

**When Your Outrage Is Not Mine:  
Consumer Responses to Expressions of Online Outrage towards Brands**

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## Abstract

In the digital age, it is common for consumers to encounter expressions of moral condemnation towards brands and their marketing activities. These expressions of moral disapproval tend to have emotional overtones of outrage. Public expressions of outrage can serve to alert bystanders towards the presence of a norm violations and encourage others to also condemn the triggering event. However, moral values can be held with deep conviction and consumers oftentimes encounter outrage that conflicts with personal values. In the present work, I explore situational factors in which outrage towards a brand can fail to influence observing-consumers to appraise the target brand negatively. Across eight studies (N = 2277), we address two questions: 1) How do consumers respond to outrage expressed towards a brand's social value marketing campaign? 2) Is outrage effective in persuading observing-consumers to respond negatively towards potentially offensive advertisements? In examining the first research question, participants were presented social marketing campaigns with accompanying expressions of disapproval towards these campaigns that varied in terms of outrage. Across five studies, our findings suggest that outrage towards social value marketing campaigns can increase brand support among consumers who share the brand's values. We find that this is because outrage (versus disapproval alone) is more threatening to those values. In examining the second research question, participants were presented potentially offensive advertisements with accompanying expressions of disapproval towards these advertisements that varied in terms of outrage. Across three studies, we provide evidence that the propensity of outrage in persuading observing-consumers to respond negatively towards potentially offensive advertisements is contingent on the severity of the ad's norm violation. Furthermore, we demonstrate that expressions of disapproval without outrage can be more effective in persuading observers to evaluate brand's negatively when the ad's norm violation is perceived to be mild (versus more severe). This is because outrage in these instances can be perceived to be inappropriate reactions. Taken together, these findings suggest that outrage towards brands does not necessarily lead to negative brand consequences.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Digital communication technologies have had vast implications for the field of marketing (Holt, 2016; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). An important feature of these technologies has been the proliferation of consumer-to-consumer interactions (Achrol & Kotler, 2012; Hoffman & Novak, 1995; Kozinets et al., 2010; Schlosser, 2006). These interactions are omnipresent in the digital sphere as individuals constantly encounter the opinions of others on social media (Appel et al., 2020; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Furthermore, these interactions can impact how consumers perceive and respond to marketing activities (Kozinets et al., 2010; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Sexton, 2015).

While research has examined some of the positive and negative implications of consumer-to-consumer interactions (Appel, 2020; Kozinets et al., 2010; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016), an area that has received less attention is social media backlash towards marketing activities that are deemed offensive (Scholz & Smith, 2019). Furthermore, such moral condemnations tend to involve expressions of outrage (Spring, Cameron & Cikara, 2018). For example, when H&M showed a website advertisement that depicted an African American child in a sweatshirt that read “coolest monkey in the jungle,” it drew global outrage on social media and calls to boycott the brand (Linning & Gordon, 2018).

The issue of online outrage has sparked growing debates amongst scholars as to whether outrage could be societally harmful by leading to unjust punishment, disingenuous virtue-signaling and societal polarization (Crockett, 2017; Crockett & Brady, 2019) or whether outrage can be beneficial by raising awareness about social issues, empowering marginalized groups and catalyzing societal change (Spring et al., 2018). Yet, there has been a paucity of research as to how individuals respond to expressions of online outrage. Expressions of outrage can signal to

observers (i.e., bystanders who are not the direct target of the outrage) that a moral norm has been violated and that the triggering event should be condemned (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Spring et al., 2018). Yet, the impact of online outrage depends on its ability to influence observers to change their appraisals of the event in line with the expressed outrage.

Prior research suggests a focal aim of moral condemnation is to influence bystanders to support the condemner and reject the condemned (De Scioli & Kurzban, 2013; De Scioli, 2016). In response to marketing material, outrage can serve to influence observers and encourage them to condemn the purported norm violation (Thomas et al., 2020). Theories of social conformity would predict that expressions of mass outrage lead observers to align their judgements and behaviours accordingly (Asch, 1956; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Sherif, 1936). Furthermore, recent research suggests that online outrage can spread rapidly (i.e., viral outrage) as observers partake in a shaming bandwagon to signal their moral virtue to others (Crockett, 2017). This is consistent with prior theorization that contends non-conformity to collective emotions can result in social and cognitive costs (e.g., ostracism; Heerdink et al., 2013). Hence, prior discourse suggests online expressions of outrage towards a brand's marketing materials should influence observers to also appraise the brand's actions negatively and potentially lead to deleterious consequences in terms of their reputation and bottom line (Sexton, 2015).

Despite prior research proposing that individuals tend to conform to expressions of outrage (Crockett, 2017), there is alternative evidence that individuals can engage in emotional non-conformity when making moral judgements (Goldenberg, Saguy & Halperin, 2014). This is based on the notion that individuals' moral values are held with deep conviction and that they will not conform when others' emotional expressions are not aligned with their own moral values (Goldenberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, past theorizing contends that others' emotional

expressions can provide social information regarding the expressor's character, social motives and intentions (Van Kleef, 2016), which can then influence whether observers will engage in conformity or non-conformity when making moral judgements (Goldenberg et al., 2020).

Overall, it remains unclear as to when and why outrage successfully (vs. unsuccessfully) influences observers to shift their appraisals and behaviors. Furthermore, our understanding of how expressed emotions influence observers' appraisals of brands is limited (Moore & Lafreniere, 2019). Lastly, there has been no research to date examining how expressed outrage towards marketing material can impact observers.

This dissertation contributes to the literature by examining the conditions in which outrage towards a brand can fail to influence observing-consumers to appraise the target brand negatively, and whether other types of emotional or nonemotional expressions of disapproval fare any better in this respect. The present work consists of four chapters that aim to enhance our understanding of observers' responses to consumer outrage towards brands. In Chapter 2, we delve into the theoretical background of outrage, including its interpersonal functions and the social information it provides observers. In Chapter 3, we provide evidence through five studies, that expressed outrage towards a brand's social value campaign can lead to positive brand implications by enhancing observing-consumers' feeling of self-brand identification. Chapter 4 consists of three studies demonstrating that the influence of outrage in response to potentially offensive advertisements is contingent on the severity of the advertisements' norm violation and that expressions of disapproval without outrage can be more effective in influencing observers to appraise the target brand negatively. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of this dissertation on our understanding of consumer outrage.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

The concept of outrage, like other emotions, has been extensively debated amongst scholars (Batson et al., 2011; Brady & Crockett, 2019; O'Mara et al., 2011; Salerno & Peter-Hagene, 2013; Spring, Cameron & Cikara, 2018). However, there is general agreement that outrage is a negative-valenced emotion that arises in response to a perceived moral norm violation (Haidt, 2003; Lindenmeier, Schleer & Pricl, 2012; Westbury et al., 2015). Prior theorizing suggest that outrage is a manifestation of anger and scholars have delineated the two by contending that outrage is concerned with moral judgement (Spring et al., 2018) whereas anger is more broadly defined as a negative emotion triggered when an individual is prevented from achieving or pursuing one's goals (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1966). Nevertheless, anger has been intrinsically linked to moral judgement (Haidt, 2003). Thus, based on prior research, we define outrage as the experience of anger in response to a perceived violation of one's moral norms (Haidt, 2003; Spring et al., 2018).

Anger can serve an intrapersonal function by activating an approach motivational system to address potentially aversive events (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). Furthermore, personal feelings of anger can motivate individuals to punish transgressors, engage in activism, seek social support and increase altruistic behaviors (Bastian, Denson & Haslam, 2013; Carlsmith, Darley & Robinson, 2002; Gummerum et al., 2016; Leonard et al., 2011; Moons et al., 2009). Past research in the consumer domain has demonstrated that personal feelings of anger motivate consumers to engage in negative word-of-mouth in response to product/service failures (Folkes, 1984; Gelbrich, 2010; Strizhakova, Tsarenko & Ruth, 2012). Similarly, research has examined consumers' responses to brands' moral norm violations and demonstrated that personal feelings



of anger motivated consumers to act against such brands by boycotting and sabotaging the transgressing brand (Lindenmeier et al., 2012; Kähr et al., 2016).

A violation of one's moral values can elicit identity threats (Branscombe et al., 1999). Thus, outrage in response to such violations can motivate individuals to resolve such threats (Jonas et al., 2014). Prior research suggests that consumers are more likely to protest brands that engage in moral norm violations when their opposition to the brand is linked to their moral identity (Cronin, Reysen & Branscombe, 2012; Hingston & Noseworthy, 2018). Similarly, Kähr and colleagues (2015) found that participants experienced a higher degree of anger when they were presented a scenario in which a brand engaged in a moral norm violation (e.g., discriminating against low-income people and utilizing child-labour) compared to a brand's severe product failure (i.e., performance-based violation). Furthermore, this increased anger was attributed to the notion that moral-based violations are more closely connected with consumers' social identities.

Based on the above, moral norm violation can elicit feelings of threat towards individuals' personal values and lead to outrage, which can serve an intrapersonal function in motivating action towards addressing the threat. While, personal feelings of outrage can serve intrapersonal functions, public expressions of outrage can serve a series of interpersonal and intergroup functions (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Van Kleef et al., 2011). For example, expressions of outrage can signal to a transgressor that their actions are unacceptable and if they do not align their behavior with the values of the expressor then they may face consequences (Friedman et al., 2004; Heerdink et al., 2013; Sinaceur et al., 2011). Additionally, outrage as an expression of moral condemnation can damage the purported transgressors reputation and result in their social

exclusion (Crockett, 2017). Thus, outrage in this context can signal a threat to the target of this emotional display and serve as a tool for social control.

Furthermore, expressions of outrage can signal to observers (i.e., bystanders who are not the target of outrage) that a moral norm violation has occurred and serve to elicit collective support against a perceived moral violation (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Spring et al., 2018). In an intergroup context, collective outrage towards perceived moral violations can influence observers to partake in collective action. For example, Leonard and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that when females were presented social information that other females were angry towards an act of gender discrimination, they were more likely to experience personal anger, appraise the event more negatively and engage in collective action. Similarly, Sabherwal and colleagues (2021) demonstrated that when individuals were presented a consensus cue that Americans were collectively angry about inaction on climate change, they were more likely to support climate change mitigation. Thus, outrage can result in conformity and influence observers to align their cognitions and behavior in line with the focal moral norm.

However, given that moral judgements can vary between individuals and groups (Haidt, 2003; Schein & Gray, 2018), it is possible that observers can engage in non-conformity in response to expressions of outrage. For example, Sawaoka and Monin (2018) found that as more people expressed outrage towards a moral norm violation, observers were more likely to view the outrage as excessive and felt more sympathy towards the offender compared to outrage expressed by one commentator. Other research suggests that individuals can experience greater outrage than their ingroup members when they perceive that their ingroup has not responded appropriately to a norm violation (Goldenberg et al., 2014). Thus, prior research provides evidence towards the notion of emotional non-conformity in the domain of moral judgements.

Extensive research has shown that an individual's interpretations and responses can be shaped by the interpretations and behaviors of others (Asch, 1956; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Sherif, 1963). Furthermore, a target's susceptibility to social influence can vary based on their motivation to fulfill three goals fundamental to social functioning, namely, the goal to affiliate with others, the goal to maintain a positive self-concept and the goal to make accurate judgements (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). While these goals can intersect (Binning et al., 2015), scholars contend that the goal to make accurate judgements is of particular importance in the moral domain (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013; DeScioli, 2016).

Prior theorizing suggests that emotional expressions are an important source of social information that can aid observers in their goal of making accurate judgements (Van Kleef et al., 2011). These expressions can provide information regarding the expressor's appraisal of the situation while also providing information about the expressor's intentions and motivations (Van Kleef et al., 2011). For example, given that outrage arises in response to a perceived moral norm violation, expressions of outrage can provide information to observers that the triggering event violates the expressor's moral values. Furthermore, outrage can signal to observers that the expressor aims to punish the transgressor or gain collective support from others (Bastian et al., 2013; Carlsmith et al., 2002; Leonard et al., 2010). However, for emotional expressions to result in conformity, the emotional expression should be perceived as appropriate by the observers (Van Kleef et al., 2011). Past research suggests that the perceived appropriateness of emotional displays is contingent on whether observers appraise the emotional display as being aligned with their personal appraisal of the event or not (Goldenberg et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). For example, Thomas and colleagues (2020) demonstrated that individuals were more likely to be influenced by others' expressions of outrage when they personally felt anger towards the

triggering event but not otherwise. Similarly, Goldenberg and colleagues (2019) found that when participants perceived that the norms of the context dictated strong emotional reactions of anger, consensus cues that others experienced this strong emotional reaction further polarized participants' angry reactions thus suggesting that expressions of outrage from others provided an informational cue that supported the observer's personal appraisal of the negative event. Furthermore, these findings support the notion that while expressions of outrage can signal the existence of a moral conflict, observers are more likely to conform to the outrage when their appraisals of the event are aligned with the expressor's emotional reaction.

In contexts where observers perceive that expressors' emotional reactions are not aligned with their personal appraisals, emotional non-conformity can occur. However, the degree of misalignment appears to also be an important factor in understanding non-conformity and observers' unique responses to expressions of outrage. For example, Sawaoka and Monin (2018) found that observers viewed mass outrage towards an individual who created a racist or sexist post as an excessive response. This was the case even when they viewed the individual's post as morally objectionable. Thus, there was some degree of misalignment between the outrage and observers' personal appraisal of the triggering event (i.e., the post was objectionable but did not deserve mass outrage). In comparison, there are contexts in which outrage can be viewed as highly misaligned with an observer's personal appraisal of the event and can be perceived as a direct threat towards the observer's personal values. For example, when Old Navy faced outrage on Twitter for featuring an interracial couple in their advertisement, this conflicted with the moral values of many observers who were opposed to the racist nature of this outrage (Kim, 2016).

Moral condemnations entail an assertion that the expressor is in the “right” and the target of that condemnation is in the “wrong” (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013). Furthermore, moral condemnation can shift societal consensus as well as coordinate others to take a side in the conflict (DeScioli, 2016; Puryear, 2020). Thus, outrage directed towards an observer’s social values can be particularly threatening even when the observer is not the personal target of the outrage. Prior research suggests that individuals are motivated to create environments that support their moral values and to avoid opinions that conflict with their values (Frimer, Skitka & Motyl, 2017). However, when individuals are confronted with a perceived threat towards their values they can be motivated to protect the threatened values (Jonas et al., 2014; Skitka, 2002; Tetlock et al., 2000). Furthermore, while protective responses can vary from concrete to symbolic (Branscombe et al., 1999), a common response to defend a threatened value is to publicly express support for the value and align with others who share similar values (Tetlock et al., 2000). For example, in the aforementioned Old Navy controversy, it appeared that individuals defended their values surrounding racial equality by posting comments in support of Old Navy and other consumers posted pictures of their interracial family (Kim, 2016). This suggests that in addition to conformity and non-conformity, individuals can respond to outrage via counter-conformity (i.e., opposing the outrage by aligning with the target), specifically, in contexts where the outrage directly conflicts with an observer’s social values.

### **Consumer offense, outrage, and emotional expressions**

In the marketing domain, there has been very little research on the impact of expressed emotions in influencing observers’ appraisals (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Rocklage & Fazio, 2020; Yin et al., 2014). For example, Kim and Gupta (2012) found that when observers encountered several negative reviews that expressed anger they were more likely to conform to the negative appraisal of the product compared to if there was only one negative angry review. Other research

examining the impact of angry reviews found that such reviews were perceived as less helpful compared to reviews that expressed anxiety because anxiety was perceived to involve more cognitive effort and thus provide more informative value (Yin et al., 2014). Other research found that observers felt greater distrust when they read reviews for utilitarian products that conveyed strong positive emotional reactions in comparison to reviews that were positive but conveyed weak emotions (Rocklage & Fazio, 2020). This was because strong emotions in response to utilitarian products violated observers' expectations. Finally, McGraw and colleagues (2015) provided empirical evidence that the use of humor (i.e., a positive emotional reaction) to complain about a service failure signalled to observers that the brand's norm violation was not severe and was thus less likely to influence observers compared to complaints without humor. While these findings provide support to the notion that emotional expressions provide social information to observers, they do not explain when and why outrage can influence observers in the context of purportedly offensive marketing material.

The existing literature on consumer offense has examined the factors that can contribute to consumer offense and downstream consequences such as negative word-of-mouth and boycotting behavior (Lindenmeier et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2019). For example, Liu and colleagues (2019) conceptualize consumer offense as anger that arises in a response to a perceived moral norm violation. Other research by Lindenmeier and colleagues (2012) suggests that while individuals can experience negative emotions in response to feelings of customer dissatisfaction, consumer outrage is a distinct reaction that pertains to moral norms which can arise even when individuals are not directly impacted by the brand's behavior. Furthermore, past research has demonstrated that personal feelings of anger are an important antecedent to behaviors such as negative word of mouth (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016) and consumer sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016).

Despite prior research demonstrating the important role of one's own outrage in responding to marketing actions that are deemed morally condemnable (Lindenmeir et al., 2012; Kähr et al., 2016), there has been no research to date that has examined how expressions of outrage further impacts the opinions and reactions of observers. This is important from a theoretical perspective as prior theorizing suggests that emotional expressions can serve as a communication tool to influence observers (Van Kleef et al., 2011). However, while prior research in the moral judgement domain has examined conditions in which individuals can engage in emotional conformity and non-conformity (Goldenberg et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020), it remains unclear how consumers respond to outrage that is directed at marketing activities and related communications, or what factors might explain when and why consumers engage in conformity versus non-conformity. Lastly, given the growing ubiquity of social feedback on social media, it appears important from a practical perspective to understand how consumers judge marketing material that face public expressions of outrage.

The scope of this dissertation is to examine when and why consumers may engage in conformity or non-conformity in response to expressions of outrage towards brands. We provide empirical evidence across nine studies that demonstrate that outrage towards brands can in fact lead to emotional non-conformity. In Chapter 3 (5 studies), we provide evidence that outrage towards a brand's social value marketing campaign can lead observers to experience enhanced feelings of self-brand identification when they share the brand's values but not otherwise (Study 1). Furthermore, we propose that the underlying factor explaining this effect is perceptions of threat towards consumers' social values (Study 1-5). Lastly, we provide evidence that this feeling of threat is more likely to occur when the outrage is expressed by a dissociative outgroup member (Study 2-3) and when the outrage has a high degree of viral social support (Study 4).

Chapter 4 (3 studies) examines the role of expressed outrage in response to a brand's norm violation (i.e., advertisement mocking a sub-group). Moreover, this research compares the effect of outrage compared to emotionally neutral displays of disapproval and humorous emotional displays of disapproval. Across three studies, we provide evidence that outrage is effective in influencing observing-consumers to evaluate the brand negatively only when the brand's violation is perceived as severe (versus mild). In contrast, when brand violations are perceived as mild, outrage is less likely to influence observers to evaluate the brand negatively than comments that express disapproval without outrage, or comments that use humour. Lastly, we provide evidence that the underlying mechanism explaining conformity versus counter-conformity to angry comments is the perceived appropriateness of the negative responses.



### **Chapter 3: The clash of values: The effects of outgroup outrage on self-brand connection**

“It doesn’t matter how many people hate your brand as long as enough people love it”

-Phil Knight, Founder of Nike

There is strong evidence that consumers can respond positively when a brand takes a stance on a personally relevant social issue (Bloom et al., 2006). This is because overlap between brand values and consumer values tends to increase support for the brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Park et al., 2010; Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). This perceived overlap has been referred to as self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017) or brand identification (Lisjak, Lee & Gardner, 2012). However, brands that attempt to connect to consumers by supporting certain social issues also run the risk of offending others who are not aligned with the brand’s position (Larcker et al., 2018). Social values are a primary basis for identifying or dissociating with/from individuals and groups (Schwartz, Struch & Bilsky, 1990). Thus, it is not surprising that supporting a value endorsed by some consumers might draw outrage from others who do not share those values. For example, in 2018, Nike aired an advertisement featuring Colin Kaepernick—an NFL athlete who had publicly protested police brutality by kneeling during the American anthem (Wang & Siegel, 2018). The advertisement was praised on social media by people who supported Kaepernick’s concerns over systemic racism in the United States. However, opposing individuals and groups also expressed outrage on social media sites towards Nike taking sides in a highly charged political debate. Some consumers went so far as to express their outrage by posting videos of themselves burning their Nike shoes under the hashtag #JustBurnIt and #BoycottNike (Wang & Siegel, 2018).

