

## Branding Alters Attitude Functions and Reduces the Advantage of Function-Matching

Persuasive Appeals

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Attitudes differ in the functions that they serve: Whereas attitudes towards some products may serve a utilitarian purpose of helping consumers maximize rewards, attitudes towards other products may symbolize or express consumers' values. This paper shows that branding alters the associations between products and attitude functions. Specifically, product categories that are generally associated with utilitarian attitudes are associated with less utilitarian, more symbolic attitudes when branded, whereas product categories that are generally associated with symbolic attitudes are associated with more utilitarian, less symbolic attitudes when branded. Branding also has important implications for persuasion and for the "function-matching" advantage: Whereas utilitarian appeals are most persuasive for "utilitarian" products (and symbolic appeals are most persuasive for "symbolic" products) at the category level, this paper shows that this pattern does not emerge at the brand level, in part because attitude functions change with branding.

Keywords: persuasion, advertising, branding, matching and mismatching appeals, product attitudes

Why do consumers form favorable attitudes towards certain products? The reasons surely differ depending on the product in question. For example, holding a positive attitude towards some products, like ceiling fans, may primarily help consumers achieve concrete benefits (e.g., staying cool). However, holding a positive attitude towards other products, like college t-shirts, may instead primarily help consumers express themselves or their values. Indeed, attitudes differ in the functions they serve for individuals (Katz 1960; Maio and Olson 2000). Whereas prior research has established associations between particular products and particular attitude functions (e.g., Shavitt 1990), such research has been primarily conducted at the category level (e.g., attitudes towards ceiling fans in general) and not at the brand level (e.g., attitudes towards brands of fans). In this paper, we demonstrate that attitude functions are altered by branding, and that such alterations have important implications for persuasion.

#### *ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS*

The idea that attitudes can serve different functions is not a new one (Katz 1960; Smith, Bruner, and White 1956). Katz, for example, described people as motivated to attain a variety of goals, including maximizing concrete rewards, expressing values and the self, defending the self against threatening ideas, and structuring the world. In Katz's framework, attitudes exist for a reason, and that reason is to fulfill one (or more) of those goals. For example, a positive attitude towards a proposal that lowers one's taxes would likely be held in the service of reward maximization, but an attitude supporting abortion restrictions might be held in the service of value expression.

Although early research proposed several attitude functions (Katz 1960; Smith, Bruner, and White 1956), subsequent research has primarily focused on the "unanimous distinction between instrumental and symbolic functions" (Ennis and Zanna 2000, p. 396; see Abelson and

Prentice 1989; Berger and Heath 2007; Johar and Sirgy 1991; Prentice 1987; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992). Indeed, a consensus has emerged that a fundamental way in which attitudes differ is in whether they serve a utilitarian function of seeking tangible rewards or a symbolic function of self- and value-expression. We consequently focus on these two functions here.

Researchers have operationalized attitude functions in different ways. Some have taken an individual-differences approach, proposing that people who differ on certain traits will exhibit corresponding differences in attitude functions (e.g., Bazzini and Shaffer 1995; DeBono 1987; Lavine and Snyder 1996; Petty and Wegener 1998). Such research has been productive, but an approach that may be more relevant to marketing is a product-centered approach that investigates associations between products and attitude functions (Shavitt 1990; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992). This research has shown that whereas some products (e.g., cough syrup and toothpaste) give rise to predominantly utilitarian attitudes, other products (e.g., class rings and flags) support predominantly symbolic attitudes (Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992).<sup>1</sup>

A successful operationalization of attitude functions allows a test of one of the central tenets of the attitude-functions framework: Knowledge of an attitude's function is predicted to confer knowledge of how to best change that attitude. Specifically, "function-matching" appeals are thought to have an advantage over "function-mismatching" appeals; thus, a utilitarian attitude will be best changed by utilitarian arguments about costs and benefits, but a symbolic attitude will be best changed by symbolic, value-related arguments (Katz 1960). Indeed, Shavitt (1990) found that (utilitarian) attitudes towards coffee were more favorably affected by learning that it is made with "a blend of the freshest coffee beans" (a utilitarian argument about quality) than by learning that it symbolizes "your rare, discriminating taste" (a symbolic argument). The reverse was true for products linked to symbolic attitudes: Those product attitudes were more easily

changed with symbolic than with utilitarian appeals. The advantages of function-matching (vs. mismatching) appeals are well documented (e.g., Bazzini and Shaffer 1995; Clary et al. 1994; Lavine and Snyder 1996; Murray, Haddock, and Zanna 1996; Petty and Wegener 1998).

### *ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS AMONG BRANDS*

Although a product-centered approach to attitude functions holds promise for marketing, this approach has “focused on product categories rather than on individual brands within a category” (Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992, p. 362). In fact, although research suggests that considering *whether* to buy from a category differs in important ways from deciding *which* brand to buy (Chakravarti and Janiszewski 2004; Dhar and Nowlis 2004), relatively little is known about whether attitude functions operate differently for brands, as compared to categories.

We propose that conclusions about attitude functions may indeed be different for brands, compared to product categories. First, we propose that although the associations between product categories and attitude functions are often direct and strong, brands, which can be thought of as specific instantiations of a category, might be less directly associated with the category’s attitude function. According to spreading-activation models (Collins and Loftus 1975), knowledge is often represented hierarchically, with a general concept (e.g., “bird”) residing at one level of a hierarchy and specific instantiations of the concept (e.g., “sparrow”) residing at lower levels. Properties associated with an entire category are predicted to be stored at the highest applicable level and to not necessarily be re-stored for each subsidiary instance (e.g., “can fly” would be stored with “bird” but not necessarily with each instance of bird; Collins and Quillian 1969).<sup>2</sup> Thus, when a product category is associated with especially utilitarian (or symbolic) features, those function-congruent features might be stored at the higher category level, and not be re-stored with each subsidiary brand. Consequently, even if a product category generally has strong

associations with a particular attitude function, associations between the category's subsidiary brands and that function may be weaker. Attitudes towards branded products may therefore serve the product category's dominant function less strongly.

Second, brands may often strive to emphasize how they differ from the generic category (Levy 1959). Brands in utilitarian categories may therefore attempt to build symbolic associations (Aaker 1997; Biel 1993; Levy 1959), but brands in symbolic categories may attempt to build utilitarian associations. Moreover, after frequent exposure to products, consumers may have (perhaps implicitly) detected this regularity: They may expect brands in utilitarian categories to be more symbolic than the category, but brands in symbolic categories to be more utilitarian than the category. Thus, although knowledge-representation research suggests that branded products may "lose" some associations with the category's dominant function, branded products may also "gain" associations with a different function.

For both of these reasons, we predict that the attitude functions associated with brands will be different from the attitude functions associated with the corresponding product categories. We specifically predict that products that give rise to predominantly utilitarian attitudes at the category level will give rise to brand attitudes that are less utilitarian (and more symbolic). For example, although one's attitude towards *beer* may be purely utilitarian, one's attitude towards *Heineken* may be driven in part by what the brand symbolizes. Conversely, we predict that products that give rise to predominantly symbolic category-level attitudes will give rise to brand attitudes that are less symbolic (and more utilitarian): Although one's attitude towards *college sweatshirts* may be purely symbolic (symbolizing school spirit), one's attitude towards a *Jerzees*-brand sweatshirt may be driven in part by utilitarian concerns.

