J Bus Ethics
DOI 10.1007/s10551-017-3577-4

ORIGINAL PAPER

Perceived Ethical Leadership Affects Customer Purchasing Intentions Beyond Ethical Marketing in Advertising Due to Moral Identity Self-Congruence Concerns

Niels Van Quaquebeke[1] · Jan U. Becker[1] · Niko Goretzki[1] · Christian Barrot[1]

Received: 21 October 2016 / Accepted: 14 May 2017
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2017

Abstract Ethical leadership has so far mainly been featured in the organizational behavior domain and, as such, treated as an intra-organizational phenomenon. The present study seeks to highlight the relevance of ethical leadership for extra-organizational phenomena by combining the organizational behavior perspective on ethical leadership with a classical marketing approach. In particular, we demonstrate that customers may use perceived ethical leadership cues as additional reference points when forming purchasing intentions. In two experimental studies ($N = 601$ and $N = 336$), we find that ethical leadership positively affects purchasing intentions because of customers' concerns for moral self-congruence. We show this by means of both mediation and moderation analyses. Interestingly, the effect of perceived ethical leadership on purchasing intentions holds over and above the ethical advertising claims (e.g., cause-related marketing) that are commonly used in marketing. We conclude by discussing the possible ramifications of ethical leadership beyond its effects on immediate employees.

Keywords Ethical leadership · Moral identity · Purchasing intention · Advertising · Marketing · Self-congruence · Ethics · Moral · Cause-related marketing

Introduction

The numerous corporate scandals of the recent past—involving Enron, FIFA, Volkswagen, and Siemens, to name a few—have been closely associated with top management's ethical transgressions. Spurred by these events and empowered by the ever-faster dissemination of information, the public has begun to demand more transparency from CEOs, placing their internal leadership behavior under increasing scrutiny. Meanwhile, people point to the success of companies like Ben and Jerry's or The Body Shop as positive examples of CEOs' ethical leadership. In the latter case, founder and CEO Anita Roddick made ethical values the core of the company's strategy and encouraged employees to follow her example in campaigning for social and environmental initiatives such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace. As part of this initiative and similar others, The Body Shop has become well known for what Roddick referred to as "moral leadership" and leverages its ethical CEO as a valuable marketing asset (Lyall 2007). Corresponding with these anecdotes, empirical research has established immediate links between ethical leadership and employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, dedication, and perceptions of leaders' effectiveness (e.g., Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Treviño 2006a), as well as reduced unethical behavior and relationship conflict (e.g., Brown and Treviño 2006a; Mayer et al. 2012). Yet, amidst the considerable attention given to ethical leadership within the field of organizational behavior (for an overview, see Den Hartog 2015), research

✉ Niels Van Quaquebeke
niels.quaquebeke@the-klu.org

Jan U. Becker
jan.becker@the-klu.org

Niko Goretzki
niko.goretzki@gmail.com

Christian Barrot
Christian.barrot@the-klu.org

[1] Management Department, Kühne Logistics University, Großer Grasbrook 17, 20457 Hamburg, Germany

Published online: 22 May 2017

has not endeavored to empirically investigate its external effects—even though scholars have conceptually suggested links between ethical leadership and consumer outcomes such as trust and long-term loyalty (Eisenbeiss 2012; Eisenbeiss et al. 2015).

While the lack of such boundary-spanning research may seem a natural consequence of academia's siloed structure (Reibstein et al. 2009; Glynn and Raffaelli 2010), there is value in understanding the potential crossover effects between leadership and customer decisions, especially in a time where information on internal leadership can easily and rapidly spread beyond organizational boundaries (e.g., through social media). Such research could not only help scholarship achieve a better representation of organizational realities, but also further substantiate the notion that better organizational performance requires better ethics at the top (Eisenbeiss and Giessner 2012; Den Hartog 2015).

In order to address these important aspects, we gleaned specific insights from the two academic silos of organizational behavior and marketing. Upon this basis, we conducted two experimental studies that investigate whether and how consumers use information on CEOs' ethical leadership behavior when forming purchasing intentions. To explain this relationship, we drew on research concerning the effect of self-congruence, which is established in both the marketing (e.g., Sirgy 1982) and organizational behavior literature (Baumeister 2010; e.g., for leadership: Bono and Judge 2003). Specifically, we argue that acting consistently with respect to one's own self-concept may drive purchasing decisions in the presence of ethical leadership cues. Accordingly, we also investigate the moderating role of customers' moral identity, i.e., the importance that individuals assign to moral values for their own self-concept (Aquino and Reed 2002). Hence, using both, moderation and mediation analyses, we seek to uncover the same underlying process (cf. Jacoby and Sassenberg 2011; Spencer et al. 2005). In this way, we hope to illuminate how moral self-congruence concerns drive customers' response to perceived ethical leadership.

In pursuing this aim, the present study seeks to contribute to two literatures. On the organizational behavior side, we introduce customers' moral self-congruence as the active ingredient between perceived ethical leadership and customers' purchasing intention. This provides another stepping stone for highlighting the specifically moral nature of ethical leadership, as opposed to simply being another positive leadership style (e.g., van Gils et al. 2015). Additionally, by integrating purchasing intentions as a dependent variable, we extend the relevance of the ethical leadership concept beyond the intra-organizational processes that so far dominate the organizational behavior literature (Den Hartog 2015).

Meanwhile, we also contribute to the marketing literature by highlighting the importance of intra-organizational processes to customer decision-making. As such, we show that (ethical) leadership may work alongside traditional marketing instruments to stimulate desirable customer behavior. By combining concepts from both literatures in one study, we heed the call for more boundary-spanning research, which seeks to apply specific insights from different disciplines in order to better reflect organizational realities (Shapira 2014).

Theoretical Background

Ethical Leadership in Organizations and Beyond

According to the dominant conceptualization, ethical leadership in organizations is characterized by "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120; for other perspectives, see overview: Den Hartog 2015). Therefore, being an ethical leader not only requires acting morally as a manager, but also being a person of high moral standards (Brown and Treviño 2006a). While the moral manager aspect covers a leader's proactive efforts to influence followers' ethical behaviors, such as communicating ethical guidelines or holding employees accountable for their actions (Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Treviño 2006a), the moral person aspect is concerned with leaders' personality traits and moral characteristics as displayed in both private and professional settings. As such, ethical leaders are associated with honesty, integrity, fairness, and an upright concern for both individuals and the community (Treviño et al. 2003). Supplemented in part by social learning theory (Bandura 1977, 1986), this understanding suggests that ethical leaders set an example of ethical behavior that employees can identify with and emulate themselves (Brown et al. 2005).

