

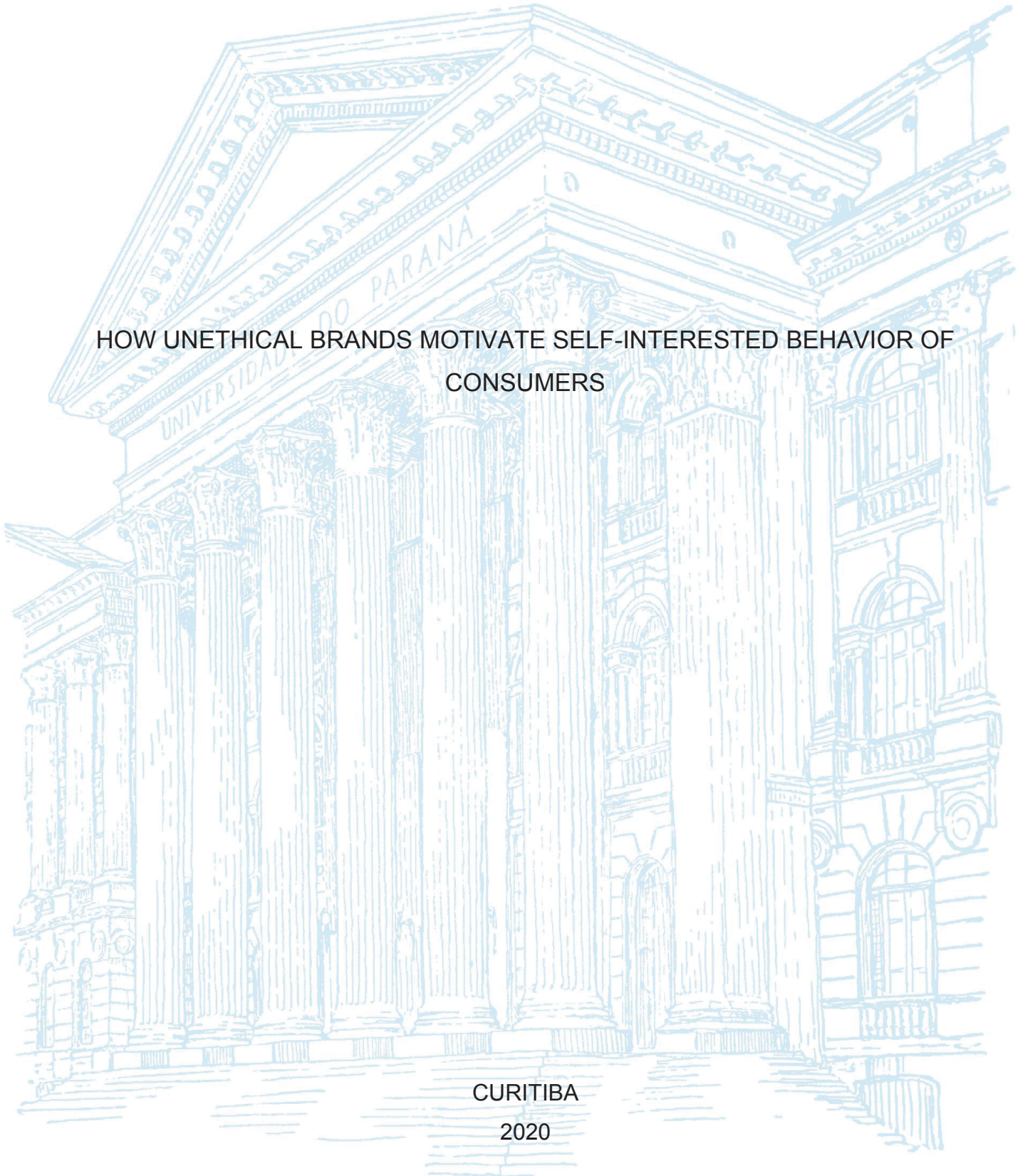
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO PARANÁ

FRANCIELLE FRIZZO

HOW UNETHICAL BRANDS MOTIVATE SELF-INTERESTED BEHAVIOR OF
CONSUMERS

CURITIBA

2020



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CONSUMERS

Tese apresentada ao Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração, área de Concentração Estratégia e Organizações, do Setor de Ciências Sociais Aplicadas da Universidade Federal do Paraná, como parte das exigências para obtenção do título de Doutora.

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Paulo Henrique Muller Prado

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Os membros da Banca Examinadora designada pelo Colegiado do Programa de Pós-Graduação em ADMINISTRAÇÃO da Universidade Federal do Paraná foram convocados para realizar a arguição da tese de Doutorado de **FRANCIELLE FRIZZO** intitulada: **HOW UNETHICAL BRANDS MOTIVATE SELF-INTERESTED BEHAVIOR OF CONSUMERS**, sob orientação do Prof. Dr. PAULO HENRIQUE MULLER PRADO, que após terem inquirido a aluna e realizada a avaliação do trabalho, são de parecer pela sua Aprovada no rito de defesa.

A outorga do título de doutor está sujeita à homologação pelo colegiado, ao atendimento de todas as indicações e correções solicitadas pela banca e ao pleno atendimento das demandas regimentais do Programa de Pós-Graduação.

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PREFÁCIO

Eu sou a principal autora desta tese. Fui responsável por construir o referencial teórico, desenvolver as hipóteses, projetar os estudos, coletar e analisar os dados e redigir o manuscrito. Contribuições adicionais estão descritas abaixo.

Os dados do estudo 2b (ver seção 6) foram coletados por Ana Paula Richarde, Demétrio Mendonça, Franciele Manosso, Rafael Demczuck e Victoria Vilasanti sob minha supervisão. Guilherme Conter e eu coletamos os dados do estudo 3 (ver seção 7).

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RESUMO

Estudos existentes têm documentado que fortes relacionamentos entre consumidores e marcas podem proteger uma marca das consequências negativas do seu comportamento antiético. A pesquisa atual investiga outro resultado possível para marcas que se envolvem em atividades éticas questionáveis: o potencial de influenciar a decisão subsequente de um consumidor. Em quatro estudos eu forneço suporte à minha previsão de que uma forte conexão com uma marca que se envolve em ações antiéticas desencadeia a conduta de interesse próprio dos consumidores em um domínio não relacionado a ação prévia da marca. Isso ocorre porque o sentimento de conexão entre a marca e o self aumenta a tendência dos consumidores em se empenharem em esforços de justificativa moral em nome da marca, e esse processo reduz os auto-impedimentos a comportamentos moralmente questionáveis e incentiva a conduta de interesse próprio em uma decisão subsequente. Concluo com uma discussão das implicações teóricas e gerenciais desta pesquisa.

Palavras-Chave: conexão self-marca, comportamento antiético das marcas, comportamento de auto interesse, justificativa moral.

ABSTRACT

Existing studies have documented that strong consumer-brand relationships can protect a brand from negative consequences of the brand's unethical behavior. The current research investigates another possible outcome for brands that engage in questionable ethical activities: the potential to influence a consumer's subsequent decision. Across four studies, I provide support for my prediction that a strong connection to a brand that engages in unethical actions triggers consumers' self-interested conduct in a domain unrelated to the brand's prior action. This occurs because the feeling of self-brand connection increases the tendency of consumers to engage in moral justification efforts on behalf of the brand, and this process reduces self-deterrents to morally questionable behaviors and encourages self-interested conduct in a subsequent decision. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications of this research.

Keywords: self-brand connection, brands' unethical behavior, self-interested behavior, moral justification.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, media reports of companies' and brands' unethical behaviors have become common in the marketplace. Almost daily, consumers are exposed to stories of dishonest conduct of one type or another – e.g., the violation of human rights in factories contracted by Apple, Adidas, and Nike, the Volkswagen emissions scandal, and, more recently, the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal. These unethical behaviors¹ violate pre-established norms and principles of society (Haidt, 2012), and have important implications for brand attitudes and the consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Huber, Vollhardt, Matthes, & Vogel, 2010).

Prior research has demonstrated that when brands commit unethical behaviors, it damages their image and reputation (Klein, Smith, & John, 2004) and often results in negative word of mouth (Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997), boycotts (Klein et al., 2004), and lower repurchase intentions (Huber et al., 2010). At the same time, however, consumers with stronger brand relationships have been shown to be relatively immune to the effects of negative brand information, maintaining positive attitudes toward the brand (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000; Swaminathan, Page, & Gurhan-Canli, 2007).

Whereas the studies related above uncovered essential insights regarding the effect of harmful and dishonest conduct on the brand itself, there is limited knowledge on the downstream consequences of a brand's unethical behavior on consumers and

¹ I use Jones' conceptualization of unethical behavior as those that are "either illegal or morally unacceptable to the larger community," and that may have harmful consequences for others (Jones, 1991, p. 367). The brand's unethical behavior scenarios employed in the experiments of this research involve violations of ethical norms and fall into the concept proposed by Jones (Gino & Pierce, 2009).

their subsequent decisions. Taking into account that individuals not only define their self-concept but also act consistently with the behavior of close others (Aron, Aron, Tunor, & Nelson, 1991; Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007), and considering that brands can also be instrumental in helping individuals to develop their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), it is interesting to regard what happens to consumers who feel a strong self-brand connection with a brand that engages in unacceptable behaviors.