Despite the backlash, Nike's advertisement was widely hailed as a success (Abad-Santos, 2018; Wertz, 2018). One straightforward explanation for this success is that the ad simply resonated with the brand's traditional customer base, which is far larger than the group that expressed outrage (Boren, 2018)—a view echoed above by the founder of Nike, Phil Knight (Snyder, 2019). However, it seemed possible that something potentially more interesting was happening. The success of Nike's campaign was not just predicated on the sheer number of existing Nike supporters, but rather the number of supporters grew as the anti-Nike outrage went viral. For instance, as the hashtag #BoycottNike was trending, many users responded to the outrage by expressing their intentions to purchase more Nike products (Wang & Siegel, 2018). This raises the interesting question as to whether it is the alignment on key social values that exclusively enhances a consumer's connection to the brand, or whether the outrage expressed by other consumers might further contribute to the ultimate success of such campaigns. Common intuition and standard practice support the former. However, the latter also seems to be a distinct possibility, and is particularly relevant to consider in today's climate of public outrage on social media. That is, some outrage may paradoxically increase consumers' connection with the target brand that has come under scrutiny, which might mean that at least some strategic social campaigns will only gain sufficient traction by attracting outrage from other individuals or groups.

Outrage is a common reaction when consumers perceive that a moral norm has been violated (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Lindenmeier, Schleer & Pricl, 2012; Liu et al., 2019). Furthermore, online expressions of outrage may lead to an echoing of such sentiments, a phenomenon referred to as viral outrage (Crockett, 2017; Sawaoka & Monin, 2018). However, while prior research has identified the negative effects of consumer outrage, including negative

word of mouth (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016), boycotting (Lindenmeier et al., 2012) and consumer sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016), existing research has yet to consider that it may alternatively serve to enhance self-brand connections in at least some cases. The current research examined whether a brand can ultimately benefit from consumer outrage expressed towards their social value marketing campaign by encouraging other consumers who share those values to identify more strongly with the brand, and subsequently increase intentions to purchase their products. Five studies supported these predictions, and further showed these positive effects held when the outrage was expressed by a group with opposing social values but not groups whose identities were not rooted in opposing values (or ingroup members). Moreover, the positive impact of outgroup outrage on self-brand connection was moderated by the degree to which target consumers shared the brand's values, as well as the level of observed viral support for outrage expressed by the outgroup. Finally, these effects operated through the level of perceived social threat evoked by the outgroup outrage.

This research makes a number of theoretical contributions. For instance, it is the first to demonstrate that the outrage expressed towards a brand's social marketing campaign can in some cases lead to increased feelings of self-brand connection and purchase intentions, as well as identifying when and why these positive effects occur. These findings contribute to the social marketing and brand relationship literatures in particular (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Park, Eisingerich & Park, 2013), which have generally highlighted the role of value overlap in the development of closer brand relationships (Ashworth, Dacin & Thomson, 2009; Park, MacInnis & Priester, 2008) by identifying the additional role played by outgroup outrage directed towards the shared values of consumers and brands. This is important given current discussions as to whether brands should take stances on contentious social issues given the potential this has for

consumer backlash (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019; Larcker et al., 2018), as well as suggestions that consumers increasingly expect brands to take political or social stands (Argenti, 2020). This research also contributes to the growing literature on the effects of viral versus individual outrage (Sawaoka & Monin, 2018), by showing that additional viral support for outgroup outrage actually further benefits the attacked brand. Our research also contributes to the dissociative outgroup literature, which suggests self-brand connections are typically negatively impacted by dissociative outgroups (White & Dahl, 2007). The present research shows dissociative outgroups can alternatively increase self-brand connection when they express outrage towards values that are shared by brands and their target consumers. Finally, this research has implications for the broader negative word-of-mouth literature (e.g., Allard, Dunn & White, 2020; Wilson, Giebelhausen & Brady, 2017), by identifying a novel context and mechanism where negative word-of-mouth can produce ironic benefits for the brand involved.

In the following sections, we theorize that outrage expressed towards a brand's social values campaign can increase brand support among consumers who share the brand's values and observe the outrage towards the brand's social values campaign. We will argue this is because outrage (versus disapproval alone) is more threatening to those social values, which encourages bystanders to support the brand by further identifying with it. This, thereby, increases purchase intentions in support of the brand. Additionally, we will suggest that some sources of outrage are likely to be more threatening than others. For instance, outrage from an outgroup that has opposing values is expected to evoke more threat than outrage from other outgroup sources or from an ingroup. For the current purposes, we will refer to these outgroups as morality-based and nonmorality-based outgroups (Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013). In addition to this, we theorize that social threat should be greater when the outrage receives a lot of viral support (e.g., likes)

than when viral support is minimal. For the current purposes, the term social threat will be used to refer to the perception that one's important social values are threatened (Duckitt, 2006).

### **Outrage and Social Threat**

Outrage, conceptualized in this research as public expressions of anger, can signal that a social value has been violated (Niedenthal & Brauer, 2011; Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011). However, while individuals can signal their disapproval towards an event without expressing outrage, it has been suggested that outrage is an effective means of signalling threatening intent (Friedman et al., 2004; Sinaceur et al., 2011). This threat can be especially salient when directed towards those with opposing social values as it can cue observers towards the existence of a moral conflict (Brady, Crockett & Van Bavel, 2020; D'Amore, van Zomeren, Koudenberg, 2021). Indeed, prior research suggests that individuals are motivated to create environments that support their core social values and avoid encountering opinions that conflict with their values to prevent feelings of threat (Frimer, Skitka & Motyl, 2017). Thus, based on the notion that outrage can signal threatening intent and that outrage can cue observers towards the existence of a moral conflict, an individual who observes outrage that conflicts with their social values may view such outrage as a threat towards their values. Based on these observations, in the context of a brand facing disapproval for their social value campaign, an observer who shares the brand's values may perceive such disapproval as more threatening when it includes expressions of outrage than when such outrage is absent, even if the overall level of disapproval is equivalent.

Other evidence suggests the level of perceived threat from expressions of outrage can further depend on a number of factors relating to its source. For instance, outrage is more likely to evoke threat related emotions, such as anger and anxiety, when expressed by an outgroup rather than an ingroup (Ackerman et al., 2006; Stephan, Ybarra & Rios, 2009; Van Der Schalk et

al., 2011). Furthermore, outgroups whose identities are rooted in opposing social values are especially likely to evoke feelings of threat (Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013; Tappin & McKay, 2019). These morality-based outgroups can provide cues towards the existence of moral conflict and societal polarization (D'Amore et al., 2021). For instance, prior research observed that individuals were more likely to feel threat related emotions about morality-based outgroups (e.g., Democrats vs. Republicans) compared to non-morality-based outgroup sources such as rival sports team fans (Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013). Similarly, other findings suggest that individuals are willing to forgo financial incentives to avoid encountering the opinions of morality-based outgroups in the context of polarized issues to prevent feelings of threat (Frimer et al., 2017). In the current context, this theorizing suggests that outrage expressed towards a brand's social value campaign is more likely to elicit social threat when it comes from a morality-based outgroup compared to the same message from an ingroup source, or when it comes from a nonmorality-based outgroup.

### **Social Threat and Self Brand Connection**

The notion that individuals will defend their core values in response to a perceived threat has been widely supported by past research (Branscombe et al., 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986, Tetlock et al., 2000). Furthermore, prior evidence suggests that individuals prefer to engage in value-protective responses that are directed towards redressing the specific threat (Jonas et al., 2014; Skitka, 2002; Tetlock et al., 2000). These responses can include concrete behaviors and symbolic expressions of support for the threatened value (Branscombe et al., 1999). For instance, Bender and colleagues (2016) found that when individuals encountered a threat towards their environmental values, they were more likely to post a positive comment on an online blog that supported their environmental values.

As social conflicts can elicit threat, it has been suggested that observing such conflicts can pressure bystanders to support one side or the other, and such bystanders often choose to support the party that shares their social or moral values (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013; DeScioli 2016). Furthermore, prior evidence suggests that threats can encourage individuals to affiliate with others who face the same threat or share similar values as them, as well as causing them to specifically seek secure social attachments (Jonas et al. 2014, p. 249).

Self-brand connection was the primary means by which we assessed whether consumers might indicate they side with the brand when their common social values are threatened by morality-based outgroup outrage. As mentioned, self-brand connection tends to be fostered when brands share the same values as consumers (Ashworth et al., 2009; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, Macinnis & Folkes, 2017). Alternatively, self-brand connection tends to be weakened when brands become associated with groups that individuals wish to dissociate from (White & Dahl, 2007), especially when those groups have conflicting social values (Schwartz et al., 1990; Schwartz & Struch, 1989; Wolf, Weinstein & Maio, 2019). In the current context, this theorizing suggests that outrage towards a brand's social value messaging might encourage consumers who share those values to seek greater affiliation and attachment with the brand involved. In other words, consumers should stand by their beliefs by standing by the attacked brand.

Overall, the above theorizing suggested the following formal predictions:

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Outgroup outrage towards a brand's social messaging will have positive effects by increasing consumer feelings of self-brand connection and purchase intention in support of the brand when consumers share the brand's social messaging values but not otherwise.
  
- H<sub>2a</sub>:** Outrage is more likely to have positive brand effects when expressed by a morality-based outgroup rather than an ingroup member.

- H<sub>2b</sub>:** Outrage is more likely to have positive brand effects when expressed by a morality-based outgroup rather than a nonmorality-based outgroup.
- H<sub>3</sub>:** The effects of morality-based outgroup outrage on self-brand connection and purchase intention will be mediated by perceptions of social threat.

### **The Role of Social Support for Online Outrage**

Social media platforms have the potential to amplify the expressions of outrage through social feedback (Puryear, 2020). This social feedback indicates approval and support for the outrage (Sawaoka & Monin, 2018). As mentioned, outrage can serve to moralize an issue and elicit support from observers who share similar values (Niedenthal & Brauer, 2011; Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011). Additionally, individuals are motivated to form consensus support for social values and feel threatened when encountering moral conflicts that challenge their values (Bender et al., 2016; D'Amore et al., 2021; Frimer et al., 2017; Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013).

In the digital age, quantifiable feedback in response to other's outrage (e.g., likes, shares, retweets), provides consensus cues as to whether these sentiments are supported by others (Brady et al., 2020). These consensus cues can influence how individuals respond to offensive content stemming from outgroup members (Puryear, 2020). When there is a high degree of social support for outgroup outrage, this can elicit increased feelings of threat for an individual. However, when this outrage has low social support from other outgroup members, then the degree of threat should be minimized. If this theorizing is correct, then the predicted effect should be exacerbated when the outrage goes viral and gains support relative to expressions that gain little to no traction. This is important because it shows not only how the virality of outrage influences self-brand connection, but it also supports our conceptual model. Based on this, we



propose that perceptions of social support from morality-based outgroup members moderate the effects of outgroup member's outrage on self-brand connection. Stated formally,

**H4:** Viral support for outgroup outrage towards a brand's social messaging should moderate consumer reactions, such that higher viral support for the outrage leads to more positive brand responses, and lower viral support minimizes its effects on the brand.

### **Overview of Studies**

Five studies tested our hypotheses using a variety of contexts that were based on real examples of outrage in response to social marketing messages, as well as a variety of morality-based outgroups. The results were generally supportive. In brief, Study 1 showed that self-brand connection increased when a morality-based outgroup (i.e., White supremacists) expressed outrage towards a brand's social messaging, and showed that positive self-brand connections primarily occurred among consumers who shared the brand's values. This was shown to be mediated by perceived social threat. Study 2 compared the effects of outrage expressed by either an ingroup or a morality-based outgroup (Republicans versus Democrats) towards a brand's message relating to gun regulations and showed that the positive effects on self-brand connection and purchase intentions were observed only when outrage was expressed by a morality-based outgroup. Study 3 examined the effects of outrage from a morality-based outgroup versus a nonmorality-based outgroup expressed towards a brand's social message relating to diversity and showed that the positive effects on self-brand connection were observed only when the outrage was expressed by a morality-based outgroup. Study 4 further examined the mediating role of perceived social threat and demonstrated that enhanced feelings of threat following outgroup outrage can result in a carry-over effect towards other brands who express support towards the same threatened value. Thus, providing support for the notion that the positive effect of outrage on self-brand connection is a value-protective response. Finally, Study 5 manipulated the viral

support received by a tweet from a morality-based outgroup expressing outrage towards a brand that supported the anti-racism protests of 2020, and showed that lower viral support for the expressed outrage reduced perceptions of social threat, thereby minimizing the impact of outgroup outrage on self-brand connection.

### **Study 1**

Study 1 provides an initial test of our theorizing that outgroup outrage increases self-brand connection amongst consumers who share the brand's values (**H<sub>1</sub>**) and that this effect is mediated by perceptions of social threat (**H<sub>3</sub>**). We tested these predictions by presenting participants a tweet from a fictitious clothing brand celebrating International Migrants Day and presented a response tweet from a morality-based outgroup (i.e., white supremacists) that varied in terms of whether or not they expressed outrage, while controlling for the overall level of disapproval towards the brand's values. This was based on real scenarios of brands expressing support for immigration and facing backlash (Gelles, 2016). A measure of political affiliation was used to operationalize the degree of value alignment based on prior research (Munro, Weih & Tsai, 2010; Newheiser & Dovidio, 2015). Specifically, liberal versus conservative beliefs were assessed with the idea that morality-based outgroup outrage expressed towards the brand's values were more likely to increase self-brand connection among consumers who held liberal beliefs than those who held more conservative beliefs. That is, outgroup outrage towards the brand's values should be particularly likely to increase self-brand connection among consumers whose values were more closely aligned with the brand's.

#### **Participants and procedure**

A total of 320 participants were recruited through TurkPrime (40.9% Female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.02$ ,  $SD = 11.21$ ) and randomly assigned to one of two conditions: an outgroup outrage

condition or an outgroup control condition. The target brand was a fictitious clothing brand and participants were presented a twitter message from this brand celebrating World Migrants Day and a commitment to donate 20 percent of sales to a non-profit organization that provided humanitarian aid to immigrants (Appendix A). A pretest ( $N = 93$ ) showed that political beliefs predicted value alignment with the brand's message and overall attitude towards immigration ( $p$ 's  $< 0.01$ ). These results were consistent with data from Pew Research on immigration attitudes, suggesting that Democrat leaning individuals have a more positive attitude towards immigration compared to Republican leaning individuals (Pew, 2019). Thus, political beliefs were used to examine the role of value alignment in determining any changes to self-brand connection as a result of expressed outgroup outrage.

The morality-based outgroup in this study was White Supremacists. This morality-based outgroup was operationalized on the basis of polls suggesting that 83% of Americans disapprove of White Supremacists (Clement & Nakumura, 2017), as well as our own pretests suggesting that both Democrats and Republicans morally opposed this group (see MDA). For the outrage manipulation, we presented participants a tweet that negatively responded to the brand's message from a twitter user named "WhitePride26" which included outrage or not (Appendix A). Based on pretests (see MDA), outrage was manipulated by incorporating capitalized words such as "OUTRAGEOUS" and including exclamation marks (e.g., "Why do companies constantly push these INFURIATING AGENDAS on us??!" versus "Why do these companies constantly push these agendas on us?"). Pretesting showed the outrage and control tweets differed significantly in terms of perceptions of outrage ( $p = .002$ ) but were equally disapproving ( $p = .65$ ).

After viewing the stimuli, participants indicated their feelings of self-brand connection to the brand (7-items,  $\alpha = .98$ ; Escalas & Bettman, 2003) and perceptions of social threat ("This

tweet seems to reject moral values that are important to me”; “This tweet threatens to harm our society”; “This tweet makes our society more dangerous for ordinary people”; 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree, adapted from Duckkit, 2006;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

Next participants indicated the degree to which they perceived the Twitter user to be outraged (“This twitter user was: Outraged, Angry, Infuriated” 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree;  $\alpha = .97$ ) and their political beliefs (How would you identify your political affiliation?” 1 = Very Liberal and 7 = Very Conservative), as well as a series of demographic items.<sup>1</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** The outgroup outrage manipulation influenced perceptions of outrage as expected. Participants who viewed the outrage tweet found the user to be more outraged ( $M = 6.09$ ) compared to when participants viewed the control tweet ( $M = 4.40$ ),  $F(1,319) = 227.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ .

**Self-Brand Connection.** . A simultaneous regression analysis (Hayes, 2017, Model 1) was conducted to test the relationship between outrage (effects coded), political value (continuous) and their interaction on self-brand connection. This analysis revealed a significant main effect of outrage on self-brand connection ( $\beta = .79, t = 3.45, p = .006$ ). There was no significant main effect of existing political values on self-brand connection ( $\beta = -.54, t = -9.54, p < .001$ ). Most importantly, the outrage x values interaction was significant ( $\beta = -.16, t = -2.9, p = .0039$ ). As predicted, spotlight analyses indicated that outrage significantly increased self-brand connection when participants indicated liberal beliefs (-1 SD below the means;  $M = 2.00; \beta = .46, t = 3.43, p = .0007$ ), but not for those with more conservative beliefs (+1 SD above the

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<sup>1</sup> There were no outliers ( $SD > 3$ ) in this study for focal measures.

mean;  $M = 6.00$ ;  $\beta = -.20$ ,  $t = -1.22$ ,  $p = .23$ ). Overall, these results suggest that outgroup outrage increased self-brand connection when participants' values aligned with the brand's social message but not otherwise (**H<sub>1</sub>**).

**Social Threat.** A regression analysis (Hayes, 2017, Model 1) showed a significant main effect of outrage on perceptions of social threat posed by the twitter response ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $t = 2.47$ ,  $p = .014$ ), and a significant main effect of existing political values ( $\beta = -.70$ ,  $t = -12.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Regardless, the predicted outrage x values interaction was significant ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.35$ ,  $p = .019$ ). Spotlight analyses revealed that outrage significantly increased social threat when participants indicated liberal beliefs (-1 SD below the means;  $M = 2.00$ ;  $\beta = .31$ ,  $t = 2.23$ ,  $p = .026$ ), but not for those with more conservative beliefs (+1 SD above the mean;  $M = 6.00$ ;  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $t = -1.42$ ,  $p = .16$ ). Thus, suggesting that outrage was perceived as more threatening amongst participants whose values aligned with the brand's message, but not amongst those with alternate values.

We conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Hayes 2017, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) to determine whether perceptions of increased social threat could account for the observed increase in self-brand connection for those exposed to outgroup outrage. The results revealed a significant index of mediated moderation ( $p < .05$ ). There was also a significant conditional indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via perceptions of social threat when participants indicated liberal beliefs ( $\beta = .13$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.032, .23]$ ), but not for those with more conservative beliefs ( $\beta = -.095$ ;  $CI_{95} = [-.24, .047]$ ). Thus, supporting **H<sub>3</sub>**.

## Discussion

Study 1 supports our theorizing that outgroup outrage expressed towards a brand can enhance self-brand connections compared to when the brand does not face such outrage.

Specifically, when consumers' social values are aligned with the social message portrayed by the brand. Additionally, mediational evidence suggested this was because morality-based outgroup outrage was more threatening than disapproval without outrage, which caused observing-consumers to side with the brand by increasing self-brand connection.

## Study 2

Study 2 used a sample of Republicans and directly manipulated whether a Twitter response was attributed to the ingroup Republican Party or the outgroup Democratic Party in order to test the prediction it was specifically morality-based outgroup outrage that led to increased self-brand connection (**H<sub>2a</sub>**). This study also examined purchase intentions to identify the downstream implications of outgroup outrage and self-brand connection.

### Participants and Procedure

A total of 268 respondents recruited through TurkPrime participated in the study (35.8% female;  $M_{age} = 37.95$  years,  $SD = 11.05$ ). Screening was used to ensure all participants were Republicans (see MDA). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (outrage vs. control) x 2 (tweet reference group: morality-based outgroup vs. ingroup) between subjects factorial design.

The target brand was a sporting apparel retailer that had no presence in the United States. The central brand tweet was based on recent debates as to whether sports retailers should regulate firearm sales (Siegel, 2019). This debate has resulted in some brands facing backlash for imposing regulations and others for refusing to impose regulations (Ciment, 2019). Republicans are generally more likely to oppose gun control and more committed to the second amendment (i.e., Right to Bear Arms) than Democrats (Parker et al., 2017; Ramussen Reports, 2019). This was further confirmed through our own pretests (see MDA). Consistent with our theorizing, we

reasoned that Republican participants would be more likely to increase self-brand connection when a morality-based outgroup (Democrats) expressed outrage towards a brand that explicitly chose not to impose gun regulations than when an ingroup (Republicans) did so.

Participants were presented a fictitious news article about an unfamiliar sporting goods retailer that refused to stop selling firearms despite pressure from advocacy groups (Appendix B). Following this, participants were randomly assigned to view a fictitious tweet that responded negatively to this brand's decision, which either included outrage or not. This tweet was attributed to a user named "Democrat for Gun Control" versus "Republican for Gun Control". Based on pretests (see MDA), outrage was manipulated by incorporating exclamation marks and capitalized words (e.g., "REAL gun control!!!"). Additionally, there was a call to "repeal and replace the second amendment" in both the outrage and control conditions (Appendix B). Pretesting showed the outrage and control tweets differed significantly in terms of perceptions of outrage ( $p = .008$ ) but were equally disapproving ( $p = .67$ ).