Traditionally, research has treated ethical leadership as an intra-organizational phenomenon that only affects members of the respective organization. To this end, studies show that ethical leadership can positively influence employees' own organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Avey et al. 2011; Brown and Treviño 2006a; Mayer et al. 2009; Piccolo et al. 2010; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck 2009)—as expressed, for example, in employees' helping behaviors (Kalshoven and Boon 2012), ethical decision-making, or willingness to report problems to management (Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Treviño

2006a). Moreover, ethical leadership has been found to enhance employees' commitment to the organization and their overall job satisfaction (Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Treviño 2006a), as well as positively influence employees' (psychological) well-being (Avey et al. 2012). Ethical leadership has also been found to hamper undesirable follower outcomes, such as employees' unethical behavior (Mayer et al. 2012), deviance (van Gils et al. 2015), or other kinds of counterproductive behavior and relational conflict within organizational units (Brown and Treviño 2006a; De Hoogh and Den Hartog 2008; Mayer et al. 2009, 2012). Besides their positive effects on employee behavior, leaders also benefit from engaging in ethical leadership—by, for instance, being perceived as more effective (Brown et al. 2005; Kalshoven and Den Hartog 2009).

Whereas the extant research on ethical leadership has focused on such intra-organizational effects as those described above, we believe that the ethical aspects of leadership also exert influence on external stakeholders, specifically customers. In the wake of numerous corporate scandals (e.g., Enron or WorldCom), intra-organizational practices and leadership ethics are nowadays receiving substantial media attention (e.g., Volkswagen). Furthermore, the increased interconnectedness between people (e.g., through the advance of social media) has allowed information to spread more rapidly and made transparency more desirable. Despite companies' efforts to curb public disclosure, it is relatively easy for employees to joke about their bosses on Facebook (Cheng 2011) or post their opinions on a blog (Lacitis 2013), and such details may be impossible to control once released. Meanwhile, the press also routinely obtain CEO e-mails intended for internal management (Butcher 2011) or confidential discussion papers that reflect badly on a company's leadership (Reuters 2015). It also happens that private videos are secretly recorded and go viral via YouTube (YouTube 2006), while bosses themselves unwittingly reveal their controversial viewpoints (Walker 2013). Thus, with more people becoming aware of intra-organizational issues, we contend that ethical leadership may gain relevance for initially distant stakeholders, such as customers, and their decision-making. Corresponding with our argument, Eisenbeiss (2012) theoretically contends that ethical leadership should be related to overall company performance through its effects on external stakeholders—in particular, on customers.

Ethics and Customer Purchasing Intentions

While the link between ethical leadership and customer behavior has yet to be empirically examined, Eisenbeiss (2012) argues that by witnessing ethical leadership, "customers may develop positive beliefs and expectations of the organization's righteousness and ethicality. With increasing trust in the organization and its management, customers may tend to prefer buying the products or services of the specific organization, because they believe in the quality of the products and sustainable production or the quality of services (i.e., the way services are delivered)" (p. 799). Analogously, marketing research generally argues that trust and credibility are important factors in brand equity (e.g., Aaker 1996), as these ultimately factor into people's purchase intent (see, for example, Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995; Keller 1993). As such, advertising research finds that customers often respond positively to cause-related marketing (e.g., Barone et al. 2000; Yechiam et al. 2003) or environmental advertising (e.g., Davis 1994). Another explanation—one more central to the present paper—argues that customers positively respond to ethical advertising in part because they want to better the world (Carrigan et al. 2004). Framed differently, the act of purchasing ethical products may be an expression of oneself and one's moral values. As such, and adapted to the present study, purchasing products from companies that are led ethically may be considered an act of identity-affirmation—a process which we will explore in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Importantly, advertising research also acknowledges that the success of ethical advertising critically depends on the presumed motives behind the company's ethical positioning. After all, customers are typically aware that advertising aims at positively influencing how a company is publicly perceived; thus, they discount ethical claims that appear purely self-serving (Barone et al. 2000). In this respect, we argue that people may regard information on ethical leadership as more authentic, and hence credible, evidence of what is really happening within the company than mere ethical advertising claims. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1 Perceived ethical leadership positively influences purchasing intention over and above the effect of ethical advertising.

Moral Identity and Self-Consistency

With ethical leadership being closely linked to the concept of morality, we expect that customer responses to ethical leadership cues are also guided by individual moral considerations (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008). Specifically, witnessing unethical/ethical leadership may provide moral arguments for or against purchasing a given product—for example, deciding whether it is morally justifiable to purchase from companies where the CEO exhibits unethical leadership.

Even though most people like to think of themselves as moral (even those commonly perceived as "evil"; Baumeister 2010), they also vary in terms of the importance they ascribe to moral beliefs in their self-concept (Blasi 1984). The relative centrality of moral values within an individual's self-conception is captured by moral identity (Aquino and Reed 2002). Like with other identities, moral identity provides a facet of the ideal self that seeks confirmation from corresponding behavior (Blasi 1984; Damon and Hart 1992; Erikson 1964). As such, people who are high in moral identity and uphold self-concepts organized around moral considerations are expected to engage in moral behavior even more than the average person (Aquino and Reed 2002; Damon and Hart 1992; Erikson 1964) in order to maintain moral self-consistency (Barkan et al. 2015; Jennings et al. 2015). For instance, high moral identity has been found to fuel volunteering behavior (Aquino and Reed 2002) and charitable giving (Reynolds and Ceranic 2007; Winterich et al. 2013a; b).

