

Abstract:

We provide evidence that receptivity towards lifestyle branding is fostered by believing in the power of intuitive thought. Two studies demonstrate 1) that trust in lifestyle branding for products without symbolic value and with dubious functionality was increased by the tendency to see intuitions as infallible and 2) that beliefs about contagion are a mediating mechanism for this effect, as such beliefs prompt individuals to believe that the brand's attributes will "spread" to the self.

GWYNETH PALTROW'S WEBSITE NOW SELLS PSYCHIC VAMPIRE REPELLENT



Goop's psychic vampire repellent.

Goop's instructions for the repellent include "spraying in the air to banish bad vibes", an idea that parallels the contagion heuristic in its assumption that the qualities of the repellent will transfer to the consumer. Goop's repellent serves as an example of LFBs playing on intuitive biases in a post-truth world.

Introduction:

Why do people trust lifestyle branding?

- Lifestyle Branding (LFB) is a strategy wherein a brand positions itself as a vehicle for self-expression or empowerment
- Rests on assumptions that consuming an LFB product will "transfer" some desirable qualities from brand to customer
- Intuitive thinking generally associated with the "contagion heuristic", an intuitive notion that when objects come into contact with each other, properties "transfer" to each other
- Since LFB seems to rest on assumptions of qualities of the brand spreading to customer, trusting one's intuitions should be associated with being receptive to lifestyle branding



Measuring belief in the infallibility of intuitions

- We measure reasoning style with the "Feelings Are Truth" scale, specifically designed to capture a sense that intuitions are infallible

Belief in the infallibility of intuitions predicts trust of lifestyle branding

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Hypotheses:

H1: Trust of lifestyle branding for products with otherwise low levels of trust is facilitated by belief in the power of intuitive thought. (Study 1)

H2: The link between trust of lifestyle branding and belief in the power of intuitions will be mediated by beliefs that qualities will "spread" from the product to the customer. (Study 2)



Methods:

Study 1

- Respondents read a description of lifestyle branding, defined as a strategy wherein brands attempt to communicate a purpose above and beyond the product itself
- Respondents evaluate six products, chosen to represent a range of acceptability of lifestyle branding: handcrafted leather boots, performance athletic shorts, magnetic healing bracelets, flavored sparkling water, Mexican fast food, and quick oil changes. The latter four we considered inappropriate for lifestyle brand marketing due to their potential low quality and/or lack of symbolism, and they thus represented product categories for which LFB generates low levels of trust
- Respondents rate each product and complete the Feelings Are Truth scale

Study 2

- Respondents read a description and watch a short video on one of two LFBs: Willis Judd magnetic bracelets or LaCroix sparkling water
- Respondents rate their trust towards the brand, items about "contagion" beliefs that measure how likely they are to think a brand's essence will "transfer" from brand to consumer, and the Feelings Are Truth scale

Results:

Study 1

Supporting **H1**, trust of lifestyle branding efforts for product categories in which lifestyle branding would normally generate low levels of trust is correlated with Feelings Are Truth

Study 1 Average acceptability of LFB products & respective correlations with "Feelings Are Truth" scale

	<i>a</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation w/Feelings Are Truth*
Handcrafted Leather Boots	.67	3.50	0.82	.001
Performance athletic shorts	.70	3.50	0.85	-.02
Flavored sparkling water	.70	3.25	0.89	.14**
Magnetic pain relief bracelets	.73	3.00	0.98	.19**
Mexican fast food	.73	2.75	0.97	.23**
Quick oil changes	.67	2.50	0.94	.20**

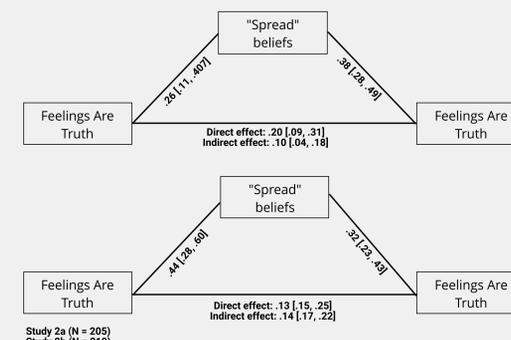
Feelings Are Truth, Openness to Experience, Self-Esteem, and Education (college degree vs. not) as covariates: Product category X Feelings Are Truth interaction was significant, $F(2, 958) = 10.80, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$

($M = 3.14, SD = .90, \alpha = .84$)

Study 2

Supporting **H2**, the link between trust of lifestyle branding and belief in the power of intuitions is mediated by beliefs that the brand's qualities will "transfer" from product to consumer

Study 2 Mediation Models



Study 2a (N = 205)
Study 2b (N = 219)



Goop's kid calming mist.

Goop attempts to convey to customers that the brand's "aura" will spread to the child's "aura" if the mist is sprayed in the air around the child, an idea unanimous with contagion, which we predict is more likely endorsed by individuals who believe in the power of intuitive thought.

Discussion:

Lifestyle branding and the post truth era

- LFB might be playing on people's biases compelling them to equate fantastical ideas with more grounded ones
- Faith in brands might increase as faith in other institutions (e.g., science) decreases
- Brands continue attempting to occupy an ever-increasing metaphorical social role, engineering relationships, identity, and connectivity



Bathing Culture's "Mind and Body Wash"

Consistent with the contagion heuristic, bathing culture centers their marketing efforts on the idea that their brand's "essence" will spread from product to customer by conveying that their product is not only a body wash, but also a "mind" cleanse.

Selected References:

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