

A Dog Story: How Underdog Brand Narratives Shape Morality Perceptions

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Abstract

Prior research on underdog brand narratives has not examined how such narratives relate to perceptions of brand morality, particularly in the absence of brand transgressions. This research explores the mechanisms linking underdog narratives to consumer attitudes, highlighting the role of perceived morality through a care ethics lens. Across four studies using both real and hypothetical brands, findings reveal that underdog narratives enhance perceived brand morality, which leads to more positive brand attitudes than top-dog narratives. This effect is moderated by consumers' belief in a just world (BJW), such that consumers with low levels of BJW ascribe higher morality to underdog brands. Overall, our insights contribute to branding, marketing, consumer, and business ethics literature by explicitly linking underdog narratives with moral perception and providing practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and consumers interested in ethical company practices.

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics