

**The Minority Ownership Awareness Effect:
When Promoting Minority Ownership Increases Brand Evaluations**

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Esther Uduehi is an Assistant Professor of Marketing and International Business, University of Washington-Seattle, PACCAR Hall, 4273 E Stevens Way NE, Seattle, WA 98195, 206-543-4091, eouduehi@uw.edu

Aaron J. Barnes is the LaDonna and Charlie Johnson Assistant Professor of Marketing, College of Business, University of Louisville, 110 W Brandeis Avenue, Louisville, KY 40208, 502-438-8633, aaron.barnes@louisville.edu

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Abstract

Recent social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, have prompted brands and retailers to increase the use of minority ownership labels (e.g., Black-owned or woman-owned). The current research examines when and why minority ownership awareness influences consumer behavior, particularly for brand failures. When a brand failure occurs, minority ownership awareness can result in higher brand evaluations and greater willingness to pay, a phenomenon referred to as the minority ownership awareness effect. This effect and its boundary conditions are demonstrated through five experiments and analyses of over 27,000 Google reviews for Black-owned restaurants. The authors propose that minority ownership awareness invokes a type of underdog effect which is pronounced in situations involving product (vs. moral) failures, among people with low (vs. high) social dominance orientation, and among those people with a high (vs. low) internal motivation to respond without prejudice.

Keywords: race, ethnicity, labels, gender, ownership, prejudice motivations, brand failure

Imagine the following scenario: a customer orders food from a restaurant they know is a Black-owned business. Unfortunately, the experience is less than ideal: the food arrives late and the order is incomplete. In this situation, how does knowing that the restaurant is Black-owned impact the customer's evaluation of the restaurant after this brand failure? Knowing that a restaurant is Black-owned is a form of minority ownership awareness, which is when consumers find out that a brand, company, or firm is owned by a person who has experienced structural discrimination in society in contrast to those belonging to a dominant social group (Healey, Stepnick, and Eileen 2018). In the wake of heightened recognition of structural discrimination in society, such as racism and sexism (Associated Press 2020; Kulich, Ryan, and Haslam 2007; Nardini et al. 2021; Scott et al. 2023; Simkins 2022), e-commerce platforms and retailers have boosted minority ownership awareness through initiatives like minority ownership badges (Goodwin 2020; Lyles 2020) and commitments to allocate dedicated shelf space for Black entrepreneurs (The Fifteen Percent Pledge). However, the resulting surge in demand for minority-owned businesses (Aneja, Luca, and Reshef 2023; Babar, Adeli, and Burtch 2023) can, at times, increase the likelihood of product malfunctions, service delays, and other brand failures (Bienasz 2020; Garcia 2021). Given the concurrent rise in awareness of minority-owned businesses and the potential for failures throughout the customer journey, it is important to understand how minority ownership awareness might affect brand evaluations.

One might expect that minority ownership awareness would compound such objectively negative information (i.e., brand failure; Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012) due to the prevalence of negative stereotypes about minority owners, which have been documented in countless examples (Soave 2019; BBC 2018; Thompson 2020) and extensively studied in stereotype research (Bone, Christensen, and Williams 2014; Jaeger and Slegers 2023). This evidence

suggests that after a brand failure, minority ownership awareness would lead to even more negative evaluations and lower repurchase intentions. However, the relationship between minority ownership awareness and consumer reactions to brand failures may be more complex than initially thought.

We propose that minority ownership awareness may mitigate the negative effects of brand failure. As people become increasingly aware of structural discrimination faced by minorities (e.g., Nardini et al. 2021), learning about a brand's minority ownership may highlight the structural disadvantages minority owners face, such as gender and racial discrimination while navigating the marketplace (e.g., Bone et al. 2019; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005; Scott et al. 2023). This awareness could result in less negative reactions. Indeed, our research finds that after a brand failure, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) leads to higher evaluations and repurchase intentions, suggesting that some people may perceive minority owners as underdogs (Paharia et al. 2011; Vandello, Goldschmied, and Richards 2007). Our work builds on prior literature, which has focused on situationally disadvantaged groups (e.g., a losing sports team or politician), by instead addressing minority groups that have been historically disadvantaged (e.g., Black business owners). In response to recent calls for increased research on racial identity (DeBerry-Spence et al. 2020; Wooten and Rank-Christman 2022), stigmatized identity cues (see Shavitt 2019), and DEI initiatives (Arsel, Crockett, and Scott 2022), our findings suggest that communicating minority ownership identities may help buffer against the negative impact of the brand failures.

Across five studies and analyses of over 27,000 Google reviews for Black-owned restaurants, we uncover evidence for a minority ownership awareness effect. This effect suggests that when a brand failure occurs, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) mitigates negative

brand evaluations. By highlighting the discrimination minorities face in the marketplace, minority ownership awareness may lead consumers to provide higher evaluations when brand failure happens. Supporting this explanation, we find that the effect attenuates in the case of a moral failure, which is less plausibly the result of discrimination minorities face. Furthermore, the effect is less pronounced among people who are not sensitive to the structural discrimination minorities face (i.e., consumers with high social dominance or low internal prejudice motivations). In the following section, we discuss the theoretical background and how the minority ownership awareness effect relates to broader sociocultural factors such as gender and racial discrimination.

Structural Discrimination and Minority Owners

In the U.S., structural institutions like slavery and policies such as redlining have perpetuated resource disparity between Black and White people for centuries. This long history of structural discrimination¹ has affected minorities both as consumers and as business owners (Bell 1995; Crenshaw 2013; Peñaloza et al. 2023; Poole et al. 2021). Minority consumers face discrimination in the form of negative stereotypes (Mobbs 2018), gentrified neighborhoods (Grier and Perry 2018), predatory pricing (Busse, Israeli, and Zettelmeyer 2017), greater suspicion in retail settings (Schreer, Smith, and Thomas 2009), and inferior financial service outcomes (Scott et al. 2023). Similarly, minority-owned businesses encounter discrimination when seeking lower capital (Bates and Robb 2013; Bone, Christensen, and Williams 2014),

¹ Defined as “macro-level conditions (e.g. residential segregation and institutional policies) that limit opportunities, resources, power, and well-being of individuals and populations” (nimhd.nih.gov).

securing fewer federal contracts (McSwigan 2022; Murrell and Bangs 2019), finding fewer mentors (Fairlie and Robb 2007), receiving lower judgments of successful leadership (Heilman et al. 1989) and quality (Ouellet 2007), and receiving less support during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Fairlie 2020). Over time, this history of structural discrimination has minoritized groups such as Black people and women, leading to ongoing hardships, marginalization, and persecution well after corrective legislation (Human Rights Watch 2021).

For minorities, recognition of these historically discriminatory situations has given rise to social movements, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Me Too, which aim to address the structural discrimination minorities face in society (Dunivin et al. 2022; Rhodan 2018). Social movements—collective actions that illuminate or resist unequal social norms (Gurrieri et al. 2018)—play a crucial role in raising consumer awareness of discrimination against minorities. For example, #MeToo demonstrations highlighted the physical and emotional abuse women experience in the entertainment industry (Luo and Zhang 2022).

Although social movements have been prevalent throughout history, technology has amplified their reach (Mattoni 2013; Nardini et al. 2021). Following the murder of George Floyd, BLM raised awareness of racial discrimination against Black people, with a record number of 8.8 million single-day social media posts for any hashtag (Anderson et al. 2020; Auxier 2020; Wang et al. 2022). Moreover, social movements have increased minority ownership awareness in the marketplace. For example, during the protests of 2020, Black owners of brick-and-mortar stores used Black-owned signs to show solidarity with protestors (Jiang 2020). In the wake of modern-day protests, numerous offline and online retailers adopted the practice of minority ownership labeling, complementing other forms of brand positioning and corporate activism (e.g., Bhagwat et al. 2020). Thus, minority ownership awareness in the US is

a product of modern-day social movements and may help people associate minority ownership with the resource disparities minorities face, prompting underdog-like sympathies from consumers and the recognition of structural discrimination minorities face. The next section explores the relationship between minority ownership awareness and underdogs.