Furthermore, we predict that these effects of branding will have important implications

for persuasion. As noted, persuasive appeals are more successful when they match the function of the targeted attitude. However, because attitude functions may change with branding, appeals that match a product's category-level function may not as closely match the product's brand-level function. As a result, an appeal that is superior at the category level (because it matches the category-level function) may not be superior at the brand level. For example, in a utilitarian product category, a utilitarian appeal should outperform a symbolic appeal when delivered for the category in general, but not necessarily when delivered for a brand in that category (because brand attitudes may be less utilitarian). We do not question the merits of matching appeals to attitude functions, but we predict that as a product's association with an attitude function is lessened with branding, so too will be the advantage of the appeal that matches that function.

We should note that there are other reasons why function-based appeals may operate differently for brands, compared to categories. For example, in a relatively homogeneous product category, brands may best differentiate themselves from each other by using appeals that contrast with the category-level attitude function (Lutz 1981; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992), and consumers may prefer appeals that differentiate brands. Consider, for example, the differentiation achieved by brands of tuna fish (a utilitarian category) that provide symbolic information by claiming to be "dolphin safe." Similarly, an attitude towards a product category may serve one function (e.g., flags symbolize patriotism), but, once it is clear that this function will be served (e.g., one decides, in principle, to buy a flag), brand decisions may reflect another function (e.g., one chooses the sturdiest flag, Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992; also Lutz 1981).

For all of these reasons, the advantage of appeals that match category-level attitude functions may not manifest at the brand level. To our knowledge, no research has compared the success of function-based appeals at the brand- versus category-level.

In what follows, we first investigate whether the functions served by attitudes towards product categories systematically differ from the functions served by attitudes towards brands in those same categories. We then compare the success of function-based appeals for product categories to the success of the same appeals for brands.

### *THE EFFECT OF BRANDING ON ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS*

Three studies examined whether branding alters the functions served by product attitudes. We predicted:

**H1:** Products predominantly associated with utilitarian attitudes at the category level will support less utilitarian, and more symbolic, attitudes at the brand level. Products predominantly associated with symbolic attitudes at the category level will support less symbolic, and more utilitarian, attitudes at the brand level.

#### *STUDY 1A: PILOT STUDY*

In our first investigation, we selected paper towels and college t-shirts as products that are likely to support predominantly utilitarian and symbolic attitudes, respectively, at the category level (based on guidelines from Shavitt 1990). We manipulated whether the products were branded, and we measured the functions served by attitudes towards the products.

#### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred thirty-two undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* We randomly assigned participants to evaluate either category-level or brand-level products. For all participants, the initial instructions were:

For each product, please tell us why you feel the way you do about that product. That is, people may think of some products in terms of the concrete benefits those products

provide, while they may think of other products in terms of what the products symbolize... Please consider whether you usually think about the products below in terms of the concrete benefits they provide, the things they symbolize, or both.

In the category-level condition, participants considered paper towels and college t-shirts. In the brand-level condition, participants considered *Bounty* paper towels and *Jerzees* college t-shirts.

Participants evaluated each product using two items adapted from Shavitt (1990). On a 1 (generally disagree) to 7 (generally agree) scale, participants evaluated, "I typically think of paper towels in terms of whether or not they give me certain benefits," (to assess the utilitarian function) and "I typically think of paper towels in terms of whether or not they symbolize certain things," (to assess the symbolic function). As appropriate, "paper towels" was replaced with, "a University of [school] shirt," "*Bounty* paper towels," and "a *Jerzees*-brand University of [school] shirt." Participants made these ratings on a questionnaire within a longer laboratory session.

### *Results and Discussion*

*Category-level functions.* As shown in Table 1, participants reported thinking of unbranded paper towels more in terms of benefits than in terms of symbols,  $t(65) = 13.0, p < .001$ , whereas the reverse was true for unbranded college t-shirts,  $t(65) = -7.72, p < .001$ . Thus, these product categories were appropriately classified as utilitarian and symbolic, respectively.

*The effects of branding.* Table 1 also reveals that attitude functions changed when the products were branded. Attitudes towards branded paper towels were slightly less utilitarian and reliably more symbolic than attitudes towards the category, but attitudes towards branded college t-shirts displayed the opposite pattern, becoming *less* symbolic but somewhat more utilitarian than attitudes towards the category. To capture the net effect of branding, we calculated a difference score for each product by subtracting symbolism ratings from benefits ratings; higher

numbers indicate more utilitarian attitudes. A 2 (level: category or brand) x 2 (product: paper towel or t-shirt) mixed ANOVA on these difference scores revealed a significant interaction between product and level,  $F(1, 130) = 33.1, p < .001$ : For college t-shirts, brand attitudes were more utilitarian (less symbolic) than category attitudes,  $t(130) = 6.01, p = .001$ , but for paper towels, brand attitudes were less utilitarian (more symbolic) than category attitudes,  $t(130) = -1.86, p = .07$ . (The ANOVA also revealed main effects of product and level,  $ps < .001$ , which are of less theoretical interest.)

This study offers initial support for hypothesis 1: On balance, attitudes towards a symbolic product category became more utilitarian with branding, and attitudes towards a utilitarian product category became more symbolic with branding. Study 1b investigates whether these conclusions hold across a broader set of stimuli.

#### *STUDY 1B: A BROADER SET OF CATEGORIES AND BRANDS*

To ensure that study 1a's results were not limited to the particular products or brands selected, study 1b used eight products and 16 brand names. As before, participants evaluated the attitude functions associated with these products at either the category or brand level.

#### *Method*

*Participants.* Two hundred six undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* We selected paper towels, toothpaste, vitamins, and cough syrup as utilitarian products, and college t-shirts, American flags, class rings, and greeting cards as symbolic products (cf. Shavitt 1990; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992).<sup>3</sup> Participants evaluated all eight products, with product order counterbalanced and symbolic and utilitarian products intermixed. We randomly assigned participants to evaluate branded or unbranded products, and

we further randomly assigned those evaluating branded products to one of two sets of brand names. Set A included *Brawny*, *Crest*, *One-a-Day*, *Robitussin*, *Jerzees*, *American Flags Express*, *Jostens*, and *American Greetings*, whereas Set B included *Bounty*, *Colgate*, *Centrum*, *Comtrex*, *Champion*, *FlagCo*, *ArtCarved*, and *Hallmark*. Using the same methods as in study 1a, participants rated each product's associations with symbols and benefits.

### *Results and Discussion*

*Category-level functions.* As predicted, unbranded paper towels, toothpaste, vitamins, and cough syrup were each more strongly associated with benefits than symbols (all  $t_s > 10.0$ , all  $p_s < .001$ ), and unbranded college t-shirts, American flags, class rings, and greeting cards were each more strongly associated with symbols than benefits (all  $t_s < -10.0$ , all  $p_s < .001$ ).

*Between-brand differences.* We next assessed whether particular brand names altered attitude functions, by comparing the ratings for Sets A and B. For example, we examined whether *Bounty* paper towels were more strongly associated with benefits than were *Brawny* paper towels. We conducted these comparisons for both symbolism and benefits ratings for each product; in no case did the two brands elicit reliably different ratings ( $.11 < p_s < .88$ ). Thus, we combined participants from Sets A and B into one "branded" condition for further analysis.

