ABSTRACT

KIM, GWIA. Brand Storytelling for Small Fashion Business: What to Tell to Build Brand Identity. (Under the direction of Dr. Byoungho Ellie Jin).

Brand storytelling – a set of brand-related activities that build a story – enables companies to effectively communicate their products and brand identities to consumers (Hall, 2019). Small businesses, particularly, need to be distinguished from their competitors in the brand-building stage. However, it is hard for them to build brand identity due to limited resources, and one possible solution is storytelling. Nevertheless, earlier studies have yet to discover the effectiveness of different brand stories of small fashion businesses. Furthermore, little is known about various contexts that are provided along with storytelling. Hence, this study aims to investigate what stories small businesses can deliver to build brand trust and how, by applying relevant theories. Specifically, this study uses video storytelling, which has gained huge popularity recently for both consumers and companies.

By integrating literature (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017), this study broadly categorizes companies' stories into two types, based on a focus on product attributes or brand identities. An attribute-focused story differentiates a company by offering information related to product attributes, such as style, design, fitting, and fabric. In contrast, identity-focused stories holistically deliver a brand's unique identity, philosophy, and values to increase the brand distinctiveness and create brand meaning. A pilot study was conducted by exploring existing small fashion business storytelling and revealed three different commonly delivered identity-focused stories: founder, craftsmanship, and eco-friendly stories.

The three identity-focused stories are compared to attribute-focused story, respectively, forming the conceptual framework of this study. Further, this study incorporates brand, product, or consumer moderators that might influence consumers' brand trust on the basis of its

storytelling. Drawing from construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003), Study 1 compared a founder's personal experience story and an attribute-focused story. Then, based on the underdog effect (Simon, 1954), this study observed the moderating effects of a brand's underdog/top-dog background and consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic on the storytelling of the founder's personal experience in relation to brand trust. In Studies 2 and 3, based on signaling theory (Spence, 1974), stories that may induce a greater brand trust than an attribute-focused story by signaling unique brand identities were examined, such as a craftsmanship story (Study 2) and an eco-friendly story (Study 3). Furthermore, Study 2 investigated the moderating effects of brand level (i.e., high versus low) and consumer individualism/collectivism. Study 3 observed the moderating effect of product aesthetic judgments (i.e., high versus low).

For this purpose, 424 usable responses were collected through Qualtrics, and each respondent was randomly assigned to one of ten experimental situations. Results presented that all three hypotheses proposed in Study 1 testing the founder's personal experience story against the attribute-focused story on brand trust were not supported (H1, H2, and H2a). In Study 2, the craftsmanship story did not lead to a higher brand trust than the attribute-focused story (H3), even in the different brand levels (H4). However, collectivistic consumers trusted the brand with the craftsmanship story more than individualistic consumers (H5). Moreover, the eco-friendly story caused a higher brand trust than the attribute-focused story (H6), and the higher the aesthetic judgements of products, the greater the brand trust they led to (H7).

The findings of this study close a research gap in brand storytelling by exploring different story types commonly used in small fashion companies and further testing the stories on building brand trust along with relevant moderators. Additionally, the findings reveal managerial

implications on how to create brand storytelling, thereby encompassing a wide range of concerns and interests beyond personal relevance that would increase brand trust. Limitations and suggestions for future studies are discussed.

Brand Storytelling for Small Fashion Business: What to Tell to Build Brand Identity

by
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BIOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Brand storytelling or brand narrative refers to a set of brand-related activities that build a story (e.g., Hong et al., 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). It enables companies to effectively communicate their products and brand identities to consumers (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017). Companies, thus, actively utilize storytelling to attract consumers and build branding in their initial stages (Hall, 2019). Small businesses, in particular, need to be distinguished from their competitors in the brand-building stage. One effective way that small companies can build their brand identities is storytelling. Indeed, there are small businesses that have succeeded in building their brand through storytelling. Nevertheless, current academic research is yet to discover the effectiveness of different brand stories of small businesses. This dissertation is to investigate how and what stories small businesses can convey to appeal to consumers. This chapter briefly introduces relevant concepts and theories in the following order: (1) Background, (2) Research Gaps, (3) Research Objectives, (4) Contributions of the Study, (5) Definition of Key Terms, and (6) Dissertation Outline.

Background

Overview of Brand Storytelling

Storytelling or narrating refers to as "the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights" (Hong et al., 2018, p. 2). It consists of four components: a character, a story or plot, a climax, and an outcome (van Laer et al., 2014). To some extent, every brand has a story (Hall, 2019) because any methods and channels that include narrativity using story components can be considered storytelling. More and more brands have recently started utilizing storytelling to

attract consumers because stories can fascinate people more and be remembered better by people than facts (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

The term brand storytelling refers to a set of brands' activities that construct a story. Brands build a story about the founder, history of the brand, product attributes, brand value and philosophy, employees, and customers using various activities (Hong et al., 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). That is, brand storytelling enables a company to convey information about its products, brand values, and what the brand stands for (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019).

Brand storytelling has existed for a long time, but since 2012, the use of brand storytelling has increased (UWA Online, 2019). This is because of its advantages as a communication strategy to deliver company information (Freeman, 2014; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Hong et al., 2018; Woodside, 2010). Brand storytelling can bring competitive advantages to the brand (Deloitte, n.d.; Kao, 2019), such as attracting customers (Freeman, 2014; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Woodside, 2010) and creating connections between brands and consumers (Deloitte, n.d.; Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Mintzias, 2019).

Story Types: Attribute-Focused Stories vs. Identity-Focused Stories

Previous studies categorized story types in several ways. Hall's (2019) and O'Connor's (2002) story type categorization follows the developmental stage of business. Hamelin et al. (2020) categorize story types based on story contents. Integrating the literature review (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Hamelin et al., 2020; Miller, 2017; O'Connor, 2002) and a pilot study, this study classifies brand stories into two categories based on story contents: "attribute-focused" and "identity-focused." In attribute-focused stories, brands use storytelling that describes their products by explaining how the products can add value to customers (Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017). The focus of this type of storytelling is a product's attributes. In this type of storytelling, fashion

brands use several product attributes, such as style or design, fitting, and fabric (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995; Swinker & Hines, 2006), to build stories and appeal to consumers.

In contrast, identity-focused storytelling uses brand-related stories to build a base of holistic brand identities, such as the founder's personal experience, rather than product attributes, (Fog et al., 2010) to construct brand philosophy. These stories are rather brand-centered (Fog et al., 2010), compared to attribute-focused storytelling. Examples of identity-focused stories commonly used in small fashion businesses include founders' personal experience stories (e.g., Universal Standard, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.), craftsmanship stories (e.g., Cuyana, n.d.; M.Gemi, n.d.), and eco-friendly stories (e.g., Pact, n.d.; Tentree, n.d.-a). An in-depth description of each story is presented in Chapter II.

Delivery of Storytelling

As brand storytelling is a set of activities that a brand establishes to construct brand identity (Hong et al., 2018), any means a brand utilizes to convey its story can be considered a storytelling method. To deliver brand stories, various channels and methods can be utilized. Two representative channels that are recently utilized are the brands' websites and social media platforms (Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017; Wahbe, 2019). First, a website is vital for small businesses, as it creates the first impression of the brand and identifies who the business is to consumers (Leinbach-Reyhle, 2014). Thus, more and more brands have begun to use websites recently to share their stories (Hong et al., 2018), via their About Us, Brand History, Philosophy, Vision, and Mission sections (e.g., Gymshark, n.d.; Universal Standard, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.).

Second, social media platforms have also become a hugely popular medium for storytelling. From 2005, social media usage has grown steadily (Pew Research Center, 2019). As of 2019, 72 percent of American adults have used at least one social media platform (Pew

Research Center, 2019). Given this wide reach, brands extensively use social media channels to convey brand stories. Brands deliver stories on social media through posts by their ambassadors (e.g., Gymshark, n.d.; Tentree, n.d.-b), advertising and public campaigns (Hong et al., 2018), and customer reviews (Hall, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; van Laer et al., 2019).

In terms of story delivery formats, such as texts, images, and videos, videos have gained a lot of popularity recently. Companies actively share videos to convey stories on their website and social media. For example, Cuyana, a small apparel and accessories brand, has featured videos on their website to narrate its craftmanship story (Cuyana, n.d.). Pact, an apparel brand, has shared a narrative video on both its website and YouTube channel that highlights the brand's environmental sustainability. Videos are also popular among consumers. Viewers engage more actively when brands post videos rather than texts or photos on social media (Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Susarla et al., 2012). Among social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube, YouTube has had the largest popularity in the last two years in the U.S. (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). This could be because of the high popularity of videos, as YouTube is a video sharing platform. In surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 73 percent of U.S. adults answered that they use YouTube (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). This is the highest percentage, followed by Facebook (69 percent) and Instagram (37 percent) (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Especially, 90 percent of people from 30 to 40 years old as well as younger generations from 18 to 29 years old answered that they used YouTube (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

Brand Storytelling for Small Businesses

There are 30.2 million small businesses in the U.S. (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018a). This number accounts for 99.9 percent of all companies in the country. The apparel and fashion industry, especially, has a highly fragmented nature. In terms of women's wear, 86.5

percent and 79.5 percent of revenue operators are small businesses in physical and online markets, respectively (O'Connor, 2020a; b). That is, the industry is characterized as having high competition among small businesses.

Although there are numerous small businesses in the U.S., the lifespan of small firms is short. From 2005 to 2017, 78.6 percent of small businesses closed one year after their establishment (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018b), meaning that they failed to build awareness and to attract consumers and survive. This high rate of failure of small businesses is largely attributed to deficient marketing (McCartan-Quinn & Carson, 2003; Möller & Anttila, 1987). In reality, the competition among businesses depends on not only the availability of good products but also clear communication with their customers (Miller, 2017). That is, companies need to put effort into clearly communicating with their customers, rather than just creating useful products (Miller, 2017).

In order to survive and sustain themselves in the current competitive market environment, small businesses need effective marketing and branding. One way by which this could be done for small businesses is brand storytelling (de Costa, 2019). Brand storytelling triggers consumers' emotional responses (de Costa, 2019) and conveys a brand's distinctive characteristics or values to consumers (Chiu et al., 2012; Deloitte, n.d.; Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017). Brand storytelling connects consumers and brands (Deloitte, n.d.; Laurence & Valentina, 2019) as well as drawing consumers' attention (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Freeman, 2014; Woodside, 2010). In summary, brand storytelling may lead to greater awareness of small businesses and can, thus, increase a brand's attractiveness over its rivals in the marketplace. Therefore, this study focuses on the brand storytelling of small businesses for brand-building.

Keeping in mind the study's focus on small businesses, a pilot study was conducted.

The pilot study explored and analyzed small fashion businesses that had successfully built their brand identity using distinctive storytelling. Three story cases commonly used by small fashion businesses were identified: founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story. A founder story narrates how the founder began the business (Hall, 2019). A craftsmanship story emphasizes the artisans behind a brand who are responsible for creating high-quality and aesthetically appealing products (Lee & Youn, 2020). An eco-friendly story relates a brand's holistic efforts to be environmentally sustainable as a brand born with a concern for environmental sustainability (Punyatoya, 2014). An in-depth description of the pilot study is provided in Chapter II.

Research Gaps

Upon reviewing the academic literature on brand storytelling, six major research gaps have been identified. First, the content of the stories has not been thoroughly explored in brand storytelling research, though a substantial number of studies have examined the delivery of storytelling. Previous studies have investigated the message delivery process (e.g., Kim et al., 2016), storytellers (e.g., Kang et al., 2019), story receivers (e.g., van Laer et al., 2019), and the delivery format (Lien & Chen, 2013). In storytelling, what to tell is as important as who and how to tell the story. Especially in brand storytelling, the content of a story determines a brand's meaning and characteristics (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019). The findings of the studies on story delivery are considerable, but academic insights on how different stories lead customers' varying responses are under-studied. This study focuses on studies on the content of stories, which may provide a greater understanding of how brands should plot stories to attract consumers.

Second, academic studies have not sufficiently investigated diverse content of stories though companies have utilized various narratives for product and brand advertising. Previous

studies on the content of stories have largely centered on the founder's underdog and top-dog backgrounds (e.g., Kao, 2019; Pahari et al., 2011, 2014), but a few recent studies have explored other story contents (e.g., Lee & Youn, 2020). Small businesses can sustain themselves by telling distinctive stories that will imbue them with unique and memorable characteristics in the consumer's minds (Entrepreneur Store, 2019). Although there are different stories used in small businesses, there is a lack of research explaining the content of these using relevant theories. Research on actively utilized stories of fashion brands that goes beyond underdog stories may generate more academic and managerial implications for companies. Accordingly, this study identifies commonly used stories in small fashion businesses and investigates these stories' effectiveness through relevant theories.

Third, previous literature on storytelling shows a lack of consideration of various contexts, such as basic brand positioning (i.e., brand level) and product features (i.e., aesthetic judgment). The effectiveness of storytelling may differ according to context; thus, the consideration of moderators is important. Earlier studies investigated the factors of consumer interaction with regard to storytelling, including consumers' demographic background (Hamelin et al., 2020) and inherent characteristics (Dalgado-Ballester, 2020). However, from the management perspective, consumer factors cannot be easily controlled by companies. Therefore, in order to provide managerial insights, contexts that companies can use to enhance their brand strategy should be considered. This study, thus, includes brand positioning and product features as factors behind consumer interaction with brand storytelling.

In particular, previous studies that offered knowledge about brand positioning mainly focused on the underdog position (e.g., Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011; 2014). In reality, brands use the underdog story to position themselves in comparison to their competitors, rather than as a

fundamental identity of the brands (e.g., Dua, 2015; Under Armour, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.). For example, the identity of Under Armour is performance, but the brand positions itself as an underdog to add allure (Dua, 2015; Under Armour, n.d.). Thus, it might be more proper to examine underdog stories as a moderator that is added to the main brand storytelling. In addition, previous studies considered the impact of consumers' self-identify as an underdog on the underdog effect (Paharia et al., 2011). This study extends this by investigating if temporary situation may influence consumers' responses to underdog stories.

Fourth, the majority of research has been conducted on large or renowned companies (e.g., Lee & Youn, 2020), but storytelling techniques of small businesses have not been explored sufficiently. Small companies, which have relatively weaker renown and familiarity than large companies, especially need to attract consumers' attention by offering interesting experiences. Furthermore, in the fashion industry, there are many small or start-up brands that have built their brand's unique identity using distinctive stories. For example, Bonobos, in its beginnings, succeeded with its unique story of providing a better fit through its signature curved waistband for men's pants (Bonobos, n.d.). However, current literature does not amply address the effectiveness of storytelling from the perspective of small businesses. As storytelling is an effective tool to create brand meaning and build brand uniqueness (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; von Wallpach et al., 2017), small brands that need to attract consumers by distinguishing themselves from their competition can benefit from brand storytelling. Therefore, it needs to be observed if small brands' storytelling can create brand meaning and lead consumer responses.

Fifth, brand trust was revealed to aid the growth of small businesses (Eggers et al., 2013), that is, the short longevity of small businesses can be overcome by increasing the brand trust between a company and its consumers. Brand trust has been known to boost brand loyalty (e.g.,

Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), brand credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004), and purchase intentions (Lude & Prügl, 2018). Despite its importance for small businesses, brand trust has not been explained with regard to brand storytelling. Various outcomes of brand storytelling revealed by earlier studies include a rise in purchase intentions (e.g., Solja et al., 2018), enhancements in brand attitude (e.g., Chiu et al., 2012), improvements in consumer experience (e.g., Kim et al., 2016), strengthening of brand identity (Canziani et al., 2019), and promotion of brand specialness (e.g., Hjelmgren, 2016). However, to the author's knowledge, brand trust has not yet been investigated in the context of brand storytelling. Hence, the issue of enhancing brand trust using different storytelling contents needs to be explored for small businesses.

Lastly, despite the recent popularity of video-based brand storytelling (e.g., Cuyana, n.d.; Pact, n.d), very few studies have examined it. Previous studies investigated storytelling through text (e.g., Hamelin et al., 2020), images (e.g., Lien & Chen, 2013), and audios (e.g., Hong et al., 2018). To the author's knowledge, only Lee and Youn (2020) have conducted an experimental study by manipulating video storytelling. Recently, people engage more actively in video posts than text or image posts on social media (Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Susarla et al., 2012). Among the many social media platforms, YouTube is the most popular, as it is a video-sharing platform (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). This study, hence, manipulates the content of different narrative videos to conduct experimental studies.

Research Objectives

To address the aforementioned research gaps, this study aims to examine the effects of different brand stories on brand trust for small fashion businesses. This section discusses the two research questions that will be addressed in this study using a series of experimental studies.

The first research question asks, *"Whether and why attribute-focused and identity-focused stories of small business brands have differences in encouraging consumers to trust a brand?"* Attribute-focused stories may appeal to consumers, as they narrate unique product-relevant information. Identity-focused stories may encourage consumers to remember a brand by triggering emotions or providing cues to help judge a brand. In specific, this study selected three types of identity-focused stories through a pilot study: founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story. Therefore, the first objective of the study is to compare the ways in which identity-focused storytelling and attribute-focused storytelling influence consumers' brand trust. In order to explain the ways in which different story contents affect brand trust, relevant theories (i.e., construal level theory and signaling theory) will be applied. To evaluate the influence of each story content on brand trust, a series of experimental studies will be conducted. Using three different studies, each identity-focused story will be compared with an attribute-focused story.

The second research question states, *"What brand, product, and consumer factors spur or hinder consumers from trusting a brand due on the basis of its brand storytelling?"* Brand storytelling should be well aligned to have authenticity (Chiu et al., 2012). Brand storytelling may or may not be trustworthy enough depending on what positioning a brand actually takes, what products it actually offers, and which customers a brand targets. The second objective of the study is to investigate how these factors influence brand trust by interacting with storytelling. For the purpose, this study incorporates several factors relevant to the context of each story content. The factors involve a brand's underdog positioning, brand level (i.e., high-end versus mid-end), the aesthetic judgment of a brand's products (i.e., high versus low), consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic (i.e., high versus low), and consumer

individualism/collectivism. To explain how each factor interacts with the contents of the stories and grows brand trust, the underdog effect, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions will be discussed.

Contributions of the Study

This study will provide both academic and managerial insights on brand storytelling for small businesses. First, this study investigates the impact of story contents on brand trust, which has been under-studied. While previous studies were mainly conducted to examine how a story is told, such as story sources, storytellers, story receivers, and format, this study focuses on what to tell in the story by comparing identity-focused and attribute-focused stories. In specific, based on the literature review and a pilot study, three commonly used identity-focused stories (i.e., founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story) that have been used to build the base of a brand's identity will be compared with attribute-focused stories, closing the academic research gap. As for the managerial side, this investigation of story contents may provide insights to marketers on how to construct the story to attract consumers.

Second, this study identifies, using existing theories, how small businesses can make their brands more credible by telling different brand stories. This study applies relevant theories to describe and empirically tests why and how the three types of identity-focused stories that lead to brand distinctiveness and attribute-focused storytelling that appeals to consumers using the functions and features of products differ in growing brand trust. This research adds more knowledge to relevant theories, such as the construal level theory, signaling theory, underdog effect, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, regarding how they can be applied to brand storytelling. Comparing the effectiveness of the contents of identity-focused stories and attribute-focused stories can be practical and meaningful for current and potential small businesses in determining their brand identity.

Third, this research will offer new insights into brand storytelling by incorporating several moderators along with storytelling. This approach is rather unique because there is a scarce understanding of how storytelling can be more effectively presented in different brand strategies. This study explores whether the impact of brand storytelling on consumer's brand trust is influenced by the brand (e.g., brand underdog versus top-dog positioning, high-end versus mid-end brand level), product (e.g., perceived aesthetic judgments), and consumer factors (e.g., consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic, consumer individualism/collectivism). With this approach, this study will offer theoretical explanations of why and how stories are more or less appealing for building brand trust. Managerially, this study will also provide an understanding of how moderating factors should be sufficiently considered to make stories more effective.

Fourth, this study will extend the literature on brand storytelling in the context of small fashion businesses, as most literature on brand storytelling has centered on large or renowned companies. The findings of this study will provide more insights for current academic literature on small businesses' storytelling, that are mainly focused on underdog stories of founders (e.g., Kao, 2019; Pahari et al., 2011, 2014). Additionally, this study will add to the literature on the phenomenon of the underdog effect. Underdog background, in this study, is considered as a story that is added to the main identity-focused story with the consideration of consumers' perceived temporary underdog. In particular, this study considers the temporary situation surrounding a consumer that may affect underdog effect by impacting the consumer's self-identity as an underdog. Thus, this study reflects consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic in underdog effect. An understanding of small business storytelling can be practical and

meaningful for both current small companies and future entrepreneurs that seek to establish a small business.

Lastly, this study contributes to the literature by filling the research gap regarding video storytelling. As video storytelling has gained huge popularity in the industry recently, previous literature is limited for understanding the recent surge in video storytelling in the industry. By employing video storytelling, this study can generate managerial implications more relevant to the industry. As one of the early attempts to employ an experimental design for video storytelling, the findings of the experiments will identify the cause-and-effect relationship between the video-formatted story contents and consumers' responses. Thus, the findings may have both academic and managerial implications.

Research Boundaries

Based on the research objectives discussed above, this study limits the study focus as follows. First, this study selected three identity-focused stories among various story contents utilized by brands. In the pilot study, where successful cases of storytelling by small brands were analyzed, three types of story contents—founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story—were found to be commonly utilized by brands (e.g., Cuyana, n.d.; Pact, n.d.; Universal Standard, n.d.). These brands have built their identity upon these story contents. The description of each story with examples is provided in Chapter II.

Second, with the focus of small business storytelling, this study will especially concentrate on the stage of building brand awareness. For brand building and survival, small businesses need to distinguish themselves from their competitors with strong brand identity (e.g., Ross, 2012). Although brand storytelling can be applied in every stage of the brand's lifespan

(Hall, 2019), this study specifically focuses on the initial stage of small brands that need to build brand awareness.

Third, the research sample of the study is limited to those living in the United States. In America, there are 30.2 million small businesses, which accounts for 99.9 percent of all businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018a). In terms of the U.S. economy, small businesses also take a high portion, generating 44 percent of U.S. economic activity (Office of Advocacy, 2019). Hence, this study has chosen the United States as a background to research small businesses' brand storytelling.

Fourth, this study will focus on female consumers. In response to storytelling, gender difference exists. A story evokes higher emotions, such as empathy, to female story receivers than male receivers (Argo et al., 2008; Stern, 1992). Accordingly, female story receivers absorb a story more than male receivers (van Laer et al., 2014). In addition, this study creates video stimuli to tell stories about a fashion brand. The videos show women's wear only, thus models and founders who have appeared in these videos will be also female. It has been found that when a storyteller is a female, the attitudes of female and male story receivers toward the story differ (Kang et al., 2019). Accordingly, this study is limited to women groups. Based on the characteristics of this sample, the results can be generalized to females interested in brand storytelling.

