

# Identity And Brand Positioning: Polarized Vs. Inclusive



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*In an era where consumers increasingly expect brands to take a stance and demonstrate authenticity, understanding the nuances of brand positioning has become paramount. While certain brand stances resonate deeply with specific consumer segments, others may not achieve the desired impact, suggesting a potential link between brand messaging and consumer identities. This study investigates the relationship between self-identity, social identity, and consumer preference for polarized versus inclusive brand positioning, using the fitness industry as its context. Utilizing a sample of 144 participants, the study first assessed self-identity and social identities related to fitness. Participants were then exposed to two fictitious fitness brands: Brand X, symbolizing a polarized brand stance, and Brand Y, symbolizing an inclusive stance. Logistic regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between identity scores and brand preference. Results indicated that individuals with lower identity scores exhibited a preference for the inclusive Brand Y, while those with high identity scores favored the polarized Brand X. Furthermore, a t-test revealed significant differences in consumer brand identification, with Brand X demonstrating stronger consumer brand identification compared to Brand Y.*

**Keywords:** Social Identity, Brand Positioning, Polarized Branding, Inclusive Branding and Consumer Brand Identification

## 1. Introduction

Brand positioning is a critical component of marketing strategy, significantly influencing consumer perceptions and brand success (Singh, 2014). It reflects the distinct space a brand occupies in the minds of its target audience, differentiating it from competitors and articulating a unique value proposition (Sujan, 1989). Effective brand positioning relies on delivering a clear and compelling message that aligns with consumer needs (Lee, 2018), often communicated through advertising (Alden, 1999). Successful campaigns, like Nike's "Just Do It" (Holt, 2004) and Dove's "Real Beauty" (Murray, 2013), can powerfully shape brand perceptions, while poor execution can lead to negative brand associations, as evidenced by Pepsi's controversial 2017 ad featuring Kendall Jenner (Minár, 2018). Such instances highlight the necessity of aligning advertising with brand positioning and cultural sensitivity.

As consumers increasingly expect brands to take authentic stances on social issues, reactions to these positions can vary widely. Nike's ad featuring Colin Kaepernick ignited divided opinions on social justice (Neureiter, 2021), while Gillette's campaign on toxic masculinity faced both praise and criticism, illustrating the polarized nature of consumer reactions (Milfeld, 2021). Therefore, the stated phenomena of polarization prompts inquiries into how and why individuals have differing reactions to extreme stances, such as polarized and inclusive positions. Addressing these questions could provide valuable insights into consumer behavior.

Given context, understanding the strategic implications of brand polarization becomes essential. Marketing literature suggests that many brands simultaneously garner love and hate reactions from consumers, sometimes evolving over time or deliberately positioning themselves at the nexus of polarization, as exemplified by Miracle Whip (Alvarado, 2014) and Apple (Monahan, 2023), which adopt a "love it or hate it" approach (Osuna Ramírez, 2019). Adopting a polarized strategy inherently involves the risk of alienating segments of an audience; however, even inclusive approaches are not immune to negative feedback, particularly when they lack authenticity, even benign marketing tactics, such as representing diverse body types, can provoke mixed responses, as seen with Gymshark's inclusion of models with visible "love handles" had been bashed a lot online (Brennan, 2020).

Existence of the complexity in consumers' mixed reactions underscores the importance of understanding social identity theory (Tajfel, 2003), which explains group polarization and rivalry, with individuals conforming to dominant group identities and leading to out-group alienation (Osuna Ramírez, 2019). Consumers express their social identities through brands that align with group values, fostering community among users of polarizing brands (Osuna Ramírez, 2019). Badrinarayanan (2018) emphasize alignment with brand values and the quest for belonging as drivers of affinity towards brands. This process is rooted in social identity theory, where supporters and detractors identify with similar sentiments within their groups, fostering intergroup alienation (Osuna Ramírez, 2019). Therefore, understanding consumer identity is pivotal in brand preference. Research indicates individuals with strong identities gravitate toward brands that resonate with their beliefs (He,

