sciendo

Brand as a leader or a servant? The effect of anthropomorphized brand roles and goal types on consumer responses

Dipankar RAI
Le Moyne College, New York, USA
raid@lemoyne.edu

Chien-Wei (Wilson) LIN
The State University of New York at Oneonta, New York, USA
wilson.lin@oneonta.edu

Napatsorn JIRAPORN
The State University of New York at Oswego, New York, USA
napatsorn.jiraporn@oswego.edu

Panitharn JUNTONGJIN
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
panitharn@cbs.chula.ac.th

Abstract. *Using research from brand roles and goal pursuit as our theoretical framework, we find that the type of goal pursuit influences how consumers respond to the brand role of leader (i.e., leader brand) vs. servant (i.e., servant brand). Two experiments show that consumers in the goal attainment condition prefer a leader brand rather than a servant brand. In contrast, consumers in the goal progress condition show no difference in their preference for a leader brand or a servant brand. Mediation analyses show that the level of motivation mediates the effect of goal pursuit on consumers' preference for leader brands. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.*

Keywords: brand role, goal pursuit, goal progress, goal attainment.

Please cite the article as follows: Rai, D., Lin (Wilson), C-W., Jiraporn, N., Juntongjin, P. (2022), "Brand as a leader or a servant? The effect of anthropomorphized brand roles and goal types on consumer responses", Management & Marketing. Challenges for the Knowledge Society, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 471-484, DOI: 10.2478/mmcks-2022-0026.

Introduction

Marketers are increasingly using social roles to position brands to build relationships with consumers. Some brands present themselves as leaders (henceforth termed leader brands) where they position themselves as being superior to other brands and providing guidance to

their consumers (Huang et al., 2013). For instance, Garmin, the technology company, positions itself as a leader with the tagline "Follow the leader" with the objective of providing directions to the consumer. Alternatively, some brands present themselves as servants (henceforth termed as servant brands) where they position themselves as serving and assisting consumers. For instance, Google positions itself as a servant with the tagline "Make Google Do It" with the objective of assisting consumers.

Research in marketing has shown that consumers associate brands with these social roles, and their evaluation of brands can be influenced by the role the brand possesses (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007). For instance, servant brands are viewed positively by consumers who want to dominate in social relationships because they feel that servant brands provide them with the opportunity to dominate the brand (Kim and Kramer, 2015). Additionally, leader brands are viewed positively by consumers when such brands are visually presented above from the consumers as they feel that the high visual representation fits with the leader image of the brand (Huang et al., 2013). Although research has established the impact of leader and servant brand roles in consumer behavior, there is no research investigating how goal pursuit strategies impact the preference for these brand roles.

Many behaviors exhibited by consumers (e.g., opening a savings account) are part of their goal pursuit or a journey to reach the desired end state (e.g., money savings goal). Scholars have begun to conceptualize such consumer behaviors as goal pursuit since 1999 (see Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999 for an initial conceptual framework). Research in goal pursuit has explored multiple-goal domains ranging from financial goals (e.g., donation goal, money savings goal) to health goals (e.g., weight loss) (see Laran, 2016 for a summary article) and has shown that consumers use goals to determine which available products offer benefits that will satisfy their goals and plan how each product will be consumed in order to attain their goals (Bayuk et al., 2010). Research in goal striving shows that consumers' perceived goal progress may affect their goal pursuit motivations. For instance, if consumers feel that they have already made some good progress in a particular goal (e.g., savings goal), they may switch their focus and pay attention to other goals (e.g., relaxation through vacation) (Fishbach and Dhar, 2005). Although the goal literature has grown significantly in the past two decades, there has been no research examining how goal progress has an impact on consumers' preference for brand roles. Specifically, our research investigates how perceived goal progress impacts consumers' perception of brand roles in two different domains: weight goal and money savings goal. An understanding of branding strategies in these goal pursuit contexts is critical to the advancement of theory and provides practical insights to marketing practitioners and consumers. We find that consumers in goal attainment (those who are pursuing a goal) prefer a brand positioned as a leader as opposed to a servant. In contrast, consumers in goal progress condition (those who have already made some progress towards the goal) are indifferent between the two brand roles. Our findings in two experiments and two-goal domains support our hypotheses.

