Too Nice to Be Dominant: How Warmth Impacts an Embodiment of Power in Brands

Jennifer Stoner, University of North Dakota, USA
Carlos Torelli, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Brands choose to differentiate themselves through various brand images; however, some of these brand images may affect perceptions of power (market dominance). We propose that a high warmth brand image can lead consumers to perceive a brand as less competitive and thus less dominant or powerful in its product category.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1024856/volumes/v45/NA-45

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The Interplay between Power and Lay Theories in Influencing Consumer Behavior

Chairs: Alison Jing Xu, University of Minnesota, USA
Sharon Shavitt, University of Illinois, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW

Power is defined by the asymmetric control over valued resources in a social relationship (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Although a significant amount of research has provided important insights on the consequences of power states and their implications for consumer behavior, little is known regarding the lay theories that underlie how consumers think about and are influenced by power states (Galinsky, Rucker, and Magee 2015). In this session, we bring together some of the leading researchers on power to present four papers demonstrating the interplay between power and lay theories in influencing consumer behavior. Across these papers, we discuss, (a) What are the lay beliefs that people have regarding the associations between brand power and other brand images? (b) How do perceptions of power differentials in a society influence the heuristics (i.e., lay theories) that people develop to make inferences about numeric information? (c) Why might feeling powerful magnify the influence of lay theories that people apply when making attributions? (d) How do consumers’ lay theories on the changeability of their current power state (i.e., entity theorists vs. incremental theorists) moderate a motivational consequence of feeling powerless?

The first paper by Stoner and Torelli discovers that one means through which brands embody power is through perceptions of market dominance. However, brands with a warm image will be perceived as less market dominant and, thus, less powerful. This effect occurs because consumers hold the lay belief that being warm is in conflict with being powerful.

The second paper by Barone, Li, Lyle, and Winterich proposes that recognizing power differentials in a society can stimulate a vertical orientation, which in turn impacts the heuristics that consumers apply when judging the difference between vertically presented original price and deal price. Specifically, consumers with a vertical orientation tend to infer that vertically presented original and deal prices are very different from each other, regardless of their actual difference. As a result, consumers with high vertical orientation judge small deals to be equally attractive as large deals.

The third paper by Kim, Han, Rucker, and Duhachek demonstrates that feeling powerful can magnify the influence of lay theories of attributing success to oneself and attributing failure to others (i.e., fundamental attribution error). Consequently, when encountering a self-failure, individuals who feel powerful generate stronger negative emotions of anger. When encountering a self-success, individuals who feel powerful also generate stronger positive emotions of pride.

The fourth paper by Xu, Shavitt, and Rucker explores the moderating role of lay theories (entity theorists vs. incremental theorists) in understanding a motivational consequence of feeling powerless. They propose and find that being in a state of low-power motivates individuals to change their current aversive state, and this motivation spills over to increase their preferences for messages or products signaling change over neutral ones or those signaling consistency. Moreover, the allure of change only holds for consumers who chronically believe, or have activated, the lay theory that their current (low power) state will not change naturally (i.e., entity theorists). That is, when people view their states as fixed, they seek change in power-irrelevant domains.

Given the important role of power in people’s daily lives and the variety of novel findings uncovered by leading scholars in this research area, this session should be of interest to a diverse audience, from academics studying power to those researching branding, advertising, and pricing more broadly. Making connections between two research areas on power and lay theories also provides important avenues for future research.

Too Nice to Be Dominant: How Warmth Impacts an Embodiment of Power in Brands

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A variety of constructs from psychology have been applied to brands (Aaker 1997, Torelli et al. 2012) The construct of power has yet to be applied to brands. What is a “powerful brand”? How are perceptions of power for a brand built?

In a pilot study, we discover that one means through which brands embody power is through perceptions of market dominance. This study confirms that a perception of market dominance is significantly correlated with an overall perception of brand power ($r = .62$). Therefore, we find it valuable to understand how consumers form perceptions of market dominance.

