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The value of future focus and experiential ad appeals in strengthening the effect of brand-pandemic fit on eWOM

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ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 brands have quickly adapted the content of their advertising to include pandemic related social and health messages. This paper explores the relationship of fit between the advertised brand and the pandemic as a potential influence on consumers' eWOM intentions in an advanced and emerging market. Inspired by metacognitive fluency theory, we propose and find that pandemic adapted advertisements for brands that are high on brand-pandemic fit enhance consumers' eWOM intentions in both markets. This relationship is stronger for experiential ad appeals and future focus in the ads. In terms of temporal focus, building on construal level theory, we find that the effect of fit on eWOM is increased by using future focused ads. Together, the results establish relationships between brand-pandemic fit of advertisements, ad liking, ad-appeals, future focus, and eWOM intentions. We conclude with a discussion of how brand advertising can facilitate societal well-being as high fit brands help individuals solve pandemic related challenges and generate more consumer engagement *via* eWOM intentions.

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Fit; ad appeals; future focus; COVID-19; eWOM; consumer engagement; societal well-being

Introduction

Two weeks after lockdowns started due to COVID-19 in 2020, TV viewing was up by 32% year on year (COVID-19 and TV, thinkboxtv). That is 50 min more a day! As society temporarily withdrew into the home, TV was a source of trusted information and much-needed distraction. During lockdowns, as people watched more TV, they were also engaging with others *via* social media (Statista 2022). Even before the pandemic, most US consumers were online while watching TV (Chmielewski 2013). Research shows that consumers engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) conversations with others during or after watching TV ads (Pauwels, Aksehirli, and Lackman 2016). Given the increased usage of TV and online media during the pandemic, this trend is likely to further impact consumers' eWOM behaviors.

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With the onset of the pandemic, the content of brand advertising also changed quickly as brands incorporated messages related to the pandemic to reflect health, community, and helping themes (Balis 2020). Some brands emphasized human resilience (e.g. Guinness), creativity (Apple), responsible citizenship (Burger King) and encouraged viewers to engage in socially responsible behaviors by social distancing, mask wearing, and getting tested if exposed (e.g. McDonald's, State Farm). While these brands adapted their messages to the pandemic in one way or another, there was an important difference. Some directly helped solve pandemic related problems or challenges, demonstrating high fit with the pandemic, while others did not (low fit).

High fit ads focused on specific attributes that were particularly useful during the pandemic, such as hand sanitizers and house cleaning products (e.g. Lysol) promised to get rid of viruses, provide effective sanitation, and help keep families safe. Low fit ads also communicated appeals focusing on health, community, and helping themes even though the product or service did not directly address a pandemic-related need (e.g. Pepsi, Oreo). We suggest that the fit between the brand and the pandemic would have significant downstream consequences. Fit in marketing refers to the compatibility of brands (Simonin and Ruth 1998). Brand-pandemic fit, in the context of COVID-19, refers to the perceived congruency between a brand's functional benefits and image with the pandemic. In this study, we conceptualize fit as the extent to which the brand advertised in the ad aligns with the needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2012). Based on this definition, we consider ads for Lysol and Amazon to have a high level of fit because the attributes of their products/services can fulfill the needs associated with the pandemic. Conversely, ads for Oreo and Pepsi presumably have low fit since cookies and beverages do not directly address COVID-19 related needs (Özsomer et al. 2022).

We focus on the relationship between brand-pandemic fit in advertising and consumer engagement *via* eWOM intentions during a global pandemic. As a desirable downstream brand consequence, eWOM intentions capture consumer's brand-related cognition, affection, and activation (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014), and, therefore, reflect consumer engagement (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Focusing on ads containing pandemic related messages in a complex multistakeholder setting (Lievens and Moons 2023), our primary objective is to demonstrate how brand-pandemic fit influences eWOM intentions. Ads with high brand-pandemic fit are expected to be easier to process because of metacognitive fluency (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009; Janiszewski and Chandon 2007) and therefore lead to higher eWOM intentions. We demonstrate this relationship in four studies in two markets (US: advanced (AM); Türkiye: emerging (EM)). We also find that brand-pandemic fit is positively associated with eWOM intentions, through an increase in ad liking. Furthermore, we differentiate effects for experiential and functional ad appeals as well as temporal focus in ads, particularly the future focus. Our results suggest that fit is especially beneficial for enhancing eWOM intentions when experiential appeals are used in an advanced and emerging market setting (Study 3 & 4). The effect of brand-pandemic fit on eWOM is highest at high levels of experiential ad appeals, suggesting an experiential ad complementing the brand-pandemic fit effect. The positive effect of brand-pandemic fit on eWOM is lessened by higher levels of functional ad appeals, suggesting diminishing returns,

when high fit ads and functional ad appeals are used together. Furthermore, in line with construal level theory (Trope and Liberman 2003), an investigation of the temporal focus in ads reveal that the effect of fit on eWOM is increased by using future focused ads (e.g. '*everything will be perfect again')*. High fit ads, suggesting solutions to pandemic related problems can help individuals envision and act towards the future, making the future more concrete for them. As individuals make sense of the otherwise uncertain future created by the pandemic with the help of high-fit brands, their eWOM intentions increase.

This study adds to literature in several ways. First, Langner and Bergkvist (2023) calls for researching relevant advertising phenomenon in the real world. Indeed, this research is inspired by and utilizes actual TV ads aired at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that adapted their messages to the pandemic by encouraging individual and societal well-being (e.g. social distancing, mask wearing) but differed in their *fit* to the pandemic. Our research shows a link between perceptions of brand-pandemic fit and consumer engagement captured as eWOM intentions in that ads will be more effective in generating consumer eWOM intentions for brands that fit the pandemic context. Second, building on the literature demonstrating the positive relationship between attitude towards the ad and behavioral intentions (e.g. Spears and Singh 2004; Hartmann, Apaolaza, and Eisend 2016), we show that the effects of brand-pandemic fit materialize through ad liking. Third, we show that pandemic adapted messages of high fit products and services are more effective in encouraging eWOM intentions when the messages are delivered *via* experiential appeals and when the messages entail a future focus. Fourth, in line with recent calls (Langner and Bergkvist 2023), we focus on an under researched country to enhance generalizability and include both managerial (eWOM intentions) and societal issues (ads with COVID-19 health messages), (De Pelsmacker et al. 2023; Taylor et al. 2023). Together, the results utilize metacognitive fluency and construal level theories to establish relationships between brand-pandemic fit of advertisements, ad liking, ad-appeals, future focus, and consumer engagement in the form of eWOM intentions.

Theoretical background

eWOM intentions during a health crisis

eWOM is defined as 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions *via* the Internet' (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 39). eWOM has emerged as a novel way of exchanging information among consumers and has become more prominent with the rise of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as well as with increased use of blogs, online product reviews, and transmission of advertising messages such as videos (Babić et al. 2016; Chu and Kim 2018; Taylor, Strutton, and Thompson 2012). With this current trend of sharing information, advertising and eWOM have become very much related, paving the way for recent work exploring the relationship between the two (Chu and Kim 2018). Successfully dealing with and understanding reflections of traditional advertising practices on eWOM (Pauwels, Aksehirli, and Lackman 2016; Taylor 2017) have also

emerged as prominent issues, as marketers became interested in engaging customers by stimulating eWOM activity with paid advertising such as TV (Pauwels, Aksehirli, and Lackman 2016; Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009).