This research makes two important theoretical contributions. First, we make a significant contribution to the brand role literature by uncovering its effect in the context of consumer goal pursuit. Second, we also add to the growing literature on goal progress by showing that consumer behavior depends on their perceived goal progress stage. Our findings also provide a direct implication for consumers seeking motivation to achieve their weight and money savings goals.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: We begin to form our hypotheses by reviewing the relevant literature on brand roles and goal pursuit literature. Then we present our method and results of the two studies, followed by a general discussion of our findings. We conclude with our theoretical contributions and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Brand roles

Previous research in marketing shows that consumers use interpersonal norms when interacting with brands, assigning them different social roles (Fournier, 1998). Assigning social roles can humanize brands which makes consumers less likely to replace them (Chandler and Schwarz, 2010). Recent research has attracted interest in the roles of leaders and servants. For instance, Huang et al. (2013) find that consumers have a positive evaluation of a brand that is positioned as a leader when the brand is spatially located above and far from the image of the consumer. This finding occurs because consumers use spatial relationships to figure out relationships. Since the vertical location of objects leads to a differential perception of the power difference, objects located higher are considered powerful (Meier and Dionne, 2009). Therefore, consumers have a positive evaluation of a brand with a leader role that is located above their image, as they prefer a leader brand to be powerful and able to provide guidance. Furthermore, Kim and Kramer (2015) find that consumers have a positive evaluation of a brand that is positioned as a servant when consumers feel the need to dominate in their relationships. Furthermore, consumers expect servant brands to be competent (Dong and Aggarwal, 2016) and believe that servant brands are suited to satisfy their needs (Hsieh et al., 2021).

Our research adds to the understanding of brand roles by investigating how brand roles impact consumers when they are in pursuit of their goals. The next section discusses extant literature on goal pursuit and our hypotheses.

Goal striving consumers

Consumers pursue goals when they engage in behaviors or perform tasks in order to accomplish the desired state (e.g., exercise to lose weight). Research in goals broadly classifies goals into two types: conscious vs. unconscious goal pursuit (Laran, 2016). When consumers set a goal or are aware of the goal (e.g., to lose weight), the goal is considered to be a conscious goal. When consumers engage in behaviors related to a goal without being aware of such a goal, the goal is considered to be an unconscious goal. For example, driving under the speed limit is behavior towards a safety goal, but many people drive under the speed limit anyway without the safety goal being salient in their minds. In this research, our emphasis is on consumers' conscious goals where they are well aware of their goal pursuit and the goals are salient to them.

Research in conscious goal pursuit suggests that a goal is active for consumers when they are aware of the discrepancy between their current state (e.g., their current weight) and their desired state (e.g., their target weight). Consumers often monitor their performance and use their progress or setback to plan their subsequent behavior (Locke and Latham1991). The inference that consumers make about their performance can influence their motivation, behaviors, and ultimately their product preferences. Extant research in the domain of goal progress has mixed findings on whether goal progress helps or hurts individuals in goal pursuit. On the one hand, research has shown that having less progress toward a goal can

lead to a higher motivation to pursue the goal (Fishbach and Dhar, 2005). For instance, in the domain of personal and relationship goals, goals that had high priority were goals where people did not make satisfactory progress (Fitzsimons and Fishbach0). On the other hand, the goal gradient hypothesis suggests that people expend more effort as they have made progress towards a goal. For example, people purchased coffee more frequently as they are closer to the reward of getting a free cup of coffee (Kivetz et al., 2006). More recently, research has shown that at the beginning of goal pursuit, people who directed attention to the small progress they made so far reported higher goal adherence than people who focused on the remaining distance toward the goal (Koo and Fishbach, 2012). However, when people were closer to the goal, focusing attention on the remaining small distance to the goal helped increase the goal adherence than focusing on the past progress. Therefore, people are motivated differently according to their stage of goal pursuit.

We suggest that people will react to brand roles differentially based on their stage of goal pursuit. Specifically, people who are in the initial stage of goal pursuit (i.e., the goal attainment condition) are usually highly motivated to make some progress toward the goal because they have made no or little progress and are eager to move closer to the desired state (Fishbach and Dhar, 2005). However, since they have made little or no progress on their goal, they may consider themselves novices without enough experience and need external help to guide them through the process. Research in brand roles has shown that a leader brand role is perceived as an expert, able to guide, and direct consumers (Meier and Dionne, 2009; Fitzsimons et al., 2008). On the other hand, brands with a servant role are perceived as brands that assist consumers, catering to consumers' desires and working for them (Kim and Kramer, 2015). Since consumers in the goal attainment condition are looking for a guide and a leader brand is perceived as a brand that is able to guide them, we propose that consumers in the goal attainment condition will prefer leader brands to servant brands. On the other hand, consumers in the final stages of their goal pursuit (i.e., in the goal progress condition) are complacent and less motivated because they have almost reached the goal (Fishbach and Dhar, 2005). Therefore, we propose that these consumers in the goal progress condition are indifferent in their preference for leader vs. servant brands because they feel that they don't need any external help to reach their goal. Therefore, using the extant literature that differentiated the goal progress from the initial goal pursuit stage as our theoretical foundation (Fishbach and Dhar, 2005; Harkin et al., 2016; Kivetz et al., 2006; Koo and Fishbach, 2012), we propose that

H1a: Consumers in the goal attainment condition will prefer a brand with a leader role than a brand with a servant role.

H1b: Consumers in the goal-progress condition will not differ in their evaluation between a brand with a leader role and a brand with a servant role.

