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It's Good to Be Different: How Diversity Impacts Judgments of Moral Behavior

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A firm is often represented to consumers and other stakeholders by a small set of its leadership team. We investigate how the composition of this team impacts consumer judgments about the moral character and behavior of the team and the firm. We find that teams that are diverse in terms of race, gender, or nationality are perceived by consumers to be of higher moral character and likely to engage in more principled behavior. We demonstrate that the positive judgments of the diverse teams' ethical conduct are shaped by perceptions of more perspective-taking within the group. The enhanced perceptions of a firm's morality in turn yield positive consumer responses such as attitudes, purchase intentions, choice, and contribution to charities. By showing that team characteristics shape consumer perceptions of team morality, we contribute to the literature on teams and diversity in three substantial ways. First, prior literature mainly examines how team composition impacts coordination, creativity, and performance. We identify perceived morality to be an important consequence of team composition. Second, prior research has examined how consumers' perceptions and behavior change with their own group composition or social surroundings. We illustrate how group characteristics impact an observing

consumer's perception of the group's morality. Third, we show that observers make inferences about perspective-taking within a group using diversity as a gauge. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, this article is the first to establish a link between diversity and the perceived morality of market actors. Substantively, we contribute to the literature on brand crisis, product harm, and consumer social responsibility by establishing team composition as a method to influence consumer judgments. Besides being important from a social equity perspective and providing a firm with potentially objective benefits of multiple perspectives, diversity can preemptively temper negative consumer reactions in morally sensitive environments.

Doing Relationship Work: A Theory of Change in Consumer–Brand Relationships

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Even though a substantial stream of research has examined consumer-brand relationships, we still know little about the dynamic nature of brand relationships as they unfold over time at the hands of consumers (MacInnis and Folkes 2017). To address this gap, the present work leverages in-depth, longitudinal interviews with consumers who interact with a brand in a technology-mediated context. A relational paradox lens emerges from analysis of these data as a valid basis from which to theorize change processes, suggesting core constructs of relational tensions, consumer actions and patterns of relationship change, relationship work, and relational outcomes. Consumer actions show how consumers navigate relational tensions in a way that promotes qualitatively distinct patterns of relationship change (i.e., equilibrium, transformation, vicious cycles, and conflict), expanding our understanding of consumer-brand relationship trajectories (Fournier 1998). The concept of “relationship work,” inducted from our data in

dialogue with different research streams (Fletcher 1999; Oliner 1989; Watts 1989; Zelizer 2005), brings the empirical process model together by illuminating how consumers build, shape, and terminate brand relationships, while also suggesting the value of a paradox lens to these theories. Our findings also contribute to a broader literature that explores consumers' active role with brands (Epp, Schau, and Price 2014; Keller 2020; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006) by offering a specific explanation of how individual consumers enable and disable their brand relationships. This research has implications for current theories on brand relationship templates, dysfunctional brand relationships, and customer relationship management.

Online Advertising Suppresses Visual Competition during Planned Purchase

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Consumers may fail to make their planned purchases when it is hard to find the product they decided to buy on cluttered shopping websites. This research tests the hypothesis that online advertising speeds up product search and thus support planned purchases, by visually suppressing competing products rather than enhancing the target product on websites that lack a systematic visual organization of products. Support for this hypothesis is of theoretical and managerial importance. Much is known about how online ads displayed on a website impact consumers' behavior as reflected in clickstream data. However, online advertising may also improve search for a product on shopping websites, and much less is known about this. Seven studies aim to help closing this knowledge gap and test our hypothesis. First, a survey supports the prevalence of the phenomenon: close to 90 percent of consumers report having searched for

products on a shopping website after having clicked on an online ad. Second, an experiment reveals that our hypothesis goes against lay theories: the majority of consumers predicted that online ads do not affect product search, and that, if they would, the effect would be independent of shopping website design. Three eye-tracking and two search-time experiments support our hypothesis that online ads containing an image of the product speed up search, when the shopping website is cluttered with competing products. We develop a new eye-tracking measure that can be readily used to capture the effects. Our results demonstrate that online advertising speeds up search by about 25 percent, mostly due to faster competitor rejection rather than faster target acceptance. Two search-time experiments replicate the effects under incentive compatible conditions. This research, therefore, reveals how online ads help consumers to implement their choice intentions by suppressing the competition, and how our new eye tracking-based measures can detect this.