While dissemination of eWOM regarding the products, brands or advertising campaigns is critical for companies' success (Babić et al. 2016), it might be particularly important during a health crisis, where brand advertisers can cultivate individual and societal well-being (Gangadharbatla 2021; Gurrieri, Zayer, and Coleman 2022) by encouraging socially desirable health behaviors. Advertising messages adapted to the pandemic context by encouraging desirable health behaviors can increase consumer engagement captured in eWOM intentions. As brands highlight the importance of socially responsible health behaviors, such as mask wearing, social distancing and getting vaccinated through advertising, they need the support of consumers who will disseminate that knowledge through eWOM (Bartels et al. 2020; Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy 2011). Hence, it is important to understand for which type of brands and messages consumers are more likely to engage in eWOM, the role of ad liking in helping these effects to materialize (mediate), and the boundary effects of ad appeals and future framing in spreading online the word about the brand's advertising messages which include socially responsible health behaviors.

Fit and eWOM intentions

We conceptualize that the brand-pandemic fit, the fit or perceived congruence between the advertising brand and the health crisis context (i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic), will have a positive impact on consumers' intentions to engage in eWOM. The concept of fit has been extensively researched in marketing, in various contexts such as brand extensions (Aaker and Keller 1990; Bottomley and Holden 2001), endorsements (Breves et al. 2019), cause related marketing (Pracejus and Olsen 2004; Schaefer, Terlutter, and Diehl 2020), and sponsorships (Rifon et al. 2004). In most of these studies, fit has been associated with beneficial outcomes such as better consumer product/brand evaluations and more positive attitudes towards the company/endorser and the advertisement.

Consumers find high-fit messages as more believable (Robinson, Irmak, and Jayachandran 2012) and credible (Özsomer et al. 2022) than low-fit messages. High fit ads that are congruent with COVID-19 related problems and communicate solutions, provide consumers a sense of familiarity with the ad information and facilitate understanding (Samu, Krishnan, and Smith 1999). High brand-pandemic fit ads are also expected to be easier to process because of metacognitive fluency (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009). Schwarz (2004) defines fluency as the ease or difficulty with which information can be processed. Consumers rate high fit messages as more believable than no-fit or low-fit messages because of the fluency in processing, potentially leading to a change in their attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Robinson, Irmak, and Jayachandran 2012). Because of perceived incongruity and unexpectedness, low-fit messages not only inhibit the fluent processing of the message but can negatively bias consumers' evaluations (Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006) and create skepticism regarding the intentions of socially responsible behaviors of companies (Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013). High-fit messages, on the other hand, can alleviate

such skepticism (Bartels et al. 2020). Based on this theorizing we propose that low brand-pandemic fit can inhibit individuals' engagement and intention to share the content aired by the brand through eWOM, while high brand-pandemic fit can increase this intention.

Similarly, the fit between the advertising brand and the pandemic can persuade consumers that the brand is genuinely and sincerely taking an initiative to support public health during a health crisis by suggesting ways to solve COVID-19 related problems in its ads. Such enhanced persuasion would increase consumer engagement and the likelihood of individuals to reciprocate by supporting the cause (Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006). Consumers can support the cause in several ways, such as purchasing the product, recommending it to their friends and families or spreading word-of-mouth about the brand/product. In the context of eWOM, consumers can reciprocate and support the cause by sharing ad and brand related content on their social media accounts or posting their opinion about the content online. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Brand-pandemic fit is positively related to consumers' eWOM intentions.

Role of ad liking

The impact of fit on positive consumer evaluations is well supported in the marketing and advertising literatures (Aaker and Keller 1990; Völckner and Sattler 2006; Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007; Nan and Heo 2007; Martínez, Montaner, and Pina 2009). Positive evaluations arise due to easier processing fluency (e.g. Germelmann et al. 2020) and integration into the consumers' existing cognitive structures (Bartels et al. 2020; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006). Positive consumer evaluation in the form of ad liking, is a desirable outcome and has been studied extensively in marketing as well as advertising research (e.g. Bellman, Wooley, and Varan 2016; Bergkvist and Rossiter 2007). The positive relationship between attitude towards the ad, such as liking of the ad, and behavioral intentions have also been previously demonstrated (e.g. Spears and Singh 2004; Hartmann, Apaolaza, and Eisend 2016).

Affective responses such as liking can be an important source of eWOM intentions through two different routes. First, based on a cognitive explanation, if individuals like the ad, they will be more likely to pay attention to it and respond to the message given in the ad (Chung and Zhao 2003) including the likelihood and willingness to share the content *via* eWOM. Second, when individuals like the ad, an affect-transfer mechanism (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986) is likely to occur, where the positive evaluations related to the ad are transferred to the brand delivering the message. This affect transfer mechanism could then increase consumer engagement and intentions to engage in eWOM regarding the brand and its advertising message. These two mechanisms together could lead to a constructive behavioral outcome of ad liking in the form of an increased willingness to engage in eWOM. Thus, we suggest that the relationship between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions would be mediated through an increase in ad liking.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between brand-pandemic fit and consumers' eWOM intentions is mediated by ad liking.

Ad appeals

Advertisements contain appeals to consumers that capture attention and motivate behavior (Moriarty 1991). Appeals have been described in the extant literature in terms of functional-rational or emotional-experiential components (Heath and Stipp 2011). The functional aspects of an ad refer to product features and the associated value (e.g. attributes, applications, and performance) resulting in a cognitive (e.g. evaluation) consumer response (Abernethy and Franke 1996). Experiential aspects, on the other hand, elicit emotions, imaginations, behaviors and lifestyles, resulting in an affective response (e.g. liking) (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt 2013).

Different ad appeals can influence attitudes and purchase intentions (Jovanović, Vlastelica, and Kostić 2017) *via* different mechanisms. Functional appeals tend to increase consumer knowledge and positive associations with the brand (Hartmann, Apaolaza Ibáñez, and Forcada Sainz 2005). Emotional appeals are especially effective in eliciting desired behaviors such as purchase or donation facilitation (Chang 2011; Sciulli and Bebko 2005). Emotional appeals, including fear, have been shown to be more effective and more likely to elicit a behavioral response compared to rational appeals (Hornik, Ofir, and Rachamim 2017). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that consumers tend to engage in sharing advertising messages more frequently when the messages elicit emotional responses (Dobele et al. 2007). Given that experiential appeals have been found to evoke such emotions, they may be particularly effective in stimulating message sharing. This effect could be stronger during a pandemic when people are in a more emotional (rather than rational) state. Individuals are less likely to engage with rational behaviors such as wearing a mask or getting tested, until they emotionally experience and accept the pandemic as a health threat (Robinson and Veresiu 2021).

