A LITTLE UGLY DUCK OR A SWAN? A PERSPECTIVE OF GOAL ORIENTATION

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Abstract - While the concept of goal orientation has been widely explored in social psychology literature, theoretical understanding of the effects of goal orientation on brand attractiveness is promising but underdeveloped. This research extends the limited attention given to the application of goal orientation to branding. Specifically, this research attempts to explore the moderating roles of underdog brands and temporal distance in the impact of consumers' goal orientation on brand attractiveness. Results demonstrate that for prevention-focused and promotion-focused consumers, appeals characterized by underdog vs. top dog brands and temporal distance (proximal vs. distant) will lead to differential brand attractiveness. Advertising practitioners will benefit from the results of this research.

Index Terms - Goal orientation, Underdog vs. Top dog brands, Temporal distance, brand attractiveness.

I. INTRODUCTION

For advertisers, story-branding has increasingly become an effective approach to communicate with consumers and develop the brand's competitiveness. An inspiring brand story contributes to help audiences know more about the brand's origins, product/service characteristics and mission statements, and helps the brand build psychological connections to consumers (Kao, 2015). One common approach to dichotomize story branding is underdog and top dog branding.

By definition, underdog can be defined as "a less powerful person or thing that struggles against a more powerful person or thing (such as a corporation)" (Marriam Webster, 2015). Superficially, underdog usually stands for a negative image attached to an object or a person. However, inspiring underdog brand stories have existed in various domains, such as sports and music (i.e., Kao, 2015), politics (i.e., Goldschmied and Vandello, 2009), as well as religion and fictions (i.e., Goldschmied and Vandello, 2012). In reality, the underdog label may connote certain positive qualities, which leads to favorable evaluations (Goldschmied and Vandello, 2012).

As Goldschmied and Vandello (2012) posited, even though the underdog bears a loser (or to be a loser) image, it has a unique appeal to draw individuals' support and sympathy. Kim et al (2008) have proposed similar conclusions. However, what is the main reason underdogs receive people's support? Goldschmied and Vandello (2012) conclude that the underdog label acts as a key role to affect the perception of success. Clearly, many examples of unlikely victorious underdogs from the media may consolidate the belief that underdogs can win as well.

Academically, scant research has explored the underdog effect on consumers' reactions to advocated brands. In addition, the underdog effect can be moderated by internal (i.e., personality traits) or external (i.e. ad tactics) variables. This research attempts to apply goal orientation as the internal moderator and temporal distance as the external moderator to examine the underdog effect. From a practical viewpoint, one of the most important issues regarding story branding for advertisers is how to take good advantage of the underdog effect to devise branding strategies to touch the hearts of target consumers.

Though for the aforementioned academic and managerial importance, research on consumer psychology and marketing regarding the effect of underdog is still scarce. This research is expected to fill up the gap between academic and practical intelligence and propose some viewpoints for future research.

II. BACKGROUND OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

A. Goal Orientation

Goal orientation has been discussed in a comprehensive manner in relation to the regulatory focus theory, which views self-regulation as a process by which people seek to align their behavior with relevant goals and standards. Goal orientation has been dichotomized into two types: promotion-focus, which seeks to maximize positive outcomes; and prevention focus, which aims to minimize negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997 and 2002). A major difference between promotion focus and prevention focus is a differential sensitivity towards positive and negative outcomes (Higgins, 1998). Recent consumer psychology literature has widely revealed that goal orientation has an impact on brand evaluation (Malaviya and Sternthal, 2009), endowment effect (Liberman, Idson, Camacho and Higgins, 1999; Higgins, 2002), the status quo bias (Chernev, 2004), mental accounting (Pham and Avnet, 2004), brand

extension (Yeo and Park, 2006), framing effect (Jain, Lindsey, Agrawal, Maheswaran, 2007), attractiveness effect (Mourali, Bckenholt, and Laroche , 2007), quality/sacrifice perception (Lin, Wu, Chuang and Kao, 2007), variety seeking (Wu and Kao, 2011), and preferences (Sett, 2014).