Fifth, keeping with research sample, the study will limit the respondents as people from 18 to 40. A large portion of this range is Generation Y (or millennials), who were born between 1981 and 1996 (Vogels, 2019), and Generation Z, who were born after 1996 (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). These generations adopt technologies heavily (Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Vogels, 2019), compared to other older generations. For example, higher percentage of these generation use

social media, including YouTube, in a weekly basis than generations (Cox, 2019). Moreover, millennials prefer online videos than traditional television (Fitzgerald, 2018), and Generation Z are specifically digital natives (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). This study uses online videos to deliver storytelling, so it selects the respondents as adults under 40.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Brand Storytelling** refers to a brand's activities that construct a story about the founder or CEO, the history and origins of the brand, the value of the company and products, the purpose of the company as regards its employees, customers, etc. (Hong et al., 2018; Paharia et al., 2011).
- **Attribute-focused stories**, in this study, are operationally defined as stories that explain the functional values of a brand's products that customers can obtain by purchasing and consuming the products (Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017).
- **Identity-focused stories**, in this study, are operationally defined as unique and distinctive stories that build a base of a holistic brand identity (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019).
- **Founder stories** refer to stories about the person who starts the business and how the business began (Hall, 2019).
- **Craftsmanship stories**, in this study, refer to stories about the way artisans create high-quality and aesthetically appealing objects (Lee & Youn, 2020).
- **Eco-friendly stories**, in this study, are defined as stories about a brand's environmental commitment and concerns for environmental sustainability (Punyatoya, 2014).
- **Construal level theory** is a social psychology theory that posits that psychological distance from an object or an event is a core determinant of the extent to which people construe the object or the event (Trope & Liberman, 2003).

- **The underdog effect** is defined as a phenomenon of support for a competitor who is expected to lose (i.e., underdog) when a particular and evidently more powerful competitor is likely to be the winner (i.e., top-dog) (Simon, 1954).
- **Signaling theory** is a theory originating from information economics that states that a signal acts as a cue for a person to judge an object by reducing the information asymmetry between two parties (Spence, 1974).
- **Brand trust** refers to as a "consumers' confidence that the brand, product, or service firm is dependable and competent" (Herbst et al., 2012, p. 910).
- **Perceived financial hardship**, in this study, means a situation in which a person is associated with economically stressful due to inability to pay bills and debts and to make end meets (Conger et al., 1992).
- **Brand level** refers to a brand's categorization in terms of exclusivity, accessibility, and price, where high-end brands are explained as premium quality, low accessibility, and high price, and low-end brands are characterized as non-premium quality, high accessibility, and low price (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Nueno & Quelch, 1998)
- **Hofstede's cultural dimensions** are a framework to understand cross-cultural personal values, beliefs, preferences, and behaviors of individuals or organizations (Hofstede, 2001).
- **Individualism/collectivism,** as one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, refers to how individuals view themselves linked to the society, in which individualism links individuals with society to a lower extent, viewing the self as "I." Collectivism links them more to society, viewing the self as an individual within "We" (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede Insights, n.d.-b).

- **Perceived aesthetic judgments** in this research are defined as consumers' responses to the aesthetic aspects of a brand or a product (Hirschman, 1986; Jacobsen et al., 2004).

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I provides a brief overview of the study by providing background information on the study topic, research gaps discovered in the current literature, research objectives, contributions, limitations, and the definitions of key terms. Chapter II offers an extensive overview of relevant literature including major concepts and theories that build the research foundation. Based on this literature review, a conceptual framework with eight hypotheses has been provided. Chapter III discusses the research methods of the study. The chapter describes overall research design, pre-test procedures and results, and data collection and analysis methods. Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis. Chapter V provides a conclusion of the study by explaining the findings and providing theoretical and managerial implications. Research limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on the major concepts and relevant theories. First, the concept and general literature of brand storytelling have been explained with current research trends on the topic. Second, the theoretical foundations and their relevant applications in consumer behavior and marketing have been reviewed. Based on this literature review, a conceptual research framework has been proposed with eight hypotheses. The rationale for each hypothesis has been provided.

Brand Storytelling

The Concept of Brand Storytelling

A story is often defined as a chronological order of connected events (Abbott, 2000; Escalas, 2004) that consists of a beginning, middle, and end (Hong et al., 2018). A similar term, narrative, is regarded as "the representation of a real or fictitious event or series of events" (Genette & Levonas, 1976). Some researchers believe that the term story and narrative are not equivalent. They insist that story is more related to oral forms and narrative is more relevant to written forms (Hong et al., 2018). With the growth of the digital era, many researchers use the terms "story" and "narrative" interchangeably as synonyms. In the digital era, the image, oral expressions, and text information are commonly used simultaneously (Hong et al., 2018), which eliminates the division between story and narrative. Therefore, storytelling or narrating is defined as "the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights" (Hong et al., 2018, p. 2). Storytelling emphasizes the act of narrating a story, where a storyteller is a person or an object who delivers a

story via media (Hong et al., 2018). In this study, therefore, the terms, storytelling and narrating, are used as synonyms.

Typically, storytelling consists of four basic components: character, plot, climax, and outcomes (Laurence & Valentina, 2019). First, a character is a story protagonist who serves as the means by which story receivers perceive a story's beliefs, purposes, and emotions (Stern, 1994). Second, a plot is a temporal sequence of events that impact a character, where the events that create sequence include processes, situations, or states (Escalas, 2004; Hall, 2019; Laurence & Valentina, 2019). Third, within the plot, there is a climax. A climax is the dramatic peak that typically presents the highest degree of emotional intensity (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Laurence & Valentina, 2019). Fourth, the outcome is the end phase of the plot that the character experiences in the story (Brechman & Purvis, 2015; Laurence & Valentina, 2019).

The relationships among the four components establish the two important characteristics of storytelling: chronology and causality (Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Stern, 1994). Chronology and causality are the strategic elements of a plot structure that creates the storytelling content (Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Stern, 1994). Chronology refers to the organization of the story elements according to a beginning, a middle, and an end, while causality refers to the causal relationships and connections among the story's events (Escalas, 2004; Laurence & Valentina, 2019). For example, chronology means the order of events that construct a plot (Escalas, 2004). Causality means the happening of an event (i.e., cause) that results in another event (i.e., outcome), which in turn may cause another sequence of events (i.e., another outcome) (Escalas, 2004). The storytelling components and characteristics are summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Storytelling Components and Characteristics

		Definition
Components	Character	Story protagonists (or sometimes same as storytellers) who are the means by which story receivers listen beliefs, purposes, and emotions
	Plot	The temporal sequence of events (i.e., processes, situations, or states) impacting a character
	Climax	The dramatic intensity in the plot (i.e., the highest degree of emotional intensity)
	Outcomes	The end phase of the plot that the character experiences within the story
Characteristics	Chronology	The organization of story elements from a beginning, a middle and an end
	Causality	The connections among the story's events to have causal relationships

Source: Organized by the author based on literature review

Storytelling is actively used in marketing and branding. Based on the definition of storytelling in previous literature, brand storytelling refers to a brand's activities that construct a story about the founder or CEO, the history and origins of the brand, the values of the company, its products, the purpose of the company regarding its employees, customers, etc. (Hong et al., 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). That is, brand storytelling enables a company to deliver its brand values and what the brand stands for (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019).

As stories fascinate people and have a higher memorability than facts (Lundqvist et al., 2013), brand storytelling is an effective advertising strategy to draw customers' attention (Freeman, 2014; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Woodside, 2010). Brand storytelling creates connections between brands and consumers (Deloitte, n.d.; Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Mintzias, 2019); thus, companies can better communicate with consumers through brand storytelling (Hong et al., 2018). Brand storytelling can effectively engender brand meaning and make branding more emotional (Kim et al., 2016; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Marketers, therefore,

use storytelling as a communication instrument that conveys company information, including products and brands (Chiu et al., 2012; Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017).

Delivery Methods and Channels of Brand Storytelling

As brand storytelling is a set of activities that a brand uses to deliver information about products and brands (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Hong et al., 2018), any means a brand can utilize to convey its story can be a storytelling method. Brands convey stories using texts, images, audios, and videos across story delivery channels (Wahbe, 2019). Any communication that has story components serves as a story. For example, brands' websites textually present their stories (Canziani et al., 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). Customer reviews on social media can also be considered as textual narrations (Lee et al., 2020; van Laer et al., 2019). The text information can be shown together with images on websites, and Instagram or Facebook posts normally combine texts and image narratives (Miller, 2017; Smith et al., 2012). One example of audio narratives are radio advertisements (e.g., Hong et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2019).

One of the recent most actively applied story delivery approaches is videos (Lee & Youn, 2020; Pera & Viglia, 2016; Wahbe, 2019). Videos that integrate visual, auditory, and textual information are extensively employed by brands. Many small fashion brands, such as Universal Standard, Warby Parker, Gymshark, Tentree, and Pact, also utilize video storytelling. Social media videos, such as YouTube videos, are acknowledged to be more effective in terms of engagement with viewers than other types of posts, such as texts and photos (Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Susarla et al., 2012). This is because videos can lead to interactions and draw the attention, emotions, and cognition of consumers (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2020).

Consumers integrate and grasp brand stories through the above methods and delivered through various channels, such as websites, social media, and advertising or campaigns (Hall,

2019; Miller, 2017; Wahbe, 2019). The most commonly used channel by many brands is the brand website (Canziani et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). Companies have started using their brand websites to present their brand stories more than ever before (Hong et al., 2018). Brand stories are embedded in the website as part of the About Us, Brand History, Philosophy, Vision, and Missions (e.g., Gymshark, n.d.; Universal Standard, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.). These sections may include textual information (e.g., Gymshark, n.d.), images (e.g., Universal Standard, n.d.), and videos (e.g., Cuyana, n.d.; Pact, n.d.) to clearly deliver their stories to customers.

As well as companies' own websites, social media is another channel to convey stories, where brands operate advertising or public campaigns (Hong et al., 2018). Companies also work with ambassadors or influencers who can tell stories on behalf of the brand on social media (e.g., Tentree, n.d.-b). Consumers can be the source of storytelling in social media as well because what they share, such as customer reviews, includes narrativity (Hall, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; van Laer et al., 2019). Especially, given the diversity in the functions of different social media platforms (Smith et al., 2012), consumers can encounter various storytelling methods (Smith et al., 2012; Khan, 2017). For example, Facebook is a place to create social connections, and thus, brands can use it to deliver timely information to customers. Instagram is designed for photo-sharing, and Twitter is suitable for micro-blogging, that is, posting and replying to relatively short and simple ideas or opinions. Therefore, brands can deliver visual stories through Instagram. Textual stories, including customer review stories, can be created on Twitter. YouTube, which is for sharing videos, is suitable for presenting brand-related and product-focused posts (Shao, 2009; Smith et al., 2012) and allows brands to promote unique story content

(Smith et al., 2012). Among these social media platforms, YouTube has been the most popular recently in the U.S. (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

Typology of Brand Storytelling

Previous literature has categorized the different types of business stories in several ways. First, Hall (2019) categorized brand storytelling based on the stages of the stories, that is, first-to-be-told and additional stories. The first to-be-told stories include value stories and founder stories. A value story discusses how the product or service can add value to customers' life. The value is not limited to physical or direct benefits from products, but it also encompasses emotional and other psychological advantages of purchasing and consuming the products. A founder story is about the person who has started the business and how the business began. Additional stories involve purpose stories and customer stories. The purpose story discusses the reasons company members should commit to the company, cooperate with each other and the company, and accomplish achievements together. Beyond the first-to-be-told stories, the purpose story offers a directional guideline to company members and the reasons for working with it. Customer stories are the stories from the customer's mouth. For example, a customer story can be told through customer reviews, like testimonials, and user communities.

Second, O'Connor (2002) classified entrepreneurial narratives into personal, generic, and situational stories. Each category has two sub-categories. Personal stories are authored by the company's founder and focus on the founder's personal life (i.e., founding stories) or technological innovations and breakthroughs (i.e., vision stories). Generic stories are shown through business plans and templates. These stories accompany the market positioning (i.e., marketing stories) and the strategic trajectory of the company (i.e., strategy stories). Situational stories are broader contextual storylines of both temporal and spatial contexts of where the

company is located. For example, these stories deal with economic trends, competitive pressures, and technological and marketplace evolution. Situational stories include historical stories and conventional stories. Historical stories describe longer or recent historical events of the industry where the company serves as just one of the players. Conventional stories include widely accepted expectations of what companies in the industry should do.

Third, stories can also be classified based on their contents into cognitive (i.e., rational) and affective (i.e., emotional) stories (Hamelin et al., 2020). Both story types are effective but in different ways. Cognitive messages specifically lead to long-term attitudinal changes, and affective messages bring overall attitudinal changes. Therefore, companies are recommended to include both rational and emotional messages.

By keeping in mind Hall (2019)'s, O'Connor's (2002), and Hamelin et al.'s (2020) classifications, story types can be in line with the business growth from the initial stage to the mid-stage. The first-to-be-told stories, founder's personal stories, and generic stories that offer business plans can be in the initial stage to build the brand. A business in its mid-stage can relate the story of its purpose, generic, and situational stories as well as founder stories. This study especially focuses on the initial stage of the business; thus, several first-to-be told story contents will be explored.

A company can convey information regarding its products and brands through storytelling (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017) for brand-branding in the initial stage. This study broadly categorizes the story types into two based on the focus of products or brands. These two types of storytelling divided as per their contents are 'attribute-focused' and 'identity-focused' storytelling that can also be used as first-to-be-told stories to build brand awareness. Whether a brand focuses on a product or identity, storytelling is imperative for successful

branding (Fog et al., 2010). In attribute-focused storytelling, brands utilize storytelling to describe their products because companies' products are common story sources (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019; Miller, 2017). Product stories offer information related to product attributes and reasons a customer should purchase the brand's product (Hall, 2019). By showing that their products are strong, brands can build points-of-difference. Brands also build and emphasize unique stories to denote brand identity, which are termed identity-focused stories. Identity stories focus on brand philosophy and brand values to increase the distinctiveness of the brand (Fog et al., 2010; Hall, 2019). By holistically conveying how the brand has been constructed with a unique identity and creating brand meaning, brands present their points-of-difference. Identity-focused stories convey distinctive brand identities and philosophies; thus, there are various story contents in identity-focused stories. In this study, three types of story contents of identity-focused stories have been selected through a pilot study, which is described in the next section.

The Contents of Brand Storytelling in Small Fashion Businesses: Results of The Pilot Study

To analyze how successful small businesses have utilized identity-focused storytelling, a pilot study was conducted. This section provides the examples of existing identity-focused storytelling by small fashion brands identified through the pilot study.

Examples of small businesses were located using keywords such as "small fashion business stories," "successful small fashion business stories," "small fashion business storytelling," "successful small fashion business storytelling," and other similar keywords in the search engines. The definition of small business followed the size standards of small businesses in the retail sector (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2019; Congressional Research Service, 2020), that is, businesses with less than 500 employees or less than $12.0 millions for men's clothing, $30.0 million for women's clothing, $41.5 millions for family clothing, $16.5 millions

for clothing accessories stores, and $30.0 millions of shoe stores of annual receipts. Annual receipts mean the firm's gross or total income, along with cost of goods sold.

Based on the search keywords and the definition of a small business, the pilot study selected three types of story contents: founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story. In the following section, the contents of these stories are discussed using examples of actual small brands.

Founder Story

First, as discussed above, the founder story is a story about how and why the founder began the business (Hall, 2019). In a small business setting, brands actively used their founder's personal experience stories. In many cases, founders realized that there was a problem in current marketplaces, such as limited available products, and their experiences led them to start their own business to solve this problem (e.g., Universal Standard, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.). For example, the founders of Universal Standard, a clothing brand, detected that limited sizes of clothing were available in the marketplace. They started their business to broaden the size availability for themselves and their customers (Universal Standard, n.d.). Therefore, they launched the brand by calling it a "size inclusive brand." In their About Us section on the official website, their story is described as follows:

> We lived in a world in which access was limited… It felt unfair, but moreover, it made no sense. If 67% of women in the U.S. wear a size 14 or above, why were their options so dismal? It was clear that all women weren't given the same level of style, quality, or even respect. (Universal Standard, n.d.)

On their YouTube channel, the brand also built a storyline of inclusiveness (Universal Standard, 2019). The brand operated a campaign that encouraged women with various body

types become the ambassadors of the brand. The ambassadors shared their experiences and feelings of being models in the videos, enhancing the authenticity of the brand story.

Another example is Warby Parker, a sunglasses brand. On their website, the founders have shared their experiences with the sunglasses market in the past, that they are too expensive (Warby Parker, n.d.). They, therefore, explained how it was hard to purchase new sunglasses when they were students who did not have the money to replace their broken sunglasses with new ones. This was what motivated them to begin their business, whose goal was to create alternative inexpensive sunglasses. On their website, they have narrated the following story:

> Every idea starts with a problem. Ours was simple: glasses are too expensive. We were students when one of us lost his glasses on a backpacking trip. The cost of replacing them was so high that he spent the first semester of grad school without them, squinting and complaining. (We don't recommend this.) The rest of us had similar experiences, and we were amazed at how hard it was to find a pair of great frames that didn't leave our wallets bare… We started Warby Parker to create an alternative. By circumventing traditional channels, designing glasses in-house, and engaging with customers directly, we're able to provide higher-quality, better-looking prescription eyewear at a fraction of the going price (Warby Parker, n.d.).

Besides the founder's personal experiences, founders also use underdog stories to emotionally appeal to customers. Underdog stories in a small business setting include the humble beginnings of the founder or how hard it was to launch and develop the business (Paharia et al., 2011). Underdog stories can include a brand's positioning as a loser that is not a leader in the marketplace and has only a small market share but puts efforts into creating valuable products (Paharia et al., 2011). While exploring the story contents of small brands, this study found that

underdog stories do not typically serve as the core of a brand. Rather, a brand offers underdog information about the founder or the brand along with the brand's identity stories. For example, Warby Parker also provides an underdog story. The brand first stated that the sunglasses marketplace is led by large companies and defines its positioning as cost-effective and affordably priced sunglasses brand compared to the leading companies (Warby Parker, n.d.; Zhang, 2018). At the same time, Warby Parker has explicitly mentioned that the brand was founded by students. Therefore, although the brand story of Warby Parker started from the founders' personal experiences of looking for inexpensive sunglasses, the founders' underdog information also helps the brand to position itself in customers' minds.

Another example is Gymshark, a fitness apparel and accessories brand. The brand has shown rapid growth recently and now sells its products in 131 countries (Gymshark, n.d.). However, it started as a tiny brand founded by a teenager, Ben Francis, and his friends. The official website of Gymshark shares the story behind its creation, saying "Gymshark has grown from a screen printing operation in a garage" (Gymshark, n.d.). This is an example of the humble beginnings of a brand and its positioning as an underdog.

Craftsmanship Story

Another commonly used story among fashion brands is craftsmanship. Craftsmanship refers to "the way in which artisans create high-quality and aesthetically appealing objects'' (Lee & Youn, 2020). Objects of fine craftsmanship can provide a sense of uniqueness, exclusiveness, and aesthetics to consumers (Bergadaà, 2008; Lee & Youn, 2020). Craftsmanship stories appeal to customers by narrating how artisans creating exclusive and aesthetical objects (Lee & Youn, 2020; Ricca & Robbins, 2012). Therefore, the story is commonly used in luxury brands because it provides customers with a sense of uniqueness, exclusivity, and aesthetics (Bergadaà, 2008;

Lee & Youn, 2020). However, small fashion businesses also use craftsmanship stories to build brand identity. For example, Cuyana, a women's clothing and accessories brand, built its brand based on a craftsmanship story (Cuyana, n.d.). On their website, the founders have explained that the brand's origin is from Italian handcrafted leather (Cuyana, n.d.). The two founders of Cuyana work with family-business owners to create handcrafted products of lasting design and high quality. They have also expanded their artisan team to include people from other regions, such as Europe, South America, and China, depending on products, such as (Cuyana, n.d.). In order to tell the brand's story, the brand utilizes not only texts but also video clips on its website. The video clips present the procedure of making a product. In the video, the founders emphasize their search for appropriate artisan countries and partners for a specific product after designing it. An example statement of the brand's craftsmanship story is provided as follows:

> Each piece is made with integrity and kindness from the highest-quality materials, and created by skilled craftsmen throughout Europe, South America, China, and the United States. (Cuyana, n.d.)

Another example is M.Gemi. It is a shoe brand that creates products based on Italian craftsmanship. The website specifies that the brand partners "with small artisanal workshops across Italy" (M.Gemi, n.d.). The brand also shares videos of craftsmen's designing, cutting, and sewing processes for creating a shoe. Unlike Cuyana that highlights the founders' efforts to look for craftsmanship, M.Gemi emphasizes the craftsmen and the process of craftsmanship.

Eco-Friendly Story

The next story content frequently embedded in small fashion brands is eco-friendliness or environmental sustainability. Previous literature coined a term, eco-friendliness, which means "the extent to which the brand is perceived" as eco-friendly and "is linked to environment

commitment and environment concerns in consumer's mind" (Punyatoya, 2014, p.282). The perceived eco-friendliness is important as it projects favorable impressions (Caruana, 2004). Recently, with the rising importance of sustainability, many fashion brands disclose information related to their sustainable agenda across product categories (Adidas, n.d.; Everlane, n.d.-b; H&M, n.d.). Meanwhile, some brands especially emphasize their deeper commitment to sustainable behavior. For example, small fashion brands, such as Tentree and Pact, portray themselves as brands rooted in environmental sustainability (Pact, n.d.; Tentree, n.d.-a). Tentree, an outdoor brand, introduces itself as the motivator and champion of environmental stewardship (Tentree, n.d.-a). In its YouTube channel, the founders describe why the brand stresses on environmental sustainability. The founders appreciated that people interact with environments always, such as through outdoor activities, and desired to find a way for consumers to sustain environments (Tentree, 2012). Therefore, the brand believes its vision is to plant more trees as well as creating more products using eco-friendly materials. They especially work with an environmental group, GreenStep, to analyze the brand's production lines and its impact on environments in terms of raw materials, water and energy usage, carbon dioxide emission, and recycling. The website underscores the sustainable materials they use, such as TENCEL (i.e., wood pulp fiber), recycled polyester, organic cotton, and hemp. As well as its website, the brand promotes ambassadors who can become eco-consciousness trailblazers and endorse the brand (Tentree, n.d.-b). As these ambassadors present themselves through social media channels, the brand strengthens its story of environmental sustainability.

Another example, Pact, a clothing company, is similar to Tentree. Pact also introduces itself as a brand building eco-friendly products by tagging itself as "Earth's Favorite Clothing" (Pact, n.d.). The brand emphasizes its use of sustainable material and organic cotton, through its

website in About Us. In its YouTube channel, the founder discusses how he was inspired to create Pact. According to the founder, unlike consumers of food products who are well aware of the organic concept , consumers of apparel have little knowledge their harmful impact on the environment (Pact, 2020a). He stated that although the fashion industry is the second most toxic industry for the environment, people do not actually recognize this fact, and this is the original raison d'être behind building this brand (Pact, 2020a). In other social media channels, such as Facebook, Pact also explains why the brand focuses on organic cotton. In one post on Facebook, for example, it says, “Organic cotton uses 91% less water than non-organic cotton”, with a hashtag #wearpact (Pact, 2020b).