Minority Owners as Underdogs

Underdogs are disadvantaged and relatively weak parties who persist through obstacles (Vandello, Goldschmied, and Richards 2007). For example, the NC State Men's Basketball team has been a perennial underdog to the Duke Blue Devils due to the former's lower success rate and fewer resources compared to Duke. Nevertheless, in any given year, these teams' rankings may change based on their performance throughout the season. Prior research has primarily focused on underdogs who face disadvantages that vary over time (e.g., sports teams, politicians, local brands; see Schmidt and Steenkamp 2022 for a review).² People are motivated to support these underdogs because they identify with them (Paharia et al. 2011), perceive them as exerting greater effort (Vandello, Goldschmied, and Richards 2007), and want to make an impact in the marketplace through their consumption choices (Paharia, Keinan, and Avery 2014).

While literature in sociology and psychology has historically discussed underdogs as underprivileged minorities facing discrimination (e.g., Schuman and Harding 1963), recent research in marketing has focused on underdogs who face situational disadvantages (Kim, Park, and Lee 2019; Kirmani et al. 2017; Paharia et al. 2011; Paharia, Keinan, and Avery 2014).

² For example, an underdog politician does not necessarily remain the same underdog after being elected.

Marketing underdog literature has focused less on historically disadvantaged minority groups, although the effects remain relevant to these groups. In fact, situationally disadvantaged groups often face structural discrimination (e.g., underfunded sports teams have fewer televised games). Nevertheless, little is known about whether consumers would root for minority owners, similar to previous underdogs effects, or if minority ownership awareness would lead to more negative consumer responses.

Minority Ownership Awareness and Brand Failure

Following previous work, we investigate the role of minority ownership awareness in consumer responses to brand failures due to high salience and diagnostic value of negative information (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Montgomery and Cowen 2020; Swaminathan, Page, and Gurhan-Canli 2007). As technologically amplified social movements increase societal awareness of minority-owned businesses and the discrimination minorities face (Nardini et al. 2021), how might minority ownership awareness affect brand evaluations when there is a brand failure? Prior research suggests a more negative effect of minority ownership awareness. For example, consumers judged wireless speakers less favorably and were willing to pay less for products made by Hispanic and Latino (vs. White) business owners (Ouellet 2007). Additionally, evidence suggests negative racial (Powell and Butterfield 1997) and gender (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky 1992; Heilman 2012; Heilman et al. 1989) stereotyping of minority leaders such that, overall, people perceive men (vs. women) leaders as more successful (Heilman et al. 1989). Moreover, following a leadership failure, people penalize Black (vs. White) leaders more harshly (Knight et al. 2003). These findings

suggest minority ownership awareness in the context of brand failure might compound previously held negative stereotypes, leading to harsher responses.

The notion that minority ownership awareness in the context of brand failures might compound previously held negative stereotypes is also consistent with previous work on stereotype threat (Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002). This robust literature has shown, for example, that women performed worse on math tests when reminded of their female identities (Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 1999), suggesting that minority ownership awareness may lead to more negative outcomes due to the negative stereotypes associated with that identity. Whereas stereotype threat studies have shown how Black people and women respond worse when their own racial or gender identities are made salient, our work explores the role of minority identity and the behavior of others, namely consumers.

Contrary to these previous findings, we propose that brand failures have a less negative effect on brand evaluation when minority ownership is made salient. We argue that minority owners are a type of underdog in that people might root for them to win because of their smaller, disadvantaged status. Importantly, we are not arguing that structural discrimination does not exist outside of brand failures as minorities and minority-owned brands face issues regardless of failures or successes (Pager and Shepherd 2008; Small and Pager 2020). Indeed, underdog literature suggests that brand failures may serve as a reminder to consumers of the structural discrimination underdogs face, such as struggles due to lack of resources, which may lead to consumers increasing support for them (Paharia et al. 2011; Vandello, Goldschmied, Richards 2007).

Additional research indicates that minority group awareness may lead to less negative effects (Jost and Kay 2005; Kay and Jost 2003; Kirgios et al. 2022; Sommers 2006). When

people are made aware of a minority identity, previous literature suggests that people regulate how they treat minorities when the information focuses on a need or highlights structural discrimination. For instance, when survey questions made race salient, White jurors had higher views of Black defendants (Sommers 2006) and when news coverage made racial bias salient, NBA referees called fewer personal fouls against players of another race (Pope, Price, and Wolfers 2018). Additionally, recent findings show that people are more likely to help minorities who ask for help directly and include their minority identity (e.g., “As a Black woman...”) compared to when they do not include their minority identity (Kirgios et al. 2022). Thus, we suggest that people may rate brands less negatively after failure when they become aware of minority ownership. Formally, we hypothesize that:

H1: When there is a brand failure, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) leads to higher brand evaluations.

An Illustration of the Minority Ownership Awareness Effect in Google Maps Reviews

To illustrate H1, we analyzed consumer reviews of actual Black-owned restaurants on Google Maps. Following the countrywide racial reckoning of 2020, Google introduced the ability for Black business owners to identify their businesses with a Black-owned label in their brand description on Google Maps in June 2020. A team of two research assistants generated a list of 488 Black-owned restaurants in the top five cities in the United States by population: New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Phoenix. At the time of data scraping, 153 out of 488 restaurants displayed the Black-owned brand label (31%), suggesting some apprehension to use the feature. Next, we used Outscraper, an API web scraper, to collect 27,558 Google Maps reviews of the restaurants between January 1, 2021 to July 26, 2022. Consistent with H1, we found that consumers used a more positive emotional tone to write about failures when the

Black-owned label was displayed on Google Maps (vs. not) (see Web Appendix A for details and robustness checks). As with any correlational approach, this preliminary illustration of H1 cannot address the causal relationship between minority ownership awareness and brand evaluation. In the next sections, we propose several boundary conditions of the minority ownership effect, starting with failure type.

Moderation by Failure Type

As it relates to the minority ownership awareness effect, product failures may be associated with discrimination against minorities in the marketplace (e.g., poor product durability or slow service because of lack of access to capital) in part due to the history of discrimination against minorities' abilities and expertise (Bone, Christensen, and Williams 2014). In contrast, moral failures are associated with an organization's ethical shortcomings such as the abuse of power or exploitation (Bhattacharjee, Berman, and Reed 2013; Brown and Dacin 1997; Paharia, Vohs, and Deshpandé 2013). Because underdogs evoke empathy and relational feelings (Jun et al. 2015), moral failures, which violate relational norms (Montgomery and Cowen 2020), may not trigger the same response as brand failures. Given these failures focus on the brand's treatment of others (e.g., unethical work conditions) and previous work suggests these failures may increase anger towards underdogs (Kim, Park, and Lee 2019), minority ownership awareness would have less of a buffering effect on consumer response when there is a moral failure. Thus, we hypothesize:

H₂: When there is a product (vs. moral) failure, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) leads to less negative brand evaluations.

Consumer-Level Moderators (Consumer Sensitivity to Discrimination Towards Minorities)

We argue that the minority ownership awareness effect should emerge when people are sensitive to the discrimination against minorities. To understand this process, we explore two moderating variables: social dominance orientation and motivation to respond without prejudice. Next, we elaborate on how these two variables may account for differences in individuals' sensitivity to the hardships minorities face due to discrimination.