A main difference between promotion-focus and prevention-focus lies in the differential propensity toward risk-taking. Generally, while the activation of promotion entails greater risk-taking, the activation of prevention entails greater risk aversion. Two sets of mechanisms can explicate the differences in risk propensity between these two focuses. First, promotion goal emphasizes on seeking matches for desired outcomes, and creates a drive to capture as many current opportunities as possible (Higgins, 1998), which generally translates into a more active form of exploration and thus greater risk-taking (Crowe and Higgins, 1997; Pham and Avnet, 2004). In contrast, prevention goal centers on the avoidance of mismatches to desired outcomes, and generates a drive to protect against potential mistakes or risks, which translates into a more vigilant form of exploration and greater risk aversion. In a nutshell, promotion-focused individuals, who center on positive outcomes, prefer the risky option. On the contrary, prevention-focused individuals concern negative outcomes favor the conservative option (Zhou and Pham, 2004).

B. Story Branding

Marketers are increasingly applying story branding to devise their advertising strategies. The traditional "story-branding" process helps customers understand the brand's origin, the brand founder's entrepreneurial history, as well as the brand's current and prospective missions. Since brand advertising is crafted to build and nurture emotional connections between the brand and customers, story-branding has increasingly become an effective approach to reach audiences and further enhance ad effectiveness. In addition, the information contained in the story branding ads can be both informational and affective. However, it appears that the information in story branding is more affection-oriented, while other information in other advertising vehicles is more focused on technical specifications (Mattila, 2000).

A smart brand is expected to build a connection between consumers and itself, which is based on perceived psychological benefits. Considered in this way, successful story branding is expected to invoke a range of consumer values, such as authenticity, artisanship, and heritage. Put another way, a successful story branding campaign is usually affection-oriented to evoke the audience's emotional attachment.

Story-branding style can be dichotomized into underdogs and top dogs. Generally, the underdog branding may include brand stories regarding the humble origins of entrepreneurs, who struggled to defeat the odds and crafted their brands and businesses through indomitable will and determination, despite the scarcity of external resources in relation to their well-resourced competitors (Parahia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor 2011). Put another way, successful underdog branding highlights both negative (i.e., odds and scarce resource) and positive characteristics (i.e., success) and is devised to evoke the audience's emotional attachment (Kao, 2015). In contrast, top dog branding may include brand histories regarding the smooth starts of the entrepreneurs, who did not experience challenges during their brand-building stages, as well as the abundance of internal and external resources, as compared with their unrivaled competitors (Parahia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor, 2011). In a nutshell, successful top dog branding highlights the positive characteristics (i.e., smooth start, abundant resources and success) and is devised to evoke the audience's rational self-brand connection (Kao, 2015).

By definition, underdog brands started with humble origins, and encountered and overcame more odds than top dog brands during their entrepreneurial period; in contrast, top dog brands have enjoyed abundant resources and have suffered from few hardships since the initial stages. That is, underdog brands have been accumulating both failures and successful experiences along the entrepreneurial stages; whereas top dog brands have been accumulating only successful experiences. For prevention-focused consumers who are characterized by seeking minimum errors and failures, underdog brands with both past failure and current successful experiences tend to offer more valuable references than top dog brands with only successful experiences. However, for promotion-focused consumers who are characterized by seeking maximum gains and success, the past failures of underdog brands are likely to elicit negative perceptions and counterarguments. In contrast, top dog brands, which demonstrate only successful experiences, are likely to result in positive perceptions. Therefore, H_1 is stated as below:

H_1: While underdog brands are likely to draw higher brand attractiveness than top dog brands for prevention-focused consumers; top dog brands are likely to draw higher brand attractiveness than underdog brands for promotion-focused consumers.