Research has shown that consumers are unaware of brands’ market dominance (Kamins, Alpert, and Perner 2007), but even misperception as a market leader leads to positive consumer evaluations (Kamins, Alpert, and Perner 2003). Past research demonstrates that brand images can be used as cues for inferences regarding product quality (Jacoby, Olson, and Haddock 1971) and brand extensions (Aaker and Keller 1990). We hypothesize that when consumers are lacking direct knowledge about a brand’s market dominance, the brand’s image is used as an inference cue: specifically, brands with a warm image will be perceived as less market dominant.

Research shows that powerful people, a desire for leadership and perceptions of leaders have been related to dominance and dominant behaviors (Fragale, Overbeck, and Neale 2011; Lord, De Vader,
and Alliger 1986), which we propose conflicts with the image of high warmth brands (Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2012). We hypothesize and find that consumers perceive high warmth brands as being less market dominant due to market dominance’s embodiment of power. Because competitiveness is believed as necessary for market dominance (Stalk, Evans, and Shulman 1992) and warmth has been negatively related to competitiveness (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske et al. 1999; Russell and Fiske 2008), we further hypothesize that the negative impact of brand warmth on perceptions of market dominance is driven by decreased perceptions of market competitiveness.

Six experiments were conducted to investigate the impact of warmth on consumers’ perceptions of market dominance. Studies 1 and 2 use real and fictitious brands to find evidence for our main hypothesis: warmth can negatively impact perceptions of market dominance. Study 3 explores perceptions of competitiveness as the mechanism behind our effect. Study 4 and 5 explore the boundary conditions and test the moderating roles of a) compatibility between warmth and dominance, and b) product category knowledge. Finally, Study 6 demonstrates downstream implications of this effect for brand preferences.

In Studies 1 and 2, we use real (Study 1) and fictitious brand (Study 2) in four product categories: cough syrup and fabric softener (Study 1) and pens and adhesive bandages (Study 2). Each participant was presented with two brands from each category: a high warmth brand and a low warmth brand. Participants were asked to estimate the market share of each brand. Consistent with our hypothesis, the high warmth brands were estimated to have lower market shares (Study 1: $M$s = 21.30 vs. 30.73, $F(1, 103)$ = 26.62, $p < .001$; Study 2: $M$s = 15.83 vs. 20.30, $F(1, 80)$ = 21.94, $p < .001$).

Study 3 builds on the first two studies by demonstrating that the effect of brand warmth on perceptions of market dominance is driven by reduced perceptions of competitiveness. This study used the cough syrup brands from Study 1 and scale measures of perceptions of competitiveness and market dominance. Again the high warmth brand was judged to be less market dominant ($M$s = 3.95 vs. 4.85, $F(1, 102)$ = 10.98, $p = .001$). Furthermore, this effect was significantly mediated by perceptions of competitiveness (95% CI of the indirect effect = -.47 to -.02).

Study 4 finds the effect disappears if the conflict between warmth and dominance is resolved. Participants completed either a neutral control sentence scramble task or one with sentences communicating compatibility of warmth and dominance (e.g., “The helpful nurse won the trophy”). Participants were asked to estimate the market share of the pen brands from Study 2. The interaction of compatibility and brand was significant ($F(1, 99)$ = 4.14, $p < .05$). The high warmth brand was less market dominant than the low warmth brand ($M$s = 19.65 vs. 23.74, $t(99)$ = 1.91, $p = .06$) in the control condition, but this effect was attenuated in the compatibility condition ($M$s = 21.76 vs. 19.73, $t(99)$ = 0.96, ns).

In Study 5, we investigate category knowledge as a boundary condition. We used real brands in the product category, soup, where knowledge is highly variant for our college student participants. Consumers with high category knowledge should be more reliant on their own knowledge and less on inferential cues such as brand image. Thus, the high warmth brand image should not have the same negative impact on market dominance for knowledgeable consumers. Therefore, knowledge should positively predict perceptions of market dominance for a high warmth, market dominant brand. We find that category knowledge is a predictor of market dominance for a dominant, high warmth brand ($\beta = .41, t(55) = 3.79, p < .001$), but not for a low warmth brand ($\beta = .10, t(55) = .94, ns$).