Social dominance orientation

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is defined as consumers' attitudes towards inequality between social groups (Ho et al. 2015). Consumers with low SDO endorse the notion that no single group should dominate in society and advocate for all groups to have an equal opportunities to succeed. Consequently, they oppose the hierarchical status quo and aim to reduce or eliminate discrimination that leads to inequalities among groups (Pratto et al. 1994). In contrast, consumers with high SDO endorse the existence of inequalities between groups, considering it unjust to address these inequalities. They believe that differences in superiority among individuals justify and reflect earned differences in resources, status, etc. (Rabinowitz 1999).

Consumers with high SDO are more likely to believe that regardless of a group's social mobility efforts, some groups should remain on top and others on the bottom (Jost 2017; Pratto et al. 1994), which is also in line with previous underdog literature (Does and Mentovich 2016). This means that they may be less sensitive to the discrimination faced by certain groups because they perceive those groups should remain inferior. In contrast, we expect low-SDO consumers to be more affected by minority ownership awareness in the event of a brand failure, given their greater propensity to address the disadvantages these groups experience. Formally, we hypothesize:

H3: When there is a brand failure, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) leads to higher brand evaluations among consumers with low (vs. high) SDO beliefs.

Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice

Heightened awareness of structural discrimination may also increase awareness of prejudice towards minorities (Plant and Devine 1998). Previous research has demonstrated that people may try to avoid being viewed as discriminatory or prejudiced for both external and internal reasons. People with a high internal motivation to respond without prejudice (IMS) focus on upholding positive self-concepts by promoting equality in society, while those with a high external motivation to respond without prejudice (EMS) are concerned with avoiding social ostracization for violating social norms (Paluck and Green 2009; Plant and Devine 1998). People with high EMS focus on avoiding negative experiences with minorities and situations where one might appear prejudiced to others, whereas high-IMS people focus on approaching (instead of avoiding) goals and strategies, such as appearing friendly and pleasant, as well as having good interactions (Plant, Devine, and Peruche 2010). Thus, in terms of brand evaluations, as this marketing outcome is not avoidance-related, IMS may be more relevant to engaging less negatively with minorities.

Further, we suggest that after a brand failure, minority ownership awareness mitigates negative brand evaluations, especially among those consumers with high IMS, while beliefs about EMS does not impact evaluations. This is consistent with recent research showing that IMS correlates with being more motivated to help others when their minority identities are made salient, but EMS does not (Kirgios et al. 2022). To summarize, we expect high-IMS consumers

will be the most likely to forgive brand failures when minority ownership awareness is high (vs. low). Formally, we hypothesize:

H4: When there is a brand failure (vs. not), minority ownership awareness (vs. not) leads to higher brand evaluations for consumers with high (vs. low) internal motivation to respond without prejudice.

Summary of Studies

Across five studies (figure 1 and tables 1 and 2), we test our hypotheses and demonstrate the minority ownership awareness effect—when there is a brand failure, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) leads to higher consumer response (H1). Study 1 shows that the basic effect only occurs for minority (Black and women) owners but not nonminority owners (men). Study 2 uses an incentive-compatible design to show that after a product failure, minority ownership awareness (vs. not) increases willingness to pay for an actual Black-owned brand. Studies 3, 4, and 5 examine moderators related to the types of failure and consumer variables that shed light on the process. Specifically, we theorize that minority ownership awareness is associated with consumer sensitivity to the discrimination that minorities face and motivates consumers to be less negative in their response towards minority-owned businesses. Consistent with our theorizing, study 3 shows that the buffering effect of minority ownership awareness is limited to product failures, but not moral ones given the latter's relation to the brand's unethical treatment of others (H2). Further, studies 4 and 5 show that the minority ownership awareness effect occurs for low-SDO consumers (H3; study 4) and high-IMS consumers (H4; study 5).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

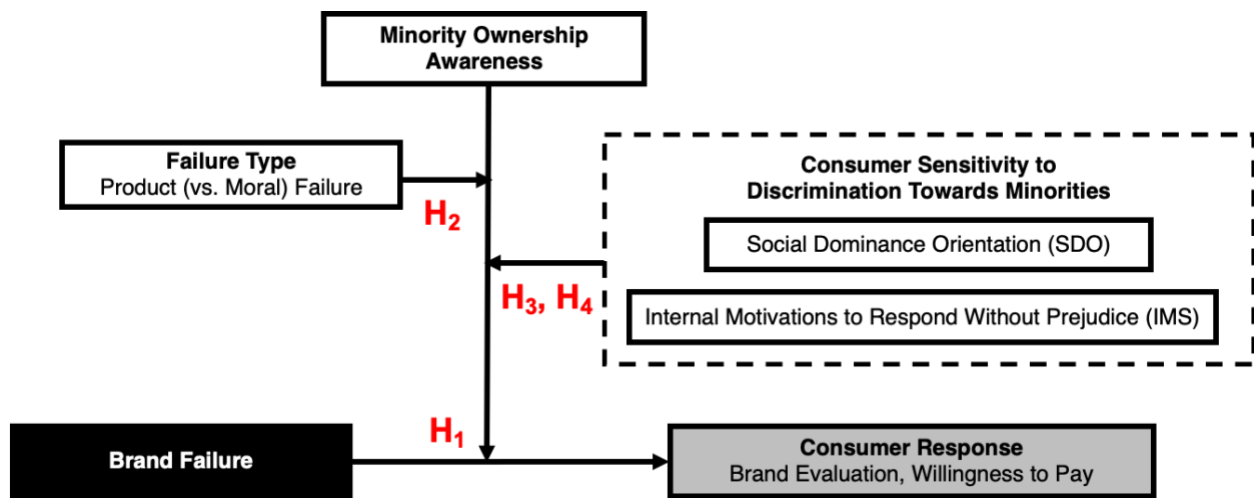


Table 1: Summary of Studies

	Ownership Label	Product Category	Sample
Study 1: Minority vs. Nonminority Identity	Black-owned Woman-owned Man-owned	Bandages	Prolific N=642
Study 2: Label versus No Label	Black-owned	Socks	University students N=297
Study 3: Product vs. Moral Failures	Black-owned	T-shirt	Connect N=400
Study 4: Moderating Role of SDO	Black-owned	T-shirt	Connect N=301
Study 5: Moderating Role of Internal Prejudice Motivations	Black-owned	Restaurant	Connect N=811
Web Appendix			
Web Appendix E: Utilitarian vs. Hedonic Products	Black-owned	Bandages	University students N=293
Web Appendix F: Utilitarian vs. Hedonic Framing	Black-owned	Bandages	Prolific N=401
Web Appendix G: Black versus White Consumers	Black-owned	T-shirt	Prolific N=381
Web Appendix H: Black and Veteran Identity	Black-owned Veteran-owned	T-shirt	Connect N=300

Table 2: Summary Statistics of the Dependent Measures for All Studies

Study	Condition	Owner Identity				
		<i>Black</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Veteran</i>	<i>No Label</i>	<i>Men</i>
1	Product Failure	2.28 (1.07) ^a	2.23 (.93) ^a		1.58 (.71) ^b	1.74 (.78) ^b
	Control	6.31 (.81) ^c	6.39 (.59) ^c		6.23 (.72) ^c	6.11 (.96) ^c
2	Product Failure	\$2.53 (1.74) ^a			\$2.13 (1.74) ^b	
3	Product Failure	2.66 (1.03) ^a			2.22 (.89) ^b	
	Moral Failure	2.43 (1.00) ^a			2.60 (1.16) ^a	
4	High SDO	2.65 (1.39) ^a			2.53 (1.36) ^a	
	Low SDO	3.24 (1.23) ^b			1.82 (.70) ^a	
5	<i>High IMS</i> Service Failure	3.87 (1.48) ^a			3.09 (1.15) ^b	
	Control	6.30 (.61) ^c			6.22 (.63) ^c	
	<i>Low IMS</i> Service Failure	3.00 (1.52) ^b			2.90 (1.08) ^b	
	Control	5.64 (1.49) ^c			5.49 (1.21) ^c	
Analyses of Google Reviews Tone	Review Contained Wordify-Analyzed Failure Terms	38.38 (28.96) ^a			28.61 (24.11) ^b	
	Review Did Not Contain Wordify- Analyzed Failure Terms	82.53 (29.54) ^c			81.29 (30.69) ^c	

Web Appendix E	Product Failure	3.15 (1.17) ^a		2.15 (1.10) ^b
	Control	5.88 (1.09) ^c		5.65 (1.05) ^c
Web Appendix F	Failure	2.85 (1.12) ^a		2.34 (.97) ^b
Web Appendix G	Black Consumers	2.82 (1.25) ^a		2.56 (1.33) ^a
	White Consumers	2.75 (.98) ^a		2.09 (.85) ^b
Web Appendix H	Product Failure	2.92 (1.29) ^a	2.69 (1.26) ^a	2.27 (1.12) ^b

NOTE. For all studies except the analyses of Google Reviews, the dependent variable was brand evaluation. SDO = Social dominance orientation. IMS = Internal motivation to respond without prejudice. Different subscripts within each study denote significant differences at $p < .05$.