C. Temporal Distance

Temporal distance has been widely discussed in construal level theory (CLT), which posits that objects, events, or individuals can be perceived as being either psychologically proximal or distant along various dimensions, such as spatial, temporal, and social distance (Trope et al. 2007). Most research on temporal construal has focused on the consequences of

temporal distance—the effects of construing a future object, event, or behavior as being in the distant versus proximal future. Liberman and Trope (1998) and Trope and Liberman (2000) show that events happening in the distant future are likely to be represented in abstract terms, whereas those happening in the proximal future are likely to be represented in specific terms.

Perceptions of temporal distance may vary across people, which means the identical event or behavior may elicit different perceptions depending on whether individuals construe it to be in the distant or in the proximal future (Spassova and Lee, 2013). Specifically, the temporal distance of a future event can be moderated by how people view themselves, either as an independent self-construal or an interdependent self-construal individual (Spassova and Lee, 2013).

Moreover, as compared with far temporal distance, proximal temporal distance represents that the events or the objects are more concrete when they are proximal (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Prevention-focused consumers, who are characterized by seeking minimum risks and losses, tend to prefer concrete to abstract objects or events. On the contrary, people usually form abstract interpretations of the events or the objects, which represent far temporal distance rather than proximal temporal distance. Promotion-focused consumers, who are characterized by seeking maximum gains and success, are likely to deem those abstract events and objects as the potential gains and the chance to obtain extra benefits. Therefore, H_2 is proposed as below:

H_2: While brands characterized by proximal temporal distance are likely to draw higher brand attractiveness than those characterized by distant temporal distance for prevention-focused consumers; brands characterized by distant temporal distance are likely to draw higher brand attractiveness than those characterized by proximal temporal distance for promotion-focused consumers.

III. MATH

Research Design and Procedure

This research aims to investigate the moderating effect of goal orientation on evaluations of the brand attractiveness on viewing an advertisement that varies in brand style (underdog vs. top dog) and temporal distance (proximal vs. distant) in the ad. A total of 230 on-the-job students were randomly assigned to a 2 (brand style: underdog vs. top dog) × 2 (temporal distance: proximal vs. distant) between-subjects factorial design, where goal orientation acts as the measured independent variable, brand style and temporal distance fulfill as the manipulated moderators and brand attractiveness acts as the dependent variable. Participants were randomly assigned to a print ad for the bank's Internet banking services, which were endorsed by either an underdog or a top dog brand. Each on-the-job student was given a premixed folder containing a description of the research purpose, a print ad endorsed by either an underdog bank or a top dog bank, and the questionnaire containing the scales of goal orientation. The coordinator informed subjects that they were invited to join a brand survey for a bank that intended to launch innovative internet banking services either in 1 month (in the proximal temporal distance condition) or 6 months (in the far temporal distance condition) later. In this questionnaire, a fictitious brand name for the bank was invented to limit confounds related to prior brand exposure. Participants were asked to rate their perceived brand attractiveness for the bank, in which the ad was endorsed either by an underdog bank or a top dog bank.

Measurement of Goal Orientation

The measurement of participants' goal orientation is adapted from the study of Lockwood et al. (2002). Participants were asked to fill out the 18 7-point question items in the prevention/promotion scale (Lockwood et al., 2002), which measured individuals' goal orientation level as a personality trait. Subjects were dichotomized into prevention-focused and promotion-focused groups based on a median split (median= 76). Participants whose scoring below the median were classified as the prevention-focused group, whereas those scoring above the median were classified as the promotion-focused group.

Manipulations of Underdog and Top Dog Brands

The manipulation of brand style (underdog vs. top dog) is adapted from the studies of Parahia et al (2011) and Kao (2015). Two versions of print advertisements were created, equal in all respects except for their brand style. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two brand style conditions, where a fictitious Union Bank was given either an underdog brand characterized by external disadvantage and passion and determination, or a top dog brand characterized by external advantage and passion and determination. When the bank was portrayed as an underdog, participants were told "the founders of Union Bank experienced a scarcely-resourced start, but held an indomitable spirit and struggled to succeed. They finally overcame the odds to bring their financial services to market with success. In the top dog condition, participants were told that "the founders of Union Bank came from the industry, were well resourced, and were favored to succeed in the market." This version of brand ad was as similar as another version in all aspects except for underdog versus top dog framing. Specifically, the framing was varied in

the two ad versions through the headline of the advertisements, and through the wording of the brand style. Subjects were asked to view the advertisement and read a statement about the ad appeals for a fictitious Union Bank. The following shows the main ad copy and the excerpts of the underdog brand Union Bank:

- The innovative Internet banking services offered by Union Bank always keep you ahead of others, since we started with the basics.