To address this gap, I demonstrate in four studies that when exposed to a brand's unethical action, high self-brand connected consumers engage in self-interested behaviors in a subsequent decision unrelated to the brand action. Throughout the research, I refer to the self-interested behavior those behaviors which individuals cheat or lie, benefiting from being dishonest (e.g., Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008; Winterich, Mittal, & Morales, 2014).

Furthermore, I explore the mediating role of moral justification in determining the consumer's subsequent decision. Conceptualized by Bandura (1999) as a process through which people justify or excuse immoral actions to make them personally acceptable, I show that consumers tend to justify the brand's unethical actions with whom they feel connected, and this justification process deactivates self-regulatory functions that rule their moral behaviors and encourages self-interested conduct in a subsequent decision.

My research makes the following contributions. First, I extend the consumer-brand relationship literature by showing that the brand's unethical behavior not only impacts brand evaluation (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Swaminathan et al., 2007) but also drives consumers' subsequent decision. In doing so, I expound a negative and aversive consequence of building a strong self-brand connection: its potential to influence consumer's self-interested behavior. Second, I add to the vicarious self-

perception theory (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007) by showing that people can infer their attitudes and behaviors not only through the behavior of close others but also through their connection to the brands. Third, I provide insight that moral justification is the mechanism through which consumer's self-interested behaviors may be motivated.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. In the next section, I develop the theoretical framework of the study. Followed, I present four empirical studies to test the proposed hypotheses. I conclude with a discussion of theoretical contributions, potential managerial implications, and limitations and directions for future research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 CONSUMER RESPONSES TO BRANDS' UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

It is well established in the marketing literature that consumers form relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998). Considerable research in the brand relationship has documented that consumers may look at brands as active relationship partners, in ways that are analogous to their relationships with people (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). Fournier (1998) emphasizes that this is possible since consumers view brands very similarly to how they see another individual (e.g., best friends).

In some cases, and more pertinent to the current dissertation, researches have demonstrated that brands may be relevant to individuals' self-concept, representing whom consumers believe they are or want to be (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998). Similar to the concept of self-other overlap documented in the social psychology literature (Aron et al., 1991) and notion that consumers view their possessions as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988), self-brand connection is conceptualized as the extent to which consumers "use brand associations to construct the self or communicate self-concept to others" (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 339). Overall, this construct represents an essential vehicle for developing a robust consumer-brand relationship and is instrumental in helping consumers create different aspects of the self.

Building a strong and meaningful consumer-brand relationship, among other benefits (Escalas, 2004), can protect a brand from the negative consequences of unethical behaviors. Prior research has demonstrated that consumers with strong

brand connections and commitment counterargue brand's negative information, maintaining positive attitudes toward the brand following a transgression (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Swaminathan et al., 2007).

In addition to examining the implication of brand relationships on consumers' reactions to negative brand behavior, prior research has investigated the reason why consumers maintain favorable brand evaluations after a failure. For example, Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner (2012) found that individuals who identified with a brand defended the brand in a way similar to how they would defend the self under threat. The authors showed that, after receiving a brand's negative information, strongly identified consumers with low implicit self-esteem demonstrated positive attitudes toward the brand when the self-concept was activated. In contrast, those participants with high implicit self-esteem did not exhibit this defensive behavior. These findings suggest that individuals who identify with a threatened brand defend the brand to preserve the integrity of the self (Lisjak et al., 2012).

Similarly, Cheng, White, and Chaplin (2012) demonstrated that consumers responded to a brand's negative information as a personal failure. Specifically, the authors found that when exposed to brand transgression, highly connected consumers exhibited a decrease in their self-evaluation and, as a result, were more favorable to the brand attitudes despite the questionable behavior. This finding challenged the view that connected consumers are less impacted by the brand's adverse information, showing that they are, in fact, more affected, since they defend the brand to protect their own self-concept. (Cheng et al., 2012).

The studies reported above are consistent with the idea that consumers with high self-brand connections are more benevolent in their brand evaluations in the face of a transgression to maintain a positive self-view (Cheng et al., 2012; Lisjak et

al., 2012). However, despite the importance of these researches in showing the effects of unethical performance on the brand itself, it is interesting to consider what happens to consumers who feel connected to a brand that engages in questionable ethical behavior. In the next sections, I propose an alternative theoretical perspective regarding the effect of a brand's unethical behavior on consumers and their subsequent decisions.

2.2 CONSUMER'S SUBSEQUENT DECISION FOLLOWING A BRAND'S UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Considering that consumers use brands to create and communicate their self-concept (Escalas & Bettmand, 2003) and that brand performance reflects on the own consumer performance (Cheng et al., 2012; Lisjak et al., 2012), I suggest that brand behavior may also affect the consumer's subsequent decision. Specifically, I propose that when exposed to the brand's unethical action, self-brand connected consumers engage in self-interested behaviors in a subsequent decision.

My argument is based on the stream of research in social psychology that found that close relationships obscure the limits between the self and their partner. According to Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion theory, individuals are motivated to enter and maintain close relationships to expand their self-concept by incorporating resources, perspectives, and characteristics of the other in the self. The principle is that by "including others in the self," people act and think as if some or all aspects of others were their own, thereby expanding their self (Aron et al., 1991).

Based on this view, Goldstein and Cialdini (2007) proposed that people sometimes infer their own characteristics and attributes by observing the actions of

close others as if they had to observe their own behavior. This vicarious self-perception process not only defines a person but can also lead individuals to behave in ways that are coherent with the behavior observed initially (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007).

This feeling of including others in the self-concept creates numerous vicarious possibilities. For example, Kouchaki (2011) showed that individuals who have established moral credentials through others' prior moral behavior were more likely to express biased attitudes in a subsequent behavior. She termed this behavior as "vicarious moral licensing," since the effects are related to those demonstrated in studies of moral licensing (behave in one direction can license people to behave in the opposite way; Khan & Dhar, 2006; Monin & Miller, 2001).

In the context of brand relationships, a recent study demonstrated that a brand's past socially responsible behavior can influence the moral behavior of consumers who have integrated the brand's schema into themselves (i.e., self-brand overlap; Newman & Brucks, 2018). Specifically, the authors found that consumers who reported a high level of identification with a brand more socially responsible were less generous in a subsequent decision. In contrast, those with a high level of identification with a brand less socially responsible were marginally more generous after exposure to brand behavior.

The findings of the studies cited above can be explained by the "compensatory ethics model" proposed by Zhong, Ku, Lount, and Murnighan (2010). Consistent with this model, in a sequential ethical decision, individuals can present a strong motivation to equilibrate their behavior by taking the opposite choice from their previous ethical decision. Thus, people can literally wash away their sins by acting more ethically after an unethical decision and less ethically after an initial ethical

choice (Zhong et al., 2010). Contrary to these ideas, theorists have also demonstrated that individuals are motivated to maintain behavioral consistency by acting more ethically after an initial ethical decision and less ethically after a prior unethical decision (Gawronski & Strack, 2012; Gino, Norton, & Ariely, 2010). It was Gneezy, Imas, Brown, Nelson, and Norton (2012) who challenged the idea proposed by the compensatory ethics model. The authors suggested that the cost of initial pro-social behavior predicted future behaviors. They found that the licensing effect was consistent with relatively *cost/less* pro-social behavior (actions that benefit others without any costs to the agent). For *cost/ly* pro-social behavior (actions that benefit others with some costs to the agent), people acted consistently with their previous pro-social action (Gneezy et al., 2012). Furthermore, in three classic psychology paradigms – cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), foot in the door (Freedman and Fraser, 1966), and self-perception (Bem, 1972) – the idea of behavioral consistency has been supported.

For instance, Gunia, Sivanathan, & Galinsky (2009) argued and demonstrated that a psychological connection between two decision-makers led the second decision-maker to justify the actions of the first and to escalate their own commitment to these decisions. In related work, Gino and Galinsky (2012) found that individuals were more likely to behave unethically in a subsequent situation after being exposed to dishonest behavior of a person they feel psychologically close. The authors called this outcome as “vicarious moral consistency” since the effect resembles those shown in studies of moral consistency (e.g., Zhong, et al., 2010).

In the present study, I explore the phenomenon of behavioral consistency in the context of the consumer-brand relationship. Based on the premise that individuals not only define their self-concept but also act consistently with the behavior of close others

(Aron et al., 1991; Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007) and that brands can help consumers to develop their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Trump & Brucks, 2012), I suggest that brands can also influence consumers' decisions and behaviors. Thus, I predict that a strong connection to a brand that engages in unethical actions can trigger consumers' self-interested conduct in a domain unrelated to the brand's prior action. In summary, I hypothesize:

H1: After being exposed to the brand's unethical (vs. ethical) behavior, high self-brand connected consumers will engage (vs. not engage) in self-interested behaviors in a subsequent decision. In contrast, brand behavior will not affect the subsequent decision of low self-brand connected consumers.

In the next section, I theorize about moral disengagement theory and its related mechanism of moral justification as a cognitive process that can explain why consumers exhibit a vicarious moral consistency behavior following a brand transgression.