Study 1: Minority Ownership Awareness Buffers Consumer Response to Brand Failures for Black and Women, Not Men Owners

Study 1 tested H1 by demonstrating that ownership awareness buffers reactions to brand failures for minority owners, such as Black and women owners, but not for nonminority owners (e.g., men).

Method

Six hundred forty-two participants (N=642; 56.4% Female, 74.8% White, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.19$, $SD=12.64$) were recruited from Prolific and completed a 4 (Black-owned vs. Women-owned vs. Men-owned vs. no label) x 2 (brand failure vs. control) between-subjects experiment.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of 8 conditions where they imagined buying first aid bandages from a company that either (a) had no label, (b) was Black-owned, (c) was woman-owned, or (d) was man-owned. Additionally, participants were randomly assigned to imagine that the bandages were either effective and durable (no failure) or not sticking to their skin well, needing replacement multiple times a day (brand failure). To encourage participants to carefully think about the scenario, we asked them to provide their open-ended thoughts. Next, participants rated the brand, product, their willingness to retry the brand, and their willingness to recommend on nine items (see Web Appendix B for all measures, means, and standard deviations). Finally, participants completed a demographic survey and manipulation check (Web Appendix C has all manipulation check data).

Results and Discussion

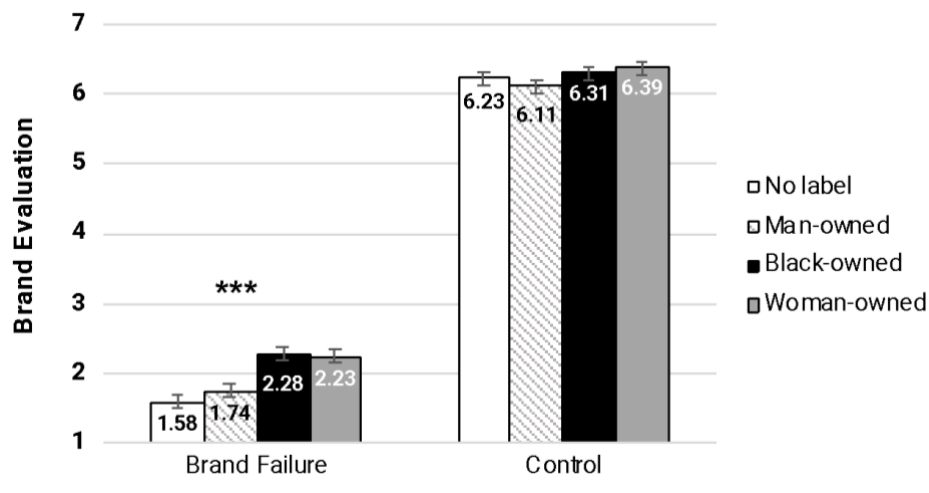
A two-way ANOVA on the brand evaluation composite ($\alpha = .99$) revealed main effects of minority ownership awareness ($F(3, 634) = 11.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .052$) and brand failure ($F(3,$

634) = 4270.08, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .871$) that were qualified by the anticipated minority ownership by brand failure interaction ($F(3, 634) = 4.18$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .019$).

Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that in the brand failure condition, there was a significant difference between the four conditions ($F(3, 634) = 14.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .063$) (Figure 2). Consistent with H1, participants rated the Black-owned ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.07$, $p < .001$) and woman-owned ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .934$, $p < .001$) brands significantly more positively than the man-owned ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .784$) and no label brands ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .705$). Evaluations of the man-owned brand did not differ from the no-label control ($p = .229$). In contrast, in the no-failure control condition, minority ownership awareness did not affect brand evaluation ($F(3, 634) = 1.58$, $p = .192$, $\eta^2 = .007$), suggesting that when there is no brand failure, minority ownership awareness may play less of a role in consumer response.

Taken together, Study 1 demonstrates the minority ownership awareness effect by showing that a nonminority group (i.e., men) does not benefit from the buffering effect of ownership awareness after failure. This suggests that the ownership awareness effect may not emerge for owners who consumers perceive have not faced structural discrimination.

Figure 2: Black and Woman, but Not Man, Ownership Awareness Increase Brand Evaluations When There is a Brand Failure



*** $p < .001$. Note: Error bars = +/- 1 SEs.

Study 2: When There is a Brand Failure, Consumers Bid More for a Gift Card When a Black-Owned Company is Labeled (vs. Not)

Study 2 was pre-registered (<https://aspredicted.org/wf3e5.pdf>) and used an established, incentive-compatible paradigm to assess how minority ownership awareness (vs. not) influenced the price participants were willing to pay for a gift card after a failure (Barnes and Shavitt 2024; Wertenbroch and Skiera 2002).

Method

Three hundred and eight undergraduates ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.47$, $SD = 3.69$; 39.3% Female; 65.6% White) at a large U.S. university participated in the 2-cell (minority ownership awareness [Black owned or founded] vs. not [no label]) between-subjects experiment. As pre-registered, we excluded 10 duplicate records from the analyses and one record with incomplete data, leaving 297 participants for analyses.

Participants were asked to imagine buying a 3-pack of low-cut socks from Pair of Thieves, an actual Black-owned brand. All participants also imagined noticing that after using them, the socks began to tear within one month. To enhance external validity, participants were randomly assigned to conditions where a “Black Owned or Founded Brand” label from Target.com was present on the same page or not.

Adapted from Wertenbroch and Skiera (2002), we used an incentive-compatible method of assessing WTP (see Web Appendix B for stimuli). Participants indicated the amount they were willing to pay for a \$5 Pair of Thieves gift card by choosing any value between \$0 and \$5 USD. If their bid was higher than the minimum price set, they would have the chance to buy the gift card. Note that the dependent variable was a consequential one, as participants believed that they had the chance to buy the gift card if they bid a sufficiently high amount. Finally, participants completed a demographic survey and a manipulation check question.

Results and Discussion

Willingness to pay (WTP)

In line with prior research (e.g., Barnes and Shavitt 2024), before analyzing WTP, we first checked whether the distribution of WTP was skewed. It was not (skewness = .223), so we conducted an independent samples t-test using the minority ownership awareness condition as the grouping variable. Consistent with H1, the analysis revealed that participants were willing to pay significantly more for the \$5 gift card when the Black-owned company was labeled as such (vs. no label; $M_{\text{Black-owned label}} = \2.53 , $SD = 1.74$, $M_{\text{no label}} = \$2.13$, $SD = 1.74$; $t(295) = -1.99$, $p = .048$, Cohen’s $d = .23$).