Simon Stuart and James Fay, the founders of Union Bank, experienced a scarcely-resourced start, but held an indomitable spirit and struggled to succeed. They finally overcame the odds to bring their financial services to market with success.

In contrast, the main slogan for the ad copy and the excerpts of the top dog brand Union Bank read:

- The innovative Internet banking services offered by Union Bank always keep you ahead of others, since we started with experiences.

Simon Stuart and James Fay, the founders of Union Bank, came from the bank industry, were well-resourced, and were favored to succeed in the market. They did not encounter many challenging odds and smoothly brought their financial services to market with success.

Manipulation of Temporal Distance

The manipulation of temporal distance is adapted from Bornemann and Homburg (2011) by varying the information regarding the availability of the Internet banking services—that is, that the services would be launched and hence be available on the bank official website for customer use either in one month (primed proximal condition) or in six months (primed distant condition). After reading the advertisement, participants received the instruction to imagine that it was now 2 days (6 months) before the launch of the Internet banking services. Subjects were asked to read the ad statement about the features of the Internet banking services launched by a fictitious bank Union Bank. The following excerpt shows the main ad copy for the primed proximal temporal distance condition:

- The innovative Internet banking services, which will be offered by Union Bank in one month, will always keep you ahead of others, since we have started with the basics.

In contrast, the main ad copy for the primed distant condition of temporal distance states as below:

- The innovative Internet banking services, which will be offered by Union Bank in six months, will always keep you ahead of others, since we have started with the basics.

IV. RESULTS

Manipulation Check of Underdog vs. Top Dog Brands

The manipulation check of underdog vs. top dog brands was assessed by having respondents rate whether Union Bank had experienced an external disadvantage but subsequently succeeded through the founder's passion and determination on a seven-point scale anchored by 1 = extremely disagree and 7 = extremely agree. As expected, an independent samples t-test revealed that the perceived valences for Union Bank (underdog vs. top dog) differed significantly ($M_{underdog}$ = 4.96, $M_{top\ dog}$ = 2.98, t(228) = 13.35, p= .000 < .001), implying that the valences of underdog and top dog brands were regarded as being different. Therefore, the manipulation of underdog vs. top dog brands was successful.

Manipulation Check of Temporal Distance

The manipulation check of temporal distance was adapted from Bornemann and Homburg (2011) and was assessed by having respondents rate whether the launch of the Internet banking services in the ad was imminent on a seven-point scale anchored by 1 = extremely disagree and 7 = extremely agree. As expected, an independent samples t-test revealed that the valences of proximal temporal distance and distant temporal distance differed significantly ($M_{proximal\ TP}$ = 4.80, $M_{distant\ TP}$ = 2.90, t(228) = 13.98, p= .000< .001), implying that the valences of proximal temporal distance and distant temporal distance were regarded as being different. Therefore, the manipulation of ad metaphor was successful.

Measurement of Brand Attractiveness

Brand attractiveness were measured with 3 7-point semantic differential scales anchored by 'The brand is successful', 'The brand has a good external image', and 'The attributes of the products or services of the brand are good'. (Maxwell and Knox, 2009). The Cronbach's α value was .81, which indicated an acceptable internal consistency. Therefore, the scales were summed up to form a single brand attractiveness measure.