*The effects of branding.* Branding altered attitude functions. Table 2 displays the difference scores obtained by subtracting each product's symbolism rating from its benefits rating, revealing the degree to which each product supports, on balance, more utilitarian (higher numbers) or more symbolic (lower numbers) attitudes. As predicted, Table 2 reveals that products supporting predominantly utilitarian category-level attitudes supported somewhat more symbolic attitudes when branded, whereas products supporting predominantly symbolic category-level attitudes supported *less* symbolic attitudes when branded. Confirming this

observation, a 2 (level: category or brand) x 2 (unbranded product type: utilitarian or symbolic) mixed ANOVA on the difference scores (averaged for each product type) revealed the predicted level x product type interaction,  $F(1, 204) = 7.70, p = .006$ ; it also revealed a less relevant main effect of product type,  $F(1, 204) = 1079, p < .001$ .<sup>4</sup> (Note also that branding had stronger effects for symbolic than utilitarian products,  $t_s(204) = 3.54$  and  $-1.46, p_s = .0005$  and  $.15$ , respectively, but the effects of branding were consistent for each product within each product type.)

Studies 1a and 1b revealed that branding has systematic effects on attitude functions: Products that support utilitarian category-level attitudes (e.g., toothpaste) are associated with somewhat more symbolic attitudes when branded, but products that support symbolic category-level attitudes (e.g., class rings) are associated with more utilitarian attitudes when branded.

#### *STUDY 1C: "MERE" BRANDING*

One potential concern about study 1b is that, although we found no effect of particular brand names on attitude functions, the chosen brands may nevertheless have conveyed symbolic or utilitarian messages. For example, although the specific use of *Bounty* versus *Brawny* may have no effect on attitude functions, perhaps both names imbue an otherwise utilitarian product with symbolism, and perhaps this explains study 1b's results. Alternatively, perhaps years of advertising for these particular brands altered attitude functions.

Our claim, however, is that the alteration of attitude functions does not rely merely on specific, semantically loaded (or familiar) brand *names*. Simply mentioning that a product is branded may trigger changes in attitude functions, because consumers may expect brands to serve a different function from that served by the product category. To test our claims about branding as conservatively as possible, study 1c investigated whether the mere act of branding, even in the absence of a specific brand name, alters attitude functions.

### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred thirty-nine undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* We collected ratings for the eight products used in study 1b, replacing only “toothpaste” with “ceiling fans” among the utilitarian products.

Participants evaluated all eight products, with symbolic and utilitarian products intermixed, and were randomly assigned to evaluate branded or unbranded products. In the unbranded (category-level) condition, ratings were made on the two seven-point scales used previously (e.g., “I typically think of vitamins in terms of whether or not they give me certain benefits”). In the brand-level condition, participants read, “Imagine that a new brand of vitamins was introduced... please give us your best guess about how you might think of it.” Participants rated the product as follows: “I would probably think of this new brand of vitamins in terms of whether or not it gives me certain benefits” and “...it symbolizes certain things.” Participants made the ratings on a questionnaire during a longer session.

### *Results and Discussion*

*Category-level functions.* As before, the utilitarian products (paper towels, ceiling fans, vitamins, and cough syrup) were each more strongly associated with benefits than symbols at the category level (all  $t_s > 5.0$ , all  $p_s < .001$ ), but the reverse was true for the symbolic products (college t-shirts, flags, class rings, and greeting cards; all  $t_s < -5.0$ , all  $p_s < .001$ ).

*The effects of branding.* Branding again predictably altered attitude functions. Table 3 displays the difference scores obtained by subtracting each product’s symbolism rating from its benefits rating, thus revealing the degree to which each product supports, on balance, more utilitarian (higher numbers) or more symbolic (lower numbers) attitudes. A 2 (level: category or

brand) x 2 (unbranded product type: utilitarian or symbolic) mixed ANOVA on the difference scores (averaged for each product type) revealed main effects of product type,  $F(1, 137) = 440, p < .001$ , and level,  $F(1, 137) = 4.97, p < .03$ , and, more importantly, a reliable interaction,  $F(1, 137) = 6.77, p = .01$ : Branding made attitudes towards utilitarian products more symbolic and attitudes towards symbolic products more utilitarian.<sup>5</sup>

Branding had stronger effects for symbolic than utilitarian products ( $t(137) = 3.44$  and  $-1.10, p < .001$  and  $= .27$ , respectively), but branding's effects were again consistent for each product. In the General Discussion, we consider why we observed somewhat weaker (albeit consistent) effects for utilitarian products. Note, however, that the effect of branding on the utilitarian products' difference scores is reliable when the results of studies 1a through 1c are combined,  $Z = 2.53, p = .01$  (Stouffer method, Rosenthal and Rosnow 1991, p. 496).

Study 1c suggests that the effects of branding on attitude functions are not due to specific brand names altering perceptions. Instead, it seems that the mere act of presenting a brand – even absent a specific name – has systematic effects. In utilitarian categories, brand attitudes are somewhat more symbolic than category attitudes; in symbolic categories, brand attitudes are less symbolic than category attitudes. Naturally, the observed effects might be stronger for some brands than for others, and we consider this point in the General Discussion. Next, however, we consider the implications of these effects for persuasion.

#### *FUNCTION-MATCHING APPEALS AT THE BRAND AND CATEGORY LEVELS*

As noted previously, one of the benefits of knowing an attitude's function is that such knowledge suggests how to change that attitude: Utilitarian attitudes are best changed with appeals highlighting costs and benefits, and symbolic attitudes are best changed with appeals highlighting symbolism or values (Katz 1960; Shavitt 1990). However, study 1 suggests that an

appeal's function-congruence will depend on whether a product is considered at the brand or category level. Because branding alters attitude functions, an appeal selected because it matches the category-level function might be less of a pure "match," and might have less of an advantage, for brands. Thus, we predict:

**H2:** Although appeals matching the category-level function will be more persuasive than mismatching appeals at the category level, this "matching advantage" will be attenuated at the brand level.<sup>6</sup>

#### *STUDY 2A: FICTITIOUS BRANDS*

In study 2a, we examined persuasive appeals for ceiling fans and American flags, which study 1c revealed to support predominantly utilitarian and symbolic attitudes (respectively) at the category level. We presented these products at the category or brand level, and we compared the efficacy of utilitarian and symbolic appeals for each product at each level. We used fictitious brands to ensure that prior knowledge about the brands would not affect the appeals' success.

#### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred seventeen undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* The materials are reproduced in the Web Appendix. For each product, participants imagined making an in-store purchase decision. A utilitarian or symbolic persuasive appeal was then delivered, and participants rated their purchase likelihood on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 7 (extremely likely). For ceiling fans, the utilitarian (matching) appeal described a fan's cooling ability, whereas the symbolic (mismatching) appeal stated that fans (which were said to be more energy-efficient than air conditioning) symbolized conservation. For American flags, the utilitarian (mismatching) appeal mentioned the low price

of flags, whereas the symbolic (matching) appeal emphasized patriotism.

In the category-level conditions, the appeal was for the category as a whole (e.g., “a fan will definitely help you stay cool”); at the brand level, the appeal was for one brand (e.g., “a *Cloud Stream* fan will...”). Similarly, purchase likelihood was rated for the category or brand, as appropriate (e.g., “how likely would you be to buy [a fan/the *Cloud Stream* fan]”). For ceiling fans, participants considered *Cloud Stream* and *Fresh Air* brands, and the persuasive appeal was delivered for (and purchase intent evaluated for) *Cloud Stream*. For flags, *Flags Unlimited* and *Flags Incorporated* were considered, with the appeal delivered for *Flags Incorporated*.

We randomly assigned participants to evaluate one appeal for each product (order counterbalanced), with both appeals drawn from one cell of a 2 (level: brand or category) x 2 (appeal: matching or mismatching the category-level function) design. Participants evaluated the appeals on a questionnaire during a longer laboratory session.

### *Results and Discussion*

As shown in Table 4, matching appeals outperformed mismatching appeals at the category level, but this advantage disappeared at the brand level. Confirming this, a 2 (level) x 2 (appeal) x 2 (specific product) mixed ANOVA on purchase likelihood revealed the predicted level x appeal interaction,  $F(1, 113) = 6.50, p = .01$ .<sup>7</sup> Collapsed across products, matching appeals significantly outperformed mismatching appeals for product categories,  $t(58) = 2.45, p = .02$ , but this advantage was non-significantly *reversed* for brands,  $t(55) = -1.08, p = .29$ .<sup>8</sup>

These results support hypothesis 2: Matching appeals outperform mismatching appeals at the category level, but not at the brand level. This may occur because, as study 1 shows, attitudes towards brands and categories serve somewhat different functions; thus, appeals that match category-level attitudes may no longer be the only fitting appeals for brand attitudes.

### STUDY 2B: REAL BRANDS

To our knowledge, study 2a is the first study to compare the success of function-relevant appeals at the category and brand levels. It is thus important to ensure that the results are not an artifact of the stimuli we employed. In study 2b, we examined another set of products and used actual brand names to verify that study 2a's conclusions are not restricted to novel brands. Specifically, we examined appeals for paper towels and college t-shirts, which support predominantly utilitarian and symbolic (respectively) category-level attitudes (see study 1). As before, we presented these products at the category or brand level, comparing the efficacy of utilitarian and symbolic appeals at each level.

#### *Method*

*Participants.* Seventy-two undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* The materials were similar to study 2a. For each product, participants imagined that a persuasive appeal was delivered as they were making a purchase decision. We randomly assigned participants to evaluate one appeal for each product (order counterbalanced), with both appeals drawn from one cell of a 2 (level: brand or category) x 2 (appeal type: matching or mismatching the category-level function) design.

As before, in the category-level conditions, the appeal was for the category as a whole, and in the brand-level conditions, the appeal was for one brand, with purchase likelihood rated for the category or brand, as appropriate. Participants in the brand-level conditions considered *Brawny* and *Bounty* paper towel brands and *Champion* and *Jerzees* t-shirt brands; appeals were delivered for *Brawny* and *Champion*.

For paper towels, the utilitarian (matching) appeal discussed cleaning spills (a benefit)

whereas the symbolic (mismatching) appeal described paper towels as made of recycled paper (thus symbolizing environmentalism). For college t-shirts, the utilitarian (mismatching) appeal described a discount offered to people wearing the shirt (a benefit) whereas the symbolic (matching) appeal stated that the shirt symbolized school support. Participants evaluated the appeals on a questionnaire during a longer laboratory session.

### *Results and Discussion*

As shown in Table 5, the results replicated study 2a's findings: The advantage of matching appeals disappeared at the brand level. As before, a 2 (level) x 2 (appeal) x 2 (product) mixed ANOVA revealed the predicted level x appeal interaction,  $F(1, 68) = 9.10, p = .004$ : Collapsed across products, matching appeals significantly outperformed mismatching appeals at the category level,  $t(33) = 3.25, p = .003$ , but this advantage was non-significantly reversed at the brand level,  $t(35) = -1.11, p = .27$ .<sup>9</sup>

Studies 2a and 2b suggest that appeals that are superior for product categories (presumably because they match the associated attitudes' functions) are less so for brands. Because the appeals themselves are virtually identical for the categories and the brands (e.g., both refer to cleaning spills), differences in appeal content cannot explain these effects. Instead, we suggest that the effects arise, at least in part, because attitude functions change with branding; thus, appeals that are a mismatch for category attitudes are more of a match for brand attitudes.

### *STUDY 3: INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS*

Study 2 established that, although appeals matching a product category's attitude function have an advantage over mismatching appeals at the category level, that advantage is eliminated, and may even reverse, at the brand level. One potential concern with study 2, however, is that *function matching* and *appeal content* were confounded (within a given product and level). For

example, with paper towels, we assumed that the utilitarian appeal (regarding cleaning spills) succeeded at the category level because it matched category-level attitudes. However, perhaps *cleaning spills* is simply a more compelling attribute than *environmental support* at the category level but not at the brand level, for reasons wholly unrelated to attitude functions. Furthermore, at the brand level, participants effectively chose between two brands, but at the category level, participants only considered one item. Perhaps the simultaneous consideration of two items diminished the “matching” appeals’ effectiveness (see Schkade and Johnson 1989 for a discussion of how between-item choices differ from single-item ratings).

In study 3, we sought to establish more conclusively that the critical factor determining appeal success is the match between the appeal and the relevant attitude function. We also aimed to replicate study 2’s findings using a different, arguably more natural, methodology. As such, we presented advertisements for one product (greeting cards), comparing the responses of participants who associated that product category with a symbolic attitude to those who associated it with a utilitarian attitude. We predicted:

**H3:** At the category level, participants with utilitarian category-level attitudes will find a utilitarian appeal more compelling than a symbolic appeal, but participants with symbolic category-level attitudes will find the same utilitarian appeal *less* compelling than the symbolic appeal. At the brand level, these effects will be attenuated.

This prediction rests on two key ideas: First, even though products are often associated with particular attitude functions, there is likely individual variation in such associations (DeBono 1987; Petty and Wegener 1998), especially for products, such as greeting cards, that both express sentiments and carry certain advantages and disadvantages. Second, study 1 suggests that, whatever the function associated with a product at the category level, that function

will be somewhat less dominant at the brand level. Thus, those who typically associate greeting cards with symbolic attitudes may see them as more utilitarian when they are branded, but those who typically associate cards with utilitarian attitudes may see them as somewhat more symbolic when branded. The success of a function-related appeal for a product should thus be contingent on which function is naturally dominant for that product for a given participant (as that will, in turn, determine which appeals are seen as “matching” and “mismatching” at the category and brand levels). Support for hypothesis 3 would further establish that the success of a given appeal is predicted by the attitude function that a consumer associates with the targeted product.

### *Method*

*Participants.* Fifty-four undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* We randomly assigned participants to one cell of a 2 (appeal: symbolic or utilitarian) x 2 (level: brand or category) between-subjects design. All participants saw a one-page advertisement for greeting cards. Only the written copy changed between conditions, with the symbolic appeal describing how cards express feelings and the utilitarian appeal describing cards as inexpensive. Figure 1 displays the category-level advertisements. To create the brand-level advertisements, we inserted a fictitious brand name (*Between-the-Lines*) before every instance of “greeting card” in the advertisements; this was the only brand mentioned. All participants were asked to read the assigned advertisement and to rate their overall reaction to it on a scale that ranged from 1 (not at all favorable) to 7 (very favorable).

On a subsequent page, we assessed the attitude functions that participants associated with the category of greeting cards. As before, we asked participants to rate their agreement with two statements (order counterbalanced) on a seven-point scale: “I typically think of greeting cards in

terms of whether or not sending them gives me certain benefits,” and “I typically think of greeting cards in terms of whether or not sending them symbolizes certain things.” Participants completed these tasks via questionnaires in a longer laboratory session.

### *Results and Discussion*

*Individual attitude functions.* Overall, participants rated the category of greeting cards as more strongly associated with symbols than benefits ( $M_s = 5.43$  v.  $3.70$ ,  $t(53) = 6.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ); thus, greeting cards were associated, overall, with symbolic attitudes. As before, we subtracted symbolism ratings from benefits ratings to generate a composite measure of attitude function. This difference score ranged from  $-6.0$  to  $5.0$  ( $SD = 2.11$ ), indicating substantial individual variation in the function served by attitudes towards greeting cards. A 2 (appeal)  $\times$  2 (advertisement level) ANOVA revealed no effects of those variables on difference scores ( $p_s > .25$ ); thus, manipulations of the advertisement did not affect the attitude functions associated with this product category.

