

The Image of Thrifting: Observer Reactions to Frugal Shopping Tactics

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Abstract

Observer impressions of thrifting are unknown but consumers anticipate negative impressions which disincentivize them from thrifting. The present research, however, reveals observer impressions to be more positive for thrifting than other frugal tactics. Six studies (N = 1,747) show that observers have positive impressions of thrifters (vs. other frugality tactics) and that observers attribute horizontal (vs. vertical) differentiation motives to thrifters. In addition, the effect of thrifting luxury products mitigates the negative associations of luxury display. These studies shed new light on the increasingly common practice of thrifting and suggest ways that marketers may leverage consumer motivation for frugal and sustainable consumption.

Background

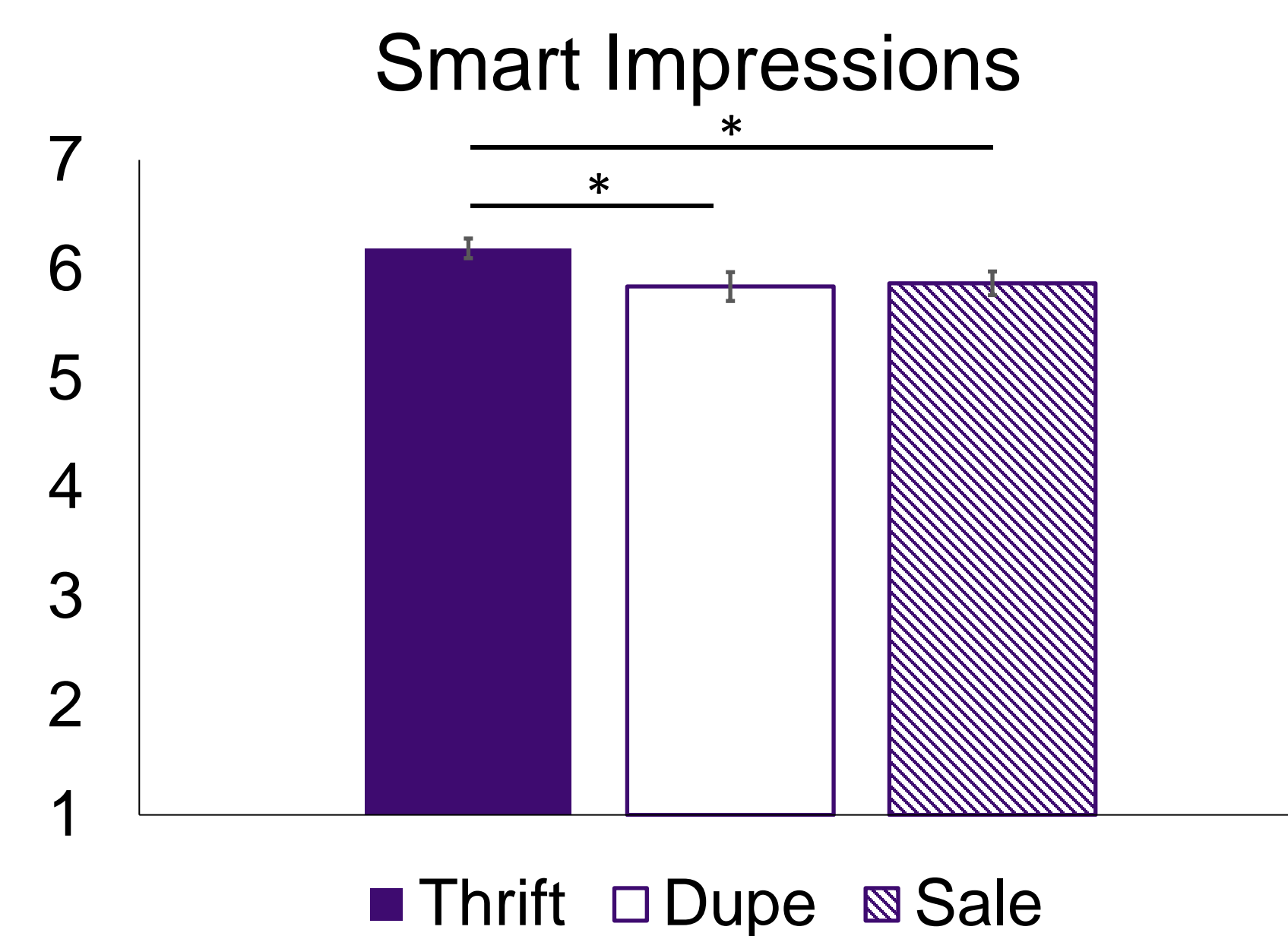
- Past research suggests that consumers make tradeoffs between saving money and making good impressions (Argo and Main 2008; Ashworth, Darke, and Schaller 2005). As a result, consumers avoid frugal behaviors to avoid negative impressions (Leary and Kowalski 1990; Philp and Nepomuceno 2020).
- However, little is known about the impressions that different frugal tactics make, such as thrifting (i.e., the purchase of apparel in the second-hand marketplace).
- Observers can attribute horizontal (i.e., variations in style) and vertical (i.e., variations in status) differentiation motives to consumers (Chan, Berger, and Van Boven 2012; Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018).
- We predict that thrifting (vs. other frugal tactics) will evoke positive observer impressions because observers will be more likely to attribute horizontal and less likely to attribute vertical differentiation motives to thrifters.

