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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
IRVINE

Humanizing Repurposed Products: A Tale of Creator Salience

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Management

by

Angela King

Dissertation Committee:  
Associate Professor Loraine Lau-Gesk, Chair  
Professor Cornelia (Connie) Pechmann  
Professor Rui (Juliet) Zhu

2025



## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, and partner—for your patience, understanding, and constant belief in me.

I also dedicate this work to my mentors and teachers, who challenged me to keep growing and generously shared their time and wisdom.

Finally, this is dedicated to the kind of resilience that rarely feels noble or easy, but instead uncomfortable, messy, and exhausting—yet still carries us forward.

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Finally, to my partner, Omari, thank you for your remarkable patience, understanding, and support of me. I could not have reached this point without you by my side.

## **VITA**

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## **FIELD OF STUDY**

Sustainability, Consumer Psychology, Brand Storytelling, Affect and Cognition

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Humanizing Repurposed Products: A Tale of Creator Salience

by

Angela King

Doctor of Philosophy in Management

University of California, Irvine, 2025

Associate Professor Loraine Lau-Gesk, Chair

The present research introduces a novel construct, *creator salience*, to test the proposition that the heightened awareness of concrete cues that an identifiable human intentionally transformed the materials increases preferences for repurposed products. I present findings of seven studies which overall provide support for a creator salience effect boost for repurposed products. Greater precision about creator salience is revealed as well. Study 1 finds that a product narrative for a table made from old skateboards emphasizing the creator's role in producing the product is more effective than detailing the creator's background or not mentioning the creator at all. Study 2 finds that the degree to which the creator's background is aligned or unaligned with product transformation ability made no difference compared to each other or to the control. Study 3 shows that there is a strong association of humans (vs. Artificial Intelligence or AI) as the creators of art (made from chalk and newspaper) to demonstrate creator salience effects even when not explicitly mentioned. Indeed, human (vs. AI) creator salience bolsters purchase intentions for a product category (i.e., artwork) that has historically been a phenomenon exclusive to human creators. In Study 4, emotional resonance emerges as a

mediator and alternative explanations are ruled out for a repurposed table. Study 5 shows a trend toward a preference for human creators compared to non-creators, but no statistically significant difference. Study 6 identifies a moderator: the creator salience effect holds for hedonic products (decorative bowl) but disappears for functional products (messenger bag). Study 7 replicates Study 3 and further confirms that emotional resonance is a stronger mediator than other potential mechanisms such as perceived product creativity or awe. This work offers somewhat counterintuitive insights to current marketing practices; it appears that certain details provided about the creator have less of a role than anticipated. Instead, marketers should emphasize the (human) creator's process behind the repurposing transformation.

## INTRODUCTION

A strategy that marketers often use to tell a compelling brand narrative is one that highlights the people behind it, like the founder (i.e., main character), to help foster a strong emotional connection with the consumer. A photo along with the founder's background and the details around the early makings of the brand can be used to convey its values and motives. Offering a 'face' behind the brand humanizes it (Mills & John, 2023) and humanizing a brand can lead to positive marketing outcomes (Fleck et al., 2014).

Repurposed products inherently contain narratives due to their transformation from an old to new form and function (Kamleitner et al., 2019; Meister, 2005). Repurposing involves using substance or materials from one product to make a different product serving a different purpose (I. Lu & Kwan, 2023). As telling stories go, a repurposed product can be viewed as a main character with a different past life. Recent research shows that offering a "minimal narrative" of a repurposed product's transformation increases its appeal in comparison to no mention of it at all (Kamleitner et al., 2019; Meister, 2005). Remiss from this work on repurposed products is any consideration of the 'human' creator behind the product's transformation. Some marketing efforts emphasize only the product transformation itself: "Compressive is made with 79% recycled water bottles (RPET) and 21% spandex" (Girlfriend Collective, n.d.). Others also highlight the creator behind the transformed product: "Each piece in this shop is upcycled from a vintage textile, sourced by our founder and upcycled into some of our signature shapes" (Proche, n.d.). Indeed, like creating art and music, repurposing a product fundamentally requires creativity, which until very recently with major advancements in AI, only humans could possibly imagine and create (Runco, 2023).

The present research examines a novel construct, coined herein creator salience, to test the proposition that the heightened awareness of concrete cues that an identifiable human intentionally transformed the materials increases preferences for repurposed products. Other lines of work beyond branding suggest generally positive effects of human influence on consumer preferences (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2015; Schroll et al., 2018; Suher et al., 2021). Creator salience should similarly improve preferences for repurposed products. Findings across several studies provide support for a creator salience boost for repurposed products and reveal greater precision about the creator salience construct. Study 1 finds that a product narrative for a table made from old skateboards emphasizing the creator's role in producing the product is more effective than highlighting the creator's background or not mentioning the creator at all. Study 2 shows that whether creator background is aligned or unaligned with product transformation ability makes no difference relative to a control. Study 3 relies on the strong association of humans (vs. AI) as the creators of art (made from chalk and newspaper) to demonstrate creator salience effects can emerge beyond explicit messaging. Indeed, human (vs. AI) creator salience bolsters purchase intentions for artwork. In Study 4, emotional resonance emerges as a mediator and alternative explanations are ruled out for a repurposed table. Study 5 shows a trend of human creators improving preferences compared to non-creators, though this effect is not statistically significant. Study 6 identifies a moderator: the creator salience effect holds for hedonic products (decorative bowl) but disappears for functional products (messenger bag). Study 7 replicates Study 3 and further confirms that emotional resonance is a stronger mediator than other potential mechanisms such as perceived product creativity or awe. This work offers somewhat counterintuitive insights to current marketing practices; it appears that certain details provided

about the creator have less of a role than anticipated. Instead, marketers should emphasize the (human) creator's process behind the repurposing transformation.

These insights are particularly timely as research suggests that the majority of consumers believe that large businesses are not doing enough to combat climate change (Tyson et al., 2023). Moreover, research suggests that recycling, though often posited as a solution to waste issues, is also significantly less effective than other sustainability strategies such as reduction and reuse, which prevent waste in the first place (e.g., Singh & Walker, 2024). This has led to a rise in repurposing among both consumers and retailers. In 2017, 66% of consumers reported that they had upcycled, with 21% saying they did so regularly (Bashir, 2025). In less than fifteen years, there has been a more than 2000% increase in repurposed product listings on Etsy, a popular e-commerce site that emphasizes the selling of hand-made or vintage items (Caprioli et al., 2024; Etsy, n.d.). In 2021, the market for repurposed food products was valued at \$53 billion and expected to double by the next decade (Jain & Deshmukh, 2023). This is not just a trend among individual consumers and small businesses; many global brands are also following suit. For example, Adidas converts plastic deep-sea gillnets into new shoes and apparel. Southwest Airlines partners with Unshattered to turn old leather airplane seat covers into bags and wallets. Even luxury fashion brands have created repurposed product lines (e.g., Miu Miu, Maison Margiela).

This inquiry around creator salience helps to disentangle the “human” and “product” effect in repurposed product narratives. By doing so, this research also offers practical strategies for marketers aiming to craft effective messages to promote sustainable behaviors. The remainder of my dissertation provides a broad review of the literature, proposes theory and

specific hypotheses around creator salience, presents seven studies and concludes with a discussion of theoretical and marketing implications, limitations, and directions for future work.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Narrative Transportation Theory**

The term narrative transportation was coined by Gerrig (1993) who used the term to describe reading as a form of travel or detachment from the reader's own world. The transportation-imagery model was then developed by Green & Brock (2002). Van Laer et al. (2014) significantly extended this theory by developing the extended transportation-imagery model. Their updated model was the first to clearly define the conceptual differences between a story and a narrative and the first to delineate the antecedents and consequences of narrative transportation.

At its most basic definition, a story is defined as an account of an event or events where one state leads to another state (Bennett & Royle, 2004). The essential elements are a plot, characters playing a role in the plot, some sort of climactic plot action, and the end of the plot where an issue is typically resolved (Banerjee & Greene, 2012; Green & Brock, 2000; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Stern, 1994). A narrative is defined as a story that the story receiver interprets in relation to their own personal experiences, knowledge, attitudes, etc. (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003). Consumers develop narratives from stories by using factors like their own personal experience, knowledge, attitudes to interpret the story information, fill in any gaps, and indulge their imagination. While some literature conceptually distinguishes between story and narrative, there are other works that do not make this distinction and use them interchangeably (e.g., Kamleitner et al., 2019).

According to this theory, there are two main components to narrative transportation (Van Laer et al., 2014). Consumers must experience some degree of empathy (Slater & Rouner, 2002) and they must generate some mental imagery of the plot (Green & Brock, 2002). Experiencing empathy for the characters means that the story receiver feels what the character feels. Generating mental imagery means that the story receivers generate vivid images of the plot such that they can imagine themselves going through those actions. Thus, narrative transportation consists of both a relatively affective component (empathy) and a relatively cognitive component (mental imagery).

Some narratives and consumers can achieve a greater degree of narrative transportation than others (Van Laer et al., 2014). For instance, narratives that have identifiable characters, an imaginable plot, and verisimilitude (i.e., lifelikeness) tend to arouse greater narrative transportation. Consumers who are more familiar with the narrative topic or have naturally high transportability (related to empathy and image-producing capacity) are also more likely to be narratively transported. Furthermore, consumers in certain demographic groups are also more likely to be transported: younger, educated, and female consumers. Situational variables such as the degree of attention consumers pay to the narrative also increase narrative transportation.

Van Laer et al. (2018) also established a theory and model of narrativity which outlines the extent to which a text tells a story. The main components of narrativity are content, discourse, transportation, and persuasion. According to this theory, narrative content, narrative discourse, and consumer characteristics determine the degree of narrative transportation which in turn determines the degree of narrative persuasion. The first two components of narrative content are affective and cognitive consciousnesses. These refer to the idea that a text recounts initial events about which characters express feelings and thoughts that directly lead to later events

(Bruner, 1986; Van Laer et al., 2018). The other two components of narrative content are spatial and temporal embedding. Spatial embedding refers to the extent to which a text provides information about the space (Escalas & Bettman, 2000). Temporal embedding refers to the extent to which a text details set of events which are both chronologically and causally related (Escalas, 1998; Thompson, 1997). Narrative discourse refers to the presentation of the narrative content using literary devices. Genre is an element of narrative discourse that refers to how the story plot unfolds, meaning whether the events are inclining, declining, or stable over the course of the narrative (e.g., tragedy, comedy, progressive, regressive) (Genette, 1979/1992). Drama is an element of narrative discourse that is caused by plot twists (Burke, 1962). The more that a text has these elements of narrativity, the more likely that consumers will be persuaded.

There are subtle differences between narrative transportation and other similar constructs: absorption, flow, and immersion. Absorption (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974) is a concept that describes a personality difference compared to narrative transportation which describes a state of mind. On the other hand, flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992) may be a more general construct or state that does not specifically entail the same components as narrative transportation (i.e., empathy and mental imagery) (Bracken, 2006). Lastly, immersion (Wang & Calder, 2006) has to do with experiential, aesthetic and visual imagery and does not involve narrative elements.

Green and Brock (2000) discussed how narrative transportation induces persuasion by helping consumers perceive information as their own real-life experiences, making novel information easier to understand (Green & Brock, 2000; Marsh & Fazio, 2006). By losing themselves in a narrative, consumers' attitudes can shift because narratives reduce counterarguing (Ma, 2020) and increase reflection on its meaning (Hamby & Brinberg, 2016). This is because narratives are not overtly persuasive and thus consumers are less likely to

scrutinize their arguments overall (Green et al., 2004, 2008). These effects can be long-lasting (Appel & Richter, 2007), particularly when a high degree of narrative transportation is achieved (Russell et al., 2019). Narrative effects on persuasion differ from other models of persuasion like the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken, 1987) that focus on analytical and overt persuasion (Escalas, 2007a; Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Slater, 2002). The latter models predict that whether the consumer considers the message arguments depends upon factors such as their personal involvement (Chaiken, 1980). However, narratives do not present overt arguments for consumers to consider.

The marketing literature shows that product and brand narratives are effective at producing narrative transportation. Much marketing research examines various moderators of narrative transportation: advertisements that utilize indirect (vs. direct) model eye gaze (To & Patrick, 2021), advertisements that show process (vs. outcome) (Ringler et al., 2024), whether the consumer is considering an experiential (vs. material) purchase (Gallo et al., 2024), whether the narrative is presented by an independent source (vs. the brand) (Tezer et al., 2020), whether there is high (vs. low) degree of narrative intimacy (Valenzuela & Galli, 2023), and consumers' similarity (vs. dissimilarity) to the narrative's protagonist (Van Den Hende et al., 2012). In turn, higher narrative transportation was linked to more favorable marketing outcomes such as increased focus on advertisement outcomes (McFerran et al., 2010), reduced focus on personal probability of winning a lottery (McFerran et al., 2010), enhanced brand experience (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010), more favorable product and brand attitudes (Glaser et al., 2024), and increased advertisement effectiveness (To & Patrick, 2021).

Of relevance to the current work, narratives have been briefly looked at within the repurposed product literature. Kamleitner et al. (2019) found that a product's transformation

from an old product to a new one is considered a “minimal narrative” (Meister, 2005). As described before, the most basic definition of a story is an account of an event or events leading from one state to another state or outcome (Bennett & Royle, 2004). A minimal narrative consists of an identical entity, time change, and usually some form of transformation (Meister, 2005). Following these definitions, a repurposed product then inherently holds a minimal narrative. These minimal narratives are not necessarily salient to consumers but have positive effects when they become salient. For instance, Kamleitner et al. (2019) found that salient (vs. non-salient) product narratives increased preferences for repurposed products. Caprioli et al. (2023) found that product narratives increased appeal for repurposed products that were relatively dissimilar (vs. similar) from their old form. Winterich et al. (2019) found that salient (vs. non-salient) product narratives improved consumers’ recycling intentions and actual behavior. In these narratives, the product is the main character. What is missing from these works is a discussion of the human element or character. How does adding the human creator the repurposed product’s transformation narrative affect consumers’ preferences for such products?

Indeed, characters are central to any narrative, many of whom are human, however, narrative transportation theory and extensions of it do not explicitly address the human “essence”. Even stories where the entire cast of characters is non-human, the characteristics imbued in these non-humans are human in nature. This warrants a review of the literature on human influence, which cuts across various disciplines and theories as illuminated in the next section.

## **Social Theories**

Evolutionary theory posits that being social increased an animal's chance of living and reproducing (McGlynn, 2010). This theory accordingly surmises that humans have naturally adapted to be social with other humans as an important survival strategy. This reinforced factors such as moral emotions (e.g., shame) which encourage individuals to adhere to social norms, reducing an individual's chance of being rejected from the group and improving their survival outcomes (Kämmerer, 2019).

Other theories suggest humans' need for social connections stems from more emotional motivations. Freud (e.g., 1930) conjectured that humans' need for social connections stems from sexual and familial motives. Attachment theory similarly posited that the way humans seek to form and maintain relationships with others is based on their relationship with their mother during infancy (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). The hierarchy of needs hypothesized that after one's physiological and safety needs are satisfied, the next most important need to satisfy is belongingness (Maslow, 1943). This feeling is fulfilled through a feeling of connection because of receiving acceptance, love, and respect from their social groups. Baumeister and Leary (1995) put forth the belongingness hypothesis which posits that humans are fundamentally motivated to seek and maintain a minimum number of lasting, positive relationships. They suggest that people are naturally open to creating social attachments and try to avoid losing them. Self-determination theory hypothesizes that relatedness, the need to form strong relationships with others around oneself, is one of three universal needs that contributes to psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Social production theory suggests that humans have just two well-being goals in life: social and physical well-being (Ormel et al., 1999; Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006). Social well-being is achieved through several goals or basic needs, including affection from others

(Nieboer et al., 2005). Empirical data even shows that poor social well-being can negatively affect physical and mental well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Both low quantity and low quality social relationships were related to an increased risk of death (House et al., 1988) and lonely individuals tended to have lower quality sleep and higher blood pressure (Cacioppo et al., 2002).

Research suggests that individuals adopt specific behaviors to cultivate human connection. For example, the social reconnection hypothesis suggests that social exclusion motivates consumers to look for other ways to obtain social acceptance (Maner et al., 2007). Consumers might engage in compensatory consumption or the purchase or use of products/services to satisfy some psychological need (Loh et al., 2021). Compensatory consumption often is used to promote symbolic connectedness to others (Mead et al., 2011; Yan & Sengupta, 2021). For instance, one work found that lonely consumers were more likely to choose used (vs. new) products (Huang & Fishbach, 2021). Consumers may also anthropomorphize (i.e., humanize a nonhuman entity), in part, when they desire social connection Epley et al. (2007). According to terror management theory, consumers will behave in ways to feel that the self is connected to other entities beyond the self (e.g., joining clubs) when they are reminded of mortality (Lifton, 1973; Yaden et al., 2017).

These broadly sourced theories and empirical data suggest a universal human need to belong and connect with other humans, illustrating how powerful human influence can be. These theories are also relevant for marketing research that indicates the power of human influence on consumer behavior. The following sub-sections provide an overview of other literature streams that have focused on the impact of human influence in some capacity and their role in the marketing literature.

## **Social Impact Theory and Social Presence Theory**

Not all social theories are focused on humans' motivations to be social and how they behave to make those connections. Other theories make predictions about the impact of a social group or presence on the individual and how that impacts outcomes like emotions and behavior. These theories suggest a nuanced outlook of human connections.

Social impact theory (Latané & Wolf, 1981) posits that several factors can impact the power of a social force: its size, proximity, and source strength. The bigger, closer, and higher the social force is, the greater the impact. Its influence is also an inverse function of these factors such that its power will be divided among the targets. There are some limitations to this theory though as it was able to explain some social presence effects but not others (Argo et al., 2005). For example, it did predict a significant increase in negative emotions as the social presence's size went from zero to one person. However, it was not able to predict the insignificant change when the social presence grew from one person to three people.

