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A Fresh Start for Stigmatized Groups: The Effect of Cultural Identity Mindset Framing in Brand Advertising

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ABSTRACT

The idea that individuals can create a new beginning, known as the *fresh start mindset*, is deeply embedded in American culture. This mindset represents an accessible, shared construct that may be particularly relevant for changing attitudes toward two highly stigmatized groups: ex-offenders and drug addicts. While previous advertising literature has suggested that ambiguous or symbolic approaches may help improve consumer response, we show (using four studies) that *cultural identity mindset framing (CIMF)* can generate more positive affect toward the sponsoring brand and more positive attitudes toward the stigmatized group. Study 1 shows that explicitly referencing a highly stigmatized group leads to a less positive affective response toward the brand. Study 2 reveals that CIMF improves that response. Study 3 uses a real brand to replicate the positive affect toward the sponsoring brand. Study 4 documents a positive attitude shift toward the stigmatized group. Our research opens a new research corridor for explicitly referencing a stigmatized group, expands the stigmatized group discourse to two underrepresented groups, provides empirical evidence for the fresh start message frame, and answers a call to understand whether corporate social responsibility advertising is better than not advertising it at all.

In January 2016, the Fresh Start Recovery Center opened in Indiana, pledging to keep families together while the mothers embark on drug treatment programs (Kwiatowski 2016). In March 2019, a Mississippi state representative introduced the Fresh Start Act to remove barriers ex-offenders face when applying for jobs (Ducote 2019). The fresh start concept is rooted in the idea that people have free will to start anew and chart a new course in life (Price et al. 2018). Despite the prevalence of the fresh start message in American culture, research examining how consumers respond to it is surprisingly absent. Economics research has referred to fresh start systems for bankruptcy recovery (Livshits, MacGee, and Tertilt 2007), and consumer behavior research recently introduced the fresh start mindset (FSM) (Price et al. 2018). Nevertheless, to our knowledge, advertising research has not examined its effectiveness as a messaging strategy.

We propose that the fresh start concept is particularly relevant to two groups: ex-offenders and drug

addicts. Negative public attitudes toward these two groups are well-documented, resulting in stigmatization (Barry et al. 2014; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016). Such stigma has consequences for individuals and society. For example, ex-offenders often face difficulty finding employment upon reentering society (Decker et al. 2015), resulting in lower levels of physical and emotional well-being (Chung and Slater 2013). While research has documented that personal contact may reduce the stigma (Corrigan et al. 2009; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016), facilitating contact with stigmatized group members is challenging. Thus, the following is an important question: Could using the fresh start concept as a message frame provide a pathway to more positive public attitudes toward a stigmatized group?

This question is timely for marketers given that an emerging brand, Dave's Killer Bread, hires individuals with a criminal background but does not advertise its

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cause. One reason for not advertising the cause may be that changing attitudes about stigmatized groups is notoriously challenging (Batson et al. 1997). Another reason may be that the public has less favorable attitudes about these two stigmatized groups compared to other stigmatized groups (e.g., those with mental illness) (Corrigan et al. 2009; LeBel 2012). Despite the public's comparatively more favorable attitude toward individuals with a mental illness, Burger King faced significant backlash when advertising support for this group (Lee 2019). Therefore, it is unsurprising that some empirical research recommends adopting more covert or symbolic approaches when referencing stigmatized groups (Oakenfull, McCarthy, and Greenlee 2008; Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher 2011).

We propose another pathway in which the advertiser uses the fresh start concept to frame a message supporting ex-offenders or drug addicts. The fresh start concept is deeply embedded in American culture: a mental representation containing culture-congruent content, procedures, and goals (Lee, Oyserman, and Bond 2010; Price et al. 2018). We refer to this representation as *cultural identity mindset*. By activating that mindset as a message frame, it may be possible to explicitly reference a stigmatized group and generate more positive affective responses to the sponsoring brand as well as improve attitudes toward the stigmatized group. To assess this possibility, we use the fresh start concept to illustrate cultural identity mindset and employ it as a message frame. To test the message frame's effectiveness, we use two underrepresented groups in advertising literature: ex-offenders and drug addicts.

Our research contributes to advertising scholarship by (a) opening a new research corridor for explicitly referencing a stigmatized group with a new type of message framing, (b) expanding the corporate social responsibility (CSR) advertising discussion to two underrepresented groups, (c) providing empirical evidence for the fresh start concept as a message frame, and (d) answering a call to determine whether CSR advertising is better than not advertising it at all (Bartsch and Kloss 2019; Bergkvist and Zhou 2019).

Conceptual Background

Stigmatized Groups

To signal their support for stigmatized groups, brands are increasingly using cues in advertising (Chaney, Sanchez, and Maimon 2019). For instance, Nike signals the company's support for some stigmatized groups (e.g., individuals with disabilities) by featuring

them in its advertising (Chaney, Sanchez, and Maimon 2019). In turn, an emerging topic in psychology and marketing is how the marketplace communicates to and about stigmatized groups (Mirabito et al. 2016). We focus on communication about stigmatized groups. The term *stigma* can be traced to ancient Greece, where physical marks identified those who committed criminal acts (Smith 2007). The term has evolved to incorporate the psychological perception of groups. *Stigma* is defined as a "simplified, standardized image of disgrace of certain people that is held in common by the community at large" (Smith 2007, 463). It encompasses individuals' social rejection based on personal or social characteristics such as race, religion, and mental or physical health (Chung and Slater 2013; Corrigan 2004; Goffman 1963). Goffman (1963) pioneered stigma research, associating drug addiction with blemished character. Thus, drug addicts and ex-offenders represent a different type of stigmatization than ethnicity or race by originating from an individuals' actions (Baur et al. 2018; Goffman 1963).

Advertising Research on Stigmatized Groups

A significant stream of stigmatized group advertising research has focused on how featuring lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals affects nontargeted consumers' responses to the sponsoring brand. The findings point to adverse nontarget effects (Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher 2011; Ruggs, Stuart, and Yang 2018), higher levels of disgust among heterosexual consumers (El Hazzouri, Main, and Sinclair 2019), and a preference for non-gay-themed ads (Um 2014). One recommendation to counter the adverse nontarget effect is to use subcultural symbolism or iconography (Oakenfull, McCarthy, and Greenlee 2008). This approach involves using clothes, symbols, appearance, or language that only holds meaning for the target (stigmatized group) (Oakenfull, McCarthy, and Greenlee 2008). For instance, Subaru's slogan "Get out. And stay out" served as an inclusive yet ambiguous message for the lesbian community (Chaney, Sanchez, and Maimon 2019). We propose a distinct pathway involving *explicitly* referencing the stigmatized group. In this way, our study differs from stigmatized group advertising literature focusing on more covert communication about stigmatized groups (Oakenfull, McCarthy, and Greenlee 2008; Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher 2011).

By focusing on an advertiser's support of a stigmatized group, we also extend CSR advertising research. For this manuscript's purposes, we explore humane-oriented CSR: "activities that focus on social justice

Table 1. Select CSR advertising and stigmatized group research.

