Better Than All the Rest: Audience Size and Goal Adherence

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Key Finding: People exhibit greater goal adherence when part of a large (vs. small) audience.

1. Abstract

Across two secondary datasets and five experiments, we found that people exhibit greater goal adherence when part of a large (vs. small) audience (Studies 1, 2, 3 & 4) because being among the best by engaging in goal-adherent behaviors is more self-enhancing in a (large vs. small) audience (Studies 5A & 5B).

We further found that (1) the perceived self-diagnosticity of behavior and (2) goal importance moderate the effect of audience size on goal adherence, such that the effect attenuates when the behavior is not diagnostic of people's self-concept (Study 6) or when the goal is less important (Study 7).

2. Background & Motivation

Consumers today often find themselves making goal-related decisions online as part of different audiences. These audiences usually vary in size, and consumers are typically aware of the size of the audience that they are part of.

Our research examines the influence of audience size on audience members' adherence to individual goals.

3. Secondary Data

Study 1: Workout Livestreams
- 86 stream sessions of a Douyin workout streamer in 2024
- **IV**: Average audience size per stream session
- **DV**: Average duration of stay per viewer
  - ✓ Provides a best estimate of how long each viewer exercised by following along with the streamer's workout.
  - ✓ Longer viewing time (longer exercising time) indicated greater adherence to fitness goals.

Study 2: Jewelry-selling Livestreams
- 595 stream sessions of the top 30 Douyin jewelry sellers in Dec 2024
- **IV**: Average audience size per stream session
- **DV**: Average spending per viewer
  - ✓ Lower spending indicated greater adherence to finance goals.

4. Methods (Experiments)

Study 3: Spending in Simulated Online Store (n = 409; MTurk)
- **IV**: Audience size (small vs. large)
- **DV**: Spending in the simulated shopping task
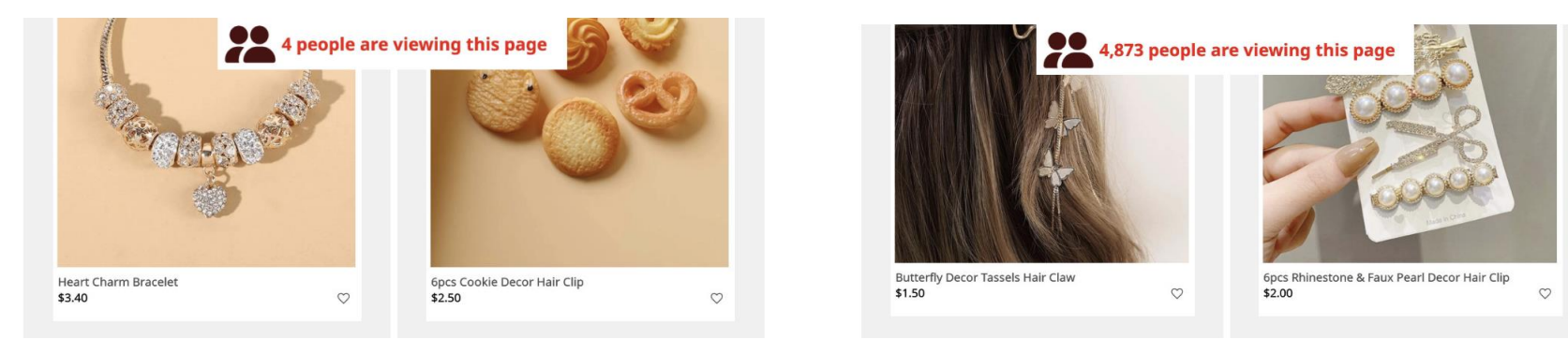
Study 6: Moderation by Self-Diagnosticity (n = 789; Connect)
- **IV**: Audience size (small vs. large) x Diagnosticity (low vs. control)
  - ✓ Audience size: 16 vs. 5164 people in an online language course
  - ✓ Low diagnosticity: the upcoming test was not designed to test language abilities but to help improve future class materials
- **DV**: Time (minutes) planned to prepare for the upcoming test

Study 7: Moderation by Goal Importance (n = 496; Prolific)
- **IV**: Audience size (small vs. large) x Goal Importance (measured continuous)
- **DV**: Entrée choice

Large audience condition:
Right now, 4,873 other people are taking this survey.