Within the dynamic of perceived ethical leadership and purchasing intention, we expect people's individual moral identity to assume a moderating role because it determines how central ethical considerations are to one's identity. Indeed, marketing research shows that the general notion of self-consistency influences the formation of purchasing intentions (e.g., Hustvedt and Dickson 2009; Reed 2004; Sirgy 1982). As such, while most people's idea of morality probably encompasses buying from companies whose CEOs are associated with an ethical leadership style, this should apply even more so for someone high in moral identity. In the same vein, people high in moral identity may be particularly reluctant to purchase from companies that are not entirely clear regarding their ethical stance (to the degree that these companies may even tolerate known unethical leadership) to prevent internal (moral) cognitive inconsistencies (Barkan et al. 2015; Festinger 1957). Similarly, it is reasonable to expect individuals high in moral identity to simply afford more awareness to ethical issues (van Gils et al. 2015) that may be lost on those low in moral identity. From this, the following argument arises: (a) Morality is a deeply rooted component of the self-concept for high-moral identity individuals; (b) these individuals will not only perceive, but also apply morality (and by extension, the perceived ethical leadership cues) more heavily as a benchmark; and (c) they will use this benchmark to evaluate and engage with, e.g., their purchasing decisions (Giessner et al. 2015; cf. van Quaquebeke et al. 2011). We therefore hypothesize that moral identity moderates the effect of ethical leadership on purchasing intention:

Hypothesis 2 The positive effect of perceived ethical leadership on purchasing intention is stronger for people high in moral identity than for people low in moral identity.

Study Overview

Our research question lends itself to a controlled research design to avoid external biasing effects. We thus conducted two experimental, scenario-based studies to test the hypothesized model. Scenario-based experiments are widely applied in leadership research (e.g., Giessner and van Knippenberg 2008; Rus et al. 2010; van Quaquebeke et al. 2010), as participants' responses largely parallel those from regular laboratory experiments (Robinson and Clore 2001). As such, scenario experiments are well suited to establishing causal relationships with high internal validity while keeping the settings in line with organizational realities (Treviño 1992).

Additionally, online experiments allow one to recruit a rather diverse group of respondents, which ideally improves the findings' external validity and generalizability (Reips 2000). Moreover, research has demonstrated the validity of online studies by successfully replicating the results of complex behavioral experiments that had only previously been conducted in laboratory settings (Crump et al. 2013). For both of our studies, we recruited respondents via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), incentivizing their participation with monetary compensation. MTurk has been found to provide reliable and representative data (Buhrmester et al. 2011; Mason and Suri 2012), and thus, the platform has become an established method for participant recruitment and data collection.

We devised two studies: the first to provide an initial test of our hypotheses, and the second to constructively replicate the findings from the first study. Within each study, we presented participants (in a between-subjects design) with two different kinds of fictional companies (*Aqua* as a product company; *Parcelnow* as a service company—both pretested) to ensure that the effects are not specific to a certain company/product type. We used fictitious companies to rule out respondents' prior experience with a company (cf. Nan and Heo 2007).

While replication generally increases the reliability of results, the specific variation of the stimulus material, in tandem with the variation of measurement, allowed us to enhance the robustness of our analysis. In Study 1, we focus on the moderating effect of moral identity on the relationship between ethical leadership and purchasing intention, showing that the formation of purchasing intentions in the presence of ethical leadership cues follows a moral process. In Study 2, we added an explicit measure of self-congruence to test whether self-consistency considerations related to a person's moral identity actually drive purchasing intentions in the presence of ethical leadership cues. Finally, we tested the resulting moderated mediation

model by means of bootstrapping to account for the non-normality of conditional indirect effects (Hayes 2013).

In line with recent conceptualizations on the proper use of control variables (Bernerth and Aguinis 2016), we included age and gender as control factors across both studies, as there are theoretical (Aquino and Reed 2002) and empirical reasons (i.e., they exhibited significant relationships with core variables in both studies) that warrant their inclusion in the analyses.

Pretest Study

The experimental design of our studies required a manipulation of both ethical leadership and ethical advertising. While an experimental manipulation for ethical leadership was available (van Gils et al. 2015), we were unable to locate a proper ethical advertising manipulation.

Against this backdrop, we created variants of ethical vs. neutral ads. The ethical ads were identical to the neutral ads, save for an ethical claim regarding the company's operations. The advertising stimulus materials were pretested with a sample of 135 MTurkers (30.2% female; average age of 30.2, SD = 10.7) to ensure that the ads chosen for manipulation conveyed significantly more ethical content than their neutral counterparts, while not differing in other advertising dimensions that may inform purchasing decisions (MacInnis et al. 1991). To this end, we asked participants how (1) ethical, (2) competent, and (3) likable they perceived the displayed company to be, and how they perceived the (4) quality of the product/service. We regressed these perception scores in a multivariate logistic regression on the objective manipulation (i.e., ethical ad vs. non-ethical ad). We then chose the two variants of ads (see "Appendix 2" section) that showed a significant difference in ethics perceptions, but not in any of the other domains. In this way, we ensured that our ethical advertising manipulation only involved the perceptions of ethics and no other dimensions relevant to purchasing intention (Table 1).

Table 1 Logistic regression (pretest) to ensure that only the ethics dimension varies significantly for the two conditions of neutral versus ethical advertising across both categories, i.e., Aqua and Parcelnow

Perceptions of…	Neutral versus ethical advertising			
	Aqua		Parcelnow	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Ethics	−3.21***	.89	−2.69**	.78
Competence of firm	.46	.64	−.42	.56
Quality of firm	.64	.53	1.03	.56
Liking of advertising	−.56	.49	.89	.79
Pseudo-R^2	.74		.74	
N	74		78	

Dependent variable: Ethical ad manipulation (1/0)

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Study 1

Sample

The sample comprised 601 participants, 42% of whom identified as female, with an average age of 32.45 years (SD = 11.05 years). Among the participants, 66% were currently employed, 18% were in college, and the rest were either retired, looking for a job, or crossed the "other" category.

Method

Experimental Design and Procedure

Participants were assigned to a product-/service-offering company that was described as comparable to competitors with respect to price and quality. They were then introduced to the specific product/service and the company's long-term CEO Alex Anderson.

The scenario followed a between-subject, two-level (unethical vs. ethical leadership), one-factorial design, with moral identity being additionally measured as a dispositional variable at the end. In accordance with previous research (van Gils et al. 2015), we manipulated the CEO's ethical leadership with a scenario. The specific scenario manipulation was based on the items of the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown and Treviño 2006b, see "Appendix 1" section). In particular, the scenario suggested to participants that they had watched a TV talk show where the CEO had made an appearance, which allowed them to make inferences about his leadership.