*Appeal efficacy.* To evaluate appeal efficacy, we regressed participants' evaluations of the advertisement on appeal ( $-1 =$  utilitarian;  $1 =$  symbolic), level ( $-1 =$  brand;  $1 =$  category), individual attitude function (the difference score described above, centered), all possible two-way interaction terms, and the three-way interaction between appeal, level, and attitude function. This analysis revealed the predicted three-way interaction between appeal, level, and attitude function,  $b = -.20$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .03$ .<sup>10</sup> Figure 2 shows the results and suggests that participants with predominantly utilitarian attitudes (difference score of  $+2$ ) evaluated the utilitarian appeal more favorably than the symbolic appeal at the category level, but that this effect slightly reversed at the brand level. However, participants with predominantly symbolic attitudes (difference score of  $-2$ ) appear to have evaluated the symbolic appeal more favorably than the

utilitarian appeal at the category level, but not at the brand level.

Further analyses confirmed this pattern: The appeal x attitude function interaction was significant at the category level,  $b = -.38$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .003$ , but not at the brand level,  $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .37$ . A simple-slopes analysis (Aiken and West 1991) aids in interpreting this interaction: At the category level, the symbolic appeal was liked less than the utilitarian appeal by participants with utilitarian attitudes (difference score of +2),  $b = -.90$ ,  $SE = .45$ ,  $p = .06$ , but liked more than the utilitarian appeal by participants with symbolic attitudes (difference score of -2),  $b = .63$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $p = .01$ . In contrast, at the brand level, there was no tendency to prefer matching to mismatching appeals: The symbolic appeal was not more or less appealing than the utilitarian appeal for participants with predominantly utilitarian attitudes,  $b = .14$ ,  $SE = .58$ ,  $p = .81$ , or for participants with predominantly symbolic attitudes,  $b = .05$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p = .85$ .

This study supports the idea that matching appeals only outperform mismatching appeals at the category level and that the matching advantage is attenuated for brands; this happens even when the product and appeal are held constant and “matches” are defined idiosyncratically. Moreover, study 3 highlights the role of attitude functions in the current effects. That is, “show you care” is not an inherently good or bad category-level appeal for greeting cards; rather, the appeal’s success hinges on whether the appeal is congruent with a consumer’s attitude’s function. Study 3 also establishes the generality of the current effects, showing that the effects emerge with more realistic stimuli than those used in study 2 and emerge whether participants compare two brands (study 2) or consider one brand in isolation (study 3).

#### *STUDY 4: EVALUATING REAL ADVERTISEMENTS*

Study 4 further explored the generality of our findings. Although Studies 2 and 3 presented compelling experimental evidence that appeals that match the product category’s

function are superior at the category level but not at the brand level, the appeals used in those studies were created by researchers, and not by professional copywriters who may be more skilled at crafting “matching” appeals for branded products. In study 4, we examined whether actual magazine advertisements are more or less favorably evaluated when appeals match versus mismatch the product category’s function.

### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred two undergraduates at a large public university participated for course credit.

*Materials and procedure.* We selected all ( $N = 44$ ) of the full-page advertisements from the December 18, 2007 issue of *Newsweek* magazine (chosen because it targets a general audience). We excluded three advertisements that were overtly seasonal and thus outdated when the study was run, and we excluded seven more that were unclassifiable as either a “category” or “brand” advertisement (e.g., advertisements for books and websites). This left 34 advertisements, two for product categories and 32 for branded products (see Table 6).

We randomly assigned participants to one of three groups. One group ( $n = 33$ ) simply evaluated each advertisement (“Overall, how effective do you find this ad to be?”). Another group ( $n = 38$ ) rated the degree to which each advertisement focused on benefits and on symbols (“This ad focuses on [the concrete benefits that the product provides / what the product symbolizes]”); question order was counterbalanced between participants. A final group ( $n = 31$ ) did not see the advertisements, but considered each advertised product category (e.g., “watches”) and rated the degree to which they typically think of that product category in terms of benefits and in terms of symbols, order counterbalanced (see study 1a for question wording). All stimuli were displayed and rated (on seven-point scales) via computer, in a randomized order.

### *Results and Discussion*

The question of interest is whether advertisement evaluation is related to the degree to which the advertisement “matches” the product category’s function. To assess this, we computed three difference scores. As before, we calculated the attitude function associated with each product category by subtracting each product category’s average (across participants) symbolism rating from its average benefits rating. Higher values on this “category-function score” indicate that the category supports more utilitarian attitudes (possible range: -6 to 6). We computed a similar score for each advertisement, subtracting its average (across participants) symbolism rating from its average benefits rating. Higher values on this “advertisement-function score” correspond to more utilitarian appeals (possible range: -6 to 6). Finally, to gauge the degree of match or mismatch between the category function and the advertisement function for each product, we computed the absolute value of the difference between the advertisement-function score and the category-function score. Higher values on this “mismatching score” thus indicate a greater discrepancy between the category function and the advertisement function (possible range: 0 to 12). Table 6 presents these scores for each product.

First, consider the 32 brand advertisements. If appeals matching the product category’s function outperform mismatching appeals, then advertisement evaluation should be *negatively* related to the mismatching score (as a lower mismatching score indicates a greater category-appeal match). Instead, the correlation between mismatching scores and evaluations was significantly *positive*,  $r = .50$ ,  $p = .003$ , suggesting that branded advertisements were liked better the more the appeal *mismatched* the product category’s function.

Further analyses revealed that advertisement evaluation was unrelated to the category-function score ( $r = -.01$ ,  $p = .94$ ) but negatively related to the advertisement-function score ( $r = -$

.50,  $p = .004$ ): More symbolic advertisements were more favorably evaluated. This finding is particularly interesting because each advertised category was rated as supporting utilitarian attitudes (all category-function scores  $> 0$ , Table 6), meaning that symbolic advertisements were also mismatching. This leads to an ambiguity in the results: Are mismatching advertisements generally liked more than matching advertisements for branded products, or does this result arise in this case because symbolic advertisements (which happen to be mismatching for these products) are liked better than utilitarian ones? Study 4's data do not conclusively resolve this issue. When we controlled for advertisement-function scores, the correlation between mismatching scores and evaluations was still (non-significantly) positive,  $r = .17, p = .37$ ; conversely, when we controlled for mismatching scores, the correlation between advertisement-function scores and evaluations was still (non-significantly) negative,  $r = -.14, p = .45$ .

The correlational nature of this study (and the limited selection of advertisements) prevents us from reaching firmer conclusions about why mismatching appeals were relatively successful in this case, but we find it striking that there is absolutely no evidence that matching appeals outperformed mismatching appeals for these branded products. Indeed, for these branded, utilitarian products, the 19 utilitarian advertisements (advertisement-function scores  $> 0$ ) were liked somewhat less than the 10 symbolic advertisements (advertisement-function scores  $< 0$ ):  $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.18, M_{\text{symbolic}} = 4.55, t(27) = -1.18, p = .25$ . (As one might expect, the pattern was reversed for the category-level advertisements: The symbolic advertisement for (utilitarian) milk was liked slightly less than the somewhat utilitarian advertisement for (utilitarian) almonds. However, we cannot draw any conclusions from just two category-level advertisements.)