After viewing the stimuli, participants indicated their purchase intentions ("I would shop at this retailer", "I would visit this retailer"; 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree;  $\alpha = .83$ ), self-brand connection using the same Escalas and Bettman (2003) scale ( $\alpha = .95$ ), and perceptions of social threat ( $\alpha = .83$ ; Duckkit, 2006). Participants then indicated the degree to which they perceived the Twitter user to be outraged ( $\alpha = .83$ ), their desire to dissociate from outgroup Democrats ( $\alpha = .83^2$ ; White & Dahl, 2007), and their desire to associate with ingroup Republicans ("I strongly identify with them"; "I want to be associated with them"; 1 = Strongly

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<sup>2</sup> The reverse scored items ("I strongly identify with them") was removed due to a poor item-total correlation (-.21). However, the results were consistent when this item was included.

Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree;  $\alpha = .75$ ). Finally, participants responded to a series of demographic items including their political affiliation.<sup>3</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** A two-way ANOVA on perceptions of outrage as a function of the outrage manipulation and reference group confirmed the expected main effect of outrage ( $M_{outrage} = 5.58$  vs.  $M_{control} = 4.94$ ,  $F(1, 266) = 14.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .051$ ). The reference group ( $p = .14$ ) and interaction effects were not significant ( $p = .62$ ). We also confirmed that our Republican sample viewed the Democrat outgroup source as dissociative and the Republican ingroup source as associative. Specifically, participants' ratings of desire to dissociate from Democrats was significantly above the scale midpoint ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $t(263) = 16.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as were their ratings of desire to associate with Republicans ( $M = 5.57$ ,  $t(262) = 24.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Self-brand connection.** A two-way ANOVA on self-brand connection showed only a significant outrage x reference-group interaction ( $F(1,261) = 4.05$ ,  $p = .045$ ;  $\eta^2 = .016$ ). The outrage ( $M_{control} = 4.95$ ,  $M_{outrage} = 5.21$ ,  $F(1, 261) = 2.40$ ,  $p = .12$ ;  $\eta^2 = .009$ ) and reference group main effects ( $M_{republican} = 5.00$ ,  $M_{democrat} = 5.16$ ,  $F(1, 261) = .77$ ,  $p = .38$ ;  $\eta^2 = .003$ ) were both nonsignificant. Pairwise comparisons further examining the interaction revealed that self-brand connection was higher when the outgroup Democrat source expressed outrage versus no outrage ( $M_s = 5.46$  vs.  $4.85$ ,  $p = .012$ ); whereas outrage had no impact for the ingroup Republican source ( $M_s = 4.96$  vs.  $5.04$ ,  $p = .74$ ). These analyses suggest, as expected, that it was outgroup outrage in particular that increased self-brand connection, and not outrage directed towards the brand's position on the issue by an ingroup source (**H<sub>2a</sub>**).

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<sup>3</sup> There were no outliers found ( $SD > 3$ ) across all focal measures.



**Perception of social threat.** The ANOVA on perceptions of social threat revealed main effects of reference group ( $M_{\text{republican}} = 4.89$ ,  $M_{\text{democrat}} = 5.30$ ,  $F(1, 266) = 5.82$ ,  $p = .017$ ;  $\eta^2 = .022$ ) and outrage ( $M_{\text{control}} = 4.90$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 5.30$ ;  $F(1, 266) = 4.92$ ,  $p = .027$ ;  $\eta^2 = .018$ ). However, these were further qualified by a significant outrage x reference-group interaction,  $F(1, 266) = 4.65$ ,  $p = .032$ ;  $\eta^2 = .017$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that perceived threat was higher when the outgroup expressed outrage ( $M = 5.65$ ) rather than no outrage ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $p = .002$ ); whereas outrage had no significant impact on threat perceptions when expressed by the ingroup source ( $M_s = 4.89$  vs.  $4.88$ ,  $p = .97$ ). Overall, these results indicate that outrage was only threatening when it was expressed by an outgroup source, whereas the same outrage did not threaten participants when it came from an ingroup source.

We conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Hayes 2018, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) to determine whether perceptions of increased social threat could account for the observed increase in self-brand connection for those exposed to outgroup outrage. The results revealed a significant index of mediated moderation ( $p < .05$ ). There was also a significant conditional indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via perceptions of social threat when the tweet stemmed from an outgroup source ( $\beta = .47$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.15, .81]$ ), but not when the tweet stemmed from an ingroup source ( $\beta = -.01$ ;  $CI_{95} = [-.34, .29]$ ).

**Purchase intention.** The ANOVA for purchase intentions revealed only a significant interaction ( $F(1, 264) = 7.23$ ,  $p = .008$ ;  $\eta^2 = .027$ ). The outrage ( $p = .18$ ) and reference group main effects were not significant ( $p = .53$ ). Pairwise comparisons revealed that purchase intentions were higher when an outgroup source expressed outrage ( $M = 5.91$ ) than when no outrage was expressed ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $p = .005$ ). In comparison, whether or not an ingroup source expressed outrage had no significant impact on purchase intentions ( $M_s = 5.39$  vs.  $5.60$ ,  $p = .34$ ).

We conducted a moderated serial mediation analysis to test whether the effect of outgroup outrage on purchase intention was mediated by social threat and increased self-brand connection (Hayes 2017, Model 85; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws). The results again revealed a significant index of mediated moderation ( $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant conditional indirect effect of outrage on purchase intention via perceptions of social threat and self-brand connection when the outrage stemmed from an outgroup source ( $\beta = .23$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.06, .42]$ ), but not for the ingroup source ( $\beta = -.02$ ;  $CI_{95} = [-.17, .16]$ ).

## Discussion

This study replicated the finding that outgroup outrage towards a brand's social messaging increased self-brand connections compared to an equally negative reaction devoid of outrage. However, the same was not true for outrage expressed by the ingroup source. Thus, providing support for **H2a**. Mediation evidence suggested this was because outgroup outrage was more threatening than ingroup outrage, which caused outgroup consumers to side with the brand by increasing self-brand connection and purchase intentions.

## Study 3

Study 3 tested the prediction that outrage is more likely to increase self-brand connection when expressed by a morality-based outgroup than a non-morality based outgroup (**H2b**). A second objective was to replicate the results of Study 1 and 2 using a different (student) sample, context (brand message supporting diversity initiatives), and value-based outgroup (i.e., Trump Supporters). Similar to prior research, the non-value based outgroup in this study comprised supporters of a rival sports team (Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013). Finally, this study also delineated the effect of outrage on perceptions of threat towards consumers' values (i.e., social

threat) compared to other threats (i.e., brand threat and personal threat), to demonstrate that this effect is mainly being driven by the former.

### **Participants and procedure**

A total of 207 undergraduate students from a North American university participated in the study for course credit (68.6% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.99$ ,  $SD = 5.09$ ). Participants recruited for the study indicated a neutral to strong commitment to diversity initiatives (i.e., 4 or higher on a 7 point scale) in a pre-screen item that was asked several months prior to the study. We used all available participants to maximize power. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (outrage vs. control) x 2 (reference group: morality-based outgroup vs. non-morality-based outgroup) between subjects factorial design. Based on a pretest conducted with other students, Trump Supporters were considered a highly morally opposed outgroup among this population and supporters of the Chicago Bulls (a rival basketball team) were viewed as a nonmorality-based outgroup (see MDA).

Participants were presented a tweet from a fictitious clothing brand that communicated their commitment towards diversity and inclusivity (Appendix C). Following this, participants were randomly assigned to view a tweet that responded negatively to this brand's decision, which either included outrage or not. This tweet was attributed to a user named "TrumpIsMyPresident98" versus "ChicagoBullsFan98". Furthermore, the display pictures either included an image stating "Trump Is My President" versus the Chicago Bulls logo. Based on pretests (see MDA), outrage was manipulated by incorporating exclamation marks and capitalized words (e.g., "DIVERSITY AGENDA!!!", Appendix C). Pretesting showed the outrage and control tweets differed significantly in terms of perceptions of outrage ( $p < .001$ ) but were equally disapproving ( $p = .14$ ).

After viewing the stimuli, participants indicated their self-brand connection ( $\alpha = .96$ ; Escalas and Bettman, 2003), perceptions of social threat ( $\alpha = .85$ ; Duckkit, 2006), threat towards diversity values (3 items, “To what extent do you believe that the response tweet: attacked, threatened, rejected, values surrounding diversity”, 1 = Not at all and 7 = Very much so,  $\alpha = .93$ ), threat to the brand (“To what extent do you believe that the response tweet: attacked, threatened, rejected, the brand”  $\alpha = .80$ ), feelings of personal threat (“To what extent did the twitter response make you feel: Not at all afraid/Very afraid, Not at all threatened/Very threatened, Not at all scared/Very scared, Not at all nervous/Very nervous, Not all anxious/Very anxious, Bipolar 7-point scale,  $\alpha = .96$ ).

Participants then indicated the degree to which they perceived the twitter user to be outraged ( $\alpha = .94$ ), their moral opposition towards the reference group (“Trump Supporters / Chicago Bulls Supporters as a group hold values that conflict with that of my own”, “Trump Supporters / Chicago Bulls Supporters as a group hold values that are dangerous to society”, “I oppose the values that Trump Supporters / Chicago Bulls Supporters stand for”, 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree;  $\alpha = .95$ ) and desire to dissociate from the reference groups ( $\alpha = .87$ , White & Dahl, 2007).<sup>4</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** A two-way ANOVA on perceptions of outrage as a function of the outrage manipulation and reference group confirmed the expected main effect of outrage ( $M_{outrage} = 5.83$  vs.  $M_{control} = 3.98$ ,  $F(1, 203) = 92.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .31$ ). The reference group ( $p = .83$ ) and interaction effects were not significant ( $p = .29$ ). We also confirmed that our student sample viewed Trump Supporters as a morality-based outgroup ( $M_{Trump} = 5.74$  vs.  $M_{Bulls} = 3.29$ ,

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<sup>4</sup> There were no outliers found in this study.

$F(1, 203) = 120.95, p < .001; \eta^2 = .37$ ). The outrage ( $p = .31$ ) and interaction effects ( $p = .21$ ) on moral opposition towards the outgroups were not significant. Lastly, the findings suggested that while participants had a greater motivation to dissociate from Trump Supporters compared to Chicago Bulls Supporters ( $M_{Trump} = 6.4$  vs.  $M_{Bulls} = 4.7, F(1, 203) = 72.73, p < .001; \eta^2 = .26$ ), the desire to dissociate from Bull Supporters was significantly above the scale midpoint,  $t(103) = 5.02, p < .001$ . Furthermore, moral opposition towards Chicago Bulls supporters were significantly below the scale midpoint,  $t(103) = -4.32, p < .001$ , thus confirming that participants viewed Bulls Supporters as a dissociative outgroup that was not rooted in opposing moral values (i.e., non-morality-based outgroup).

**Self-brand connection.** A two-way ANOVA on self-brand connection showed only a significant outrage x reference-group interaction ( $F(1,200) = 11.52, p = .001; \eta^2 = .054$ ). The outrage ( $p = .31$ ) and reference group main effects ( $p = .49$ ) were both nonsignificant. Pairwise comparisons further examining the interaction revealed that self-brand connection was higher when the Trump Supporter source expressed outrage versus no outrage ( $M_{outrage} = 4.31$  vs.  $M_{control} = 3.33, p = .002$ ); whereas outrage from the Bulls Supporter source trended in the opposite direction and did not significantly increase self-brand connection ( $M_{outrage} = 3.33$  vs.  $M_{control} = 3.90, p = .094$ ). These analyses provide evidence that outrage expressed by a morality-based outgroup increases self-brand connection, but not outrage expressed by a non-morality-based outgroup (**H2b**).

**Perception of social threat.** The ANOVA on perceptions of social threat revealed main effects of reference-group ( $M_{Trump} = 4.74, M_{Bulls} = 4.33, F(1, 201) = 3.90, p = .05; \eta^2 = .019$ ) and outrage ( $M_{control} = 4.00, M_{outrage} = 5.12; F(1, 201) = 28.02, p < .001; \eta^2 = .12$ ). However, these were further qualified by a significant outrage x reference-group interaction,  $F(1, 201) = 5.15, p =$

.024;  $\eta^2 = .025$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that perceived threat was higher when the morality-based outgroup expressed outrage ( $M = 5.59$ ) rather than no outrage ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, outrage also had a significant impact on threat perceptions when expressed by the non-morality-based outgroup source ( $M_s = 4.66$  vs.  $4.00$ ,  $p = .033$ ). Overall, these results indicate that outrage was threatening when it was expressed by both moral and non-moral outgroups.

We conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Hayes 2018, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) to determine whether perceptions of increased social threat could account for the observed increase in self-brand connection for those exposed to outgroup outrage. The results revealed a significant index of mediated moderation ( $p < .05$ ). There was also a significant conditional indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via perceptions of social threat when the tweet stemmed from a morality-based outgroup source ( $\beta = .83$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.49, 1.25]$ ) and when the tweet stemmed from a non-morality-based outgroup source ( $\beta = .33$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.0073, .65]$ ). Furthermore, we conducted a pairwise contrast between these two indirect effects and found that the indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via social threat was significantly larger when the tweet stemmed from the morality-based outgroup compared to the nonmorality-based outgroup ( $\beta = .50$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.076, 1.03]$ ).

**Diversity Value Threat.** The ANOVA on perceptions of threat towards diversity-based values revealed main effect of outrage ( $M_{\text{control}} = 4.35$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 5.65$ ;  $F(1, 203) = 29.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .13$ ) and a marginal reference group effect ( $M_{\text{Trump}} = 5.21$ ,  $M_{\text{Bulls}} = 4.79$ ,  $F(1, 203) = 3.19$ ,  $p = .075$ ;  $\eta^2 = .015$ ). However, these were further qualified by a significant outrage x reference-group interaction,  $F(1, 203) = 9.43$ ,  $p = .002$ ;  $\eta^2 = .044$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that perceived threat towards diversity values was higher when the morality-based outgroup

expressed outrage ( $M = 6.23$ ) rather than no outrage ( $M = 4.20, p < .001$ ), whereas the effect of outrage on diversity threat perceptions was only marginally significant when expressed by the non-morality-based outgroup source ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 5.01$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.51, p = .095$ ). Overall, these results indicate that outrage was threatening when it was expressed by a morality-based outgroup source, whereas the same outrage did not threaten participants to the same degree when it stemmed from a non-morality based outgroup source.

We conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Hayes 2018, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) to determine whether perceptions of increased threat towards diversity values could account for the observed increase in self-brand connection for those exposed to morality-based outgroup outrage. The results revealed a significant index of mediated moderation ( $p < .05$ ). There was also a significant conditional indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via perceptions of diversity-value threat when the tweet stemmed from a morality-based outgroup source ( $\beta = .74$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.42, 1.10]$ ), but not when the tweet stemmed from a non-morality-based outgroup source ( $\beta = .21$ ;  $CI_{95} = [-.05, .49]$ ).

**Brand Threat.** The ANOVA on perceptions of threat towards diversity-based values revealed main effects of outrage ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.95, M_{\text{outrage}} = 4.96$ ;  $F(1, 196) = 22.24, p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .10$ ). The reference group effect ( $p = .36$ ) and interaction effect ( $p = .29$ ) were not significant. Furthermore, the indirect effects of morality-based outgroup outrage on self-brand connection via social threat and diversity-value threat were consistent when controlling for brand threat. This implies that it was threat towards values related to diversity that increased self-brand connection and not perceived threat towards the brand.

**Personal Threat.** The ANOVA on perceptions of threat towards diversity-based values revealed a main effect of outrage ( $M_{\text{control}} = 2.32, M_{\text{outrage}} = 3.10$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 11.56, p = .001$ ;  $\eta^2 =$

.054). The reference group effect ( $p = .82$ ) and interaction effect ( $p = .80$ ) were not significant. Furthermore, the indirect effects of morality-based outgroup outrage on self-brand connection via social threat and diversity-value threat were consistent when controlling for person threat. This implies that the threat towards consumers' values was driving the effect of morality-based outgroup outrage on self-brand connection and not a broader personal threat.

## **Discussion**

This study replicated the finding that morality-based outgroup outrage towards a brand's social messaging increased self-brand connections compared to an equally negative reaction devoid of outrage. However, the same was not true for outrage expressed by a non-morality based outgroup source. Moreover, mediational evidence suggested this was because morality-based outgroup outrage was more threatening towards the social value than non-morality-based outgroup outrage, which caused consumers to side with the brand by increasing self-brand connection.

## **Study 4**

The aim of study 4 was to provide further support for our theorization that social threat is the underlying mechanism between the effect of morality-based outgroup outrage on self-brand connection. Specifically, our theorizing suggests that increased self-brand connection in response to outrage towards a brand's social message is a value-protective response. Prior research suggests that when individuals feel that their values are threatened they will engage in responses to protect these values (Tetlock et al., 2000). Thus, expressing greater affiliation towards a brand that is attacked for its social value message constitutes a value-protective response. However, based on prior theorizing (Branscombe et al., 1999; Jonas et al., 2014), we further predicted that when consumers encounter outgroup outrage directed towards the social message of one brand,



they might even express greater self-brand connection to other brands who share the same values. This is because, according to our theorizing, it is the social values that are threatened by outrage that observers seek to protect, suggesting that the same value-protective goal can be served by supporting another brand that shares the same attacked social values despite that brand not being the direct target of the expressed outrage. Therefore, an aim of study 4 was to test this prediction and further support our theories. Lastly, we wanted to examine whether the outgroup outrage effect on self-brand connection would lead to behavioral outcomes. Specifically, we gave participants the option to choose between a gift-card from a brand that shared similar values as them or a gift-card from a more popular retailer.

### **Participants and procedure**

A total of 254 undergraduate students from a North American university participated in the study for course credit (77.5% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.60$ ,  $SD = 2.95$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: a morality-based outgroup outrage condition or a morality-based outgroup control condition, in a one-factor between-subjects design. Participants recruited for the study indicated a neutral to strong commitment to diversity initiatives (i.e., 4 or higher on a 7 point scale). Participants were told that the study consisted of two sections and at the end of the study they would have an opportunity to enter a lottery for a \$100 gift card. They were then assigned to one of two conditions: an outgroup outrage condition or an outgroup control condition. The target of the outgroup outrage disapproval was a real brand (Champs Sports). The message of the tweet was the same as Study 3 (i.e., commitment to diversity and inclusivity). Also, the outrage manipulation and the morality-based outgroup were the same as in Study 3. Participants were then asked to describe their thoughts about the materials and presented a series of items to ensure they had read the contents of the tweets. Following this, they were presented

the second section of the study, which asked them to read a fictitious press-release from a second brand (Designer Shoe Warehouse) announcing their decision to donate twenty-million dollars to organizations dedicated to diversity and inclusion (Appendix D). Participants were then asked to provide their thoughts and answer a series of items to ensure they read the press-release.

Following this, participants indicated their feelings of self-brand connection to the second brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2003;  $\alpha = .96$ ) and perceptions of social threat (Duckkit, 2006;  $\alpha = .86$ ) and value threat ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Next participants indicated the degree to which they perceived the Twitter user to be outraged ( $\alpha = .94$ ), and responded to a series of attention check items to ensure they recalled the two brands (i.e., target of negative responses and the press-release brand). Following, this they indicated whether they had prior experiences with the two focal brands and responded to a series of demographic items. Lastly, they were asked to select whether they wanted to receive a \$100 gift-card from the press-release brand (Designer Shoe Warehouse) or from another retailer (i.e., Aldo Shoes). Based on a pretest conducted with other students, Aldo Shoes was viewed to be a more favorable brand compared to the press-release brand (See MDA).

## Results

**Initial analyses.** The outgroup outrage manipulation influenced perceptions of outrage as expected. Participants who viewed the outrage tweet found the user to be more outraged ( $M = 5.90$ ) compared to when participants viewed the control tweet ( $M = 4.29$ ),  $F(1,247) = 69.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .22$ . Additionally, 90.1% of the sample correctly recalled the initial brand that was attacked for their social message (i.e., Champs Sports) and 89.8% of the sample correctly

recalled the second brand presented to them in the press-release (i.e., Designer Shoe Warehouse). The results were consistent when excluding participants who failed this attention check.<sup>5</sup>

**Self-Brand Connection.** An ANOVA for self-brand connection with the second brand was higher when participants viewed the outrage tweet ( $M = 3.51$ ) compared to the control tweet ( $M = 3.13$ ;  $F(1,244) = 3.34$ ,  $p = .069$ ,  $\eta^2 = .014$ ). Also, while 30% of the sample had past experiences shopping at Designer Shoe Warehouse, the results were consistent when controlling for these factors. Additionally, the interaction effect of outrage and purchase experience was not significant ( $p = .10$ ).