Research study	Cause	Benefiting group	Positive affect <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Empirical approach: real brand
Gupta and Pirsch (2006)	St. Jude Children's Research Hospital	Children with cancer	7.53 (1.88)	✓
Basil and Herr (2003)	Feed the Children	Children without life's essentials	7.51 (1.99)	✓
Kleber, Florack, and Chladek (2016)	SOS Children's Villages	Orphaned children	7.38 (1.88)	
Lafferty and Edmondson (2014)	American Cancer Society	Patients with cancer	7.21 (1.84)	✓
Tangari et al. (2010)	Not specified	Patients with bone cancer	7.16 (1.89)	
Vanhamme et al. (2012)	PFA (International Aid Organization)	Individuals displaced due to natural disaster	7.12 (2.02)	
Chang and Lee (2010)	Child Welfare Vision Foundation	Disadvantaged children	7.10 (2.15)	
Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005)	Famine Relief Fund	Individuals without access to a reliable food supply	7.09 (2.06)	✓
Kleber, Florack, and Chladek (2016)	Amnesty International	Victims of human rights violations	7.09 (2.02)	
Chang (2012)	Concert for handicapped young adults	Handicapped young adults	7.01 (2.02)	
Bartsch and Kloß (2019)	Big Boston Warm-up Campaign	Homeless persons	6.94 (2.07)	
Dean (2003); Kleber, Florack, and Chladek (2016)	United Nations Children's Fund; UNICEF	Children in developing countries	6.93 (2.04)	
Folse et al. (2014)	Public education system	Children in failing schools	6.84 (2.11)	
Lafferty and Edmondson (2014)	Big Brothers, Big Sisters	At-risk youth	6.83 (2.05)	✓
Kleber, Florack, and Chladek (2016)	Doctors without Borders	Individuals who live in endemic disease areas	6.82 (2.00)	
Tangari et al. (2010)	American Heart Association	Individuals with heart disease	6.80 (2.08)	
Yeh, Jewell, and Thomas (2017)	None	Persons with mental illness	6.75 (2.17)	
Chowdhury and Khare (2011)	U.S. National Employment Trust Fund	Laid-off workers	6.75 (1.98)	
Grau and Folse (2007)	Local or national skin cancer research	Patients with skin cancer	6.66 (2.11)	
Kleber, Florack, and Chladek (2016)	Doctors without Borders	Individuals who lived in armed conflict zones	6.66 (2.08)	
Das et al. (2016)	Coffee Kids	Farmers in developing countries	6.38 (2.13)	
Lafferty and Edmondson (2014)	Box Project	Rural American families	6.34 (2.09)	✓
El Hazzouri, Main, and Sinclair (2019); Oakenfull, McCarthy, and Greenlee (2008); Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher (2011); Read, van Driel, and Potter (2018); Um (2014)	None	LGBTQ persons	5.68 (2.52)	
This study	None	Drug addicts Ex-offenders Individuals with a criminal background	5.41 (2.46) 4.93 (2.35) 4.91 (2.28)	✓

We also included benefiting groups not studied in corporate social responsibility (CSR) advertising research such as refugees ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 2.29$), individuals with limited English proficiency ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 2.20$), and persons with alcoholism ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 2.34$). Please contact the authors for the complete list.

and the well-being of people,” including cause-related marketing (i.e., committing to donate a certain amount of money to a nonprofit organization or social cause) (Diehl, Terlutter, and Mueller 2016, 731). This form of CSR advertising typically focuses on issues that already have broad public support, such as combatting poverty (Chang and Lee 2010) and malnutrition (Lafferty and Goldsmith 2005) and promoting education (Folse et al. 2014). These causes do not often explicitly reference the benefiting group; when

doing so, these causes focus on groups with broad public support such as young adults with disabilities (Chang 2012) and children (Dean 2003) (see Table 1 for a review of advertising literature on these topics; see Study 1's pretest for survey details). Ex-offenders and drug addicts may be largely ignored due to their extreme stigmatization and the difficulty in changing attitudes about these groups (Batson et al. 1997; Baur et al. 2018; Corrigan et al. 2009). The question is how to counteract this response.

Message Framing

We turn to a communication strategy—message framing—as a potential approach. *Framing* is defined as “the ability to shape the meaning of a subject, to judge its character and significance. To hold the frame of a subject is to choose a particular meaning (or set of meanings) over another” (Fairhurst 2005, 168). Message framing is a valuable theoretical framework for our research because it can reshape how consumers feel about a group (Chang and Lee 2010).

While framing research extends across the social sciences, each discipline approaches framing in a distinct way (Wicks 2005). Psychologists consider framing in terms of judgment or choice problems (Iyengar and Simon 1993), and advertising research often uses framing to show two logically equivalent ways of communicating the same information (Baek and Yoon 2017). These dichotomous frames (e.g., gain versus loss, positive versus negative) are complementary; when one is present, the other is implied (Kreiner and Gamliel 2018). An advertisement promoting 75% lean implies that the other 25% is fat and vice versa (Kreiner and Gamliel 2018). Other dichotomous frames include promotion versus prevention (Kim 2006), present versus future orientation (Tangari et al. 2010), exact versus abstract (Kureshi and Thomas 2020), and using foreground versus background (Budinsky and Bryant 2013).

We adopt a distinct view of framing that is not limited to presenting facts or complementary propositions. Goffman (1974) used the term *frame* to refer to organizing an experience. Similarly, the communications and media perspective considers framing as relaying accessible concepts (Shen 2004). For instance, media frames emphasize a specific element of a story (e.g., the “free speech controversy”), making the concept more accessible (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997). In this context, framing provides a field of meaning through which messages about people and events may be understood, thus enabling individuals to evaluate, convey, and interpret information based on shared conceptual constructs (Wicks 2005).

Social Identity and Cultural Identity Mindset Framing

A potential shared construct to use in a message frame is an individual’s *social identity*, “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge or his group membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to the membership” (Tajfel 1974, 69). Rooted

in Durkheim’s collective consciousness, social identity framing reorganizes the individual’s interpretation of a situation, promoting the “we-ness” of a group (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant 2005). Emphasizing a social identity restructures the individual’s beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, weakening any personal associations (Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer 2007).

Empirical studies using social identity framing have produced positive results. Activating a social identity of “who we are” and “what we stand for” led to decreased water consumption when compared to an information-oriented message (Seyranian, Sinatra, and Polikoff 2015). Communicating student identity—by stating “UEA students save water” and “as UEA students, saving water and caring for the environment is part of who we are”—improved the likelihood of water-saving behaviors among students versus a baseline condition (Lede, Meleady, and Seger 2019). Finally, using the social identity “South East Queenslander” improved the perception of recycled drinking water, believed to have low levels of initial support (Schultz and Fielding 2014). The latter finding suggests that social identity framing could improve consumer response even when support is tepid, providing a contextual parallel to our study: low support for stigmatized groups. We use this branch of framing research as our conceptualization’s starting point.

