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Good Guys Can Finish First: How Brand Reputation Affects Extension Evaluations

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This research investigates how consumer evaluations of brand extensions are affected by two distinct types of brand reputation: a reputation for social responsibility built through commitments to societal obligations, versus a reputation for ability developed by delivering quality offerings. Through six studies, we establish that while the two reputation types equivalently influence high fit brand extensions, a reputation for social responsibility (vs. ability) leads to more favorable responses toward low fit brand extensions by inducing a desire to support and help the company that has acted to benefit consumers. Furthermore, the facilitative effect of social responsibility on low fit brand extension evaluations is more prominent among consumers who value close relationships and caring for one another's well-being (i.e., those with high communal orientation), and tends to dissipate when social responsibility initiatives are tainted with self-serving motives (i.e., when these initiatives are aligned with the brand's core offering).

Keywords Reputation; Social Responsibility; Ability; Brand Extensions; Warmth; Altruism

Social responsibility initiatives have become increasingly important for brands and corporations (Godfrey, Merrill, & Hansen, 2009), with over 90% of Fortune 500 firms routinely investing in these practices (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Nonetheless, extant research has challenged the economic benefits of building a social responsibility reputation as compared to alternative forms of brand reputation, specifically an ability-based reputation built through manufacturing and distributing high-quality products (Biehal & Shenin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Newman, Gorlin, & Dhar, 2014). In particular, prior research has shown that an ability reputation is more effective in shaping consumers' positive responses toward the brand's product offerings than a socially responsible reputation (Berens, van Riel, & van

Bruggen, 2005; Biehal & Shenin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997).

Existing research on the influence of brand reputation has focused on products within a brand's existing lines (existing products or line extensions, e.g., Berens et al., 2005; Biehal & Shenin, 2007). While it is common for brands to extend into new product categories as brand extensions (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Sood & Keller, 2012), the literature is hitherto silent on the relative effect of an ability versus a social responsibility reputation on extension evaluations. Given evidence that 80% of new products are launched as brand extensions (Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000), investigating how brand reputation impacts extension evaluations is warranted.

Drawing on the literature streams of social judgments (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005) and reciprocal altruism (Trivers, 1971), this research proposes an interaction effect between brand reputation (ability vs. social responsibility) and extension fit (high vs. low) on consumer responses to brand extensions. Specifically, when

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extension products have high fit with the brand, consumers transfer favorable brand perceptions onto the new product (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Since a reputation of either ability or social responsibility enhances brand perceptions (Brown & Dacin, 1997), we expect that under high fit conditions, the two reputation types will each lead to positive extension evaluations. In contrast, low fit brand extensions lack strong connections with the brand and tend to encounter more difficulty in the marketplace (Monga & John, 2007). For low fit extensions, a positive social responsibility reputation becomes critical. Viewed as benevolent and warm, a brand known for philanthropic efforts is likely to induce reciprocal helping intentions and motivate consumers to show support to the company through more favorable responses toward low fit extensions.

In the remainder of the article, we introduce our theoretical framework and report six studies that test the proposed hypotheses. In studies 1a and 1b, we find support for our fundamental thesis that compared to ability, a reputation based on social responsibility leads to more positive consumer responses when a brand extension has low fit, but this difference dissipates when brand extension fit is high. Studies 2a and 2b explore the mechanism underlying this effect and show that a socially responsible reputation enhances responses toward low fit extensions through increasing the warmth perception of the brand and inducing consumers' reciprocal helping intentions. Studies 3 and 4 examine the boundary conditions of the effects, specifically consumers' communal orientation and social responsibility's alignment with the brand's core offerings.

Theoretical Underpinning and Core Hypothesis

Brand Extension Evaluations

The brand extension literature has largely proposed a categorization process as underlying how consumers evaluate extension products (Boush & Loken, 1991; Herr, Farquhar, & Fazio, 1996). When consumers are able to connect an extension product with the parent brand category, favorable brand perceptions are transferred, increasing evaluations of the brand extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Kirmani, Sood, & Bridges, 1999). Extant research has identified brand extension fit, or consumers' perception of physical or conceptual similarity between the brand and extension categories, as an important factor for extension success (Estes, Gibbert, Guest, & Mazursky, 2012; Mao & Krishnan, 2006; Park,

Milberg, & Lawson, 1991; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Compared with low-fit extensions, high-fit brand extensions evoke a faster, category-based judgment, which contributes to more favorable consumer evaluations and eventually more successful market performance (Boush & Loken, 1991; Sood & Keller, 2012).

Recent research has acknowledged the effect of fit perceptions on extension evaluations as influenced by consumer and situational factors. For instance, the importance of extension fit tends to decrease among consumers with certain thinking styles (e.g., interdependent vs. independent, Ahluwalia, 2008; holistic vs. analytic, Monga & John, 2007), motivations (e.g., promotion vs. prevention, Yeo & Park, 2006; a salient mating motive, Monga & Gürhan-Canli, 2012), or beliefs (e.g., believing personalities as malleable vs. fixed, Yorkston, Nunes, & Matta, 2010). A reduced effect of extension fit is also found in certain decision contexts, where sufficient attribute information of the extension is provided (Klink & Smith, 2001) or competitive brands are available to compare with the extension product (Meyvis, Goldsmith, & Dhar, 2012; Milberg, Sinn, & Goodstein, 2010). While the above findings help identify consumer segments and purchase situations that reduce negative consequences of distant extensions, this research proposes that deliberate brand strategies, such as building a socially responsible brand reputation, can effectively facilitate favorable responses toward low-fit extensions.

Brand Reputation and Perceived Warmth and Competence

Two types of brand reputation have been viewed as central to a brand (Dacin & Brown, 2006). A brand with a favorable ability reputation signals quality and innovation, whereas a socially responsible reputation indicates that a brand is committed to philanthropic activities, community giving, and cause-related marketing (Biehal & Shenin, 2007; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). While both favorably influence consumers' product judgments (Brown & Dacin, 1997), firms often have to decide which type of reputation development is more worthy of finite financial investments. Prior research has indicated an advantage of an ability (vs. a social responsibility) reputation in inducing favorable product responses (Gürhan-Canli & Batra, 2004). For example, Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner (2010) documented that consumers are more willing to buy products from for-profit organizations that pursue product

quality than from non-profit organizations known for seeking social good. In general, researchers have associated the positive effect of an ability (vs. a socially responsible) reputation in product evaluations with its greater utility to inform product quality (Berens et al., 2005; Biehal & Shenin, 2007). In this research, we demonstrate that the two types of reputations also induce distinct impressions of the brand, which contribute to different responses toward brand extensions.

Specifically, recent psychology literature proposes warmth and competence as two fundamental dimensions in social judgments (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). While warmth judgments evaluate whether the target's intentions are benevolent or ill, competence perceptions appraise whether the target is capable of enacting these intentions (Judd et al., 2005). Marketing researchers have suggested that these two dimensions of social perceptions also apply to brand judgments (Aaker et al., 2010; Johnson, Lee, & Ashoori, 2017; Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). Since social responsibility initiatives are in general viewed as prosocial and other-focused (Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2012), brands engaging in such causes tend to be perceived as warmer (Kervyn et al., 2012). In comparison, a reputation for delivering quality products is likely to elevate the competence perception (Aaker et al., 2010). Prior research shows that warmth and competence perceptions tend to elicit distinct behavioral tendencies (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). Drawing from the reciprocal altruism theory (Trivers, 1971), we anticipate that a warm (vs. competent) brand is more likely to induce helping behavior among consumers.