Using an actual Black-owned brand and Target.com’s actual Black-owned or founded label, Study 2 provides results that are consistent with our theorizing. The results suggest

tangible implications of minority ownership awareness for actual Black-owned brands on e-commerce platforms. Compared to using no label, using the Black-owned or founded label increased participants' awareness that Pair of Thieves was Black-owned from 4% to 65%. Perhaps more importantly, after learning about the brand's failure, consumers were willing to pay 19% more for a gift card exclusively for that brand when there was minority ownership awareness (vs. not).

Study 3: The Buffering Effect of Minority Ownership Awareness Emerges After Product Failure, Not Moral Failure

Study 3 expands on the minority ownership awareness effect observed in studies 1 and 2 by testing the moderating role of failure type (H2). As previously discussed, we suggest that minority ownership awareness prompts more forgiveness of product (vs. moral) brand failures because moral failures deal more with the brand's ethical issues (e.g., poor treatment of others) and less with structural discrimination minority-owned brands face in the marketplace.

Method

Four hundred participants (N=400; 55.8% Female, 71.8% White, $M_{age} = 40.90$, $SD = 12.99$) were recruited from Connect and completed a 2 (minority ownership awareness [Black-owned] vs. not [no label]) x 2 (product vs. moral failure) between-subjects experiment.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. To manipulate minority ownership awareness, the company was either labeled as Black-owned or there was no label. To manipulate failure type, they read that the company has been abusive to several employees at the

company (moral) or that when they use the shirt, they notice that the shirt has loose strings and the material isn't durable (product).

Next, participants answered the nine-item brand evaluation measure from earlier studies. Finally, participants completed demographic questions.

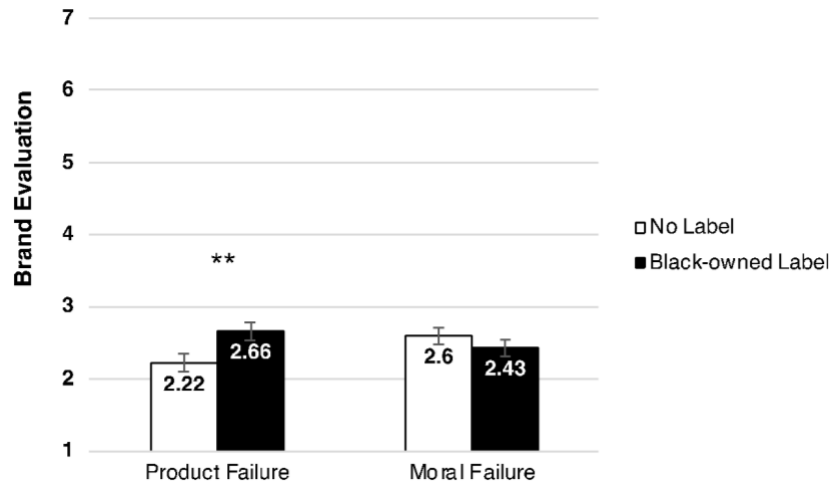
Results

Brand evaluation

Consistent with H2, a two-way ANOVA on brand evaluation ($\alpha = .92$) revealed a significant minority ownership awareness x failure type interaction ($F(1, 396) = 8.68, p = .003, \eta^2 = .021$) (figure 3). There was no significant main effect of failure type ($F(1, 396) = .419, p > .518, \eta^2 = .001$) or minority ownership awareness ($F(1, 396) = 1.61, p = .206, \eta^2 = .004$).

Follow-up pairwise comparisons of the minority ownership awareness by failure type interaction revealed that in the product failure condition, consumers rated the brand more favorably when there was minority ownership awareness (vs. not; $M_{\text{minority ownership awareness}} = 2.66, SD = 1.03$ vs. $M_{\text{not}} = 2.22, SD = .892; p = .003, \eta^2 = .021$), consistent with H1. In contrast, in the moral failure condition, there was no significant difference based on minority ownership awareness (vs. low; $M_{\text{minority ownership awareness}} = 2.43, SD = .998$ vs. $M_{\text{not}} = 2.60, SD = 1.16; p = .237, \eta^2 = .004$).

Figure 3: Minority Ownership Awareness Increases Brand Evaluations When There is a Product Failure, but not a Moral Failure



** $p < .01$. Note: Error bars = +/- 1 SEs.

Discussion

In Study 3, we replicate the findings of prior studies and identify yet another important boundary condition: The buffering effect of minority ownership awareness does not emerge for moral failures. While the moral failure in this study was related to organizational leadership, this isn't a necessary condition for higher perceptions of moral failure (e.g., sweatshop labor (Paharia, Vohs, and Deshpandé 2013)). This result suggests that minority ownership awareness is not a cure-all for any brand failure and that consumers will not compensate for a minority-owned brand's moral failures.

Consumer-Level Moderators

The next series of studies adds further insight into why and for whom the minority ownership awareness effect should occur. We hypothesized that for low-SDO consumers (H4) and high-IMS consumers (H5), minority ownership awareness may increase the perceived structural discrimination that minority owners face, thereby increasing consumers' motivation to

not respond in ways that they may view as prejudiced against those groups when they learn of a brand failure. To understand the associations among SDO, prejudice motivation, and perceived structural discrimination against minority owners, we conducted a pretest.

Pretest

Two hundred pretest participants rated on seven-point scales their agreement with survey measures of SDO (e.g. “No one group should dominate in society”, Ho et al. 2015), IMS (e.g., “When selecting my preferences, I consider my personal commitment to not be racist”), and EMS (e.g., “When selecting my preferences, I consider my desire to not appear racist in order to avoid negative reactions from others;” Plant and Devine 1998) after learning of a minority-owned brand’s failure (see Web Appendix B for full scales). To measure the hardships minorities face from discrimination, participants also rated on a seven-point scale the extent to which they believed minority-owned businesses (a) face harsher conditions in the marketplace, (b) face less fair conditions in the marketplace, and (c) face greater difficulties in the marketplace (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). All scales were presented in a randomized order.

To test the associations among SDO, prejudice motivations, and perceived structural discrimination against minority owners we examined the correlations among each of the scales (see table 3).

Table 3: Cronbach Alphas and Correlations in the Pretest

	α	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Social dominance orientation (SDO)	.92	-			
2. Internal motivation to respond without prejudice (IMS)	.90	-.56**	-		
3. External motivation to respond without prejudice (EMS)	.89	-.05	.34**	-	
4. Perceived minority hardship	.95	-.54**	.60**	.12	-

N=200. ** $p < .001$.

We observed significant correlations between SDO and perceived minority hardship ($r = -.54, p < .001$) as well as IMS and perceived minority hardship ($r = .60, p < .001$). We also observed a significant correlation between IMS and SDO ($r = -.56, p < .001$), which is in line with previous work suggesting that high-IMS people may be more motivated to approach more egalitarian outcomes (Plant and Devine 1998; Plant, Devine, and Peruche 2010). In contrast, we did not observe a significant relation between external prejudice motivations and SDO ($r = -.05, p = .472$) or perceived minority hardship ($r = .12, p = .097$). These pretest results suggest that, at the consumer level, the sensitivity to discrimination against minorities (i.e., SDO and IMS) should moderate the minority ownership awareness effect. However, EMS should not moderate the effect.

Study 4: The Minority Ownership Awareness Effect Emerges for Consumers with Low (vs. High) Social Dominance Orientation

In Study 4, we test H4 which predicts that SDO moderates the effects of minority ownership awareness (vs. not) when there is a brand failure. As shown in previous studies, the minority ownership awareness effect emerges when consumers can plausibly associate the structural discrimination minorities face with the minority-owned brand. Socially dominant individuals are more likely to think that, regardless of a group's social mobility efforts, some groups should remain on top and others on the bottom. In contrast, low-SDO consumers are more likely to think that groups at the bottom are just as deserving as groups at the top. Therefore, we expect low-SDO consumers to be the most affected by minority ownership

awareness, given their greater sensitivity to the disadvantages these groups face (see consumer level moderator pretest).