A closely related framework is social presence theory (Short et al., 1976). This theory was originally used to explain differences in consumers' "sense of being with another" through various communication mediums (e.g., email, telephone). Argo et al. (2020, p. 126) defined it as "a social entity, which includes another person, or group of people who are physically present and influence a consumer, intentionally or not". Schroll et al. (2018) defined social presence as the presence of others in the same environment as the consumer (Argo et al., 2005; Dahl et al., 2001; Jiang et al., 2013; Ramanathan & McGill, 2007). Expanding on these definitions, Lee et al. (2024) distinguish between interactive social presence, passive social presence, and virtual social presence. Interactive social presence requires direct communication between the social entity and

the consumer. Passive social presence means that the social entity is present, but not in direct communication with the consumer. Virtual social presence is distinctly defined as another entity's co-presence in a virtual space that either intentionally or unintentionally influences the consumer. This definition encompasses social presence that occurs online and not physically in-person (e.g., merely thinking about another person, speaking with someone on the phone, or meeting someone in virtual reality). Publishing the number of video views (Ringler et al., 2024) or receiving haptic feedback (Hadi & Valenzuela, 2020) are examples of virtual presence in the marketplace. Definitions of social presence do not appear to refer to the presence of any specific person or differentiate between the presence of known (vs. unknown) individuals or socially close (vs. distant) others.

Social presence had both positive and negative impacts on consumer affect and marketing outcomes. For example, Argo et al. (2005) found that when social size increased from no one to one other consumer, negative emotions decreased. Social presence also increased student engagement in online courses (Picciano, 2002) and reinvigorated consumers' happiness with their own belongings (Chugani & Irwin, 2020). On the other hand, Argo et al. (2005) found that when social size increased from beyond one consumer, negative emotions increased. When the social presence was close, greater social size caused more negative emotions, but increased consumers' likelihood of choosing more expensive/high-quality brands. Increased social size may increase self-presentation behavior, thereby increasing the likelihood of choosing more reputable brands. Dahl et al. (2001) found that both real and imagined social presence increased embarrassment during the purchase of an embarrassing product. Similarly, consumers preferred to avoid social presence during an embarrassing service encounter (Holthöwer & Van Doorn, 2023). Furthermore, social presence reduced preferences for a target venue when it was present

in the marketing (e.g., photos) of an identity-relevant experience (e.g., a vacation, a wedding) due to reduced feelings of personal ownership (Lu et al., 2024).

The social theories seem to generally suggest that consumers seek out human presence. Yet one might conclude from social impact theory and social presence theory suggest that human presence has negative effects on consumers. Social theories appear to suggest that specifically, consumers seek quality individual human connections, but unknown social groups have more mixed effects on consumers.

### **Positive Contagion**

The law of contagion, one of the laws of sympathetic magic (Frazer [1890] 1959; Mauss [1902] 1972; Tylor [1871] 1974), states that when a person or object directly or indirectly touches another person or object some of its “essence” (i.e., its essential properties) is transferred over and remains after contact (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994; Rozin & Nemeroff, 1990). This “essence” is not necessarily visible and consumers do not need to have personally witnessed the transfer for a transfer to be perceived (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). The transferable “essence” can have many meanings, ranging from specific abilities and traits to moral qualities to germs (Rozin & Nemeroff, 2002).

Contagion can be both negative (e.g., wanting to avoid an item touched by someone disliked or an out-group member) and positive (e.g., more positive evaluations for a product touched by a loved one or an attractive person) (Rozin et al., 1986, 1989, 1994). Negative contagion tends to be more physical in nature and leads to feelings of disgust (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994). Positive contagion is more symbolic in nature (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994) and

tends to result in positive inferences about the product user's traits and abilities (e.g., artistic, athletic ability) (Kramer & Block, 2014).

Positive contagion, as studied in the literature, often occurs because the contagion source has been physically touched by someone who is admirable in some capacity (e.g., physically attractive, famous). For example, participants reported increased willingness to pay for a t-shirt made of used recycled plastic bottles if they were told that an attractive model of the opposite sex (vs. same sex) had drunk from a bottle used to produce the shirt (Meng & Leary, 2021). Consumers also evaluated a product more favorably, expressed higher purchase intentions, and higher willingness to pay when a product had merely been touched by an attractive (vs. average) looking shopper, particularly when the shopper was of the opposite sex (Argo et al., 2006). For men, these effects were strongest when a highly attractive female confederate had worn a target shirt previously and it had not (vs. had) been dry-cleaned after. Similarly, individuals were willing to pay more for George Clooney's sweater if it had not (vs. had) been dry cleaned (Newman et al., 2011a). Consumers also preferred a product that was used by a person whose characteristics were congruent (vs. incongruent) with one's own salient goals (e.g., a golfer who touched Tiger Wood's golf clubs) because they increased perceptions of attaining one's goal (Kim et al., 2022), even affecting one's actual performance (Kramer & Block, 2014).

In this stream of literature, it is often unclear what exactly is the appeal of the product, besides containing a general "essence". For instance, Smith et al. (2016) looked at consumers' demand for work by specific, famous creators (e.g., the Beatles, Andy Warhol). They found that consumers were more likely to choose and willing to pay more for the same limited-edition item when it had a smaller (vs. larger) serial number. They found that products that were temporally closer to the source (i.e., have a smaller serial number) contained more of the creator's "essence"

(Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994; Newman et al., 2011a; Newman & Dhar, 2014). Though, this effect only occurred when the creator was a particular creator (e.g., Alexander Wang) and not a company (e.g., H&M). Additionally, the effect only occurred when the creator was liked (vs. not liked). Similarly, Newman and Bloom (2012) found that both artwork and artifacts were perceived to be more valuable when there was a high (vs. low) degree of physical contact from a “well-known” but unnamed creator, though the effect was somewhat attenuated for artifacts. Even a duplicate artwork that was explicitly stated to be made by the original artwork’s “well-known” named creator (vs. the creator’s unnamed apprentice) was seen as more valuable. Though not empirically demonstrated in their studies, the authors posited that artworks do not have any functional value unlike artifacts. Therefore, for artwork, consumers can only determine its value based on an object’s historical properties (i.e., creator contagion, assessments of creative performance).

### **Anthropomorphism**

Another large body of work has looked at the effects of anthropomorphism, or the application of human features, characteristics, or emotions to a non-human entity (Epley et al., 2007). Guthrie (1993) suggested that there are three types of anthropomorphizing. Partial anthropomorphizing occurs when people attribute human features to a nonhuman entity and interpret behavior accordingly but do not believe that it is human. Literal anthropomorphizing occurs when people (usually mistakenly) believe the non-human entity is human. Accidental anthropomorphizing occurs when people recognize human features in nonhuman entities but consider it to merely be a coincidence. Epley et al. (2007) provided a theory of anthropomorphism to explain when people are more likely to humanize a nonhuman entity. They

posited that consumers are more likely to engage in anthropomorphism when anthropocentric knowledge is accessible and applicable, when they are motivated to understand others' behaviors to experience a sense of control, and when they desire social connection.

Anthropomorphism has been increasingly studied in the marketing literature. It can lead to numerous positive marketing outcomes. For instance, anthropomorphism increased the appeal of old vegetables (Koo et al., 2019), increased charitable giving (Zhou et al., 2019), and reduced the weighting of quality in product replacement decisions (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010). It even has positive implications for consumer well-being. When consumers felt disconnected or incompetent, anthropomorphizing enhanced consumers' sense of vitality and subsequently their self-control (Chen et al., 2018). However, anthropomorphism can inadvertently have negative effects. For example, it decreased product evaluations when the human knowledge evoked was negatively valenced (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). In the case of embarrassing service encounters, anthropomorphizing robots gave the illusion of face-to-face human presence, which decreased consumers' preference for them compared to human presence as (Holthöwer & Van Doorn, 2023). Highly anthropomorphized chatbots increased consumers' feelings of social presence which inflated consumers' rating valence and decreased the helpfulness of their reviews (Tsekouras et al., 2024).

### **Human Presence in Product Production**

Another stream of literature has investigated the effects of human production information on product preferences. In these works, consumers did not perceive that the product was human-like, but that the product contained some degree of human contact or presence (Fuchs et al., 2015; Suher et al., 2021; Schroll et al. 2018).

A few works have found positive effects of an unnamed human presence on product preferences. These works often contrasted human production information, machine production information, and control production information. For example, Fuchs et al. (2015) found that products advertised as handmade (vs. machine-made vs. no production information) increased product attractiveness (i.e., consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the product). As the authors discussed, marketers often advertise products as "handmade" or "machine-made" even though purely handmade or purely machine-made products are rare. Fuchs et al. (2015) utilized contagion and consumer labor theory to posit that products that are handmade are perceived to symbolically contain "love" which increases its perceived value. The authors demonstrated that consumers significantly preferred a handmade (vs. machine-made) product, particularly when their purchasing goal was to convey love.

Similarly, Suher et al. (2021) found that human (vs. machine vs. no) care information had a more positive impact on product preferences. They found that imperfect (vs. perfect) unprocessed foods and perfect (vs. imperfect) processed foods were perceived to have lacked human care in their creation. However, providing human (vs. machine) care information increased (vs. decreased) choice percentage of the imperfect food products relative to a control condition with no care information. This result is particularly important for unprocessed foods as consumers tend to avoid imperfect (vs. perfect) fruit and vegetables but prefer imperfect (vs. perfect) processed foods. Additionally, human care (vs. carelessness) information increased (vs. decreased) this preference relative to a control condition for both processed and unprocessed foods, suggesting that any human production information is not necessarily better than none. Suher et al. (2021) found that adding a "care" sign increased choice percentage of the perfect (vs.

imperfect) processed food and of the imperfect (vs. perfect) unprocessed food, counteracting the effects of food processing on preferences for imperfect foods.

Furthermore, Schroll et al. (2018) found that certain cues can implicitly communicate human presence. Through knowledge activation theory, they posited and found that products with handwritten typefaces activated human schemas which led to higher emotional attachment and increased preference compared to products with machine-written typefaces. The product was seen to have been imbued with some touch of humanity and human presence without a human necessarily being physically there, even when consumers were aware that the handwritten typeface was produced by a machine. These effects were mitigated when consumers were already emotionally attached to the brand. Additionally, the pattern of results reversed when consumers were purchasing utilitarian (vs. hedonic) products, preferring products with machine-written (vs. handwritten) typefaces.

### **Other Literature Streams in Consumer Behavior**

An important factor of human influence is the degree of source credibility perceived by consumers. Source credibility refers to the extent to which a message receiver believes that the source is able and motivated to provide accurate and truthful information (e.g., Kelman & Hovland, 1953). Kelman & Hovland's (1953) source credibility theory posited that this construct consists of source trustworthiness and source expertise. Although the two components appear similar, there is a conceptual difference. Trustworthiness is defined as the degree to which the consumer believes the source's statements to be valid, whereas expertise is about the source's capability to make valid statements. Sternthal et al. (1978) expanded upon Kelman & Hovland's (1953) work by offering a multi-item scale of source. Other work by Ohanian (1990) also

included an attractiveness component to measure celebrity credibility. McCrosky and Teven's (1999) measure of source credibility in the communication literature included the sub-components of competence, trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill. It is often used as a heuristic by consumers to reduce cognitive effort in decision making with highly credible sources (e.g., experts) tending to be more persuasive (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Rhine & Severance, 1970). For example, the degree of a seller's attractiveness affected their source credibility, with moderately (vs. highly and not) attractive sellers being seen as the least credible (Peng et al., 2020). Source credibility is influenced by visual judgments beyond attractiveness. For example, baby-faced (vs. non-baby-faced) CEOs were perceived as more truthful when denying knowledge of a mistake (Gorn et al., 2008).

An important topic in current salesforce research is how artificial intelligence (AI) will impact the power of human influence in replacing customer service. One work (Chang, 2022) theorizes about the relative effectiveness of AI vs. human salespeople based on the AI job replacement theory (Huang & Rust, 2018) and the relationship lifecycle theory (Dwyer et al., 1987; Ring & Van De Ven, 1994). The AI job replacement theory posits that tasks that require greater intuitive and empathetic (vs. mechanical and analytical) intelligence are unlikely to be replaced by AI. The relationship lifecycle theory posits that the relationship between buyers and sellers changes over time as the goals and behaviors of each change (Dwyer et al., 1987; Jap, 2001). Chang (2022) proposed that AI (vs. human) salespeople are preferred in the early (vs. later) stages of the sales process, when buyers' needs are stable (vs. changing), and when consumers have the intention to discontinue (vs. revive) the sales relationship. Pappas et al. (2023) similarly theorized that while AI improves consumers' baseline experience, human salespeople can elevate those experiences to their full potential. AI can improve consistency and

efficiency while human salespeople can build relationships with customers, demonstrate the ability to creatively adapt to situations, and consider ethical factors.

## **Summary**

In summary, humans often seek to be connected to other humans in a variety of ways. There appears to be something special about products and services that have a human quality to them. In this work, I seek to expand upon that general human salience and focus on the salience of the creator. I apply it to the sustainability research, specifically the market for repurposed goods. The next section briefly examines existing work on sustainability in consumer behavior.

## **Sustainability Literature in Consumer Behavior**

There is an increasing amount of marketing literature devoted toward sustainable marketing. For example, research on sustainable message appeals has examined the effect of aggressiveness language (Kronrod et al., 2012b), the main emotion evoked (ethical vs. guilt) appeals (Peloza et al., 2013), and the number of appeals and the underlying motivations used (Edinger-Schons et al., 2018). Other work focuses on understanding consumers' perceptions of sustainable products. For instance, consumers perceived sustainable products to be gentler and thus preferred them more when gentleness was valued for that product category, but less when strength was valued for that product category (Luchs et al., 2010). Because of these lay beliefs, consumers tended to use relatively more of a sustainable (vs. conventional) product in a single usage experience (Lin & Chang, 2012), particularly when they held higher (vs. lower) environmental concerns. Marketers can reduce these beliefs when they induce consumers to

associate sustainable benefits more strongly with the company (vs. the product) and emphasize the product's societal benefits (Chernev & Blair, 2021).

Much work has focused on factors affecting consumers' attitudes toward recycled products and their recycling behavior. For example, liberals (vs. conservatives) reported greater recycling intentions in response to an individualizing (vs. binding) appeal (Kidwell et al., 2013). Collectivism was positively related to positive attitudes towards recycling while individualism was associated with perceptions of recycling as an inconvenience (McCarty & Shrum, 2001). Nostalgia increased recycling tendencies by inducing a sense of meaning (Zhang et al., 2021). Linking the product to the consumer's identity (e.g., writing their name on it) increased the likelihood that it would be recycled (vs. trashed) (Trudel et al., 2016). The mere experience of using a recycled (vs. conventional) product increased consumers' perceptions that they were valued in society, regardless of whether the recycled product usage was intentional or not, increasing warm glow (Tezer & Bodur, 2020). However, some recycling products and interventions had the opposite effect. Products made from used recycled materials with a high (vs. low) amount of contact with the skin were seen as more disgusting and resulted in lower purchase intentions (Meng & Leary, 2021). Pro-environmental labelling (i.e., "landfill" vs. trash) had backfire effects such that a "landfill" label increased the salience of the negative impacts of waste (Catlin et al., 2021). Providing a recycling option inadvertently increased consumption by some consumers (Catlin & Wang, 2013).

### **Repurposing and Repurposed Products**

Repurposing has been defined as taking old products used for one purpose and turning them into new products with a different purpose (Lu & Kwan, 2023). This is a growing area both

in the marketplace and in the marketing literature. For example, Winterich et al. (2019) found that salient (vs. non-salient) product narratives improved consumers' recycling intentions and actual recycling. The effect on recycling occurred even when the new product had the same function (i.e., not repurposed) or a new function (i.e., repurposed). In fact, the researchers found that making any type of transformation (product or general) salient increased recycling intentions. Other work looked at the effects of narratives on consumer preferences for already repurposed products. For example, Kamleitner et al. (2019) examined the effects of making a product's narrative salient by highlighting the repurposed product's prior identity. For example, a table with the caption, "I was made from an old pallet" was perceived to hold a story more than a table with the caption "I was made for dining". Revealing these products' transformation increased product story perceptions and consumers' felt specialness thereby increasing demand (i.e., willingness to pay, choice, purchase, purchase intentions, product appeal). The effects were attenuated when consumers already felt special and when the old product was easily discernible. They found that past identity salience applied to two types of repurposed products that have different production processes: upcycled and recycled products. Other research investigates moderators to this effect. For instance, Caprioli et al. (2023) found that product narratives about old products becoming dissimilar (vs. similar) products led to an aha! moment and thus higher perceptions of product creativity. For instance, a tarp (vs. bag) that becomes a backpack would be perceived as more creative and thus result in greater product appeal. The effect strengthened when the product material was more (vs. less) malleable and when there was at least one (vs. none) repurposed component from a distant domain. The effect was diminished when the product was described without discussing the function of the parts or when consumers were less open to experience. Furthermore, while research generally finds that product narrative increase

preferences, this is not always the case. For example, Meng & Leary (2021) found that revealing a product's prior form can evoke disgust (e.g., a shirt made from used plastic bottles). This was less important if the product category was one where the product has low (vs. high) contact with the skin (e.g., a bag versus a shirt). They further found that positive contagion counteracted negative contagion (e.g., the plastic bottles had been used by an attractive person).

### **Perceived Creativity**

A discussion of creator salience naturally obliges a discussion of creativity. Creativity has been widely explored in diverse fields including neuroscience, education, psychology, sociology, economics, organizational management, and to some degree, marketing. The definition of creativity as a construct has been widely debated within marketing. Generally, research has used creativity, originality, and innovativeness interchangeably (Acar et al., 2017; Hirschman, 1980). Some research suggests that it is comprised of two subconstructs: novelty / originality / innovativeness and meaningfulness / appropriateness / usefulness (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Lehnert et al., 2014; Rosengren et al., 2020; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). While some work posits that some degree of usefulness is required for an idea to be perceived as creative (Goldenberg & Mazursky, 2002; Rietzschel et al., 2010), other research suggests that perceptions of creativity are better predicted by novelty than usefulness (Diedrich et al., 2015; Runco & Charles, 1993). Accordingly, creativity is measured through items such as perceived creativity, novelty, innovativeness, originality, and unconventionality (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Benoit & Miller, 2019, 2022; Caprioli et al., 2023; Casalo et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2007).