We propose that the underlying mechanism that drives the interactive effect of the two-goal types and the brand roles on consumer response is the level of motivation consumers have when pursuing the goal. Koo and Fishbach (2012) show that consumers report a lower level of goal adherence when they direct their attention to the significant progress that they have made than to the remaining progress towards the goal. In other words, people in the goal progress condition may have less motivation because of the

significant progress they have made in their goal attainment. However, people in the goal attainment condition are motivated because they have not made enough progress and are looking to move forward in achieving their goals. Therefore, consumers in the goal attainment condition are motivated to achieve their goals and are looking for leaders to help them achieve their goals. However, consumers in the goal progress condition feel that they have already achieved so much of their goal that they are less motivated and do not need any external help to reach their goal. Therefore, we propose that consumers in the goal progress condition are less motivated than consumers in the goal attainment condition, and this level of motivation leads to variation in their differential evaluation of brand roles of leader and servant. In other words, we hypothesize that

H2: The interactive effect of the brand role and goal type on the preference of brand roles is mediated by the level of motivation.

Study 1

To test our hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2, we constructed a 2 (goal type: goal attainment vs. goal progress) X 2 (brand role: leader vs. servant) between-subjects condition. We manipulated both goal type and brand role and used weight loss goal to test our hypotheses in study 1.

Method

A sample of 185 adults was recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk) to participate in this online survey for a compensation of 70 cents. The survey was posted on December 7th, 2019 and was restricted to US workers with at least a 98% approval rating. We excluded six participants from the analyses because they failed the attention check question (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). The final sample consisted of 179 participants (45% female; Mage = 42).

Each participant reported their current height and weight and then was assigned to one of the two goal-type conditions. We followed a similar procedure and manipulations used in the prior literature (Jiraporn and Desai, 2011; Fishbach and Dhar, 2005). Specifically, in the goal attainment condition, participants read a scenario in which they imagined that they had to lose 20% of their weight. In the goal progress condition, participants read a scenario where they imagined that they had to lose 20% of their weight and they had already reached 75% of their goal, i.e., they had already lost 15% of the weight. The online survey platform showed the percentages of their reported weight by converting the percentage into the number of pounds for participants' ease of understanding. Next, we checked if our goal-type manipulations were successful in eliciting the two goal type conditions. We did so by asking them to report their willingness to pursue the goal by responding to the question: "How willing are you to pursue this goal to lose your weight to the recommended level?" (1 = very unwilling, 9 = very willing). The participants were then thanked for their participation and asked to complete a different survey.

In a new survey, participants viewed an advertisement for a fitness app for mobile devices. Participants either saw the app with a leader brand role or a servant brand role. The ad with a leader role emphasized how the app works like a "mentor guiding your exercising path" and like "a leader that always inspires you" (Meier and Dionne, 2009), whereas the ad with a servant role emphasized how the app works like "an assistant serving your exercising

path" and like "a servant" that "does it all for you" (Kim and Kramer, 2015). The stimuli for both the brand roles are provided in Appendix A. After reading the information about the app, participants reported their likelihood to adopt the app (1 = not at all likely to adopt, 9 = very likely to adopt). We also measured participants' level of motivation by scale items such as: "How motivated do you feel if you adopt this fitness application" (1 = no motivated at all, 9 = very motivated; adopted from Aaker et al., 2012). Participants also rated their agreement about their brand role perceptions which measured the effectiveness of the brand role manipulations. Specifically, participants answered the two-scale items: "To what extent do you think the app is represented as a servant (i.e., one who will work for me to achieve my goal) to you",(1 = not at all, 9 = very much) and "To what extent do you think the app is represented as a leader (i.e., one who will lead me to achieve my goal) to you," (1 = not at all, 9 = very much) (adapted from Kim and Kramer, 2015). Finally, participants provided their age, gender, and income. Since none of these variables affected the results (all *ps* > .10), we do not discuss these variables further.

Results

Manipulation checks

To check whether the weight loss goal was a legitimate goal for our participants, we calculated their body mass index based on the weight and height they provided. Across all four conditions of goal type X brand role, the average BMIs are 28.2, 26.6, 26.5, and 27.5, respectively. These BMI numbers do not vary significantly across conditions, but they all fall in the overweight range based on the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Therefore, the goal of losing weight could be one of the goals our participants have considered or are considering in their lives. To ensure that our goal condition appropriately motivated participants' willingness to pursue the goal, we measured their willingness to pursue the weight loss goal. The results showed that participants from both the conditions were equally willing to pursue the weight loss goal ($M_{attainment}$ = 7.83, $M_{progress}$ = 7.78, p >.1, and both p values < .01 when compared to the midpoint of the scale M = 5 ($M_{attainment}$: t = 16.15; $M_{progress}$: t = 17.20).