**Perceptions of Social Threat.** An ANOVA for the outrage factor revealed that perceptions of social threat were higher for participants who viewed the outrage tweet ( $M = 5.11$ ) compared to the control tweet ( $M = 4.43$ ),  $F(1, 248) = 11.39$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .044$ . Mediation analyses (Hayes 2017, Model 4, bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) revealed that there was a significant indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via perceptions of social threat ( $\beta = .20$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.059, .38]$ ).

**Gift Card Selection.** A higher percentage of participants who viewed the outrage tweet selected the press release brand (Designer Shoe Warehouse) as their preferred gift card (53.8%) compared to those who viewed the control tweet (46.2%;  $\chi^2(1, N = 237) = 3.56$ ,  $p = .059$ ). Mediation analyses (Hayes 2017, Model 4, bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) revealed that there was a significant indirect effect of outrage on gift-card preference via perceptions of social threat ( $\beta = .16$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.032, .35]$ ).

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<sup>5</sup> There were no outliers found in this study.

## Discussion

Study 4 provides additional support for our framework by demonstrating that the increased feelings of threat towards consumers' personal values as a result of outgroup outrage can lead to increased self-brand connection for other brands that share similar values. Specifically, this increased self-brand connection can occur even for brands that are not the direct target of the outrage. This further suggests that increased self-brand identification is a value-protective response. Furthermore, this study provides evidence that increased perceptions of social threat can have behavioral consequences (i.e., preference for gift-card from a value affirming brand).

### Study 5

Study 5 provides further evidence for the social threat mechanism by varying the level of perceived threat using indications of viral support for the outrage expressed by the morality-based outgroup. That is, Study 5 tested whether viral support would moderate the effect outgroup outrage had on perceptions of threat and self-brand connection (**H4**). Prior research suggests that social media messages that express outrage tend to diffuse more rapidly (i.e., go viral) than messages devoid of outrage (Brady et al., 2017). Thus, our theorizing predicted that the relationship between outgroup outrage and perceived social threat should also depend on the apparent level of viral support for the expressed outrage. Tweets typically receive viral support through retweets, likes and comments (Pancer & Poole, 2016). Our previous studies all included indications of "likes" along with the outgroup tweet, mainly for purposes of realism. These "likes" largely indicated moderate levels of viral support for the tweets involved. In contrast, the current study manipulated the level of viral support for the outgroup tweet in order to test

whether lower levels of support would minimize the perceived threat of outgroup outrage, and thereby attenuate any subsequent effects on self-brand connection.

### **Participants and Procedure**

A total of 205 undergraduate psychology students from a North American university participated in the study for course credit (82.4% female;  $M_{age} = 22.22$ ,  $SD = 6.05$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (outrage: anger vs. control) x 2 (social support: high vs. low) between subjects factorial design. As in Study 4, Trump supporters were used as the morality-based outgroup.

This study was conducted during the anti-racism protests of 2020, during which numerous brands posted messages of solidarity on social media (Ad Age, 2020). We presented participants with a real tweet from the Brooks Running brand (a sports apparel company) that expressed the injustice of racism and the need to speak out against it (Appendix E). Following this, participants viewed a tweet from a user named “Trump Fan,” which was varied in terms of the outrage it expressed. The outrage version of the tweet mirrored comments made by Trump and his supporters during the protests (Nather & Talev, 2020), and further utilized capitalized words and exclamation marks consistent with the outrage messages in our previous studies (“I’m sick of companies playing politics!” and “The destruction of people’s property is also an INJUSTICE!”). In comparison, the outgroup tweet in the control condition was based on a common criticism that did not obviously express outrage (“Seems like another case of a company playing politics”; Bradley, 2020). A pretest ( $N = 52$ ) confirmed that the outrage tweet and control tweet varied in terms of perceived outrage ( $p < .001$ ) but not disapproval ( $p = .57$ ). Finally, the number of likes, comments, and retweets for the outgroup tweet was manipulated to

create a high support condition (4237 likes, 342 comments, and 822 retweets) and a low support condition (0 likes, 1 comment, and 1 retweet; Appendix E).

After viewing the tweet, participants indicated their feelings of self-brand connection to the target brand ( $\alpha = .96$ ), as well as perceptions of social threat ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Participants then indicated the degree to which they perceived the outgroup source to be outraged ( $\alpha = .96$ ), and their own desire to dissociate from “Trump supporters” ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Following this, participants indicated the degree to which they supported the protests (“How much or little do you support the current anti-racism protests?” and “How important are these anti-racism protests to you?”; ( $\alpha = .92$ ). This measure was included to confirm whether the sample was indeed supportive of the protests and thus opposed to the outgroup’s tweet. Participants then indicated the degree to which they felt the outgroup tweet received social support from other Trump supporters as a manipulation check (“This tweet went viral among Trump Supporters.”; “This tweet was supported by other Trump Supporters.”; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree;  $\alpha = .81$ ).<sup>6</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** A two-way ANOVA on the check for perceptions of outrage revealed only a significant main effect of the outrage manipulation ( $F(1, 200) = 51.37, p < .001; \eta^2 = .21$ ), where perceived outrage was higher in the outrage versus control condition ( $M_s = 5.59$  vs. 3.39). The viral support and interaction effects were not significant ( $p_s = .15$  and  $.10$  respectively). The social support check revealed only a main effect of the support manipulation ( $F(1, 203) = 20.46, p < .001; \eta^2 = .093$ ), where perceived support for the outgroup tweet was higher when more likes, comments and retweets were received ( $M_s = 5.53$  vs. 4.54). The outrage main effect and the interaction were not significant ( $p_s = .20$  and  $.45$ , respectively). Together these analyses indicate

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<sup>6</sup> There were no outliers found in this study.

the manipulations were successful. Other measures confirmed the sample was highly supportive of the anti-racism protests, as 91.2% of respondents scored above the scaler midpoint, and 50.2% indicated the maximum level of support. The distribution of responses was strongly negatively skewed ( $M = 6.08$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ,  $Skewness = -1.85$ ).

**Self-brand connection.** A two-way ANOVA on self-brand connection as a function of outrage and viral support revealed only the predicted outrage x viral-support interaction ( $F(1, 203) = 5.78$ ,  $p = .017$ ;  $\eta^2 = .028$ ). The main effects of outrage ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.00$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 3.31$ ,  $F(1, 203) = 4.32$ ,  $p = .124$ ;  $\eta^2 = .012$ ) and support were nonsignificant ( $M_{\text{low}} = 3.08$ ,  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.22$ ,  $F(1, 203) = .63$ ,  $p = .43$ ;  $\eta^2 = .003$ ). Additional pairwise comparisons revealed that, when viral support for the tweet was high, self-brand connection was stronger if the outgroup expressed outrage ( $M = 3.63$ ) rather than no outrage ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $p = .028$ ). In contrast, there was no significant effect of outrage when viral support for the tweet was lower ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.15$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 2.98$ ,  $p = .244$ ).

**Perceptions of social threat.** The ANOVA for this measure revealed a significant main effect of outrage ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.80$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 4.34$ ,  $F(1, 203) = 5.20$ ,  $p = .024$ ;  $\eta^2 = .025$ ), which was qualified by a significant outrage x viral support interaction ( $F(1, 203) = 4.47$ ,  $p = .036$ ;  $\eta^2 = .022$ ). The viral support main effect was not significant ( $M_{\text{low}} = 3.99$ ,  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.11$ ,  $F(1, 203) = .31$ ,  $p = .58$ ;  $\eta^2 = .002$ ). Additional pairwise comparisons for the interaction revealed that a tweet expressing outrage was more threatening than a tweet that did not express outrage, but only when it was highly supported ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.61$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 4.64$ ,  $p = .002$ ), not when it received little viral support ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.97$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 4.00$ ,  $p = .91$ ).

A mediated moderation analysis (Hayes 2017, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws) was computed to test whether perceived threat could account for the interactive effects of

outgroup outrage and viral support on self-brand connections. The results revealed a significant index of mediated moderation ( $p < .05$ ). There was also a significant conditional indirect effect of outrage on self-brand connection via perceptions of social threat when viral support for the tweet was high ( $\beta = .19$ ;  $CI_{95} = [.04, .40]$ ), whereas the conditional indirect effect was non-significant when viral support was low ( $\beta = .007$ ;  $CI_{95} = [-.13, .14]$ ).

## **Discussion**

Study 5 provides additional support for our framework by demonstrating that perceived viral support moderated the effects of outgroup outrage and social threat on self-brand connections. Specifically, outgroup outrage again led to increased self-brand connection when it received higher levels of viral support, but was perceived as less threatening and had little impact on self-brand connection when there was only a low level of viral support for the outgroup tweet.

### **General Discussion**

This research examined the effects of outgroup outrage expressed towards a brand's social marketing campaign. Contrary to the notion that consumer outrage typically has deleterious consequences for brands (Kähr et al., 2016; Lindenmeier et al., 2012), five studies showed it instead led to enhanced feelings of self-brand connection and increased purchase intentions when expressed by a morality-based outgroup. These positive effects were observed primarily among consumers who shared the brand's values (Study 1), and only when outrage was expressed by a morality-based outgroup member rather than an ingroup member (Study 2) or a non-morality-based outgroup member (Study 3). This enhanced self-brand connection in response to outrage towards a brand's social value message carried over to a brand that expressed support towards the focal social value (Study 4). The observed level of viral support for the outgroup outrage also moderated its effects on self-brand connection. Specifically,



outrage increased self-brand connection when viral support for the outgroup tweet was high, but not when it was low (Study 4). Finally, the effects of outrage, shared values, morality-based outgroup membership, and viral support on self-brand connections were all mediated by perceptions of the social threat involved (Studies 1-5). Overall, these findings are consistent with the idea that morality-based outgroup outrage expressed towards a brand's social messaging can threaten consumers who share those values and lead them to support the brand through closer self-brand connection and increased purchase intentions.

The current research offers a number of theoretical contributions to the literatures on consumer outrage, social values marketing and brand relationships, negative word-of-mouth and self-brand connection. With respect to consumer outrage, previous research has provided important insights as to the antecedents and consequences of consumer outrage on brands (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Kähr et al., 2016; Lindenmeier et al., 2012). In particular, this literature has identified the consequences of outrage as predominantly negative, but has not distinguished between ingroup and outgroup sources of the expressed outrage. Our research contributes to this area of research by demonstrating that in some cases outrage can instead result in positive consequences for the brand, and specifically when the source of that outrage is a morality-based outgroup rather than an ingroup or a nonmorality-based outgroup member. Furthermore, our findings pertaining to the moderating role of viral support of outrage highlights an important difference from more isolated forms of outrage (Sawaoka & Monin, 2018). Specifically, our research suggests viral support can exacerbate the social threat posed by online outrage, or alternatively curtail the perceived threat when viral support is lacking. This finding speaks to concerns raised about the magnifying effect that outrage can have in online environments and the social harm such viral outrage can cause (Brady & Crockett, 2019;

Sawaoka & Monin, 2020). In contrast, our results suggest that viral outrage can alternatively stir others to side with the target of that outrage, in support of common social values.

With respect to the literature on social marketing and brand relationships, existing research has emphasized the role of value overlap in building stronger relationships with brands (Ashworth et al., 2009; Park et al., 2008). However, when brands engage in such social marketing strategies, they risk angering other groups who oppose those values (King, 2019; Larcker et al., 2018, Torossian, 2019). Our research suggests that such outrage can actually aid social value campaigns to further promote closer self-brand relationships and specifies exactly when and why evoked outrage is likely to produce positive consequences for the brand. Moreover, the fact that these positive effects were observed for unknown brands (Study 1-3), suggests that outgroup outrage can also foster relationships with new customers.

The present research also furthers our understanding of the positive implications negative word-of-mouth sometimes has for brands (Allard et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2017). While there is some research that suggests negative word-of-mouth (WOM) can increase support for brands amongst consumers who have pre-existing relationships with the brand (Wilson et al., 2017), we demonstrate that negative WOM, in the form of outgroup outrage towards a brand's social marketing campaign, can lead to enhanced brand identification even when consumers have no pre-existing relationship with the brand. Furthermore, recent work has demonstrated that negative word-of-mouth about product/service failures that is viewed as unfair can actually increase purchase intentions due to feelings of empathy towards the brand (Allard et al., 2020). Building on this, we demonstrate that outgroup outrage towards a brand can also increase purchase intentions, but in this case due to perceptions of social threat and the closer self-brand connections it fosters.

Finally, our research contributes to the literature on self-brand connection. Prior studies have identified the important impact reference groups can have on such connections (e.g., Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2005), and show that relating a brand to a dissociative outgroup can negatively impact self-brand connection (Dahl & White, 2007). Our research extends these ideas by further demonstrating that morality-based outgroups are a unique type of dissociative outgroup that can alternatively increase self-brand connection when they angrily attack values that are shared by consumers and the attacked brand.

From a managerial perspective, this research also provides useful insights for the practice of social value marketing. Historically, many brands have been reluctant to take sides on political or social matters (Bailey & Philips, 2020), and this question remains an issue of debate due in part to the potential risks of evoking outrage from opposing consumer groups (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019; Horst, 2018; King, 2019; Larcker et al., 2018; Torossian, 2019). At the same time, consumers increasingly seem to expect companies to take political positions on issues that are important to them (Argenti, 2020; Erskine, 2017). Given the potential reach that social value marketing campaigns can have, and the attention they are capable of attracting, such campaigns have great potential for raising awareness and reinforcing important progressive social values among consumers, as seen in the example of Nike's support of Kaepernick and the Black Lives Matter movement. The current research provides reason for optimism regarding the potential consequences of angering others who do not agree with such values, in that it suggests this apparent risk can in fact be a benefit, so long as those who are angered are considered a morality-based outgroup by the target consumers the brand hopes to engage with in their social value campaign.

The current research suggests a number of additional questions that would be worth examining in future research. For instance, does outgroup outrage negatively impact a brand if that brand was perceived as violating a value shared by both ingroup and outgroup members? Our theorizing suggests it should because it is the threat to social values that is key to determining which side bystanders will support, where bystanders would be expected to take the side of whichever party supports their values against those who attack them. Additionally, we examined outrage stemming from a single outgroup tweet and high social support was conveyed by suggesting that the single tweet had received many likes, shares, and comments. This differs from viral outrage in the form of hundreds of Twitter users expressing outrage through comments of their own, which is common in everyday viral outrage. Future work should examine whether a large number of comments conveying outrage towards a brand might further enhance support for the brand involved. This kind of viral outrage seems likely to substantially increase the level of perceived social threat and would therefore be expected to increase levels of support for the attacked brand according to our model. Ultimately, there are many nuances to consumer outrage that need to be explored in future research and such questions seem increasingly important to address given the current social climate.

## **Chapter 4: Was that ad offensive?**

### **The role of expressed outrage and emotion-based social influence**

“Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not easy.”

Aristotle (350 BCE/2004)

A Hyundai Superbowl advertisement dubbed “The Elevator” features a couple riding an elevator that drops off passengers to a series of unpleasant life experiences, such as root canals, jury duty, shopping for a car, and vegan dinner parties. This advertisement instantly faced backlash on social media as some users angrily criticized Hyundai for mocking vegans (Shen, 2019). However, anger was not the only negative reaction as other commentators expressed their disapproval without outrage and some users even expressed their disapproval via humor. Furthermore, others indicated confusion as to why the ad was considered offensive at all, and still others accused those who were offended of overreacting and being “snowflakes” (Starnes, 2019). While offense is said to be primarily driven by the violation of important norms or values that prescribe acceptable behavior (Liu et al. 2019), the Hyundai example suggests a more complicated process in which consumer groups and activists who are offended, publicly express their disapproval towards such advertisements which can be accessible to observing-consumers who may agree or disagree. As these public expressions of disapproval tend to have emotional overtones (Brady, Crockett & Van Bavel, 2020), online outrage has become an important topic of discussion amongst scholars and the general public (Crockett, 2017). Extensive evidence suggests that expressed outrage serves a social-functional role in persuading observers that a negative event is worthy of criticism (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). However, prior research has also

provided evidence that individuals can engage in non-conformity in the context of moral judgements (Goldenberg et al., 2014). Thus, it is possible that outrage can occasionally backfire and fail to persuade observers to appraise an event negatively compared to expressions of disapproval without outrage. This raises the question as to when and why outrage towards potentially offensive marketing material, such as advertisements can be less (versus more) effective in eliciting support from observing-consumers.

Typically, marketing communications refrain from engaging in severe offensive norm violations. This is due to the intense backlash that can ensue from consumers and regulators, as well as the fact that most marketing communications go through multiple levels of approval aimed at avoiding such mistakes (Watson, 2019). As a result, many of the messages that are accused of being offensive by some consumers are relatively mild or benign violations that are difficult for the majority of consumers to detect, and can even be deemed socially acceptable (Gianfagna, 2014). However, while such advertisements may not be considered offensive by the majority, they may nevertheless be considered offensive and harmful to consumer subgroups and activists (Bartholomew, 2018; Gulas & Weinberger, 2006). Indeed, prior research (Campbell & Manning, 2014; Lui & Quezada, 2019) suggests that subtle and ambiguous violations can be harmful to society because they are overlooked by large segments of individuals and thus, remain unfettered in contributing to deleterious outcomes (e.g., stereotyping, micro-aggressions and discrimination).

One touted benefit of social media has been its ability to identify immoral actions and societal injustices while amassing collective support against perceived transgressors (Kende et al., 2016). In the present case, consumer groups can raise awareness about potentially offensive marketing messages by expressing their disapproval on social media. These online expressions

of disapproval may serve to influence other observing-consumers to appraise the brand and its actions negatively. However, despite the impactful role of emotions as a communication tool to express disapproval in other social contexts (Van Kleef, 2014), it remains unclear what role they might play in encouraging social action towards the offending brand in other consumers (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Moore & Lafreniere, 2019; Yin, Bond & Zhang, 2014).

Outrage is a fairly common reaction when consumers perceive that a moral norm has been violated (Haidt, 2003). Furthermore, outrage can lead to an emotional contagion effect by signaling to observers that they too should also feel angry and condemn the norm violator (Goldenberg & Gross, 2020). Thus, it appears that outrage may be an effective online communication tool for offended consumer groups and activists to elicit the support of the broader public. However, paralleling the notion that social norms indicate appropriate versus inappropriate marketing actions (Lindenmeier, Schleer & Priel, 2012), there are also social norms regarding the appropriateness of different emotional displays in response (Van Kleef et al., 2011). Moreover, prior empirical work demonstrates that observers compare their own personal appraisal of an event to the emotional reactions of others to assess whether the latter seem appropriate or not (Goldenberg, Saguy & Halperin, 2014). When there is a misalignment between an observer's appraisal of an event and other person's emotional reaction to the same event, the latter can be perceived as inappropriate (Van Kleef, 2016), thus potentially rendering such emotional displays as uninfluential and reducing the likelihood of emotional contagion.

Public expressions of outrage towards brands can be conceptualized as a form of negative word-of-mouth (WOM). The literature on negative WOM has examined the role of personal anger as an antecedent to negative word-of-mouth. Furthermore, public expressions of anger have been examined as a social-functional tool to communicate product and service failures to

other observing-consumers (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Yin & et al., 2014). Yet, there is mixed evidence as to whether expressed outrage is an effective tool in convincing observing-consumers to evaluate the underperforming brand negatively (Moore & Lafreniere, 2019).

Furthermore, while outrage can signal that a marketing message is potentially offensive, it is not the only emotional reaction used to express offense. For example, humorous disapproval is another type of emotional reaction that is associated with amusement (Apte, 1985), which can also signal to observers that a behavior is unacceptable and worthy of ridicule (Graham et al. 1992; McGraw, Warren & Kan, 2014). Thus, humor and outrage can both encourage observers to appraise an advertisement negatively. The current research examined and compared these two reactions to control for emotionality while understanding when and why outrage may be less (versus more) influential.

The present research contends that the effectiveness of outrage in persuading observers to respond negatively towards the offending brand is contingent on the severity of the norm violation. Specifically, three studies examined whether outrage can be less effective (versus more effective) in persuading consumers to evaluate advertisements that are mildly (versus more severely) offensive in comparison to negative online reactions that do not contain outrage, or to reactions that use humor rather than outrage. The underlying process explaining the observed effects is the perceived appropriateness of the negative online reactions. Specifically, when an advertisements' offense is mild, outrage was perceived as an inappropriate reaction compared to negative reactions without outrage, and thus outrage was less likely to lead to negative brand evaluations for milder offenses. Whereas, when an advertisement's offense was more severe, outrage was viewed as an appropriate reaction and thereby elicited emotional contagion (i.e., personal feelings of anger) and negative brand evaluations.



