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“Ambassadors can have outsized impacts on your mission, making it more likely they’ll stay engaged over time,” (Hague 2022).

Leveraging social influence to trigger consumer prosociality is common in the marketplace (e.g., Jaffe 2014; Smiley 2020). Relatedly and of interest to the present research, some firms employ consumer-to-consumer ambassador programs to prompt prosocial behavior. For example, Tentree (2022), a sustainable apparel company, employs a customer ambassador program in which it seeks out “eco-conscious trailblazers to help spread our mission [and] inspire a generation to protect the world we play in.” Likewise, MTV ran the prosocial campaign, “+1 THE VOTE” leading up to the 2018 election, asking consumers to vote and to encourage a friend to vote. As Table 1 attests, various organizations encourage prosocial behaviors by engaging consumers in ambassador roles that ask them to: (a) commit to a prosocial behavior and (b) promote this prosocial behavior to others. While marketers believe ambassador programs can successfully influence prosocial behaviors among an ambassador’s social network (Wozniak 2019), scholarly research has yet to investigate how encouraging consumers to take on ambassador roles impacts *the ambassador’s behavior*. Thus, we examine how inducing an ambassador role affects the ambassador’s own behavior and how firms can leverage this role.

Through this investigation, our research contributes to the literature in several ways. We introduce the *ambassador effect* as a novel means to prompt prosociality, proposing consumers are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors after being asked to serve as an ambassador. We theorize consumers take on an ambassador role when asked to (a) engage in a prosocial behavior themselves (i.e., *personal commitment*) and (b) encourage another person to engage in the same prosocial behavior (i.e., *interpersonal promotion*). We show that both dimensions (personal commitment *and* interpersonal promotion) are essential to the ambassador role, which makes it conceptually distinct from prior work on commitment and self-consistency (e.g., Baca-Motes et

al. 2013; Kristofferson et al. 2014; Schwartz et al. 2014) as well as the broader literature on how to motivate prosocial consumer behaviors (see Appendix A). In addition, prior research on moral identity (Aquino and Reed 2002; Reed and Aquino 2003) suggests higher internalization (reminiscent of personal commitment) primarily drives prosocial behavior, with a relatively small impact of symbolization (reminiscent of interpersonal promotion; Winterich et al. 2013). We enrich this perspective by demonstrating that *both* components of the ambassador role *together* have a stronger (interactive) effect on prosocial behavior.

This research also offers actionable and timely implications for firms, policy makers, and consumers. Encouraging consumers to engage in prosocial behaviors like using reusable bags or beverage containers not only helps protect the environment (providing reputational benefits to the firm), but can also offset some operational costs in that the firm is not required to offer as many disposable alternatives. Our research provides a novel form of intervention that firms can readily implement. From a pragmatic perspective, the ambassador effect appears long-lasting, while its implementation is relatively simple and inexpensive: firms can induce an ambassador role by offering or selling consumers prosocial products to use and to give to another person to use (e.g., a reusable bag or beverage container at check-out). Moreover, because the ambassador effect appears most prominent among those who are low in environmental consciousness, firms should target these consumers as potential ambassadors. As Table 1 suggests, the ambassador effect is applicable in a variety of organizations – from for-profit and non-profit firms to consumer advocacy groups to schools – to support important prosocial causes.

Three experiments – two in the field and one in a natural setting (one of which is longitudinal and two that capture real behavior with real products) – demonstrate the ambassador effect within the prosocial context of using reusable bags and beverage containers.

Table 1: Marketplace Examples of Ambassador Roles

Firm and Source	Role of an Ambassador
<i>For Profit and Non-Profit Firms</i>	
5 Gyres Institute (2019)	This sustainability-focused non-profit organization institutes an ambassador program in which ambassadors encourage firms and other consumers in their local communities to be more sustainable.
The Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG 2019)	AEG, a worldwide sporting and music entertainment presenter, launched its 1EARTH Ambassadors Program. This voluntary sustainability advocacy program encourages, “employees to learn more about sustainability practices that they can adopt personally, as well as to champion sustainability within their department or business division.”
Galaxy Digital (Hague 2022)	This software company aids non-profit firms in developing peer-to-peer ambassador campaigns to raise money for their organizations. Ambassadors are current donors, committed to the cause, and are asked to encourage others to donate.
H&M (2019)	H&M employees are encouraged to become H&M Conscious Ambassadors, in which they implement and follow up “on sustainable actions and work routines in stores and offices, contributing to leading the change for a sustainable future in the fashion industry, engaging customers and stakeholders with our sustainability initiatives and policies.”
MTV (Hosken 2018)	Leading up to the 2018 midterm election, MTV ran the “+1 THE VOTE” campaign in which consumers were asked to vote and encourage a friend to accompany them to vote.
Tentree (2022)	In a customer ambassador program, Tentree (a sustainable apparel company) seeks out, “eco-conscious trailblazers to help spread our mission, inspire a generation to protect the world we play in, and...help us plant more trees!”
<i>Consumer Advocacy Groups</i>	
Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA 2017)	The FCCLA’s Environmental Ambassador events educate high school participants on topics that impact human health and well-being. Participants examine areas in their community, home, or school where they can make a difference, implement stewardship projects, and then share these environmental problems and potential solutions with others.
Minnesota Department of Health (2022)	The Minnesota Department of Health’s ambassador program encourages residents to be a vaccine advocate: asking community members to get the COVID-19 vaccine, share that they were vaccinated on social media, and encourage others to get vaccinated.
NIRODAH (Respect Ambassador Program 2018)	This Respect Ambassador Program promotes prevention of violence and bullying by teaching students about self-awareness, self-regulation, respect for others, kindness, etc. These students then educate their peers about these skills.

