequently receive information on other people’s food consumption, such as in food commercials and when dining together. Recently, _Mukbang_ – a combination of the Korean word for eating and broadcasting – has caught on. People worldwide share “eating show” videos of themselves eating large quantities of food, attracting billions of viewers globally (Evans 2015; Pequeno 2016). How does another’s food consumption influence one’s own desire for that food? Whereas it may whet one’s appetite and signal the positive quality of the food (i.e., increase liking), we explore the possibility that consumers may desire the specific food others just had less momentarily (i.e., decrease wanting) (Garbinsky, Morewedge, and Shiv 2014).

Building on the notion that, as social animals, people experience blurred interpersonal boundaries (Aron et al. 1991; Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Small and Simonsohn 2008), and can perceive others’ traits (Goldstein and Cialdini 2007), decision conflict (Schrift and Amar 2015) and ownership (Tu and Fishbach 2015), as partially their own, we propose that other’s consumption can make people feel as if they have consumed it too, which in turn leads to lower desire, postponement of consumption and switching consumption. It follows that the degree of perceived self-other overlap matters – people will experience vicarious satiation only when self-other overlap is sufficiently large. Crucially, we study attribute-based (rather than hunger-based) satiation, which is sensory-specific (Imman 2001; Larson, Redden, and Elder 2014) and predict people will desire the food that is similar (rather than dissimilar) in taste to what others consumed less. Five studies tested the theoretical framework.

Study 1 documented the vicarious satiation effect by having participants watch an adapted “eating show” video, in which the protagonist ate a whole pizza, slice by slice. Participants’ desire for pizza changed over time – before watching the video, 1 minute, 3 minutes, and 4 minutes into the video (F(3, 120) = 8.71, p < .001; M1 = 3.93, SD1 = 1.85; M2 = 4.12, SD2 = 1.85; M3 = 3.49, SD3 = 1.82; M4 = 3.15, SD4 = 1.90) and followed a linear pattern (F(1, 40) = 10.78, p = .002). Moreover, they desired pizza less after than before watching the video (F(1, 40) = 9.34, p = .004).

Study 2 used postponement of consumption as a behavioral marker of vicarious satiation. We recruited acquaintances-dyads and presented them with two flavors of candies. We assigned one person (1st mover) to eat one flavor [consumption], or to evaluate its wrapper design without eating it [non-consumption]. We then invited the other person (2nd mover) to eat both flavors and measured his/her consumption order. In support of our hypothesis, more participants postponed consumption of the flavor the 1st mover received when the 1st mover consumed it (73%) than not (46%; χ2(1) = 4.38, p = .036).

Study 3 used switching consumption as a behavioral marker of vicarious satiation, and explored the similarities between vicarious satiation (for observers) and physiological satiation (for actors). Specifically, observers watched a video of a person either eating [consumption] or counting [non-consumption] M&M’s; actors watched the same video and mimicked corresponding actions. We then asked participants to choose between three equally priced gifts: a pack of M&Ms, a pack of Skittles (a different food) or Post-it notes (non-food). We found a main effect that participants chose M&M’s less in the consumption conditions (35%) than in the non-consumption conditions (57%; χ2(1) = 9.27, p = .002), regardless of whether they were observers (vicarious satiation; 39% vs. 60%; χ2(1) = 4.15, p = .052).
Study 4 shed light on the proposed mechanism—vicarious satiation happens because people treat other’s consumption as their own, meaning that the degree of self-other overlap matters. We had participants watch the same eating [consumption] or counting [non-consumption] video as in study 3, and manipulated perceived self-other overlap by informing participants that the protagonist either shares [high self-other overlap] or opposes [low self-other overlap] their political view. We measured participants’ desire for M&M’s, for something sweet, and for something chocolatey after they finished watching the video. A Behavior (consumption vs. non-consumption) x Self-Other Overlap (high vs. low) ANOVA on desire for M&M’s yielded the predicted interaction (F(1, 292) = 5.25, p = .023). Specifically, watching another person eat (M = 2.94, SD = 2.03) rather than count (M = 3.72, SD = 1.97) reduced desire for M&M’s (F(1, 150) = 5.84, p = .017) but only in the high self-other overlap conditions. When self-other overlap was low, this effect disappeared (Mfood = 3.25, SD = 2.29 vs. Mfood = 2.93, SD = 2.01; F < 1). Desire for something sweet and something chocolatey followed the same pattern.

Study 5 aimed to 1) explore whether vicarious satiation can happen when imagination is minimal by providing only text information and 2) document its sensory-specific nature. We had participants read either a daily food journal [consumption], in which a gender-matched person recorded that he/she had lots of Reese’s peanut butter cups, or a daily task log [non-consumption], in which the person recorded the tasks he/she performed. We then measured desire for Reese’s, for snacks that taste similarly (Snickers bar and M&M’s), and for snacks that taste differently (Doritos, Lay’s chips, and Goldfish crackers). We found that information about another person’s consumption of Reese’s (vs. daily tasks) reduced desire for Reese’s (Mfood = 2.87, SD = 2.06 vs. Mfood = 3.48, SD = 2.25, F(1,220) = 4.46, p = .036) and for similar snacks (Mfood = 2.51, SD = 1.72 vs. Mfood = 3.11, SD = 2.04, F(1,220) = 5.57, p=.019; Mfood = 2.43, SD = 1.70 vs. Mfood = 3.11, SD = 1.92, F(1,220) = 7.73, p = .006), but not for dissimilar snacks.