2.3 MECHANISMS OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

The concept of moral disengagement was initially proposed by Bandura (1986) as an extension of social cognitive theory. According to this theory, people internalize personal standards of moral behavior that exert a self-regulatory function of their thoughts and actions (Bandura, 1999). Thus, when the opportunity for deviant behavior arises, self-regulatory mechanisms, such as guilt and self-censure, prevent individuals from acting in ways that conflict with their moral standards. In accordance

with Bandura (1999), “the self-regulatory mechanisms governing moral conduct do not come into play unless they are activated, and there are many psychosocial maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged from inhumane conduct” (p. 193). From this perspective, he proposed moral disengagement as a key mechanism that can deactivate this moral self-regulatory process.

Moral disengagement refers to eight interrelated cognitive mechanisms that allow people to disconnect from their internalized moral standards in order to engage in unethical behavior (Bandura, 1999; Moore, 2015). These mechanisms encompass various categories of dissonances and reduce the rationalization that people use to protect themselves from the consequences of misconduct and the self-condemnation it may be imposed (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001). Through moral disengagement, people are free from the self-censure and the accompanying blame that would result when internal moral standards are violated, and therefore more likely to involve in unethical actions (Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008).

Bandura’s eight moral disengagement work through any of the following mechanisms: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, and advantageous comparison serve to cognitively restructure reprehensible behavior so that they appear less harmful. Other mechanisms – displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, and distortion of consequences – serve to obscure or minimize the consequences of harmful behaviors. Finally, attribution of blame and dehumanization count for reducing or eliminating the perception of the injury one causes others. (Bandura, 1986; Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012).

Moral disengagement theory provides relevant insights to understand why well-intentioned individuals engage in immoral actions on their behalf or of others

without feeling distressed and maintaining a positive self-view. Below, I discuss the mechanism of moral justification more deeply and review some empirical studies that demonstrate a positive relationship between this cognitive process and unethical behaviors. In doing so, I propose moral justification as the underlying mechanism responsible for explaining why high self-brand connected consumers engage in self-interested behavior after being exposed to the brands' unethical actions.

2.3.1 The Mediating Effect of Moral Justification

Moral justification is conceptualized as a process through which people distort their understanding of their actions and deal with harmful behavior as personally and socially acceptable (Bandura, 1986). It comprises a cognitive reconstruction of the behavior itself, portraying it as having a good social or moral purpose. In the present days, most people recognize that harming others is wrong. However, supported by moral justification, individuals reconstruct their misbehavior in order to make it resemble morally justifiable (Detert et al., 2008). For instance, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) experimentally found that the most influential predictor of harmful actions (e.g., violence, lying) was the "moral reconstruction of harmful conduct by linking it to worthy purposes" (p. 364). Similarly, Aquino, Reed II, Thau, and Freeman (2007) demonstrated that the American public endorsed the many abusive actions taken by the United States during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as a punitive form of revenge for September 11th terrorist attacks. In this case, the terrorist attack against the US justified the practice of violence acts by describing them as serving a higher social purpose.

Gino and Galinsky (2012) provide evidence of the moral justification effect in the interpersonal relationships' context. These authors showed that feelings of psychological closeness to someone who engaged in a selfish behavior increased moral justification about this action, leading individuals to behave less ethically themselves.

In organizational research, moral justification has been shown to influence unethical behavior. Barsky (2011) showed that individuals with a greater tendency to morally justify their behavior were more likely to engage in unethical acts in the workplace. Chen, Chen, & Sheldon (2016) found that organizational identification drove unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) through the mediation of moral justification. In a consumption context, Paharia, Vohs, and Deshpandé (2013) demonstrated that people were more likely to endorse moral justifications for sweatshop labor when contemplating desirable goods produced under this condition, compared to when they were observing the same product produced under more favorable working situations.

Based on rationalizations describe above, I suggest that a strong connection to a brand that engages in unethical behavior can motivate the consumer to justify the brand behavior, and this vicarious self-justification process induce people to behave more selfishly in a subsequent decision. Given that consumers experience a threat to their self-evaluation when the brand to which they feel highly connected involve in unethical behavior (Cheng et al., 2012), I propose that consumers engage in a moral justification process on behalf of the brand to maintain a positive self-image, and this process reduces the moral rationalization that they use to protect themselves from the consequences of harmful behavior (Bandura, 1999), and encourages self-interested conduct in a subsequent decision. Thus, I predict that

moral justification will mediate the effect of the brand's unethical behavior on the consumer's subsequent decisions. In summary, I hypothesize:

H2: Moral justification mediates the effect of the brand's unethical behavior on the consumer's subsequent decisions for those with a high self-brand connection. That is, after being exposed to the brand's unethical (vs. ethical) behavior, high self-brand connected consumers will justify the brand behavior and will engage (vs. not engage) in self-interested actions in a subsequent decision. In contrast, moral justification will not mediate the effect of the brand's unethical behavior on the consumer's subsequent decisions for those with a low self-brand connection.

3 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

I conduct four experiments to test the hypotheses accounted above. Studies 1 and 2a were run on Amazon Mechanical Turk using a geographic filter (were excluded all non-US participants) and a worker ID filter (participants were not able to participate in more than one study). Studies 2b and 3 were run with undergraduate students from a University in South Brazil. Using a validated measure of self-brand connection (Thompson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), study 1 demonstrates that high self-brand connected consumers engage in self-interested behavior when exposed to brand failure. Specifically, this study finds that participants with a high self-brand connection to Nike and who were exposed to Nike's unethical behavior demonstrated lower intentions to point out a service mistake made in their favor in comparison to the participants in the ethical behavior condition. Studies 2a and 2b provide further evidence that the brand's unethical actions drive consumers' self-interested behavior using a new measure of self-brand connection. Further, in study 2b, a real decision setting is used as a measure of self-interested behavior. The findings from the previous studies provide support for hypothesis 1. Finally, study 3 presents a different brand in manipulation (Adidas) and shows that moral justification is the underlying mechanism that accounts for consumer's tendency to involve in self-interested actions after being exposed to the brand's transgression which he or she feels connected. This result confirms the hypothesis 2 of the research.

4 STUDY 1

The goal of study 1 was to examine whether a strong connection to a brand that engages in questionable ethical actions increases a consumer's tendency to subsequently involve in self-interested behaviors unrelated to the brand action. To achieve this, I measured the self-brand connection and manipulated Nike's decision to ban (or not to ban) the exploitation of labor in the manufacture of its products. Nike was selected to enhance the credibility of the manipulation since the brand was accused of using sweatshop labor in the past (Paharia et al., 2013). I predicted that after being exposed to a brand's unethical (vs. ethical) behavior, high self-brand connected consumers would engage in self-interested acts in a subsequent decision.

4.1 METHOD

Participants and Design. A total of 377 members of MTurk (51.2% male; $M_{age} = 36.60$, $SD_{age} = 11.71$) participated in this study in exchange for payment. The design employed was a 2 (self-brand connection: high vs. low) x 2 (brand behavior: unethical vs. ethical) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were informed that they would participate in four unrelated studies. The first study consisted of an advertising poster evaluation task in which participants assessed an ad of the focal brand Nike (based on Cheng et al., 2012, study 1). After viewing the ad, participants rated on a seven-point scale a set of dimensions about the ad and the brand (e.g., bad/good, negative/positive, unfavorable/favorable, dislike/like). Then they responded to the self-brand connection scale proposed by Thomson et al. (2005), which assessed the extent to which

consumers felt connected, bonded, and attached toward Nike, on a 7-point scale anchored at 1 = Not at all to 7 = Very well (see appendix A for additional details). I averaged these three items into a single measure of self-brand connection for subsequent analysis ($\alpha = .97$).

The second study was a filler task (e.g., product evaluation, see appendix B for the full details) to hide the association of the self-brand connection measure and manipulation task. In the third study, participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. In each condition, they read a hypothetical news article about the Nike decision to ban (not to ban) the exploitation of labor in their factories (see Appendix C for the full scenarios). For instance, In the ethical brand behavior condition, participants read the text in brackets; in the unethical brand behavior condition, they read the text in parenthesis:

Nike chooses [to ban] (not to ban) the exploitation of labor in the manufacture of its products.

Nike is the [first] (only) major apparel company [to join] (not to join) the Fair Labor Association – FLA, by [banning] (not banning) the manufacture of its products in Indonesian factories. As this country has lax human rights regulations, the vast majority of these factories work beyond legal limits, forcing their workers to work excessive daily hours, under poor working conditions, and in degrading hygiene situations. In extreme cases, there are reports that workers are physically and mentally abused and sexually harassed.

As Nike does not technically control these factories, the company decided [to ban] (to keep) its production from these manufactures, [even though] (because) this work may be the main source of income for a large number of

people living in extreme poverty. Nike's CEO explained that (even though) "there is strong evidence that the owners of these factories perpetuate violence against the workers [and the brand cannot be a part of this type of behavior.]" (the brand cannot leave these people without any income.)"

In the last study, as a measure of self-interested behavior, participants read a scenario with a service bill error made in their favor and indicated their intention to point out the mistake (Schwabe, Dose, & Walsh, 2018). Precisely, I described a restaurant scenario in which consumers received a bill with missing items. Participants were told that they recognized the error and were asked to indicate whether they would point out the mistake on a 7-point scale anchored at 1 = Very likely to not point out the mistake to 7 = Very likely to point out the mistake (see appendix D for additional details).