To check for boundary conditions, we included other between-subjects factors, such as 2 (ethical advertising) × 2 (product type) × 2 (rotation) design. For ethical advertising, we showed either the pretested ad containing the ethical claim or the neutral ad (see "Appendix 2" section). This was included to ascertain that perceived ethical leadership elicits an effect above and beyond ethical advertising (see H1). Regarding product type, we assigned participants to one type—either Parcelnow (a provider of parcel services) or Aqua (a producer of mineral water)—in order to ascertain that there are no differences across product types. Finally, in order to prevent potential sequence effects, we randomly rotated the stimuli order of ethical leadership and ethical advertising between participants.

This was included to ascertain that ethical leadership elicits an effect beyond ethical advertising, irrespective of when participants see the ad.

Although we computed the full factorial model, the only meaningful interactions, as predicted, occurred between ethical leadership and moral identity. As a result, we have restricted the reported results to the focal analyses involving the different product types. We report the other factors as controls only, as the results are the same without controls.

Measures

Purchasing intention was assessed with an established, single-item measure as originally used by Samu and Wymer (2009). The item "Would you consider purchasing the (product/service) from (company)?" was anchored on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (definitely would not consider) to 7 (definitely would consider).

To assess moral identity, we used the moral identity internalization scale by Aquino and Reed (2002). Research on moral identity has distinguished two dimensions: (1) internalization, which directly refers to how important moral characteristics are to the self, and (2) symbolization, which captures the degree to which people like to publicly "decorate" themselves as moral (Aquino and Reed 2002). However, as perceptions of moral cues are generally thought to come from within (Bandura 1999; Rest 1986; Reynolds and Ceranic 2007), scholars argue that the internalization dimension better reflects the core definition of moral identity (Giessner et al. 2015). Indeed, extant research suggests that the internalization dimension is a stronger predictor of moral decisions (Aquino and Reed 2002; Aquino et al. 2007; Reed and Aquino 2003; Reynolds and Ceranic 2007). The corresponding five-item scale asked participants to envision a person who has characteristics such as honesty, compassion, or fairness. Consequently, participants answered five items such as "Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am" or "I would be ashamed to be a person who had these characteristics." The items were anchored with seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The item "How do you perceive Alex Anderson's leadership behavior?" was used to check the success of the ethical leadership manipulation; participants answered on a seven-point semantic differential ranging from "clearly unethical" (1) to "clearly ethical" (7).

Results

We checked the ethical leadership manipulation by comparing the mean scores of perceived ethical leadership from the manipulation check item across the scenario conditions. The main effect of ethical leadership was significant ($p < .01$). Participants in the low ethical leadership condition perceived the leadership behavior of the fictitious CEO as significantly less ethical compared to participants in the high ethical leadership condition ($M_{low} = 1.62$, $SD = 1.00$; $M_{high} = 6.60$, $SD = .67$; $t(452) = -62.89$, $p < .01$).

Table 2 shows the correlations for all measured variables in Study 1. With a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .74, the moral identity scale demonstrated an acceptable degree of reliability, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., Giessner et al. 2015). Table 3 provides the means, standard deviations, and number of participants for all constructs in Study 1 across the experimental conditions.

To test our hypotheses, we standardized the predictors before conducting the moderation analysis (Cohen et al. 2003). As shown in Table 4, the positive effects of ethical leadership on purchasing intention were significant, even when controlling for ethical advertising ($\beta_{Aqua} = .67$, $p < .01$; $\beta_{Parcelnow} = .81$, $p < .01$), thus supporting H1. Likewise, and in line with H2, the interaction of ethical leadership and moral identity was significantly related to purchasing intention ($\beta_{Aqua} = .12$, $p < .01$; $\beta_{Parcelnow} = .13$, $p < .01$). Figure 1 displays the plots for the interactions and their respective coefficients for simple slopes (at ± 1 SD of moral identity mean). They indicate that, in the case of high moral identity, ethical leadership is significantly related to purchasing intention. The same applies to low levels of moral identity, but to a lesser extent, as predicted. Of note is that all results hold without the controls (age, gender, rotation). For those interested, these analyses are available from the authors upon request.

Discussion

While the results of Study 1 generally support the hypothesized positive effect of ethical leadership on purchasing intention, one may argue that the specific type of ethical advertising used pertained only to company operations. As such, it may not indicate the specific support of ethics that is present in, say, cause-related marketing ads (e.g., Nan and Heo 2007). Moreover, one may argue that the single-item measure of purchasing intention could potentially impede the reliability of our findings. Even more important from a theoretical point of view, it seems desirable to obtain additional evidence for the self-congruence mechanism underlying people's moral identity, to ascertain whether this factor drives the formation of purchasing intention in the wake of ethical leadership cues.

Table 2 Correlations and internal reliabilities (Study 1)

	Aqua					Parcelnow				
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Moral identity	(.74)					(.74)				
2. Purchasing intention	−.02	–				.06	–			
3. Participant gender	.23***	−.05	–			.18**	.04	–		
4. Participant age	.13*	.01	.16**	–		.20***	.07	.21***	–	
5. Ethical advertising	.02	.03	.12*	.02	–	.00	−.03	−.10	.08	–
6. Rotation	−.01	−.07	.02	.09	.09	−.01	−.07	−.11	.01	.06

$N = 300$ (Aqua); 301 (Parcelnow)

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Cronbach's alpha in bracket where available. Gender: 1 = female; 2 = male; ethical advertising: 1 = ethical; 0 = neutral; rotation: 1 = ethical leadership first, then ethical advertising; 0 = ethical advertising first, then ethical leadership

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for measured constructs (Study 1)

	Low ethical leadership—neutral advertising		Low ethical leadership—ethical advertising		High ethical leadership—neutral advertising		High ethical leadership—ethical advertising	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Aqua								
Moral identity	5.97	1.01	6.03	1.05	5.98	.90	5.99	.81
Purchasing intention	2.60	1.62	2.59	1.79	5.47	1.63	5.55	1.79
Participant gender	.43	.50	.48	.50	.31	.47	.51	.50
Participant age	33.06	11.87	33.83	12.39	31.69	9.98	32.02	10.11
N	68		81		64		87	
Parcelnow								
Moral identity	6.02	.88	5.98	.89	6.03	.83	6.09	.83
Purchasing intention	2.53	1.40	2.76	1.51	6.23	1.06	6.15	.93
Participant gender	.48	.50	.31	.46	.45	.50	.44	.50
Participant age	32.04	10.73	31.61	10.56	31.31	10.68	35.28	12.65
N	73		75		84		69	

Gender: 1 = female; 2 = male

Study 2

To address the aforementioned limitations of Study 1, we devised a second study for the purpose of constructive replication (Lykken 1968). Furthermore, while the conducted moderation analysis in Study 1 already points toward self-congruence as the psychological process at play (Jacoby and Sassenberg 2011; Spencer et al. 2005), we wanted an additional confirmation of the process via mediation in order to bolster our confidence in the proposed process mechanism. We thus extended our initial conceptual model by adding an explicit measure of perceived self-congruence, intended as the psychological mediating process between perceived ethical leadership and purchase intention.

