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“Don’t Worry, We Are Here for You”: Brands as External Source of Control during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic increases consumers’ worries and makes them experience a loss of control over their lives. We investigate how these factors affect the roles that brands play in consumers’ lives. Results of a longitudinal survey ($N = 5,393$) and an online experiment ($N = 387$) show that brands gain relevance and are more firmly included in consumers’ self-concepts if consumers experience more worries about Covid-19 and a lack of control. Brands can benefit from this by addressing worries associated with the crisis in their advertisements. This is particularly effective for consumers who express greater worry about the Covid-19 pandemic.



Introduction

Brands play important roles in consumers’ lives: consumers use brands to identify products, to evaluate product quality, and to simplify choice. In addition, consumers use brands to express their own identity, to signal group memberships, and to form opinions about others (Batra 2019; Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler 2010). In this study, we set out to investigate how extreme contextual factors, such as the current Covid-19 pandemic, affect the role brands play in consumers’ lives.

Brands are linked to extensive mental networks of brand associations that are formed through consumers’ interactions with a brand’s products or services and with brand-related communications. These mental networks include associations related to quality and other functional benefits, but also more symbolic associations that express and reflect upon consumer identity (Batra 2019). To capture the importance of brands to consumers, Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler (2010) introduced the concept of “brand relevance” (BR). Measured at the product-category level, this construct captures the

extent to which consumers use brands (a) to reduce the perceived risk of their purchase and (b) as a symbolic device to communicate their self-concept to others (see also the “brand engagement in the self-concept” construct, Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009).

Both the functional and the symbolic roles of brands are likely to become more relevant in times of uncertainty, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, when consumers are looking for ways to reduce stress and cope with their anxieties (Asmundson 2020; Kotler 2020). Brand managers are highly aware of brands’ importance and look for ways to support consumers as they try to deal with their anxieties (Balis 2020). They have adjusted their advertising to acknowledge consumer anxiety and cast brands in the role of providing emotional support and social coherence (Hess 2020). To better understand how consumers use brands to cope with stress and anxiety, we draw on compensatory control theory (Kay et al. 2008, 2009), which we review below. The main premise of our research is that in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, brands serve as “safe havens”

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because they reduce uncertainty and reaffirm consumers' self-concepts. We thus argue that heightened levels of worry and anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic are tied to an enhanced relevance of brands for consumers. We test this premise in a large-scale longitudinal survey conducted during the pandemic among a sample of consumers from The Netherlands. In addition to this survey study, we conducted an online experiment that ties this mechanism to advertising by showing that consumers have a more positive attitude toward brands that address the worry and anxiety associated with the Covid-19 crisis and that consumers experience a stronger connection with these brands. These effects are stronger for consumers who worry more about the pandemic and its consequences.

Theory

Worries about Covid-19

The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic heralded a period of deprivation and anxiety (Kotler 2020) as well as uncertainty (Sheth 2020) for individuals across the world. In order to help people take care of their mental health and embrace adaptive coping mechanisms, organizations like the WHO, the United States' CDC, and the Red Cross have provided extensive resources and guidelines on how to deal with the multifaceted Covid-19 stress syndrome and its symptoms (Asmundson 2020). The uncertainty that individuals experience goes hand in hand with "feelings of dread, social aversion as well as a loss of control" (Stewart 2021, 97). At the same time, Covid-19 has also significantly changed the corporate landscape. While some companies and smaller brands have vanished, consumers continue to look for reliability and steadiness (Kotler 2020), and for brands that are part of the solution (Edelman Insights 2020). More specifically, as consumers realize the impact of the pandemic on their lives, they are "attempting to defend against perceived threats and regain control of lost freedoms" (Kirk and Rifkin 2020, 124).

