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I, Roseann V Hassey, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration.

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Stand By Your Brand: How Brand Personality and Brand Failure Type Shape Brand Forgiveness

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Stand By Your Brand:

How Brand Personality and Brand Failure Type Shape Brand Forgiveness

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by

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ABSTRACT

Brand failures—that is, violations of implicit or explicit expectations we have for brand performance—are inevitable and can come with a hefty price tag to companies. Yet why is it that seemingly minor brand failures can have significant repercussions, whereas comparably major violations can go relatively unnoticed? Drawing from research on brand personalities, I propose that (i) brand personalities impact consumers’ expectations regarding brand performance, (ii) violating these expectations heightens the severity of the brand failure, and (iii) this difference in severity determines brand forgiveness. In particular, I propose that the brand’s dominant personality—namely, whether warm or competent—elicits different expectations regarding brand performance, such that consumers should expect their interactions with warm brands to align with communal brand dimensions and their interactions with competent brands to align with functional brand dimensions. Moreover, a brand failure that violates these expectancies (i.e., a communal brand failure committed by a warm brand, a functional brand failure committed by a competent brand) should be viewed as more severe and thus less forgivable than one that does not violate these expectations (i.e., a communal failure committed by a competent brand, a functional failure committed by a warm brand). Three experiments test these hypotheses and, in doing so, surprisingly reveal that consumers more readily forgive, rather than censure, brands failures which violate their expectations (Experiments 1 – 3). Moreover, these failures are shown to induce this unexpected result by heightening the credibility of the brand (Experiment 2). Finally, this effect is shown only for those consumers most likely to use brand failures to re-evaluate the brand (Experiment 3). These findings then, though contrary to expectations, offer novel insight.
into the importance of brand personality as a basis for brand forgiveness as well as the most effective means for strategists to engage in effective brand recovery.
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Brand failures—or violations of implicit or explicit brand performance expectations (Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2011; Metts 1994; Donovan, Priester, MacInnis and Park 2012)—are inevitable and can be extraordinarily expensive, both psychologically and financially. The cost of a single brand failure includes distrust, disapproval, and reduced advocacy, all of which undermine a brand’s financial performance. (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Humphreys and Thompson 2014). Additionally, brand failures are linked with an array of negative consumer consequences including decreased purchase intentions (Smith and Bolton 1998; Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekaran 1998), increased brand avoidance (Gregoire, Tripp, and Legoux 2009), and extreme negative word of mouth (Ariely 2007; Gregoire et al. 2009). Furthermore, brand failures can be expensive; the U. S. settlement for Volkswagen’s emissions cheating scandal was a breathtaking $14.7 billion (Wall Street Journal 2016).

Interestingly, consumer reactions to brand failures are not equal and at times can be rather counterintuitive in how they are perceived by the public. For example, when considering two historical Apple brand stumbles—one involving human rights violations and another a glitch in their map and directions app—the former would be judged as significantly more egregious; however, it was the latter that dominated the news and social media (Forbes 2012; BBC 2014). In a similar vein, compare two brand failures within the same category: Chipotle’s 2015 bout with the e coli virus involving 73 consumers across over 2100 outlets versus McDonald’s 2015 recall of over one million chicken nuggets across all of Japan; here, the former was attributed with a 32% plunge in Chipotle’s stock price, while the latter sidestepped the main stream news and had no
noticeable effect on McDonald’s stock price (Fortune 2016; Mother Jones 2015).

In searching to explain these seemingly paradoxical consumer responses, prior research has focused on consumer-brand relationships and their associated norms (Aggarwal 2004). Strong consumer-brand relationships are associated with a host of positive outcomes including increased commitment, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Hess and Story 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006) as well as more forgiving responses toward a range of brand failures (Ahluwalia and Gurhan-Canli 2000; Chandler and Schwartz 2010; Cheng et al. 2011). In Aggarwal’s (2004) seminal piece in this area, he showed that transgressions that violate relationship norms exerted the most negative impact on brand forgiveness. That is, consumers struggled to forgive brands that violated the norm of the consumer-brand relationship.

However, strong consumer-brand relationships are exceedingly rare (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005), whereas brand failures (even minor ones) occur rather frequently. Thus, if consumers only forgive brands for which they have a strong relationship, then consumer forgiveness of brands should occur infrequently despite the ubiquity of brand failures.

In contrast to this perspective, I posit that consumers still vary in their levels of forgiveness following brand failures irrespective of the consumer-brand relationship. That is, while the consumer-brand relationship no doubt impacts brand forgiveness, I propose brands signal expectations through other means that, when violated, impact consumers’ willingness to forgive. Specifically, I argue that a brand’s personality—specifically whether the brand is viewed as warm or competent (Aaker, Garbinsky, and Vohs 2011; Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2011; Fournier 1998; Fournier and Alvarez 2011;
Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone (2012)—impacts consumers’ expectations, and that these expectations are violated only by certain types of brand failures. As a result, these failures can exert a systematic impact on consumers’ willingness to forgive, independent of whether a relationship exists between the consumer and the brand.

**CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

*Brand Failures*

Whether personal inconveniences (flight delays) or global disturbances (massive consumer product recalls), brands repeatedly fail consumers. These brand failures, defined as violations of implicit or explicit brand performance expectations (Metts 1994, see also Aaker et al. 2004; Cheng et al. 2012; Donovan et al. 2012), are thus both common and unavoidable. Not surprisingly, the ubiquity and inevitability of these failures play a pivotal role in altering consumers’ expectations about—and subsequent judgments toward—the brand (Aaker et al. 2004; Cheng et al. 2012; Donovan et al. 2012). For instance, Aaker et al. (2004) showed that, when an on-line film processing brand lost consumer photos, the brand was judged to be less reliable and less trustworthy. Thus, brand failures serve as a meaningful reference point for consumers’ evaluation of brands.

Given the ubiquity of these expectation violations, one might think consumers anticipate them. That is, consumers might expect brands to fail. Yet research shows the opposite—that consumers believe brands will not fail them (Aaker et al. 2004; Reis and Knee 1996; Smith, Bolton, and Wagner 1999). As such, brand failures are consistently unexpected.
However, as noted in the opening, not all brand missteps are the same. As such, not all failures exert an equal impact on consumers’ brand evaluations. For instance, Aggarwal (2004) demonstrated that the effect of expectancy violations—here, by violating a relationship norm—on consumers’ evaluations depended on both the nature of the brand relationship and the nature of the transgression. Specifically, by delineating between relationships that are based on self-interest versus relationships based on shared interest (i.e., functional versus communal; see Clark and Mills 1993; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007; Judd et al. 2005; Kervyn et al. 2012), Aggarwal found that transgressions that violated the norm of the relationship were viewed more negatively. Specifically, communal transgressions were more adverse than functional transgressions for communal-based relationships, whereas functional transgressions were more adverse than communal transgressions for functional-based relationships. Furthermore, this effect was shown to stem from the perceived severity of the transgression, as transgressions that matched the basis of the relationship presumably violate some pre-existing relationship norm that heightens their severity (e.g., violating a communal value is more egregious for communal relationships than violating a functional value).