An ad appeal is more effective at increasing positive behaviors when the message is deemed as authentic (Van Quaquebeke et al. 2019; Cornelis and Peter 2017). When a high brand-pandemic fit product or service (e.g. Lysol disinfectant) is communicated with an experiential appeal (versus a functional appeal) evoking imaginations, lifestyles and emotions, it can be viewed as more authentic, subsequently increasing desirable brand behaviors.

Furthermore, previous literature shows that anxiety results in an increased attention to affective information because of its uncertainty appraisal dimension (MacLeod, Mathews, and Tata1986, Motoki et al. 2019). In other words, people would be less likely to pay attention to rational/functional appeals and deem them as less important, undermining the matching effect between rational/functional appeals and high fit products (Yang, Hwang, and Mattila 2021). During a health crisis when the level of anxiety and uncertainty is high, individuals would then be more likely to pay attention to experiential appeals and less likely to attend to rational ones.

Additionally, in the case of a global health crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, advertising appeals which are telling individuals what to do in a rational/functional manner (i.e. sanitize your hands), versus how to feel (i.e. fear of illness, concern for their family, protecting loved ones) may lead to psychological reactance (Shoenberger,

Kim, and Sun 2021) and desensitization (Cho and Salmon 2007; Keating and Galper 2021), reducing the likelihood of such messages being shared. Communication of COVID-19 related health messages by high-fit brands using an experiential frame could be perceived as more compassionate and therefore more positive by individuals. While repeated exposure to such messages using a functional route might increase reactance and desensitization, experiential appeals could restore emotions (i.e. prevent desensitization), reduce the likelihood of psychological reaction and view the brand as more compassionate.

Even when the products are helpful during the pandemic and it makes sense for the brand to advertise during a pandemic (i.e. there is high brand-pandemic fit), delivering these health messages with a rational/funtional appeal will lead to reduced attention, higher desensitization, and psychological reactance, attenuating the effect of fit on eWOM intentions. On the other hand, emotional ad appeals that provide concrete solutions to pandemic related problems, (i.e. high brand-pandemic fit) can generate authenticity perceptions (Shoenberger, Kim, and Sun 2021), attract more attention and restore emotions leading to positive emotional engagement (Businesswire 2020). Thus, experiential appeals will complement and compound the positive effect of fit (Nan and Heo 2007), in our context, brand-pandemic fit, on intentions to engage in eWOM, while rational appeals will attenuate this effect.

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between brand-pandemic fit and consumers' eWOM intentions H3: is stronger (weaker) at higher levels of experiential (functional) advertising appeals.

Future focus

Temporal framing in advertising messages has been investigated in marketing in several contexts, including the temporal aspects of health risk messages (Chandran and Menon 2004) and cause related marketing (Tangari et al. 2010). Findings from this literature heavily depend on the Construal Level Theory (Trope and Lieberman 2003) which posits that distant (close) framing leads to more abstract (concrete) construal. The effect of temporal framing is contingent on an individual's temporal orientation (Tangari et al. 2010; Kees, Burton, and Tangari 2010) or his/her decision status mindset (pre-decisional or post-decisional) at the time of message evaluation (Nenkov 2012).

Recent literature has explored the role of temporal framing in advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic, a very uncertain time for consumers (Sharma et al. 2020; Kim, Cho, and Youn 2021). Focusing on the effect of proximal versus distal temporal framing in advertising messages during the pandemic, Kim, Cho, and Youn (2021) has found that consumers with high levels of uncertainty are more likely to display an increased fluency towards distal framing. Another conceptual study that explores the role of temporal framing in advertising during a context-harm crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that future-framing in advertising can help consumers to restore their hope, by providing them an imagined future (Robinson and Veresiu 2021).

Advertising during the pandemic can be present-focused, giving messages about what consumers are going through today, or future-focused, talking about what the future is going to be like. Present-focused advertising can be deemed as more concrete for consumers. However, it may not be very effective in helping customers reduce their current anxiety and stress (Verlegh et al. 2021). Present focused messages can even deteriorate the situation by reminding individuals the 'unpleasant present' (Robinson and Veresiu 2021, 222). While future-focus in advertising might be perceived as more abstract by consumers compared to a present-focus, a high-fit ad with a future-focus can help consumers to envision the future during a very uncertain and stressful situation and visualize how the brand can intervene and take preemptive action to build that future. Similar to different types of ad appeals, temporal focus may invoke rational versus emotional elaboration. A present-focus advertisement is likely to be focused on rational behaviors that can be done today versus what may possibly happen in the future. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when individuals were feeling highly uncertain in the current situation, advertisements with a distal framed message were evaluated more favorably (Kim, Cho, and Youn 2021). High-fit brands, bringing a concrete solution to pandemic related problems can help individuals to envision and act towards that future, making the future more concrete for them. As individuals can make sense of the otherwise uncertain future with the help of high-fit brands, their likelihood of engagement *via* eWOM would increase.

Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between brand-pandemic fit and consumers' eWOM intentions is stronger (weaker) when a future (present) focus is used in advertising appeals.

Methodology and results

Overview of studies

We conduct one study with fictitious display ads and three studies using real TV commercials aired shortly after the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic between June 2020 and September 2022 to test our proposed framework (Figure 1). To enhance generalizability, the studies use different stimuli (fictitious display ads and real TV commercials), varied operationalizations of our dependent variable (eWOM intentions) and independent variable (fit is manipulated in Study 1 and measured in Study 2, 3, and 4) and are administered in different countries (United States and Türkiye). Study 1 (US) was run to explore the relationship between brand-pandemic fit in ads and individuals' eWOM intentions. The second study (US) was run to establish the relationship between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions through increased ad liking. In Study 3 (US), we demonstrate that experiential ad appeals strengthen the association between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM, and ad liking mediates the process. Finally, in our fourth study, which was run in Türkiye, we examine the moderating impact of future-focused ad appeals in promoting the brand pandemic fit's positive impact on consumers' eWOM intentions. Study 4 also corroborated our findings in Study 3 (role of experiential ad appeals) in a different country context. Our core effect - the relationship between brand-pandemic fit in advertising and eWOM intentions - is replicated in all four studies.

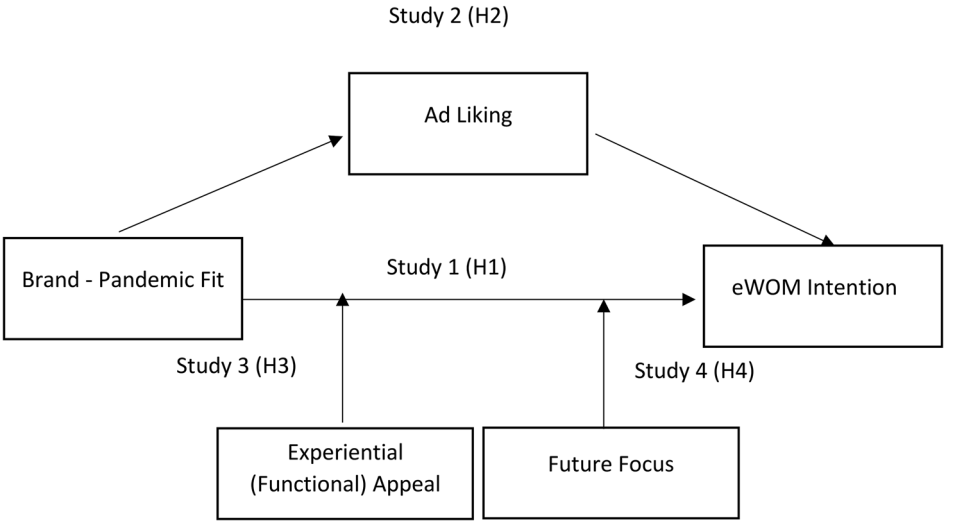


Figure 1. A conceptual model of brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intention.

