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Francesca Gino

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# Symbolic Consumption and Alternative Signals of Status

A dissertation presented

by

Silvia Bellezza

to

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Anat Keinan Silvia Bellezza

Symbolic Consumption and Alternative Signals of Status

Abstract

My dissertation is composed of three papers on symbolic consumption–how consumers use products, brands, and time to express who they are and signal status. The first paper (Brand Tourists: How Non–Core Users Enhance the Brand Image by Eliciting Pride) demonstrates the positive impact of non-core users of a prestige brand perceived as "brand tourists" into the brand community. The second paper (The Red Sneakers Effect: Inferring Status and Competence from Signals of Nonconformity) investigates the conditions under which nonconforming behaviors, such as wearing red sneakers in a professional setting, can act as a particular form of conspicuous consumption and lead to positive inferences of status and competence in the eyes of others. The third paper (Conspicuous Consumption of Time: When Busyness and Lack of Leisure Time Become a Status Symbol) further extends this line of investigation on alternative signals of status by uncovering the role of long hours of work and lack of leisure time as a status symbol. I conclude with a discussion of current working papers and future research agenda on symbolic consumption and branding.

Contents

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# Brand Tourists: How Non-Core Users Enhance the Brand Image by Eliciting Pride

SILVIA BELLEZZA

ANAT KEINAN

## Abstract

This research examines how core consumers of selective brands react when non-core users obtain access to the brand. Contrary to the view that non-core users and downward brand extensions pose a threat to the brand, this work investigates the conditions under which these non-core users enhance rather than dilute the brand image. A distinction between two types of non-core users based on how they are perceived by current users of core products is introduced: "brand immigrants" who claim to be part of the in-group of core users of the brand and "brand tourists" who do not claim any membership status to the brand community. A series of studies shows that core consumers respond positively to non-core users when they are perceived as brand tourists. The brand tourism effect is mediated by core users' pride and moderated by brand patriotism and selectiveness of the brand.

There is an inherent trade-off in managing symbolic and exclusive brands. Brand managers need to generate growth by extending the customer base to new segments and new markets; yet, this increased popularity and prevalence can paradoxically hurt the brand and threaten its symbolic value. For instance, the popularity of Tiffany's highly profitable and fast growing line of cheaper silver jewelry threatened to alienate the brand's older and wealthier clients and to damage its reputation for luxury. Burberry displayed its iconic tan plaid on multiple products and brand extensions, and struggled with the resulting overexposure (Byron 2007). Other notorious examples of brands that stumbled while trying to satisfy both investors' clamor for sales growth and customers' demand for exclusivity include Pierre Cardin, who became too common for many high-fashion customers (Andrews 2004), and Gucci, whose product line grew to 22,000 items, but eventually managed to re-focus the brand (Galloni 2005).

Indeed, consumer research warns managers of brand dilution risks (for a review see Loken and Roedder John 2009). Consumers of exclusive brands, as members of a selective in-group, want to limit the number and type of consumers who have access to the brand and also want to maintain the brand's distinctiveness (Amaldoss and Jain 2005; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010). The value of brands can be diluted when firms engage in aggressive brand extension strategies (Keller 2009; Kirmani, Sood and Bridges 1999) and when undesired outsiders start using the brand (Berger and Heath 2008; White and Dahl 2007).

Contrary to the shared view that downward brand extensions and non-core users are by definition a threat to exclusive brands and that the prestige of the brand community decreases with the number of users, we investigate the conditions under which non-core consumers can enhance rather than dilute the prestige image of the brand. Our conceptualization integrates several research streams in psychology and marketing and establishes an analogy between countries and brands. Building on this analogy, we introduce a distinction between two types of

users of non-core products based on how they are perceived by current users of the core offering of the brand. We define "brand immigrants" as those who claim to be part of the in-group of core users of the brand and "brand tourists" as those who buy the non-core branded products but do not claim any in-group membership (i.e., do not claim to be part of the brand core users' in-group).

We argue that non-core consumers perceived as brand tourists rather than brand immigrants can prevent brand dilution and positively impact the image of the brand in the eyes of the core users of the brand. Non-core users who are perceived by the current core users as claiming in-group status (i.e., brand immigrants) pose a threat to the brand and dilute the brand image. In contrast, when these non-core users are not perceived to claim membership status (i.e., brand tourists), they serve as proof of value for the brand, making it more aspirational without compromising its attainability. We label this positive phenomenon "the brand tourism effect." We investigate psychological processes and demonstrate a new mechanism of consumers' pride toward the brand. We show that brand tourists elicit feelings of pride among core users of the brand and that pride mediates the positive impact of brand tourists on the image of the brand. Moreover, we demonstrate that the effect is moderated by core customers' level of attachment to the brand as measured through the "brand patriotism" scale adapted from political psychology literature. Finally, we demonstrate that the effect is attenuated for non-selective brands.

Our research contributes to the literatures on brand extension (Keller 2009; Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999; Loken and Roedder John 2009) and inter-group dynamics within brand communities (Berger and Heath 2008; Schouten and Mcalexander 1995; Shalev and Morwitz 2012; White and Dahl 2007) by offering novel insights for preventing brand dilution and enhancing the image of exclusive brands. Our findings demonstrate that providing out-group members access to exclusive brands through non-core products can actually enhance the brand

image. When the users of these non-core products are perceived as brand tourists, they can serve as a source of pride for core users and generate positive value for the brand.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### The Symbolic Value of Brands and Brand Extension

Consumers buy products not only for functional purposes, but also for what they symbolize, thereby using products to express desired identities and to make inferences about the identities of others (Belk 1988; Kleine, Keine and Allen 1995; Levy 1959). Research examining consumers' connection to brands demonstrates how brands in particular become part of consumers' self-concept and fulfill their identity needs (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998). Brands are perceived as symbolic to the extent that they are able to communicate information about the individual using them (Escalas and Bettman 2005; White and Dahl 2007). Moreover, the symbolic properties of reference groups become associated with the brands those groups are perceived to use (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Childers and Rao 1992; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). The brand meaning and its symbolic value are co-created and reinforced by the brand community. Brand community members, much like other social groups, share a system of values, consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of "us" versus "them" (Fournier and Lee 2009; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005). Individuals display pride in being associated with specific in-groups and brand communities (Decrop and Derbaix 2009) and value their membership even more in the case of exclusive groups with demanding and effortful initiation processes (Aronson and Mills 1959; Gerard and Mathewson 1966).

The symbolic value of brands can be diluted when firms engage in aggressive brand extension strategies or when undesirable social comparison groups start using them. Consumers abandon their preferences for and their usage of products when they become associated with undesirable outsiders (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; White and Dahl 2006, 2007). While symbolic and prestigious brands have great potential for brand extension (Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991), they are extremely exposed to the risks of unsuccessful extensions (Keller and Aaker 1992) and of losing their high-status character when over-diffused (Dubois and Paternault 1995; Kapferer and Bastien 2009; Keller 2009). Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges (1999) examine brand owners' response to extensions of exclusive brands and demonstrate that owners of these brands exhibit parent brand dilution in response to downward brand extensions because of their desire to maintain brand distinctiveness. Thus, this literature suggests that downward brand extensions and non-core users typically pose a threat to exclusive brands and dilute the brand image in the eyes of the core users of the brand. In the present research, we propose a new framework to understand core users' response to non-core users and downward brand extensions of exclusive brands. We argue that the response to these non-core users and their impact on the brand depends on whether they are perceived to claim membership status to the brand in-group. Our conceptualization builds on the observation that while immigrants are often treated with hostility and viewed as a threat, tourists, who do not demand any privileges or citizenship rights, are more welcomed by residents. Such tourists confirm and reinforce the attractiveness and desirability of the place they visit and have a positive effect on residents' sense of pride.

## Brand Immigrants and Brand Tourists

We draw an analogy between countries and brands and propose that the differential response to immigrants versus tourists can help us understand and predict how core users of exclusive brands will respond when peripheral individuals are given access to the brand community. Research in political and social psychology suggests that immigrants are often treated with hostility and resentment by national residents (for a review, see Dovidio and Esses 2001). Such prejudice, intolerance, and exclusionary reactions have been shown to be driven by group conflict over resources. The theoretical accounts of group conflict (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958) argue that individuals tend to view minority groups as a potential threat to one's key in-group. Immigrant minorities in particular are often perceived as taking resources and enjoying benefits that "belong to" current citizens (Esses, Jackson, and Armstrong 1998; McLaren and Johnson 2007).

Moreover, recent research examining attitudes toward immigrants in the United states and Western Europe finds that anti-immigrant hostility is not only associated with a desire to protect the economic benefits of current citizens, but it is mostly driven by symbolic concerns and desires to protect and maintain the nation's cultural unity and distinctiveness (McLaren and Johnson 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). These findings are consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), which suggests that people are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive and distinctive social identity and thus seek to differentiate their in-group. Accordingly, in the context of selective brands, brand immigrants can threaten the symbolic value of the brand and the distinctiveness of the brand community.

While there is extensive work on attitudes towards immigrants, there is scant research examining responses to tourists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that tourists are more welcomed

than immigrants and inspire feelings of pride.[1] In a between-subjects pilot with 210 American citizens, we confirmed that citizens hold more favorable attitudes towards tourists than towards immigrants.[2] An examination of residents' responses to tourism development in their community demonstrates that, in addition to the economic benefits of tourism, tourists promote community pride and a sense of cultural identity. Tourism makes local residents feel more proud of their town and makes them feel good about themselves and their community (Tovar and Lockwood 2008). Residents feel proud when they see tourists visit their city (Alhammad 2012) and proud to live in a place that provides many tourism opportunities (Huh and Vogt 2007).

We draw on this differential affective response to immigrants and tourists to explain and understand current customers' responses to non-core users of a brand and downward brand extensions. We propose a classification of non-core users of selective brands depending on whether they are perceived to claim in-group status to the brand community. Core users (or *"brand citizens"*) are consumers of the brand's core offering who can claim in-group status by virtue of possessing the brand's marquee. For example, Harvard University students enrolled in a full-time undergraduate or graduate program, consumers who own a Prada handbag, or users of Lomography cameras are considered core users of the Harvard, Prada, and Lomography brands respectively. Non-core users are consumers who obtain access to the brand by consuming one of its non-core offerings (e.g., individuals who take summer classes or online courses at Harvard University, consumers who buy a Prada keychain, users of a smart-phone Lomography application). We propose that non-core users can be seen as either "brand immigrants" or "brand

[1] A Google search of relevant keywords confirms this differential response to tourists and immigrants. Pairing "tourists welcome" results in 58 million hits and paring "tourism proud" results in 51 million hits. Searches for "immigrants welcome" and "immigration proud" produce many fewer entries (respectively, 24 and 32 million hits).
[2] Respondents recruited through Qualtrics were asked (a) whether they thought the number of immigrants [tourists] to the US should be reduced or increased on a 5-point scale, and (b) to indicate their agreement on a 7-point scale with the statement "the Unites States would lose its identity if more immigrants [tourists] came to the US." Respondents wanted to increase the number of tourists but not the number of immigrants (3.4 vs. 2.3, $t(209) = 13.8$, $p < .001$) and tourists were seen as less threatening to the identity of the US (2.2 vs. 3.9, $t(209) = 11.7$, $p < .001$).

tourists" depending on whether they claim in-group status to the brand community. "Brand immigrants" are individuals who consume non-core branded products and claim to be part of the in-group of core users (e.g., online students who mention Harvard University on their résumé, a Prada keychain owner who sees herself as part of the core brand users' in-group, users of the smart-phone app who claim to be Lomographers). We define "brand tourists" as those who also consume the non-core branded products but do not claim any membership status (e.g., students taking online courses who do not mention Harvard University on their résumé, Prada keychain owners who do not claim to be part of the core brand users' in-group, users of the smart-phone app who do not see themselves as Lomographers). We suggest that non-core consumers perceived as brand tourists rather than brand immigrants can enhance the image of the brand in the eyes of core users of the brand and elicit positive reactions toward these non-core users. While both groups of non-core users admire the brand and want to be associated with it, brand immigrants dilute the distinctiveness of the brand image and make it more attainable since they claim membership to the brand community. In contrast, brand tourists, who do not claim membership, serve as a source of value for the brand without compromising its attainability.

It is important to specify that our analogy between citizens of a country and members of a brand community should be interpreted as such. We propose a classification of consumers of a brand building on one specific and stylized aspect of the analogy: the extent to which non-core members are perceived to claim in-group status. Of course, in reality there are several other differences between actual immigrants and tourists. Some of these differences extend beyond claims of citizenship (e.g., their socio-economic status), and some might not even translate so naturally in the context of brands (e.g., the length of the stay in the country). Nonetheless, countries and brand communities share several interesting similarities across many dimensions. For example, brand communities, just like national communities, are marked by shared

consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Indeed, some brands refer to their communities as "nations" (e.g., the "Red Sox Nation") or "countries" (e.g., the "Republica Popular do Corinthians" founded by Nike in 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hklbtRaF-k), and countries have been referred to as brands (Kotler and Gertner 2002). Our analogy between countries and brands, based on some of those similar dimensions, allows us to derive theoretical implications for brands by deepening our understanding of intergroup dynamics within exclusive brand communities.

Why are brand tourists expected to have a positive impact on the brand image when compared to brand immigrants? We argue that the brand tourism effect is mediated by core users' pride. Just as tourists boost the pride of citizens toward their home country and reinforce the attractiveness and desirability of the place they visit, brand tourists, as fans of the brand, inspire feelings of pride among core members who attained access to the brand community and thus enhance the image of the brand. Pride is a feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment over one's achievements and capabilities (Cavanaugh et al. 2011; Tracy and Robins 2004). Feelings of pride appear when one's behavior is positively valued by others and may spread over in-group social identity, as when pride is felt in association with national and patriotic anthems and actions (Lazarus 1991). The marketing literature analyzes pride arising from a wide range of consumption situations (Aaker and Williams 1998; Mochon, Norton, and Ariely 2012; Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2007; Wilcox, Kramer, and Sen 2011). Specifically, research in the branding domain suggests that brand communities often develop around beloved brands such as Ferrari, Harley Davidson or Apple that involve passionate consumers who are proud to be associated with the brand and involved in the brand community (Decrop and Derbaix 2009; Fournier and Lee 2009; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006). We propose that feelings of pride among core users, who achieved access to selective brand communities, can be further

heightened by the presence of brand tourists. Moreover, we examine the downstream consequences for the brand, such as future choices and willingness to spread positive word of mouth, and additional affective responses such as core users' feelings of anger toward non-core users. We therefore predict that:

**H1:** Non-core users of a selective brand will have a positive effect on the brand and will be viewed positively by core users of the brand when they are perceived as brand tourists rather than when they are perceived as brand immigrants (or compared to a control condition).

**H2:** The positive effect of non-core users perceived as brand tourists versus brand immigrants will be mediated by core users' pride: brand tourists will increase pride among core users of the brand compared to brand immigrants (or compared to a control condition).

Both the political psychology and the consumer behavior literature demonstrate that individual differences in attachment and identification with one's country/brand can have a strong impact on citizens'/consumers' reactions and behaviors. Consumer research offers several measures of connection and self-identification with the brand, including self-brand connection (Escalas and Bettman 2003), brand attachment (Park et al. 2010; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005), and brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2011). In political psychology, the patriotism scale (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989) is the most established measure of individual level differences in attachment to one's nation. Since our conceptualization integrates political psychology and consumer behavior literature, we adapt the patriotism scale from countries to brands (see method section in study 4) and coin the term "brand patriotism." Compared to other measures of attachment to and identification with the brand, the brand patriotism scale specifically focuses on feelings of smugness and superiority associated with being part of the in-

group of the brand. We predict that the brand patriotism level among brand owners will moderate reactions to non-core users and downward brand extensions. This hypothesis is consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), which suggests that attitudes toward out-groups are affected by the level of identification with the in-group (Jetten, Spears, and Postmes 2004).

**H3:** The positive effect of non-core users perceived as brand tourists will be moderated by core users' brand patriotism: core users with higher levels of brand patriotism will have a more positive response to brand tourists than core users with lower levels of brand patriotism.

Finally, we investigate an additional moderator of the brand tourism effect by comparing responses to brand tourists of selective versus non-selective brands. Consistent with recent research demonstrating more pronounced effects for products that require an acquisition effort (Kivetz and Simonson 2002; White and Argo 2011), we expect a stronger positive response to brand tourists when the brand is perceived as selective. Brands are perceived as selective to the extent to which access to the brand is not open and some acquisition effort is required to gain membership in the brand community. Membership to exclusive communities is often valued as a function of severe initiation processes (Aronson and Mills 1959; Gerard and Mathewson 1966), suggesting that exerting effort to acquire in-group status makes the brand more important to the self. As such, brand tourists expressing admiration for the brand without making it more accessible should be particularly rewarding and gratifying for those individuals who invested energy and commitment to obtain brand membership. In contrast, when less effort is expended to acquire in-group status and the brand is perceived as fairly easy to attain (i.e., non-selective), brand tourists should not elicit such a positive reaction. To examine this moderator of the brand tourism effect, we compare selective versus less selective brand communities within the same product scenario. We predict that brand tourists will enhance the image of the brand for members

of selective in-groups, but that this effect will be attenuated for members of less exclusive in-groups that require less effort to achieve admission.

**H4:** The positive effect of non-core consumers perceived as brand tourists will be stronger for brands that are perceived as selective (i.e., high effort to attain) compared to brands that are perceived as less selective (i.e., low effort to attain).

## Overview of the Present Research

We explore the response of consumers of selective brands to non-core customers and downward brand extensions. Figure 1.1 summarizes our conceptual model and hypotheses. In our studies, we examine diverse consumer populations and exclusive brands that encompass a wide variety of ways to earn access to the in-group such as investing monetary resources (e.g., owners of expensive brands), passing admission requirements and tests (e.g., students at selective institutions), or even training for an activity (e.g., participants of endurance races). All studies are based on real branding dilemmas and brand extension scenarios.

We show how the brand tourism effect translates into three focal dependent variables: (a) brand image, (b) downstream consequences for the brand, and (c) attitudes toward the non-core users. Specifically, we assess the brand image primarily through the brand prestige scale (Kirmani et al. 1999; studies 3, 4, 5 and 6), and we also measure the impact on the image and reputation of the brand (study 1). Moreover, we examine downstream consequences by analyzing willingness to spread positive word of mouth, using Cheema and Kaikati's (2010) measures, and the frequency and intensity with which respondents expect to engage with the brand and the community in the future. Finally, we examine attitudes toward non-core users.

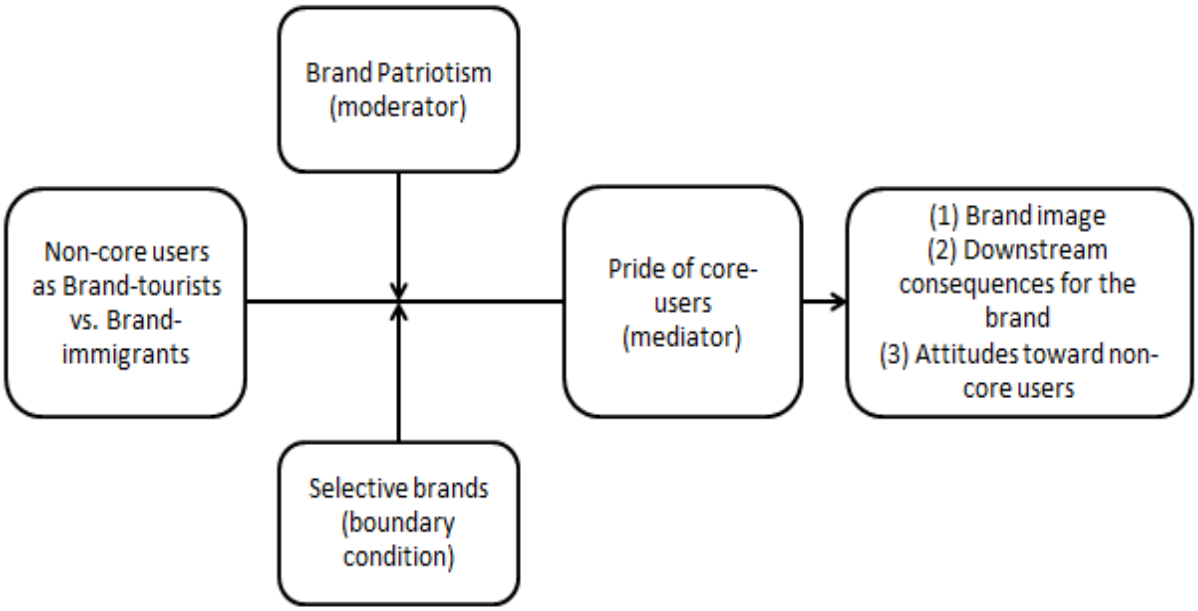
The construct of "claiming in-group status" is critical in our theorizing for it differentiates between brand tourists and brand immigrants. Our studies explore various ways of operationalizing the distinction between brand immigrants and tourists, such as a reference of affiliation on a résumé (study 1), explicit claims by non-core users (studies 3 and 4), and methods that can be directly applied by brands, such as the positioning and advertising of the non-core products (studies 2 and 5) and the strategic management of symbols of membership to the brand community (study 6). We confirm that each of these experimental manipulations conveys different perceptions of "claiming in-group status."

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

### Study 1: The Effect of Depicting Non-Core Users as Brand Tourists

Study 1 introduces our research paradigm and examines the response to brand tourists versus brand immigrants in the context of education brands. According to the author of Luxury World, "Universities accept that they too are brands. And some of them are premium brands" (Tungate 2009). Malcolm Gladwell (2005) argues that Ivy League admissions directors are "in the luxury brand management business." Harvard University in particular has been labeled as "the Gucci of higher education" (Katz 2005) and as a "branding empire" (Silverstein 2008). Past research has often operationalized in-group membership by recruiting students of a specific university brand, for example Stanford students (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008) or Duke students

FIGURE 1.1: THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES




(Gino and Chen-Bo Zhong 2009). Similarly in this study, we investigate intergroup dynamics within the community of Harvard students.

The study is inspired by a real-world example of a downward brand extension (the part-time programs offered by Harvard University) that generated anger and resentment among full-time Harvard students. These programs offer evening, summer, and online courses. Registration requires full payment of tuition but usually does not require an application or a selective admissions process. A Harvard Crimson editorial (2005), written by full-time students, criticized these programs and questioned their legitimacy. A few years later, some full-time students argued that participants in these programs should correctly report their affiliation to Harvard by an explicit mention of the nature of the program on their résumé (cluehq.com/blog). Our study tests the responses of full-time Harvard students to summer school courses offered by their

university. Students in the summer school program are described either as brand tourists who do not claim group membership or as brand immigrants claiming membership.

Method. We recruited 60 Harvard University full-time undergraduate students (54% female, $M_{age} = 21$) who participated in a series of unrelated lab studies. All participants read the same description of the Harvard summer program: "Harvard University offers a Harvard summer program to non-Harvard students. These students come all the way from all over the world to participate in a program at Harvard. In contrast to other Harvard programs, attending this 6-week program does not require a selective admissions process." The description of the summer school students manipulated between-subjects whether they claimed in-group status by mentioning Harvard on their résumés (brand immigrant condition), or did not claim in-group status by not mentioning Harvard on their résumés (brand tourist condition). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that read: "Participants in this program [do not] put Harvard University on their résumé, because they [do not] think of themselves as real Harvard students."

Next, we measured the three dependent variables of interest: (a) brand image, (b) downstream consequences for the brand (i.e., intended alumni support and donations), and (c) attitudes toward non-core users. First, respondents assessed "How does the summer program impact the reputation of Harvard University?" using a scale from (1) "Very negatively" to (7) "Very positively," and they indicated whether "The summer program will have a positive or negative impact on the image of Harvard University," using a scale from (1) "Extremely negative" to (7) "Extremely positive." Second, two items assessed respondents' intended alumni support and donations; participants rated on a scale ranging from (1) "Not likely at all" to (7) "Extremely likely" the likelihood of engaging in the following two behaviors: (a) "Donate money to Harvard," and (b) "Attend Harvard alumni events." Third, participants were asked to indicate their attitudes toward the non-core students, using three 7 point scale items ranging from

(1) “I dislike them” to (7) “I like them,” (1) “I react unfavorably to their story” to (7) “I react favorably to their story,” and (1) “I feel negative about them” to (7) “I feel positive about them.”

Finally, participants responded to a manipulation check to confirm that non-core users who put Harvard on their résumés (the brand immigrants) were perceived to claim more in-group status than non-core users who did not put Harvard on their résumés (the brand tourists). Three items on a scale ranging from (1) “Definitely not” to (7) “Definitely yes” measured the extent to which non-core users were perceived to claim membership: (a) “The summer students will claim they are Harvard students,” (b) “The summer students will see themselves as Harvard students,” and (c) “The summer students believe they deserve a Harvard diploma.”

Results. The analysis of the manipulation check (3 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$) confirmed that brand immigrants were perceived to claim more in-group membership than brand tourists ($M_{immigrant} = 4.0$ vs. $M_{tourist} = 2.9$, $t(58) = 2.5$, $p < .05$). The analysis of the brand image (2 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$) revealed that respondents thought that the image and reputation of Harvard University would benefit from the summer school more in the brand tourist condition, when summer students were not claiming membership, than in the brand immigrant condition, when summer students were claiming membership ($M_{tourist} = 4.4$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 3.8$, $t(58) = 2.2$, $p < .05$). Moreover, full-time Harvard students reported a higher willingness to donate money to their school and to attend alumni events (2 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$) in the brand tourist condition than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.9$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 5.2$, $t(58) = 2.0$, $p = .05$). Finally, the analysis of attitudes toward the non-core users (3 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$) indicated that full-time Harvard students had more positive reactions toward brand tourists than toward brand immigrants ($M_{tourist} = 4.9$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 3.8$, $t(58) = 3.3$, $p < .01$).

Discussion. This study demonstrates that simply framing consumers of a downward brand extension as brand tourists rather than brand immigrants can have a positive impact on the

brand. We demonstrate that the extent to which non-core users are perceived to claim group membership matters a great deal to core members of the brand community and can impact downstream consequences, such as intended donations. In this study, non-core users explicitly claimed membership status by stating their affiliation on their résumés. The next study employs a more subtle manipulation and frames non-core users as brand tourists or brand immigrants through the characteristics of the non-core product.

## Study 2: The Brand Tourism Effect and Willingness to Spread Positive Word of Mouth

Study 2 extends the experimental design of the previous study by adding a control condition. Specifically, the control condition in this study represents a neutral scenario for the brand (i.e., in the absence of a downward brand extension). Importantly, this neutral control condition allows us to demonstrate the benefits of launching non-core products that generate the brand tourism effect, compared to not engaging in downward brand extension strategies at all. In addition to examining downstream consequences for the brand as in study 1 (i.e., future intentions to engage with the brand), in this study we also examine a formal measure of willingness to spread positive word of mouth (Cheema and Kaikati 2010). This study is also inspired by the real-world example of a downward brand extension: a smart-phone application of the Lomography cameras. The Lomography camera is an analog photographic machine that produces creative visual effects (e.g., oversaturated colors, optical distortions). Lomography cameras are engineered so that the artistic effects are random, always slightly different, and, as such, irreproducible. Our study is directly inspired by the recent launch of the Lomography app for smart-phones. The app emulates the real Lomography filters; however, it does not retain the random element that is obtained through the physical camera.

We examine how the introduction of this app would have a positive or negative impact depending on whether app users are viewed as brand tourists or brand immigrants. We asked participants to imagine that they own a Lomography camera, and we examined three different conditions. In the brand tourist condition, we framed the app pictures as clearly not generated by a real camera. In contrast, in the brand immigrant condition, we told participants that it was "not very apparent" that the app pictures were not generated by a real camera. Finally, in the control condition, there was no mention of the Lomography app. We predict that respondents in the brand tourist condition will have more positive reactions to Lomography than respondents in the control and brand immigrant conditions. When pictures taken with the app are clearly distinguishable and thus app users cannot claim that they are Lomographers, we expect that the app will generate a positive brand tourism effect and will increase positive word of mouth.

Method. We recruited 90 participants who responded to a paid online survey (33% female; $M_{age}$ = 32). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (brand tourists, brand immigrants, or control condition). All participants read the same study introduction and a description of Lomography. They were told, "Lomography is a relatively new trend/hobby in photography. The Lomography camera is analog (rather than digital) and is designed to produce photographic effects such as oversaturated colors, optical distortions, rainbow-colored subjects, blurring, and alternative film processing. Lomography cameras are deliberately engineered so that the artistic photographic effects are random and always slightly different. Thus each picture is unique and not replicable. Lomography cameras typically sell for an average price of $250 and the most sophisticated models can cost over $1,000. Imagine that you own a Lomography camera and enjoy taking creative pictures with it." In the control condition, no further description was reported; in the other two conditions, the text continued with a description of the app for smart-phones. The description manipulated between-subjects

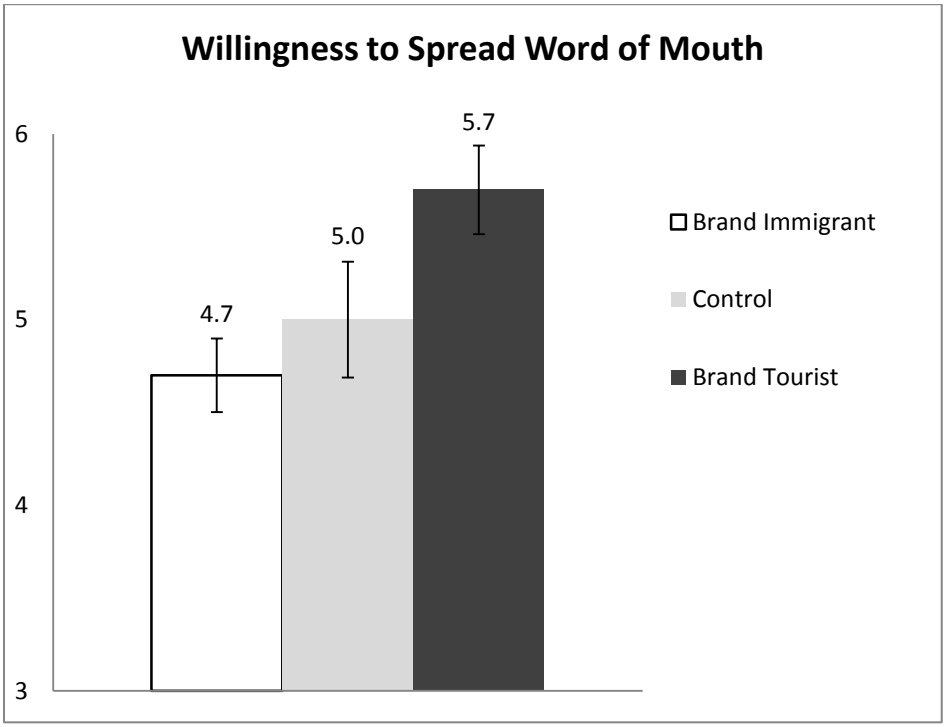
the extent to which it was very apparent (brand tourist condition) or not very apparent (brand immigrant condition) that the app pictures were not generated by a real Lomography camera. In detail, participants in the brand tourists [brand immigrants] condition read: "The manufacturer of the Lomography camera recently launched a popular Lomography application for smart phones. Although the app emulates the Lomography experience, it is [not] very apparent that these pictures were not generated by a real Lomography camera."

After reading the description, participants answered a series of questions measuring downstream consequences for the brand: (a) word of mouth and (b) future intentions to engage with Lomography. Employing Cheema and Kaikati's (2010) measures of willingness to generate positive word of mouth and to recommend a product, participants in all conditions rated "How likely are you to tell friends and acquaintances positive things about Lomography?" and "Will you recommend Lomography to others" on a scale ranging from (1) "Not likely at all" to (7) "Very likely." Moreover, participants in the brand tourist and brand immigrant conditions (participants in the control could not answer this item since they did not read any information about the non-core product) also indicated their willingness to talk about the non-core product: "Will you try to spread the word about the availability of the Lomography app?" on a scale from (1) "Definitely no" to (7) "Definitely yes." Similar to the measure of "intended alumni support and donations" employed in the study with Harvard students, all participants next rated two items tapping into future intentions to engage with Lomography. Specifically, respondents answered a question about their expected usage frequency, "How often would you want to use your Lomography camera?" on a time interval scale ranging from (1) "Never" to (7) "Daily." Moreover, they rated on a scale from (1) "Definitely no" to (7) "Definitely yes" their willingness to engage with the brand community: "Would you be an active member of the global community of Lomography." We averaged the two items and used the resulting measure of future intentions

to engage with Lomography in our analysis. Finally, as a check for our manipulation, participants in the brand tourist and brand immigrant conditions rated the following two items: "The Lomography app allows its users to claim that they take Lomography pictures" on a scale from (1) "Not very much" to (7) "Very much," and "Users of the app can claim they are Lomographers" on a scale from (1) "Definitely no" to (7) "Definitely yes."

Results. First, the analysis of the manipulation check (2 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .57$) confirmed that non-core users in the brand immigrant condition were perceived to claim more in-group membership than non-core users in the brand tourist condition ($M_{immigrant} = 5.4$ vs. $M_{tourist} = 4.5$, $t(58) = 2.5$, $p < .05$). The analysis of willingness to spread positive word of mouth (2 items Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$) revealed a significant effect of condition ($F(2, 87) = 4.0$, $p < .05$). As shown in figure 1.2, planned contrasts revealed that participants' willingness to mention and recommend Lomography to others was significantly higher in the brand tourist condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.7$) than in the control ($M_{control} = 5.0$; $t(87) = 2.0$, $p < .05$) and brand immigrant ($M_{immigrant} = 4.7$; $t(87) = 2.7$, $p < .01$) conditions. There was no significant difference between the control and brand immigrant conditions. In addition, the willingness to mention the non-core product to others was higher in the brand tourist condition than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 4.5$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 3.4$, $t(58) = 2.1$, $p <.05$). The analysis of future intentions to engage with Lomography (2 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$) revealed a similar pattern of results with a significant effect of condition ($F(2, 87) = 4.4$, $p < .05$). As hypothesized, planned contrasts showed that participants were more willing to engage with Lomography in the brand tourist condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.4$) than in the control ($M_{control} = 4.7$; $t(87) = 2.1$, $p < .05$) and brand immigrant ($M_{immigrant} = 4.4$; $t(87) = 2.9$, $p < .01$) conditions. Again, there was no significant difference between the control and brand immigrant conditions.

FIGURE 1.2: STUDY 2 RESULTS – THE BRAND TOURISM EFFECT ON WILLINGNESS TO SPREAD POSITIVE WORD OF MOUTH




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

Discussion. This study demonstrates the potential benefits of non-core products generating the brand tourism effect compared to a neutral control condition in the absence of the non-core product. Our findings demonstrate that, when non-core users are perceived as brand tourists, the brand can benefit from pursuing downward brand extension strategies, rather than refraining from launching non-core products.

Of special relevance to marketers is whether the documented positive effect of framing non-core users as brand tourists (who do not claim membership status) can potentially enhance the prestige of the brand in the eyes of core consumers. Study 3 further extends our findings by examining how brand tourists affect the prestige image of the brand compared to brand immigrants and to a control condition. In this study, we also delve into the underlying

mechanisms of the brand tourism effect and demonstrate that non-core users depicted as brand tourists boost the pride of core users of the brand.