Given that processes can be investigated via mediation and moderation analyses (Jacoby and Sassenberg 2011; Spencer et al. 2005), we expect two patterns to emerge and, ultimately, converge. First, if exposure to ethical leadership cues really triggers self-congruence considerations, self-congruence should mediate the influence of ethical leadership on purchasing intention. Put differently, ethical leadership should lead to purchasing intent because people view the purchasing decision as an expression of themselves and their moral attitudes. Second, following the concept of moral identity as "the self-importance of moral traits" (Aquino and Reed 2002), we continue to expect that moral identity moderates the influence of ethical leadership. That is, even though most people view themselves as moral, high-moral identity individuals should show the

Table 4 Regression results for testing moderation of moral identity (Study 1)

	Purchasing intention			
	Aqua		Parcelnow	
	β	SE	β	SE
Participant gender	−.02	.10	−.02	.07
Participant age	.06	.10	.02	.07
Ethical advertising	.01	.10	.01	.07
Rotation	−.05	.20	−.01	.14
Ethical leadership	.67***	.10	.82***	.07
Moral identity	−.01	.10	.04	.07
Ethical leadership × moral identity	.11*	.10	.13***	.07
Adj. R^2	.45		.68	
N	300		301	

Gender: 1 = female; 2 = male; rotation: 1 = ethical leadership first, then ethical advertising; 0 = ethical advertising first, then ethical leadership

*** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

strongest response to ethical leadership as a way of affirming who they are. Third, moderation and mediation should converge in that we expect moral identity to moderate the positive effect of ethical leadership purchasing intentions via self-congruence. To put it differently, those high in moral identity should be especially attentive (more so than individuals low in moral identity) to whether the context (i.e., leadership) matches their moral self-congruence, which should then affect their purchase intentions. Specified as a moderated mediation (see Fig. 2), this conceptual model provides the full representation of our process argument that ethical leadership positively affects purchasing intention via self-congruence motives. Consequently, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3 The positive effect of perceived ethical leadership on purchasing intention is (a) positively mediated by the experience of self-congruence and (b) this indirect effect is stronger for people high in moral identity than for people low in moral identity.

Sample

The sample consisted of 336 participants, 38% of whom identified as female, with an average age of 31.29 years (SD = 9.92 years). Among the participants, 66% were currently employed, 16% were in college, and the rest were either retired, looking for a job, or crossed the "other" category.

Method

Experimental Design and Procedure

While the overall procedure remained unchanged compared to Study 1 (i.e., we used the same setting, including the established manipulation of perceived ethical leadership in a vignette; van Gils et al. 2015), we varied the ethical advertising stimulus material to check whether our results are robust with regard to the type of ethical advertising used. Here, instead of relaying an ethical claim concerning the company's operations, we used a claim reflecting cause-related marketing (e.g., Nan and Heo 2007), in which the company promises to donate a certain sum to a specific cause for every product sold (e.g., "For every bottle of Aqua sold, we donate 5 cents to the American Red Cross"; see "Appendix 3" section).

Measures

We used the same scale as in Study 1 to assess moral identity and the same manipulation check to assess whether

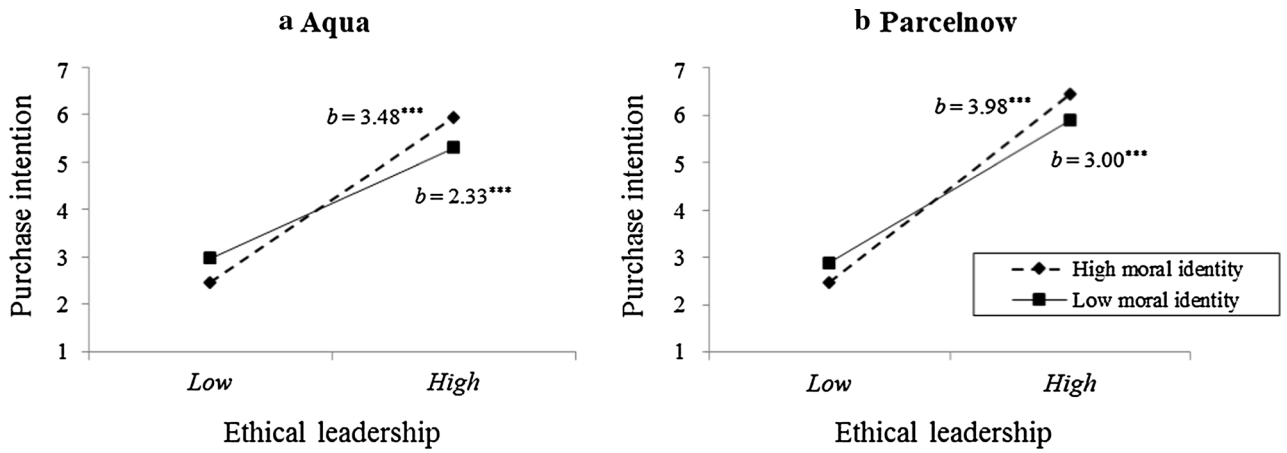


Fig. 1 Relationship between ethical leadership and purchasing intention as moderated by moral identity in Study 1