Social identity framing activates an accessible, shared construct using national or ethnic but not psychological identities (Anteby and Molnar 2012). We propose that activating an individual’s *cultural mindset*—mental representation containing culture-congruent content, procedures, and goals (Lee, Oyserman, and Bond 2010)—could generate comparable, positive effects. These “imagined communities” (Anteby and Molnar 2012) consist of shared knowledge binding people together (Wicks 2005). Activating a cultural mindset can influence social behaviors, values, beliefs, and judgments (Lee, Oyserman, and Bond 2010). For instance, emphasizing an organization’s shared cultural values can motivate individual behaviors (Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer 2007). Health research has investigated how mindsets can change health-related messages’ meanings (Conner et al. 2019). While advertising research has largely considered dichotomous frames, we present a new messaging strategy building on social identity framing. We introduce the term *cultural identity mindset framing (CIMF)* referencing communication (a word or phrases) that emphasizes a deeply embedded cultural identity. While social identity framing explicitly refers to a collective identity (e.g., Australians or mothers),

CIMF emphasizes embedded beliefs appearing to be “common sense” (Budinsky and Bryant 2013). *CIMF* is also distinct from metaphor, an implied comparison between two objects (Phillips and McQuarrie 2010). A metaphor meets some criteria for message framing: It relates accessible concepts and makes salient specific elements. In this context, while *CIMF* transfers meaning from the frame to the stigmatized group, it does not compare two objects. Therefore, we consider metaphor to be a framing type but not *CIMF*. To investigate *CIMF*, we turn to a cultural identity mindset theoretically relevant to the focal stigmatized groups. Because the perception of stigmatized groups varies across cultures (Mirabito et al. 2016), we consider stigmatized groups from a U.S. perspective.

The FSM: A Cultural Identity Mindset Frame

Recently introduced in consumer research, the FSM is defined as a “belief that people can make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life regardless of past or present circumstances” (Price et al. 2018, 22). Deeply embedded in American culture, this mindset influences preferences, goals, choices, behaviors, and attitudes (Price et al. 2018). Separating an individual from his or her past based on the idea that character is mutable, the FSM may counteract the negative response to stigmatized groups whereby people assign responsibility for a situation. Americans tend to assign responsibility to groups such as drug users (Lloyd 2013), smokers with lung cancer (Bresnahan, Silk, and Zhuang 2013), and criminals (LeBel 2012; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016). These findings are supported by the causal attributions model, theorizing that believing someone is responsible for his or her behavior reduces the potential for helping behavior (Corrigan et al. 2009). We propose that activating the FSM could reshape a person’s perception by focusing on the opportunity for the stigmatized group member to start anew.

Despite the ubiquity of the fresh start concept in American culture, no studies have used it as a message frame. Economics research has considered two bankruptcy systems: a “Fresh Start System” and a “No Fresh Start System” (Livshits, MacGee, and Tertilt 2007). Consumer research recently introduced the FSM into the academic lexicon but did not examine the fresh start concept as a message frame (Price et al. 2018). We hypothesize that framing the stigmatized group with an accessible, shared construct generates more positive feelings toward the sponsoring brand.

We focus on the affective response for several reasons. First, affect is an important component of social identity (Maldonado and Muehling 2006). People have emotional reactions when social identities, from large-scale social categories to interest groups, are emphasized (Fielding and Hornsey 2016; Smith 2007). Second, the dual-process model of reactions to perceived stigma proposes that there is an automatic emotional response to stigmatized groups (Lavack 2007). Third, CSR advertising aims to induce a positive affective state, which can lead to broader, more positive consumer associations (Chang 2012). These reactions may mediate the effects on attitudes and behavior (El Hazzouri, Main, and Sinclair 2019; Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher 2011).

Building on these insights, we conducted a pilot study to understand the consumer’s immediate affective response to the fresh start concept. Participants ($N = 86$) from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) listed three emotions they associate with a fresh start. Nearly 78% of those emotions were positive, and almost 50% of the participants listed *happy* (or *happiness*) as one of their three emotions. To assess the FSM’s application to an advertising context, we asked participants to indicate how they would feel about a favorite local business supporting fresh starts for homeless youth (the example from Price et al. 2018) in terms of four positive affective measures (happy, good, pleased, and satisfied) and six negative affective measures (bad, sad, displeased, dissatisfied, disgusted, unpleasant feelings) (items collected from Chang 2012; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Chowdhury, Olsen, and Pracejus 2008; Richins 1997). Paired t tests showed a significantly higher level of positive ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 1.45$; $\alpha = 0.91$) versus negative affect ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.33$; $\alpha = 0.98$; $t(85) = 21.67$, $p < .001$) toward the local business. Since the fresh start concept evoked a positive affective response toward the local business, we focus on positive affect in our empirical studies. As a result, we propose that *CIMF*, operationalized through the fresh start concept, can reshape a message that explicitly references support for a stigmatized group. Thus, we formalize our first two hypotheses:

- **H1:** *CIMF* will generate a more positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand.
- **H2:** Positive affect toward the sponsoring brand will mediate *CIMF*’s effect on behavioral intent.

We also explore whether *CIMF* can shift attitudes toward the stigmatized group. While most CSR

Table 2. Overview of studies.

Study	Dependent variable(s)	Sponsoring brand	Stimuli	Key finding
1	Positive affect toward sponsoring brand, behavioral intent	Fictional brand	Print ad	Advertising support for a stigmatized group (versus a group with broad public support) generates less positive affect toward the sponsoring brand. Establishes causal sequence of positive affect toward sponsoring brand and behavioral intent.
2	Positive affect toward sponsoring brand, behavioral intent, willingness to pay	Fictional brand	Print ad	CIMF generates more positive affect toward the sponsoring brand, attenuating the no-framing effect documented in Study 1 (H_1 supported).
3	Positive affect toward sponsoring brand, behavioral intent, attitude toward the brand	Real brand	Social media post	CIMF (versus no frame) increases behavioral intent through more positive affect toward the sponsoring brand (H_1 and H_2 supported)
4	Attitude toward stigmatized group, attitude toward issue	Real brand	Print ad	CIMF ad exposure (versus no ad exposure) generates more positive attitudes toward a stigmatized group (H_3 supported).

advertising research has compared different messages, an important question is left unanswered: Is CSR advertising better than not advertising it at all (Bergkvist and Zhou 2019)? We answer this question by comparing consumer attitudes of an ad-exposure group to a no-ad-exposure group, thus formalizing our final hypothesis:

- **H3:** CIMF will generate more positive attitudes toward the stigmatized group.

We conduct four experiments to investigate the effect of a sponsoring brand explicitly supporting a stigmatized group (see Table 2 for an overview of all studies). In Study 1, we find that consumers indicate a less positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand when it supports a stigmatized group versus veterans, corroborating empirical data on public attitudes. Study 2 reveals that CIMF improves the affective response toward the sponsoring brand. Finally, to enhance external realism, we conduct two experiments with a real brand. Study 3 supports our previous finding that a positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand leads to behavioral intent. Study 4 shows that CIMF can shift attitudes toward the stigmatized group. We now turn to the empirical studies.

Study 1: Effect of Advertising Support for a Stigmatized Group

The purpose of Study 1 is to corroborate that the public maintains less positive attitudes about ex-offenders compared to other groups (Baur et al.