## Study 3: Non-Core users as Brand Tourists in the Domain of Luxury Fashion Brands

Study 3 examines consumers of luxury fashion brands, a highly symbolic product category. We test the responses of Prada or Marc Jacobs owners to a collectors' paper shopping bag offered to anyone entering the boutique. Using a 3 conditions between-subjects design, we describe consumers receiving this paper bag as brand tourists, as brand immigrants, or neutrally (control condition). The brands explored in this study (Prada and Marc Jacobs) are known for their high-end leather goods and clothes (e.g., purses, shoes, wallets, dresses), and each has over 250 branded luxury boutiques worldwide.

The study was inspired by a recent trend covered by Korean TV news about a flourishing second hand market for luxury paper bags, including brands such as Tiffany's and Gucci. The news story indicated that consumers buy these second hand paper bags to claim status; consumers who cannot afford the actual high-end product carry the shopping paper bags as substitutes because they have a desire to be seen and perceived as real luxury users.

We examine whether offering a free collectors' paper shopping bag to all store visitors would have a positive or negative impact on the brand image. This study also examines a formal measure of prestige image of the brand (Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999) and the mediating role of pride. We predict that the impact of offering the paper shopping bag will depend on whether the product recipients are described as brand tourists or immigrants. Across three conditions, we describe women receiving this paper bag as brand tourists (not-claiming membership to the brand community), as brand immigrants (claiming in-group status), or

neutrally (control condition). We predict that brand owners will react more positively when the non-core users are depicted as brand tourists than when the non-core users are depicted either as brand immigrants or neutrally (control condition). In other words, core users will react positively only when it is clear that the non-core product (the paper bag) does not confer in-group status to non-core users. In the brand tourist condition, the non-core product does not compromise the exclusivity of the brand but rather boosts the pride of core users and reinforces the image and desirability of the brand.

Method. Sixty-four women recruited from a national online sample responded to a paid online survey ($M_{age}$ = 41). We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions (brand tourist, brand immigrant, or control condition). Respondents were recruited by Qualtrics panel services, based on their income (a minimum of $5,000 monthly income) and ownership of Prada or Marc Jacobs products. The sample was equally split between these two luxury brands with 30 owners of Prada and 34 owners of Marc Jacobs (the two brands examined were collapsed and analyzed jointly since there were no significant differences in the patterns of results). Respondents were assigned to the scenarios relative to the brand that they owned. All participants read the same description of a new free collectors' paper shopping bag and a prototypical consumer, Lucy, receiving such product: "To celebrate its anniversary, the Prada/Marc Jacobs brand is considering offering a free collectors' paper shopping bag to anyone who enters one of its boutiques worldwide. Now imagine Lucy, who just walked into a Prada/Marc Jacobs store and received a free Prada/Marc Jacobs collectors' paper shopping bag." In the control condition, no further description was reported; in the other two conditions, the text continued with additional information about the non-core consumer. In the brand immigrant condition, Lucy was depicted as claiming membership to the owners' community: "Even though Lucy cannot afford a Prada/Marc Jacobs purse, she can still be part of the community of

Prada/Marc Jacobs owners and consider herself part of the Prada/Marc Jacobs brand. The Prada/Marc Jacobs collectors' paper shopping bag will allow her to show that she is a customer of the brand." In contrast, in the brand tourist condition, Lucy was not depicted as claiming membership through the paper bag, but simply showing her admiration for the brand: "Even though Lucy cannot afford a Prada/Marc Jacobs purse and does not belong to the community of Prada/Marc Jacobs owners, she still wants to show her admiration for the Prada/Marc Jacobs brand. The Prada/Marc Jacobs collectors' paper shopping bag will allow her to show that she is a fan of the brand." A manipulation check conducted with a separate group of respondents confirmed that Lucy was perceived as claiming significantly less in-group status in the tourist condition than in both the control and immigrant conditions.[3]

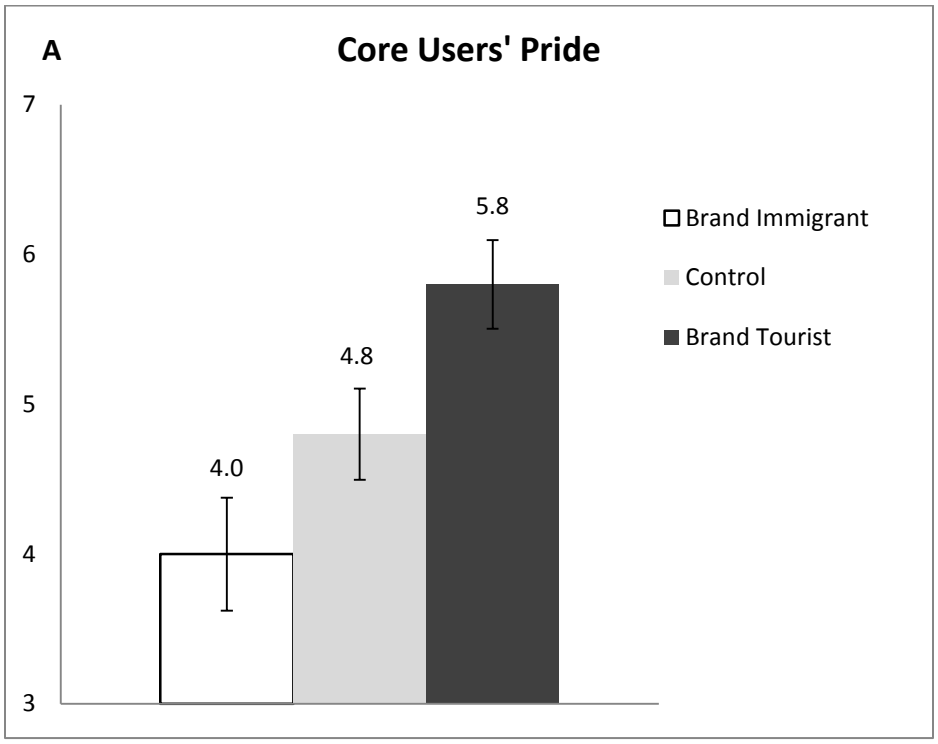
After reading the non-core user's description, all participants were asked how the paper bag would affect the pride of Prada/Marc Jacobs' owners using a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "Extremely negative" to (7) "Extremely positive." Subsequently, we measured the two dependent variables of interest in this study: (a) brand image and (b) attitudes toward non-core users. First, participants responded to three prestige scale items (Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999) measuring the extent to which the paper bag would make the image of the brand seem (a) "Exclusive," (b) "High status," and (c) "Prestigious" using a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "Less" to (7) "More." Second, respondents indicated their attitudes toward the non-core user using the same three items employed in study 1.

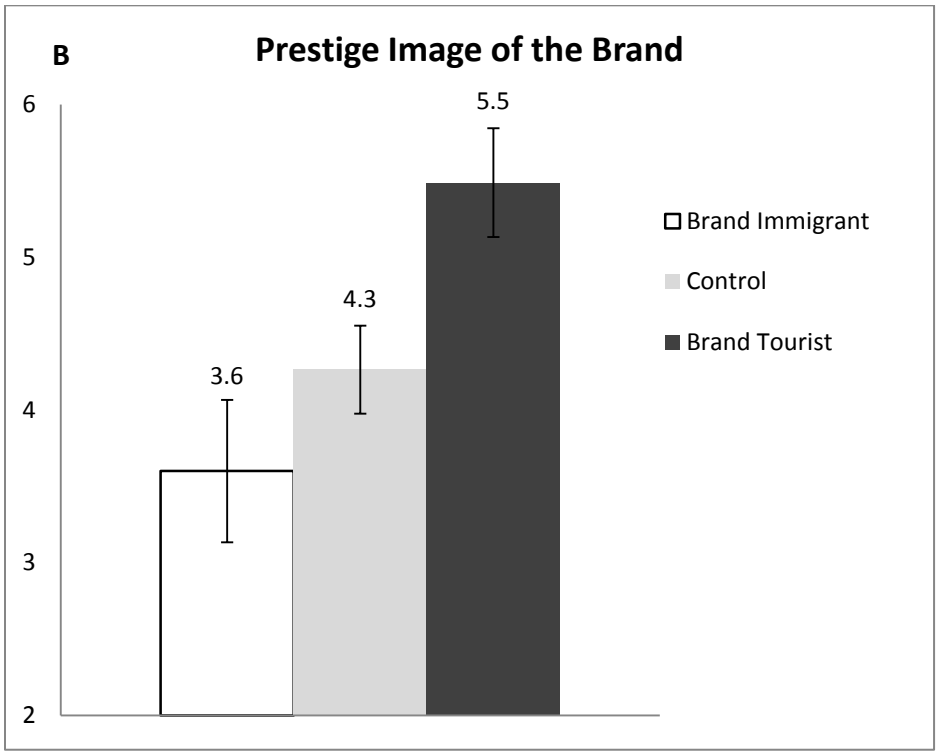
[3] A separate group of 72 respondents recruited online were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. Participants answered 3 items on a scale from (1) "Definitely not" to (7) "Definitely yes:" (a) "Lucy will claim she is a Prada owner," (b) "Lucy will define herself as a Prada owner," and (c) "Lucy sees herself as a fan of the brand rather than an actual owner" (reverse coded). The analysis confirmed that the non-core user in the brand tourist condition ($M_{tourist} = 2.9$) claimed less membership than in the control ($M_{control} = 3.6$, $t(69) = 2.2$, $p < .05$) and in the brand immigrant ($M_{immigrant} = 3.7$, $t(69) = 2.4$, $p < .05$) conditions.

Results. The analysis of pride revealed a significant effect of non-core user's description ($F(2, 61) = 5.7$, $p < .01$). As depicted in figure 1.3.A, core users' ratings in the brand tourist condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.8$) were higher than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{immigrant} = 4.0$; $t(61) = 4.0$, $p < .01$). Responses in the control condition fell in-between the tourist and immigrant conditions and were significantly lower than the tourist condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.8$ vs. $M_{control} = 4.8$; $t(61) = 2.1$, $p < .05$), and marginally higher than ratings in the immigrant condition ($M_{control} = 4.8$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 4.0$, $t(61) = 1.7$, $p = .10$). The analyses of the two dependent variables yielded the hypothesized pattern of results. First, the analysis of the prestige image of the brand (3 items Cronbach's $\alpha = .99$) revealed a significant effect of new consumer's description ($F(2, 61) = 5.4$, $p < .01$). As shown in figure 1.3.B, planned contrasts showed that participants perceived a more positive impact on the prestige image of the brand in the brand tourist condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.5$) than in the control ($M_{control} = 4.3$; $t(61) = 2.3$, $p < .05$) and brand immigrant ($M_{immigrant} = 3.6$; $t(61) = 3.2$, $p < .01$) conditions. In addition, the description of the non-core user (as brand tourist vs. brand immigrant vs. control) had a significant impact on attitudes toward the non-core user ($F(2, 61) = 4.3$, $p < .05$). Planned contrasts revealed that participants' attitudes toward the new consumer (3 items Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) were significantly higher ($M_{tourist} = 5.9$) in the brand tourist condition than in the control ($M_{control} = 5.0$; $t(61) = 2.0$, $p < .05$) and brand immigrant ($M_{immigrant} = 4.5$; $t(61) = 2.9$, $p < .01$) conditions. For both dependent variables, there was no significant difference between the immigrant and control conditions.

Mediation Analyses. A series of mediation analyses examined whether the boost in core users' pride mediated the relationship between the differential framing of the non-core users across conditions and the two dependent variables (i.e., brand image and attitudes toward the non-core user) following the Hayes and Preacher (2012) method for mediation with multi-categorical independent variables. We created two dummy-coded variables (one with the

FIGURE 1.3: STUDY 3 RESULTS – THE BRAND TOURISM EFFECT ON PRIDE AND PRESTIGE IMAGE OF THE BRAND




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

immigrant condition coded as 1 and the other conditions coded as 0; the other with the control condition coded as 1 and the other conditions coded as 0) and included them simultaneously as predictors in the regression analyses.

The analysis of prestige image of the brand revealed a significant mediation path by core users' pride. Effects of both brand immigrant and control conditions on brand image were significantly reduced (from $\beta_{immigrant}$ = -.49, t(61) = -3.3, p < .01, to $\beta_{immigrant}$ = -.16, t(60) = -1.3, NS, for the brand immigrant condition; and from $\beta_{control}$ = -.34, t(61) = -2.3, p < .05, to $\beta_{control}$ = -.14, t(60) = -1.1, NS, for the control condition) when pride was included in the mediation model and pride was a significant predictor ($\beta_{pride}$ = .65, t(60) = 6.6, p < .001). Furthermore, the bias-corrected confidence interval of the indirect effects through pride excluded zero for both the difference between the brand tourist condition and the brand immigrant condition (95% CI = -2.07 to -.67) and for the difference between the brand tourist condition and the control condition (95% CI = -1.52 to -.18).

Second, the analysis of attitudes toward the non-core users revealed a similar mediation path by core users' pride. Effects of both brand immigrant and control conditions on attitudes toward non-core users were significantly reduced (from $\beta_{immigrant}$ = -.44, t(61) = -2.9, p < .01, to $\beta_{immigrant}$ = -.15, t(60) = -1.1, NS, for the brand immigrant condition; and from $\beta_{control}$ = -.31, t(61) = -2.0, p = .05, to $\beta_{control}$ = -.12, t(60) = -.96, NS, for the control condition) when pride was included in the mediation model and pride was a significant predictor ($\beta_{pride}$ = .59, t(60) = 5.4, p < .001). The bias-corrected confidence interval of the indirect effects through pride excluded zero for both the difference between the brand tourist condition and the brand immigrant condition (95% CI = -1.57 to -.48) and for the difference between the brand tourist condition and the control condition (95% CI = -1.05 to -.17).

In sum, these results indicate that pride mediated the positive effect of brand tourists on both dependent variables: the prestige image of the brand and attitudes toward the non-core user.

Discussion. In conclusion, these data show that describing non-core users of a brand as brand tourists rather than brand immigrants (or compared to a neutral control condition) significantly enhanced the image of the brand in the eyes of core users of the brand and increased liking of the non-core consumers. At the end of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to comment on their responses if they wished. These open-ended explanations also suggested that core users responding to the tourist condition liked the non-core product more since the paper bag *"will allow everyone to show their fondness of the brand."* In contrast, participants responding to the immigrant condition perceived the non-core product as a threat to the brand: *"It is a clever idea, but I think* it will sort of cheapen the bra*nd."* Our results in the control condition, directionally higher than the immigrant condition but not significantly different from it, are consistent with previous literature (Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999) documenting brand dilution in the case of downward extensions for prestige brands. In this context, non-core users in the neutral condition were perceived more similarly to brand immigrants. These perceptions are in line with the image portrayed in the news story discussed above, describing users of these luxury paper bags, and with the resentment by full-time students toward part-time students reported in study 1. Furthermore, study 3 demonstrates that the brand tourism effect is mediated by pride among core users of the brand.

In the next studies we focus on the brand tourist and brand immigrant conditions and explore two moderating factors of the brand tourism effect: core users' brand patriotism and brand selectiveness. In study 4, we explore the effect in another different brand community and consumption context. The study also examines whether the differential response to brand tourists versus brand immigrants is stronger for core users who more strongly identify with the brand.

Study 4: The Moderating Role of Brand Patriotism

To generalize our findings within a different context and a different type of brand, in this study, we examine our conceptualization with "Tough Mudder" participants. Tough Mudder is a series of obstacle course competitions that bill themselves as "probably the toughest one day event on the planet." According to the New York Times (2010), the event is designed to be "more convivial than marathons and triathlons, but more grueling than shorter runs or novelty events." Tough Mudder is marketed more as an event than as a race and encourages teamwork and helping other "mudders" over difficult obstacles. Each event consists of a 7-12 mile mud/trail run over uneven, hilly, and wet ground followed by 17 to 20 sets of military-style obstacles. Participants train for several months prior to the contest and, as stated by corporate communication, "Not everyone will finish, but those who do make it to our post-event party will have truly earned the right to call themselves a Tough Mudder." This message clearly conveys the idea that members have to earn their membership to the Tough Mudder community. After completion of the run, race participants attend the Tough Mudder post-party. Study 4 examines the effect of allowing people who did not participate in the run to be part of the event and the post-event festivities. Specifically, we test how in-group members of the brand community (run participants – "Tough Mudders") feel about offering non-participants the opportunity to buy a $25 ticket that allows them to attend all events—watching the run along the trail and taking part in the festivities after the run. We describe these non-participants as brand tourists or brand immigrants. While so far we employed descriptions of non-core users in the third person, in this study we operationalize the proposed distinction between brand immigrants and brand tourists by manipulating direct verbal testimonials made by non-core users (i.e., brand immigrants and

brand tourists). As hypothesized, we expect that respondents' level of attachment to the brand as measured through brand patriotism scale, adapted from the political psychology literature (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989), will moderate the positive brand tourism effect.

Method. Participants were 83 Tough Mudders (74% male, $M_{age}$ = 31) recruited through the Tough Mudder mailing list. Respondents were given a description of the event tickets for non-participants and a potential consumer "Mike." All Participants were told "Tough Mudder events are spectator friendly. Anyone can buy a spectator ticket and watch Tough Mudder participants slog up hills, climb over obstacles, jump into cold water and run through fire. After the event, spectators can enjoy the Tough Mudder post party. Tickets are $25 (or $15 if bought in advance). Please read carefully the following description of Mike, a potential Tough Mudder spectator, and answer the questions below. Mike has never done a Tough Mudder race. He just learned about the spectator tickets and is planning to attend the next run as a spectator." In the immigrant condition participants were told, "When asked why he wants to attend the event, Mike said, 'This is my chance to be in the Tough Mudder location and become a real, hardcore, Tough Mudder. I am looking forward to telling people I am a Tough Mudder.'" In the tourist condition participants were told, "When asked why he wants to attend the event, Mike said, 'This is my chance to see the Tough Mudder location and meet real, hardcore Tough Mudders. I am looking forward to telling people I saw the Tough Mudders in action and cheered them on.'"

In this study, we examined brand image and attitudes toward the non-core users. We adapted the brand prestige scale used in study 3 to the specific Tough Mudder brand and measured the extent to which people like Mike would make the image of the brand seem (a) "Tough," (b) "High status," and (c) "Popular" using a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "Less" to (7) "More." Participants answered the same three items used in previous studies (study 1 and study 3) to assess their attitudes toward the non-core users. Additionally, three manipulation

check items measured whether Mike was perceived to claim membership to the Tough Mudder community: "Mike will claim he is a Tough Mudder," "Mike will see himself as a Tough Mudder," and "Mike believes he deserves to be treated like a Tough Mudder." These items were measured on a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "definitely not" to (7) "definitely yes."

To examine the moderating role of individual differences in attachment to the brand, participants completed the brand patriotism scale. We adapted the patriotism scale (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989) from countries to brands in order to measure brand patriotism for Tough Mudder. The scale included the following items: "I love Tough Mudder"; "I am proud to be a Tough Mudder"; "In a sense, I am emotionally attached to Tough Mudder"; "I feel a great pride in that I am part of the Tough Mudder community"; "When I see the Tough Mudder logo I feel great"; *"The fact that I am a Tough Mudd*er is an important part of my identity"; *"I would not* want to switch to a different event"; and "Tough Mudder runs are one of the best in the world."

Results. The analysis of the manipulation check (3 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) confirmed that the brand tourist was perceived to claim significantly less membership than the brand immigrant ($M_{tourist} = 2.5$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 5.1$, $t(81) = 8.1$, $p = <.001$).

We first report results supporting hypothesis 1 (main effect of brand tourists vs. brand immigrants) and then report additional analyses testing hypothesis 3 (moderation). In line with previous findings, participants rated the impact on the prestige image of the brand as higher in the brand tourist condition than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 4.7$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 3.0$, $t(81) = 8.5$, $p = <.001$). To provide stronger support for our conceptualization, we tested not only whether there was a significant difference between the two conditions, but also whether these responses were significantly different from the scale mid-point (4). Brand image ratings in the brand tourist condition were significantly higher than the mid-point ($t(36) = 3.9$, $p < .001$),

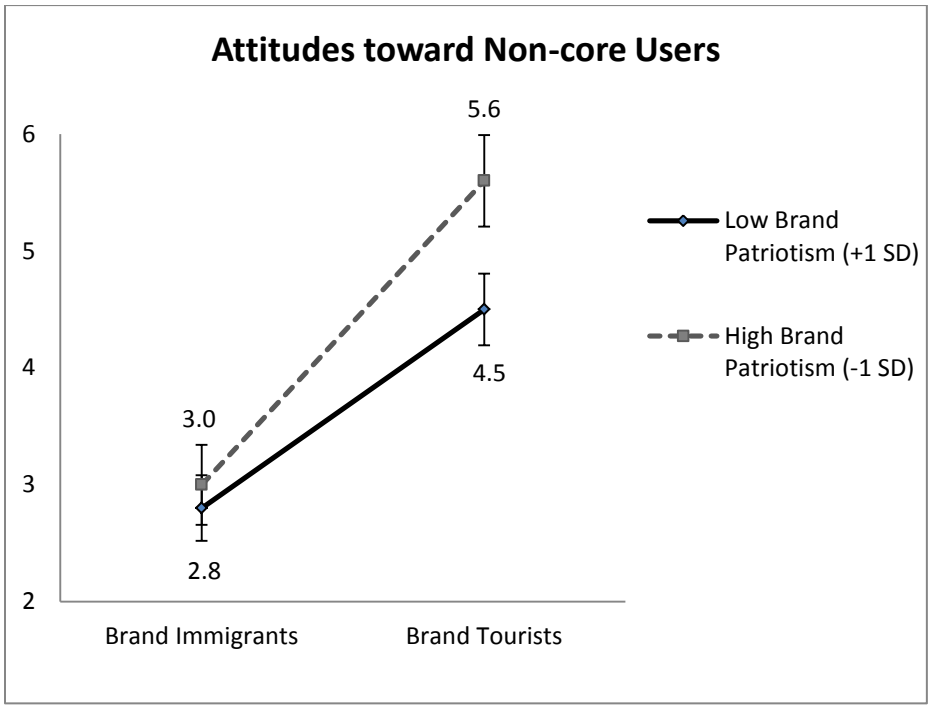
while ratings in the brand immigrant condition were significantly lower than the mid-point ($t(45) = 5.5$, $p < .001$). The analysis of attitudes toward the non-core users (3 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) indicated that Tough Mudders liked the non-core user more when he was perceived as a brand tourist rather than a brand immigrant ($M_{tourist} = 4.9$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 2.9$, $t(81) = 3.4$, $p < .001$). Both ratings were significantly different from the scale mid-point. Attitudes toward the brand tourist were significantly higher than the mid-point ($t(36) = 3.5$, $p < .001$), while attitudes toward the brand immigrant were significantly lower than the mid-point ($t(45) = 5.7$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that while brand immigrants are viewed as a threat to the brand, brand tourists are perceived positively and enhance the brand's image. Thus, describing Mike as a brand tourist rather than an immigrant not only mitigated the negative effect on the brand, but also positively contributed to the brands' image. At the end of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to comment on their responses. Respondents' open-ended explanations also suggested that brand tourists have a positive effect on the brand since they *"help to confirm the toughness of the Tough Mudder event"* and that brand tourists could help Tough Mudder "be more popular if more people want to *watch and see what it is all about."*

Brand Patriotism as a Moderator. To examine the interaction between the description of the non-core user and Tough Mudders' brand patriotism, responses were analyzed using a linear regression with brand image as the dependent variable and the following independent variables: a variable for non-core user's description (coded as 1 for brand tourist and -1 for brand immigrant), brand patriotism scale (8 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$; standardized for ease of interpretation), and their interaction. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of non-core user's description ($\beta = .57$, $t(79) = 6.3$, $p < .001$), a non-significant main effect of brand patriotism ($\beta = -.09$, $t(79) = -.95$, NS), and a significant interaction ($\beta = .17$, $t(79) = 2.0$, $p = .05$). To explore this interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis focusing on participants with

higher and lower levels of brand patriotism. The spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above the mean of brand patriotism revealed a significant difference ($\beta$ = .75, t(79) = 5.7, p <.001): participants with high brand patriotism reported higher brand prestige in the brand tourist than in the brand immigrant condition. A similar spotlight analysis performed at one standard deviation below the mean of brand patriotism also showed a significant difference between conditions ($\beta$ = .39, t(79) = 3.1, p <.01). While framing non-core users as tourists rather than immigrants elicited a significant reaction for participants with both high and low brand patriotism, the magnitude of the effect for Tough Mudders with high brand patriotism was almost double compared to the size of the effect for Tough Mudders with low brand patriotism ($\beta_{\text{high brand patriotism}}$ = .75 vs. $\beta_{\text{low brand patriotism}}$ = .39).

A similar moderation analysis on the second dependent variable, attitudes toward the non-core users, yielded an analogous pattern of results. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of non-core user's description ($\beta$ = .60, t(79) = 6.6, p < .001), a non-significant main effect of brand patriotism ($\beta$ = .13 , t(79) = 1.5, NS), and a marginally significant interaction between these two variables ($\beta$ = .17, t(79) = 1.9, p = .07). To explore this interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis focusing on participants with higher and lower levels of brand patriotism. As illustrated by figure 1.4, a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above the mean of brand patriotism revealed a significant difference ($\beta$ = .78, t(79) = 5.8, p <.001): participants with high brand patriotism reported more positive attitudes toward the non-core users in the brand tourist than in the brand immigrant condition. A similar spotlight analysis performed at one standard deviation below the mean of brand patriotism also showed a significant difference between conditions ($\beta$ = .43, t(79) = 3.4, p = .001). Again, the size of the effect for Tough Mudders with high brand patriotism was almost double compared to the size of the effect for Tough Mudders with low brand patriotism ($\beta_{\text{high brand patriotism}}$ = .78 vs. $\beta_{\text{low brand patriotism}}$ = .43). In sum, these results

FIGURE 1.4: STUDY 4 RESULTS – RESPONSES TO BRAND TOURISTS AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF BRAND-PATRIOTISM (SPOTLIGHT ANALYSIS)




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

suggest that core users with high levels of brand patriotism have a more positive response to brand tourists compared to the reactions of consumers with lower levels of brand patriotism.

Discussion. Study 4 extends previous findings on the brand tourism effect. This study further demonstrates that these results are moderated by core users' level of attachment to the brand as measured through the brand patriotism scale (adapted from Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). In the next studies, we further explore how firms can create and leverage the brand tourism effect. Specifically, we examine how firms can position non-core products (study 5) and manage products that signal membership to the brand community (study 6) to generate the inference that non-core users are brand tourists, rather than brand immigrants. Additionally,

study 5 identifies a moderator of the brand tourism effect by examining brand communities that vary in the degree to which they are perceived as selective.

## Study 5: Selectiveness of the Brand as a Moderator of the Brand Tourism Effect

Study 5 tightens the conceptualization of our theoretical framework in three ways. First, we seek to identify an additional moderator of the brand tourism effect by demonstrating that the enhancement of the brand image is attenuated for non-selective brand communities. In particular, we manipulate the extent to which access to a university course is depicted as limited and selective. Specifically, we compare the reactions of students of a selective course (i.e., admits a limited number of students and demands high requirements for enrolling) to the reactions of students of a less selective course (i.e., open to all students and has no specific requirements for enrolling). Second, this study further tests the mediating role of pride among core users and it complements the findings of study 3 by employing a direct measure of feelings of pride. Importantly, we also collect a measure of feelings of anger to examine whether framing non-core users as brand tourists rather than brand immigrants can reduce negative feelings of anger among core users. Finally, in this study we expand our previous findings by exploring how firms can generate the brand tourism effect through the positioning and the marketing of the non-core products. Specifically, study 5 examines how students enrolled in a course react to the launch of a popular book based on the lectures. The book is marketed either as a sampling of the class, allowing everyone to get a taste of the lectures (brand tourist condition), or as a substitute for taking the class, allowing everyone to gain access to the lectures (brand immigrant condition). We predict that the positive brand tourism effect will be particularly strong for students enrolled in the selective class. For selective brand communities, non-core products marketed to generate

the brand tourism effect reinforce the prestige and the desirability of the brand in the eyes of core users who had to put effort into gaining their membership in the brand community.

Method. We recruited 148 participants who responded to a paid online survey (41% female; $M_{age}$ = 32). We randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions, in a 2 (selective vs. non-selective course) x 2 (brand tourist vs. brand immigrant condition) design. All participants were asked to imagine that they are students enrolled in a university course. To manipulate the selectiveness of the course, we varied the effort required to enroll: "The class is limited to a select number of students [open to all students.] You worked very hard to meet the high requirements for enrolling in this class [There are no specific requirements for enrolling in this class.]" Moreover, we told participants about a new book based on the class, and we manipulated between-subjects whether the book was positioned and advertised as a sampling of the class (brand tourist condition), or as a substitute for taking the class (brand immigrant condition). Specifically, participants in the brand tourist [brand immigrant] condition read the following book description: "You just found out that the university press has published a popular book based on the course. The back cover of the book indicates that readers can view this book as a sampling of the class: 'Get a taste of what it would feel like to attend these lectures!' [as an almost perfect substitute for taking the class: 'Now everyone can gain access to these lectures!']" To examine how the brand tourist manipulation affected the image of the course, participants then responded to the three prestige scale items (Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999) measuring the extent to which the image of the course was rated as (a) "Exclusive," (b) "High status," and (c) "Prestigious" on a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "Strongly disagree" to (7) "Strongly agree."

While in study 3 we first measured the mediator and then the dependent variables, in this study, we reversed the order of the measures to avoid potential order effects. Thus, we next measured feelings of pride and anger. While our focus and predictions center on pride, we

measured both kinds of feelings to test whether pride is the dominant mediating mechanism of the brand tourism effect. Moreover, collecting both measures allowed us to reduce potential demand effects. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate how (a) "Proud" and (b) "Angry" they felt as students in the course on a scale ranging from (1) "Not at all" to (7) "Extremely." The order of appearance of the two items was randomized.

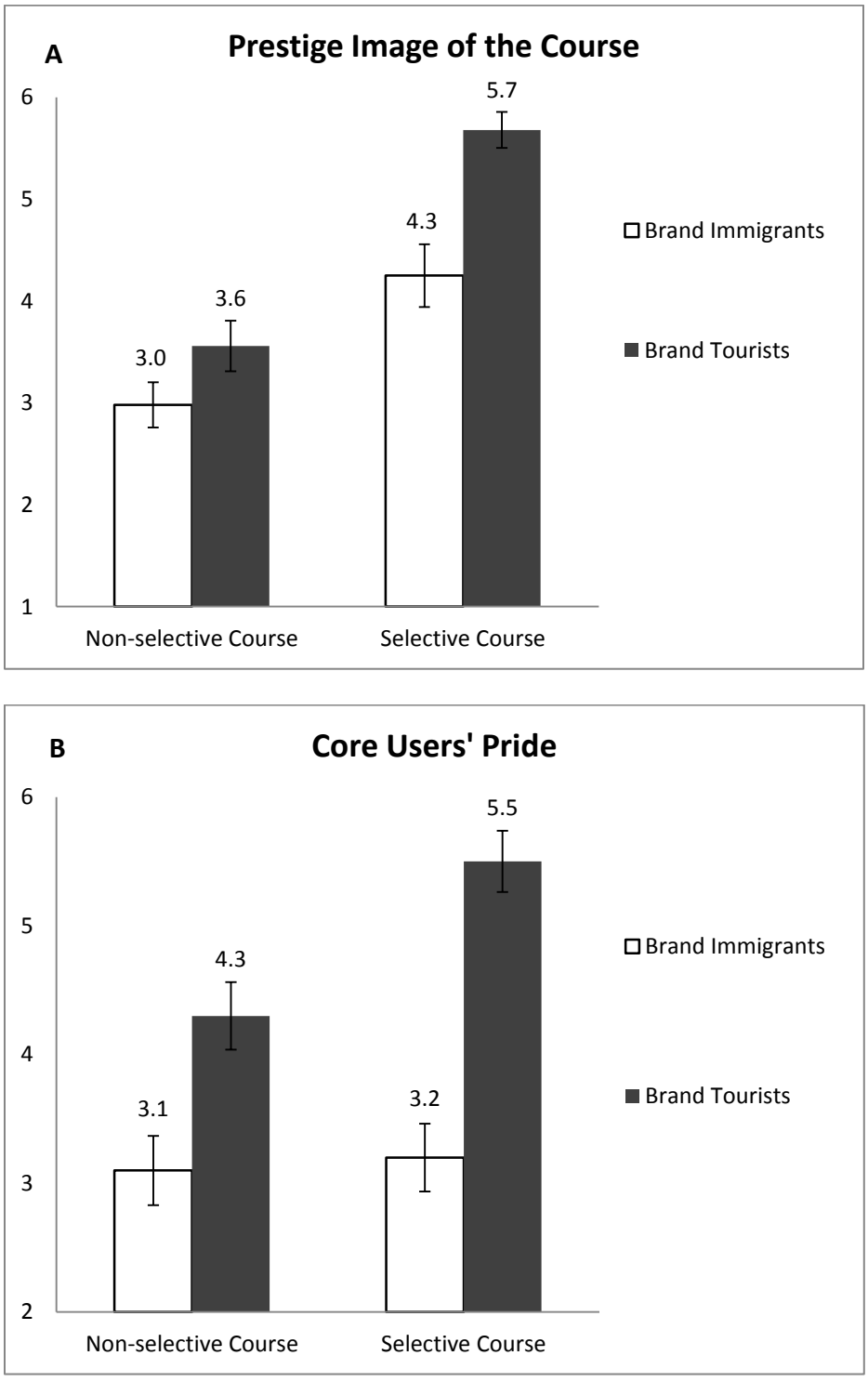
Subsequently, we assessed the success of our manipulations by asking participants to rate the degree of effort required to enroll: "Do you perceive this course as selective?" on a scale from (1) "Not selective at all" to (7) "Extremely selective," and "How much effort is required for students to enroll in this course?" on a scale from (1) "Definitely not much effort" to (7) "Very much effort." Finally, three additional manipulation check items tested the extent to which non-core users were perceived to claim membership: (a) "Book readers will see themselves as course students," (b) "Readers will claim they are like students in the course," and (c) "Book readers will feel they are just as knowledgeable as students who actually took the course;" items were measured on a scale ranging from (1) "Definitely not" to (7) "Definitely yes."

