

Title

Too proud to please? When and why arrogant restaurant brands win consumers over

Highlights

- We identify conditions where positive effects of brand arrogance are pronounced.
- This study integrates signaling theory with congruity theory.
- We conducted three vignette-based experiments in restaurant settings.

Abstract

Although arrogance is typically frowned upon in interpersonal interactions, it may signal unobservable competence. Prior research offers limited insight into when and why brand arrogance generates positive rather than negative consumer responses. Consequently, we conducted three vignette-based, between-subjects experiments with Prolific participants. Across studies, we manipulated arrogant message, brand expertise, and brand biography (top dog vs. underdog), measured consumer underdog tendency, and tested their effects on competence and visit intention using regression-based moderated mediation analyses. Study 1 shows that arrogant messages increase competence when the brand has high expertise. Study 2 reveals that arrogant messages increase (vs. decrease) competence of top-dog (vs. underdog) brands. Study 3 finds that consumers low in underdog tendency perceive greater competence after reading arrogant messages. Integrating signaling theory and congruity theory, this research shows that arrogant messaging can signal competence, but only under specific brand and consumer conditions.

Keywords

Arrogance, competence, top dog, underdog, signaling theory, congruity

Introduction

Hospitality brands craft stories that resonate with consumers because these stories shape perceptions of the brand's identity, distinctiveness, and persuasiveness in a highly competitive marketplace (Hwang & Shin, 2021). An intriguing storytelling approach is the communication of arrogance (Senyuz & Hasford, 2022). Arrogance is defined as the display of one's superior capabilities while undermining others' (Munichor & Steinhart, 2016). For example, Pizza Hut's slogan, "No one outpizzas the Hut" demonstrates a sense of superiority. Burger King's slogan, "Have it your way: eat somewhere else" boldly dismisses those who may not appreciate their offerings. As such, arrogance has a dual nature: It showcases superiority while belittling competitors and sometimes even consumers (Munichor & Steinhart, 2016). This duality may result in contrasting perceptions: the brand is perceived as confident but alienating.

Gong et al. (2025) assert that brand arrogance can give a strong yet positive impression to consumers when it is used appropriately. However, they posit that when brand arrogance is not used appropriately, it can bring about negative responses from consumers. The key question is "how can we use brand arrogance appropriately?" Previous research has addressed this question by investigating how consumer characteristics modulate the brand arrogance effect (Awad & Youn, 2018; Brown, 2012, Munichor & Steinhart, 2016; Senyuz & Hasford, 2022). To be specific, Brown (2012) tested for the moderating effect of product usage experience and found that individuals negatively evaluate arrogant brands when they do not own any product of the brand. Senyuz and Hasford (2022) demonstrated that people prefer arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brands when they are highly motivated to form a romantic relationship. In short, previous research posits that brand arrogance can be used appropriately by considering consumer characteristics.

While previous research has improved our understanding of how brand arrogance can be aligned with consumer characteristics to generate favorable outcomes, two important gaps remain. First, prior work has focused predominantly on consumer characteristics (for a notable exception, see Gong et al., 2025, which examines brand positioning [leader vs. friend]), leaving limited insight into how brand characteristics and consumer characteristics jointly shape responses to arrogant brand messaging. Second, the literature lacks an integrated explanation of *why* the effects of brand arrogance become positive rather than negative across different boundary conditions. Existing studies have identified mechanisms such as self-promotion mindset (Senyuz & Hasford, 2022) and attention (Gong et al., 2025), but these mechanisms are tied to specific moderators and do not explain how both brand-side cues and consumer predispositions influence evaluations of arrogant brands. As a result, current knowledge remains fragmented: we know that certain conditions can alter the effectiveness of brand arrogance, but we have a limited understanding of the broader evaluative process through which both brand characteristics and consumer characteristics shape such effects. Developing a shared explanatory mechanism is therefore important not merely for parsimony, but for building a more coherent theoretical account of when and why brand arrogance succeeds or backfires.

The current study aims to address these two research gaps by proposing a unified framework that investigates when and why brand expertise and biography (brand characteristics) and consumer underdog tendencies (consumer characteristics) influence brand arrogance effect in the restaurant context. We draw on signaling theory to suggest that brand arrogance can be construed as a positive or negative signal of competence, depending on signaler (i.e., brand expertise, biography) and signal receiver's characteristics (i.e., consumer underdog tendency). We then draw on congruity theory to posit that brand arrogance can be a positive (vs. negative) signal of competence when the brand exhibits high expertise (arrogant messages fit better brands with high [vs. low] expertise), when the brand authors top dog [vs. underdog] biography (arrogant messages reflect top dog [vs. underdog] characteristic better), and when consumers have low levels of underdog tendency (those consumers perceive a high similarity with arrogant brands). To test this framework, we conducted three vignette-based experiments and recruited Prolific (crowd-sourced consumer panel) users ($n = 1,144$). In short, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

Research Objective 1. Identify and test boundary conditions (both brand and consumer characteristics) under which consumers' positive (vs. negative) responses to brand arrogance occur.

Research Objective 2. Identify and test the mechanism underpinning such boundary conditions.

The current study advances previous research drawing on signaling theory (e.g., Li et al., 2025a, 2025b; Lin et al., 2020) by demonstrating that brand arrogance can serve as a strategic signal of competence in the hospitality industry. By identifying the moderating roles of brand expertise, brand biography, and consumer underdog tendencies, the study clarifies the boundary conditions under which arrogant brand messaging enhances perceived competence and visit intentions. Based on our findings, we suggest when and for whom arrogant messages are effective, offering actionable insights for positioning and communication strategies for hospitality brands.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Brand arrogance as a costly signal of competence

Arrogance is a human characteristic that displays superiority of one's abilities by disparaging others (Brown, 2012; Munichor & Steinhart, 2016). Arrogance differs from self-confidence, which is defined as one's belief in the efficacy of skills or abilities (Bearden et al., 2001). While arrogance is based on self-confidence, not all confident individuals are arrogant because some of them just do not display their superiority over others. Arrogance also differs from pride. Pride results from one's internal state that does not involve reference to others (Johnson et al., 2010). That is, "I am proud of you" does not involve a comparison with others. In sum, arrogance entails a social comparison with others, while self-confidence and pride do not.

Converging evidence suggests that brands exhibit arrogance as humans do (Brown, 2012; Munichor & Steinhart, 2016; Panchal & Gill, 2020). Brands manifest arrogance in promoting their products and persuading individuals to buy (e.g., Arrogant Bastard Stone Brewing Co. "You are not worthy"). Previous research shows both positive and negative consequences of brand arrogance. On one hand, arrogant brands entice consumers with a high need for status and those who infer high quality of product or service from such arrogance (e.g., Senyuz & Hasford, 2022; Shariff & Tracy, 2009). On the other hand, consumers avoid arrogant brands because such brands make them feel inferior and thus they experience self-threat (Munichor & Steinhart, 2016). Brown (2012) reveals that individuals negatively evaluate arrogant brands, particularly when they do not own any product of the brand.

Signaling theory involves three major elements: signaler, signal, and receiver (Spence, 1973; Friske et al., 2023). The signaler is the brand who has inside information that is not available to outsiders, including consumers. They send signals to the receiver to reduce information asymmetry (Friske et al., 2023). Signal receivers are normally consumers exposed to brand communications (e.g., advertisements, social media posts). Drawing on signaling theory, we argue that arrogant claims (e.g., assertions of superiority, dismissiveness of competition) are 'costly signals' that can convey competence. Signal is "an action, attribute, or communication that conveys credible and valuable information to external parties" (Connelly et al., 2025, p.25). For some brands, making such a bold claim is risky; it invites scrutiny and backlash if the claim is not credible. As competence is invisible and not quite readily observable, consumers may experience asymmetry of information regarding brands' competence (Friske et al., 2023). As such, brands send arrogant messages to consumers with the assumption that such messages positively signal their competence.

However, the same signal can backfire when contextual cues do not support its credibility. In such cases, consumers may interpret arrogance as unjustified boasting and downgrade competence judgments. Accordingly, we focus on perceived competence as the proximal outcome of arrogant messaging, and examine how brand expertise, brand biography, and consumer underdog tendency influence whether arrogance is interpreted as a credible or non-credible competence signal. A broader downstream outcome (e.g., visit intention) is theorized and tested as mediated by competence, rather than being directly affected by arrogance.