Small audience condition:
Right now, 4 other people are taking this survey.

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(1) Grilled Chicken Platter— Tender grilled chicken breast served with assorted grilled vegetables and fresh seasonal fruits	**(2) Bacon Cheese Burger**— Ground chuck patty covered with melted cheddar and crispy bacon; served with French fries
(3) Steamed Salmon— Wild caught salmon fillet served with cauliflower rice and fresh vegetables	**(4) Chicago Style Stuffed Pizza**— With four cheeses, mushroom, green pepper, caramelized onions
(5) Roasted Vegetables— Seasonal fresh vegetables, marinated, roasted and chilled; served with a light dipping sauce	**(6) Baby Back Pork Ribs**— Slow-basted juicy, smoked ribs with BBQ sauce; served with loaded mashed potatoes
(7) Baked Whitefish and Thyme— Whole bakes whitefish, spiced and served with roasted mushrooms, cherry tomatoes, and asparagus	**(8) Classic Beef Lasagna**— A classic recipe with ground beef, assorted sausages, Italian spices and creamy ricotta cheese
(9) Mediterranean Chickpea Salad— Tossed chickpeas, cucumber, bell pepper, red onion, olives, and feta, with a light vinaigrette	**(10) Honey Butter Fried Chicken**— Deep-fried chicken legs served with spicy sweet potato fries and creamy coleslaw

5. Results (Secondary Data)

Study 1: Audience size was positively associated with duration of stay per viewer in workout streams ($B = -.13$, SE = .11, $p < .001$; controlling for total session views).

Study 2: Audience size was negatively associated with spending per viewer in jewelry-selling streams ($B = -.97$, SE = .11, $p < .001$; controlling for total likes, comments, livestream duration, number of items promoted, peak audience size, and streamer-level random effects).
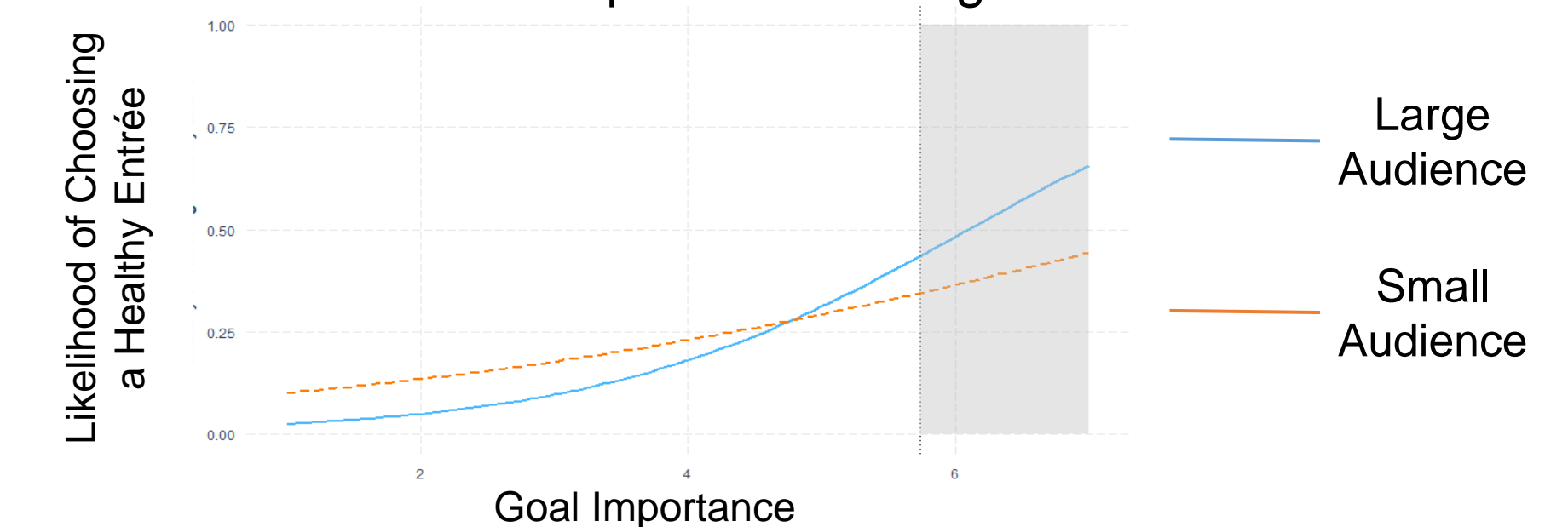
6. Results (Experiments)