Research Streams in Brand Storytelling

Studies on the topic of brand storytelling have increased recently with the importance of brand storytelling. Table 2.2 summarizes the major studies on brand storytelling based on its study focus (i.e., story delivery-related studies and story content-related studies), company size/renown, outcomes of brand storytelling, and story delivery considered in the literature. Several identified research streams are discussed below.

Story Delivery-Related Studies

Table 2.2 categorized previous brand storytelling studies with sub-headings. The focus of the studies is broadly classified into content-related studies, delivery-related studies, and other studies. As presented in Table 2.2, the major research stream is the delivery of storytelling, which is diverse from the storytelling process, storytellers, story receivers and story formats. The storytelling process is mainly understood through narrative transportation from various sources. Narrative transportation in brand storytelling is the process by which a customer absorbs and becomes involved with the story (Green & Brock, 2000). The sources of narrative transportation

include advertisements (Kim et al., 2016; Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Lien & Chen, 2013), customer reviews, communication (Pera & Viglia, 2016; van Laer et al., 2014; von Wallpach et al., 2017), and packaging (Solja et al., 2018). These studies confirmed that stories are transmitted through narrative transportation from these different sources to customers.

Researchers have conducted storyteller comparisons between founder/professional and customer/user (Hong et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2019; 2020; van Laer et al., 2019). These studies discovered customer- or user-generated stories to be more effective than founder- or professional-generated messages. Kang et al. (2019) compared the different impacts of the storytellers' gender along with founder and customer tellers. Respondents displayed a more positive attitude toward a customer story when the storyteller's gender was the same as the story receiver's gender. In the founder teller condition, female story receivers exhibited a more positive attitude toward male storytellers than other female storytellers. van Laer et al. (2019) revealed that stories are more appealing when a story targets one single receiver rather than multiple receivers. Lien and Chen (2013) compared verbal narrative and pictorial narrative ads. Participants were more favorably disposed toward verbally delivered conditions than visually delivered stories.

Relatively, another category, story content-related studies, has been less actively researched than delivery-related studies. The studies are shown under the second sub-heading of Table 2.2. Story content-related studies may offer insights into what to tell for brands to attract consumers, requiring more attention from researchers.

Story Content-Related Studies

Several studies analyzed story contents although the diversity of story content is lacking. The second column of the Table 2.2 shows details of the study focus. Among the story content-

related studies, majority of them compared underdog and top-dog backgrounds of the founder and brand (Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Kao, 2019; Pahari et al., 2011, 2014). Kao (2019) and Pahari et al. (2011) proved that underdog effect (c. details in the next section), which is a phenomenon of support for an underdog over a top-dog (Simon, 1954), is not always effective and is also dependent on consumers' characteristics. Pahari et al. (2011) linked the consumers' self-identities to underdog effects, showing that consumers who define themselves as underdogs may demonstrate higher empathy when reacting to underdog stories than those who define themselves as top-dogs. Kao (2019) observed the relationship between types of envy and underdog effects on brand preference. Benign envy brings with it a higher yearning to be a top-dog. Delgado-Ballester (2020) compared underdog and top-dog stories in lending empathy that led to different levels of consumer brand identification. Underdog stories aroused consumers' higher empathic feeling, and consequently, fostered their feeling of belonging to a brand.

On the other hand, Lee and Youn (2020) investigated the effectiveness of consumer shopping scenes in craftsmanship videos of luxury brands. They created two types of craftsmanship story videos that included or excluded a consumer shopping scene. They concluded that inclusion of consumer shopping scenes increased consumer experiences but decreased the perceived luxury of luxury brands, compared to the exclusion of consumer scenes (i.e., just showing a craftsmanship scene). This is why consumer shopping scenes triggered a socially close feeling in consumers. Hamelin et al. (2020) compared two story types, cognitive and affective stories, using the neuromarketing approach. Consumers presented a greater overall attitudinal change to affective stories, but cognitive messages especially led to a long-lasting attitudinal shift. Although some previous literature investigated story content, there is a need to research more diverse storylines. Small businesses utilize diverse distinctive stories to sustain

themselves in the competitive marketplace, so an understanding of the impact of story content in constructing brands' unique identities is needed.

Moderators in Brand Storytelling

Prior studies included several factors that interact with brand storytelling as presented in the third column of Table 2.2. Most of these moderators are consumer-related. Delgado-Ballster (2020) incorporated a moderation of consumer implicit mindset that has two levels: growth mindset (i.e., belief that individuals can change intelligence and personality) and fixed mindset (i.e., belief that individuals' traits are determined and not changed). When consumers tended to have a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset, the consumers' empathy to underdog stories was intensified. Hamelin et al. (2020) observed the gender differences in trust, likability, and perception of a story. Their research confirmed that an emotional story generated greater attitudinal changes than a cognitive story in both genders, but the attitudinal changes were stronger among female story readers than males. Hong et al. (2018) investigated the interaction of consumer involvement, which is the extent of being interested in the product being narrated. In their research, consumers with low level of involvement reflected a positive attitude toward the founder story than the customer story, while high-involvement participants expressed a favorable attitude toward customer stories. Kang et al. (2020) observed the interaction between storyteller and consumers' response to a story or story preference. The researchers confirmed that consumers evinced more positive emotional responses to a story delivered by a founder rather than a customer, and this emotional response was stronger among consumers with a high-story preference than a low-story preference. Kao (2019) also included an interaction between two consumer factors, envy and consumer psychological (i.e., social) distance from the founder. As a main effect, the researcher discovered that types of envy led to different preferences for the

underdog or top-dog brand. Additionally, the consumers' psychological distance from the founder moderated the relationship between brand preference and consumer envy, such that consumers with malicious envy preferred a brand with an underdog story and this preference was stronger among people who felt closer to the founder than more distant.

A couple of studies explored interaction effects with non-consumer factors. Chiu et al. (2012) explored the differences of storytelling by product categories. Although storytelling was revealed to infuse positive brand attitudes in both search and experience products, specific story characteristics which lead to the positive attitude differed. For search products, story conciseness and humor proved more important than for experience products. In contrast, story authenticity and reversal (i.e., dramatic contrast in a climax) led to higher brand attitude in experience products than in search products. Paharia et al. (2014) included a moderator and competitive salience (i.e., the degree of market competitiveness), along with underdog storytelling. Underdog stories of small businesses were revealed to be more effective when the competition was higher than lower.

Despite the interactions considered in the previous literature, there is a lack of reflection of various contexts, such as brand level and product aesthetics. Storytelling may influence consumers differently based on various contexts, so a reflection on these moderators in storytelling research is required. In addition, previous studies on underdog effects used the underdog positioning as a main effect (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011, 2014). Actual brands in reality tend to apply underdog positioning as a story supplementing their brand identity storytelling for better appeal rather than the main storytelling of the brand (Dua, 2015; Under Armour, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.). Thus, it is essential to consider underdog stories an interaction effect that complements the main brand storytelling. In addition to the underdog

effect, a previous study revealed that consumer self-identify as an underdog reinforced the effect (Paharia et al., 2011). A temporary financial situation, such as financial hardship during the pandemic, that may trigger or weaken empathy have not yet been incorporated in preceding underdog studies, so more academic understanding of the temporary characteristics is necessary.

Context of Brand Storytelling

As presented in the fourth column of Table 2.2, previous studies have explored brand storytelling in the context of large or well-known companies. The studies were conducted with existing large companies across various sectors, such as fashion brands (Kim et al., 2016; Kim & Sullivan, 2019; Lee & Youn, 2020), department stores (Hjelmgren, 2016), toy products (von Wallpach et al., 2017), rental services (Pera & Viglia, 2016), and personal care products (Laurence & Valentiana, 2019). Kim et al. (2016) and Kim and Sullivan (2019) conducted qualitative research and concluded that the storytelling of famous luxury brands (e.g., Hermès, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Burberry) can effectively create brand meaning and emotional branding. Hjelmgren (2016) conducted a case study of a large department store and concluded that facilities, goods, and services all communicate stories as well as various written and oral stories offered by a company. Laurence and Valentina (2019) also conducted a qualitative study that analyzed the videos of Dove. The researchers analyzed story components in the videos to confirm the narrativity of video storytelling. Pera and Viglia (2016) and von Wallpach et al. (2017) analyzed stories shared by customers of a well-known brand, Airbnb. Pera and Viglia (2016) observed that Airbnb customers share their reviews with the online community and confirmed that these reviews serve as stories with narrativity. von Wallpach et al. (2017) concluded that Lego's storytelling is one of the brand activities for co-creating brand identity.

While previous studies conducted storytelling research in large company contexts, there are a few studies focused on small business. As discussed above, these previous studies mainly investigated the brands' underdog effects (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011; 2014). For example, Paharia et al. (2014) especially compared large and small companies in terms of the underdog effect and found that small companies are a larger beneficiary when evoking underdog effects than are large companies. In the context of an online start-up mattress company, Hong et al. (2018) manipulated the brand storytellers: founders versus customers. The results showed that consumers perceive stories told by customers as more meaningful, upbeat, and memorable, with higher word-of-mouth than stories told by founders. To the authors' knowledge, there is limited research on small business storytelling, especially for story contents. As many small companies utilize various storytelling to build their brand identity, there is a need of academic understanding of small businesses' storytelling contents.

Outcomes of Brand Storytelling

The outcomes of storytelling were discovered in previous studies as illustrated in the fifth column. Previous studies noted the effectiveness of storytelling in driving purchase intention (Hong et al., 2018; Lee & Youn, 2020; Pahari et al., 2011; Solja et al., 2018), attitude (Chiu et al., 2012; Hamelin et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2019; Solja et al., 2018), and consumer engagement or experience (Kim et al., 2016; Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Pera & Viglia, 2016). Furthermore, storytelling is revealed to increase brand identity (Canziani et al., 2019; von Wallpach et al., 2017) and specialness (Hjelmgren, 2016), implying that brand storytelling can construct a distinctive characteristic of a brand. Brand storytelling is also known to help build brand loyalty (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Nevertheless, brand trust is not yet observed. As brand trust is especially important for relationship building between brands and consumers

(Eggers et al., 2013; Rauyruen et al., 2009; Reijonen, 2010), leading to small business growth (Eggers et al., 2013), studies revealing the relationship between brand trust and storytelling may add implications.

Approach of Brand Storytelling

Story delivery methods observed in previous studies are summarized in the last column of Table 2.2. The delivery methods include texts, audios, and videos. Majority of the studies used text-based stories (Canziani et al., 2019; Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Hamelin et al., 2020; Kao, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Pahari et al., 2011, 2014; Solja et al., 2018). Many of these studies utilized advertising with texts. Solja et al. (2018) created two types of texts putting on the product packages. One type of text had stories (i.e., narrativity) and the other type of text listed information without story components (i.e., non-narrativity). By comparing the two, the researchers confirmed the narrativity of texts through packaging can convey meaning. Lien and Chen (2013) compared text-based and visual stories, concluding that consumer showed more positive attitude toward verbal than pictorial stories. A study by Canziani et al. (2019) conducted content analysis using text data written in About Us pages in each company's official website. Their study identified commonly used words in the websites of winery family brands to build a brand identity.

Some studies used audio advertisements (Hong et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2019; 2020). These studies manipulated and compared the storytellers: founder versus customer. The founder story and customer story were both played through audio advertisements and confirmed that the founder story appealed to consumers more than the customer story.

There are several studies using videos (Laurence & Valentina, 2019; Lee & Youn, 2020; Pera & Viglia, 2016), but Lee and Youn (2020) conducted only an experimental study

manipulating videos. Laurence and Valentina (2019) and Pera and Viglia (2016) analyzed the components of existing videos and their relationship to evoking consumers' experience, supporting the importance of video storytelling. Pera and Vilglia (2016) especially argued that digital video storytelling can build customer relationship experiences with brands. Among the texts, audios, and videos, videos have been least utilized in experimental studies. As videos are popular among both brands and consumers recently, more studies need to concentrate on video storytelling.

Summary

In summary, despite the ample research on brand storytelling, there are substantial gaps in research. First, story content-related studies are scarce as majority studies have explored only the delivery of stories. Second, a few story content-related studies heavily concentrated on underdog stories of the founder. In reality, more diverse story contents are used by small fashion businesses for the purpose of brand building (Pact, n.d.), and content is important for brands to be distinguished from their competitors (Miller, 2017). Therefore, studies examining the effectiveness of different story content related by small fashion businesses need to be investigated. Third, the reflection of various contexts in storytelling is insufficient in previous literature. The interaction effect of brand level, product esthetic judgments, and other consumer factors that are associated with the brand storytelling contents may add managerial implications for businesses to build a marketing strategy. In addition, Paharia et al. (2011) addressed self-identify as an underdog, and this study extends this by examining whether perceiving oneself as a temporary underdog also engenders or strengthens the underdog effect. In order to measure the perception of being a temporary underdog, this study incorporated consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic. Fourth, research was largely conducted in the context of

renowned and large companies although storytelling is also important for small businesses. Thus, more understanding may help small companies to employ storytelling to build their brands. Fifth, despite the popularity of video storytelling in industry practice, academic understanding on video storytelling is lacking. Manipulation of videos will provide companies with practical insights into utilizing video storytelling. In conclusion, to address the research gaps, this study will compare two storytelling types in the context of small business video storytelling: identity-focused and attribute-focused stories. Especially, the identity-focused stories will comprise three different contents: founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story. These stories will be compared with attribute-focused stories with relevant theories. Furthermore, particular factors relevant to each story will be incorporated based on theoretical backgrounds. The theoretical foundation is explained in the next section.

Table 2.2. Research Streams in Brand Storytelling

Author(s) (year)	Study focus	Interaction	Company size/renown	Outcome (s) of storytelling	Story delivery
Story delivery-related studies					
Lien and Chen (2013)	Format: verbal vs. visual	–	Not specified	Ad attitude, product evaluation	Text & image (Print)
Lundqvist et al. (2013)	Narrativity of packaging	–	Not specified	Willingness to pay	Text (Packaging)
van Laer et al. (2014)	Narrative transportation of customer review storytelling	–	Not specified	Narrative persuasion	Not specified
Kim et al. (2016)	Brand meaning transportation through storytelling ads	Country differences	Well-known (luxury brands)	Consumer engagement	Not specified
Pera and Viglia (2016)	Customer story sharing in online community	–	Well-known (Airbnb)	Consumer experiences	Social media video
Hjelmgren (2016)	Brand meaning creation through stories	–	Large, well-known (Gekas)	Felt specialness	Not specified
von Wallpach et al. (2017)	Storytelling co-creation brand performance	–	Large, well-known (LEGO)	Brand identity	Not specified
Hong et al. (2018)	Tellers: founder vs. customer	Consumer involvement	Start-up	Ads attitude, favorability, WOM, purchase intention	Audio ads
Solja et al. (2018)	Narrativity of packaging	–	Well-known	Brand attitude, purchase intention	Text (Packages)
Kang et al. (2019)	Tellers: founder vs. customer, Receivers' gender	Teller's gender	Not specified	Ads attitude, Emotion	Audio ads
Laurence and Valentina (2019)	Narrativity of video storytelling components	–	Large, well-known (Dove)	Consumer engagement	Social media video
van Laer et al. (2019)	Domain: commercial vs. non-commercial, Teller: company vs. customers, Receivers: single vs. multiple	–	Not specified	Narrative persuasion	Not specified
Kang et al. (2020)	Storytellers: founder vs. customer	Consumer story preference	Not specified	Emotion, WOM	Audio ads

Table 2.2. Research Streams in Brand Storytelling (continued)

Author(s) (year)	Study focus	Interaction	Company size/renown	Outcome (s) of storytelling	Story delivery
Story content-related studies					
Canziani et al. (2019)	Website 'About Us' contents in family winery websites	–	Not specified	Family brand identity	Text (About Us)
Hamelin et al. (2020)	Different story types (affective vs. cognitive story)	Gender	Large, well-known (Chevron)	Attitudinal changes	Text
Lee and Youn (2020)	Different scenes in craftsmanship story	–	Large, well-known (Dior, Chanel, Prada)	Perceived luxury, purchase intention	Social media video
Pahari et al. (2011)	Underdog effect by consumer self-identity (i.e., underdog vs. top-dog)	Consumer self-identity	Small	Purchase intention	Text
Pahari et al. (2014)	Underdog effect by company size	Competitive salience	Large versus small	Purchase interest	Text
Kao (2019)	Underdog effect by envy	Consumer social distance to the founder	Small	Brand preference	Text (Print ads)
Delgado-Ballester (2020)	Underdog effect by empathy	Consumers mindset	Not specified	Consumer-brand identification	Text
Others					
Chiu et al. (2012)	Elements of creating good storytelling	Product types	Not specified	Brand attitude, purchase intention	Text
Kim and Sullivan (2019)	Storytelling as one of emotional branding strategies	–	Large, well-known (Burberry, Lululemon)	Brand loyalty	Not specified

Source: Organized by author based on literature review

Theoretical Foundation

This section discusses the theories and concepts applied in building the conceptual framework. The following theories and their applications in branding and marketing are explained: (1) Construal Level Theory, (2) Underdog Effects, (3) Signaling Theory, and (4) Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. Also, the concept of brand trust is discussed.

Construal Level Theory

Construal level theory (CLT), a social psychology theory, explains that psychological distance from an object or an event is a core determinant of the extent to which people construe the object or the event (Trope & Liberman, 2003). The principal proposition of the theory is that an individual's psychological distance (e.g., distal and proximal) decides the level of construal (i.e., high or abstract and low or concrete) of thoughts and behaviors; the more distant an object is, the more abstract and personally irrelevant the object is; on the contrary, the more proximal the object is, the more concrete and personally relevant it is (Liberman & Trope, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010).

CLT posits that the way an individual perceives an object can be understood by one of four natures of psychological distance, which are temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical distance (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Psychological distance decreases (i.e., closer distance) when an event occurs in the more current time, in a closer location, with a higher chance of hypothetically happening, and when an object is perceived as more similar to oneself. Therefore, a subjective perception of how closer from now, here, the self, and the possibility of it happening engenders the lower construal level, which is concrete (Förster et al., 2004).

Specifically, social distance, which means how close or far away the target is from oneself, is discovered as a vital factor of psychological distance among the four factors (Trope &

Liberman, 2010). A previous study stated social distance as “a core psychological distance that exerts a particularly strong influence on activation and perception of other distances” (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 7). This might be because the dimension of social distance is related to the self. The social distance is distinguished by two different levels: social proximity and social remoteness. Social proximity means the social distance between the target and the self is close, whereas social remoteness refers to the social distance between the target and the self being far apart (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Previous studies discovered several situations adding to the magnitude of the social distance. For example, people feel socially more proximate to others who are similar to themselves than to those dissimilar (Liviatan et al., 2008). Similarly, people who are in-group members are considered psychologically closer than out-group members (Kim et al., 2008; Liberman et al., 2008) As people feel closer to self, similar others, and in-group members, the people determine these close people in a more concrete and self-relevant approach (Kim et al., 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Building on this line of reasoning, previous studies explored how the relationship between psychological (especially social) distance and construal level influences consumer behaviors as well as in the realm of social psychology. For example, Kao (2019) applied the CLT to compare the origin of the founder (i.e., local versus foreign), with the reflection of a consumer characteristic: envy (i.e., malicious versus benign). When psychological distance is proximal (i.e., a local founder), consumers with malicious envy prefer underdog stories because they perceive the envied targets as relevant to themselves. Consumers with benign envy preferred a top-dog story when a founder is from local rather than foreign country due to socially close feeling.

Lee et al. (2020) used CLT to describe the effect of customer review stories in different types of service. Their study explained how the customer review with different levels of stories (i.e., distal versus proximal) impacts the creation of a rapport between service provider and customers and overall service provider evaluation. If a brand experience is tangible, customer review story should cause a feeling of closeness. By causing the closeness, brands can establish a higher rapport with customers, who perceive a more positive overall appraisal of the brand.

Lee and Youn (2020) introduced the theory into the understanding of luxury brand storytelling. They investigated the effect of social distance between consumers and luxury brands on perceived luxury and consumer experience. In their research, the social distance differed by including or excluding a consumer scene in a luxury craftsmanship video. The inclusion of the consumer scene in the craftsmanship video reduced the psychological distance between the consumers and the luxury brand more than the exclusion of the consumer scene (i.e., just showing a craftsmanship video), leading to higher consumer experiences. However, perceived luxury was decreased as consumers felt close to the brand because of the consumer scene in the video. In the current dissertation, CLT is utilized to support the reason behind the founder's personal experience story evoking perceived closer distance, leading to consumers' trust in the brand.

Underdog Effects

Underdog refers to a person, a group, or an object in the position of a loser or predicted loser within a struggle in a competition, while top-dog is defined as one in the position of the winner or of superiority (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). The underdog effect is a phenomenon of support for a competitor who is expected to lose (i.e., underdog) when a particular other candidate is likely to be a winner (i.e., top-dog) (Simon, 1954). The key mechanism that leads to

the underdog effect is its unique characteristic of evoking empathy (Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Vandello et al., 2007). Most people tend to judge themselves as underdogs at some point in their lives, and this self-positioning triggers the superior persuasiveness of underdog stories (Paharia et al., 2011). Accordingly, although the nature of an underdog is associated with a negative evaluation, which is an inferiority, underdog stories have received support from diverse contexts, including fictional literature (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012), politics (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2009; Simon, 1954), sports (Vandello et al., 2007), and other business marketing and branding (Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011, 2014). Especially, underdog marketing is actively researched within the context of small businesses because underdog positioning was found to be more beneficial for small businesses than large companies (Paharia et al., 2011; 2014). By setting themselves as an underdog label, small businesses can gain competitiveness against larger rivals (Kao, 2015; Paharia et al., 2011; 2014) with the perception of success (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012).

Earlier studies categorized brand positioning type or brand storytelling style into underdog versus top-dog (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011; 2014). Consumers perceive a company or a brand as an underdog from the information on its limited resources, small market share, or the company's struggling biography (Paharia et al., 2011). On the contrary, top-dog stories are conveyed through the abundant opportunities, dominant market shares, and company's smooth development stories (Paharia et al., 2011). For example, if a brand uses a founder story, the underdog story underscores the founder's humble origins and lack of resources but strong entrepreneurial spirit and passionate will, compared to its competitors (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). In contrast, a founder story with top-dog positioning presents smooth

beginnings in the entrepreneurial stage and growth with plentiful resources and few obstacles, compared to rivals (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011).

Paharia et al. (2011), at the same time, provided a logic about some situations that may not lead to effective results from the underdog story. Sufficient resources imply the company's ability to deliver high quality products from a consumer demand perspective, while lack of resource means inability. In particular, the underdog effect was also tested and examined based on different consumer characteristics, revealing that the underdog story is not always effective. Paharia et al. (2010) discovered that the effectiveness of the underdog effect can vary depending upon how an individual perceives himself: underdog versus top-dog. Given the nature of the underdog effect, which draws empathy, the more people perceive themselves as underdogs, the more they prefer the brand with the underdog narrative. Kao (2019) also observed the different usefulness of the underdog effect varying with consumers' characteristics, i.e., envy. Consumers with malicious envy (i.e., envy that "prompts people to inflict misfortune on envied others or put envied others down", [Kao, 2019, p. 3]) preferred underdog stories, but other consumers with benign envy (i.e., "envy that can motivate a person to invest more effort to become as successful as the envied person instead of putting others down, [Kao, 2019, p.3]) preferred top-dog stories. In this study, the underdog effect is applied to explain whether the founder's information (i.e., underdog versus top-dog) interacts with the founder's personal experience story to lead to brand trust.