Study 1: brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intention

Methods

Three hundred and ninety-one Prolific respondents participated in Study 1. To address concerns of careless responding, we implemented two distinct filters. Respondents were first asked to choose 'strongly disagree' for a given question and then correctly identify the product category used in the experiment. After the filters, we had 355 usable responses (60% male, age: 62%=18–34, 28%= 35–54, 9%=55 or higher).

The stimuli consisted of high fit and low fit display ads (Please see Appendix B). The ads were the same in terms of content, size, visuals, and theme (wearing a mask, using a delivery and paying with card) except for the fit of the product category. In the high fit condition participants were told that Planox, a (fictitious) hygiene brand who sells products such as surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers has adapted its advertising to the emergence of this new virus. In the low fit condition, Planox was a hair cosmetics brand who sells products such as hair serums and hair masks. Participants were asked to imagine coming across the ad by Planox illustrated on the next page (See Appendix B for stimuli). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two ads, and were asked to answer the following question to capture their eWOM intentions: *'To what extent would you be interested in sharing content related to the Planox ad on social media? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 9 using the slider'*.

Results

We conducted a t-test to check whether brand-pandemic fit was successfully manipulated. It showed a significant effect of the display ad manipulations on perceived brand-pandemic fit measured with a reduced form of the perceived fit scale (Simonin and Ruth 1998). The hygiene brand ad (high fit), on average, scored higher in terms of the perceived fit (i.e. 'The products are helpful during the pandemic.', 'The function of the products fit with the current situation'. 'The products have benefits that are

useful during the pandemic', 'It makes sense for this company to respond to the pandemic' and 'The image of this company fits with its response to the pandemic') than the hair cosmetics brand (low fit) on a 7-point scale ($M_{high\text{-}fit}$=5.72, $M_{low\text{-}fit}$= 3.69, t = 14.7, p< .001) which revealed that our manipulation was successful.

One-way ANOVA showed a marginally significant difference in eWOM intentions between high-fit and low fit conditions ($M_{high\text{-}fit}$=3.69, $M_{low\text{-}fit}$= 3.21, F (1, 354) = 3.72, p=.05, η2=.01). The results revealed that high-brand pandemic fit can enhance individuals' intentions to engage in eWOM. In other words, ads containing health messages related to the pandemic are more likely to be shared online, if the advertising brand has a high fit with the pandemic. While the effect sizes are relatively small, this could be attributed to the use of display ads in our manipulations, which could be less captivating compared to TV commercials. Therefore, we use TV ads in subsequent studies.

Study 2: brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intention through ad liking

Methods

To investigate the link between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions, we analyzed a diverse set of advertisements across multiple industries that varied in terms of their level of fit. Specifically, we recorded and analyzed a total of 1514 unique advertisements broadcasted during prime time on four major U.S. national TV networks with high viewership (NBC, ABC, CBS, and FOX) during weekends in April and May of 2020. Then, two of the authors coded the ads independently on the extent of message adaptation to COVID-19. Of the 1514 ads, 462 (31%) included COVID-19 messaging. From this subset, fifteen highly adapted ads from well-known brands were selected for a pre-test to evaluate brand-pandemic fit.

228 Mturk respondents evaluated brand-pandemic fit on a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) using an adapted version of Simonin and Ruth (1998) 8-item perceived fit scale (α = .92); (e.g. the function of the products and services fit with the current situation; the products and services are helpful during the pandemic; company's image fits with its response to the pandemic.) (Complete scale items are in Appendix A). Based on the pretest and our own judgment, we selected six different brands from six different categories (Online Shopping: Amazon, Hygiene: Lysol, Insurance: State Farm, Fast Food: McDonald's, Biscuits: Oreo, Soft Drinks: Pepsi) that varied on fit scores (Oreo: 2.73; Pepsi: 2.75; McDonald's: 3.05; State Farm: 3.72; Amazon: 4.42; Lysol 4.73 on a five-point scale).

For Study 2, three hundred and three Mturk participants (57% male, age: 42%=18–34, 46%= 35–54, 12%=55 or higher) were randomly assigned to watch one of the ads *via* YouTube links in June 2020 and complete the online questionnaire. Respondents were paid $1US. Brand-pandemic fit was measured by the same eight-item perceived fit scale that was used in the pretest (α = .94) (Simonin and Ruth 1998). eWOM intention was measured by a three-item 7-point Likert-type (α=.97) scale, exploring the likelihood of respondents to participate in activities related to the advertising brand such as 'expressing opinions online', 'sending/sharing online messages/links about the brand's ad' or 'writing/posting something about it online' (Eelen, Özturan, and Verlegh 2017; Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit 2011). Ad-liking was measured with a 'disliked a lot', 'liked a lot' 7-point semantic differential scale (Bellman, Wooley, and Varan 2016; Bergkvist and Rossiter 2007).

Results

To test the relation of brand-pandemic fit to eWOM intentions, mediated by ad liking, we ran PROCESS computational macro (Model 4) for SPSS from Hayes (2013), controlling for brand effects, income, gender, age, race and education level. Regression results (Table 1) reveal that perceived brand-pandemic fit is positively related to ad liking (B = .93, SE=.10, t = 9.61, p <.05) which in turn is positively related to an increased intention to engage in eWOM (B = .50, SE = .06, t = 8.19, p <.05) supporting H2. Perceived brand-pandemic fit in advertising is positively associated with an individual's intention to engage in eWOM. Examination of the indirect effect revealed partial mediation, with a significant direct effect (B = .40, p = .006, 95% CI [.17, .63]) and a significant indirect effect with the 95% confidence interval excluding zero (B = .47, SE_{BOOT}=.08, 95% CI_{BOOT} [.32, .64]) (see Fig. 2 for path coefficients). Therefore, results of Study 2 support H2 that the effects of brand-pandemic fit on consumers' eWOM intentions are partially materialized through an increase in ad liking.

Study 3: experiential (functional) ad appeal as a moderator

Methods

The objective of Study 3 (US) was to evaluate moderation of the relationship between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM by experiential and functional ad appeal characteristics and the role of ad liking as a mediator between fit and eWOM intentions. Study 3 uses the same advertising selection criteria and data collection procedures as in Study 2. The same ads from Study 2 were used in the US except for Amazon (Campbell's instant soup was used since the Amazon ad was no longer available). 302 MTurk respondents participated in the study and received $1US. Of these, 290 that passed

Table 1. Perceived brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions.