Compensatory Control Theory and the Use of Brands to Alleviate Anxiety

A large body of research has shown that people have a deeply rooted basic need for personal control, defined by Kay et al. (2009, 264) as "the belief that they can personally predict, affect, and steer events in the present and future." A sense of personal control is thought to create a mental buffer against the anxiety that is triggered by the realization that randomness

and chance can and do determine important life outcomes. Of course, it is not always possible to directly influence one's environment to make it comply with one's own desires, especially when this uncertainty is heightened by situational influences such as economic crises, natural disasters, or war (Kay et al. 2008, 2009). In such situations, people have been found to employ compensatory control strategies (Landau, Kay, and Whitson 2015) that rely on external sources of control. These external sources of control can reassure the individual that the world is not random and help to restore a sense of personal control. Indeed, research has shown that individuals draw on various means and resources to (re-)establish a sense of order: perceived loss of control has, for example, been tied to a heightened belief in conspiracy theories (Whitson and Galinsky 2008) and stronger support for gun ownership (especially among conservatives; Shepherd and Kay 2018). Consumer research has shown that loss of control is related to a preference for product displays and brand logos that are more neatly structured and have clear borders (Cutright 2012) and to a dislike for brand extensions that do not fit closely with consumers' expectations (Cutright et al. 2013).

Brands are widely regarded as a source of meaning for consumers, reducing uncertainty and reinforcing identity (Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler 2010). Consumers experience a personal connection to the brands they use and like, and these brands often become part of their extended self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2017; Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009). The findings of Cutright and colleagues (2012, 2013) allude to the importance of brands as cornerstones of consumption experiences that allow individuals to establish a notion of order. Their work does not, however, examine how loss of control and the anxiety related to uncertainty influence consumers' relationships with brands. In the present study, we aim to fill this gap and study this question within the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic, which threatens societal order and structure in unprecedented ways and leaves individuals in dire need of means to rekindle their sense of personal control (Kirk and Rifkin 2020). We propose that brands provide structure and meaning that help consumers cope with the worries and anxiety induced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Perceived loss of control and worries about the pandemic and its consequences should therefore be related to a higher perceived relevance of brands and a stronger tendency to connect brands to the self.

H1a: Higher levels of worry about the Covid-19 pandemic are related to stronger brand relevance and

a stronger tendency for consumers to connect brands to their selves.

H1b: Higher levels of perceived loss of control due to the Covid-19 pandemic are related to stronger brand relevance and a stronger tendency for consumers to connect brands to their selves.

In addition to these main effects, there may be an interaction effect between worries and perceived loss of control. The pattern of this interaction is difficult to predict. On the one hand, tests of compensatory control theory in lab settings have found a negative interaction, such that the use of external control devices is strongest when participants experience a lack of control (Laurin, Kay, and Moscovitch 2008). However, in a real-world setting like the present one, where consumers' worries about the Covid-19 pandemic may be very strong and immanent, the interaction may be reversed. Consumers who worry a lot about the Covid-19 pandemic experience high levels of anxiety, which may overshadow the role of the more existential angst that is associated with a perceived loss of control over one's own life (Kay et al. 2008). As a result, the impact of perceived loss of control on BR may be lower at higher levels of worry about the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. Given these contradictory predictions, we refrain from formulating a specific hypothesis about the interaction between perceived control and worries about the pandemic.

How Covid-19-Related Advertising Can Enhance the Self-Brand Connection

Our theorizing above suggests that brands become more relevant when consumers are worried about the Covid-19 pandemic or its consequences. This relationship is interesting to academics because it offers a psychological perspective on the importance of brands in times of turmoil, extending compensatory control theory to the domain of branding. For marketing practitioners, it may be comforting to know that their brands can provide psychological support to consumers during the pandemic. But more importantly, if consumers attach more importance to brands in response to the anxiety that they experience as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, then individual brands may capitalize on this mechanism by expressing their support for consumers in extremely worrying times. During the present pandemic we have seen several such campaigns in which brands express their support to consumers, including Ford's "built to lend a hand," Aldi's "we are here for you," and Google's "where there is help, there is hope." According to our theory,

such advertising should have a positive impact on consumer attitudes toward the brand and strengthen the connection between the brand and the self (self-brand connection), especially for those consumers who worry a lot about the pandemic.

H2: Communicating that a brand will help consumers during the pandemic will lead to (a) more favorable brand attitudes and (b) higher levels of self-brand connection.