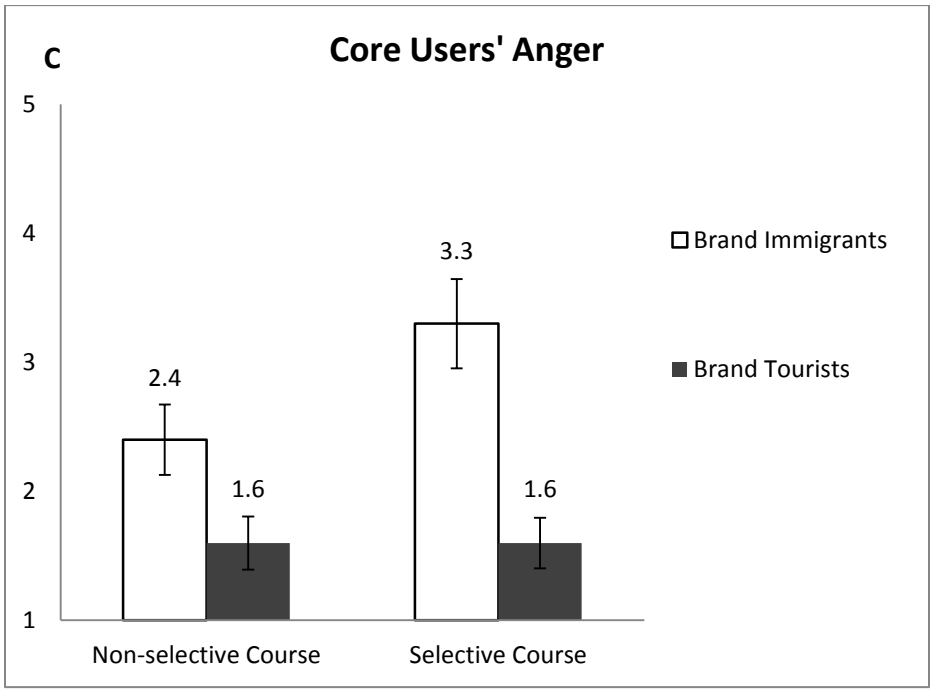
Results. The analysis of the manipulation check on selectiveness (2 items, Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .91) confirmed that getting access to the class was perceived as more effortful in the selective course condition than in the non-selective condition ($M_{selective}$ = 5.7 vs. $M_{non\text{-}selective}$ = 2.5, $t(146)$ = 13.3, $p < .001$). Moreover, the analysis of the manipulation check for claiming (3 items, Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .84) confirmed that book readers in the brand immigrant condition were perceived to claim more in-group membership than book readers in the brand tourist condition ($M_{immigrant}$ = 4.7 vs. $M_{tourist}$ = 3.9, $t(146)$ = 3.3, $p < .01$).

Next, we conducted a 2 (selective vs. non-selective course) x 2 (brand tourist vs. brand immigrant condition) between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of brand image of the course as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for the selectiveness of

the course ($F(1, 144) = 48.1$, $p < .001$), a significant main effect for the brand tourism manipulation ($F(1, 144) = 16.9$, $p < .001$), and a marginally significant interaction ($F(1, 144) = 3.0$, $p = .08$), depicted in figure 1.5.A. As predicted, when the course was described as selective, students perceived the course as more prestigious in the brand tourist condition than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{\text{tourist selective}} = 5.7$ vs. $M_{\text{immigrant selective}} = 4.3$, $t(72) = 4.0$, $p < .001$). We also tested whether these prestige ratings were significantly different from the scale mid-point (4). The prestige image of the course in the brand tourist condition was significantly higher than the scale mid-point ($M_{\text{tourist selective}} = 5.7$, $t(36) = 9.6$, $p < .001$), whereas the prestige image in the brand immigrant condition was not significantly different than the mid-point ($M_{\text{immigrant selective}} = 4.3$, $t(36) = .82$, NS). When the course was described as non-selective, there was a marginally significant difference between brand tourist and the brand immigrant condition ($M_{\text{tourist non-selective}} = 3.6$ vs. $M_{\text{immigrant non-selective}} = 3.0$, $t(72) = 1.7$, $p = .09$). In absolute terms, both ratings were lower than the scale midpoint ($M_{\text{tourist non-selective}} = 3.6$, $t(38) = 1.8$, $p = .09$; $M_{\text{immigrant non-selective}} = 3.0$, $t(34) = 4.6$, $p < .001$). Open-ended comments that participants were free to write at the end of the study suggested that participants in the selective course were flattered by the book's positioning as a sample of the class and used it as proof of value for the course. Participants commented, *"It's* a good thing that they are publicizing the course. That means that the course I *got into was so good that everyone wants to do it"*; and *"I* would feel happy and proud to be in such a class, especially given that I earned my way in and wasn*'t simply placed there by luck."* In contrast, participants in the non-selective course did not find it plausible that the book would generate a positive brand tourism effect: *"*It's an open class without requirements, so it sounds like an intro class. I don't see what the big deal is with the book being a "taste" of the class. Just sounds like an intro class which isn*'t a big deal either way."*

FIGURE 1.5: STUDY 5 RESULTS – THE BRAND TOURISM EFFECT FOR SELECTIVE VERSUS NON-SELECTIVE BRAND COMMUNITIES






Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

Subsequently, we conducted a similar ANOVA using feelings of pride as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for the selectiveness of the course ($F(1, 144) = 5.3$, $p < .05$), a significant main effect for the brand tourism manipulation ($F(1, 144) = 44.1$, $p < .001$), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 144) = 5.0$, $p < .05$), depicted in figure 1.5.B. As predicted, when the course was described as selective, students reported higher feelings of pride in the brand tourist condition than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{\text{tourist selective}} = 5.5$ vs. $M_{\text{immigrant selective}} = 3.2$, $t(72) = 6.5$, $p < .001$). In absolute terms, pride in the brand tourist condition was significantly higher than the scale mid-point ($M_{\text{tourist selective}} = 5.5$, $t(36) = 6.1$, $p < .001$). In contrast, pride in the brand immigrant condition was significantly lower than the scale mid-point ($M_{\text{immigrant selective}} = 3.2$, $t(36) = 3.2$, $p < .01$). When the course was described as non-selective, there was also a significant difference between brand tourist and the brand immigrant conditions ($M_{\text{tourist non-selective}} = 4.3$ vs. $M_{\text{immigrant non-selective}} = 3.1$, $t(72) = 3.0$, $p < .01$); however

pride in the brand tourist condition was not significantly different than the scale mid-point ($M_{tourist\ non\text{-}selective}$ = 4.3, t(38) = 1.1, NS).

Finally, we conducted a similar ANOVA using feelings of anger as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a non-significant main effect for the selectiveness of the course (F(1, 144) = 2.3, NS), a significant main effect for the brand tourism manipulation (F(1, 144) = 23.2, p < .001), and a marginally significant interaction (F(1, 144) = 3.3, p = .07), depicted in figure 1.5.C. When the course was described as selective, students reported lower feelings of anger in the brand tourist condition than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist\ selective}$ = 1.6 vs. $M_{immigrant\ selective}$ = 3.3, t(72) = 4.3, p < .001). When the course was described as non-selective, there also was a significant difference between brand tourist and the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist\ non\text{-}selective}$ = 1.6 vs. $M_{immigrant\ non\text{-}selective}$ = 2.4, t(72) = 2.3, p < .05). Interestingly, when the book was positioned as a substitute of the class (i.e., in the brand immigrant conditions), participants were angrier in the selective condition, that is when access to the class was limited and some effort was required to gain in-group status ($M_{immigrant\ selective}$ = 3.3 vs. $M_{immigrant\ non\text{-}selective}$ = 2.4, t(70) = 2.0, p = .05). The finding on anger is in line with previous research examining prestige versus mainstream brands (Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999). This work suggests that owners of prestige brands react negatively in response to downward brand extensions, because of their desire to maintain brand exclusivity.

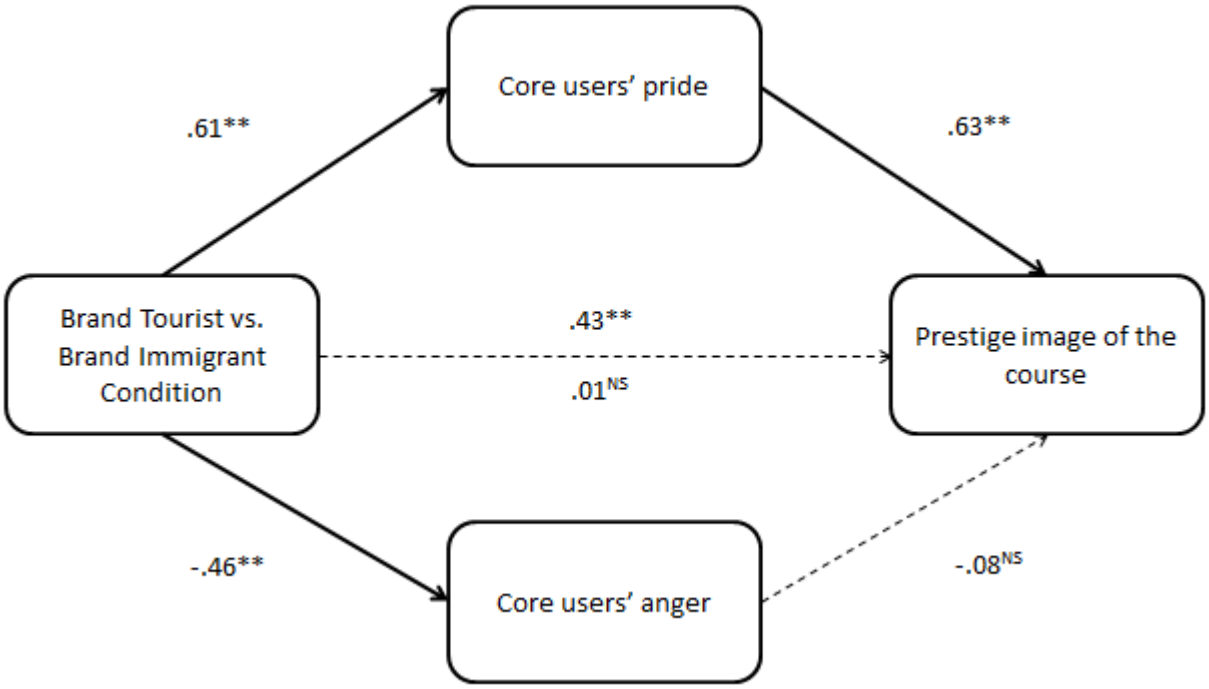
Mediation Analysis. The analysis tested whether the difference in prestige image of the course as a function of the brand tourism manipulation was jointly or differentially mediated by pride and anger. We employed a series of regression procedures that allowed us to look at the role of both pride and anger simultaneously and independently. Focusing on the two selective course conditions, the independent variable (dummy coded as 1 for brand tourist and 0 for brand immigrant) predicted both pride ($\beta$ = .61, t(72) = 6.5, p <.001) and anger ($\beta$ = -.46, t(72) = -4.3,

p <.001). In addition, consistent with our hypothesis, only the direct effect of pride significantly predicted the prestige image of the course ($\beta$ = .63, t(70) = 5.6, p <.001), whereas anger was not a significant predictor ($\beta$ = -.08, t(70) = -.75, NS). Last, this analysis revealed that book description (i.e., the tourist vs. immigrant manipulation) no longer predicted the prestige image of the course (from $\beta$ = .43, t(72) = 4.0, p <.001, to $\beta$ = .01, t(70) = .09, NS). Furthermore, we tested whether the indirect effect (the path through the mediator) was significant using bootstrapping procedures for multiple mediator models (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The indirect effect involving pride was significant, and the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .64 to 2.16), indicating successful mediation through this path, whereas the indirect effect involving anger was not significant (95% CI = -.32 to .68; see figure 1.6).

Mediated Moderation Analysis. To test mediation by pride (hypothesis 2) and moderation by selectiveness of the brand community (hypothesis 4), we conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Edwards and Lambert 2007) examining whether greater pride mediated the interaction between the brand tourism manipulation and selectiveness on prestige image of the course.

As reported above, selectiveness of the course significantly moderated both the dependent variable (prestige image) and the mediator (pride). Moreover, when prestige image of the course was regressed on the brand tourism manipulation, selectiveness of the course, their two-way interaction, and pride, the mediator was significant ($\beta$ = .59, t(143) = 9.3, p < .001), and the effect of the interaction between brand tourism manipulation and selectiveness of the course on the dependent variable became non-significant ($\beta$ = .04, t(143) = .45, NS). In a bootstrap analysis, we found that the confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .12 to 1.29), suggesting a significant overall indirect effect.

FIGURE 1.6: STUDY 5 RESULTS – MEDIATION VIA PRIDE AND ANGER ON PRESTIGE IMAGE OF THE COURSE




Note. Path coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients. Coefficients significantly different from zero are indicated by asterisks (**p < .001), and their associated paths are shown by solid lines; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths.

Discussion. Taken together, the results of study 5 deepen our understanding of the mediating and moderating processes underlying the brand tourism effect. We find that marketing a non-core product as a sample, rather than as a substitute, of the core offering generates a positive brand tourism effect by eliciting feelings of pride. We also examine the role of anger and show that while anger is lower in the brand tourist condition, pride is the dominant emotion driving the effect. Moreover, study 5 provides evidence for the selectiveness of the brand as a moderator of the brand tourism effect by comparing the responses of in-group members of selective versus non-selective communities. As predicted, we find that the enhancement of the brand image due to the brand tourism effect is attenuated for non-selective communities. We

show that when the course is depicted as selective, non-core products not conferring membership status have a positive impact on the image of the course, validating its desirability and prestige. In contrast, when the course is perceived as non-selective, the brand tourism manipulation is less effective.

In the next study we examine the strategic management of symbols of membership to the brand community, another method that can be directly applied by marketers.

## Study 6: The Brand Tourism Effect and Signals of Membership

In this study, we explore how firms can manage signals of membership to the brand community to generate the inference that non-core users are brand tourists rather than brand immigrants. Indeed, managers can increase the perceived separation between core users and peripheral users by strategically managing symbols that allow core users to claim full membership to the community. Often, membership clubs distribute branded symbols and accessories that signal club affiliation to their members. For example, the exclusive Italian Yacht Club in Genoa gives a stylish tie decorated with the club's logo as a gift to its affiliates upon acquiring membership. Notably, the tie is not available for sale to non-members. The NY Athletic Club, a prestigious gym in the US, gives its members club-branded warm-ups, socks and stickers. Inspired by this phenomenon, which is common among many sports, golf, and country clubs, the scenario portrayed in this study features a selective sports club where members receive a distinctive accessory with the club's logo. We describe non-core users of the club as visitors who buy passes to the gym during non-peak hours. We manipulate between conditions whether these visitors receive the distinctive symbol of affiliation to the club (a gym bag with the club's logo used by core members). Moreover, this study further investigates the mediating role of pride

and, in addition to the pride measures used in studies 3 and 5, it also assesses a direct measure of "pride to be a core member." We predict that members of the club will feel prouder and will perceive the image of the club as more prestigious when visitors who buy passes to the gym are depicted as brand tourists rather than brand immigrants. In other words, core users will react positively only when it is clear to them that the visitors are not claiming in-group status. When the distinctive symbol of affiliation to the club (the gym bag with the club's logo) is clearly reserved for club members, the visitors do not compromise the exclusivity of the club but rather boosts the pride of core members and reinforce the image and desirability of the club.

Method. Sixty-nine participants responded to a paid online survey (47% female; $M_{age}$ = 38). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (brand tourist or brand immigrant condition). All participants were told, "Imagine you are a member of a gym and sports club. All members receive a distinctive gym bag with the club's logo. Members of the club typically use this recognizable gym bag whenever they go." The description manipulated between-subjects whether people buying these passes would receive the gym bag or not. Specifically, participants in the brand tourist [brand immigrant] condition read: "The club is open to members only, however during non-peak hours, people who do not have gym membership can buy a guest pass and get access to the gym. People typically line up to buy one-day passes and have the chance to spend time at the sports club. They do not [also] receive the distinctive gym bag with the club's logo."

After reading the descriptions, all participants rated the prestige image of the club. As in previous studies, we used the brand prestige scale (Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges 1999) and asked participants to rate the extent to which the image of the gym club was perceived as (a) "Exclusive," (b) "High status," and (c) "Prestigious," using a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "Strongly disagree" to (7) "Strongly agree." Next, we collected pride through three measures.

First, similarly to study 3, we asked participants to rate the pride of gym club members using a 7 point scale ranging from (1) "Very low" to (7) "Very high." Second, as in study 5, participants indicated how (a) "Proud" and (b) "Angry" they felt on a scale ranging from (1) "Not at all" to (7) "Extremely." The order of appearance of the two items was randomized. Third, we asked respondents to indicate whether they felt "Proud to be a member of the club" and "Proud be a considered part of the club" on a scale ranging from (1) "Not proud at all" to (7) "Extremely proud." We averaged the last two items to create a measure of pride to be a core member.

Finally, as a manipulation check, participants answered the following two items: "One-day visitors will claim membership to the club" and "One-day visitors will see themselves as club members" on a scale ranging from (1) "Definitely no" to (7) "Definitely yes."

Results. The analysis of the manipulation check (2 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$) confirmed that non-core users in the brand immigrant condition were perceived to claim more in-group membership than non-core users in the brand tourist condition ($M_{immigrant} = 4.7$ vs. $M_{tourist} = 3.6$, $t(67) = 2.9$, $p < .01$). The analysis of the brand image (3 items Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) revealed that participants perceived the brand as more prestigious in the brand tourist than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.3$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 4.1$, $t(67) = 3.4$, $p < .01$). In addition, the analysis of pride revealed a similar pattern of results across all measures. First, participants' ratings of club members' pride was higher in the brand tourist than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.8$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 4.9$, $t(67) = 2.9$, $p < .01$). Second, participants reported higher feelings of pride in the brand tourist than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 4.6$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 3.8$, $t(67) = 2.1$, $p < .05$), whereas feelings of anger were equally low in both conditions ($M_{tourist} = 2.0$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 2.1$, $t(67) = .24$, NS). Finally, pride to be a core member (2 items Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) was higher in the brand tourist than in the brand immigrant condition ($M_{tourist} = 5.5$ vs. $M_{immigrant} = 4.8$, $t(67) = 2.2$, $p < .05$).

Mediation Analyses. A series of mediation analyses examined whether the relationship between the independent variable (brand tourist vs. brand immigrant) and the dependent variable (prestige image of the club) was mediated by each of the three measures of pride: (a) rating of club members' pride, (b) feelings of pride, and (c) pride to be a core member.

First, the effect of the independent variable (dummy coded as 1 for tourist and 0 for immigrant) on prestige image was significantly reduced (from $\beta = .38$, $t(67) = 3.4$, $p < .01$, to $\beta = .18$, $t(66) = 1.9$, $p = .07$) when rating of club members' pride was included in the mediation model, whereas rating of club members' pride was a significant predictor ($\beta = .58$, $t(66) = 5.9$, $p < .001$). The confidence interval for the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .29 to 1.11). Second, the effect of the independent variable on prestige image was significantly reduced (from $\beta = .38$, $t(67) = 3.4$, $p < .01$, to $\beta = .27 = .35$, $t(66) = 2.6$, $p < .05$) when feelings of pride were included in the model, whereas feelings of pride were a significant predictor ($\beta = .43$, $t(66) = 4.2$, $p < .001$). The confidence interval for the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .02 to .79).[4] Third, the effect of the independent variable on prestige image was significantly reduced (from $\beta = .38$, $t(67) = 3.4$, $p < .01$, to $\beta = .24$, $t(66) = 2.5$, $p < .05$) when pride to be a core member was included in the model, whereas pride to be a core member was a significant predictor ($\beta = .56$, $t(66) = 5.8$, $p < .001$). The confidence interval for the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .04 to 1.06).

Discussion. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that firms can generate the perception that non-core users are brand tourists rather than brand immigrants by strategically managing the symbols of affiliation to the club. The findings from this study provide further evidence in support of the brand tourism effect and show that non-core users perceived as brand tourists inspire feelings of pride and thus enhance the image of the brand in the eyes of core users.

[4] We also run a multiple mediator model to simultaneously test feelings of pride and anger. The indirect effect of pride was significant (95% CI = .04 to .89), whereas the indirect effect of anger was not (95% CI = -.16 to .05).

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

This paper establishes a novel framework to understand the responses of core consumers of selective brands to non-core users of the brand and downward brand extensions. Six studies demonstrate that the reaction to non-core users depends on whether they are perceived to claim in-group status to the brand community. We distinguish between two types of non-core users based on how they are viewed by core consumers of the brand: "brand immigrants" who appear to claim membership (i.e., consider themselves as part of the in-group of core brand consumers) and "brand tourists" who do not claim any membership (i.e., do not claim to be part of the brand core in-group). While brand immigrants pose a threat to the image and distinctiveness of selective brands, brand tourists can actually reinforce and enhance the brand's desirability and value in the eyes of core users. As shown in our conceptual model (figure 2.1), we demonstrate that the positive response to brand tourists is mediated by the feelings of pride held by current core consumers for the brand. We further demonstrate that the effect is moderated by core customers' level of attachment to the brand measured through the brand patriotism scale. Finally, our studies show that the brand tourism effect applies to brand communities that are perceived as selective and that require effort to gain membership.

We broaden the breadth of prior research on brand extension for prestige brands (Dubois and Paternault 1995; Kirmani et al. 1999; Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991) by identifying the conditions under which non-core users and downward extensions of exclusive brands enhance, rather than dilute, the brand image. Our findings also contribute to our understanding of intergroup dynamics within brand communities (Berger and Heath 2008; Mazzocco et al. 2012; Shalev and Morwitz 2012; White and Argo 2011; White and Dahl 2007). We demonstrate that

when non-core users show admiration for the brand but do not claim membership status to the brand community, they are perceived as brand tourists and enhance the image of the brand. Moreover, we provide new insights into a novel psychological mechanism by investigating pride among core consumers of the brand as a key mediating process of the brand tourism effect. Finally, our research further contributes to the branding literature by offering strategies to leverage the brand tourism effect and boost pride among core users of exclusive brands.

## Directions for Future Research

Our conceptual framework could be further applied to explore additional important marketing and consumption phenomena such as response to brand extensions in different product categories, response to "brand emigrants," response to counterfeits, and others.

Brand Extensions in Different Product Categories. Applying the brand tourism theoretical conceptualization to the question of consumer's response to high versus low-fit brand extensions can potentially add a new perspective to the debate in the branding literature about this topic (for a review, see Loken and Roedder John 2009; Meyvis, Goldsmith, and Dhar 2012). Our distinction between brand immigrants and brand tourists is based on whether these non-core users are perceived by core users of a brand to claim in-group status. To operationalize this distinction and provide a stronger test for our conceptualization, we hold the product category constant in both the tourist and immigrant conditions and manipulate the description of these non-core users as either claiming or not claiming in-group status. However, it is also possible that certain product categories are inherently more or less likely to be viewed as providing new customers an opportunity to claim in-group status.

Response to Emigrants. At a conceptual level, our classification of brand users can be further extended to include another category, the "brand emigrants" – those who could claim in-group status, but willingly decided not to claim it. These would include, for instance, a consumer who owns a Ferrari car but decides to replace it with a different luxury sports car, or a full-time undergraduate student at Harvard who transfers to another institution (e.g., M.I.T.) to complete the degree. Brand emigrants inspire negative reactions from core users of the brand, just as citizens might feel betrayed by compatriots who decided to leave the country and live elsewhere. Previous research has documented the abandonment of previously held tastes and products to avoid disliked out-groups who adopt similar consumption behaviors (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; Berger and Ward 2010; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010; White and Argo 2011; White and Dahl 2006, 2007). In the case of emigrants, we would examine the effect of liked in-group members abandoning the brand community.

Response to Counterfeits. An alternative way for new customers to get access to the brand at a lower price is by buying a counterfeit version of the product (e.g., buying a fake Gucci purse or a Rolex replica). Our conceptualization suggests that the consumption of counterfeits may have a negative or positive effect, depending on whether the consumers of counterfeit products claim in-group status. When it is not apparent that the counterfeit version is fake, and people mistake it for a real branded product, then counterfeit users will be seen as "illegal immigrants," claiming to be part of the core users' in-group. However, when it is apparent that the product is fake, and neither the product nor its users are associated with the brand, then users of such fake products may be seen as brand tourists.

Other Extensions. Future work could examine individual characteristics of the brand tourists (e.g., socio-economic background, age) and manipulate the similarity to the prototypical profile of the core users along several dimensions. Based on existing literature examining

intergroup dynamics, two divergent predictions can be formulated regarding this question and are open to potential future empirical investigation. Some research on dissociative out-groups (Berger and Heath 2008; White and Dahl 2006, 2007) would suggest that brand tourists of analogous profile to the core users should be more welcome to the brand community and thus elicit positive reactions among core in-group members; however, other research on intergroup differentiation (see Jetten et al. 2004 for a review) would suggest that brand tourists particularly similar to the prototypical core user would pose a threat to the identity of the core members and potentially dilute the distinctiveness of the in-group. Moreover, a complementary research angle could examine brand tourism beyond the perspective of core users of the brand. Indeed, managers have to consider and balance the perceptions and needs of both their existing and prospective customers. Thus, future work could examine the effect of brand tourists on non-users and potential users of the brand. It would be interesting to compare the effect of brand tourists between non-members potentially interested in belonging to the brand community and non-members who are not interested in engaging with the brand at all. Finally, another fruitful direction for further research pertains to the investigation of the primary drivers motivating core users to belong to the brand community in the first place. For example, one hypothesis is that core users whose primary motive for belonging to a selective brand community is status display (e.g., individuals buying a Ferrari car to show off) might react even more positively to brand tourists relative to core users seeking primarily functionality (e.g., individuals buying a Ferrari car because of the superiority of the engine).

Alternative Explanations. Results in the manipulations entailing more explicit claims by the core users (studies 3 and 4) might potentially be driven by perceived honesty; that is, brand tourists might elicit positive reactions because they are viewed as honest, whereas brand immigrants might elicit negative reactions because they are illegitimately over-claiming

membership. While honesty is an interesting and relevant aspect to consider, when exploring responses to non-core users, this mechanism cannot fully explain our findings. In particular, honesty would not account for the positive boost generated by brand tourists compared to a neutral control condition, or for the moderators supporting our theoretical framework (i.e., brand patriotism and selectiveness). Moreover, honesty is less of a concern across all other studies manipulating how marketers position or advertise the non-core products (studies 2, 5, and 6).

## Managerial Implications

Our findings offer actionable strategies for brand managers who want to leverage their brand by launching new products and extend their consumer base without incurring brand dilution and compromising the long term equity of their brands. Our research demonstrates the importance of understanding and managing the perceptions and reactions of existing core consumers to new non-core branded products and their buyers:

Minimizing the Negative Effects of Brand Immigration. Our findings suggest that core users of exclusive brands react less negatively to downward brand extension and their customers when these non-core users do not claim in-group status. Thus marketers need to carefully manage the perceptions of these non-core consumers and their ability to claim membership status.

Some firms actively limit outsiders' access to the products when they are not part of the brand owners' in-group. For example, the luxury car brand Aston Martin recently launched its first luxury city car, the Aston Martin Cygnet, priced around $50,000. Interestingly, Aston Martin announced in its brand magazine that only current Aston Martin owners will be able to purchase the Cygnet (New York Times 2009). Another example is provided by Tough Mudder.

In 2011, the company decided to launch a "Finisher Only" line of merchandise that could only be purchased at the end of the trail by participants who completed the run and earned the right to buy them. The line was very popular and sold out quickly.

Alternatively, managers can mitigate the effects of brand immigration by strategically increasing the perceived separation between core products and brand extensions, as seen in study 6. Examples of such strategies might include launching distinct types of packaging, separate distribution channels, dissimilar customer service, or targeting an unrelated consumer group that cannot be mistaken for in-group members.

Finally, one more strategy for mitigating reactions to immigrants is creating a perception of immigrants as more deserving of in-group status. For example, in 2011 Bulgari launched the "Save the Children Collection." This line introduced more affordable silver versions of the B01 rings collection, previously available only in gold. The firm donated part of the revenues to a charity organization, thus shielding negative reactions of brand owners to the introduction of a less exclusive version. This is metaphorically equivalent to conferring "honorary citizenship" or offering citizenship eligibility to immigrants who volunteer to serve in the military.

Leveraging Brand Tourism. Throughout our studies we demonstrate that brand tourists have a positive impact on the brand. Managers could therefore strategically manipulate the presence of brand tourists in order to increase product liking and feelings of pride among their consumers. For example, several brands grant visibility to brand tourists by publicly displaying on their websites the statistics about the number of Facebook fans and Twitter endorsers of the brand (e.g., Mercedes, New York Giants, Walt Disney World Resorts). Tough Mudder sought to test whether the presence of brand tourists could improve the perception of an obstacle that was poorly rated by previous race participants. In 2011 Tough Mudder introduced the "Electro Shock Therapy" obstacle in its racing trail. This obstacle required participants to sprint through a field

abstractof live wires, some of which carried a 10,000 volt electric shock. Post-event ratings from the first event indicated very poor liking. In a subsequent event, the obstacle was strategically placed closer to the audience, so that participants were watched by spectators while sprinting though the wires. As a result, participants evaluated this obstacle more positively. In the absence of spectators, 19.5% of participants wanted to remove "Electro Shock Therapy," whereas when spectators were present, only 5.5% of participants wanted to remove this obstacle ($z = 10.6$, $p < .001$; 2.457 observations). The control conditions were represented by two other obstacles (i.e., "Devil's beard," and "Log Bog") that maintained the same trail position in both events and were not watched by spectators. There was no increased liking for the control obstacles and the number of participants who wanted to remove these obstacles was stable between races (around 8% for Devil's beard and around 5% for Log Bog). It would be interesting to further examine the positive effect of the presence of brand tourists in a variety of consumption contexts.

Successful luxury brands creatively cultivate brand tourism by creating touristy destinations such as extravagant flagship stores and brand museums. Several prestige brands have recently dedicated entire museums to the history and the myth of their brand (e.g., Louis Vuitton, Valentino, Gucci, Nike) and accompanied the opening of these museums with extensive media exposure. Such brand museums offer access to consumers who wish to pay tribute to the brand, but do not confer any membership status to visitors. This strategy contributes to the enhancement of the brand image and boosts the pride of core users of the brand. In sum, managers of exclusive brands need to constantly nurture and sustain the value of their brand. Our research stresses the importance of embracing and cultivating brand tourism and demonstrates that brand tourists can serve as a source of pride and value for the brand.

# The Red Sneakers Effect: Inferring Status and Competence from Signals of Nonconformity

SILVIA BELLEZZA

FRANCESCA GINO

ANAT KEINAN

## Abstract

This research examines how people react to nonconforming behaviors, such as entering a luxury boutique wearing gym clothes rather than an elegant outfit or wearing red sneakers in a professional setting. Nonconforming behaviors, as costly and visible signals, can act as a particular form of conspicuous consumption and lead to positive inferences of status and competence in the eyes of others. A series of studies demonstrates that people confer higher status and competence to nonconforming rather than conforming individuals. These positive inferences derived from signals of nonconformity are mediated by perceived autonomy and moderated by individual differences in need for uniqueness in the observers. An investigation of boundary conditions demonstrates that the positive inferences disappear when the observer is unfamiliar with the environment, when the nonconforming behavior is depicted as unintentional, and in the absence of expected norms and shared standards of formal conduct.

> Your sweats, PJs and flip-flops are losing you money! … Do you crave more confidence, respect and power? … Find out how image connects to success!
> -- Eve Michaels, author of Dress Code

> I have a number of super-successful Silicon Valley clients who dress in ripped denim, Vans shoes, and t-shirts. They are worth hundreds of millions, even more, but it's a status symbol to dress like you're homeless to attend board meetings.
> -- Tom Searcy, CBS Moneywatch

In both professional and non-professional settings, individuals often make a significant effort to learn and adhere to dress codes, etiquette, and other written and unwritten standards of behavior. Conformity to such rules and social norms is driven by a desire to gain social acceptance and status (see Cialdini and Goldstein 2004) and avoid negative sanctions such as social disapproval, ridicule, and exclusion (Kruglanski and Webster 1991; Levine 1989; Miller and Anderson 1979; Schachter 1951). In the present research, we propose that under certain conditions, nonconforming behaviors can be more beneficial than efforts to conform and can signal higher status and competence to others. We argue that while unintentional violations of normative codes and etiquette can indeed result in negative inferences and attributions, when the deviant behavior appears to be deliberate, it can lead to higher rather than lower status and competence inferences.

Since nonconformity often has a social cost (e.g., Levine 1989; Schachter 1951), observers may infer that a nonconforming individual is in a powerful position that allows her to risk the social costs of nonconformity without fear of losing her place in the social hierarchy. Signaling theory suggests that, for a signal to be effective, it must be costly and observable by others (Feltovich, Harbaugh, and To 2002; Spence 1973; Zahavi and Zahavi 1997). We propose that nonconforming behaviors, as costly and observable signals, can act as a particular form of conspicuous consumption and lead to inferences of status and competence by observers. Such positive inferences are consistent with Veblen's classic theory of conspicuous consumption

(1899/1994), which suggests that individuals display status through the prominent, visible evidence of their ability to afford luxury goods. Similarly, we argue that nonconformity can lead to inferences of higher status and greater competence by providing visible evidence that individuals can afford to follow their own volition. Based on some of our experimental stimuli for nonconformity, we label this potential positive outcome of nonconforming behaviors the "red sneakers effect."

As a preliminary test, we first explore the relationship between nonconformity and status in the field by examining the dress style of conference participants and their professional status. Next, five lab and field studies explore how nonconforming behavior is perceived by others. In particular, when do people interpret nonconformity as a signal of status and competence, and what are the processes underlying such inferences? Our studies explore various consumption environments and populations, including shop assistants at high-end boutiques, business executives, and college students.

Our investigation of psychological processes reveals that inferences of status and competence derived from signals of nonconformity are mediated by perceived autonomy. We demonstrate that nonconformity can fuel perceptions of status and competence in the eyes of others because deviating from the norm signals that one has the autonomy needed to act according to one's own inclinations and to bear the cost of nonconformity. Moreover, we show that the relationship between a person's nonconforming behavior and observers' perceptions of enhanced status and competence is moderated by observers' need for uniqueness (Snyder and Fromkin 1977), such that observers with high levels of need for uniqueness tend to confer greater status and competence to nonconforming behaviors as compared to observers with low needs for uniqueness. We further investigate boundary conditions of the effect by manipulating and

measuring additional characteristics of the observers, of the environment, and of the nonconforming behavior.

Our research contributes to the conspicuous consumption literature and to research on nonconformity. First, we extend consumer behavior research analyzing alternative and counterintuitive ways to display status, such as using less recognizable but more expensive luxury brands and products or smaller logos (Berger and Ward 2010; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010). Specifically, we investigate a different kind of consumer behavior and an alternative way of displaying status (e.g., violating a dress code rather than buying subtly branded but expensive luxury products). Second, in contrast to most nonconformity research, which has focused on nonconforming individuals and the antecedents for their behavior, we focus on the consequences of nonconformity and on the perceptions of external observers. Importantly, we concentrate on nonconformity-based inferences of status and competence.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Society has powerful formal and informal mechanisms that motivate individuals to conform to social norms and expectations regarding appropriate conduct. While conformity is rewarded with group acceptance and social inclusion (see Cialdini and Goldstein 2004), nonconformity can be risky and costly, often leading to social disapproval, rejection, and punishment (Anderson, Ames, and Gosling 2008; Anderson et al. 2006; Levine 1989; Lin, Dahl, and Argo 2013; Marques, Abrams, and Serôdio 2001; Miller and Anderson 1979; Schachter 1951; Wilson 1979). The power of these rewards and sanctions has been demonstrated in classic social psychology experiments. For example, in Asch's (1956) well-known studies examining the conformity of judgments and opinions in groups, participants often conformed because it was

easier to follow the crowd than to face the consequences of going against it (Crutchfield 1955). More powerful and disturbing evidence comes from Zimbardo's prison experiment (1973), in which volunteers who were randomly assigned the roles of "guards" or "prisoners" behaved accordingly, and Milgram's obedience experiments (1963), which demonstrated that people readily conform to the social roles they are expected to play.