The Solid Waste Authority (2022)	Ambassadors will “engage in hands-on activities and labs to learn all about their environment through an integrated solid waste management perspective...and [are] encouraged to teach their family and friends how their waste can affect our environment.”
Youth Power (USAID 2020)	Youth Power, a USAID project, developed a program in which all young people are encouraged to 1) “commit one act of good between now and May 15 that combats the impact of COVID-19...” and 2) “share one tool, resource, or action that young people can use to take action in their own communities to combat the impact of the COVID-19 virus.”
<i>Schools and Universities</i>	
Albuquerque Public Schools (Edu. Development Center 2013)	In the Albuquerque Public Schools Safe School Ambassadors Program, middle school students are trained to (a) identify bullying, (b) circumvent bullying, and (c) educate peers about the harms of bullying.
Sustainability @BU (Boston University 2019)	Sustainability Ambassadors are current students who implement sustainable practices and engage new students and their families in conversations about sustainable living on campus; they help inspire new students to be sustainable.
Penn State University (Rosini 2017)	Penn State’s Tailgate Ambassadors program consists of students who are “passionate about promoting sustainable tailgating practices at Penn State football home games.”
KU Center for Sustainability (The University of Kansas 2018)	Faculty and staff serve as Sustainability Ambassadors for their departments, in which they help create a more sustainable university via learning about campus sustainability initiatives and sharing this information with others.

Conceptualizing the Ambassador Effect

Identity theory suggests a key part of one's identity is the social self; aspects of the self-concept that reflect assimilation to others (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Cross et al. 2011). One key concept to understand this assimilation to others is the *collective self* (Brewer and Gardner 1996), which describes the “we” facet of the self; the collective identity recognizes the self as a contributing member of a social group (Breckler and Greenwald 1986; Luhtanen and Crocker 1992). Different selves can be activated by making them salient, leading to shifts in identities (Ashmore et al. 2004; Reed II 2004; White and Dahl 2007). We propose that engaging in both components of the ambassador role – (a) personally committing to a prosocial behavior *and* (b) interpersonally promoting the prosocial behavior to another person – transforms the prosocial behavior into a behavior in which “we” can engage together (i.e., the ambassador and the other consumer(s) they invite), thereby *inducing a collective identity*. Our theoretical rationale for the emergence of a collective identity and its effects on prosociality draws on the following:

First, a collective identity is one that is shared with a group of others who have (or are believed to have) some characteristic(s) in common (Ashmore et al. 2004). Because collective identities are psychological in nature, activation is an “automatic process that engages as soon as people are given any basis for grouping an assortment of others into meaningful categories” (Ashmore et al. 2004, p. 84). Group membership does not need to be outwardly recognized; it can be implicit and unconscious (Bagozzi 2000; Oyserman 2009). We predict the commonality for such a basis of grouping to be the prosocial behavior the ambassador intends to engage in (i.e., personally commits to) and encourages others to engage in (i.e., interpersonally promotes).

Second, we predict a collective identity will (only) be induced with both components of the ambassador role: personal commitment *and* interpersonal promotion. Because collective

identities are those shared with a group of others (Ashmore et al. 2004), personal commitment alone would not cue a collective identity as no others would be involved to develop such a group. Interpersonal promotion alone would also not cue a collective identity, as collective identities are developed around shared values, or commonalities (Ashmore et al. 2004); if the consumer does not also commit to the prosocial behavior, an overlapping interest would not exist.

Third, those with collective identities should be motivated to support group welfare, internalize group norms, and strive for collective achievement because people aim to establish self-worth in their self-concepts (Breckler and Greenwald 1986; Brewer and Gardner 1996). Thus, a collective identity should drive behaviors deemed important to the group, consistent with a key prediction of identity theory: once activated, people think, feel, and act in ways that align with the identity (White and Dahl 2007). In our research, behaviors deemed important to the group should be the focal prosocial behavior.

Given this reasoning, we propose that (a) committing to a prosocial behavior and (b) interpersonally promoting this behavior to another person will induce a prosocial collective identity. Because the collective self adopts values and internalizes goals, norms, and expectations of the groups associated with it, ambassadors should then align their behavior with the induced collective identity, thereby enhancing their engagement in the prosocial behavior.

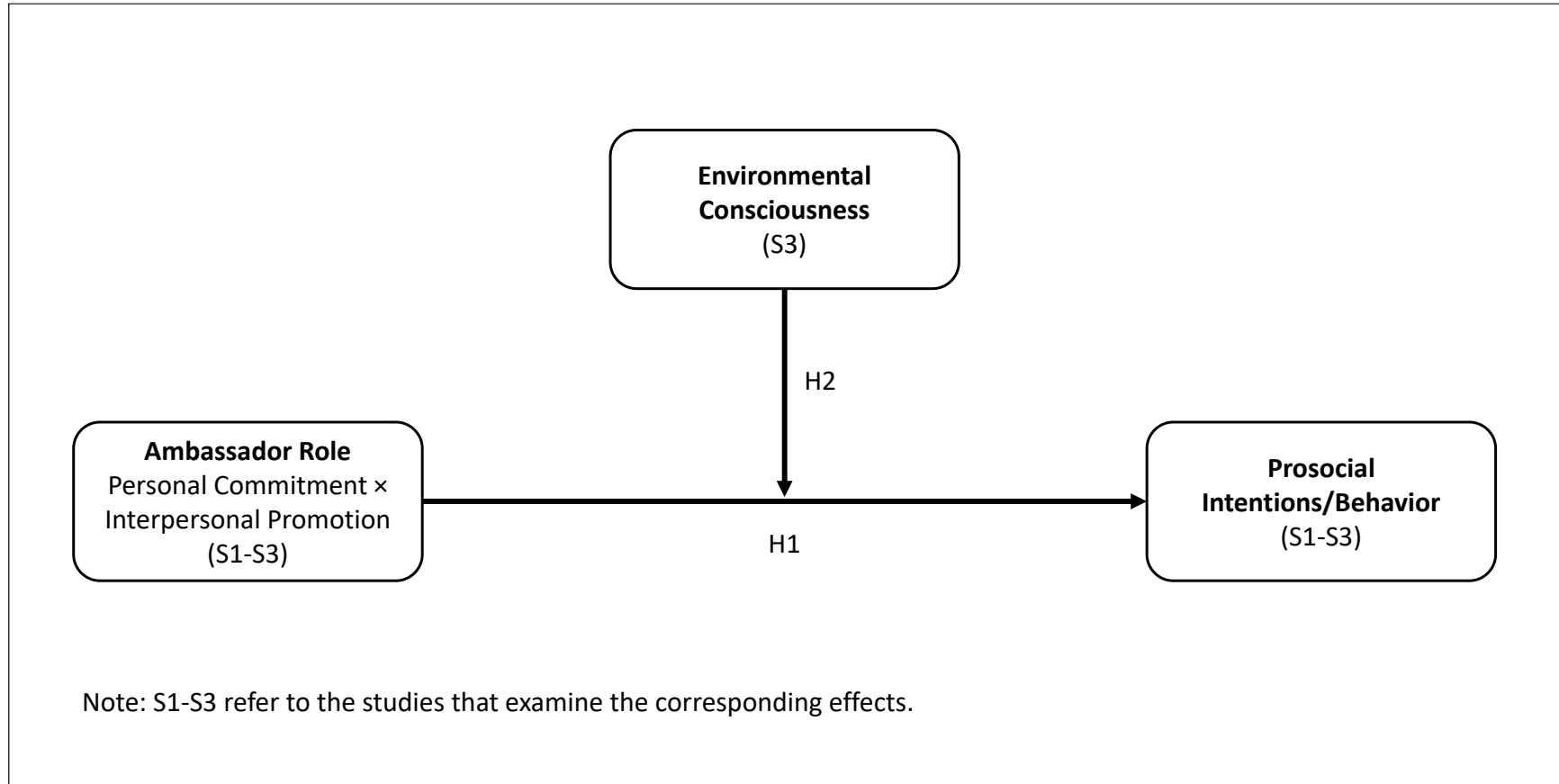
H1: Inducing an ambassador role – via personal commitment and interpersonal promotion of a prosocial initiative – increases the ambassador’s prosocial intentions and behavior.