This research is critical in that it offers a conceptual basis for why brand failures are not held to the same standard when consumers’ re-evaluate the brand. However, this basis is critically dependent on consumers’ relationship with the brand. Indeed, this effect only occurs for those with a strong brand relationship (Aggarwal, 2004; Donovan et al. 2012; Wan, Hui, and Wyer 2012). Yet, as noted, while brands do often fail on both communal and functional attributes, consumers rarely hold strong brand relationships (Aaker et al. 2004; Reis et al. 1996; Smith et al. 1999). As such, brand failures should
impact even casual consumers who know nothing about the brand, as failures should be viewed as diagnostic to brand performance (Ein-Gar, Shiv, and Tormala 2012; Hart, Heskett, and Sasser 1989; Reis et al. 1996; Smith et al. 1999). Thus, the present research considered the possibility that brand failures can differentially influence consumers’ brand evaluations as a function of features inherent to all brands—namely, brand personality.

**Brand Personality**

Brand personality reflects a set of enduring human characteristics or traits associated with a brand (Aaker 1997; Aaker et al. 2004; Aaker et al. 2010; Wee 2004). For instance, research has demonstrated that consumers find it intuitive to instill brands with human personality traits such as “friendly” or “capable” (Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998 Malhotra 1981; Plummer 1985), with examples including FedEx as reliable, Johnson & Johnson as caring, or Lego as clever. In fact, just as human personality is argued to consist of several core traits (Costa and McCrae 1985), researchers have argued that brand personality consists of several core dimensions. For instance, Aaker (1997) posited five such dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

While Aaker’s (1997) seminal article on brand personality originally defined 5 primary dimensions of brand personality, recent work emphasizes two *primary* personality dimensions: warmth and competence (Aaker et al. 2010; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2006; Fiske and Malone 2012; Judd et al. 2005; Kervyn et al. 2012). While definitions vary, warm personalities answer the question, “What are the brand’s
intentions toward me?” and are exemplified with brand attributes such as friendliness, sincerity, and well-intentioned, whereas competent brand personalities answer the question, “How capable is the brand at carrying out its intentions?” and are exemplified with brand attributes such as capability, efficiency, and skillfulness (see Kervyn et al. 2012). For instance, Aaker et al. (2010) showed that consumers tend to view nonprofit organizations as warm, but for-profits companies as competent.

*Brand Personality-Based Expectations and Failure Evaluations: A Matching Hypothesis*

As noted earlier, Aggarwal’s (2004) seminal article regarding consumer-brand relationships and brand failure severity served to establish a matching effect, such that perceived severity was based on whether or not a relationship norm was violated. Brand personality has been similarly proven to influence consumer expectations for brand attributes, including dependability and reliability (Boon and Holmes 1999) and supportiveness (Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltman 1993), as well as specific behaviors including an ability to resolve problems (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol 2002) and keep promises (Iacobucci, Ostrom, and Grayson 1995). In summary, prior research has demonstrated the broad applicability and range of situations in which brand personality influences brand judgments as well as the associated expectations stemming from these judgments.

Given the ability of brand personality to set expectations for and influence consumer judgments of brand behaviors, this research posits that these expectations should serve as a reference point for consumer judgments concerning brand failure and specifically their likelihood to forgive brands for violating their expectations. While
definitions of brand forgiveness vary, for the purposes of this research it is defined as the behavioral intentions of decreased retaliation and increased goodwill (Donovan et al. 2012; McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal 1997). Here, I posit that violating expectancies of how certain personalities should perform will heighten the perceived severity of the failure and consequently reduce consumers’ likelihood to forgive the brand. Specifically, I propose that consumers should perceive it as more severe—and thus be less willing to forgive—a warm brand that commits a communal (vs. functional) failure and a competent brand that commits a functional (vs. communal) failure.

OVERVIEW

This research proposes that brand personality establishes consumer expectations that interact with brand failure type to influence the perceived severity of the failure and therefore subsequent brand forgiveness. Three experiments tested this framework, with the goal of offering novel insight into the importance of brand personality as a basis for brand forgiveness, irrespective of the strength of the consumer-brand relationship.

EXPERIMENT 1

I conducted an initial experiment to test my primary hypothesis that brand personality type and brand failure type would play a combined role in consumers’ ability to forgive brand failures. Consistent with the matching hypothesis, this research predicts that consumers will be less forgiving of brands that fail on attributes that match their personality—specifically, warm brands that fail on communal (vs. functional) attributes and competent brands than fail on functional (vs. communal) attributes.

Method
**Participants and design.**

One-hundred twenty-five participants (51% Female; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.02$ years) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on brands. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (Personality: Competent or Warm) $\times$ 2 (Brand Failure: Functional or Communal) between-participants factorial design.

**Procedure.**

Participants were welcomed to the study and told of our interest in obtaining their reactions toward Greens, an ostensibly-real hardware store. Participants were then directed to background information purported to be from the company’s website. This information served as the manipulation of brand personality (see Appendix A for stimuli). Specifically, participants in both conditions were presented with information about the company’s employees. However, in the warm personality condition, participants were presented with information that described the employees as friendly and honest. Additionally, this information was presented in a font shown to be perceived as warm (i.e., Comic Sans; Childers and Jass 2002) and was accompanied by a photograph of a smiling employee. Conversely, in the competent personality condition, participants were presented with information that described the employees as knowledgeable and professional. Additionally, this information was presented in a font shown to be perceived as competent (i.e., Times New Roman; Childers and Jass 2002) and was accompanied by a photograph of a skilled employee.