In the context of consumer behavior, research demonstrates that assimilation and conformity motives can drive consumption practices and choices in the marketplace. Consumers are motivated to behave like those around them and make choices that are consistent with their in-group due to a need to increase affiliation and express desired identities (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989; Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; McFerran, Dahl, Fitzsimons, and Morales 2010a; b). In particular, individuals who feel socially excluded and lonely are more likely to conform in an effort to avoid the negative evaluations of others by selecting products endorsed by most consumers (Mead et al. 2011; Wang, Zhu, and Shiv 2012).

Given these powerful social mechanisms, researchers across disciplines, including sociology, social psychology, economics, and marketing, have devoted their attention to the study of nonconformity and its antecedents. Nonconformity is generally defined as a behavior or belief that is inconsistent with norms or standards (Nail, Macdonald, and Levy 2000). In the consumer psychology literature, the tendency to engage in nonconforming consumption has been associated with a desire to distance the self from dissimilar, disliked, or unattractive others or from out-group members (Berger and Heath 2007, 2008; White and Dahl 2006, 2007), or to establish one's uniqueness and distinctiveness (Ariely and Levav 2000; Griskevicius et al. 2006; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Snyder and Fromkin 1977).

While this literature has focused primarily on the antecedents of the nonconforming individual's behaviors, in our work we shift the focus of analysis to how external observers

perceive and interpret nonconforming behaviors in terms of status and competence. That is, rather than examining individuals' decisions to conform or not conform, we examine the consequences of deviating from the norm in the eyes of others. A vast body of research on impression formation and status beliefs suggests that individuals rapidly make inferences and judgments of others' competence and status based on observable signals, such as appearance, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, attitudes, and consumption choices (Ambady and Rosenthal 1993; Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012; Hall, Coats, and LeBeau 2005; Knapp, Hall, and Horgan 2009; Magee 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2006; Ridgeway et al. 1998; Schmid Mast and Hall 2004; Todorov et al. 2005). We contribute to this literature by investigating the conditions under which lay observers make nonconformity-based inferences of targets' economic, professional, and social status.

## Nonconformity, Status, and Competence

As compared to low-status individuals, high-status individuals have wider latitude for deviation and are relatively free from social constraints (Feshbach 1967; Hollander 1958; Peterson and Kern 1996; Phillips and Zuckerman 2001). A group member can be said to earn and maintain increased status through "idiosyncratic credits," or an accumulation of positive impressions in the minds of the rest of the group (Hollander 1958). This accumulation is reflected in the degree to which the individual can deviate from group norms without sanction. Thus, unlike low-status group members, high-status members and powerful individuals can afford to deviate from conventional behavior and common expectations without social disapproval (Cartwright 1959; Galinsky et al. 2008; Haslam 2004; Sherif and Sherif 1964).

More specifically, in the domain of consumption, high-status individuals may voluntarily downgrade their lifestyle and adopt nonconforming consumption habits, such as material frugality, "omnivoreness" (consuming a broad range of products), and simplicity (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Brooks 1981; Holt 1998; Peterson and Kern 1996; Solomon 1999). For example, high-status individuals may choose to dress informally in business settings. Certain CEOs of major corporations, including Microsoft's Bill Gates and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, have been known to appear without ties or even wearing sweatshirts at interviews and formal gatherings such as the World Economic Forum (Etzioni 2004); some successful entrepreneurs have a habit of attending their companies' board meetings in casual dress, such as jeans and sneakers (Searcy 2011).

To provide empirical evidence of the relationship between nonconformity to dress codes and status and competence, we conducted a pilot observational study examining the potential relationship between the dress style of participants in a professional academic conference and the number of articles they had published. In this pilot study, we focus on the link between actual status and nonconforming behavior; in our remaining studies, we focus on the link between nonconforming behavior and observers' perceptions of status and competence. We predicted that conference participants who had gained greater status through research productivity would dress more casually than other participants. Participants were 76 randomly selected attendees of the 2011 Association for Consumer Research conference. We recorded the names of participants, as indicated on their name tags, and coded the formality of their dress. To code dress formality objectively, we created a composite score ranging from a minimum of 0 points (less formal) to a maximum of 4 points (more formal) by discretely coding four clothing elements worn by each participant. More specifically, we adopted the following scoring system: 1 point for wearing a blazer, 0 points otherwise; 1 point for wearing a button-down shirt or a dress, 0 points otherwise

(e.g., for a T-shirt); 1 point for wearing formal pants, 0 points otherwise (e.g., for jeans); 1 point for wearing dress shoes, 0 points otherwise (e.g., for sneakers). We then collected data on the number of publications for each scholar in our sample (based on information available online) as an objective measure of status and competence in the academic community. To control for gender and age, we also coded these variables (measuring age by years since PhD graduation) and included them in our regression analysis. We counted participants' total number of peer-reviewed publications in academic journals and their number of publications in top marketing journals for consumer behavior scholars, namely the Journal of Consumer Research, the Journal of Marketing Research, Marketing Science, the Journal of Marketing, Science, Psychological Science, and the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. We found that a less-conforming dress style was significantly correlated with research productivity ($r = -.35$, $p < .01$). Interestingly, this correlation was even stronger when focusing on publications in top marketing journals ($r = -.53$, $p < .001$). These results, which hold even when controlling for gender and age,[5] indicate that higher status and performance within a given community is correlated with a stronger tendency to deviate from a conforming dress code (e.g., wearing jeans, sneakers, T-shirts rather than professional attire). Although these results are correlational, they are consistent with Hollander's (1958) theoretical account that high-status and well-respected individuals tend to engage in nonconforming behaviors. But are these nonconforming behaviors actually interpreted as a signal of status and competence by third-party observers? And if so, when and why does this happen?

We propose that nonconforming behavior can act as a particular form of conspicuous consumption and lead to perceptions of enhanced status and competence in the eyes of others.

[5] In a linear regression, formality score was regressed on number of top publications, gender (dummy coded 1 for male, 0 for female), and age. The final model was significant ($R^2 = .29$, $F(3, 67) = 8.9$, $p < .001$). There was a significant effect of number of top publications ($\beta_{publications} = -.47$, $t(67) = -2.8$, $p < .01$), whereas the other independent variables were not significant ($\beta_{gender} = -.11$, NS; $\beta_{age} = -.02$, NS).

Observers may infer that a nonconforming individual is in a more powerful position that allows her to follow her volition in autonomy and bear the cost of deviating from the norm. Research suggests that high-status individuals tend to avoid blatant and conspicuous displays of wealth, status, or personal accomplishments, and instead seek alternative ways to differentiate themselves from lower-status individuals (Berger and Ward 2010; Feltovich et al. 2002; Han et al. 2010). For example, sophisticated luxury consumers elect to use less known and less conspicuous luxury brands. We investigate the conditions under which nonconforming behaviors, such as entering a luxury boutique wearing gym clothes rather than an elegant outfit or wearing red sneakers in a professional setting, can serve as an alternative, nonconventional form of conspicuous consumption. In line with research on status beliefs and impression formation (Hollander 1958; Ridgeway and Correll 2006; Ridgeway et al. 1998), we examine inferences of both status and competence. Status is defined as a higher position compared to others on some dimension (wealth, hierarchy, etc.), and it relates to the respect one has in the eyes of others (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Competence refers to the perceived ability to successfully pursue and perform specific tasks (Fiske et al. 2002).

We argue that inferences of greater status and competence from nonconforming behavior result from observers' attributions of the nonconforming individual's autonomy. Autonomy refers to self-governance and self-regulation (Ryan and Lynch 1989). The central idea in the concept of autonomy is indicated by the etymology of the term: autos (self) and nomos (rule or law). Thus autonomous individuals tend to act independently and behave according to their own rules. The significance of freedom and autonomy is built into the founding documents of the United States, and the idea that individuals are independent and autonomous is pervasive and generally greatly admired (Dworkin 1988; Markus and Schwartz 2010). Especially in Western cultures that place high value on individualism and independence, resisting group pressure can

be perceived as a brave and bold gesture (Baumeister 1982; Galinsky et al. 2008; Kim and Markus 1999). Here, we suggest that nonconformity can be perceived as admirable behavior that reflects high levels of autonomy and control. While being easily influenced by others is not an admired personal trait (see Jetten, Hornsey, and Adarves-Yorno 2006), deviating from the norm signals freedom and autonomy from the pressure to conform (Phillips and Zuckerman 2001; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006) and thus can fuel positive inferences in the eyes of others (Van Kleef et al. 2011; Simonson and Nowlis 2000). Hence, we predict that observers will infer enhanced status and competence from signals of nonconformity because they believe that nonconforming individuals have greater autonomy to act according to their own volition and bear the cost of nonconforming:

**H1:** Nonconforming behavior can lead to greater inferences of status and competence as compared to conforming behavior.

**H2:** Positive inferences of status and competence from nonconforming behavior will be mediated by observers' attributions of the nonconforming individual's autonomy.

Characteristics of the Observers. We investigate the impact of individual differences in observers' need for uniqueness (Nail et al. 2000; Snyder and Fromkin 1977) on how they interpret signals of nonconformity. Consumers' need for uniqueness reflects individual differences in motivations for distinguishing the self via consumer goods that manifest the willful pursuit of differentness relative to others (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). Individuals with a high level of need for uniqueness are particularly sensitive to the degree to which they are seen as similar to others and are more likely than others to exhibit behaviors that establish a sense of specialness, such as acquiring unique or scarce products (Snyder 1992).

Previous research on uniqueness motive demonstrates its impact on consumption choices and behavior (Ariely and Levav 2000; Chan, Berger, and Van Boven 2012; Cheema and Kaikati

2010; Irmak, Vallen, and Sen 2010; Lynn and Harris 1997; Maimaran and Wheeler 2008; Ratner and Kahn 2002; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; White and Argo 2011). For example, consumers with a high level of need for uniqueness tend to prefer objects that deviate from norms over those that comply with norms (Lynn and Harris 1997; Snyder and Fromkin 1977; Tian et al. 2001); these consumers often demonstrate nonconforming preferences in group contexts to distinguish themselves from others (Ariely and Levav 2000). Our studies measure *observers'* need for uniqueness and examine how such uniqueness motives impact the inferences observers make about a nonconforming individual. That is, rather than examining how need for uniqueness impacts consumers' decision to conform or not conform, we examine how it impacts the inferences they make about other individuals who deviate.

We hypothesize that individual differences related to need for uniqueness, as measured through the Tian et al. (2001) scale, will moderate the red sneakers effect. Research on uniqueness emphasizes that people who score relatively high on need for uniqueness often deviate from the norm in order to assert their differentness, affirm strong character and, thus, enhance their social-image (Gross 1977; Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). Moreover, high-need-for-uniqueness individuals are relatively free from social constraints imparted by others and exhibit high levels of autonomy (Snyder and Fromkin 1977). Accordingly, we expect those individuals who score high on need for uniqueness to associate (as external observers) higher autonomy, status, and competence with nonconforming behaviors relative to individuals with low need for uniqueness. Therefore, we predict that:

**H3:** Positive inferences of status and competence and attributions of autonomy from nonconforming behavior will be moderated by observers' need for uniqueness; observers with high levels of need for uniqueness will infer more status, competence, and autonomy

from nonconforming rather than conforming behavior as compared to observers with low levels of need for uniqueness.

We also examine observers' familiarity with the environment and consumption context as an important boundary condition for the red sneakers effect. Familiarity with the context is critical in verifying and understanding the signal of nonconformity (Hollander 1958). In the consumer behavior domain, individuals who are familiar with the context are capable of finer, more articulated discrimination in that specific environment compared to those who are not and they rely less on the ownership of prototypical product symbols (Solomon 1999). Accordingly, we predict that only observers who are familiar with the consumption context and have experience observing and interpreting individuals' behavior in this specific context will infer greater status and competence from signals of nonconformity rather than from signals of conformity. For example, in the setting of our observational study, conference participants may infer that their colleagues are violating the dress code with their casual attire, but observers who are not part of this specific community or who have no past experience with it will not make such attributions. Instead, they might infer that nonconforming individuals are unaware of the dress code or cannot afford nicer clothes. Thus, inferences of status and competence require the observer to be somewhat familiar with the environment. We therefore predict that:

**H4:** Nonconforming behavior will be interpreted as a positive signal of status and competence as long as the observer is familiar with the environment.

Characteristics of the Environment. Nonconformity signals can only occur in environments that have strong norms and shared standards, with a social expectation of conformity to these norms (Walker and Heyns 1962). For example, formal and prestigious contexts (e.g., a black tie event, a business meeting) are typically characterized by an official dress code or behavioral etiquette. Accordingly, in all our experiments we examine prestige

settings with expected norms of appropriate conduct (e.g., luxury boutiques, golf clubs, professional symposiums at business schools), and we define nonconforming behaviors as those that deviate from such behavioral standards. Consistent with the notion that individuals integrate specific environmental information into their overall evaluations, inferences, and choices (Belk 1975; Herr 1989; Swait and Adamowicz 2001), we investigate the role of context on perceptions of status and competence derived from signals of nonconformity. We suggest that nonconformity is likely to fuel perceptions of greater status and competence in prestigious contexts, with expected behavioral norms and relatively high standards of conduct. For example, in the setting of our first study, luxury boutiques, we find that shop assistants attribute higher potential to a prospect wearing casual gym clothing than to one wearing an elegant dress. We would not expect to detect a similar red sneakers effect in the context of an ordinary store that lacks the expected norm of being nicely dressed. Thus, we propose that a nonconforming behavior will signal status and competence in the eyes of others in prestige contexts with shared standards of formal conduct. We predict that:

**H5:** Nonconforming behavior will lead to higher inferences of status and competence in prestigious contexts with expected norms than in less prestigious contexts.

Characteristics of the Nonconforming Behavior. We investigate the extent to which a specific nonconforming behavior is perceived as deliberate and intentional as another important boundary condition for the red sneakers effect. A behavior is defined as deliberate if the actor set out to produce the action (Malle and Knobe 1997), and an intention is generally understood as a determination to engage in a particular behavior (Atkinson 1964). We suggest that observers attribute heightened status and competence to nonconformity when they believe that the nonconforming individual is purposely deviating from an accepted, established norm. That is, the observer assumes that the nonconforming individual is both aware of the norm and potentially

able to conform, but deliberately decided to adopt a nonconforming conduct. In contrast, we expect that when a nonconforming behavior is perceived as unintentional, it will no longer be associated with enhanced perceptions of status and competence. For example, when a nonconforming behavior appears dictated by lack of a better alternative (as in the case of observing a poorly dressed person who is homeless) rather than by a deliberate dress choice, it will not lead to positive inferences in the eyes of others.

Similarly, we expect enhanced attributions of autonomy derived from signals of nonconformity to dissipate when the deviant behavior is perceived as unintentional. This prediction is in line with research suggesting that intentionality and autonomy are strongly and positively associated (Deci and Ryan 1987). Thus, we predict that:

**H6:** When a specific nonconforming behavior is perceived as unintentional, it will no longer be associated with status, competence, and autonomy.

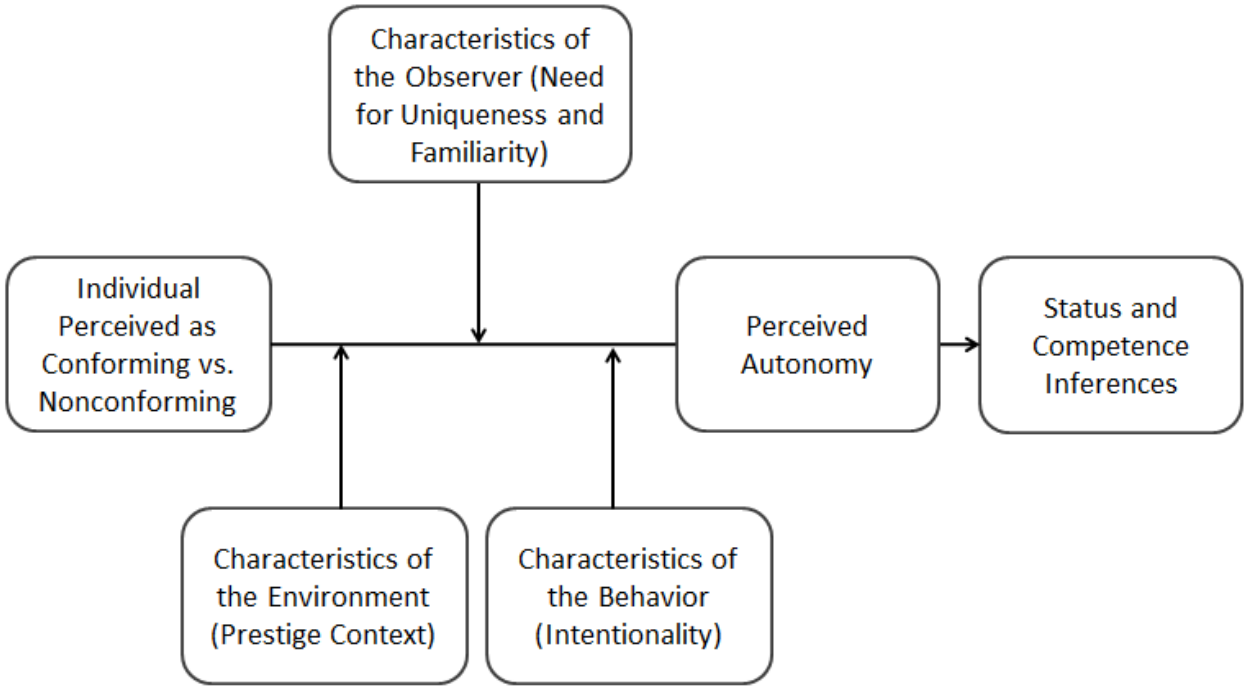
## Overview of the Present Research

We test our hypotheses and theoretical framework, depicted in figure 2.1, in five laboratory and field studies that employ different types of nonconformity and different populations of participants. Resistance to conformity pressures can take distinct forms across individuals. Of particular relevance to our work is Tian, Bearden, and Hunter's (2001) conceptualization, which suggests that consumers exhibit three main behavioral manifestations of nonconformity. First, "creative choice counterconformity" refers to the tendency of some consumers to seek social differentness by selecting original, novel, or unique consumers' goods (e.g., wearing a colorful, unusual tie to a formal event). Second, "unpopular choice counterconformity" reflects the selection or use of products and brands that strongly violate and

disrupt existing norms of proper conduct (e.g., wearing a tie around one's head in a formal context). Finally, "avoidance of similarity" entails a downgrading of one's consumption style and refers to a loss of interest in, or discontinued use of, possessions to move away from the norm and reestablish one's differentness (e.g., not wearing a tie in a formal context). In our research, we focus on behavioral dimensions of nonconformity that entail some deviance from the norm but are not perceived as a strong disruption and violation of the norm. Accordingly, the manipulations in our studies center on creative nonconformity and avoidance of similarity—that is, manifestations of nonconformity within the realm of commonly accepted behaviors.

Study 1 examines the responses of shop assistants in luxury boutiques in Milan, Italy, and illustrates that nonconformity, as compared to conformity, leads to inferences of higher status among individuals who are familiar with the environment. Study 2 investigates the effect of nonconformity and the role of the prestige context in a professional setting by testing students' responses to the dress style of their professors. Study 3 delves into the underlying mechanisms of the red sneakers effect and demonstrates that inferences of status and competence are mediated by the autonomy that participants perceive in the individual's nonconforming behavior. Moreover, this study shows that the positive inferences dissipate when the nonconforming behavior is perceived as unintentional. Study 4 examines the moderating role of observers' need for uniqueness and shows that participants with high levels of need for uniqueness tend to attribute more status and competence to nonconforming behaviors as compared to participants with lower needs for uniqueness. Finally, in a follow-up study we increase the validity of our findings by examining nonconformity and need for uniqueness outside the laboratory.

FIGURE 2.1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES




## RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

### Study 1: Status Inferences Based on a Nonconforming Dress Style

We begin our investigation by examining whether individuals confer greater status to people who do not conform to shared norms of behavior in a given context. We create vignettes that describe a potential client who enters an elegant boutique and engages in either conforming or nonconforming behavior. We employ two different operationalizations of nonconforming behavior to luxury stores. In study 1A, we manipulate nonconformity through style of dress (e.g., entering the store wearing a gym outfit versus a dress), and in study 1B we examine consumers' use of well-known brand names (e.g., wearing a Swatch watch versus a Rolex). We selected

luxury boutiques as an experimental setting due to their established and commonly perceived behavioral norm of elegant dress. Thus, we expect that in this specific context, rather than in ordinary stores, a casual dress style will stand out and will be perceived as a deviation from the established standard. Moreover, we consider the case of people who are either familiar or less familiar with the context being examined by comparing the responses of two samples: shop assistants in luxury shops in downtown Milan, Italy, and women recruited in Milan's central train station. We predict that participants who are familiar with the context (i.e., the shop assistants) will confer greater status to the nonconforming client rather than to the conforming one. However, we expect the effect to be attenuated or even reversed for participants who are less familiar with the context (i.e., pedestrians recruited at the central station). Prior to running Studies 1A and 1B, we conducted an exploratory interview in Rome with the store manager of a prestigious luxury brand. According to him, shoppers at high-end boutiques generally wear elegant and expensive clothing, in keeping with the store's luxury atmosphere. However, he admitted that his store's very top clientele also includes customers who dress quite casually. Therefore, we expect shop assistants in luxury boutiques, who are familiar with the environment and are motivated to determine the status of potential customers, to be able to detect and interpret the unconventional behavior of potential customers as a signal of status.

Method. We recruited 109 female adults in downtown Milan. All participants responded to a short survey in Italian and received a pen for participating in the study. Fifty-two participants were shop assistants working in boutiques selling luxury brands such as Armani, Burberry, Christian Dior, La Perla, Les Copains, and Valentino (i.e., individuals familiar with the environment of a high-end boutique). On average, shop assistants had 12 years of experience in the fashion sector and an estimated net income ranging from €14,400 to €16,800 per year. The other 57 female participants were recruited at Milan's central station (i.e., individuals less

familiar with the environment of a high-end boutique). The estimated average net income for women living in Milan is €15,800 (Registry Office Milan 2011). Thus, both groups share comparable demographic profiles (gender, age, income, and nationality), but the first group is better acquainted with the environment of luxury boutiques than the second group.

Participants completed the study in their own environment (boutique or train station) and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: conforming versus nonconforming potential client. Participants in each condition read a vignette about a potential client entering a luxury boutique. In study 1A, the text read: "Imagine that a woman is entering a luxury boutique in downtown Milan during winter. She looks approximately 35 years old." Participants in the nonconforming condition next read: "She is wearing gym clothes and a jacket." Participants in the conforming condition next read: "She is wearing a dress and a fur coat." After reading the vignette, participants answered questions to assess whether they believed the individual described could be a potential client at the luxury store and whether she might be a V.I.P. or a celebrity using 1-7 scales. Specifically, participants answered three questions assessing the woman's status as a luxury client: 1. "How likely is the woman described to purchase something in the store?" (1 = Very unlikely, 7 = Very likely); 2. "Imagine that the woman described were to buy something. Would she spend more or less than the average store client?" (1 = Less than average, 7 = More than average); 3. "Can she afford the most expensive items in the store?" (1 = Definitely yes, 7 = Definitely no). We averaged the three items and used the resulting measure of status as a luxury client as the first dependent variable in our analyses. Next, participants answered one question assessing the client's perceived status as a celebrity, the second dependent variable: "Is she likely to be a V.I.P. or a celebrity?" (1 = Very unlikely, 7 = Very likely). In study 1B, participants in both conditions read: "Imagine that a woman is entering a luxury boutique in downtown Milan during summer. She looks approximately 35 years old."

Next, participants in the nonconforming condition read: “She is wearing plastic flip-flops and she has a Swatch on her wrist.” Participants in the conforming condition read: “She is wearing sandals with heels and she has a Rolex on her wrist.” After reading the description of the client, participants answered the same questions as in study 1A.

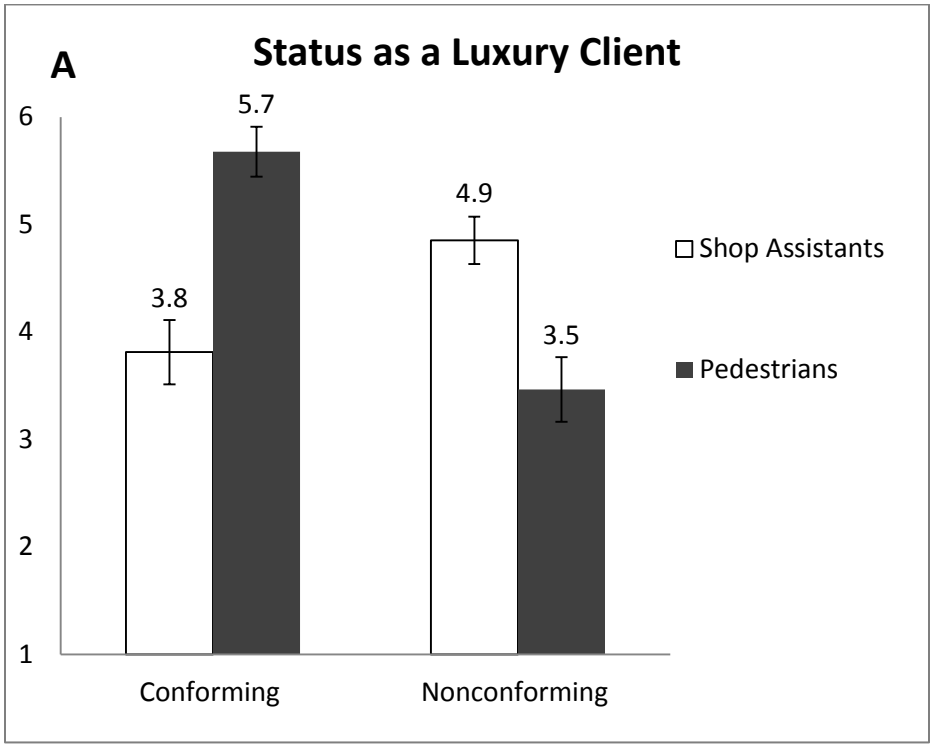
Results (study 1A). A 2 (nonconforming vs. conforming client) x 2 (familiar vs. non familiar observer) between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of the potential as a luxury client ($\alpha$ = .88) as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 104) = 4.9$, $p < .05$), no main effect for familiarity ($F(1, 104) = .82$, NS), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 104) = 37.7$, $p < .001$) depicted in figure 2.2.A. Shop assistants familiar with the environment granted greater status to the nonconforming client rather than to the conforming client ($M_{nonconforming} = 4.9$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 3.8$, $t(49) = 2.8$, $p < .01$). In contrast, participants unfamiliar with the context granted less status to the nonconforming client than to the conforming one ($M_{nonconforming} = 3.5$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 5.7$, $t(55) = 5.8$, $p < .001$). We conducted a similar ANOVA using celebrity status as the dependent variable and found a similar pattern of results. The main effect for nonconformity was significant ($F(1, 104) = 8.1$, $p < .01$), while the main effect for familiarity was not ($F(1, 104) = 1.7$, NS). Consistent with our predictions, we found a significant interaction between conformity and familiarity ($F(1, 104) = 15.5$, $p < .001$; see figure 2.2.B). Shop assistants believed that the nonconforming client was more likely than the conforming client to be a celebrity or a V.I.P ($M_{nonconforming} = 4.9$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 2.5$, $t(49) = 5.4$, $p < .001$); there was no significant difference between conditions for participants unfamiliar with the luxury boutiques ($M_{nonconforming} = 4.0$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 4.3$, NS).

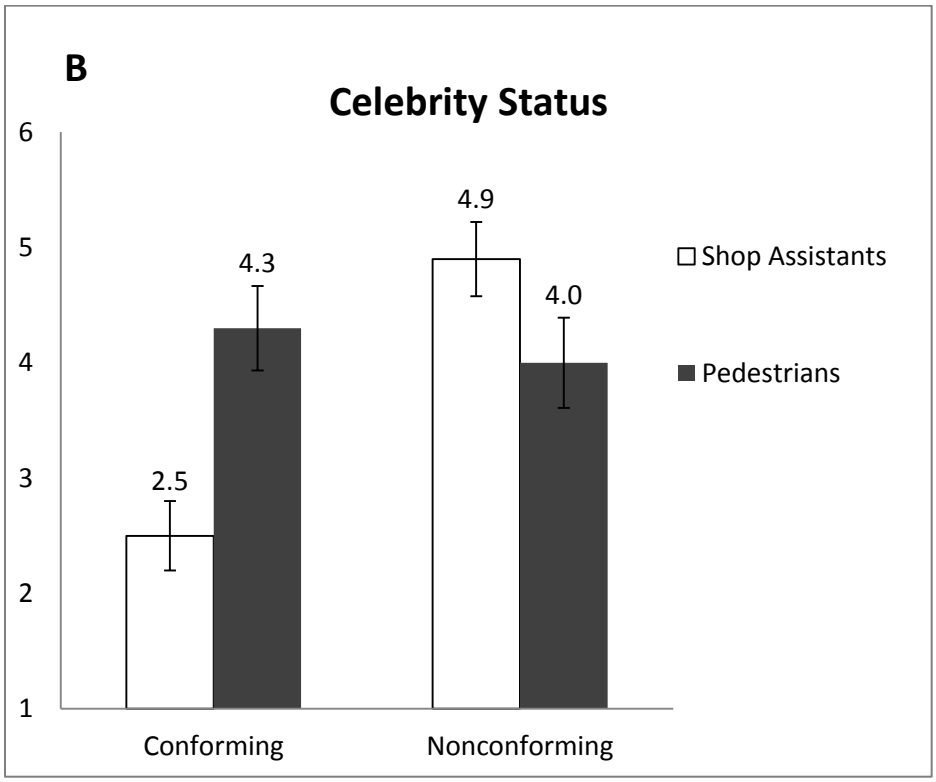
Results (study 1B). A 2 (nonconforming vs. conforming client) x 2 (familiar vs. unfamiliar observer) between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of the status as a luxury client ($\alpha$ = .74) as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 104) =$

10.9, $p < .001$), no main effect for familiarity ($F(1, 104) = .02$, NS), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 104) = 35.0$, $p < .001$). Shop assistants granted greater status to the nonconforming client than to the conforming one ($M_{nonconforming} = 4.8$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 4.2$, $t(50) = 2.1$, $p < .05$); participants with no familiarity with the environment did just the opposite ($M_{nonconforming} = 3.4$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 5.6$, $t(54) = 5.9$, $p < .001$). A similar ANOVA using perceived celebrity status as the dependent variable revealed no main effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 103) = 2.5$, NS) or for familiarity ($F(1, 103) = .96$, NS) and a significant interaction between these two factors ($F(1, 103) = 7.9$, $p < .01$). Mimicking the results of study 1A, shop assistants granted greater status to the nonconforming client than to the conforming one ($M_{nonconforming} = 4.6$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 3.0$, $t(49) = 3.2$, $p < .01$), and there was no significant difference between conditions for pedestrians ($M_{nonconforming} = 3.9$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 4.4$, NS).

Discussion. Consistent with our hypotheses, the results of study 1 show that observers grant higher status to a nonconforming individual than to a conforming one, as long as the observers are familiar with the environment. Specifically, shop assistants at luxury boutiques perceived a client to be more likely to make a purchase and to be a celebrity when she was wearing gym clothes or a Swatch than when she was wearing an elegant dress or a Rolex. The effect for pedestrians recruited at Milan's central station was attenuated or even reversed. These participants, of similar background but less familiar with the luxury boutique environment, tended to perceive the shopper with the elegant outfit as being of higher or similar status relative to the poorly dressed shopper. The shop assistants' status inferences are consistent with research demonstrating that conspicuous consumption of brands and explicit use of other status symbols is often associated with low-status groups (Feltovich et al. 2002; Han et al. 2010; Mazzocco et al. 2012). We analyzed shop assistants' open-ended comments and conducted follow-up questions to clarify their status inferences. Interestingly, the shop assistants in our study seemed to believe

FIGURE 2.2: STUDY 1A RESULTS – THE EFFECT OF NONCONFORMITY AND FAMILIARITY WITH THE ENVIRONMENT




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

that the nonconforming client was purposely deviating from the accepted norm of appropriate behavior in an attempt to distinguish herself from the average shopper. Some participants in the nonconforming condition believed, in the words of one of them, that poorly dressed shoppers are often "playing a role and doing it on purpose." One shop assistant stated that "wealthy people sometimes dress very badly to demonstrate superiority" and that "if you dare enter these boutiques so underdressed, you are definitely going to buy something." In contrast, it did not occur to pedestrians that a shopper might purposely enter a luxury store poorly dressed. These remarks suggest that status inferences may be driven by perceived deliberateness of the individual's nonconforming behavior. The scenarios tested in this study bring to mind the famous scene from the film *"Pretty Woman"* of Julia Roberts's character shopping on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. Consistent with our conceptualization, the character's nonconforming dress style did not lead to inferences of high status by store clerks because it did not appear to be intentional. We will directly test this proposition in study 3 by manipulating the extent to which nonconforming behavior is depicted as deliberate or unintentional.

In study 2, we seek to complement the findings of study 1 by testing our hypotheses in a more controlled laboratory environment. We will examine the consequences of nonconformity through down-dressing in a professional setting and the role of the prestige of the context with relatively high standards of conduct. Since in study 1 we demonstrated the boundary condition of familiarity with the environment, in the studies that follow, we focus on participants who are familiar with the particular environment, and we assess the degree of their familiarity as a precondition.

## Study 2: Nonconformity in Professional Settings

In this study, we examine the effect of nonconforming behavior in a more professional context by testing students' responses to the dress style of their professors. In professional settings, nonconformity, and casual dress style in particular, are typically viewed as a costly behavior that could potentially damage one's employment or promotion prospects (Michaels 2012; De Souza, Baumgarten Ulyssea Baaio, and Otta 2003). Given the context, we measure status in terms of respect by others and competence in terms of workplace performance. In addition, we investigate the role of prestige of the context by manipulating between-subjects the reputation of the setting described in the experiment. We predict that students will perceive a male professor who wears a T-shirt and is unshaven (i.e., nonconforming) as having higher professional status and competence than a professor who wears a tie and shaved (i.e., conforming), but only when the professor teaches at a top school where established norms exist regarding formal attire at work.

Method. We recruited 159 respondents (55% female, $M_{age} = 23$) in a city in the Northeastern United States who participated in a series of unrelated lab studies. The vast majority of respondents were current students at local universities (83%), thus ensuring that our sample was familiar with the experimental stimuli (i.e., descriptions of professors). We randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions, in a 2 (conforming vs. nonconforming individual) x 2 (prestige context vs. non-prestige context) between-subjects design. We manipulated the conformity of the dress style of the professor by telling participants that the professor typically wears a tie and is clean-shaven (conforming) or that he typically wears a T-shirt and has a beard (nonconforming). To manipulate the prestige of the context, we varied whether or not the university the professor teaches at was described as a top-tier university. Participants read the following description: "Mike is 45 years old and teaches at a university [a top-tier university]. He typically wears a tie [a T-shirt] to work and is clean-shaven [has a beard]." Participants then

assessed the professor's professional status and competence by answering three questions: 1. "How well respected is Mike by his students?" (1 = Not respected at all, 7 = Extremely well respected); 2 "How do you expect him to perform in class as a teacher?" (1 = Poor, 7 = Excellent); 3. "How do you expect him to perform as a researcher?" (1 = Poor, 7 = Excellent). We averaged the three items ($\alpha = .80$) and used the resulting measure as the dependent variable in our analysis. Participants also answered a manipulation check for our conformity manipulation: "How conforming to his work environment is Mike's style?" (1 = Not conforming at all, 7 = Extremely conforming).