The current research either controlled for or manipulated the severity of the norm violations involved in offensive advertising messages, while also manipulating the emotional tone of the negative responses involved in social media complaints about the advert. Furthermore, throughout our studies we kept the content of the responses relatively constant, while otherwise manipulating emotional cues in the responses, such as exclamation marks, capitalized words and emojis. This research makes several theoretical contributions. It is the first to demonstrate that outrage expressed towards a brand's offensive advertisement can be less effective in influencing observers to evaluate a target brand negatively compared to unemotional expressions of disapproval or humorous expressions of disapproval. Moreover, these findings contribute to the consumer offense literature (Liu et al., 2019). While prior research has emphasized the role of anger in eliciting consumer offense and negative WOM, the current research demonstrates that expressing outrage may backfire in certain instances. Furthermore, this research suggests that expressing disapproval without outrage may sometimes be more effective in persuading observing-consumers to evaluate a brand negatively. This is important given current discussions on the impacts of online outrage in eliciting collective action (Brady & Crockett, 2019) and broader discussions on allyship (Grier, Johnson & Scott, 2022).

### **Theoretical Development**

Individuals can experience outrage when they perceive that a moral norm has been violated (Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011). Personal feelings of outrage can motivate individuals to take action against the perceived transgressor (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007). Thus, serving an intrapersonal function. For example, consumer research suggests that outrage can motivate consumers to boycott brands that engage in unethical corporate behavior (Lindenmeier et al., 2012). Furthermore, it can lead consumers to engage in negative word-of-mouth and

sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016). However, beyond motivating personal action, expressions of outrage can also serve an interpersonal function by signaling to observers that a moral norm has been violated (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Van Kleef & Fischer, 2016). Thus, outrage can be utilized as a communication tool for social influence, that is to encourage bystanders to also feel anger and appraise the event negatively (Brady & Crockett, 2019; Goldenberg & Gross, 2020). This process has been referred to as emotional contagion and emotion-based social influence (Thomas et al., 2020; Van Kleef & Fischer, 2016).

More recently, the literature has examined the conditions in which emotional expressions fail to elicit social influence (Goldenberg et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). Underlying this literature is the notion that expressions of emotion provide information about the expressor's appraisal of the situation while also providing information about the expressor's character, social motives, and intentions (Goldenberg et al., 2019; Van Kleef, 2016). Furthermore, observers can engage in emotional non-conformity when they perceive that others' emotional reactions are not aligned with their personal moral values (Goldenberg et al., 2014). Therefore, expressions of outrage not only provide information about the event but can also guide observers to make inferences concerning the expressor (Van Kleef, 2016).

Additionally, scholars have proposed that a key determinant of the relative influence of emotional reactions is the perceived appropriateness of the emotional expression (Elfenbein, 2014; Shields, 2005; Van Kleef, 2016). Perceptions of inappropriateness can arise when observers view the expressor's emotional reaction as inconsistent with the norms of the context (Van Kleef, 2014). For instance, an individual laughing at a funeral would be considered as expressing an inappropriate emotion given the norms of the somber context (Van Kleef, 2016). Hence, expressions of outrage are likely to lead observers to appraise an event more negatively if

the emotional expression is viewed as appropriate. However, it is important to note that what is considered to be an appropriate emotional reaction can vary amongst individuals depending on their personal moral values and appraisals. Therefore, if an observer believes that an individual's emotional reaction is not aligned with the observers' personal values, they will be less likely to view the expression as appropriate (Goldenberg et al., 2014). Furthermore, given that there can be a degree of subjectivity in perceptions of moral norm violations (Schein & Gray, 2018), observers can dismiss others' expressions of outrage due to a mismatch between their personal appraisals of the triggering event and the expressor's emotional reaction. For example, Thomas and colleagues (2020) suggest that others' expressions of outrage will lead to emotional social influence only when the reaction matches the observer's appraisal that a moral norm violation has occurred. Similarly, Shields (2005) suggests that the emotional reaction of others can be viewed as less legitimate when the reason for the reaction conflicts with an observer's personal norms.

Based on the above, expressions of outrage in response to perceived norm violations should lead observers to appraise the appropriateness of the expressor's reaction based on their personal appraisals of the triggering event. If this outrage is viewed as appropriate, then it should be more likely to lead observers to also appraise the triggering event negatively. Furthermore, the appropriateness of these expressions is dependent on the degree to which the emotional reaction is aligned with the observer's personal appraisal of the purported norm violation.

### **Overview of Studies**

Three studies tested our proposed theorizing. In brief, Study 1 compared the effects of outrage in expressions of disapproval to emotionally neutral and humorous expressions of disapproval. This study also included a control condition without expressions of disapproval (i.e.,

just the advertisement) to gauge the extent to which emotional and less emotional disapproval convinced participants to respond negatively towards the focal brand in an overall sense. The results indicated that complaints about the advert that included outrage were ineffective in evoking more negative brand attitudes and negative WOM intentions relative to the no complaints condition (i.e., advert alone), and less effective than either affectively neutral or humorous expressions of disapproval in evoking negative reactions among participants. These effects were shown to be mediated by the perceived appropriateness of the expressed disapproval. Study 2 replicated this effect using more subtle and better controlled manipulations of emotional expression. Finally, Study 3 manipulated the severity of the advertisement's norm violation, and again replicated the finding that expressions of disapproval that included outrage were less effective in evoking negative brand evaluations among participants than humorous disapproval when the violation was mild, whereas outrage was more likely to lead to negative brand evaluations when the violation was more severe.

### **Study 1**

Study 1 provides an initial test of our theorizing that expressions of disapproval towards advertisements that engage in mild norm violations are more likely to result in lower brand evaluations when they do not contain outrage compared to when they do. Furthermore, we also aimed to test whether the perceived appropriateness of the expressed disapproval would mediate the effect of emotional tone (i.e., outrage vs. no outrage) on brand evaluations. We tested this effect using a real advertisement from a brand that was unfamiliar to our student participants. This advertisement was originally presented in the United Kingdom as part of a campaign that promoted their burgers at the expense of mocking vegans (Spary, 2016). Pilot tests confirmed that this advertisement was perceived as a mild norm violation (Appendix F).

## Participants and procedure

A total of 419 undergraduate students from a North American university participated in the study for course credit (56.2% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.78$ ,  $SD = 4.22$ ). Prior research suggests that individuals are more likely to find a norm violation to be severe when the violation is personally implicating (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005). Thus, 47 participants who reported being vegan or vegetarian were removed from the analyses given that the norm violation was personally implicating vegans/vegetarians.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four negative response conditions: outrage vs. humor vs. neutral emotion vs. control. Participants were presented a real advertisement from a burger chain in the United Kingdom which had received backlash for mocking vegans (Spary, 2016). This advertisement featured an image of quinoa grains in the shape of a burger with the headline “Burger It’s The New Quinoa” which was perceived as mocking vegans for their abstinence from meat (Blott et al., 2016). Participants were presented a tweet featuring this advertisement with a comment from a user stating “Burger Brothers just put out an advertisement that mocks vegans for choosing to eat quinoa instead of beef” to ensure participants were aware of the purported norm violation. Pilot tests confirmed that the advertisements’ purported violation was perceived to be mild (Appendix F). Following this, participants in the negative response conditions were presented fictitious tweets from four users who reacted negatively towards this advertisement. These tweets varied in terms of expressed emotion and were based on real tweets in response to advertisements that were perceived as offensive. Participants in the control condition simply viewed the original tweet and were not presented negative responses. Based on prior research (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Luangrath, Peck & Barger, 2017), we varied emotional cues such as emojis (e.g., laughing emoji), profanity, capitalized words, and

exclamation marks (Appendix F). Pilot tests confirmed that the tweets used in each condition varied in terms of perceived outrage and humor (Appendix F).

After viewing the stimuli, participants indicated their attitude towards the brand ( $A_{\text{brand}}$ ;  $\alpha = .98$ ; Mackenzie, 1986), intention to engage in negative word-of-mouth ( $\alpha = .94$ ; Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz, 2006), and the extent to which they personally thought the advertisement insulted vegans. This was followed by participants in the negative response conditions (i.e., outrage, humor, or neutral) indicating their perceptions of the negative response's appropriateness (4 items;  $\alpha = .93$ ; "The responses by the twitter users were: justified/unjustified; inappropriate/appropriate; disproportionate/proportionate; unwarranted/warranted"; 7-point bipolar scale) and perception of the response's affective tone, as to whether it involved humor ( $\alpha = .98$ ; "twitter users found the advertisement to be: humorous, funny, comical" 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so) or outrage ( $\alpha = .97$ ; "the twitter users were: outraged, angry, infuriated" 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Participants also indicated the extent to which they perceived the responses to be expressing disapproval ("To what extent were these tweets an expression of disapproval towards the advertisement" 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so).<sup>7</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** An ANOVA for perceptions of anger as a function of emotional responses revealed a significant effect,  $F(2, 275) = 23.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that the outrage-laden responses had the intended effect ( $M = 6.12$ ) compared to the humorous responses ( $M = 4.73, p < .001$ ) and the emotionally neutral responses ( $M = 5.22, p < .001$ ), whereas there were no differences between the latter two conditions ( $p = .79$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant ANOVA effect on perceptions of humor,  $F(2, 275) =$

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<sup>7</sup> There were no outliers ( $SD > 3$ ) found in this study.

20.78,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that the humorous responses were perceived to be more humor-laden ( $M = 2.81$ ) compared to the outrage responses ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the neutral emotion responses ( $M = 1.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Whereas there were no differences between the latter two conditions ( $p = .09$ ). Overall, the emotional response manipulations were effective.

Additionally, the advertisement was viewed to be generally mild (i.e., not viewed as highly insulting to vegans) as the means for all three conditions were not significantly above the scale midpoint ( $M_{\text{control}} = 3.96$ ,  $M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.33$ ,  $M_{\text{humor}} = 4.33$ ,  $M_{\text{outrage}} = 4.13$ ,  $ps > .08$ ).

Furthermore, the type of negative response had no significant effects on perceived severity ( $F(3, 368) = 1.03$ ,  $p = .38$ ,  $\eta^2 = .008$ ).

**A<sub>brand</sub>**. An analysis of brand attitude as a function of the social media responses revealed a significant effect,  $F(3, 366) = 5.71$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .045$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that A<sub>brand</sub> was significantly higher when participants were presented the outrage responses ( $M = 3.70$ ) compared to the neutral ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $p = .038$ ) and humorous responses ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $p = .009$ ). The latter two condition did not significantly differ ( $p = .60$ ), thus supporting our prediction that outrage is less effective in influencing consumers to evaluate a brand negatively when the violation is mild. Furthermore, the outraged responses did not significantly impact participants' A<sub>brand</sub> in comparison to the control condition in which participants did not view negative responses ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $p = .31$ ). In contrast, both the humorous and emotionally neutral responses resulted in more negative A<sub>brand</sub> compared to the control condition ( $ps < .01$ ), thus suggesting that expressed outrage was relatively ineffective in persuading consumers to evaluate the brand negatively.

**Appropriateness of responses.** The analysis for perceived appropriateness revealed a significant effect,  $F(2, 279) = 10.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .072$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that perceived appropriateness was lower when participants viewed the outrage responses ( $M = 3.75$ ) compared to the neutral emotional responses ( $M = 4.42, p = .003$ ) and the humorous responses ( $M = 4.73, p < .001$ ). There were no significant differences between the latter two conditions ( $p = .17$ ).

To determine whether the perceptions of appropriateness accounted for the effect of emotional responses on brand attitude, we conducted a mediational analysis (Hayes, 2017, Model 4; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws). We used the outrage condition as the reference group and compared it with the other two conditions by specifying the manipulation as a multicategorical variable (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). The mediational analysis comparing the outrage condition with the neutral condition using dummy coding (outrage = 0 and neutral = 1) revealed a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = -.19; 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.36, -.06]$ ). The mediational analysis comparing the outrage condition with the humor condition (outrage = 0 and humor = 1) revealed a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = -.28; 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.45, -.14]$ ).

**Negative Word of Mouth.** The ANOVA on negative word-of-mouth revealed a significant effect,  $F(3, 368) = 5.18, p = .002, \eta^2 = .041$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants reported a lower intention to engage in negative WOM when presented outrage responses ( $M = 2.69$ ) compared to the neutral ( $M = 3.30, p = .002$ ) and humorous responses ( $M = 3.17, p = .017$ ). The latter two conditions did not significantly differ ( $p = .52$ ). Furthermore, the outraged responses did not significantly impact negative word-of-mouth in comparison to the control condition in which participants did not view negative responses ( $M = 2.67, p = .93$ ) whereas participants who viewed humorous and emotionally neutral responses were more likely



to engage in negative word-of-mouth relative to the no response control ( $p = .015$  and  $p = .002$  respectively).

We conducted a multi-categorical mediation analysis to test whether the effect of emotional responses on negative word-of-mouth was mediated by perceived appropriateness. The mediational analysis comparing the outrage condition with the neutral condition (outrage = 0 and neutral = 1) revealed a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = .24$ ; 95% CI = [.073, .45]). The mediational analysis comparing the outrage condition with the humor condition revealed a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = .35$ ; 95% CI = [.18, .55]).

## **Discussion**

Study 1 supports our theorizing that expressed outrage in response to potentially offensive advertisements is less effective in influencing consumers to evaluate a target brand negatively and that expressions of disapproval without outrage have greater impact. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the underlying process explaining why expressions of outrage are less effective is perceived appropriateness, in that outrage is perceived as less appropriate in comparison to disapproval without outrage. Finally, we demonstrate that expressions of disapproval without outrage also have greater proclivity to influence consumers to engage in negative word-of-mouth compared to expressions of outrage.

## **Study 2**

The aim of Study 2 was to replicate the results of Study 1 using a different (mTurk) sample, advertisement, and with outrage-laden responses that were better controlled and more subtle in emotional tone compared to Study 1. In this study, we compared outrage-laden expressions of disapproval to humor-laden expressions of disapproval and predicted that outrage would again be less effective in influencing observers to evaluate the target brand negatively.

Furthermore, we predicted that the perceived appropriateness of the responses would mediate this effect.

### **Participants and procedure**

A total of 300 respondents were recruited through TurkPrime and participated in the study (49.3% Female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 41.90$ ,  $SD = 13.00$ ). Twenty-three participants who reported being vegan or vegetarian were removed from the analyses given that the advertisement was mocking vegans, similar to Study 1. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two negative response conditions: humor versus outrage.

Participants were presented a real advertisement from the same brand as Study 1. This advertisement featured an image of a lettuce with the headline “Anyone fancy a nice juicy 6oz lettuce? Nah, nor do we” (Appendix F). Pilot tests suggested that this advertisement was perceived to be engaging in a mild norm violation (Appendix F). Participants were then presented fictitious tweets from four users who expressed disapproval towards the brand. These tweets varied in terms of being presented as outrage-laden or having a more humorous tone. We manipulated the emotional tone of the reactions by keeping the content of the tweets constant while varying emotional cues such as emojis, capitalizing words, and using exclamation marks (Appendix F). Furthermore, pilot tests confirmed that the outrage-laden response tweets in this study were perceived to be less extreme compared to the outrage-laden response tweets in Study 1 (Appendix F).

After viewing the stimuli, participants indicated their attitude towards the brand ( $A_{\text{brand}}$ ;  $\alpha = .98$ ; Mackenzie, 1986) and perceptions of advertisement harmfulness (3 items;  $\alpha = .94$ ; “To what extent do you think this advertisement could be harmful, hurtful, distress”; 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very). This was followed by participants indicating their perceptions of the negative

response's appropriateness ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and perception of the response's affective tone, as to whether it involved outrage ( $\alpha = .97$ ) or humor ( $\alpha = .98$ ).<sup>8</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** An ANOVA of perceptions of humor as a function of the emotional responses revealed that the humorous responses were perceived to be more humorous ( $M = 3.07$ ) compared to angry responses ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $F(1, 275) = 25.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .085$ ). Furthermore, the analysis of perceptions of anger ( $\alpha = .97$ ) revealed that the anger laden responses altered the intended variable ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 6.00$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 4.83$ ,  $F(1, 276) = 35.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ ). This confirmed that the manipulation was successful.

Additionally, the advertisement's norm violation was perceived to be mild (i.e., low on perceived harm) as the means for both response conditions were significantly lower than the scale midpoint ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 2.02$ ;  $M_{\text{humour}} = 2.54$ ,  $p_s < .001$ ). In this case, participants who viewed the humorous response tweets also perceived the advertisement to be more harmful compared to the outrage-laden tweets ( $F(1, 276) = 17.67$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ).

**A<sub>brand</sub>.** An analysis of brand attitudes as a function of emotional responses revealed that when participants viewed the humorous responses, they judged the brand more negatively ( $M = 4.42$ ) compared to when they viewed the outrage-laden responses ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $F(1, 275) = 5.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .019$ ).

**Appropriateness of responses.** The analysis for this measure demonstrated that participants viewed the humorous responses to be more appropriate ( $M = 3.77$ ) compared to the outrage-laden responses ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $F(1, 276) = 18.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .063$ ).

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<sup>8</sup> There were no outliers ( $SD > 3$ ) found in this study.

To determine whether the increased perceptions of appropriateness accounted for decreased brand attitude, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017, Model 4; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws). The results revealed a significant indirect effect of social feedback on brand attitude via appropriateness ( $\beta = -.46$ ; 95% CI = [-.74, -.23]) and a non-significant direct effect when controlling for the indirect effect ( $\beta = -.0009$ ; 95% CI = [-.35, .34]).

## **Discussion**

Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 support our theorizing that expressed outrage in response to advertisements that engage in mild norm violations are less likely to influence observing-consumers to evaluate the target brand negatively in comparison to expressions of disapproval without outrage. Furthermore, these studies support our prediction that this effect is explained by perceived appropriateness of the responses, in that outrage-laden reactions are perceived as less appropriate in comparison to reactions without outrage.

## **Study 3**

Study 3 directly manipulated the severity of the advertisement's norm violation to be mild or more severe to test the prediction that outrage is more likely to influence observing-consumers when the brand's violation is more severe but not when the violation is mild. Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that outrage is less effective in influencing observing-consumers compared to disapproval without outrage when the brand's violation was mild. Furthermore, the findings suggested that this was because outrage was viewed as an inappropriate reaction. In contrast, when the brand's violation is more severe, outrage should be viewed as an appropriate reaction and thus more likely to lead observers to evaluate the target brand negatively. This latter prediction is consistent with prior research suggesting that expressed outrage is an effective

communication tool to signal to observers that a moral norm violation has occurred and that the triggering event is worthy of condemnation (Brady et al., 2020; Keltner & Haidt, 1999).

Moreover, prior theorizing suggests that the underlying process explaining the emotion-based influence of outrage is emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993), that is encountering others' expressions of outrage can signal to observers that they too should experience anger which can lead to more negative appraisals of the triggering event. Thus, in Study 3 we also included a measure of personal anger towards the advertisement to determine whether emotional contagion would play a mediating role between expressed outrage and brand evaluations when the advertisement's norm violation was more severe (vs. mild).

### **Participants and procedure**

A total of 335 undergraduate students from a North American university participated in the study for course credit (68.4% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.58$ ,  $SD = 3.43$ ). Thirty-nine participants who reported being vegan or vegetarian were removed from the analysis given that the norm violation personally implicated vegans and vegetarians. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (norm violation: mild vs. more severe) x 2 (negative response: outrage vs. humor) between subjects factorial design.

Participants were presented an advertisement that mocked vegans. In the mild violation condition, participants viewed the same advertisement as Study 1 ("Burger It's The New Quinoa"). Whereas, in the more severe violation condition, the text of the advertisement read "Vegans, Stop Trying. Say Yes to Meat & No to Quinoa". A pilot test ( $N = 169$ ) with the same population confirmed that this manipulation was effective (perceived offensiveness:  $M_{\text{mild}} = 3.42$  vs.  $M_{\text{severe}} = 4.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, the more severe norm violation was not significantly above the scale midpoint of 4 ( $p = .069$ ), thus it was not highly severe. Whereas the mild norm

violation was significantly lower than the scale midpoint ( $p < .001$ ). Ethical considerations limited the degree of severity that could be used in our experiment otherwise.

Following the advertisement, participants were presented four fictitious tweets from users who expressed disapproval towards the brand. These tweets varied in terms of being presented as outrage-laden or as having a more humorous tone via similar emotional cues as the prior studies. Aside from the emotional tone of the social feedback, we aimed to keep the content of the tweets identical (Appendix F).