Eating is largely a social phenomenon; so much so that people are reluctant to dine alone (Ratner and Hamilton 2015). We identify a social path to satiation and discuss its implications in marketing and social coordination.

Suit Up and Shop: Social Confidence and the Influence of Consumer Attire on Purchasing Decisions

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

We investigate the relationship between formality of dress and purchase intent. Drawing from research on consumer confidence (Bearden, Hardesty and Rose 2001), we argue that when consumers are wearing formal clothing, they are more likely to feel socially confident, or that they have the ability to impress others with the products that they choose to purchase. This enhanced social confidence, which is distinct from other forms of confidence, leads to higher purchase intent in shopping domains that are related and unrelated to clothing.

We expect that formality of dress is an important precursor to social confidence because a primary function of clothing is to communicate one’s self to others and generate positive social outcomes. Research has shown that people in formal dress view themselves more positively (Hannover and Kuhnen 2002) and have a greater sense of authoritativeness and competence (Peluchette and Karl 2007; Cardon and Okoro 2009). In this sense, formally dressed individuals should expect to be viewed positively by others, or socially confident. We expect that they should also be more eager to make purchases, as believing that others will view one’s decisions positively reduces the hesitancy associated with making a purchase decision. Although not focusing on social confidence, prior research has shown that when people feel more confident, they perceive less risk and require less information to make a decision (Hisrich, Dornoff, Kernan 1972).

In Study 1, we test our predictions in the behavioral lab. The day before their scheduled session, participants received an email asking them to arrive to the lab dressed formally (sport coat or blazer, slacks or dress) or casually (sweat pants, t-shirts, tennis shoes and flip flops) in exchange for $5. Undergraduate participants were told that we were collaborating with a retailer to learn about college students’ clothing style and the types of items they purchase. They would have the opportunity to spend up to $30 in a store sponsored by this retailer, which had a variety of college life products (e.g., water bottles, school supplies). Our dependent variable was the number of items participants purchased. We found that participants chose more items in the formal relative to the casual condition (F(1, 245) = 4.37, p = .04, Mformal = 10.53, Mcasual = 8.89). We also measured perceived economic and social status, financial resource slack, and deservingness, and ruled these out as alternative explanations.

In Study 2, we examine formal versus casual dress in an online context. To manipulate dress, we use avatars, or computer-based representations of our participants. Participants created an avatar in the image of themselves and were told to select an outfit for this avatar. Those in the formal and casual dress conditions were given options that were purely formal (slacks, dresses, business casual shirts) or casual (athletic pants, sweatshirts and sneakers or flip flops). All participants imagined entering a virtual store as their avatar. Our focal dependent measures were the likelihood participants would buy themselves something and feelings of confidence using Bearden et al.’s Consumer Self-Confidence scale, focusing specifically on the “Social Outcomes Decision-Making” dimension (i.e., “social confidence” α = .88). We found that participants were more likely to purchase something for themselves in the formal (vs. casual) dress condition (F(1, 253) = 7.71, p = .01, Mformal = 4.53, Mcasual = 4.02). This effect was mediated by feelings of social confidence, but not other types of confidence.

In Study 3, we identify type of store as a boundary condition. While in more traditional stores, we predict that formal dress should lead to feelings of being at one’s best, in stores where the norm is to dress casually, casual dress may also be consistent with being socially confident, since casual dress is associated with engaging in effort to build or repair. Thus, we conducted a 2 (dress: formal vs. casual) x 2 (shopping environment: formal store vs. casual store) experiment, again using avatars. We also measure feelings of best self, feelings of fit and consumers’ desires for self-consistency in addition to our primary dependent measure of purchase likelihood. We found a significant store x dress interaction (F(1, 395) = 5.52, p = .02). In the formal store, those assigned to formal (vs. casual) dress showed greater purchase intent (F(1, 395) = 6.77, p = .01, Mformal = 4.88, Mcasual = 4.30). Within the casual store, however, there were no such differences (F(1, 395) = .51, p = .48, Mformal = 4.30, Mcasual = 4.46). Consistent with predictions, mediation within the formal store condition revealed the predicted mediation within the formal store condition, formal dress→social confidence→purchase intent.

Finally, in Study 4 we look at whether simply feeling socially confident or actually needing to publicly use a product drives our effect. We assigned MTurk participants to a 2 (formality of dress: formal vs. casual) x 2 (usage objective: public vs. private) experi-
ment. We reasoned that if social confidence is indeed a critical component, the effect of dress should be strongest when individuals are focusing on decisions for social contexts rather than private ones. Participants then imagined that they decided to shop online, in the privacy of their own home (with no one else around) and were shown an online shopping interface. To manipulate the public versus private use of goods, participants were told that they were shopping for new clothes that they would wear exclusively while working from a private home office or a public office. Our dependent measures were purchase intent and social confidence. Results revealed a significant dress x store environment interaction, $F(1, 395) = 5.18, p = .02$. For public use, those dressed formally (vs. casually) displayed greater purchase intent ($F(1, 395) = 4.36, p = .04, M_{formal} = 4.89, M_{casual} = 4.44$). For private use, however, there were no differences ($F(1, 395) = 1.27, p = .26, M_{formal} = 4.18, M_{casual} = 4.42$). Further analyses replicated our prior mediation paths in the public condition, emphasizing the dependence of our effect on public display.

In sum, across 4 studies, we formal attire enhances the extent to which consumers feel socially confident, which heightens desires for consistency and feelings of belonging, and consequently purchase intent. This can be turned off by shopping in non-traditional contexts where casual clothing is reflective of social confidence, and in contexts where usage is private.

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