To check whether the leader and servant brand roles were successfully manipulated, we conducted a t-test on both the partner perception and servant perception for participants in the leader role condition and those in the servant role condition. As expected, participants in the leader role condition rated the application to be represented as a leader than a servant (M_{leader} = 6.05 vs. $M_{servant}$ = 4.71, t = -4.03, p < .01), whereas participants in the servant role condition rated the application to be represented as a servant than a leader ($M_{servant}$ = 6.37 vs. M_{leader} = 4.20, t = 5.83, p < .01). Therefore, our brand role manipulation worked as intended.

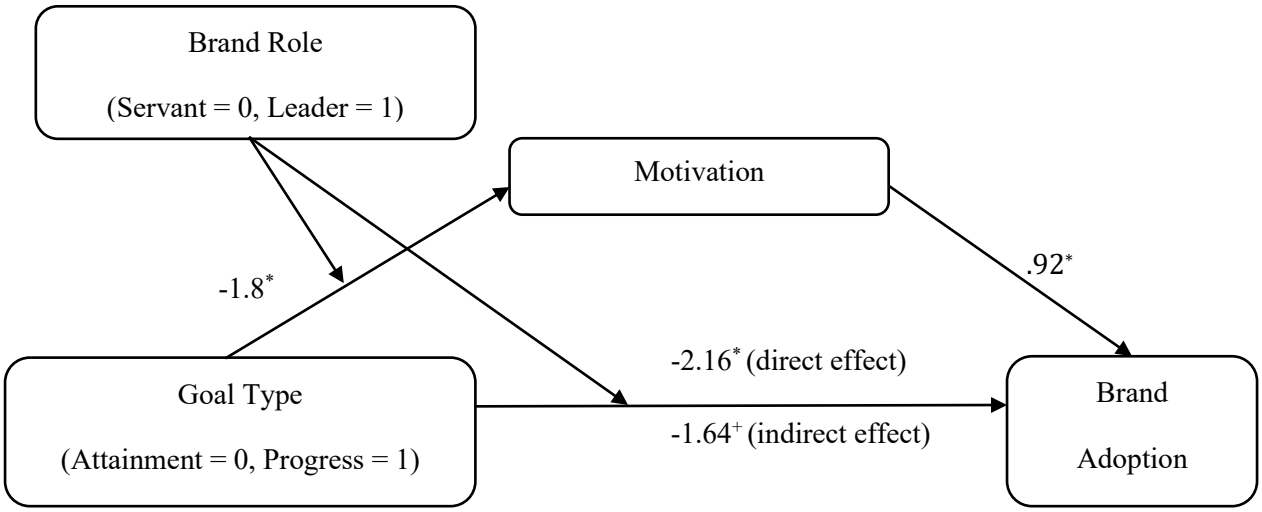
Brand adoption.

We conducted a 2 (goal attainment vs. goal progress) X 2 (leader vs. servant) ANOVA to test our prediction. As predicted, the results revealed the significant interaction effect between goal type and brand role (F (1, 175) = 8.07, p < .01, η^2 = .04) and the marginal significant main effect of goal type (F (1, 175) = 2.95, p = .09) and insignificant main effect of brand role (F (1, 175) = .97, p > .3). Participants in the goal attainment condition were more likely to adopt a leader brand than a servant brand (M_{leader} = 5.80 vs. $M_{servant}$ = 4.35, F (1, 85) = 8.14, p < .01), providing support for hypothesis 1a. Participants in the goal progress condition were equally

likely to adopt both the brand roles (M_{leader} = 4.07 vs. $M_{servant}$ = 4.78, F (1, 90) = 1.58, p > .2), providing support for hypothesis 1b.

Mediation analysis.

We conducted a moderated mediation analysis (independent variable = goal type, moderator = brand role, mediator = motivation, dependent variable = brand adoption; Hayes, 2017, Model 8) to test whether motivation mediated the interactive effect of goal type and brand role. As expected, the analysis revealed a 95% confidence interval of the index of moderated mediation that did not include zero (β = -1.64, standard error [SE] = .68, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [-2.96, -.34]), confirming the moderated mediation. Importantly, the analysis showed that goal types (goal attainment (0) vs. goal progress (1)) affect the adoption of the leader brand through their level of motivation (β = -1.6; SE = .46, 95% CI = [-2.49, -.7]). We found no mediating effect for servant brand adoption, as the 95% confidence interval included zero (β = .04, SE = .5, 95% CI = [-.94, 1.04]). Figure 1 illustrates the model. In other words, participants in the goal attainment (vs. goal progress) condition reported higher motivation, which led them to prefer a leader brand. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.



** p < .01, + p < .1*

Figure 1. Moderated Mediation Model (Study 1)

Discussion

Study 1 shows that participants in the goal attainment condition preferred leader brands more than servant brands, whereas participants in the goal progress condition equally preferred leader brands and partner brands. Additionally, participants in the goal attainment condition preferred leader brands more than servant brands because their motivation level was higher than participants in the goal progress condition. Although this study provides initial support for our hypotheses, it is not without limitations. Since our findings could be specific to weight-related goals, we cannot generalize our findings to other domains. To test for the generalization of our findings, we used a different goal domain, the money savings goal.