After viewing the stimuli, participants indicated their attitude towards the brand ( $\alpha = .94$ ), appropriateness of the negative responses ( $\alpha = .94$ ), personal feelings of anger ( $\alpha = .97$ ; “To what extent did these tweets make you feel; angry, outraged, infuriated”; 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so), perceived emotional tone of the responses ( $\alpha_{\text{outrage}} = .94$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{humor}} = .94$ ) and severity of the norm violation ( $\alpha = .94$ ; this advertisement was offensive, inappropriate, off-putting; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).<sup>9</sup>

## Results

**Initial analyses.** A two-way ANOVA on perceptions of severity as a function of the norm violation and negative responses revealed a significant main effect of norm violation such that the mild norm violation was perceived to be less severe ( $M = 3.27$ ) compared to the more severe norm violation ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $F(1, 293) = 83.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .22$ ). Furthermore, the emotional negative reaction ( $p = .68$ ) and interaction effects were not significant ( $p = .13$ ). This confirmed that the severity manipulation was effective.

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<sup>9</sup> There were no outliers ( $SD > 3$ ) found in this study.

The ANOVA on perceptions of outrage revealed that the outrage-laden responses had the intended effect ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 5.38$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 4.14$ ,  $F(1, 294) = 40.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ ). The effect of norm violation was not significant ( $p = .28$ ), but the interaction approached significance,  $F(1, 294) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .077$ ,  $\eta^2 = .011$ . Although the outrage responses were perceived to be more outrage-laden when the violation was severe rather than mild ( $M_{\text{mild}} = 5.10$  vs.  $M_{\text{severe}} = 5.65$ ,  $p = .044$ ), the outrage responses were perceived as much more outrage-laden compared to humor for both the mild ( $p < .001$ ) and severe violations ( $p < .001$ ).

The ANOVA for perceptions of humor revealed that humorous reactions had the intended effect ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 2.13$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 2.93$ ,  $F(1, 292) = 35.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ ). The norm violation ( $p = .52$ ) and interaction effects were not significant ( $p = .46$ ). Overall, the emotional response manipulation was effective.

**Abrand.** The ANOVA for brand attitude revealed a significant effect of norm violation ( $M_{\text{mild}} = 3.92$  vs.  $M_{\text{severe}} = 2.64$ ,  $F(1, 289) = 72.2$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .20$ ), but not response type ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 3.24$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 3.31$ ,  $F(1, 289) = .12$ ,  $p = .73$ ;  $\eta^2 < .001$ ). Importantly, the predicted interaction was significant ( $F(1, 289) = 8.75$ ,  $p = .003$ ;  $\eta^2 = .03$ ). In the case of the mild violation, humorous responses ( $M = 3.73$ ) led to more negative brand attitudes than outrage-laden responses ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $p = .067$ ). In contrast, when the violation was more severe the outrage-laden responses ( $M = 2.39$ ) led to more negative brand attitudes than humorous responses ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Also, it should be noted that brand attitudes were significantly lower when the violation was more severe compared to benign, in both the humor and outrage conditions ( $p < .001$ ). This result was consistent with the pilot test ( $N = 169$ ), in which the more severe advertisement sans the negative responses resulted in participants reporting a lower brand

attitude compared to the benign advertisement ( $M_{\text{mild}} = 4.54$  vs.  $M_{\text{severe}} = 3.73$ ,  $F(1, 168) = 27.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .071$ ).

**Appropriateness of responses.** An analysis of perceptions of appropriateness revealed main effects of negative responses ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 4.25$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 4.50$ ,  $F(1, 295) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .086$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ ) and norm violation ( $M_{\text{mild}} = 3.66$  vs.  $M_{\text{severe}} = 5.10$ ,  $F(1, 295) = 85.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .22$ ), as well as an interaction effect ( $F(1, 295) = 3.82$ ,  $p = .052$ ;  $\eta^2 = .013$ ). Pairwise comparisons revealed that perceived appropriateness was significantly higher when the violation was more severe compared to mild, in both the outrage and humor conditions ( $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, pairwise comparisons revealed that participants viewed the humorous responses to be more appropriate ( $M = 3.94$ ) than the outrage-laden responses ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $p = .01$ ) when the violation was mild. In contrast, participants viewed the outraged and humorous responses equally appropriate when the violation was more severe ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 5.12$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 5.09$ ,  $p = .87$ ).

We conducted a moderated mediation analysis to determine whether appropriateness accounted for the interaction on brand attitudes (Hayes, 2017, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws). The results revealed a marginally significant index of moderated mediation ( $\beta = .18$ ; 90% CI = [.024, .36]). When the violation was mild, there was a significant conditional indirect effect of negative responses on brand attitude via perceived appropriateness ( $\beta = -.17$ ; 95% CI = [-.34, -.046]), whereas the conditional indirect effect was non-significant when the violation was more severe ( $\beta = .007$ ; 95% CI = [-.13, .14]).

**Personal anger.** The ANOVA for personal anger revealed main effects for negative responses ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 3.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 2.66$ ,  $F(1, 295) = 4.72$ ,  $p = .031$ ;  $\eta^2 = .016$ ) and norm violation ( $M_{\text{mild}} = 2.49$  vs.  $M_{\text{severe}} = 3.28$ ,  $F(1, 295) = 15.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .051$ ). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 295) = 7.71$ ,  $p = .006$ ;  $\eta^2 = .026$ .



This interaction showed that in the more severe norm violation condition, feelings of personal anger were higher when participants were presented the outrage-laden responses ( $M = 3.76$ ) compared to the humorous responses ( $M = 2.55, p = .001$ ). This suggests that there was an emotional contagion effect. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the emotional tone of the responses when the norm violation was mild ( $M_{\text{outrage}} = 2.43$  vs.  $M_{\text{humor}} = 2.55, p = .67$ ).

To determine whether feelings of anger accounted for the interaction effects on brand attitudes, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017, Model 8; bootstrapped with 20,000 draws). Furthermore, perceived appropriateness was included as a parallel mediator. The results revealed a significant index of moderated mediation via anger ( $p < .05$ ). When the violation was more severe, there was a significant conditional indirect effect of negative responses on brand attitude via personal anger ( $\beta = .16$ ; 95% CI = [.050, .30]), but not when the violation was mild ( $\beta = -.037$ ; 95% CI = [-.13, .43]). Furthermore, the indirect effect via appropriateness was again significant when the norm violation was mild even when controlling for personal feelings of anger ( $p < .05$ ).

## **Discussion**

Study 3 demonstrates that when a brand's norm violation is severe, the effect of expressed outrage in influencing observers to appraise the brand negatively is driven by emotional contagion. This finding is consistent with prior research (Elfenbein, 2014; Goldenberg & Gross, 2020; Hatfield et al., 1993). When the norm violation is mild, however, outrage can be viewed as an inappropriate reaction in comparison to expressions of disapproval without outrage, which can lead outrage to be less impactful in influencing observing-consumers to appraise the target brand negatively. This supports our theorizing that the impact of outrage in influencing

observing-consumers to appraise a brand negatively is contingent on the perceived severity of the norm violation and that when a brand's norm violation is perceived as mild, outrage may actually be less effective than disapproval without outrage.

### **General Discussion**

The current research examined how observers respond to expressions of outrage towards an advertisement that engaged in a norm violation. Contrary to the notion that outrage can persuade observers to view the target of the outrage negatively and as morally condemnable, three studies demonstrated that expressions of disapproval without outrage were more persuasive to observers when the advertisement's norm violations were mild. Furthermore, this effect was mediated by perceptions of the expressed disapproval's appropriateness. In contrast, when an advertisement's norm violation was more severe, outrage was more effective in persuading observers to evaluate the brand negatively. This effect was mediated by observers' personal feelings of anger (Study 3). Finally, when the advertisement's norm violation was mild, outrage did not have a unique effect on consumers' appraisals beyond observing the advertisement without any negative reactions (Study 1). Overall, these findings demonstrate that outrage expressed towards an advertisement's mild norm violation can be less effective in persuading observers to evaluate a brand negatively compared to negative expressions without outrage. This is because outrage can be perceived as being misaligned with observers' personal appraisals of the advertisement.

This research offers a number of theoretical contributions to the literature on consumer outrage, offensive advertising and negative word-of-mouth. With respect to consumer outrage, prior research has provided important insight regarding the antecedents of outrage and the role of personal outrage on consumer behavior from an intrapersonal perspective (Kähr et al., 2016;

Lindenmeier et al., 2012). However, the literature has not examined the interpersonal function of expressed outrage and how consumers respond to such expressions. Our research contributes to this area by demonstrating that expressing outrage can be counter-productive in persuading observers to evaluate a brand negatively when the brand's violation is mild. Specifically, Study 1 suggests that outrage can negate the social information provided by expressions of disapproval as outrage did not lead to more negative brand evaluations compared to when participants viewed the advertisement without the negative reactions (i.e., baseline control condition).

In comparison, expressions of disapproval without outrage were more likely to convey to observers that the advertisement was reprehensible and that the brand should be appraised negatively. This particular finding speaks to theorizing pertaining to the role of expressed emotions in providing social information (Van Kleef et al., 2011) by suggesting that expressed outrage may in fact undermine the social information expressors communicate to observers.

With respect to the literature on offensive advertising, prior research suggests that consumers react negatively to advertisements that engage in perceived moral norm violations (Barnes & Dotson, 1990; Beard, 2008; Chan et al., 2007; Christy & Haley, 2008). In contrast, the present research is the first to examine the role of social information and the role of emotional expressions on consumer responses to potentially offensive advertisements. Our research suggests that the severity of an advertisement's norm violation can interact with the emotional tone of the disapproving reaction to impact observers' appraisals. Specifically, outrage led observers to perceive the focal brand more negatively when the violation was severe and not otherwise. Moreover, outrage only resulted in emotional contagion when observers appraised the outrage as an appropriate response. This suggests that observers incorporate social feedback with their personal appraisals to determine whether advertisements are worthy of condemnation.

Finally, our research contributes to the negative word-of-mouth literature. Prior studies have examined observers' response to customer reviews of product/service failures that contain emotional expressions (Kim & Gupta, 2012; McGraw et al., 2014). In particular, such studies show that observers will conform to emotional reactions when the emotion converges across multiple reviews (Kim & Gupta, 2012) and when the emotional tone of the expression signals that the violation was severe (McGraw et al., 2015). Our research suggests that this is not necessarily the case when observers have the ability to independently appraise the emotional triggering event. In the context of negative reviews, consumers rely on the reviewers' response as the main source of social information to assess the severity of the violation (i.e., what occurred). In comparison, with advertisements, observers have the ability to independently appraise the norm violation and compare it with the emotional reaction. If the observer's personal appraisal aligns with outrage (i.e., severe norm violation), then outrage can further enhance the observer's negative appraisals of the brand. However, when the observer's appraisal is inconsistent with the expressed outrage (i.e., mild norm violation) then this negative emotional reaction will not impact the observer's appraisals.

In terms of practical implications, this research provides insight into the impact of negative backlash towards brand activities (Brady et al., 2021; Scholz & Smith, 2019) and discussions on the impact of online outrage (Brady et al., 2020; Borah et al., 2020). Specifically, this research suggests that brands should monitor the emotional tone of negative responses to mitigate and de-escalate the backlash. Brands tend to be focused on expressions of outrage and whether it hurts or potentially benefits them via increased attention (Tait, 2016). The current research suggests that negative reactions that do not contain outrage can be more effective in eliciting support from observing-consumers in certain common instances. For example, it

appears that brands are increasingly facing backlash for norm violations that are not explicitly severe and this backlash has contributed to policy changes by advertising regulatory boards (Watson et al., 2019). In such instances, brands may be more swift in responding to outrage as opposed to humorous expressions of disapproval. Indeed, prior research suggests that managers may be less likely to respond to humorous complaints in comparison to more serious complaints (McGraw et al., 2014). The present research suggests that managers would benefit from developing strategies in responding to complaints that may not express outrage (e.g., humorous complaints). Nevertheless, prevention does seem to be the best cure for such consumer backlash. Thus, it appears important for managers to review marketing material with a diverse sample of consumers to ensure that norm violations are detected prior to their release to prevent potential backlash.

Additionally, this research could also provide insight to consumer activists who wish to use social media to contest offensive marketing material and gain support from bystanders. Firstly, if the brand's norm violation is severe, it appears that outrage can be an effective emotional expression to gain the support of observing-consumers. However, if the brand's violation is perceived to be mild by observing-consumers, then outrage may not be an effective emotional response to persuade observers to condemn the brand. Rather, activist may opt to express disapproval without outrage to be more effective. Given the important role of allyship in challenging societal injustices and the benefits of building consensus support to bring about societal change, it appears important to understand when outrage might be an effective versus ineffective tool to persuade observers to condemn unethical brand behaviors.

The current research raises a series of questions that would be worth examining in future research. For example, the current study examined the impact of outrage when consumers were

not the direct target of the norm violation (i.e., non-vegans). Given that prior research has suggested that individuals respond more negatively when a norm violation personally implicates them versus when they are a bystander, our theorizing would suggest that consumers who are personally implicated by a brand's violation would view such a violation as more severe and thus would be more likely to be influenced by outrage. Additionally, we examined outrage in the context of four negative comments from anonymous users. Given that social media tends to foster environments in which users are presented feedback from their social groups or individuals who share similar ideological values (Brady et al., 2020), it would be important to examine how observers respond to outrage from ingroup versus outgroup sources. Shields (2005) suggest that there are group-based stereotypes that impact how individuals appraise the appropriateness of emotional reactions. It is important to learn how these stereotypes play a role in observers' responses to expressions of outrage.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Social media has contributed towards the proliferation of outrage in response to perceived moral norm violations (Brady et al., 2020). Furthermore, outrage can serve as a communication tool to express moral condemnation and gather support from observers (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Thus, outrage can provide social information to observers regarding the existence of a potential moral conflict and can impact their appraisals of the triggering event and their broader moral judgements.

Moral judgements can signal an individual's values, identity, and group affiliation (Crockett, 2017; Everett, Pizarro & Crockett, 2016; Uhlmann, Pizarro & Diermier, 2015; Rom, Weiss & Conway, 2017). Hence, an individual's proclivity to conform or counter-conform to expressions of outrage can also be guided by these motives. While prior research has examined circumstances surrounding when individuals conform to others' emotional reactions (Goldenberg et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020), our understanding of how and why observers engage in conformity, non-conformity or counter-conformity in response to expressions of outrage is limited. Furthermore, while consumer research has examined the intrapersonal role of outrage (Lindenmeier et al., 2012; Kähr et al., 2016), our research is the first to examine how consumers respond to others' public expressions of outrage towards marketing activities and how this impacts the observing-consumer's appraisals, attitudes, and behavior.

This dissertation consists of two essays (i.e., Chapters 3 and 4) that contribute to the literature. The first essay (Chapter 3) provides evidence that outrage towards a brand's social value message can influence observing-consumers to experience greater feelings of self-brand connection towards the target brand. Specifically, we provided evidence that this effect of outrage on self-brand connection occurs when the observing-consumer shares the brand's values

and when the outrage is expressed by a morality-based outgroup member. Furthermore, we demonstrated this effect was strengthened when the outgroup outrage had a high degree of viral social support. Lastly, we demonstrated that social threat was the underlying reason why outrage resulted in increased self-brand connection, that is the viral outgroup outrage signaled a threat towards consumers' personal moral values. Thus, providing evidence that observers' responses to expressed outrage can depend on various social cues including whether the outrage is aligned with observers' personal values, the source of the outrage, and the degree of social support the outrage receives.

With respect to the second essay (Chapter 4), we provide insight into the role of expressed outrage towards advertisements that engage in a norm violation. Three studies provided evidence that outrage towards advertisements that engage in mild violations were less likely to influence observers to appraise the brand negatively compared to negative reactions without outrage. The underlying mechanism for this effect was the perceived appropriateness of the negative reaction. This research suggests that consumers independently appraise an advertisement's norm violation and compare it with the social information provided by expressions of disapproval. Thus, when the expressor's emotional reaction is misaligned with the observer's personal appraisal of the triggering event this can lead to non-conformity. Given that outrage signals that the expressor has appraised an event to be a severe norm violation, if an observer independently appraises the event differently, the outrage can be viewed as inappropriate and the impact of expressions of disapproval will be diminished. Interestingly, inappropriate anger was counterproductive in the sense that it reversed the effects of the informational content of the expressor's appraisal and ultimately rendered the angry response as no more effective than a no social media response control, suggesting that outrage can



undermine the social information that expressors aim to communicate to observers regarding the offensiveness of such advertisements. Taken together, the two essays of this dissertation provide evidence that outrage towards brands does not necessarily lead to negative brand consequences (Lindenmeier et al., 2012; Kähr et al., 2016), and can even backfire, in the sense that expressed outrage actually resulted in increased support for brands (Chapter 3) and also undermined the informational effects that expressing disapproval had on brand appraisals when conveyed in a nonemotional manner (Chapter 4).

Understanding how consumers respond to online outrage towards brands is important in the current digital age, where marketing communications are rarely presented in a social vacuum. Oftentimes consumers encounter marketing actions simultaneously with social feedback from a large number of people on social media. Furthermore, given the tendency for moral content to rapidly spread across social networks (Brady, Crockett & Van Bavel, 2020), encountering outrage toward marketing material that is deemed offensive is fairly prevalent (Sexton, 2015). Given that the internet has become a battleground amongst groups with conflicting moral values (Needleman & Herrera, 2020; Puryear, 2020), consumers and brands are increasingly expected to “choose a side” (DeScioli, 2016; Hydock, Paharia & Blair, 2020). These trends have created a complex digital environment for brands and raise the need for more research to enhance our understanding of consumer outrage.

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## Appendix A: Chapter 3- Study 1 Methodological Details and Pilot Tests

### Study 1

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section you will be presented a tweet by **Moda Fashion**, a clothing retailer. You will also be provided an individual’s reaction to this tweet. Please remember, we are interested in your opinion-there are no right or wrong answers. Please click on the next page to view the tweets.”

Afterwards, participants moved on to the next page, where they were presented the brand’s tweet and randomly assigned to view a tweet from a value-based outgroup that expressed outrage towards the brands or expressed disapproval without outrage (image of the tweets below). Participants were then asked to describe their thoughts about the tweets.

**Participants Instruction: Please spend some time to view this tweet and the ensuing reaction to this tweet.**



### Value-Based Outgroup Outrage Tweet

Tweets    Tweets & replies    Media    Likes

 **David W @WhitePride26**  
Replying to @modafashion  
This is OUTRAGEOUS! Why do these companies constantly push these INFURIATING AGENDAS on us?!! #NoMigrants

13    21    118

### Value-Based Outgroup Control Tweet

Tweets    Tweets & replies    Media    Likes

 **David W @WhitePride26**  
Replying to @modafashion  
Why do these companies constantly push these agendas on us? #NoMigrants

13    21    118

Please describe your thoughts about these tweets. You have two minutes to respond before being transferred to the next page.





### Additional Demographic Information

#### Ethnicity

##### Which racial or ethnic group do you best identify with?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Aboriginal (First Nations, Native Canadian, etc.)	2	.6	.6
Black (African-Canadian, East/West African, Caribbean, Jamaican, etc.)	26	8.1	8.8
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	15	4.7	13.4
Latin American (Mexican, Costa Rican, Panamanian, etc.)	10	3.1	16.6
Middle Eastern (Afghani, Israeli, Persian, etc.)	1	.3	16.9
Polynesian (Native Hawaiian, New Zealander, etc.)	1	.3	17.2
South American (Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, etc.)	2	.6	17.8
South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	5	1.6	19.4
South East Asian (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)	10	3.1	22.5
White (Australian, European, Canadian, American, South African, etc.)	232	72.5	95.0
Mixed	12	3.8	98.8
Other	4	1.3	100.0
Total	320	100.0	

## Study 1 Pilot Test Results

**Pretest A:** An initial pretest ( $N = 109$ ) among the same population was conducted to assess the degree in which TurkPrime participants wished to dissociation from “White Supremacists”. All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section you will be presented a series of groups of individuals and asked to provide your opinion about these groups. Please remember, we are interested in your opinion-there are no right or wrong answers.”

Afterwards, participants were presented four groups in random order (White supremacists, Trump supporters, Biden supporters and Canadians) and asked to indicate the degree to which they wished to dissociate from the group (4 items; White & Dahl, 2007). Participants also indicated their general attitude towards these groups (3 items, 7-point scale, Bad-Good, Not Favorable-Favorable, Negative-Positive). The results suggested that White supremacists were a highly dissociative outgroup and the desire to dissociate from this group was significantly higher than the scale midpoint ( $M = 5.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, paired sample *t*-tests suggested that in comparison to Biden supporters ( $M = 4.03$ ) and Canadians ( $M = 3.77$ ), participants were significantly more likely to dissociate from White supremacists ( $ps < .01$ ).