	Study 2 (mediation model)			
	DV: ad liking		DV: eWOM	
Predictors	B	t	B	T
Constant	1.84***	2.77	.71	1.00
Fit	.93***	9.61	.40**	3.44
Ad Liking	–	–	.50***	8.19
Controls:				
B1	−0.96***	−3.63	.30	1.08
B2	.69***	2.68	−0.16	−0.58
B3	.09	.36	.21	.78
B4	−0.22	−0.88	.26	.95
B5	−0.43	−1.57	−0.10	−0.35
Race	−0.07	−0.48	−0.29*	−2.07
Gender	−0.30	−1.92	−0.10	−0.59
Age	.05	.75	−0.17*	−2.41
Income	.06	1.02	−0.00	−0.06
Education	−0.05	−0.79	.05	.71
R^2	.32		.37	
F-value	12.66***		14.40***	
N	303		303	

Least Squares Regression Results.
*p <.05.
**p <.01.
***p <.001.
Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented in the table.
B1: Amazon B2: Oreo B3: Pepsi B4: McDonald's B5: Lysol, Baseline: State Farm.

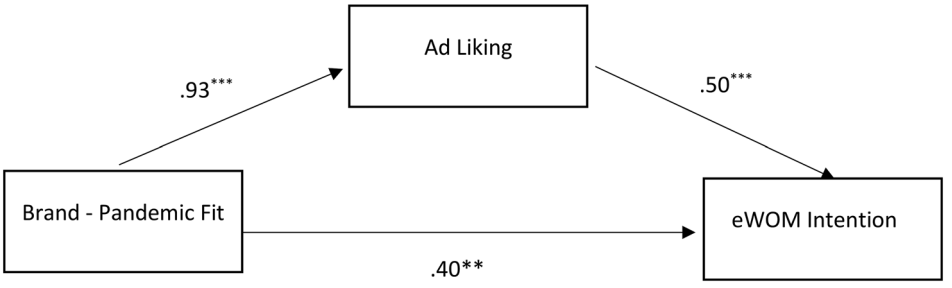


Figure 2. Ad liking partially mediates eWOM intention (Study 2).
Note: Path coefficients for Study 2 **p<.01, ***p <.001.

the attention-check question (Age: 43% = 18–34, 47% = 35–54, 10% = 55 or higher; gender: 59% male) were used. Construct means and standard deviations are provided in Appendix A.

The six ads for the US were coded in terms of the extent of experiential and functional appeals (Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt 2013) by two of the authors on a 1 to 5 scale. The authors compared their evaluations and resolved discrepancies. Three of the commercials were found to be more experiential in nature (Oreo, Campbell's and Pepsi) whereas the other three were more functional (State Farm, Lysol and Mc Donald's). Both perceived brand-pandemic fit (α = .94) and eWOM intentions (α = .96) demonstrated high reliability. Participants also responded to demographic questions (age, gender, education, race, household income) that were included in the models as controls. Ad liking was measured with the same scale used in Study 2.

Results

Moderation analyses with Hayes's (2013) PROCESS (Model 5) macro were performed for the two moderators (experiential and functional ad appeal) separately on our outcome variable (eWOM intention). Our findings reveal that experiential ad appeals moderate the association of brand-pandemic fit with eWOM, with a positive and significant interaction between brand-pandemic fit and experiential ad appeals (B = .27, SE=.10, t = 2.74, p < .05). Like Study 2, the indirect effect of brand-pandemic fit on eWOM intentions through ad liking was significant (B=.49, SE_{BOOT}=.09, 95% CI_{BOOT} [.32, .69]). The conditional effect of the brand-pandemic fit was positive and significant only at high levels of experiential ad appeals (1SD above the mean) (B = .48, SE=.17, t = 2.70, p < .05). As expected, the positive association between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions was lessened by higher levels of functional ad appeals (B = −0.35, SE=.13, t= −2.77, p < .05). Examination of conditional effects reveal that the effect of brand-pandemic fit is positive and significant only at the low levels of functional ad appeals (1 SD below the mean) (B = .53, SE=.18, t = 2.91, p < .05). Again, the indirect effect through ad liking was positive and significant (B = .47, SE_{BOOT}=.09, 95% CI_{BOOT} [.31, .67]) (see Fig. 3 for path coefficients). These results demonstrate that the positive relationship between perceived brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions is strengthened by experiential appeals but lessened by functional appeals (Table 2).

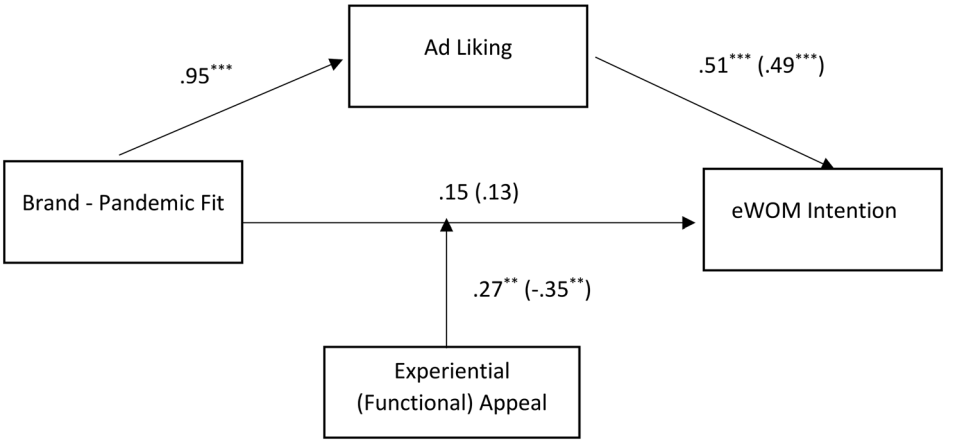


Figure 3. Experiential appeal moderates and ad liking mediates eWOM intention (Study 3).
Note: Path coefficients (with Experiential Appeal as a moderator) for Study 3 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p <.001.
Coefficients in parentheses are for the model with Functional Appeal as a moderator.

Table 2. Experiential and functional ad appeals as moderators.

	Study 3 (moderation by experiential & functional ad appeals					
	DV: ad liking		DV: eWOM		DV: eWOM	
	B	t	B	t	B	t
Predictors						
Constant	4.82***	10.02	2.54***	3.23	2.58***	3.30
Fit	.95***	11.87	.15	1.04	.13	.87
Ad Liking	–	–	.51***	6.14	.49***	5.83
Exp	–	–	.07	.90	–	–
Exp*Fit	–	–	.27**	2.74	–	–
Fnc	–	–	–	–	−0.004	−0.03
Fnc*Fit	–	–	–	–	−0.35**	2.77
Controls:						
Race	.03	.19	−0.57**	−2.96	−0.53**	−2.72
Gender	−0.14	−0.98	.05	.24	.09	.44
Age	.02	.32	−0.23*	−2.35	−0.21*	−2.15
Income	.12*	2.20	−0.05	−0.68	−0.05	−0.69
Education	.03	.48	.12	1.46	.10	1.25
R^2	.36		.26		.27	
F-value	26.37***		11.22***		11.42***	
N	290		290		290	

Least Squares Regression Results.
*p <.05.
**p <.01.
***p <.001.
Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented in the table. Fnc: Functional ad appeal, Exp: Experiential ad appeal. Education, income, age, gender and race effects are controls. Age, income and education are measured as ordinal variables, where higher values indicate greater levels. Brand dummies are omitted in models that contain experiential and functional ad appeals due to multicollinearity. Variables were mean centered prior to interaction analysis.