2012), while social identity dynamics dictate brand affiliation (Goncalves Filho, 2022). Brands resonant with an individual's self-identity, especially those central to their self-concept, are favored, enhancing consumer-brand connections. These connections are often associated with brands of high symbolic value (Harmon-Kizer, 2013). The congruence between a brand's personality and a consumer's self-concept can significantly affect brand evaluation and purchase intentions (Khare, 2009). Moreover, the autonomy in choosing meaningful identities enhances brand evaluations linked to those identities. This emphasizes the need for brands to align with both polarized and inclusive strategies carefully, as misalignment may undermine trust and loyalty. Building on this, we will investigate the following research hypotheses

**H1:** There is a significant association between individuals' self-identity and their choice of brand based on Positioning (polarized vs. inclusive)

**H0:** There is no significant association between individuals' self-identity and their choice of brand based on Positioning (polarized vs. inclusive)

**H2:** There is a significant association between individuals' social-identity and their choice of brand based on Positioning (polarized vs. inclusive)

**H0:** There is no significant association between individuals' social identity and their choice of brand based on Positioning (polarized vs. inclusive)

Another phenomenon derived from social identity theory is consumer–brand identification (CBI). This occurs when a brand helps consumers articulate their identity, creating a strong emotional and psychological connection (Bhattacharya, 2003). Research has demonstrated that when a brand resonates with an individual's self-identity, it fosters strong brand identification, enhancing loyalty and WOM (Wallace, 2017). Such identification means consumers are more likely to support brands that reflect their values and beliefs, which suggests that CBI is crucial for understanding consumer behavior within polarized or inclusive brand strategies because these strategies occupy opposite ends of the spectrum and can evoke strong connections. A polarized brand may reinforce a sense of exclusivity and identity alignment, attracting consumers with specific, aligned values. Conversely, inclusive brands appeal by providing a sense of belonging and acceptance, drawing in a broader audience with diverse identities. Therefore, by incorporating CBI into our study of self-identity and social identity, we aim to examine a critical question: Does consumer brand identification differ significantly between those who favor polarized brands and those who favor inclusive brands?

**H0:** There is no significant difference in consumer brand identification between individuals associated with polarized brands and those associated with inclusive brands

**H3:** There is a significant difference in consumer brand identification between individuals associated with polarized brands and those associated with inclusive brands

By investigating these dynamics in detail, this study aims to provide clarity on the situational effectiveness of polarized versus inclusive positioning, thereby equipping brands with the knowledge to navigate these complex strategies effectively. In the first part of the study, we explore how self-identity and social identity influence consumer choices between brands positioned as polarized versus inclusive. To provide a contextual foundation for the study, we chose to conduct our research within the fitness industry. The study will involve respondents from gyms who will first assess their self- and social identities related to fitness. Participants will then be exposed to two fictitious brands—one with a polarized positioning and the other with an inclusive Positioning, the study will seek to identify relationships between participants' identity quotients and their brand preferences. In the second part of the study, we compare the consumer–brand identification achieved by each brand.

## 2. Methodology

Our research examines how self and social identity affect brand preference based on positioning (polarized versus inclusive). We chose the fitness industry because individuals display varied identification patterns (Anderson et al., 1994). Our study employs a survey methodology and unfolds in two parts: first, we assess self and social identity in Fitness using established scales, then we introduce respondents to stimuli (fictitious brands for fitness). In the second part, we evaluate consumer–brand identification. We collected data from physically active individuals at both university and commercial gyms to ensure a diverse sample. We used binary logistic regression to examine the relationship between self-identity in fitness and social identity in fitness with brand preference based on positioning (polarized vs. inclusive). We conducted a t-test to compare the consumer–brand identification garnered by each brand.

### Procedure

Respondents first completed the self-identity in fitness scale, which we adapted from the Exercise Identity Scale by Anderson et al. (1994). We chose this scale because it focuses on measuring how individuals perceive exercise as an integral part of their self-concept and self-identity, making it highly relevant for our study in the fitness context. We adapted six items on a 7-point Likert scale.: *"I consider myself an exerciser"*, *"When I describe myself to others, I usually include my involvement in exercise"*, *"Physical exercise is a central factor to my self-concept"*, *"I need to exercise to feel good about myself"*, *"Others see me as someone who exercises regularly"* and *"For me, being an exerciser is way of life"* ( $\alpha = .896$ ).

We assessed social identity using an adapted scale from Bruner (2018), modifying five items on a 7-point Likert scale *"I feel a bond with others in the fitness community"*, *"I feel connected to others in the fitness community"*, *"Being part of a fitness community is an important part of my self-image"*, *"I am proud to be part of the fitness community"* and *"I feel good when I see members of the fitness community do well"* and *"I believe my fitness offers more benefits than other activities"* ( $\alpha=.857$ ).

(Table 1). By capturing the strength of identification with fitness communities, the scale provides valuable insights into how these social connections influence consumer preferences and behaviors.

We designed our research to test our hypothesis in the fitness industry and included an inclusive moment, 'Body Positivity,' in developing the stimulus. We embraced inclusive branding through #bodypositivity, creating an environment where diversity and acceptance were celebrated, aiming to resonate with those seeking a supportive and welcoming community. Conversely, we developed advertisements for polarized branding that deliberately opposed the principles of body positivity. These ads were crafted to be divisive, creating a clear sense of alienation for untargeted segments while fostering a sense of superiority among the targeted audience. We then introduced participants to these two fictitious fitness brands and asked them to choose the brand they resonated with most. To ensure genuine preference and avoid forcing a choice, we also gave respondents the option not to select either brand, allowing for a non-forced measurement of brand preference. Brand X conveyed a polarized stance, while Brand Y conveyed an inclusive stance, with each brand promoted through three distinct advertisements.

Brand X's advertisements featured headlines such as "Carving body is not for everyone. People who sit behind excuses will always be behind us. #BodyPositivityIsForLazyPeople", "We are not for everyone, only for the elite lifter" and "Elite Lifting League: Not Every Woman's Battle – Only the Fittest Reign Here" In contrast, Brand Y's advertisements included headlines such as "For all the lifters out there #fitnessForEveryone", "Every Shape Tells a Story: We're Here to Listen and Support Your Journey. #BodyPositivity #FitnessForEveryone" and "Unite we lift: Every woman, every strength—No bar too high"

After selecting a brand, respondents evaluated the advertisements with descriptors such as "Good/Bad" "Pleasant/Unpleasant" and "Dislike/Like" (Haupt, 2023). They also completed a 5-point, 3-item scale to assess consumer–brand identification (Haupt, 2023) for the brand they chose to associate with, using statements like "I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Brand", "The Brand embodies what I believe in" and "After seeing what the Brand stands for, this brand is like a part of me" ( $\alpha=.764$ ). (Table 1)

### 3. Data Specification

In this study, we collected primary data from gym-goers at university and commercial gyms using SurveyMonkey. A total of 183 individuals participated. Among these participants, 144 respondents chose either Brand X or Brand Y, while 141 completed the study. Out of those, 139 provided demographic information (Tables 2 and 3). Three participants exited the survey after selecting a brand, and 26 chose not to associate with either brand.

We measured perceived boldness and divisiveness using control questions to ensure clear differentiation between the brand messages. T-test results showed significant differences: Brand X scored higher in boldness ( $M = 7.57$ ) and divisiveness ( $M = 7.84$ ) compared to Brand Y (boldness  $M = 2.48$ , divisiveness  $M = 2.59$ ), confirming the stimuli's effectiveness in representing polarized over inclusive stances.

To evaluate the advertisements and ensure no significant differences in ad evaluation that could create a bias in choosing one over the other, we included a 3-item attitude scale adapted from Haupt et al. (2023) ( $\alpha = .866$ ). T-test results showed no significant difference in ad evaluation between the two brands (Brand X:  $M = 8.08$ , Brand Y:  $M = 7.97$ ;  $t(142) = 0.308$ ,  $p = 0.758$ ), confirming balanced perceptions (Monahan, 2023).

For those who opted not to choose a brand, some provided insightful feedback on their decision. Comments included observations such as, "I don't feel drawn to either. Brand X's stance is, in my opinion, very divisive and appeals to people who tend not to be inclusive, whereas Brand Y is very generic and by trying to cater to everyone might not retain people." Another participant mentioned, "Brand X is a bit too bold for my taste. But in general, I would choose the brand that is more bold, that makes me feel special." Lastly, a respondent noted, "Both stances are aggressively pandering to a select audience and are relying on targeting specific groups which I don't fall into either category of."