Study 2

The purpose of this study was to establish the generalizability of our findings. Therefore, we used a different goal domain, participants' money savings goal, to test for the generalizability of our hypotheses.

Method

A sample of 190 adults was recruited through Mturk to participate in this online survey for a compensation of 70 cents. The survey was posted on July 24th, 2020 and was restricted to US workers with at least a 98% approval rating. We excluded four participants from the analyses because they failed the attention check question. The final sample consisted of 186 participants (55% female; Mage = 39).

We used a 2 (goal type: goal attainment vs. goal progress) X 2 (brand role: leader vs. servant role) between-subject design. The procedure was similar to Study 1 except that the goal type was a money savings goal. Specifically, in the first study, participants were randomly assigned to either the goal attainment or the goal progress condition. In the goal attainment condition, participants imagined that they had set a goal to save 5% of their annual income. In the goal progress condition, they had a goal to save 5% but they had already reached 75% of their goal, i.e., made ¾ progress toward the goal. Participants were thanked and asked to participate in a new study.

In a new survey, participants viewed an advertisement for a savings app for mobile devices. Participants either saw the app with a leader brand role or a servant brand role. The brand role stimuli are similar to those of study 1 but the stimuli were those of a mobile application that facilitates budget management and money savings. The ad with a leader role emphasized how the app worked as a "mentor guiding your saving path" and as "a leader that always inspires you", whereas the ad with a servant role emphasized how the app works like "an assistant serving your saving path" and like "a servant" that "does it all for you" (see the stimuli in the appendix B). Participants then responded to the same brand adoption, motivation, and manipulation checks questions as in Study 1. Finally, we collected demographic information (gender, age, and income level) from participants. Since neither their main effects nor their interactions with the independent variables of goal type and brand role were significant, (*ps* > .10), we do not discuss them further.

Results

Manipulation checks.

Similar to Study 1, participants reported their willingness to pursue the savings goal. Results show that participants in both the goal conditions were equally willing to pursue the savings goal ($M_{attainment}$ = 7.68, $M_{progress}$= 7.66; $p > .1$, and both p values < .01 when compared to the midpoint of the scale M = 5 ($M_{attainment}$: t = 15.95; $M_{progress}$: t = 14.64).

Next, we checked whether the leader and servant brand roles were successfully manipulated. As expected, participants in the leader role condition rated the application to be represented as a leader than a servant (M_{leader} = 6.55 vs. $M_{servant}$ = 5.58, t = -2.95, $p < .01$), whereas participants in the servant role condition rated the application to be represented as a servant than a leader ($M_{servant}$ = 6.55 vs. M_{leader} = 4.82, t = 5.02, p < .01). Therefore, our brand role manipulation worked as intended.

Brand adoption.

As we hypothesized, the 2 (goal attainment vs. goal progress) X 2 (leader vs. servant) ANOVA showed the significant interaction effect between goal type and brand role ($F(1, 183) = 4.78$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). The main effects of the goal type and brand role were insignificant (*ps* > .1). The interaction effect remained significant when the analysis included participants' income level as a covariate ($F(1, 182) = 5.16$, $p < .05$). Participants in the goal attainment condition were more likely to adopt the brand with a leader role than the brand with a servant role ($M_{leader} = 6.46$ vs. $M_{servant} = 5.1$, $F(1, 94) = 8.4$, $p < .01$). Participants in the goal progress condition were indifferent between the two brand roles ($M_{leader} = 5.54$ vs. $M_{servant} = 5.76$, $F(1, 89) = .16$, $p > .6$). Hence, this finding successfully replicated the results of study 1 and provided support for both H1a and H1b.

Mediation analysis.

Similar to Study 1, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis (independent variable = goal type, moderator = brand role, mediator = motivation, dependent variable = brand adoption; Hayes, 2017, Model 8) to test whether the motivation mediated the interactive effect of goal type and brand role. As expected, analysis revealed a 95% confidence interval in the index of moderated mediation that did not include zero (β = -1.48, SE = .57, 95% CI = [-2.61, -.34]), confirming the moderated mediation. The analysis showed that goal types (goal attainment (0) vs. goal progress (1)) affects the adoption of the leader brand through their level of motivation (β = -.92; SE = .37, 95% CI = [-1.62, -.17]). We found no mediating effect for servant brand adoption, as the 95% confidence interval included zero (β = .56, SE = .44, 95% CI = [-.31, 1.41]). Figure 2 illustrates the model. Thus, Hypotheses 2 was again statistically supported.