Study 3: Participants in the large (vs. small) audience spent less money.

* $p < .05$
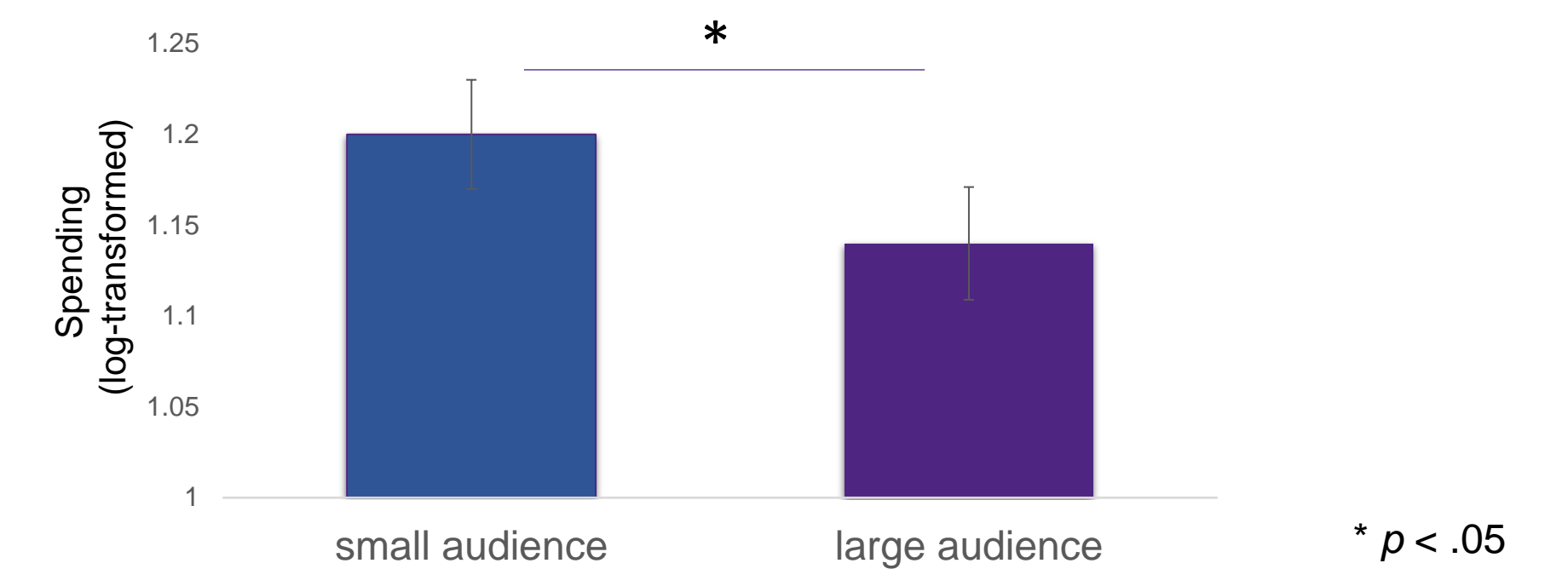
Study 6: The effect of audience size on planned test prep time attenuated when the test was not diagnostic of abilities and self-concept.