In sum, the authors draw on signaling theory to suggest that arrogant messages can signal high vs. low competence of brand, depending on how arrogant messages are congruent with signaler and signal receiver characteristics. For signaler characteristics, we examine brand expertise (present vs. absent), and biography (top dog vs. underdog). For signal receiver characteristics, we investigate consumers' underdog tendencies. To do so, we integrate signaling theory with congruity theory and argue that arrogance can be a positive signal only when it is congruent with brand and consumer characteristics.

Congruency of arrogance with brand expertise and biography

Congruity theory is robust to explain that an individual holds a positive or negative attitude toward an object because the object is consistent or inconsistent with the individual's existing belief (Kim et al., 2024; Lee & Jeong 2014; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Su et al., 2017). Drawing from this logic, Lee and Jeong (2014) suggest that congruity of marketing activities across offline and online channels drives positive outcomes. Against the backdrop of emergence of online commercials, brands should align such commercials with their existing offline counterparts. Similarly, Su et al. (2017) argued that hotel functional services should align with consumer expectations.

This study argues that arrogant messages drive more positive outcomes for brands with (vs. without) expertise because such messages fit better for brands with expertise. Brand expertise is defined as a brand's ability to deliver functional and emotional benefits of a product or service as promised (Pontes et al., 2017). It also reflects the brand's ability to deliver high quality products or services in a consistent manner. For example, the owner chef of a restaurant brand can emphasize that he or she built career trajectories across countries and experimented with novel food ingredients and unconventional cooking. Thus, this research operationalizes restaurant brand expertise as the owner chef's expertise, given that the owner chef is a key representative of the restaurant brand.

We predict that when brand expertise is present, consumers may infer competence from the arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) message. Competence indicates one's intelligence or efficiency in completing tasks (Fiske et al., 2007). Expertise of a message sender increases perception of persuasiveness of the message (Ohanian, 1990). Crisci and Kassinove (1973) find that expertise of a communicator (Dr. vs. Mr.) increases compliance with the communicator's recommendations. Therefore, when brand expertise is present, consumers may find arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages of the brand convincing because such messages are congruent with the brand. In the restaurant context, if the owner chef has built his or her career in various countries and experimented with unique combinations of food ingredients, people may find the restaurant brand's arrogance reasonable and infer competence.

Meanwhile, we propose that when brand expertise is absent, consumers may not infer competence of brand from its arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) message. Anecdotal evidence points to the common practice of using arrogant messages by well-known, international brands (e.g., Pizza Hut and Burger King). That is, consumers may infer a small, new restaurant as "not expert" in the field and thus arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages are not congruent with the image of restaurant. Drawing on the congruity framework (Kim et al., 2024; Lee & Jeong

2014), we predict that arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages decrease consumer perception of brands lacking or without expertise because such messages are not congruent with the brands. In sum, we put forth the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 [H1]. Brand expertise moderates the effect of arrogance on consumer perception of brand competence. Specifically,

Hypothesis 1a [H1a]. With high brand expertise, arrogance (vs. non-arrogance) increases consumer perception of brand competence.

Hypothesis 1b [H1b]. With low brand expertise, arrogance (vs. non-arrogance) decreases consumer perception of brand competence.

In addition to brand expertise, brand biography can play a crucial role in the effectiveness of brand arrogance. Consumers may infer brand status (top dog vs. underdog) based on the brand's market share and resources (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). Underdog brands are relatively disadvantaged in the market competition because they have limited resources (e.g., marketing budget, number of employees). However, underdog brands exhibit determination and passion (Paharia et al., 2011). Meanwhile, top dog brands are relatively advantaged in the market competition because they are endowed with abundant resources. For example, independent specialty coffee shops are considered an underdog while international chain (e.g., Starbucks) coffee shops are considered a top dog (Paharia et al., 2011).

Nowadays, marketers do not just rely on consumer inferences of brand status. Instead, they author brand biographies (He et al., 2024; Paharia et al., 2011; Schumacher & Mai, 2024). For example, some brands showcase their humble beginnings and how they weathered through difficult times during the early years of businesses with limited capital and lack of reach to consumers. On the brand website, underdog stories accompany a historical account of milestones that shape and expand business models with passion to deliver quality products and services. As such, underdog biographies have been used by both small and large companies (e.g., Ben & Jerry's, In-N-Out Burger; Paharia et al., 2011; Schumacher & Mai, 2024).

In this study, we propose that the effectiveness of brand arrogance depends on brand biography. Prior research suggests that positive consumer responses are more likely when there is fit or congruity between a communicator's characteristics and the target being endorsed (Till & Busler, 2000). For example, a celebrity known for environmentally responsible behavior may be perceived as a better fit for a hotel that promotes energy reduction initiatives than a celebrity without such an image. Applying this fit logic to brand biography, we argue that arrogant messaging should be more congruent with top dog than underdog brands. Top dog brands are typically perceived as dominant, resource-rich, and advantaged in the marketplace, whereas underdog brands are characterized by disadvantage, limited resources, and a struggle against stronger competitors (Paharia et al., 2011). Because arrogance involves asserting superiority and, at times, demeaning others (Munichor & Steinhart, 2016), such messaging is more consistent with the image of a top dog brand than with that of an underdog brand, whose appeal rests more on humility, perseverance, and

relatability. By contrast, we propose that consumers do not infer competence of an underdog brand after reading arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages because such messages do not fit the underdog brand image. Drawing from the congruity theory (Kim et al., 2024), we predict that competence of an underdog brand will decrease following arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages. Taken together, we put forth the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 [H2]. Brand biography moderates the effect of arrogance on consumer perception of brand competence.

Hypothesis 2a [H2a]. Arrogance (vs. non-arrogance) increases consumer perception of competence of a top dog brand.

Hypothesis 2b [H2b]. Arrogance (vs. non-arrogance) decrease consumer perception of competence of an underdog brand.

Congruity of arrogance with consumer underdog tendency

As a subset of congruity theory, self-congruity theory posits that individuals behave in ways of reinforcing their self-concept, defined as a set of beliefs about themselves (Sirgy et al., 1982; Su et al., 2017). The degree of similarity between brands and self-concept is self-congruity, and the higher the similarity, the more likely that consumers prefer brands. By contrast, they evaluate a brand unfavorably when it is dissimilar to their self-concept because they experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1964). The similarity-attraction account holds that individuals tend to sustain relationships with others who they believe are similar to themselves (Byrne et al., 1967). Likewise, consumers may sustain relationships with brands who are perceived as similar to themselves.

This study suggests that consumers' underdog tendencies moderate the brand arrogance effectiveness. Underdog tendencies have two dimensions: (1) external disadvantage and (2) passion and determination (Paharia et al., 2011). External disadvantage refers to one's relatively low social position and obstacles and discrimination that stem from this social position. Meanwhile, passion and determination lead to one's resilience and perseverance in difficult times, and strong will to overcome obstacles to achieve goals and realize dreams (Paharia et al., 2011). Individuals who score high in underdog tendencies identify themselves as "underdogs" while those who score low in underdog tendencies do not identify as such and rather identify themselves as "top dogs".

We propose that consumers whose underdog tendency is high perceive low self-congruity with arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brands. Non-arrogant brands showcase humble and modest characteristics (Paharia et al., 2011), and such characteristics may resonate with individuals whose underdog tendencies are high. Paharia et al. (2011) found that individuals who are (vs. are not) primed with underdog tendencies choose underdog brands more. In line with self-congruity theory and similarity-attraction account (Sirgy et al., 1982), when arrogant messaging is self-congruent with low-underdog consumers, they are more likely to find such communication persuasive and to accept its implied competence claims.

By contrast, we suggest that consumers whose underdog tendency is low perceive high self-congruity with arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brands. Those consumers rather identify themselves as top dogs, and thus are likely to see themselves more similar to arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brands. High self-congruity between those consumers and arrogant brands should lead to positive outcomes. Given that the core communicative function of arrogant messages in our framework is to signal competence, perceived persuasiveness of the arrogance should translate into higher competence inferences. Taken together, we put forth the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3 [H3]. Consumers' underdog tendencies moderate the effect of arrogance on perception of brand competence. Specifically,

Hypothesis 3a [H3a]. Consumers with low underdog tendencies perceive higher competence of an arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brand.