To assess the veracity of this manipulation, a separate sample ($N = 50$) was randomly presented with one of the two brand descriptions. After exposure to the manipulation, participants responded to 4-items (adapted from Aaker et al. 2010) that
asked participants to rate *Greens* on 9-pt scales that assessed both warmth (i.e., *warm* and *well-intentioned*) and competence (i.e., *competent* and *knowledgeable*). The warmth items were reverse-scored and items were averaged \( (\alpha = .75) \), such that higher values indicated greater competence (versus warmth). Along with assessing the personality of *Greens*, I sought to make sure the manipulation did not vary in several important ways. First, to ensure *Greens* was viewed as equally favorable, I assessed brand preference on three semantic differentials (adapted from Clarkson, Tormala, and Rucker 2008) on 21-pt scales anchored from \(-10 – negative/bad/unfavorable\) to \(+10 – positive/good/favorable\) \( (\alpha = .96) \). Second, to ensure quality perceptions were equal, I assessed the general quality of *Greens* as well as its product and service quality on 9-pt scales anchored from \(1 – Not\) at all to \(9 – Very\) much \( (\alpha = .86) \). Third, to ensure the manipulation did not vary participants’ relationship with the brand (i.e., communal versus functional: see Aggarwal 2004), I assessed participants’ brand relationship on four-items adapted from Aggarwal (2004) that were reverse scored (2 warm items), averaged \( (\alpha = .66) \), and scored such that higher values indicated a greater functional relationship. In line with predictions, independent t-tests revealed the predicted difference in brand personality \( (t(48) = 2.26, p = .03) \), such that the warmth manipulation was viewed as warmer than was the competence manipulation. Additionally, the manipulation did not vary participants’ attitudes \( (p = .91) \), perceptions of quality \( (p = .93) \), or brand relationship \( (p = 0.09) \). Means and standard deviations of all variables are presented in Table 1.

Following the brand personality manipulation, participants were told about a (supposed) incident that happened at *Greens*. This information served as the manipulation of brand failure. In the communal failure condition, participants read about an incident in
which a consumer was helped by an incredible employee who went out of his way to make sure the consumer’s needs were met but was fired when the store came under new management. In the *functional failure* condition, participants read about an incident involving a consumer who was unable to return a product that was being sold at a less expensive price only days after making the purchase.

In order to develop brand failure scenarios that best aligned with each failure condition (functional and communal), an initial pretest was conducted to assess the extend to which over 30 brand attributes reflected each of these two properties. Those attributes that participants identified as most strongly associated with each condition served as the basis for the brand failure scenarios developed for all three experiments. Specific to Experiment 1, and to access the veracity of the manipulation, a separate sample ($N = 47$) was randomly presented with one of two failure conditions (see Appendix B for stimuli). After exposure to the manipulation, participants responded to the same scale described previously to assess brand personality (Aaker et al. 2010; $\alpha = .68$). Next, to ensure there were no differences between the brand’s responsibility for the failure, participants answered the following question: “How responsible was *Greens* for the incident?” on a 5-point scale anchored from 1– *Not at all* to 5 – *Very*. Participants did not view the failures as differently warm or competent ($p = .53$) and the brand was held equally responsible for each failure ($p = .34$). Means and standard deviations of all variables are presented in Table 2.

Afterward, participants were asked to indicate how forgiving they would be toward *Greens* following this incident (adapted from Donovan et al. 2012) on a 21-point Likert scale anchored from -10 – *Extremely unforgiving* to +10 – *Extremely forgiving*. 


Finally, participants answered demographic questions before being debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

**Results.**

The forgiveness index was submitted to a two way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with personality (0 = warm, 1 = competent) and failure (0 = communal, 1 = functional) as the independent variables. The analysis revealed a significant personality × failure interaction ($F(1,121) = 9.29, p = .003$; see Figure 1). Specifically, those in the warm personality condition were more likely to forgive Greens after the brand committed a communal (versus functional) failure ($F(1,121) = 5.34, p = .023$). Conversely, those in the competent personality condition were more likely to forgive Greens after the brand committed a functional (versus communal) failure ($F(1,121) = 4.01, p = .048$).

**Discussion.**

The findings from Experiment 1 offer initial evidence that the brand’s personality interacts with the type of failure committed to significantly influence the consumer’s propensity to forgive. Specifically, I found that consumers were more forgiving of a communal failure committed by a warm brand and of a functional failure committed by a competent brand. Interestingly, then, the direction of the results contradicts my original hypothesis. Thus, while significant, these findings are indicative of a mis-matched effect, such that consumers are actually more—rather than less—inclined to forgive brands for failures most closely associated with the brand’s personality.

**Experiment 2**

Though opposite of my predictions, the findings of Experiment 1 present an interesting alternative to my initial hypothesis. Specifically, one reason I might be
obtaining findings opposite my predictions is that brand failures present an unexpected upside by making brands appear more credible. Brand credibility is defined as the brand’s willingness and ability to deliver on its promises (Morhart, Malar, Guevremont, Girardin, and Grohmann 2015). While counterintuitive, this possibility fits with prior research showing that one piece of negative brand information, when combined with otherwise positive brand information, can lead to more favorable evaluations than merely presenting only positive brand information (Ein-Gar et al. 2012). The reason for this upside of negative information is that the isolated negative information heightens the favorability of the positive information.

Importantly, then, I still believe consumers expect warm brands to outperform on communal (versus functional) attributes and, conversely, competent brands to outperform on functional (versus communal) attributes. However, when that expectation is violated, the brand failure might heighten consumers’ attention to the other ways the brand has acted in accordance with their expectations. If true, then I would predict that violating these expectations should heighten brand forgiveness (consistent with Experiment 1 findings) as a result of increased brand credibility. I explore this alternative hypothesis in Experiment 2.

Additionally, in Experiment 2, I sought to address three additional issues. First, if this violation heightens attention to expectancy-consistent information, then the brand failure—and the expectancy violation it elicits—should be perceived as equally severe across both functional and communal conditions. In other words, unlike prior research showing failures that violate expectations on congruent dimensions heighten the severity of the failure (Aggarwal 2004; Wan et al. 2011), this alternative hypothesis would argue
that the brand failures are seen as equally severe regardless of the dimension that has been violated. Second, while the initial experiment used a fictitious brand to demonstrate the importance of brand forgiveness even in the absence of a brand relationship, consumers still do have relationships with brands. Thus, in Experiment 2, I used a real brand and assessed consumers’ self-brand connection, with the expectation that any effects of my manipulations on forgiveness would be independent of the strength of individuals’ relationship with the brand. Finally, I assessed brand forgiveness using a series of intentions to assess whether the scale response used in the initial experiment replicated across measures critical to predicting subsequent behavior (Ajzen 1991).

Method

Participants and design.

One-hundred thirteen participants (56% Female; \(M_{age} = 35.27\)) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on brands. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Personality: Warm or Competent) \(\times\) 2 (Failure: Communal or Functional) between-participants factorial design.

Procedure.