Of both theoretical and practical relevance, a natural question arises: which consumers will the ambassador role have the greatest impact? We predict the ambassador role will have a greater influence on consumers whose collective identity is not already activated. Specifically, in the focal context of sustainability-related prosocial behaviors, a consumer’s level of environmental consciousness (i.e., their orientation of concern for the environment; Dunlap and

Jones 2002; Dunlap and Van Liere 1978; Lin and Chang 2012; Moon et al. 2016) serves as a proxy for having an inherently strong or weak collective identity. Indeed, consumers with a preexisting pro-environmental orientation are relatively high in environmental consciousness and tend to already identify with (Garvey and Bolton 2017) and engage in prosocial behaviors (Kaiser et al. 1999; Lin and Chang 2012; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996). Because prosocial behaviors are collective in nature, in that they are meant to benefit a group or community (Organ 1990; Tidwell 2005), consumers who identify with prosocial behaviors should already have a salient collective identity, *whether or not an ambassador role was induced*. As a result, inducing an ambassador role should have relatively little impact on environmentally conscious consumers' prosocial behavior (which is already high). In contrast, consumers low in environmental consciousness tend to be more at risk of engaging in socially irresponsible behaviors and do not naturally identify with environmental prosocial causes (Garvey and Bolton 2017). Thus, inducing an ambassador role – thereby activating a collective identity (Ashmore et al. 2004; Breckler and Greenwald 1986; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Oyserman 2009) – should influence these consumers to align their future prosocial behaviors with this identity (White and Dahl 2007). We hypothesize:

H2: Inducing an ambassador role increases the ambassador's prosocial intentions and behavior, more so among those lower (vs. higher) in environmental consciousness.

Figure 1 displays our theorizing in a corresponding conceptual model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Empirical Overview

Together, our theorizing in H1-H2 predicts: heightened prosociality due to an ambassador role and moderation by environmental consciousness (reflecting a pre-existing collective identity). Three experiments — including two studies in the field and one in a natural setting (one of which is longitudinal and two that capture real behavior with real products) — test our hypotheses (see Figure 1 for an organizing framework and Table 2 for an overview of studies). We show robust effects over time and in two prosocial contexts (using reusable shopping bags and reusable beverage containers). Study 1 shows that grocery store customers in an ambassador role (vs. control condition) reported greater prosocial intentions regarding reusable shopping bags. Study 2 provides longitudinal insight in the field, demonstrating that the ambassador effect persists over the course of several weeks with real prosocial behavior (i.e., actual reusable shopping bag usage). Study 3 examines consumer environmental consciousness and shows that the ambassador effect is more pronounced among consumers with lower levels of environmental consciousness, providing evidence of generalizability (via real reusable bottle usage).

Study 1: Grocery Store Field Study

Study 1 investigates how inducing an ambassador role affects ambassadors' prosociality. In the field, grocery store customers are asked to adopt an ambassador role (vs. personally commit to a prosocial behavior) regarding the use of reusable bags. We predict consumers in the ambassador role will report higher intentions to engage in prosocial behavior (H1).

Design, Participants, and Procedure

This study employed a 2 (control, ambassador) between-subjects design, with 162 shoppers of a large grocery store chain (118 females; $M_{Age} = 43.51$). Appendix B provides a

summary of sample characteristics and screening criteria for this and all other studies.

We set up a booth outside the entrance of a grocery store where participants were asked to complete a short paper survey in exchange for a reusable cloth shopping bag (cf., Morales et al. 2017). The reusable bags were beige and did not contain printing. In the ambassador condition, participants were given one reusable bag for their own use (representing their personal commitment) *and* a second bag to give to a family member to use (to interpersonally promote the prosocial behavior); they specified the recipient. In the control condition, participants were given one reusable bag for their own use (personal commitment only). Data collection took place during the same time window (comprised of four time-blocks) on two consecutive Saturdays. On the first Saturday, we began with the control condition and alternated between conditions. We followed the same procedure on the second Saturday but began with the ambassador condition.

The survey assessed prosocial behavioral intentions as follows: “After receiving a free bag today [and giving away the second bag], how often do you think you will use reusable bags when shopping in the future?” (0% = never, 100% = always). For consistency, all studies control for current prosocial behavior (in this case current reusable bag usage; 0% = never, 100% = always). In addition, because this is a field study at an actual grocery store, we also control for time of day, the amount shoppers planned to spend on the current shopping trip, and demographics. After completing the paper survey, participants were given the promised number of bags, they entered the grocery store, and were able to use their bag for their shopping that day.