2018; LeBel 2012). Confirming these findings in an advertising context is important because it establishes the need for a message frame, laying the groundwork for our first hypothesis test. We selected veterans as a comparison group for two reasons. First, public opinion polls have continually shown favorable attitudes toward veterans (Roper 2020). Second, there is some anecdotal support for featuring veterans. For example, Heroes Vodka donated 10% of its profits to veterans for several years, and Google advertised its support for veterans in a 2019 Super Bowl ad.

Pretest

To ensure our group manipulation's effectiveness, we asked participants to indicate how they would feel about a brand they like being committed to supporting 32 groups of people by using a nine-point scale (1 = *not at all happy*, 9 = *very happy*). We identified these groups from CSR advertising research (see Table 1). Participants ($N=116$, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.1$, 39% female) were significantly happier about the brand committing to help veterans ($M=6.83$, $SD=1.99$) versus ex-offenders ($M=4.93$, $SD=2.35$; $t(115) = 8.10$, $p < .001$). A forced-ranking supports these findings: 64% of participants ranked individuals with a criminal background as the last group out of nine options. Based on these findings, we proceeded to test advertising support for two groups: a stigmatized group (ex-offenders) and a group with broad public support (veterans). While we did not measure perceived stigmatization, these results align with previous research on stigmatized groups (LeBel 2012).

Method

Manipulations

We asked participants to imagine they were flipping through a magazine. The veterans (ex-offenders) group saw the ad's final sentence: "That's why 10% of every purchase goes to initiatives that help veterans (ex-offenders)." We selected percentage contributions because of their marketplace prevalence (Kleber, Florack, and Chladek 2016), and the only difference between the two ads was the benefiting group (see Appendix for all stimuli).

Participants and Procedure

In exchange for payment, 123 individuals ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.1$, 44.7% female) from MTurk were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Seven participants who indicated they had taken a similar version of this survey were excluded from data analysis (not included in the 123 individuals).

We selected MTurk as the platform for our research for two reasons. First, research on stigmatized groups tends to use national samples due to the influence of age, political ideology, and personal contact on attitudes (Corrigan et al. 2009; Hirschfeld and Piquero 2010; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016). MTurk offers a demographically diverse sampling pool (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011; Read, van Driel, and Potter 2018) that enhances this study's external validity. Second, MTurk has become a popular forum for consumer research and is a reliable platform for advertising research experiments (Goodman and Paolacci 2017; Kees et al. 2017).

To ensure consistency and data integrity, we adopted several recommended procedures (Buhrmester et al. 2018). First, only U.S. participants with a 95% or greater Human Intelligence Task approval rating qualified for the study. Second, attention checks were included (Kees et al. 2017), and the survey was automatically terminated for those failing attention checks (Hauser, Paolacci, and Chandler 2019). Finally, participants who completed one of the studies were excluded from participating in the other studies (Hauser, Paolacci, and Chandler 2019).

Measures

Participants indicated their degree of positive affect toward the sponsoring brand ("How does the brand make you feel?") using a seven-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very strongly*; $\alpha = 0.95$). We used the same four positive affect items (happy, good, pleased, satisfied) from our fresh start survey. Next, to explore behavioral intent, we modified a purchase-intent scale

(Muehling, Sprott, and Sultan 2014) to provide a more realistic behavioral proxy because the sponsoring brand was unfamiliar. We asked participants to complete the statement "The next time I go to buy snacks, it is ... I will look for this brand" by using a three-item (improbable/probable, unlikely/likely, impossible/possible), nine-point bipolar scale ($\alpha = 0.95$). To determine whether the manipulation worked as intended, we asked participants to select the group featured in the ad and to indicate whether the company/brand supported a specific group of people (1 = *disagree completely*, 7 = *agree completely*). After indicating whether they had taken this survey or a similar version (another data integrity check), participants provided demographic information (age, gender, education, household income, and political ideology) and category purchase frequency.

Results

Manipulation and Confound Checks

Validating our benefiting group manipulations, participants correctly identified the group referenced in the ad (86.7% in the veteran condition, 90.5% in the ex-offender condition). Corroborating the effectiveness of explicitly referencing a benefiting group, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no difference between groups regarding the extent to which the company/brand was perceived to support a specific group of people ($M_{\text{veterans}} = 6.42$, $SD = 1.15$; $M_{\text{ex-offenders}} = 6.30$, $SD = 1.17$; $F(1, 121) = 0.30$, $p = .59$). There were no differences between groups in terms of snack bar purchase or consumption frequency, variables possibly affecting behavioral intent.

Positive Affect and Behavioral Intent

The mediation model (Hayes 2017, PROCESS Model 4) included the benefiting group as the independent variable (veterans = 0, ex-offenders = 1), positive affect toward the sponsoring brand as the mediator, and behavioral intent as the outcome variable. Participants reported less positive affect toward the sponsoring brand when it supported ex-offenders ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.67$) versus veterans ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.28$; $\beta = -0.38$, $t = -2.87$, $p < .01$). Higher levels of positive affect were associated with higher levels of behavioral intent ($\beta = 1.11$, $t = 15.04$, $p < .001$), yielding a significant indirect effect ($-.43$; 95% confidence interval [CI], $-.72$ to $-.14$). A direct effect was not found ($.11$; $t = .93$; 95% CI, $-.12$ to $.33$). The results did not change by excluding participants who failed the manipulation check or by including

participants who reported taking a similar version of this survey. We also ran the model with behavioral intent as the mediator and positive affect as the dependent variable; this analysis did not reveal a significant indirect effect ($-.19$; 95% CI, $-.40$ to $.02$), thus supporting our proposed causal sequence.

Discussion

The first study reveals that advertising support for a stigmatized group (versus a group with widespread support) generates a less positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand. Although not surprising given public attitudes toward stigmatized groups (Barry et al. 2014; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016), this finding provides empirical evidence of the challenge that brands face when explicitly referencing a stigmatized group. Next, we turn to a messaging strategy that could generate a more positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand.

Study 2: CIMF and Stigmatized Groups

Study 2 seeks to answer our focal research question: *Can CIMF counteract the less positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand when advertising support for a stigmatized group?* To test the effect, we used the fresh start concept as a message frame for the two stigmatized group conditions. With the condition for veterans, we created a frame relevant to their situation: transitioning to civilian life. We viewed this test as stringent given the widespread support for helping veterans (as evidenced by the previous study and the pretest's results).

Pretest

To validate that the stigmatized group ads evoked the fresh start concept and to address potential confounds, we conducted a pretest with 63 MTurk participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.3$; 33.3% female). Participants initially answered questions about their snack bar purchasing and consumption frequency along with their willingness to pay for a box of five snack bars. We used the reported amount (approximately \$3.00) to create a willingness-to-pay range for the main study. Then, participants viewed two ads for a fictional snack brand, one advertising support for drug addicts and the other advertising support for veterans. The ad presentation was counterbalanced. Analysis using paired t tests showed that participants were more likely to agree ($1 = \text{do not agree at all}$, $7 = \text{strongly}$

agree) that the drug addicts ad ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.25$) reflected the idea of a fresh start compared to the veterans ad ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.51$; $t(62) = 5.83$, $p < .001$). We also eliminated alternative explanations. There were no differences between the ads in terms of their perceived emotional appeal ($M_{\text{drug}} = 5.90$, $SD = 1.10$ versus $M_{\text{veterans}} = 5.68$, $SD = 1.45$; $t(62) = 1.65$, $p = .10$), level of persuasion ($M_{\text{drug}} = 5.03$, $SD = 1.53$ versus $M_{\text{veterans}} = 5.02$, $SD = 1.63$; $t(62) = 0.10$, $p = .92$), or amount of information ($M_{\text{drug}} = 3.84$, $SD = 1.63$ versus $M_{\text{veterans}} = 3.70$, $SD = 1.44$; $t(62) = 0.87$, $p = .38$). Based on the pretest results, we used these ads for the main experiment and added a third condition, advertising support for ex-offenders.