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory originated from the study of information economics under the situation of information asymmetry between two parties, one who sends a signal (i.e., signaler) and the other one who receives a signal (i.e., receiver) (Spence, 1974). In the information asymmetry

condition, a signal plays a role as a cue for a person to use to judge an object by reducing the information asymmetry between two parties (Spence, 1974). For example, Spence (1973) explained that job applicants in labor markets might reduce information asymmetry to help the selection ability of prospective employers. The high-quality job candidates distinguish themselves from low-quality candidates using the costly signal of higher education. His research has been the basis of other studies to explain information asymmetry situations between two parties across various fields (Connelly et al., 2011).

Management scholars have also applied signaling theory to help explain the influence of information asymmetry in a wide array of research contexts. (Connelly et al., 2011). In the context of a market interaction, signaling theory provides an understanding of how a buyer and a seller handle information in pre-purchase situations (Wells et al., 2011). The signal plays a role of a cue that a seller can use "to convey information credibly about unobservable product quality to the buyer" (Rao et al., 1999, p. 259). The buyer (i.e., the consumer) then uses the signal to evaluate the products.

The types of signals can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic cues. Intrinsic cues are defined as inherent attributes of a product which may change fundamental product attributes if the cues are altered (Richardson et al., 1994). The fundamental nature of the product, therefore, is not changed even if the extrinsic attributes are modified (Richardson et al., 1994). The example of intrinsic cues may include garment construction and fabric (Swinker & Hines, 2006). On the contrary, extrinsic cues include product-related characteristics that are "not inherent to the product being evaluated" (Wells et al., 2011, p. 375). The extrinsic signals that can be easily evaluated by potential buyer include firm and retailer reputation (Chu & Chu, 1994; Dawar & Parker, 1994), perceived warranty (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993), marketing mixes (Erdem &

Swait, 1998), price and physical appearance (Dawar & Parker, 1994), country of origin, and store environments (Baker et al., 1994).

Consumers utilize both intrinsic and extrinsic cues to evaluate a product quality or brand. Nevertheless, extrinsic cues are more influential in certain contexts because consumers rely on extrinsic signals under time constraints (Zeithml, 1988) or a lower need for cognition (Chatterjee et al., 2002). Consumers' low involvement or interest in research on products leads them to use extrinsic cues that are easier to access and interpret than intrinsic cues (Dawar & Parker, 1994; Zeithml, 1988).

These provide information to consumers that may later lead to further consumption behavior (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Rao et al., 1999). This study applies the signaling theory to describe how the signal of brand stories (e.g., craftsmanship story and eco-friendly story) can appeal to consumers by reducing information asymmetry.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's (2001) culture dimensions supplied a framework to understand cross-cultural personal values, beliefs, preferences, and behaviors of individuals or organizations. It consisted of five national cultural dimensions, which are Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-term versus Short-term Orientation. Recently, a sixth dimension – Indulgence/Restraint – was added, constructing a 6-dimensional model (Hofstede Insights, n.d.-b). To understand the effect of culture on consumer behavior, retailing, and marketing, therefore, Hofstede's dimensions have been widely applied (Dutta-Bergman & Wells, 2002; Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000; Sternquist, 2007).

The Individualism/Collectivism dimension is especially imperative to understanding consumer behavior (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000). Collectivist cultural consumers define their

self-image and perception as “we”, while individualist consumers define themselves as “I” (Hofstede, 2001). Collectivist consumers tend to be surrounded by strong group norm conformity, group goals, socially traditional values, and authority (Watkins & Liu, 1996). Thus, the notion offers an underlying reason why collectivist consumers engage the world from the perspective of others and care about others’ opinions (e.g., firm reputation) in judging products and brands (Lee & Kacen, 2008; Maiyak, 2013). Individualist consumers, however, rely more on the internal references (e.g., product attributes) when evaluating product quality and purchasing it.

Previous studies typically observe the country-wise differences by different dimensions that are measured on index scales from 0 to 100 for each country (Hofstede, 2001). In terms of Individualism/Collectivism, high Individualism score indicates Individualism, while low Individualism score indicates Collectivism. For example, Asian countries have generally been shown to be collectivist (e.g., China has an individualism score of 20), and Western countries (e.g., the United States has individualism score of 91) are known to have individualist features. However, recently, researchers also examined the Individualism/Collectivism propensity at the micro-level, such as regions or individuals within a country (e.g., Hofstede et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2018). Hofstede et al. (2010) measured cultural differences within Brazil, confirming that there are regional differences within a country. Hollebeek (2018) posits that consumer engagements are predicted by consumers’ different cultural traits. Furthermore, scales to measure the extent of collectivism or individualism of an individual were also developed (Sivadas et al., 2008; Yoo et al., 2011). Sivadas et al. (2008) and Yoo et al. (2011) developed scales to measure the cultural differences at the individual level. These scales are validated by actually measuring individuals from different countries. In this study, with respect to the cultural

differences at individual level, the moderation effect of consumers' individualism/collectivism trait on craftsmanship story and brand level will be observed.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is defined as "consumers' confidence that the brand, product, or service firm is dependable and competent" (Herbst et al., 2012, p. 910). That is, brand trust identifies the consumer's belief that a particular brand is perceived to have an intention to prioritize the consumer's interests and is reliable in satisfying the brand's value promise (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Brand trust is an important factor in branding as it leads to various positive outcomes for a brand, such as brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; He et al., 2012), brand credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004), and purchase intention (Lude & Prügl, 2018). Brand trust is also a fundamental component in fostering successful marketing relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Urban et al., 2000).

Brand trust, in particular, is revealed to become a critical competitive tool for small businesses (Reijonen, 2010). In the context of small and medium enterprises (SME), brand trust is known as an important determinant for customer loyalty (Eggers et al., 2013; Rauyruen et al., 2009). Eggers et al. (2013) also found that brand trust of SME increases SME growth. That is, small businesses should build brand trust for long-term development. In order to strengthen brand trust, Eggers et al. (2013) suggested that small businesses perform value-driven brand management.

Along with outcomes, antecedents of brand trust were identified in previous studies. The antecedents include brand satisfaction (He et al., 2012; Song et al., 2012), brand affect (Song et al., 2012), perceived brand value (He et al., 2012), brand authenticity (Eggers et al., 2013; Lude & Prügl, 2018), brand sincerity and competence (Sung & Kim, 2010), and brand identity (He et

al., 2012). In particular, strong brand identity leads to positive brand trust (He et al., 2012). As a strong and attractive brand identity is built on more distinctive and prestigious characteristics (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994), the distinctive characteristics of a brand associate with brand trust positively (Balmer, 2001; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). The current research investigates the effect of brand storytelling on brand trust because brand storytelling helps form the specific identity for a brand.

Proposed Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Based on the literature review and theoretical backgrounds, a conceptual framework is proposed in Figure 2.1. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of various storytelling contents in small fashion businesses on brand trust. Additionally, several interaction factors of brand, products, and consumers that are relevant to each story content are incorporated. A total of three experimental studies with eight hypotheses will be conducted, in which each study is constructed based on the different story contents. Literature review revealed that story types can be in line with the developmental stages of business from initial to mid-stage, from first-to-be-told to additional stories (Hall, 2019; O'Connor, 2002). This study focuses on the first stage of the business that requires building awareness.

Based on the literature review, this study largely categorizes the story types into two types: attribute-focused and identity-focused storytelling. The attribute-focused stories offer information of product attributes. The identity-focused stories build a base of brand identity through distinctive story content, and this study especially selected three identity-focused story contents: founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story. These three identity-focused story contents are compared with attribute-focused storytelling in each study.

Each experimental study is built on relevant theoretical backgrounds and tested through specific variables. Built on CLT, Study 1 investigates the effectiveness of the founder story as small businesses commonly appeal through founder stories. Study 1 manipulates two videos. One of them has a founder's personal experience story reasoning behind building the brand and its interaction with an underdog or top-dog brand background. The other video narrates product attributes. Study 1 involves a moderator, consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic (i.e., high versus low perceived financial hardship during the pandemic). Study 2, built on signaling theory, utilizes two manipulated videos that include either a craftsmanship story or an attribute-focused story. Then, by varying brand levels (i.e., high-end versus mid-end), the Study 2 tests if the craftsmanship story can trigger more or less brand trust. Study 2 includes the reflection of consumers' cultural differences as cultural differences are expected to create different perspectives of craftsmanship story (i.e., consumer individualism versus collectivism). Based on signaling theory, Study 3 tests an eco-friendly story that deals with environmental impact and a brand's efforts regarding it. Videos will contain either an eco-friendly story or an attribute-focused story. Then, Study 3 includes the interaction effect of aesthetic judgments (i.e., high versus low) which have been a barrier to purchasing eco-friendly products.

In all three studies, two control variables are contained: age and education level. Age is included as younger people possess a more flexible mindset than older people, even in purchasing (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010). Higher education level was found to lead to greater narrative transportation and understanding of storytelling (van Laer et al., 2014); thus, it was controlled.

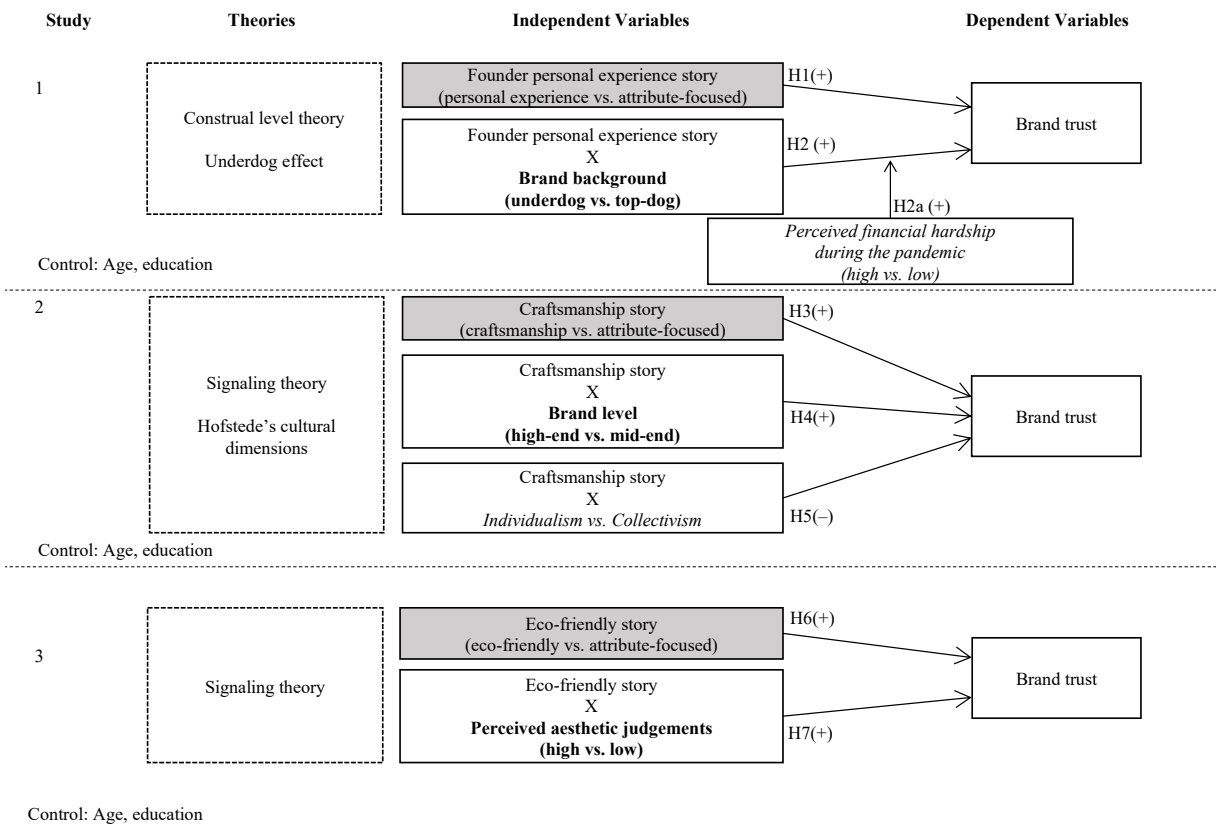

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework
Note. Main effects in the shaded boxes were manipulated by storytelling video stimuli
Bolded moderators were manipulated by written stimuli
Italic moderators were measured by scales

Study 1: Founder's Personal Experience Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

According to CLT, how close or far away people perceive themselves from a target object determines the level at which people construe objects (Trope & Liberman, 2003). When people perceive themselves psychologically close to the object, they have and show concrete ideas and behaviors. On the contrary, people express abstract behaviors when they feel far away from the target psychologically. Based on the theory, people feel proximal to similar others compared to dissimilar others, so they have a self-relevant approach with concrete behaviors (Liviatan et al., 2008).

It is common for small businesses to utilize their founder story behind why the founder started a business (Hall, 2019). In many cases, the reason for business foundation is because of the founders' own needs (e.g., Universal Standard, n.d.; Warby Parker, n.d.). These stories began with the founders' realization of the deficiencies in the products available in the marketplace. The founders then share their stories that they put in their efforts on starting a business to satisfy others who may experience the same feeling as the founders' own needs. By listening to these stories, consumers may feel an intimacy to the founders because the founders who share similar experiences may be perceived as similar others. The perception of 'similar others' may lead consumers to have a proximal psychological distance to the brand (Liviatan et al., 2008), provoking higher empathy. On the contrary, attribute-focused storytelling, that explains what values customers can earn by purchasing the brand' products (Hall, 2019), may be positioned at a distance from consumers. This is because consumers cannot perceive similar others in the attribute-focused storytelling.

After perceiving the founder and the brand as similar others who have already experienced the same problems and solved them, consumers may perceive the brand as more concretely authentic, sincere, and competent to tackle the consumers' own problem as well. As authenticity, sincerity, and competence of a brand leads to brand trust (Eggers et al., 2013; Lude & Prügl, 2018; Sung & Kim, 2010), consumers are expected to feel trustworthy when receiving the founders' personal experience story compared to product-focused storytelling. Thus,

H1: Founder's personal experience story creates higher brand trust than attribute-focused storytelling.

Small brands can be perceived as underdogs because insufficient resources and small market shares are interpreted as hardships of small companies (Paharia et al., 2011). According

to the previous literature, the underdog effect is an effective tool in small business branding (Paharia et al., 2011; 2014). Underdog stories appeal to consumers by engendering sympathy to a loser (i.e., underdog) against a winner (i.e., top-dog) in a competitive situation (Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Vandello et al., 2007). Small businesses which have limited resources and humble beginnings, rather than sufficient capital and smooth beginnings, can thus gain consumers' support (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011).

One determinant of brand trust is the brand's competence (Sung & Kim, 2010). In terms of brand's competence, small brands can use an underdog background that presents their efforts to overcome the initial struggles to provide high product capabilities. Top-dog background, on the contrary, can advertise the sufficient resources to invest in developing products (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). Interacting with the founder' personal experiences, a brand's underdog background may serve as a credible cue that the founder who experienced the same problem as the consumers has surmounted the problem with a tremendous effort. Top-dog background may be interpreted as a brand that has solved the problem by investing abundant capital. Due to the underdog effect, consumers may feel stronger empathy and credibility for a brand with an underdog background than a top-dog background when listening to the founders' personal experiences. Accordingly,

> H2: Founder's personal experience story with the brand's underdog background leads to higher brand trust than the founder's personal experience story with a top-dog background.

Previous literature on the underdog effect confirmed that the effectiveness of underdog stories may vary with consumers (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). Specifically, Paharia et al. (2011) suggested that the individuals' self-evaluation of their position in their lives (i.e.,

underdog versus top-dog) determines the effectiveness of the underdog effect. As the core mechanism of the underdog effect is empathy, people support underdog stories (Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Vandello et al., 2017); people who categorize themselves as underdogs feel higher empathy and respond more to the underdog stories (Paharia et al., 2011).

One recent issue in the society is the pandemic due to COVID-19 (Jones et al., 2020). People are now undergoing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, generating huge unemployment (Jones et al., 2020). In this situation, people confront financial hardship, even including inability to make ends meet (Adamczyk, 2020). People may feel themselves as underdogs if they have faced financially negative consequences of the pandemic, having higher empathy to the underdog brands. In other words, underdog stories may accentuate empathic emotional support from people who have experienced economic difficulty themselves. Thus, underdog stories are expected to lead to higher brand trust than top-dog stories, and consumers with higher empathy due to the pandemic may provide stronger support to underdog brands. Accordingly,

> H2a: Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic moderates the positive effect between founder's personal experience story and the brand's underdog background on brand trust, such that the relationship is stronger among the consumers with higher perception of being a temporary underdog.

Study 2: Craftsmanship Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Based on signaling theory, small businesses, which are under the situation of information asymmetry due to the low familiarity and renown, can use signals to appeal their products. Given the definition of craftsmanship, when a brand utilizes a craftmanship story as its identity, the

brand can convey a strong signal about its products. The story signals that the brand's products are unique and exclusive.

On the contrary, an attribute-focused story may narrate the value function of the products (Hall, 2019). Telling about a great product can appeal to consumers, but it is weak at building points-of-difference to brands, compared to a craftsmanship story. This is because how clearly and uniquely the distinctive characteristics of products and brands are communicated determines their competitiveness (Miller, 2017). An attribute-focused story may not be able to send a stronger signal of uniqueness and exclusiveness than a craftsmanship story. Distinctive features of a brand develop brand trust, generating customers' positive feelings and being perceived as convincing (Lundqvist et al., 2013). Accordingly, the signal of a craftsmanship story may be more effective in creating the perception that the brand is trustworthy, compared to the attribute-focused storytelling with no signal of a craftsmanship story. Thus,

H3: A craftsmanship story leads to higher brand trust than attribute-focused storytelling.

A brand can be categorized into different levels in terms of exclusivity, accessibility, and price (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Nueno & Quelch, 1998). High-end brands are explained as the brands with premium quality, low accessibility, and high price, whereas low-end brands are perceived as having non-premium quality, high accessibility, and lower price and mass distribution. High-end brands are known for exclusivity (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), and consumers tend to perceive high-end brands as having an image of high quality, uniqueness, and prestigiousness (Keller, 1993; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). There is also a mid-end brand between high- and low-end brand level. Luxury brands are categorized as high-end brands, and the examples of mid-end level brands include fast fashion brands (Okonkwo, 2007).

A craftsmanship story includes all the components that high-end brands should have, such as high-quality, exclusivity, and low accessibility (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). High-end luxury brands actually utilize craftsmanship stories widely (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Lee & Youn, 2020). Mid-end level small brands also can use craftsmanship stories to build their brand concepts, but consumers may doubt the prestigiousness and quality of products. That is, craftsmanship storytelling signals high-quality and prestigious products, but this cue may not be well-matched with mid-level brands in consumers' minds, compared to high-end brands. On the contrary, the cue of a craftsmanship story and the cue of high-end brand are consistent and well-matched, improving credibility. Thus,

H4: A craftsmanship story with a perceived high-end brand level leads to higher brand trust than a craftsmanship story with a perceived mid-end brand level.

Based on one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, when judging an object, collectivists tend to be context-dependent, but individualists are likely to focus on the object itself and its attributes (Ji et al., 2000). In consumption, collectivistic consumers seek subjective information relevant to purchase, whereas individualistic consumers prefer to know detailed product-attribute information (de Mooij, 2004).

In addition, individualistic/collectivistic consumers put different value on their priorities (Schwartz, 1990). Collectivistic consumers value tradition more than individualistic people. Collectivistic individuals respect and accept customs and ideas that are traditionally cultured more than do individualistic people. Thus, in collectivist countries, craftsmanship is highly valued and preserved. Japan, for instance, which is considered one of the collectivist-cultured countries (Hofstede Insights, n.d.-a) still values craftsmanship (Japan Society, 2004; Lufkin,

2020). Craftsmanship still accounts for a huge economic value in Japan across different sectors (Japan Society, 2004; Lufkin, 2020).

Accordingly, collectivistic consumers, who focus more on overall context to judge an object, may rely more on craftsmanship story that holistically serves as a cue for the product information than individualistic consumers do. Furthermore, collectivistic consumers, who value traditions more, may concentrate more on the cues transmitted by craftsmanship storytelling, having higher brand trust. Whereas, individualistic consumers who tend to value traditions less may rely less on the information offered by a craftsmanship story. Hence,

H5: A craftsmanship story among collectivist consumers leads to higher brand trust than a craftsmanship story among individualist consumers.

Study 3: Eco-Friendly Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Another story that can be a unique signal of a brand is environmental sustainability. Although, recently, most brands put in their efforts on practicing environmental sustainability and present their efforts to consumers, consumers are skeptical and doubtful about their actual eco-friendly behaviors and degree of sustainability. For example, most brands disclose the information of how they perform sustainable activities on their websites or other media across brand categories (Adidas, n.d.; Everlane, n.d.; H&M, n.d.). However, consumers do not always express trust in these performances, and are rather skeptical (Aji & Sutikno, 2015; Cho & Taylor, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019; Ulusoy & Barretta, 2016).

Eco-friendly storytelling may present how a brand positions its identity with environmental sustainability (e.g., Tentree, n.d.-a). Given the rationale of signaling theory, the brand story with environmental sustainability may convey a stronger signal of a firm's high concern for the societal issues than attribute-focused storytelling. Also, it may confer higher

credibility than companies which operate a few environmentally sustainable activities. That is, consumers may feel that the brand is socially conscious, and the brand seems to be able to solve the problem of environmental issues with enough competence (Punyatoya, 2014; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). When it compares to attribute-focused stories, this may serve as a signal of additional values that consumers can achieve by purchasing and consuming the products.

Accordingly,

H6: An eco-friendly story leads to a higher brand trust than attribute-focused storytelling.

Although eco-friendly products and brands have gained popularity recently, especially among young generations, there is still an intention-action gap (White et al., 2019). This is because one of the most important factors in consumers purchasing apparel is intrinsic cues to judge the quality, such as style, fashionability, and fabric quality (Fiore & Damhorst, 1992). Especially for women consumers, aesthetic attributes of an apparel, such as color, style, and fabric are important determinants of apparel purchasing (Eckman et al., 1990). Therefore, consumers may not desire to purchase if the aesthetic quality is not ensured even if the eco-friendly story is appealing.

Indeed, one of the major barriers to purchasing sustainable apparel for consumers is related to aesthetic quality, meaning that the products are not aesthetic enough in terms of style (Cho et al., 2015). Previous studies also found that consumers present performance risk perception toward eco-friendly products (Han & Chung, 2014; Kang & Kim, 2013). The performance risk means the perception associated with unsatisfactory quality, such as unsatisfactory color and design, poor fit, and limited variety (Kang & Kim, 2013), which are mainly relevant to aesthetic judgments. In this case, consumers show negative attitudes toward eco-friendly apparel products with dissatisfaction (Han & Chung, 2014). Therefore, although a

brand utilizes eco-friendly storytelling, if the products are not perceived as aesthetic enough, the brand may not be credible enough. Thus,

H7: An eco-friendly story with high aesthetic judgments leads to higher brand trust than an eco-friendly story with low aesthetic judgments.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overall Research Design

This chapter describes the methodology for testing the eight hypotheses developed in Chapter II. First, the overall research design is explained. This includes the sample, stimuli development, and measurements used. Second, the pre-test procedure and results are described. Thereafter, the data collection procedure and statistical analysis for the main study are discussed.