Results

An ANCOVA on reusable bag usage intentions revealed a main effect of control/ambassador condition ($M_{\text{Control}} = 63.57$ vs. $M_{\text{Ambassador}} = 70.02$, $F(1, 156) = 2.80$, $p = .096$; $\eta^2 = .02$), providing initial, marginally significant support for H1 in a field setting. Current

reusable bag usage was a significant control variable ($p < .001$); planned spending, income, and time of day were NS (p 's $> .11$).

Discussion

Study 1 provides initial evidence that adopting an ambassador role enhances prosocial behavioral intentions. The ambassador role was operationalized by providing customers two reusable bags (one for their own use and a second to give to someone else), compared against a control group where customers received one reusable bag for their own use. However, this approach does raise the possibility that the quantity of bags could account for results. We examined this question in our next study.

Study 2: Field Study Examining the Ambassador Effect Over Five Weeks

The primary objective of Study 2 is to investigate the persistence of the ambassador effect over time. Specifically, we manipulate the ambassador role and examine *actual* prosocial behavior over five consecutive weeks to see if time moderates the ambassador effect.

Secondarily, this study includes a control group in which participants received *two* reusable bags for their personal use, to rule out an explanation based on quantity.

Design, Participants, and Procedure

This study employed a 2 (control, ambassador) \times 5 (time) mixed-design. The ambassador role was manipulated between-subjects and measures were repeated across five time periods. Sixty-two community bowlers in a U.S. city (15 females; $M_{Age} = 45.47$) participated for the chance to win a \$50 gift card each week, and a \$200 gift card at the end of the entire study.

The study took place over five weeks. In week 1, participants were randomly assigned (by bowling lane) to the control or ambassador condition using the following script:

Control Condition (Personal Commitment Only).

Using reusable bags for your shopping, instead of disposable, plastic bags, can be a way to help reduce waste and keep our environment clean. You can help reduce plastic waste by committing to use reusable bags. As part of this study, you will receive TWO reusable bags. These bags are FOR YOU TO USE to commit to helping reduce plastic waste. You should NOT give these bags away to anyone.

Ambassador Condition.

Using reusable bags for your shopping, instead of disposable, plastic bags, can be a way to help reduce waste and keep our environment clean. You can help reduce plastic waste by (1) committing to use reusable bags AND (2) encouraging someone else to use reusable bags. As part of this study, you will receive TWO reusable bags. One bag is FOR YOU TO USE to commit to helping reduce plastic waste. The second bag is FOR YOU TO GIVE TO SOMEONE ELSE TO USE, to encourage them to reduce plastic waste, too. The person you give the additional bag to should NOT be anyone in this bowling league.

The bags were beige with no printing. Note that the control group is conservative inasmuch as the ambassador role must enhance prosocial behavior beyond the elevated baseline (in which consumers received two bags for personal use). Following the manipulation, participants reported reusable bag usage intentions as follows: “After receiving [bags today for yourself / a bag today for yourself and giving away the second bag], how often do you think you will use a reusable bag for your shopping in the future?” (0% = never, 100% = always). As control variables, participants indicated their current reusable bag usage (number of bags owned) and bag attractiveness (un-/attractive; 7-point bi-polar). They also provided demographics.

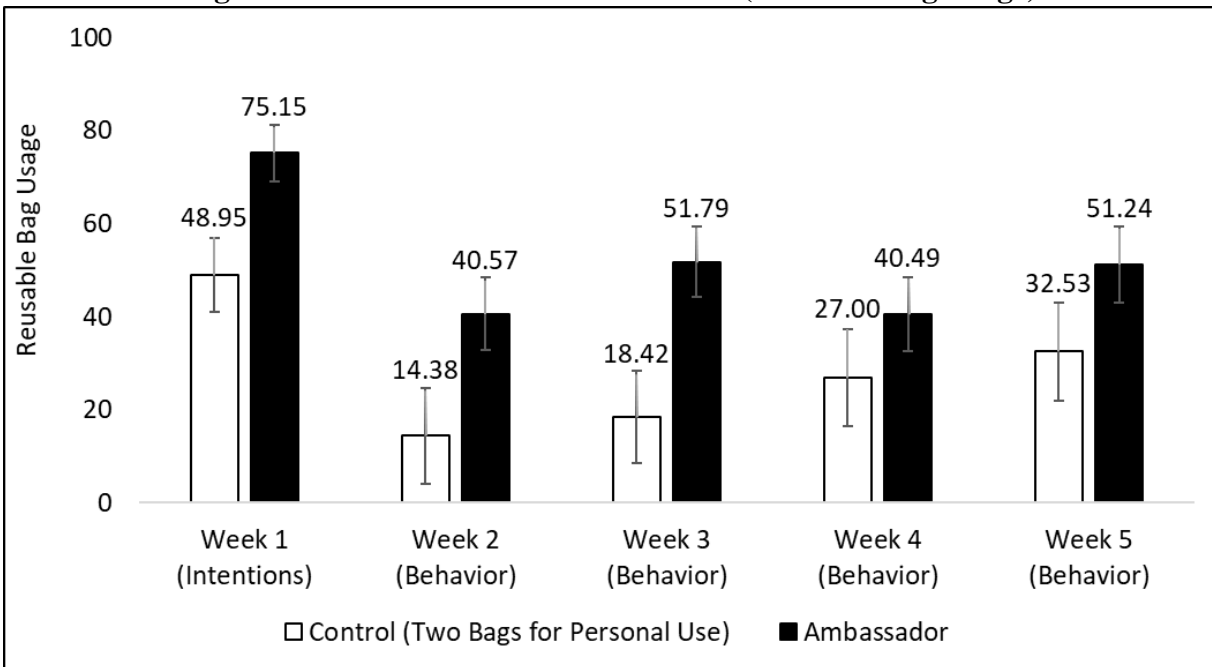
In the four subsequent weeks (weeks 2 – 5), participants reported their *actual* reusable bag usage: “Since you received the bags we gave you, how often have you used a reusable bag for your shopping?” (0% = never, 100% = always). In week 2, participants in the ambassador condition also reported whether they gave their second bag to someone else (87.20% of participants in the ambassador condition did so).