Method

Manipulations

We used the same ads from the pretest. The ex-offenders and drug addicts messages were framed with a fresh start message: "Sometimes you just want a do-over. A full reset. We believe your past shouldn't hold you back from achieving your greatness." Since the FSM implies that mistakes or previous poor decisions should not impair future opportunities (Price et al. 2018), the veterans message was framed with a more relevant message for this group: "Sometimes you face a transition. A major change. We believe your dedication symbolizes how you achieve your greatness." The study's objective was to understand the consumer's affective response toward the sponsoring brand when the benefiting group was explicitly referenced; therefore, the only imagery we included was a snack bar. The layouts for all three ads were identical.

Participants and Procedure

In exchange for payment, 205 individuals from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.9$, 46.3% female) completed the study. Four participants indicating they had taken a previous version of the survey were excluded from data analysis. Participants viewed an ad purported to appear in a magazine.

Measures

Participants indicated their degree of positive affect toward the sponsoring brand ($\alpha = .94$) and behavioral intent ($\alpha = .95$) using the same scales as in Study 1. To further analyze the effect on behavioral intent, participants indicated the amount they would be willing to pay for a box of snack bars ranging from \$1.00 to \$5.50 in increments of \$0.50 ($1 = \1.00 or less, $10 = \$5.50$ or more). Next, to determine whether the

manipulation was successful, we asked participants to identify the extent to which they agreed (1 = *do not agree at all*, 7 = *strongly agree*) that “the ad referenced second chances” (referring to the final sentence in the ex-offenders and drug addicts conditions), a component of the FSM. We included three other questions designed to ensure data integrity (e.g., “the brand/company supported a group of people”). To validate the explicit reference to a benefiting group, we asked participants to select the group referenced in the ad from six options. Moreover, to ensure that levels of perceived responsibility did not influence the results, all participants were asked, “To what degree do you think each group is responsible for their problem/issue?” on a seven-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The groups were also counterbalanced. Finally, participants indicated whether they knew someone who was part of the referenced group (yes/no) and provided demographic information.

Results

Manipulation and Confound Checks

A Tukey honestly significant difference post hoc test confirmed that participants were more likely to agree that second chances (explicitly stated in the ad copy) were referenced in the ad with ex-offenders ($M = 6.40$, $SD = 1.03$, $p < .001$) and drug addicts ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 0.99$, $p < .001$) compared to the ad with veterans ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.77$), revealing that the ad effectively evoked the fresh start concept. There was no difference between the ex-offenders and drug addicts conditions ($p = .74$). Validating our benefiting group manipulations, participants correctly identified the group referenced in the ad (94.0% in the ex-offender condition, 92.6% in the drug addict condition, and 88.6% in the veteran condition).

The confound checks indicated there was no difference in the sponsoring brand supporting a group of people ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 6.25$, $SD = 1.15$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 6.01$, $SD = 1.23$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 6.07$, $SD = 1.26$; $F(2, 202) = 1.05$, $p = .49$), level of information ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 4.58$, $SD = 1.53$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 4.31$, $SD = 1.52$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 4.37$, $SD = 1.81$; $F(2, 202) = 1.38$, $p = .59$), or focus on a social (versus product) message ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 6.01$, $SD = 1.19$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 5.91$, $SD = 1.22$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 5.86$, $SD = 1.25$; $F(2, 202) = 0.29$, $p = .75$). Additionally, there were no differences in demographics or product category interaction (purchase or consumption frequency).

Positive Affect, Behavioral Intent, and Willingness to Pay

A one-way ANOVA revealed that there were no differences in positive affect toward the sponsoring brand among the three conditions ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 4.62$, $SD = 1.81$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 4.75$, $SD = 1.59$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 4.57$, $SD = 1.54$; $F(2, 202) = 0.23$, $p = .80$), providing initial support for our first hypothesis. Additionally, there were no differences in behavioral intent ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 6.14$, $SD = 2.34$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 6.29$, $SD = 2.29$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 5.96$, $SD = 2.30$; $F(2, 202) = 0.36$, $p = .70$) or willingness to pay ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 5.01$, $SD = 2.44$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 5.46$, $SD = 2.43$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 4.77$, $SD = 2.39$; $F(2, 202) = 1.41$, $p = .25$).

Level of Perceived Responsibility

Drug addiction and criminal offenses are perceived to be controllable, while other stigmas such as race and gender are less controllable (Baur et al. 2018); thus, we would not expect differences among the groups. Nevertheless, an alternative explanation could be that participants viewed ex-offenders or drug addicts as less responsible for their problems, translating to a more positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand. A one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference in ex-offenders' perceived responsibility levels ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 5.01$, $SD = 1.51$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 4.94$, $SD = 1.63$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 4.97$, $SD = 1.37$; $F(2, 202) = 0.41$, $p = .96$) and drug addicts' perceived responsibility levels ($M_{\text{ex-offender}} = 4.69$, $SD = 1.77$; $M_{\text{drug}} = 4.85$, $SD = 1.57$; $M_{\text{veterans}} = 4.89$, $SD = 1.41$; $F(2, 202) = 0.31$, $p = .74$). The data suggest that a lower level of perceived responsibility for the stigmatized group did not drive these effects.

Personal Contact with Group Members

Personal contact with stigmatized group members can result in more positive attitudes toward the group (Hirschfield and Piquero 2010; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016). Therefore, an alternative explanation may be that participants had more direct contact with one of the stigmatized groups, contributing to a more positive affective response. A Chi-square test revealed that there were no differences in personally knowing someone who is part of the referenced group [$\chi^2(2, N = 205) = 1.93$, $p = .38$].

Discussion

Study 2 provides support for our first hypothesis that CIMF generates a positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand by attenuating the effect

documented in Study 1. We now turn to CIMF's effect with a real brand.

Study 3: CIMF with a Real Brand

Our findings have thus far been limited to *fictional* brands; in contrast, the purpose of Study 3 is to conduct an additional test of our first and second hypotheses using a *real* brand to improve external realism. Previous research cautions that findings for fictitious brands may not extend to real brands (Campbell and Keller 2003), and advertising scholars have called for more CSR advertising research using real brands (Tangari et al. 2010). In fact, only a few CSR advertising studies use real brands, and these studies focus on causes with broad public appeal (see Table 1). We selected the brand Dave's Killer Bread because the company hires individuals with a criminal background. An estimated 65 million U.S. adults have a criminal record, and the criminal background stigma presents a barrier in job searches (Ali, Lyons, and Ryan 2017; Decker et al. 2015). The brand manager confirmed that the brand had not advertised its support for this group, thus providing a realistic advertising situation of a brand considering advertising its support for a stigmatized group. To investigate CIMF's effect, we conducted two studies. The first aimed to (a) replicate the theorized mediation model in Study 1 using CIMF and (b) rule out an existing association between the brand and the cause. The second study examined the potential for CIMF to shift attitudes toward the stigmatized group.