Creativity has long been seen as important to marketing practitioners, but the academic marketing literature on it is still growing. Most of the research in this area has focused on

advertisement creativity. For instance, research found that advertisements that displayed a high (vs. low vs. mixed) level of divergence and relevance were most effective in terms of “wear in” time and “wear out” over additional exposures (Chen et al., 2016). Instagram posts that were perceived as more creative generated greater positive affect and thus greater interaction intentions (Casaló et al., 2021). More creative advertisements reduced channel changing (Becker et al., 2023) and were especially effective for high (vs. low) involvement product categories (Rosengren et al., 2020). Various media formats (e.g., television, print, non-traditional) produced differential benefits on cognition, attitudes and behavioral intentions (Darley & Lim, 2023). Rosengren et al.’s (2020) meta-analysis suggested that advertising creativity mainly impacted attitudes toward (vs. memory of) the advertisement and brand. Interestingly, less work appears to look at moderators of perceived creativity. This literature has found that perceived creativity can be altered by factors including fear (Benoit & Miller, 2022) and the gender of the idea producer (Proudfoot et al., 2015). Importantly, creative works were perceived as more creative when produced by a human (vs. machine) (Horton Jr et al., 2023; Millet et al., 2023). Importantly, consumers enjoy and actively seek out products that challenge them to be creative (Dahl & Moreau, 2007). Making a product’s creator salient could have implications for the perceived creativity of the product.

## **Summary**

To summarize, the definition of creativity is debatable, but most research tends to agree that novelty is at least one of the key components to measuring the construct. In marketing, creativity has chiefly been studied in the context of advertisement creativity. Moreover, creativity is said to be a uniquely human quality (Millet et al., 2023). Creativity is particularly

relevant for repurposed products which, by definition, require some degree of creativity in transforming the product from one state and purpose to another.

## **Awe**

Perceived creativity can spur other affect, including feelings of awe (Millet et al., 2023). Awe has been defined as an emotional response to something vast or extraordinary. Keltner and Haidt's (2003) seminal paper on the psychology of awe found that, across disciplines, it involves feelings of submission in the presence of something powerful, difficulty in comprehension, confusion, surprise and wonder. Keltner and Haidt (2003) posited that there are two main components that define awe. First, an awe-inducing stimulus is one that is perceived to be vast in some sense (e.g., physically, psychologically). Second, an awe-inducing stimulus prompts the consumer to attempt to restructure their previous schemas or knowledge to understand or "accommodate" the stimulus, in reference to the Piagetian concept of accommodation (Piaget & Inhelder, 1966/1969).

Keltner and Haidt (2003) proposed that there are two kinds of awe: primordial and elaborated. Primordial emotions are those that are intuitive to the central and peripheral nervous systems (e.g., disgust in response to feces). In contrast, elaborated emotions are those that are affected by cultural norms and meanings (e.g., disgust in response to racism). Consequently, a wide variety of stimuli can evoke feelings of awe. For instance, awe can be induced by physically large natural objects (e.g., mountains, space, storms), infinitely repetitive natural movements (e.g., ocean waves), and human-made infrastructures (e.g., skyscrapers, cathedrals, dams). However, awe can also be evoked by psychologically large concepts with more culturally dependent meanings such as power, fame, exceptional skill, authority, religion, the morally

admirable, and art (e.g., music, plays, movies, paintings). Awe-inspiring stimuli tend to be those that challenge the way people look at the world and involve some degree of obscurity (e.g., Monet's water lilies).

Awe has implications for other affective responses. Awe promoted self-diminishment and humility (Stellar et al., 2018), led to the pursuit of an authentic-self through self-transcendence (Jiang & Sedikides, 2022), and was associated with decreased daily stress leading to higher life satisfaction (Bai et al., 2021). While much work on awe frames it as a positive emotion, it can also be negatively valenced, evoked by negative stimuli (e.g., natural disasters). For instance, negative awe was associated with decreased perceived self-control and certainty, as well as increased fear and sympathetic autonomic arousal compared to positive awe (Bai et al., 2021).

There were some more mixed findings in terms of cognition. Research showed that awe decreased consumers' need for cognitive closure (Shiota et al., 2007) and had mixed effects on ambiguity aversion (Ahmmad et al., 2024). Other work showed that increased awareness of knowledge gaps leading to the pursuit of knowledge (e.g., choosing science museum tickets over art museum ones) (McPhetres, 2019), increased the use of wise reasoning (Kim et al., 2023), and the tendency to see patterns (Valdesolo & Graham, 2014).

Some research on awe points to positive outcomes like prosocial behavior. This is because awe is characterized as a collective emotion (Durkheim, 1887; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Weber, 1978) and a moral emotion (Xie et al., 2019). Awe increased the likelihood that consumers' self-concept included membership in "universal" categories (Shiota et al., 2007). These feelings of collectiveness were driven by perceptions of the "small self" (Bai et al., 2017) which increased prosocial behaviors like consumers' willingness to help a researcher (Piff et al., 2015). Awe stemming from nature or from God (vs. man-made wonders) was particularly

effective at increasing pro-environmental behavior (Kaplan et al., 2024). Threat-based awe increased charitable giving and sharing intentions (Septianto et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Awe also has implications for marketing outcomes, though it has been less studied within this literature. For instance, awe was particularly important for content virality (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Nikolinakou & King, 2018). It increased desire for the experiential creation of goods (vs. pre-made goods) (Rudd et al., 2018), choice of healthy (vs. unhealthy) food (Cao et al., 2020) and engagement in extreme sports (Huang et al., 2024).

### **Hedonic versus Functional Products**

In this dissertation, I posit that creator salience may be relevant for some product types but not others. The categorization of hedonic and utilitarian has been a tricky one to define as products, services, and experiences are not necessarily just hedonic or utilitarian (Batra & Ahtola, 1991). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) originally defined hedonic consumption as the “multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects” of a product experience. Typically, it has been thought that there must be a tradeoff between the two attributes, referred to as the “heart and mind in conflict” (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). For example, chocolate cake would be affectively superior but cognitively inferior and vice versa for fruit salad (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). There have since been several different approaches to defining hedonic and utilitarian consumption: product-based (e.g., Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998; Wertenbroch, 1998), goal-based (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Pham, 1998), and motive-based. However, there are some issues with each. For example, a shampoo can be marketed as providing hedonic benefits like cleansing efficacy and utilitarian benefits like softening hair (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). A product can be used to achieve both hedonic and utilitarian goals (e.g., a smartphone) (Alba & Williams, 2013). It also

depends on the individual consumer's perspective. For instance, the act of drinking coffee can be seen as utilitarian to someone who drinks it to get energy but hedonic to someone who drinks it because they enjoy the taste.

Hedonic products have been defined as those that are primarily affective and sensory driven, that provide pleasure fantasy, and fun (e.g., designer clothes) (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic benefits promote affect such as cheerfulness and excitement and lead to consumer delight (Chitturi et al., 2008). While utilitarian products are those that are primarily cognitive, instrumental, goal driven, and provide function (e.g., minivans) (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Utilitarian benefits promote affect such as confidence and security and lead to consumer satisfaction (Chitturi et al., 2008).

Consumers use different tactics when searching for hedonic and utilitarian products. For instance, they would rather use a human to help make hedonic recommendations but use AI to help make utilitarian recommendations (Longoni & Cian, 2022). For hedonic products, they also prefer to use social media sites and on-site product pages, whereas for utilitarian products they prefer to look at third party reviews, search engines, competitors' pages (Li et al., 2020). They also prefer reviews that explain the affective (vs. cognitive) reasons for choosing the product (Moore, 2015).

The decision-making situation can alter preferences for primarily hedonic or utilitarian products. When considering which items to give up (vs. which to acquire), hedonic features are more salient (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Consumers were more likely to prefer hedonic (vs. utilitarian) products when preference was operationalized by choice (willingness to pay). This is because choice relies more on the affect heuristic while willingness to pay involves more deliberation (O'Donnell & Evers, 2019). Large assortments make choosing more difficult and

then consumers sense that a choice requires more justification which makes them more likely to choose utilitarian (vs. hedonic) products (Sela et al., 2009). Relatedly, discounts on the hedonic (vs. utilitarian) products in a cross-category bundle increased the likelihood of purchasing the bundle (Khan & Dhar, 2010). When cognitive resources were limited (vs. available), consumers tended to rely on affect (vs. cognition) resulting in greater preferences for hedonic (vs. utilitarian) products (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). Dynamic (vs. static) advertisement format increased consumers' preference and willingness to pay for hedonic products (Roggeveen et al., 2015). Consumer found that there was a better fit when assertive language (Kronrod et al., 2012a) and unstructured (vs. structured) features (Affonso & Janiszewski, 2023) was used to advertise hedonic (vs. utilitarian) products.

Framing the same product or experience as hedonic or utilitarian can influence consumer behavior. When consumers had little control, they preferred the same product more when it was framed as utilitarian (vs. hedonic) (Chen et al., 2016). Consumers were more willing to do a hedonic public activity alone if the experience was described as more utilitarian (Ratner & Hamilton, 2015). Furthermore, consumers preferred a product framed as hedonic more when it had a handwritten (vs. machine-written) typeface, but preferred a product framed as utilitarian more when it had a machine-written (vs. handwritten) typeface (Schroll et al., 2018). This research may suggest similar implications for creator salience.

## LITERATURE RELEVANT TO HYPOTHESES

### **Narratives in Consumer Behavior**

Narratives are powerful tools for persuasion and immersion (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000). In essence, they are accounts of an event or events leading from one state to another state or outcome (Bennett & Royle, 2004). According to narrative transportation theory, immersion into a narrative, through empathy and mental imagery, can lead to powerful changes in the story receiver's attitudes and intentions (Green, 2008; Van Laer et al., 2014). Specifically, consumers imagine narratives as their own real-life experiences, facilitating the comprehension of novel information and reducing counterarguments (Escalas, 2007b; Green & Brock, 2000; Marsh & Fazio, 2006). Many factors can impact narrative effectiveness, including whether the narrative utilizes high versus low narrative intimacy (Valenzuela & Galli, 2023), are centered around experiential versus material purchases (Gallo et al., 2024), focus on process versus outcome (Ringler et al., 2024), the narrator is the brand (vs. independent) (Tezer et al., 2020), and the degree to which an individual is similar to the narrative's protagonist (Van Den Hende et al., 2012). Narratives are linked to positive marketing outcomes including increased focus (McFerran et al., 2010), enhanced experience (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010), and favorable judgments (Glaser et al., 2024).

Narratives are particularly relevant for repurposed products. A so-called "minimal narrative" consists of an identical entity, time change, and usually some kind of transformation (Meister, 2005). In this way, exposing a product's transformation from past to present form and function can lead consumers to perceive that these products hold a "minimal narrative" (Kamleitner et al., 2019; Meister, 2005). For example, Winterich et al. (2019) found that narratives that emphasized (vs. did not emphasize) how products can be recycled and

transformed into new products increased both recycling intentions and actual recycling behavior. The effect occurred regardless of whether consumers believed the new product would have the same function or a different function (i.e., repurposed). In fact, making any type of transformation (product or general) salient appeared to have a positive effect on recycling intentions. While that work looked at consumer disposal behavior, other work examined the effects of narratives on consumers' preferences for the repurposed products themselves. Kamleitner et al. (2019) showed that making a repurposed product's narrative salient by highlighting its prior identity increased product narrative perceptions. For example, a table with the caption, "I was made from an old pallet" (vs. "I was made for dining") led to increased product narrative perceptions. These storied products increased product narrative perceptions and consumers' felt specialness which led to greater demand for repurposed products. More recent research investigates moderators of the effectiveness of product narratives. For instance, Caprioli et al. (2023) found that product narratives about old products becoming dissimilar (vs. similar) products produced an aha! moment in consumers' minds, which in turn, increased perceptions of product creativity and product preferences. For instance, a tarp (vs. bag) that became a backpack would be perceived as more creative and thus result in increased product preferences. In sum, while there has been considerable work relying on and extending narrative transportation theory, little to no work to date explicitly addresses the human "essence" despite its pervasiveness in narratives. That is, even narratives where the entire cast of characters is non-human, the characteristics imbued are often human in nature.

Beyond narrative transportation theory, narratives also have been examined in branding research, through the lens of a brand's core identity, values, and message (Heinrich, 2025). A "brand biography" typically specifies a certain type of brand narrative, one authored by the

brand, that details a selective, historical account of the brand's origin and evolution over time (Avery et al., 2010). Within this literature, researchers seem mostly focused on the "underdog" trope, emphasizing the brand's humble origins, high level of passion and determination (Paharia et al., 2011). Such brand narratives can be effective at increasing outcomes such as purchase intentions, choice, and brand loyalty, driven by increased identification with the brand (Paharia et al., 2011). These narratives may be centered around the brand itself as an entity, or on the human founders of the brand (Paharia et al., 2011). The use of the founders themselves may serve to humanize the brand.

Few works focus on the effectiveness of using human main characters to humanize the brand. Exploratory data from 321 packaged goods and across 19 categories found that a significant portion (30%) of the brand narratives centered around the founder(s), whether that be an individual (22%) or a family (8%) (Mills & John, 2023). Though this work did not suggest whether human narratives are more effective than other non-human narratives which may center around the production process or the origin of the ingredients. Other research contrasted the effectiveness of different types of human characters such as CEOs, founders, celebrities, and corporate employees (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2019; Fleck et al., 2014; Gräve et al., 2021) and promoting different founder values (Hamby et al., 2019). However, little to no work touches on the explicit role of the human in the brand narrative, which is what my research investigates.

The ideal context to study human essence is in repurposed products, because they are one of the few where the narrative can be absent of human essence. The existing research on repurposed product narratives has not investigated this distinction (e.g., Caprioli et al., 2023; Kamleitner et al., 2019; Winterich et al., 2019). Therefore, I put forward the following questions. How does creator salience impact preferences for repurposed products? What factors underlie it?

What moderates it? To answer these questions, I unpack the literature on human influence in consumer behavior.

## **Human Influence in Consumer Behavior**

The varied literature on theories related to human influence generally posits that humans have an innate desire to connect with other humans. For instance, evolutionary theory speculates that being social helped increase humans' chance of living and reproducing (McGlynn, 2010). Several other theories such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), social production function theory (Lindenberg, 1986, 1991; Ormel et al., 1999; Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006), and the theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943) all suggest that strong social relationships with other humans are fundamental to human nature and well-being. In fact, the social reconnection hypothesis posits that social exclusion motivates consumers to look for other avenues to regain social acceptance (Maner et al., 2007). Anthropomorphism theory predicts that consumers are more likely to humanize a nonhuman entity when they desire social connection (Epley et al., 2007). Moreover, terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1986; Solomon et al., 1991) postulates that when reminded of one's mortality, consumers will find ways to connect to other entities beyond the self (e.g., joining clubs, donating self-connected possessions) (Dunn et al., 2020; Lifton, 1973; Yaden et al., 2017). Contagion research suggests that an object touched by a positively valenced consumer is more desirable (e.g., Meng & Leary, 2021a; Newman et al., 2011b). These broadly sourced theories suggest a universal human need to connect with other humans, signifying that there's something special about products and services that have a human quality to them.

Consumer research has investigated the effects of human influence on product preferences. These works also suggest generally positive effects of human influence on product preferences. For example, in one study Fuchs et al. (2015) found that products advertised as hand-made (vs. machine-made vs. no production information) increased product attractiveness (i.e., consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the product). As the authors discussed, products are often described as "hand-made" or "machine-made" even though purely hand-made or purely machine-made products are rare. Based on contagion and consumer labor theory, the authors found that hand-made products in particular contained "love" which increased their perceived value to consumers.

Similarly, Suher et al. (2021) found that human (vs. machine vs. no) care information increased product preferences. Consumers perceived that imperfect (vs. perfect) unprocessed foods and perfect (vs. imperfect) processed foods lacked human care in their creation. However, providing human (vs. machine) care information increased (vs. decreased) choice percentage of the imperfect food products relative to a control condition with no care information. This result is particularly important for unprocessed foods as consumers tend to avoid imperfect (vs. perfect) fruit and vegetables but prefer imperfect (vs. perfect) processed foods. Conversely, human careless (vs. no care) information decreased preferences for both processed and unprocessed foods.

Schroll et al. (2018) found that products with handwritten (vs. machine-written) typefaces triggered consumers' schemas about humans which increased emotional attachment and increased product preferences. The product was perceived as having some sense of humanity and human presence even without a human being physically there and even when consumers were aware that the typeface was produced by a machine. These typeface effects were mitigated when

consumers had a previous emotional attachment to the brand. Conversely, consumers preferred products with machine-written (vs. handwritten) typefaces when considering functional products.

Research further suggests that creator-specific production cues have generally positive effects. Consumers valued a duplicate piece of art more when it was explicitly stated as made by the original creator (vs. another creator) (Newman & Bloom, 2012). Moreover, consumers valued both artwork and artifacts more when there was a high (vs. low) degree of physical contact from the creator, though the effect was somewhat attenuated for artifacts. Similarly, consumers were more likely to choose and pay more for the same limited-edition item with a smaller (vs. larger) serial number as consumers perceived greater essence of the source in the product (Smith et al., 2016). Collectively, these works suggest that adding a salient human creator to the product's story can further enhance their effectiveness.