Participants were welcomed to the study and told of our interest in obtaining their reactions toward L.L. Bean, a clothing and outdoor equipment retailer. Participants were then directed to background information from the company’s website. This information served as the basis for the brand personality manipulation (see Appendix C for stimuli). Specifically, participants in both conditions were presented with information about the company’s values and employees. However, in the warm personality condition, participants were presented with information stating that the company was committed to
honesty, fairness, and service to others and describing employees as warm and friendly. Additionally, this information was accompanied by two photographs, one of the *L.L. Bean* storefront decorated for the holidays and another of the *L.L. Bean* traveling bootmobile. Conversely, in the *competent personality* condition, participants were presented with information stating that the company was committed to quality materials, product knowledge, and innovative design, and describing employees as competent and committed. Additionally, this information was accompanied by two photographs: one featuring *L.L.Bean’s* outdoors equipment and clothing and another showcasing their iconic 100-year-old boots. Both versions included the same font manipulation described in Experiment 1.

Again, I assessed the veracity of this manipulation by randomly-assigning a separate sample (*N* = 62) to one of the two brand descriptions. After exposure to the manipulation, participants responded to the same measures of brand personality (*α* = .79), brand preference (*α* = .99), quality (*α* = .90), and relationship (*α* = .61) described in Experiment 1. In line with predictions, independent *t*-tests revealed the predicted difference in brand personality (*t*(60) = 2.21, *p* = .03), such that the competence manipulation was viewed as more competent than was the warmth manipulation. Additionally, the manipulation did not vary participants’ attitudes (*p* = .19), perceptions of quality (*p* = .49), or brand relationship (*p* = .43). Means and standard deviations of all variables are presented in Table 3.

After receiving this information, participants were told about a (supposed) incident that happened at *L.L. Bean*. This information served as the manipulation of brand failure (see Appendix D for stimuli). Specifically, participants read about a consumer
who was looking to purchase a new pair of hiking boots for an upcoming trip. In the
*communal failure* condition, participants read that the consumer chose to make their
purchase at *L.L. Bean* based on their corporate community-based boot recycling program,
only to discover after purchasing their new boots that the program was eliminated by the
company. In the *functional failure* condition, participants read that the consumer
purchased a specific hiking boot from *L.L. Bean*, which was subsequently unable to be
returned despite never being used.

To assess the veracity of this manipulation, a separate sample (*N* = 52) was
randomly presented with one of two failure conditions. After exposure to the
manipulation, participants answered the same questions used in Experiment 1 to ensure
the brand was viewed as equally responsible for the failure across conditions (*p* = .29)
and the failures were not viewed as differentially warm or competent (*p* = .78). Means
and standard deviations of both variables are presented in Table 4.

After completing the brand failure manipulation, participants were asked about
their willingness to engage in several behaviors that reflect forgiveness (Donovan et al.
2012). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate their willingness to shop at *L.L.
Bean*, to hold a grudge against *L.L. Bean* (reverse-scored), to defend *L.L. Bean* to
someone speaking badly about the brand, and to stick with *L.L. Bean*. Responses were
obtained on a 7-pt scale anchored from 1 – *Very unlikely* to 7 – *Very likely* and averaged
(α = .74), such that higher values indicated greater intention to engage in brand
forgiveness.

Upon indicating their forgiveness intentions, I then had participants indicate the
credibility of the brand as well as the perceived severity of the failure, with the order of
the scales randomized. To assess brand credibility, participants completed the three-item credibility subscale of the Morhart et al. (2015) Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) Scale. Specifically, participants were asked to think about L.L. Bean and then indicate their agreement with the extent to which L.L. Bean would not betray them, accomplishes its value promise, and is honest. Responses were provided on 9-pt scales anchored at 1–Strongly disagree to 9–Strongly agree and averaged (α = .91), with higher values indicating greater brand credibility.

To assess the perceived severity of the failure, participants completed four items adapted from prior research (Aggarwal 2004; Donovan et al. 2012): How severe do you consider this incident at L.L. Bean to be? How significant do you consider this incident at L.L. Bean to be? How consequential do you consider this incident at L.L. Bean to be? How important do you consider this incident at L.L. Bean to be? Responses were provided on 9-point scales anchored at 1–Not at all to 9–Very much and averaged (α = .94) such that higher values indicated greater severity.

Afterward, participants indicated their connection with L.L. Bean on the Self-Brand Connection Scale (Escalas and Bettman 2005). This scale consists of seven items (e.g., “LL Bean reflects who I am”) that focus on the strength of the connection or relationship between the consumer and a brand (here, L.L. Bean). Responses were obtained on a 100-pt scale anchored at Strongly disagree—Strongly agree and averaged (α = .96) such that higher values indicated greater self-brand connection.

Finally, participants answered demographic questions before being debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

Results
All measures were submitted to a two way ANOVA, with personality (0 = warm, 1 = competent) and failure (0 – communal, 1 = functional) as the independent variables and relationship strength as a covariate. Means and standard deviations for all measures are listed in Table 5.

**Main Analyses**

**Forgiveness.** Analysis of the forgiveness index revealed a significant personality × transaction interaction \( F(1,108) = 9.10, p = .003 \). Specifically, those in the warm personality condition were marginally more willing to forgive LL Bean after the brand committed a communal (versus functional) failure \( F(1,108) = 3.39, p = .068 \). Conversely, those in the competent personality condition were more willing to forgive LL Bean after the brand committed a functional (versus communal) failure \( F(1,108) = 5.85, p = .017 \). Additionally, and consistent with prior research (Ahluwalia et al. 2000; Fournier 1994, 1998; Pomerantz, Chaiken, and Tordesillas 1995), self-brand connection revealed a significant and positive relationship with brand forgiveness \( F(1,108) = 43.49, p < .001 \).

**Credibility.** Analysis of the credibility index also revealed a significant personality × transaction interaction \( F(1,108) = 5.66, p = .019 \). Specifically, those in the warm personality condition were more likely to perceive LL Bean as more credible after the brand committed a communal (versus functional) failure \( F(1,108) = 3.81, p = .054 \). Conversely, those in the competent personality condition were more likely to perceive LL Bean as more credible after the brand committed a functional (versus communal) failure \( F(1,108) = 2.04, p = .156 \).
Perceived Severity. Finally, analysis of the failure severity index revealed no effects of the manipulations ($p < .19$). Thus, the failure was viewed as equally severe across conditions.

Mediation Analysis.

I assessed the mediating role of credibility on brand forgiveness by constructing a 95% confidence interval (CI) around the indirect effect (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007). Specifically, this approach involves bootstrapping procedures that compute a 95% CI around the effect of the personality × failure interaction on brand forgiveness through credibility (controlling for the main effect terms and self-brand connection), and mediation is indicated by a CI that does not include zero (Model 4; Hayes 2013). The result of this analysis revealed a significant mediating pathway through credibility (indirect effect $= .667$, 95% CI: .18, 1.28; see Figure 2 for standardized betas of individual analyses). This result offers evidence that participants’ perception of credibility mediates the interaction of personality and failure on brand forgiveness.

Discussion.