Study 1

301 Connect workers formed impressions about a consumer that bought a second-hand shirt (vs. dupe, vs. on sale)

3 (thrift vs. dupe vs. sale)

DV: Smart shopper impressions



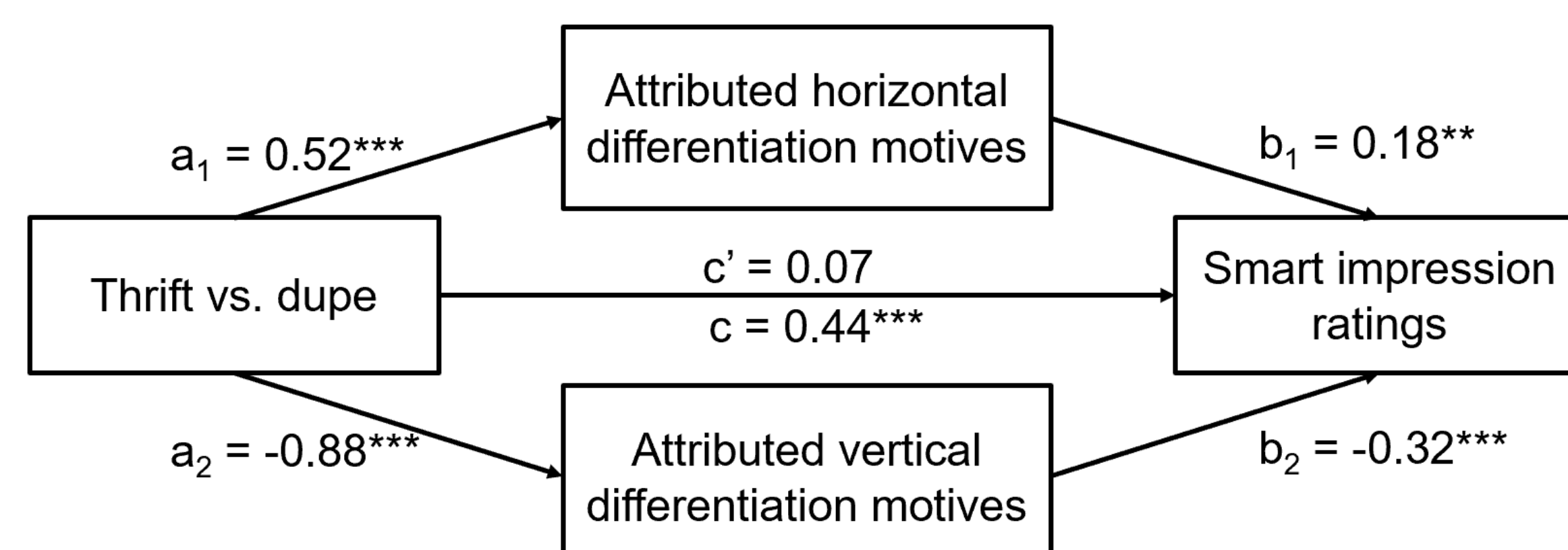