Study 4 thus supports, with real advertisements, the conclusions of the more controlled experiments reported earlier: Although appeals matching the category's attitude function may

succeed for product categories, this advantage does not hold, and may even reverse, for brands. Although it is important to keep in mind study 4's limitations, this study also suggests that most advertisements are indeed for branded products and thereby emphasizes the importance of understanding *branded* appeals. Study 4 further suggests that brand advertisements may more often match than mismatch the category function (i.e., there were only 10 symbolic advertisements among the 32 utilitarian products), but that managers might successfully employ the opposite strategy.

### *GENERAL DISCUSSION*

This paper compares the attitude functions associated with product categories to those associated with brands. Study 1 revealed that products associated with utilitarian attitudes at the category level become associated with less utilitarian, more symbolic attitudes when branded, whereas products associated with symbolic attitudes at the category level become associated with less symbolic, more utilitarian attitudes when branded. Study 2 demonstrated one important consequence of this finding: Persuasive appeals that match the category-level attitude function have an advantage over mismatching appeals at the category level but lose their advantage at the brand level, possibly because mismatching appeals are more fitting at the brand level. Study 3 confirmed the role of attitude functions in this effect while ruling out certain alternative explanations, and studies 3 and 4 together expanded the generality of these results.

#### *Shifting Attitude Functions*

Why do attitude functions shift at the brand level? As discussed earlier, spreading-activation models of knowledge (Collins and Loftus 1975) predict that properties associated with an entire category are stored at the highest applicable level of the category and are not effortfully re-stored for each subsidiary instance (e.g., "sweet" may be stored with "soda" but not

necessarily with each instance of soda; Collins and Quillian 1969). Thus, even if attitude functions are strongly associated with products at the category level, the link between functions and specific brands may be indirect and thus weaker. In addition, consumers may have learned that brands of utilitarian products are often more symbolic than the category, but that brands of symbolic products are often somewhat less symbolic than the category. These expectations may have consequences for brand attitudes. Both this and the spreading-activation account are somewhat speculative, but these processes, as well as others, may operate together to produce the observed effects.

#### *The Differential Effectiveness of Appeals*

One can similarly consider why appeals that match category-level attitude functions lose their advantage over mismatching appeals at the brand level. We do not argue with the idea that appeals that match an attitude's function will generally be more effective than those that do not (Katz 1960). Rather, we suggest that, because attitude functions shift with branding, appeals that are a clear mismatch for the product category may no longer be such a mismatch for brands.

We should note, however, that other factors may also make mismatching appeals relatively compelling at the brand level. For example, in a category largely associated with one function, brands may best differentiate themselves from each other via appeals that highlight attributes associated with another function (Lutz 1981; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992), and consumers may prefer appeals that sharply differentiate products. To examine the degree to which such differentiation contributed to the current effects, we collected post-test ratings for studies 2a and 2b, asking a new sample of participants to rate how much brands differ on each attribute targeted by the appeals (e.g., "How much do brands of paper towels generally differ in terms of cleaning up spills?"). Although two products (fans and flags) indeed differed non-

significantly more on mismatching than matching attributes, two other products (paper towels and college t-shirts) were seen as differing reliably more on the *matching* attributes. Thus, there is no evidence that study 2's effects arose primarily because we chose mismatching appeals that provided a valid way to differentiate products and matching appeals that provided no basis for differentiation. That said, it may generally be easier to achieve brand differentiation with mismatching appeals, and this, along with brand-level shifts in attitude functions, may contribute to the differential success of appeals at the category and brand levels.

#### *Limitations and Boundary Conditions*

Study 1 showed large and reliable effects of branding on symbolic products, but the effect of branding on utilitarian products was, although consistent, noticeably weaker. This may have happened because we selected rather *unsymbolic* brands for the utilitarian categories to avoid biasing our results with semantically loaded brand names. The effects might have been stronger had we used the sort of strong, symbolic brands (e.g., *Apple* computers, *Luvvs* diapers) that are often cultivated in utilitarian categories. That said, it could also be true that branding has generally stronger effects on attitude functions in symbolic categories, compared to utilitarian categories. We can only speculate as to why this may be, but perhaps branding (an inherently commercial act) seems incongruous and even inappropriate for a symbolic product, and perhaps pairing a commercial brand with a symbolic product alters attitude functions to an even greater extent than the processes already discussed would suggest.

Indeed, one unexplored boundary condition of the current effects relates to these issues. Although we have shown that, all else equal, branding makes symbolic products more utilitarian and utilitarian products somewhat more symbolic, we do not contend that every brand will only and always exert these effects. Although study 1 (especially study 1c) suggests that this will

likely be the default pattern, these effects might be weakened or eliminated by creating a very utilitarian brand for a utilitarian product or a very symbolic brand for a symbolic product.

Although this seems possible, we believe that this does not typically happen. Instead, it seems that some of the most iconic and symbolic brands (e.g., *Coca-Cola*, *Nike*, and *McDonald's*) are for products (e.g., beverages, shoes, and food) that would likely support rather utilitarian attitudes were they unbranded. (Of course, the existence of such symbolic brands in these categories may eventually change how people think about the categories themselves; for example, the category of shoes may now have some symbolic associations in part because of widespread symbolic branding.) It is relatively difficult to recall equally strong, symbolic brands for purely symbolic products; although our participants are familiar with brands like *Jostens* and *Jerzees*, the brand images for such symbolic products are arguably much weaker, even for the best-known brands like *Hallmark*. Perhaps this marketplace reality is related to the processes discussed here. A utilitarian product gains symbolism from branding, and so strong, symbolic brands are cultivated. A symbolic product, on the other hand, loses symbolism with branding; cultivating similarly strong symbolic brands in symbolic categories may thus be difficult.

A related boundary condition is that we have restricted our analysis to products that give rise to predominantly utilitarian *or* symbolic attitudes. As noted in footnote 1, we did not examine “mixed” product categories, such as sunglasses, cars, or clothing, which support attitudes that have relatively equal symbolic *and* utilitarian components. Perhaps it is for these mixed products that the specific brand will matter most in determining branding’s effects on attitude functions. One could imagine that, for a mixed product like clothing, some brands (e.g., Gucci) could make attitudes decidedly symbolic, whereas others (e.g., Kmart) could make those attitudes decidedly utilitarian. Preliminary evidence collected in a separate study suggests that

this is indeed the case for such “mixed” products.

Finally, we should note that, while this may be the first *comparison* of attitude functions at the category and brand levels, some of Shavitt’s (1990) research involved appeals for brands. For example, she found that a utilitarian appeal for one brand of coffee (a utilitarian product) was rated more highly than a symbolic appeal for another brand. This may seem to contradict our results, as we predict that the utilitarian appeal’s advantage would be attenuated at the brand level. However, a comparison of Shavitt’s methodology to ours may reconcile these findings: Shavitt (1990) presented appeals within-subjects (e.g., participants rated a symbolic appeal for Brand X and a utilitarian appeal for Brand Y), whereas we manipulated appeals between-subjects. Shavitt (1990, p. 141) briefly discusses a follow-up study in which the appeals were not juxtaposed; in that case, the function-matching advantage for her branded products was diminished. Thus, the apparent contradiction between the findings may be illusory, and Shavitt’s findings may even highlight another boundary condition of our effects. Juxtaposing appeals may prompt participants to use conversational norms to infer that there “must” be a reason why the mismatching appeal does not contain the information found in the matching appeal (e.g., “Brand X is *not* boasting about taste, but Brand Y is; Brand X must be inferior;” Grice 1975). However, when an appeal is considered in isolation (as they often are), a mismatching appeal may no longer be disadvantaged by such comparisons, and it may thus be relatively persuasive at the brand level. This is precisely what we found. This difference between how appeals are evaluated when juxtaposed versus in isolation may itself be a fruitful topic for investigation.