## **Overview of Studies**

Across seven studies, I disentangle this construct and attempt to identify the underlying mechanism and a moderator with various product categories (furniture, bags, décor). Study 1 finds that a product narrative emphasizing the creator's process to produce the product was more effective than one that also includes the creator's background or no explicit creator. Study 2 finds that whether the creator's background is aligned or unaligned with product transformation ability has no impact on preferences compared to each other or a control. Study 3 shows that humans (vs. AI) are strongly associated with the creation of artwork even when not explicitly mentioned. It found that human (vs. AI) creator salience improved purchase intentions for the artwork. Study 4 shows that the effect is driven by emotional resonance and rule out alternative explanations. Study 5 shows that human creators increase preferences compared to non-creators, but not quite

significantly. Study 6 identifies a moderator of the creator salience effect such that hedonic products benefit from it, but functional products do not. Study 7 replicates Study 3 and confirms that emotional resonance is a stronger explanatory variable for the effect than perceived product creativity.

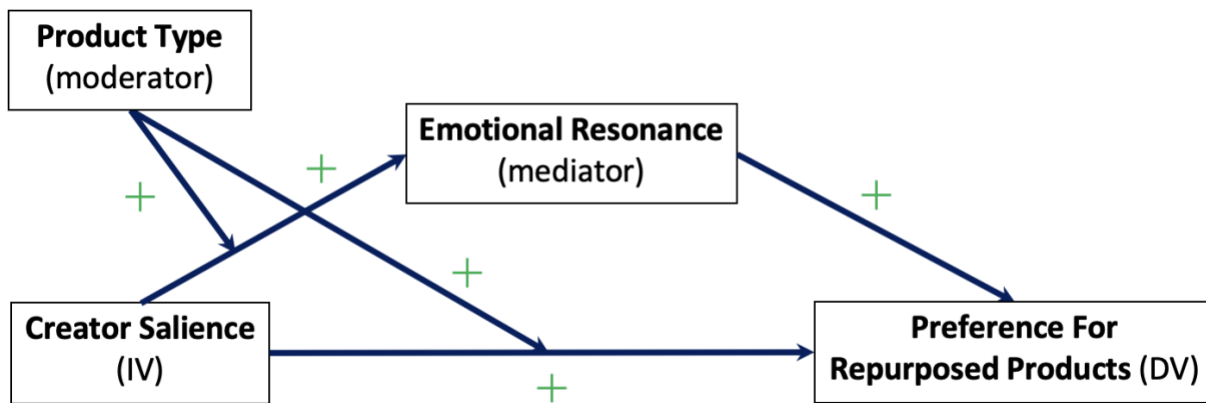


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

### Creator Salience

I introduce a new construct, creator salience, defined as the heightened awareness of concrete cues that an identifiable human intentionally transformed the materials which increases preferences for repurposed products. The basic hypothesis put forth in this research is that creator salience increases preferences for the repurposed product. Beyond human essence, through creator salience, the investigation here delves into what is unique about being human. That is, the idea of changing the form and function of a product to another serving a different purpose requires a certain level of integration, imagination, and creativity that only humans have been thought to possess (Runco, 2023). Building on prior research on the influence of human essence, this research aims to provide greater precision around what aspects of ‘being a human

creator' factor into the proposed creator salience effect (Fuchs et al., 2015; Newman & Bloom, 2012; Schroll et al., 2018; R. K. Smith et al., 2016; Suher et al., 2021).

Marketers can make a product's creator salient in various ways. Some companies may choose to simply state that a product was "made by" the creator. For example, Lush, a hand-made cosmetics retailer, includes a sticker on each product that specifies the name of the creator (e.g., "Made by Sheldon"). Research has found that products specified as hand-made increased the attractiveness and choice of such products (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2015; Suher et al., 2021). On the other hand, some retailers may choose to provide background information regarding the creator (e.g., personal background, values, interests). For instance, Siggi's is a company that makes Icelandic yogurt, named after its founder, Siggi Hilmarsson. On the packaging of each yogurt is the Siggi's narrative: he found American yogurts "too sweet and artificial tasting", so he started his own company selling Icelandic-style yogurt in the United States. In support of this strategy, findings from the brand biography literature suggests that providing information about the brand's historical origin can invoke consumer values such as authenticity and heritage (Paharia et al., 2011).

Describing the creator's process in creation seems more effective particularly for repurposed products where the transformation presumably was imagined by someone. The act of creating and being creative is thought to be uniquely human, just as certain qualities like care and love appear to be uniquely human (Fuchs et al., 2015; Suher et al., 2021). JP Guilford, president of the American Psychological Association (APA), predicted that the value of human brains would be reduced to their unique ability to think creatively if "thinking machines" were to reach their predicted potential (Guilford, 1950). Millet et al. (2023) found that consumers viewed the same piece of artwork when it was labelled as human-made (vs. AI-made) as more creative and

thus preferred it more. Horton Jr et al. (2023) found that art labelled as “human-made” was perceived as more creative after being shown an artwork labelled as “AI-made” compared to before. Moreover, in his work on the intersection of evolutionary psychology and aesthetics, Dutton (2010) suggested that the value of art is based on perceptions of the human creation process involved in creating the art. This suggests that creative works like art are valued because of the knowledge of the human process that created the outcome, not necessarily because the human-made work is perceived to be better than a machine or AI-made one. Furthermore, creativity is inherently part of repurposing. For instance, Tarabashinka et al. (2010) found that priming consumers to think creatively encouraged them to repurpose old products. Caprioli et al. (2023) found that when the old product was repurposed from a distant (vs. close) product domain as the new product, consumers reported greater perceived product creativity and thus increased product appeal. This would suggest that a simple narrative that details a creator engaging in creation of a product can be an effective repurposed product narrative.

**H<sub>1a</sub>:** Creator salience (vs. control) will increase preferences for a repurposed product.

Furthermore, I predict that a creator salience inclusive of background information will result in increased preferences relative to a creator salience focusing only on the creative process. Certain narrative attributes such as identifiable characters, an imaginable plot, and verisimilitude (i.e., lifelikeness) tend to improve persuasion effectiveness (Van Laer et al., 2014). Narrative transportation theory predicts that increased immersion in a narrative has powerful effects on attitudes and intentions (Green, 2008; Van Laer et al., 2014) such as enhanced brand experience (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010), more favorable product and brand attitudes (Glaser et al., 2024),

and increased advertisement effectiveness (To & Patrick, 2021). Background information about the creator's values and history viewed as contributing to the creation of the company or product might lead to a more imaginable plot within the product narrative and increased empathy for the main character. This may lead to a stronger effect compared to narratives centered just on the creator's process.

**H<sub>1b</sub>:** Creator salience comprised of creative process and creator background information (vs. creator process only) will increase preferences for a repurposed product.

### **Study 1: Types of Creator Stories**

In Study 1, I first examine the creator salience construct by testing different forms of human creator salience against a control condition. I test a form of creator salience that highlights the creator's process to produce a product and a form that not only highlights the creator's process but also provides details about the creator's background. Specifically, I predict that creator salience (vs. control) will increase preferences for a repurposed product. For greater precision, I predict that creator salience comprised of creator process and creator background information (vs. creator process only) will increase preferences for a repurposed product.

#### *Method*

##### *Participants and design.*

In Study 1, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (creator process vs. creator process and background vs. control). I recruited 303 participants through CloudResearch for nominal monetary compensation.

*Materials and procedure.*

All conditions viewed an advertisement for a repurposed table along with a caption that read “Side Table” and “made from old skateboards”. Depending on the condition, participants viewed one of three additional captions:

[Creator Process]: Morgan Brown who personally collects and transforms skateboards into new pieces

[Creator Process and Background]: Morgan Brown a lifelong skater, Morgan wants to preserve the stories and spirit of every ride in a different form. Morgan personally collects and transforms skateboards into new pieces

[Control]: Echo Furniture skateboards collected and transformed into new pieces

See Appendix L for stimuli.

*Measures.*

After viewing the advertisement, participants were asked to indicate their purchase intentions. I measured purchase intentions with three items (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “very much”;  $\alpha = .970$ ) from Lee and Winterich (2022): “How likely would you be to purchase the table?”, “How inclined would you be to purchase the table?”, and “How willing would you be to purchase the table?”. Then, participants answered a creator salience manipulation check with five items (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”;  $\alpha = .875$ ): “The description makes the

product's creator salient," "The description highlights the product's creator," "The description made me think about the creator who created the table made from skateboards," "The description made me think about the evolution from skateboards to a table," and "The description made me get to know the creator who would create a table made from skateboards". Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

## *Results*

### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

As intended, creator salience increased perceived creator salience ( $F(2, 300) = 28.63, p < .001$ ). The effect was due to creator process resulting in greater perceived creator salience compared to control ( $M = 5.07$  vs.  $3.88, t(300) = 6.64, p < .001$ ) and creator process and background resulting in greater perceived creator salience compared to control ( $M = 5.03$  vs.  $3.88, t(300) = 6.49, p < .001$ ); creator process and creator process and background did not differ ( $t(300) = .19, p = .851$ ).

### *Purchase intentions.*

As predicted, overall, creator salience increased purchase intentions ( $F(2, 300) = 5.05, p = .007$ ).  $H_{1a}$  was partially supported as creator process resulted in greater purchase intentions compared to control ( $M = 4.16$  vs.  $3.69, t(300) = 1.81, p = .072$ ), though creator process and background and control did not differ ( $t(300) = 1.33, p = .183$ ). Interestingly, contrary to  $H_{1b}$ , creator process resulted in greater purchase intentions compared to creator process and background ( $M = 4.16$  vs.  $3.35, t(300) = 3.16, p = .002$ ). See Figure 2.

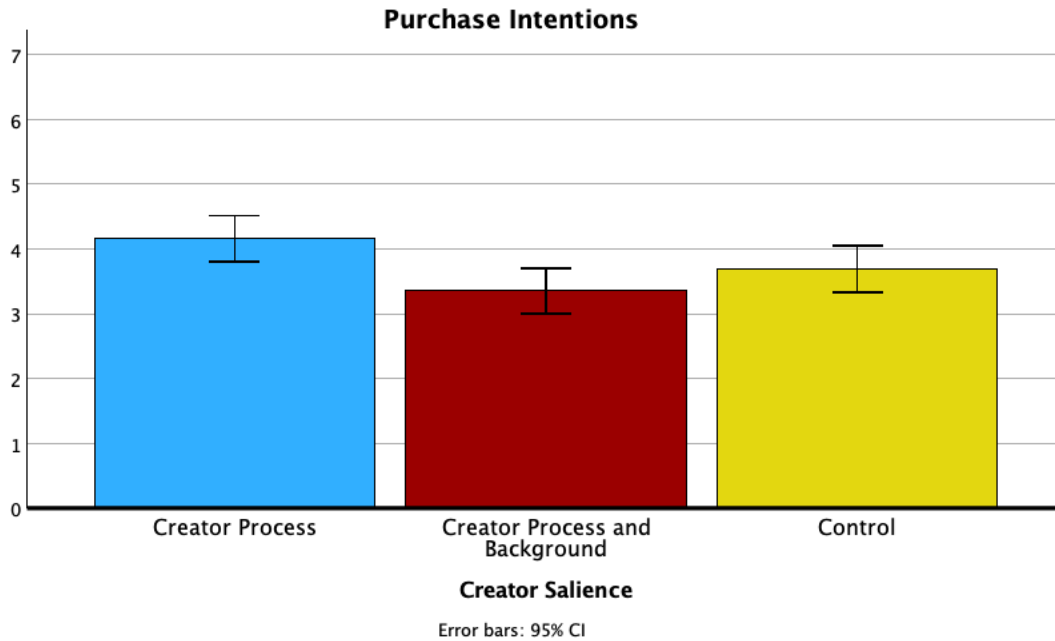


Figure 2. Study 1 Results – Purchase Intentions

### Discussion

Study 1 shows that H<sub>1a</sub> is partially supported, providing initial evidence for the notion that creator salience (vs. control) improves purchase intentions for a repurposed product. Though, this effect only comes from creator process (but not creator process and background) versus control. Surprisingly, the results are contrary to H<sub>1b</sub>. While I predicted that creator salience comprised of creator process and creator background (vs. creator process only) would increase preferences for a repurposed product, I find the opposite, such that creator process significantly increases preferences relative to creator process and background. This suggests that, at its core, the creator salience effect is about the creator process and human uniqueness of imagination and creativity that is demonstrated through the creator’s transformation of the product. Thus, creator salience messages appear to be more effective when focusing on the

creator's process (vs. process and background), which is key to the unique creation of the repurposed product.

## **Study 2: Types of Creator Backgrounds**

Given the findings of Study 1, I consider how different types of creator backgrounds may impact consumers' preferences for these products. For instance, in Study 1's creator process and background condition, there is no background information to illustrate the development of the creator's skills that allowed them to transform the product so the background information may seem irrelevant to the product's production. Therefore, one might question whether the degree to which the creator's background is aligned with their ability to transform the product impacts consumers' preferences. This might reflect the creator's source credibility. As discussed previously, source credibility includes sub-components of competence, trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill (McCrosky and Teven, 1999). Importantly, experts tend to be more persuasive than non-experts (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Rhine & Severance, 1970). This would suggest that revealing information about a creator's background that aligns (vs. does not align) with their ability to transform the product would increase preferences.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Creator salience with an aligned creator process and background (vs. unaligned creator product and background vs. control) will increase preferences for a repurposed product.

### *Method*

#### *Participants and design.*

In Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (aligned creator process and background vs. unaligned creator process and background vs. control). I recruited 300 participants through Prolific for nominal monetary compensation.

*Materials and procedure.*

All participants viewed an advertisement for a bowl made from a vinyl record. Depending on the condition, participants viewed one of three captions:

[Aligned Creator Process and Background]: Lee Brown collects vinyl records and transforms them into bowls. A former audio engineer who spent decades restoring vintage turntables, his deep understanding of vinyl's durability and heat response allows him to transform retired records into art.

[Unaligned Creator Process and Background]: Lee Brown collects vinyl records and transforms them into bowls. An avid traveler who collects vinyl records from all around the United States, he aims to bring his travels into people's homes, turning retired records into art

[Control]: Vinyl records collected and transformed into decorative bowls.

See Appendix M for stimuli.

*Measures.*

After viewing the advertisement, participants were asked to indicate their purchase intentions ( $\alpha = .971$ ) and responded to the manipulation check items ( $\alpha = .871$ ). Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

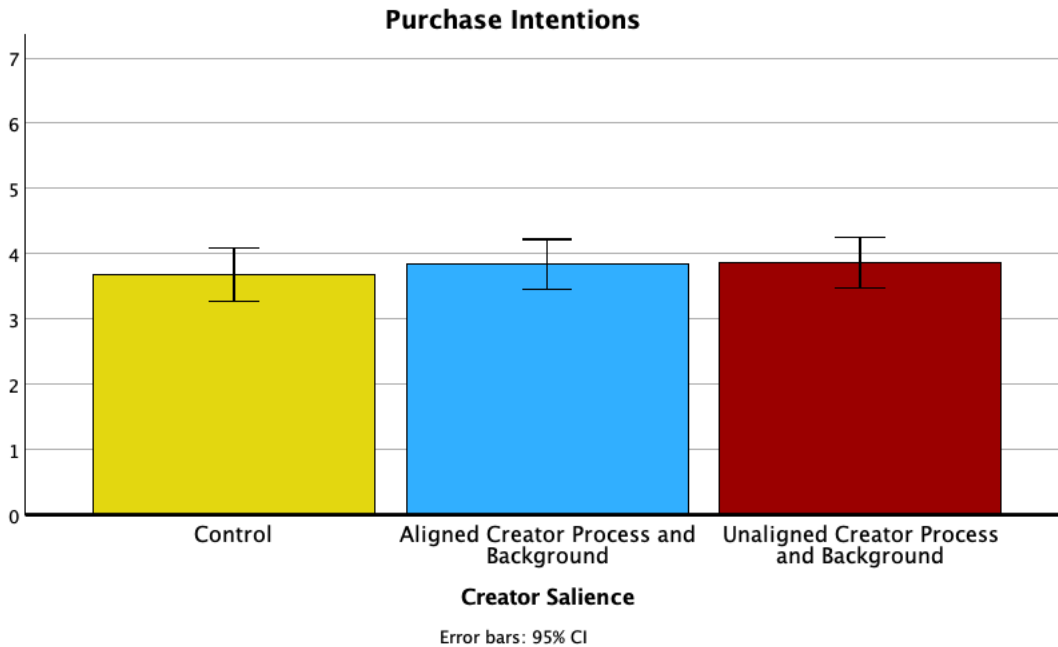
## *Results*

### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

As intended, creator salience increased perceived creator salience ( $F(2, 297) = 64.93, p < .001$ ). Aligned creator process and background increased perceived creator salience compared to control ( $M = 5.55$  vs.  $3.73, t(297) = 10.99, p < .001$ ). Unaligned creator process and background increased perceived creator salience compared to control ( $M = 5.15$  vs.  $3.73, t(297) = 8.47, p < .001$ ). Related creator process and background marginally increased perceived creator salience compared to unrelated creator process and background ( $M = 5.55$  vs.  $5.15, t(297) = 2.52, p = .012$ ).

### *Purchase intentions.*

As predicted, overall, creator salience increased purchase intentions ( $F(2, 303) = 1.46, p = .240$ ).  $H_2$  was not supported. There was no difference between related creator background and control ( $t(303) = 1.47, p = .142$ ). There was no difference between unrelated creator background and control ( $t(303) = 1.33, p = .183$ ). There was no difference between related and unrelated creator background ( $t(303) = .06, p = .950$ ). See Figure 3.



*Figure 3. Study 2 Results – Purchase Intentions*

*Discussion*

Study 2 shows that H<sub>2</sub> is not supported. There was no difference between aligned creator background (vs. control), unaligned creator background (vs. control), nor was there any difference between related and unrelated creator background. This is aligned with Study 1’s findings that creator process and background was no difference between.