Consistent with Experiment 1, consumers were more forgiving of a communal failure committed by a warm brand and of a functional failure committed by a competent brand. Importantly, however, these findings also offer tentative support for the unexpected direction of this effect. Specifically, consumers viewed the warm brand as more credible when it committed a communal (versus functional) failure and the competent brand as more credible when it committed a functional (versus communal) failure. Furthermore, these differences in credibility mediated the forgiveness effect.
Thus, it appears that brand failures present a positive upside in heightening brand credibility and thus consumers’ willingness to forgive the brand.

Three additional points are critical to note about these findings. First, they occurred using a real brand. Indeed, the effects held when controlling for self-brand connection. As with the fictitious brand used in Experiment 1, then, this finding strengthens support for the argument that other aspects of the brand can influence consumers’ forgiveness apart from the consumer-brand relationship. Second, I found no support for differences in the perceived severity of the failure, which suggests that this effect is less about perceived extremity of the violation and more about the information that violation signals about the credibility of the brand. Finally, these findings were shown to extend beyond forgiveness itself and on to consumers’ intentions to engage in forgiving behaviors.

**Experiment 3**

As noted, brand failures provide a means by which consumers reflect on or re-evaluate their brand preferences (Ein-Gar et al. 2011; Fiske 1980; Johnson et al. 2011; Ybarra and Stephan 1999). Johnson et al.’s (2011) work, while perhaps extreme, uses a negative letter ostensibly sent to a consumer from a brand to explore how the recipient re-evaluated their relationship with the brand under differing conditions. However, not all consumers are equally motivated to re-evaluate their thoughts, beliefs, and preferences. Specifically, those high (versus low) in need for closure are motivated to attain an initial evaluation that they need not reconsider (Kruglanski and Webster 1996; see Roets, Kruglanski, Kossowska, Pierro, and Hong 2015). Thus, I propose this effect should occur only for those motivated to use brand failures as a means of reflecting on their evaluation.
of the brand (i.e., low in need for closure individuals); for those not motivated to use brand failures to reflect on their evaluation of the brand (i.e., high in need for closure individuals), I expected to see no effects of brand failure on their willingness to forgive the brand.

**Method**

*Participants and design.*

Two-hundred thirty-seven participants (54% Female; \( M_{\text{age}} = 36.41 \)) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a study on brands. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Personality: Warm or Competent) \( \times 2 \) (Failure: Communal or Functional) between-participants factorial design. I also obtained a measure of participants’ need for closure (Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, and Bullington 2007).

*Procedure.*

Participants were welcomed to the study and told of our interest in obtaining their reactions toward *Starbucks*. All participants first read a brief description of the *Starbucks* brand and history. Participants were then directed to a page that described how brands, like people, have personalities. This information served as the manipulation of brand personality (see Appendix E for stimuli). Specifically, in the *warm personality* condition, participants were presented with information describing *Starbucks* as having a warm brand personality, with examples including their welcoming store environment and well-intentioned sales associates. Participants were then asked to “think of a personal instance or experience when *Starbucks* demonstrated *warmth*”. Conversely, in the *competent personality* condition, participants were presented with information describing *Starbucks*
as having a competent brand personality, with examples including their product quality and knowledgeable sales associates. Participants in this condition where then asked to think of a personal instance or experience when *Starbucks* demonstrated *competence.*”

A separate brand personality pretest was not conducted, given the experiential recall method used in this experiment. However, brand preference was assessed using the same measure used in Experiments 1 and 2 ($\alpha = .98$), with no differences between the two conditions in participants’ attitudes ($p = .29$) toward the brand.

Following the brand personality manipulation, participants were told about a (supposed) incident that happened at *Starbucks*, which provided the basis for my brand failure manipulation (see Appendix F for stimuli). Specifically, participants were presented information about a consumer who stopped by *Starbucks* on the way to work in order to purchase a coffee beverage. Further, the person has a big meeting at 9 a.m. and so is eagerly anticipating their beverage. When they enter the store, the line is unusually long. In the *communal failure* condition, the line moves quickly but the workers all seem tense, the customer’s favorite barista fails to engage in conversation, and the customer leaves feeling that their day has gotten off on the wrong foot. In the *functional failure* condition, the line moves extremely slowly, the customer notices the baristas seem to be much less efficient than usual, and—by the time their coffee is ready—the consumer is on the verge of being late for work.

To assess the veracity of this manipulation, a separate sample ($N = 55$) was randomly presented with one of the two failure conditions. After exposure to the manipulation, participants answered the same questions used in Experiments 1 and 2 to ensure that the brand was viewed across conditions as equally responsible for the failure...
(p = .45) and that the failure scenarios were not viewed as differentially warm or competent (p = .30). Means and standard deviations of both variables are presented in Table 6.

Upon completing the brand failure manipulation, participants were asked to indicate how forgiving they would be toward Starbucks following this incident on the same forgiveness measure used in Experiment 1 (Donovan et al. 2012).

Following the forgiveness measure, participants then completed the Kardes et al. (2007) Need for Cognitive Closure Scale. Responses were obtained on 6-pt scales anchored at 1– Strongly Disagree to 6 – Strongly Agree and were averaged (α = .89) to create a composite index of participants’ need for closure.

Finally, participants answered demographic questions before being debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

**Results**

The forgiveness index was submitted to a hierarchical regression, with personality (0 = warm, 1 = competent), failure (0 = communal, 1 = functional), and need for closure (continuous, mean-centered) as predictors in the first step, all two-way interactions in the second step, and the three-way interaction in the third step (Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken 2003). Consistent with predictions, the analysis revealed a significant personality × failure × need for closure interaction (b = -.228, t(228) = -2.12, p = .035; see Figure 3).

For those **low in need for closure** (-1 SD), I observed a significant personality × transaction interaction (b = 3.67, t(228) = 2.31, p = .022) in a pattern consistent with the results in Experiments 1 and 2. Specifically, those in the warm personality condition were more likely to forgive Starbucks after the brand committed a communal (versus
functional) failure ($b = -1.48, t(114) = -1.32, p = .188$). Conversely, those in the competent personality condition were more likely to forgive Starbucks after the brand committed a functional (versus communal) failure ($b = .256, t(114) = 1.96, p = .052$).

For those high in need for closure (+1 SD), I observed only a marginal main effect of brand failure ($b = -1.02, t(228) = -1.81, p = .071$); in general, participants were more likely to forgive Starbucks after the brand committed a communal (versus functional) failure. Neither the main effect of personality nor the personality × failure interaction was significant ($ps > .26$).