Results

A repeated measures ANCOVA on reusable bag usage over consecutive weeks revealed

the predicted main effect of control/ambassador condition ($M_{\text{Control}} = 28.26$ vs. $M_{\text{Ambassador}} = 51.85$; $F(1, 36) = 5.08, p = .03; \eta^2 = .12$), supporting H1.¹ Time period was significant ($F(4, 144) = 2.52, p = .04; \eta^2 = .07$); the condition by time period interaction ($F(4, 144) = .94, p = .44$) and control variables (current bag usage and bag attractiveness) were NS (p 's > .25). Hence, inducing an ambassador role increased consumers' reusable bag usage, and the ambassador effect persisted over time, supporting H1 (see Figure 2). Unsurprisingly, prosocial intentions over-state behavior (Prothero et al. 2011; United Nations Environment Programme 2005) – nonetheless, an ambassador effect emerges on both intentions and behavior and persists over time.

Figure 2: Prosocial Behavior Over Time (Reusable Bag Usage)



Note: Error bars = +/- 1 SEs

Discussion

Helping to address the call for more longitudinal consumer research (Chintagunta and Labroo 2020), Study 2 provides evidence in a field setting that the ambassador effect increases

¹ This study experienced 35.48% attrition; better than average for longitudinal studies (~50%; Taris 2000). Results are consistent in all weeks and if we restrict analysis to the first and second weeks when there was minimal attrition (see Appendix B for details).

actual prosocial behavior (in addition to intentions) and persists over several weeks.

Managerially, this suggests a long-lasting return on prosocial behavior with a firm's one-time effort to induce an ambassador role. As a final note, we recognize the number of bags owned is not a perfect indicator of usage, but used it as a proxy for usage seeing that the more bags a consumer owns, the more opportunities they have for usage.

Study 3: The Moderating Role of Environmental Consciousness

Having established the ambassador effect, we now turn to an investigation of environmental consciousness as a theoretically and pragmatically relevant moderator. The objective of the present study is to test H2. Specifically, we predict that the ambassador effect will emerge more so among consumers lower in environmental consciousness (for whom this prosocial collective identity is not already activated). We also provide evidence of robustness by extending our investigation to a new prosocial context (*actual usage of reusable water bottles*).

Design, Participants, and Procedure

This study employed a 2 (control, ambassador) \times (measured moderator: environmental consciousness) between-subjects design, with 72 U.S. undergraduates (48 females; $M_{\text{Age}} = 21.03$).² Participants received course credit and a chance to win a \$25 gift card. To begin, participants reported their environmental consciousness “humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs (R),” “mankind is severely abusing the environment,” “humans need not adapt to the natural environment because they can remake it to suit their needs (R),” “plants and animals exist primarily to be used by humans (R),” and “mankind was created

² Participants were from two sections of the same course and instructor. Both classes met on Tuesdays and Thursdays; one class began at 9:30 a.m. (control condition), the other at 11:00 a.m. (ambassador role). We note that use of environmental consciousness as a covariate helps rule out potential alternative accounts based on our inability to employ random assignment.

to rule over the rest of nature (R),” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; Dunlap and Van Liere 1978; Lin and Chang 2012). To manipulate the ambassador role, participants were told:

Control Condition (Personal Commitment).

“Using reusable bottles for your drinks, instead of disposable, plastic bottles, can be a way to help reduce waste and keep our environment clean. You can help reduce plastic waste by committing to use reusable bottles. As part of this study, you will receive ONE reusable bottle. This bottle is FOR YOU TO USE to help reduce plastic waste.”

Ambassador Condition.

“Using reusable bottles for your drinks, instead of disposable, plastic bottles, can be a way to help reduce waste and keep our environment clean. You can help reduce plastic waste by committing to use reusable bottles AND encouraging someone else to use reusable bottles. As part of this study, you will receive TWO reusable bottles. One bottle is FOR YOU TO USE to help reduce plastic waste. The second bottle is FOR YOU TO GIVE TO SOMEONE ELSE TO USE, to encourage them to reduce plastic waste, too.”

Participants then received the specified number of plain, stainless steel reusable bottles. As control variables, they reported their current reusable bottle usage and rated the attractiveness of the bottle (unattractive/attractive; 7-point bi-polar scale). Finally, they provided demographics.

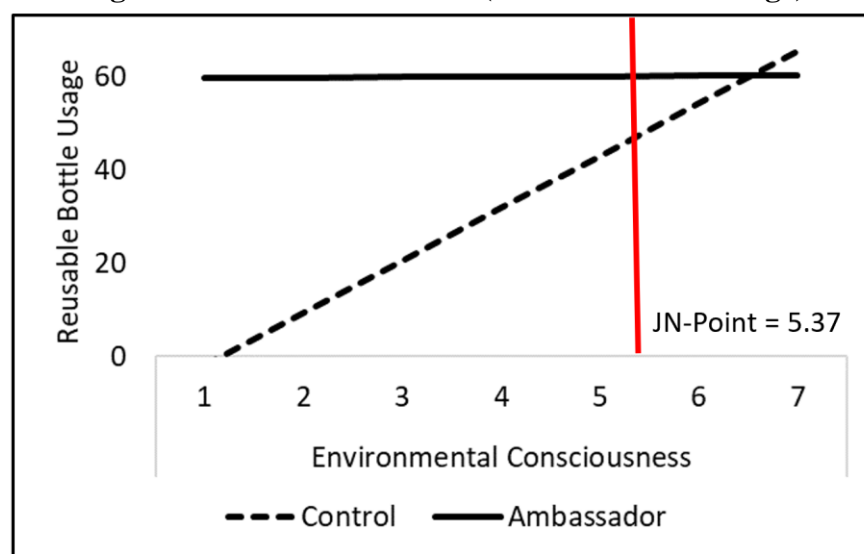
In the second part of the study, participants completed a follow-up survey 1-2 weeks later. We incorporate a control variable indicating the eleven participants who experienced a delay completing the study (e.g., due to missing class) – which did not vary by condition. As a measure of prosocial behavior, participants were asked to report their reusable bottle usage as follows: “Since you received the bottle[s] we gave you, how often have you used a reusable bottle for your drinks?” (0% = never, 100% = always). Participants in the ambassador condition were subsequently asked to report if they gave their additional bottle to someone else and if so, to whom (86.70% of participants in this condition complied with this instruction).