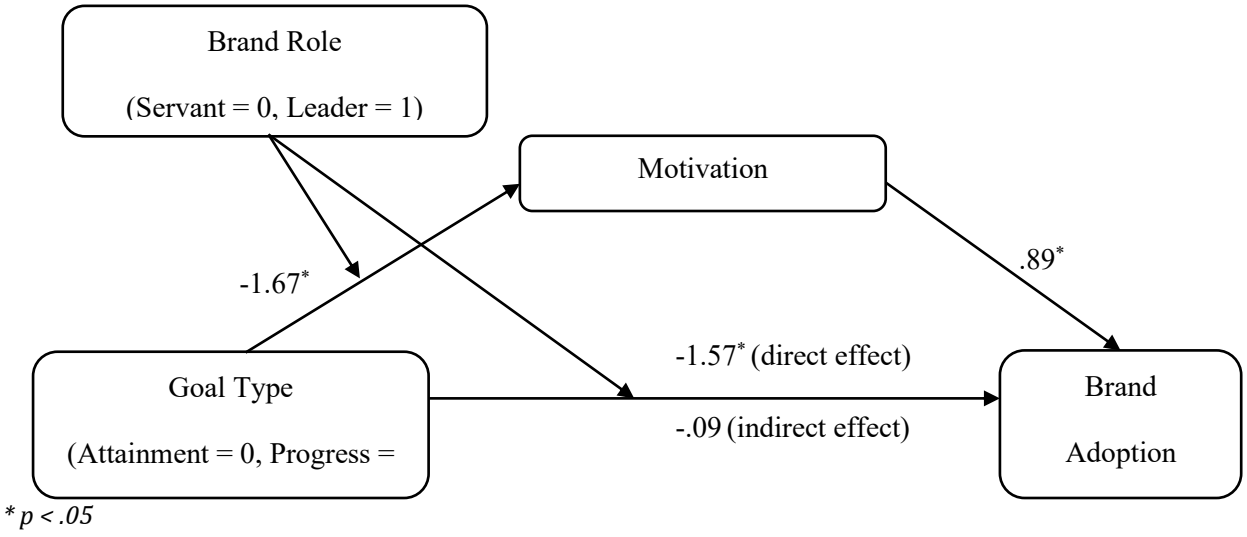


Figure 2. Moderated Mediation Model (Study 2)

Discussion

The above findings show that goal pursuit type influences consumers' preference for different brand roles. We find that goal attainment motivates consumers to prefer a leader brand to a servant brand and this effect does not exist for consumers who are in goal progress condition. Furthermore, we find that motivation mediates this effect. Specifically, goal attainment leads consumers to prefer a leader brand because they are highly motivated to achieve their goals.

General discussion

In this research, we uncovered the differences in consumer evaluation of brand roles based on their differential goal pursuits. We find that consumers in their initial stage of pursuit (goal attainment condition) prefer a leader brand to a servant brand. However, this effect dissipates for consumers who have felt that they made a lot of progress towards their goal (goal progress condition). This effect occurs because consumers in the goal attainment condition are more motivated to reach their goal than consumers in the goal progress condition. Because consumers in the goal attainment condition are motivated, they are looking for a brand that provides guidance to reach their goal. This need is satisfied by a leader brand. Our findings reiterate how characteristics of consumers such as their goal pursuit strategies, may influence their evaluation of various brand roles. Our findings are consistent with prior research (Han et al., 2020; Lin and Rai, 2016) which shows that depending upon consumers' characteristics affect how they respond to brand roles. Further research is needed to uncover other potential consumer characteristics that could drive these preferences.

Theoretical and managerial implications

Our research offers several important contributions. Research in self-regulation has investigated factors how the type of goal pursuit influences consumer behavior (Bayuk et al., 2010). Our findings add to this research by identifying different types of brand roles as an important variable to consider when investigating consumer behavior. Specifically, across two studies, we find that participants vary in their preferred brand roles without exerting any real effort of taking any concrete action to pursue the goal. In other words, we show that merely perceiving goal progress is sufficient to drive consumers to vary their brand role preferences. Therefore, our finding offers a novel and strong linkage between brand roles and goal pursuit.

Our findings provide important practical implications for marketers. First, our finding suggests that marketers need to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to brand roles may not be successful. Marketers need to recognize that consumers in different stages of their goal pursuit may have different preferences for brand roles. Therefore, marketers can improve the effectiveness of their brand roles by customizing their brand roles based on the type of goal pursuit strategies held by consumers. Since we show that consumers in a goal attainment mindset prefer leader brands to servant brands, marketers could use this knowledge to their advantage. Specifically, marketers can identify consumers who are in the initial stages of goal pursuit and ensure that they present their brands as leaders to these consumers. Furthermore, the mechanism underlying the effect provides marketers with interesting insights for marketing strategies. Specifically, we find that

consumers in the goal attainment mindset prefer leader brands because they are highly motivated to reach their goals. Marketers can identify consumers who have a high level of motivation to reach their goals and present their brands as leaders to motivate these consumers to use their brands.