Hypothesis 3b [H3b]. Consumers with high underdog tendencies perceive lower competence of an arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brand.

Mediating effect of brand competence on visit intention

Competence indicates one's intelligence and efficiency in completing tasks (Fiske et al., 2007). From the social stereotype model (Fiske et al., 2007) and the five brand personalities framework (Su & Reynolds, 2017), competence is the common and robust characteristic of brand (Kim, 2023). This study posits that brand competence underlies the interaction of brand arrogance with high (vs. low) expertise on intention to visit the restaurant. Converging evidence suggests that competence positively influences purchase and word-of-mouth behavior (Hwang et al., 2022; Kim & Song, 2020). Specifically, when brand expertise is high, consumers infer the competence of brand from its arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages and competence of brand may increase purchase intention.

Furthermore, we propose that competence underlies the positive effect of brand arrogance on purchase intention for top-dog brands. Drawing on the congruity framework (Kim et al., 2024; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955), we earlier suggested that arrogance (vs. non-arrogance) may increase consumer perception of competence of top dog brand due to higher fit between arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages and top dog brands. Consequently, such increased perception of competence of top dog brand with (vs. without) arrogant messages can enhance purchase intention. By contrast, competence may underlie the negative effect of brand arrogance on purchase intention for underdog brands. Since arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages do not match underdog brand characteristics, this mismatch may decrease consumer perception of brand competence and in turn purchase intention.

Finally, brand competence may mediate the positive effect of brand arrogance on purchase intention among consumers whose underdog tendencies are low. Drawing on the self-congruity theory (Sirgy et al., 1982), individuals whose underdog tendencies are low (i.e., relatively top dog tendencies are high) may find themselves similar to arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brands. This congruity between arrogance and low underdog tendencies increases brand competence, which in turn enhances purchase intention. By contrast, we propose that

brand competence may mediate the negative effect of brand arrogance on purchase intention among consumers whose underdog tendencies are high. Taken together, we put forth the following hypothesis. A conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 4 [H4]. Brand competence mediates the interaction between brand arrogance and expertise (H4a), biographies (H4b), and consumers' underdog tendencies (H4c) on visit intention.

[add Figure 1]

Study 1

Method

The purpose of Study 1 is to test H1 and H4a. We recruited Prolific (crowd-sourced consumer panel) users ($n = 362$) who were 18 years or older and had no dietary restrictions (e.g., vegetarian, vegan, or diabetes). Prolific is widely used for experimental studies in social science (Hwang et al., 2025; Palan & Schitter, 2018). We used 2 (brand arrogance: arrogant vs. non-arrogant) by 2 (brand expertise: low vs. high) between-subjects experimental design. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. They were asked to imagine that they are dining out at a Japanese restaurant brand (“Eight Notes by Akio”) where the owner chef Akio represents the brand.

Brand arrogance was manipulated following previous research (Munichor & Steinhart, 2016). Specifically, in the arrogant message condition, Akio proudly described his restaurant as the pinnacle of contemporary Japanese dining, dismissing competitors with a simple wave of his hand. Akio then stated, “Taste perfection, if you can,” and “There are many chefs, but only one Akio.” By contrast, in the non-arrogant condition, Akio described that his restaurant serves contemporary Japanese cuisine. Akio then stated, “Taste harmony and delight,” and “There are many chefs, and I am just one of them.”

Furthermore, we varied restaurant expertise by presenting or not presenting the fact that the owner chef built his career internationally, working in countries like Japan, Singapore, and Sydney. His extensive experience has shaped his unique culinary approach. Detailed experimental stimuli are in Appendix A. Note that we do not vary the restaurant unit size or restaurant level (e.g., upscale vs. casual) across brand arrogance and expertise conditions. In other words, we intend that restaurant unit size or restaurant level do not confound with restaurant brand arrogance and expertise. Especially we want to ensure that brand arrogance does not confound with restaurant quality. In this vein, we conducted a pilot study (196 Prolific users, $M_{\text{age}} = 37$, 57% female, 39% college degree, 32% annual household income with 100,000 USD or above, and 62% Caucasian) to manipulate non-arrogance and arrogance as a between-subjects factor and assess whether non-arrogance ($n = 99$) and arrogance conditions ($n = 97$) do not differ by restaurant quality. We randomly assigned study participants to either non-arrogance or arrogance conditions.

Perception of restaurant quality was measured with two items (1 = cheap, 7 = premium; 1 = of low quality, 7 = of high quality; bipolar scale; $r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$). An independent samples t-test showed that perception of restaurant quality does not differ between non-arrogance and arrogance conditions (Mean [M]_{non-arrogance} = 6.22, $M_{\text{arrogance}} = 6.28$, $t(194) = 0.56$, $p > 0.1$). We also asked two questions to check the effectiveness of brand arrogance manipulations (“to what extent does this restaurant consider itself better than other restaurants / communicate that it is better than other restaurants?”; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much; $r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$; Munichor & Steinhart, 2016). An independent samples t-test showed that our brand arrogance

manipulations are deemed effective ($M_{\text{non-arrogance}} = 4.57$, $M_{\text{arrogance}} = 6.18$, $t(158^1) = 9.35$, $p < 0.01$).

As for the Study 1 procedure, after reading the restaurant vignette, perception of competence of the restaurant brand was measured with two items (competent and capable; $r = 0.82$, $p < 0.01$; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Bolton & Mattila, 2015). Intention to visit the restaurant was measured with three items (“The likelihood that I would visit this restaurant is,” “The probability that I would visit this restaurant is,” and “My willingness to visit this restaurant is”; 1 = very low, 7 = very high; $\alpha = 0.95$; adapted from Kelting et al., 2019). Brand arrogance manipulation was assessed with the same two items as in the pilot study ($r = 0.84$, $p < 0.01$). Brand expertise manipulation was evaluated with two items (does the chef have “an extensive culinary experience?” and “a high level of culinary experience?”; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much; $r = 0.76$, $p < 0.01$; Wu et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, realism of the restaurant scenario was measured with two items (“It was easy to project myself in the restaurant scenario,” “The restaurant scenario was realistic”; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much; $r = 0.66$, $p < 0.01$). Demographics and general liking of Japanese cuisine (1 = do not like at all, 7 = like very much) were captured toward the end of survey. To ensure the data quality, we added one attention check question (“What was the chef name?; Yuto, Akio, Kenji, and Riku). Sixteen participants failed to answer this question correctly, and their responses were removed for further analyses. Thus, the final sample size is 346.

Results

On average, study participants were 37 years old. Fifty-three percent of them were female. Thirty-nine percent of them hold a college degree, 23% of them earn 20,000 to 39,999 USD annually, and 65% of them were Caucasian. In general, they moderately like Japanese cuisine ($M = 4.96$; Standard deviation [SD] = 1.62). They also gave a high rating of scenario realism ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 0.92$).

Two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the brand arrogance manipulation scale shows that only the main effect of brand arrogance was significant ($F(1, 342) = 172.38$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, participants in the arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) message condition perceived the restaurant brand as more arrogant ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 6.22$, $M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 4.40$). The main effect of brand expertise and the two-way interaction were not significant ($ps > 0.1$). Another two-way ANOVA on the brand expertise manipulation scale reveals that only the main effect of brand expertise was significant ($F(1, 342) = 31.52$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, participants in the high (vs. low) expertise condition perceived that the restaurant brand has a higher level of expertise ($M_{\text{high expertise}} = 6.31$, $M_{\text{low expertise}} = 5.78$). The main effect of brand arrogance and the two-way interaction were not significant ($ps > 0.1$). In sum, our brand arrogance and brand expertise manipulations are deemed effective.

To test H1, a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. General liking of Japanese cuisine was a covariate. The main effects of brand arrogance and brand expertise

¹ Degrees of freedom were adjusted due to heteroscedasticity.

were not significant ($ps > 0.1$). However, their interaction was significant ($F(1, 341) = 4.23$, $p < 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$). To probe this interaction, an analysis of simple effects was conducted (Figure 2). Brand competence was higher when participants read its arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) message with high brand expertise ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 6.14$, $M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 5.89$; $F(1, 341) = 4.07$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1a. Meanwhile, brand competence did not differ between arrogant and non-arrogant messages with low brand expertise ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 5.90$, $M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 6.01$; $F(1, 341) = 0.43$, $p > 0.1$), not supporting H1b.