After completing the dependent measure, participants responded to manipulation-check items (Newman & Brucks, 2018). Specifically, participants rated to what extent they considered their respective news article to be wrong, morally inappropriate (reprehensible), and unethical on a seven-point scale anchored at 1 = Not at all to 7 = Very much. Next, participants rated the believability and interestingness of the news article on a seven-point scale (not at all believable/very believable, not at all interesting/very interesting). Then they provided demographic information and were thanked and debriefed.

4.2 RESULTS

Following previous research (Chen, Lee, & Yap, 2017), I removed thirty-five participants from the study because they failed to follow the instructions in the

manipulation task (e.g., they read the article in less than 3 seconds), leaving a final sample of 342 participants.

Manipulation Check. As expected, compared with those participants in the brand's ethical behavior condition, participants in the brand's unethical behavior condition perceived the news article as more wrong ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.22$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.67$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.57$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.87$; $F(1, 340) = 188.65$, $p = .000$), morally inappropriate ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.34$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.62$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.60$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.94$; $F(1, 340) = 200.28$, $p = .000$), and unethical ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.32$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.71$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.55$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.94$; $F(1, 340) = 193.60$, $p = .000$). No significant effect of brand behavior was found on the believability ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.45$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.51$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.54$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.50$; $F(1, 340) = .290$, $p = .591$) and interestingness ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.56$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.28$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.42$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.45$; $F(1, 340) = .814$, $p = .368$) of the news article.

Consumer decision. I performed a two-way ANOVA with a dummy variable representing the brand behavior conditions (0 = Unethical, 1 = Ethical), another dummy variable representing the self-brand connection measure created by median split (0 = High, 1 = Low), and their interaction term as independent variable, and intentions to point out the mistake as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed a significant interaction between brand behavior and self-brand connection $F(1, 338) = 6.915$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .011$; see figure 1). Follow-up analyses demonstrated that participants with high self-brand connection to Nike and who were exposed to Nike's unethical behavior demonstrated lower intention to point out the service mistake in comparison to the participants in the ethical behavior condition ($F(1, 338) = 3.872$, $p = .050$; $M_{\text{unethical}} = 4.35$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 2.30$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.09$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.03$). This difference was not significant for participants who did not feel a strong self-brand

connection to Nike ($F(1, 338) = 3.047, p = .08; M_{\text{unethical}} = 4.32, SD_{\text{unethical}} = 2.45, M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.71, SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.57$).

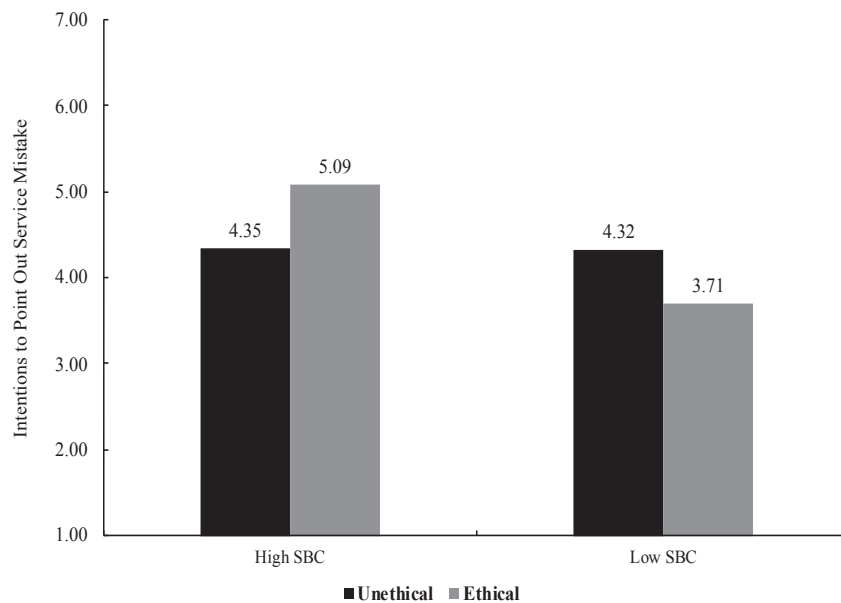


Figure 1. Graphical representation of study 1 results.

Note: High vs. Low self-brand connection levels were created by median split.

4.3 DISCUSSION

The findings of study 1 provided initial support for the prediction that the brand's unethical actions drive consumers' self-interested behavior. Specifically, study 1 demonstrated that high self-brand connected participants were marginally less likely to point out the service error made in their favor after exposed to the brand's unethical behavior. Also, study 1 found that this effect did not occur for those participants in low self-brand connection conditions, proving that was the strong identification with Nike the mechanism responsible for the self-interested behavior of the participants.

One limitation of this first study is related to the self-brand connection measure. It is possible that the responses in study 1 were motivated by the

participants' positive attitude toward the advertising poster, not by the connection to the brand. This may explain the marginal effect found in the high self-brand connection condition. To address this issue, I employed a different measure of self-brand connection in the subsequent studies.

5 STUDY 2a

Study 1 showed that a strong connection to a brand that engages in unethical actions can trigger consumers' self-interested behavior. Study 2a sought to provide additional evidence for the behavioral consistency effect found in the prior study. For that, I used a new measure of self-brand connection in which participants selected the most self-relevant brand from a list of six real global brands to test the predicted effect.

5.1 METHOD

Participants and Design. A total of 463 members of MTurk (50.8% male; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.64$, $SD = 12.40$) participated in this study in exchange for payment. The design employed was a 2 (self-brand connection: high vs. low) x 2 (brand behavior: unethical vs. ethical) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were informed that they would participate in four unrelated studies. The first study consisted of the self-brand connection measure. All participants read an explanation of different types of relationships that people develop with brands. Specifically, they read:

Some consumer researchers highlight that people hold different types of relationships with brands. Some people have close relationships with certain brands and may think, "I consider Brand X to be me," that is, it reflects whom I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others. Others, on the other hand, hold no relationship or even a negative relationship with a brand and may think, "I don't consider Brand X to be me".

After reading the explanation, participants were solicited to select the brand that best fitted the concept of the “I consider Brand X to be me” from a list of six brands (e.g., Ray-Ban, The North Face, Puma, Beats by Dre, Samsung, and Nike - the brand presented in the manipulation; see Appendix E for the full measure). The order in which the six brands were presented to participants was randomized. For subsequent analysis, I grouped participants into high self-brand connection ($n = 129$) those who selected Nike, and into low self-brand connection ($n = 308$) those who did not select Nike, that is, those who selected the other brands.

The remainder of the study followed precisely the same procedures, manipulation, and measures as study 1 (see Appendix B, C, and D for the full information).

5.2 RESULTS

I removed twenty-six participants from the study because they failed to follow the instructions in the manipulation task (e.g., they read the article in less than 3 seconds), leaving a sample of 437 participants.

Manipulation Check. Again, compared with those participants in the brand’s ethical behavior condition, participants in the brand’s unethical behavior condition perceived the Nike news article as more wrong ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.12$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.67$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.43$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.79$; $F(1, 435) = 262.20$, $p = .000$), morally inappropriate ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.07$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.74$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.35$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.81$; $F(1, 435) = 255.64$, $p = .000$), and unethical ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.19$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.73$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.39$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.85$; $F(1, 435) = 263.35$, $p = .000$). No significant effect of brand behavior was found on the believability ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.09$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.74$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.33$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.58$;

$F(1, 435) = 2.30, p = .129$) or interestingness ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.28, SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.34, M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.43, SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.46; F(1, 435) = 1.12, p = .290$) of the news article.

Consumer decision. I ran a two-way ANOVA with a dummy variable representing the brand behavior conditions (0 = Unethical, 1 = Ethical), another dummy variable representing the self-brand connection measure (0 = High, 1 = Low), and their interaction term as independent variable, and intentions to point out the mistake as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed a significant interaction between brand behavior and self-brand connection ($F(1, 433) = 5.002, p = .026, \eta^2 = .011$; see figure 2). Follow-up analyses demonstrated that participants with high self-brand connection to Nike and who were exposed to Nike's unethical behavior demonstrated lower intention to point out the service mistake in comparison to the participants in the ethical behavior condition ($F(1, 433) = 5.002, p = .041; M_{\text{unethical}} = 3.56, SD_{\text{unethical}} = 2.38, M_{\text{ethical}} = 4.40, SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.28$). This difference was not significant for participants who did not feel a strong self-brand connection to Nike ($F(1, 338) = 3.047, p = .342; M_{\text{unethical}} = 4.28, SD_{\text{unethical}} = 2.25, M_{\text{ethical}} = 4.03, SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.37$). As illustrated in figure 2, these results supported the hypothesis 1 of the research.

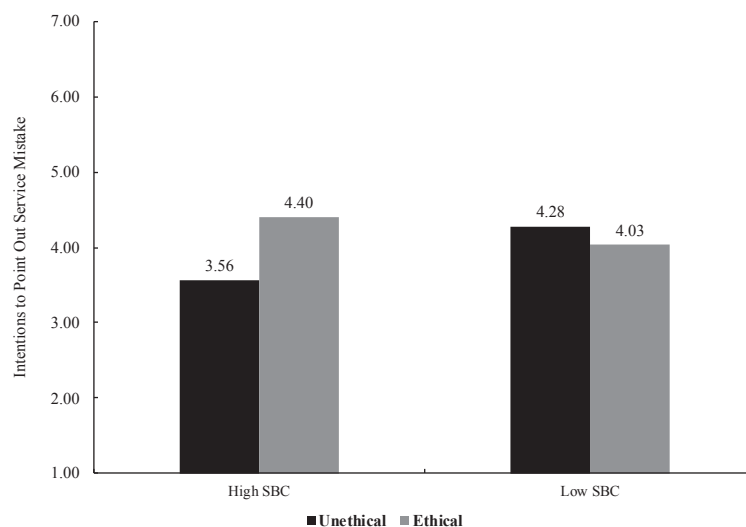


Figure 2. Graphical representation of study 2a results.

