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Key Finding

Thinking of yourself as a busy person can help you exercise self-control.

Business Application

“Busy” marketing appeals can backfire for indulgent brands (e.g., McDonald’s).

The key to successful marketing activities is understanding consumer characteristics. As an increasing number of consumers reportedly feel busier than ever, one defining characteristic of modern consumers is “busyness”. Accordingly, a growing number of brand advertisements can be seen to empathise with consumers’ busy lifestyles. For example, Apple’s popular Siri advertisement, featuring Martin Scorsese, focused on the busy day of the celebrated director and Dunkin’ Donuts advertisements position their product as real food for a “busy lifestyle”. How does such use of “busy” marketing appeals influence consumers and their subsequent decisions? My research shows that the use of busy appeals can work differently, depending on whether the brand making the busy appeal is indulgent (e.g., McDonald’s) or not-indulgent (e.g., Subway).

In one field study and seven randomised experiments, we found that busy appeals used in marketing can activate consumers’ busy self-concept (i.e., awareness of the self as a busy person). This has interesting downward consequences on consumer psychology and decision-making. Specifically, thinking of the self as a busy person bolsters individual’s sense of self-importance (i.e., the feeling their life matters, and that their presence is important), which in turn, facilitates consumers to make better decisions in self-control dilemmas. For example, my co-authors and I found that activating a busy self-concept made people eat less fatty foods in a dining hall, show reduced preference for indulgent brand (e.g., McDonald’s), and make better self-control decisions throughout the day (e.g., choosing to walk up stairs instead of taking an elevator). This effect attenuates for those who are under high time pressure and those who have a low work ethic.

Read more: Kim, J. C., Wadhwa, M., Chattopadhyay, A. (2018), “When Busy is Less Indulging: Impact of Busy Mindset on Self-Control Behaviors”, *Journal of Consumer Research*, forthcoming.

J. Christine Kim is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at HKUST. She is an expert on busyness and self-control. To know more, visit her [website](#).

Research interests: Time perception, Busyness, Impulsivity, Self-Control, Motivation