Reciprocal Altruism

According to the reciprocal altruism theory, the norm of reciprocity plays a fundamental role in altruistic acts beyond kinship (Trivers, 1971). The normative belief that people should help those who help them serves as an important moral code in social interactions (Cialdini, 1993) and motivates people to reciprocate the kindness when help providers are later in need of assistance (Batson & Powell, 2003; Thomas & Batson, 1981). It is noteworthy that reciprocity often goes beyond the dyadic relationship between the provider and recipient of assistance (Simpson & Willer, 2008). Indirect or generalized reciprocity may take place when recipients of help reciprocate benefits toward a third party, or when help providers are rewarded with assistance from those who have not benefitted from their helping behavior (Nowak & Sigmund, 1998).

Generalized reciprocity incentivizes cooperative behavior in communities and encourages reciprocity based on reputation (Nowak, 2006). Specifically, engaging in helping behavior gradually builds a reputation for being altruistic and people with this reputation are more likely to receive assistance, even from those who have not directly benefited from their altruistic acts (Seinen & Schram, 2006).

As evidence for the ubiquity of reciprocal altruism, prior work has shown its effect on children as young as 6 years old (De Cooke, 1992). In addition, people are found to reciprocate even when favors received are small (Pillutla, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003) or unwanted (Morales, 2005), suggesting that altruistic behavior, regardless of its value to the receiver, induces reciprocal helping intentions. Furthermore, recent developments in neuroscience research suggest that reciprocal altruism is not restricted to person-to-person interactions and can take place between a human and a non-human entity. Using magnetic resonance imaging technology, Tankersley, Stowe, and Huettel (2007) found that watching a computer playing games to earn money for charity activated the posterior superior temporal cortex (pSTC) zone in participants' brains, an area responsible for managing social relations, and that the magnitude of pSTC activation was further correlated with participants' tendency to help others. This finding suggests altruistic acts from a non-human entity have the same effect as those from a human entity in increasing people's helping intentions.

According to the reciprocal altruism literature, since consumers perceive a socially responsible brand as engaging in altruistic behavior that benefits consumers and society, they should feel motivated to repay the brand's kindness (Batson & Powell, 2003; Trivers, 1971). This motivation is more likely to elicit reciprocal helping actions when consumers perceive the brand is in need of assistance (Batson & Powell, 2003). Consistent with this proposition, prior work documents that social responsibility builds moral capital for the company and effectively protects companies against adverse events (Eisingerich & Bhardwaj, 2011). For instance, in the event of negative publicity, social responsibility preserves the perceived values of stakeholders by inducing them to make favorable attributions of the events (Godfrey et al., 2009). While prior research has shown the benefit of social responsibility in protecting the company, extant literature does not offer a clear view on whether social responsibility also enhances product evaluations (Chernev & Blair, 2015; Newman et al., 2014). Below, we

present our predictions that a socially responsible (vs. an ability) reputation is more likely to facilitate favorable responses toward low-fit extension products by inducing reciprocal helping intentions among consumers.

The Differential Effects of Brand Reputations on Extension Evaluations

For a brand extension that bears sufficient similarity with the parent brand category, consumers engage in a relatively fast category-based judgment and transfer favorable perceptions of the brand onto the new product (Boush & Loken, 1991). As ability and social responsibility both evoke favorable brand perceptions, we expect the two reputation types to cast an equally favorable influence on evaluations of high-fit extensions. In this case, the facilitative effect of social responsibility will not be activated, as consumers expect the new product to be successful.

When brand extension fit is low, category-based judgment becomes less likely as consumers have difficulty connecting the new product with the core brand (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998). Typically, lack of brand-extension similarity leads consumers to form low expectations of the new offering (Mao & Krishnan, 2006), associating it with a weaker position in the marketplace (Völckner & Sattler, 2006) and a lower probability of financial success (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000; Lane & Jacobson, 1995). In such a case, whether the brand has established an ability or a social responsibility reputation becomes critical in shaping consumer responses. We expect that when a brand with an ability reputation introduces a low fit extension, consumers tend to evaluate the new product unfavorably since they are less concerned about harm to the brand should the extension fail. In contrast, based on reciprocal altruism theory, we assert that a social responsibility reputation will induce reciprocal helping intentions, motivating consumers to repay the brand for its kindness (Batson & Powell, 2003). Hence, when a brand with a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation introduces a low fit extension that is likely to face challenges in the market, consumers are more likely to respond favorably to the new product.

Studies 1a and 1b: Initial Evidence

Study 1a

To test our main proposition, study 1 employed a 2 (brand reputation: ability vs. social responsibility) × 2

(extension fit: high vs. low) between-subjects full-factorial design. A total of 283 respondents were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and provided financial compensation ($M_{Age} = 35.71$, ranging from 19 to 71; 134 females; self-reported ethnicity included 216 white, 23 Asian, 19 African American, 21 Hispanic, and 4 participants who did not report ethnicity or selected "other").

Respondents first read a description of a fictitious brand, Rise and Shine, a manufacturer of ready-to-make breakfast sandwiches. To manipulate brand reputation, the description focused on either the brand's ability or social responsibility. Specifically, in the ability condition Rise and Shine was described as well-known for using high-quality ingredients and advanced quality control mechanisms. Participants also read that the brand recently invested over \$250,000 in new production facilities to enhance product quality. In addition, the brand received A-level ratings for technological and manufacturing innovation. In the social responsibility condition, participants were informed that Rise and Shine was well-known for their initiatives to give back to community, and had recently donated \$250,000 to help children living in poverty gain access to high-quality early care and learning experiences. The brand received A-level ratings for community giving and involvement.

Following the brand description, respondents read that Rise and Shine would be introducing a new product, either a breakfast bar (high fit) or a ceramic mug (low fit). Respondents evaluated the new product on a four-item scale (1 = unfavorable/unpleasant/undesirable/awful, 7 = favorable/pleasant/desirable/nice; Batra & Ray, 1986; $\alpha = .96$). Subsequently, respondents reported extension fit perceptions on six items (e.g., "product functions," "product features," 1 = not very similar, 7 = very similar; Klink & Smith, 2001; $\alpha = .94$). They also reported perceptions of brand reputation on items adapted from Brown and Dacin's (1997) scales (ability: "reputation for manufacturing ability" and "reputation for product quality," $r = .87$; social responsibility: "reputation for giving back to the community" and "reputation for community involvement," $r = .97$; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). In addition, to account for the potential influence from demand artifacts, respondents completed the 40-item balanced inventory of desirable responding (BIDR, e.g., "I am a completely rational person," 1 = not true, 7 = very true; Paulhus, 1991; $\alpha = .84$). Finally, demographic information was collected from respondents. Please see Appendix S1 to view manipulations and questions used.

Results—manipulation checks. A 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) MANOVA model was performed on respondents' perceptions of ability, social responsibility, and extension fit. As expected, compared to the ability condition, respondents in the social responsibility condition reported less favorable ability perceptions ($M_{\text{ability}} = 5.97$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 4.23$; $F(1, 279) = 111.82$, $p < .001$) and more favorable social responsibility perceptions ($M_{\text{ability}} = 3.29$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 6.39$; $F(1, 279) = 298.56$, $p < .001$). In addition, respondents perceived breakfast bars as having a higher level of fit with the brand than ceramic mugs ($M_{\text{high}} = 4.99$ vs. $M_{\text{low}} = 2.63$; $F(1, 279) = 275.89$, $p < .001$). No interaction effects emerged in these analyses ($ps > .10$). These results provide support for the brand reputation and extension fit manipulations.