**Discussion.**

The purpose of Experiment 3 was to explore the possibility that only those motivated to use brand failures to re-evaluate the brand would be impacted by the personality of the brand and the type of brand failure when forming judgments of forgiveness. Consistent with this hypothesis, the forgiveness ratings of those low in need for closure paralleled the results of the first two experiments. That is, those low in need for closure were more forgiving of a communal failure committed by a warm brand and of a functional failure committed by a competent brand. For those high in need for closure, their forgiveness of the brand was not impacted by either the brand personality or by the type of brand failure. This finding is consistent with the desire of those high in need for closure to freeze on an initial evaluation (Kruglanski and Webster 1996; Roets et al. 2015) and supports my contention that these effects require consumers to be motivated to use brand failures to re-evaluate their initial evaluation of the brand.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**
Brands fail us all the time, from minor infractions (flight delay) to significant (automobile recall) transgressions. The goal of the current research was to explore consumers’ varying responses to these brand failures, as minor failures (e.g., Starbucks’ “Race Together” campaign) can be met with strong upheaval (The Atlantic 2015) while major failures (e.g., Apple’s human rights violations) can be met with acceptance (Forbes 2012). Yet, while prior research has focused on the role of norm violations within a pre-existing consumer-brand relationship (Aggarwal 2004; Wan et al. 2011), we are unaware of any work that has tested consumer responses to brand failure absent the presence of a relationship. This question is important as consumers often respond to failures by brands unfamiliar to them or brands they lack a strong connection with. The present research sought to address this gap by proposing that brands can signal expectations through their personality (Aaker 1997, Aaker et al. 2010; Kervyn et al. 2012).

Across three experiments, we tested how consumers respond to different brand failures through the lens of brand personality. Our findings, though opposite our initial hypotheses, were consistent. Specifically, we found that consumers were more forgiving of a communal failure committed by a warm (versus competent) brand and of a functional failure committed by a competent (versus warm) brand. Importantly, this finding was shown to occur across different brands, different manipulations of both brand personality and brand failure, and different indices of brand forgiveness (see Figure 4 for a revised conceptual model).

In exploring the underlying reasons for these findings, we proposed the intriguing possibility that brands which fail on dimensions where they are expected to perform well (i.e., warm brand/communal dimensions, competent brand/functional dimensions) are
actually seen as more credible. The rationale for this counterintuitive hypothesis is that brand failures can direct consumers’ attention to favorable, expectancy-congruent information (see Ein-Gar et al. 2012). In support of this hypothesis, we demonstrated that the interactive effect of brand personality and failure type was mediated by brand credibility. Moreover, this effect was independent of the strength of consumers’ relationship with the brand, a finding that offers direct support for the importance of other dimensions of the brand—apart from the nature of the brand relationship—in consumers’ willingness to engage in brand forgiveness.

Finally, as noted, brand failures often serve as a means or reason for consumers to re-evaluate their attitudes toward the brand (Aaker et al. 2004; Altman and Taylor 1973; Fiske 1980). As such, we tested consumers’ desire to re-evaluate the brand as a boundary condition for this effect. Consistent with this hypothesis, we observed that the forgiveness ratings of individuals willing to engage in re-evaluation (i.e., those low in need for closure) were impacted by the personality of the brand and the type of failure committed by the brand; the forgiveness ratings of individuals unwilling to engage in re-evaluation (i.e., those high in need for closure) showed no effect of our manipulations.

Future Research

The primary contribution of this research is that it demonstrates that brands can signal expectations that impact consumers’ forgiveness, even when there is no consumer-brand relationship. Thus, given the contradictory nature of our findings versus prior work based on consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal 2004; Wan et al. 2011), it will be important to reconcile these two research streams. Indeed, in instances where consumers do have a strong brand relationship, the impact of a failure might be a function of
contextual factors that heighten the salience of either the brand personality or the consumer-brand relationship. For instance, reminding consumers of preferred brand attributes (e.g., Samsung detailing the various features of their latest cell-phone) versus reminding consumers of their loyalty to the brand (e.g., Delta thanking its frequent fliers) should impact whether violating consumers’ expectations about brand performance has a positive or negative effect. As such, future research needs to clarify both when and why brand failures lead to positive and negative outcomes from brand evaluation.

Additionally, the present research focused on perceived failures, a method consistent with prior research (Aaker et al. 2004, Aaker et al. 2011; Aggarwal 2004; Cheng et al. 2011; Donovan et al. 2012; Ein-Gar et al. 2011; Wan et al. 2011). However, it is interesting to consider whether experiencing versus imagining a failure could offer insight into when expectancy violations increase versus decrease brand forgiveness. Researchers show that individuals can vary distinctly in their reactions based on whether they experience versus imagine a situation (Buehler and McFarland 2001; Kermer, Driver-Linn, Wilson, and Gilbert 2006; Wilson and Gilbert 2003; Wilson and Gilbert 2005). Here, it could be the case that experiencers might overweight the negative reaction to an expectancy violation (i.e., adverse emotions), which would lead to decreased brand forgiveness, whereas imaginers might overweight the positive reaction to an expectancy violation (i.e. increased credibility) which would lead to increased brand forgiveness.

Moreover, in seeking to better understand consumers’ varying responses to brand failures, there exists a need to focus on the failure event itself. Specifically, how do consumers classify different types of brand failures and, as importantly, why? Current research treats the majority of brand failures as interchangeable, with research examples
ranging from a rude service experience to a major global disturbance. However, brand failures vary at different levels of specificity (e.g. personal vs. global), and we might expect different effects at different levels. For instance, consumers might generally be less forgiving of personal failures because they are more concrete than are global failures. Seeking to understand the potential impact of different features of these brand failures (such as specificity), then, might offer new insight into when consumers view such events as more versus less forgivable.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to consider the temporal nature of the documented effects. Specifically, while this research indicates that consumers are more forgiving of brand failures whose failures violate personality-based expectations, we do not know what effect this failure has when the brand inevitably falls down again. One possibility is that the failures accumulate to the point where consumers’ eventually become less forgiving of the brand. Alternatively, repeated failures could paradoxically lower consumers’ expectations which, in turn, could increase forgiveness despite repeated failures. Thus, understanding the effect of repeated failures on both brand expectations and brand forgiveness would provide interesting insight into the timecourse by which consumers’ evaluate brands.

Finally, while the current research identified need for closure as a boundary condition for this event, it is worth exploring other potential moderators of this effect. For example, self-construal, defined as the extent to which the self is viewed as interconnected with others (interdependent self-construal) versus separate from others (independent self-construal) (Singelis 1994), has long been shown to impact judgments (Mandel 2003; Torelli 2006) and persuasion (Agrawal and Maheswaran 2005), as well as
brand evaluations (Ng and Houston 2006). As such, one can imagine that, when re-evaluating the brand following a failure, those individuals exhibiting an interdependent self-construal might reflect outward toward the brand, and the salient, positive brand personality-related attributes, resulting in heightened forgiveness. Conversely, those exhibiting an independent self-construal might reflect inward, on how they have been wronged by the current incident, and so respond more negatively toward the failure. Thus, exploring the role of self-construal within the context of brand personality and failure would further our understanding of the role of failure at a critical time for brand re-evaluation by consumers.