Results. The manipulation check confirmed that the shaved professor wearing a tie was perceived to be significantly more conforming to his work environment than the unshaved professor wearing a T-shirt ($M_{conforming} = 5.7$ vs. $M_{nonconforming} = 2.9$, $t(156) = 13.8$, $p < .001$). As a further manipulation check, we conducted a (conforming vs. nonconforming individual) x 2 (prestige context vs. non-prestige context) between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of conformity as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 154) = 165.2$, $p < .001$), a significant main effect for prestige context ($F(1, 154) = 5.0$, $p < .05$), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 154) = 6.0$, $p < .05$). Given the statistical significance of both treatment variables and their interaction, we proceeded with an analysis of the effect sizes to compare the relative impact of each factor (Perdue and Summers 1986). The effect size of the nonconformity manipulation ($\eta^2_{nonconformity} = .52$) was respectively 16 and 14 times larger than the effect size of the prestige context manipulation ($\eta^2_{prestige} = .03$) and of the interaction ($\eta^2_{interaction} = .04$), suggesting that our nonconformity manipulation was successful.

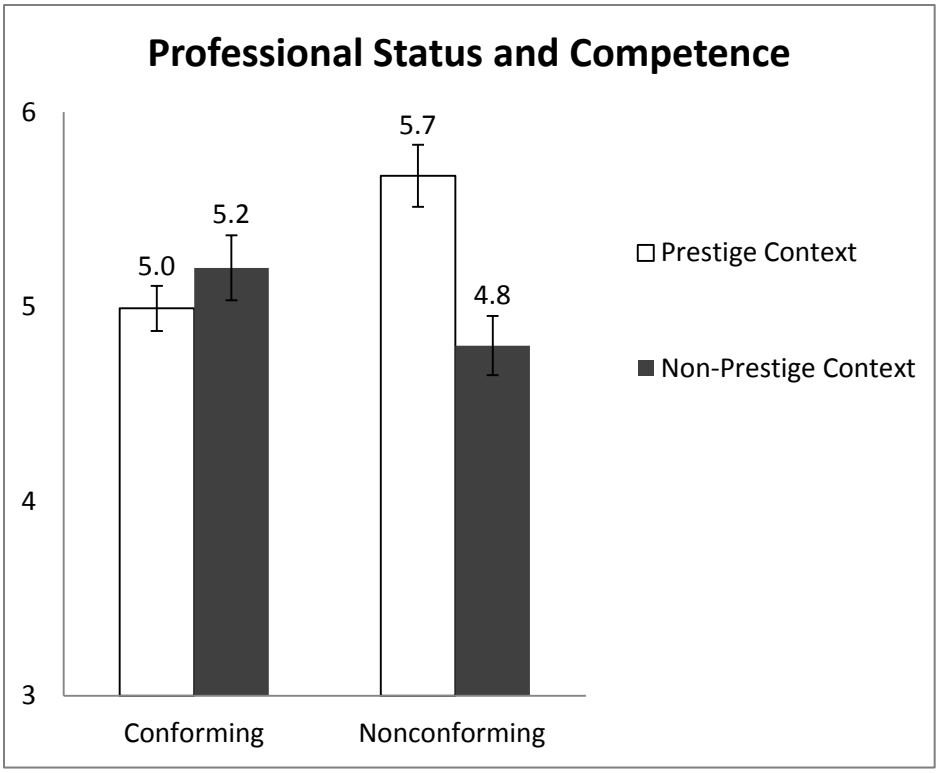
Next, we conducted a similar 2 x 2 between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of the professor's professional status and competence as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for prestige context ($F(1, 155) = 6.1$, $p < .05$), a non-significant main

effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 155) = .70$, NS), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 155) = 13.0$, $p < .001$), depicted in figure 2.3. As predicted, when the school was described as prestigious, students attributed significantly more status and competence to the nonconforming professor than to the conforming one ($M_{nonconforming} = 5.7$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 5.0$, $t(83) = 3.3$, $p < .01$). In contrast, when no information about the school was provided, there was a marginally significant difference between conditions in favor of the conforming individual ($M_{nonconforming} = 4.8$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 5.2$, $t(72) = 1.8$, $p = .07$). These results suggest that people attribute higher status and competence to individuals who are nonconforming rather than conforming in prestigious contexts with expected norms of formal conduct. We also checked whether participants' gender would impact status attributions. We conducted the same ANOVA analysis including gender as a control variable and found no significant effect for this demographic variable.

Discussion. Study 2 extends the findings of study 1 regarding the relationship between signals of nonconformity and perceptions of status and competence by examining this link in a different domain. We find that students perceive an unshaven professor who wears a T-shirt to have higher professional status and competence than a shaven professor who wears a tie, but only in a prestigious context, with relatively high standards of conduct.

Individuals can deviate from the norm and non-conform in several ways (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). While Studies 1 and 2 operationalized nonconformity as dressing down, in the next study we examine non-adherence to dress codes through an original product choice (i.e., wearing a red bow tie at a formal black-tie party at a country club). We also examine the role of perceived autonomy as the key mediating mechanism underlying status inferences. Since in this study we tested and demonstrated the boundary condition relative to prestige contexts, in the experiments that follow we examine the red sneakers effect in similar contexts with shared norms of formal conduct (e.g., country clubs, business schools).

FIGURE 2.3: STUDY 2 RESULTS – THE EFFECT OF NONCONFORMITY IN PRESTIGE CONTEXTS




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

Study 3: Nonconformity Depicted as Unintentional and Perceived Autonomy

The goal of study 3 is threefold. First, it examines nonconforming behaviors in the domain of non-adherence to dress codes from a different angle than studies 1 and 2. Tian, Bearden, and Hunter's (2001) theoretical account suggests that consumers' resistance to conformity pressures can have distinct behavioral manifestations, such as downgrading of the consumption style (so-called "avoidance of similarity") or the selection of original and novel

consumer goods ("creative choice counterconformity"). While studies 1 and 2 manipulated nonconformity through casual dress styles, study 3 investigates nonconformity through original dress styles. Specifically, we test how participants grant status within a membership club to an individual attending a formal black-tie party. We describe the individual as conforming or nonconforming by manipulating the color of the bow tie he is wearing at the party (black vs. red). Second, in this study we examine another necessary condition of the red sneakers effect. We expect that when a specific nonconforming behavior is "unintentional" (i.e., "it was not his intention to dress in a way that potentially deviates from the norm"), the nonconforming conduct no longer will be associated with enhanced status, competence, and autonomy, as hypothesized. Finally, in study 3 we delve into the mechanisms underlying status and competence inferences resulting from nonconformity. Specifically, we seek to demonstrate that observers attribute higher status and competence in response to signals of nonconformity because they believe that the nonconforming individual is autonomous and in control, and can afford to act according to his volition, as predicted by hypothesis 2.

Method. We recruited 141 participants who responded to a paid online survey (45% female; $M_{age}$ = 35). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (conforming vs. nonconforming dress style) x 2 (no intention to deviate vs. control) between-subjects design. We manipulated conformity of dress style by telling participants about Charles, an individual attending a formal black-tie party who was either wearing a red bow tie (nonconforming) or a black bow tie (conforming). Participants read the following description: "Imagine Charles, a 40-year-old man who likes to play golf. This year, Charles's golf club is hosting a black-tie holiday party. Charles decides to wear a red [black] bow tie to the party. Most of the other male invitees are wearing a black bow tie." In addition, we manipulated the deliberateness of the behavior by either depicting the choice as unintentional through an extra

statement at the end of the description (no-intention-to-deviate condition) or by omitting this information (control condition). Specifically, participants in the no-intention-to-deviate condition read: "It was not Charles's intention to dress in a way that potentially deviates from the expected dress code." After reading Charles's description, participants assessed his perceived autonomy by rating the following two items ($\alpha = .66$): 1. The extent to which Charles can afford to do what pleases him (1 = He can never afford to do what he wants, 7 = He can always afford to do what he wants); and 2. The extent to which Charles is in control over the decision of what to wear (1 = Not in control at all, 7 = Completely in control). Participants then answered two questions on membership status in the golf club and performance as a golf player: 1. "How likely is Charles to be one of the top members of the country club?" (1 = Not likely at all, 7 = Extremely likely); and 2. "Do you think Charles has won golf competitions/prizes in the past?" (1 = Not likely at all, 7 = Extremely likely). We averaged the two items ($\alpha = .62$) and used the resulting measure as the dependent variable in our analyses. Subsequently, participants answered three manipulation-check questions about, respectively, the perceived (1) nonconformity, (2) creativity, and (3) deliberateness of the behavior described: 1. "To what extent does Charles's bow tie conform to the dress code?" (1 = Not conforming at all, 7 = Extremely conforming); 2. "How creative is Charles's bow tie choice?" (1 = Not creative at all, 7 = Extremely creative); and 3. "How deliberate is Charles's bow tie choice?" (1 = Not deliberate at all, 7 = Extremely deliberate). Finally, we asked participants if they ever attended parties or events with formal or semiformal dress codes to assess the general level of familiarity with formal gatherings in the sample.

Results. The vast majority of participants (89%) have attended formal gatherings in the past, thus guaranteeing a satisfactory level of familiarity with the scenario being tested.

Manipulation Checks: Nonconformity and Creativity. As expected, the manipulation checks confirmed that participants perceived wearing a black bow tie to the party as a more

conforming and non-creative behavior as compared to wearing a red bow tie. In particular, wearing a black bow tie was perceived as significantly more conforming than wearing a red bow tie ($M_{conformity}$ = 6.5 vs. $M_{nonconformity}$ = 2.3, t(139) = 21.2, p < .001), and as significantly less creative ($M_{conformity}$ = 2.0 vs. $M_{nonconformity}$ = 4.8, t(139) = 11.8, p < .001). As a further check to assess the success and the validity of the manipulation (Perdue and Summers 1986), we also conducted a 2 (nonconforming vs. conforming dress style) x 2 (no intention to deviate vs. control) between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of conformity as the dependent variable. As expected, the analysis revealed a significant main effect only for nonconformity (F(1, 137) = 453.3, p < .001) but not for deliberateness (F(1, 137) = 1.4, NS), nor for the interaction between the two factors (F(1, 137) = .81, NS). The same analysis performed on ratings of creativity as the dependent variable revealed an analogous pattern of results with a significant main effect for nonconformity (F(1, 137) = 138.3, p < .001), and non-significant effects for both deliberateness (F(1, 137) = .23, NS) and the interaction (F(1, 137) = .01, NS).

Manipulation Check: Deliberateness. Participants perceived the described behavior as less deliberate in the no-intention-to-deviate condition than in the control condition ($M_{unintentional}$ = 4.4 vs. $M_{control}$ = 6.2, t(139) = 6.8, p < .001). As a further check, we conducted the same 2 x 2 ANOVA using ratings of deliberateness as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for nonconformity (F(1, 137) = 4.4, p < .05), a significant main effect for deliberateness (F(1, 137) = 51.9, p < .001), and a significant interaction (F(1, 137) = 13.3, p < .001). Given the statistical significance of both treatment variables and their interaction, we proceeded with an analysis of the effect sizes to compare the relative impact of each factor (Perdue and Summers 1986). The effect size of the deliberateness manipulation ($\eta^2_{deliberatedness}$ = .28) was nine times larger than the effect size of the nonconformity manipulation ($\eta^2_{nonconformity}$ =

.03) and three times larger than the effect size of the interaction ($\eta^2_{interaction} = .09$), suggesting that our deliberateness manipulation was successful.

Inferences of Status and Competence. Next, we conducted a 2 (nonconforming vs. conforming dress style) x 2 (no intention to deviate vs. control) between-subjects ANOVA using ratings of status within the country club and competence as a golf player as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a non-significant main effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 137) = 1.5$, NS), a significant main effect for deliberateness ($F(1, 137) = 4.1$, $p < .05$), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 137) = 3.7$, $p = .05$), depicted in figure 2.4.A. In line with the findings of our previous studies, when the behavior was deliberate, participants granted significantly more status and competence to the individual wearing the red bow tie than to the one wearing the black bow tie ($M_{control\ nonconformity} = 4.9$ vs. $M_{control\ conformity} = 4.2$, $t(68) = 2.4$, $p < .05$). In contrast, there was no significant difference between conditions when the behavior was depicted as unintentional ($M_{unintentional\ nonconformity} = 4.0$ vs. $M_{unintentional\ conformity} = 4.2$, NS). Importantly, when comparing the two non-conforming conditions, we found that the positive status and competence inferences associated with wearing a red bow tie significantly decreased when the nonconforming behavior was clearly depicted as unintentional ($M_{control\ nonconformity} = 4.9$ vs. $M_{unintentional\ nonconformity} = 4.0$, $t(68) = 2.6$, $p < .001$). We also checked whether participants' gender would impact status attributions. We conducted the same ANOVA analysis including gender as a control variable and found no significant effect for this demographic variable.

Perceived Autonomy. We then performed a similar analysis using ratings of autonomy as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for nonconformity ($F(1, 137) = 35.3$, $p < .001$), a significant main effect for deliberateness ($F(1, 137) = 4.1$, $p = .05$), and a significant interaction ($F(1, 137) = 4.8$, $p < .05$), depicted in figure 2.4.B. As predicted, when we provided no information about the intentions of the described individual and the behavior was

interpreted as deliberate, participants perceived the nonconforming individual as having significantly higher autonomy than the conforming one ($M_{\text{control nonconformity}} = 6.0$ vs. $M_{\text{control conformity}} = 4.5$, $t(68) = 6.0$, $p < .001$). The nonconformity manipulation elicited a significant difference between conditions also when the behavior was depicted as unintentional ($M_{\text{unintentional nonconformity}} = 5.2$ vs. $M_{\text{unintentional conformity}} = 4.5$, $t(69) = 2.6$, $p < .05$). Importantly, the comparison between the two non-conforming conditions revealed that the perceived autonomy participants associated with wearing a red bow tie was significantly weakened when this nonconforming behavior was depicted as unintentional ($M_{\text{control nonconformity}} = 6.0$ vs. $M_{\text{unintentional nonconformity}} = 5.2$, $t(68) = 3.4$, $p < .001$), as we predicted. In sum, we find that enhanced perceptions of the nonconforming individual's status, competence, and autonomy dissipate when observers perceive the nonconforming conduct as unintentional.

Mediated Moderation Analysis. To test moderation by deliberateness and mediation by perceived autonomy, we conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Edwards and Lambert 2007) examining whether perceived autonomy mediated the detected interaction between nonconformity and deliberateness. As reported above, deliberateness significantly moderated both the dependent variable (status and competence) and the mediator (autonomy). Moreover, when status and competence were regressed on nonconformity, deliberateness, their two-way interaction, and autonomy, the mediator was significant ($B = .38$, $t(137) = 4.1$, $p < .001$), and the effect of the interaction between nonconformity and deliberateness on status and competence became non-significant (from $B = .82$, $t(137) = 1.9$, $p = .05$, to $B = .51$, $t(136) = 1.2$, NS). In a bootstrap analysis, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .032 to .717), suggesting a significant indirect effect. Taken together, the results of study 3 deepen our understanding of the interactions among the underlying processes of the red sneakers effect. We find that nonconformity leads to inferences

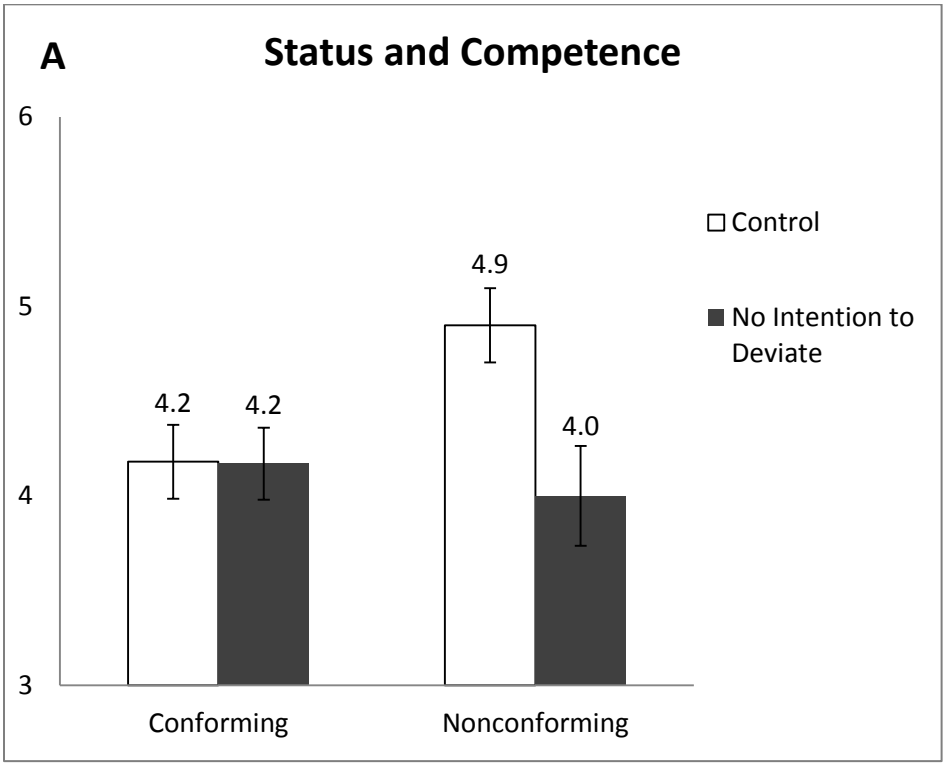
of heightened status and competence, as long as the deviant conduct is perceived as deliberate. Moreover, we show that autonomy mediates the interaction between the nonconformity manipulation and deliberateness on status and competence inferences.

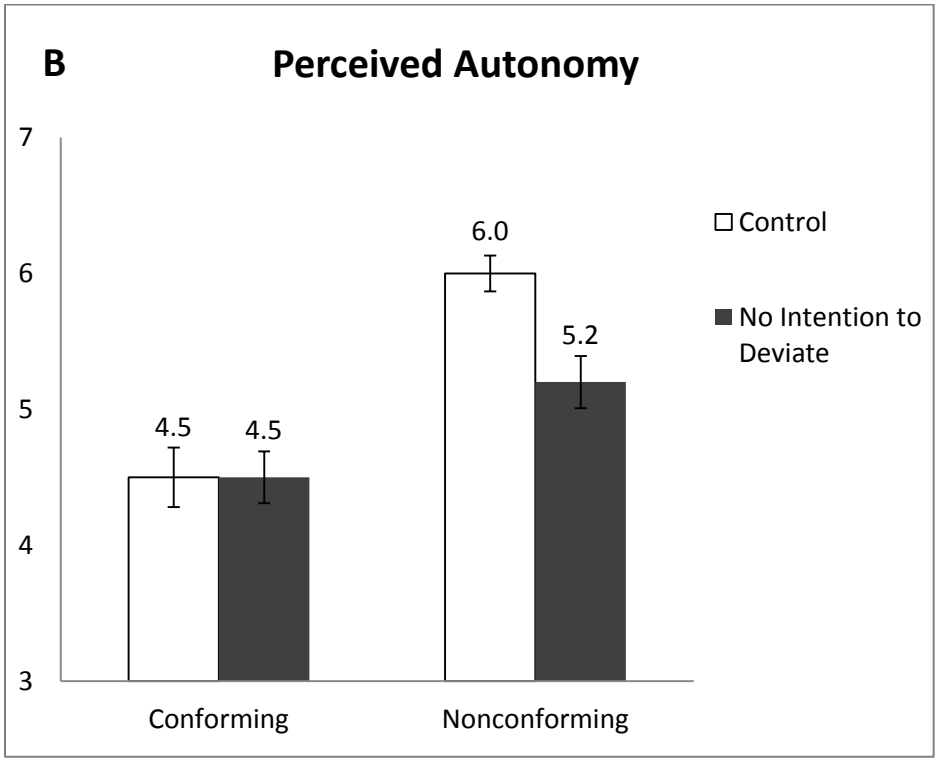
Discussion. Study 3 extends our previous findings by examining deviance from the norm through a dress choice that denotes originality. We demonstrate that participants perceive an individual wearing a red bow tie at a black tie party in a country club as a higher-status member in the club and as a better golf player relative to a conforming individual wearing a black bow tie. Importantly, this study explores the role of perceived deliberateness as a boundary condition of the red sneakers effect. As predicted, we find that when the behavior is perceived to be unintentionally nonconforming, the positive inferences associated with nonconformity dissipate. Finally, we provide evidence in support of our proposed mediating mechanism and show that participants infer enhanced status and competence because they believe that the nonconforming individual has the autonomy to follow his preferences and deviate from the norm.

## Study 4: Inferences from a Nonconforming Presentation Style and Observers' Need for Uniqueness

Thus far, our experiments have manipulated nonconformity as non-adherence to expected dress codes. In this study, we extend our findings by examining a different way of deviating from the norm: the styles people use in their PowerPoint presentations in a prestigious competition. We test how participants confer status and competence to a contestant in the MIT's well-known $100K business competition. We manipulate between subjects whether the contestant adopts his own PowerPoint presentation layout (nonconforming condition) or MIT's official layout (conforming condition). Importantly, we clearly establish the behavioral norm by stating in both

FIGURE 2.4: STUDY 3 RESULTS – UNINTENTIONALITY OF THE NONCONFORMING BEHAVIOR AS BOUNDARY CONDITION AND PERCEIVED AUTONOMY AS MEDIATOR



conditions that other participants in the contest are using MIT's official background. In this study, we test whether the relationship between nonconformity and perceptions of greater status and competence is moderated by respondents' level of need for uniqueness. Consistent with hypothesis 3, we expect participants with high levels of need for uniqueness, as compared to participants with low levels of need for uniqueness, to confer greater status and competence to the nonconforming individual. Moreover, we seek further support for hypothesis 2 and for the findings of study 3 on the mediating role of perceived autonomy. Finally, in this study we measure the actor's perceived awareness of the typical PowerPoint slide style to confirm that in all conditions the contestant is viewed as knowledgeable of the norm.

Method. We recruited 149 participants who responded to a paid online survey (50% female; $M_{age}$ = 37). Participants were introduced to the study and read a description of the actual MIT $100K competition. They were told, "The MIT $100K Competition is one of the nation's premier business plan competitions. The capital raising contest is aimed at helping students and researchers in the MIT community start up their firms. The MIT $100K brings together a network of resources (venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, mentors, and more than $350K in cash and prizes) to help participants through the funding process of new ventures." Then participants read about John, a candidate in the competition. The study manipulated between subjects whether John adopted his own PowerPoint presentation layout (nonconforming condition) or, like most other contestants, the MIT official layout (conforming condition). Participants read the following description: "Imagine John, a 22-year-old student at MIT, who is participating in the MIT $100K competition. John has already passed the first round of the contest and is about to participate in the second round. As he is preparing the slides for the presentation of his business plan, he could pick the official MIT background or use a background of his choice for the slides. His slides would have a more unusual and less conventional background. The majority of the

other participants are using the official MIT background for the slides. Eventually John decides to use his own [the MIT official] layout for the slide presentation."

Subsequently, participants answered a series of questions. In order to avoid potential order effects, we counterbalanced the appearance of the measures. Specifically, the order of appearance of the dependent variable (perceived status and competence) and the mediator (autonomy) was interchanged, and the moderator (need for uniqueness) appeared either at the beginning or at the end of the survey. We assessed status and competence by asking participants to answer four questions: 1. "How likely is John to win the MIT $100K competition?" (1 = Not likely at all, 7 = Extremely likely); 2. "How likely is John to become a millionaire entrepreneur one day?" (1 = Not likely at all, 7 = Extremely likely); 3. "How do you think John's business idea compares to other business proposals in the contest?" (1 = Below average, 7 = Above average); and 4. "How well respected is John by his friends?" (1 = Not respected at all, 7 = Extremely well respected). We averaged the four items to create a measure of perceived status and competence ($\alpha$ = .82) and used it as the dependent variable in our analyses. Similarly to study 3, participants assessed John's perceived autonomy by rating the following two items ($\alpha$ = .81): 1. The extent to which John can afford to do what he wants (1 = He can never afford to do what he wants, 7 = He can always afford to do what he wants); and 2. The extent to which John is in control (1 = Not in control at all, 7 = Completely in control). As a manipulation check for our nonconformity manipulation, participants answered the following question: "How conforming to competition standards is John's presentation style?" (1 = Not conforming at all, 7 = Extremely conforming). Moreover, participants were asked to judge John's awareness of the norm: "Is John knowledgeable about the appropriate slides style for the competition?" (1 = Not knowledgeable at all, 7 = Extremely knowledgeable). We then assessed the level of acquaintance with the behavior described by asking respondents to rate their familiarity level with PowerPoint

or similar presentation programs (1 = Not familiar at all, 4 = Somewhat familiar, 7 = Very familiar). Participants completed the 31-item scale developed by Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001) to measure the degree to which individuals pursue differentness and uniqueness (e.g., "I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands").

Results. Preliminary analysis revealed no significant differences in the patterns of results between respondents' gender groups; thus, we analyzed the results jointly. The manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the student as nonconforming when he was using his own background for the slides ($M_{nonconforming} = 5.7$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 2.7$, $t(147) = 14.1$, $p < .001$). Moreover, participants' mean level of familiarity with PowerPoint was fairly high ($M = 5.1$) and significantly above the scale mid-point (4) in both conditions ($M_{conforming} = 4.8$, $t(66) = 3.8$, $p < .001$, and $M_{nonconforming} = 5.3$, $t(80) = 6.9$, $p < .001$).

As expected, participants granted more status and competence to the nonconforming individual than to the conforming one ($M_{nonconforming} = 5.0$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 4.2$, $t(147) = 5.3$, $p < .001$). Moreover, they perceived the nonconforming individual as more autonomous and more able to afford his preferences ($M_{nonconforming} = 5.6$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 4.3$, $t(147) = 7.4$, $p < .001$). Participants thought that John was more knowledgeable about the appropriate PowerPoint slide style for the competition when he was nonconforming rather than conforming ($M_{nonconforming} = 5.8$ vs. $M_{conforming} = 5.2$, $t(144) = 4.1$, $p < .001$), indicating that in this case nonconforming behavior is not associated with ignorance of expectations in the given context.

Perceived Autonomy as Mediator. We examined whether perceived autonomy mediated the relationship between nonconformity and greater status and competence inferences, as we hypothesized. First, the nonconformity manipulation affected status and competence inferences ($B = .38$, $t(147) = 5.3$, $p < .001$). Second, the nonconformity manipulation significantly affected autonomy ($B = .66$, $t(147) = 7.4$, $p < .001$). Finally, the influence of the independent variable on

status and competence became non-significant when autonomy was included in the model (from B = .38, $p < .001$, to B = .11, NS). In a bootstrap analysis, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .164 to .389). These results suggest that participants attributed higher status and competence to the nonconforming individual, relative to the conforming individual, because he was perceived as more autonomous.

Need for Uniqueness as Moderator. Next, we examined the moderating role of observers' need for uniqueness ($\alpha = .97$). We analyzed responses using a linear regression with perceptions of status and competence as the dependent variable and with the following independent variables: a variable for the behavior coded as 1 for using a nonconforming presentation layout and -1 for using a conforming presentation layout, need for uniqueness scale (standardized for ease of interpretation), and their interaction. This analysis revealed a main effect of condition (B = .38, $t(145) = 5.5$, $p < .001$), a non-significant main effect for observers' need for uniqueness (B = .08, NS), and a significant interaction between these two variables (B = .28, $t(145) = 4.1$, $p < .001$).[6] To further explore this interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis (Fitzsimons 2008) that considered the effect of nonconformity among those participants with higher and lower need for uniqueness. As illustrated by figure 2.5, a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above the mean of need for uniqueness revealed a significant difference (B = .66, $t(145) = 6.8$, $p < .001$): participants with high need for uniqueness conferred significantly more status and competence to John when he engaged in a nonconforming behavior as compared to when he engaged in a conforming behavior. In contrast, a similar spotlight analysis performed at one standard deviation below the mean of need for uniqueness showed a non-significant difference

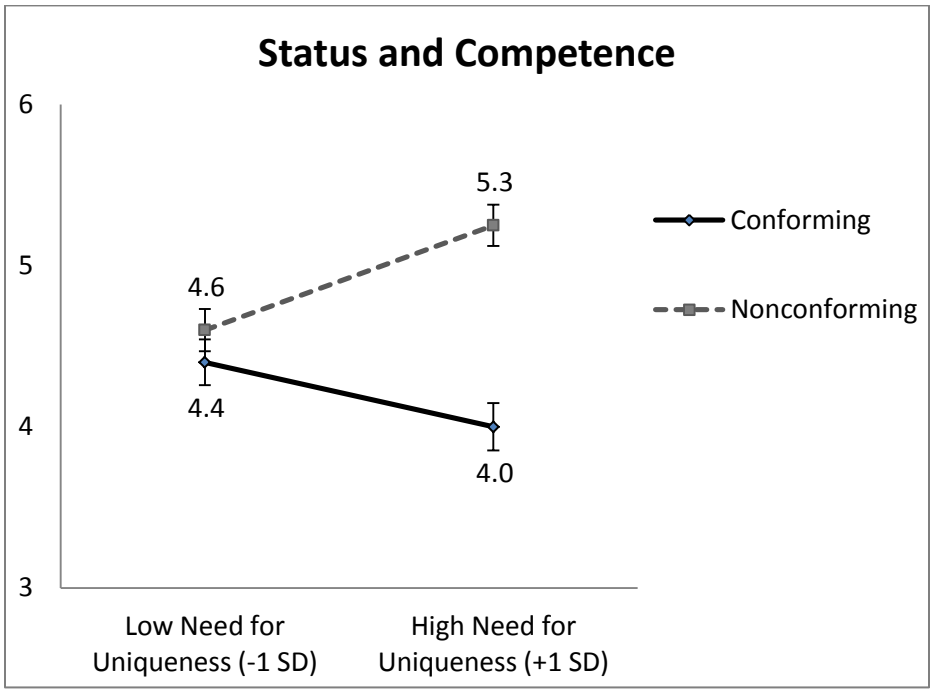
[6] The 31 items of the Need for Uniqueness scale, as conceptualized by Tian et al. (2001), can be further divided in three subsets: 1. Creative counterconformity (12 items); 2. Unpopular counterconformity (11 items); 3. Avoidance of similarity (8 items). We performed the same moderation analysis with each of the three subscales and found a significant interaction with each of them.

between conditions (B = .09, NS). Thus, nonconformity predicted higher inferences of status and competence when respondents scored high in need for uniqueness, but such relationship did not exist for respondents who scored low in need for uniqueness.

Additionally, we examined the slopes of need for uniqueness in each condition. The slope was positive and significant when John was depicted as adopting a nonconforming presentation format (B = .36, $t(145) = 3.9$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants scoring high on the need for uniqueness scale attributed more potential to John when his behavior was perceived as deviant (as compared to the reactions of participants with lower levels of need for uniqueness). However, when John was described as adopting a mainstream presentation style, the slope of need for uniqueness was negative (B = -.20, $t(145) = -2.0$, $p = .05$), suggesting that participants high in need for uniqueness granted less status and competence to John when he followed the same behavior of other contestants.

Next, we also examined the moderating role of observers' need for uniqueness on the mediator, perceived autonomy. We analyzed responses using a linear regression with perceived autonomy as the dependent variable and with the following independent variables: a variable for the behavior coded as 1 for using a nonconforming presentation layout and -1 for using a conforming presentation layout, need for uniqueness scale (standardized for ease of interpretation), and their interaction. This analysis revealed a main effect of condition (B = .66, $t(145) = 7.5$, $p < .001$), a non-significant main effect for observers' need for uniqueness (B = .02, NS), and a significant interaction between these two variables (B = .19, $t(145) = 2.1$, $p = .04$). To explore this interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis (Fitzsimons 2008) that considered the effect of nonconformity on perceived autonomy among those participants with higher and lower need for uniqueness. A spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above the mean of need for uniqueness revealed a significant difference (B = .85, $t(145) = 6.7$, $p < .001$): participants with

FIGURE 2.5: STUDY 4 RESULTS – OBSERVERS' NEED FOR UNIQUENESS AND RESPONSES TO NONCONFORMITY (SPOTLIGHT ANALYSIS)




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

high need for uniqueness perceived John as significantly more autonomous when he engaged in a nonconforming behavior as compared to when he engaged in a conforming behavior. A similar spotlight analysis performed at one standard deviation below the mean of need for uniqueness also showed a significant difference between conditions ($B = .47$, $t(145) = 3.8$, $p < .01$). While the nonconformity manipulation elicited a significant reaction for participants with both high and low need for uniqueness, the magnitude of the effect for respondents with high need for uniqueness was almost double compared to the size of the effect for respondents with low need for uniqueness ($B_{\text{High Uniqueness}} = .85$ vs. $B_{\text{Low Uniqueness}} = .47$).

Mediated Moderation Analysis. To test moderation by need for uniqueness and mediation by perceived autonomy, we conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Edwards and Lambert

2007) examining whether perceived autonomy mediated the detected interaction between the nonconformity condition and need for uniqueness. As reported above, need for uniqueness significantly moderated both the dependent variable (status and competence) and the mediator (autonomy). Moreover, when status and competence were regressed on nonconforming behavior, need for uniqueness, their two-way interaction, and autonomy, the mediator was significant ($B = .37$, $t(144) = 6.6$, $p < .001$), and the effect of the interaction between nonconforming behavior and need for uniqueness on status and competence decreased (from $B = .28$, $t(145) = 4.1$, $p < .001$, to $B = .21$, $t(144) = 3.5$, $p < .001$). In a bootstrap analysis, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (95% CI = .004 to .162), suggesting a significant indirect effect.

In sum, the results of study 4 shed light on the interactions between the underlying processes of the red sneakers effect. Need for uniqueness moderated both the direct effect of nonconformity on status inferences (dependent variable) and the first stage of the indirect effect of nonconformity on perceived sense of autonomy (mediator), suggesting that participants high in need for uniqueness attributed higher status and competence and heightened sense of autonomy in response to nonconformity signals, relative to participants with low levels of need for uniqueness. Moreover, we find that autonomy mediated the interaction between the nonconforming manipulation and need for uniqueness on status and competence inferences.

Discussion. Study 4 extends our findings about nonconformity-based inferences beyond the domain of non-adherence to dress codes. We find that participants perceive a contestant in a prestigious competition as having higher status and competence when he adopts his own layout for the presentation rather than the standard background. In addition, we show the moderating role of observers' need for uniqueness on inferences of heightened status and competence and perceived autonomy. Relative to participants with low levels of need for uniqueness, participants

with high levels of need for uniqueness attributed greater status, competence, and autonomy to the nonconforming individual rather than to the conforming one. In line with hypothesis 2 and the findings of study 3, we provide further evidence in support of our proposed mediating mechanism and show that participants infer higher status and competence because they believe that the nonconforming individual has the autonomy to follow his volition.

In the next, follow-up study, we examine responses to nonconformity outside the laboratory and provide further support to the moderating role of need for uniqueness through a behavioral proxy.