$F(1, 785) = 5.57$, $p = .019$

\+ $p < .1$
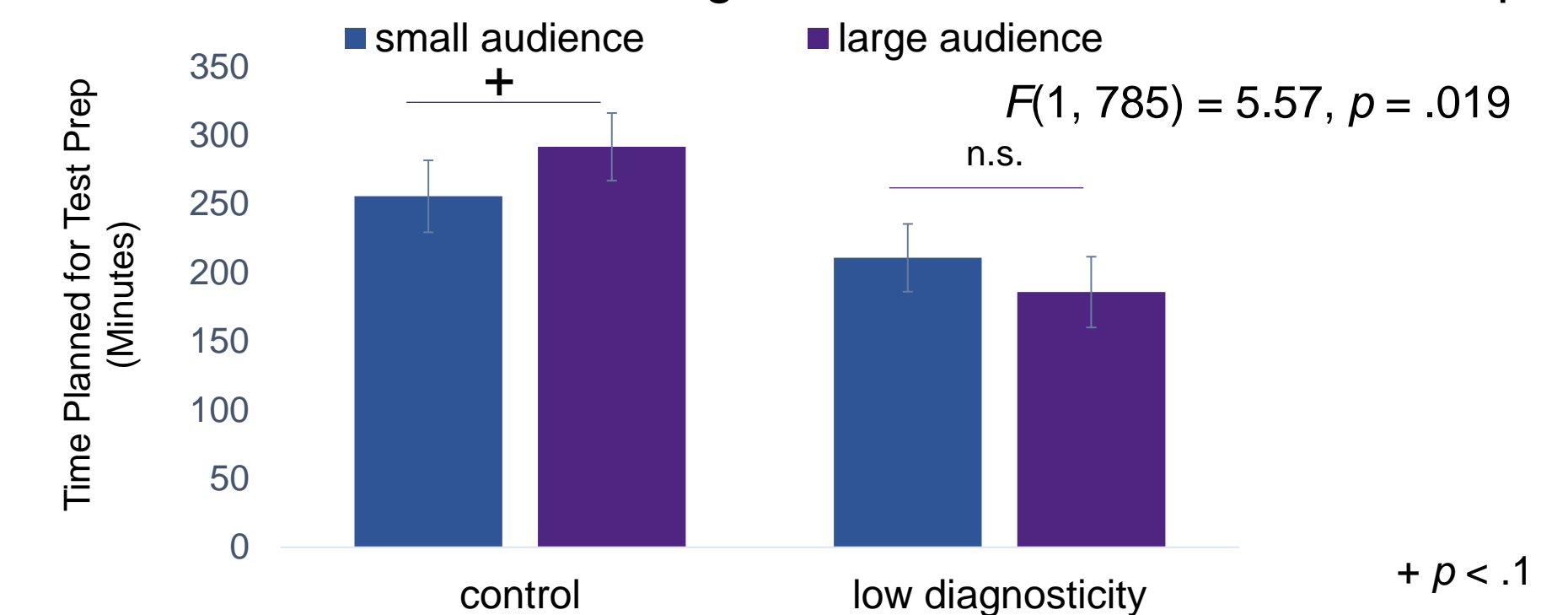
Study 7: The effect of audience size on (healthy) entrée choice attenuated for those with less important health goals.

The vertical line marks the JN point (goal importance = 5.74) at which the effect of audience size on entrée choice becomes significant. Shaded area represents region of significance.

7. Discussion

- People are more motivated to pursue personal goals when in larger audiences (Studies 1-4).
- Studies 5A and 5B tested self-enhancement as the mediator with a causal-chain design, suggesting that this effect occurs because being among the best by making goal-consistent decisions in a large (vs. small) group is more self-enhancing.
- Two moderators: (1) the perceived self-diagnosticity of behavior (Study 6); (2) goal importance (Study 7).