Results—extension evaluations. As expected, 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction on product evaluations ($F(1, 279) = 8.82$, $p = .003$; see Figure 1). When extension fit was high, differences between the ability and social responsibility conditions did not achieve significance ($M_{\text{ability}} = 5.66$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.64$; $p = .93$). However, participants rated the low fit extension more favorably when the brand was described as having a social responsibility reputation rather than an ability reputation ($M_{\text{ability}} = 4.58$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.45$; $F(1, 279) = 16.72$, $p < .001$).

In a follow-up analysis, we included BIDR as a covariate in an ANCOVA model. One participant failed to complete the BIDR scale and was excluded from the analysis. Results show BIDR's influence on extension evaluations was nonsignificant ($p = .45$). More importantly, the interaction between brand reputation and extension fit remained significant ($F(1, 277) = 8.90$, $p = .003$), providing evidence that social responsibility's facilitative effect on low fit brand extensions is unlikely driven by demand artifacts.

Study 1b

As with study 1a, study 1b employed a 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) between-subjects full-factorial design. A total of 153 students from a large university participated in the study ($M_{\text{Age}} = 20.79$, ranging from 18 to 37; 77 females; self-reported ethnicity included 129 white, 10 Asian, 5 African American, 6 Hispanic, and 3 participants who did not report ethnicity or selected "other"). Respondents first read a description of Alti, a salad dressing brand. In the ability condition, participants read that Alti is known for product quality and innovativeness, and the brand spent approximately \$6 million on quality control mechanisms last year. The brand was also described as receiving A-level ratings on manufacturing capability and product quality. In the social responsibility condition, Alti was described as being known for commitment to

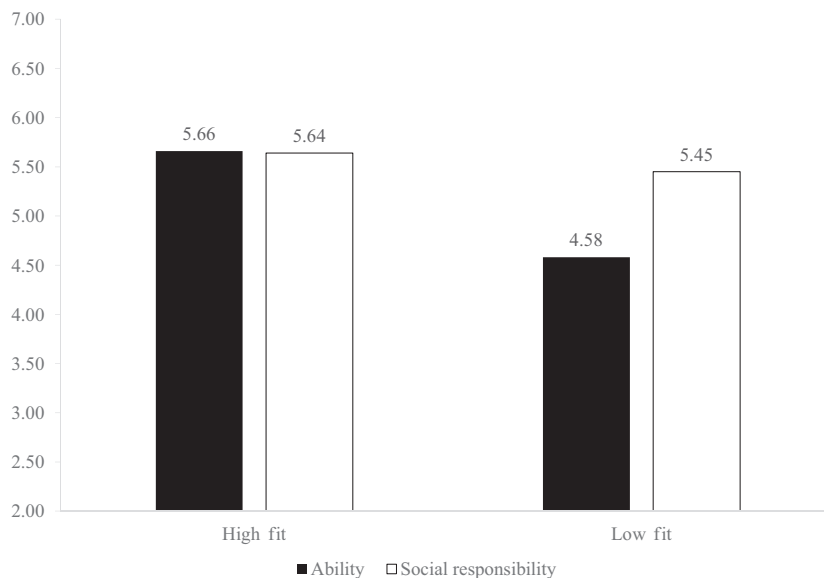


Figure 1. Study 1a: the influence of brand reputation on extension evaluations.

honesty and integrity, and the brand gave over \$6 million to charities and to community causes last year. In addition, the brand received A-level ratings on corporate giving and community involvement.

Subsequently, respondents read that Alti was introducing a new product, either BBQ sauce (high fit) or shampoo (low fit), and reported product evaluation on the same scale used in study 1a ($\alpha = .93$). They also rated extension fit on the same scale used in study 1a ($\alpha = .91$) and brand reputation on two items (1 = manufacturing ability and product quality/ability to make good products, 7 = giving back to the community and community involvement/social responsibility; $r = .89$). In addition, we measured respondents' perception of the overall brand affect as a confound check, using items adapted from Yeung and Wyer (2005) (e.g., 1 = highly unfavorable/very negative/very bad/very low/unpleasant, 7 = highly favorable/positive/very good/very high/pleasant; $\alpha = .95$). Finally, demographic information was collected from respondents. Please see Appendix S1 to view manipulations and questions used.

Results—manipulation checks. A 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) MANOVA model was performed on respondents' extension fit and brand reputation perceptions. As expected, respondents perceived BBQ sauce as having a higher level of fit with the brand than shampoo ($M_{\text{high}} = 4.90$ vs. $M_{\text{low}} = 2.52$; $F(1, 149) = 177.30$, $p < .001$). Those in the social responsibility (vs. ability) conditions perceived the brand as enjoying a reputation for social responsibility rather than manufacturing capability ($M_{\text{ability}} = 2.94$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.38$; $F(1, 149) = 103.43$, $p < .001$). No interaction effects emerged in these analyses ($ps > .10$). These results provide support for both manipulations.

Results—extension evaluations. As expected, 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction on extension evaluations ($F(1, 149) = 5.63$, $p = .02$; see Figure 2). The two reputation types did not produce difference in evaluations of high fit extensions ($M_{\text{ability}} = 5.45$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.43$; $p = .94$). However, participants rated the low fit extension more favorably when the brand had a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation ($M_{\text{ability}} = 3.77$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 4.65$; $F(1, 149) = 10.63$, $p = .001$). In the follow-up ANCOVA analysis to control for the effects of overall brand affect, we included both brand affect and its interaction with extension fit as covariates (Yzerbyt, Muller, & Judd, 2004). The interaction between brand reputation and extension fit remained significant ($F(1, 146) = 6.40$, $p = .01$),

suggesting the results are unlikely driven by varying levels of overall brand affect that might have been induced by ability versus social responsibility.

Discussion

In support of our theoretical framework, studies 1a and 1b establish the differential impact of an ability versus a social responsibility reputation on consumers' brand extension evaluations. We found that the two types of brand reputations exerted similar effects on a high-fit brand extension, but a social responsibility reputation led to more favorable evaluations for a low-fit brand extension than an ability reputation. Please see Appendix S1 to view means and standard deviations.

Studies 2a and 2b aim to explore the underlying mechanism for the observed effects. Based on our theorizing, a socially responsible (vs. an ability) reputation increases warmth perceptions of the brand and induces consumers' reciprocal helping intentions (Aaker et al., 2010; Tankersley et al., 2007). As helping intentions are more likely to motivate favorable actions when the target is in need of assistance (Batson & Powell, 2003), we propose that intentions to help a socially responsible brand increase consumers' positive responses to low (vs. high) fit brand extensions. Therefore, we anticipate reciprocal helping intentions to mediate the effects of reputation on extension evaluations, dependent on the level of extension fit.