**Practical Implications**

Beyond advancing our understanding of the processes that drive brand forgiveness, the current research offers several practical implications for managers. Indeed, this research demonstrates that brand personality can actually serve to heighten consumer forgiveness and positive behavioral intentions following these negative events. Further, when the failure type matches the brand’s personality, it can serve to re-focus customers on positive brand traits. As such, while brand failures have previously been considered largely in light of their negative consequences, this research offers an unexpected upside for managers to consider. Specifically, by focusing on brand attributes and service experiences related to the brand’s dominant personality, managers will cushion themselves from the negative consequences of mistakes. Finally, these findings offer an alternative approach to brand recovery (Aaker et al. 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Cheng et al. 2012; Ein-Gar et al. 2012; Gregoire et al. 2009; Smith et al. 1998; Tax et al. 
1998), suggesting that one factor (among many) for managers to consider should be whether the failure violates expectations stemming from the brand’s personality.
**Dissertation Conclusion**

Brand failures play a pivotal role in altering consumers’ expectations of and attitudes toward the brand. Further, consumer reactions to brand failures vary and can be counterintuitive. The current research posits that, under certain conditions, such negative events can actually have positive consequences by serving to highlight positive personality-related brand attributes. As such, this surprising effect has both theoretical and practical importance for understanding how consumers react to brand failures in terms of their willingness to engage in brand forgiveness.
References


Lurie, Julia (2015, January 15), McDonald’s Just Recalled 1 Million Chicken Nuggets for a Super-Gross Reason. [www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com)


Table 1. Pretest findings of brand personality manipulation in Experiment 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Warm</th>
<th>Competent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(\text{Attitudes})</td>
<td>6.74 (2.94)\text{a}</td>
<td>6.83 (2.63)\text{a}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\text{Quality})</td>
<td>5.77 (0.93)\text{a}</td>
<td>5.79 (0.84)\text{a}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\text{Relationship})</td>
<td>4.54 (1.27)\text{a}</td>
<td>5.02 (1.59)\text{a}</td>
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*NOTE.* Means with the same subscript do not differ from each other (subscripts should be interpreted within row for each experiment). Standard deviations are given in parentheses.
Table 2. Pretest findings of brand failure manipulation in Experiment 1.

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<thead>
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<th>Competent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>4.88 (1.79)\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>5.36 (1.62)\textsuperscript{a}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>5.21 (1.37)\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>5.07 (2.22)\textsuperscript{a}</td>
</tr>
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</table>

\textit{NOTE}. Means with the same subscript do not differ from each other (subscripts should be interpreted within row for each experiment). Standard deviations are given in parentheses.
Table 3. Pretest findings of brand personality manipulation in Experiment 2.

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<td>Personality</td>
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<td>4.33 (0.67) &lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
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<td>6.10 (3.28) &lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
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<td>5.83 (0.94) &lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>3.98 (1.63) &lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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</table>

*NOTE.* Means with the same subscript do not differ from each other (subscripts should be interpreted within row for each experiment). Standard deviations are given in parentheses.
Table 4. Pretest findings of brand failure manipulation in Experiment 2.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
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<td>3.83 (1.27)_a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
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<td>4.25 (0.63)_a</td>
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NOTE. Means with the same subscript do not differ from each other (subscripts should be interpreted within row for each experiment). Standard deviations are given in parentheses.
Table 5. Results from Experiment 2.

<table>
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<th>Competent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>3.59 (1.32)</td>
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<td>3.26 (1.07)</td>
<td>4.09 (1.11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Credibility</td>
<td>5.69 (1.34)</td>
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<td>5.92 (1.61)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure Severity</td>
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<td>5.07 (2.22)</td>
<td>5.29 (2.20)</td>
<td>4.44 (1.96)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: Values in parentheses represent standard deviations.*
Table 6. Pretest findings of brand failure manipulation in Experiment 3.

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<th>Warm</th>
<th>Competent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>3.52 (0.89)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.71 (0.92)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>4.33 (0.91)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.61 (1.05)&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Means with the same subscript do not differ from each other (subscripts should be interpreted within row for each experiment). Standard deviations are given in parentheses.
Figure 1. Willingness to forgive as a function of personality and failure in Experiment 1.
Figure 2. Path analysis in Experiment 2.

Note. Values represent standardized betas. *p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
Figure 3. Participants’ likelihood to forgive the brand as a function of personality and failure for those low (top-panel) and high (bottom-panel) in need for closure in Experiment 3.
Figure 4. Revised conceptual model
Appendix A. Brand personality manipulation in Experiment 1.

Brand Personality: Competent

Green’s Hardware

Welcome to Green’s Hardware Solutions Store

Thank you for wanting to learn more about Green’s Hardware.

When you arrive at Green’s, you can rest on one of our skilled associates to immediately lend a hand in solving your problem. And if we don’t have what you need, we guarantee we will get it within 24 hours. Because we know your time is important to you.

At Green’s, we carry all the major brands of tools, and we are so confident in them that we offer a money-back guarantee for any product beyond that offered by the manufacturer. Plus, we pride ourselves on having the widest range of products in the area. So whether you come in to buy a plunger for a clogged-up drain, the right point for the headboard, or a secret key for the cellar while you finally upgraded us, we’re here to make sure you leave with the best solution to your problem.

At Green’s Hardware, we don’t just sell products. We Fix Problems!

Brand Personality: Warm

Welcome to Green’s Hardware

Thank you for wanting to learn more about Green’s Hardware.

Whether your purchase is big or small, you can count on us to greet you with a friendly smile when you arrive, and to ask what brings you into Green’s. Plus, your kids are always welcome — and will look forward to coming — because we have fresh popcorn waiting for them! After all, it’s the simple things in life that make the day a little brighter.

Here at Green’s, we carry all the major brands of tools, and offer a money-back guarantee for any product beyond that offered by the manufacturer. So whether you need an opinion choosing the right shade of paint for your new baby nursery, a second key for your new driveway, or a helping hand getting your purchase to your car, it makes our day to help make yours.

At Green’s Hardware, we don’t just sell products. We do our best to make your day better!
Appendix B. Brand failure manipulation in Experiment 1.