Study 4: temporal focus (future) as a moderator

Methods

The objective of Study 4 was to evaluate moderation of the relationship between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions by the temporal focus (future focus) in the

ad. Study 4 uses the same advertising selection criteria and data collection procedures as in Study 2 and 3. In Türkiye, the authors coded 465 unique ads aired during prime time on three national TV channels with large and broad viewership (ATV, Kanal D and Fox) on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays of April and May of 2020. Six brands from various categories were chosen with varying fit levels (Hygiene: Bingo, E-commerce: Hepsiburada, Internet Banking: Akbank, Automobile Tires: Lassa, Household Appliances: Vestel, Biscuits: Ülker) and across industries. Two of the authors identified and coded three of the six ads (Ülker, Vestel and Lassa) as future focused and dummy coded them as 1. To verify this categorization, the authors first translated the scripts of the six commercials from Turkish to English and then conducted text analysis using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Software (LIWC; Pennebaker et al. 2015). Future focus was operationalized according to standard LIWC dictionaries that scan the script for a mix of future events or times (Please see LIWC manual). LIWC results corroborated that the ads identified by authors as future focused were indeed scored highest in terms of their future focus (Table 3). An alternative operationalization could be the difference between present and future focus scores generated by LIWC, where higher scores indicated stronger future focus (Biliciler, Raghunathan, and Ward 2022). Both operationalizations corroborated the authors' coding (Ülker, Vestel and Lassa). Scripts from the future-focused ads include phrases such as '… Our streets will fill up and we will watch the sea again. We will go back to the fields, fill the rows, and hug each other. We will sit at tables next to each other and have meals together. And everything will be perfect again' or '… We know that we will overcome these days together'.

The studies were conducted simultaneously with those in the US, using an online panel where participants earn points and rewards for completing questionnaires successfully. Of 485 completed questionnaires, 35% were eliminated *via* an attention-check question, resulting in 312 usable responses (37% male, age: 41% = 18–34, 44% = 35–54, 15% = 55 or older). Construct means and standard deviations are provided in Appendix A. Perceived brand-pandemic fit (α = .95) and eWOM intentions (α = .96) have high reliabilities. Participants also responded to demographic questions (age, gender, education, household income) which were included in models as controls. To rule out the possibility that the positive emotions in future-focused ads led to the expected outcomes, we controlled for the

Table 3. Future focus classification of ads and LIWC estimation results.

Brand in ad	Authors' classification*	LIWC future focus	LIWC (difference)**	LIWC positive emotions
Ülker	1	3.28	−9.83	6.56
Vestel	1	7.37	−8.42	6.32
Lassa	1	1.67	−10.00	2.50
Hepsiburada	0	0	−13.43	10.45
Bingo	0	0	−10.71	5.36
Akbank	0	0.71	−13.11	3.25

*(1/0) Dummy Coding where 1 represents Future Focus.
**Future Focus minus Present Focus.
Notes: There is no significant correlation between the future focus and the positive emotions (r=-0.005).
US ads were also examined for their extent of future focus, however they were not future focused, as evaluated by authors and assessed by LIWC dictionary.

extent of positive emotions in the ad, again estimated by LIWC (presented in Table 3).

Results

Hayes's (2013) PROCESS (Model 5) macro was used to assess our hypothesis regarding the moderating role of future focus of ad appeals. Our findings reveal that future focus in ads moderate the association of brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intention, with a marginally significant interaction between brand-pandemic fit and future-focused ad appeals (B = .35, SE=.19, t = 1.84, p = .07) at 90% confidence level. Like Study 2 and 3, the indirect effect of brand-pandemic fit on eWOM intentions through ad liking was significant (B=.27, SE_{BOOT}=.06, 95% CI_{BOOT} [.16, .39]) (see Fig. 4 for path coefficients). The conditional effects demonstrate that perceived brand-pandemic fit exerts a positive and significant effect on eWOM when the ad is future-focused (B = .50, SE=.14, t = 3.44, p < .05), but not when it's not (B = .15, SE=.13, t = 1.12, p = .26). We find that the positive association between perceived brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions is increased when the ad is future-focused, confirming H4 (Table 4).

We, then coded the ads used in Study 4 (Türkiye) in terms of their experiential and functional appeals, using the same coding procedures as in Study 3 (US). The objective was to test H3, which was previously supported in an advanced market (US, Study 3) in an emerging market (Türkiye, Study 4). Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt (2013) found experiential appeals to influence individuals differently in developing versus advanced markets. Therefore, we wanted to run a post-hoc analysis to see whether we observe such a difference. Regression analysis revealed that just like in the US, in Türkiye the positive impact of fit on eWOM intentions increased with experiential ad appeals, with a positive and significant interaction (B = .26, SE=.12, t = 2.17, p < .05), and decreased with functional ad appeals, with a marginally significant negative interaction (B = −0.23, SE=.13, t=-1.81, p = .07). These findings speak to the robustness of our results to different country settings in a pandemic context. Given

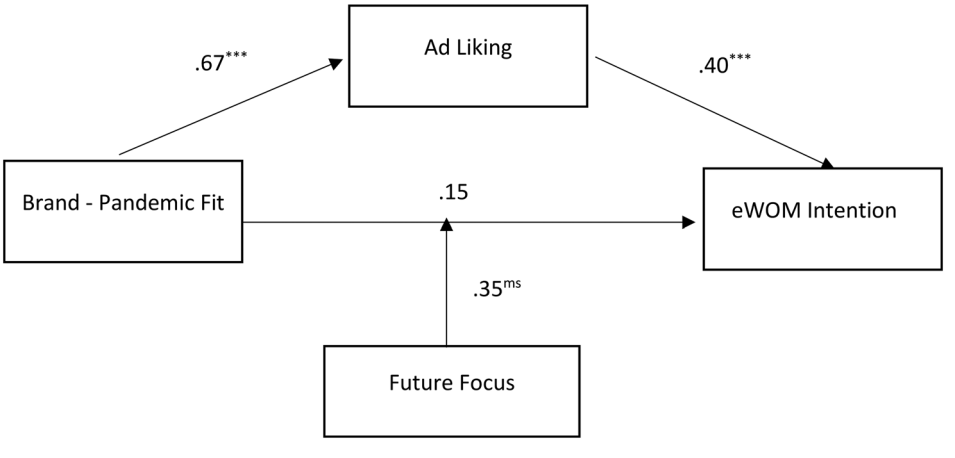


Figure 4. Future focus moderates and ad liking mediates eWOM intention (Study 4).
Note: Path coefficients (with Future Focus as a moderator) for Study 4 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p <.001, ms: marginally significant with p<.10.