H3: The impact of Covid-19-related brand communication on brand attitude and self-brand connection is stronger for consumers who express greater worry about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Design

Our hypotheses were tested in two studies. The relationship between Covid-19-related worries on the one hand, and brand relevance/brand-self connection on the other (formalized in Hypothesis 1a/b) was tested in a large-scale survey conducted during the pandemic among a sample of consumers from the Netherlands. Hypotheses 2 and 3 translate this general relationship into an advertising setting, proposing a causal relationship between Covid-19-related brand communication and consumer responses (more favorable brand attitudes and higher levels of self-brand connection). These latter hypotheses were tested in an experimental design. Because of participant availability, we conducted this experiment in an online sample of U.S. consumers. Using U.S. consumers has the additional advantage of testing the underlying notion of brands as a compensatory control mechanism in two different cultures. The outcomes further confirm the robustness of the compensatory control framework (in line with Landau, Kay, and Whitson, 2015), which found no differences in the underlying mechanism in U.S. vs non-U.S. studies); it also confirms the cross-national applicability of the measures we used for BR and brand-self connection. Details of the studies are given below.

Study 1: The Survey

We cooperated with Validators, a Dutch market research agency that gathered data at regular intervals in an online survey on consumer behavior and opinions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was sent out to a representative panel of Dutch consumers (ISO-26362 certified) maintained in line with the standards set by the national (MOA) and international (ESOMAR) associations of market research. The

Table 1. Coefficients from the SUR regressions for BR and BESC.

	BR				BESC			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i> > <i>z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i> > <i>z</i>
Intercept	3.539	0.062	56.70	0.000	3.667	0.063	58.62	0.000
Worry	0.206	0.017	11.82	0.000	0.240	0.017	13.61	0.000
Lack of control	0.066	0.018	3.66	0.001	0.074	0.018	4.11	0.000
Worry x Lack of Ctrl	−0.085	0.019	4.59	0.000	−0.102	0.019	5.49	0.000
Control variables								
Age	−0.008	0.001	9.73	0.000	−0.012	0.001	15.74	0.000
Gender	−0.384	0.025	15.26	0.000	−0.426	0.025	16.86	0.000
Weekly fixed effects	Included				Included			
RMSE	0.904				0.907			
R ²	0.101				0.145			
χ ²	593.35	<i>p</i> < .001			893.97	<i>p</i> < .001		
<i>N</i>	5294				5294			

Note: SUR estimates of the impact of worry and lack of control on BR and BESC. The fixed effects estimates for the weekly dummy variables are omitted due to space limitations.

agency allowed us to include items related to our focal constructs in this survey. The first officially established case of Covid-19 in The Netherlands was reported on February 27, 2020. On March 12, national measures to counteract the spread of the virus were put in place. Data collection started on March 27 (calendar week 13) and ran until October 9 (week 41). As the number of Covid-19 infections in The Netherlands decreased over the summer of 2020, the frequency of data collection was reduced; when the number of infections started to increase again, so did the frequency. Specifically, data was collected in calendar weeks 13–22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 34, 38, 40, and 41. Respondents were recruited from the company's market research panel by sending them a link to the survey. This survey contained items related to our focal constructs (detailed below), but also other questions related to consumer behavior and Covid-19. It generally took 10–15 minutes to complete. In each wave, 300 respondents completed the survey. In later waves, this pool was supplemented with participants from the panel in order to handle attrition. Several quality checks were applied to ensure data quality: in accordance with the agency's standard protocols, respondents who failed to complete the survey, had missing data, or who completed the survey in less than five minutes were excluded from the data, as were respondents with suspect answer patterns. The final data set consists of 5,393 observations, collected on 18 occasions, over a period of 29 weeks.

Dependent Variables

To increase validity and reliability, we used extant scales for most of our variables. Our measure of brand relevance (BR) is taken from Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler (2010), who developed this scale to assess the overall importance of brands in consumer decision-making. We adjusted the scale to reflect the relevance

of brands in general, rather than in a specific category ($\alpha = 0.94$). In addition, we measured brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) using a short form of the BESC scale (Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009; $\alpha = 0.95$). This scale captures consumers' general tendency to experience connections between brands and the self.

Independent Variables

We measured the extent to which consumers were worried about the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the extent to which they perceived they lacked control over their own lives. For "worries about COVID-19," we could not use an existing scale. We therefore decided to adopt a straightforward approach by asking respondents seven questions to indicate whether they were worried about different aspects of their life like health, work, and finances. We selected these items based on their prominence in media coverage on the Covid-19 crisis and consulted with experts at the market research agency to ensure clarity in the wording. The seven items were combined into one measure of worries about the Covid-19 crisis ($\alpha = 0.84$). Perceived control (or lack thereof) was measured by four items capturing the extent to which respondents have a feeling of control over their life, taken from earlier studies on compensatory control theory (Kay et al. 2008; $\alpha = 0.77$). The items were coded in such a way that a higher score reflects a stronger sense of perceived control. All items were measured using 5-point Likert scales and back-translated from English to Dutch to ensure proper translation. An overview is presented in Appendix A.