Studies 2a and 2b: Process Evidence

Study 2a

Study 2a employed a 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) between-subjects full-factorial design, with a total of 141 respondents recruited and paid through MTurk ($M_{\text{Age}} = 32$, ranging from 18 to 65; 65 females and 3 participants who did not report gender; self-reported ethnicity included 112 white, 12 Asian, 11 African American, and 6 Hispanic participants). To enhance ecological validity, we tested a real brand—Ben and Jerry's—in this study, a brand known for both high-quality products and commitment to social causes. Respondents first read a brand description, which provided either ability or social responsibility information adapted from the company's website. In the ability condition, the description emphasized product ingredient quality, employees' skill training, and Ben and Jerry's mission "to make, distribute and sell the finest quality all natural ice

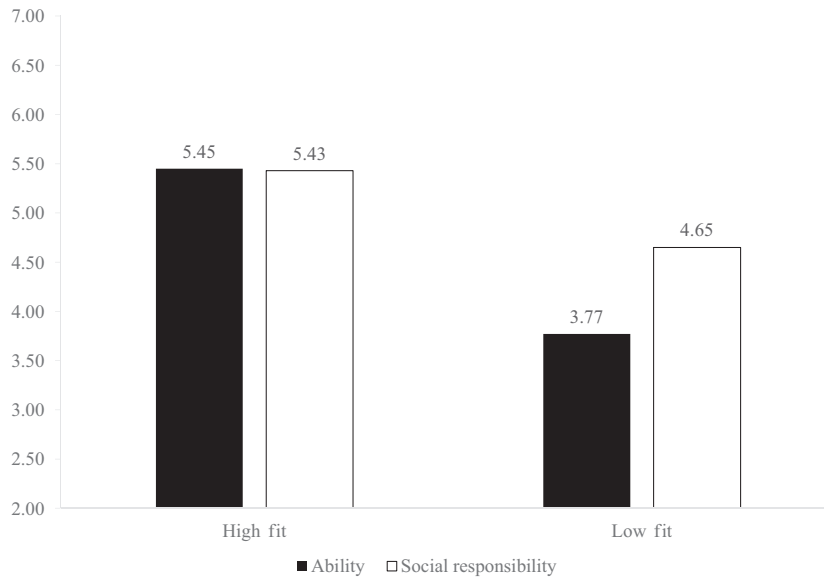


Figure 2. Study 1b: the influence of brand reputation on extension evaluations.

cream.” The brand was further described as having A-level ratings for technological and manufacturing innovation. In the social responsibility condition, the profile highlighted Ben and Jerry’s commitment to protecting the environment, benefiting the community, and its mission to contribute to society by improving “the quality of life locally, nationally and internationally.” Participants also read that the brand had A-level ratings for community giving and involvement.

In a pretest to check the validity of the brand reputation manipulation, 23 respondents from MTurk read either version of the description and rated Ben and Jerry’s ability and social responsibility on the same scales as in study 1a ($r_{\text{ability}} = .90$; $r_{\text{social responsibility}} = .98$). Results showed that compared to the ability condition, respondents in the social responsibility condition reported less favorable ability perceptions ($M_{\text{ability}} = 6.38$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.45$; $F(1, 21) = 5.99$, $p = .02$) but more favorable social responsibility perceptions ($M_{\text{ability}} = 4.42$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.95$; $F(1, 21) = 8.10$, $p = .01$).

After reading the description, respondents were informed of the brand’s hypothetical new product, either cookie dough (high fit) or vitamins (low fit). Respondents evaluated the extension on the same scale used in studies 1a and 1b ($\alpha = .95$). Following the extension evaluation, participants reported reciprocal helping intentions on two items (“I like the idea of helping this company succeed through my purchase” and “When a company like Ben and Jerry’s is having a difficult time, I would likely

support the company,” 1 = disagree, 7 = agree; $r = .89$). Finally, respondents evaluated extension fit on items similar to those used in studies 1a and 1b ($\alpha = .95$) and completed demographic measures. Please see Appendix S1 to view manipulations and questions used.

Results—manipulation checks. A 2 (brand reputation) \times 2 (extension fit) ANOVA model performed on extension fit perceptions revealed that the cookie dough product was rated higher in fit than the vitamin product ($M_{\text{cookie dough}} = 5.69$ vs. $M_{\text{vitamins}} = 4.01$; $F(1, 137) = 45.19$, $p < .001$). No other effect was significant ($ps > .10$).

Results—moderated mediation. We conducted moderated mediation analysis with PROCESS Model 15 using 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017). The index of the overall model was significant at .10 level (moderated mediation index = $-.17$, 90% CI: -0.37 to 0.01 ; see Figures 3 and 4). As anticipated, brand reputation significantly influenced consumers’ helping intentions ($a_1 = .69$, $p = .006$) and helping intentions interacted with extension fit to affect evaluations ($b_3 = -.25$, $p = .02$). There was also an interaction effect between brand reputation and fit ($c_3 = -.73$, $p = .02$). The indirect effect of brand reputation on extension evaluations through helping intentions was significant when extension fit was low (effect = $.37$, 95% CI: 0.13 – 0.64). For the high fit brand extension, the indirect effect remained significant but was smaller in comparison (effect = $.20$, 95% CI: 0.07 – 0.35). Taken together, these results suggest that a social responsibility (vs. an

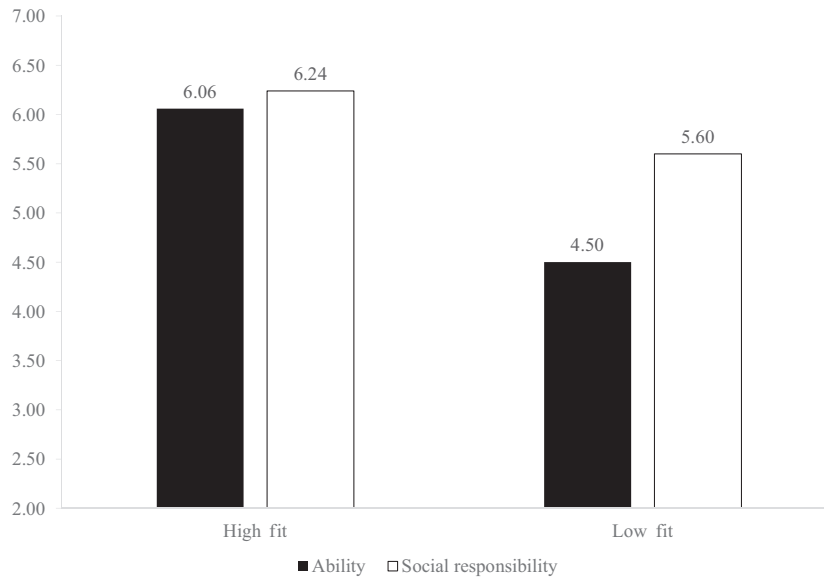


Figure 3. Study 2a: the influence of brand reputation on extension evaluations.

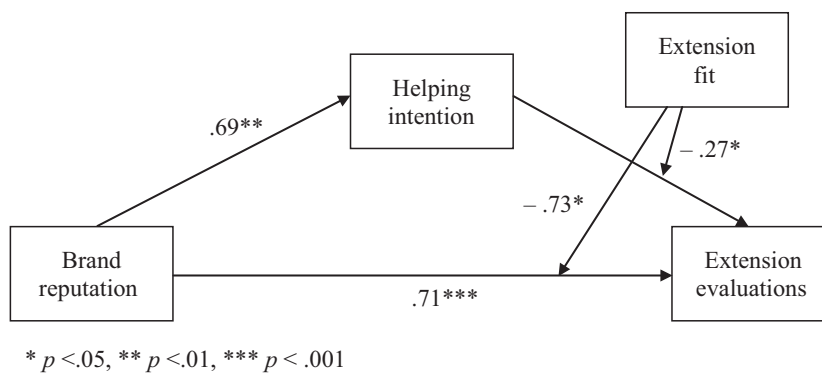


Figure 4. Study 2a: the mediating role of helping intentions.

ability) reputation increases consumers’ helping intentions toward the brand, which in turn are more likely to enhance favorable extension evaluations when extension fit is low (vs. high). Please see Appendix S1 to view means, standard deviations, and PROCESS output.

Study 2b

To advance the findings of study 2a, study 2b includes the brand’s warmth and competence perceptions as another mediator and investigates a moderated serial mediation model to understand the underlying mechanism. We anticipated that compared to an ability reputation, a social responsibility reputation enhances warmth perceptions of the brand and subsequently reciprocal helping

intentions, which in turn influences extension evaluations, dependent on the level of extension fit.