Table 4. Future focus as a moderator.

	Study 4: moderation by future focus			
	DV: ad liking		DV: eWOM	
	B	t	B	t
Predictors				
Constant	2.57***	4.50	.96	1.30
Fit	.67***	7.50	.15	1.12
Ad Liking	–	–	.40***	6.57
Future	–	–	−1.11	−1.45
Future*Fit	–	–	.35	1.84
Controls:				
Positive Emotions	.05	1.38	.07*	2.07
Gender	.16	.88	−0.16	−0.87
Age	.05	.62	−0.13	−1.72
Income	−0.27***	−4.85	−0.16**	−2.63
Education	.02	.32	−0.09	−1.23
R^2	.24		.34	
F-value	15.80***		17.07***	
N	312		312	

Least Squares Regression Results.
*p <.05.
**p <.01.
***p <.001.
Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented in the table.
Variables were not mean centered as Future focus was dummy coded. Education, income, age and gender, and positive emotions are controls. Age, income and education are measured as ordinal variables, where higher values indicate greater levels. Brand dummies are omitted in models that contain future focused ads due to multicollinearity.

Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt (2013) results on the functional route as the most important driver for persuasion in emerging markets, these relationships can be tested in other emerging markets. In both advanced and developing market settings, experiential appeals boost the positive association between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions while functional ad appeals dampen this relationship. Consumers seem more responsive to ads of brands that directly address a COVID-19 related problem in a way evoking emotions, imaginations, and lifestyles in both countries during the stressful, high anxiety and uncertainty context of the global pandemic.

Discussion

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, TV viewing increased significantly. Brands that advertised adapted their content to reflect health, community, and helping themes. The products and services of some advertisers solved COVID-19 related problems and constraints, while others did not. Building on fluency theory (e.g. Janiszewski and Chandon 2007) in Study 1, we show that high levels of fit between the advertising brand and the pandemic are positively associated with higher levels of eWOM intentions. In Study 2 we illustrate that this relationship is mediated through ad liking. In Study 3 and 4, we corroborate these findings in an advanced (US) and emerging market (Türkiye) and test the moderating effects of ad appeals (emotional and functional) and future focus in ads. Collectively, the results indicate that high brand – pandemic fit in advertising motivates individuals to engage in eWOM, through increased ad liking. Communicating brand-pandemic fit *via* experiential ad appeals rather than functional appeals, and future focus in ads strengthen the association of

fit and eWOM, encouraging individuals to express opinions about the brand online, share online messages or links, and write or post comments online.

Experiential appeals have been found to influence individuals differently in emerging versus advanced markets (Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt 2013). While Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt (2013) has found the functional route as the most important driver for persuasion in EMs, our results reveal that in a pandemic context, experiential ad appeals are more instrumental in both EMs and advanced markets. In an EM, experiential appeals boost the positive association between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM while functional ad appeals dampen these relationships. EM consumers are more responsive to ads of brands that directly address a COVID-19 related problem in a way evoking compassion, emotions, imaginations, and lifestyles. The fit of the ad facilitates fluency and invokes a cognitive consumer response such as positive evaluation (Abernethy and Franke 1996) and the emotional appeal of the ad invokes affective response such as liking. The two responses complement each other enhancing eWOM intentions. Future research could further explore the reasons behind this effect. One reason could be that consumers are more emotional during the pandemic, therefore seeking more emotional ad appeals of brands that can provide concrete solutions to pandemic related problems (Businesswire 2020).

In terms of temporal focus observed in the ads, in line with construal level theory (Trope and Lieberman 2003), fit is especially beneficial for enhancing eWOM intentions for ads with a future focus. This finding is also in line with a recent conceptual study by Robinson and Veresiu (2021) where future framing in advertisements could be instrumental during a pandemic. Uncertainty about the future is one of the biggest challenges individuals face during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim, Cho, and Youn 2021; Sharma et al. 2020). Consumers that observe a high fit ad with a future focus can make sense of how the brand can help them individually and society at large to build a better future (post-Covid) enhancing their eWOM intentions.

These results extend research on brand fit, ad liking, ad appeals, and temporal focus to the context of a global public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a new context where consumers from both advanced and emerging markets needed to re-focus on functional features and benefits and (re-)assess when a product/service works to mitigate new pandemic related problems. Our focal construct of interest, the ad's brand-pandemic fit, persuaded consumers to engage in eWOM through an affective response of increase in ad liking. The pandemic caused high levels of anxiety and stress, making anxiety and stress reduction the top reason for watching TV during the pandemic (Johnson and Dempsey 2020). Given this emotional context, the mediating effect of ad liking can materialize though a cognitive route, where liking the ad increases attention to the ad and responding to the ad message (Chung and Zhao 2003) including behavioral intentions (Spears and Singh 2004; Hartmann, Apaolaza, and Eisend 2016) such as eWOM intentions. Similarly, *via* an affect-transfer mechanism (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986) when individuals like the ad, the positive evaluations related to the ad are transferred to the brand delivering the message, enhancing behavioral intentions (Spears and Singh 2004; Hartmann, Apaolaza, and Eisend 2016) including eWOM intentions.

In terms of the moderating effect of experiential messages, when the high-fit ads were communicated *via* experiential appeals, evoking compassion, sensations, feelings, and imaginations, both the cognitive (with high fit) and affective (with experiential appeal) complemented each other as the two different routes of persuasion (Petty and

Cacioppo 1986) to enhance eWOM in both markets. In contrast, the positive effect of brand-pandemic fit was lower at higher levels of functional appeals. Talking about COVID-19 related features and benefits in a rational and functionally utilitarian way could activate only the cognitive route, decreasing the persuasiveness of the ad on eWOM. Consumers could also evaluate functional ads as 'too cold and rational' failing to comprehend the anxiety and stress generated by the pandemic. Besides, consumers were bombarded with functional ad appeals during the pandemic. Being stuck at home and sometimes in quarantines, they were 'fed up' with functional ads potentially leading to psychological reactance (Shoenberger, Kim, and Sun 2021) and desensitization (Cho and Salmon 2007; Keating and Galper 2021), dampening customer engagement *via* e-WOM.

TV advertising has been criticized as detrimental to people's subjective wellbeing due to its promotion of consumerism and materialistic goals (Guillen-Royo 2019). In this research, we show that TV advertising can contribute to societal well-being by including desirable health messages such as social distancing, mask wearing and getting tested if exposed. In taking a stance by encouraging desirable health behaviors, brand advertisers with high brand-pandemic fit can also enhance consumer engagement captured by eWOM intentions. Since this effect materializes *via* ad liking, it is important airing ads that are liked particularly during times when consumers are under stress. While pre-pandemic reasons for watching TV were explained by uses and gratifications theory with distraction and unwinding being the main reasons, anxiety and stress relief rose to the top reasons during the pandemic (Johnson and Dempsey 2020). Hence, high fit ads generate engagement through the ad liking route, where consumers express intentions to share the message content online and on social media with others. Furthermore, brand managers should deliver these messages with experiential appeals. Given the anxiety and stress relief reasons for watching TV during the pandemic (Johnson and Dempsey 2020), experiential appeals invoking compassion, sensations, emotions seem to work better in generating eWOM intentions. In the complex, multistakeholder setting (Lievens and Moons 2023) of the pandemic, our research shows that brand advertising can take on an active role in addressing desirable health behaviors while simultaneously enhancing consumer engagement reflected in eWOM intentions. Such win-win situations for positive societal as well as brand related outcomes reflect that an active role for the advertising industry can go hand in hand with contributions to consumer welfare. Carefully crafted ads also directly enhance societal well-being as high fit products and services help individuals during the course of the pandemic. Understanding how individuals will process ads during a global crisis and the cross-country differences and similarities provide actionable insights for companies, governments, and policy makers to enhance the wellbeing of individuals and society.