Sample

The sample of the study comprised female consumers aged between 18 and 40 living in the U.S. There are several reasons behind the selection of the respondents. First, the U.S. has numerous small businesses that account for 99.9 percent of all businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018a). These are responsible for a large proportion of economic activities in the U.S. (Office of Advocacy, 2019). Hence, this study selected the United States as the research background to discuss the brand storytelling of small businesses.

Second, the age range of the study (i.e., 18–40 years) primarily includes millennials also known as Generation Y and Generation Z. Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996 (Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Vogels, 2019). Generation Z were born after 1996 (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). These two generations stand out for their savvy technology use (Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Vogels, 2019). In particular, they are heavier users of social media than other generations (Cox, 2019). Moreover, in a survey, 86% of millennials and 68% of Generation X answered that they use YouTube more (Cox, 2019). They ranked in the top 2 of generations that actively use YouTube. Additionally, millennials watch more online videos than traditional television (Fitzgerald, 2018), and the focus of this study is video storytelling employed by small fashion

businesses delivered via online channels. Specifically, it can be said that Generation Z are digital natives who have little memory and experience of the world before smartphones existed (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Therefore, this dissertation limited the respondents to adults aged under 40.

Third, regarding female respondents, previous literature has revealed gender differences in the reception of stories (Kang et al., 2019; van Laer et al., 2014). Women tend to generate more emotions than men when responding to a story (Stern, 1992), such as higher empathy (Argo et al., 2008). As female story receivers feel more emotions than male receivers, naturally, narrative transportation is greater for the former than the latter (van Laer et al., 2014). In this study, video stimuli were created to manipulate the story content, and the videos display women's wear. As the apparel products in the videos are women's wear, models and founders shown in the stimuli are accordingly female. A study found that female and male story receivers' attitudes toward the story differed when a female storyteller narrated the same story (Kang et al., 2019). Accordingly, this study confined itself to women's responses alone.

Stimuli Development

Two types of stimuli were developed in this study. The first type of stimuli comprised videos that had identity-focused and attribute-focused stories. These stimuli were created for testing the main effects of the three studies (see Fig 2.1). The second type of stimuli was written scenarios developed to test the interaction effects of the three studies (see Fig 2.1). The following sections detail how each stimulus was developed.

Storytelling Video Stimuli

A total of four storytelling video stimuli were developed. They were attribute-focused, founder's personal experience, craftsmanship, and eco-friendly storytelling videos. Video clips displaying each storytelling were developed. The attribute-focused story focused on the

product's attributes (i.e., fabric, structure, color, fit). The founder's personal experience story shared the founder's personal experience seeking a brand selling size-inclusive clothing. The craftsmanship story entailed craftsmanship and artisans can build the basis of a brand's identity. Finally, the eco-friendly story talked about the brand's eco-friendly activities. A fictitious fashion brand, Luna, was used to create the video clips for all three studies. The use of a fictitious brand for an experiment is known to reduce the confounding effects on participants' previous experiences on responses (e.g., Nan & Heo, 2007).

To create videos, several video clips that fit each storytelling format were downloaded from a copyright-free video website (https://www.pexels.com/videos/) and edited using iMovie to form 30-second clips. A background music was also downloaded from a copyright-free website (https://www.bensound.com/royalty-free-music/2) and inserted in all four videos. To present stories, textual narrations were included with each video scene. The textual narrations were structured to include the four components of storytelling that are presented in Table 2.1: character, plot, climax, and outcome. The scripts of textual narrations were created similar to the existing scripts in the video-formatted and written stories presented by small fashion brand websites and social media (e.g., Cuyana, n.d.; M.Gemi, n.d.; Ori, 2019; Pact, n.d.; 2020; Tentree, n.d.; Universal Standard, n.d.). The textual narrations are presented in Table 3.1. The complete videos were posted on YouTube and each link was embedded in each survey.

Written Stimuli

Written stimuli were created as textual scripts. The variables manipulated with text-based stimuli are as follows: brand underdog/top-dog background (Study 1), brand level (Study 2), and aesthetic judgments of products (Study 3). For the brand positioning of underdog/top-dog, the respondents received the background information (i.e., scripts) of a brand sorted according to the

hardship of its beginning, monetary status, and story of hard work. The script for each underdog and top-dog information was modified from Kao (2019).

For the brand level (i.e., high-end versus mid-end versus low-level) in Study 2, this study created three different scripts in terms of price ranges and sales retailers associated with the brand. The low-end brand level was included to check whether the mid-end scenario was perceived lower enough than the high-end scenario but simultaneously higher enough than the low-end brand level. The low-end scenario was only used for manipulation checks and was not used for hypothesis testing. Based on the literature review (Dennis, 2018; Stathopoulou & Balabanis, 2016), the examples of brands and retailers of different levels were identified. For a high-end brand retailer, the example selected was Bloomingdale, while that for the mid-end brand retailer was Macy's. Hence, the price range of the high-end brand level was set similar to the products at Bloomingdale. The retailer associated with the high-end brand, Bloomingdale, was also presented in the script. Additionally, Nordstrom, that has a similar price range to Bloomindale was also mentioned along with Bloomingdale. The price range of the mid-end brand level was set similar to the average price of the products sold at Macy's. The name Macy's was also included in the script, and Kohl's, whose items range similar to Macy's, was also added to the script. For the low-end retailer, Walmart was included. When setting the price range, this study specifically selected jackets and coats for comparison in the equivalent condition.

To manipulate the aesthetic levels of products (Study 3), this study developed two different scripts about the aesthetic aspects of the brand's products (i.e., high versus low aesthetic), written in the form of customer reviews. Customer reviews narrate and deliver information about the brand and products/services (e.g., van Laer et al., 2014). Most apparel consumers look for ratings and customer reviews before purchasing new items (Deloitte, 2014;

Power Reviews, 2016). This is because customer ratings and reviews help consumers make an informed purchase decision (Power Reviews, 2016). To resemble the existing customers reviews from Tentree and Pact, this study created customer reviews focusing on aesthetic aspects. Aesthetic attributes to be judged comprised color, style, and fabric (Eckman et al., 1990). Thus, customer reviews were manipulated to include opinions about these attributes. High aesthetic level was manipulated with a very positive aesthetic judgment of the brand's products, while low aesthetic level entailed a low opinion of the same. The text-based information used for the manipulation of these variables has been summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.1. Summary of Video Stimuli for Hypotheses Testing

Study	Story	Text Narrations in Video Stimuli	Video link	Hypothesis
1, 2, 3	Attribute-focused story	The Luna Story… Clothes are a part of our everyday lives. What we wear matters. Luna strives to create clothing for you. Luna uses the softest fabrics. The fabrics are constructed to give you a sleek, slim look while not forgoing comfort. We provide quality clothing with smooth texture. Luna solely focuses style with comfort and quality. Try Luna, for everyday life...	https://youtu.be/X49FaDwoVgQ	H1, H3, H6
1	Founder's personal experience story	The Luna Story… Clothes are a part of our everyday lives. What we wear matters. Luna strives to create clothing for you. While shopping from popular brands, my co-founder and I were frustrated at the lack of sizes available. Their sizes were exclusively too large for me and too small for my co-founder. This is why we made Luna, for women in all shapes and sizes. Over half of U.S. females wear sizes that are not provided in the traditional ranges. Luna provides inclusive sizing for real women, from 00-40. Try Luna, for everyday life...	https://youtu.be/B5lhNRdTVvE	H1, H2, H2a

Table 3.1. Summary of Video Stimuli for Hypotheses Testing (continued)

Study	Story	Text Narrations in Video Stimuli	Video link	Hypothesis
2	Craftsmanship story	The Luna Story… Clothes are a part of our everyday lives. What we wear matters. Luna strives to create clothing for you. Luna creates carefully curated collections created by artisan designers. We travel the world to provide you with unique designs. Local crafters worldwide contribute to Luna's creations for you to enjoy. The designers spend countless hours in the process. Luna strives to provide unique and exclusive craftsmanship. Try Luna, for everyday life…	https://youtu.be/8E2VJU9dNvg	H3, H4, H5
3	Eco-friendly story	The Luna Story… Clothes are a part of our everyday lives. What we wear matters. Luna strives to create clothing for you. At Luna, we believe it is our responsibility to protect our planet. We create clothing inspired by nature, with nature. Our clothes are manufactured with environmental sustainability, purely eco-friendly resources, and recycling. Luna is an Earth-loving clothing company that aims to protect nature. Try Luna, for everyday life…	https://youtu.be/2wPno2XvLxE	H6, H7

Table 3.2. Summary of Written Stimuli for Hypotheses Testing

Study		Scripts	Hypothesis
1	Brand background		H2, H2a
	Underdog	The women's clothing brand, Luna, started from the bottom and worked through their struggles. The founders of Luna experienced a rough start with limited external resources but worked passionately despite their difficulty. Their hard work and commitment bring their clothing to market successfully.	
	Top-dog	The women's clothing brand, Luna, started with few challenges and worked through no struggles. The founders of Luna experienced a smooth start with a lot of external resources and worked effortlessly without difficulty. Their resources and experiences bring their clothing to market successfully.	
2	Brand level		H4
	High-end	Luna is a women's clothing brand. Luna offers a variety of high-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts. Luna's popular items, luxury jackets and coats, are sold at over $2,000. The products of Luna are also sold through the high-end department stores, Bloomingdale and Nordstrom.	
	Mid-end	Luna is a women's clothing brand. Luna offers a variety of middle-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts. Luna's popular items, jackets and coats, are sold at $150 to $250. The products of Luna are also sold through the middle-end department stores, Macy's and Kohl's.	
	Low-end	Luna is a women's clothing brand. Luna offers a variety of low-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts. Luna's popular items, jackets and coats, are priced at under $70. The products of Luna are also sold through the low-end retailer, Walmart.	

Table 3.2. Summary of Scripts for Hypotheses Testing (continued)

Study		Scripts	Hypothesis
3	Aesthetic levels of products		H7
	High aesthetic	By a verified customer on 09/10/2020 (Size purchased: M) ★★★★★ Quality: Bad --Good –**Great** | Fit: Small --**True to Size** - Large I purchased a few Luna pieces. The sweatshirts and skirts are all super soft and comfortable. The materials are great. This sweatshirt is also soft, pretty and cute! I like the color of this sweatshirt. It is adorable.	
	Low aesthetic	By a verified customer on 09/10/2020 (Size purchased: M) ★★☆☆☆ Quality: **Bad** --Good –Great | Fit: **Small** --True to Size - Large I purchased a few Luna pieces. The sweatshirts and skirts are neither soft nor comfortable. I think the fabric is low-quality. This sweatshirt does not look good- Originally the color was not bad, but it fades quickly-- which is disappointing.	

Measurements

A total of ten measurements were used in this study and have been summarized in Table 3.3. Below, we explain the main effects, interaction effects, and a dependent variable.

Main Effects

In this study, the main effects are manipulated by storytelling video stimuli (Table 3.1). To check the manipulation of four video stimuli (attribute-focused story, founder's personal experience story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story), this study modified the measurement from Lien and Chen (2013). Participants were asked how strongly they agree to each statement after watching one of the four videos. The scales were rated using a seven-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Interaction Effects

Five interaction effects are proposed in this study (see Figure 2.1). To test these five interaction effects, moderators were measured using three written stimuli and two measurement scales. The three written stimuli included brand background (i.e., underdog versus top-dog), brand level (i.e., high-end versus mid-end), and perceived aesthetic judgments (i.e., high versus low). The underdog versus top-dog brand background was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Tang and Tsang (2020) for the manipulation check. The scale enquires if the brand's background information regarding positioning includes a brand story having passion and determination, having any external disadvantages, and being perceived as an underdog. The brand level manipulated by scenarios was determined by a scale from Baek et al. (2010) that comprised three items and enquired whether the brand is perceived as prestigious, high status, and very upscale. The manipulation check for perceived aesthetic judgments was conducted through a scale adapted from Hirschman (1986) and Jacobsen et al. (2004) that comprised six

items rated using a seven-point semantic differential scale. For example, for the item Not attractive–Attractive, 1 indicates Not attractive and 7 indicates Attractive, with a number between 1 and 7 referring to different degrees of perceived attractiveness.

Second, two of the moderators, perceived financial hardship during the pandemic (H2a) and consumer individualism/collectivism (H5) were measured using scales. Consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic was measured using a scale adapted from Conger et al. (1992). This scale with two items is designed to measure the financial hardship of an individual or family, and this study modified the items according to the situation "during the pandemic". Participants answered how much they agreed with each statement. The scales were rated using a seven-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Individualism/collectivism was measured using the degree of collectivism. A scale was adapted from Hofsted (1980) and Yoo et al. (2011) that consisted of four items. Participants answered the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a seven-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Dependent Variable

Brand trust was the dependent variable for all three studies. Based on the definition, this study borrowed and integrated three scales from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Holmes and Rempel (1989), and Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002). Participants indicated brand trust using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree), specifying the degree to which they agreed with each statement.

Table 3.3. Summary of Measurements

Measurement (items #)	Study	Items	Source
Main effects			
Attribute-focused story (4)	1, 2, 3	The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the fabric comfort/quality. The video showed the fabric comfort/quality of the brand. The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story.	Lien and Chen (2013)
Founder's personal experience story (4)	1	The video told a story of founder's personal experience of the brand. The video had a beginning, middle, and end about founder's personal experience of the brand. The video showed the personal experience story of the brand. The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand.	
Craftsmanship story (4)	2	The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand. The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand. The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand. The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand.	
Eco-friendly story (4)	3	The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand. The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand. The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand. The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand.	

Table 3.3. Summary of Measurements (continued)

Measurement (items #)	Study	Items		Source
Interaction effects				
Brand Underdog vs. top-dog background (3)	1	The information includes a brand story having passion and determination. The information includes a brand story having external disadvantages. The brand can be characterized as an underdog.		Tang and Tsang (2020)
Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic (2)	1	I have difficulty paying bills each month during the pandemic. I have money left over at the end of the month during the pandemic. (R)		Conger et al. (1992)
Brand level (3)	2	This brand is perceived as very prestigious. This brand is perceived to have high status. This brand is perceived to be very upscale.		Baek et al. (2010)
Collectivism (4)	2	The interest of the whole is more important than the interest of the individual. The individual remains faithful to the group, even if it is difficult. The success of the group is more important than individual success. The good of the group is more important than the success of the individual.		Hofsted (1980); Yoo et al. (2011)
Perceived aesthetic judgments (6)	3	This brand is…	Not attractive – attractive Not arousing – arousing Not beautiful – beautiful Ugly – beautiful Not elegant – elegant Not harmonious – harmonious	Hirschman (1986); Jacobsen et al. (2004)
Dependent Variable				
Brand trust (11)	1, 2, 3	I trust this brand. This brand is predictable. This brand is dependable This brand is reliable. This brand is truthful. This brand is competent. This brand has integrity. This brand is responsive. I rely on this brand. This is an honest brand. This brand is safe.		Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001); Holmes and Rempel (1989); Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002)

Note. (R): reverse coded item

Pre-test

The purposes of the pre-test included 1) conducting manipulation checks of four storytelling video stimuli (i.e., a founder story, a craftsmanship story, an eco-friendly story, and an attribute-focused story) and six written stimuli (i.e., brand underdog/top-dog background, brand level, and perceived aesthetic judgments) and 2) validating the measurement scales before using them in the main experiments.

For the pre-test, 179 females aged 18 and 40 were recruited through MTurk and provided a link to a Qualtrics online survey after receiving IRB approval (see Appendix A for the IRB letter). Initially, 90 participants were recruited, but the manipulation checks revealed that brand level written stimuli were not perceived as intended. Thus, an additional 89 participants were recruited.

In the pre-test, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four video stimuli and answered questions regarding whether the videos were perceived as the researchers intended. Then, participants were assigned to one of the underdog/top-dog positioning stimuli, one of the three brand levels, and one of the high/low aesthetic judgment levels of products stimuli to determine whether each written stimulus was perceived as intended. At the end of the survey, the participants were compensated with incentives. The survey took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Appendix B shows a copy of the pre-test survey questionnaire.

Pre-Test Results

First, the validity and reliability of the scale items were tested. As shown in Table 3.4, all measurements reported one-dimensionality and acceptable reliability, ranging from 0.79 to 0.98 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3.4. Results of Scale Reliability Tests in Pre-Test

Scale (# of items)	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Attribute-focused story (4)	4.13	1.73	0.93
Founder's personal experience story (4)	4.16	2.12	0.96
Craftsmanship story (4)	4.41	1.92	0.97
Eco-friendly story (4)	4.33	1.91	0.94
Brand underdog vs. top-dog positioning (3)	4.79	1.60	0.79
Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic (2)	3.73	1.93	0.83
Brand level (3)	4.60	1.84	0.98
Collectivism (4)	4.60	1.49	0.91
Perceived aesthetic judgments (6)	4.57	1.73	0.96
Brand trust (11)	4.67	1.36	0.97

Second, the manipulation checks of storytelling video stimuli were conducted to determine whether the videos were perceived by participants as the researchers intended. Independent t-test results confirmed that each video was perceived as intended as shown in Table 3.5. For instance, attribute-focused story video was significantly perceived as containing attribute-focused story ($M_{attribute}$ = 5.33), while the other videos were not; founder story ($M_{founder}$ = 3.70, t=3.80, p<.001), craftsmanship story ($M_{craftsmanship}$ = 3.87, t=3.54, p<.01), and eco-friendly story ($M_{eco\text{-}friendly}$ = 3.80, t=3.72, p<.01). Similarly, founder story was significantly perceived as the founder's personal experience story, while attribute-focused story was not ($M_{founder}$ = 5.31, $M_{attribute}$= 2.70, t=5.52, p<.001). Craftsmanship story ($M_{craftsmanship}$ = 5.15, $M_{attribute}$= 3.58, t=3.23, p<.01) and eco-friendly story ($M_{eco\text{-}friendly}$ = 5.28, $M_{attribute}$= 3.34, t=4.07, p<.001) were also confirmed to have been created as intended, whereas attribute-focused story was found significantly less likely to contain the two stories.

Third, the manipulation checks of written stimuli were conducted to determine whether the written information was perceived by participants as the researchers intended (see Table 3.6). For Study 1, the independent t-test result confirmed that the brand underdog scenario was perceived as underdog more than top-dog scenario ($M_{underdog}$ = 5.61, $M_{top\text{-}dog}$ = 3.00, t=8.07,

p<.001). For Study 2, the initial scenarios did not show significant differences between high-end and mid-end scenarios ($M_{high-mid}$ = 0.76, p=.15, $M_{mid-low}$ =1.95, p<.001) using Tukey HSD (honestly significant difference) post-hoc, although the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) result for three levels were significant (M_{high} =5.57, M_{mid} =4.81, M_{low} =2.86, p<.001). Hence, the scenarios were modified, and 89 data were additionally collected. The one-way ANOVA test for the new scenarios revealed that the three scenarios denoting different brand levels (i.e., high, mid, and low) were significantly different (M_{high} = 5.93, M_{mid} = 4.76, M_{low} = 3.07, F=27.904, p<.001). Particularly, Tukey HSD post-hoc results displayed the significant mean difference between high-end and mid-end scenarios ($M_{high-mid}$= 1.17, p<.01) and between mid-end and low-end scenarios ($M_{mid-low}$ = 1.68, p<.001). For Study 3, the validation confirmed a significant difference on aesthetic judgements between high aesthetic (M_{high}= 5.50) and low aesthetic (M_{low} = 3.38), as shown in Table 3.6 (t=8.06, p<.001).

Table 3.5. Manipulation Pre-Test Results of Video Stimuli

Hypothesis	Video watched	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
H1, H3, & H6	Attribute	Attribute	19	5.33	0.98	3.80	.000***
		Founder's	24	3.70	1.65		
		Attribute	19	5.33	0.98	3.54	.001**
		Craftsmanship	21	3.87	1.54		
		Attribute	19	5.33	0.98	3.72	.001**
		Eco-friendly	20	3.80	1.52		
H1	Founder	Founder's	24	5.31	1.09	5.52	.000***
		Attribute	19	2.70	1.97		
H3	Craftsmanship	Craftsmanship	21	5.15	1.13	3.23	.003**
		Attribute	19	3.58	1.90		
H6	Eco-friendly	Eco-friendly	20	5.28	1.97	4.07	.000***
		Attribute	19	3.34	0.78		

Note. *<.05, **<.01, ***<.001

Table 3.6. Manipulation Pre-Test Results of Written Stimuli

Hypothesis	Group					
		N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
H2&H2a	Underdog	38	5.61	.97	8.07	.000***
	Top-dog	43	3.00	1.76		
		N	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
H4	High-end brand level (A)	28	5.93	1.05	27.904	.000***
	Mid-end brand level (B)	26	4.76	1.33		
	Low-end brand level (C)	27	3.07	1.80		
		N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
H7	High aesthetic judgements	47	5.50	.85	8.06	.000***
	Low aesthetic judgements	37	3.38	1.53		

Note. *<.05, **<.01, ***<.001
A, B, and C denote post-hoc results.

Main Experiments

Data Collection

After the pre-test, a total of three studies were conducted to test eight hypotheses. A summary of the experimental design is presented in Table 3.7. The three studies entailed a total of ten different experimental settings with combinations of main effects and interaction effects that required manipulation. The situations included four different contents of stories (i.e., founder's personal experience story, craftsmanship story, eco-friendly story, and attribute-focused story), two brand background information elements (i.e., underdog and top-dog), two brand levels (i.e., high-end and mid-level), and two perceived aesthetic judgments (i.e., high and low).

After the IRB review, participants of consumer panels were recruited, and they completed surveys by Qualtrics. Regarding sample size, it is typically recommended to involve a minimum of 30 participants per cell for experimental studies (Hair et al., 2010). This study recruited 482 so that every single cell included over 30 participants. The participants were randomly assigned to

one of ten situations such that each cell included 40–60 participants. The questionnaires for studies 1–3 are provided in Appendix C.

For the main effects of all three studies, participants were assigned to one of four settings in which the story contents (i.e., attribute-focused, founder's personal experience, craftsmanship, or eco-friendly story; H1, H3, or H6) differ. The participants first watched one of the four storytelling videos posted on YouTube and embedded in the survey and answered questions enquiring whether the stories were perceived as intended, depending on what they were assigned, as a manipulation check. To confirm that the participants actually watched the video, an attention check asking the brand's name was conducted. Moreover, the time remaining in the video link was recorded and the response was not used if the time elapsed watching the video was insufficient.

For the interaction effects of Study 1, new participants were assigned to one of two situations in which the founder's personal experience story varied by brand positioning information (i.e., underdog and top-dog; H2 and H2a). After watching the video about the founder's personal experience story, the participants read either the underdog or the top-dog brand background information. They answered questions about the founder's personal experience story and perceived underdog versus top-dog as a manipulation check. They also answered questions about perceived financial hardship during the pandemic.