Limitations and future research

Even though this research has important implications both for theory and practice, it is not without limitations. First, this research investigated brand role preference in the context of weight loss goals and money savings goals. Future research could test the generalizability of our findings by investigating the influence of goal pursuit and brand roles on other consumption domains such as academic goals, dieting goals, self-improvement goals, etc. Future research could also investigate the boundary conditions of this influence. For example, future research could investigate how perceived expertise and self-esteem in achieving the goal moderates the impact of goal pursuit on brand role preference. Specifically, since perceived expertise and self-esteem may make consumers feel confident that they can easily achieve their goals, they may not feel the need for leader brands to provide them any guidance. Furthermore, a longitudinal study in which participants exert their effort to pursue a goal over time would reflect more realistic behaviors and preferences of consumers than online lab experiments. Finally, future research can examine other brand roles, such as friends and partners. Pursuing these lines of inquiry could provide much-needed insights into the role that goal pursuit and brand roles play in influencing consumer behavior.

References

Aaker, J. L., Garbinsky, E.N., & Vohs, K.D. (2012). "Cultivating admiration in brands: warmth, competence, and landing in the "golden quadrant". *Journal of consumer psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 191-194.

Aggarwal, P. and McGill, A.L. (2007), "Is that car smiling at me? Schema congruity as a basis for evaluating anthropomorphized products." *Journal Consumer Research,* Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 468-479.

Bagozzi, R.P., and Dholakia, U. (1999), "Goal setting and goal striving in consumer behavior." *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 19-32.

Bayuk, J.B., Janiszewski, C., and Leboeuf, R. (2010), "Letting good opportunities pass us by: examining the role of mind-set during goal pursuit*." Journal Consumer Research*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 570-583.

Chandler, S. and Schwarz, N. (2010), "Use does not wear the fabric of friendship: thinking of objects as alive makes people less willing to replace them." *Journal of Consumer Psychology,* Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 138-145.

Dong, P. and Aggarwal, P. (2016). "Partner or servant? When relationship type affects trait expectations and evaluations of the brand". *ACR North American Advances.*

Fitzsimons, G., Chartrand, T.L., and Fitzsimons G.J. (2008), "Automatic effects of brand exposure on notivated behavior: how apple makes you 'think different'." *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 21-35.

Fitzsimons, G. and Fishbach, A. (2010), "Shifting closeness: Interpersonal effects of personal goal progress." *Attitude and Social Cognition*, Vol. 98, No. 4, pp. 535-549.

Fishbach, A. and Dhar, R. (2005), "Goals as excuses or guides: the liberating effect of perceived goal progress on choice." *Journal Consumer Research,* Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 370-377.

Fournier, S. (1998), "Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research*." Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 343-373.

Han, B., Wang, L., and Li, X. (2020), "To collaborate or serve? Effects of anthropomorphized brand roles and implicit theories on consumer responses." *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 53-67.

Harkin, B., Webb, T.L., Chang, B.P.I., Prestwich, A., Conner, M., Kellar, I., Benn, Y., and Sheeran, P. (2016), "Does monitoring goal progress promote goal attainment? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence." *Psychological Bulletin,* Vol. 142, No. 2, pp. 198-229.

Hayes, A.F. (2017). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. The Guilford Press, New York, NY.

Huang, X., Li, X., and Zhang, M. (2013), "Seeing' the social roles of brands: how physical positioning influences brand evaluation." *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 509-514.

Hsieh, M.H., Li, X.B., Jain, S.P., & Swaminathan, V. (2021). "Self-construal drives preference for partner and servant brands." *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 129, pp. 183-192.

Jiraporn, N. and Desai, K.K. (2011). "Maintenance versus attainment goals: Influence of self-regulation goal type on goal pursuit behaviors." *ACR North American Advances*.

Kim, H.C. and Kramer, T. (2015), "Do materialists prefer the 'brand-as-servant"? The interactive effect of anthropomorphized brand roles and materialism on consumer response." *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 284-299.

Kivetz, R., Urminsky, O., and Zheng, Y. (2006), "The goal-gradient hypothesis Resurrected: purchase acceleration, Illusion Goal Progress, and Customer Retention." *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 39-58.

Koo M. and Fishbach, A. (2012), "The small-area hypothesis: Effects of progress monitoring on goal adherence." *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 493-509.

Laran, J. (2016), "Consumer goal pursuit", *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 10, pp. 22-26.

Lin, C.W. and Rai, D. (2016). Work with me or for me: the influence of implicit self-theories on the preference of anthropomorphized products. *ACR North American Advances*.