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Identity in Fitness (Bruner, 2018)	183	2	7	5.395	1.18	-.686	-.202
Self-Identity in Fitness (Anderson et al., 1994)	183	2.2	7	5.425	1.103	-.727	-.188
Consumer Brand Identification (Haupt et al., 2023)	141	2	5	3.803	.6958	-.117	-.437

Table 2 Gender and Age

		Age * Gender			Total
		Gender			
		Male	Female	Other	
Age	18-21	17	1	0	18
	22-25	39	11	0	50
	26-29	43	13	0	56
	30-33	10	4	1	15
Total		109	29	1	139

To ensure the constructs' validity and reliability, a factor analysis was conducted on the scales for self-identity, social identity, and consumer–brand identification (CBI) (Table 4). This analysis aimed to confirm that each scale effectively

measures its intended construct.

**Table 3 Education Background**

	No.	%
Higher Secondary School	14	10%
Undergraduate	63	45%
Postgraduate	55	40%
Ph.D.	7	5%
Total	139	

The principal component analysis extracted three components, which collectively explained 68.814% of the total variance. The first component alone accounted for 51.431% of the variance, indicating a strong initial factor presence. The second and third components added 11.139% and 6.244% respectively, cumulatively supporting the robustness of the measurement scales.

**Table 4 Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component		
	1	2	3
Self Iden. (Item 1)	.674		
Self Iden. (Item 2)	.611		
Self Iden. (Item 3)	.755		
Self Iden. (Item 4)	.734		
Self Iden. (Item 5)	.759		
Self Iden. (Item 6)	.791		
Social Iden.(Item 1)		.783	
Social Iden.(Item 2)		.680	
Social Iden. (Item 3)		.764	
Social Iden. (Item 4)		.747	
Social Iden.(Item 5)		.557	
CBI (Item 1)			.827
CBI (Item 2)			.767
CB1 (Item 3)			.795
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			
Rotation Method: Equamax with Kaiser Normalization.			

#### 4. Analysis

We employed logistic regression analysis to investigate the relationship between self-identity in exercise and brand choice, distinguishing between Brand X and Brand Y (Brand X=0, Brand Y=1 as internal value in the model). The analysis showed that self-identity significantly impacts brand choice, confirming **H1** (Table 4), which posited a significant association between self-identity and brand choice based on positioning. Specifically, the coefficient for self-identity ( $B = -0.945$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicates that higher self-identity decreases the odds of choosing Brand Y by 61.1% ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.389$ ). The model, confirmed by a Chi-square value of 30.594 ( $p < .001$ ), explains 19.1% to 25.8% of the variance (Cox & Snell R Square = 0.191; Nagelkerke R Square = 0.258). With 69.4% classification accuracy and a Hosmer and Lemeshow Test value of 6.463 ( $p = 0.596$ ), the results highlight self-identity as a crucial factor in brand preference.

**Table 4 Variables in the Equation (Logistic Regression)**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)		
									Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Self Iden.	-.945	.198	22.730	1	.000	.389	.264	.573	
	Constant	5.642	1.158	23.746	1	.000	281.981			

Similarly, we investigated the relationship between social Identity for fitness and Brand choice. The results demonstrated a significant effect, Confirming **H2** (Table 5), which anticipated a significant association between social identity and brand choice based on positioning. With a coefficient of  $B = -1.016$  ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that higher social identity decreases the likelihood of choosing Brand Y. The odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.362$ ) suggests a 63.8% reduction in odds, highlighting the strong influence of social identity.

**Table 5 Variables in the Equation (Logistic Regression)**

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)		
									Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Social Iden.	-1.016	.221	21.160	1	.000	.362	.235	.558	
	Constant	6.066	1.289	22.152	1	.000	430.809			

The model's fit was supported by a Chi-square value of 28.841 ( $p < .001$ ), explaining 18.2% to 24.4% of the variance (Cox & Snell R Square = 0.182; Nagelkerke R Square = 0.244). The classification accuracy was 68.8%, and the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test yielded a Chi-square of 3.746 ( $p = 0.879$ ), confirming the model's adequacy.

When comparing both identities, self-identity's slightly larger model fit and classification accuracy suggest it has a more substantial influence on brand choice. This finding highlights the critical role of self-identity in consumer preferences, pointing to its stronger predictive power compared to social identity in this context.