Results

Reusable bottle usage was analyzed as a function of control/ambassador, environmental

consciousness, their interaction, and control variables.³ ANCOVA revealed a main effect of control/ambassador condition ($F(1, 64) = 5.16, p = .03; \eta^2 = .08$), supporting H1, and a main effect of environmental consciousness ($F(1, 64) = 3.18, p = .08; \eta^2 = .05$). These main effects are qualified by their expected interaction ($F(1, 64) = 3.22, p = .08; \eta^2 = .05$). Current bottle usage was a significant control variable ($p < .001$); bottle attractiveness and study completion delay were NS (p 's $> .73$). To understand the nature of the interaction, a floodlight analysis was conducted and reveals that prosocial behavior increased due to the ambassador role (vs. control) among participants with *lower levels of environmental consciousness* (JN-point = 5.37; $\beta = 13.00, SE = 6.51, p = .05$), but participants with *higher levels of environmental consciousness* were relatively unaffected, supporting H2. This pattern is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Prosocial Behavior (Reusable Bottle Usage)



Discussion

These results support H2 and do so while generalizing to a new prosocial behavior (use of reusable bottles) over time. For consumers lower (but not higher) in environmental

³ For completeness: In this study, a two-factor structure emerged from our 5-item environmental consciousness scale, and we thus report our analysis using the largest factor (first 3 items listed; Dunlap 2008).

consciousness, the ambassador role heightens prosocial behavior. The natural setting of this study (along with Study 2) underscores the sustained impact that the ambassador role can have for consumers on their behavior over time.

General Discussion

We demonstrate consumers take on an ambassador role when they are asked to (a) personally commit to a prosocial behavior and (b) interpersonally promote the behavior to another person. Three experiments examine the ambassador role, its influence on consumers' prosocial behavior, and the moderating role of environmental consciousness (see Appendix B for study summaries). Study 1 provided initial evidence that inducing an ambassador role increases prosocial intentions. Study 2 replicated the ambassador effect longitudinally, demonstrating an increase in actual prosocial behavior over the course of several weeks. Study 3 revealed the moderating role of environmental consciousness, such that the ambassador effect has relatively more impact on consumers with lower (vs. higher) levels of environmental consciousness. Finally, in terms of generalizability, our studies demonstrate the ambassador effect across two prosocial behaviors (reusable bag usage and reusable beverage container usage).

Theoretical Contributions

This research introduces the ambassador effect as a novel means to encourage consumer prosocial behavior. Although prior work found that committing to a smaller behavior can enhance larger prosocial behaviors (e.g., towel reuse in hotels, charity donations, volunteering; Appendix A), our work expands marketing research because it boosts prosocial intentions *beyond* the capabilities of personal commitment alone (i.e., a conservative control condition). As a key distinction, the ambassador effect leverages interpersonal promotion (involving another in a prosocial cause) in addition to personal commitment.

Our findings also relate to research on the dimensions of consumers' pre-existing moral identity, internalization and symbolization (Aquino and Reed 2002), which are reminiscent of the components of the ambassador effect. Prior work finds high levels of internalization drive prosocial behavior, whereas the impact of symbolization is relatively small (Winterich et al. 2013). We enrich this perspective by demonstrating that together, both components of the ambassador role have a stronger (interactive) effect on prosocial behavior.

In addition, we identify a meaningful boundary condition by demonstrating that an ambassador role increases prosocial behavior among consumers *low* (vs. high) in environmental consciousness. This boundary condition is noteworthy from a conceptual viewpoint because it helps rule out an alternative explanation: that the ambassador effect is 'merely' a way to make salient an already existing social identity. If that were the case, we would expect a positive effect on prosocial behavior when environmental consciousness, which is reflective of identity strength, is high (Bolton and Reed 2004; Reed II 2004). This boundary condition also sheds light on whether the ambassador role could elicit licensing effects. Notably, we see no evidence of licensing across studies; instead, we find robust evidence that the ambassador role heightens subsequent prosocial behavior rather than undermining it. While licensing effects are well-established (see Appendix A), such effects are often examined in contexts that do not appear to reflect the critical components of the ambassador effect (personal commitment and interpersonal promotion), which may make it less likely for licensing to emerge. Given that a collective identity underlies the ambassador role, we suggest that this collective identity may render consumers less susceptible to licensing in the prosocial domain (cf. Garvey and Bolton 2017).

Managerial and Policy Implications

From a managerial and policy perspective, our research reveals implications. First, this

research helps address priorities 5 and 6 from the 2022-2024 MSI Research Priorities. That is, the role firms play in shaping consumers' prosocial behaviors via ambassadorships can help promote responsible consumption (Priority 5) and advance the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Priority 6). Second, the investment required of the firm to induce the ambassador role is quite reasonable, in both time and monetary expense. A firm only needs to encourage the ambassador to involve one other person in the prosocial behavior and the return from this investment can last multiple weeks. Third, our findings point to actionable implications for retailers. On average, consumers in the U.S. use approximately 100 billion plastics bags per year (Gamerman 2008), accounting for an estimated annual cost to retailers of four billion U.S. dollars (Szaky 2009). Encouraging consumers to engage in prosocial behaviors like using reusable bags not only helps protect the environment (which can lead to reputational benefits for the firm), but can also be beneficial via cost savings. Fourth, our research finds the ambassador effect is more likely to emerge among consumers who are low (vs. high) in environmental consciousness. From a substantive viewpoint, this finding suggests that an ambassador role is particularly effective at enhancing prosocial behavior among those consumers who need the 'nudge' toward prosociality the most (relative to consumers who are already more concerned with the focal prosocial cause). Combining this insight with our finding that the ambassador effect can last multiple weeks, an ambassador role could therefore make a lasting difference among consumers who are relatively less receptive to certain prosocial behaviors. This finding also highlights the type of consumer firms should target as potential ambassadors. Finally, the ambassador effect can be implemented by a variety of organizations that seek to encourage prosociality (highlighted in Table 1). In addition to these broader implications, in Table 2 we outline specific examples of the ambassador effect in practice based on key insights.