Method

Three hundred and one participants ($N=301$; 44.2% Female, 69.1% White, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.28$, $SD = 10.92$) were recruited from Connect and completed a 2 (minority ownership awareness [Black-owned] vs. not [no label]) between-subjects experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Both conditions contained the same product failure and they were told about a t-shirt that when they buy it, they notice that the shirt has loose strings and the material isn't durable. To manipulate minority ownership awareness, participants were either shown an actual Black-owned label or were told the company was named Sleeves and Ink.

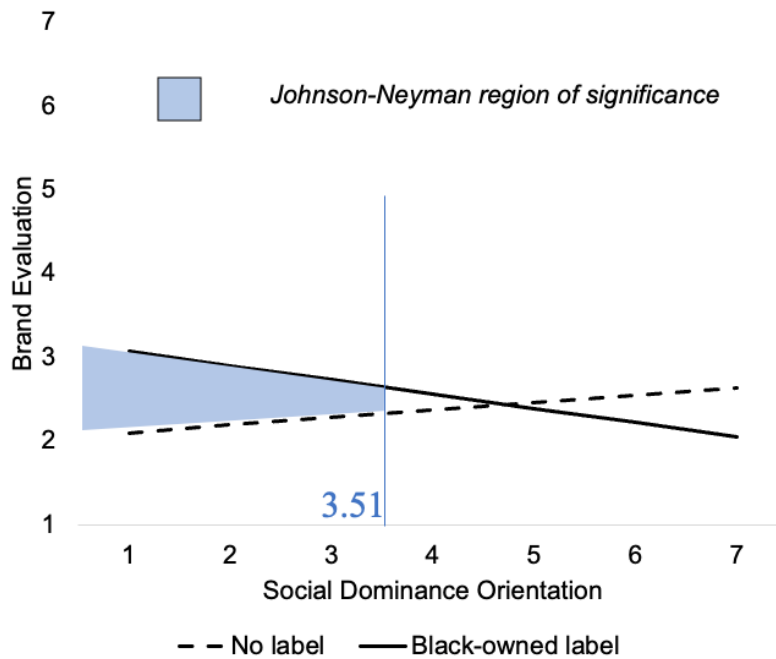
Next, participants answered the nine-item brand evaluation measures from earlier studies ($\alpha = .958$). Participants also rated their agreement to the same SDO scale used in the pretest (Ho et al. 2015). Finally, participants completed a demographic survey.

Results

We regressed the brand evaluation composite on the minority ownership conditions, mean-centered SDO, and their interaction. The analysis revealed a main effect of minority ownership awareness ($b = .61$, $t(297) = 4.998$, $p < .001$) that, consistent with H4, was qualified by a significant interaction ($b = -.26$, $t = -2.84$, $p = .005$). The effect of SDO was not significant ($b = .091$, $t = 1.53$, $p = .127$). A Johnson-Neyman analysis revealed that, for consumers with an SDO score of 3.51 and below (approximately 79% of participants were below this threshold), the buffering effect of minority ownership awareness was significant ($b_{JN} = .32$, $p = .05$; see figure 4). When there is a product failure, participants at this value and below (i.e., lower social

dominance) rated the brand significantly better when there was minority ownership awareness (vs. not).

Figure 4: Black Ownership Awareness Increases Evaluations for Consumers with Low (vs. High) Social Dominance Orientation



Discussion

Study 4 helps illuminate the process driving the minority ownership awareness effect. The results show that, in a brand failure context, minority ownership awareness operates more effectively for low-SDO consumers, as communicating minority ownership aligns with their beliefs that groups at the bottom of social hierarchies are just as deserving as groups at the top (Kay and Jost 2003). In contrast, communicating minority ownership to high-SDO consumers made little difference, potentially due to their relative insensitivity to the discrimination minorities face (as shown in the pretest).

Study 5: The Minority Ownership Awareness Effect Emerges for Consumers with High (vs. Low) Internal Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice

In Study 5, we test H5 which predicts that internal prejudice motivations moderates the minority ownership awareness effect, as this may highlight the structural disadvantages minority-owned business face. After a brand failure, minority ownership awareness may make structural discrimination more salient, especially among those who seek to respond without feeling prejudiced. When there is no brand failure, minority ownership awareness should play less of a role, regardless of individual differences in internal prejudice motivation.

Method

Eight hundred and eleven participants (N=811; 50% Female, 70% White, $M_{\text{age}} = 41.01$, $SD = 12.71$) were recruited from Connect and completed a 2 (minority ownership awareness: [Black-owned] vs. not [no label]) x 2 (brand failure vs. control) between-subjects experiment. IMS was a measured variable. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. To manipulate minority ownership awareness, participants were either told the restaurant was Black-owned or not. To manipulate brand failure, participants were told that the order was complete and ready at the scheduled time (vs. not complete and ready one hour later than the scheduled time).

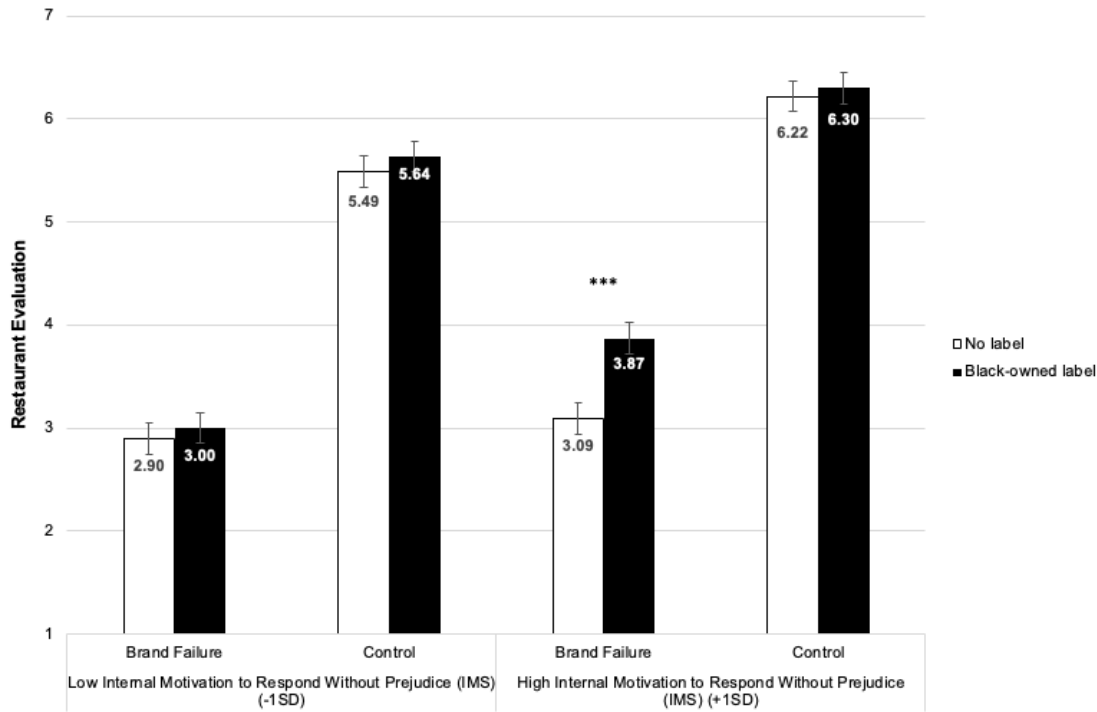
Next, participants answered the nine-item brand evaluation measures from earlier studies ($\alpha = .98$). On the following screen, participants rated the extent to which they agreed with IMS ($\alpha = .94$) and EMS ($\alpha = .90$) scales from the pretest (Plant and Devine 1998; Paluck and Green 2009) (see Web Appendix B for full scales). Finally, all participants completed a minority ownership awareness manipulation check question as in prior studies.