For the interaction effects of Study 2, participants were assigned to one of three settings with a craftsmanship story video varying by brand level (i.e., high-end versus mid-end; H4, and additionally low-end) to manipulate the brand level. The low-end scenario was only used for manipulation checks and not for the hypotheses testing. The participants watched the

craftsmanship storytelling video and read one of the brand level scenarios and answered questions about craftsmanship story. They also answered questions about consumer collectivism.

For the interaction effects of Study 3, participants were assigned to one of two settings differing by aesthetic judgments scenarios (i.e., high vs. low; H7) with the eco-friendly storytelling video. The participants watched the video and read a customer review manipulated for high versus low aesthetic judgments. Thereafter, they answered questions about the eco-friendly story and aesthetic judgments for the manipulation check. At the end of all surveys, all participants answered questions about brand trust and demographic information.

Table 3.7. Summary of Experimental Design

Study	Hypothesis	Independent Variables		
		Main effect	Interaction	Moderation
Study 1: Founder story	H1	**Founder's personal experience story** **Attribute-focused story**	–	–
	H2	Founder's personal experience story	Brand background information Underdog Top-dog	–
	H2a	Founder's personal experience story	Brand background information Underdog Top-dog	Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic* High Low
Study 2: Craftsmanship story	H3	**Craftsmanship story** **Attribute-focused story**	–	–
	H4	Craftsmanship story	Brand level High-end Mid-end	–
	H5	Craftsmanship story	Consumer individualism /collectivism* Individualism Collectivism	–
Study3: Eco-friendly story	H6	**Eco-friendly story** **Attribute-focused story**	–	–
	H7	Eco-friendly story	Perceived aesthetic judgments High aesthetic Low aesthetic	–

Note. Bolded main effects were manipulated by storytelling video stimuli
Underlined moderators were manipulated by written stimuli
*These two moderators were measured by scales

Data Analyses

Manipulation Checks

All data analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics 26.0. The manipulation checks were conducted and analyzed first. For Study 1, the following variables required manipulation checks: 1) founder's personal experience story video versus attribute-focused story video and 2) brand underdog versus top-dog background scenarios. Independent t-tests were conducted (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). For Study 2, two variables required manipulation checks: 1) craftsmanship story video versus attribute-focused story video and 2) perceived high-end versus mid-end brand level scenarios. For comparison between the two videos, independent t-tests were conducted (Hair et al., 2010). The brand-level scenarios were tested through one-way ANOVA and further through Tukey HSD post-hoc tests to compare each two pairs of scenarios as there were three scenarios (Hair et al., 2010). For Study 3, the variables for 1) eco-friendly story video versus attribute-focused story video and 2) the high versus low level of aesthetic judgements scenarios performed manipulation checks. Each requires comparison of two independent groups. Therefore, independent t-tests were conducted (Hair et al., 2010; 2019).

Hypotheses Testing

Before hypotheses testing, preliminary analyses were conducted and included descriptive analyses, exploratory factor analyses, and reliability tests for the measurement scales. Assumption checks including normality, skewness, kurtosis, and outliner checks were also performed.

For hypothesis testing, this study utilized analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and moderation regression. Between-subjects ANCOVA was used for testing all hypotheses except H2a because between-subject ANCOVA determines group differences on the dependent variable

(e.g., brand trust) (Hair et al., 2010). There were two groups to compare for each hypothesis, which is normally tested through t-test (Hair et al., 2010). Nevertheless, this study selected between-subject ANCOVA to compare treatment groups while controlling for the effects of other confounding variables such as covariates (e.g., age and education) (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, H2a (i.e., perceived financial hardship during the pandemic) and H5 (i.e., individualism/collectivism) entailed interaction factors that were not manipulated through experiments. Instead, these interaction effects were measured by a survey. H2a was tested through moderated regression analysis. Moderated regression enables the discovery of interaction effects between two factors on a dependent variable (i.e., brand trust) (Hair et al., 2010). Consumer individualism/collectivism was measured using the collectivism scale and was split by a median to separate a continuous independent variable into two dichotomous levels (Hair et al., 2010; MacCallum et al., 2002). For all three studies, the variables of age and education were controlled.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of the data collection and hypothesis testing. First, the results of preliminary analyses are presented. Subsequently, the results of hypothesis testing are discussed followed by discussion of the data analysis method and result for each hypothesis.

Preliminary Analyses

For the main experiments, a total of 482 responses were collected from Qualtrics consumer panels. Table 4.1 summarizes the number of responses collected and usable responses that were utilized for hypotheses testing. Among 482 data, 58 data were excluded for further data analyses because the participant did not pass the attention check or answered in inattentive ways (e.g., answering 1, 1, 1, 1, … for all question). As a result, 87.97 percent of data remained usable. The number of usable responses for each cell met the minimum requirement of 30 participants for experimental research (Hair et al., 2010; 2019).

Table 4.1. Data Collection Results

Study	Group		Collected	Unusable	Usable
1	Story type	Founder's personal experience	60	8	52
		Attribute-focused	60*	7*	53*
	Brand background positioning	Underdog	40	3	37
		Top-dog	40	5	35
2	Story type	Craftsmanship	60	8	52
		Attribute-focused	60*	7*	53*
	Brand level	High-end	41	2	39
		Mid-end	40	9	31
3	Story type	Eco-friendly	60	9	51
		Attribute-focused	60*	7*	53*
	Product aesthetic judgments	High	41	0	41
		Low	40	7	33
Total		All participants	482	58	424

Note. *Same participants were used for all three studies for the attribute-focused story
Total Usable Response Rate: 424/482 = 87.97%

Descriptive Analyses

Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 summarize the respondents' demographic information. The overall number of respondents for Study 1 was 177, for Study 2 was 175, and for Study 3 was 178. In terms of age, participants were rather equally distributed, but the most frequently answered age range was 18–21 in Study 1 (33.1%), Study 2 (22.3%), and Study 3 (28.1%). Most respondents were white in all three studies: Study 1 (65.5%); Study 2 (70.9%); and Study 3 (74.2%). In terms of education level, respondents were quite diverse from lower to higher, but participants with college degrees were most common in Study 1 (27.7%) and Study 3 (28.1%). In Study 2, participants with university degrees were most common (26.2%). In terms of geographic regions, most frequently answered were from Southeast respondents for Study 1 (26.0%), and Northeast were the largest in Study 2 (27.4%) and Study 3 (28.7%). The annual individual income of most respondents was less than $19,999: Study 1 (26.0%), Study 2 (19.4%) and Study 3 (23.0%).

Table 4.2. Descriptive Statistics for Study1

Age Frequency (%)		Ethnicity Frequency (%)		Education Frequency (%)		Location Frequency (%)		Income Frequency (%)	
18-21	55 (33.1)	White	116 (65.5)	< High school	38 (21.5)	West	24 (13.6)	<$19,999	46 (26.0)
22-25	23 (13.9)	Black	26 (14.7)	Some college	49 (27.7)	Southwest	18 (10.2)	$20k-$34,999	29 (16.4)
26-29	15 (9.0)	Asian	19 (10.7)	University	41 (23.2)	Midwest	42 (23.7)	$35k-$49,999	31 (17.5)
30-33	31 (18.7)	Others	16 (9.0)	Professional degree	7 (4.0)	Southeast	46 (26.0)	$50k-$64,999	25 (14.1)
34-37	26 (15.7)			Graduate	42 (23.7)	Northeast	47 (26.6)	$65k-$79,999	18 (10.2)
38-40	16 (9.6)							>$80k	28 (15.8)
Mean = 27.33									
Median = 27.00									
SD = 7.18									
Missing = 11									

Note. *N*=177

Table 4.3. Descriptive Statistics for Study 2

Age Frequency (%)		Ethnicity Frequency (%)		Education Frequency (%)		Location Frequency (%)		Income Frequency (%)	
18-21	39 (22.3)	White	124 (70.9)	< High school	36 (20.6)	West	26 (14.9)	<$19,999	34 (19.4)
22-25	24 (13.7)	Black	19 (10.9)	Some college	44 (25.1)	Southwest	14 (8.0)	$20k-$34,999	27 (15.4)
26-29	26 (14.9)	Asian	19 (10.9)	University	46 (26.2)	Midwest	44 (25.1)	$35k-$49,999	28 (16.0)
30-33	29 (16.6)	Others	13 (7.4)	Professional degree	5 (2.9)	Southeast	43 (24.6)	$50k-$64,999	33 (18.9)
34-37	33 (18.9)			Graduate	44 (25.1)	Northeast	48 (27.4)	$65k-$79,999	22 (12.6)
38-40	24 (13.7)							>$80k	31 (17.7)
Mean = 28.98									
Median = 29.00									
SD = 6.98									

Note. *N*=175

Table 4.4. Descriptive Statistics for Study 3

Age		Ethnicity		Education		Location		Income	
Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)	
18-21	50 (28.1)	White	132 (74.2)	< High school	43 (24.2)	West	28 (15.7)	<$19,999	41 (23.0)
22-25	26 (14.6)	Black	23 (12.9)	Some college	50 (28.1)	Southwest	9 (5.1)	$20k-$34,999	27 (15.2)
26-29	18 (10.1)	Asian	9 (5.1)	University	46 (25.8)	Midwest	43 (24.2)	$35k-$49,999	29 (16.3)
30-33	33 (18.5)	Others	14 (7.9)	Professional degree	9 (5.1)	Southeast	47 (26.4)	$50k-$64,999	27 (15.2)
34-37	33 (18.5)			Graduate	30 (16.9)	Northeast	51 (28.7)	$65k-$79,999	19 (10.7)
38-40	18 (10.1)							>$80k	35 (19.7)
Mean = 28.01									
Median = 29.00									
SD = 7.07									

Note. *N*=178

Evaluation of Measurements

Prior to hypotheses testing, the measurements were evaluated to determine their construct validities and reliabilities. First, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) with principal component analysis and varimax rotation identified the dimensions of constructs. Table 4.5 summarizes the EFA results. Eigenvalues of one or greater were retained, indicating unidimensional factors for all variables (Hair et al., 2019). All items had a factor loading over than 0.6, indicating a well-defined structure (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, all items remained for the hypothesis testing of all measurements. All ten measurements also showed acceptable reliabilities (Cronbach's α = .78–.95).

Table 4.5. Results of Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFAs) and Cronbach's alpha

Scale items	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	α
Attribute-focused story		2.81	70.20%	.90
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality.	.77			
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the fabric comfort/quality.	.90			
The video showed the fabric comfort/quality of the brand.	.88			
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story.	.80			
Founder's personal experience story		3.24	80.93%	.94
The video told a story of founder's personal experience of the brand.	.85			
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about founder's personal experience of the brand.	.90			
The video showed the personal experience story of the brand.	.92			
The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand.	.93			
Craftsmanship story		3.45	86.14%	.91
The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand.	.91			
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand.	.93			
The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand.	.95			
The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand.	.92			
Eco-friendly story		3.44	86.11%	.95
The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand.	.91			
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand.	.95			
The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand.	.94			
The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand.	.91			

Table 4.5. Results of Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFAs) and Cronbach's alpha (continued)

Scale items	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	α
Brand underdog vs. top-dog background		2.13	70.83%	.79
The information includes a brand story having passion and determination.	.72			
The information includes a brand story having external disadvantages.	.89			
The brand can be characterized as an underdog.	.90			
Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic		1.64	81.90%	.78
I have difficulty paying bills each month during the pandemic.	.91			
I have money left over at the end of the month during the pandemic. (R)	.91			
Brand level		2.63	87.78%	.93
This brand is perceived as very prestigious.	.92			
This brand is perceived to have high status.	.96			
This brand is perceived to be very upscale.	.93			
Collectivism		2.67	66.69%	.86
The interest of the whole is more important than the interest of the individual.	.87			
The individual remains faithful to the group, even if it is difficult.	.63			
The success of the group is more important than individual success.	.90			
The good of the group is more important than the success of the individual.	.84			
Perceived aesthetic judgments		4.50	75.03%	.93
Not attractive – attractive	.93			
Not arousing – arousing	74			
Not beautiful – beautiful	.93			
Ugly – beautiful	.90			
Not elegant – elegant	.84			
Not harmonious – harmonious	.84			
Brand trust		7.54	68.52%	.95
I trust this brand.	.84			
This brand is predictable.	.61			
This brand is dependable	.89			
This brand is reliable.	.89			
This brand is truthful.	.86			
This brand is competent.	.80			
This brand has integrity.	.83			
This brand is responsive.	.85			
I rely on this brand.	.75			
This is an honest brand.	.88			
This brand is safe.	.86			

Note. (R): Reverse coded item

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks were conducted to ensure that the stimuli were perceived in the manner intended. For all three studies, video story types were manipulated. To verify whether consumers perceived each story as the researchers intended, respondents were asked to rate how each study contained the specific story. Furthermore, to distinguish whether each identity-focused story included attribute-focused story contents, respondents were asked to rate how each study contained these contents. Similarly, respondents were asked to rate questions to confirm whether the attribute-focused story was perceived as including identity-focused stories as well.

As shown in Table 4.6, the mean score for attribute-focused story was higher than all three identity-focused stories: founder's personal experience story (t=2.17, p<.05), craftsmanship story (t=2.53, p<.05), and eco-friendly story (t=2.06, p<.05). Founder's personal experience story was significantly perceived as intended rather than an attribute-focused story (t=5.13, p<.001). Furthermore, the mean score of craftsmanship story was higher than attribute-focused story (t=5.20, p<.01). The eco-friendly story also had a significantly higher mean score than attribute-focused story (t=5.20, p<.001). Thus, the manipulation checks for video stimuli verified that all four videos had been created as intended.

Manipulation checks for written information were also necessary before testing the hypotheses as shown in Table 4.7. For Study 1, the mean score for underdog was higher than top-dog background information in the independent t-test (t=4.10, p<.001). For Study 2, three brand levels were compared using one-way ANOVA and further compared through Tukey HSD. The mean score of high-end brand level scenario was higher than mid-end scenario ($M_{high\text{-}mid}$ = 1.07, p<.001). Furthermore, the mean score of mid-end scenario was higher than low-end scenario ($M_{mid\text{-}low}$ = .82, p<.05). For Study 3, the mean score of craftsmanship story was higher

than attribute-focused story (t=5.20, p<.01). The eco-friendly story also showed a significantly higher mean score for high aesthetic judgements low aesthetic judgements (t=2.26, p<.05). Thus, the manipulation checks verified that written stimuli were perceived as intended.

Table 4.6. Results of Manipulation Checks for Video Stimuli

Video watched	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Attribute	Attribute	53	5.55	.91	2.17	.032*
	Founder's	52	4.95	1.81		
	Attribute	53	5.55	.91	2.53	.013*
	Craftsmanship	52	4.98	1.54		
	Attribute	53	5.55	.91	2.06	.042*
	Eco-friendly	51	5.08	1.38		
Founder	Founder's	52	5.35	1.52	5.13	.000***
	Attribute	53	3.70	1.76		
Craftsmanship	Craftsmanship	52	5.38	.97	5.20	.000**
	Attribute	53	3.99	1.67		
Eco-friendly	Eco-friendly	51	5.71	1.17	5.20	.000***
	Attribute	53	4.14	1.82		

Note. *<.05, **<.01, ***<.001

Table 4.7. Results of Manipulation Checks for Written Information

Hypothesis	Group					
		N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
H2&H2a	Underdog	37	5.63	1.03	4.10	.000***
	Top-dog	35	4.45	1.40		
		N	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
H4	High-end brand level (A)	39	6.09	.98	20.415	.000***
	Mid-end brand level (B)	31	5.02	1.36		
	Low-end brand level (C)	36	4.20	1.50		
		N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
H7	High aesthetic judgements	41	5.01	1.39	2.26	.028*
	Low aesthetic judgements	33	4.14	1.85		

Note. *<.05, **<.01, ***<.001
A, B, and C denote post-hoc results.

Normality Assumption Checks

Prior to conducting the data analysis, the existence of outliers, the normality of variables, and the homogeneity for ANCOVA were assessed. First, outliers were detected by calculating

Mahalanobis D2s measure, which is a multivariate assessment of observation across a set of variables (Hair et al., 2019). The results revealed that there are no outliers as the probability of Mahalanobis D^2/df was evaluated as sufficiently conservative, yielding a value over .001 (Hair et al., 2019). Second, Q-Q plots presented that the data was normally distributed as the plots displayed linear shapes (Hair et al., 2019). Third, prior to ANCOVA tests, homogeneity of variance should be conducted. Levene's tests results confirmed that all pair groups compared in each study had equal variances across groups, yielding p-values greater than .05. Overall, the data were deemed appropriate to test the hypotheses.

Results of Hypotheses Testing

Between-subjects ANCOVA was performed to test all hypotheses except H2a. In H1, H3, and H6, ANCOVA assessed the effects of the independent variables (i.e., story types) on the dependent variable (i.e., brand trust). In H2, H4, H5, and H7, ANCOVA tested the effects of the independent variables (i.e., underdog/top-dog positioning, consumer individualism/collectivism, brand level, perceived aesthetic judgements) on the dependent variable (i.e., brand trust). H2a was tested through moderation regression in which the interaction of the independent variable (i.e., underdog/top-dog positioning) and the moderator (i.e., perceived financial hardship during the pandemic) was regressed on the dependent variable (i.e., brand trust). For all hypotheses, age and education level were controlled.

Study 1: Founder's Personal Experience Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Study 1 (H1, H2, and H2a) examined the effect of different types of stories (i.e., founder's personal experience story versus attribute-focused story) on consumers' brand trust based on construal level theory. H1 in particular hypothesized that the founder's personal experience story would create a greater brand trust than attribute-focused storytelling. For this

purpose, ANCOVA was performed to compare the mean difference between brand trust driven by the two story types with covariates of age and education level. Table 4.8 shows an insignificant difference between the story types ($M_{founder}$ = 4.93, $M_{attribute}$ = 4.57, $F_{(1,104)}$=1.60, p=.21); hence, H1 was not supported.

Table 4.8. Study 1: ANCOVA Results Testing H1

Story Type	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*n*	
Founder's personal experience	4.93	4.90	1.36	52	
Attribute-focused	4.57	4.59	1.09	53	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.020	1	.00	.00	.99
Education level	3.59	1	3.59	2.39	.16
Story type	2.39	1	2.39	1.60	.21

H2 proposed that founder's personal experience story with the brand's underdog brand background would leads to a greater brand trust than the founder's personal experience story with a top-dog brand background. An ANCOVA was conducted to compare the mean difference between brand trust differed by underdog/top-dog brand background within founder's personal experience story. Table 4.9 presents that the result is insignificant ($M_{underdog}$ = 4.88, $M_{top\text{-}dog}$ = 4.59, $F_{(1,71)}$=2.13, p=.15), not supporting H2.

Table 4.9. Study 1: ANCOVA Results Testing H2

Brand Background in Founder's personal experience story	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*n*	
Underdog	4.88	4.90	.98	37	
Top-dog	4.59	4.57	.89	35	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.12	1	.12	.14	.971
Education level	4.26	1	4.26	5.12	.03
Brand background	1.77	1	1.77	2.13	.15

H2a tested the moderation effect of consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic on H2. H2a hypothesized that consumers' perceived financial hardship during the

pandemic would positively moderate the effect of founder's personal experience story and the brand's underdog/top-dog background on brand trust such that the relationship would be stronger among consumers with higher perception of financial hardship. Regression analysis with a moderator was performed. Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic was mean-centered to avoid multicollinearity when analyzing. Multicollinearity was assessed through the VIF (variance inflation factor) value, and the value for all variables and the interaction terms was under the cutoff of 10 (Har et al., 2010). Income level was controlled to observe the influence of the specific pandemic period along with age and education level.

Below three regression equations denote the effect of H2 and H2a with interaction terms between the independent (i.e., brand background) and moderating variable (i.e., perceived financial hardship during the pandemic). The three control variables (i.e., age, education level, income level) were also included.

Model 1: $Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2L + b_3M + b_4N$
Model 2: $Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2L + b_3M + b_4N + b_5Z$
Model 3: $Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2L + b_3M + b_4N + b_5Z + b_6XZ$
Y = dependent variable (i.e., brand trust)
X = independent variable (i.e., brand background)
Z = moderator variable (i.e., perceived financial hardship during the pandemic)
XZ = interaction between independent (i.e., brand background) and moderator variable (i.e., perceived financial hardship during the pandemic)
b_0 = intercept
$b_1, b_2, b_3, b_4, b_5, b_6$ = regression coefficient
L, M, N = control variables (i.e., age, education level, income level)

Table 4.10 summarizes the statistic results. H2a was not supported because the significant *F* change between Model 2 and Model 3 was not significant (*F* change = .004, *p*=.95).

Table 4.10. Study1: Regression Results Testing H2a

Independent variable	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Model 1				
Brand background (underdog vs. top-dog)	-.31	.24	-1.30	.20
Age	.01	.02	.56	.58
Education level	-.19	.08	-2.27	.03*
Income level	.01	.07	.11	.92
R^2=.10, F-value=1.76, p-value=.15				
Model 2				
Brand background (underdog vs. top-dog)	-.38	.24	-1.56	.12
Age	.01	.02	.49	.63
Education level	-.20	.08	-2.43	.02*
Income level	.04	.08	.50	.62
Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic	.10	.08	1.32	.19
R^2=.12, F-value=1.77, p-value=.13, F change= 1.73, Sig. F change=.19				
Model 3				
Brand background (underdog vs. top-dog)	-.38	.23	-1.54	.13
Age	.01	.02	.49	.63
Education level	-.20	.09	-2.40	.02*
Income level	.04	.08	.50	.62
Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic	.11	.22	.50	.62
Brand background * Perceived financial hardship	-.01	.15	-.06	.95
R^2=.12, F-value=1.45, p-value=.21, F change= .004, Sig. F change=.95				

Note. Dependent variable: Brand trust, Control variables: age, education level, income

Study 2: Craftsmanship Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Study 2 analyzed the effects of different story types (i.e., craftsmanship story versus attribute-focused story) on consumers' brand trust. Age and education level were also incorporated as covariates. H3 proposed that a craftsmanship story would lead to higher brand trust than attribute-focused storytelling. The ANCOVA analysis presented in Table 4.11 indicates that the mean score of brand trust did not significantly differ from that of craftsmanship story and attribute-focused story ($M_{craftsmanship}$ = 4.89, $M_{attribute}$ = 4.57, $F_{(1,104)}$=2.00, p=.16).

Table 4.11. Study 2: ANCOVA Results Testing H3

Story Type	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*N*	
Craftsmanship	4.89	4.88	1.03	52	
Attribute-focused	4.57	4.58	1.09	53	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.35	1	.35	.31	.58
Education level	.42	1	.42	.36	.55
Story type	2.29	1	2.29	2.00	.16

H4 postulated that a craftsmanship story with a perceived brand level would be positively related to brand trust. Based on the ANCOVA results (see Table 4.12), it can be concluded that the mean brand trust was not significantly different by high-end and mid-end brand level (M_{high} = 4.63, M_{mid} = 4.63, $F_{(1,69)}$ =.06, p =.98). Thus, H4 was rejected.