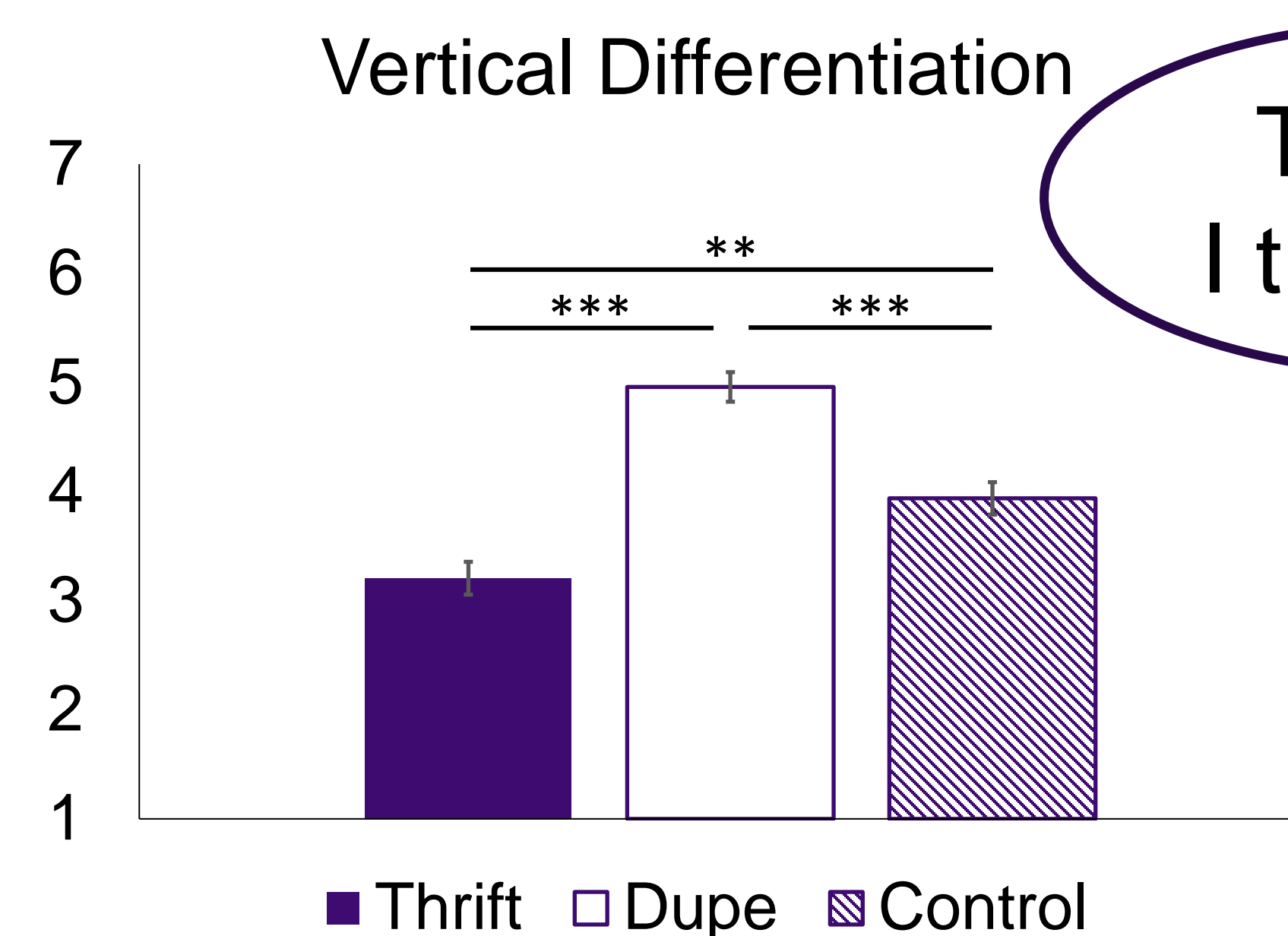
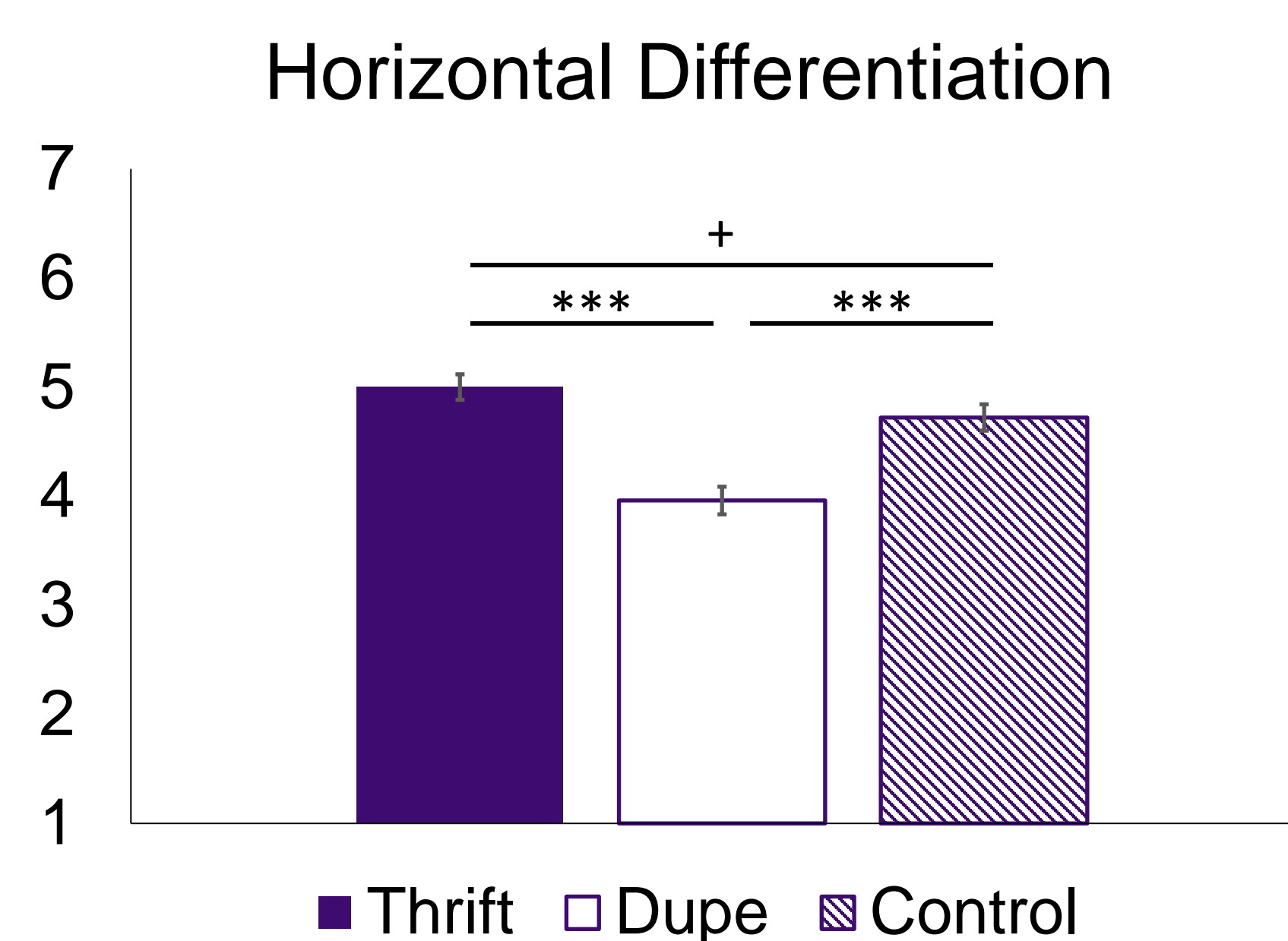
Study 2