Analysis and Results

Regression analysis was used to assess the impact of consumers' worries and perceived lack of control on

BR and BESC. Because the composition of the sample varied across waves, it was not possible to use a repeated-measure approach or similar models for longitudinal effects at the individual level. We therefore opted for a regression model and included week-fixed effects to account for the idiosyncratic pattern of data collection, using the first week as reference (van Heerde, Leeflang, and Wittink 2000). Because the dependent variables are related, we employed a seemingly unrelated regression estimator (SUR). The error terms of the two models for BR and BESC are strongly correlated, justifying our choice ($p = 0.77$; Breusch-Pagan test of independence $\chi^2(1) = 3152.99, p < .001$).

The results of this analysis show an identical pattern for BR and BESC, and are displayed in Table 1. The relevance of brands, as captured by these constructs, was positively related to respondents' worries about the Covid-19 pandemic (BR: $b = 0.206$; $p < .001$; BESC: $b = 0.240$; $p < .001$), which indicates that consumers find brands more relevant in their purchasing decision and integrate brands more readily in their self-concept when they are more worried about Covid-19-related issues. Perceived lack of control is also significantly related to BR ($b = 0.066$; $p = .001$); and BESC ($b = 0.074$; $p < .001$). These findings are in line and support H1a and H1b. The interaction between worries and perceived control is significant and negative for both variables (BR: $b = -0.085$; $p < .001$; BESC: $b = -0.102$; $p < .001$), indicating that the effect of lack of control becomes weaker when the effect of worries on the dependent variable is stronger. We controlled for age and gender, and both variables are significantly related to our dependent variables (see Table 1): BR declines with age (Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler 2010) and is lower for women than for men.

Discussion

This study provided support for our hypotheses that brands gain relevance (H1a) and are more firmly included in consumers' self-concepts (H1b) if consumers experience more worries about Covid-19 and a lack of control. Furthermore, we found an interaction between worries about Covid-19 and perceived loss of control: the effect of perceived loss of control on BR is reduced at higher levels of worry about the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. In Study 2, we translate these results into more actionable insights by examining our theory in an advertising campaign in an online experiment. This experiment also helps

establish the causality of our effects, which is not possible with the cross-sectional design of the survey.

Study 2: The Experiment Design

Four hundred U.S.-based participants were recruited through Prolific in November 2020. Thirteen participants failed to pass an attention check, leaving us with a final sample 387 (age 18–77; $M_{age} = 31.79$; $SD_{age} = 10.72$; 213 female, 165 male, 9 other). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions of a single-factor, between-subjects design (ad expressing Covid-19 support vs. control ad), and presented with an ad for a fictitious insurance brand (Corrent). We developed two versions of the ad—one for each condition. The “Covid-support” version was based on a review of a range of ads published in the United States during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ad displayed a female doctor wearing a face mask and contained a short text: “We are here for you—taking care of your worries—since 1876.” In the control condition, the advertisement showed a similar-looking woman in a corporate-looking outfit with the slogan “We do what we are good at—providing quality insurance—since 1876.” After seeing this ad for at least five seconds, participants answered three items measuring self-brand connection (adapted from Escalas and Bettman 2017; $\alpha = 0.93$), three items measuring attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = 0.97$), a single-item manipulation check (measuring whether the ad was perceived to refer to the Covid-19 pandemic), and the measure of worries about the Covid-19 pandemic that was used in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.85$). A manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the target ad to refer more to peoples' worries about the Covid-19 pandemic than the control ad ($M_{target} = 4.95$ [$SD = 1.75$]; $M_{control} = 2.21$ [$SD = 1.63$]). A complete overview of materials is presented in Appendix B

Results

Attitude toward the Brand

The target ad led to significantly more favorable brand attitudes than the control ad ($M_{target} = 4.73$ ($SD = 1.40$); $M_{control} = 3.87$ ($SD = 1.68$); $t(385) = 5.48$; $p < .001$). This confirms H2a, which states that expressing support for Covid-19-related anxieties leads to more favorable brand attitudes. To investigate the interaction with worries predicted in H3, we used Process 3.5 (Hayes 2017) to estimate moderation Model 1 in a bootstrap analysis with 10,000 samples.