## Follow-up Study: Stepping Outside the Lab with Red Sneakers

This follow-up study aims to increase the ecological validity of our findings by employing a real-world manipulation of nonconformity and by examining a product-related behavioral proxy for need for uniqueness. Specifically, we examine the reactions of executives attending a formal symposium in a prestigious business school at which a professor wears red sneakers while teaching in the classroom. In addition to measuring need for uniqueness through conventional scale items, we collect information on whether participants own shoes that have an unusual color and thus do engage in less conventional consumption in their daily lives. Relative to individuals with low need for uniqueness, we expect individuals with high need for uniqueness to own more unusual pair of shoes and to attribute more status and competence to signals of nonconformity, in line with hypothesis 3 and with the results of study 4.

Method. Participants were 59 male executives ($M_{age}$ = 46) attending the Inner City 100 Urban Small Business Symposium.[7] At this one-day event, executives gather for networking opportunities and a full day of management education. We decided to focus our analysis on male participants because almost all female respondents (28 out of 30) said they owned a pair of distinctive-looking shoes. In the case of male participants, 40 individuals out of 59 indicated that they owned this type of shoes. Because this behavior seems to be the prevailing norm for female individuals, it is not a discriminating behavioral proxy for nonconforming and uniqueness motives. Nevertheless, we also analyzed the sample in its entirety and, as reported below, the nature and significance of the results did not change. In this study, the female negotiations professor taught her 90-minute session wearing a pair of (nonconforming) red Converse sneakers. At the end of the class, participants were asked to complete a short survey. Participants assessed the professor's professional status and competence by answering four questions similar to those used in our previous studies: 1. "How high is [professor's name] status within [school name] (compared to colleagues in her cohort)?" (1 = Definitely low, 7 = Definitely high); 2. "How likely is she to be the head of the negotiations unit at [school name] 10 years from now?" (1 = Very unlikely, 7 = Very likely); 3 "How likely is [professor's name]'s research to be featured in the Harvard Business Review?" (1 = Very unlikely, 7 = Very likely); 4 "In your opinion, how likely is she to be selected to present her research at the prestigious [school name] research symposium?" (1 = Very unlikely, 7 = Very likely). We averaged the four items ($\alpha$ = .75) and used the resulting measure in our analysis. Next, we asked participants whether they had ever owned a pair of distinctive-looking shoes: "Did you ever own a pair of shoes that had a distinctive color?" (Yes, No). To make sure that owning a pair of distinctive shoes was a valid behavioral proxy for uniqueness motives, we asked participants to answer three items (two

[7] This number excludes 10 participants who did not notice that the professor was wearing red sneakers, possibly because the shoes were not visible from where they were sitting.

questions related to distinctiveness and one specific to nonconformity) selected from Snyder and Fromkin's (1977) need for uniqueness scale: 1. "Do you typically prefer to conform to dress codes?" (1 = Strongly avoid, 7 = Strongly prefer, reverse coded); 2. "Do you like to dress in a way that is distinctive?" (1 = Dislike extremely, 7 = Like extremely); 3. "Please rate your agreement with the statement: Whenever I take part in group activities, I am something of a non-conformist" (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

Results. First, we checked the relationship between owning a pair of distinctive shoes and the items measuring need for uniqueness. We found a positive and significant correlation between these measures ($r = .37$, $p < .01$). Additionally, owners of a pair of distinctive shoes displayed higher average scores on need for uniqueness than did others ($M_{owners} = 4.6$ vs. $M_{nonwners} = 3.9$, $t(57) = 3.0$, $p < .01$).[8] These results suggest that owning a pair of original shoes was a valid behavioral proxy for uniqueness motives for male individuals in the sample. Importantly, participants who owned a pair of distinctive shoes attributed greater professional status to the professor wearing red sneakers than did those who did not ($M_{owners} = 5.6$ vs. $M_{nonwners} = 5.1$, $t(57) = 2.4$, $p < .05$).[9] Thus we confirm that people with high rather than low levels of need for uniqueness are more likely to attribute enhanced status and competence to nonconforming individuals.

Discussion. In this follow-up study, we extended our findings by examining nonconformity in a real-world context and a behavioral proxy for need for uniqueness. We find that owners of products that deviate from the norm (individuals with high levels of need for uniqueness) are more sensitive to nonconforming behaviors and grant more status and competence to signals of nonconformity than individuals with low levels of need for uniqueness.

[8] There was also a significant correlation ($r = .25$, $p < .05$) and a significant difference between groups ($M_{owners} = 4.5$ vs. $M_{nonwners} = 3.9$, $t(87) = 2.5$, $p < .05$) when we included all 89 individuals (male and female) in the sample.
[9] There was also a significant difference between owners of original shoes and non-owners ($M_{owners} = 5.7$ vs. $M_{nonowners} = 5.2$, $t(86) = 2.4$, $p < .05$) when we considered all 89 individuals (male and female) in the sample.

# GENERAL DISCUSSION

Individuals who are aware of social norms and expectations may still decide to deviate from standards of appropriate behavior in the way they dress, speak, and behave. Our research examines how third-party observers interpret such violations of conventional norms in terms of status and competence attributions. We demonstrate that nonconforming behavior, as a costly and visible signal, can operate similarly to conspicuous consumption and, as compared to conforming behavior, lead to inferences of enhanced status and competence in the eyes of others. Across a series of lab and field studies, we explore observers' reactions to a variety of nonconforming behaviors in different settings and find that observers confer higher status and competence to nonconforming individuals compared to conforming ones. At a process level, our investigation reveals that the positive inferences from signals of nonconformity are driven by perceived autonomy and moderated by observers' need for uniqueness. Moreover, we explore boundary conditions of the red sneakers effect and demonstrate that inferences of greater status and competence disappear when the observer is unfamiliar with the environment, when the nonconforming behavior is perceived as unintentional, and in the absence of established norms of formal conduct in the given context.

Our theoretical framework (figure 2.1) and findings deepen our understanding of when and how individuals attain status and competence in the eyes of others by adopting behaviors that deviate from the norm. This research highlights the value of nonconformity and contributes to the literature in several ways. First, while most nonconformity research in psychology, sociology, economics, and marketing has focused on the nonconforming individual and on the antecedents for her behavior, we focus on the consequences of nonconformity and on the

perceptions of third-party observers. In the present article, we focus specifically on inferences of status and competence. Though prior literature on nonconformity has highlighted potential costs to nonconforming individuals (e.g., rejection from a group, see Schachter 1951), here we show that nonconformity can lead to attributions of greater status and competence. Second, the current research extends findings on subtle ways to display status (Berger and Ward 2010; Han et al. 2010) by investigating a different kind of consumer behavior (e.g., not respecting a dress code, using a non-standard presentation style). Moreover, our work provides novel insights into the psychological processes underlying the inferences of greater status and competence for nonconforming individuals rather than conforming ones. We demonstrate that positive inferences of status and competence from signals of nonconformity are mediated by observers' attributions of autonomy. Observers confer greater status and competence to nonconformity compared to conformity because they believe that the nonconforming individual has the necessary level of autonomy to follow her own inclinations and bear the cost of deviating from the norm. Our research also contributes to the growing literature on distinctiveness motives and variety seeking (Ariely and Levav 2000; Chan, Berger, and Van Boven 2012; Cheema and Kaikati 2010; Lynn and Harris 1997; Maimaran and Wheeler 2008; Ratner, Kahn, and Kahneman 1999; Simonson and Nowlis 2000; White and Argo 2011) by examining, for the first time, the moderating role of need for uniqueness in observers.

## Directions for Future Research

Our research can be further extended to examine additional potential moderators of the red sneakers effect. In particular, future work could examine how inferences from signals of nonconformity relate to cultural variability along the dimension of individualism-collectivism.

Individualism-collectivism is perhaps the most basic dimension of cultural variability (Hofstede 1980; Triandis, McCusker, and Hui 1990), and constructs related to this theme, such as the independent versus interdependent self-construal, have been extensively investigated in psychology and consumer behavior (Aaker and Lee 2001; Agrawal and Maheswaran 2012; Escalas and Bettman 2005; S. Han and Shavitt 1994; Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000). This research indicates that Western cultures tend to embrace individualism. Individualists construe themselves as independent and unique, and they value characteristics that distinguish themselves from other members of the group. In contrast, East Asian and Latin American cultures tend to promote collectivism. Collectivists view themselves as interdependent and as part of a group, and they place high value on maintaining harmony with others in the collective entity. Since collectivists are strongly motivated by group norms, future research could examine whether individuals from cultures strongly oriented toward collectivistic values or individuals chronically oriented toward interdependent self-construal react differently to nonconforming behaviors.

Another fruitful direction for further research pertains to the study of gender, physical attractiveness, and more general stereotypes. Future work could examine gender dynamics by manipulating the gender of the nonconforming individual across experimental conditions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine whether the nonconforming individual's physical attractiveness moderates the red sneakers effect observed in our studies. Past research demonstrates that physically attractive individuals are assumed to possess more socially desirable characteristics and are expected to lead better lives than their less attractive counterparts (Berscheid and Walster 1974; Langlois et al. 2000; Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid 1977). Hence, future research could examine whether observers associate nonconformity with even higher inferences of status and competence in the case of attractive, rather than relatively less attractive, individuals deviating from the norm. Moreover, drawing on stereotype research

examining the intertwined relationship between competence and warmth (Fiske et al. 2002), it would be interesting to explore additional dependent variables and inferences such as warmth and liking of the target individual. Additionally, further research could investigate the impact of the observers' status and their relative status compared to the nonconforming individual (e.g., students evaluating a professor versus professors evaluating a student).

Finally, future work could investigate the extent to which the nonconforming individual is deviating from norms of appropriate behavior and its impact on status inferences. In the current research, we focused on behavioral manifestations of nonconformity that entail deviance from the norm, but that are not perceived as a strong or offensive violation of the norm. Based on the threefold conceptualization articulated by Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001), our experiments manipulated nonconformity as "avoidance of similarity" (e.g., using one's personal PowerPoint presentation format rather than the standard one in a formal competition) and as "creative choice counterconformity" (e.g., wearing a red bow tie at a black-tie party). Future research could manipulate nonconformity by varying the third behavioral manifestation of nonconformity, namely "unpopular choice counterconformity," and examine under what conditions the use of products and brands that strongly violate existing norms of proper conduct would also result in inferences of greater status in the eyes of others. One hypothesis is that nonconforming behaviors might lie within a "range of acceptance" for observers, such that deviance within the range leads to inferences of higher status and competence, whereas deviance outside the range might not.

## Managerial Implications

Our research investigates nonconformity within the realm of branded consumption and our findings offer actionable implications for brands. Specifically, the results of study 1 demonstrate

that under certain conditions, less luxurious brands can signal higher status than more expensive ones (e.g., Swatch vs. Rolex). This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that conspicuous consumption of brands and the explicit use of other status symbols can be associated with low-status groups (Berger and Ward 2010; Feltovich et al. 2002; Han et al. 2010; Mazzocco et al. 2012). At times, less-conforming brands or perhaps even original product choices within the same luxury brand can serve as a signal of even higher status and competence in the eyes of others as compared to more conforming luxury brands and more mainstream product choices.

Our research also bears potentially important managerial insights by highlighting the boundary condition of perceived intentionality on the positive inferences derived from signals of nonconformity. We demonstrate that nonconformity to normative codes and etiquette can result in inferences of greater status and competence, relative to conformity, when the deviant behavior appears to be intentional. Thus, a key question for marketers is to understand how consumers can demonstrate that they are intentionally not conforming through brands and products. What makes nonconformity seem more intentional in consumption? Some existing products on the market appear "engineered for nonconformity." For example, the LittleMissMatched brand sells collections of mismatched socks sold in packs of three with the tagline "nothing matches, but anything goes." In this case, nonconformity is a product feature that clearly denotes the intentionality of the consumer to deviate from the standard practice of wearing paired socks. Indeed, there is a growing demand for what Eric Jennings, the men's fashion director at Saks Fifth Avenue, refers to as "crazy socks," according to a New York Times article (Colman 2011). "The more novelty, the brighter or bolder the pattern or color, that's what men are buying," says Jennings. Marketers of both niche and mainstream brands can capitalize on the growing demand for clothes and accessories that signal intentional nonconformity.

In addition, price might be a valuable driver of perceived intentionality in marketing nonconforming products. Nonconforming brands that are associated with premium prices signal that the nonconforming individual can afford conventional status symbols. This notion is consistent with the "poorgeoisie" trend of wealthy consumers embracing nonconformity by "dressing like hoboes but spending like millionaires" (Kandell 2012). The brands and products that these consumers use to deliberately "look poor" are often priced much higher than average fashion brands, such as a $300 pair of Acne jeans or a $200 guayabera shirt. Thus, the relatively high price of these nonconforming product choices manifests as an intentional willingness to deviate from the norm. Future investigations may directly test this hypothesis by manipulating the price of the nonconforming product or brand in an experimental setting.

In conclusion, we hope that our work is a first step toward providing a more articulated view of nonconformity behaviors in the domain of consumption. Contrary to the notion that nonconformity has ubiquitous negative effects, the current research demonstrates that nonconforming rather than conforming to behavioral norms can lead to inferences of greater status and competence in the eyes of others.

# Conspicuous Consumption of Time: When Busyness and Lack of Leisure Time Become a Status Symbol

SILVIA BELLEZZA

NEERU PAHARIA

ANAT KEINAN

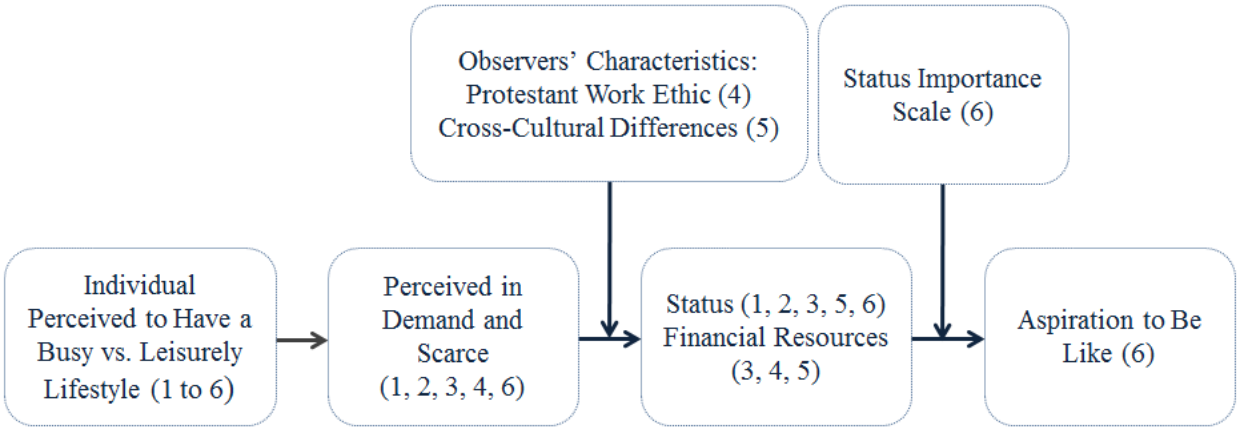
## Abstract

In this research we uncover an alternative kind of conspicuous consumption that operates by shifting the focus from the preciousness and scarcity of goods to the preciousness and scarcity of individuals. In contrast to the theory of the leisure class (Veblen 1899/2007), we propose that busyness at work and lack of leisure time can signal high status in the eyes of others. A series of studies shows that the positive inferences of status in response to busyness (and products associated with busyness) are driven by the perception that a busy person is in demand and scarce. Furthermore, we examine cultural values (the protestant work ethic) and differences among cultures (North America vs. Europe) to demonstrate moderators and boundary conditions. Finally we show that the aspiration to be like a busy individual is higher for status-conscious people, despite the fact that a busy individual is viewed to be less happy.

Movies, magazines, and popular TV shows such as "the Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" often highlight the abundance of money and leisure time among the wealthy. Consistent with this portrayal, Veblen's (1899/2007) theory of the leisure class suggests that the wealthy signal their ability to live idle lives by consuming time unproductively. At the same time though, complaining about being busy and about working all the time is an increasingly widespread phenomenon in modern society. On Twitter, celebrities publicly complain about "having no life" or "being in desperate need for a vacation" (Alford 2012). New York Times social commentator suggests that a common response to the question "How are you?" is "Busy!" (Kreider 2012). An analysis of holiday letters indicates that references to "crazy schedules" have increased since the 1960s (Schulte 2014). Contrary to the prediction that signaling time spent leisurely is associated with high status and wealth, we propose that signaling busyness has also become a status symbol and is regarded as an aspirational lifestyle.

In this research we uncover an alternative kind of conspicuous consumption that operates by shifting the focus from the preciousness and scarcity of goods to the preciousness and scarcity of individuals. Our investigation of the underlying mechanisms reveals that positive status inferences in response to busyness are mediated by the perception that a busy person is in high demand and scarce. A series of six studies test our conceptual model (summarized in figure 3.1). In study 1, our aim was to establish that a more-busy individual would be perceived to have more status than a less-busy individual, and to demonstrate a proposed mediating process of being in demand and scarce, while controlling for alternative mechanisms. In studies 2 and 3, we show how the public use of time-saving products (e.g., Bluetooth headset) and services (Peapod delivery) can signal status, regardless of how busy one truly is. In study 4 and 5, we examine cultural values (the work ethic) and differences among cultures (i.e., North America vs. Europe)

FIGURE 3.1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDIES




to demonstrate moderators and boundary conditions of the busyness effect. We find that Americans with values consistent with the protestant work ethic (Mirels and Garrett 1971) are very likely to interpret busyness as a positive signal of status. Moreover, we obtain a reversed effect in Europe, with busyness signaling lower status. Finally, in study 6, rather than measure the inferences an observer makes in regards to a busy person, we show that people aspire to be more like a busy individual, especially for status-conscious people, despite the view that busyness is associated with low levels of happiness.

Our work develops a novel and yet unexplored association between time expenditure and status inferences, and contributes to several streams of literature. First, we expand research on the decline of leisure time (Gershuny 2005; Hamermesh and Lee 2007; Hochschild 1997; Rutherford 2001; Schor 1992; Southerton and Tomlinson 2005) by systematically examining the conditions under which busyness operates as a status symbol. Second, while past research has primarily focused on how the expenditure of money has been a vehicle to signal status (Bellezza and Keinan 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Griskevicius et al. 2007; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010; Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006; Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011; Rucker and Galinsky 2008; Wang and Griskevicius 2014; Ward and Dahl 2014), we explore how the expenditure of time can

lead to the same end. Finally, our novel predictions contribute to recent research analyzing more subtle and alternative signals of status (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010).

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

### Busyness as Long Hours of Work and Lack of Leisure Time

The concept of busyness has been defined in different ways by various scholars (Gershuny 2005). Of particular relevance to our work is Schor's (1992) framework, which suggests that total hours can be broadly divided into three time categories. First, paid work time is represented by the total hours of remunerated employment. Second, unpaid work time (a category whose major components are cleaning, cooking, and child-care) is constituted of hours of household labor. Finally, the residual hours are composed by leisure time. In this research, we focus on the first time category and define busyness in terms of long hours of paid work time. To support this definition, we conducted a pilot study to determine which category of time expenditure is most associated with busyness – that is, if one is perceived to be busy, do people infer they are busy with paid work, household work, or busy with leisure? Each participant read a description of three people (full study in Appendix A): a person who was "more busy" than average, a person with an "average level of busyness," and a person "less busy" than average. We then asked participants about how they thought these people spent their time, specifically asking whether they thought each person spent many hours at work, doing home-related chores and activities, or doing hobbies and/or leisure activities. Participants inferred that the more-busy individual spent significantly more time at work than the less-busy individual. Conversely,

participants inferred the more-busy individual to spend significantly less time with leisure than the less-busy individual. The average-busy individual was between the more-busy and less-busy individual for both work and leisure. Participants inferred that the more busy person spent more time at work ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.23$) than the average busy person ($M = 4.84$, $SD = .90$), or the less busy person ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.44$, $F(1, 116) = 148.46$, $p < .001$). Conversely, participants perceived a more busy person to spend less time on leisure ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.40$) than the average busy person ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.04$) or the less busy person ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.36$, $F(1, 116) = 83.95$, $p < .001$). For time spent on chores, there was no significant difference related to level of busyness. Thus, following Schor's (1992) framework for time categorization, we conceptualize busyness to be associated with "long hours of work" and having "less time for leisure," and the following theorizing is anchored on this premise. This conceptualization also converges with standard definitions where dictionary.com defines busyness as: "actively engaged in work or an activity," and "not at leisure." Although one could conceivably find that a person is busy with leisure activities (has an active social calendar) or busy with home-related activities (many chores to finish), these inferences are not spontaneous when considering a busy individual.

## Work versus Leisure

Ancient philosophers have often portrayed paid work as the degeneration and enslavement of the human existence. The free man in ancient Greece and Rome had only contempt for work while slaves performed tasks of labor. In Cicero's words (44B.C./1913): "A citizen who gives his labor for money degrades himself to the rank of slaves." This insight continued in the thoughts of more modern thinkers. In his theory of the leisure class, Veblen

(1899/2007) defined leisure as the non-productive consumption of time and proposed that "conspicuous abstention from labor […] becomes the conventional mark of superior pecuniary achievement" (p. 30). Consistent with his view, economic theory suggests that beyond a certain wage level, more income will cause workers to supply less labor and work less (the "income effect"). Accordingly, studies of leisure and labor patterns argue that in the 19th century one could predict how poor somebody was by how long they worked (Economist 2014; Voth 2001). Furthermore, the economist John Maynard Keynes predicted a fifteen-hour week by 2030, and time to enjoy "the hour and the day virtuously and well"(Schulte 2014). Recent research on happiness similarly shows that the desire to earn more income is driven by a belief that it will allow for less work and more leisure time (Kahneman et al. 2006). Moreover, some empirical evidence demonstrates that greater income leads to supplying less work: cabdrivers quit working once they reach their daily income target (Camerer et al. 1997), lottery winners work less and consume more leisure after receiving the prize (Imbens, Rubin, and Sacerdote 2001), and the ultra-rich spend the lion share of their yearly expenditures on vacations and leisure travels (Frank 2012). Thus, based on these premises, one may infer that those with time for leisure may be of higher wealth and social status, and that those who work more may be less well regarded.

However, there are some reasons to believe that those who devote more time to work, and less time to leisure may be viewed to have more status. Beyond an income effect, economists also propose an opposing substitution effect, where higher wages increase the supply of labor because the opportunity cost of consuming leisure becomes higher. Consistent with this view, research has documented that work hours have increased steadily among the high status and have remained flat for low-status workers (Kuhn and Lozano 2008), and that an increase in leisure time has been driven by less educated people working less than before (Aguiar and Hurst 2006).

Other factors may also drive inferences that busy individuals have more status. For example, attributions of competence, ambition, or access to an enjoyable and meaningful job may underlie the positive attributions in response to busyness and lack of leisure time. Furthermore, workplace norms dictating long hours may be associated with high status professions, where employees are required to put in face-time (Hochschild 1997).

## Busy Individuals as a Scarce Resource

Beyond attributions that may be made based on the income effect, the substitution effect, or alternative accounts (e.g., competence, ambition), we propose that busyness has become a status symbol through a mechanism of being perceived as in demand and scarce. Contrary to the prediction that observers attribute higher status and wealth to individuals who conduct idle, though enjoyable lives (Veblen, 1899/2007), we propose that busyness and lack of leisure time have now become a more powerful status symbol. The shift of status attribution based on time expenditure may be linked to the development of knowledge-intensive economies, characterized by structured employment markets. In advanced economies, the market for human resources is typically highly specialized both on the supply side, with individuals investing in their human capital (Nakamura 2000; Wasik 2013), and on the demand side, with a large body of companies, institutions, and head hunters competing to hire the best talents. Those possessing the skills and abilities that employers or clients value are expected to be in high demand and short supply, and command more compensation. According to research conducted at the Federal Reserve Bank, in the "new economy" human capital and talent are increasingly viewed as the scarcest economic resources (Nakamura 2000). While working hard in economic systems that were (and some that currently are) mostly based on less-skilled agriculture and manufacturing may have been

perceived as virtuous, it may not have implied an individual was in high demand. In contrast, we propose that in advanced economic environments, busyness may operate as a signal that one is in high demand and scarce.

## Scarcity and Status

We argue that long hours of work and products manifesting one's busy lifestyle (e.g., multitasking devices) are a signal that one is in demand and scarce. In the domain of luxury goods, scarcity is a central attribute to maintaining product value (Lynn 1991). Luxury researchers categorize various types of scarcity that marketers can take advantage of, which include natural scarcity (diamonds), techno-scarcity (new technologies), and limited-edition scarcity, which can all be used to demand higher market prices (Catry 2003). Research has further documented a "scarce-is-good" heuristic which suggests that consumers learn based on their buying experiences that scarce objects tend to be more valuable than non-scarce objects (Cialdini 1993). Others have suggested that scarcity is appealing based on psychological reactance, where scarcity threatens one's freedom to attain unavailable resources (Brehm 1966) or because people need to be unique (Snyder and Fromkin 1980). The possession of scarce products has also been associated with feelings of status. In a recent study, researchers found that participants desired a scarce limited-edition picture when they felt powerless in an attempt to regain feelings of status (Rucker and Galinsky 2008). Just as items that are scarce may be afforded more status and value, so might a person who is scarce. We surmise that the overall status benefits that busy people enjoy over non-busy people may stem from the perception that they are scarce and inaccessible. A busy individual is scarce like a rare gemstone and thus perceived to have high status.

Status represents the respect one has in the eyes of others, and the need to communicate status has been attributed to the motivation to attain advantage in social relationships (Magee and Galinsky 2008; Ridgeway and Correll 2006). In line with previous research on status attribution, we consider status in terms of both "social status" and "financial resources" (Bourdieu 1984; Scott, Mende, and Bolton 2013; Veblen 1899/2007). A large stream of research has found that individuals display their status through the publicly visible act of consuming luxury goods (Berger and Ward 2010; Fuchs et al. 2013; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010; Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006; Wang and Griskevicius 2014; Ward and Dahl 2014). In addition, recent research has uncovered the role of more subtle signals of status such as larger food and drink packages, smaller logos, and nonconforming behaviors (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010). In this research, we propose another novel way to communicate status, through the conspicuous displays of one's busyness.

**H1:** More busyness (less leisure) can lead to inferences of higher status as compared to less busyness (more leisure).

**H2:** The perception that a busy individual is in demand and scarce will mediate the positive inferences of high status.

We then explore the role of culture, and cultural values as an important boundary condition for the positive associations based on busyness. We propose that Americans' status inferences may be highly influenced by the protestant work ethic (Mirels and Garrett 1971) which suggests that idleness and leisure is sinful, and hard work is a moral pursuit necessary to receive "God's grace" (Furnham 1984). Such values are fundamental in American culture and are reflected in the ethos of the American Dream (Adams 1931), which suggests that regardless of social class, one has the opportunity for social mobility based on hard work. Popular culture

often reflects and amplifies these cultural values; a recent Super Bowl commercial by Cadillac features a wealthy businessman who glorifies the busy working American lifestyle, and lampoons Europeans for enjoying long vacations. Thus, the pursuit of work is a central component of an American's identity (Gershuny 2005; Hochschild 1997; Rutherford 2001; Schulte 2014). The protestant work ethic scale (Mirels and Garrett 1971) measures the degree to which individuals value work versus leisure (e.g., "Our society would have fewer problems if people had less leisure time," "If one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself"). Accordingly, we expect that among Americans, status inferences towards a busy individual will be higher for individuals with values more consistent with the protestant work ethic. Furthermore, because the notion of being in demand and scarce is relevant within the context of spending more time on work and less time on leisure, we also expect that our mediator would be more valued, and a stronger predictor of overall status attributions for those higher in the protestant work ethic. That is, all participants would find the busy individual to be more in demand and scarce, but these inferences will drive status perceptions more for those high on the protestant work ethic (moderated mediation).

**H3a:** Positive inferences of status in response to busyness will be moderated by observers' protestant work ethic; observers with high protestant work ethic will infer higher status compared to observers with low levels of protestant work ethic.

**H3b:** Positive status attributions of a busy individual will be mediated by scarcity more for those high on the protestant work ethic than for those low on the protestant work ethic.

We further explore the role of cultural values through a cross cultural study comparing Americans and Italians' perceptions of busy individuals. Because North Americans and Europeans display different attitudes and values toward work and leisure (Krueger et al. 2008),

we surmise that these cultural differences could lead not only to attenuation, but even a reversal of the inferences observed with U.S. participants.

Along the lines of the protestant work ethic, while Americans view work as a priority and tend to idealize busyness and long hours of work, Europeans regard their leisure time as important as, or more important, than work time (Brislin and Kim 2003; Richards 1998, 1999). Brislin and Kim (2003) show that in Western Europe, leisure and vacations are greatly valued and constitute the most important events in many people's lives. Over the last half century, Western Europeans have gradually opted to work less and take longer vacations (Bennhold 2004) while Americans have increased the time spent at work (Ferguson 2003). According to a study by the OECD, between 1979 and 1999, the average American working year lengthened by 50 hours, or nearly 3%, but the average working year in some European countries shrank by 12% (Ferguson 2003). Yet another study on time use in France versus the U.S. (Krueger et al. 2008) found that on average the French take 21 more vacation days a year than Americans. On popular media, Europeans pride themselves on working fewer hours, but producing more (e.g., "Winning is not about working hard. It is about working smart and less, as the French know well!" Carney, 2009). A New York Times article discussing Europe's love of leisure features European businessmen and economists who argue that "the main difference with the U.S. is that we spend more time enjoying life" and "leisure is a normal good, and as you become richer, economic theory says that you consume more of it" (Bennhold 2004). Cross-cultural differences associated with the protestant work ethic also impact how status is obtained and perceived. Societies vary on whether the concept of social status can be earned through success and accomplishments (achieved status), or is inherited through family background and inherited wealth (ascribed status) (Foladare 1969). While status perceptions are usually a function of both, in the U.S., consistent with protestant values and work ethic, earned status carries a larger influence on

overall status perceptions (Linton 1936). Based on these cultural differences, we predict that Americans will associate a busy lifestyle and long hours of work with high status, whereas Europeans will view a leisurely lifestyle and the ability to enjoy life and take long vacations as a signal of status.

**H4:** Positive inferences of status in response to busyness will be moderated by cross-cultural differences; Americans will interpret busyness at work as a stronger signal of status than leisure time, whereas Europeans will interpret leisure time as a stronger signal of status than busyness at work.

Finally, rather than explore *observers'* status inferences made towards busy individuals, we explore the aspirations to be like a busy individual. Because the attainment of status is a central motivation and a socially desirable condition (Argyle 1994; Bourdieu 1984), we predict that people would aspire to be more like a busy individual than a less busy individual, despite the fact that that a busy person may be viewed as less happy. Furthermore, we explore the relationship between status-conscious individuals and these aspirations. To that end we use a status importance scale (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Reinecke Flynn 2009), an individual difference measure assessing how much people care about status. This scale has been validated with more traditional luxury brands like Prada and Gucci such that people who rank higher on this scale exhibit more favorable attitudes towards these brands. Examples of items on the scale include "I would buy a product just because it has status" and "A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal." If displaying one's busyness increases *observers'* perceptions of status, we would expect that status-conscious individuals would especially aspire to more like busy individuals.

**H5:** Aspirations to be like a more-busy individual will be higher than aspirations to be like a less-busy individual, especially for status-conscious people.

In conclusion, we propose that people will regard busy individuals to be higher in status and will want to be like them more than those who work less and conduct a leisurely lifestyle. Like a rare gemstone, a busy individual is seen as in high demand and scarce. Across our studies, we manipulate busyness in a variety of ways, including the use of scenarios, time-saving products and services, and social media posts. In line with research associating status with both the concepts of "social status" and "financial resources" (Bourdieu 1984; Scott, Mende, and Bolton 2013), we first test each dependent variable independently (social status: studies 1-2; financial resources: study 3), before demonstrating that these two constructs converge (study 4-5) in the context of busyness. Our studies are conducted across several different participant populations (students at a Mid-Atlantic university, students and community members at a Northeastern University, Qualtrics, Mechanical Turk, international participants, and data collected from Twitter) to confirm the generalizability of our results.

In the general discussion, we report additional findings exploring important boundary conditions such as the role of perceived agency over the decision to be busy (i.e., the extent to which one's busy lifestyle and lack of leisure time are perceived to be the product of a voluntary and deliberate choice). We predict that observers will ascribe a heightened status to long hours of work as long as they believe that the busy individual has agency over the decision to work long hours. Indeed, we find that observers typically assume the busy individual deliberately decided to accept a demanding job and conduct a busy lifestyle. However, when busyness at work and lack of leisure time are clearly depicted as driven by need rather than as a deliberate choice, the positive inferences of higher status are considerably diminished. Thus busyness must also be accompanied by agency over the decision to be busy for it to work as an effective signal of status in the eyes of others. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications, providing tangible prescriptions for how marketers can emphasize busyness and

promote time saving products for status signaling purposes. Across our studies, participants were retained regardless of whether they completed the entire survey, or skipped questions. For that reason, degrees of freedom may vary across dependent variables within each study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

### Pilot Study: Humblebragging on Social Media

To provide empirical evidence of the conspicuous display of busyness and lack of leisure time, we first collected field data examining the content of more than one thousand tweets posted by famous people, a demographic of status-conscious individuals (Brim 2009), available on the "humblebrag" website. Humblebragging is the act of showing off about something through an ostensibly self-deprecating statement. For example, the cover of the book "Humblebrag, The Art of False Modesty" (Wittels 2012), mentions that the author "would love some free time but has been too busy writing for Parks and Recreation, Eastbound & Down, and a bunch of other stuff #vacationplease." The goal of this study was to examine the frequency of complaints about busyness on social media, as compared to other types of self-deprecating statements, such as humblebragging about fame, popularity, and attractiveness.

Our dataset of brags was retrieved from the web on the Humblebrag page on twitter (https://twitter.com/Humblebrag). Before publishing the Humblebrag book, the author asked people to email him leads on any humblebrags available online. About 1,600 statements, the majority of which were by famous people, were then retweeted on the humblebrag web page from 2010 to 2012. With the help of three research assistants, we coded 1,100 of these self-deprecating statements for busyness and lack of leisure time.

We found that 12% of the coded tweets related to complaints about hard work and lack of time (e.g., Tlaloc Rivas, stage director, "Opened a show last Friday. Begin rehearsals for another next Tuesday. In-between that, meetings in DC. I HAVE NO LIFE;" Austin Pettis, American football receiver, "Had a lot going on these past few weeks and even more these next *two ... this is wayyyy to much to handle!*" Kai Ryssdal, journalist, "The CNN-LA green room is a cold and lonely place at 7 on a Sunday morning!" Josh Sigurdson, singer, "*Hi, I'm 16 and I'm* publishing 3 books and an album this year. Do you have any advice on how to handle it best?"). Other humble brags not related to time were, for example, about celebrity status (e.g., Lindsay Lohan, actress, "Oh my god, I'm so embarrassed, paparazzi just blinded me with flashes again, as I was walking into dinner. They pushed me and I tripped!"), or award winning (e.g., Olivia Wilde, actress, "Watching my brother graduate from Andover today. So proud, it is silly. More important than MTV awards but thank you to all who voted for me!"). In sum, this study confirms that conspicuously displaying one's busyness through social media is a practice pursued to some extent by status-conscious people who are famous, and have been recognized to be bragging by the humblebrag community. Although these results are observational, they offer initial evidence that people use social media to publicly display how much they work and complain about lack of leisure time in an attempt to exhibit their high status.