Study 2b employed a 2 (brand reputation) × 2 (extension fit) between-subjects design, with a total of 460 respondents recruited and paid through MTurk ($M_{Age} = 34.7$, ranging from 18 to 72; 191 females, 7 participants did not indicate gender; self-reported ethnicity included 329 white, 82 African American, 11 American Indian or Alaska Native, 22 Asian, and 16 participants who did not respond or selected “other”). Respondents first read a profile of EJ, a brand described as manufacturing winter clothing and accessories. In the ability conditions, respondents read that EJ adopts the most advanced technology within the industry and delivers innovative and high-quality products. In the social responsibility conditions, EJ was

described as a supporter of childhood cancer initiatives, with a recent contribution of \$250,000 for families with children being treated for cancer. In a pretest to check, the brand reputation manipulation, a total of 100 MTurk participants read either version of the profile and rated the brand's reputation on the scale used in study 1b ($r = .89$). Supporting the manipulation, results showed that participants in the social responsibility (vs. ability) condition rated the brand as having a stronger reputation in social responsibility rather than manufacturing capability ($M_{\text{ability}} = 2.37$ vs. $M_{\text{social responsibility}} = 5.16$; $F(1, 99) = 68.20, p < .001$).

After reading the brand's profile, participants were told that EJ had announced a new offering, either a t-shirt (high fit) or a hand sanitizer (low fit). In another pretest, a total of 101 MTurk participants read about EJ's current product domain and rated the perceived level of fit for either extension product on the same scale used in studies 1a and 1b ($\alpha = .94$). Results confirmed that T-shirts were perceived as having a higher level of fit with the brand than hand sanitizers ($M_{\text{high}} = 4.32$ vs. $M_{\text{low}} = 3.06$; $F(1, 100) = 15.49, p < .001$).

Subsequently, respondents read a cover story that EJ was offering them the opportunity to try the new product for \$1.00. Respondents indicated whether they would like to forfeit their \$1.00 MTurk participation payment in exchange for the product. Those who decided to purchase the product signed a form with their MTurk identification number to confirm their agreement to purchase. Afterwards, all respondents reported their reciprocal helping intentions on five items, similar to those used in study 2a (e.g., "I like the idea of helping this company succeed through purchases," "Whenever the company is having a difficult time, I would be willing to help the company," and "I feel grateful that the company cares about people and will be willing to do something that benefits the company," $\alpha = .72$). In addition, respondents rated the brand on warmth and competence dimensions (warmth: "warm," "kind," "friendly," and "sincere," $\alpha = .94$; competence: "competent," "intelligent," "capable," and "skillful," $\alpha = .93$; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much so; Wang, Mao, Li, & Liu, 2017). We created a warmth/competence index by taking the difference between the average warmth scores and the average competence scores, with the higher (lower) scores of the index indicating stronger warmth (competence) perceptions. Finally, respondents completed demographic measures and were debriefed before exiting the study. Please see Appendix S1 to view manipulations and questions used.

Results—moderated serial mediation. We conducted moderated serial mediation analysis with PROCESS Model 90 and 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017). The index for the full model was significant (moderated mediation index = $-.16$, 95% CI: -0.35 to -0.01 , see Figures 5 and 6). As expected, brand reputation significantly affected warmth/competence perceptions ($a_1 = .69, p < .001$) and warmth/competence perceptions significantly affected consumers' helping intentions ($d = .37, p < .001$). Helping intentions and extension fit showed a significant interaction effect on purchase decision ($b_4 = -.61, p = .02$). After adding the helping \times fit interaction, the brand reputation \times fit interaction was no longer significant ($c_3 = -.58, p = .19$). The indirect effects through warmth/competence and helping intentions was significant for the low fit brand extension (effect = $.31$, 95% CI: 0.16 – 0.53). For the high fit extension, the indirect effects were significant but smaller in comparison (effect = $.15$, 95% CI: 0.06 – 0.28). Please see Appendix S1 to view effects and PROCESS output.

Discussion

Utilizing fictitious and real brands and assessing product evaluations as well as purchase decisions, studies 2a and 2b provide evidence on the mechanism underlying the influence of reputation on consumer responses toward brand extensions. Together, the results show that a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation increases the warmth perceptions of the brand and subsequently consumers' helping intentions, which facilitate more favorable responses toward low-fit brand extensions. In particular, we found that the mediating effects were significant in both fit conditions but stronger for the low-fit extension than the high-fit extension. This finding is consistent with the brand extension literature that all extension products endure a risk of failure, and the risk tends to increase as extension fit decreases (Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Since consumers are more likely to reciprocate kindness when the brand is in need of assistance (Batson & Powell, 2003), the reciprocal helping process is found to be stronger in the low-fit (vs. high-fit) conditions.

Studies 3 and 4 further build our theorizing by examining boundary conditions for the brand extension effects. Specifically, as reciprocal altruism drives consumers' differential responses to brand extensions, the facilitative effect of social responsibility on low-fit brand extensions should be more likely to emerge among consumers who value close

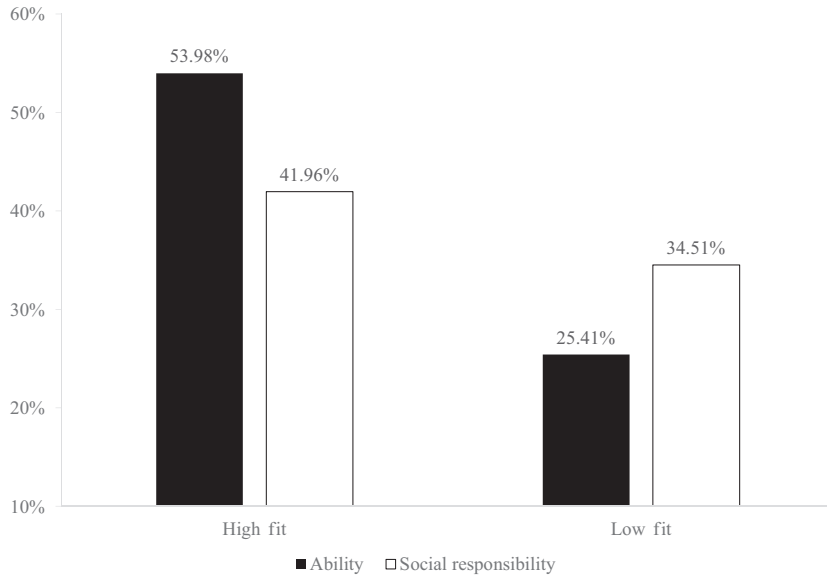


Figure 5. Study 2b: the influence of brand reputation on purchase decisions.

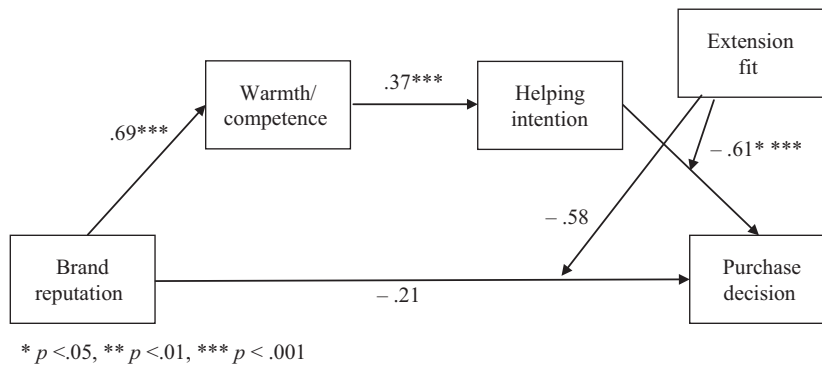


Figure 6. Study 2b: the mediating role of warmth/competence perceptions and helping intentions.

relationships that feature genuine caring and concern for one another (study 3) and be attenuated when consumers perceive the brand’s social responsibility initiatives as tainted by self-serving motives (study 4).