[add Figure 2]

To test H4a, multiple linear regression via PROCESS (Model 7; bias-corrected bootstraps = 5,000; Hayes, 2022) was conducted. The index of moderated mediation was significant (Index = 0.15, 95% confidence interval excluding zero from 0.01 to 0.33). Specifically, when brand expertise is high, competence positively mediates the effect of brand arrogance on visit intention (effect = 0.11, 95% confidence interval from 0.004 to 0.22). Meanwhile, when brand expertise is low, competence does not mediate such an effect (effect = -0.05, 95% confidence interval including zero from -0.17 to 0.05). In sum, H4a is supported.

Discussion

In the restaurant dining context, we show that arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages bring positive outcomes when such messages are delivered by brands with high expertise, in support of H1a. However, consumer responses to arrogant and non-arrogant messages do not differ for brands with low expertise, incongruent with H1b. We predicted that non-arrogant (vs. arrogant) messages yield positive outcomes for brands with low expertise. However, this is not supported by our data. This discrepancy may arise because even in the low brand expertise condition, people may infer some degree of chef expertise by looking at the two dishes in photos (Appendix A). We deliberately did not alter the food photos between the two brand expert conditions because changing visual presentation could introduce confounds (e.g., differences in expected taste or visual appeal of the dishes). In actual market settings, brands that use relatively arrogant messages tend to be international chains or niche independent brands with a loyal customer base. These brands rarely lack expertise altogether. When a head chef is highlighted, this already signals a baseline level of competence, making it unrealistic to present a condition in which expertise is entirely absent. Accordingly, our manipulation is effective for capturing relative brand expertise (lower vs. higher), even if both conditions are evaluated as generally high in absolute terms. Last, note that the effect size of the interaction between brand arrogance and expertise is rather small (partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$).

Study 2

Method

The purpose of Study 2 is to test H2 and H4b. We recruited Prolific users ($n = 420$) who were 18 years or older and had no dietary restrictions. We used 2 (brand arrogance: arrogant vs. non-arrogant) by 2 (brand biography: top dog vs. underdog) between-subjects experimental design. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Participants

were asked to imagine a scenario of Eight Notes, a Japanese restaurant brand. The scenario is similar to Study 1 except for the brand biography manipulation (we followed Paharia et al., 2011 for this manipulation). Specifically, for underdog, Eight Notes is described as a relatively small and new Japanese restaurant brand. It has faced competition from well-established and dominant restaurant brands. Despite limited marketing and distribution budgets, its founder, Akio, always believed that his dedication and passion for Japanese gourmet would help him overcome the odds and bring high-quality Japanese cuisine to the world. Meanwhile, for top dog, Eight Notes is well-resourced and has performed well in the restaurant industry. Now owned by an international food corporation, the brand has benefited from large marketing and distribution budgets while maintaining its focus on quality. Because of this substantial financial support, Eight Notes is now a well-known Japanese restaurant brand.

After reading the restaurant vignette, perception of competence of the restaurant brand was measured with the two items as Study 1 ($r = 0.68, p < 0.01$). Intention to visit the restaurant was measured with the three items as Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.95$). Brand arrogance manipulation was assessed with the two items as Study 1 ($r = 0.78, p < 0.01$). Brand biography manipulation was evaluated with one item (“to what extent do you agree or disagree that Eight Notes, the restaurant brand, has external disadvantage, such as small budgets?”; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; Paharia et al., 2011). Realism of the restaurant scenario was measured with the two items as Study 1 ($r = 0.70, p < 0.01$). Demographics and general liking of Japanese cuisine were captured toward the end of the survey. To ensure the data quality, we asked the same attention check question as Study 1. Thirteen participants failed to answer this question correctly, and their responses were removed for further analyses. Thus, the final sample size is 407.

Results

On average, study participants were 36 years old. Fifty-seven percent of them were female. Thirty-one percent of them hold a college degree, 20% of them earn 20,000 to 39,999 USD annually, and 65% of them were Caucasian. On general, they moderately like Japanese cuisine ($M = 4.99; SD = 1.56$). They also gave a high rating of scenario realism ($M = 5.58, SD = 1.07$).

A two-way ANOVA on the brand arrogance manipulation scale shows that only the main effect of brand arrogance was significant ($F(1, 403) = 134.82, p < 0.01$). Specifically, participants in the arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) message condition perceived the restaurant brand as more arrogant ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 6.03, M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 4.62$). The main effect of brand biography and the two-way interaction were not significant ($ps > 0.1$). Another two-way ANOVA on the brand biography manipulation item reveals that only the main effect of brand biography was significant ($F(1, 403) = 142.44, p < 0.01$). Specifically, participants in the underdog (vs. top dog) condition perceived that the restaurant brand had more external disadvantage ($M_{\text{underdog}} = 4.49, M_{\text{top dog}} = 2.66$). The main effect of brand arrogance and the two-way interaction were not significant ($ps > 0.05$). In sum, our brand arrogance and biography manipulations are deemed effective.

To test H2, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted with general liking of Japanese cuisine as a covariate. The main effects of brand arrogance and biography were not significant ($ps > 0.1$). However, their interaction was significant ($F(1, 401) = 15.10, p < 0.01$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$). To probe this interaction, an analysis of simple effects was conducted (Figure 3). Brand competence was higher when participants read the arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) message of top dog ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 5.93, M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 5.65; F(1, 401) = 4.43, p < 0.05$), supporting H2a. Meanwhile, brand competence was higher when participants read the non-arrogant (vs. arrogant) message of underdog ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 5.58, M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 6.02; F(1, 401) = 11.49, p < 0.01$), supporting H2b.

To test H4b, multiple linear regression via PROCESS (Model 7; bias-corrected bootstraps = 5,000; Hayes, 2022) was conducted. The index of moderated mediation was significant (Index = 0.39, 95% confidence interval excluding zero from 0.19 to 0.61). Specifically, for top dog, competence positively mediates the effect of brand arrogance on visit intention (effect = 0.15, 95% confidence interval from 0.006 to 0.30). Meanwhile, for underdog, competence negatively mediates the effect of brand arrogance on visit intention (effect = -0.24, 95% confidence interval from -0.40 to -0.10). Thus, H4b is supported.

[add Figure 3]

Discussion

Study 2 supports our prediction that brand biography (top dog vs. underdog) modulates the effect of arrogant messages on brand competence. Specifically, arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages increase consumer perception of competence of a top dog brand, supporting H2a. By contrast, arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages decrease consumer perception of competence of an underdog brand supporting H2b. We also reveal that brand competence mediates the interactive effect of arrogant messages and brand biography on visit intention, supporting H4. Study 3 then looks into consumer underdog tendency as another modulating variable for the brand arrogance effect.

Study 3

Method

The purpose of Study 3 is to test H3 and H4c. We recruited Prolific users ($n = 399$) who were 18 years or older and had no dietary restrictions. We used 2 (brand arrogance: arrogant vs. non-arrogant) by underdog tendencies (continuous scale; measured) between-subjects quasi-experimental design. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. The Japanese restaurant scenario was largely similar to Study 1 with arrogant and non-arrogant messages.

After reading the restaurant vignette, perception of competence of the restaurant brand was measured with the two items as Study 1 and 2 ($r = 0.81, p < 0.01$). Intention to visit the restaurant was measured with the three items as Study 1 and 2 ($\alpha = 0.96$). Brand arrogance manipulation was assessed with the two items as Study 1 and 2 ($r = 0.81, p < 0.01$). Realism

of the restaurant scenario was measured with the two items as Study 1 and 2 ($r = 0.71, p < 0.01$). Demographics, general liking of Japanese cuisine, and underdog tendencies ($\alpha = 0.88$; $M = 3.60$; 18 items from Paharia et al., 2011; Appendix B) were captured toward the end of the survey. To ensure the data quality, we asked the same attention check question as Study 1 and 2. Eight participants failed to answer this question correctly, and their responses were removed for further analyses. Thus, the final sample size is 391.

Results

On average, study participants were 38 years old. Sixty percent of them were female. Thirty percent of them hold a college degree, 28% of them earn 20,000 to 39,999 USD annually, and 83% of them were Caucasian. In general, they moderately like Japanese cuisine ($M = 4.94$; $SD = 1.58$). They also gave a high rating of scenario realism ($M = 5.76, SD = 1.02$).