5.3 DISCUSSION

Study 2a provided further support to the hypothesis that the brand's unethical behavior influence consumers' subsequent decisions. These findings are consistent with prior research in social psychology which assumes that people sometimes behave in ways that are coherent with the behavior of close others (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007), and extend the vicarious moral consistency effect in the consumer-brand relationships (Gino and Galinsky, 2012). In the next study, I used a real decision setting as a measure of the dependent variable to establish a generalization of these findings.

6 STUDY 2b

Study 2a founded that high self-brand connected consumers engaged in self-interested action after being exposed to the brand's unethical behavior. Study 2b aimed to replicate the findings from the previous study employing a real decision measure as the dependent variable. I allow participants to engage in self-interested behavior by overstating their outcomes on a problem-solving task to obtain money incentives (adapted from Mazar et al., 2008).

6.1 METHOD

Participants and Design. A total of 158 undergraduate students (50.6% female; $M_{age} = 22.62$, $SD_{age} = 4.86$) from a University in South Brazil participated in this study. Participants did not receive any monetary compensation but had the opportunity to earn a maximum amount of R\$ 5,00 during the study. The design was a 2 (self-brand connection: high vs. low) x 2 (brand behavior: unethical vs. ethical) between-subjects design. Eight distinct experimental sessions were conducted; each one had between 17 and 23 participants.

Procedure. This study followed the same procedure used in study 1 and 2a, except for two differences. The list of real brands used in the self-brand connection measure was adapted to the Brazilian context (e.g., Sony, Lenovo, Hollister, Puma, Calvin Klein, and Nike). The second change involved a problem-solving task under time pressure as a measure of self-interested behavior. At the beginning of the experiment, all participants received a four-digit numbered envelop contained R\$ 5,00 (one two-real bills, two coins of one, and two coins of fifty cents) and a sheet of

paper with 10 matrices, each based on a set of 12 three-digit numbers (taken from the Appendix of Amir and Lobel, 2010). As in the previous study, participants were informed that they would participate in four unrelated studies. Then they responded to the self-brand connection measure, evaluated a product offer (filler task), and read the hypothetical news article about the Nike decision to ban (not to ban) the exploitation of labor in their international manufacturing plants. Next, they were asked to enter the envelope number on the computer screen and to read the instructions for participating in the next task. The envelope number was used to match participants' performance in this task with the data filled in on the computer since the research was completely anonymous. Once the task started, participants had 2 minutes to find and mark two numbers per matrix that added up to 10 (see an example in figure 3). For each pair of numbers correctly identified, participants were allowed to keep \$0.50 from their supply of money. At the end of the allotted time, they were asked to calculate the amount earned by the matrices they had solved and to return the sheet of paper and the unearned amount to the envelope. After completed a post-experiment questionnaire that included manipulation check and demographic questions, participants were thanked and debriefed and deposited the envelope in a recycling bin box located next to the exit of the room (see Appendix F for the full measure). I verified the difference between self-reported and real performance on the task with the total amount returned. Differences in this check demonstrated that participants overreported their performance to earn more money, indicating a self-interested behavior. For subsequent analysis, I grouped participants into those who overestimated their performance ($n = 38$) and into those who did not do it ($n = 120$)².

² In this study, no participants were removed for failing to follow instructions.

3,91	0,82	3,75
1,11	1,69	7,94
3,28	2,52	6,25
9,81	6,09	2,46

Figure 3. Problem-solving matrix.

6.2 RESULTS

Manipulation Check. As expected, compared with those participants in the brand's ethical behavior condition, participants in the brand's unethical behavior condition perceived the Nike news article as more wrong ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 4.98$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.81$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.00$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.16$; $F(1, 156) = 39.065$, $p = .000$), morally inappropriate ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.51$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.86$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.10$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.15$; $F(1, 156) = 56.731$, $p = .000$), and unethical ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.06$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 2.07$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.05$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.21$; $F(1, 156) = 34.838$, $p = .000$). No significant effect of brand behavior was found on the believability ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 3.74$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = .85$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.58$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = .92$; $F(1, 156) = 1.34$, $p = .248$) of the news article.

Consumer decision. I conducted a binary logistic regression analysis on the likelihood that respondents would report a self-interested behavior by overstating their performance on a problem-solving task (0 = Not Overestimated, 1 = Overestimated), using brand behavior (0 = Ethical, 1 = Unethical), self-brand connection (0 = Low, 1 = High), and the interaction between them as predictors. As expected, a significant effect of the predicted interaction between brand behavior and self-brand connection on the consumer's self-interested behavior emerged ($b = 1.63$, $SE = .77$, $\text{Wald } \chi^2(1, n = 158) = 4.45$, $p = .035$; Odds Ratio = 5.15; see Figure 4).

To clarify this interaction, I analyzed the simple slopes of self-brand connection in each brand behavior condition, which revealed a repetition of the effects found in studies 1 and 2a: participants with a high self-brand connection to Nike and who were exposed to Nike's unethical behavior were more willing to engage in self-interested behaviors by overstating their outcomes on the problem-solving task to earn more money than those in the ethical behavior condition ($b = 1.42$, $SE = .56$, $Wald \chi^2(1, n = 73) = 6.38$, $p = .012$). This difference was not significant for participants who did not feel a strong self-brand connection to Nike ($b = -.21$, $SE = .53$, $Wald \chi^2(1, n = 85) = .156$, $p = .693$).

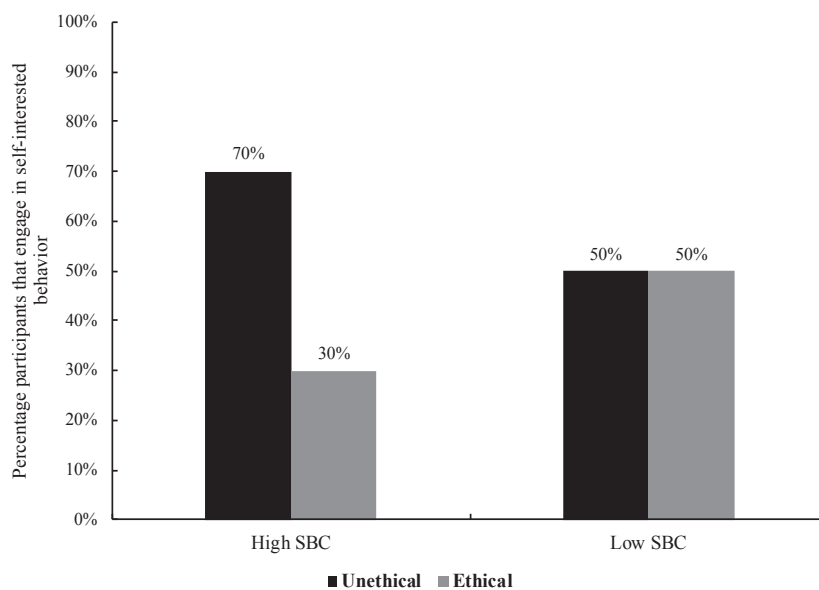


Figure 4. Graphical representation of study 2b results.

6.3 DISCUSSION

Study 2b provided additional evidence for the claim that the brand's unethical behavior drives consumer's subsequent decisions and generalized the findings using

a real decision environment as a measure of self-interested behavior. In study 3, I extend this result by exploring a possible mechanism that can explain this effect.

7 STUDY 3

Study 3 aimed to replicate the previous findings and test moral justification as the mechanism that explains why consumers exhibit a vicarious moral consistency behavior following a brand transgression. Specifically, my conceptualization suggests that consumers tend to justify the unethical actions of the brand with which they feel connected, and this process reduces self-deterrents to morally questionable behavior and encourages self-interested conduct in a subsequent decision. Thus, I predicted that moral justification mediates the effect of the brand's unethical behavior on the consumer's subsequent decisions for those with a high self-brand connection. Also, study 3 used a new brand in the manipulation (Adidas brand) and employed a different measure to test the self-brand connection.

7.1 METHOD

Participants and Design. A total of 114 undergraduate students (51.8% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 24.8$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 6.11$) from a University in South Brazil participated in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (intentions to maintain the relationship: yes vs. not) x 2 (brand behavior: unethical vs. ethical) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were told that they would participate in a series of unrelated tasks. The first part of the study consisted of manipulation of brand behavior. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. In each condition, they read the same hypothetical news article from the previous studies, but now involving the Adidas brand decision to ban (not to ban) the

exploitation of labor in their factories (see Appendix G for the full scenarios). Adidas brand was selected based in a pretest ($n = 115$), which determined the favorite brand of clothing, shoes, or accessories for a sample of undergraduates from the same population. Next, participants rated the same measure of self-interested behavior used in study 1 and 2a (see appendix D for the full measure). Specifically, they read a scenario with a service bill error made in their favor and indicated their intentions to point out the mistake.