Pretest

High brand familiarity could confound tests with a real brand given that consumers would already be familiar with the brand's support of ex-offenders. In exchange for payment, 55 individuals from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.0$, 40.0% female) indicated their familiarity (1 = *not familiar at all*, 7 = *very familiar*) with eight national brands (e.g., Starbucks, Microsoft, Hershey's) including Dave's Killer Bread. Participants reported significantly lower familiarity with Dave's Killer Bread compared to other national brands. These results are unsurprising given the national brands' prominence; thus, we conducted a follow-up test to compare Dave's Killer Bread with other emerging brands. One hundred twenty-six individuals from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.0$, 38.1% female) reported significantly lower familiarity with Dave's Killer Bread compared to the other brands (e.g., KIND, Chobani). Finally, we asked 60

individuals from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.2$, 53.3% female) whether they associated "offering employment to those with a criminal background" with any brands. Nearly 98% of participants indicated that they did not. Based on these pretests, we conducted the main study.

Method

Manipulations

Participants were asked to imagine that they were on social media, selected as the context for two reasons. First, social media offers a contemporary form of brand advertising. Second, social media also tends to use text; therefore, this format provides a viable test for this messaging strategy. We designed the posts to depict a high degree of realism, but we also omitted references to likes or comments because that information could influence the results. The no-message framing condition featured the following statement: "We are proud to hire those with a criminal background." In the CIMF condition, the message frame preceded the benefiting group.

Participants and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: no message framing and CIMF. In exchange for payment, 127 individuals from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.1$, 38.6% female) completed the study. Five participants who indicated they had participated in a previous version of the study were excluded from data analysis.

Measures

After viewing the social media post, participants indicated how they would feel about the sponsoring brand; a seven-point positive affect scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very strongly*; $\alpha = .96$) was used. Although we used a distinct positive affect scale (Chowdhury, Olsen, and Pracejus 2008) to ensure that our findings were not dependent on one scale, two positive affect items (happy and good) were consistent across all studies. Next, to assess the impact on behavioral intent, we asked participants to indicate their behavioral intent ($\alpha = .96$) using the same scale as in Study 1 and attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .96$) using a three-item, nine-point bipolar scale (Tangari et al. 2010). Participants then responded to a manipulation check and confound checks related to personal contact with the group, awareness of previous brand support, and social media usage. After indicating their brand familiarity (Batra et al. 2000; $\alpha = .96$) and brand

loyalty (Kim, Morris, and Swait 2008; $\alpha = .96$), participants answered demographic questions.

Results

Manipulation Checks

A Welch's one-way ANOVA confirmed that participants in the CIMF condition were more likely to agree that the social media post referenced the idea of a fresh start ($M_{\text{no_frame}} = 4.30$, $SD = 2.06$ versus $M_{\text{CIMF}} = 5.92$, $SD = 1.54$; $F(1, 110.81) = 25.13$, $p < .001$). There were no differences in identifying the sponsoring brand [$\chi^2(3, 127) = 1.08$, $p = .78$], product category interaction, or demographics.

Confound Checks

There were no differences in previous exposure to the brand's support for the group ($M_{\text{no_frame}} = 2.02$, $SD = 1.90$ versus $M_{\text{CIMF}} = 2.18$, $SD = 2.01$; $F(1, 125) = 3.83$, $p = .64$), personal contact with a group member [$\chi^2(1, 127) = 0.02$, $p = .86$], or social media usage [$\chi^2(4, 127) = 2.50$, $p = .64$].

Mediation Model

The mediation model (Hayes 2017, PROCESS Model 4) included message framing as the independent variable (no message framing = 0, CIMF = 1), positive affect toward the sponsoring brand as the mediator, behavioral intent as the outcome variable, and brand loyalty as the covariate. CIMF (versus no message framing) was associated with more positive affect toward the sponsoring brand ($M_{\text{no_frame}} = 3.88$, $SE = 0.22$ versus $M_{\text{CIMF}} = 4.51$, $SE = 0.21$; $\beta = 0.32$, $t = 2.08$, $p < .05$), supporting our first hypothesis. Consistent with Study 1's findings, an indirect effect provided evidence of mediation (.31; 95% CI, .01 to .64), supporting our second hypothesis. A direct effect was not found (.02; $t = .12$; 95% CI, $-.30$ to .34). A similar pattern was observed with attitude toward the brand; positive affect mediated the message's effect (.27; 95% CI, .01 to .55), and there was not a direct effect (.08; $t = .60$; 95% CI, $-.18$ to .33). The results did not change with another significant covariate, brand familiarity. We also ran the model with attitude toward the brand as the mediator and positive affect as the dependent variable; this analysis did not reveal a significant indirect effect (.21; 95% CI, $-.01$ to .42).

Discussion

These findings provide additional support for our second hypothesis that CIMF increases behavioral

intent by generating more positive affect toward the sponsoring brand. We also rule out an existing association between the brand and the stigmatized group. If a relationship existed, consumers would have already assimilated this brand knowledge, and there would not be a positive affective response toward the brand. This study represents a real-world situation in which a brand supporting a stigmatized group begins to advertise their support for that group. We show that CIMF improves the affective response toward the sponsoring brand. We now proceed to the final study, which assesses the effect on stigmatized group attitudes.

Study 4: Effect of CIMF on Stigmatized Group Attitudes

The final study (a) tests our third hypothesis by examining whether CIMF can generate more positive attitudes toward the stigmatized group and (b) addresses whether CSR advertising is more effective than doing nothing at all. We previously examined CIMF's effect on positive affect toward the sponsoring brand using messages containing different benefiting groups (Study 2) and comparing two distinct messages (Study 3). These approaches are consistent with empirical CSR advertising studies that compare the effectiveness of distinct messages (Bergkvist and Zhou 2019). However, advertising scholars have called for a more in-depth understanding beyond comparative messages, one that examines whether CSR advertising is more effective than doing nothing at all (Bergkvist and Zhou 2019). This study also answers that call by comparing an ad-exposure group to a no-exposure group.

Method

Manipulations

Participants in the no-exposure (control) condition completed a survey about consumer attitudes, while participants in the ad-exposure (CIMF) group imagined they were flipping through a magazine and saw a print advertisement. The full-color advertisement featured CIMF before explicitly referencing support for the stigmatized group: "Have you ever wished for a do-over? A reset? We believe everyone deserves a chance to put the past behind them and achieve greatness. That's why we hire individuals with a criminal background—a second chance at greatness." We used Dave's Killer Bread as the brand sponsor.