**Study 3: Examining Explicit versus Implicit Creator Salience**

Artwork in particular has been considered a phenomenon exclusive to humans (Bellaiche et al., 2023). So much so that it has even been posited as a defining characteristic of the human species (Morriss-Kay, 2010). This is due, in part, to its ability and usage to convey complex human emotions, experiences, and ideas (Chatterjee, 2014). Relatedly, the value of art is said to be driven by assumptions about the human creation process (Dutton, 2010). Importantly, this

aligns with Millet et al. (2023) which found that consumers preferred an artwork more when it was labelled as human-made (vs. AI-made) due to increased perceived product creativity and awe. Even further, Horton Jr et al. (2023) found that the same artwork labelled as “human-made” was perceived as more creative after (vs. before) being shown an artwork labelled as “AI-made”. In these works, the artwork itself is not altered, only the label, suggesting that simply changing the creator significantly sways consumers’ perceptions and judgements of artwork. This would suggest that the creator salience effect should not apply to an AI creator, but only to a human creator of repurposed artwork.

Artwork is also an ideal context to explore the degree to which creator salience can be implied without explicit messaging. Given that artwork is so strongly associated with humans and the human experience (Bellaiche et al., 2023; Chatterjee, 2014), there is a strong implicit association that a human creates artwork. The same may not be true for many other product categories (e.g., cars, appliances) which have historically required machinery to create and therefore may be less associated with human creators despite there still being human involvement in the creation process. Accordingly, I expect human creator salience effects to emerge with and without explicit mention of the creator when the repurposed product involves artwork. In this next study, the AI creator salience condition represents the control condition since human creator salience is being tested implicitly via this specific product category, artwork, which requires another comparison condition. In this way, different forms of creator salience are examined by looking at AI creator salience and implicit creator salience.

Specifically, the proliferation of AI technology has caused many to reconsider the definition of creativity and thus, who or what can “create” (Arriagada, 2020; Chamberlain et al., 2018; Koivisto & Grassini, 2023). In response to this, I examine how consumers respond to

human (vs. AI) creators of repurposed products. I also consider how product category (e.g., artwork) can impact the degree to which human creators can be implicitly salient even in the absence of explicit messaging.

Past literature points to a bias against non-human creators (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2015; Suher et al., 2021). For instance, human care (vs. no care) information increased choice of imperfect foods, while machine care (vs. no care) information decreased choice of imperfect foods (Suher et al., 2021). Similarly, consumers preferred a product labelled as hand-made significantly more than one that was labelled as machine-made (Fuchs et al., 2015).

Some might argue that AI is a type of machine so one can make similar assumptions about consumers' responses toward AI based on this research. Though, an important theoretical consideration is that, unlike most machines, AI can simulate human intelligence by engaging in problem solving, decision making, and providing emotional responses. Therefore, one could argue that AI, unlike a machine, can "create" like a human and thus consumers may view AI-made products more favorably than machine-made ones and possibly even equally as favorable as hand-made products. However, this seems unlikely as creativity and creative acts have historically been considered unique to humans, with the proliferation of AI only recently seriously challenging these assumptions and prompting a complex discussion of the definition of creativity. Moreover, prior research in this area suggests that consumers still prefer human-made (vs. AI-made) products (Horton Jr et al., 2023; Millet et al., 2023).

**H3:** Creator salience increases preferences for a repurposed product strongly associated with human (vs. AI) creators.

## *Method*

### *Participants and design.*

In Study 3, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (explicit human creator salience vs. implicit human creator salience vs. AI). University students were recruited for course credit. The final sample size consisted of 377 participants.

### *Materials and procedure.*

All conditions viewed an advertisement for a repurposed artwork on a canvas called “Ethereal Drift” which was “made from old newspaper and crushed chalk”. The advertisements highlighted the creative process behind the scenes with the product’s transformation attributed to human creator. These manipulations reflect the findings from Study 1, that only the creator process condition (vs. creator process and background) increased preferences relative to control, which suggests that creator salience is in essence about highlighting the human uniqueness of imagination and creativity operationalized through product transformation. Reflecting Study 2, the manipulations do not include background information about the creator. There is strong implicit association that a human creates artwork. Therefore, I expect human creator salience effects to emerge with and without explicit mention when the repurposed product involves artwork. In this study, the AI condition in essence represents the control condition since human creator salience is being tested implicitly via this specific product category, artwork, which requires another comparison condition. Depending on the condition, participants were randomly assigned to also view one of three captions:

[Explicit Human Creator Salience]: Created by Ada Brown who applies repurposed materials to create new works of art.

[Implicit Human Creator Salience]: Created by applying the repurposed materials to create new works of art.

[AI]: Created by an AI robot that applies repurposed materials to create new works of art.

See Appendix N for stimuli.

### *Measures.*

After viewing the advertisement, participants were asked to indicate their purchase intentions using the same measures as in Study 1 and 2 ( $\alpha = .925$ ). Following Millet et al. (2023), I measured perceived product creativity with two items (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “very much”;  $\alpha = .711$ ): the extent to which participants perceived the product to be “revolutionary” and “original”. I measured feelings of awe with two items (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “very much”;  $\alpha = .872$ ): the extent to which participants perceived the product to be “magnificent” and “gorgeous”. Participants then answered a creator salience manipulation check using the first two items of the index used in Study 1 and 2 ( $\alpha = .778$ ). The last three items were dropped since the stimuli provided no additional information about the creator. Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

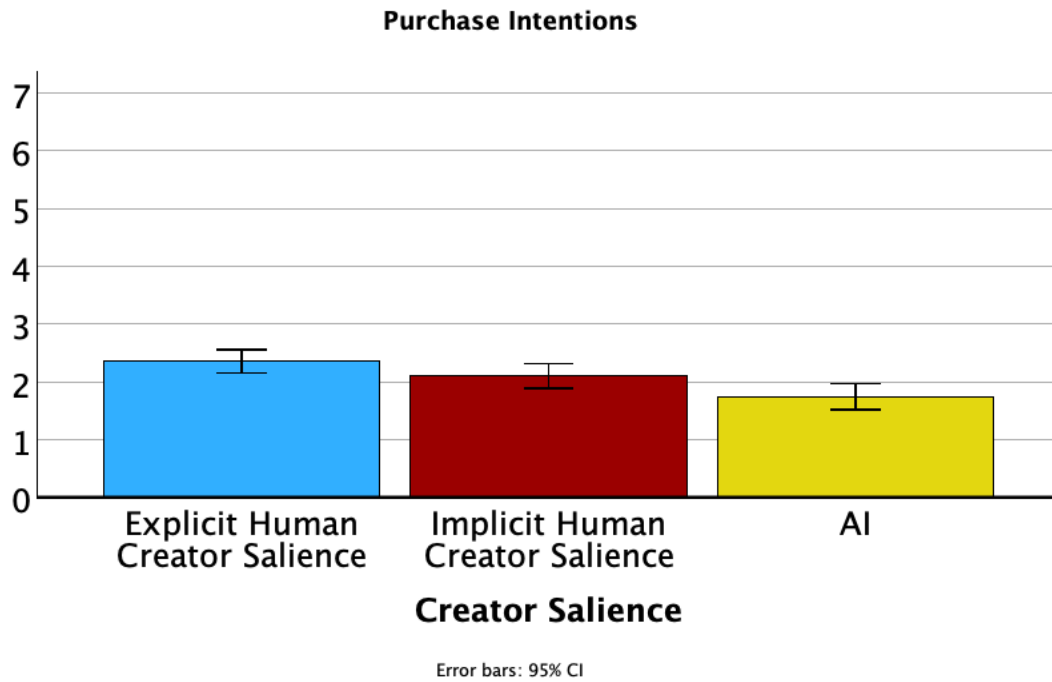
### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

As intended, creator salience increased perceived creator salience ( $F(2, 374) = 15.29, p < .001$ ). Explicit human creator salience increased perceived creator salience compared to AI ( $M =$

3.48 vs. 2.62,  $t(374) = 5.52, p < .001$ ). Implicit human creator salience increased perceived creator salience compared to AI ( $M = 3.13$  vs. 2.62,  $t(374) = 3.23, p = .004$ ). Explicit human creator salience marginally significantly increased perceived creator salience compared to implicit human creator salience ( $M = 3.48$  vs. 3.13,  $t(374) = 2.34, p = .059$ ).

#### *Purchase intentions.*

Overall, creator salience increased purchase intentions ( $F(2, 374) = 8.00, p < .001$ ). In support of H<sub>3</sub>, creator salience increased preferences for artwork which is strongly associated with human (vs. AI) creators. Explicit human creator salience resulted in increased purchase intentions compared to AI ( $M = 2.36$  vs. 1.75,  $t(374) = 4.01, p < .001$ ) and implicit human creator salience marginally significantly increased purchase intentions compared to AI ( $M = 2.10$  vs. 1.75,  $t(374) = 2.29, p = .066$ ). Explicit and implicit human creator salience did not differ ( $t(374) = 1.73, p = .233$ ). See Figure 4.



*Figure 4. Study 3 Results – Purchase Intentions*

*Perceived product creativity.*

As discussed previously, Millet et al. (2023) found that human (vs. AI) produced artwork produced greater perceived product creativity. Similarly, this study indicates that creator salience increased perceived product creativity ( $F(2, 374) = 17.57, p < .001$ ). Explicit human creator salience increased perceived product creativity compared to AI ( $M = 3.37$  vs.  $2.40, t(374) = 5.91, p < .001$ ). In addition to Millet’s findings, I found that implicit human creator salience increased perceived product creativity compared to AI ( $M = 3.01$  vs.  $2.40, t(374) = 3.63, p < .001$ ). Explicit human creator salience marginally significantly increased perceived product creativity compared to implicit human creator salience ( $M = 3.37$  vs.  $3.01, t(374) = 2.29, p = .065$ ).

*Awe.*

Again, as in Millet et al. (2023), human (vs. AI) artists generated greater feelings of awe in consumers. Similarly, it was found that creator salience increased awe ( $F(2, 374) = 12.43, p < .001$ ). The effect was due to explicit human creator salience resulting in increased awe compared to AI ( $M = 3.31$  vs.  $2.49, t(374) = 2.12, p < .001$ ). In addition to Millet's findings, I found that implicit human creator salience resulting in increased awe compared to AI ( $M = 2.98$  vs.  $2.49, t(374) = 2.89, p = .004$ ). Explicit and implicit human creator salience did not differ ( $t(374) = 2.12, p = .101$ ).

#### *Serial mediation analysis.*

Serial mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 6. Following Millet et al. (2023), the test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through perceived product creativity and awe supported mediation (effect = .2021, 95% CI .1153, .3081).

#### *Discussion*

Study 3 shows that  $H_3$  is supported, as both explicit human creator salience and implicit human creator salience (vs. control) increased purchase intentions, driven by perceived product creativity and awe. Additionally, the manipulation checks show that both explicit human creator salience and implicit human creator salience significantly increased perceived creator salience relative to the control condition. However, explicit human creator salience only marginally increased perceived creator salience compared to implicit human creator salience. This would suggest that a human creator is nonconsciously salient for an artwork even when none is explicitly mentioned, and that creator salience may have an even stronger effect for product categories that are less ubiquitously human.

This study aligns with Millet et al. (2023) while extending it by adding a control condition and examining a repurposed (vs. new) product. In the following study, I look at alternative explanations for the effect, particularly given the novel construct creator salience and different product category context. Would perceived product creativity and awe hold up against other mechanisms in different product categories that are less inherently considered human (e.g., furniture)?

#### **Study 4: Emotional Resonance**

While prior research suggests perceived product creativity and awe as the underlying mechanisms (Millet et al., 2023), there are many other mechanisms discussed in the human influence literature (e.g., perceptions of love, perceptions of human care) that may better explain the creator salience construct. As mentioned, past work found that handwritten (vs. machine-written) typefaces evoked increased emotional attachment to a target product (Schroll et al., 2018). Emotional attachment is a multi-faceted affective construct that includes feelings of affection, passion, and connection (Thomson et al., 2005). It is both a cognitive and emotional connection between the product and the self. A narrative that makes a product's transformation salient evokes inspiration, because consumers become aware of the possibilities of old products to be used for new products (Winterich et al., 2019). Taken together, creator salience (vs. control) should stimulate deep emotional resonance with the repurposed product among consumers. Therefore, the underlying mechanism proposed here that connects creator salience with consumer response is emotional resonance, conceptualized as a meaningful emotional response that leads to feelings of inspiration and attachment (Schroll et al., 2018; Winterich et al., 2019). Once again, I rely on furniture as a stimulus which is less obviously hand-made and

contrast this to alternative explanations from the literature on human influence including perceived product creativity, awe, perceptions of love, perceptions of human care, felt specialness, narrative transportation, and perceptions of creator essence.

**H4:** Creator salience (vs. control) will increase emotional resonance and preferences for a repurposed product, and emotional resonance will mediate the effect on preferences for a repurposed product.

### *Method*

#### *Participants and design.*

In Study 4, participants were randomly assigned to view one of two conditions (creator salience vs. control). We targeted 200 university students to participate in exchange for course credit. A total of 188 participants rated their perceptions of human care regarding the target product (Suher et al., 2021). Perceptions of human care toward the target product were measured (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”;  $\alpha = .810$ ) with three total items: “This product received human care when it was produced,” “This product received human attention when it was produced,” and “This product was neglected by a human (i.e., not cared for by a human) during the production process” (reverse-coded). Participants who scored the reverse-scored item the same as at least one of the other two regular items were excluded. The final sample size consisted of 145 participants.

#### *Materials and procedure.*

All conditions viewed an advertisement for a repurposed table by a fictional company, “Echo Furniture”, which featured a caption that read “Side Table” and “made from old skateboards”. Depending on the condition, participants also viewed one of two captions:

[Creator Salience]: Designed by Taylor Brown who personally scours the globe for diverse materials and designs them into new pieces.

[Control]: Designed with diverse materials from around the globe and designed into new pieces.

See Appendix O for stimuli.

### *Measures.*

After viewing the ad, participants were asked to indicate their purchase intentions using the same items as in the previous studies ( $\alpha = .925$ ). Next, participants indicated the extent to which they experienced emotional resonance toward the target product (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”) with the following emotions: affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful, passionate, delighted, captivated, connected, bonded, attached, inspired, astonished, and wonder. These were subsequently formed into an index ( $\alpha = .950$ ). Alternative mechanisms from related literature were also measured: perceived product creativity ( $\alpha = .768$ ), awe ( $\alpha = .872$ ), perceptions of love ( $\alpha = .849$ ), perceptions of human care ( $\alpha = .810$ ), felt specialness ( $\alpha = .892$ ), perceptions of creator essence ( $\alpha = .914$ ), and narrative transportation ( $\alpha = .640$ ). For more details on the items, see Appendices E-K. Then participants answered the creator salience

manipulation check as in Study 3 ( $\alpha = .839$ ). Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

## *Results*

### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

As intended, creator salience versus control increased perceived creator salience ( $M = 4.45$  vs.  $3.71$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 9.70$ ,  $p = .002$ ).

### *Purchase intentions.*

In line with previous results, creator salience increased preferences for a repurposed product. Creator salience versus control increased purchase intentions ( $M = 2.66$  vs.  $2.16$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 4.81$ ,  $p = .030$ ). This result in part supports  $H_4$ .

### *Process measures.*

In support of  $H_4$ , creator salience versus control increased emotional resonance ( $M = 2.77$  vs.  $2.18$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 9.59$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Additionally, creator salience versus control increased perceived product creativity ( $M = 3.72$  vs.  $3.04$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 7.67$ ,  $p = .006$ ), marginally significantly increased awe ( $M = 2.82$  vs.  $2.44$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .092$ ), increased perceptions of love ( $M = 3.85$  vs.  $3.27$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 5.73$ ,  $p = .018$ ), increased perceptions of human care ( $M = 5.42$  vs.  $4.93$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 6.52$ ,  $p = .012$ ), increased felt specialness ( $M = 3.52$  vs.  $2.99$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 4.53$ ,  $p = .035$ ), marginally increased perceptions of creator essence ( $M = 4.63$  vs.  $4.20$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 3.73$ ,  $p = .056$ ). However, creator salience had no impact on narrative transportation ( $M = 3.25$  vs.  $2.99$ ,  $F(1, 143) = 1.27$ ,  $p = .261$ ).

### *Mediation analysis.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes (2022) PROCESS Macro for SPSS, Model 4. As predicted, the test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through emotional resonance supported mediation (effect = .4555, 95% CI .1599, .7597). Some alternative mechanisms also mediated the effect on creator salience on purchase intentions, but none were as strong as compared to emotional resonance. See Appendix P for more details.

### *Principal component analysis.*

Principal component analysis extracted one component with an eigenvalue greater than 1, which explained 76.37% of the total variance. All items showed strong loadings on this component (ranging from .697 to .931), indicating that they measure a common underlying construct.

### *Discussion*

To summarize, Study 4 provides further support for the notion that creator salience (vs. control) significantly improves purchase intentions for a repurposed product. Additionally, the effect of creator salience on purchase intentions appears most driven by emotional resonance, thereby confirming H4. Other psychological underpinnings from related research were tested including perceived product creativity, awe, perceptions of love, perceptions of human care, felt specialness, perceptions of creator essence, and narrative transportation. While some of the measures showed significant mediation, none of them explained the effect as strongly as emotional resonance. Emotional resonance as a mediator captures the human quality of creator

saliency that beat out other mediators found in the past repurposed literature. Uncovering emotional resonance as the strongest mediator provides deeper understanding and greater predictive utility around the construct of creator saliency.

### **Study 5: Human Creators vs. Human Non-Creators**

In Study 5, I further disentangle the creator saliency effect by examining other human influence. As discussed previously, prior research has found that consumers prefer products more when they are given cues that indicate greater creator presence (Newman & Bloom, 2012) and creator “essence” (Smith et al., 2016) in the product’s production. Based on these works, I predict that human creator (vs. non-creator) saliency will increase purchase intentions and emotional resonance for a repurposed product.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Human creator (vs. non-creator) saliency will increase emotional resonance and preferences for a repurposed product, and emotional resonance will mediate the effect on preferences for a repurposed product.