**Functional brand failure**

You recently went to Green’s Hardware Store and purchased a leaf blower for the yard. You purchased it without exploring other options, as it was a well-respected brand and the sale sign indicated it was significantly marked down. You spoke with a sales associate about it, and made the purchase after he said he had the same model and highly recommended it. Several weeks later you are on Amazon.com when you notice the exact leaf blower you purchased at Green’s, only it is significantly less expensive than yours, which was supposedly discounted to a rock bottom price. Because you have already used it, you know it can’t be returned. However, the price difference is enough that you bring it back to Green’s to ask if they might match the Amazon.com price. The sales associate—the same one who recommended the product—says no, they don’t do price matching, and then adds—without your asking—that products, once used, are only returnable if defective.

**Communal brand failure**

You recently went to Green’s and purchased a new leaf blower for the yard. You purchased it without exploring other options, as it was a good brand and the sale sign showed that it was a great value. You spoke to your favorite sales associate, Dave about it—he’s been helping you for years-- and he said the he had the same model and thought you would really like it. Several weeks later you’re back at Green’s, this time to pick up a garden rake. You look around to see if Dave is working, as you want to tell him how much you like the leaf blower. When you don’t see him, you ask the high schooler behind the counter if Dave is working. He says that Green’s is under new management, and recently laid off Dave--along with several other sales associates that have worked there for a long time. On the way out to your car, you notice Green’s has a “Hiring. Inquire within.” sign in the window.
Appendix C. Brand personality manipulation used in Experiment 2

Brand Personality: Competent

Brand Personality: Warm
Appendix D. Brand failure manipulation used in Experiment 2

**Functional Brand Failure**

You are going on a backpacking trip at the end of the summer and decide to purchase a new pair of hiking boots for the trip, replacing the ones you’ve owned since college. You spend several hours researching hiking boots on-line, ultimately deciding on the brand and model that you want. LL Bean is listed as carrying the shoe locally. You check their website and are able to confirm that they have the model you want in-stock. You head over to the store to try them on. A sales associate greets you, and asks how he can help. When you say the brand and model of hiking boot you’ve come for, he replies that LL Bean no longer carries it, adding that their website has been acting up. However, he is also an avid hiker and convinces you to trade up to a more technical boot, which is significantly more expensive than the pair you had originally planned to purchase. Additionally, as the boot is marked down, it's a final sale.

A few weeks later you see the boots you were originally shopping for at another local outdoor store. While you remember that the LL Bean sales associate told you that your boots were not returnable, you haven’t worn them and hope they’ll make an exception. You take the boots back to LL Bean and explain the situation that resulted in your purchase—namely that their website listed a shoe as in stock that they no longer carried, followed by the sales associate convincing you to purchase a shoe that was out of your price range. You ask if they’ll make an exception in this one case, and accept your return, especially as this is a purchase that you’ll use for years to come. They say no, they simply can't make an exception.

**Communal Brand Failure**

You are going on a backpacking trip at the end of the summer and decide to purchase a new pair of hiking boots for the trip, replacing the ones you’ve owned since college. You spend several hours researching hiking boots on-line, ultimately deciding on the brand and model that you want. You notice on LL Bean’s website that, in addition to carrying these hiking boots, they also have a give-back program that accepts and refurbishes old hiking boots, distributing them to those who are less fortunate. You are really excited about the program, as you volunteer for The City Kids Wilderness Project, a non-profit that introduces urban kids to the transformative power of nature. You head over to LL Bean to make your purchase, bringing along your old pair of boots. A sales associate greets you and quickly brings out the hiking boots you are interested in. After trying them on, you know these are exactly the right boots for you.

As the sales associate is ringing up your purchase, you ask about donating your old boots. The associate says this program was discontinued about a year ago, along with several other community-based give-back initiatives, and that they’ve decided to focus on other things. He off-handedly says it was too much of a hassle to run, adding that they must have forgotten to update the website. You ask if he knows of anywhere else that provides this service, sharing that this was an important factor in your decision to come to
LL Bean to purchase your new boots. Without giving it much thought, he replies that he has absolutely no idea.
Appendix E. Brand personality manipulation used in Experiment 3

Brand Personality: Competent

Much like people, brands can be viewed as having a personality, which varies on a number of dimensions. These dimensions relate to specific attributes, or qualities, associated with the brand or to personal experiences that exemplify this dimension. For example, using people to illustrate this, you might describe someone as cheerful or serious or hard-working. One dimension of Starbucks’s brand personality that stands out is their competence.

When describing someone’s personality as competent, it’s often because we see him or her as knowledgeable or capable at what they do. Some of the reasons Starbucks is often described as having a competent brand personality trace to their long-standing commitment to product quality and to their knowledgeable sales associates.

Now take a moment to write about a personal instance or experience when Starbucks demonstrated competence in the space below.

Brand Personality: Warm

Much like people, brands can be viewed as having a personality, which varies on a number of dimensions. These dimensions relate to specific attributes, or qualities, associated with the brand or to personal experiences that exemplify this dimension. For example, using people to illustrate this, you might describe someone as cheerful or serious or hard-working. One dimension of Starbucks’s brand personality that stands out is their warmth.

When describing someone’s personality as warm, it’s often because we see him or her as honest or well-intentioned. Some of the reasons Starbucks is often described as having a warm brand personality trace to their comfortable and welcoming store environment and helpful and well-intentioned sales associates.

Now take a moment to write about a personal instance or experience when Starbucks demonstrated warmth in the space below.
Appendix F. Brand failure manipulation used in Experiment 3

**Functional Brand Failure**
You stop by Starbucks on your way to work, as you do each morning, ready for your piping hot coffee beverage to jump start your day. You have a big meeting at 9 a.m., and are looking forward to your morning stop at Starbucks.

When you walk in the door, you immediately notice that the line is significantly longer than usual. Initially you take the longer line in stride, as you left even earlier than usual in order to get your coffee and still arrive at work with plenty of time to complete the final prep for your meeting. However, after a few moments and when the line still doesn’t appear to have moved much, you notice the employees behind the counter seem to be managing customer orders much less efficiently than usual. Time is getting tight but, as you’re next up to be helped, you stay, place your order, and—once you get your coffee—make a dash for the car.

**Communal Brand Failure**
You stop by Starbucks on your way to work, as you do each morning, appreciating that your regular coffee ritual-- including the friendly, welcoming environment--helps to give a lift to the start of your day. You have a big meeting at 9 a.m., and are looking forward to your morning Starbucks ritual.

When you walk in you notice that, while there’s a longer line than usual, it also seems awfully quiet. The line is moving briskly, but employees seem tense as they work to move through the orders. When it’s your turn, rather than being greeted with your favorite worker's usual and cheery greeting, she quickly asks how she can help you, takes your order, and gives you your change. Your drink order is up before you know it but, as you head out to the car, it seems that-- somehow--your day is a little off.