Before combining self-identity and social identity in a logistic regression model, we conducted a multicollinearity check using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Both variables demonstrated VIF values of 2.389, which are well below the commonly accepted threshold of 5. This indicates that multicollinearity is not a significant concern. With these low VIF values, we can confidently include both variables in the model, ensuring that multicollinearity does not adversely impact the regression results.

The combined logistic regression model, including both self-identity and social identity, offers a comprehensive view of their joint impact on brand choice. Utilizing a backward stepwise method, the model confirmed that self-identity remains a significant predictor with a coefficient of  $B = -0.598$  ( $p = 0.027$ ). This finding indicates that higher levels of self-identity reduce the odds of choosing Brand Y by 45% ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.550$ ), reinforcing its crucial role in brand selection.

Social identity, although less significant with a coefficient of  $B = -0.523$  ( $p = 0.078$ ), still suggests a trend where increased social identity is associated with lower odds of selecting Brand Y ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.593$ ). This marginal significance indicates that while social identity influences brand choice, its impact is not as robust as that of self-identity when both are considered together.

The model's overall fit was robust, as evidenced by the Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients with a Chi-square of 33.915 ( $p < .001$ ), indicating the model's efficacy in predicting brand choice. Additionally, the classification accuracy was 71.5% (Table 6).

These results underscore the dominant role of self-identity in influencing consumer preferences, while social identity, although contributory, plays a secondary role when both factors are evaluated simultaneously. This highlights the nuanced interplay between personal and social identity factors in shaping brand preferences.

Table 6 Classification Table

Observed		Predicted		
		Brand Choice		Percentage Correct
		1	2	
Brand Choice	1	40	20	66.7
	2	21	63	75.0
Overall Percentage				71.5

The Cut Value is .500

We employed an independent samples t-test to test Hypothesis 3, which posits a difference in consumer brand identification (CBI) between individuals associated with polarized brands and those with inclusive brands. The test revealed a statistically significant difference in CBI scores. Levene's test confirmed equal variances ( $F = 12.619$ ,  $p = .001$ ). The t-test results,  $t = 4.715$ ,  $p < .001$ , demonstrate a significant mean difference of 0.52, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.30 to 0.74, supporting **H3**. Specifically, Brand X, representing a polarized stance, showed a higher mean score ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) compared to Brand Y's inclusive stance ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). This indicates a stronger consumer brand identification with the polarized brand.

### 5. Results and Discussions

The results of this study underscore the intricate dynamics between identity factors and brand choice, particularly within the context of polarized and inclusive brand positioning. The logistic regression analyses provided compelling evidence that both self-identity and social identity significantly influence brand preference. The coefficient for self-identity ( $B = -0.945$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicates that higher self-identity decreases the odds of choosing Brand Y by 61.1% ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.389$ ), showcasing its substantial impact on brand choice. Individuals with a strong self-identity in fitness gravitated towards Brand X that emphasized exclusivity and a sense of superiority in fitness, aligning with polarized branding strategies. This aligns with findings indicating a coefficient for self-identity that significantly impacts brand choice, suggesting these consumers felt a heightened connection with brands that distinguished enthusiasts from non-enthusiasts. Similarly, the analysis of social identity further reinforces these dynamics. With a coefficient of  $B = -1.016$  ( $p < .001$ ) and an odds ratio of  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.362$ , the study highlights that higher social identity reduces the likelihood of selecting Brand Y by 63.8%. This finding indicates that strong social identity encourages consumers to engage with Brand X that resonate with communal and in group values and reject out group values. The data reveal a clear division in consumer preferences, The self-concept is closely aligned with brand messaging that fosters a sense of differentiation from individuals who do not share similarly strong core beliefs. Such messaging resonates deeply, allowing individuals to reaffirm their unique identities and values, a phenomenon well-supported in the literature on identity-based brand engagement. These insights confirm the hypothesized associations between identity strength and brand positioning, emphasizing the need for strategic alignment between brand attributes and consumer identities to foster stronger brand connections.