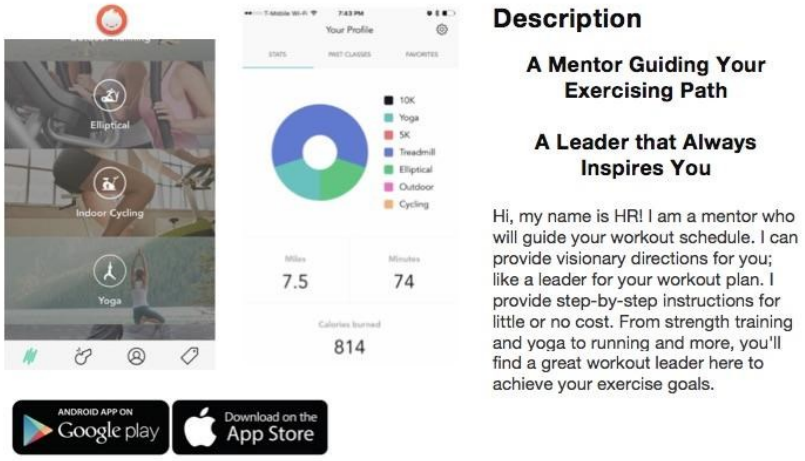
Locke, E. and Latham, G. (1991), "Self-Regulation through goal setting." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 212-247.

Meier, B.P., and Dionne, S. (2009). "Downright sexy: verticality, implicit power, and perceived physical attractiveness." *Social Cognition,* Vol. 27, No. 6, pp. 883–892.

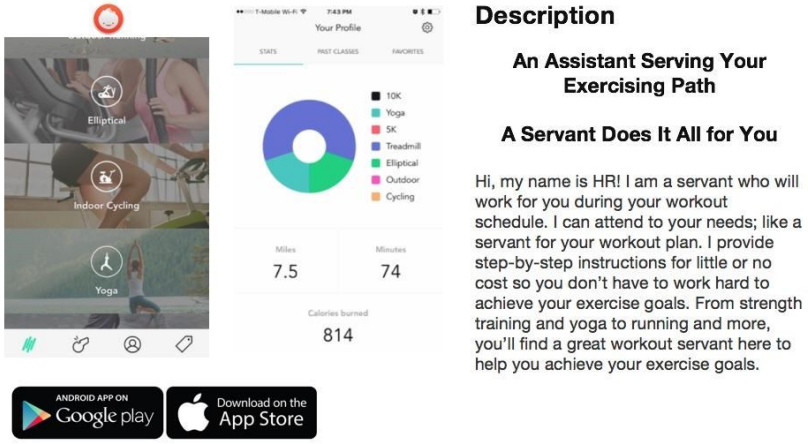
Oppenheimer, D.M., Meyvis, T., & Davidenko, N. (2009). Instructional manipulation checks: Detecting satisficing to increase statistical power. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 867-872.

Appendix A: Study 1 Brand role scenario

Leader role scenario

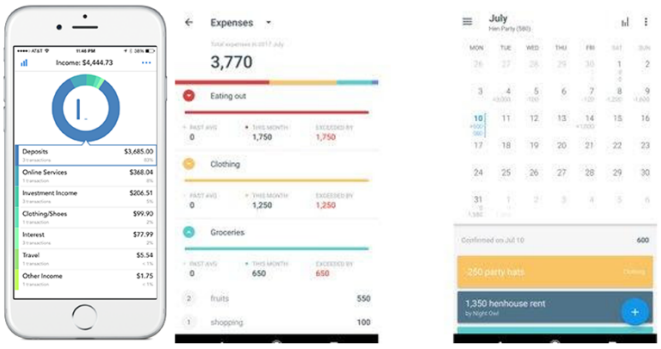


Servant role scenario



Appendix B: Study 2 Brand Role Scenario

Leader role scenario

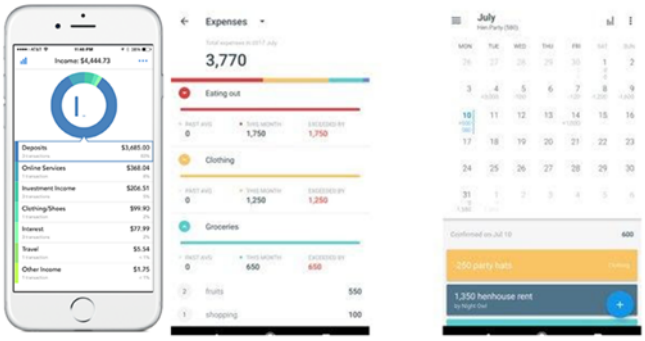


A Mentor Guiding Your Saving Path

A Leader that Always Inspires You

Hi, my name is Wally! I am a mentor who will guide your saving schedule. I provide visionary directions and lessons for reducing fees and saving money. I can guide you to think more intelligently about credit cards and learn what you can do with your money and allocate money for savings; like a leader for your savings plan. So you follow my lead, you save money faster. From budgeting to checking bills and more, you'll find a great leader here to achieve your saving goals.

Servant role scenario



An Assistant Serving Your Saving Path

A Servant Does It All for You

Hi, my name is Wally! I am an assistant who will serve and work for you. I look at your current income and expenditures and then calculate what you can save. I do the thinking and acting on saving money for you so I take the effort off your shoulders; like a servant for your saving plan. So you don't have to work as hard to save money fast. From budgeting to checking bills and more, you'll find a great servant here to achieve your saving goals.