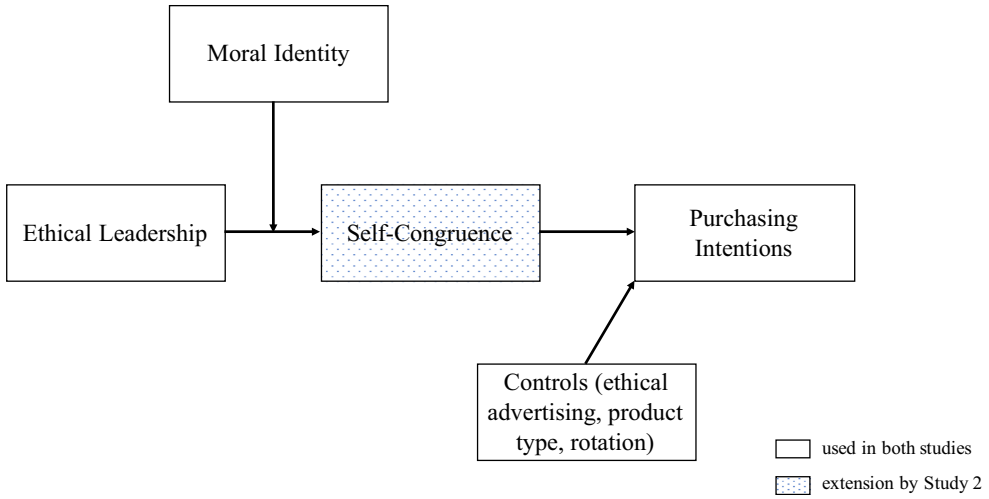


Fig. 2 Extension of Study 1 through Study 2: the full moderated mediation model

the manipulation of ethical leadership was successful. To ensure that the measurement method was robust, we replaced the one-item measure of purchasing intention from Study 1 with a four-item scale by Coyle and Thorson (2001). Sample items include "I will purchase (from Aqua/Parcelnow) the next time I need a (mineral water/parcel service)" or "I will definitely try (Aqua/Parcelnow)."

To assess the experience of self-congruence, we employed a four-item scale based on Sirgy et al. (1997). The scale contained the items: "Purchasing (Aqua/Parcelnow) is consistent with how I see myself," "Purchasing (Aqua/Parcelnow) reflects who I am," "People similar to me would buy/use (Aqua/Parcelnow)," and "The kind of person who typically buys/uses (Aqua/Parcelnow) is very much like me."

Results

The results of Study 2 indicate a successful ethical leadership manipulation: Participants in the low ethical leadership condition perceived the leadership behavior of the fictitious CEO as significantly less ethical than participants in the high ethical leadership condition ($M_{low} = 1.98$, SD = 1.16; $M_{high} = 6.43$, SD = .84; $t(496) = -49.12$, $p < .01$).

Table 5 shows the correlations for the constructs in Study 2. With Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .74 to .97, all scales demonstrated good reliability. Table 6 shows the means, standard deviations, and number of participants for all constructs within the experimental conditions.

As some of the correlations between the measured constructs were high, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in order to test for empirical discreteness (in addition to the arguments that can be made conceptually for the distinctiveness). To ensure the existence of three distinct factors among our measured variables, we compared the fit of a correlated three-factor model to the fit of a one-factor model and the fit of an uncorrelated three-factor model. We evaluated the model fit based on three fit indices (Hair et al. 1998). The correlated three-factor model showed an acceptable fit with the data (Aqua: $\chi^2(65) = 149.25$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.30$; CFI = .95; SRMR = .07; Parcelnow: $\chi^2(62) = 197.21$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 3.18$; CFI = .94; SRMR = .04). In comparison, there was an inadequate fit for both the one-factor model (Aqua: $\chi^2(65) = 689.52$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 10.61$; CFI = .67; SRMR = .16; Parcelnow: $\chi^2(65) = 644.13$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 9.91$; CFI = .75; SRMR = .16) and the uncorrelated three-factor model (Aqua: $\chi^2(65) = 264.74$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 4.07$; CFI = .90; SRMR = .25; Parcelnow: $\chi^2(65) = 425.61$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 6.55$; CFI = .84; SRMR = .30). Although self-congruence and purchasing intention are clearly of a different conceptual nature, their high correlation led us to also check whether collapsing these two factors would be statistically superior to the correlated two-factor solution. This was not the case: The correlated two-factor model (Aqua: $\chi^2(19) = 93.29$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 4.91$; CFI = .95; SRMR = .04; Parcelnow: $\chi^2(19) = 122.38$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 6.44$; CFI = .95; SRMR = .03) showed a significantly better fit (with χ^2 difference values of 228.46 for Aqua and 213.77 for Parcelnow) with the data than the one-factor model (Aqua: $\chi^2(20) = 366.53$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 18.33$; CFI = .79; SRMR = .11; Parcelnow: $\chi^2(20) = 245.78$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 12.29$; CFI = .88; SRMR = .05).

To test the moderated mediation as explicated in H3 (cf. model 7 in PROCESS), we followed the steps outlined by Hayes (2013) and Preacher et al. (2007). The mediation

Table 5 Correlations and internal reliabilities (Study 2)

	Aqua						Parcelnow					
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Self-congruence	(.92)						(.93)					
2. Moral identity	.03	(.74)					.09	(.79)				
3. Purchase intention	.70***	−.03	(.97)				.86***	.05	(.98)			
4. Participant gender	.08	.21**	.12	–			.02	.12	−.02	–		
5. Participant age	.14	.18*	.01	.20*	–		.00	−.04	.03	.07	–	
6. Ethical advertising	.02	.01	.05	.01	−.01	–	.05	−.01	.05	.10	−.07	–
7. Rotation	.06	−.01	.03	−.02	.08	−.00	−.01	.02	.03	−.03	.02	−.01

$N = 168$ (*Aqua*); 168 (*Parcelnow*)

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Cronbach's alpha in brackets where available. Gender: 1 = female; 2 = male; ethical advertising: 1 = ethical; 0 = neutral; rotation: 1 = ethical leadership first, then ethical advertising; 0 = ethical advertising first, then ethical leadership

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for measured constructs (Study 2)