Table 2: Managerial Implications and the Ambassador Effect in Practice

<i>Key Findings</i>	<i>Managerial Implications</i>	<i>The Ambassador Effect in Practice</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers in an ambassador role (i.e., personally commit to and interpersonally promote a prosocial behavior) exhibit greater prosociality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inducing an ambassador role is relatively simple and cost effective. • Customer prosociality can lead to cost savings • Inducing an ambassador role can result in reputational benefits for the firm. • Ambassadorships can help promote responsible consumption (2022-2024 MSI Research Priority 5) • Ambassadorships can help advance the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (2022-2024 MSI Research Priority 6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a frontline employee ambassador program by encouraging employees to be prosocial and encourage customers to do the same, and/or train frontline employees to induce ambassador roles among customers. • Run a promotion, giving customers two prosocial products, one for themselves and one to give to another person. • Advertise reusable products as bought in pairs at point of purchase, one for the customer and one to give to another person. • Call for prosocial ambassadors via the firm's social media accounts, requesting they engage in the prosocial behavior and encourage another person to get involved in the initiative as well. • Recruit volunteers to engage in peer-to-peer fundraising who are passionate about a cause.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambassador effect endures over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A one-time effort from the firm can have a relatively lasting impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firms can track their ambassadors' prosociality to determine when the effect declines. Once a decline is detected, firms can reengage with the ambassador to revitalize the effect.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambassador effect emerges primarily among consumers who are not already environmentally conscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firms should target consumers who low in environmental consciousness as potential ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize customer data to create profiles of potential ambassadors

Limitations and Future Research

Although we demonstrate the ambassador effect across different contexts and over time, our studies have limitations that point to future research. One avenue is to explore ways to enhance the effectiveness of the ambassador role. Would the ambassador effect remain if personal commitment and interpersonal promotion were not tied to a product giveaway? For example, can an ambassador role be induced by simple communication (e.g., posting on social media)? Moreover, would the ambassador effect be heightened if the ambassador role was made *more* visible to others (e.g., a ‘prosocial ambassador’ logo printed on the bag)? The ambassador effect emerged when reusable bags were free, but what if consumers purchased the reusable items; might the ambassador effect be stronger when the prosocial behavior is more costly (Gneezy et al. 2012)? Likewise, given that the marketplace already rewards or penalizes customers to encourage prosocial behavior (e.g., a 10-cent discount for using a reusable bag vs. a 10-cent fee for using a non-reusable bag; Neiman 2017; Romer 2017), how does the ambassador role interact with other marketplace incentives? Another avenue for research relates to firm characteristics. What kind of firms (e.g., non-profit, for-profit) find the most success with ambassador programs? Moreover, is it better for firms to induce ambassadorships at the organizational frontline (e.g., store check-out line) or corporate level (e.g., via communication campaigns)? Finally, besides environmental consciousness, what other consumer characteristics are important when targeting potential ambassadors? Will the ambassador effect be more pronounced among opinion leaders or market mavens (Clark and Goldsmith 2005) due to greater investment in the role? Will individuals with extensive social networks be more vested or is the ambassador effect stronger among consumers for whom interpersonal influence is more rare? Certainly, there is opportunity to further explore best practices of the ambassador effect.

Appendix A: Positioning of the Current Research Relative to the Broader Literature on Prosocial Consumer Behavior

Source	Approach to Influence Prosociality	Stimuli	Dependent Variables	Main Results
Ariely et al. (2009)	Financial Incentives and Social Observability	Reward-Based Incentives and Social Observability	Prosocial Behavior	Private (vs. public) reward-based incentives encourage more (less) prosocial behavior; implying that public reward-based incentives crowd-out image motivation and the benefits of signaling.
Baca-Motes et al. (2013)	Personal Commitment	Specific/Action Oriented Commitments	Prosocial Behavior	Specific/action-oriented commitments increase prosocial behavior.
Bénabou and Tirole (2006)	Financial Incentives	Reward- and Penalty-Based Incentives	Prosocial Behavior	Reward- and penalty-based incentives create doubt as to true motive, crowding out, and thus reducing, prosocial behavior.
Brough et al. (2016)	Social Identity	Gender Identity	Prosocial Behavior	Male engagement in green behaviors is influenced by threatening or affirming their masculinity and masculine green branding.
Duclos and Barasch (2014)	Self-Construal Orientation and Social Identity	Independent and Interdependent Orientation; In-Groups and Out-Groups	Prosocial Behavior	When primed with an independent self-construal, consumers aid members of their in-groups and out-groups. When primed with an interdependent self-construal, consumers are more likely to aid in-group members than out-group members.
Frey and Meier (2004)	Social Norms	Social Comparisons	Prosocial Behavior	Prosocial behavior (e.g., charitable giving) increases when consumers know that others contribute.
Gneezy et al. (2011)	Costliness of Initial Prosocial Behavior and Social Identity	Costly and Costless Initial Prosocial Behaviors	Prosocial Behavior	When consumers engage in costly prosocial behaviors, they signal a prosocial identity, and align their subsequent behavior with this self-perception.
Gneezy and Rustichini (2000)	Financial Incentives	Penalty-Based Incentives	Prosocial Behavior	Small, penalty-based incentives reduce prosocial behavior.
Goldstein et al. (2008)	Social Norms	Normative Appeals	Prosocial Behavior	Normative (vs. industry standard) appeals enhance prosocial behavior.
Karmarkar and Bollinger (2015)	Priming and Licensing	Prosocial Behavior	Prosocial & Indulgent Purchases	Engaging in prosocial behavior (e.g., using reusable bags) primes (vs. licenses) consumers to make more prosocial (vs. indulgent) purchases.
Khan and Dahr (2006)	Licensing	Altruistic (Prosocial) Choice	Indulgent Consumption	Via licensing, making an altruistic choice before consumption increases consumers' likelihood to engage in indulgent consumption.
Krishna (2011)	Licensing	Cause-Related Marketing	Prosocial Behavior	Purchasing products attached to cause-related marketing decreases prosocial behavior (e.g., charitable giving) and consumer happiness.
Kristofferson et al. (2014)	Self-Consistency, Licensing, and Social Observability	Social Observability of Token Support	Motives and Meaningful Support	Private (vs. public) token support enacts consistency (vs. impression management) motives, leading to increased (vs. decreased) meaningful support; effect is attenuated when values are aligned with the cause, and reversed when connection to the cause is strong.