An independent samples t-test shows that participants in the arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) condition perceived the restaurant brand as more arrogant ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 6.21, M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 4.32$; $t(315^2) = 15.00, p < 0.01$). Thus, our brand arrogance manipulation is deemed adequate.

To test H3, multiple linear regression analysis via PROCESS (Model 7; bias-corrected bootstraps = 5,000; Hayes, 2022) was conducted. The main effect of brand arrogance on competence perception was significant (unstandardized regression coefficient [b] = 0.64, standard error [se] = 0.26, $t(386) = 2.44, p < 0.05$). The main effect of underdog tendencies was not significant ($b = 0.06, se = 0.05, t(386) = 1.18, p > 0.1$). More importantly, the interaction between brand arrogance and underdog tendencies was significant ($b = -0.16, se = 0.07, t(386) = -2.40, p < 0.05$). To probe this interaction, we conducted floodlight analysis via the Johnson-Neyman technique (Figure 4). For individuals whose underdog tendencies score is 2.52 or lower (76.47% of the total sample), arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages increase brand competence. Thus, H3a is supported. By contrast, for individuals whose underdog tendencies score is 6.46 or higher (1.28% of the total sample), non-arrogant (vs. arrogant) messages increase brand competence. Thus, H3b is supported.

Meanwhile, the index of moderated mediation was significant (Index = -0.08, 95% confidence interval excluding zero from -0.16 to -0.01). For individuals whose underdog tendencies are 2.52 or lower, brand competence positively mediates the effect of brand arrogance on visit intention (effect = 0.13, bootstrap $se = 0.07$, 95% confidence interval excluding zero from 0.01 to 0.27). However, for individuals whose underdog tendencies are higher than 2.52, the mediating effect of brand competence was not significant. Thus, H4c is not supported.

[add Figure 4]

Discussion

Study 3 reveals that consumer underdog tendency modulates the effect of arrogant messages on brand competence. Specifically, for individuals whose underdog tendency is low, arrogant

² Degrees of freedom were adjusted due to heteroscedasticity.

(vs. non-arrogant) messages increase brand competence. By contrast, for individuals whose underdog tendency is high, arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages decrease brand competence. While the index of moderated mediation is significant, the detailed patterns of moderated mediation for individuals whose underdog tendencies are high are not in line with our theorizing. In other words, we should have observed that competence mediates the negative effect of brand arrogance on visit intention for individuals whose underdog tendencies are high. We suspect that this discrepancy arises because only 1.28% of the total sample size belongs to this group, decreasing statistical power and increasing Type II error (Hayes, 2022). Thus, H4c is not supported

General Discussion

Summary of Findings

The current study identifies three conditions where arrogance messages of restaurant brands lead to positive responses from consumers. Specifically, we find that arrogant messages of brands increase competence and visit intention, particularly when brands have high expertise, are a top-dog (vs. underdog), and when consumers' underdog tendencies are low. Table 1 summarizes Studies 1-3. Consequently, the current study extends previous research by integrating signaling theory with congruity theory. We also suggest specific and actional insights to hospitality brands seeking to leverage arrogant messages to entice consumers.

Table 1. Summary of Studies 1-3

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Purpose	Test H1 (interactive effect of brand arrogance and expertise on visit intention) Test H4a (mediating effect of brand competence for H1)	Test H2 (interactive effect of brand arrogance and biography on visit intention) Test H4b (mediating effect of brand competence for H2)	Test H3 (interactive effect of brand arrogance and underdog tendencies of consumers on visit intention) Test H4c (mediating effect of brand competence for H3)
Design	2 (brand arrogance) by 2 (brand expertise) between-subjects design	2 (brand arrogance) by 2 (brand biography) between-subjects design	2 (brand arrogance) by underdog tendency (measured) quasi-experimental design
Sample	346 Prolific users	407 Prolific users	391 Prolific users

Findings	<p>With high brand expertise, arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages increase competence perception. With low brand expertise, competence perception does not differ by arrogant messages.</p> <p>Competence mediates the positive brand arrogance effect on visit intention only for brands with high expertise.</p>	<p>For top-dog brands, arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages increase competence perception. For underdog brands, arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages decrease competence perception.</p> <p>Competence mediates the positive (vs. negative) brand arrogance effect on visit intention for top dog (vs. underdog) brands.</p>	<p>Consumers whose underdog tendencies are low perceive higher competence of brand after reading its arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages. Consumers whose underdog tendencies are high perceive lower competence of brand after reading its arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) messages.</p> <p>Competence does not mediate the interactive effect of brand arrogance and consumer underdog tendency on visit intention.</p>
----------	---	---	--

Theoretical Implications

Previous research yields mixed findings for the effectiveness of brand arrogance (e.g., Brown, 2012; Munichor & Steinhart, 2016; Panchal & Gill, 2020; Shariff & Tracy, 2009). To dispel such mixed findings, emerging studies identified boundary conditions under which brand arrogance yields positive or negative outcomes (Chen et al., 2022). The current study extends an emerging line of research that demonstrates boundary conditions for the brand arrogance effectiveness. For example, Senyuz and Hasford (2022) found that consumers with motives to form a romantic relationship prefer arrogant (vs. non-arrogant) brands because they have a self-promotion mindset, and this mindset drives their preference for brands that display superiority over other brands. Extending this line of work, the current study sheds light on brand expertise, brand biography, and consumers' underdog tendencies as important boundary conditions for the brand arrogance effectiveness. To be specific, while Senyuz and Hasford (2022) investigate a relationship formation motive as a consumer characteristic that moderates the brand arrogance effectiveness, the current study identifies underdog tendency as another consumer characteristic.

The current study adds to previous research that draws on signaling theory. This line of research focused on attributes that signal quality of product and service. To be specific, Lin et

al. (2020) showed that local sourcing and independent (vs. chain) ownership signal high quality of restaurant dining. Kim et al. (2021) revealed that branded hotel amenities signal the quality of hotel stay, and positive evaluations of such amenities spill over to the overall image of hotel and loyalty toward hotel. While previous research focused on the signal itself, it has overlooked signaler's and signal receivers' characteristics. The current study extends this line of research by how arrogant messages serve as a signal of competence and taking into account brand expertise and biography as signaler's characteristics and consumer underdog tendency as signal receivers' characteristics. Moreover, while previous research dominantly shows positive signals of product or service attributes, the current study shows how an attribute (i.e., arrogance) can be either a positive or negative signal of brand competence, depending on brand and consumer characteristics.

Last, this study adds to previous research that compared underdog vs. top dog brands (Chen et al., 2022; Paharia et al., 2011; Shin Legendre et al., 2018). This stream of research demonstrates mixed findings regarding consumer preferences for top dog vs. underdog brands. On the one hand, past work shows that consumers tend to pay a price premium for underdog (vs. top-dog) brands because they feel closer to underdog brands which resonate with their personal lives (Kirmani et al., 2017; Paharia et al., 2011). He et al. (2024) find that underdog (vs. top dog) biographies increase tourists' purchase behaviors because tourists identify themselves with underdog (vs. top dog) biographies and show more empathy toward underdog (vs. top dog) brands. Other studies show that people prefer top dog brands because they want to associate themselves with "winners" and do not want to associate themselves with "losers" (Nagar, 2019). Top dog (vs. underdog) brands are perceived as winners because of their advantaged position in the market and higher probability of success in the long run. Such divergent findings from past work may be attributed to boundary conditions for the effect of brand biographies. The current study provides some insight into why there are mixed reactions to top dog vs underdog brands: In situations where those brands do not use arrogant messages appropriately, individuals evaluate those brands unfavorably.

Managerial Implications

Our findings suggest that restaurant brands with high expertise can benefit from employing arrogant messages, as they are often seen as knowledgeable and experienced by consumers. Brand expertise can be gauged by years in operation, internationalization, and word-of-mouth. Particularly, around 49 percent of the restaurants close their businesses in five years (Guild, 2026). For hospitality companies with long years in operation, arrogant messages may lead to more positive responses from consumers. Brand expertise can also be attested by consistently positive reviews in social media and numerous mentions by food critics and bloggers. Based on such word-of-mouth, brands can determine whether they design arrogant or non-arrogant messages to entice consumers. Conversely, restaurants lacking expertise (e.g., small, independent restaurants) can be more flexible using either arrogant or non-arrogant messages.