Table 4.12. Study2: ANCOVA Results Testing H4

Brand Level in Craftsmanship story	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*n*	
High-end	4.63	4.66	1.08	39	
Mid-end	4.63	4.59	1.16	31	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.02	1	.02	.01	.91
Education level	.83	1	.83	.66	.42
Brand level	.07	1	.07	.06	.98

H5 was posited to compare brand trust between collectivist consumers and individualist consumers when a craftsmanship story was exposed. As shown in Table 4.13, ANCOVA was performed, and it was concluded that mean brand trust was significantly greater for collectivist consumers than individualist consumers ($M_{collectivism}$ = 5.07, $M_{individualism}$= 4.11, $F_{(1,69)}$= 15.30, p<.001). Hence, H5 was accepted.

Table 4.13. Study2: ANCOVA Results Testing H5

Individualism/Collectivism in Craftsmanship story	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*n*	
Collectivism	5.07	5.09	1.02	38	
Individualism	4.11	4.09	.97	32	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.18	1	.23	.18	.67
Education level	.02	1	.01	.02	.89
Individualism/Collectivism	15.72	1	15.72	15.30	.000***

Note. ***p<.001

Study 3: Eco-Friendly Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Study 3 assessed the effects of different story types (i.e., eco-friendly story versus attribute-focused story) on brand trust. Age and education level were included as covariates for Study 1 and Study 2. H6 hypothesized that an eco-friendly story would evoke higher brand trust than attribute-focused storytelling. Table 4.14 presents the ANCOVA results. There is a significant mean difference between eco-friendly and attribute-focused storytelling in leading brand trust ($M_{eco\text{-}friendly}$ = 5.00, $M_{attribute}$= 4.57, $F_{(1,104)}$=4.72, p<.05), which supports H6.

Table 4.14. Study3: ANCOVA Results Testing H6

Story Type	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*n*	
Eco-friendly	5.00	5.02	1.11	51	
Attribute-focused	4.57	4.55	1.09	53	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.05	1	.05	.04	.97
Education level	3.25	1	3.25	2.71	.15
Story type	5.65	1	5.65	4.72	.03*

Note. *p<.05

H7 posited that brand trust would be higher when consumers perceived high aesthetic judgments than low aesthetic judgments about a brand's products with an eco-friendly story. The ANCOVA results are summarized in Table 4.15 and confirm that high aesthetic judgments

significantly lead to greater brand trust than low aesthetic ($M_{high\ aesthetic} = 5.10$, $M_{low\ aesthetic} = 4.22$, $F_{(1,73)}=5.95$, $p<.05$). Therefore, H7 was accepted.

Table 4.15 Study3: ANCOVA Results Testing H7

Product Aesthetic Judgments in Eco-friendly story	Purchase Intention				
	Observed Mean	*Adjusted Mean*	*SD*	*n*	
High aesthetic	5.10	5.05	1.14	41	
Low aesthetic	4.22	4.29	1.40	33	
Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Age	.36	1	.36	.22	.64
Education level	3.34	1	3.34	2.09	.15
Product aesthetic judgments	9.49	1	9.49	5.95	.02*

Note. *$p<.05$

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

To summarize, three out of eight hypotheses were supported. Table 4.16 provides the summary of these findings with the statistical analysis. Overall, in Study 1, no hypotheses were accepted. In Study 2, H5 was accepted. In Study 3, H6 and H7 were accepted.

Table 4.16. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

	Hypothesis	Independent variable	Interaction	Analysis	Results
Study 1	H1	Founder's personal experience vs. Attribute focused	-	ANCOVA	Rejected
	H2		Underdog vs. Top-dop brand background	ANCOVA	Rejected
	H2a		Perceived financial hardship during the pandemic	Regression	Rejected
Study 2	H3	Craftsmanship vs. Attribute focused	-	ANCOVA	Rejected
	H4		High-end vs. Mid-end brand level	ANCOVA	Rejected
	H5		Consumer Individualism/Collectivism	ANCOVA	Accepted*
Study 3	H6	Eco-friendly vs. Attribute focused	-	ANCOVA	Accepted*
	H7		High vs. Low product aesthetic judgments	ANCOVA	Accepted*

Note. Dependent variable: Brand trust

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter explains the summary of findings from each study (Studies 1, 2, and 3) and discusses them considering relevant theories and literature. Based on the discussion, theoretical and practical implications are presented. Finally, the research limitations and future study suggestions are discussed.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of different brand story types on consumers' brand trust for small fashion businesses with relevant brand, product, or consumer factors that likely influence the effects of stories. Particular, the differences between attribute-focused story and three different contents of identity-focused story in eliciting brand trust were emphasized. Furthermore, this study investigated the influence of relevant brand, product, or consumer factors that would affect the storytelling with respect to brand trust. A total of eight hypotheses (H1–H7) were developed in three experimental studies (Studies 1–3). Based on construal level theory, Study 1 examined the founder's personal experience story that would bring higher brand trust than attribute-focused story. Based on the underdog effect, the brand's underdog/top-dog background and consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic were included as interactions that would influence the storytelling. The signaling theory served as a basis of Study 2 and Study 3. Study 2 investigated the influence of the craftsmanship story on brand trust and compared it with that of attribute-focused story. Brand level and consumer individualism/collectivism were incorporated as interactions. In Study 3, eco-friendly story was assumed to garner greater brand trust than attribute-focused story and further, with the consideration of product aesthetic judgements.

A total of 424 usable responses were obtained to test the eight hypotheses. The respondents were females aged between 18 and 40, residing in the U.S., and they were recruited and administered a survey via Qualtrics. The findings of Study 1 revealed that all three hypotheses testing founder's personal experience story and relevant interactions were not supported. That is, there was no statistical difference between founder's personal experience story and attribute-focused story in evoking brand trust (H1). The underdog/top-dog brand background in founder's personal experience story also did not differ in terms of increasing brand trust (H2). Further, the level of financial hardship perceived by consumers during the pandemic did not change the relationship between the underdog/top-dog brand background and brand trust (H2a). Study 2 had three hypotheses, and one of them was supported. Brand storytelling with craftsmanship content was not more effective in leading to higher brand trust than attribute-focused story content (H3). Moreover, the craftsmanship story content did not show differences in high-end/mid-end brand level in terms of brand trust (H4). However, the consumer factor was relevant. That is, collectivist consumers showed higher brand trust than individualist consumers when viewing craftsmanship story content (H5). All hypotheses in Study 3 were supported. Eco-friendly story content was more effective to bring brand trust than attribute-focused story (H6). Furthermore, when consumers perceived the products as highly aesthetic, they trusted the brand more than when the products were judged as less aesthetic (H7). These findings are discussed further in the next section.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the specific findings from each study (Study 1–Study 3) are discussed in relation/comparison to existing theories and relevant literature. In each study, one example of an identity-focused story and an attribute-focused story were compared to investigate whether the

former can lead to higher brand trust. Furthermore, brand, product, or consumer factors that would encourage or inhibit brand trust with each identity-focused story were investigated. Although not all hypotheses were accepted, this study discovered some patterns in the findings. As the dependent variable was brand trust, the stories more relevant to personal preferences were found to be insignificant in leading to brand trust (H1-H4). Instead, story and factors beyond personal concern or preference (e.g., eco-friendly story) showed a significant impact on evoking brand trust (H5-H7). The details are explained as follows.

Study 1: Founder's Personal Experience Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Built on construal level theory (CLT) (Trope & Liberman, 2003), Study 1 examined the effects of founder's personal experience story on brand trust compared to attribute-focused story (H1). The literature suggests that when people perceive an object as psychologically close, they have more concreate ideas and behaviors regarding it, while psychological distal distance makes people have abstract ideas and behaviors (Trope & Liberman, 2003). People feel proximal to similar others and distant to dissimilar others; they exhibit concrete ideas and behaviors to psychologically similar others compared to dissimilar others (Liviatan et al., 2008). As such, this study speculated that the founder's personal experience story might be perceived as similar compared to attribute-focused story. This is because the brand shares a story on how the founder experienced difficulties and solved them through products and services instead of simply narrating product attributes that might lead to feeling distant, leading to higher brand trust (H1). However, our findings demonstrate that there is no difference between founder's personal experience story and attribute-focused story with respect to brand trust.

This finding can be argued through another consideration that causes psychological distance in construal level theory. Psychological distance also depends on how an event is likely

to occur (i.e., hypothetical distance) as well as how similar an object is (Trope & Liberman, 2010). That is, the discrepancy between the finding and the previous research may be because of the possibility that an individual would hypothetically experience the same issue the founder experienced. For example, in the case of Study 1, the video contained a story of the founders' concerns about limited clothing size in the marketplace and their attempts to solve this issue by offering diverse, size-inclusive clothing. Therefore, people feel closer to an object when the events surrounding it seem more likely to occur (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Thus, consumers who are more likely to share the size concern and experience the limited size offering issue may feel closer to the brand and have higher brand trust. Accordingly, it can be concluded that not only the founder's personal experience story but also its relevance and likelihood of occurrence for each individual would influence brand trust over attribute-focused story, evoking closer distance to the brand (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Guided by the underdog effect (Simon, 1954), Study 1 also explored whether it exists in the context of the founder's personal experience story. This study hypothesized that people feel greater empathy toward an underdog brand over a top-dog brand (Delgado-Ballester, 2020; Vandello et al., 2007) because such a brand with an underdog background is believed to have overcome struggles. This perception might also lead to higher trust in the brand (H2). However, the results of the experiments revealed that there is no difference between underdog and top-dog brand background in evoking brand trust.

Such a discovery is noteworthy because it suggests that a response might not always be influenced by the underdog effect: brand trust. That is, one possible reason of the conflicting results with the previous studies could be the inclusion of the dependent variable, brand trust. Previous studies provide substantial support to the underdog effect in various consumer

responses, such as brand preference (Kao, 2019; Paharia et al., 2011), purchase intention (Paharia et al., 2011), purchase interest (Paharia et al., 2014), and consumer-brand identification (Delgado-Ballester, 2020). However, to the authors' knowledge, studies that examined the underdog effect on brand trust in the branding setting are limited. By definition, brand trust is consumers' confidence that the brand is competent (Herbst et al., 2012), reliable in performing its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), and credible to satisfy value promises (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Previous studies have explored certain situations in which underdog effects might be not effective (Paharia et al., 2011; Tang & Tsang, 2020). Paharia et al. (2011) argued that sufficient resources in the top-dog brand positioning could imply that the company can deliver products and services that a consumer demands, while lack of resources in the underdog company could mean incompetence to do so. Given this rationale, the top-dog story offered along with the founder's personal experience story video in Study 1 might have given the impression that the brand is competent and can solve the problem and successfully market products because of sufficient resources. Again, simultaneously, given the rationale of the underdog effect, an underdog background might evoke consumers' empathy and credibility that the founder shared the same problem as the consumers but successfully marketed the products through hard-work. The authors presume that these two contradictory rationales can be further explained by possible mediators. One study by Delgado-Ballester (2020) seems to support this idea. The previous study found that underdog brand storytelling causes consumer brand identification to be higher than top-dog brand storytelling only through the story readers' empathy. The underdog brand storytelling did not cause consumer brand identification without the mediator, empathy. In other words, a consumer's emotion fully mediates the relationship between underdog/top-dog brand storytelling and their response. Therefore, this study expects

that the underdog brand background in Study 1 could increase brand trust if a relevant mediator were included. For instance, if empathy, the core mechanism of the underdog effect (Delgado-Ballester, 2020), were to be included as a mediator, the underdog background could enhance brand trust.

Extended by H2, H2a expected that consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic would moderate H2 such that higher perceived financial hardship would lead to greater brand trust. Previous studies have found that the underdog effect is not always applicable depending on some consumer characteristics (e.g., Paharia et al., 2011; Tang & Tsang, 2020). One such characteristic how an individual perceives oneself: underdog versus top-dog (Paharia et al., 2011). An individual who perceives herself or himself as an underdog has higher brand preference with underdog positioning over top-dog positioning. Based on this finding, this study speculated that the perceived financial hardship during the pandemic, which would make an individual feel as an underdog, would have higher empathy. However, H2a was not supported.

More recently, researchers discovered additional characteristics and emotions that impact the effectiveness of the underdog effect (e.g., Kao, 2019; Tang & Tsang, 2020). Tang and Tsang (2020), particularly, revealed that an individual who believes he/she has a weak ability to gain desired outcomes and prevent undesired outcomes preferred underdog brand positioning over top-dog positioning. However, an individual who considered oneself had a strong ability to control the self preferred neither underdog nor top-dog positioning. One's perceived financial hardship during the pandemic is rather a temporary situation that can impact the individual to self-identify as an underdog. In Paharia et al.'s (2011) study, self-identity as an underdog or top-dog was evaluated in terms of general timeline rather than a specific or temporary period. Hence, in accordance with Tang and Tsang (2020), consumers in H2a might be less influenced by

underdog/top-dog brand background because they might consider the financial hardship during the pandemic to be a temporary situation that can be overcome.

Study 2: Craftsmanship Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

Based on the signaling theory (Spence, 1974), Study 2 investigated the role of craftsmanship story on brand trust compared to attribute-focused story. The study hypothesized that craftsmanship story would lead to higher brand trust than attribute-focused story because the former sent a strong signal of brand uniqueness and exclusivity among many small businesses which are experiencing low familiarity and renown (H3). Though, it was revealed that consumers' brand trust was not significantly different between craftsmanship story and attribute-focused story.

Therefore, the results are inconsistent to previous research that a craftsmanship story video of a luxury brand is more effective to evoke brand experience and perceived luxury than a video only featuring the product (Lee & Youn, 2020). One possible explanation of the outcome is that craftsmanship is not an essential brand feature of small businesses unlike luxury brands. Thus, consumers' personal preference of craftsmanship could impact the results. As found in the pilot study of this research, small businesses feature different types of studies, such as founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story. Craftsmanship by definition, refers to especially offering unique and exclusive products (Bergadaà, 2008; Lee & Youn, 2020). In terms of uniqueness, the extent of the need for uniqueness differs with each individual (Snyder & Fromkin, 1997). Some people desire to be more distinguished from others, while some people want to be as similar as possible to others (Ruvio, 2008; Snyder & Fromkin, 1997). The need for uniqueness also impacts consumption behaviors such that consumers who desire to be more distinctive are likely to prefer unique products relative to others (Ruvio, 2008). Accordingly, this

study argues that each individual's degree of the need to be unique would be associated with preference for craftsmanship story.

In H4, it was anticipated that a high-end brand level would increase consumers' brand trust better than mid-end brand level with respect to craftsmanship story. Such a prediction was based on the reasoning that the cues of craftsmanship storytelling and the cues of high-end brand would be well-matched and consistent, arousing higher trustworthiness. However, the hypothesis was not supported, implying that there was no difference between high-end and mid-end brand level within craftsmanship story with respect to brand trust. This contradiction may be justified by the features of the signals. Based on previous literature, signals have strength so some signals are more easily identified by receivers than others (Connelly et al., 2011; Lampel & Shamisie, 2000). Given this reasoning, there could be stronger and weaker signals in Study 2. Craftsmanship might have issued a stronger cue, while brand level may have served as a weak signal. More specifically, as craftsmanship already provides the cues of high quality, exclusivity, and uniqueness of products (Bergadaà, 2008; Lee & Youn, 2020), the cues offered by brand level would not be as influential as the signals of craftsmanship. Thus, the high-end and mid-end brand level scenarios did not display discrepancies in evoking brand trust.

The notion of individualism/collectivism in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1980; 2001) served as a basis for H5. H5 proposed that collectivistic consumers would trust the brand more than individualistic consumers when a craftsmanship story is provided. The experiments supported this hypothesis. This finding is also in accordance with the previous literature. Individualism/collectivism influences the prioritization of different values; for instance, collectivistic consumers put more value on traditions than individualistic consumers (Schwartz, 1990). Thus, collectivistic consumers respect and accept the traditionally preserved

customs and ideas (Schwartz, 1990), such as craftsmanship. That is, collectivistic consumers in Study 2 were more motivated to have brand trust than individualistic consumers as the story was related to traditions.

Study 3: Eco-Friendly Story versus Attribute-Focused Story

While Study 1 and Study 2 focused on storytelling relevant to personal concerns or preference, Study 3 focused on the storytelling beyond personal relevance. Based on signaling theory (Spence, 1974), Study 3 investigated whether identity-focused story with environmental sustainability content can be a signal for societal concerns and result in brand trust. We hypothesized that a story that conveys brand identity with eco-friendly behaviors can bring higher brand trust than attribute-focused story (H6). After manipulating each story, it was found that consumers exhibited greater brand trust with the eco-friendly story than attribute-focused story. This finding agrees with the literature that the brands performing with a concern for environmental sustainability are considered more benevolent, competent, and dedicated to solving and caring about environmental issues (Punyatoya, 2014). Thus, consumers had a higher confidence in brands that exhibit green behaviors and that are perceived to be well aware of environmental concerns. Therefore, in our research context, consumers strongly trusted the brand that showed environmental awareness and behaviors through the video, signaling a sense of responsibility toward the environment.

Furthermore, this study incorporated the perception of the product's aesthetic judgements in the eco-friendly story. H7 proposed that consumers would trust a brand when the products are perceived as highly aesthetic rather than low aesthetic with respect to the eco-friendly story. The rationale was validated by previous literature in which one of the crucial factors in purchasing apparel for women was aesthetic features, such as clothing color, style, and fabric (Eckman et al.,

1990). Thus, H7 predicted that the aesthetic judgments are still important in eco-friendly apparel. The finding of the study provided empirical support for this prediction. This is consistent with previous studies. Cho et al. (2015) found that consumers hesitate to purchase eco-friendly apparel products due to limited offerings in terms of style. Han and Chung (2014) also revealed that consumers had negative attitudes toward and were dissatisfied at an apparel product if it was unsatisfactory in color, design, fit, and variety despite the item's eco-friendliness. In the context of this study, consumers who perceived the products as high aesthetic trusted the brand more than low aesthetic.

Summary of Discussion

To summarize, the findings of the three studies (Study 1–3) seem to generate patterns that 1) the stories and factors based on personal relevance might not be effective enough to evoke brand trust (H1-H4), while 2) the story beyond personal preference or concern might evoke brand trust (H5-H7). This could be because of the characteristics of the dependent variable, brand trust. Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence that the brand can respect and satisfy their demands with competence (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Doney & Connon, 1997; Herbst et al., 2012). Simultaneously, it incorporates an extensive range of ability beyond the personal interest of consumers such as socially shared goals (Fatma et al., 2015; Gilal et al., 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2019). For example, the ability to encompass socially valued aspects also influences brand trust (Fatma et al., 2015; Gilal et al., 2020; Khan & Fatma, 2019). Khan and Fatma (2019) especially demonstrated that consumers strongly trust companies that value societal goals in their strategy. Hence, founder's personal experience story (H1) and craftsmanship story (H3–H4) that are more relevant to each individual's concern or preference might show weaker evidence in relation to brand trust. Similarly, underdog/top-dog brand

positioning (H2) and consumers' perceived financial hardship during the pandemic (H2a) are considered in the boundary of individual consumer level. On the contrary, the eco-friendly story encompassing societal concerns resulted in higher brand trust (H6–7). The patterns found in this study can be further investigated in future studies.

Implications

The findings of this study offer meaningful theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretical implications overcome research gaps and contribute to the existing theories, and managerial implications explain what the findings suggest for branding and marketing practitioners of small companies in terms of brand storytelling.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the existing theories and literature in five ways. First, this study explored identity-focused versus attribute-focused aspects through a pilot study and subsequent experiments. While previous literature on storytelling primarily focused on delivering a story (i.e., story delivery), this study explored story contents. In particular, previous studies were devoted to identifying the impacts of storytellers, story receivers, and format on consumer responses and there was limited attempt to research various story contents beyond underdog stories to increase brand awareness and attract consumers. Therefore, the discovery of two different types (i.e., identity-focused and attribute-focused stories) through the pilot study and literature review addressed a gap in brand storytelling research.

Second, this study provides an understanding of how a brand identity can be constructed and brand trust enhanced through storytelling by extending existing theories and empirically testing three different story contents of identity-focused story and attribute-focused story. Previous literature on storytelling has considered storytelling as one of many communication

methods to bring various benefits instead of as an identity-building tool. The previous studies investigated, for example, attitudinal changes (Hamelin et al., 2020), purchase intention (Lee & Youn, 2020; Pahari et al., 2011; 2014), and brand preference (Kao, 2019). There was lack of research on storytelling as an identity-builder in the initial stage of brand lifespan and growing trust. This research adds more knowledge to this research gap, applying construal level theory and signaling theory. Especially, while signaling theory has been applied extensively in reasoning various marketing and branding concepts (Connelly et al., 2011), research on story as a signal to be conveyed is scarce. Despite rejecting some hypotheses, the study found a basis for future study to investigate story contents for building brand identity with related theories.

Third, this research contributed to investigating several factors that might influence storytelling and brand trust. This approach adds a novel perspective to storytelling studies because past research shows a lack of identifying how storytelling can be more effectively delivered with credibility and trustworthiness. Accordingly, this study incorporated different factors relevant to each storytelling that might enhance or discourage brand trust through each story. The study discovered that consumer individualism/collectivism interacts with craftsmanship story in increasing brand trust, and perceived product aesthetic levels interact with eco-friendly story. Such findings about consumer and product factors along with brand storytelling empirically highlights why and how stories are more or less credible and reliable in different situations. Further, these findings open opportunities to incorporate other possible factors.

Fourth, the literature on brand storytelling is extended to the context of small fashion businesses. Most previous studies on brand storytelling center on large or renowned companies. While a few studies have observed small business storytelling, they mainly concentrate on their

founders' underdog stories (e.g., Kao, 2019; Pahari et al., 2011; 2014). This study, however, incorporates other stories that small business can use to build brand identity, thereby providing additional insights for current academic literature on small businesses.

Finally, the utilization of video storytelling opens a new avenue for future studies. Although video storytelling has gained significant popularity across different genders and generations, there is insufficient research in brand storytelling through videos. The current trend entails using videos more than any other methods, videos being the ideal format to disperse a story (Dayan, 2018). Video posting can induce viewers' engagement more than texts or photos on social media (Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Susarla et al., 2012). Through empirical data, this study confirmed that videos can serve as storytelling tools as long as they contain a character, a plot, a climax, and an outcome (van Laer et al., 2014). Through its attempt to test video storytelling, this study contributes to bridging the research gap.

Managerial Implications

Practically, first, the results of the pilot study offered an exploratory insight on story contents delivered by small fashion companies. More specifically, the investigation of three different story contents of identity-focused story—founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story—provided an understanding of the stories told by small fashion companies to build distinctive points-of-difference. The stories are embedded within each brand website and social media in the form of videos as well as written information (e.g., About Us section) and pictures. These stories build brands' identity such that consumers can more easily visualize their unique and distinctive features than only through comprehensive integration and communication of brand messages. Hence, this study provides an insight to small business practitioners as to how stories can be delivered to construct a brand identity that is distinguished from competitors.

Second, the results of the main effects of the three studies suggest that a story that incorporates a wide range of concerns and interests beyond personal relevance can increase brand trust. While the eco-friendly story led to higher brand trust over attribute-focused story (H6), there was no evidence that founder's personal experience story and craftsmanship story did (H1 and H3). In the discussion section, this study argued that this is because of the nature of brand trust which does not limit its ability to satisfy personal and individual level needs. In building brand trust in the initial stages of the small business, societal factors would be more important rather than personal preference. Therefore, companies aiming for higher brand trust are recommended to address the concerns and interests of shared goals rather than personal needs to appeal to as many consumers as possible. If companies' main goals are other than brand trust, such as purchase intention or brand preference, other stories might be more effective or relevant.