#### *Method*

##### *Participants and design.*

Study 5 employed a single-factor (product narrative: human creator vs. human non-creator) between-subjects design. I recruited participants from Prolific for nominal monetary compensation. I recruited 302 participants. I followed the same exclusion criteria as in Study 4. The final sample size was 253 participants.

### *Materials and procedure.*

All participants read an advertisement for a “Side Table” “made from old skateboards” by a fictional company, “Echo Furniture”. Participants were also randomly assigned to view one of two captions.

[Human Creator]: Table pieces crafted by the creator, Taylor Brown

[Human Non-Creator]: Table inquiries handled by sales rep, Taylor Brown

See Appendix O for stimuli.

### *Measures.*

First, participants indicate their purchase intentions ( $\alpha = .967$ ) and emotional resonance ( $\alpha = .973$ ), measured as in previous studies. The other three manipulation check items from Study 1 and 2 were re-added to the creator salience index (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”) ( $\alpha = .883$ ) to capture additional nuances of the creator salience construct. Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

### *Results*

#### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

As intended, creator salience versus control increased perceived creator salience ( $M = 5.28$  vs.  $4.54$ ,  $F(1, 251) = 17.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### *Purchase intentions.*

Creator salience versus non-creator salience had no effect on purchase intentions ( $M = 4.36$  vs.  $4.15$ ,  $F(1, 251) = .76$ ,  $p = .384$ ).

### *Emotional resonance.*

Creator salience versus non-creator salience had no effect on emotional resonance ( $M = 4.11$  vs.  $3.87$ ,  $F(1, 250) = 1.26$ ,  $p = .263$ ).

### *Mediation analysis.*

I conducted the mediation analyses using PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Mediation was tested using PROCESS Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of product narrative on purchase intentions through emotional resonance did not support mediation (effect =  $.2227$ , 95% CI  $-.1574, .6047$ ).

## Discussion

While  $H_5$  was not supported in Study 5, the results suggested a trending pattern where a human creator (vs. human non-creator) increased both purchase intentions and emotional resonance. Future research studies can modify the manipulations to make them stronger. For example, it may be interesting to contrast different types of human non-creators (e.g., the founder, CEO). These types of non-creators are less customer-facing than a sales representative which may be increasing consumers' perceptions of social presence. This might dilute the effect of a human creator (vs. non-creator) on repurposed product preferences.

## **Study 6: Moderation by Product Type**

In Study 6, I explore a moderator of the creator salience effect. Specifically, the moderating role of product type, that is, whether the product is classified as either hedonic or functional. Hedonic products are those that are primarily affective and sensory driven, providing pleasure, fantasy, and fun (e.g., gourmet chocolate) (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). They tend to promote positive affect such as cheerfulness, excitement, and delight (Chitturi et al., 2008). In contrast, functional products are those that primarily cognitive, instrumental, goal driven, and provide function (e.g., a power strip) (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998).

I find that the creator salience effect for a repurposed table appears to be driven by information about the creator's process, but not process and background. It didn't appear to matter whether the creator's background was aligned or unaligned with the creator's ability to transform the materials into a new product. Additionally, I find that both implicit and explicit human creator salience improve preferences for a repurposed artwork relative to an AI creator. Study 3 finds that emotional resonance best captures what underlies the creator salience effect for a repurposed table. There are some nuances between the stimuli to note. Artwork as a product category appears to lean toward hedonic rather than functional. On the other hand, furniture could be seen as more hedonic or more functional depending on the piece (Gao & Wu, 2025). The table made of skateboards used in previous studies could arguably be seen as more hedonic (vs. functional) given that it is brightly colored and associated with a hedonic activity (skating). Accordingly, in Study 6 I examine product type as a moderator by choosing two distinct product categories that are more categorically seen as hedonic versus functional.

Whether a product is seen as hedonic or functional can influence consumers' preferences, judgments, and choices. For example, when consumers had little control, they preferred the same product more when it was framed as functional (vs. hedonic) due to greater perceptions of the product's problem-solving abilities (Chen et al., 2017). Other work found that consumers were more willing to enjoy a hedonic public activity alone if the experience was described as more functional due to reduced anticipated negative inferences from others (Ratner & Hamilton, 2015).

Prior research suggests that human influence does not improve outcomes for all product types. For instance, handwritten (vs. machine-written) typefaces were less preferred for functional items due to lower associations with economy and strength (Poffenberger & Franken, 1923). Handwritten typefaces were also perceived as less technical and professional compared to machine-written typefaces (Mackiewicz & Moeller, 2004). Accordingly, products with machine-written (vs. hand-written) typefaces were preferred when the product was positioned as functional (vs. hedonic) (Schroll et al., 2018). This would suggest that creator salience (vs. control) may increase preferences for hedonic products. However, a control (vs. creator salience) narrative may not be contrasting enough to reduce preferences for functional products.

**H6:** When a repurposed product's framing is hedonic, creator salience (vs. control) will increase emotional resonance and preferences for a repurposed product. When a repurposed product's framing is functional, creator salience will have no such effects.

## *Method*

### *Participants and design.*

In Study 6, participants were randomly assigned in a 2 (creator salience: creator salience vs. control) x 2 (product type: hedonic vs. functional) between-subjects design. I recruited 400 participants through Prolific for nominal monetary compensation. I followed the same exclusion criteria as in Study 4, and 5. The final sample size consisted of 314 participants.

*Materials and procedure.*

All conditions saw an advertisement by a fictional company, “Echo Living Co.” According to their creator salience condition, participants also read the following:

[Creator Salience]: Designed by Taylor Brown who personally scours the globe for diverse materials and designs them into new pieces.

[Control]: Designed with diverse materials from around the globe and designed into new pieces for all kinds of lifestyles.

Additionally, according to their product type condition, participants in the hedonic product condition viewed a decorative bowl while those in the functional product condition viewed a messenger bag. To maximize the probability of finding effects, I chose repurposed products that were representative of their product type (hedonic and functional) and measured perceived price to control for it the analyses. Depending on their condition, they saw one of two respective captions:

[Hedonic]: Decorative bowl, made from old vinyl stereo records

[Functional]: Messenger bag, made from old leather seat covers

See Appendix Q for stimuli.

### *Measures.*

The measures for purchase intentions ( $\alpha = .952$ ) and emotional resonance ( $\alpha = .980$ ) remained the same as in previous studies. To ensure that the decorative bowl was seen as more hedonic than the messenger bag, participants completed a hedonic manipulation check. Participants read the following: “Functional products are products that are primarily useful, functional, and help you achieve a goal. Hedonic products are products that are predominantly fun, enjoyable, and appeal to the senses. How would you rate this product?”. Participants rated the target product on a single 7-point bipolar item (1 = “is definitely functional,” and 7 = “is definitely hedonic”) (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Schroll et al., 2018). Lastly, to control for price, participants were asked to indicate for how much they perceived the product sold on a sliding scale from \$0 to \$100 (USD). Participants answered the same manipulation check items as in Study 1, 2, and 5 ( $\alpha = .875$ ). Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

### *Results*

#### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on perceived creator salience with perceived product price as a covariate found a marginally significant interaction between creator salience and product type ( $F(1, 309) = 3.53, p = .061$ ). Also, there was no main effect for product type ( $p$

= .822), but as intended, there was a main effect for creator salience versus control ( $F(1, 309) = 32.61$ ,  $M = 5.23$  vs.  $4.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The two-way interaction revealed the following. When the product was hedonic, creator salience versus control increased perceived creator salience ( $M = 5.36$  vs.  $4.13$ ,  $t(309) = 5.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When the product was functional, creator salience versus control increased perceived creator salience ( $M = 5.09$  vs.  $2.67$ ,  $t(309) = 5.44$ ,  $p = .008$ ). The covariate, perceived selling price, also related positively to perceived creator salience ( $F(1, 309) = 4.04$ ,  $B = .007$ ,  $p = .045$ ).

#### *Hedonic manipulation check.*

An ANCOVA on perceptions of hedonism with perceived product price as a covariate found an interaction between creator salience and product type ( $F(1, 309) = 11.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As intended, there was a main effect for hedonic products versus functional products ( $F(1, 309) = 17.52$ ,  $M = 4.51$  vs.  $3.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but no main effect for creator salience ( $p = .785$ ). The two-way interaction revealed the following. When the product was hedonic, creator salience versus control decreased perceptions of hedonism ( $M = 4.16$  vs.  $4.86$ ,  $t(309) = 2.22$ ,  $p = .027$ ). When the product was functional, creator salience versus control increased perceptions of hedonism ( $M = 3.79$  vs.  $2.96$ ,  $t(309) = 2.54$ ,  $p = .011$ ). The covariate, perceived selling price, did not relate to perceived hedonism ( $F(1, 309) = 1.24$ ,  $B = -.005$ ,  $p = .267$ ).

#### *Purchase intentions.*

An ANCOVA on purchase intentions with perceived product price as a covariate found a marginally significant interaction between creator salience and product type ( $F(1, 309) = 3.69$ ,  $p = .056$ ). Also, there was no main effect for creator salience ( $p = .589$ ) and no main effect for

product type ( $p = .879$ ). The two-way interaction revealed the following. As predicted in H<sub>6</sub>, when the product was hedonic, creator salience versus control marginally significantly increased purchase intentions ( $M = 4.74$  vs.  $4.26$ ,  $t(309) = 1.76$ ,  $p = .079$ ). Also as predicted in H<sub>6</sub>, when the product was functional, no such effects were obtained ( $p = .334$ ). The covariate, perceived selling price, also related positively to purchase intentions ( $F(1, 309) = 4.65$ ,  $B = .009$ ,  $p = .032$ ). See Figure 5.

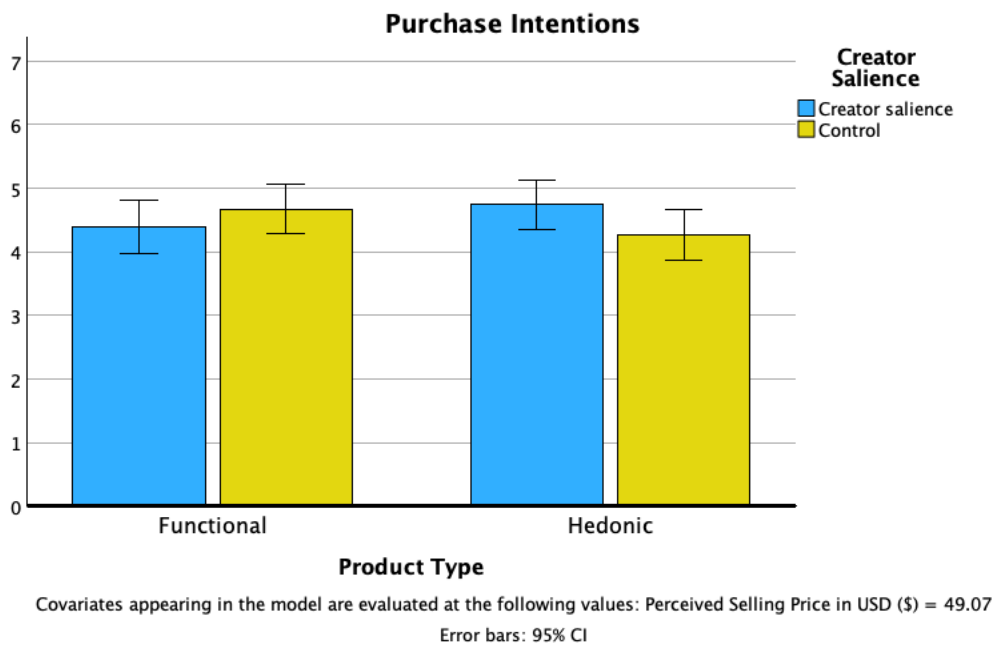


Figure 5. Study 6 Results – Purchase Intentions

*Emotional resonance.*

As expected, an ANCOVA on emotional resonance with perceived product price as a covariate found a significant interaction between creator salience and product type ( $F(1, 309) = 4.00$ ,  $p = .046$ ). Also, there was no main effect for creator salience ( $p = .473$ ) and no main effect for product type ( $p = .246$ ). The two-way interaction revealed the following. In line with H<sub>6</sub>, when the product was hedonic, creator salience versus control marginally significantly increased

emotional resonance ( $M = 4.63$  vs.  $4.11$ ,  $t(309) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .052$ ). Also, in line with  $H_6$ , when the product was functional, no such effects were obtained ( $p = .370$ ). The covariate, perceived selling price, was not related to emotional resonance ( $F(1, 309) = 1.98$ ,  $B = .006$ ,  $p = .160$ ). See Figure 6.

*Moderated mediation analysis.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes (2022) PROCESS Macro for SPSS, Model 8. As predicted, when the product was hedonic, the test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through emotional resonance supported mediation (effect =  $.4369$ , 95% CI  $.0077$ ,  $.8752$ ). However, when the product was functional, the test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through emotional resonance did not support mediation (effect =  $-.2066$ , 95% CI  $-.6429$ ,  $.2364$ ). Finally, the index of moderated mediation or difference between these indirect effects was significant (index =  $.6435$ , 95% CI =  $.0307$ ,  $1.2623$ ).

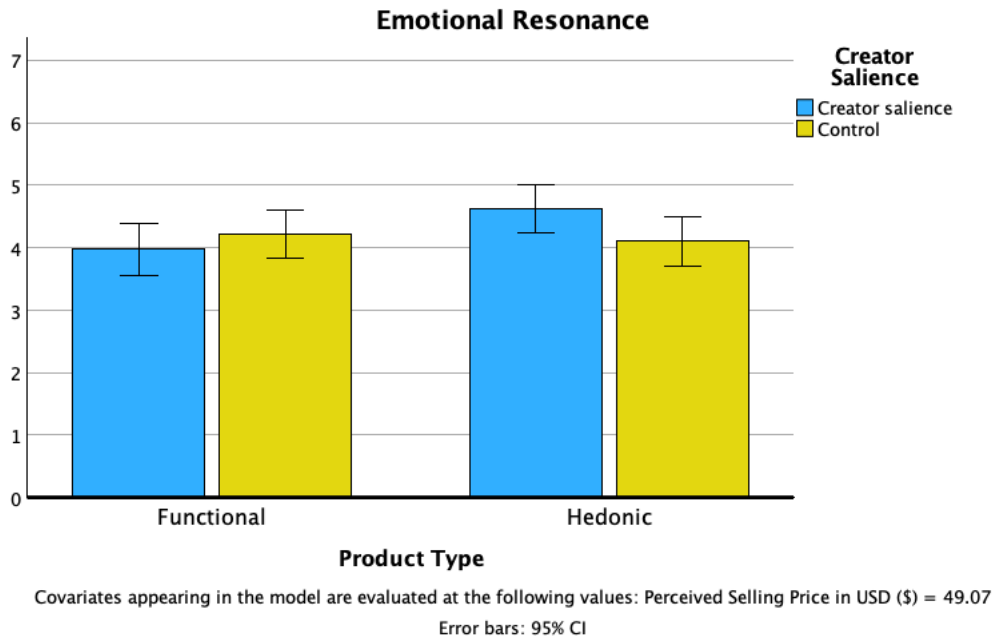


Figure 6. Study 6 Results – Emotional Resonance

## *Discussion*

Study 6 shows that H<sub>6</sub> was supported. Specifically, that when the product was hedonic, creator salience (vs. control) marginally significantly increased both purchase intentions and emotional resonance. However, when the product was functional, creator salience (vs. control) did not affect either purchase intentions or emotional resonance. These findings offer additional managerial insight regarding when creator salience messaging is most effective. The results suggest that creator salience should have a positive effect on product categories that are typically viewed as hedonic. Creator salience does not appear to have any effect on product categories that are typically viewed as functional.

## **Study 7: Explicit and Implicit Human Creator Salience and Emotional Resonance**

In Study 7, I revisit Study 3's experimental design to test whether emotional resonance mediates the pattern of results on purchase intentions.

**H7:** Creator salience will increase emotional resonance and preferences for a repurposed product strongly associated with human (vs. AI) creators, and emotional resonance will mediate the effect on preferences for a repurposed product.

## *Method*

### *Participants and design.*

In Study 7, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (explicit human creator salience vs. implicit human creator salience vs. AI). I recruited 300 participants

through Prolific for nominal monetary compensation. Study 7 utilized the same exclusion criteria as in Study 4, 5, and 6. The final sample size consisted of 233 participants.

### *Materials and procedure.*

The advertisement manipulations for Study 7 were the same as in Study 3. See Appendix N.

### *Measures.*

The measures for purchase intentions ( $\alpha = .966$ ) and emotional resonance ( $\alpha = .980$ ) remained the same as in previous studies. This was followed by the creator salience manipulation check index ( $\alpha = .902$ ). Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

### *Results*

#### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

As intended, creator salience increased perceived creator salience ( $F(2, 229) = 6.32, p = .002$ ). The effect was due to explicit human creator salience resulting in greater perceived creator salience compared to AI ( $M = 4.85$  vs.  $4.40, t(229) = 1.92, p = .056$ ); and implicit human creator salience resulting in marginally greater perceived creator salience compared to AI ( $M = 5.23$  vs.  $4.40, t(229) = 3.56, p < .001$ ). Explicit and implicit human creator salience did not differ ( $t(229) = 1.62, p = .106$ ).

#### *Purchase intentions.*

Overall, creator salience increased purchase intentions ( $F(2, 229) = 4.04, p = .019$ ). The pattern of results was like that of Study 2. The effect was due to explicit human creator salience

resulting in marginally greater purchase intentions compared to AI ( $M = 4.25$  vs.  $3.71$ ,  $t(229) = 10.50$ ,  $p = .085$ ) and implicit human creator salience resulting in greater purchase intentions compared to AI ( $M = 4.61$  vs.  $3.71$ ,  $t(229) = 9.06$ ,  $p = .005$ ). Explicit and implicit human creator salience did not differ ( $t(229) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .248$ ). See Figure 7.