In the next studies, we focus on inferences in terms of status and made by others in response to busyness.

## Study 1A: The Effect of Busyness on Status Perceptions

The aim of this study is to first establish that more busy people are accorded more status than less busy people, and secondly to confirm whether these effects consistently apply across

economic classes. Though empirical evidence is mixed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014)[10], it may be that people infer that a busy person is from a higher socio-economic background because there is a natural correlation between these two types of people in the world, a proposition that is also more consistent with the substitution effect in economics. To control for this possibility, we test the effects of busyness versus non-busyness across different levels of socio-economic background of the target individual described in the experiment.

Method. We recruited 483 participants through Mechanical Turk (41% female; $M_{age}$ = 31). In a mixed design, participants were randomly assigned to one of four between subjects socio-economic background conditions: wealthy, upper middle class, lower middle class, and lower class. In each condition, participants were told: "Imagine the following three people who all come from [wealthy/upper middle/lower middle/lower class] families." All participants then read the identical stimuli regarding three people: "Person A appears to be more busy than average. Person B appears to have an average level of busyness. Person C appears to be less busy than average." Next, we measured our main dependent variable, social status. Specifically, participants were asked how much they agreed with three statements regarding the social status of persons A, B, and C (three repeated measures): "This person has high social status" (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree). Finally, participants answered to two manipulation check items: "This person spends many hours at work"; and "This person spends many hours doing hobbies and/or leisure activities" (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree).

Results. We first analyzed the manipulation check items by conducting a repeated measures ANOVA with socio-economic background of the target individual as the between subjects factor (wealthy, upper middle class, lower middle class, and lower class), level of busyness as the within subjects factor (more-busy, average-busy, and less-busy), and hours spent

[10] For example, people employed in management professions earn almost twice as much as people employed in production and transportation, though both categories are the highest in terms of number of hours worked per week.

at work as the dependent variable. There was a main effect of busyness ($F(2, 956) = 617.87$, $p < .001$), a non-significant main effect of socio-economic background ($F(3, 478) = 1.34$, NS), and no significant interaction ($F(6, 956) = 1.03$, NS). Participants accorded more hours worked to the more-busy individual ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.16$) than to the average-busy individuals ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .95$, $F(1, 478) = 352.29$, $p < .001$) and to the less-busy individual ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.31$, $F(1, 478) = 757.81$, $p < .001$). The same analysis on the leisure manipulation check exhibited an opposing effect such that the more-busy individual was perceived to spend less time on leisure. There was a main effect of busyness ($F(2, 952) = 257.63$, $p < .001$), a non-significant main effect of socio-economic background ($F(3, 476) = 2.42$, NS), and no significant interaction ($F(6, 952) = .41$, NS). Participants accorded less time spent on leisure to the more-busy individual ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.41$) than to the average-busy individual ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.00$, $F(1, 476) = 176.82$, $p < .001$) and to the less-busy individual ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.28$, $F(1, 476) = 308.71$, $p < .001$).

We then analyzed our main dependent variable, social status, with a similar repeated measures ANOVA. As expected, there was a main effect of busyness ($F(2, 956) = 70.82$, $p < .001$), a main effect of socio-economic background ($F(3, 478) = 6.66$, $p < .001$), and no significant interaction ($F(6, 956) = .87$, NS). Regardless of socio-economic background of the target individual described in the experiment, we find that participants accorded higher status to the more-busy individual ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.46$) than to the average-busy individual ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .98$, $F(1, 478) = 48.96$, $p < .001$) and to the less-busy individual ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.42$, $F(1, 478) = 83.39$, $p < .001$). Because the main effects of socio-economic background are not relevant to our hypotheses, we do not present the statistical results, however, they were consistent with a positive trend where socioeconomic background and status were associated. All simple effects between the three levels of busyness were significant. Consistent with H1, in study 1A, we find

that regardless of socio-economic background, a more-busy individual is accorded more status than a less-busy individual.

## Study 1B: The Mediating Process of Being in Demand

In study 1B, our aim is to replicate the busyness effects found in study 1A in a between subjects design, while determining whether status inferences made towards busy individuals are driven by the proposed process mechanism of being "in demand." Because busyness can lead to a variety of inferences, we also include a number of other mechanisms that may be relevant to busyness perceptions. For instance, greater time spent working may indicate a higher status individual who has access to a more enjoyable job (Baumeister et al. 2013; White and Dolan 2009), or greater time spent working may be an indication of a person's competence, or level of ambition. Because these measures may also contribute to status attributions, they are included as control variables in a comprehensive mediation analysis. Finally, participants were asked about well-being (i.e., happiness). Because busyness is associated with more work and less leisure, we predict a busy individual would be perceived to have less well-being, despite higher status perceptions.

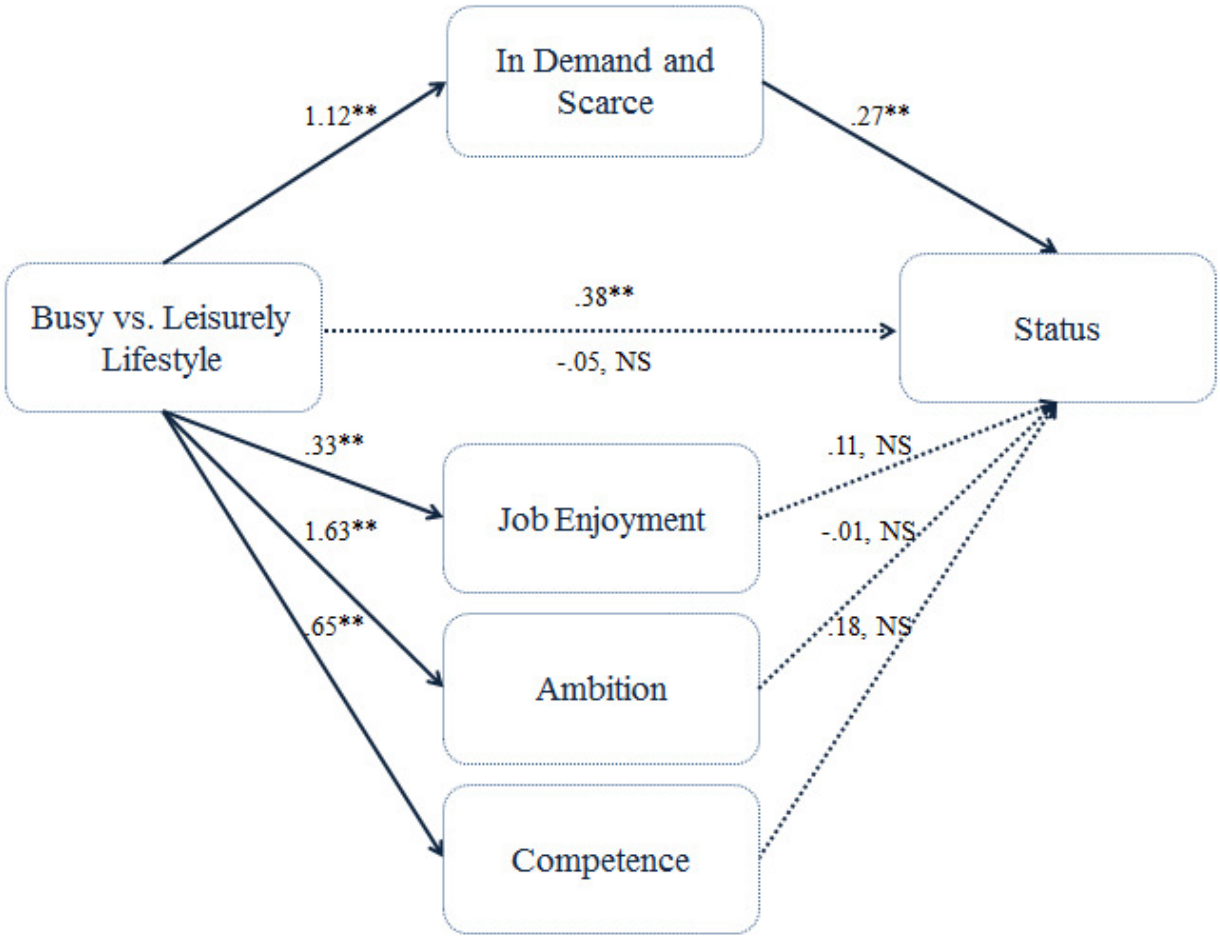
Method. We recruited 285 participants through Mechanical Turk (58% female; $M_{age}$ = 33). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between subjects conditions where they either read about a more-busy individual or a less-busy individual. Specifically, participants read "Imagine the following person. Person A appears to be more (less) busy than average." As in study 1A, participants were then asked to rate the social status of the individual described. Next, participants rated their level of agreement (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree) with a variety of mediating items: "This person is in demand," "This person enjoys their job," "This person is

ambitious," and three items to measure competence (Grandey et al. 2005; Judd et al. 2005) "This person is effective"; "This person is efficient" and "This person is competent" ($\alpha = .89$). In addition, one item was included to measure perceptions of well-being: "This person is happy." Finally the same manipulation check items were used from study 1A.

Results. Analyzing the manipulation check items, participants found the more-busy individual to spend more hours at work ($M = 5.34$, $SD = .93$ vs. $M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.35$, $F(1, 283) = 238.06$, $p < .001$), and less hours on leisure ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.24$ vs. $M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.03$, $F(1, 281) = 179.04$, $p < .001$). Replicating the effects on our main dependent variable from study 1A, participants found the more-busy individual to have more status ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.31$ vs. $M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.16$, $F(1, 283) = 6.65$, $p < .001$). Analyzing the mediating items, participants found the busy person to be more in demand ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.05$ vs. $M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.27$, $F(1, 280) = 62.66$, $p < .001$), enjoy their job more ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.05$ vs. $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.06$, $F(1, 280) = 7.81$, $p < .001$), be more ambitious ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.01$ vs. $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.22$, $F(1, 279) = 151.12$, $p < .001$), and be more competent ($M = 4.92$, $SD = .86$ vs. $M = 4.28$, $SD = .98$, $F(1, 282) = 33.60$, $p < .001$) than the less-busy individuals. However, participants also found the more-busy individual to be less happy ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .92$ vs. $M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.14$, $F(1, 280) = 36.94$, $p < .001$) than the less-busy individual. We then conducted a multiple mediation analysis to determine whether our proposed mechanism, being in demand, mediated status inferences towards a more-busy individual, when other mechanisms, such as enjoying one's job, ambition, and competence were controlled for. We conducted a mediation analysis using level of busyness (more-busy vs. less-busy) with in demand, competence, ambition, and job enjoyment as simultaneous mediators, and with status inferences as the dependent variable. As seen in figure 3.2, in a bootstrap analysis with 5,000 resamples, only being in demand remained as a significant mediator of status perceptions; the size of the indirect effect was .30,

and the confidence interval excluded zero (.09, .55). Competence, ambition, and job enjoyment were not significant when controlling for perceptions of being in demand.

FIGURE 3.2: STUDY 1B RESULTS – MEDIATION VIA SCARCITY, COMPETENCE, AMBITION, JOB ENJOYMENT ON PERCEIVED STATUS




Note. Path coefficients represent regression coefficients. Coefficients significantly different from zero are indicated by asterisks (*p < .05; **p < .01), and their associated paths are shown by solid lines; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths.

Discussion. In sum, in study 1A, we find that a more-busy individual is accorded more status than a less-busy individual, even when controlling for socio-economic background. In study 1B, we replicate the effects found in study 1A between subjects, and also demonstrate that

being in demand mediates the effect of busyness on status attributions, controlling for alternative mechanisms such as competence, ambition, and job enjoyment, consistent with H2. We also find that a more-busy person is seen to be less happy, despite being viewed to have more status. We replicate these main effects and mediation of study 1B, as part of study 6 with a different population of participants (students). The replication is presented in the Appendix B for space considerations.

## Study 2: The Signaling Power of Multitasking Products

In studies 1A and 1B, we directly manipulated the busyness of a hypothetical individual. In study 2, our aim is to determine whether a more subtle, yet visible signal of busyness would have a similar effect. While luxury products and brands have been shown to be an effective tool to communicate status, our aim in this study is to determine whether the use of timesaving products and services can also effectively signal status, regardless of how busy one truly is. Specifically, study 2 examines the signaling power of a timesaving multitasking product associated with busyness (i.e., a hands-free Bluetooth cell phone headset) as compared to a product associated with leisure and free time (i.e., a pair of expensive headphones for music and leisure). We hypothesize that the Bluetooth user would be perceived to have more status than the headphone user because participants would believe the Bluetooth user was in demand and scarce.

Method. We recruited 130 participants through the Qualtrics market research panel who responded to a paid online survey (49% female; $M_{age}$ = 48, American). Given the huge variability in terms of product aesthetics for existing Bluetooth headsets on the market, we selected two different Bluetooth models (a technical model and a high-design model). As a stronger test of our hypotheses, we also examined two conditions for the music headphones using the same picture

of the product and emphasized the expensiveness of the device in one of them. Thus, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four following conditions: (a) Bluetooth technical (multitasking product condition); (b) Bluetooth design (multitasking product condition); (c) headphones for music (leisure product condition); and (d) expensive headphones for music (leisure product condition). Participants read a short paragraph about an individual named Anne and saw a picture of her using a product (see Appendix C for a representation of the stimuli). In the Bluetooth conditions, participants read the following description, "Imagine Anne, a 35-year-old woman. She is wearing a hands-free Bluetooth headset for her cell phone. It seems that she is always wearing her hands-free headset." In the headphones conditions, participants read the following description, "Imagine Anne, a 35-year-old woman. She is wearing a pair of [expensive] headphones for music and leisure. It seems that she is always wearing her headphones." Next, participants answered: On a scale from 1 to 7, how would you rank the social status of the individual described? (1 = Low social status, 7 = High social status). Participants then answered two questions assessing whether Anne was perceived to be in demand and scarce using a more robust 2-item measure compared to study 1. More specifically participants were asked: 1. Do you perceive Anne as a "scarce resource"? (1 = Definitely no, 7 = Definitely yes); 2. "To what extent is Anne in demand?" (1 = In very low demand, 7 = In very high demand). We averaged the two items ($\alpha = .80$) and used the resulting measure as mediator in our analyses. Lastly, manipulation check questions asked participants to estimate the price of the product [What is the price of the product that Anne is wearing? (insert a number)], and whether she spent time at work or at leisure using items from study 1. In addition, because busyness was not directly manipulated (as it was in study 1), we added a manipulation check item to directly measure Anne's level of busyness: "How busy is Anne?" (1 = Not busy at all, 7 = Extremely busy).

Results. As expected, the expensive headphones were perceived as the most expensive product ($140.3) followed by the Bluetooth design ($95.5), the regular headphones ($72.6), and the Bluetooth technical ($67.5), however the differences between conditions were not significant potentially due to large standard deviations (ranging from $95.5 to $157.56).

Since there were no significant differences in the overall pattern of results between the two multitasking product conditions and between the two leisure product conditions, the data were collapsed and analyzed jointly (i.e., the Bluetooth technical and Bluetooth design results were merged and the "expensive headphones" and "headphones" results were merged). Anne was perceived as busier in the Bluetooth condition ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.21$) than in the headphone condition ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.39$, $F(1, 127) = 38.27$, $p < .001$). She was also seen to be spending more time at work in the Bluetooth conditions ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.41$) than in the headphone conditions ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.54$, $F(1, 127) = 15.25$, $p < .001$), and spending less time with leisure in the Bluetooth condition ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.53$) than in the headphone condition ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.51$, $F(1, 127) = 10.36$, $p = .002$).

Compared to participants in the leisure product condition, participants in the multitasking product condition perceived Anne to have greater status ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.19$ vs. $M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.12$, $F(1, 128) = 19.46$, $p < .001$), and perceived her to be more in demand and scarce ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.18$ vs. $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.21$, $F(1, 127) = 16.98$, $p < .001$). We then conducted a mediation analysis to determine whether being in demand and scarce mediated the relationship between the busyness manipulation (multitasking product vs. leisure product) and perceptions of Anne's status. In a bootstrap analysis, we found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the overall size of the indirect effect excluded zero (indirect effect = .44; 95% CI = .22 to .75), suggesting a significant indirect effect.

Discussion. Findings from this study demonstrate the signaling power of products associated with a busy lifestyle, such as a multitasking Bluetooth headset. These findings are consistent with popular blogs and magazine articles providing suggestions on how to look busy. For example, a recent humorous blog (www.thefacultylounge.org) providing "tips on how to make sure you convey to others the full extent of your busyness and importance" suggests "…Talk on one of those Bluetooth ear thingies for your cell phone at all times while in the building. The exception to this is faculty meetings or workshops, when it is acceptable not to talk on the phone, though you should continue to wear the earpiece. If anyone asks, say that you didn't even notice – you spend so much time wearing it 'for conference calls' that it's like a part of your body." In line with H2, our findings again provide evidence in support of our proposed mediating mechanism and demonstrate that status inferences are driven by the belief that the busy individual is in demand and scarce for the more subtle use of multitasking products. The next study further deepens our understanding of how products and brands can generate inferences of status in the eyes of others by virtue of their associations with a busy lifestyle.

## Study 3: The Signaling Power of Brands Associated with Busyness

In study 2, we investigated the status signaling attributes of leisure products against time-saving products. In study 3, we examine the status signaling attributes of an expensive brand (Whole Foods) against a time-saving brand (Peapod), while also including a control condition (Trader Joe's). In addition, we use financial resources (wealth and income), as an alternative dependent variable related to status (Scott, Mende, and Bolton 2013). The design of study 3 entails three stages. Specifically, the study is composed of (1) a pretest to identify retail brands for the main study, (2) the main study testing the three Peapod, Whole Foods, and Trader Joe's

brands, and (3) a follow-up study focusing on the Peapod brand and manipulating busyness, to control for potential confounds linked to brand specificities in the main study. Importantly, all participants for the three stages of the study are drawn from the same pool of lab respondents.

Pre-test for Retail Brands. In a pretest (Appendix D), we confirmed that the two retail brands Peapod and Whole Foods were respectively highly associated with busy and expensive lifestyles compared to other retail brands that have outlets in the state where the study took place: Star Market, Costco, Peapod online grocery shopping, Trader Joe's, Walmart, Whole Foods, and Safeway. Trader Joe's was picked as the control brand since its association with a busy lifestyle was similar to Whole Foods, but significantly lower than Peapod, and its association with an expensive lifestyle was similar to Peapod, but significantly lower than Whole Foods.

Method. We recruited 291 participants (50% female, $M_{age}$ = 24, American) from a subject pool of students and community members at a large Northeastern university. We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions (Peapod – busy lifestyle vs. Whole Foods – expensive lifestyle vs. Trader Joe's – control lifestyle) between-subjects. Participants read a short paragraph about a grocery brand and a customer, Matthew. Participants in the busy lifestyle condition read, "Peapod is an online grocery service in the United States. Peapod's home delivery service allows consumers to shop online and receive groceries delivered right to their homes." Participants in the expensive lifestyle condition read, "Whole Foods is a chain of supermarkets in the United States. Consumers can buy groceries at Whole Foods stores located throughout the country." Finally, participants in the control lifestyle condition read, "Trader Joe's is a chain of supermarkets in the United States. Consumers can buy groceries at Trader Joe's stores located throughout the country." All participants then read "Imagine Matthew; he is 35 years old. Matthew typically buys groceries at Peapod/Whole Foods/Trader Joe's." Participants then assessed Matthew's level of financial resources: 1. "This person has a high

income level" " (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree); 2 "Do you think he is financially wealthy (1 Not wealthy, 7 Extremely wealthy). The two items were collapsed into a measure of financial resources (2 items, $\alpha = .84$). As in study 2, we finally asked participants to rate the level of busyness of the described individual.

Results. The analysis of the manipulation check confirmed that Matthew was perceived as busier when shopping through Peapod. A one-way ANOVA with perceived level of busyness as the dependent measure revealed a significant effect of condition ($F(2, 289) = 25.96$, $p < .001$). Planned contrasts revealed that Matthew was perceived as busier when shopping at Peapod ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.21$) than at Whole Foods ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .85$, $t(289) = 5.91$, $p < .001$) or at Trader Joe's ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .92$, $t(289) = 6.49$, $p < .001$). In line with the results of the pretest, the difference between Whole Foods and Trader Joe's was not significant.

A one-way ANOVA with financial resources as the dependent measure revealed a significant effect of condition ($F(2, 289) = 18.35$, $p < .001$). Planned contrasts revealed that participants rated Matthew's financial resources as higher in the Whole Foods condition ($M = 4.97$, $SD = .83$) than the Trader Joe's condition ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.11$, $t(289) = 5.93$, $p < .001$) and also higher in the Peapod condition ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.15$) than in the Trader Joe's condition ($t(289) = 4.09$, $p < .001$). However, the difference between the Whole Foods condition and Peapod condition did not reach significance ($t(288) = 1.88$, NS). Participants inferred that a person who shops with Peapod has more financial resources than a person who shops at Trader Joe's, despite the two brands being perceived as equally expensive. Furthermore, the difference between the expensive brand (Whole Foods) and the "busy" brand (Peapod) was not significant.

Follow-up Study. We recruited 153 different participants (62% female, $M_{age} = 23$, American) from the same subject pool as the main study. In this study, we held the Peapod brand constant and we randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions manipulating busyness

(more-busy vs. less-busy). All participants read the same description of Peapod as in the main study and busyness was manipulated through an extra statement at the end of the description. Specifically, in the more-busy condition, the additional statement read, "He buys at Peapod because he is very busy at work and does not have time to shop for groceries." In less-busy condition, the additional statement read, "He buys at Peapod because he is not very busy at work and has a lot of time to search for products online." After reading the description, participants answered the same questions as in the main study to rate Matthew's perceived level of financial resources (2 items, $\alpha = .78$). Participants also answered the 2-items in demand and scarcity measure from study 2 (2 items, $\alpha = .85$). As expected, participants rated Matthew to have more financial resources in the more-busy condition than in the less-busy condition ($M = 5.01$, $SD = .89$ vs. $M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.01$, $F(1,150) = 21.45$, $p < .001$). Moreover, participants rated Matthew to be more in demand and scarce in the more-busy condition than in the less-busy condition ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.0$ vs. $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.21$, $F(1,150) = 42.15$, $p < .001$). Next, we conducted a mediation analysis, using a 5,000 resamples bootstrap procedure. Being in demand and scarce significantly mediated perceptions of financial resources (indirect effect = .35, CI: .16, .58).

Discussion. Findings from study 3 demonstrate that as compared to the expensive Whole Foods brand, Peapod, a brand associated with busyness, can also lead to high status inferences. Moreover, we provide further evidence that positive status inferences are mediated through whether a busy individual is perceived as being in demand and scarce (H2). In the next two studies, we investigate how inferences of status derived from busyness and lack of leisure time interact with two related characteristics of the observers: the protestant work ethic and cross-cultural differences.

## Study 4: Social Media and the Moderating Role of the Protestant Work Ethic

Over the last decade, the exponential growth of social networks and blogs has multiplied the chances consumers have to portray a virtual image of themselves in front of others and has opened up a new way to display one's time spending to a large audience. Through social media, consumers can share their lives (e.g., Facebook), their opinions and interests (e.g., Twitter, Pinterest), their professional achievements (e.g., Linkedin), among others things. Inspired by the Humblebrag pilot, in this study we examine status inferences of a person who signals their busyness on Facebook. Moreover, we test whether the relationship between busyness and perceptions of greater status are moderated by respondents' level of protestant work ethic (Mirels and Garrett 1971). Consistent with H3, we expect that the attributions of enhanced status will be particularly high for those who value the protestant work ethic. Furthermore, we aim to determine the relationship between our proposed mediator (in demand and scarce) and our proposed moderator (cultural values). Because the notion of being in demand and scarce is relevant within the context of spending more time on work and less time on leisure, we predict our mediator would be more valued, and a stronger predictor of overall status attributions for those higher in the protestant work ethic. That is, we predict that the moderator would interact with the dependent variable after the mediator (see figure 3.1).

Method. We recruited 244 respondents through the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform (42% female; $M_{age}$ = 33, American). In order to avoid potential order effects, the order of appearance of the stimuli and of the protestant work ethic scale (Mirels and Garrett 1971) was counterbalanced and participants completed the scale either at the beginning or at the end of the study. The protestant work ethic scale (Mirels and Garrett 1971) measures the degree to which individuals value work versus leisure and is composed of 19 statements, 3 of which reverse coded (19 items, $\alpha$ = .86).

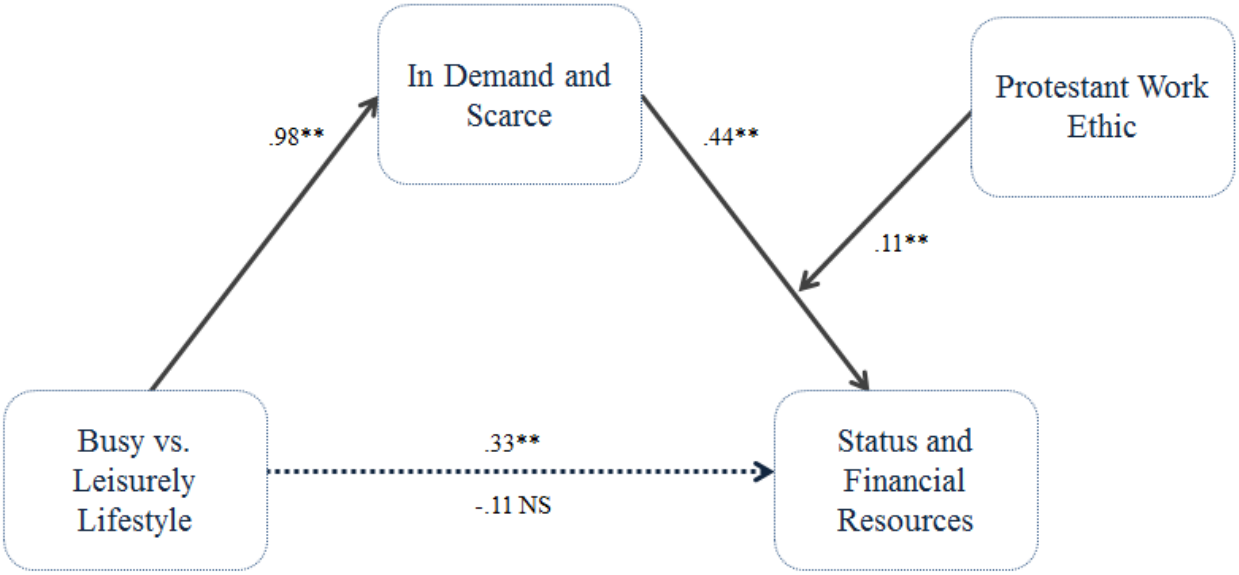
We randomly assigned participants to one of two between subjects conditions: "busy Facebook posts" or "leisurely Facebook posts" condition. All participants were asked to imagine they were friends with Sally Fisher on Facebook and to read a few of Sally's recent posts. The content of three status updates was manipulated between subjects. The status updates appeared one after another in chronological order on a simulated Facebook page (see Appendix E for a representation of the stimuli). In the busy Facebook posts condition, participants read the following posts: 1. Thursday 2pm, "Oh I have been working non-stop all week;" 2. Friday noon, "Quick 10 minute lunch;" 3. Friday 5pm, "Still at work!" In the leisurely Facebook posts condition, participants read the following posts: 1. Thursday 2pm, "I haven't worked much this week, had lots of free time;" 2. Friday noon, "Enjoying a long lunch break." 3. Friday 5pm, "Done with work!" Because the measures of social status (from studies 1-2) and the financial resources (from study 3) yielded consistent results, participants were asked about both status, and financial resources, where three items (status, wealth, and income) were collapsed into a single measure of overall status (3 items, $\alpha = .79$). Participants were also asked the in demand and scarcity items from study 2 (2 items, $\alpha = .90$) and a manipulation check item to measure Sally's level of busyness, as in study 3.

Results. The analysis of the busyness manipulation check confirmed that Sally was perceived as busier in the busy posts condition than in the leisurely posts condition ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.34$ vs. $M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.01$, $F(1, 240) = 463.49$, $p < .001$), and she was also perceived to be more in demand and scarce ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.53$ vs. $M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.00$, $F(1, 242) = 124.48$, $p < .001$). To examine the interaction between conditions and the protestant work ethic, responses were analyzed using a linear regression with overall status inferences as the dependent variable and the following independent variables: a variable for busyness (coded as 1 for busy posts and -1 for leisurely posts), the protestant work ethic scale (standardized for ease of

interpretation), and their interaction. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of busyness ($b = .31$, $SE = .07$, $t(240) = 4.41$, $p < .001$), a significant main effect of protestant work ethic ($b = -.19$, $SE = .07$, $t(240) = -2.58$, $p = .010$), and a significant interaction ($b = .23$, $SE = .07$, $t(240) = 3.24$, $p = .001$). To explore this interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis (Fitzsimons 2008) focusing on participants with higher and lower levels of protestant work ethic. The spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above the mean of protestant work ethic revealed a significant difference ($b = .55$, $SE = .10$, $t(240) = 5.48$, $p < .001$). In contrast, a similar spotlight analysis performed at one standard deviation below the mean of protestant work ethic showed a non-significant difference ($b = .08$, $SE = .10$, $t(240) = .80$, NS). We then conducted a moderated mediation analysis using model 14 in PROCESS (Hayes 2013). An index of moderated mediation was significant (.11, CI: .06, .17). As seen in figure 3.3, being in demand and scarce was a stronger mediator at higher levels (.54, CI: .40, .69) than at lower levels of the protestant work ethic (.32, CI: .19, .44).

Discussion. The results of study 4 demonstrate that an individual who is posting Facebook updates about her busy lifestyle at work is perceived as higher in status than an individual whose updates reveal a more leisurely lifestyle. Importantly, consistent with H3, this study demonstrates the moderating role of the protestant work ethic on inferences of heightened status within American participants. Furthermore, we find that being in demand and scarce is a stronger predictor of overall status attributions for those higher in the protestant work ethic. Finally, these results held when we conducted the analyses again, controlling for income, education, age, and gender – factors which may potentially correlate with the protestant work ethic. The next study further contributes to our understanding of the consequences of appearing busy by testing our propositions with an international sample of participants drawn from Italy and the U.S.

FIGURE 3.3: STUDY 4 RESULTS – MODERATED MEDIATION WITH THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC




Note. Path coefficients represent regression coefficients. Coefficients significantly different from zero are indicated by asterisks (*p <.05; **p <.01), and their associated paths are shown by solid lines; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. When the protestant work ethic was one standard deviation below the mean, the mediating effect of in demand and scarce was .32 (.19, .44), at the mean level the effect was .43 (.31, .56), and at one standard deviation above the mean the effect was .54 (.40, .69). An index of moderated mediation was significant .11 (.06, .17), suggesting that the mediating effect of being in demand and scarce was stronger at higher levels of the protestant work ethic than at lower levels (Hayes 2013).

Study 5: The Boundary Condition of Cross-Cultural Differences: Americans vs. Italians

Study 5 explores the moderating role of culture (U.S. vs. Italy) where we compare the responses of Italian and American participants to an individual working long hours and conducting a busy lifestyle versus an individual conducting a leisurely lifestyle. Furthermore, rather than vary whether an individual is more busy or less busy, in study 5 we vary whether the individual in question works, or does not work at all, and instead conducts a leisurely lifestyle.

This operationalization may be a stronger test, where someone who does not work and can also enjoy leisure may be a more consistent portrayal of Veblen's conceptualization (1899/2007). In line with H4, we predict that Americans will interpret busyness as a stronger signal of status than leisure time, whereas the effect will be reversed for Europeans.

Method. We recruited 94 Italian participants through a Qualtrics panel (49% female; $M_{age}$ = 40) and 99 U.S. participants through Mechanical Turk (33% female; $M_{age}$ = 35). Participants responded to a paid online survey in their native language (i.e., either English or Italian). All participants read a short description of a 35-year-old individual named Jeff (or "Giovanni" for Italians). We randomly assigned participants to one of two between subjects conditions: "busy lifestyle" or "leisurely lifestyle" condition. Participants in the busy lifestyle condition read, "Imagine Jeff, he is 35 years old. Jeff works. He has a busy lifestyle and his calendar is always full." In contrast, participants in the leisurely lifestyle condition read, "Imagine Jeff, he is 35 years old. Jeff does not work and has a leisurely lifestyle." Participants answered the three-item status measure from study 4 ($\alpha$ = .84). As in study 2, three manipulation checks measured whether participants found Jeff to be busy, and whether he spent time at work, or in leisure.

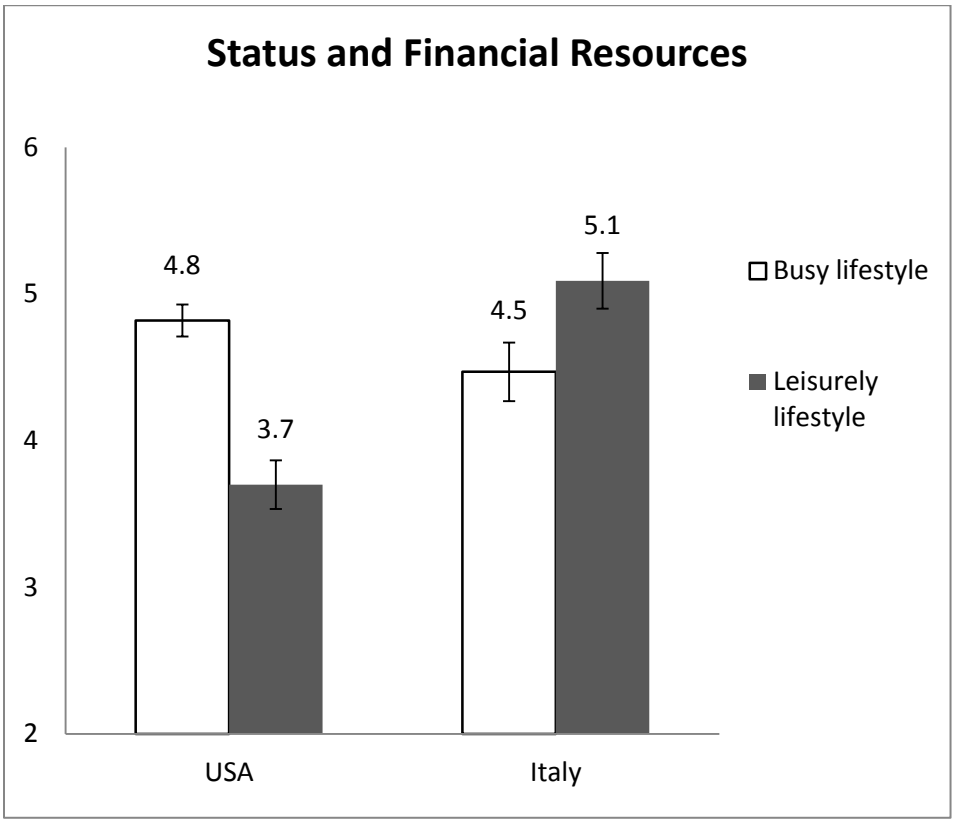
Results. To assess the effectiveness of our manipulation, we conducted a series of 2 (busy lifestyle vs. leisurely lifestyle) x 2 (U.S. vs. Italy) between-subjects ANOVAs with each of the manipulation check items as the dependent variable. The analysis of the item measuring the extent to which the target was perceived as busy revealed a significant main effect for busyness ($F(1, 187) = 422.40$, $p < .001$), suggesting that participants found the individual to be busier in the busy lifestyle condition ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.36$) than in the leisurely lifestyle condition ($M = 2.66$, $SD = .99$, $F(1, 189) = 399.18$, $p < .001$). For time spent at work, the analysis revealed a significant main effect for busyness ($F(1, 188) = 678.14$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants perceived the individual to work more in the busy lifestyle condition ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.12$) than

in the leisurely lifestyle condition (M = 1.64, SD = 1.08, $F(1, 190) = 672.82$, $p < .001$). Finally, the analysis of the manipulation check measuring leisure revealed a significant main effect for busyness ($F(1, 188) = 80.01$, $p < .001$), in this case suggesting that the individual described in the busy lifestyle condition was perceived to have less time for leisure (M = 3.52, SD = 1.74) than the individual described in the leisurely lifestyle condition (M = 5.64, SD = 1.64, $F(1, 190) = 75.46$, $p < .001$). In sum, the analyses of the manipulation checks show that our manipulation of busyness was successful.