Following the dependent variable measure, participants were asked to indicate in a four-item measure their agreement with the moral justification scale (adapted from Eckhardt, Belk, & Devinney, 2010; Paharia et al., 2013; 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree): “Jobs that use exploitative labor conditions are the primary source of income for workers in poorer countries,” “Jobs that use exploitative labor conditions are okay because otherwise, workers in poor countries would not have jobs,” “Jobs that use exploitative labor conditions are okay because they help workers in poorer countries to have a better life,” and “The use of exploitative labor conditions is okay because companies must remain competitive and all other companies do it.” I averaged these four items into a single measure of moral justification for subsequent analysis (reverse-scored; $\alpha = .83$)³.

Next, participants reported whether they were a customer of the Adidas brand, as well as their intentions to maintaining the relationship after exposure to the brand’s questionable behavior. This constituted the measure of self-brand connection. For subsequent analysis, I grouped participants into high self-brand connection ($n = 47$) those who intended to maintain the relationship and into low self-brand connection (n

³ A factor analysis confirmed that these four items loaded onto a single factor with an eigenvalue = 2.91 and explained variance = 72,82%.

= 67) those who did not intend to maintain the relationship. After that, participants responded to the same manipulation-check items used in study 1 and rated the believability of the news article (not at all believable/very believable). Then they provided demographic information and were thanked, debriefed, and dismissed⁴.

7.2 RESULTS

Manipulation Check. As expected, compared with those participants in the brand's ethical behavior condition, participants in the brand's unethical behavior condition perceived the Adidas news article as more wrong ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.54$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.86$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.50$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.45$; $F(1, 112) = 24.831$, $p = .000$), morally inappropriate ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.54$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.82$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.36$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.50$; $F(1, 112) = 28.110$, $p = .000$), and unethical ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.52$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.87$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.43$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 2.49$; $F(1, 112) = 25.563$, $p = .000$). No significant effect of brand behavior was found on the believability ($M_{\text{unethical}} = 3.36$, $SD_{\text{unethical}} = .97$, $M_{\text{ethical}} = 3.56$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.01$; $F(1, 112) = 1.06$, $p = .304$) of the news article.

Consumer decision. I performed a two-way ANOVA with a dummy variable representing the brand behavior conditions (0 = Unethical, 1 = Ethical), another dummy variable representing the self-brand connection measure (0 = participants who intend to maintain the relationship, 1 = participants who do not intend to maintain the relationship with), and their interaction term as independent variable, and intentions to point out the mistake as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed a significant interaction between brand behavior and self-brand connection ($F(1, 110) = 11.117$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .092$; see figure 5). Follow-up analyses

⁴ In this study, no participants were removed for failing to follow instructions.

demonstrated that participants with high self-brand connection (those who intend to maintain the relationship) and who were exposed to Adidas' unethical behavior demonstrated lower intention to point out the service mistake in comparison to the participants in the ethical behavior condition ($F(1, 110) = 4.185, p = .043; M_{\text{unethical}} = 5.27, SD_{\text{unethical}} = 1.98, M_{\text{ethical}} = 6.16, SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.37$). In contrast, participants with low self-brand connection (those who did not intend to maintain the relationship) and who were exposed to the Adida's unethical behavior demonstrated higher intention to point out the mistake in comparison to the participants in the ethical behavior ($F(1, 110) = 7.567, p = .007; M_{\text{unethical}} = 6.68, SD_{\text{unethical}} = .52, M_{\text{ethical}} = 5.68, SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.83$).

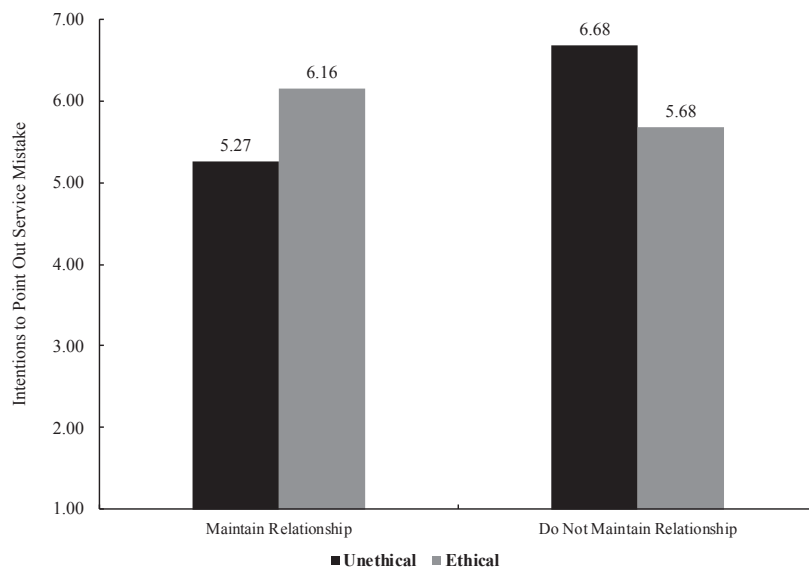


Figure 5. Graphical representation of study 3 results.

I ran a moderated mediation analysis (model 7; 5,000; Hayes, 2018) with brand behavior as the independent variable, intentions to point out the mistake as the dependent variable, intention to maintain the relationship as the moderator, and moral justification as the mediator (see figure 6). Consistent with my prediction, I found that

moral justification mediated the effect of brand behavior on the intention to point out the service bill error for participants who intended to maintain the relationship with the Adidas brand ($Effect = 0.2908$, $SE = 0.23$, 95% CI [0.0041, 0.9124]), but not for those participants who did not intend to maintain the relationship ($Effect = -0.0512$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI [-0.3053, 0.1434]).

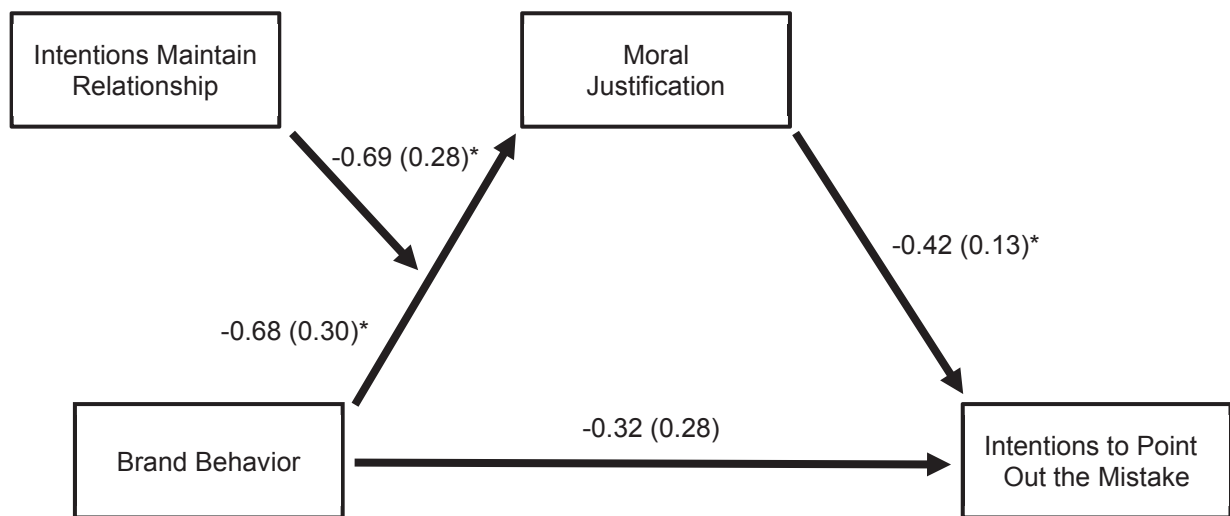


Figure 6. Graphical representation of study 3 moderated mediation.

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized and are shown in the format $b(SE)$; * $p < 0.05$.

7.3 DISCUSSION

Study 3 provided additional support for hypothesis 1 of the research and also demonstrated that moral justification mediated the effect observed in the prior studies, corroborating the hypothesis 2 of the research. Participants who felt connected to the brand that engaged in unethical behavior judged this behavior to be socially acceptable, and it was this vicarious justification process that disabled their moral standards (Bandura, 1999), causing them to behave more selfishly in a

subsequent decision⁵. These findings corroborate the view that mechanisms of moral disengagement reduce the moral rationalization that individuals use to preserve themselves from the consequences of harmful action (Bandura, 1999).

Surprisingly, study 3 showed that low self-brand connected consumers demonstrated higher intentions to point out the service mistake after exposed to the brand's unethical behavior. This finding provided further support for my prediction that behavioral consistency just occurs for strongly connected consumers

Furthermore, the current study showed the generalizability of findings using a different brand in the manipulation and measuring the self-brand connection after the brand's unethical behavior.