Limitations and future research directions

In this research we corroborate the positive (negative) moderating effect of experiential (functional) ad appeals on the relationship between brand-pandemic fit and eWOM intentions in both an advanced and an emerging market context. The analysis can be expanded to include other advanced and emerging markets to see if consumers respond similarly to ad appeals during a health crisis. Türkiye can be considered a more developed emerging market where consumers have a long history of

experience with and knowledge of brands (Cavusgil et al. 2018) and are closely conversant with the products that are available in the rest of the world (Kravets and Sandikci 2014). The results could be different and in line with Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt (2013) where the functional route could be more persuasive and engaging than the experiential route in a different emerging market with a shorter history of open market reforms and experience with brands (e.g. China, Czech Republic, Poland).

Another area for future research is incorporating variations across individuals in collectivistic and individualistic values to investigate the effects of brand-pandemic fit, ad liking, appeal types and temporal framing. Collectivistic values, defined by social embeddedness and interdependence with others (Hofstede 2001; Triandis 1995), are especially strong in Asia (Awanis, Schlegelmilch, and Cui 2017). Individualistic values where the self is largely defined by individual autonomy and independence from others, are high in Western cultures. Future focused ads may be more effective in eliciting desired behaviors (e.g. eWOM) in collectivistic individuals when presented in an emotional ad, enabling individuals to fluently envision a better future for the social groups (family, community, nation) that they belong.

We hope that our research provides new perspectives on how brand advertisers can take an active role (e.g. Gurrieri, Zayer, and Coleman 2022) by incorporating health messages during a global pandemic. In the context of pandemic adapted ads, we investigate relationships between brand-pandemic fit of advertisements, ad liking, ad-appeals, future focus, and eWOM intentions. Positive downstream consequences in terms of eWOM intentions show us that advertisers can deliver win-win results, benefiting multiple stakeholders such as the advertising brand as well as individual and societal well-being by taking an active role during a global pandemic. In terms of consumer engagement, we focus on eWOM intentions as one of the most ecologically valid ways of exchanging information during the pandemic where mobility restrictions and lockdowns were in place. The research can be expanded by focusing on actual eWOM and other forms of engagement.

Despite these contributions, we need to fully acknowledge the limits of the context of the study. The unique conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic can limit the generalizability of the lessons to be learned from this paper. Nevertheless, we hope our paper attracts attention to the active role brand advertising can play in addressing desirable health behaviors while simultaneously enhancing consumer engagement during pandemics.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix A. Key constructs (Study 2-3-4) and measurement properties

Constructs and item	Study 2: US (*N* = 303) α=.94	Study 3: US (*N* = 290) α=.94	Study 4: TR (*N* = 312) α=.95
Perceived Fit (Simonin and Ruth 1998**)**			
For the following questions please think about the products and services provided by the company/brand in the advertisement:	CR=.95 AVE=.71 *M* = 4.13 SD=.86	CR=.89 AVE=.49 *M* = 3.98 SD=.92	CR=.91 AVE=.55 *M* = 3.93 SD=.97
The products and services are helpful during the pandemic.	.88	.71	.74
The products and services have benefits that are useful during the pandemic.	.87	.73	.71
The function of the products and services fit with the current situation.	.89	.72	.78
The products and services improve the current situation	.84	.67	.69
It is logical for this company to help during the pandemic.	.81	.65	.77
It feels right for this company to respond to the pandemic.	.84	.75	.73
It makes sense for this company to respond to the pandemic.	.82	.70	.76
The image of this company fits with its response to the pandemic.	.80	.69	.74
eWOM Intention (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit 2011**)**			
How likely are you to participate in the following activities with regard to the products and services provided by the company/ brand in the advertisement?	α=.97 CR=.98 AVE=.94 *M* = 4.08 SD = 1.66	α=.96 CR=.95 AVE=.86 *M* = 3.54 SD = 1.98	α=.96 CR=.97 AVE=.92 *M* = 2.84 SD = 1.91
I would express my opinion about them online (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, other)	.97	.92	.95
I would send or share online messages or links about this brand's ads.	.97	.94	.97
I would write something or post about this brand online.	.97	.93	.96
Coded Functional and Experiential Ad Appeals (Zarantonello, Jedidi, and Schmitt 2013**)**		*M* = 2.39 SD = 1.15	*M* = 3.73 SD=.75
To what degree does the ad focus on:			
Product attributes (i.e. the formulation or ingredients of the product and its features)?			
Product application (i.e. how the product has to be applied or rinsed; example: instructions for use, dosage, implement required)?			
Product performance (i.e. what the product can do and its cleaning efficacy)?			
Functional benefits (i.e. the advantages for the consumer)?			
Functional value (i.e. value for money or convenience of the product)?			
Overall functional (i.e. an ad that includes the above and related characteristics)			
To what degree does the ad use or appeal to:		*M* = 2.96 SD = 1.23	*M* = 2.78 SD=.81
Sensory elements (i.e. colors and exciting visuals, music, touch, smell)?			
Feelings and emotions (i.e. all kinds of feelings and emotions, either positive such as joy or negative such as fear)?			
Imagination and mental stimulation (i.e. thinking in a different, original and innovative way, approaching things from a new angle)?			
Behaviors and actions (i.e. physical activities, specific actions, bodily experiences)?			
Overall experiential (i.e. an ad that includes the above and related characteristics)			
Ad Liking (Bergkvist and Rossiter 2007)	*M* = 5.43 SD = 1.53	*M* = 5.33 SD = 1.53	*M* = 5.17 SD = 1.72
Please rate your opinion of the advertisement you just watched: Extremely dislike: Extremely like			

Notes: Column entries for items are factor loadings.

Appendix B. Stimuli for study 1

High-fit condition (low fit condition)

Imagine that the world is hit by a new virus, ROBID-23. The virus has already spread across the US and Europe and people have to stay at home again. COVID-19 related precautions, such as keeping social distance, wearing masks and washing hands are also effective in preventing the spread of the new virus.

During this new health crisis, you observe various advertisements that address problems and precautions related to the new virus.

Planox, a hygiene brand who sells products such as surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (Planox, a hair cosmetics brand who sells products such as hair serums and hair masks), has adapted its advertising to the emergence of this new virus. Imagine you came across the ad by Planox illustrated on next page.

Please carefully examine this ad as you will answer questions related to the ad:

High Fit Condition



Low-Fit Condition