Results

We regressed the brand evaluation composite on the minority ownership conditions, brand failure conditions, mean-centered IMS, and all possible interactions. The analysis revealed main effects of brand failure ($b = -2.86, t(803) = -23.82, p < .001$) and IMS ($b = .30, t(803) = 4.18, p < .001$) that were qualified by a marginal minority ownership awareness by brand failure interaction ($b = .33, t(803) = 1.91, p = .057$), a significant brand failure by IMS interaction ($b = -.22, t(803) = -2.22, p = .027$), and consistent with H5, a significant three-way interaction ($b = .31, t(803) = 2.21, p = .027$). The significant three-way interaction suggests that the minority ownership awareness effect depends on consumers' motivations to not *feel* prejudiced. The effects of minority ownership awareness ($b = .11, t(803) = .92, p = .357$) and the minority ownership by IMS interaction were not significant ($b = -.03, t(803) = -.33, p = .742$).

A Johnson-Neyman analysis revealed that, for consumers with an IMS score of .03 and above (approximately 55% of participants were above this threshold), the buffering effect of minority ownership awareness (vs. not) was significant when there was a failure (vs. not; $b_{JN} = .33, p = .05$; see figure 5). When there was a service failure, participants at this value and above (i.e., those with stronger motivations to reduce internal prejudice) rated the brand significantly better when minority ownership awareness was high (vs. low).

Figure 5: Black Ownership Awareness Increases Evaluations for Consumers with High (vs. Low) IMS



*** $p < .001$. Note: Error bars = +/- 1 SEs.

For comparison, we also regressed the brand evaluation composite on the minority ownership conditions, brand failure conditions, mean-centered *EMS*, and all possible interactions. The analysis revealed main effects of brand failure ($b = -2.91, t(803) = -24.16, p < .001$) and *EMS* ($b = .15, t(803) = 2.23, p = .026$) that were qualified by a significant minority ownership awareness by brand failure interaction ($b = .37, t(803) = 2.17, p = .03$), and a significant brand failure by *EMS* interaction ($b = .22, t(803) = 3.20, p = .001$). The effects of minority ownership awareness ($b = .11, t(803) = .89, p = .371$), the brand failure by *EMS* interaction ($b = .14, t(803) = 1.42, p = .157$), and the minority ownership by *EMS* interaction were not significant ($b = -.03, t(803) = -.36, p = .719$). Importantly, the three-way interaction was not significant ($b = .16, t(803) = 1.20, p = .229$), suggesting that the minority ownership awareness effect does not depend on consumers' motivations to avoid prejudiced situations.

General Discussion

Technologically amplified social movements are helping spread the awareness of structural discrimination against minorities. In response, the marketplace has sought to raise consumer awareness of and demand for minority-owned businesses. Given the increased probability of brand failure across growth stages, we aimed to understand how and why minority ownership awareness might affect brand evaluations after brand failures. Across five studies and analyses of over 27,000 reviews of Black-owned restaurants, this paper documents a robust minority ownership awareness effect such that when there is a brand failure occurs, consumers evaluate the brand less negatively when there is minority ownership awareness (vs. not). The results show that minority ownership awareness can result in higher brand evaluations, a higher willingness to pay, and a greater willingness to try the brand again. The results also show that the minority ownership awareness effect does not hold when it is less plausible to associate brand failure with structural discrimination (e.g., moral failures the brand commits) and for people who are insensitive to structural discrimination. This evidence points to the unexpected potential outcomes of communicating minority ownership for owners who may experience increased demand as their minority identity becomes public. As diversity and inclusion become increasingly relevant in today's marketplace (Arsel, Scott, and Crockett 2022; Poole et al. 2021), we hope our exploration of this process can inspire future investigations of how consumers make sense of DEI-related topics in marketing.

Theoretical Contributions

Structural discrimination. By exploring when minority ownership awareness impacts brand evaluation, we show how structural discrimination shapes the preferences and decisions of individual consumers through social dominance orientation and internal prejudice motivations. While we are not suggesting minority ownership awareness lowers the structural discrimination minority-owned brands face, we do observe that making consumers aware of minority ownership via badges or labels can improve brand evaluations for consumers who are sensitive to the discrimination of minorities.

Structural discrimination in the form of racism and sexism continues to harm minorities and minority-owned businesses (Peñaloza et al. 2023; Poole et al. 2021; Mobbs 2018; Grier and Perry 2018; Busse, Israeli, and Zettermeyer 2017; Scott et al. 2023; Bates and Robb 2013; Bone, Christensen, and Williams 2014; McSwigan 2022; Murrell and Bangs 2019; Fairlie 2020). While not tested directly, technologically amplified social movements may help increase individual sensitivity to such discrimination. These actions may change how consumers interact with minority-owned businesses experiencing product failures, at least among consumers who believe that the discrimination is unjust. We encourage future work to more deeply examine social movements as opportunities to study disadvantaged groups in particular and to investigate the role of technology in perpetuating or preventing systemic bias in general (see Nardini et al. 2021 for social movement marketing applications).

Second, our focus on structural discrimination contributes to the literature on underdogs (Vandello, Goldschmied, and Richards 2007) and underdog brands (Schmidt and Steenkamp 2022). We show that consumers may view structurally disadvantaged minority-owned businesses as a type of underdog within the marketplace. While we observe similar overall effects for minority owners to previous underdog studies (see Web Appendix H for further exploration

utilizing veteran-owned businesses), the relationship between the types of disadvantage (whether it is framed as structural vs. situational) is a fruitful area for future research as consumers might respond differently to underdogs under these positionings. For instance, unlike consumer responses when underdogs are framed as structurally disadvantaged, consumers may not monitor their reactions to minority owners as a function of their sensitivity to the structural discrimination minorities when underdogs are framed as situationally disadvantaged (e.g., losing sports teams). Thus, future work should explore when results may differ based on the type of underdog framing, such as small business versus minority-owned.

Third, by conceptualizing minority owners as underdogs who have faced historical resource disparities, our perspective also allows for a more comprehensive understanding of minority ownership awareness along the consumer journey. As underdogs, minority owned businesses can reap the benefits of acquiring more first-time customers who want them to win, as shown in recent studies (Aneja et al. 2023, Babar et al. 2023). Moreover, considering minority owners as underdogs also informs when and why they might retain some customers after purchase. For example, study 3 shows that minority ownership awareness buffers responses to brand failures that are more (vs. less) feasibly related to discrimination.

Further, for minority owners, we observed consumer discrimination sensitivity as a novel driver of our effect. Our results show that the minority ownership awareness effect emerges for consumers who are less likely to endorse the idea that some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups (i.e., low-SDO consumers, Study 4) and for those who try to not view themselves as prejudiced towards minorities (i.e., high-IMS consumers, Study 5). By showing that the minority awareness effect relates to how consumers view structural discrimination against minorities, our findings build on related research suggesting that more politically conservative

consumers may not show increased demand after learning of minority ownership (Babar et al. 2023; Webster et al. 2014). Future work should explore the extent to which consumer discrimination sensitivity can explain other underdog effects. For example, do internal prejudice motivations relate to other underdog narratives, or just for historically marginalized populations? This exploration could lead to understanding how underdogs may attract different consumer groups as some may be drawn to their perceived effort (Vandello, Goldschmied, Richards 2007) vs. their historical marginalization (the focus of this paper), or even a combination of both.