#### *Managerial Implications and Conclusions*

Product categories are often associated with particular attitude functions, but branding those products alters the associated attitude function, with predictable consequences for the

efficacy of function-relevant appeals. By comparing symbolic and utilitarian appeals, we found that function-matching appeals that have an advantage at the category level lose their superior status at the brand level. This is important to establish, especially because, as study 4 suggests, most persuasive appeals target specific brands rather than entire product categories.

Our results suggest that managers, who may have shied away from mismatching appeals for their brands, may actually achieve some measure of success with such appeals. Specifically, this paper suggests that, in utilitarian product categories, symbolic brand appeals may be more successful than utilitarian appeals. It is worth noting that this recommendation may entail a departure from current practice, inasmuch as study 4 revealed that symbolic advertisements for branded utilitarian products were a minority. For symbolic product categories, utilitarian appeals seem to be at least as successful as, if not more successful than, symbolic appeals at the brand level. Again, this may come as a surprise given not only the prior literature, but also the intuition that one should promote, for example, an American flag by appealing to patriotism (and that discussions of price or durability might appear crass).

Although branding has been discussed by marketing researchers for years (e.g., Levy 1959), only recently have researchers begun to document the ways in which thought processes and decisions involving brands may be systematically different from decisions about product categories (e.g., Dhar and Nowlis 2004). These differences have potentially important implications. For example, market researchers may often ask category-level questions (e.g., “What factors are important to you in choosing paper towels?”), but responses may reflect systematically different concerns from responses to brand-level questions (e.g., “What factors are important to you in choosing a *brand* of paper towels?”). Our findings suggest that decisions about branding and promotion ought not overly rely on answers to the former, category-level

questions. As we have shown, the mere fact that a product has been branded can alter not only how it is perceived, but also how attitudes towards it are best changed.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. We focus on products predominantly associated with one function, but attitudes can serve more than one function, with attitudes towards some products (e.g., cars, sunglasses) having strong utilitarian *and* symbolic components (Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992). Such “mixed-function” products are beyond the scope of this research, but we consider the implications of our research for such products in the General Discussion.
2. This is not to say that category-level properties are *never* re-stored with specific subsidiary instances, but research suggests that category-wide properties are often less accessible for specific instances of the category than they are for the category itself (see, e.g., Collins and Loftus 1975, Collins and Quillian 1969, and Shoben 1988).
3. From here on, “utilitarian product” refers to a product associated with predominantly utilitarian attitudes at the category level, and “symbolic product” refers to a product associated with predominantly symbolic attitudes at the category level.
4. This analysis focused on difference scores, but the level x product type interaction emerged for both the average benefits rating,  $F(1, 204) = 5.94, p = .02$ , and the average symbolism rating,  $F(1, 204) = 6.86, p = .02$ .
5. Again, this interaction emerged both for the average benefits rating,  $F(1, 137) = 3.91, p = .05$ , and the average symbolism rating,  $F(1, 137) = 7.11, p = .009$ .
6. Matching appeals” (whether delivered for categories or brands) will refer to appeals congruent with a product’s *category-level* attitude function, and “mismatching appeals” will refer to appeals incongruent with that function.
7. The only other reliable effects in the ANOVA were a main effect of level,  $F(1, 113) = 5.21, p = .02$ , and a product x appeal interaction,  $F(1, 113) = 4.01, p = .05$ , neither of

which is of theoretical interest. Note also that, in a follow-up study, we examined whether participants who did not receive the appeals viewed these brands differently. Participants did not believe that *Cloud Stream* and *Fresh Air* differed in cooling ability or energy conservation ( $ps > .72$ ), nor did they believe that *Flags Unlimited* and *Flags Incorporated* differed in price or patriotism ( $ps > .29$ ). Thus, the differential efficacy of the appeals cannot be attributed to inferences drawn from the brand names.

8. It is possible that we inadvertently introduced a utilitarian element into the symbolic fan appeal by saying that fans symbolize conservation *because they use less electricity*. In a new study, we thus randomly assigned participants to consider either the utilitarian fan appeal or a new, more purely symbolic appeal: “Buying a fan – instead of using air conditioning – is a good way to express your commitment to helping the environment.” As before, the matching appeal outperformed the mismatching appeal at the category level ( $M_s = 4.56$  vs.  $4.22$ ,  $t(156) = 2.21$ ,  $p = .03$ ), but this pattern non-significantly reversed at the brand level ( $M_s = 4.26$  vs.  $4.34$ ,  $t(131) = -.39$ ,  $p = .70$ ).
9. The ANOVA also revealed an irrelevant product x level interaction,  $F(1, 68) = 5.00$ ,  $p = .03$ . Note also that, as in Study 2a, a follow-up study showed that participants who did not receive the appeals did not believe that *Brawny* and *Bounty* differed in their likelihood of being made of recycled paper or in their ability to clean spills ( $ps > .38$ ), nor did they believe that *Champion* and *Jerzees* differed in terms of school support or likelihood of earning one a discount ( $ps > .56$ ). Thus, appeal success should not have been affected by pre-existing differences in how the brands were perceived.
10. This interaction qualified significant two-way interactions between appeal and attitude function,  $b = -.18$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .05$ , and between level and attitude function,  $b = -.20$ ,  $SE$

= .09,  $p = .03$ . There was also a main effect of level: Attitudes were more favorable when the card was unbranded versus branded,  $b = .41$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .02$ . No other main effects or interactions were significant.

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TABLE 1

ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS AT THE BRAND AND CATEGORY LEVELS, STUDY 1A

	Paper Towels		College T-Shirts	
	Category	Brand	Category	Brand
Benefit rating	5.27	5.20	4.06	4.45
Symbolism rating	1.88	2.52**	5.92	3.94**
Benefit – symbolism difference	3.39	2.68*	-1.86	.52**

\* $p \leq .07$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$

Note: p-values refer to brand-category differences for each product.

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TABLE 2

ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS AT THE BRAND AND CATEGORY LEVELS, STUDY 1B

Product	Benefit – Symbolism Difference Score	
	Category level	Brand level
Paper towels	3.64	3.24
Toothpaste	4.13	3.54
Vitamins	4.18	4.03
Cough syrup	4.45	4.16
Average of “utilitarian” products	4.09	3.74
College t-shirt	-2.40	-1.45**
American flag	-3.60	-2.80*
Class ring	-3.14	-2.48*
Greeting card	-2.37	-1.84
Average of “symbolic” products	-2.88	-2.14**

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .001$

Note: p-values refer to brand-category differences for each product. Higher numbers indicate more utilitarian attitudes.

TABLE 3

ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS AT THE BRAND AND CATEGORY LEVELS, STUDY 1C

Product	Benefit – Symbolism Difference Score	
	Category level	Brand level
Paper towels	2.47	2.41
Ceiling fans	4.09	3.46
Vitamins	4.32	3.77
Cough syrup	4.19	4.14
Average of “utilitarian” products	3.77	3.43
College t-shirt	-1.40	-.83
American flag	-3.10	-2.03*
Class ring	-2.69	-1.06**
Greeting card	-2.00	-1.27
Average of “symbolic” products	-2.30	-1.29**

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .001$

Note: p-values refer to brand-category differences for each product. Higher numbers indicate more utilitarian attitudes.