Conversely, those with low to moderate self-identity in fitness preferred Brand Y's inclusive approach. This preference reflects a desire for acceptance and community, aligning with the notion that inclusive branding resonates with individuals seeking less competitive environments. Similarly, individuals with low to moderate social identity showed a tendency to favor Brand Y's inclusive messaging. The coefficient for social identity,  $B = -1.016$  ( $p < .001$ ), with an odds ratio of  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.362$ , indicates a 63.8% decrease in the likelihood of selecting Brand Y at higher identity levels. This suggests that individuals seeking acceptance and community-oriented values resonate more with inclusive branding. Individuals with lower self-identity and social Identity often seek environments that are supportive and accepting, aligning with inclusive branding that emphasizes community and collective growth rather than competition. This form of branding minimizes threat perception and offers a welcoming atmosphere for those who may not have strong self and social Identity as it reduces the pressure to conform to more exclusive social groups and embraces diversity.

In comparing self-identity and social identity, the higher odds ratio for self-identity ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.389$ ) as opposed to social identity ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.362$ ) indicates that self-identity is more influential in brand choice. This heightened influence arises from self-identity's connection to personal values and self-perception, which are essential for alignment with brands that resonate with individual beliefs and lifestyle.

While comparing the Consumer Brand Identification (CBI) scores of the two brands, we observed that the polarized Brand X garnered a stronger CBI (mean = 4.10) compared to the inclusive Brand Y (mean = 3.59), despite more participants choosing Brand Y (84 vs. 60). This difference was statistically significant, as indicated by an independent samples t-test ( $t = 4.715$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This outcome can be attributed to the nature of polarized brands, which often evoke stronger emotional connections and a sense of belonging among their supporters (Osuna Ramírez, 2019). Polarized brands typically align closely with specific personal values and identities, intensifying consumer attachment. This deep-seated emotional resonance fosters a robust identification even among a smaller group of chosen consumers. The strength of emotional engagement and alignment with personal beliefs enhances the consumer's sense of connection, leading to a higher CBI despite fewer selections.

## 6. Conclusions

This study examines how self and social identity influence consumer choice based on brand positioning, with a particular focus on polarized and inclusive strategies. The rationale for testing our hypothesis lies in understanding the contextual effects of identity alignment on brand preference. By designing our study around self and social identity, we aimed to explore how these elements interact with brand messaging to shape consumer behavior. The choice of stimuli in the same context ensures a relevant examination of identity strength and its impact on brand positioning. Hence, we decided to develop stimuli and adapt self and social identity measurements all within the fitness context, allowing us to capture effects contextually and maintain greater control over the research design.

We discovered that while fewer participants chose the polarized brand, it fostered stronger Consumer Brand Identification (CBI). Polarized brands often take clear and definitive stances on issues, aligning strongly with specific values and beliefs. Consumers with corresponding identities are more likely to experience a sense of resonance and shared purpose with these brands. This alignment can contribute to a feeling of belonging and make consumers feel like they are part of a distinct and meaningful group (Osuna Ramírez, 2019). By drawing clear lines and potentially alienating those who don't share its values, a polarized brand can foster a sense of exclusivity among its adherents. This can tap into in-group bias, where individuals favor and feel more connected to groups they perceive as elite or selective (Lin, 2020). Polarized branding can be particularly effective in niche marketing as it appeals directly to consumers with specific interests or beliefs, creating a strong and loyal customer base.

Conversely, those with less definitive identities might consider inclusive branding. This strategy offers a welcoming and safe environment, reducing the risk of alienating consumers whose identities are not strongly aligned. By fostering an inclusive atmosphere, brands can appeal to a diverse group, ensuring that all consumers feel valued and acknowledged. In conclusion, our study underscores the importance of tailored brand positioning strategies based on consumer identity strength, offering a nuanced framework for engaging different segments of the market effectively.

The current study has some limitations. Firstly, it focuses solely on the fitness industry. It would be interesting to replicate this study in different industries, such as apparel or telecommunications, by creating polarized and inclusive brand scenarios while measuring self and social identity. This could reveal how identity factors influence brand preference across various contexts. Additionally, the study did not employ randomization, which could be addressed in future research to enhance validity. Moreover, the use of fictitious brands and ads allowed for greater control, yet investigating real brands could provide more practical insights. Future studies could also explore a more diverse demographic sample to ensure broader applicability of the findings.

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