Participants and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: no exposure and ad exposure. This procedure has been used to investigate how viewing a movie or television program affects beliefs about Opus Dei and conspiracy beliefs surrounding former president John F. Kennedy's death (Butler, Koopman, and Zimbardo 1995; Igartua and Barrios 2012). We viewed this procedure as stringently testing CIMF given the prevailing negative attitudes toward ex-offenders and empirical evidence that changing attitudes toward stigmatized groups is notoriously difficult (Batson et al. 1997; Lloyd 2013). To our knowledge, this is the first CSR advertising study to use a no-exposure condition to investigate the effects of explicitly referencing a stigmatized group.

In exchange for payment, 233 individuals from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 39.2$, 43.3% female) completed the study. Six participants who indicated they had participated in a previous version of the study were excluded from data analysis. All participants responded to the same questions with these exceptions: The ad-exposure group indicated their attitudes toward the brand and purchase intent and completed two manipulation checks.

Measures

To capture attitude toward the stigmatized group, we asked all participants to indicate their level of agreement (1 = *do not agree*, 7 = *agree completely*) with the statement "We should do more to help" using two groups (ex-offenders and individuals with a criminal background). We also included five other groups (homeless persons, drug addicts, people with mental illness, compulsive gamblers, and veterans) to address an alternative explanation that the ad generated more positive attitudes toward groups in general. The presentation of groups was counterbalanced. Using the same scale ($\alpha = .94$), we also included a second measure of ad effectiveness: attitude toward the issue with four statements related to supporting ex-offenders—for example, "We should do more to help ex-offenders chart a new course in life." This scale followed a similar approach to measuring attitude toward issues in narrative literature (Appel and Richter 2007).

To address a confound in perceived level of responsibility among groups, participants indicated the extent to which they thought several other groups (blind persons, homeless persons, drug addicts, compulsive gamblers, obese individuals) were responsible for their problem (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). To

address differing levels of personal contact with the groups, we asked participants to indicate (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*) whether they knew anyone who is part of four groups (veterans, criminals, persons with mental illness, drug addicts). Participants in the exposure condition then completed a single-item measure of attitude change toward the brand (1 = *much less positive*, 7 = *much more positive*) and a single-item measure of intent to purchase this brand (1 = *much less likely*, 7 = *much more likely*) (scales adapted from Brechman and Purvis 2015). To check for the manipulation's effectiveness, we asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with two true statements ("referenced the idea of a fresh start" and "referenced individuals with a criminal background") and one false statement ("focused on product benefits") using a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and to select the ad sponsor from a list of five options. Participants then indicated their familiarity with ($\alpha = .98$) and loyalty to ($\alpha = .98$) Dave's Killer Bread using the same scales as in Study 3. Completing the survey, participants indicated their product category purchase frequency, consumption frequency, whether they had taken a similar version of this survey, and demographic information.

Results

Manipulation and Confound Checks

Since the no-exposure group did not view a message, we used a one-sample *t* test to assess the manipulation's effectiveness. Participants reported a high level of agreement with the two true statements ($M = 6.43$, $SD = 0.87$, $t(122) = 31.02$, $p < .001$) and a high level of disagreement with the false statement ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 2.08$; $t(122) = -2.15$, $p < .001$) compared to the midpoint. In terms of brand recall, 80.5% of participants identified Dave's Killer Bread as the sponsoring brand. There were no differences in two important demographic variables, age and political ideology, empirically shown to affect attitudes toward ex-offenders (Hirschfield and Piquero 2010).

Attitude toward the Stigmatized Group

We combined ex-offenders and individuals with a criminal background to form a two-item index ($r = .76$). A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with loyalty as a covariate revealed a significantly more positive attitude toward helping the stigmatized group after seeing the ad ($M = 5.11$, $SE = 0.14$) compared to no ad exposure ($M = 4.17$, $SE = 0.15$; $F(1, 230) = 19.65$, $p < .001$), supporting our third

hypothesis. There were no statistical differences among the other groups, suggesting that the ad was uniquely effective in improving attitudes toward the focal group.

Attitude toward the Issue

Participants in the ad-exposure condition ($M=5.44$, $SE=0.13$) also reported more favorable attitudes toward the issue compared to the no-exposure condition ($M=4.79$, $SE=0.14$; $F(1, 230) = 11.03$, $p = .001$). These findings provide additional evidence that the ad shifted participants' attitudes toward the stigmatized group.

Attitude Change and Purchase Intent Change

A one-sample t test revealed more positive brand attitudes in the ad-exposure condition ($M=5.53$, $SD=1.21$; $t(122) = 14.01$, $p < .001$) and a greater intent to purchase ($M=5.23$, $SD=1.41$; $t(122) = 9.73$, $p < .001$) compared to the midpoint.

Level of Perceived Responsibility

Consistent with Study 2's results, a one-way ANCOVA showed no differences between groups in perceived level of responsibility for individuals with a criminal background ($M_{\text{no_exposure}} = 5.48$, $SE=0.13$; $M_{\text{ad_exposure}} = 5.24$, $SE=0.12$; $F(1, 230) = 1.82$, $p = .18$). Furthermore, there were no significant differences between the two conditions for other groups; therefore, a perceived lower level of responsibility did not drive the effect. Participants exposed to the ad still viewed individuals with a criminal background as being responsible for their situation, reinforcing the fresh start message's relevance.

Personal Contact with the Group

A Chi-square test showed no difference in personal contact between the two groups, $\chi^2(1, N=233) = 0.02$, $p = .89$). Therefore, we can eliminate the explanation that more personal contact led to more positive attitudes toward the group.

Discussion

These findings provide a pathway for advertising support of a stigmatized group. The data suggest that CIMF can shift attitudes toward a stigmatized group, a well-documented challenge in stigmatized group research (Batson et al. 1997). Furthermore, we answer a call to understand whether CSR advertising is better than no advertising (Bergkvist and Zhou 2019), finding that CIMF coupled with explicit reference to the

stigmatized group can generate more favorable brand attitudes and higher purchase intent.

General Discussion

Advertising research on stigmatized groups has suggested that covert or symbolic communication approaches may help counteract some negative consumer responses toward brands featuring a stigmatized group. We present an alternative that involves explicitly referencing the stigmatized group. Through a series of four experiments, we show how CIMF can (a) improve positive affect toward the sponsoring brand, leading to increased behavioral intent, and (b) generate more positive stigmatized group attitudes. The well-documented negative public attitudes toward ex-offenders and drug addicts present a stringent test of CIMF (Barry et al. 2014; Lloyd 2013; Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell 2016), yet we show the positive effect using different experimental approaches, product categories, and sponsoring brands (both fictional and real). We also address alternative explanations of perceived responsibility and personal contact with the groups. Our final study answers a call in CSR advertising, providing empirical evidence that explicitly referencing support for a stigmatized group may be better than doing nothing.

Our research offers several contributions to theory and practice. First, we build on social identity framing and introduce *cultural identity mindset framing* in the advertising discourse. By using an accessible, shared concept as a message frame, we activate a mindset influencing how people interpret a message. Second, we expand CSR advertising research to groups with lower levels of public favorability. CIMF offers a communication approach to overcome prevailing negative public attitudes toward ex-offenders and drug addicts. This approach references the stigmatized group, showing that it may be possible to adopt more explicit versus implicit (i.e., subcultural symbolism) communication strategies when advertising support for these groups. Our findings reveal that sponsoring brands can mitigate some of the less positive affective responses when explicitly referencing a stigmatized group. As a result, brands may consider advertising support for other groups with lower levels of public support, such as individuals with limited English proficiency and people with alcoholism (see Table 1). Future research should identify communication strategies to *explicitly* reference these underrepresented groups.