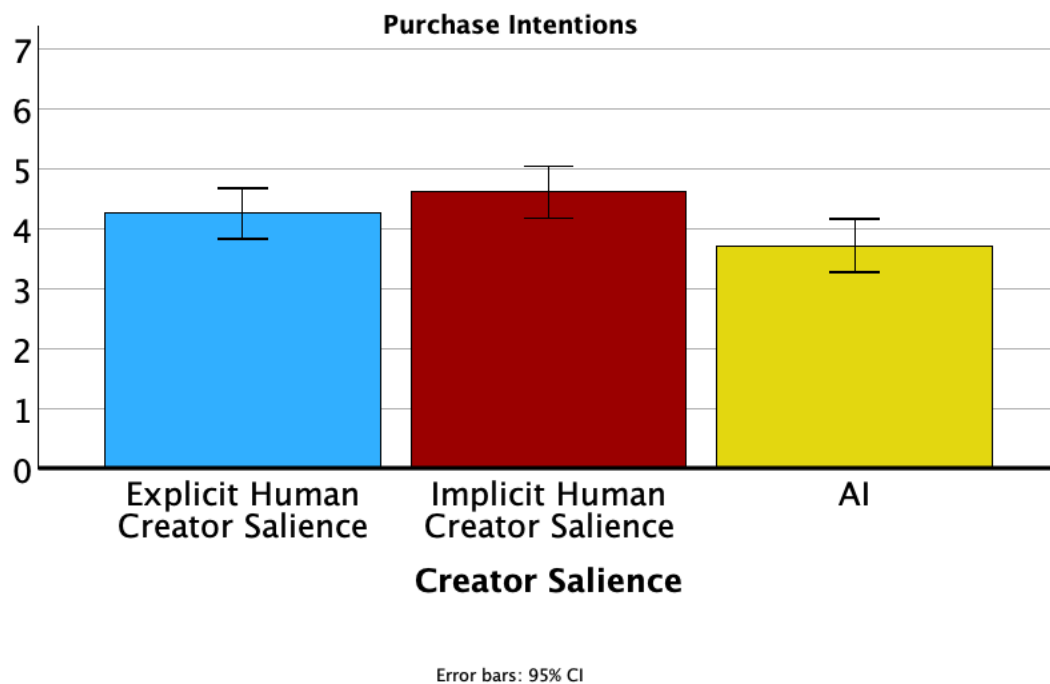


Figure 7. Study 7 Results – Purchase Intentions

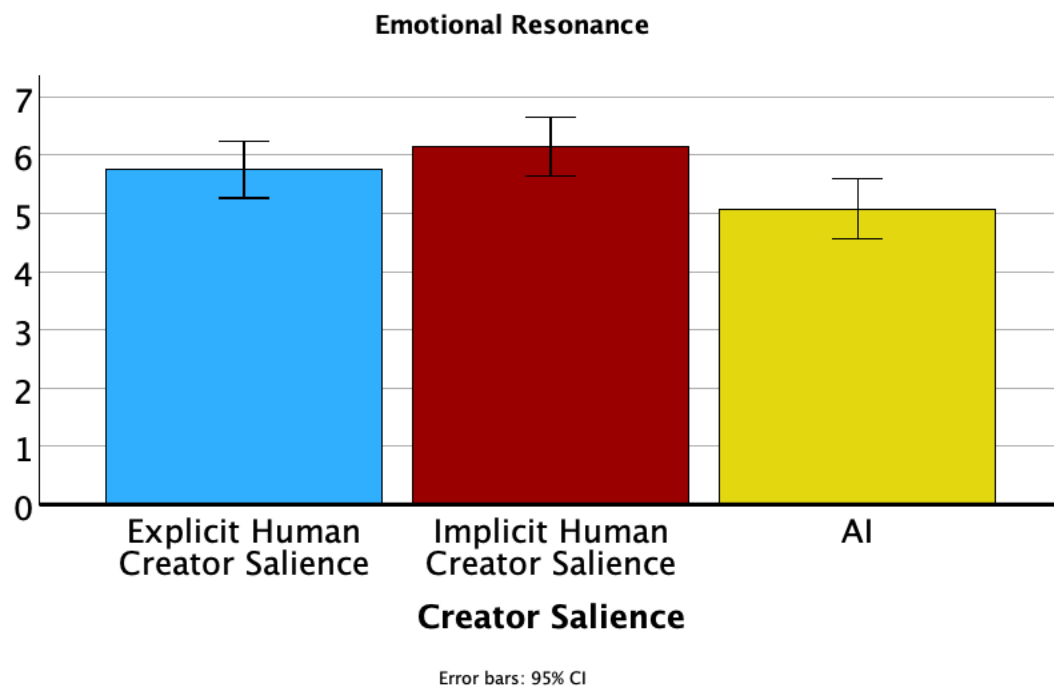
#### *Emotional resonance.*

Overall, creator salience increased emotional resonance ( $F(2, 230) = 4.35$ ,  $p = .014$ ). As predicted in H<sub>7</sub>, the results of emotional resonance paralleled that of purchase intentions. The effect was due to explicit human creator salience resulting in marginally greater emotional resonance compared to AI ( $M = 5.76$  vs.  $5.08$ ,  $t(230) = 10.50$ ,  $p = .062$ ) and implicit human creator salience resulting in greater emotional resonance compared to AI ( $M = 6.15$  vs.  $5.08$ ,

$t(230) = 9.06, p = .004$ ). Explicit and implicit human creator salience did not differ ( $t(230) = 1.33, p = .272$ ). See Figure 8.

#### *Mediation analysis.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes (2022) PROCESS Macro for SPSS, Model 4. In line with the previous studies and H<sub>7</sub>, the test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through emotional resonance supported mediation (effect = .6550, 95% CI .1718, 1.1393).



*Figure 8. Study 7 Results – Emotional Resonance*

#### *Discussion*

As discussed in Study 3, there are non-significant differences on purchase intentions and awe and marginally significant differences on perceived product creativity between the human

creator salience conditions and the AI condition. In Study 3, the explicit human creator salience (vs. implicit human creator salience) condition only marginally significantly increases perceived creator salience which suggests that even when no creator is mentioned, consumers are nonconsciously aware of the creator anyway. In fact, in Study 7, the creator is equally salient in the explicit human creator salience and implicit human creator salience conditions. AI art has only recently become available, so it is natural that artwork automatically conjures schemas of a human creator. The pattern of results around the manipulation check index also aligns with the pattern of results found for purchase intentions and emotional resonance.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The present research finds that creator salience can increase purchase intentions for repurposed products, a form of sustainable consumption. I find that this effect is driven by consumers' emotional resonance. Although past research has found that repurposed products contain minimal narratives, it does not disentangle the effects of the human versus product. The product story benefits from information about the creator's process. My studies explore exactly what it is about creator salience that improves preferences for repurposed products. Given that consumers are becoming more interested in repurposing (Bashir, 2025) this presents a good opportunity for managers.

Across seven studies, I define and disentangle creator salience and attempt to identify the underlying mechanism and a moderator with various product categories. Study 1 finds that a product narrative emphasizing the creator's process to produce the product was more effective than one that also includes the creator's background or no explicit creator. Study 2 finds that whether the creator's background is aligned or unaligned with product transformation ability has no impact on preferences compared to each other or a control. Study 3 shows that humans (vs.

AI) are strongly associated with the creation of artwork even when not explicitly mentioned in the marketing messaging. Accordingly, human (vs. AI) creator salience improved purchase intentions for the artwork. Study 4 shows that the effect is driven by emotional resonance and rule out alternative explanations. Study 5 shows that human creators increase preferences compared to non-creators, but not quite significantly. Study 6 identifies a moderator of the creator salience effect such that hedonic products benefit from it, but functional products do not. Study 7 replicates Study 3 and confirms that emotional resonance is a stronger explanatory variable for the effect than perceived product creativity.

## **Theoretical Implications and Future Research Directions**

### *Disentangling Creator Salience*

Future studies can further disentangle the creator salience effect. For example, would this effect apply to creators who mentally create versus physically create? Products sometimes have multiple creators, so they are not always manually produced by the person who came up with the product idea like in bigger companies which work at a large production scale. As I mentioned previously, Lush is a major hand-made cosmetics retailer that marks each product with the name of the creator (e.g., made by Sheldon). However, it's unlikely that the person handmaking the product is also designing the formulas to make said products. A future study can directly test to see if there is a significant difference on product preferences when the creator physically produced the product versus simply designed the product.

### *Field Studies*

Future studies can focus on examining real purchasing behavior outside of online surveys for increased external validity. I plan to conduct an additional field study where I set up a stall with real repurposed products or collaborate with local artisans to obtain data. I plan to manipulate the signs within the store according to my independent variable conditions. This situation poses an interesting question. Small farmers' markets often have the creator standing at the table directly selling their goods to the consumer. In this situation, creator salience may be engendered simply having the creator present without the need for any messaging on products. However, would consumers also automatically assume the person selling the products at the stand is the creator? What if there are multiple sellers at a stand? These questions seem to be best answered by conducting a field study.

### *Manipulation Checks and Scale*

As discussed, creator salience is a new construct, and the definition can further be fine-tuned. As I continue to refine the construct, the manipulation checks may also need to be altered. As stated previously, I define creator salience as the heightened awareness of concrete cues that an identifiable human intentionally transformed the materials. Three of the manipulation check items more clearly reflect this definition than the other two: "The description makes the product's creator salient," "The description made me think about the creator who created the [target product] made from [materials]," and "The description made me get to know the creator who would create a [target product] made from [materials]". Future research can focus on these items only. Another natural extension would be to develop a measurement scale and determine the various components to the construct.

### *Durability Concerns*

Prior research posits durability neglect as a barrier to sustainable consumption (Sun, Bellezza, and Paharia, 2021). In the case of repurposed products, durability concerns made be a barrier to sustainable consumption. As discussed, I found that product type moderated the effect creator salience. That is, creator salience improved product preferences for a hedonic product, but did not have any effect for functional products. Additionally, emotional resonance did not mediate purchase intentions for functional products. Repurposed products are specifically those that have undergone a transformation from one product with one function to another product with another function. It is possible that consumers have questions about the durability of such products if they know that their function has changed over time.

### *Regulatory Focus*

Another possible area of exploration is regulatory focus as another moderator. Research suggests that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus promotes more analytic (vs. heuristic) reasoning (Bless et al., 1992, 1996; Förster et al., 2003; Friedman & Förster, 2000, 2001). Since narrative transportation increases persuasion and tends to reduce analytical reasoning through reduced counterarguing, it is possible that consumers with a promotion focus might respond more favorably to product narratives in general. This tracks with prior research that shows that promotion (vs. prevention) focused consumers are less sensitive to an advertiser's manipulative intent (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007)

### *Repurposed vs. Conventional Products*

In the current work, I do not compare the effects of creator salience on repurposed and conventional products. The human influence literature focused on its positive effects on preferences for new (i.e., conventional) products. Therefore, it is reasonable to suspect that creator salience would have a positive effect that is not unique to repurposed products. On the other hand, it's also possible that the effect of creator salience may be more pronounced for repurposed products. Repurposed products innately require creativity to transform an old product with one purpose into a new product with another purpose. This unique context may make the creator more important to the product's narrative.

### *Marketing Implications*

This work has practical implications for marketers to determine the most effective messaging tactics to encourage consumers to engage in sustainable behaviors such as choosing recycled and upcycled products. As mentioned before, consumers are more concerned about sustainable business practices than ever before. They believe that businesses need to do more to be sustainable (Tyson et al., 2023) and are willing to spend more for sustainable options (First Insight, 2022). Moreover, there is an increasing consumer interest for repurposed products in particular (Petro, 2019; Wilson, 2016) and a growing number of major retailers who are responding to this consumer interest (e.g., Adidas, Patagonia, Miu Miu, Nespresso).

I propose that creator salience, the strategy of alerting consumers to a repurposed product's human creator can boost preferences for said products. This effect is driven by increased feelings of emotional resonance in consumers. As consumers grow increasingly concerned about sustainability, many retailers, both small and large, have seen this as an

opportunity. Making the repurposed product's creator salient may be a simple and strategy to boost preferences for such products, encouraging more consumers to engage in reuse (vs. recycling), which is a more effective strategy to minimize waste.

## **Conclusion**

I propose that creator salience, the strategy of alerting consumers to a repurposed product's human creator can boost preferences for said products. This effect is driven by increased feelings of emotional resonance in consumers. As consumers grow increasingly concerned about sustainability, many retailers, both small and large, have seen this as an opportunity. Making the repurposed product's creator salient may be a simple and strategy to boost preferences for such products, encouraging more consumers to engage in reuse (vs. recycling), which is a more effective strategy to minimize waste.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Creator Salience Manipulation Check

“Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements”

- The description makes the product’s creator salient
- The description highlights the product’s creator
- The description made me think about the creator who created the [target product] made from [materials]
- The description made me think about the evolution from [materials] to a [target product]
- The description made me get to know the creator who would create a [target product] made from [materials]

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

### Appendix B: Hedonic/Functional Manipulation Check (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Schroll et al., 2018)

“Hedonic products are products that are predominantly fun, enjoyable, and appeal to the senses. Functional products are products that are primarily useful, functional, and help you achieve a goal. How would you rate this [target product]?”

(1 = definitely functional, 7 = definitely hedonic)

### Appendix C: Purchase Intentions (Lee & Winterich, 2022)

- “How likely would you be to purchase the [target product]?”
- “How inclined would you be to purchase the [target product]?”
- “How willing would you be to purchase the [target product]?”

(1 = not at all, 7 = very much)

### Appendix D: Emotional Resonance (adapted from Schroll et al., 2018; Winterich et al., 2019)

“Please describe the extent to which the following words describe your feelings toward this [target product]”

- inspired
- astonished
- wonder
- affectionate
- friendly

- loved
- peaceful
- passionate
- delighted
- captivated
- connected
- bonded
- attached

(1 = not at all, 7 = very much)

### **Appendix E: Perceived Creativity (adapted from Millet et al., 2023)**

“What do you think of this [product]?”

- [This product is] revolutionary
- [This product is] original

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

### **Appendix F: Awe (adapted from Millet et al., 2023)**

“To what extent is the product...”

- Magnificent
- Gorgeous

(1 = not at all, 7 = very much so)

### **Appendix G: Perceptions of Love (Fuchs et al., 2015)**

“The product can figuratively be described as...”

- warm (warmhearted)
- full of love
- full of passion

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

### **Appendix H: Felt Specialness (Kamleitner et al., 2019)**

“How special/unique/recognized would you feel if you owned this product?”

(1 = not at all, 7 = very)

### **Appendix I: Perceptions of Human Care (Suher et al., 2021)**

“Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following items”

- This product received human care when it was produced
- This product received human attention when it was produced
- This product was neglected by a human (i.e., not cared for by a human) during the production process (R)

(R) items are reverse-coded

(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

### **Appendix J: Narrative Transportation (To & Patrick, 2021)**

“Please indicate how well the following statements describe how you felt when viewing the ad.”

- While thinking about the ad, I could easily imagine myself being there.
- While I was viewing the ad, the activity going in the room around me was on my mind (R)
- I was mentally involved with the ad.
- I could picture myself as part of the advertisement.
- After viewing the ad, I found it easy to put it out of my mind (R).
- I found my mind wandering when viewing the ad (R).
- The product advertised is relevant to me.
- I was transported into the ad.

(R) items are reverse-coded

(1 = not at all, 7 = very well)

### **Appendix K: Perceptions of Creator Essence (adapted from Schroll et al., 2018)**

“Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements”

- There is a sense of human creator contact in this [target product]
- There is a sense of human creator personalness in this [target product]
- There is a sense of human creator sociability in this [target product]
- There is a sense of human creator warmth in this [target product]
- There is a sense of human creator sensitivity in this [target product]

(1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree)

**Appendix L: Study 1 Stimuli**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Advertisement</b>
Creator Process	<p data-bbox="683 373 1154 447">Side Table made from old skateboards</p> <hr data-bbox="662 464 1182 468"/>  <p data-bbox="651 894 1187 1024"><b>Morgan Brown</b> who personally collects and transforms skateboards into new pieces</p>

Creator Process and  
Background

Side Table  
made from old skateboards

---



**Morgan Brown**  
a lifelong skater, Morgan wants to preserve the stories and spirit of every ride in a different form. Morgan personally collects and transforms skateboards into new pieces

Control


Side Table  
made from old skateboards

---



**Echo Furniture**  
skateboards collected and transformed into new pieces

**Appendix M: Study 2 Stimuli**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Advertisement</b>
<p>Aligned Creator Process and Background</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Decorative Bowl</b> made from old vinyl records</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted black;"/>  <p><b>Echo Living Co.</b></p> <p>Lee Brown collects vinyl records and transforms them into bowls. A former audio engineer who spent decades restoring vintage turntables, his deep understanding of vinyl's durability and heat response allows him to transform retired records into art.</p> </div>

Unaligned Creator

Process and Background

## Decorative Bowl made from old vinyl records

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### **Echo Living Co.**

Lee Brown collects vinyl records and transforms them into bowls. An avid traveler who collects vinyl records from all around the United States, he aims to bring his travels into people's homes, turning retired records into art.