Our final study demonstrates the downstream consequences of this effect on brand preference. Prior literature finds that dominant brands are preferred only when the choices are self-relevant (Kim et al. 2008), therefore, high warmth brands that are perceived as being low in dominance should decrease brand preference in high self-relevant condition, but not in the low self-relevant condition. Participants picked products either to try themselves (high self-relevant) or for others to try (low self-relevant). They then viewed pairs of brand pictures for four product categories that communicated either high or low warmth. Participants responded with their brand preference on a 9-point scale (1 = Definitely Brand A, 9 = Definitely Brand B). Again, the high warmth brands were perceived as less dominant, but they were evaluated less favorably only in the high self-relevant condition ($M$s = 5.77 vs. 5.20, $F(1, 124)$ = 6.35, $p < .05$).

**Turning a Blind Eye: When Views of Power Differentials Increase Deal Attractiveness**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Across online retail websites and in-store displays, the regular price and sale price are frequently presented together, usually with one above or below the other. Although presenting prices vertically might be an unstated norm, the current research suggests that businesses may benefit from such presentations without offering a heavy discount. This research examines a novel factor that affects consumers’ evaluations of deals with vertically presented prices: a vertical orientation (i.e., knowledge structure reflecting power differentials; Oyserman 2006).

High- (vs. low) vertical individuals possess strong associations between power differential and spatial locations, which likely guides information processing (Briley, Wyer, and Li 2014; Shavitt et al. 2009). Specifically, since vertical layout is associated with differentials in power, status, and standing in the minds of high- (vs. low) vertical people, high- (vs. low) vertical people likely infer that entities (e.g., prices) in vertical layouts must possess different levels of power, status, and standing (e.g., magnitude). Since the difference in price magnitude between regular and sale prices is inferred from merely the layout, the actual sale information is not attended to and the deal depth (difference between the regular price and sale price) is not processed systematically by high- (vs. low) vertical people. We hypothesize that for vertical layouts low-vertical people respond more favorably when deal depth is high than low and high-vertical people are indifferent of deal depth, and for horizontal layouts both high and low vertical people respond more favorably when the deal depth is high than low. In particular, the effect on vertical layout is driven by low-vertical (high-vertical) people’s greater (equal) attention to sale price and higher (equal) motivation to process the deal when deal depth is high than low.

In study 1, participants (n = 200 undergraduate students) first responded to a scale that measured vertical orientation (Triandis and Gelfand 1998), and then reviewed a pizza cutter advertisement with regular price $7 and sale price $5. There were two versions for the advertisement: a vertical layout where sale price was below regular price and a horizontal layout where sale price was alongside the regular price. Finally, participants indicated their purchase likelihood of the pizza cutter. Regressing verticality (continuous), deal depth (‘0’ for low, ‘1’ for high), layout condition (‘0’ for horizontal, ‘1’ for vertical), and all possible interactions on purchase likelihood revealed a significant interaction: layout × deal depth interaction ($F(1, 192)$ = 4.14, $p = .04$). The results showed that when price information was presented horizontally, both high- (+1 SD) and low- (-1 SD) vertical participants are more likely to purchase the pizza cutter when the
deal depth is high than low (high-vertical: $B = 2.18, t = 3.21, p < .001$; low-vertical: $B = 1.14, t = 1.59, p = .11$). More importantly, consistent with our hypothesis, when the prices were presented vertically, high-vertical participants (+1 SD) are equally likely to purchase the pizza cutter regardless of deal depth ($B = -1.13, t = -0.20, p = .84$), but low-vertical participants (-1SD) are more likely to purchase the pizza cutter when the deal depth is high than low ($B = 1.57, t = 2.56, p < .05$).