	Low ethical leadership—neutral advertising		Low ethical leadership—ethical advertising		High ethical leadership—neutral advertising		High ethical leadership—ethical advertising	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Aqua								
Self-congruence	2.35	1.37	2.61	1.43	4.27	1.66	4.14	1.49
Moral identity	5.91	1.09	5.96	1.00	5.84	1.10	5.81	.90
Purchasing intention	2.22	1.37	2.65	1.58	5.28	1.28	5.19	1.19
Participant gender	.41	.50	.32	.47	.38	.49	.48	.51
Participant age	30.93	7.73	31.09	11.59	31.60	10.38	31.17	11.89
N	42		44		40		42	
Parcelnow								
Self-congruence	2.20	1.05	2.50	1.26	4.74	1.45	4.77	1.32
Moral identity	5.87	1.11	5.99	.76	5.97	1.01	5.83	1.15
Purchasing intention	2.24	1.17	2.73	1.23	5.40	1.25	5.32	1.11
Participant gender	.37	.49	.48	.51	.30	.46	.37	.49
Participant age	32.37	9.03	30.98	8.03	33.09	11.59	31.81	9.83
N	41		40		44		43	

Gender: 1 = female; 2 = male

analyses (Table 7) indicate that the experience of self-congruence mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and purchasing intention ($\beta_{\text{Aqua}} = .46$, $p < .01$; $\beta_{\text{Parcelnow}} = .63$, $p < .01$). This result supports the idea that ethical leadership positively influences purchasing intention through self-congruence (H3a). Notably, the effect of ethical leadership persisted even when controlling for ethical advertising, thus supporting H1. Furthermore, the moderation analyses (Table 7) show that the interaction between perceived ethical leadership and moral identity is significantly related not only to the outcome purchasing intention ($\beta_{\text{Aqua}} = .10$, $p < .10$; $\beta_{\text{Parcelnow}} = .21$, $p < .001$), which supports H2, but also to the mediator self-congruence ($\beta_{\text{Aqua}} = .15$, $p < .05$; $\beta_{\text{Parcelnow}} = .26$, $p < .01$), which is our first support for H3. Notably, the analysis also shows that the direct effect of ethical leadership on purchasing intention (i.e., when controlling for self-congruence) is not moderated, suggesting that there is no conditional direct effect. The bootstrapped results of the conditional indirect effects (Table 8) provide full support for H3, which stated that the positive effect of perceived ethical leadership on purchasing intention, as mediated by

Table 7 Regression results for testing moderated mediation (Study 2)

	Aqua						Parcelnow					
	Purchasing intention		Self-congruence experience		Purchasing intention		Purchasing intention		Self-congruence experience		Purchasing intention	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Participant gender	.08	.11	.01	.12	.07	.09	.04	.09	.08	.09	−.00	.07
Participant age	−.02	.11	.12$^{\#}$	.12	−.07	.09	−.01	.09	−.04	.09	.01	.07
Rotation	.01	.21	.03	.23	−.00	.18	.05	.18	.01	.18	.05	.13
Ethical advertising	.05	.11	.03	.12	.04	.09	.06	.09	.05	.09	.03	.07
Ethical leadership	.71***	.11	.50***	.11	.48***	.10	.78***	.09	.70***	.09	.36***	.09
Moral identity	−.00	.11	.04	.12	−.02	.09	.03	.09	.06	.09	−.01	.07
Ethical leadership x moral identity	.10$^{\#}$	.11	.14*	.11	.04	.09	.21***	.09	.25***	.09	.06	.07
Self-congruence	–	–	–	–	.46***	.10	–	–	–	–	.60***	.10
Adj. R^2	.51		.27		.67		.63		.54		.80	
N	168		168		168		168		168		168	

Gender: 1 = female; 2 = male, rotation: 1 = ethical leadership/ethical advertising; 0 = ethical advertising/ethical leadership

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; $^{\#}$ $p < .1$

Table 8 Moderated mediation results for self-congruence across ±1 SD of moral identity (Study 2) on purchasing intentions

Moderator (level)	Aqua				Parcelnow			
	Conditional indirect effect	SE	Z	p	Conditional indirect effect	SE	Z	p
Moral identity (high)	.58	.13	4.40	<.01	1.05	.11	9.42	<.01
Moral identity (low)	.32	.10	3.13	<.01	.49	.09	5.36	<.01

N = 168 (Aqua); 168 (Parcelnow); variables are standardized; bootstrapping with 5000 replications

self-congruence, becomes stronger for people high in moral identity. Figure 3 illustrates this relationship. Of note is that all results hold without the controls (age, gender, rotation). These analyses are available from the authors upon request.

General Discussion

The present paper set out to investigate whether purchasing intentions are a function of how customers perceive a CEO's unethical/ethical leadership. At the core of the process, we proposed, lie customers' self-concepts, which we sought to examine by means of moderation and mediation analyses. In Study 1, we found not only a generally positive relationship between perceived ethical leadership and purchasing intention (H1), but also that this relationship is moderated by moral identity. In other words, as moral concerns became more central to participants' identity, their perception of ethical leadership exerted greater influence over their purchase intentions (H2). As identity "amplifies" the effect, we have a first indication that customers' self-congruence affects the conversion of ethical leadership into purchase intentions (Jacoby and Sassenberg 2011; Spencer et al. 2005). Study 2 confirmed the interaction effect, as well as corroborated the underlying self-congruence process by means of mediation analyses. Specifically, we found that self-congruence translated the effect of perceiving ethical leadership to purchase intention (H3a). Notably, and in line with our theorizing, this mediation effect was stronger for those with highly internalized moral identity (moderated mediation model) (H3b).

In the process of testing, we varied a host of other factors to ensure the robustness of the findings. As such, the relationships were robust against different measures of purchasing intention. Likewise, different advertising stimuli (i.e., ethical claims and cause-related marketing claims) were not able to override the effect of perceived ethical leadership. The order in which information was presented (i.e., company advertising or company leadership; rotation factor) also did not influence the results, which suggests