TABLE 4  
 PERSUASIVENESS OF APPEALS AT THE BRAND AND CATEGORY LEVELS, STUDY 2A

	Category-Level Products		Branded Products	
	“Matching” appeal	“Mismatching” appeal	“Matching” appeal	“Mismatching” appeal
Ceiling fan	4.68	4.14	4.66	5.25*
American flag	5.16	4.10*	5.07	5.07
Average across products	4.92	4.12*	4.86	5.16

\* $p \leq .05$

Note: p-values refer to matching-mismatching differences within the brand or category level for each product. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes. “Matching” and “mismatching” appeals are defined with respect to the category-level attitude function.

TABLE 5

PERSUASIVENESS OF APPEALS AT THE BRAND AND CATEGORY LEVELS, STUDY 2B

	Category-Level Products		Branded Products	
	“Matching” appeal	“Mismatching” appeal	“Matching” appeal	“Mismatching” appeal
Paper towels	5.59	4.17*	4.28	4.84
College t-shirts	4.29	3.56	4.61	4.84
Average across products	4.94	3.87*	4.45	4.84

\* $p \leq .05$

Note: p-values refer to matching-mismatching differences within the brand or category level for each product. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes. Matching and mismatching appeals are defined as in Table 4.

TABLE 6  
 ADVERTISEMENT RATINGS, STUDY 4

Product	Category Function	Ad Function	Degree of Mismatch	Ad Evaluation
Movado watch	1.19	-1.87	3.06	5.76
Ford car	1.23	-.58	1.80	5.06
Allianz financial products	2.00	-1.37	3.37	3.85
Nikon camera	2.00	0.00	2.00	4.58
Jitterbug cell phone	2.19	1.18	1.01	3.12
Promise health drinks	2.19	1.47	.72	4.48
Omaha steak	2.19	.34	1.85	5.03
Mt. Sinai hospital	2.23	.84	1.38	4.03
Templeton investments	2.29	-.26	2.55	3.27
Bose music system	2.35	.76	1.59	4.00
T. Rowe Price retirement investments	2.42	1.84	.58	3.09
Metlife retirement investments	2.42	-.63	3.05	4.39
Ameritrade retirement investments	2.42	1.79	.63	3.06
Greenwise paper products	2.48	-1.79	4.27	5.12
Dell computer	2.54	-2.24	4.79	5.55
Allstate retirement advice	2.58	.05	2.53	3.97
Bank of America	2.58	0.00	2.58	4.70

checking account

TABLE 6 (CONT'D)

Product	Category Function	Ad Function	Degree of Mismatch	Ad Evaluation
Lipitor cholesterol med.	2.65	2.16	.49	3.76
Vytorin cholesterol med.	2.65	1.53	1.12	4.24
Braun electric razor	2.65	.05	2.59	5.12
Flomax prostate med.	2.74	.16	2.58	4.30
Phillips toothbrush sanitizer	2.81	1.18	1.62	4.79
Quaker oatmeal	2.81	.61	2.20	4.85
Cypher stent	2.84	-.82	3.65	3.88
Bose headphones	2.87	1.42	1.45	3.88
Regions financial advisors	2.94	-.32	3.25	3.36
Liberty Mutual car insurance	2.97	-.37	3.34	5.21
Lyrica pain med.	3.06	.87	2.20	3.33
Lunesta sleep med.	3.42	0.00	3.42	5.30
Mucinex sinus med.	3.48	.95	2.54	5.55
APC surge protector	3.55	1.76	1.79	3.94
Kodak printer	3.94	.18	3.75	4.85
Milk	2.35	-1.34	3.70	5.03
Almonds	2.65	.76	1.88	5.18

Note: When a product category was represented by more than one brand (e.g., retirement investments), participants made only one set of product-category ratings.

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FIGURE 1

CATEGORY-LEVEL APPEALS, STUDY 3

**Celebrate while saving some cash...  
Send a greeting card!**

**Special occasion?**  
 Birthday?  
 Graduation?  
 Holiday?  
 Just because?

Did you know that greeting cards are the most economical gift you can give? Celebrating with your friends and family doesn't have to hurt your wallet!

Send a greeting card...  
and make your wallet happy.

**Show them that you care...  
Send a greeting card!**

**Special occasion?**  
 Birthday?  
 Graduation?  
 Holiday?  
 Just because?

Did you know that greeting cards have been rated as the best way to show someone that you care? Recipients say they really appreciate the extra thought!

Send a greeting card...  
and send the right message.

Note: The utilitarian appeal is on the left, and the symbolic appeal is on the right.



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## **Branding Alters Attitude Functions and Reduces the Advantage of Function-**

### **Matching Persuasive Appeals**

Robyn A. LeBoeuf

Joseph P. Simmons

### **Web Appendix**

#### *MATERIALS, STUDY 2A*

All questions were followed by a scale ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 7 (extremely likely).

#### *Fans, Category-Level Appeal:*

Imagine that your family is considering installing a ceiling fan... You are currently in a store and are trying to decide whether to purchase one of the fans on display. Another customer sees you inspecting the fans, and says, "Buying a fan right now is a great idea!..."

*Utilitarian appeal:* "...Summer's here, and a fan will definitely help you stay cool."

*Symbolic appeal:* "...Since fans cool the air using less electricity than air conditioners, buying a fan is a good way to express your commitment to saving energy."

How likely would you be to buy a fan at this store?

#### *Flags, Category-Level Appeal:*

Imagine that your family is considering buying a large American flag... You are currently in a store and are trying to decide whether to purchase one of the available flags. Another customer

sees you inspecting the flags, and says, “Buying a flag right now is a great idea!...

*Utilitarian appeal:* “...Flags are much less expensive these days.”

*Symbolic appeal:* “...Flags are made in America, and displaying a flag is a great way to show your patriotism.”

How likely would you be to buy an American flag at this store?

*Fans, Brand-Level Appeal:*

Imagine that your family has decided to install a ceiling fan.... You are currently in a store and are trying to decide whether to purchase the fan made by *Fresh Air* or the one made by *Cloud Stream*. Another customer sees you inspecting the fans, and says, “Buying a *Cloud Stream* fan right now is a great idea!...

*Utilitarian appeal:* “...Summer’s here, and a *Cloud Stream* fan will definitely help you stay cool.”

*Symbolic appeal:* “...Since *Cloud Stream* fans cool the air using less electricity than air conditioners, buying a *Cloud Stream* fan is a good way to express your commitment to saving energy.”

Assuming that you are definitely buying a fan at this store, how likely would you be to buy the *Cloud Stream* fan?

*Flags, Brand-Level Appeal:*

Imagine that your family has decided to buy a large American flag... You are currently in a store and are trying to decide whether to purchase the flag made by *Flags Unlimited* or the one made by *Flags Incorporated*. Another customer sees you inspecting the flags, and says, “Buying

a *Flags Incorporated* flag right now is a great idea!...

*Utilitarian appeal:* "...*Flags Incorporated* flags are much less expensive these days."

*Symbolic appeal:* "...*Flags Incorporated* flags are made in America, and displaying a flag from *Flags Incorporated* is a great way to show your patriotism."

Assuming you are definitely buying a flag at the store, how likely would you be to buy the *Flags Incorporated* flag?

*Note:* The brand-level dependent measures are conditional on having already decided to purchase within the category. This isolates the brand-level decision (and avoids conflating it with the category-level decision, which invokes different processes, Dhar and Nowlis 2004). This primarily affects one's ability to compare mean ratings *between* the category and brand levels, but the question of interest is the appeals' relative effectiveness *within* a particular level (and within a particular level, the dependent measure is held constant).