**Pretest B:** A second pretest ( $N = 59$ ) using the same population was conducted to test the outrage manipulation while controlling for measures of disapproval towards the brand’s social message. The procedure and stimuli for this study were identical to Study 1, however the measures differed. After viewing the morality-based outgroup tweet respondents indicated the extent to which they felt that the outgroup tweet was an expression of disapproval towards this advertisement. Following this, participants indicated the degree in which they thought the twitter user was outraged, the extent to which the response tweet was personally relevant and the tweets perceived typicality.

A one way ANOVA of outgroup outrage on perceptions of disapproval suggested that there were no significant differences between the control condition ( $M = 6.45$ ) and the outrage condition ( $M = 6.54$ ),  $F(1,56) = .20$ ,  $p = .65$ ). The effect for outrage on perceptions of personal relevance ( $p = .70$ ) and typicality were also non-significant ( $p = .18$ ). Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA of outgroup outrage on perceptions of outrage suggested that there was a significant difference between the control condition ( $M = 5.30$ ) and the outrage condition ( $M = 6.31$ ),  $F(1,57) = 10.6$ ,  $p = .002$ .

**Pretest C:** A third pilot test ( $N = 93$ ) using the same population was conducted to see whether political affiliation would predict attitudes towards immigration and attitudes towards the brand’s message. Regression analyses predicted that political affiliation significantly predicted attitudes towards immigration ( $B = -.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and attitudes towards the message ( $B = -.25$ ,  $p = .005$ )



## Appendix B: Chapter 2- Study 2 Methodological Details and Pilot Tests

**A priori screening rules:** This study was restricted to individuals who identified as Republican. We requested 600 participants on TurkPrime. Of these respondents, 268 participants self-identified as Republicans and were therefore retained in the study.

### **Procedure and Stimuli**

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section you will be presented a newspaper article about Sporting Life and asked to provide your opinion about it. **Sporting Life is a sporting goods retail company that sells clothing and equipment.** Please remember, we are interested in your opinion-there are no right or wrong answers. Please click on the next page to view this article.”

Afterwards, participants moved on to the next page, where they were presented the passage and were asked to describe their thoughts about the article.

### **Study 2 Stimuli**

BUSINESS NEWS MARCH 2, 2020 / 9:27 AM

## **Sporting Life will continue to sell guns despite pressure**

Sporting Life announced it will continue selling firearms at its stores, despite pressure from advocacy groups. This announcement follows recent calls to ban the sales of firearms at large retailers in the wake of several mass shootings.

Sporting Life, which sells guns in 125 of its stores, will continue selling long-barrel deer rifles, shotguns, as well as other firearms and ammunition for hunting and sports shooting. It will also continue to allow customers to carry concealed firearms at its stores, as long as they have proper permits.

After reading the article and responding to the open ended question, participants were presented the following information:

“In this section you will be presented a tweet from a user commenting on Sporting Life’s decision. Please click on the next page to view this tweet.”

Participants moved on to the next page in which they were randomly assigned to view one of four response tweets; an outgroup outrage tweet, an outgroup control tweet, an ingroup outrage tweet, or an ingroup control tweet. Participants were asked to describe their thoughts about the tweet. Instructions and the stimuli for this section are shown below.

Please view the tweet from a **twitter user** regarding **Sporting Life's decision**.

Please view this carefully as you will be asked your opinions about this tweet.

### Outgroup control



**Democrat for Gun Control**  
@democratforguncontrol

We need to stop relying on companies like this to do the right thing. We need to repeal and replace the second amendment with something that allows for common sense gun control @sportinglife

♡ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

### Outgroup outrage



**Democrat for Gun Control**  
@democratforguncontrol

We need to stop relying on GREEDY companies like this to do the RIGHT thing! We need to REPEAL and REPLACE the second amendment with something that allows for REAL gun control !!! @sportinglife

♡ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

### Ingroup control



**Republican for Gun Control**  
@republicanforguncontrol

We need to stop relying on companies like this to do the right thing. We need to repeal and replace the second amendment with something that allows for common sense gun control @sportinglife

♡ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

### Ingroup outrage



**Republican for Gun Control**  
@republicanforguncontrol

We need to stop relying on GREEDY companies like this to do the RIGHT thing! We need to REPEAL and REPLACE the second amendment with something that allows for REAL gun control !!! @sportinglife

♡ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

Please take some time to describe your thoughts about this tweet.

All participants were then directed to respond to a series of items capturing their brand attitude (3 items, Mackenzie, 1986), purchase intentions (2 items; screenshot of interface shown below) and self-brand connection (7 items; Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

### **Brand Attitude Measure**

Overall, how do you feel about **Sporting Life**:

Bad	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Good
Not Favorable	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Favorable
Negative	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Positive

### **Purchase Intention Measure**

Please imagine that a **Sporting Life** Retailer **opened near you**.

With this in mind, please respond to the following statements.

1. I would shop at this retailer.

1. Strongly Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

2. I would visit this retailer.

1. Strongly Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Following this, participants were presented the following information:

In this section we would like to ask a series of questions related to the **tweet in response to Sporting Life's decision**.

Please proceed to the next page.

Participants then responded to a series of items capturing their perceptions of social threat (3 items, Duckitt, 2006) and perceptions of outrage (3 items). Participants then indicated whether they identified as a Republican and then indicated their desire to dissociate from Democrats (4 items, White & Dahl, 2007) and desire to associate with Republicans (2 items). Screenshot of interface are shown below.

### Desire to Dissociate from Democrats

Please read the following questions carefully and indicate your response using a 7 point scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree).

Please note that "**them**" refers to members of the **Democratic Party**.

1. I do not want to be associated with them.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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2. I want to avoid being associated with them.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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3. I would avoid identifying with them.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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4. I strongly identify with them.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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### Desire to Associate with Republicans

Please read the following questions carefully and indicate your response using a 7 point scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree).

Please note that "**them**" refers to members of the **Republican Party**.

1. I strongly identify with them.

1. Strongly Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. I want to be associated with them.

1. Strongly Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Afterwards, participants responded to two items as to whether they agreed with Sporting Life's decision and whether they supported gun reforms. Following this, participants responded to two items regarding their commitment to the second amendment and a series of items related to the typicality of the tweet. Screenshots of the interface are shown below.

### Views towards brand's decision and gun reforms

Are you in favor of Sporting Life's decision.

Yes

No

Not Sure

Are you in favor of Gun Reforms

Yes

No

Not Sure

### **Commitment to the second amendment**

How much or little do you care about the "right to bear arms" ?

1. Do not care at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Care a great deal <input type="radio"/>
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How important is the "right to bear arms" to you?

1. Not at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Very much so <input type="radio"/>
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### **Typicality of Tweet**

How typical was this tweet?

1. Not at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Very much so <input type="radio"/>
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Was this tweet believable?

1. Not at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Very much so <input type="radio"/>
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Was this tweet unusual?

1. Not at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Very much so <input type="radio"/>
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Finally, participants responded to a series of demographic items including their political affiliation and educational background.

## Study 2: Education

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g., GED)	13	6.2	6.2	6.2
Some college credits, no degree	20	9.6	9.6	15.8
College diploma	6	2.9	2.9	18.7
Bachelor's degree	115	55.0	55.0	73.7
Master's degree	54	25.8	25.8	99.5
Doctorate degree	1	.5	.5	100.0
Total	209	100.0	100.0	

**Study 2 Pretest Information:** A pretest ( $N = 263$ ) among a Republican and Democrat population was conducted to test the outrage manipulation. In this pretest we manipulated the text of the tweet by including certain phrases (e.g., GREEDY companies) and incorporating exclamation marks and capitalized words (e.g., “Real gun control!!!”). Furthermore, we attempted to control for perceptions of disapproval by including certain phrases in both conditions (e.g., “repeal and replace the second amendment”). The procedure and stimuli for this study was identical to Study 3, however participants were randomly assigned to one of three democrat outrage conditions: a high outrage condition, a moderate outrage condition and a low outrage condition. The high and low outrage condition were identical to Study 3. However, the moderate outrage condition contained the exact same text as the high outrage condition without the capitalized words and exclamation marks (see images below).

### Democrat Low Outrage



**Democrat for Gun Control**

@democratforguncontrol

We need to stop relying on greedy companies like this to do the right thing. We need to repeal and replace the second amendment with something that allows for real gun control @sportinglife

♥ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

### Democrat Moderate Outrage



**Democrat for Gun Control**

@democratforguncontrol

This company is only concerned with profits. We need to repeal and replace the second amendment with something that allows for common sense gun control @sportinglife

♥ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

### Democrat High Outrage



**Democrat for Gun Control**

@democratforguncontrol

I'm sick of companies like this! Only concerned with PROFITS. We need to REPEAL and REPLACE the second amendment with something that allows for REAL gun control. Enough is ENOUGH!  
@sportinglife

♥ 340 5:04 PM-Mar 3, 2020

After viewing the tweet, respondents indicated the extent to which they felt that the was supportive of Sporting Life's decision and the extent to which they thought the user disapproved of Sporting Life's decision. Following this, participants indicated the degree in which they thought the twitter user was outraged (3 items), their support for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment (i.e., "Right to Bear Arms) and their political affiliation.

A oneway ANOVA of outrage on perceptions of disapproval suggested that there were no significant differences between the three conditions,  $F(1, 261) = .77, p = .67$ . Furthermore, perceptions of disapproval were significantly above the scale midpoint for the low outrage ( $M = 6.00, p < .001$ ), moderate outrage ( $M = 6.13, p < .001$ ) and high outrage conditions ( $M = 5.94, p < .001$ ). Also, the pattern of results were consistent when controlling for political affiliation.

Additionally, a one way ANOVA of outrage on perceptions of outrage suggested that there was a significant difference between the groups,  $F(1,260) = 4.90, p < .01$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that the high outrage condition was perceived to be significantly more outraged ( $M = 5.47$ ) compared to the low outrage condition ( $M = 4.80, p < .01$ ). However, there were no differences in perceptions of outrage between the moderate outrage ( $M=5.10$ ) and the other conditions ( $p = .086$  and  $p = .17$  respectively). Also, the pattern of results were consistent when controlling for political affiliation. Finally, a regression analysis revealed that political affiliation predicted support for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment in that Republican participants were more likely to express support for the Right to Bear Arms ( $B = .62, p < .001$ ).



## Appendix C: Chapter 2-Study 3 Methodological Details

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section you will be presented a tweet by **Moda Fashion**, a clothing retailer. You will also be provided an individual’s reaction to this tweet. Please remember, we are interested in your opinion—there are no right or wrong answers. Please click on the next page to view the tweets.”

Afterwards, participants moved on to the next page, where they were presented the brand’s tweet and randomly assigned to view one of four response tweets: a value-based outgroup outrage tweet, a value-based outgroup control tweet, a non-value-based outgroup outrage tweet, or a non-value-based outgroup control tweet. Participants were then asked to describe their thoughts about the tweets.



### Value-Based Outgroup Outrage



### Value-Based Outgroup Control









### **Moral Opposition to Outgroup (Trump Supporters)**

1. Trump Supporters as a group hold values that conflict with that of my own.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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2. Trump Supporters as a group hold values that are dangerous to society.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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3. I oppose the values that Trump Supporters stand for.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
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### Study 3 – Ethnic Background

#### Which racial or ethnic group do you best identify with?

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Aboriginal (First Nations, Native Canadian, etc.)	1	.4	.4
Black (African-Canadian, East/West African, Caribbean, Jamaican, etc.)	23	9.2	9.6
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	19	7.6	17.3
Latin American (Mexican, Costa Rican, Panamanian, etc.)	6	2.4	19.7
Middle Eastern (Afghani, Israeli, Persian, etc.)	29	11.6	31.3
Polynesian (Native Hawaiian, New Zealander, etc.)	1	.4	31.7
South American (Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, etc.)	1	.4	32.1
South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	65	26.1	58.2
South East Asian (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)	20	8.0	66.3
White (of traditional European decent)	57	22.9	89.2
Mixed	19	7.6	96.8
Other	8	3.2	100.0
Total	249	100.0	

## Appendix D: Chapter 2-Study 4 Methodological Details and Pilot Test

All participants were informed that there would be two sections to this study and that at the end of the studies they would be provided an opportunity to enter a lottery for a \$100 gift card. Following this, participants were presented the initial stimuli and told that a team of graduate students were interested in their opinions of these tweets to help guide subsequent research.

Participants were presented a tweet from Champs Sports in support of diversity initiatives and then randomly assigned to view a tweet from a value-based outgroup that expressed outrage or not. They were then asked to provide their thoughts about these tweets in an open ended response.

### Brand Message from Champs Sports



### Value-Based Outgroup Control Tweet



### Value-Based Outgroup Outrage Tweet



Following this, participants were presented a series of attention check questions to ensure that they carefully viewed the material. If the attention check questions were answered incorrectly they were asked to view the material again. This was important to include to ensure that participants did not confuse the attacked brand (Champs Sports) with the value affirming brand (Designer Shoe Warehouse).

### Attention Check Items (Champs Sports Tweet & Negative Reaction)

In this section, we would like to ask you a series of questions about the material you were presented.

1. The name of the brand presented in the first tweet was:

Champs Sports

Browns Shoes

SoftMoc

2. The content of the tweet was related to:

Promotion on Shoes

Diversity and Inclusivity

None of the Above

3. The response tweet:

Supported the Brand's tweet

Opposed the Brand's tweet

Was neutral

Following this participants were forwarded to the second section and told the following “In this section, you will be presented a press release from **Designer Shoe Warehouse, a company that sells footwear and fashion accessories**. Press releases are an official statement issued to news outlets, giving information on a particular mater. Your thoughts on this will help guide subsequent research.” Participants were then presented the press release and asked to provide their thoughts about it.

### Press Release for Designer Shoe Warehouse

January 10th, 2022 09:01 AM Eastern Standard Time

NEW YORK--(GLOBE NEWSWIRE)—Designer Shoe Warehouse announced today that they will commit \$20 million to support organizations dedicated to diversity and inclusion through economic development and education. In addition, Designer Shoe Warehouse has commissioned an Inclusion Advisory Board with the aim of providing demonstratable strategies to make recruitment and retention more inclusive.

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After this, participants answers two attention check items to ensure they read the material and did not confused the initial brand from the press release brand. If participants answered the items incorrectly they were asked to view the stimuli again.

### **Attention Check (Designer Shoe Warehouse Press Release)**

In this section, we would like to ask you a series of questions about the material you were presented.

1. The name of the brand presented in the press release was:

Designer Shoe Warehouse (DSW)

Browns Shoes

SoftMoc

2. The content of the press release was related to:

Promotion on Shoes

Diversity and Inclusivity

None of the Above

All participants were then directed to respond to a questionnaire capturing their feeling of self-brand connection to Moda Fashion (7 items; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), social threat (3 items), threat towards values surrounding diversity (3 items), perceptions of outrage (3 items), entitativity of the outgroup (3 items), desire to dissociate from the outgroup (4 items), moral opposition to the outgroup (3 items), attention check items to ensure that participants distinguished the attacked brand from the press-release brand. Participants then reported whether they had heard of Designer Shoe Warehouse (press-release brand) and Champs Sports (attacked brand), whether they had shopped from these brands in the past, and how often they shopped from these brands. Participants then responded to a series of demographic items.

Following this participants were requested to enter the lottery by choosing whether they wanted a \$100 Gift-Card from Designer Shoe Warehouse (press-release brand) or another retailer (Aldo Shoes). Participants then reported whether they had shopped from Aldo in the past and how often they shopped from this retailer.

**Screen Shot of Interface for gift card lottery selection (Designer Shoe Warehouse vs. Aldo)**

**As mentioned in the beginning of the study, you have an opportunity to Win a \$100 gift card from the retailer of your choice as an additional thanks for participating in this study!**

All participants are invited to enter their email address to be entered in a random draw for a \$100 gift card to one of two retailers (**Designer Shoe Warehouse or Aldo**).

We will conduct a random draw once the study has finished running.

If you win the lottery, you will receive the gift card from the retailer you chose.

To maintain your privacy, we will not link your responses to your email address. Please tell us here which gift card you would like:

**\$100 Gift Card from Designer Shoe Warehouse**

**\$100 Gift Card from Aldo**

**Study 4 Pretest Information:** A pretest ( $N = 56$ ) from the same population was conducted to test attitudes towards the three focal brands in Study 4 (i.e., Designer Shoe Warehouse, Champs Sports and Aldo) and to test the Outrage manipulation. Participants reported their attitudes and loyalty towards these brands. Following this, they were presented the social message from Study 4 (i.e., Champ Sports message in support of diversity) and the negative responses (outrage versus control). They then reported the extent in which they thought the response was disapproving of Champ Sports message and the extent in which they thought the commentator was outraged.

Pairwise comparison revealed that participants had higher attitudes ( $M = 4.88$  vs.  $M = 4.53$ ,  $p = .083$ ) and brand loyalty ( $M = 2.82$  vs.  $M = 2.14$ ,  $p = .031$ ) towards Aldo Shoes (i.e., the gift card alternative brand) compared to Designer Shoe Warehouse (i.e., focal gift card brand). Furthermore, a one way ANOVA of outgroup outrage on perceptions of disapproval suggested that there were no significant differences between the control condition ( $M = 4.54$ ) and

the outrage condition ( $M = 4.61$ ),  $F(1,54) = .03$ ,  $p = .87$ ). Lastly, a one-way ANOVA of outgroup outrage on perceptions of outrage suggested that there was a significant difference between the control condition ( $M = 4.65$ ) and the outrage condition ( $M = 6.13$ ),  $F(1,54) = 20.67$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### Study 4: Ethnicity

##### Which racial or ethnic group do you best identify with?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Black (African-Canadian, East/West African, Caribbean, Jamaican, etc.)	25	12.1	12.1	12.1
	East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	15	7.2	7.2	19.3
	Latin American (Mexican, Costa Rican, Panamanian, etc.)	3	1.4	1.4	20.8
	Middle Eastern (Afghani, Israeli, Persian, etc.)	24	11.6	11.6	32.4
	South American (Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, etc.)	2	1.0	1.0	33.3
	South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	63	30.4	30.4	63.8
	South East Asian (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)	21	10.1	10.1	73.9
	White (Australian, European, Canadian, American, South African, etc.)	40	19.3	19.3	93.2
	Mixed	8	3.9	3.9	97.1
	Other	6	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	207	100.0	100.0	

## Appendix E: Chapter 2-Study 5 Methodological Details and Pilot Test

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section you will be presented a tweet by Brooks Running and asked to provide your opinion about it. **Brooks Running is a sporting goods company that sells shoes and apparel.** Please remember, we are interested in your opinion-there are no right or wrong answers. Please click on the next page to view the tweet.”



After viewing the tweet and responding to the open ended question, participants were randomly assigned to view a text that either suggested the tweet had gone viral or a text without such information (screenshot of interface below).

### Low Social Support Condition

In this section you will be presented a tweet from a user commenting on **Brooks Running's** tweet.

Please click on the next page to view this tweet.

### High Social Support Condition

In this section you will be presented a tweet from a user commenting on **Brooks Running's** tweet.

**This tweet has gained a significant amount of attention on social media (i.e., gone viral).**

Please click on the next page to view this tweet.

After participants moved on to the next page, they were randomly assigned to view one of four response tweets; an outgroup outrage tweet with high social support, an outgroup outrage tweet with low social support, an outgroup control tweet with high social support and an outgroup control tweet with low social support (image of tweets below). Social support was manipulated by altering the number of likes, retweets and comments to the twitter post. Additionally, participants were asked to describe their thoughts about the tweet.

#### Outgroup Outrage (High Social Support)



#### Outgroup Outrage (Low Social Support)



#### Outgroup Control (High Social Support)



#### Outgroup Control (Low Social Support)



All participants were then directed to respond to a series of items capturing their self-brand connection (7 items; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), perception of social threat (3 items, Duckitt, 2006) and perceptions of outrage (3 items). Furthermore, participants were asked if they identify as Trump supporters and were subsequently direct to respond to a series of items capturing their desire to dissociate from Trump supporters (4 items; White & Dahl, 2007). Participants were then asked to identify their commitment to the anti-racism protests of 2020 (2 items) and were asked to identify their perceptions of the degree of social support the outgroup tweet received (2 items). This latter measure served as a manipulation check. Screenshots of the interface for the measures not included in the prior studies are provided below.

## Commitment to Protests

How much or little do you support the current anti-racism protests?

1. Do not care at all	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Care a great deal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How important are these anti-racism protests to you?

1. Not at all	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Very much so
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Perceptions of Social Support

Please read the following questions carefully and indicate your response using a 7 point scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree).

This tweet went viral among Trump Supporters.

1. Strongly Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This tweet was supported by other Trump Supporters.

1. Strongly Disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Finally, participants responded to a series of demographic items.