Study 2 was similar to earlier studies but examined attention to sale price as a mediator to test the underlying mechanism. Participants ($n = 130$ mTurk workers) responded to the vertical orientation scale, viewed a pizza cutter advertisement with a vertical layout that varied in deal depth (high vs. low), indicated likelihood to purchase the pizza cutter, as well as how much attention they paid to the sale price. Regression analysis revealed a significant verticality × deal depth interaction ($F(1, 124) = 4.49, p = .04$). As hypothesized, low-vertical participants (-1SD) are more likely to purchase the pizza cutter when the deal depth is high than low (-1 SD: $B = -2.22, t = -4.36, p < .01$), whereas high-vertical participants (+1 SD) are equally likely to purchase the pizza cutter regardless of deal depth (+1 SD: $B = .71, t = 1.41, p = .16$). In addition, attention to the sale price mediated the interaction of verticality × deal depth on purchase likelihood (Hayes 2015; Model 8; indirect effect = -1.99, se = 1.40, 90% CI: -4.9735 to -1.835). These results support that high- (vs. low) vertical consumers rely on the layout instead of sale price to when processing deals.

Study 3 ($n = 118$ undergraduate students) replicates this pattern when vertical orientation is temporarily activated. In the high (low) vertical condition, participants were asked to select two out of three statements taken from the vertical orientation scale (e.g., one should respect the decisions made by others who are more competent) with which they most agreed (disagreed) and to write a short paragraph detailing the reasons for their agreement (disagreement). Next, participants examined a promotion for dental floss in a vertical layout that varied in deal depth (high vs. low). Finally, participants indicated their deal evaluations, as well as how motivated they were while processing the price comparison. A 2 x 2 ANCOVA revealed a significant verticality × deal depth interaction ($F(1, 59) = 4.09, p < .05$). Specifically, low-vertical participants were more likely to purchase the floss with a small deal size ($M = 4.48, SD = .39$) than small ($M = 3.30, SD = .30$) deal depth ($F(1, 114) = 5.74, p = .02$). However, high-vertical participants were equally likely to purchase the floss with a large ($M = 2.84, SD = .30$) or small deal depth ($M = 3.41, SD = .39$; $F(1, 114) = 1.34, p = .25$). Also, processing motivation mediates the effect of verticality × deal depth on purchase likelihood (Model 8: indirect effect = -.4777, se = .29, 95% CI: -1.2117 to -.0315).

The current research adds to the literature that vertical orientation guides information processing in spatial space (Moeller et al. 2008; Robinson et al. 2008). Specifically, high (vs. low) vertical individuals assume price differentials upon seeing vertical layouts without processing information related to deal depth.

**The Effects of Power on Emotional Responses to Self-Failure and Self-Success**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Previous research suggests that power influences one’s expression and experience of emotions (Berdahl and Martorana 2006; Keltner et al. 2003; Van Kleef et al. 2006). Specifically, high power results in increased positive emotions, whereas low power leads to elevated negative emotions. However, scant research has examined how power influences the experience of specific negative emotions. To fill this gap, the current research finds a context in which power affects discrete negative emotion with a focus on anger and suggests that high power leads to greater anger when individuals encounter self-failure. The current research focuses on anger because the previous literature on anger in the context of self-failure suggests two competing predictions. Thus, the current research aims at resolving these competing predictions.

According to cognitive-appraisal theories of emotion (Lerner and Keltner 2001; Smith and Ellsworth 1985), individuals feel angry when they believe that others are responsible for negative outcomes or have high control over negative events (Averill 1983). Given that individuals in high power positions (i.e., leaders) feel more responsible for and control over a task than those in low power positions (i.e., employees, Anderson and Berdahl 2002), one may predict that high power will lead to reduced anger in the face of self-failure. However, given that increased power activates approach-related tendencies due to increased rewards and freedom whereas decreased power activates inhibition-related tendencies due to elevated threat, punishment, and social constraint (Keltner et al. 2003) and that anger is associated with an approach orientation (Labroo and Rucker 2010), one may posit that individuals in high power will feel greater anger when encountering self-failure. To resolve these two opposite predictions, the current research empirically examines the effect of power on anger in the self-failure contexts.