286 Connect workers formed impressions about a consumer

3 (thrift vs. dupe vs. control)

DV: Smart shopper impressions

Mediator: Attributed horizontal and vertical differentiation motives

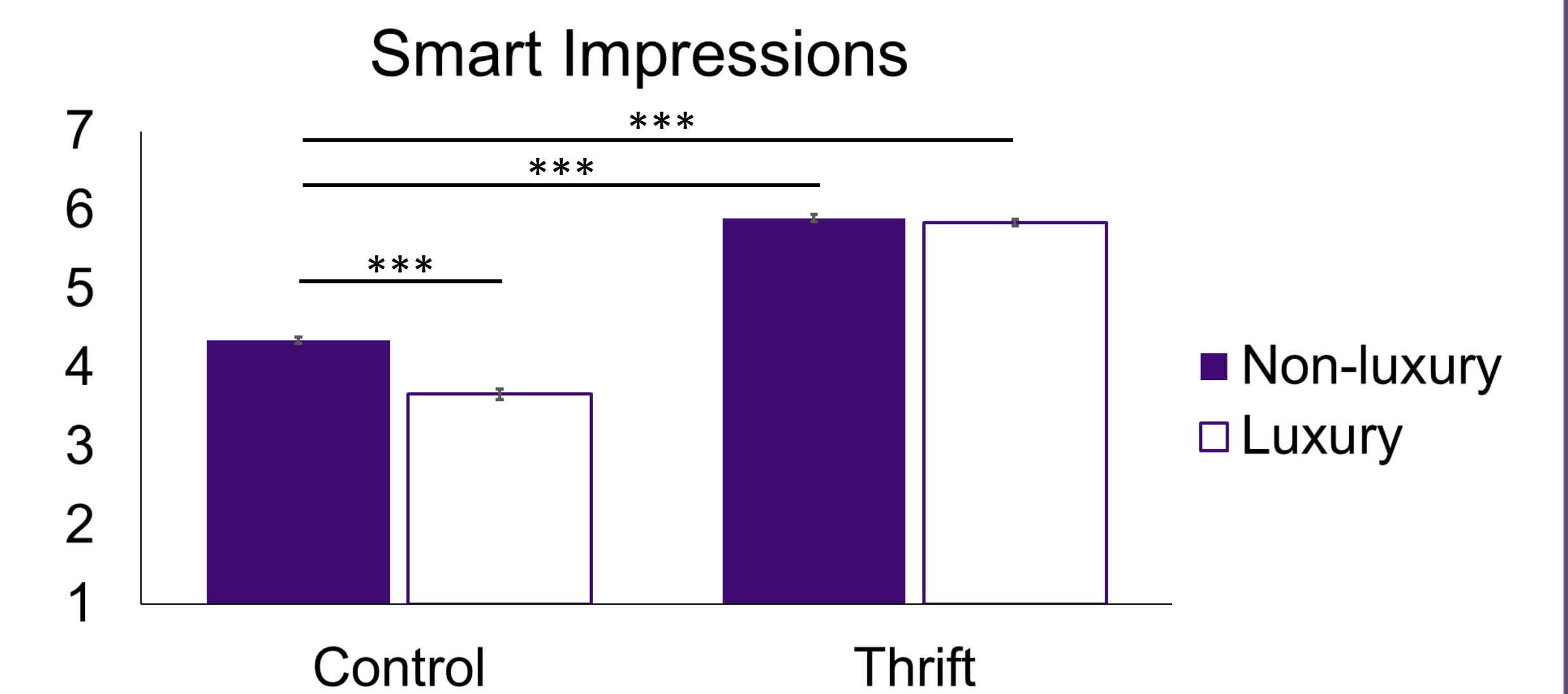


Study 3

388 Connect workers reported their impressions of 12 individuals

2 (thrift vs. control) x 2 (luxury vs. non-luxury)

DV: Smart shopper impressions



Discussion

- Observers have positive impressions of thrifters compared to other frugal (dupes and sales) and non-frugal shopping tactics
- Observers attribute more horizontal and less vertical differentiation motives to thrifters and this increases positive impressions
- Thrifting buffers against negative social costs of luxury

Thanks,
I thrifted it!



References

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* $p < .1$ ** $p < .01$
* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$