⁵ I ran a follow-up test using the same procedures employed in study 1 to examine whether several related, but alternative mechanisms—namely moral decoupling, moral disengagement, and self-protection—could explain the consumer's subsequent decision. None of these additional variables emerged as a significant mediator (see appendix H for the full measures)

8 GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this research, I investigate a different outcome for brands that engage in questionable ethical behaviors: the potential to influence the subsequent decision of a consumer who feels highly connected to the brand. Four studies demonstrate a consistent pattern of results. Study 1 provides initial evidence that high self-brand connected consumers engage in self-interested behavior, such as lying and being dishonest about the performance on a problem-solving task to obtain a monetary vantage, when exposed to a brand's unethical actions. For low self-brand connected consumers, this effect is not significant. Using a new measure of self-brand connection, studies 2a and 2b provide further support for the effect observed in study 1. Also, in study 2b, a real decision setting is used as a measure of the dependent variable. Finally, study 3 replicates the findings from the prior studies and shows that moral justification is the mechanism that explains the consumer's self-interested behavior following a brand transgression.

8.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Consumer-brand relationship and brands' unethical behavior. Brands' unethical behaviors are a phenomenon increasingly present in the market place. While prior research has revealed essential insights regarding the brands' dishonest conducts and its downstream consequences on the brand itself (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Swaminathan et al., 2007; Cheng et al., 2012; Lisjak et al., 2012), there is a shortage of research on the potential effects of brand's negative information on the consumers and their subsequent decisions. The current research contributes to

consumer-brand relationship literature by showing that a strong connection to a brand that engages in unethical actions trigger consumers' self-interested behavior. To my knowledge, this study is among the first to demonstrate this effect. Although Newman & Brucks (2018) had investigated the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on consumer behavior outcomes, the current research can be integrated into a broader framework for a better comprehension of the consumer-brand relationship in the unethical behavior domain.

Self-brand connection. Prior research assumes that self-brand connection is instrumental in the formation of consumer's self-concept, to the extent which individuals use brands that represent who they are or want to be (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998). The current research extends these works by examining the negative consequences of building a self-brand connection, including social and moral risks. Specifically, I show that a psychological connection to a brand that engages questionable ethical behavior is a powerful motivator for consumer's self-interested behavior. While research in behavioral psychology implies that unethical behaviors are sensitive to contextual factors (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011; Wiltermuth, 2011), I show that psychological factors such as self-brand connection can also influence individuals' unethical and selfish behavior. In doing so, I provide critical information for further discussion on the consequences of self-brand connection on the consumers and their subsequent well-being.

Vicarious self-perception theory. Prior research suggests that people can infer their characteristics and act similarly to the behavior of close others observed initially (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007). Building on this work, Gino and Galinsky (2012) demonstrated that feeling connected to an individual who engages in selfish or dishonest behavior can cause people to behave unethically in a subsequent

situation. The current research contributes to this literature by showing that people can infer their attitudes and behaviors not only through the behavior of close others (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007) but also through their connection with brands.

Specifically, I show that a high self-brand connection to a brand that engages in unethical actions motivates consumers to behave more selfishly in a subsequent decision. Thus, I provide evidence that our relationships with brands can also motivate our vicarious self-perception.

Moral Justification. The current research investigates moral justification as the specific mechanism through which the brand's unethical behavior and self-brand connection relate to the consumers' self-interested conduct. Specifically, I show that due to the oneness of the self and brand, consumers justify the brand's unethical behavior to maintain a positive self-image (Cheng et al., 2012), and this process deactivates self-regulatory functions that rule their moral codes (Bandura, 1999) and encourages self-interested conduct in a subsequent decision. In doing so, I situate moral justification in my conceptual framework as the mechanism through which consumers' self-interested behaviors manifest, providing a further explanation of why well-intentioned people cross ethical boundaries in the consumer brand-relationship context.

8.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the current research suggest to brand managers that improving the objectivity of consumers' judgments about brand's unethical actions can be an effective way to avoid the consumer's self-interested behavior in a subsequent decision. For instance, brands can adopt a robust communication strategy to recover

from the negative consequences associated with ethical failures. Apologize quickly, express empathy with the aggrieved parties, and accepting responsibility for their actions are examples of strategies that can be used not only to improve the brand image but also to neutralize the harmful consequence of the moral justification on the subsequent behavior of high self-brand connected consumers.

Engage in recovery efforts to restoring damaged reputations, is another possibility that can be used by brands that evolve in ethical scandals. As an example, Starbucks closed more than 8,000 stores in the U.S. for several hours in May 2018 to conduct racial-bias training for its nearly 175,000 workers. This decision came after the arrest of two black men for “trespassing” while they were waiting for a friend in one of their stores in Philadelphia. Also, Starbucks chief executive condemned the arrests, calling them reprehensible and said he wanted to apologize to the men face to face.

Finally, Brands can also use marketing activities to highlight their efforts on positive actions. Prior research has shown that positive Corporate Social Responsibility associations can lessen the adverse effects of brand misconduct (Klein and Dawar, 2004). Thus, brands can reduce the negative impact of behavioral consistency by presenting their consumers with information that emphasizing, for example, their pro-social actions.

8.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations that reflect possible directions for further research. First, future research could investigate the factors that may help reduce or even eliminate consumer’s self-interested behavior. Improve the objectivity of

consumer judgments on brand behavior through self-affirmation task (actions that restore a positive self-view) may be one way to mitigate consumers' selfish behaviors. Given that previous study has demonstrated that engaging in self-affirmations activities reduced the tendency of high self-brand connected consumers to defend the brand (Cheng et al., 2012), it would be interesting that future studies examine this possibility in the conceptual framework proposed in this research. Increase consumer's moral awareness may also lessen the influence of brand transgression on consumers' outcomes.

Second, while the present research focuses on a single type of brand's unethical behavior (e.g., exploitation of labor), further studies may investigate other controversial situations that consumers can encounter in their relationships with brands, and that can impact in their futures behaviors. Future studies may also extend the scope of this research to other contexts, such as technology and food products.

Third, an issue that still needs to be understood is related to the severity of the brand's unethical actions. Among all possible types of brand transgressions, will the moral justification always emerge as a motivator for self-interested conduct in high connected consumers? For example, Reimann, Macinnis, Folkes, Uhalde, and Pol (2018, p. 250) showed that "brand betrayal has the potential to harm consumers' sense of self by triggering experiences of self-directed blame and psychological loss, which are likely to motivate consumers to take actions that will restore their sense of identity". For these authors, both revenge-seeking behaviors and relationship dismissal might reestablish the consumer's identity. Future studies may consider testing whether brand betrayal would result in similar effects as those presented in

the current research. Furthermore, exploring the distinctions between the brand's unethical behavior and brand betrayal would be welcome.

To conclude, it would be interesting to find a new mediator that helps to understand the underlying mechanism that accounts for connected consumer's tendency to engage in unethical actions after being exposed to the brand transgression. Although the findings of study 3 supported my prediction, I acknowledge that the mechanism has not examined exhaustively. The literature offers several plausible theoretical perspectives on this issue (Barky, 2011; Chen et al., 2016; Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011; Umphress, Gingham, & Mitchell, 2010; Winterich et al., 2014), some of which have already been tested in the current research, but which deserve further investigation. For instance, Bhattacharjee, Berman, and Reed II (2013) showed that moral decoupling, a process in which judgment of morality is separated from judgments of performance, allowed consumers to support the performance of public figures while simultaneously condemning his or her transgression. Further research could investigate whether moral decoupling would trigger the same consequences for high self-brand connected consumers and their subsequent decisions.

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What is your overall impression of the brand presented in this ad?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Negative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Positive
Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favorable
Dislike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like

Please describe the extent to which the following words describe your typical feelings toward the brand presented in this ad on a 7-point scale anchored at:

1 = Not at all

7 = Very well

	1 - Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Very well
Connected	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bonded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attached	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX 2 – PRODUCT EVALUATION TASK (STUDY 1, 2a, 2b)

In this study you will be invited to evaluate an offer available at AWESOME.com. Please, read carefully the scenario below.

AWESOME.com is a major worldwide online retail service, in which you can find exclusive awesome offers from their verified business partners. Please consider that their service is fast, trusted, and reliable and many of your friends already use it. Recently, Awesome.com released their own currency, called "AWECOIN", also referenced as AWE\$. You can acquire your AWE\$ directly at AWESOME.com and use it to purchase the offers available at the online retail platform. Since the release, all the prices of the offers in Awesome.com are presented just in AWECOINS.

Assume the following exchange rate for the purpose of your evaluations:

C\$1.00 = 1.50 AWE\$

1.50 AWE\$ = C\$1.00

How many AWE\$ can you buy with a hundred dollars (C\$100.00):

- 300.00 AWE\$
- 150.00 AWE\$
- 75.00 AWE\$
- I don't know

Please evaluate carefully the offer below and respond the following questions on a 7-point scale anchored at: **1 = Strongly disagree** **7 = Strongly agree**

AWESOME HOTEL DEAL
 Stay three nights in a double bedroom at any of our four-star hotel partners around the world.*



300 AWE\$

* You can choose your hotel and book a room later.

APPENDIX 3 – BRAND BEHAVIOR SCENARIOS (STUDY 1, 2a, 2b)

Brand Unethical Behavior

Nike chooses not to ban the exploitation of labor in the manufacture of its products

Toronto | Mar 4, 2019 10:00 AM

Nike is the only major apparel company not to join the Fair Labor Association (FLA) by not banning the manufacture of its products in Indonesian factories. As this country has lax human rights regulations, the vast majority of these factories work beyond legal limits, forcing their workers to work excessive daily hours, under poor working conditions and in degrading hygiene situations. In extreme cases, there are reports that workers are physically and mentally abused and sexually harassed.