Hypothesis Testing

The simple interaction effect of underdogs (vs. top dogs) × goal orientation on brand attractiveness reached the significance level (F(1, 226) = 81.42, p=.000 < .001), implying that the underdog effect on brand attractiveness was subject to goal orientation. The follow-up independent samples t-test for the brand attractiveness revealed that underdog brands are likely to have stronger brand attractiveness than top dog brands for prevention-focused consumers ($M_{underdog}$ = 4.99, $M_{top\ dog}$ = 4.10, t(112)= 7.92, p= .000< .001). On the contrary, top dog brands are likely to have stronger brand attractiveness for promotion-focused consumers than underdog brands ($M_{underdog}$ = 3.18, $M_{top\ dog}$ = 4.06, t(114)= -5.49, p= .000 < .001). Therefore, H_1 was supported.

The simple interaction effect of temporal distance ×

goal orientation on brand attractiveness reached the significance level ($F(1, 226) = 26.82$, $p=.000< .001$), implying that the temporal distance effect on brand attractiveness was subject to goal orientation. The follow-up independent samples t-test for the brand attractiveness revealed that brands characterized by proximal temporal distance are likely to have stronger brand attractiveness for prevention-focused consumers than those characterized by distant temporal distance ($M_{proximal\ TP} = 4.74$, $M_{distant\ TP} = 4.36$, $t(112)= 2.84$, $p= .01< .05$). On the contrary, brands characterized by distant temporal distance are likely to have stronger brand attractiveness for promotion-focused consumers than those characterized by proximal temporal distance ($M_{proximal\ TP} = 3.25$, $M_{distant\ TP} = 3.98$, $t(114)= -4.38$, $p= .000 < .001$). Therefore, H_2 was supported.

V. DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contribution

This research differs from the prior research in two main respects, which contribute to consumer psychology literature. First, from an academic perspective, theoretical understanding of the effects of goal orientation on marketing is promising but underdeveloped. Much research regarding goal orientation is on organizational behavior (i.e., Alexander and van Knippenberg, 2014; Nederveen, van Knippenberg, and van Dierendonck, 2013; Zhang, Law and Lin, 2016) and human resource management (i.e., Beenen, 2014; Liu, Wang and Wayne, 2015). While recent marketing literature focuses on examining the impact of consumers' goal orientation on consumer preference (e.g., Sett, 2014), consumer judgment (e.g., Park and Morton, 2015), information processing (i.e., Roy and Phau, 2014; Yoon, Sarial-Abi., and Gü Rhan-Canli, 2012), and persuasion (e.g., Chang and Chou, 2008), this research explores the impact of consumers' goal orientation on the interaction effects of underdog (vs. top dog) branding and temporal distance, and thus successfully fills the research gap.

Second, underdog vs. top dog branding is an innovative concept in marketing, which was first introduced to consumer psychology literature by Parahia et. al., (2011). This research further concludes that the underdog effect is stronger for prevention-focused consumers and the top dog effect is stronger for promotion-focused consumers. The underlying mechanism is that the ads of underdog brands are usually characterized by both negative (i.e., odds) and positive (i.e., passion) information, which helps reduce the perceived risks of prevention-focused consumers; in contrast, top dog brands are usually characterized by positive (i.e., well-resourced) information, which is consistent with the gain-seeking traits of promotion-focused consumers. By examining how the underdog (vs. top dog) effect interacts with temporal distance and consumers' goal orientation, this research contributes to broaden the horizon of underdog effects in marketing and consumer psychology literature.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As stated above, this research contributes to the knowledge base of advertising psychology and proposes some practical implications to advertisers. However, some limitations need to be mentioned for future research. First, this research concludes that advertisers can adopt different types of underdog strategies (underdog vs. top dog) and temporal distance (proximal vs. distant) for targeting consumers with different extents of goal orientation; however, it is a tough challenge for advertisers to distinguish prospective consumers' different extents of goal orientation (prevention-focused or promotion-focused) before an ad message strategy is devised. Second, this research does not take consumer knowledge of the product domain into account. It is assumed that when consumer knowledge is high, the underdog effect tends to be mitigated. Specifically, consumers are likely to apply their existing knowledge to assess the candidate brands (either underdogs or top dogs), rather than the brand information provided in the ads. At last, this research uses financial services as the experimental stimulus materials. Future research is expected to adopt tangible products to examine the external validity.

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