This revealed a significant main effect of ad type ($b = 0.407$; $t = 5.13$; $p < .001$), and a significant interaction between worry and ad type that ran in the expected direction ($b = 0.200$; $t = 2.21$; $p = .028$). The main effect of worry was not significant ($b = 0.160$; $t = 1.76$; $p = .080$). Inspection of conditional effects revealed a positive effect of ad type that was significant at all levels of worry, but increased substantially from $b = 0.232$ ($t = 2.06$; $p = .041$) at one standard deviation below the mean level of worry about Covid-19 to $b = 0.582$ ($t = 5.21$; $p < .001$) at one standard deviation above the mean.

Self-Brand Connection

The target ad lead to significantly stronger self-brand connection than the control ad ($M_{\text{target}} = 4.73$ [$SD = 1.40$]; $M_{\text{control}} = 3.87$ [$SD = 1.68$]; $t(385) = 5.48$; $p < .001$), which supports H2b. To investigate the interaction of ad type with worries, we again used Process 3.5 (Hayes 2017) to estimate moderation Model 1. We found a significant main effect of ad type ($b = 0.338$; $t = 4.59$; $p < .001$). The interaction between worry and type of ad ran in the expected direction ($b = 0.129$) but was not significant ($t = 1.53$; $p = .127$), and neither was the main effect of worry ($b = 0.125$; $t = 1.48$; $p = .139$). Inspection of the conditional effects revealed that the effect of ad type was significant and positive at all levels of worry, but increased in strength from $b = 0.225$ ($t = 2.15$; $p = .032$) at one standard deviation below the mean level of worry about Covid-19 to $b = 0.465$ ($t = 4.21$; $p < .001$) at one standard deviation above the mean.

Taken together, these results support H2, which states that if a brand expresses support for Covid-19–related anxieties that leads to (a) a more favorable brand attitude and (b) stronger self-brand connection. The results also are in line with H3, which states that the positive effect of expressing support is stronger for consumers who are more worried about the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, although this interaction effect was significant for brand attitude, but not for self-brand connection.

General Discussion

This research extends literature on brand relevance and compensatory control by demonstrating how brands can serve as an external resource of control and, in this role, help alleviate consumers' worries and anxieties. The results of a survey-based measurement of Covid-19 worries, perceived control, and brand

relevance confirm the importance of brands in situations of heightened worries and low perceived control. We find that consumers who worry about the Covid-19 pandemic not only find brands more important in their purchase decisions but also engage them more in their self-concept. An experimental follow-up study demonstrates how advertising can capitalize on this mechanism with messages of reassurance during times of uncertainty. Addressing consumer worries in brand communication positively influences consumers' brand attitude and strengthens their connection with the brand, in particular among those consumers with higher levels of worries. Collectively, the results consolidate the important roles of brands in individuals' lives as they act as a source of identity formation and expression for consumers (Batra 2019; Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler 2010) and offer them structure when facing anxiety and adversity (Landau, Kay, and Whitson 2015).

Managerial Implications

The mechanism we have uncovered provides important practical implications for advertisers. First and foremost, it stresses the relevance of advertising in times of crisis, not only for companies to strengthen consumer-brand identification but also to help their customers navigate through the crisis. During the Covid-19 pandemic, advertising spending has dropped dramatically (World Economic Forum 2020), and advertisers have been confronted with the challenging task of creating messages that fit the current atmosphere or, as Mull (2020) pointedly formulates it: "Companies that want to remain solvent through an extended catastrophe will have to master the precarious, high-stakes art of disasterising." But how should companies address a reality that is less optimistic than the one typically portrayed in advertisements? Our results demonstrate that acknowledging and addressing consumers' worries actually helps both sides: consumers feel reassured and are able to restore a sense of personal control, and brands benefit from increased brand identification. As we have argued in the introduction and empirically demonstrate throughout this article, brands do indeed serve as "safe havens" in times of uncertainty when individuals yearn for structure beyond governments or god (Cutright et al. 2013).