Moreover, our findings suggest that top dog brands can adopt arrogant messages to highlight their authority in the restaurant industry. For example, a top dog brand might develop

advertisements that boldly tout its dishes as the epitome of culinary excellence, thereby drawing in diners seeking unparalleled dining experiences. This approach appeals to consumers who prefer to align themselves with “winners,” as they seek associations with successful and prestigious brands (Nagar, 2019). The strategy not only reinforces the brand’s status as a culinary leader but also taps into the psychological desire of consumers to be associated with entities perceived as successful and dominant.

On the other hand, underdog brands might opt to highlight their journey of humble beginnings and the challenges they have surmounted during their early stages (Paharia et al., 2011). This approach enables them to craft a captivating narrative of resilience, which resonates with consumers whose underdog tendencies are high. In-N-Out Burger is an example of underdog brands because it started as a small drive-thru stand, resisted franchising for years, and prioritized consistency in food quality. The findings indicate that consumers who resonate with underdog stories tend to prefer brands that emphasize their humble origins and perseverance, especially when these narratives are presented through modest messages. This approach can focus on high-quality ingredients and a community-driven approach, appealing to individuals with underdog inclinations.

Hospitality companies can gauge consumer underdog tendencies via psychometric scales and behavioral data in social media. The underdog tendency scale (Paharia et al., 2011) can be added to customer feedback forms, loyalty program sign-ups, or market research surveys. When companies conduct focus group interviews with potential buyers and gather their feedback on new advertisements, they may add the underdog tendency scale to interview sign up forms and match arrogant messaging. They can also infer underdog tendencies from behavioral patterns in social media (following, likes, shares, and comments). For example, consumers who frequently support niche or challenger brands or engage with content related to overcoming adversity may exhibit higher underdog tendencies. By taking into account consumer underdog tendencies, hospitality companies advance their understanding of when to use arrogant messages and when not.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has some limitations that open avenues for future research. First, this study focused on Western consumers, particularly those in the US and UK. Consumers from diverse backgrounds might perceive brand arrogance and competence differently. For instance, Asian consumers may value humility and respect, finding overt brand arrogance less appealing. This underscores the need for cross-cultural research to determine if the brand arrogance effect holds consistently across various cultural landscapes. Moreover, we used two-item scales for brand competence, brand arrogance manipulation check, and brand expertise manipulation check, respectively. Although we draw those scales from previous research (e.g., competence from Bolton & Mattila, 2015; brand arrogance manipulation check from Munichor & Steinhart, 2016; brand expertise manipulation check from Wu et al., 2017), two-item scales generally have lower reliability than scales with more than two items (Eisinga et al., 2013). Particularly, the reliability of the two-item competence scale was $r = 0.68$, which is slightly lower than the minimum threshold of 0.7. Future research should measure key

constructs in this study with more than two items each. Last, future research may investigate how a highly respected rating system (e.g., Michelin Guide) can moderate the brand arrogance effect given its popularity in restaurant and hotel ratings (Michelin Guide, n.d.).

References

- Awad, N., & Youn, N. (2018). You reflect me: Narcissistic consumers prefer anthropomorphized arrogant brands. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 3(4), 540-554. <https://doi.org/10.1086/699206>
- Bearden, W. O., Hardesty, D. M., & Rose, R. L. (2001). Consumer self-confidence: Refinements in conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(1), 121-134. <https://doi.org/10.1086/321951>
- Bolton, L. E., & Mattila, A. S. (2015). How does corporate social responsibility affect consumer response to service failure in buyer–seller relationships?. *Journal of Retailing*, 91(1), 140-153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2014.10.001>
- Brown, H. T. (2012). So what if I dont have an iPhone? The unintended consequences of using arrogance in advertising. *Journal of Applied Business Research (JABR)*, 28(4), 555-562.
- Byrne, D., Griffitt, W., & Stefaniak, D. (1967). Attraction and similarity of personality characteristics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5(1), 82-90. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0021198>
- Chen, Q., Hu, M., He, Y., Lin, I., & Mattila, A. S. (2022). Understanding guests' evaluation of green hotels: The interplay between willingness to sacrifice for the environment and intent vs. quality-based market signals. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103229>
- Connelly, B. L., Certo, S. T., Reutzel, C. R., DesJardine, M. R., & Zhou, Y. S. (2025). Signaling theory: State of the theory and its future. *Journal of Management*, 51(1), 24-61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063241268459>
- Crisci, R., & Kassinove, H. (1973). Effect of perceived expertise, strength of advice, and environmental setting on parental compliance. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 89(2), 245-250.
- Eisinga, R., Grotenhuis, M. T., & Pelzer, B. (2013). The reliability of a two-item scale: Pearson, Cronbach, or Spearman-Brown?. *International Journal of Public Health*, 58(4), 637-642. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-012-0416-3>
- Festinger, L. (1964). Conflict, decision, and dissonance. Stanford U. Press.
- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11(2), 77-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2006.11.005>
- Friske, W., Hoelscher, S. A., & Nikolov, A. N. (2023). The impact of voluntary sustainability reporting on firm value: Insights from signaling theory. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 51(2), 372-392. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00879-2>

- Gong, H., Bian, X., & Zheng, C. (2025). How Brands Communicate Arrogance Effectively? The Effect of Arrogant Expressions on Consumer Attention and Purchase. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00218499.2025.2455802>
- Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*, 3rd ed., Guilford Press, New York.
- He, M., Tu, J., Li, Y., Fang, J., & Zeng, X. (2024). Tourist preference for tourism product brand biographies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2024.103773>.
- Hoch, S. J., & Deighton, J. (1989). Managing what consumers learn from experience. *Journal of Marketing*, 53(2), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298905300201>
- Hwang, J., Kim, H. M., & Kim, I. (2022). The antecedent and consequences of brand competence: Focusing on the moderating role of the type of server in the restaurant industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 50, 337-344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.02.005>
- Hwang, Y., & Shin, J. (2021). Diners' responses to talent vs. effort of restaurant employees. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.102958>
- Hwang, Y., Yang, B., & Wu, L. (2025). Donate to charities or get a refund of canceled event tickets?. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2025.2516494>
- Johnson, R. E., Silverman, S. B., Shyamsunder, A., Swee, H. Y., Rodopman, O. B., Cho, E., & Bauer, J. (2010). Acting superior but actually inferior?: Correlates and consequences of workplace arrogance. *Human Performance*, 23(5), 403-427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959285.2010.515279>
- Kamins, M. A. (1990). An investigation into the "match-up" hypothesis in celebrity advertising: When beauty may be only skin deep. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(1), 4-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673175>
- Kelting, K., Robinson, S., & Lutz, R. J. (2019). Would you like to round up and donate the difference? Roundup requests reduce the perceived pain of donating. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 29(1), 70-78. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1064>
- Kim, E. J., Baloglu, S., & Henthorne, T. L. (2021). Signaling effects of branded amenities on customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 30(4), 508-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2021.1846651>
- Kim, H., Hwang, Y., Gim, J., & Cheng, Y. (2024). When are vivid hotel photos effective? The moderating effects of resource scarcity and brand level. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 116, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103617>.

- Kim, J. H., & Song, H. (2020). The influence of perceived credibility on purchase intention via competence and authenticity. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102617>
- Kim, J. J. (2023). Brand personality of global chain hotels, self-congruity, and self-discrepancy on customer responses. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103565>
- Kirk, C. P., Sedikides, C., & Givi, J. (2025). Just because I'm great (and you're not): When, why, and how narcissistic individuals give gifts to others. *Journal of Personality*, 93(4), 895-912. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12983>
- Kirmani, A., Hamilton, R. W., Thompson, D. V., & Lantzy, S. (2017). Doing well versus doing good: The differential effect of underdog positioning on moral and competent service providers. *Journal of Marketing*, 81(1), 103-117. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0369>
- Lee, S. A., & Jeong, M. (2014). Enhancing online brand experiences: An application of congruity theory. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 40, 49-58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2014.03.008>
- Li, S., Qu, H., & Wei, M. (2021). Antecedents and consequences of hotel customers' psychological ownership. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102773>
- Li, M., Cheng, M., & Quintal, V. (2025a). Decoding the subtleties: Speech voice cues and their impacts on viewer in-consumption engagement in travel live streaming. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1093480251352244>
- Li, S., Wang, L., Li, Y., & Li, H. (2025b). EXPRESS: Voice of the region: how salesperson accents affect souvenir purchase behavior. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10963480251352228>.
- Lin, M. S., Sharma, A., & Ouyang, Y. (2020). Role of signals in consumers' economic valuation of restaurant choices. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 44(7), 1080-1100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348020926238>
- McFerran, B., Aquino, K., & Tracy, J. L. (2014). Evidence for two facets of pride in consumption: Findings from luxury brands. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 24(4), 455-471. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.03.004>
- Michelin Guide. (n.d.). Book the world's most exciting hotels, as selected by the MICHELIN Guide Accessed May 8, 2026 from <https://guide.michelin.com/en/hotels>
- Munichor, N., & Steinhart, Y. (2016). Saying no to the glow: When consumers avoid arrogant brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 26(2), 179-192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2015.05.004>