To analyze respondents' status inferences, we conducted a similar 2 (busy lifestyle vs. leisurely lifestyle) x 2 (U.S. vs. Europe) between-subjects ANOVA with status as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed no significant main effect for busyness ($F(1, 189) = 1.87$, NS), a significant main effect of country ($F(1, 189) = 7.87$, $p = .006$), and a significant cross-over interaction ($F(1, 189) = 22.26$, $p < .001$) depicted in figure 3.4. As predicted, Americans granted greater status to the individual conducting a busy lifestyle than to the individual conducting a leisurely lifestyle and not working (M = 4.82, SD = 1.01 vs. M = 3.70, SD = 1.35, $F(1, 97) = 22.08$, $p < .001$). In contrast, we obtained the opposite pattern of results from Italian respondents who granted less overall status to the busy individual than the leisure individual (M = 4.47, SD = 1.11 vs. M = 5.09, SD = 1.42, $F(1, 92) = 4.76$, $p = .032$).

Discussion. Consistent with H4, we find that status inferences based on busyness are culturally dependent. While busyness is associated with higher status among Americans, the effect is reversed for Italians. Though there may be many other differences between Italian and U.S. participants, all the preceding effects held when controlling for demographic factors (i.e., gender, income, age, and level of education).

FIGURE 3.4: STUDY 5 RESULTS – CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS BOUNDARY CONDITION




Note. Error bars denote standard errors.

Study 6: Who Wants to Be a "Busyllionaire"?

In the preceding studies our aim was to determine what inferences observers make regarding busy individuals. In study 6, our goal is to show that people also aspire to be like busy individuals, despite the perception that busy individuals may be viewed as less happy. Furthermore, our objective is to examine whether a traditional measure of status linked with luxury brands could be linked to busyness. To that end participants answered questions on the status importance scale (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Reinecke Flynn 2009), an individual

difference scale that measures how much people care about status. We predict that those who rank higher on the status importance scale would aspire to be more like a busy individual than a less busy individual, because busy individuals are perceived to be higher in status. Finally, our goal is to replicate the process effects found in study 1B across a demographically different sample of participants, college students, to confirm the generalizability of the results.

Method. We recruited 210 student participants from a Mid-Atlantic university (49% female; $M_{age}$ = 20). The procedure was similar to study 1B with the exception of a few differences. Rather than vary "busyness," we varied whether an individual was "busy with work," specifically to provide a manipulation more directly related to our theorizing. However, because in our pilot study we found that busyness is spontaneously associated with work, we did not expect the results to differ from study 1B. Specifically, participants read "Imagine the following person. Person A appears to be more (less) busy with work than average." Participants then indicated how much they agreed with the same items from study 1B. In addition, participants rated how much they agreed with the following item: "I want to be like this person" (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree). Finally participants answered the five items ($\alpha$ = .86) on the status importance scale (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Reinecke Flynn 2009).

Results. The results were similar to that of study 1B. For space considerations the replicated main effects and mediation effects are reported in Appendix B. However, it is worth noting that participants again found the busy person to have more status than the less busy individual (M = 4.54, SD = 1.18 vs. M = 3.88, SD = 1.14, $F(1, 208) = 16.97$, $p < .001$), and be less happy (M = 3.88, SD = .73 vs. M = 4.55, SD = .95, $F(1, 206) = 31.78$, $p < .001$). Importantly, participants indicated they wanted to be more like the busy individual than the less busy individual (M = 4.26, SD = 1.19 vs. M = 3.87, SD = 1.37, $F(1, 205) = 4.97$, $p = .027$). Furthermore, this aspiration to be like the busy individual was qualified by the status importance

scale. To examine the joint effect of busyness condition and status importance on aspiration, we conducted a regression analysis with level of busyness (coded as 1 for more busy and -1 for less busy = -1), importance of status (centered for ease of interpretation), and the interaction of the two variables. The results revealed a main effect of busyness ($b = .18$, $SE = .09$, $t(199) = 2.00$, $p = .047$) favoring the busy individual, no effect of status importance ($b = .02$, $SE = .08$, $t(199) = .28$, NS), and a significant interaction between busyness and status importance ($b = .17$, $SE = .08$, $t(199) = 2.04$, $p = .043$). To explore this interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis (Fitzsimons 2008) focusing on participants with higher and lower levels of status importance. The spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above the mean of status importance revealed a significant difference ($b = .36$, $SE = .13$, $t(199) = 2.85$, $p < .005$) where participants aspired to be more like the more-busy individual than the less-busy individual. In contrast a similar spotlight analysis performed at one standard deviation below the mean of status importance showed no significant effect between conditions ($b = -.004$, $SE = .13$, $t(199) = .03$, NS).

Discussion. In study 6, we find that status-conscious people aspire to be like busy people where less status conscious people do not. Despite being perceived to be less happy, participants overall preferred to be more like the busy person and the effect was especially strong for status-conscious individuals, consistent with our hypotheses.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

While research on conspicuous consumption has typically analyzed how people spend money on products that signal status, in this research we investigate conspicuous consumption in relation to time. In contrast to the predictions of the classical theory of the leisure class (Veblen,

1899/2007), we demonstrate the conditions under which displaying one's busyness operates as a visible signal of status, leading to inferences of status and aspiration in the eyes of others.

Six studies, across several distinct groups of participants, find that the positive status effect of displaying one's busyness is driven by the perception that a busy person is in demand and scarce. We also investigate the mechanisms of competence, ambition, job enjoyment (studies 1B and 5) and show that our proposed process explanation holds controlling for these alternative mechanisms, across two distinct participant populations. In studies 2 and 3, rather than manipulate busyness directly, we further examine whether the more subtle use of time saving products (e.g., Bluetooth) and services (e.g., Peapod) can trigger inferences of busyness and status, regardless of how busy one truly is. In studies 4 and 5, we examine cultural values (the protestant work ethic) and differences among cultures (i.e., North America vs. Europe) to demonstrate moderators and boundary conditions of the busyness effect. Finally, in study 6, we find that overall, people aspire to be more like a busy individual despite the fact that they are viewed to be less happy. Furthermore, we find this effect is stronger for status-conscious individuals using a scale that has been validated on traditional luxury brands.

Our theoretical framework (figure 3.1) and findings deepen our understanding of how busyness and status inferences are related. This research highlights the value of being perceived as busy and contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we contribute to work on the decline of leisure time (Gershuny 2005; Hamermesh and Lee 2007; Hochschild 1997; Rutherford 2001; Schor 1992; Southerton and Tomlinson 2005) by uncovering the conditions under which busyness operates as a costly and visible status symbol. Second, while past research on status signaling has primarily focused on the conspicuous spending of money (Bellezza and Keinan 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Griskevicius et al. 2007; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010; Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006; Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011; Rucker and Galinsky 2008; Wang

and Griskevicius 2014; Ward and Dahl 2014), our work considers the conspicuous spending of time. Third, our investigation contributes to previous research on product scarcity (Brehm 1966; Cialdini 1993; Lynn 1991; Snyder and Fromkin 1980) by demonstrating that busyness at work can be associated with scarcity of individuals. Instead of associating oneself with scarce resources (e.g., diamonds, jewelry, or expensive real-estate), consumers can signal status by portraying themselves as a scarce resource through the conspicuous display of busyness and lack of leisure. Fourth, we contribute to recent consumer behavior research analyzing more subtle and alternative signals of status by showing how busyness can be a status symbol (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014; Berger and Ward 2010; Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010). Finally, we contribute to cross-cultural research in consumer behavior (Aaker, Benet-Martínez, and Garolera 2001; Aaker 2006; Briley and Aaker 2006; Samuel Craig and Douglas 2006; Üstüner and Holt 2010) by demonstrating that status inferences based on busyness are culturally dependent.

More broadly, our work is also consistent with signaling theory which suggests that, for a signal of status to be effective, it must be costly and observable by others (Feltovich, Harbaugh, and To 2002; Spence 1973). For example, spending money on a luxury watch operates as a signal of status and fits in signaling theory because consumers have to give up pecuniary resources to buy it and others can see it (i.e., it is a costly and visible signal). As per busyness at work, it is "costly" in the sense that people are giving up pleasurable leisure time and also because it raises performance expectations in the eyes of others. One might be seen as less efficient if future delivery and performance are not satisfactory relative to the perceived time invested. We would expect that if an individual works long hours and is busy simply because they are not efficient and are unable to perform their tasks in due time, positive status inferences may be diminished. As suggested in the popular office and t-shirt quote "Of course I don't look

busy. I did it right the first time." As per the visibility element, long hours of work and lack of leisure time can be made observable to others by physically spending time at the office through "face time" (Hochschild 1997), or through the use of time-saving products (e.g., Bluetooth headset) and services (e.g., Peapod), as well as through social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook).

## Directions for Future Research

Because the association of busyness and status is an underexplored area in consumer research we surmise there may be a number of other mechanisms, beyond the perception of being in demand and scarce, that could be acting in parallel, or interacting with one another. Exploring these numerous processes in detail would be well outside the scope of one research paper. For that reason, our aim was to effectively demonstrate the existence of one proposed mechanism controlling for a number of likely alternative explanations, while not claiming our treatment is exhaustive.

Our research could be further applied to examine other consumption phenomena and to explore additional moderators of the busyness effect. One important boundary condition is perceived agency (i.e., the extent to which one's busy lifestyle and lack of leisure time are perceived as a voluntary and deliberate choice). One could imagine that a person with many financial burdens has no choice but to be busy with work, working overtime or even taking more than one job – and thus may be perceived to have less status. In two follow-up studies, we directly manipulated whether the decision to work long hours was framed as deliberate or not. As predicted, we find that when long hours at work and limited leisure time are not perceived to be the product of a voluntary and deliberate choice, the positive inferences associated with busyness are significantly weakened.

Although busy people, who always work, presumably have little time off, it would be interesting to examine how the short leisure time available to them is spent and whether it impacts perceptions of status in the eyes of others. Analyses of leisure time in contemporary society suggest that the consumption of free time is increasingly "harried" and characterized by an acceleration of the pace at which leisure is enjoyed (Linder 1970; Robinson and Godbey 2005). We predict that observers will attribute even higher status to those people who, besides being busy, are also able to enjoy and live their lives to the maximum (i.e., "work hard and play hard"). Since today's consumers are striving to "have it all" and aspire for achievements in multiple domains even when engaging in leisure activities (Keinan and Kivetz 2011), the "work hard and play hard" lifestyle—embodying both hard work and a propensity to enjoy life—should represent the most aspirational and highly regarded model.

Our work examines a potentially more socially acceptable and efficient way for people to signal their social status that goes beyond spending financial resources to obtain luxury products. Though past research has found an association between inferences of status for people who use expensive luxury products, such inferences may be tainted by views that those same people are extrinsically motivated and less likeable (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). However, by using busyness to signal one's status, we surmise that one can avoid these negative side effects. Future research should determine whether this is indeed the case. In addition to being more socially acceptable, signaling one's status through busyness at work may also be more cost effective. For example, rather than spending money on the expensive brands (Whole Foods), one can display status through the use potentially cheaper time saving products, complaining about one's level of busyness, or simply by appearing busy. To that end, some may even go as far as making fake cell phone calls to appear busy. Research has found that 13% of cell phone calls

made in public have no one on the other end of the line (Smith 2011). One could also employ more creative methods, for example by scheduling meetings at odd time like 4:20pm.

Social media has also opened up a new way to communicate one's level of work to a large number of people through status updates and tweets. The emergence of such communication media may have even enhanced the efficacy of busyness as a credible status signal. While having a BMW may be appreciated or envied from the street, tweeting about owning one may be viewed as less appropriate because it does not offer consumers the alibi of simultaneously using the product for functional reasons (Keinan, Kivetz, and Netzer 2009). Thus, signaling one's busyness may be a more appropriate and disguised way to signal one's status on social media compared to traditional forms of luxury consumption, which may be more appropriate in a physical setting. Future research should consider more carefully the relationship between social media and methods of status signaling.

## Managerial Implications

A deeper understanding of the conspicuous consumption of time and the role of busyness as a status symbol has interesting implications for marketers of both time-saving and symbolic products. Our findings offer a different perspective on how to promote and advertise time-saving and multitasking benefits of specific products. New technologies and innovations often allow consumers to reduce the time it takes to perform specific tasks (voice recognition and remote control technologies, etc.). Rather than focusing on time saving in an abstract sense, communication campaigns might emphasize how well such products integrate with an overworked lifestyle. For example, notable author Michael Pollan (2013) argues that marketing messages by the processed food industry flatter consumers' sense of busyness, implicitly telling

them, “You don’t have time to cook, you’re too important, you’re a loser if you have time to cook.” Other time saving services like Peapod, should consider ways to make their offerings more conspicuous, allowing people to signal their status and enhance the value of their products.

Even symbolic luxury brands and products that do not necessarily offer time saving benefits may try to associate the brand with an aspirational and glorified busy lifestyle. Rather than flattering consumers’ purchase ability and financial wealth, brands can flatter consumers’ busyness and lack of valuable time to waste. For example an advertising campaign by the Audi brand suggests “Then again, maybe you don’t even have one minute.” Our findings suggest that appealing to consumers’ lack of time could be a form of flattery, making consumers feel their time is very valuable. Feeling busy and overworked may make us feel in demand and scarce, and therefore more valuable and important. In conclusion, this research examines the conspicuous consumption of time and it uncovers the conditions under which busyness and lack of leisure time become a status symbol. Instead of associating oneself with scarce resources and products, this research demonstrates that consumers can signal status by portraying themselves as a scarce resource through the conspicuous display of busyness and lack of leisure time.

## Ongoing Research

My research pipeline is composed of a series of projects at different stages with one paper under review, two manuscripts in preparation, and two early stage projects.

While the focus of my research is symbolic consumption, I also have two advance-stage research projects that pertain to decision making and product upgrades. In the paper "Temporal Profiles of Instant Utility during Anticipation, Event, and Recall Felicity during Anticipation and Recall" with Manel Baucells (Darden School of Business, University of Virginia), we propose the Anticipation-Event-Recall model formally linking the utility from anticipation, event utility, and utility from recall in a comprehensive formulation. The paper is currently under review at Management Science (invited resubmission). In the paper "Be Careless with That! Availability of Product Upgrades Increases Cavalier Behavior toward Possessions" with Josh Ackerman (University of Michigan) and Francesca Gino, we demonstrate that consumers act more reckless with their belongings if an opportunity to purchase a better product arises. The manuscript is currently under review at the Journal of Marketing Research.

In one current paper "The Advantage of Low-Fit Brand Extensions: Addressing the Paradox of Luxury Brands" with Anat Keinan, we are using the brand tourism framework to address the question of consumer's response to high- versus low-fit brand extensions. The manuscript is in preparation for submission at the Journal of Marketing. Because this research is in the area of symbolic consumption and directly builds on one of the dissertation papers, the extended abstract is reported below.

Finally, I am exploring and conducting experiments on two additional research questions related to symbolic consumption and status signaling. In the project "The Extravagant Use of Empty Space and Silence in Advertising" with Anat Keinan and Francesca Gino, we are testing

the conditions under which silence, empty space and lack of information in advertising have a positive impact on the perceived prestige and status of a brand. We propose that empty space and silence in advertising may convey a prestige image and enhance perceptions of high quality because consumers think that the brand can allow itself to waste precious media space and "air time." Moreover, together with Jonah Berger (Wharton, University of Pennsylvania), we are exploring the origins of new and alternative signals of status. Why did jeans or Jazz music or the hipster fashion, which were strongly associated with factory workers and low-status groups, became all of a sudden so popular and widespread among high-status consumers? Since the middle-class has become so good at appropriating the styles of the high-status people, our hypothesis is that high-status consumers choose products and consumption habits that are highly associated with low-status groups as a sign of distinction because the middle-class is reluctant to engage in such consumption practices.

# The Advantage of Low-Fit Brand Extensions: Addressing the Paradox of Luxury Brands

SILVIA BELLEZZA

ANAT KEINAN

Managing symbolic and luxury brands poses an inherent trade-off. Brand managers need to generate growth by extending the customer base to new segments and new markets; yet, this increased popularity and prevalence can paradoxically hurt the brand and threaten its prestige image. In particular, downward brand extensions of luxury brands may cause brand dilution and compromise the long-term equity of the brand. Indeed, several luxury brands (e.g., Burberry, Pierre Cardin, Bulgari, Gucci, Tiffany) extended their brands to multiple products and struggled with the resulting overexposure of the brand.

Contrary to the view that downward brand extensions and their users are a threat to brands, recent work (Bellezza and Keinan 2014) demonstrates that users of these extensions can enhance the brand's prestige when they are perceived as brand tourists (i.e., fans and admirers of the brand, who are not perceived to claim in-group status into the brand community). Building on the brand tourists' conceptualization and on research on brand membership, we consider responses to high-fit (same product category as the parent brand) versus low-fit (different product category than the parent brand) downward brand extensions of luxury brands. For example, we examine reactions to a Ferrari city car (high-fit) versus a Ferrari video game (low-fit). We propose that low-fit downward brand extensions can reinforce, rather than dilute, the brand image and generate a positive brand tourism effect because these extensions do not allow their users to claim membership into the brand community. We examine the conditions under

which low-fit extensions serve as proof of value for the brand, making it more aspirational without compromising its attainability in the eyes of existing customers of the brand.

To ensure high external validity of our findings, the majority of our studies examine the reactions of real consumers to brands they actually own or use (e.g., Ferrari car owners, Harvard College students, Tough Mudders participants). Moreover, all of our stimuli are based on real branding dilemmas and brand extension scenarios.

In a pilot study conducted with 39 real owners of Ferrari cars (within-subjects) recruited at a luxury automobile event, we find that two low-fit extensions (a Ferrari museum and a Ferrari video game) are liked more and have more of a positive impact on the brand image than a high-fit extension (a Ferrari city car).

In a between-subjects design, Study 1 tests the reactions of 100 Harvard College undergraduates to three different branded downward brand extensions: Harvard gadgets (low-fit), Harvard exchange program (high-fit) and Harvard extension school (high-fit). We find that branded gadgets are liked more (6.2) than the exchange program (4.8, $t(98) = 3.32$, $p = .002$) and the extension school (4.3, $t(98) = 4.7$, $p < .001$). Similarly, participants view the low-fit brand extension as having significantly more of a positive impact on the brand image compared to the high-fit extensions.

In Study 2 we investigate the reactions (between-subjects) of 166 participants who completed the Tough Mudder race (a 12 mile run with military-style obstacles). Again, we find that Tough Mudders like two low-fit extensions (Tough Mudder gears and Spectators' tickets) more than three high-fit extensions (Urban Mudder, Soft Mudder, and 5K Mudder races). Interestingly, we detect a significant interaction between the manipulation and the brand patriotism scale (Bellezza and Keinan 2014), a measure of attachment to the brand ($b = .44$, $t(156) = 2.7$, $p = .009$). The positive response to low-fit extensions is driven by those Tough

Mudders particularly attached to the brand (scoring high on brand patriotism). Moreover, in a mediation analysis, we find that the low-fit extensions elicit positive reactions among Tough Mudders because these products don't allow their users to claim membership to the Tough Mudders' brand community (indirect effect = .25; 95%CI = .024 to .519).

Finally, in Study 3 we replicate the main effect and mediation results in a laboratory experiment where we ask 164 women to imagine that they owned the shoe luxury brand Louboutin. In a between-subjects design, we find again that participants like a low-fit extension (Louboutin nail polish) more than a high-fit extension (flat shoes) because the nail polish doesn't allow users to claim membership to the Louboutin's brand community.

We are currently exploring two additional boundary conditions of the effect pertaining to the nature of the brand (luxury brand vs. mainstream brand), respondents' ownership status (whether they own the brand or not), and products' type (downward brand extensions that show appreciation for the brand, but cannot be viewed as a substitute for core products).

In conclusion, our findings address the paradox of downward brand extensions for luxury and symbolic brands. We demonstrate that low-fit extensions can enhance the brand image in the eyes of the existing customers because these products do not allow their users to claim membership to the exclusive brand community.

# Conclusion and Future Direction

In conclusion, my research provides novel perspectives on how consumers use products and spend time to express who they are and to signal status. The three papers discussed in this dissertation contribute to the growing body of research on symbolic brands and status signaling by establishing new theoretical frameworks, such as the distinction between "Brand Tourists" and "Brand Immigrants," and by exploring subtle signals of status, as in the "Red Sneakers Effect" and in the "Conspicuous Consumption of Time" papers. The first two articles are both published in the Journal of Consumer Research, and the third paper is currently being revised for resubmission at the Journal of Consumer Research.

Moving forward, I intend to maintain the focus of my research on symbolic consumption and branding. These interrelated domains have the potential to yield innovative and high-impact research by uncovering psychological mechanisms driving consumer behavior and by demonstrating relevant implications for marketers. From a theoretical perspective, brands and symbolic products are a fascinating domain to study consumer behavior, since much of the purchase decision is driven by emotions and psychological needs rather than product functionality. From a practical perspective, understanding consumers' needs and offering ways to address them can help brand managers create value for their customers and shareholders. In recent years, branding has become one of the most important aspects of business strategy. Thus, understanding the value of brands, and in particular of symbolic brands, for consumers and for firms, is likely to have important implications and deep impact on management practice. As such, I look forward to actively contributing through my research to the fruitful areas of symbolic consumption and branding in the consumer behavior literature.

# Appendix

## Appendix A

## PILOT STUDY

Participants (N = 118, 43% female, $M_{age}$ = 32) recruited from Mechanical Turk were told about three hypothetical people with varying levels of busyness within subjects. More specifically participants were told: “Imagine the following three people. Person A appears to be more busy than average. Person B appears to have an average level of busyness. Person C appears to be less busy than average.” Participants were then asked a number of questions regarding persons A, B, and C. Specifically, participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree). “This person spends many hours at work”; “This person spends many hours doing home-related chores and activities”; and “This person spends many hours doing hobbies and/or leisure activities.” Analyzing the data using an ANOVA with repeated measures, participants inferred that the more busy person spent more time at work (M = 5.67, SD = 1.23) than the average busy person (M = 4.84, SD = .90), or the less busy person (M = 3.24, SD = 1.44, $F(1, 116) = 148.46$, $p < .001$). Perceptions of household work did not differ significantly across the different levels of busyness (busy: M = 4.15, SD = 1.48; average busy: M = 4.34, SD = .91; less busy: M = 4.04, SD = 1.42; $F(1, 117) = .28$, NS). Finally, participants perceived a more busy person to spend less time on leisure (M = 3.20, SD = 1.40) than the average busy person (M = 4.15, SD = 1.04) or the less busy person (M = 5.14, SD = 1.36, $F(1, 116) = 83.95$, $p < .001$).

Appendix B

STUDY 6: REPLICATION RESULTS

Method. We recruited 210 student participants were recruited from a Mid-Atlantic university (49% female; $M_{age}$ = 20). In a between subjects design, participants either read about a more-busy or a less-busy individual. More-specifically, participants read "Imagine the following person. Person A appears to be more (less) busy with work than average." Participants then indicated how much they agreed with the same items from study 1B, except that rather than being asked about whether they felt the person enjoyed their job, they were asked whether they agreed with the statement "this person has a meaningful job." Though job enjoyment and meaningfulness may be tapping into a similar construct of enjoyment, the concept of job meaningfulness may have an additional element which encompasses the idea that job itself is purposeful. Beyond enjoyment, purpose can affect one's desire to work, and therefore be busy. Importantly, participants then answered a question on aspiration: "How much do you want to be like this person?" (1 Strongly disagree, 7 Strongly agree). Finally participants answered items on the status importance scale (Eastman, Goldman, and Flynn 1999).

Results. Participants found the more-busy individual to have more status (M = 4.54, SD = 1.18 vs. M = 3.88, SD = 1.14, F(1, 208) = 16.97, p < .001), be more ambitious (M = 5.33, SD = .98 vs. M = 3.35, SD = 1.15, F(1, 207) = 179.17, p < .001), be more competent (α = .82) (M = 4.64, SD = .75 vs. M = 4.14, SD = .97, F(1, 209) = 16.99, p < .001), have a more meaningful job (M = 4.64, SD = .90 vs. M = 3.66, SD = 1.11, F(1, 207) = 49.15, p < .001), and be more in demand (M = 4.98, SD = .82 vs. M = 3.55, SD = 1.13, F(1, 206) = 109.00, p < .001) than less-busy individual. Participants also found the more-busy individual to be less happy (M = 3.88, SD = .73 vs. M = 4.55, SD = .95, F(1, 206) = 31.78, p < .001). Finally, participants found the more-busy individual to spend more hours at work (M = 5.62, SD = .92 vs. M = 2.86, SD = 1.27, F(1,

206) = 319.73, $p < .001$) and less hours on leisure ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .90$ vs. $M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.0$, $F(1, 205) = 269.46$, $p < .001$) than the less busy individual.

We conducted a simultaneous mediation, using level of busyness (more busy vs. less busy) with in demand, competence, ambition, and meaningful job on status inferences. In a bootstrap analysis with 5,000 resamples, only being in demand mediated status perceptions; the size of the indirect effect was .28, and the confidence interval excluded zero (.01, .56). The other mechanisms were not significant.

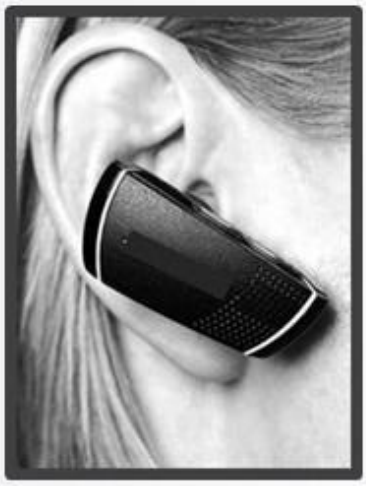
Appendix C

STUDY 2: VISUAL STIMULI

A: Bluetooth 1 (multitasking product)

***Imagine Anne, a 35 years old woman.***

***Anne is wearing a hands-free Bluetooth headset for her cell phone. It seems that she is always wearing her hands-free headset.***



B: Bluetooth 2 (multitasking product)

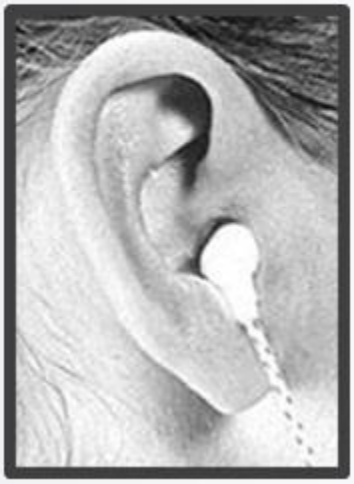
***Imagine Anne, a 35 years old woman.***

***Anne is wearing a hands free Bluetooth headset for her cell phone. It seems that she is always wearing her hands free headset.***

C: Headphones for music (leisure product)

***Imagine Anne, a 35 years old woman.***

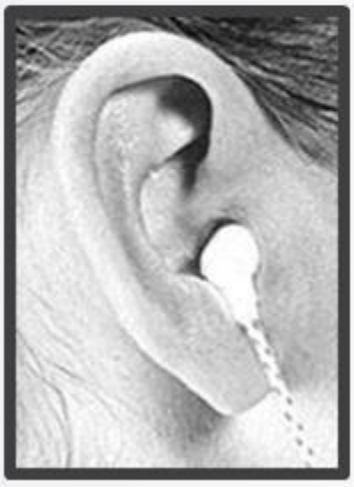
***She is wearing a pair of headphones for music and leisure.***
***It seems that she is always wearing her headphones.***



D: Expensive headphones for music (leisure product)

***Imagine Anne, a 35 years old woman.***

***She is wearing a pair of expensive headphones for music and leisure.***
***It seems that she is always wearing her headphones.***



Appendix D

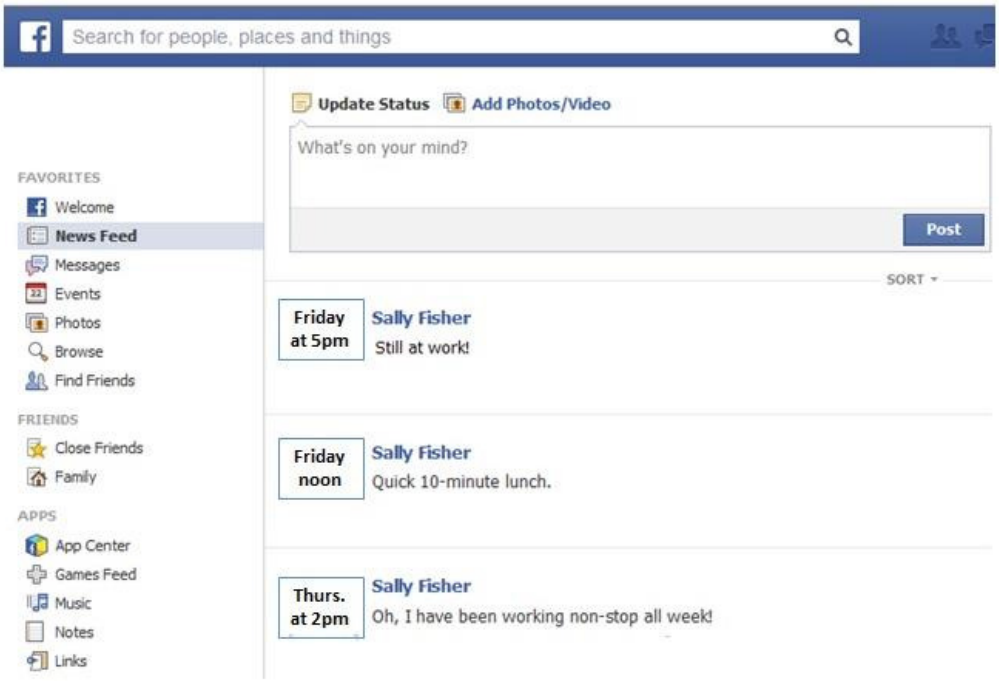
STUDY 3: PRETEST

Pre-test for Retail Brands. We confirmed that the two retail brands Peapod and Whole Foods were respectively highly associated with busy and expensive lifestyles in a pre-test with an independent sample of 64 participants (50% female; $M_{age}$ = 23; American), recruited from a subject pool at a Northeastern university. We selected the following list of retail brands that have outlets in Massachusetts (the region where the study took place): Star Market, Costco, Peapod online grocery shopping, Trader Joe's, Walmart, Whole Foods, and Safeway. We measured the extent to which these retail brands were associated with busy and expensive lifestyles. For each brand, participants rated the level of association with a randomized list of lifestyles: In your opinion, to what degree is [retail brand] associated with the following lifestyles? (a) Busy at work, (b) Working long hours, (c) Expensive, (d) Rich (1 = Not associated at all, 7 = Extremely associated). Peapod's level of association with the two items tapping into busyness ($\alpha$ = .86) was higher than the other focal brand, Whole Foods (M = 4.71, SD = 1.79, vs. M = 3.82, SD = 1.39, t(61) = 3.21, p = .002) and it was the highest level of association with a busy lifestyle among all pretested brands. Whole Foods's level of association with the two items tapping into an expensive lifestyle ($\alpha$ = .90) was higher than the other focal brand, Peapod (M = 5.97, SD = 1.08, vs. M = 4.05, SD = 1.58, t(61) = 8.40, p < .001) and it was the highest expensiveness rating among all brands. Trader Joe's was picked as the control brand since its association with a busy lifestyle (M = 3.96, SD = 1.22) was similar to Whole Foods (M = 3.82, SD = 1.39, t(62) = 1.43, NS), but lower than Peapod (M = 4.71, SD = 1.79, t(60) = 2.43, p = .018) and its association with an expensive lifestyle (M = 4.28, SD = 1.32) was similar to Peapod (M = 4.05, SD = 1.58, t(60) = .98, NS), but lower than Whole Foods (M = 5.97, SD = 1.08, t(62) = 8.24, p < .001).

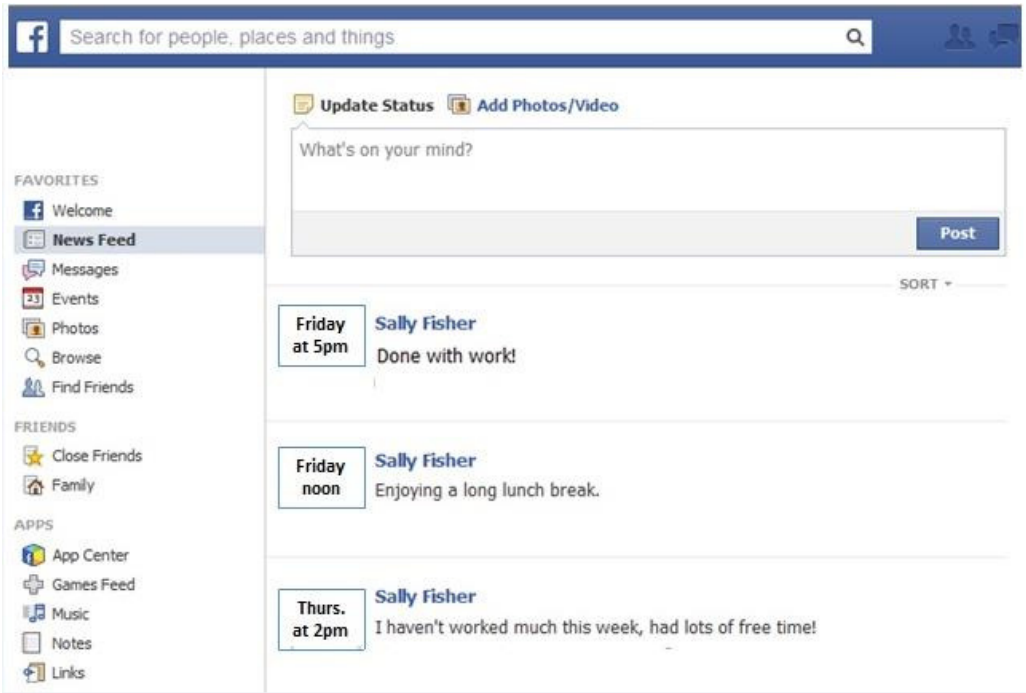
Appendix E

STUDY 4: VISUAL STIMULI

A: Busy Facebook Posts




B: Leisurely Facebook Posts



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