## Study 5 - Ethnicity

### Which racial or ethnic group do you best identify with?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Black (African-Canadian, East/West African, Caribbean, Jamaican, etc.)	23	11.2	11.2
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	24	11.7	22.9
Latin American (Mexican, Costa Rican, Panamanian, etc.)	4	2.0	24.9
Middle Eastern (Afghani, Israeli, Persian, etc.)	27	13.2	38.0
South American (Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, etc.)	3	1.5	39.5
South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	50	24.4	63.9
South East Asian (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)	11	5.4	69.3
White (Australian, European, Canadian, American, South African, etc.)	52	25.4	94.6
Mixed	9	4.4	99.0
Other	2	1.0	100.0
Total	205	100.0	

**Study 5 Pretest Information:** A pretest ( $N = 52$ ) from the same population was conducted to test the outgroup outrage manipulation while controlling for measures of disapproval towards the advertisement. The procedure and stimuli for this study was identical to Study 5, however the measures differed. After viewing the outgroup tweet respondents indicated the extent to which they felt that the outgroup tweet was supportive of the advertisement and the extent to which they thought the user disapproved of the advertisement. Following this, participants indicated the degree to which they thought the twitter user was outraged (3 items). A one way ANOVA of outgroup outrage on perceptions of disapproval suggested that there were no significant differences between the control condition ( $M = 5.90$ ) and the outrage condition ( $M = 5.66$ ),  $F(1,51) = .33, p = .57$ ). Furthermore, a one way ANOVA of outgroup outrage on perceptions of outrage suggested that there was a significant difference between the control condition ( $M = 3.57$ ) and the outrage condition ( $M = 5.79$ ),  $F(1,51) = 32.04, p < .001$ .



## Appendix F: Chapter 4 Methodological Details and Pilot Tests

### Study 1

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this study you will be presented an advertisement by Burger Brothers, a restaurant chain. Please remember, we are interested in your opinions- there are no right or wrong answers. Please click on the next page to view the advertisement and social media comments.”

Afterwards, participants moved on to the next page, where they were presented the advertisement and randomly assigned to one of four conditions (negative response: outrage, neutral-emotion, humor, control). Participants were then ask to describe their thoughts.



**K Preme** @kpreme



Burger Brothers just put out an advertisement that mocks vegans for choosing to eat quinoa instead of beef.






71

90

164



## Emotionally Neutral Negative Responses

-  **Pat B** @patb887  
Replying to @kreme  
Their burgers are terrible  
11 replies 30 retweets 110 likes
- 
-  **Muv** @muvalee  
Replying to @kpreme  
This ad is pathetic  
17 replies 28 retweets 89 likes
- 
-  **Dom** @dpano22  
Replying to @marsverne  
Who thought this ad was a good idea?  
14 replies 23 retweets 72 likes
- 
-  **Kelly Low** @low\_kelly13  
Replying to @kpreme  
What a dumb ad  
8 replies 10 retweets 30 likes

## Humorous Negative Responses

-  **Pat B** @patb887  
Replying to @kpreme  
I've had their burgers..the quinoa is a better option 🤔  
11 replies 30 retweets 110 likes
- 
-  **Muv** @muvalee  
Replying to @kpreme  
This ad is hilariously bad 😂  
17 replies 28 retweets 89 likes
- 
-  **Dom** @dpano22  
Replying to @kpreme  
Hahaha I can't believe a group of people got together and thought this ad was a good idea  
14 replies 23 retweets 72 likes
- 
-  **Kelly Low** @low\_kelly13  
Replying to @kpreme  
LOL what a dumb ad 😂  
8 replies 10 retweets 30 likes

## Outrage Responses



**Pat B** @patb887

Replying to @kpreme

Fuck them and their shitty burgers!!!

11

30

110



**Muv** @muvalee

Replying to @kpreme

This ad is OUTRAGEOUS!!!

17

28

89



**Dom** @dpano22

Replying to @kpreme

The IDIOTS who thought this ad was a good idea should be FIRED!!!

14

23

72



**Kelly Low** @low\_kelly13

Replying to @kpreme

What a ridiculously dumb ad!!! FUCK THIS COMPANY!

8

10

30



Please take two minutes to list any thoughts you had about the advertisement and the response comments.

Move on to the next question when you have listed the thoughts you had or when time is expired.

List each thought separately in the boxes below.

Thought 1

Thought 2

Thought 3

Thought 4







### Empathy towards brands

To what extent did these **tweets** make you feel **empathy, sympathy and compassion towards the brand.**

	1. Not at all	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Very much so
Empathy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sympathy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compassion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Schadenfreude towards brands

1. I couldn't resist a little smile that the twitter users were upset.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
--	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	---

2. I couldn't help but laugh a bit that the twitter users were upset.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
--	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	---

3. I took pleasure in knowing that the twitter users were upset.

1. Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/>
--	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	---

### Perceptions of responses outrage and humor

Please rate the extent to which the **twitter users** found the Gourmet Burger Kitchen advertisement to be:

	1. Not at all	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Very much so
Humorous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Funny	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the extent to which the **twitter users** were:

	1. Not at all	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Very much so
Outraged	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Angry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Infuriated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Study 6: Dietary Restrictions & Ethnicity

Do you have any dietary restrictions? - Selected Choice

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Vegetarian	41	9.8	9.8
Vegan	6	1.4	11.2
Halal	78	18.6	29.8
Kosher	5	1.2	31.0
Other (Specify)	20	4.8	35.8
Gluten Free	4	1.0	36.8
None	265	63.2	100.0
Total	419	100.0	



**Which racial or ethnic group do you best identify with?**

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Black (African-Canadian, East/West African, Caribbean, Jamaican, etc.)	13	3.1	3.1
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	48	11.5	14.6
Latin American (Mexican, Costa Rican, Panamanian, etc.)	2	.5	15.1
Middle Eastern (Afghani, Israeli, Persian, etc.)	31	7.4	22.5
South American (Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, etc.)	1	.2	22.7
South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	187	44.7	67.5
South East Asian (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)	21	5.0	72.5
White (of traditional European decent)	101	24.2	96.7
Mixed	8	1.9	98.6
Other	6	1.4	100.0
Total	418	100.0	

## Study 2

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section, you will be presented an advertisement by Gourmet Burger Kitchen, a restaurant chain. You will also be provided some consumer reactions to this advertisement. Please remember, we are interested in your opinion- there are no right or wrong answers.”

Afterwards, participants moved on to the next page, where they were presented the advertisement and randomly assigned to one of two conditions (negative response: outrage vs. humor). Participants were then ask to describe their thoughts.

## Study 2 Stimuli



## Humorous Reponses

-  **Jimmy Pierson** @jimmyspierson  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 Honestly, I've had your burgers..the lettuce is a better option 🤔  
 25 30 120
-  **N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 Lol mocking vegans for not wanting to abuse animals? Not smart  
 18 21 73
-  **Sammy** @SammyM  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 This ad is so bad that it's funny...who approved this?!  
 11 6 38
-  **Mars Verne** @MarsVerne  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 I think I'm going to fancy a boycott of ur company 😬  
 21 30 170

## Outrage Responses

-  **Jimmy Pierson** @jimmyspierson  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 HONESTLY, I've had your burgers..the lettuce is a better OPTION!!!!  
 25 30 120
-  **N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 Mocking vegans for not wanting to abuse animals!? NOT SMART!  
 18 21 73
-  **Sammy** @SammyM  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 This ad is so bad that it's OUTRAGEOUS..who approved this!?  
 11 6 38
-  **Mars Verne** @MarsVerne  
 Replying to @gbkburgers  
 I THINK I'M GOING TO FANCY A BOYCOTT OF YOUR COMPANY!  
 21 30 170





### Typicality of Responses

How typical were these tweets?

1. Not at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Very much so <input type="radio"/>
--	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	--

Were these tweets unusual?

1. Not at all <input type="radio"/>	2. <input type="radio"/>	3. <input type="radio"/>	4. <input type="radio"/>	5. <input type="radio"/>	6. <input type="radio"/>	7. Very much so <input type="radio"/>
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## Study 2: Dietary Restrictions

### 2. Do you have any dietary restrictions? - Selected Choice

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Vegetarian	17	5.7	5.7
	Vegan	6	2.0	7.7
	Halal	2	.7	8.3
	Kosher	1	.3	8.7
	Other (Specify)	13	4.3	13.0
	Gluten Free	9	3.0	16.0
	None	252	84.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	

### Study 3

All participants were provided the following information about the survey session:

“In this section, you will be presented an advertisement by Gourmet Burger Kitchen, a restaurant chain. You will also be provided some consumer reactions to this advertisement. Please remember, we are interested in your opinion- there are no right or wrong answers.”

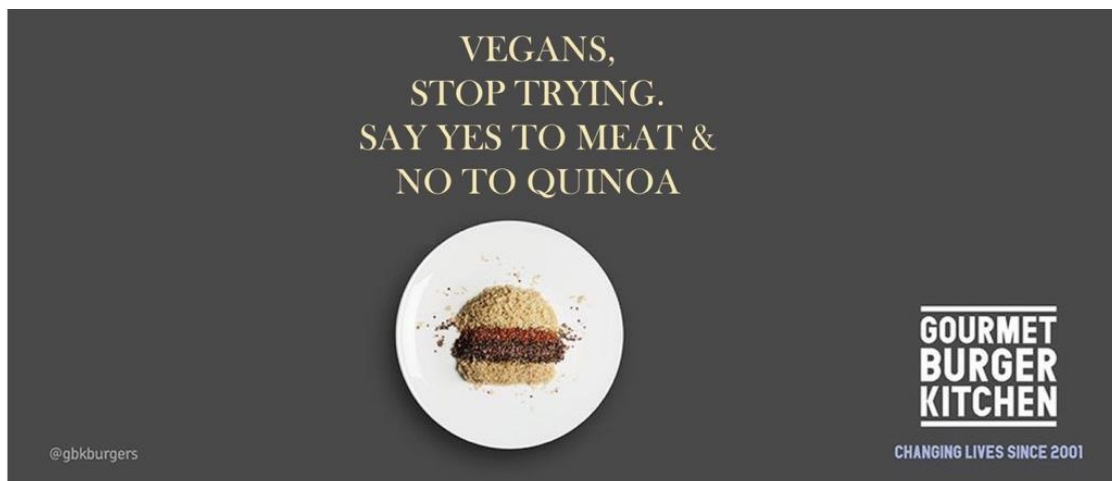
Afterwards, participants moved on to the next page, where they were presented the advertisement and randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (norm violation: mild vs. more severe) x 2 (negative response: outrage vs. humor) in a between subjects factorial design.

### Study 3 Stimuli

#### Mild Violation







#### More Severe Violation



## Humorous Response

-  **Jimmy Pierson** @jimmypierson  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
Honestly, I've had your burgers..Quinoa is a better option 😊  
11 replies 15 retweets 84 likes
- 
-  **N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
Lol mocking vegans for not wanting to abuse animals? Not smart  
8 replies 18 retweets 67 likes
- 
-  **Sammy** @SammyM  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
This ad is so bad that it's funny...who approved this?!  
12 replies 18 retweets 121 likes
- 
-  **Mars Verne** @MarsVerne  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
Hahaha business must be really bad 😂  
5 replies 7 retweets 55 likes

## Outrage Responses

-  **Jimmy Pierson** @jimmypierson  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
Honestly, I've had your CRAPPY BURGERS!!! Quinoa is a better option!  
11 replies 15 retweets 84 likes
- 
-  **N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
Mocking vegans for not wanting to abuse animals!? OFFENSIVE!!!  
8 replies 18 retweets 67 likes
- 
-  **Sammy** @SammyM  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
This ad is outrageous and insensitive...who approved this?!  
12 replies 18 retweets 121 likes
- 
-  **Mars Verne** @MarsVerne  
Replying to @gbkburgers  
Business must be really bad for you morons!  
5 replies 7 retweets 55 likes





### Study 3: Ethnicity and Dietary Restriction

#### Which racial or ethnic group do you best identify with?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Aboriginal (First Nations, Native Canadian, etc.)	2	.6	.6
Black (African-Canadian, East/West African, Caribbean, Jamaican, etc.)	38	11.3	11.9
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	44	13.1	25.1
Latin American (Mexican, Costa Rican, Panamanian, etc.)	2	.6	25.7
Middle Eastern (Afghani, Israeli, Persian, etc.)	48	14.3	40.0
South American (Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, etc.)	6	1.8	41.8
South Asian (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	96	28.7	70.4
South East Asian (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)	22	6.6	77.0
White (Australian, European, Canadian, American, South African, etc.)	57	17.0	94.0
Mixed	15	4.5	98.5
Other	5	1.5	100.0
Total	335	100.0	

**Do you have any dietary restrictions? - Selected Choice**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Vegetarian	34	10.1	10.1
Vegan	5	1.5	11.6
Halal	68	20.3	31.9
Kosher	5	1.5	33.4
Other (Specify)	25	7.5	40.9
Gluten Free	6	1.8	42.7
None	192	57.3	100.0
Total	335	100.0	

**Pretest A Information:** A pretest ( $N = 170$ ) from the same population as Study 1 and 3 was conducted. This pretest aimed to 1) Determine whether the advertisement in Study 1 was considered to be engaging in a mild norm violation 2) Determine whether the norm violation severity manipulation was effective. Participants were randomly assigned to either the mild norm violation advertisement (i.e., “Burger, It’s The New Quinoa”) which was also used in Study 1 or the severe norm violation advertisement (i.e., “Vegans, Stop Trying. Say Yes to Meat & No To Quinoa”). Following this participants reported their advertisement attitude, brand attitude and perceived offensive of the advertisement.

A one way ANOVA of norm violation severity revealed a significant effect on advertisement attitude ( $M_{\text{Mild}} = 4.37$  vs.  $M_{\text{Severe}} = 3.57$ ,  $F(1,166) = 10.33$ ,  $p = .002$ ), brand attitude ( $M_{\text{Mild}} = 4.54$  vs.  $M_{\text{Severe}} = 3.74$ ,  $F(1,168) = 12.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and perceived offense ( $M_{\text{Mild}} = 3.44$  vs.  $M_{\text{Severe}} = 4.35$ ,  $F(1,167) = 35.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, the perceived offensiveness of the mild norm violation was significantly below the mid-point ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $t(84) = 4.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas the more severe violation was above the scale midpoint ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $t(83) = 1.84$ ,  $p = .069$ ).

**Pretest B Information:** A pretest ( $N = 163$ ) from a student population was conducted to test the outrage manipulations for Study 1-3. Participants were presented the advertisement from Study 2 (“Anyone Fancy a 6oz Lettuce?”). However, in addition to the humor or outrage response tweets from Study 2, there was also an alternative humor condition, alternative outrage condition, and a

emotionally neutral negative response condition. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five condition (see below).

### Stimuli for Pretest B (6oz Lettuce Ad)

**Mars Verne** @marsverne  
Have you seen the new advertisement by Gourmet Burger Kitchen that mocks Vegans? What do you think?



63 86 423

### Outrage Tweets (Study 2)

**Jimmy Pierson** @jimmierson  
Replying to @marsverne  
HONESTLY, I've had their burgers..the lettuce is a better OPTION!!!!  
25 30 120

---

**N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
Replying to @marsverne  
Mocking vegans for not wanting to abuse animals!? NOT SMART!  
18 21 73

---

**Sammy** @SammyM  
Replying to @marsverne  
This ad is so bad that it's OUTRAGEOUS..who approved this!?  
11 6 38

---

**EV** @EV\_NM  
Replying to @marsverne  
I THINK I'M GOING TO FANCY A BOYCOTT OF THEIR COMPANY!  
6 2 28

## Humor Tweets (Study 2)

-  **Jimmy Pierson** @jimmypierson  
Replying to @marsverne  
Honestly, I've had their burgers..the lettuce is a better option 😂  
🗨️ 25    ↻ 30    ❤️ 120    ⬆️
- 
-  **N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
Replying to @marsverne  
Lol mocking vegans for not wanting to abuse animals? Not smart  
🗨️ 18    ↻ 21    ❤️ 73    ⬆️
- 
-  **Sammy** @SammyM  
Replying to @marsverne  
This ad is so bad that it's funny...who approved this?!  
🗨️ 11    ↻ 6    ❤️ 38    ⬆️
- 
-  **EV** @EV\_NM  
Replying to @marsverne  
I think I'm going to fancy a boycott of their company 😡  
🗨️ 6    ↻ 2    ❤️ 28    ⬆️

## Alternative Outrage Tweets (Extreme Emotion)

-  **Jimmy Pierson** @jimmypierson  
Replying to @marsverne  
Who could be STUPID enough to come up with these IDIOTIC ads & who the fuck approves them!? This is OUTRAGEOUS!  
🗨️ 25    ↻ 30    ❤️ 120    ⬆️
- 
-  **N.A.** @nina\_adel  
Replying to @marsverne  
Unbelievable! They do realize this is bad for business, right!? They deserve to be taught a fucking lesson!!!  
🗨️ 18    ↻ 21    ❤️ 73    ⬆️
- 
-  **Sammy** @Sammy  
Replying to @marsverne  
WHAT THE FUCK?! I know brands do this to get attention, but this is EXTREMELY TASTELESS. They really need to SHUT THE FUCK UP!  
🗨️ 11    ↻ 6    ❤️ 38    ⬆️
- 
-  **EV** @ev\_nm  
Replying to @marsverne  
[@gbkburgers](#)  
  
🗨️ 6    ↻ 2    ❤️ 28    ⬆️

## Alternative Humor Tweets

**Jimmy Pierson** @jimmypierson  
Replying to @marsverne

This ad is not only disgusting but really offensive and vile. What genius marketer thought of this? 🤔 Hope they enjoy the boycott 🙄

25 30 120

**N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
Replying to @marsverne

Who comes up with these ads & who approves them? 🤔 They must have been smoking weed on the job. This is hilarious!

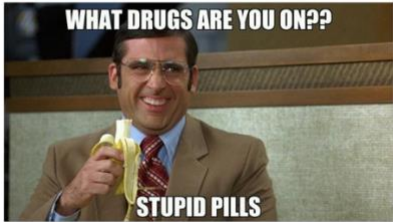
18 21 73

**Sammy** @SammyM  
Replying to @marsverne

LOL! They do realize this is bad for business, right? They released a new commercial that will make everyone go to their competitors. LMAOO I'm done 🤔

11 6 38

**EV** @EV\_NM  
Replying to @marsverne  
@gbkburgers



6 2 28

## Emotionally-Neutral Tweets

**Jimmy Pierson** @jimmypierson  
Replying to @marsverne

This ad is not only disgusting but really offensive and vile. We should boycott them.

25 30 120

**N.A.** @Nina\_Adel  
Replying to @marsverne

Who comes up with these ads & who approves them?


18 21 73

**Sammy** @SammyM  
Replying to @marsverne

They do realize this is bad for business, right?

11 6 38

**EV** @EV\_NM  
Replying to @marsverne  
@gbkburgers



6 2 28

After view the response tweets, participants reported the extent to which they thought the respondents were outraged, amused and disapproving of the advertisement. A oneway ANOVA of emotional tone on perceptions of disapproval suggested that there were significant differences between the five conditions,  $F(4, 159) = 13.10, p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that the humorous tweets from Study 1 and 3 were view as equally disapproving ( $p = .27$ ), whereas both

humorous tweets were viewed as less disapproving compared to the outrage conditions ( $ps < .001$ ) and the neutral-tone condition ( $ps < .05$ ). Furthermore, there were no difference between the outrage tweets from Study 1 and 3 ( $p = .18$ ) and these tweets were not significantly from the neutral-tone condition ( $ps > .05$ ). Furthermore, all tweets were significantly above the scale midpoint ( $ps < .001$ ).

The ANOVA of emotional tone on perceptions of outrage suggested that there were significant differences between the five conditions,  $F(4, 159) = 33.42, p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that the outrage tweets from Study 1 were viewed as more outrage laden than the outrage tweets from Study 3 ( $M = 6.51$  vs.  $M = 5.85, p = .06$ ). Furthermore, the outrage tweets from Study 1 and 3 were perceived as more outrage-laden in comparison to the other two humor conditions and the control condition ( $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, the humor condition in Study 1 was perceived to be less outrage laden in comparison to humor condition in Study 3 ( $M = 2.82$  vs.  $M = 4.17, p < .001$ ) and the control condition ( $M = 4.59, p < .001$ ). The ANOVA of emotional tone on perceptions of amusement suggested that there were significant differences between the five conditions,  $F(4, 158) = 27.95, p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that the humor tweets from Study 1 were viewed as more humor laden than the humor tweets from Study 3 ( $M = 4.10$  vs.  $M = 1.33, p = .06$ ). Furthermore, both condition were perceived as more humor laden than the outrage tweets ( $ps < .001$ ) and the control tweets ( $p < .001$ ). Lastly the outrage laden tweets and the control condition did not differ from each other ( $ps > .05$ ).