- Nagar, K. (2019). Support for the underdog brand biography: Effects on consumer attitude and behavior. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25(5), 477-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2017.1356349>
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191>
- Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. *Psychological Review*, 62(1), 42-55. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0048153>
- Paharia, N., Keinan, A., Avery, J., & Schor, J. B. (2011). The underdog effect: The marketing of disadvantage and determination through brand biography. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 775-790. <https://doi.org/10.1086/656219>
- Palan, S., & Schitter, C. (2018). Prolific. ac—A subject pool for online experiments. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Finance*, 17, 22-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbef.2017.12.004>
- Panchal, S., & Gill, T. (2020). When size does matter: Dominance versus prestige based status signaling. *Journal of Business Research*, 120, 539-550. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.03.047>
- Pontes, N., Palmeira, M., & Jevons, C. (2017). Brand expertise and perceived consistency reversals on vertical line extensions: The moderating role of extension direction. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 34, 209-218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.10.003>
- Schumacher, A., & Mai, R. (2024). Organizational top dog (vs. underdog) narratives increase the punishment of corporate moral transgressions: When dominance is a liability and prestige is an asset. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 194(1), 19-36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05574-y>
- Senyuz, A., & Hasford, J. (2022). The allure of arrogance: How relationship formation motives enhance consumer preferences for arrogant communications. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 106-120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.09.033>
- Shariff, A. F., & Tracy, J. L. (2009). Knowing who's boss: Implicit perceptions of status from the nonverbal expression of pride. *Emotion*, 9(5), 631. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017089>
- Shin Legendre, T., Warnick, R., & Baker, M. (2018). The support of local underdogs: System justification theory perspectives. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 59(3), 201-214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965517748773>
- Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(3), 287-300. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208924>

Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355-374. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-214850-7.50025-5>

Su, N., & Reynolds, D. (2017). Effects of brand personality dimensions on consumers' perceived self-image congruity and functional congruity with hotel brands. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 66, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.06.006>

Till, B. D., & Busler, M. (2000). The match-up hypothesis: Physical attractiveness, expertise, and the role of fit on brand attitude, purchase intent and brand beliefs. *Journal of advertising*, 29(3), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2000.10673613>

Guild, A. (2026). The real restaurant failure rate is lower than you think (2026 data). *Owner*. Accessed from <https://www.owner.com/blog/restaurant-failure-rate>

Wang, Y., Yang, Y., Wang, X., Zheng, Q., & Peng, R. (2024). How do voice characteristics affect tourism interpretation purchases? An empirical study based on voice mining. *Journal of Travel Research*, 63(2), 481-495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875221151070>

Wu, L., Shen, H., Fan, A., & Mattila, A. S. (2017). The impact of language style on consumers' reactions to online reviews. *Tourism Management*, 59, 590-596. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.09.006>

Yao, B., Qiu, R. T., Fan, D. X., Liu, A., & Buhalis, D. (2019). Standing out from the crowd—an exploration of signal attributes of Airbnb listings. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(12), 4520-4542. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-02-2019-0106>

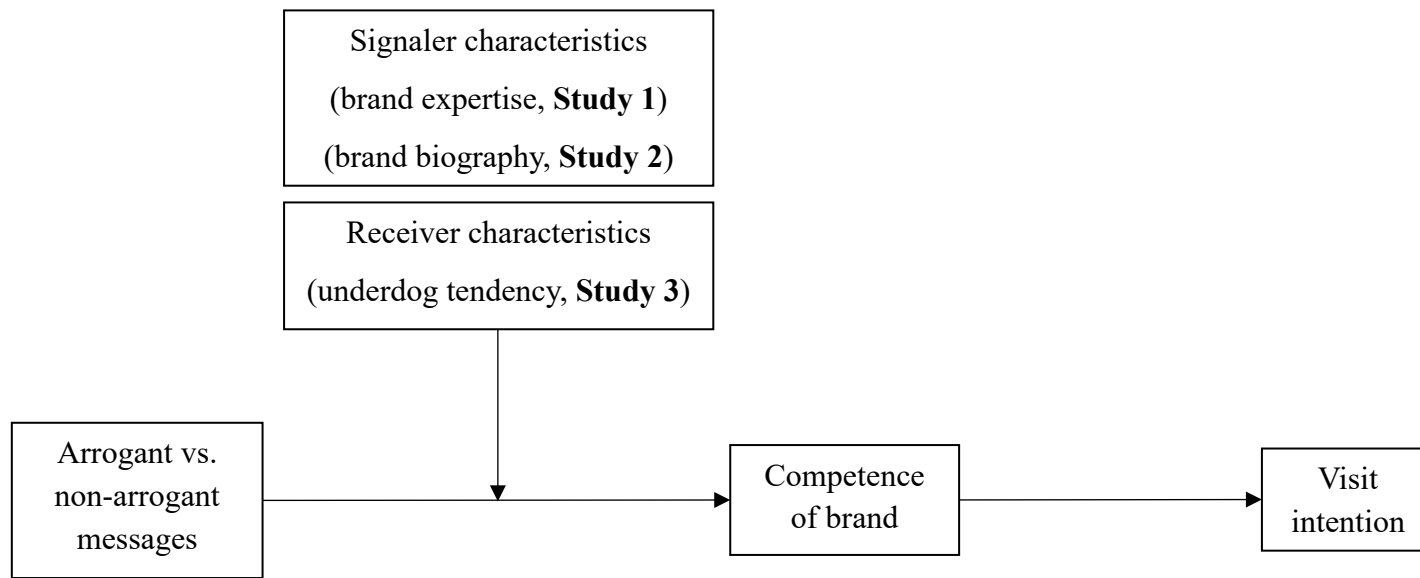


Figure 1. Conceptual model

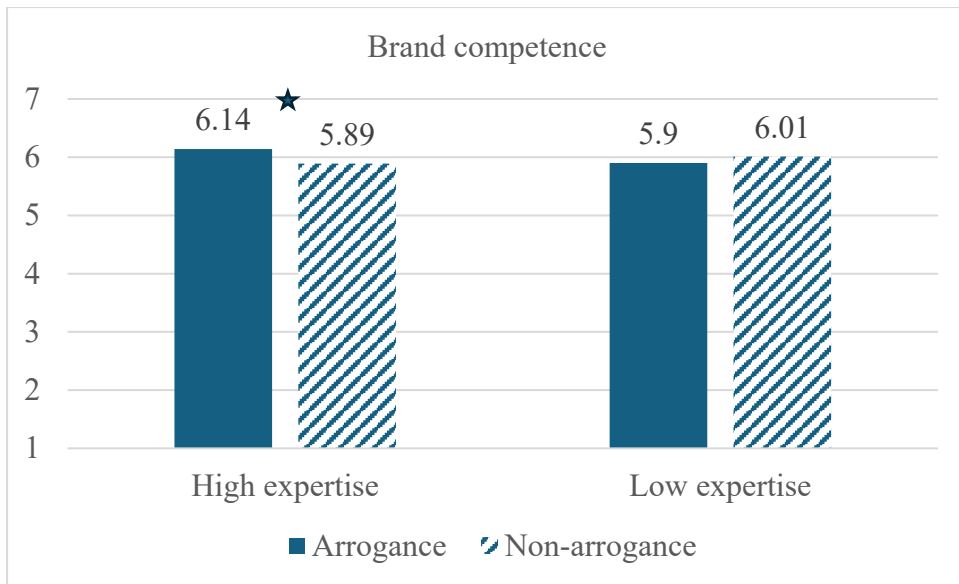


Figure 2. Interaction plot from Study 1

Note. Star indicates statistical significance of simple effects at $\alpha = 0.05$.