Study 3 Communal Orientation

Individuals tend to hold different views about developing and maintaining relationships, including relationships with brands (Aggarwal, 2004). One such key difference documented in the literature is a person’s communal orientation, or their tendency to emphasize genuine care and concern for the well-being of the relationship partner (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987). People with a high communal orientation place great value in

responding to each other’s needs and giving and receiving benefits accordingly (Clark & Mills, 2011). Extant research has demonstrated that people with high (vs. low) communal orientation are more responsive to warmth perceptions (Scott, Mende, & Bolton, 2013) and are more willing to provide assistance to others (Clark et al., 1987). Similarly, it has been found that consumers in a communal brand relationship tend to genuinely desire the brand to succeed and engage in acts to help the brand (Johnson & Grimm, 2010). These findings associate communal orientation with people’s intentions to help a warm brand. Accordingly, we anticipate that consumers with high (vs. low) communal orientation tend to show greater desire to help a socially responsible brand, and hence the facilitative effect of social responsibility on low fit extensions is more likely to emerge among these consumers.

Design and Procedure

To test the boundary conditions of communal orientation, study 3 manipulated brand reputation and measured participants' communal orientation. A total of 205 MTurk respondents completed the study in exchange for monetary compensation ($M_{Age} = 32.3$, ranging from 19 to 69; 89 females, 1 participant did not indicate gender; self-reported ethnicity included 159 white, 33 African American, 1 American Indian or Alaska Native, 7 Asian, and 5 participants who selected "other"). Participants first read a description of Alti, a brand producing and distributing salad dressing. The description contained the brand reputation manipulation similar to study 1b. Participants were also told that Alti would be introducing shampoo, the same low-fit extension product used in study 1b.

Afterwards, participants responded to the same product evaluation scale used in previous studies ($\alpha = .95$). They also completed the 5-item helping intention scale ($\alpha = .72$), the warmth ($\alpha = .95$) and competence ($\alpha = .95$) scales used in study 2b, and the brand reputation scale used in studies 1b and 2b ($r = .87$). Finally, participants completed the 14-item communal orientation scale (e.g., "I believe people should go out of their way to be helpful," 1 = extremely uncharacteristic, 5 = extremely characteristic; Clark et al., 1987, $\alpha = .84$) and reported demographic information. Please see Appendix S1 to view manipulations and questions used.

Results

Manipulation check. One-way ANOVA performed on perceived brand reputation supports the validity of the manipulation. Specifically, participants in the social responsibility (vs. ability) condition perceived the brand as having a stronger reputation in social responsibility rather than manufacturing capability ($M_{ability} = 3.03$ vs. $M_{social\ responsibility} = 5.82$, $F(1, 204) = 153.75$, $p < .001$).

Moderation effect. The moderating role of communal orientation was assessed with PROCESS Model 1 using 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017). As anticipated, a significant interaction effect emerged between brand reputation and communal orientation on extension evaluations ($t = 3.50$, $p < .001$). To probe the pattern of the interaction, spotlight analysis was conducted at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the communal orientation scale. Results showed that when communal orientation was high, brand reputation had a

significant effect on product evaluation ($t = 3.60$, $p < .001$), where social responsibility led to higher evaluations than ability ($M_{ability} = 5.12$ vs. $M_{social\ responsibility} = 6.00$). The effect dissipated when communal orientation was low ($M_{ability} = 5.22$ vs. $M_{social\ responsibility} = 4.90$; $t = -1.36$, $p = .17$).

Moderated serial mediation. We conducted the moderated serial mediation analysis with PROCESS Model 83 using 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017). The index of the overall model was significant (moderated mediation index = .01, 95% CI: 0.00–0.02; see Figure 7). As expected, brand reputation and communal orientation showed an interaction effect on warmth/competence perceptions of the brand ($a_{31} = .04$, $p = .02$), which then influenced participants' helping intentions ($d = .21$, $p < .001$). Subsequently, helping intentions significantly impacted extension evaluations ($b_2 = .85$, $p < .001$). The indirect effects through warmth/competence and helping intentions were significant among respondents with high communal orientation (effect = .27, 95% CI: 0.08–0.52). The indirect effects among those with low communal orientation, although significant, were smaller in comparison (effect = .14, 95% CI: 0.04–0.27). Please see Appendix S1 to view PROCESS output.

Discussion

The findings of study 3 bolster our theorizing by demonstrating the moderating role of communal orientation. The facilitative effect of social responsibility on low fit extensions is more likely to emerge among consumers with high (vs. low) communal orientation, who value close relationships and are more dispositioned toward caring and helping others.

Study 4: Social Responsibility Alignment with Core Offering

People often evaluate motives that drive a helping behavior (Tsang, 2006). Help perceived as motivated by benevolence or altruism leads to a desire to reciprocate, but acts driven by self-interest result in negative emotions and reduced likelihood of reciprocity (Batson & Powell, 2003; McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008; Tsang, 2006). Accordingly, we expect that the effect of social responsibility on extension evaluations is likely to dissipate when consumers perceive social responsibility initiatives as motivated by self-interest as opposed to altruism.

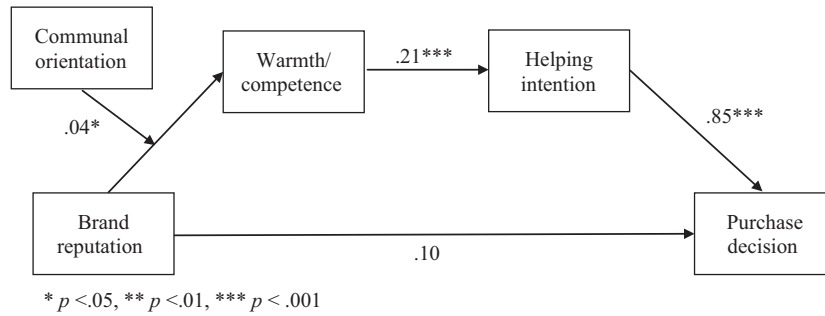


Figure 7. Study 3: the moderating role of communal orientation.

Researchers have argued that not all social responsibility initiatives are perceived as sincere (Berman, Levine, Barasch, & Small, 2015; Johnson, Ashoori, & Lee, 2018; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). In this study, we propose that aligning social responsibility to a brand's core offering may cast doubt on the altruistic nature of the effort and lead to perception of the brand's motive as opportunistic or exploitive (Drumright, 1996; Lee, Bolton, & Winterich, 2017). Based on reciprocal altruism research (Tsang, 2006), when social responsibility is tainted with self-serving motives, reciprocal helping is likely to diminish. This is also consistent with earlier findings that compared to initiatives focusing on community and diversity, activities directly associated with the firm's products or employee management are less effective in protecting the company's value (Godfrey et al., 2009). Based on this evidence, we anticipate that consumer responses toward a low-fit extension will be less positive when a social responsibility reputation is (vs. is not) directly aligned with the brand's core offering. When the brand extension features high fit, such differences will likely disappear as consumers base extension evaluations on overall brand perceptions.