Lacetera et al. (2012)	Financial Incentives	Reward-Based Incentives	Prosocial Behavior	Reward-based incentives increase prosocial behavior and are more effective as size increases; substitution effects should be considered.
Lacetera et al. (2014)	Financial Incentives	Reward-Based Incentives	Prosocial Behavior	Reward-based incentives increase prosocial behavior and are more effective as the size increases; donor type should be considered.
Liu and Aaker (2008)	Mindsets	Emotional and Value Maximization Mindsets	Prosocial Behavior	Emotional (vs. value maximization) mindsets increase charitable donations.
Mazar and Zhong (2010)	Licensing	Exposure to/Purchases of Prosocial Products	Altruistic Behavior	Mere exposure to prosocial products increases altruistic behaviors, but purchasing prosocial products decreases altruistic behaviors.
Meier (2007)	Financial Incentives	Reward-Based Incentives	Prosocial Behavior	Reward-based incentives that aid a cause increase prosocial behavior in the short-term but may undermine behavior in the long-term.
Ratner and Miller (2001)	Self-Relevance	Self-Relevance	Social Action	Consumers are more likely to take social action when the action is congruent with their self-interest.
Schwartz et al. (2014)	Personal Commitment	Binding Pre-Commitment	Healthy Behaviors	Self-control oriented, binding pre-commitments to healthy behavior (e.g., healthy food choices) increases healthy behavior.
Small and Verrochi (2009)	Emotional Contagion	Sad, Happy, and Neutral Facial Expressions	Prosocial Behavior	Sad (vs. happy or neutral) facial expressions on the victim's face enhance donations.
White and Simpson (2013)	Appeals and Identity	Injunctive Appeals, Descriptive Appeals, Benefit Appeals and Individual Identity, Collective Identity	Unfamiliar Prosocial Behavior	Injunctive and descriptive appeals are most effective when the collective self is activated, whereas self-benefit and descriptive appeals are effective when the individual self is activated.
Williams et al. (2006)	Question-Behavior Effect	Questioning Someone's Intentions	Healthy Behavior	Asking questions about normative (e.g., exercising) and non-normative (e.g., using drugs) healthy behaviors, increases these behaviors.
Winterich et al. (2009)	Social Identity	Moral Identity and Gender Identity	Prosocial Behavior	Moral identity increases donations for out-groups (in-groups) for consumers with a feminine (masculine) gender identity.
Winterich et al. (2013)	Social Identity and Social Observability	Moral Identity Dimensions and Social Recognition	Prosocial Behavior	Social recognition increases charitable behavior for consumers high in moral identity symbolization and low in moral identity internalization. Those high in moral identity internalization are unaffected by social recognition, despite their level of symbolization.
Current Research	Ambassador Role	Personal Commitment and Interpersonal Promotion (Ambassador Role), Group Size, Engagement from Others, Time	Prosocial Behavior and Intentions	Consumers' prosocial behavioral intentions and actual behavior are greater when in an ambassador role. The ambassador effect endures over time. The ambassador effect emerges predominantly among those who are low (vs. high) in environmental consciousness.

Appendix B: Summary of Studies

Design	Sample	Number Screened	Operationalization	Control Variables	Key Findings
Study 1: 2 (control, ambassador) between-ss	162 Shoppers 118 females $M_{Age} =$ 43.51	0	Study in the field giving shoppers reusable bags as they enter the store	Current prosocial behavior, time of day, planned spending, demographics	Consumers in an ambassador role exhibit greater prosocial behavioral intentions
Study 2: 2 (control, ambassador) between-ss \times 5 (time) within-ss	62 Consumers 15 females $M_{Age} =$ 45.47	0	Study in the field giving consumers reusable bags, assessing real prosocial behavior over multiple weeks	Current prosocial behavior, attractiveness of prosocial item	Consumers in an ambassador role exhibit greater prosocial behavior; demonstrates persistence of the effect over time; rules out mere quantity as an explanation
Study 3: 2 (control, ambassador) between-ss \times (environmental consciousness)	72 students 48 females $M_{Age} =$ 21.03	1	Study in a natural setting giving consumers reusable bottles, assessing real prosocial behavior over 1-2 weeks	Current prosocial behavior, attractiveness of prosocial item, study completion delay	For consumers lower (vs. higher) in environmental consciousness, the ambassador role heightens prosocial behavior.

Notes:

1. Study 2 experienced a total attrition rate of 35.48%. In week 2, three participants dropped out, for an attrition rate of 4.84% and a sample of 59. In subsequent weeks, the number of participants dropped were nine (week 3), eight (week 4), and two (week 5), resulting in a final sample of 40. Results are consistent if we restrict analysis to the first and second time periods when there was almost no attrition (main effect of condition: $M_{Control} = 32.07$ vs. $M_{Ambassador} = 56.57$; $F(1, 55) = 10.63$, $p = .002$; $\eta^2 = .16$; main effect of time period: $F(1, 55) = 8.16$, $p = .006$; $\eta^2 = .13$; condition by time period interaction: $F(1, 55) = .81$, $p = .37$). We note that (a) this attrition rate is better than the average for longitudinal studies, which is close to 50% (Taris 2000; Wang et al. 2013), and (b) that our results are consistent in early and later weeks (helping to rule out concerns about missing data).

2. Because Study 3 utilized a student sample, we included an instructional attention check (e.g., select agree; Oppenheimer et al. 2009). This attention check was used as screening criteria. The pattern of results is consistent when including the screened participant.

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