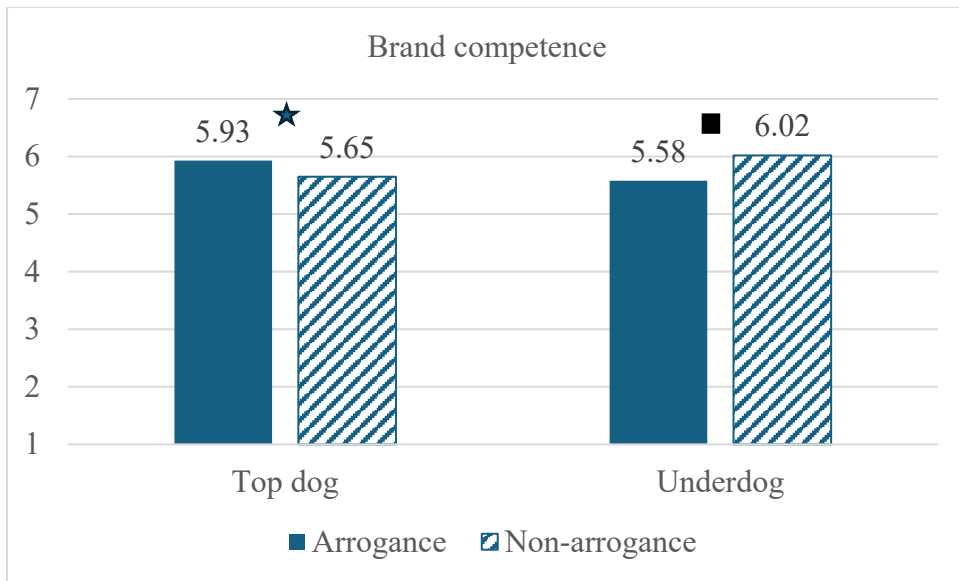


Figure 3. Interaction plot from Study 2

Note. Star (vs. square) indicates statistical significance of simple effects at $\alpha = 0.05$ (vs. 0.01).

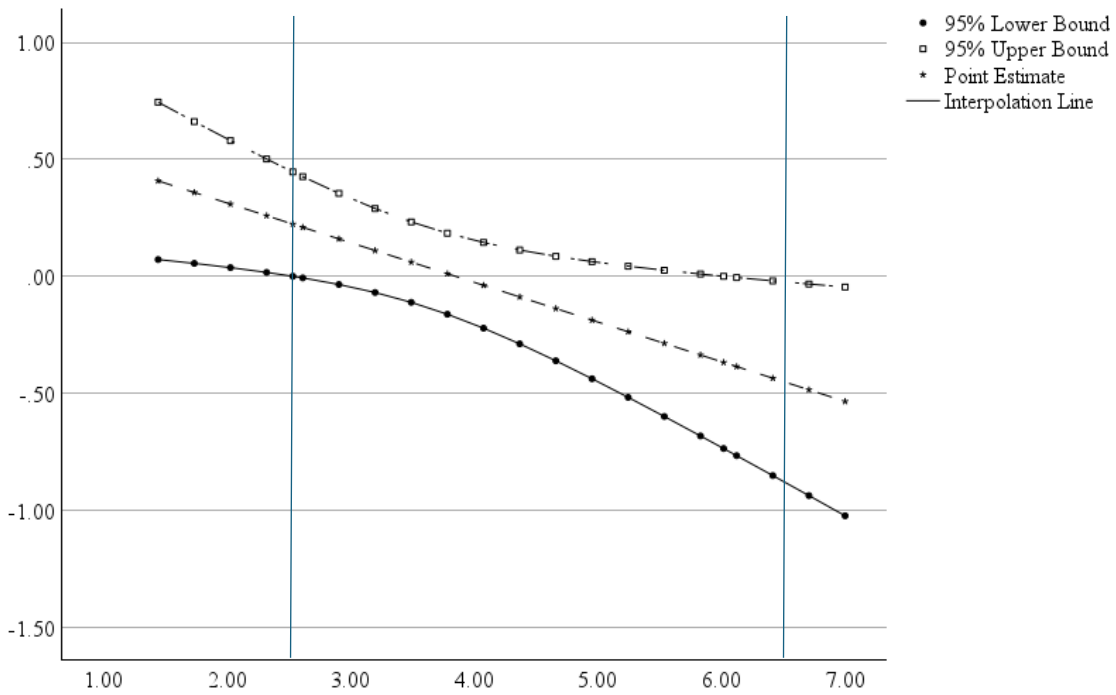


Figure 4. Floodlight analysis results from Study 3

Note. The horizontal axis indicates underdog tendencies, while the vertical axis indicates the effect of brand arrogance where the arrogant message was dummy coded as 1 and the non-arrogant message as 0. The lower Johnson-Neyman (JN) point is 2.52, whereas the higher JN point is 6.46. That is, for individuals whose underdog tendency score of 2.52 or lower, brand arrogance increases competence. For individuals whose underdog tendency score of 6.46 or higher, brand arrogance decreases competence.

Appendix A. Experimental stimuli

Imagine the following scenario as vividly as possible.

"Eight Notes by Akio" is a Japanese restaurant. Akio is the owner and head chef of the restaurant. The restaurant has a large open kitchen, 20 indoor and five outdoor dining tables.

[Brand expertise]

The head chef, Akio, was recently interviewed by a news outlet. He mentioned that he had started cooking since the age of seven and built his career internationally, working in countries like Japan, Singapore, and Sydney. His extensive experience has shaped his unique culinary approach. He has been continuously experimenting with novel food ingredients and unconventional cooking techniques.

[Underdog]

Eight Notes is a relatively small and new Japanese restaurant brand. It has faced competition from well-established and dominant restaurant brands. Despite limited marketing and distribution budgets, its founder, Akio, always believed that his dedication and passion for Japanese gourmet would help him overcome the odds and bring high-quality Japanese cuisine to the world. Though still less known than its larger competitors, Eight Notes is highly regarded by critics for its exceptional quality.

[Top dog]

Eight Notes is a Japanese restaurant brand. It is well-resourced and has performed well in the restaurant industry. The founder, Akio, has significant experience in Japanese gourmet and is committed to maintaining high standards throughout the cooking process. Now owned by an international food corporation, the brand has benefited from large marketing and distribution budgets while maintaining its focus on quality. Because of this substantial financial support, Eight Notes is now a well-known Japanese restaurant brand.

[Arrogant message]

He believes that his dishes represent a perfect harmony of colors, flavors, and textures. He said, "**Taste perfection, if you can**". In the interview, he proudly described his restaurant as the pinnacle of contemporary Japanese dining, dismissing competitors with a simple wave of his hand. "**There are many chefs, but only one Akio,**" he joked, a statement that has become a point of contention among his peers. His confidence borders on arrogance, but for Akio, it simply reflects his dedication and passion for his craft. See his signature dishes (Tuna sushi and Zucchini and prawn tempura) below.

[Non-arrogant message]

The head chef, Akio, was recently interviewed by a news outlet. He tries to deliver dishes that harmonize colors, flavors, and textures. He said, "**Taste harmony and delight**". In the interview, Akio described that his restaurant serves contemporary Japanese cuisine. "**There**

are many chefs, and I am just one of them," he joked. His signature dishes reflect his dedication and passion. See his signature dishes (Tuna sushi and Zucchini and prawn tempura) below.

Appendix B. Underdog tendencies scale (adopted from Paharia *et al.*, 2011)

- I started from a disadvantaged position in meeting my goals compared to my peers
- There are more obstacles in the way of me succeeding compared to others
- I've had to struggle more than others to get to where I am in my life
- It was harder for me to get where I am today compared to others in my position
- I've often felt like I am a minority trying to break in
- I feel that the odds are against me in pursuing my goals compared to my peers
- I often feel I have to compete with others who have more resources than me
- I often feel I have to fight against discrimination compared to others
- Some people are jealous of me because of my privileged background (R)
- I always stay determined even when I lose
- I show more resilience than others in the face of adversity
- Compared to others I am more passionate about my goals
- When others expect me to fail I do not quit
- Compared to others I do not give up easily
- Even when I've failed I have not lost my hope
- Compared to others my dream is more important to the meaning of my life
- I fight harder compared to others to succeed when there are obstacles in my way
- When I encounter obstacles I usually quit (R)

Note. (R) indicates reverse-coded items