In addition to test the above prediction, study 4 also aims to examine an important alternative explanation. One could argue that non-aligned social responsibility is more effective than aligned responsibility or even ability in enhancing low fit extension evaluations because it lacks association with any specific product categories, thus allowing it to be perceived as relevant to any distant extension. To examine whether the reputation's category specificity produces any difference, we included two versions of nonaligned social responsibility (in addition to aligned social responsibility) in the study: while both are unrelated to the brand's core offering, the nonaligned-general initiatives are social causes involving no specific product category, and

the nonaligned-specific initiatives relate to a specific product category different from the brand's core offering or extension. A corollary of the category specificity based explanation would predict that when social responsibility becomes closely associated with a specific product category (as in the aligned or nonaligned-specific responsibility conditions), its facilitative effect on low fit extensions would decrease. Our theorizing based on reciprocal altruism, however, would offer a different prediction. As long as social responsibility is viewed as an altruistic act of the brand (as in the nonaligned-general and nonaligned-specific conditions), it would induce reciprocal helping intentions and enhance low fit extension evaluations. Hence, exploring the effect of nonaligned-specific social responsibility would allow us to assess whether the reciprocal helping account or the alternative category specificity explanation is underlying the effects of social responsibility.

Design and Procedure

Study 4 employed a 3 (social responsibility reputation: aligned vs. nonaligned-general vs. nonaligned-specific) \times 2 (extension fit: high vs. low) between-subjects design. A total of 426 respondents recruited and paid through MTurk completed the study ($M_{\text{Age}} = 35.16$, ranging from 18 to 71; 175 females; self-reported ethnicity included 311 white, 32 Asian, 45 African American, 29 Hispanic, and 9 participants who did not respond or selected "other"). Respondents first read a profile of Kelast, a brand described as a toothpaste manufacturer known for social responsibility. In the aligned social responsibility condition, the brand was described as engaging in social responsibility initiatives that are aligned with its core products. Specifically, Kelast was committed to enhancing "childhood dental hygiene education," ranking in the top 1% in its industry for giving to childhood dental hygiene education philanthropies

and for offering employees paid time off to volunteer in elementary schools to improve childhood hygiene education. In the nonaligned-general social responsibility condition, respondents read the same information except that the brand was described as engaging in the more general cause of enhancing “childhood education.” In the nonaligned-specific social responsibility condition, the description portrayed the brand as engaging in the cause of enhancing “childhood computer education,” an initiative that relates to a specific product category (i.e., computer) with no alignment to the brand’s core offering.

After reading the brand description, respondents were told that Kelast planned to introduce a new product: either mouthwash (high fit) or lamps (low fit). Subsequently, respondents evaluated the extension on the same scale used in previous studies ($\alpha = .96$), and reported perceived level of fit for the extension on the same scale used in studies 1a, 1b, 2b, and 3 ($\alpha = .97$). Respondents also completed confound check measures for demand artifacts (BIDR, $\alpha = .87$) and overall brand affect ($\alpha = .96$) on the same scales as in studies 1a and 1b, as well as demographic measures. Please see Appendix S1 to view manipulations and questions used.

Results

Manipulation checks. We performed a 3 (social responsibility) \times 2 (extension fit) ANOVA model on extension fit perceptions. As expected, respondents perceived higher extension fit for the mouthwash product compared to the lamp product ($M_{\text{high}} = 5.22$ vs. $M_{\text{low}} = 2.16$; $F(1, 420) = 444.46$, $p < .001$). No other effect was significant ($ps > .05$).

Extension evaluation. The same ANOVA performed on extension evaluation revealed a significant two-way interaction between social responsibility and extension fit ($F(2, 420) = 6.59$, $p = .002$; see Figure 8). As anticipated and consistent with the reciprocal helping account, when brand extension fit was low, nonaligned social responsibility, both general and specific, led to more favorable extension evaluations than aligned social responsibility ($M_{\text{nonaligned-general}} = 4.50$ vs. $M_{\text{aligned}} = 3.80$; $F(1, 420) = 8.91$, $p = .003$; $M_{\text{nonaligned-specific}} = 4.33$ vs. $M_{\text{aligned}} = 3.80$; $F(1, 420) = 5.07$, $p = .02$). Differences between the two nonaligned conditions were not significant ($F(1, 420) = .50$, $p = .48$).

When brand extension fit was high, product evaluations in the aligned social responsibility condition were more favorable than the nonaligned-general condition ($M_{\text{aligned}} = 5.83$ vs. $M_{\text{nonaligned-general}} = 5.32$; $F(1, 420) = 4.26$, $p < .05$), and equally favorable as the nonaligned-specific condition ($M_{\text{aligned}} = 5.83$ vs. $M_{\text{nonaligned-specific}} = 5.56$; $F(1, 420) = 1.12$, $p = .29$). There was no difference between the nonaligned-general and the nonaligned-specific conditions ($F(1,420) = .98$, $p = .32$). Therefore, aligned social responsibility induced more or equally favorable extension evaluations than nonaligned social responsibility (general or specific). Although we did not expect aligned social responsibility to enhance high fit extension evaluations in some situations, this beneficial effect is consistent with the literature that advocates aligning social responsibility with core businesses of the brand (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Keller & Aaker, 1998; Porter & Kramer, 2002).

We performed follow-up ANCOVA analysis including BIDR, overall brand affect, and the

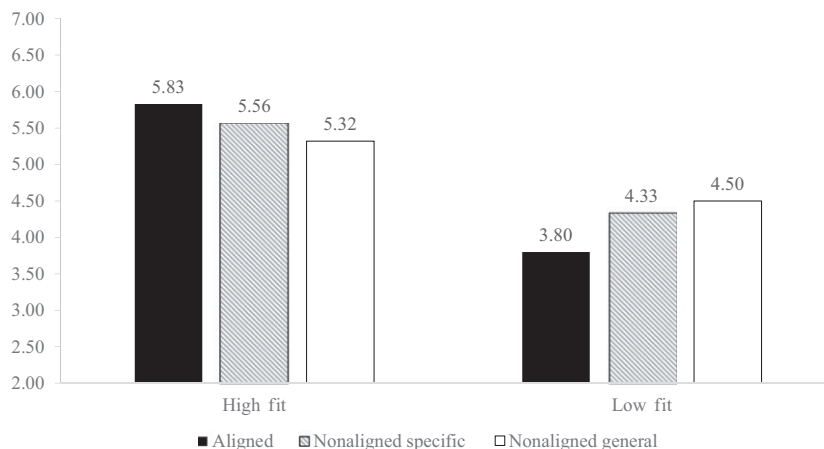


Figure 8. Study 4: the moderating role of aligning social responsibility with core offering.

interaction term between brand affect and extension fit as covariates. Four respondents did not complete the covariate measures and were excluded from the analysis. Results showed that the interaction between social responsibility alignment and extension fit persisted after controlling for both covariates ($F(2, 413) = 5.05, p = .007$), reducing concerns for unintentional influences from demand artifacts or differential brand affect induced by the two reputation types. Please see Appendix S1 to view means and standard deviations.

Discussion

Study 4 suggests that aligning social responsibility with a brand's core offerings interferes with consumers' perception of social responsibility as altruistic. Consequently, aligned social responsibility initiatives are less likely to induce favorable responses to a low-fit brand extension compared with nonaligned initiatives (general or specific). These findings provide further evidence for the reciprocal helping mechanism as underlying the facilitative effect of social responsibility on low-fit extension, and reduce the concern that category specificity may be driving the effects.