As Nike does not technically control these factories, the company decided to keep its production agreements with these manufactures because this work may be the main source of income for a large number of people living in extreme poverty. Nike's CEO explained that even though *"there is strong evidence that the owners of these factories perpetuate violence against the workers, the brand cannot leave these people without any income."*



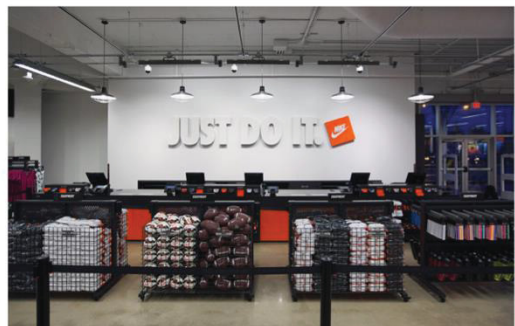
Brand Ethical Behavior

Nike chooses to ban the exploitation of labor in the manufacture of its products

Toronto | Mar 4, 2019 10:00 AM

Nike is the first major apparel company to join the Fair Labor Association (FLA) by banning the manufacture of its products in Indonesian factories. As this country has lax human rights regulations, the vast majority of these factories work beyond legal limits, forcing their workers to work excessive daily hours, under poor working conditions and in degrading hygiene situations. In extreme cases, there are reports that workers are physically and mentally abused and sexually harassed.

As Nike does not technically control these factories, the company decided to ban its production from these manufactures, even though this work may be the main source of income for a large number of people living in extreme poverty. Nike's CEO explained that *"there is strong evidence that the owners of these factories perpetuate violence against the workers and the brand cannot be a part of this type of behavior."*



APPENDIX 4 – SELF-INTERESTED BEHAVIOR MEASURE (STUDY 1, 2a, 3)

Please imagine the following situation:

You visit a good restaurant with a companion and order the restaurant's dish of the day that was highlighted on the blackboard near the entrance. You order drinks and dessert and receive the bill afterward. When checking the bill, you notice that the dish of the day appeared with a lower price than what was written on the blackboard. The waiter returns to your table and asks if everything is fine with the bill.

How likely it is that you would point out the mistake to the waiter?

1 = Not at all likely to point out the mistake to the waiter

7 = Very likely to point out the mistake to the waiter

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all likely to point out the mistake to the waiter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely to point out the mistake to the waiter

APPENDIX 5 – SELF-BRAND CONNECTION MEASURE (STUDY 2a, 2b)

Please read the following text slowly and carefully.

Some consumer researchers highlight that people hold different types of relationships with brands. Some people have close relationships with certain brands and may think, “**I consider Brand X to be me**”, that is, it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others. Others, on the other hand, hold no relationship or even a negative relationship with a brand and may think, “**I don’t consider Brand X to be me**”.

For a moment, view the list of brands below and based on the text you just read, select the brand that best fits the concept of the “**I consider Brand X to be me**” for you.

- Nike
 - Ray Ban
 - Samsung
 - The North Face
 - Puma
 - Beats by Dre
-

APPENDIX 6 – SELF-INTERESTED BEHAVIOR MEASURE (STUDY 2b)

Neste estudo você será convidado a participar de uma tarefa de resolução de problemas sob pressão de tempo e terá a oportunidade de ganhar até R\$5,00.

Antes de clicar no botão "Avançar" para continuar, por favor, anote o número do envelope que se encontra na sua mesa.

*****Por favor, não abra o envelope até ler atentamente as instruções abaixo.*****

O envelope que você recebeu contém uma folha com 10 matrizes. Cada matriz contém 12 números, dois dos quais somam exatamente 10. Seu objetivo é encontrar esses dois números em cada uma das 10 matrizes e marcá-los como mostrado no exemplo a seguir:

3,91	0,82	3,75
1,11	1,69	7,94
3,28	2,52	6,25
9,81	6,09	2,46

Se você conseguir encontrar dois números que somam 10 em uma determinada matriz, você resolveu a matriz!

Sua missão é resolver o maior número possível de matrizes **em 2 minutos**. Após os 2 minutos, por favor, conte quantas matrizes você resolveu.

Juntamente com a folha de matrizes você receberá a quantia de R\$5,00 (uma nota de R\$2,00, duas moedas de R\$1,00 e duas moedas de R\$0,50).

Para cada matriz resolvida, você ganhará R\$0,50.

Por exemplo:

Se você resolver as 10 matrizes, você ganhará R\$5,00.

Se você resolver 7 matrizes, você ganhará R\$3,50.

Se você resolver 5 matrizes, você ganhará R\$2,50.

Se você resolver 3 matrizes, você ganhará R\$1,50.

Você será responsável por calcular o valor ganho pelas matrizes resolvidas!!!

Ao final da tarefa, guarde com você o valor ganho e retorne o que sobrou (se sobrar) e a folha das matrizes no envelope.

Feche e lacre o envelope. Ao finalizar a pesquisa, você mesmo depositará o envelope na caixa que se encontra localizada na saída da sala.

Boa Sorte!!!

Por favor, aguarde "EM SILÊNCIO" o instrutor da pesquisa para abrir o envelope e começar a tarefa.

Abaixo encontram-se 10 matrizes. Cada matriz contém 12 números, dois dos quais somam exatamente 10. Sua missão é encontrar esses dois números em cada uma das matrizes e marcá-los. Você terá 2 minutos para resolver o maior número possível de matrizes.

Boa Sorte!!!

1,69	1,82	2,91
4,67	2,81	3,15
5,82	5,06	4,28
6,36	7,19	4,57

1,17	4,83	7,76
5,66	1,86	5,17
6,83	5,95	4,25
7,01	6,28	3,82

0,49	0,74	1,13
3,72	2,66	1,22
3,75	5,22	5,67
8,87	8,23	7,71

3,17	4,61	2,57
0,47	3,82	4,38
4,94	5,39	5,98
2,15	4,86	7,54

2,92	4,98	4,34
1,39	0,72	5,53
8,61	3,57	3,36
6,80	0,53	7,58

3,08	9,42	5,87
3,94	5,41	3,42
4,02	5,06	4,12
4,13	4,65	2,86

3,15	0,95	1,31
4,98	2,90	2,88
6,66	6,73	7,67
9,75	6,85	8,17

0,63	1,02	0,65
2,64	2,34	2,12
2,89	5,98	8,89
9,49	9,37	9,33

6,21	2,47	9,57
2,68	9,52	4,52
8,72	7,69	1,47
7,41	4,44	7,32

0,81	1,31	2,09
4,55	3,75	3,12
5,62	9,41	6,88
7,02	8,48	8,51

APPENDIX 7 – BRAND BEHAVIOR SCENARIOS (STUDY 3)

Brand Unethical Behavior

Adidas não bane a exploração de mão de obra na confecção de seus produtos

São Paulo | 02 de Agosto de 2018, 11h:00

Os consumidores da Adidas ficaram chocados com a decisão da marca em continuar fabricando seus produtos nas fábricas terceirizadas da Indonésia.

Essas fábricas estão sendo acusadas de explorar seus trabalhadores, forçando-os a trabalhar em jornadas diárias excessivas, sob péssimas condições de trabalho e em situações de higiene degradantes. Em casos extremos, há relatos de que os trabalhadores são abusados física e mentalmente, além de serem assediados sexualmente.

A Adidas explicou publicamente que decidiu manter sua produção nessas fábricas, pois considerou que este trabalho pode ser a principal fonte de renda para um grande número de pessoas que vivem em condições de extrema pobreza, mesmo havendo fortes indícios que os donos dessas fábricas perpetuam a violência contra os trabalhadores.



Brand Ethical Behavior

Adidas bane a exploração de mão de obra na confecção de seus produtos

São Paulo | 02 de Agosto de 2018, 11h:00

Os consumidores da Adidas ficaram sensibilizados com a decisão da marca em suspender a fabricação de seus produtos nas fábricas terceirizadas da Indonésia.

Essas fábricas estão sendo acusadas de explorar seus trabalhadores, forçando-os a trabalhar em jornadas diárias excessivas, sob péssimas condições de trabalho e em situações de higiene degradantes. Em casos extremos, há relatos de que os trabalhadores são abusados física e mentalmente, além de serem assediados sexualmente.

A Adidas explicou publicamente que decidiu cancelar sua produção nessas fábricas, mesmo considerando que este trabalho pode ser a principal fonte de renda para um grande número de pessoas que vivem em condições de extrema pobreza. Justificou que há fortes indícios que os donos dessas fábricas perpetuam a violência contra os trabalhadores.



APPENDIX 8 – ALTERNATIVE MECHANISMS (ADDITIONAL STUDY)

Moral Decoupling Scale

(Bhattacharjee, Berman & Reed II, 2012)

Please rate to what degree you agree with the following statements using a 7-point Scale anchored at:

1 = Strongly disagree

7 = Strongly agree

	1 - Strongly disagree	2	3	4 - Neither agree nor disagree	5	6	7 - Strongly agree
The method of production does not change my assessment of the brand's performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judgments of performance should remain separate from judgments of morality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reports of wrongdoing should not affect our view of the brand's performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