Third, continuing Study 3, the discovery of product aesthetic judgments as an interaction in eco-friendly story recommends that eco-friendly products need to be sufficiently aesthetic to appeal to consumers. Aligned with previous studies, this study found that consumers trust a brand less when the items are not aesthetic even if they are environmentally friendly. Thus, it is advised that companies creating eco-friendly products should not forgo the style, design, color, and fit of apparel.

Fourth, consumer individualism/collectivism was found to be a factor affecting craftsmanship story on brand trust (H5). Although the results of H3 revealed that craftsmanship story is not more effective to make consumers trust a brand than attribute-focused story, the H5 finding suggests that there could be some situations in which the craftsmanship story is appealing. As collectivistic consumers trusted a brand more than individualistic consumers, practitioners who are targeting regions with more collectivism culture than individualism culture

are recommended to use craftsmanship story. Similarly, storytellers can consider other cultural dimensions by Hofstede (1980) or factors that might help the storytelling delivery be more effectively and attractive to consumers.

Fifth, based on the finding that the moderator of underdog effect was not effective on brand trust in founder's personal experience story, this study suggests that companies need to wisely set their underdog positioning. Unlike previous studies that show underdog stories increasing various consumer responses, this study revealed that it might be not a successful tool to build brand trust. Brand trust is important for small companies for brand loyalty and further long-term success. Practitioners should understand that the underdog information can be interpreted as the brand having limited resources, while top-dog positioning can imply sufficient capitals to provide products. Essentially, the empathy associated with the underdog story might not be powerful enough to lead consumers' positive reactions. Accordingly, companies need to carefully address their underdog positioning if they aim to make the brand more credible and reliable.

Finally, companies are recommended to convey stories through videos. Small fashion companies often face deficient resources and skills to create technology-based advertising. As an early attempt to employ video storytelling, this study created simple videos by downloading short clips from copyright-free websites, edited the clips into a story format, and inserted text narrations and background music. Then, the video was posted on YouTube to direct research participants to the videos through a link provided within the surveys. Although this method was simple and required little money, skill, and relatively less time, the videos still included story contents and were perceived as the researchers intended. As such, we believe that we presented a feasible way to create video storytelling for small companies.

Limitations and Future Studies

The limitations of this study suggest directions for future studies. First, while the study selected and explored three different story contents of identity-focused stories – founder story, craftsmanship story, and eco-friendly story – through a pilot study and experiments, there might exist other story contents used in small fashion companies to build brand identities. For example, other concerns on societal issues and ethical behaviors can help build brand identity—e.g., Everlane (n.d.-b). Everlane builds its brand identity by disclosing transparent information about its supply chain and ethical working conditions (Everlane, n.d.-b). Future studies can observe whether other stories containing societal issues can increase brand trust better than attribute-focused stories.

Second, unlike the research framework predicted, founder's personal experience story and craftsmanship story did not produce any significant results in evoking brand trust over attribute-focused story. As discussed earlier, these results might be related to the possible covariates that intervened in the relationship between each independent variable and brand trust. As mentioned in the discussion section, people feel closer to an object when they perceive the events surrounding it more likely to occur (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Thus, the covariate of 'how likely the same concern the founder had occurs for each respondent' could be included in Study 1. For the craftsmanship story, a covariate of the need for uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008; Snyder & Fromkin, 1997) or personal preference to craftsmanship story can be incorporated and measured in future studies.

Third, similar to the second limitation, the underdog effect was not found in brand trust in the context of storytelling. As discussed earlier, the authors suggest future studies to include possible mediators. For example, emotion (Delgado-Ballester, 2020) would mediate underdog

stories and competence, sincerity, or authenticity (Eggers et al., 2013; Sung & Kim, 2010) would mediate the top-dog stories. Collectively, this study supposes that the effectiveness of underdog/top-dog positioning might differ based on the mediator included.

Fourth, this study limited the storytelling to the stage of building brand awareness for small companies to be distinguished from other competitors. Brand storytelling can be presented at every stage of the brand's existence (Hall, 2019). Thus, further studies can observe how small companies can last for a long term by examining other dependent variables. Being distinguished from competitors might be not enough for long-term survival. Therefore, other benefits from storytelling, such as building a relationship with customers through active communication, might be tested as an outcome of storytelling. Other dependent variables more relevant to the mature stages of companies can be tested in future studies.

Fifth, future studies could investigate the tellers of video storytelling. Other tellers may represent customers/users better. Previous researchers have found that customer/user tellers provide more credibility to story receivers than founder/professional tellers (Hong et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2019; 2020; van Laer et al., 2019). Thus, future studies can compare the effectiveness of different story distributors and storytellers of the same video.

Sixth, the last limitation concerns the sample of the study – female consumers aged 18 to 40 and living in the U.S. The restriction of the sample to female participants was set because of two reasons: 1) the gender of story receivers is associated with the effectiveness of storytelling and 2) the products used in the stimuli are for female consumers. However, experimenting with male consumers is also suggested. YouTube is as popular among men as women, since 82 percent of U.S. male adults and 80 percent of female adults watch YouTube (Pew Research Center, 2021). Furthermore, there is a gender difference in response to storytelling. Similarly, the

age range of 18–40 was decided as individuals of this age are more familiar with technology than other generations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Vogels, 2019). However, recently, more and more people from older generations have also adopted technology and social media, such as YouTube (Cox, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2021). Hence, male consumers and consumers of other age ranges can be explored in the further research with respect to their responses in brand video storytelling.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB LETTER

Dear Gwia Kim:

Date: December 18, 2020
IRB Protocol 23673 has been assigned Exempt status
Title: Brand Storytelling for Small Fashion Business: What to Tell to Build Brand Identity
PI: Jin, Byoungho Ellie

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. Exempt d.2, d.3). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/submission-guidance/.
4. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding non-compliance here: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

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NCSU IRB Office

Please contact ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu if an official PDF approval letter with signature is required by your funding source.

Dear Gwia Kim:

Date: 02/09/2021

Project Title: Brand Storytelling for Small Fashion Business: What to Tell to Build Brand Identity

IRB#: 23673

PI: Jin, Byoungho Ellie

The renewal/amendment request for the project listed above has been approved in accordance with policy under 45 CFR 46. If your application was to amend your study protocol, and your study received expedited or full board review, this letter does NOT change the expiration date for your study. If you applied to renew your expedited or full board protocol, your new expiration date is shown above.

1. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. You must use the approved documents which have the status "approved" in the document viewer in the eIRB for your study.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation via amendment request.
4. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/irb-forms/
5. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding how to avoid non-compliance here: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf

Please let us know if you have any questions..

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NCSU IRB Office

Please contact ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu if an official PDF approval letter with signature is required by your funding source.

Appendix B

PRE-TEST

Exempt Survey Consent

You are being asked to complete a survey for research purposes. The survey is about brand storytelling for small fashion business. The survey will show you video storytelling by a small fashion brand and will ask questions about the video and the brand to explore how consumers respond to the story told by the video and to the brand. Completing this survey is voluntary and you can stop at any time by closing the window. Incomplete survey will result in the failure of receiving compensation.

You must be aged between 18 and 40, reside in the United States, and female to participate in this study.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this survey. You will receive a $US 0.5 for completing this survey. In order to receive full compensation for completing the survey, you must pass attention checks and enter a random code into the MTurk Hit window.

Please note that because you are participating in this research via MTurk, your participation will be listed on your MTurk profile. However, MTurk will not have access to your responses on the survey. Further, while we will have access to your MTurk ID, we will only use this information to pay you and then your ID will be deleted from our records and will no longer be associated with your responses.

If you have any questions about the survey itself, how it is implemented, or survey compensation, please contact Gwia Kim, 336-930-3195, gkim7@ncsu.edu or Dr. Byoungho Ellie Jin, 919-515-5977, bejin@ncsu.edu. Please reference study number 23673 when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out this confidential form online.

If you consent to complete this survey, please click "Yes I consent" button to see the survey.

Please indicate if you agree with the above consent form
- ○ Yes I consent
- ○ No I don't consent

Please select your gender.
- ○ Female
- ○ Male

Are you aged between 18-40?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

***I. Participants were shown and answered one of the four sets (storytelling video & questions) of the following:**

***1. Attribute-focused story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/X49FaDwoVgQ

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***2. Founder's personal experience story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/B5lhNRdTVvE

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***3. Craftsmanship story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/8E2VJU9dNvg

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***4. Eco-friendly story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/2wPno2XvLxE

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***II. Participants were shown one of the two underdog/top-dog brand backgrounds below and answered questions:**

***1. Underdog background**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

The women's clothing brand, Luna, started from the bottom and worked through their struggles.
The founders of Luna experienced a rough start with limited external resources but worked passionately despite their difficulty.
Their hard work and commitment bring their clothing to market successfully.

***2. Top-dog background**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

The women's clothing brand, Luna, started with few challenges and worked through no struggles.
The founders of Luna experienced a smooth start with a lot of external resources and worked effortlessly without difficulty.
Their resources and experiences bring their clothing to market successfully.

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The information includes a brand story having passion and determination	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information includes a brand story having external disadvantages	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand can be characterized as an underdog	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***III. Participants were shown one of the three brand levels below and answered questions:**

***1. High-end brand level**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

Luna is a women's clothing brand.
Luna offers a variety of high-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts.
Especially, Luna's popular items, jackets are sold at over $2,000.
The products of Luna are also sold through the high-end department stores, Bloomingdale and Nordstrom.

***2. mid-end brand level**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

Luna is a women's clothing brand.
Luna offers a variety of middle-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts.
Especially, Luna's popular items, jackets are sold at $150 to $250.
The products of Luna are also sold through the middle-end department stores, Macy's and Kohl's.

***3. Low-end brand level**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

Luna is a women's clothing brand.
Luna offers a variety of low-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts.
Luna's popular items, jackets, and coats are sold at under $50.
The products of Luna are also sold through the low-end retailer, Walmart.

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand is perceived as very prestigious	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is perceived to have high status	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is perceived to be very upscale	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Somewhat disagree to this statement.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***IV. Participants were shown one of the two customer reviews below and answered questions:**

***1. High aesthetic judgments review**

Please read the customer review of the Luna.

By a verified customer on 09/10/2020 (Size purchased: M) ★★★★★
Quality: Bad --Good –**Great** | Fit: Small --**True to Size** - Large
I purchased a few Luna pieces. The sweatshirts and skirts are all super soft and comfortable.
The materials are great. This sweatshirt is also soft, pretty and cute!
I like the color of this sweatshirt. It is adorable.

***2. High aesthetic judgments review**

Please read the customer review of the Luna.

By a verified customer on 09/10/2020 (Size purchased: M) ★★☆☆☆
Quality: **Bad** --Good –Great | Fit: **Small** --True to Size - Large
I purchased a few Luna pieces. The sweatshirts and skirts are neither soft nor comfortable.
I think the fabric is low-quality. This sweatshirt does not look good-
Originally the color was not bad, but it fades quickly-- which is disappointing.

Please indicate how much you felt about the products of the brand.
The brand is...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not attractive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Attractive
Not arousing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Arousing
Not beautiful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Beautiful
Ugly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Beautiful
Not elegant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Elegant
Not harmonious	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Harmonious

***V. Participants answered the following questions:**

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is predictable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is dependable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is truthful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is competent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand has integrity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is responsive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I rely on this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is an honest brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is safe	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The interest of the whole is more important than the interest of the individual	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The individual remains faithful to the group, even if it is difficult	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The success of the group is more important than individual success	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The good of the group is more important than the success of the individual	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have difficulty paying bills each month during the pandemic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have money left over at the end of the month during the pandemic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Age

Last earned education level

- ○ High school
- ○ Some college
- ○ University
- ○ Graduate
- ○ Doctoral degree
- ○ Professional degree

Annual income level

- ○ $19,999 or less
- ○ $20,000-34,999
- ○ $35,000-49,000
- ○ $50,000-64,999
- ○ $65,000-79,999
- ○ $80,000 and up

Location

- ○ West
- ○ Southwest
- ○ Midwest
- ○ Southeast
- ○ Northeast

Ethnicity

- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Others

Appendix C

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR MAIN EXPERIMENTS

MAIN EFFECTS – VIDEO STORYTELLING

Exempt Survey Consent

You are being asked to complete a survey for research purposes. The survey is about brand storytelling for small fashion business. The survey will show you video storytelling by a small fashion brand and will ask questions about the video and the brand to explore how consumers respond to the story told by the video and to the brand. Completing this survey is voluntary and you can stop at any time by closing the window. Incomplete survey will result in the failure of receiving compensation.

You must be aged between 18 and 40, reside in the United States, and female to participate in this study.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this survey. You will receive an incentive from your panel provider for completing this survey. In order to receive full compensation for completing the survey, you must pass attention checks and finish your survey.

If you have any questions about the survey itself, how it is implemented, or survey compensation, please contact Gwia Kim, 336-930-3195, gkim7@ncsu.edu or Dr. Byoungho Ellie Jin, 919-515-5977, bejin@ncsu.edu. Please reference study number 23673 when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out this confidential form online.

If you consent to complete this survey, please click “Yes I consent” button to see the survey.

Please indicate if you agree with the above consent form
- ○ Yes I consent
- ○ No I don't consent

Please select your gender.
- ○ Female
- ○ Male

Are you aged between 18-40?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

***I. Participants were shown and answered one of the four sets (storytelling video & questions) of the following:**

***1. Attribute-focused story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/X49FaDwoVgQ

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***2. Founder's personal experience story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/B5lhNRdTVvE

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***3. Craftsmanship story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/8E2VJU9dNvg

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***4. Eco-friendly story**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/2wPno2XvLxE

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***II. Participants answered the following questions:**

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is predictable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is dependable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is truthful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is competent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand has integrity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is responsive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I rely on this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is an honest brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is safe	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Age

Last earned education level

○ High school ○ Some college ○ University
○ Graduate ○ Doctoral degree ○ Professional degree

Annual income level

○ $19,999 or less ○ $20,000-34,999 ○ $35,000-49,000
○ $50,000-64,999 ○ $65,000-79,999 ○ $80,000 and up

Location

○ West ○ Southwest ○ Midwest
○ Southeast ○ Northeast

Ethnicity

○ White ○ Black or African American ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
○ Asian ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ○ Others

INTERACTION EFFECTS in FOUNDER'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE STORY

Exempt Survey Consent

You are being asked to complete a survey for research purposes. The survey is about brand storytelling for small fashion business. The survey will show you video storytelling by a small fashion brand and will ask questions about the video and the brand to explore how consumers respond to the story told by the video and to the brand. Completing this survey is voluntary and you can stop at any time by closing the window. Incomplete survey will result in the failure of receiving compensation.

You must be aged between 18 and 40, reside in the United States, and female to participate in this study.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this survey. You will receive an incentive from your panel provider for completing this survey. In order to receive full compensation for completing the survey, you must pass attention checks and finish your survey.

If you have any questions about the survey itself, how it is implemented, or survey compensation, please contact Gwia Kim, 336-930-3195, gkim7@ncsu.edu or Dr. Byoungho Ellie Jin, 919-515-5977, bejin@ncsu.edu. Please reference study number 23673 when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out this confidential form online.

If you consent to complete this survey, please click "Yes I consent" button to see the survey.

Please indicate if you agree with the above consent form
- ○ Yes I consent
- ○ No I don't consent

Please select your gender.
- ○ Female
- ○ Male

Are you aged between 18-40?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

***I. Participants were shown the following video and answered questions:**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/B5lhNRdTVvE

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the founder's personal experience of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the founder's personal experience story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***II. Participants were shown one of the two underdog/top-dog brand backgrounds below and answered questions:**

***1. Underdog background**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

The women's clothing brand, Luna, started from the bottom and worked through their struggles.
The founders of Luna experienced a rough start with limited external resources but worked passionately despite their difficulty.
Their hard work and commitment bring their clothing to market successfully.

***2. Top-dog background**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

The women's clothing brand, Luna, started with few challenges and worked through no struggles.
The founders of Luna experienced a smooth start with a lot of external resources and worked effortlessly without difficulty.
Their resources and experiences bring their clothing to market successfully.

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The information includes a brand story having passion and determination	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information includes a brand story having external disadvantages	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand can be characterized as an underdog	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***III. Participants answered the following questions:**

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is predictable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is dependable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is truthful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is competent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand has integrity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is responsive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I rely on this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is an honest brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is safe	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have difficulty paying bills each month during the pandemic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have money left over at the end of the month during the pandemic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Age

Last earned education level

○ High school ○ Some college ○ University
○ Graduate ○ Doctoral degree ○ Professional degree

Annual income level

○ $19,999 or less ○ $20,000-34,999 ○ $35,000-49,000
○ $50,000-64,999 ○ $65,000-79,999 ○ $80,000 and up

Location

○ West ○ Southwest ○ Midwest
○ Southeast ○ Northeast

Ethnicity

○ White ○ Black or African American ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
○ Asian ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ○ Others

INTERACTION EFFECTS in CRAFTSMANSHIP STORY

Exempt Survey Consent

You are being asked to complete a survey for research purposes. The survey is about brand storytelling for small fashion business. The survey will show you video storytelling by a small fashion brand and will ask questions about the video and the brand to explore how consumers respond to the story told by the video and to the brand. Completing this survey is voluntary and you can stop at any time by closing the window. Incomplete survey will result in the failure of receiving compensation.

You must be aged between 18 and 40, reside in the United States, and female to participate in this study.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this survey. You will receive an incentive from your panel provider for completing this survey. In order to receive full compensation for completing the survey, you must pass attention checks and finish your survey.

If you have any questions about the survey itself, how it is implemented, or survey compensation, please contact Gwia Kim, 336-930-3195, gkim7@ncsu.edu or Dr. Byoungho Ellie Jin, 919-515-5977, bejin@ncsu.edu. Please reference study number 23673 when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out this confidential form online.

If you consent to complete this survey, please click “Yes I consent” button to see the survey.

Please indicate if you agree with the above consent form
- ○ Yes I consent
- ○ No I don't consent

Please select your gender.
- ○ Female
- ○ Male

Are you aged between 18-40?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

***I. Participants were shown the following video and answered questions:**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/8E2VJU9dNvg

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of artisans and craftsmanship of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the artisans and craftsmanship story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***II. Participants were shown one of the three brand levels below and answered questions:**

***1. High-end brand level**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

Luna is a women's clothing brand. *Luna offers a variety of high-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts.* *Especially, Luna's popular items, jackets are sold at over $2,000.* *The products of Luna are also sold through the high-end department stores, Bloomingdale and Nordstrom.*

***2. mid-end brand level**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

Luna is a women's clothing brand. *Luna offers a variety of middle-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts.* *Especially, Luna's popular items, jackets are sold at $150 to $250.* *The products of Luna are also sold through the middle-end department stores, Macy's and Kohl's.*

***3. Low-end brand level**

Please read the information about a brand, Luna.

Luna is a women's clothing brand. *Luna offers a variety of low-end products, such as sweaters, shirts & blouses, dresses, jackets, coats, pants, and skirts.* *Luna's popular items, jackets, and coats are sold at under $50.* *The products of Luna are also sold through the low-end retailer, Walmart.*

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand is perceived as very prestigious	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is perceived to have high status	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is perceived to be very upscale	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Somewhat disagree to this statement.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***III. Participants answered the following questions:**

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is predictable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is dependable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is truthful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is competent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand has integrity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is responsive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I rely on this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is an honest brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is safe	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The interest of the whole is more important than the interest of the individual	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The individual remains faithful to the group, even if it is difficult	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The success of the group is more important than individual success	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The good of the group is more important than the success of the individual	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Age

Last earned education level

- ○ High school
- ○ Some college
- ○ University
- ○ Graduate
- ○ Doctoral degree
- ○ Professional degree

Annual income level

- ○ $19,999 or less
- ○ $20,000-34,999
- ○ $35,000-49,000
- ○ $50,000-64,999
- ○ $65,000-79,999
- ○ $80,000 and up

Location

- ○ West
- ○ Southwest
- ○ Midwest
- ○ Southeast
- ○ Northeast

Ethnicity

- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Others

INTERACTION EFFECTS in ECO-FRIENDLY STORY

Exempt Survey Consent

You are being asked to complete a survey for research purposes. The survey is about brand storytelling for small fashion business. The survey will show you video storytelling by a small fashion brand and will ask questions about the video and the brand to explore how consumers respond to the story told by the video and to the brand. Completing this survey is voluntary and you can stop at any time by closing the window. Incomplete survey will result in the failure of receiving compensation.

You must be aged between 18 and 40, reside in the United States, and female to participate in this study.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this survey. You will receive an incentive from your panel provider for completing this survey. In order to receive full compensation for completing the survey, you must pass attention checks and finish your survey.

If you have any questions about the survey itself, how it is implemented, or survey compensation, please contact Gwia Kim, 336-930-3195, gkim7@ncsu.edu or Dr. Byoungho Ellie Jin, 919-515-5977, bejin@ncsu.edu. Please reference study number 23673 when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out this confidential form online.

If you consent to complete this survey, please click “Yes I consent” button to see the survey.

Please indicate if you agree with the above consent form
- ○ Yes I consent
- ○ No I don't consent

Please select your gender.
- ○ Female
- ○ Male

Are you aged between 18-40?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

***I. Participants were shown the following video and answered questions:**

Please click the below link and watch the video.
https://youtu.be/2wPno2XvLxE

What is the name of the brand?

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of eco-friendliness of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of the eco-friendly story of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The video told a story of fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had a beginning, middle, and end about fabric comfort/quality	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video showed fabric comfort/quality of the brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The video had chronical order of fabric comfort/quality story	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Please select Strongly agree for this statement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

***II. Participants were shown one of the two customer reviews below and answered questions:**

***1. High aesthetic judgments review**

Please read the customer review of the Luna.

By a verified customer on 09/10/2020 (Size purchased: M) ★★★★★ Quality: Bad --Good –**Great** | Fit: Small --**True to Size** - Large I purchased a few Luna pieces. The sweatshirts and skirts are all super soft and comfortable. The materials are great. This sweatshirt is also soft, pretty and cute! I like the color of this sweatshirt. It is adorable.

***2. High aesthetic judgments review**

Please read the customer review of the Luna.

By a verified customer on 09/10/2020 (Size purchased: M) ★★☆☆☆ Quality: **Bad** --Good –Great | Fit: **Small** --True to Size - Large I purchased a few Luna pieces. The sweatshirts and skirts are neither soft nor comfortable. I think the fabric is low-quality. This sweatshirt does not look good- Originally the color was not bad, but it fades quickly-- which is disappointing.

Please indicate how much you felt about the products of the brand.

The brand is...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not attractive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Attractive
Not arousing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Arousing
Not beautiful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Beautiful
Ugly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Beautiful
Not elegant	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Elegant
Not harmonious	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Harmonious

***III. Participants answered the following questions:**
Please select the choice that best describes your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is predictable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is dependable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is truthful	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is competent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand has integrity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is responsive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I rely on this brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This is an honest brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is safe	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Age

Last earned education level

○ High school ○ Some college ○ University
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Location

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