Finally, we document the fresh start message's positive effects for the advertiser. Despite this message's prevalence in U.S. culture, little research has examined its impact. We provide empirical evidence for using the fresh start concept as a message frame. By investigating its effect with highly stigmatized groups, we show that the fresh start concept may improve positive affect toward the sponsoring brand. This approach may offer an advertising pathway to destigmatization. Destigmatization strategies such as personal contact with group members are effective but largely impractical (Corrigan et al. 2009; LeBel 2012). The fresh start concept offers a communication strategy for brands, not-for-profits, and public policy organizations aiming to help these stigmatized groups. To build on our findings, future research could explore how the fresh start concept can influence stigmatized individuals' behavior. Our findings show a strong association between the fresh start concept and positive affect. This association could help reframe how an individual perceives and responds to challenging circumstances.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. First, our sample is limited to the MTurk universe, which we selected to capture a broad demographic given the recorded influence of age, political ideology, and personal contact on attitudes toward these stigmatized groups (Corrigan et al. 2009; Hirschfield and Piquero 2010). Examining behavioral intent and willingness to pay, we also sought to ensure some familiarity with the product categories. However, we acknowledge that reliance on MTurk presents some limitations, such as the inability to capture behavioral data and the possibility that MTurk workers do not represent the general population.

Second, we explore CIMF at one point in time. A potential limitation is that attitude change may be temporary (Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy 2009). While we find that the message frame leads to more positive attitudes toward the stigmatized group, we do not suggest a permanent attitude shift. Future research should examine the effects of repetitive CIMF, particularly among those individuals who do not share the cultural identity mindset. Nevertheless, we find that CIMF can counteract the negative consumer response to explicitly advertising support for a stigmatized group.

Third, the observed effects could be due to other elements in the CIMF ads. For instance, Study 3's two ads differed in message length to rule out an existing

relationship between the brand and the cause, and Study 4's ad included a visual to enhance external realism. Experimental design inherently encompasses trade-offs, and the visual may have influenced positive affect toward the brand. To reduce the likelihood of these confounds, the stimuli in Studies 1 and 2 were the same length and did not include a visual image, initially demonstrating that CIMF improved brand affect.

Fourth, some readers may be curious about the difference between message framing and priming in the current research. Message frames are "an integral part of the target object to be evaluated," whereas priming is "usually conceptualized as an effect due to the influence from external, irrelevant stimuli" (Teigen 2015, 575). The current study employs the fresh start concept as a message frame; it is an integral part of an ad. Future research should examine how implicitly priming the FSM (versus activating it explicitly through a message frame) may affect attitudes toward stigmatized groups.

Fifth, we focus on the consumer's positive affective response toward the sponsoring brand, consistent with our findings that consumers associate the fresh start message with positive affect. Because our context is a brand that advertises support for a stigmatized group, measuring positive affect is congruent with a real-world advertising objective: to generate more positive feelings toward the brand. Future research may seek to explore the role of negative emotion or consumers' cognitions related to advertising support for stigmatized groups.

Finally, we focus on the fresh start message as an exemplar of CIMF. While our empirical work was limited to the United States, we found multiple references to fresh starts in other cultures. For instance, the Fresh Start Recovery Programme in Western Australia works with drug addicts. Therefore, the fresh start message is viable beyond the United States. Future research should seek to understand to what extent the fresh start concept influences attitudes in other cultures and toward different groups. For instance, how and when does the fresh start concept apply to less controllable circumstances, such as individuals with developmental disabilities or refugees?

We hope these findings inspire future research on CIMF, the fresh start concept as a message frame, and advertising support for stigmatized groups.

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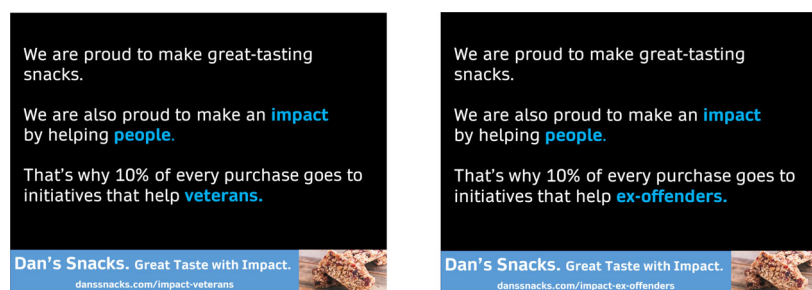
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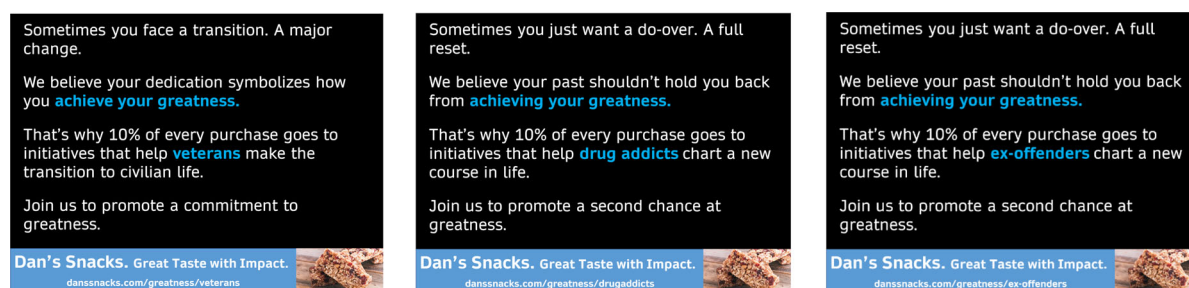
Appendix

All stimuli

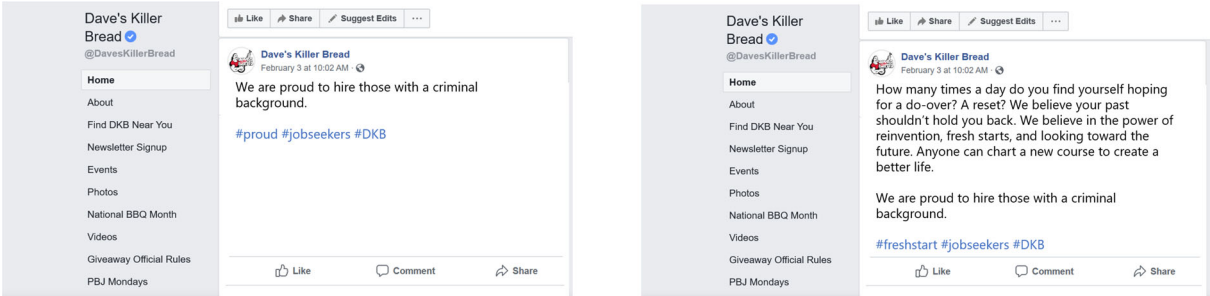
Appendix A-1 (study 1)



Appendix A-2 (study 2)



Appendix A-3 (study 3)



Appendix A-4 (study 4)