Additionally, this research suggests these emotional differences elicited by different levels of power are contingent on whether the task outcome is positive or negative. Specifically, we focused on pride (anger) as a focal positive (negative) emotion and examined how high power influences pride (anger) when individuals have success (failure) as an outcome. Prior work revealed that high power leads individuals to have agentic orientation because those who have high power are less dependent on others due to the greater ability and freedom (Rucker et al. 2012). Agentic orientation results in “self-protection, self-assertion and self-expansion” (Bakan 1966, p. 14-15). Thus, individuals with high power will be more likely to attribute one’s success to them. According to self-agency appraisals, one feels pride when attributing positive outcomes to the self (Agrawal et al. 2013). Therefore, we posit that when facing a success, high (vs. low) power will lead to greater pride.

Study 1 examined the effects of power on anger when encountering the individual task failure to resolve the competing hypotheses. We predict that individuals in high (vs. low) power will be more likely to exhibit anger in the context of failure in the individual task. Although low (vs. high) power results in a more negative mood, we argue that high power may amplify the experience of anger when coupled with self-failure. It is because individuals in high power would be motivated to solve the negative events driving failure whereas those in low power would be less motivated (Keltner et al. 2003), and anger might help to solve the problem since it facilitates an effort to overcome the violation of what ought to be (Fischer and Roseman 2007). Participants were assigned to either the high or low power condition. We manipulated high (low) power by asking them to imagine to be a boss (employee) at a company. They read about the role and were instructed to vividly imagine that what it would be like to be in this role (Rucker, Dubois, and Galinsky 2011). After, all participants were asked to solve five insight problems and were informed that their score would be reported to them after completion. After 30 seconds of completion, all participants read that they failed the test. Next, participants indicated the degree to which they felt angry after learning about their test results (frustrated, angry, and irritated; Richins 1997). A one-way ANOVA with power as the independent variable and anger as the dependent variable revealed that
participants in the high power condition felt angry to a greater extent than did those in the low power condition \((p < .05)\).

Study 2 investigated whether an outcome of the task (i.e., success versus failure) moderates the effects of power on emotions. In this study, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Power: high vs. low) x 2 (Outcome: success vs. failure) between-participants design. The power manipulation was identical to that in Study 1. However, in the success condition, participants were told that they passed the test. A two-way ANOVA as power and outcome as the independent variables and anger as the dependent variable revealed a significant interaction \((p < .05)\). Simple contrasts revealed that in the failure condition, participants in the high (vs. low) power condition reported anger to a greater extent \((p < .05)\). However, in the success condition, there was no difference between high and low power conditions \((p > .7)\). In addition, a two-way ANOVA as power and outcome as the independent variables and pride as the dependent variable revealed a significant interaction \((p < .05)\). Simple contrasts revealed that in the success condition, participants in the high (vs. low) power condition reported pride to a greater extent \((p < .05)\). However, in the failure condition, there was no difference between high and low power conditions \((p > .2)\).

Overall, our findings contribute to the consumer literature by providing evidence to understand the relationship between power and consumer’s emotional responses to an outcome in a task as a function of the valence of the outcome.

**Captivated by Change:**

**A Motivational Consequence of Feeling Powerless**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

For generations, brands have used advertising appeals that position their products around change from the status quo. Apple’s iconic “1984” commercial introduced the Macintosh personal computer as a heroine that gave humanity an alternative to conventional computers. Yet, surprisingly, little research exists on factors that affect whether and when consumers are receptive to persuasive appeals that emphasize change.

In this work, we explore how a critical psychological factor—one’s sense of power—affects consumers’ response to the idea of change. Given the aversive nature of a low-power state (Rucker and Galinsky 2008), we propose that being in a state of low-power triggers a desire, even unbeknownst to consumers, for change. As a consequence, triggering a low-power state in consumers can increase consumers’ preferences for messages or products that signal the prospect for change over neutral ones or those that signal consistency. Moreover, we reveal this association is dependent upon consumers’ implicit theories of whether their current states will naturally change. The allure of change only holds for consumers who chronically believe, or have activated, the implicit theory that their current (low power) state will not change naturally (i.e., entity theorists). Consequently, they seek messages or products that signal change. We conducted five experiments to test the above hypotheses.

Experiment 1 tested the automatic link between a low-power state and enhanced evaluations of change-related constructs using an Implicit Association Test (IAT). We first manipulated high versus low power by asking participants to recall a previous personal experience in which they felt powerful or powerless (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003). Participants then completed a valence IAT (Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998; Richeson and Ambady 2003) in which they categorized words from four categories including change (e.g., alteration, adjustment, shift), stability (persistent, enduring, lasting), good (joy, love, peace), and bad (agony, terrible, horrible) in two main blocks of test trials. This study found that transient feelings of low power made change constructs evaluatively more positive and made stability constructs evaluatively more negative. This provides the first piece of evidence suggesting that a low-power state enhances the preference for things that symbolize change.

Experiment 2 investigated whether power affects conscious decisions that reveal a preference between change from the status quo and stability of the status quo. Power state was manipulated via the same power recall task as in experiment 1 and then reinforced by a Bonus Allocation Game in which participants played the role of either a powerful boss who made bonus allocation decisions for employees, or a powerless employee who indicated how much bonus she/he expected to get. In a subsequent consumer survey, participants saw twenty-seven adjectives that can describe the characteristics of suits, a third of which implied change-being different (i.e., trendy, up-to-date, recent), a third implied no change/staying the same (i.e., classic, standard, timeless), and a third were neutral (i.e., tidy, striped, lightweight). Participants were asked to check five adjectives that could best describe what they would find appealing if they were shopping for a new suit for themselves. The results revealed that participants placed in a low-power (compared to high-power) state chose more adjectives implying change/being different, fewer adjective implying no change/staying the same, and the same number of neutral adjectives.

Experiment 3a and 3b explored the moderating role of people’s implicit theory regarding the extent to which they believe their current states would change naturally. By both manipulating (experiment 3a) and measuring (experiment 3b) people’s implicit theory, we demonstrated that the influence of low-power states on preference for change-signaling messages emerges among entity theorists, but not among incremental theorists. In experiment 3a, participants were randomly assigned into one of four conditions with a 2 (power: high vs. low; between-subjects) x 2 (implicit theory: entity theory vs. incremental theory; between-subjects) x 2 (slogan theme: change vs. control; within-subjects) mixed design. To manipulate participants’ implicit theory, they read an excerpt from a news article, which supported either the entity theory or the incremental theory, and then wrote an essay to support the claims of the article (Park and John 2014). Participants’ high versus low power state was manipulated by the same power recall tasks. Finally, participants evaluated four slogans embedded in banner ads that were designed for two brands, IBM and Panasonic. For each brand, one slogan indicated change whereas the other was the control. We calculated a relative preference for change index by subtracting the average evaluations of two control slogans from the average evaluations of two change slogans. A greater value indicated a stronger preference for change slogans. Analyzing this relative preference for change index as a function of power and implicit theory in ANOVA yielded a significant power x implicit theory interaction. Planned contrasts indicated that primed entity theorists had a stronger preference for change slogans in the low-power condition than in the high-power condition. In contrast, among primed incremental theorists, power did not influence their preference for change slogans, ns. Experiment 3b used a similar design and measured participants’ implicit theory. The results replicated Experiment 3a.

A final experiment replicated the basic effect of low power on motivation to seek signals of change, and also showed as expected that the effect was specific to the aversive state of low power and did not emerge for a more malleable negative state (negative mood induction).
REFERENCES