More broadly, the role IMS plays in consumer decision-making helps marketing research go beyond constructs such as political ideology and political correctness (Korschun, Martin, and Vadakkepatt 2020; Ordabayeva and Fernandes 2018; Prevel Katsanis 1994; Ulver and Laurell 2020; Heil and Merveilde 2006; Weber et al. 2023), which have been previously discussed in the literature into other domains such as impression management. Our findings suggest that consumers' impression management motives (e.g., IMS) are a way to understand their responses to brand failure. Consumers tend to view brand failures as the brand's problem to resolve, not their own (Khamitov and Gregoire 2020; see Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012 for an important exception). Whereas prior literature has focused on how the impression management motives of others may be perceived as a brand failure (i.e., conspicuous brand usage; Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013), we find that consumer response to minority ownership awareness depends on their own internal motivations.

Mitigating responses to brand failures. Our findings contribute to a rich literature on mitigating the negative consequences of brand failures (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Roehm and Brady 2007; Swaminathan, Page, and Gürhan-Canli 2007; Tax and Brown 1998; Tax, Brown, and

Chandrashekar 1998; You et al. 2020) by showing that when there is minority ownership awareness, consumers may interpret failure differently and respond less negatively to failure.

However, consumers may not associate all types of failure with the discrimination minorities face. When the failure type conflicts with consumer expectations about the minority owner, the positive effects of minority ownership awareness disappear. Study 3 shows that minority ownership awareness did not mitigate consumers' brand evaluations after a moral failure, suggesting that consumers are less likely to associate moral failures with discrimination that minorities face. This finding is consistent with growing evidence that people tend to expect disadvantaged individuals to be moral (e.g., poor but honest; Kay and Jost 2003) and weigh morality more heavily when considering disadvantaged service providers (Kim, Park, and Lee 2019; Kirmani et al. 2017).

Whereas Kirgios et al. (2022) show that emphasizing minority status is useful when making more direct appeals for help, this paper shows the role of minority ownership awareness for brand evaluations after brand failures. Our findings also extend recent evidence showing that minority ownership awareness can increase consumer demand (Aneja, Luca, and Reshef 2023; Babar, Adeli, and Burtch 2023) by showing that minority ownership awareness can also aid in brand evaluations. In contexts of product failures, we find that minority ownership awareness benefits the brand by lessening negative consumer response. While we don't find evidence of this, future research should explore the instances when, in today's climate, consumers respond negatively to minority ownership awareness.

Our studies also advance marketing literature by outlining when consumers are sensitive to the discrimination that minorities face. One might have assumed that ownership awareness would have a uniformly positive impact on consumer attitudes, perhaps by humanizing the brand

(Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto 2013; Schroll, Schnurr, and Grewal 2018). In contrast, the effect emerges for minority owners but not nonminority ones (Study 1). Consumers may feel less inclined to forgive owners whose identities already comprise the majority and therefore, face less structural discrimination. In addition, the results show that the minority ownership awareness effect occurs most clearly in contexts of brand failure because the failure prompts consumers to be aware of the discrimination minorities face. Moreover, in our no-failure control conditions, minority ownership awareness was less influential for brand evaluation.

Managerial Implications

Our findings speak primarily to minority business owners with the message that brand failures may not be a moment to hide their minority identities. This message may be surprising to brand owners who have been reasonably advised against disclosing their minority identity to avoid inviting racist or otherwise negative backlash (Drew 2021). Marketing managers should find ways to make consumers aware of minority ownership that aligns and is authentic with brand image.

Further, our work suggests that marketers should not expect minority ownership awareness to bolster evaluations when there are moral failures. Treating employees unfairly, for example, does not seem in line with this effect, potentially because it violates relatability norms of underdogs. Thus, marketers should not view the link between brand failures and minority ownership awareness as a license or catch-all for wrongdoing by brands.

Our findings also suggest consumers for whom minority ownership awareness is more impactful. Our work suggests that minority awareness may align more closely with consumers with different levels of social dominance orientation and internal motivations to respond without prejudice. We hope marketers see our findings as an opportunity for new explorations into how

consumers sensitive to discrimination may be drawn to their ads, such as through minority ownership awareness, and situations that make this discrimination more salient (e.g., brand failures).

Limitations and Future Research

Our studies focused on minority owners who have been historically discriminated against (e.g., Black owners). We believe these owners deserve attention because of the current social-cultural climate and the mixed guidance in the literature to anticipate consumer response to minority ownership awareness and brand failure. Future work could explore how different types of ownership awareness impact consumers. For instance, the marketplace contains a host of other ownership labels, including those less tied to structural discrimination or one's social identity, such as local-owned, small businesses, or family-owned (Botero and Litchfield-Moore 2021).

Our studies were also agnostic to whether consumers perceived the firm to intentionally communicate its minority ownership. The results across studies suggest that communicating minority awareness with various levels of intentionality (e.g., e-commerce labels or descriptions) can reduce consumer negative reactions to failures. However, future work could explore how consumer perceptions of a brand's intent when communicating owner identity may impact behavior. Consumers continue to trust product information from other consumers more than the same information from the brand (Matter 2023), suggesting a greater benefit from unintentional minority ownership communication. On the other hand, intentional minority ownership communication could result in a greater benefit so long as consumers perceive it to be a costly signal (Smith and Bird 2000).

In our studies, we focused on one minority identity at a time, but in some cases, owners may communicate one minority identity while identifying with several (e.g., being a Black

woman owner and only communicating “Woman-owned”). For example, what factors do owners consider when deciding to communicate one minority identity over others? What assumptions do consumers make about owners’ other identities after receiving information about a subset of identities? In other cases, owners may communicate multiple minority identities with which they identify (e.g., being a Black woman owner and communicating “Woman-owned and Black-owned”). What additive or interactive effects might emerge from different intersections of minority ownership communications (e.g., Uduehi, Saint Clair, and Crabbe 2024)? Future work can explore how these intersections impact consumer perceptions and behavior for both owner identities and the identities of the consumer (see Web Appendix G).

There may instances in which minority ownership awareness does have an effect when there is no failure. For example, future work should examine when there are stronger impacts of minority ownership awareness when there is no failure, such as if there were more explicit reminders of structural discrimination under these circumstances. Additionally, while this paper focuses on single failure situations, future work can research how repeated failures change brand evaluation patterns and the impact of a consumer experiencing several failures. This can help disentangle boundaries of the minority ownership awareness effect to understand more about the nature of brand failures and minority awareness. We hope this work can provide important points for exploration for marketing researchers as well as useful conclusions for marketing practitioners.

Our focus on the role of structural discrimination that minority-owned businesses face in society relates to existing work on how consumers make attributions for product-harm crises (Dawar and Pillutla 2000). However, there are important conceptual gaps in understanding the extent to which consumers believe brand failures are in minority owners’ control. While not

dealt with directly, the minority ownership awareness effect could be explored from an attributional model perspective (Dawar and Pillutla 2000; Klein and Dawar 2004) or explore if there are situations where consumer expectations for minority-owned business may differ from other businesses.

Future work should explore how differences in attribution for minority-owned businesses specifically factor into consumer decision-making. Our minority ownership awareness effect suggests that consumers may also feel a warm glow or a more positive affect after purchasing from a minority-owned brand. This is also consistent with our findings that for Black-owned brands, consumers may attribute failure less to the owner when there is minority ownership awareness (Web Appendix H). Future research could explore whether and how these effects impact consumer perceptions of themselves after purchasing from minority-owned businesses.

For instance, while we find some support that consumers hold minority-owned brands less responsible for product failures (see Web Appendix H), there could be systematic differences in consumer attributional beliefs based on the type of minority (Islam and Hewstone 1993) and individual-level differences such as locus of control perceptions (Andor et al. 2022). Future research should also explore how consumers view different types of minority groups, such as exploring other racial minorities based on the Racial Position Model (Zou and Cheryan 2017). For instance, consumers may view Asian-owned brands differently than Black-owned products as there are differences in how both foreignness and superiority stereotypes play in their marginalization within society. Overall, we hope this paper serves as an opportunity for new work on minority-owned brands and an understanding of how consumer beliefs around structural discrimination influence their marketing behavior.

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