Theoretical Implications

The main contribution of our research lies in the cross-fertilization of two important research streams in marketing and advertising. The current work extends prior

literature on the role of brands in consumer behavior by demonstrating their capacity as a means to help consumers assert personal control (Landau, Kay, and Whitson 2015). These findings show that brands can transcend their previously conceptualized functions in positive environments and help consumers make sense of negative environmental experiences. Brands can help consumers navigate difficult situations. At the same time, we contribute to the literature on compensatory control by adding brands to the repertoire of external resources instrumental in establishing a sense of personal control (Kay et al. 2008, 2009).

Limitations and Future Research Avenues

As with any research, this work has its limitations. In this paragraph, we highlight three of them, and discuss how they may inspire future research. First of all, the survey-based nature of Study 1 results in correlational data that shows how brands relate to worries about the Covid-19 pandemic and to perceived loss of control. Although we reaffirm the relationship between worries and self-brand connection in the experimental context of Study 2, it would be interesting to investigate how brand and self-brand connection respond to other types of (experimentally induced) loss of control or worries, and examine whether our findings generalize beyond the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Second, it seems interesting to explore differences between brands. In Study 1, we focused on brands in general, and in Study 2, we made use of a fictitious brand. Although our findings suggest that anxiety and loss of control make consumers attach more importance to brands in general, it seems reasonable to expect that brands differ in the extent to which they can serve this purpose. Anxiety and loss of control may, for example, lead consumers to attach more importance to those brands with which they already have strong relationships, because these brands allow them to experience stronger personal connections (Fournier 1998). It may also be interesting to examine responses to warm versus competent brands (Bernritter, Verlegh, and Smit 2016; Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone 2012), although it is not obvious to predict the pattern of effects. On the one hand, warm brands may be more readily considered by consumers who are looking for empathy and support. On the other hand, competent brands may be better able to provide the structure and clarity that these consumers need.

Third, it would be interesting to also examine the role of Covid-19-related worries in actual purchase behavior. Scanner data or data from online stores may provide insights into whether and how worries and

perceived control influence shopping behavior. Such data would allow us to examine whether the enhanced brand relevance would, for example, translate into greater brand loyalty or a stronger focus on national brands versus private labels.

To conclude, our research offers a novel perspective on branding in times of global crises. Brands gain relevance if consumers experience more worries and a lack of control, which suggests that consumers can use brands as a kind of anchor that provides them with a sense of stability in uncertain times. Brands can capitalize on this by addressing worries and anxiety associated with the crisis in their advertisements.

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Appendix A: Survey Measures

Respondents evaluated each item using a five-point Likert scale with *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neutral* (3), *agree* (4), *strongly agree* (5).

BR: Brand Relevance (Fischer, Völckner, and Sattler 2010)

1. When I purchase a product, the brand plays—compared to other things—an important role
2. When purchasing, I focus mainly on the brand
3. To me, it is important to purchase a brand-name product
4. The brand plays a significant role as to how satisfied I am with the product

BESC: Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009)

1. I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer
2. I can identify with important brands in my life
3. I have a special bond with the brand that I like
4. Part of me is defined by important brands in my life

Worries about Covid-19

I am worried about ...

1. My own physical health
2. My own mental health
3. The physical health of people close to me
4. The mental health of people close to me
5. A possible impending economic crisis
6. My employment
7. My financial situation

Perceived lack of control (Kay et al. 2008).

1. I feel like I don't have much control over my life at this moment
2. I have the feeling I control my own life (R)
3. I don't have much influence on the things that happen around me
4. At this moment, my life is largely controlled by others

Appendix B: Stimuli and Measures for Experiment

Brand Identification (adapted from Escalas and Bettman, 2017), measured on a 7-point Likert scale)

1. I feel a personal connection with Corrent.

2. I identify with Corrent.
3. Corrent reflects who I am.

Brand Attitude (7-point semantic differential)
 Unfavorable/Favorable; Bad/Good; Dislike/Like
Worries about Covid-19
 To what extent do you worry about ...?

1. My own physical health
2. My own mental health
3. The physical health of people close to me
4. The mental health of people close to me
5. A possible impending economic crisis
6. My employment
7. My financial situation