Control	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Decorative Bowl</b> made from old vinyl records</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted black;"/> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Echo Living Co.</b> Vinyl records collected and transformed into decorative bowls.</p>
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**Appendix N: Study 3 & Study 7 Stimuli**

Condition	Advertisement
<p>Explicit Human</p> <p>Creator Salience</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Studio Decor</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Ethereal Drift”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">• made from old newspaper and crushed chalk</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p>Created by Ada Brown who applies repurposed materials to create new works of art</p> </div> </div>

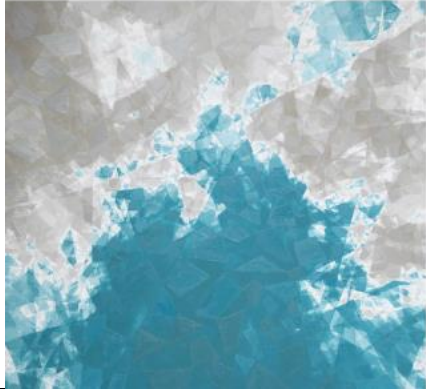
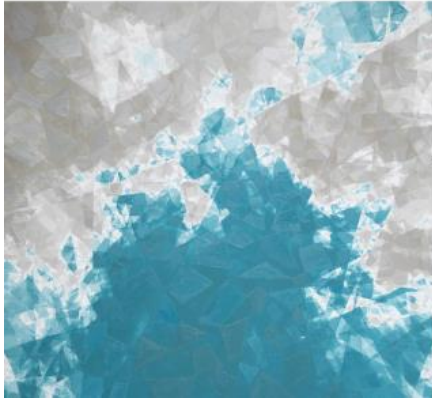
<p>Implicit Human</p> <p>Creator Salience</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Studio Decor</b></p> <p>“Ethereal Drift”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• made from old newspaper and crushed chalk</li> </ul>  <p>Created by applying the repurposed materials to create new works of art</p>
<p>AI</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Studio Decor</b></p> <p>“Ethereal Drift”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• made from old newspaper and crushed chalk</li> </ul>  <p>Created by an AI robot that applies repurposed materials to create new works of art</p>

Image adapted from Ai-Da (n.d.).

**Appendix O: Study 4 Stimuli**

<p><b>Condition</b></p>	<p><b>Advertisement</b></p>
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<p>Creator Saliency</p>	 <p>Side Table • made from old skateboards</p>	<p>Echo Furniture</p> <p>Designed by Taylor Brown who personally scours the globe for diverse materials and designs them into new pieces.</p>
<p>Control</p>	 <p>Side Table • made from old skateboards</p>	<p>Echo Furniture</p> <p>Designed with diverse materials from around the globe and designed into new pieces.</p>

Image adapted from AndrewHancockBuilt (n.d.)

**Appendix P: Study 4 Alternative Mechanism Analyses**

*Perceived product creativity.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through perceived product creativity supported mediation (effect = .31, 95% CI .08, .54).

*Awe.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through awe did not support mediation (effect = .26, 95% CI -.04, .56).

*Perceptions of love.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through love supported mediation (effect = .21, 95% CI .03, .40).

*Perceptions of human care.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through perceptions of human care supported mediation (effect = .14, 95% CI .02, .29).

*Felt specialness.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through specialness supported mediation (effect = .28, 95% CI .02, .54).

*Perceptions of creator essence.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through perceptions of creator essence did not support mediation (effect = .15, 95% CI = -.01, .32).

*Narrative Transportation.*

Mediation was tested using Hayes PROCESS Macro, Model 4. The test of the indirect effect of creator salience on purchase intentions through narrative transportation did not support mediation (effect = .12, 95% CI -.09, .35).

**Appendix Q: Study 5 Stimuli**

Condition	Advertisement
Creator	<p data-bbox="685 1209 1149 1255">Echo Furniture</p> <hr data-bbox="617 1270 1221 1274"/> <p data-bbox="794 1293 1029 1329">Side Table</p> <p data-bbox="685 1333 1149 1360"><i>made from old skateboards</i></p>  <p data-bbox="1057 1457 1268 1724"><b>Table pieces crafted by the creator, Taylor Brown</b></p>

<p><b>Sales Rep</b></p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <h1>Echo Furniture</h1> <hr/> <h2>Side Table</h2> <p><i>made from old skateboards</i></p> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">  <div style="text-align: right;"> <p><b>Table inquiries handled by sales rep, Taylor Brown</b></p> </div> </div>
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**Appendix R: Study 6 Stimuli**

<p><b>Condition</b></p>	<p><b>Advertisement</b></p>
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Creator

Saliency,

Hedonic

## Echo Living Co.

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### Decorative bowl

*made from old vinyl stereo records*



Designed by Taylor Brown who personally scours the globe for diverse materials and designs them into new pieces.

Creator

Saliency,

Functional

## Echo Living Co.

---

### Messenger bag

*made from old leather seat covers*



Designed by Taylor Brown who personally scours the globe for diverse materials and designs them into new pieces.

Control,  
Hedonic

## Echo Living Co.

---

### Decorative bowl

*made from old vinyl stereo records*



Designed with diverse materials from around the globe and designed into new pieces for all kinds of lifestyles.

Control,  
Functional

## Echo Living Co.

---

### Messenger bag

*made from old leather seat covers*



Designed with diverse materials from around the globe and designed into new pieces for all kinds of lifestyles.

## **Appendix S: Supplementary Literature Review - Construal Level Theory**

Construal level theory is a social psychology theory that proposes that events can be thought of at a low or high-level of construal (Trope & Liberman, 2003). When people engage in a high level of construal they think about an event in terms of its global, superordinate, central features, and its desirability. They think of just the main, abstract features that capture the gist of the event or object. In contrast, when people engage in a low level of construal, they think about it in terms of its local, subordinate, peripheral features, and its feasibility. This level of construal does not clearly distinguish between the most important, defining attributes and the incidental features. Construal level theory also states that the psychological distance of a target affects how concretely or abstractly one will think about an event. Psychological distance and construal levels are related concepts, but they are not the same (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Psychological distance is the egocentric perception of the event relative to the self in terms of spatiotemporal distance (i.e., when an event will happen, where it will happen, to whom it will happen, and whether it occurs). Construal level refers to the mental representation of the event itself, with a focus on its properties or features.

There are several types of psychological distance: social, temporal, spatial, and hypothetical. Temporal distance refers to the distance in time that an event takes place. An event that takes place one day later is temporally near whereas an event that takes place in a year is temporally distant. Spatial distance refers to the physical, geographic distance between events. For example, an event with low spatial distance could be in one's city whereas an event with high spatial distance could take place in another country. Social distance refers to the distance between two or more social groups or consumers. There might be low social distance among

friends but high social distance between a consumer and their boss or a stranger. Hypothetical distance refers to the probability of an event occurring. For instance, the odds of winning the lottery are low (vs. experiencing traffic) and thus there is high (vs. low) hypothetical distance. However, there is mixed support for Wakslak et al. (2006)'s findings on hypothetical distance (Calderon et al., 2020). The psychological distance types tend to correlate with each other. For instance, greater social distance from a person would likely lead to greater spatial distance from them as well (Macrae et al., 1994; Mooney et al., 1992). These types of distance share a common meaning that people generate automatically (Bar-Anan et al., 2007). However, it is possible that there are stronger distance correlations for events that are construed at a low (vs. high) level (Trope and Liberman 2010). Consumers who are high in mental imagery facility and empathy are less likely to be impacted by changes in psychological distance (Davis et al., 2011).

Construal level is commonly manipulated by having participants complete a task that primes them to construe at low or high levels. For example, a common task involves asking participants “why” (vs. how) they engage in a task or goal (Freitas et al., 2004; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Another task involves categorization where all participants are given the same word, but those in the high (vs. low) construal level condition are asked to think of a superordinate (vs. subordinate) label (Eyal et al., 2008). For example, for the word “dog”, a superordinate label could be “mammal” and a subordinate label could be “poodle”. However, construal level can also be primed in more naturalistic ways as well. Simply reading a passage that describes an event in general, abstract (vs. specific, concrete) terms can activate a high (vs. low) construal level (Fujita et al., 2006). It can also subtly be primed through visuals. For example, one work found that displaying an image in black and white (vs. color) imagery

promotes a focus on the image's form (vs. details), thereby activating a high (vs. low) construal level (Lee et al., 2014).

While people can be primed to construe at a low or high level, they generally have a chronic construal level. This is commonly measured using a 25-item questionnaire called the Behavior Identification Form (BIF) (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). Participants are asked to choose between one of two ways to describe the same action where one of the phrases is a low construal representation and the other is a high construal representation. Higher total scores represent a greater tendency to construe at a high level. Another way to measure construal level is by having participants complete a category inclusiveness task. Participants must indicate the extent to which the exemplar belongs to the category (1 = "Definitely does not belong to the category" to 10 = "Definitely belongs to the category") (Isen & Daubman, 1984). For each category, the first exemplar was highly prototypical, but the rest are presented randomly. A similar category measurement task involves asking participants to categorize three separate lists of items into groups, with a higher number of groups indicating one's tendency to use more global processing (Wakslak et al., 2006).

Construal level theory has been applied in a wide variety of disciplines such as social psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, organizational management, economics, information systems, and marketing. It has broad implications for a variety of phenomenon including perceptions, judgments, and behavior. High psychological distance generally increases preferences for more desirable, but less feasible (vs. less desirable, but more feasible) outcomes. High (vs. low) psychological distance also tends to increase the likelihood of risk-taking, politeness (Fujita et al., 2006), self-control (Fujita & Roberts, 2010), stereotyping (McCrea et al., 2012), and correspondence bias (Nussbaum et al., 2003). Construal level also has

implications for categorization behaviors (Wakslak et al., 2006), and negotiation strategies (Henderson et al., 2006).

Construal level and psychological distance have also been well studied in the marketing literature. In some decision situations, a high construal level / high psychological distance led to more positive outcomes. For example, consumers' online reviews for restaurants were found to be more positive with greater temporal and geographical distance (Huang et al., 2016). Detection and prevention health behaviors construed at a high (vs. low) level both increased fear and self-efficacy and increased behavioral intentions (Achar et al., 2020). However, in other decision situations, distance led to different preferences. For instance, when consumers made choices temporally and geographically near (vs. distant), they preferred large (vs. small) choice assortments because the psychological distance increased perceptions that options are like each other (Goodman & Malkoc, 2012). Consumers preferred high construal level product information when doing an initial search, but low construal level information when they had narrowed their search (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2013). Moreover, in the informational (vs. transactional) stage, consumers reported greater satisfaction and sense of perceived goal progress when they received abstract (vs. concrete) results and advertisements (Humphreys et al., 2021). Research suggests that low (vs. high) psychological distance increases the relative importance of affective (vs. cognitive) inputs in decision making. For example, low psychological distance (i.e., when making decisions for the present, ongoing self) has been shown to be influenced mainly by subjective experiences (Pronin et al., 2008). When explicitly asked to make decisions for oneself from the standpoint of a non-emotionally involved stranger (vs. simply asked to decide for oneself), participants were more likely to delay gratification for a larger reward later (vs. a smaller reward now). If a participant was asked to choose an apartment to rent soon (vs. later),

they were more likely to choose the affectively (vs. functionally) superior apartment (Chang & Pham, 2013). Social distance impacts consumer behavior as well. For example, when consumers gave gifts, they tended to weight desirability more heavily than feasibility while gift receivers tended to weight feasibility more heavily when relying on judgments (Baskin et al., 2014).

Prior research suggests that construal level affects both creativity and awe. For example, a high construal level was associated with ease in solving insight problems (Förster et al., 2004; Jia et al., 2009; Kwang, 2005; Schimmel & Förster, 2008) and abstract thinking which is associated with creative cognition (Förster et al., 2004). For instance, a moderate (vs. low) amount of noise led to a higher construal level and increased consumer creativity (Mehta et al., 2012). Research also suggests that judgements of a target's creativity can differ based on construal level. For instance, consumers with a low (vs. high) level construal mindset rated the same creative idea lower on creativity due to greater uncertainty (Mueller et al., 2014). Moreover, construal level can increase cognitive flexibility such as an ability to expand schemas (Bullard et al., 2019), which is a key effect of awe. It's been suggested that awe's ability to induce self-transcendence can promote a high construal level (Dai & Jiang, 2024). In turn, an awe-induced high construal level promoted outcomes such as global self-continuity (Pan & Jiang, 2023) and tourists' eco-friendly behavior (Xu & Hu, 2024). When an awe appeal was matched with a high (vs. low) construal level, it increased advertisement persuasiveness (Septianto et al., 2023), donation amounts (Septianto et al., 2022), and sustainable behavior (Kim et al., 2023). Given the above, construal level may enhance the predicted effects of creator salience.

## **Appendix T: Supplementary Study – Moderation by Construal Level**

In this study, I explore the moderating role of product type, that is, whether product categories are typically seen as hedonic or functional. Prior literature suggests that human (vs. machine) influence has a positive effect for hedonic products, but a negative effect for functional products (Schroll et al., 2018). In this study, I determine whether a similar pattern holds for a creator salience (vs. control) product narrative. Specifically, that for hedonic products, a creator salience (vs. control) product narrative increases purchase intentions, but for functional products, a control (vs. creator salience) product narrative has no impact on purchase intentions.

**Hypothesis:** When consumers hold a high construal level, creator salience (vs. control), will increase preference for repurposed products. When consumers hold a low construal level, there will be no differences in preference for repurposed products as a function of product narrative.

### Method

#### *Participants and design.*

This study employed a 2 (product narrative: creator salience vs. control) x 2 (construal level: low vs. high) between-subjects design. I recruited 400 participants through Prolific for nominal monetary compensation. I followed the same criteria for exclusions as in Study 4, 5, 6 and 7. The final sample size consisted of 323 participants.

#### *Materials and procedure.*

Participants were told that the online survey involved looking at a product image and answering some questions about it. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

According to their product narrative condition, participants saw either a control or creator salience product narrative.

[Control]: Made by Bagged Co.

[Creator Salience]: Made by Taylor Brown

According to their construal level condition, participants saw one of two captions:

[Low Construal level]: How to use this backpack? One exterior and two interior pockets plus adjustable straps.

[High Construal level]: Why use this backpack? A unique addition to any outfit that goes with everything.

### *Measures.*

The measures for purchase intentions and emotional resonance remained the same as in previous studies. Participants answered the same creator salience manipulation check items as in Study 1, 4 – 7.

Finally, participants answered demographic questions.

## *Results*

### *Creator salience manipulation check.*

The creator was more salient in the creator salience condition than in the control product condition ( $F(1, 321) = 6.18, M = 5.06$  vs.  $4.68, p = .013$ ).

### *Construal level manipulation check.*

Participants in the low construal conditions held a lower construal level than those in the high construal conditions ( $F(1, 321) = 16.67, M = -1.25$  vs.  $0.21, p < .001$ ).

### *Purchase intentions.*

An ANOVA on purchase intentions found a marginal interaction between product narrative and product type ( $F(1, 319) = 3.70, p = .055$ ). There was a main effect for a creator salience versus control product narrative ( $F(1, 319) = 6.29, M = 4.44$  vs.  $4.93, p = .013$ ) and no main effect for low construal versus high construal ( $F(1, 319) = 1.62, M = 4.56$  vs.  $4.81, p = .203$ ). The significant main effect of product narrative was qualified by a significant two-way interaction, revealing the following. When the advertisement evoked a low construal level, there was no difference between the creator salience and the control product narrative ( $M = 4.50$  vs.  $4.62, t(319) = 0.43, p = .666$ ). However, when the advertisement evoked a high construal level, a creator salience (vs. control) product narrative significantly decreased purchase intentions ( $M = 4.38$  vs.  $5.25, t(319) = 3.01, p = .003$ ).

### *Emotional resonance.*

An ANOVA on emotional resonance found a significant interaction between product narrative and product type ( $F(1, 319) = 2.94, p = .088$ ). There was a marginally significant main effect for a creator salience versus control product narrative ( $F(1, 319) = 2.97, M = 4.11$  vs.  $4.43, p = .086$ ) and no main effect for low construal versus high construal ( $F(1, 319) = 0.39, M = 4.24$  vs.  $4.31, p = .699$ ). The marginal main effect of product narrative was qualified by a significant two-way interaction, revealing the following. When the advertisement evoked a low construal level, there was no difference between a creator salience and control product narrative ( $M = 4.23$  vs.  $4.24, t(319) = 0.01, p = .995$ ). However, when the advertisement evoked a high construal level, a creator salience (vs. control) product narrative marginally significantly increased emotional resonance ( $M = 3.98$  vs.  $4.63, t(319) = 2.34, p = .020$ ).

#### *Moderated mediation analysis.*



I conducted the mediation analyses using PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Mediation was tested using PROCESS Model 8. When advertisement evoked a low construal level, the test of the indirect effect of product narrative on purchase intentions through emotional resonance supported mediation (effect =  $.0015, 95\% \text{ CI } -.4460, .4268$ ). However, when the advertisement evoked a high construal level, the test of the indirect effect of product narrative on purchase intentions through emotional resonance supported mediation (effect =  $.5402, 95\% \text{ CI } .1066, .9721$ ). Finally, the index of moderated mediation or difference between these indirect effects was not significant (index =  $.5387, 95\% \text{ CI } -.0424, 1.1586$ ).

#### Discussion

The results suggest that, contrary to the hypotheses, that a control product narrative improves product preferences when the advertisement evokes a high construal level. The mediation pathway from narrative to purchase intention via emotional resonance appears to operate only under one condition, high construal level, but the evidence for this difference being meaningful across conditions is inconclusive.

**Appendix U: Supplementary Study – Construal Level Stimuli**

Condition	Advertisement
<p>Control, Low Construal</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b><i>THE PUFFER BAG</i></b></p> <p><b>Made by Bagged Co., from old puffer jackets</b></p> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">  <div style="text-align: left;"> <p><b>How to use this backpack? One exterior and two interior pockets plus adjustable straps</b></p> </div> </div>

<p>Control, High Construal</p>	<p><b><i>THE PUFFER BAG</i></b></p> <p>Made by Bagged Co., from old puffer jackets</p>  <p>Why use this backpack? A unique addition to any outfit that goes with everything</p>	
<p>Creator Salience, Low Construal</p>	<p><b><i>THE PUFFER BAG</i></b></p> <p>Made by Taylor Brown, from old puffer jackets</p>  <p>How to use this backpack? One exterior and two interior pockets plus adjustable straps</p>	

**Creator Salience,**

**High Construal**

## ***THE PUFFER BAG***

**Made by Taylor Brown,  
from old puffer jackets**



**Why use this  
backpack? A  
unique addition to  
any outfit that  
goes with  
everything**