General Discussion

This research finds that a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation increases the brand's extendibility. Across six studies, we document a facilitative effect of a social responsibility reputation on low fit brand extensions. Specifically, we show that while the two reputation types influence high fit brand extensions similarly, a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation is more likely to enhance favorable responses toward low fit extensions. This impact occurs because a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation is capable of enhancing the warmth perceptions of the brand and subsequently inducing helping intentions among consumers. Furthermore, we establish that the facilitative effect of social responsibility on low fit brand extensions is more likely to emerge among consumers with high communal orientation and to dissipate when brands align social responsibility initiatives with core product offerings.

In the three studies that tested the mediating processes (studies 2a, 2b, and 3), we measured the mediators after the dependent variables. While doing so avoids creating a demand artifact on the dependent variables, it could potentially raise a concern of reverse causality. That is, favorable

evaluations or purchase decisions may influence helping intentions, which then influence warmth perceptions. While we cannot rule out the reverse causality statistically (Thoemmes, 2015), we reason theoretically that this path is untenable. Specifically, the prosocial behavior literature documents that people tend to help those who are in need and lack self-sufficiency, characteristics that are often at odds with positive judgments (Batson, Lishner, Cook, & Sawyer, 2005). Recent studies also find that people are more likely to help those who express negative emotions such as fear or sadness (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Small & Verrochi, 2009), yet negative facial expressions often reduce positive impressions (Keltner, Ekman, Gonzaga, & Beer, 2003). In addition, people are less likely to donate to attractive children (Fisher & Ma, 2014), while physical attraction is closely associated with favorable dispositions (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). Thus, the reverse path that liking or purchasing a brand extension leads to increased helping intentions is inconsistent with the evidence in the literature.

Similarly, there lacks a theoretical basis to conjecture that intentions to help a brand increase perceptions of the brand as warm, while the causal relationship from warmth to helping behavior, on the other hand, is well established in the BIAS (i.e., behavior from intergroup affect and stereotype) literature (Becker & Asbrock, 2012; Cuddy et al., 2007). Taken together, the reversed mediation, in either link of the causal chain, does not receive much support from extant literature, and hence poses limited threat to the proposed theoretical framework.

To enhance generalizability, we examined five different sets of product stimuli across the six studies. To ensure that idiosyncrasy of these product categories did not introduce an inadvertent advantage to either ability or social responsibility in product evaluations, we conducted a posttest with 60 MTurk respondents, who rated either the five high-fit or the five low-fit extension products used in the studies. For each product category, respondents reported the perceived importance of the brand's manufacturing and technological capabilities established in a different domain, and the brand's engagement in community involvement and giving. We performed 2 (extension fit) \times 2 (brand reputation) \times 5 (sets of product stimuli) mixed ANOVA, with extension fit as a between-subjects variable and the other two factors as within-subjects variables. Results revealed the interaction between extension fit and brand reputation as nonsignificant

($F(1, 58) = 1.13, p = .29$), suggesting the relative importance of ability versus social responsibility was comparable for high versus low fit categories. The lack of a three-way interaction ($F(4, 232) = 1.75, p = .14$) further showed that the comparability across high and low fit categories held for each of the five sets of product stimuli. These results rule out product idiosyncrasy as a possible confound in our studies.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

This research makes important contributions to both the brand reputation and brand extension literature streams. Prior research comparing the effects of ability and social responsibility reputation on line extensions has, in general, viewed the role of social responsibility as limited (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Our research, however, shows that in the context of brand extensions, social responsibility is as effective as ability in inducing favorable responses for high fit extensions, and more effective than ability in increasing evaluations of low fit extensions. Therefore, engaging in social causes paves the way for brands to expand their business and could eventually bring forth substantial and tangible returns.

On the other hand, the brand extension literature has considered extension fit as one of the most critical determinants of extension success (Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Our research adds to prior work by identifying conditions that may facilitate the success of distant extensions. In particular, we find that different from ability, social responsibility brings social considerations into product judgments and motivates consumers to reciprocate help and support to the brand, resulting in more favorable responses toward low-fit extensions. Thus, we show that beyond functional and economic reasons, social considerations could also cast an important influence on consumers' receptivity of brand extensions.

This research also provides clear managerial implications. First, this research offers evidence that engaging in socially responsible initiatives could positively enhance corporate performance. Extant literature on social responsibility engagement has in general offered mixed findings on its impact on corporate performance (Hull & Rothenberg, 2008). Our research suggests that social responsibility initiatives could potentially enhance a company's overall market and financial performance through increasing the success rates of its new products.

Second, brand managers are often bounded by financial constraints when building positive brand images. Based on our findings, for brands that plan

to expand territories and enter distant product domains, priorities should be given to developing a favorable social responsibility reputation rather than an ability reputation, as the former is more likely to facilitate favorable responses toward distant extensions. It is noteworthy that, based on our results, the facilitative effect of social responsibility does not always completely eliminate negative judgments resulting from the extension's lack of connection with the brand. Hence, even for brands with a socially responsible reputation, the risks of introducing distant extensions remain.

Third, managers should gauge consumers' responsiveness toward social responsibility when introducing distant extensions. We find in study 3 that social responsibility is more likely to help distant extensions among consumers who value close and caring relationships. Hence, when the extension is marketed toward these consumers, emphasizing brand involvement in social causes could be particularly effective in enhancing acceptance level of the new product.

Finally, our results call for caution when companies engage in the increasingly popular strategy of aligning social responsibility initiatives with the commercial interests of their offerings. While such an alignment can lead to certain benefits (i.e., enhancing evaluations of a high-fit extension), it can increase consumer resistance toward low fit brand extensions.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this research should be considered with its limitations. First, while we find that a social responsibility (vs. an ability) reputation leads to more favorable responses toward low-fit brand extensions, it is unclear to what extent this difference is driven by the facilitative effect of social responsibility and to what extent it may be caused by an inhibiting effect of the ability reputation. Evidence in the brand extension literature largely opposes the possibility of ability reputation exerting an inhibiting effect, with findings suggesting that a quality-based brand image has either neutral or positive impact on distant extensions (Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Rangaswamy, Burke, & Oliva, 1993). This implies that the difference we observed in extension responses is likely a result of an insignificant influence from the ability reputation compared to a large boost due to social responsibility. Nonetheless, empirical testing is needed in future research to unambiguously tease out the proportions of influence stemming from ability versus social responsibility in extension judgments.

Second, consistent with prior work (Berens et al., 2005; Biehal & Shenin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Gürhan-Canli & Batra, 2004), the social responsibility and ability manipulations in our studies were positively positioned. However, we acknowledge that despite a brands' intentions to create a positive image, sometimes an unfavorable reputation may be developed over time. For example, prior work has shown that social responsibility initiatives conflicting with the brand may be perceived as negative (Torelli et al., 2012). More importantly, consumers may perceive a brand as varying in its reputation in ability and social responsibility (i.e., a favorable ability reputation but an unfavorable social responsibility reputation, or vice versa). While our research investigated situations where only one type of brand reputation was salient and positive, it is important for future research to investigate, in situations where the two reputations types are both salient and vary in valence, how they might interact with one another to influence product judgments.

Finally, this research demonstrates that a social responsibility reputation may induce consumers to help the brand through providing favorable product evaluations and making positive purchase decisions. However, these helping behaviors demand little or no resources from consumers, consistent with prior findings that warmth perceptions are more likely to induce low-cost (vs. high-cost) forms of assistance (Wang et al., 2017). We anticipate that helping behavior induced by a social responsibility reputation is likely bounded by the cost associated with the assistance and encourage future research to investigate the boundaries of actions consumers are willing to take to help a socially responsible brand.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Appendix S1. Methodological Data.