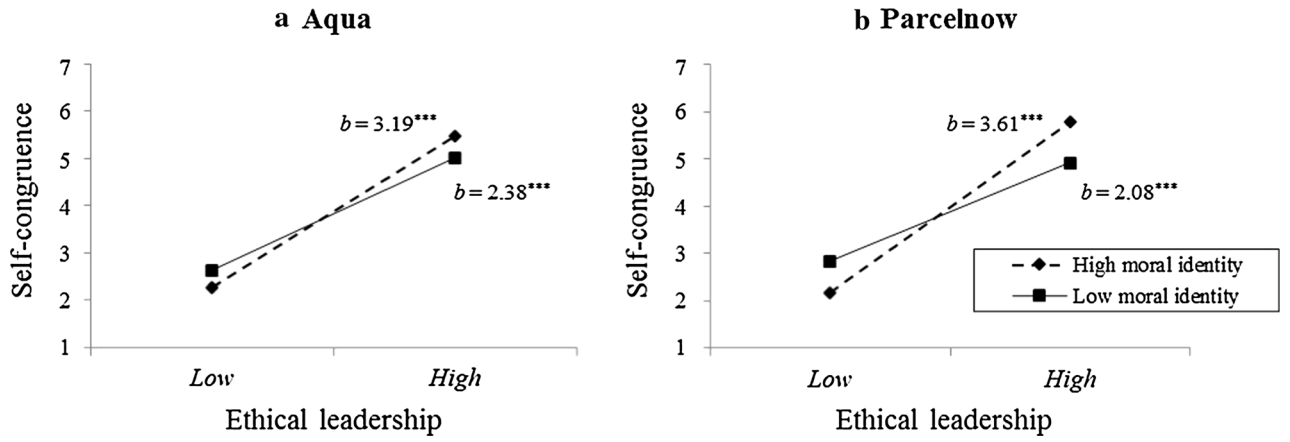


Fig. 3 Contingent indirect effects between ethical leadership and purchasing intention via experienced self-congruence as moderated by moral identity in Study 2

that ethical leadership information matters irrespective of when people find out about it.

Based on our two experimental studies, the present paper contributes to the existing literature in several ways. By integrating a marketing perspective, we extend the relevance of the ethical leadership construct beyond the domain of organizational behavior. At the same time, we contribute to the marketing literature by highlighting the importance of intra-organizational processes to customer decision-making. Providing the first empirical evidence that CEOs' ethical leadership positively affects customers' purchasing intentions, our study offers several implications for both research and practice.

Theoretical Implications

The present study features several insights for further theoretical development. First, we found that the ethical dimension of leadership has relevance beyond organizational boundaries and its immediate effects on organizational members. This novel insight supplements existing research on ethical leadership, which has mainly focused on intra-organizational outcomes (e.g., Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Treviño 2006a; Mayer et al. 2012) and has largely neglected (outside of a few purely theoretical deliberations, i.e., Eisenbeiss 2012; Eisenbeiss et al. 2015) ethical leadership's potential effects on external stakeholders, such as customers.

Second, we extend the previously identified processes behind how ethical leadership works intra-organizationally—that is, through social learning, exchange, and organizational identification (Walumbwa et al. 2011)—with another process: self-congruence. While self-congruence has generally been investigated as a factor driving purchase decisions (e.g., Sirgy 1982), the present results suggest that it is also relevant in the ethics domain. In other words, people lean more (or less) toward products and services issued by an ethical CEO in an effort to stay congruent with a (more or less) moral self-conception. Thus, it could be that the marketing appeal of ethical leadership derives partly from the human need to self-verify as a moral person and enact congruent purchasing behavior (Barkan et al. 2015). Future studies could translate this notion to intra-organizational research by empirically assessing whether employees' support of (un)ethical leaders depends on their self-conceptions as moral beings. While similar effects have been noted for transformational or socialized charismatic leadership (Bono and Judge 2003; Brown and Treviño 2006b), the same considerations have yet to be applied to ethical leadership.

Third, our results bolster the notion that customers care about a company's ethics (see, for example, Becker-Olsen et al. 2006; Creyer 1997; Sen et al. 2006). Here, the moderating role of customers' moral identity signals that the response to ethical leadership follows a moral consideration process. This finding also suggests that customers respond to the inherently ethical aspect of leadership and not solely because they perceive the CEO in question as a generally good or bad leader (cf., van Gils et al. 2015).

Interestingly, our ethical advertising had no effect across our studies and product groups, while ethical leadership did. While this effect may be due to the relative manipulation strength (as we discuss further in "Limitations" section), it should be noted that the displayed advertising did mirror regular advertising campaigns. Remarkably, the advertising remained irrelevant for purchasing intentions

irrespective of the type of ethical advertising, such as information on more ethical production itself or cause-related marketing. One potential theoretical explanation could be that participants are desensitized to such advertising because so many ads these days have an ethical or cause-related claim. Another explanation may be that the effectiveness of communicating company ethics is contingent on the communication sources and their credibility (Du et al. 2010). Indeed, consumers seem to experience positive effects on their purchasing intentions or brand evaluations when they are informed about ethical behavior via independent sources, such as media or NGOs; however, communication via corporate sources, such as brochures or advertising, often leads to no positive effects and may even have a negative impact (see, for example, Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006; Yoon et al. 2006). As such, it is unclear to what extent consumers can be affected by "unmoored" advertising. Instead, it seems appropriate to hold company leadership at least partly responsible for customer choices.

Fourth, and more generally, our results empirically emphasize the importance of overcoming academic "silos." By combining specific insights from largely distinct fields of research—such as ethical leadership research from organizational behavior and purchasing intention research from marketing—we can advance our understanding of how different issues within business management interact. Indeed, it seems that customers may perceive companies more holistically than previously suggested, integrating different types of information (including their internalized priorities) when forming their attitudes toward companies. Future research may seek to investigate this issue in reverse, looking at how employees are affected by their perceptions of the company's external marketing activities.

Managerial Implications

The insight that CEOs' ethical leadership matters both internally (i.e., for employees) and externally (i.e., for customers) entails a clear prescription for managerial practice. In conjunction with previous literature, our results imply that leading ethically positively influences purchasing intentions. Naturally, this only holds when CEOs are "visible" to customers, as is the case for well-known CEO Anita Roddick (The Body Shop), who often attracts considerable press coverage for her leadership style. By contrast, many CEOs are not publicly visible, despite a general push for transparency; hence, little is known about their internal leadership behavior. Of course, some CEOs, especially unethical ones, will strive to avoid having their leadership style publicly portrayed or discussed. However, as highlighted in the introduction, such information will be increasingly difficult to contain in an era of omnipresent smartphones and copious opportunities for opinion sharing.

Given that prospect, companies should identify and communicate their existing facets of ethical leadership to potential customers, e.g., through coordinated public relations efforts (see, for example, Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). While this has not been the primary focus of this study, our results paint a clear picture: Credible information on internal ethical leadership seems to be even more effective in stimulating purchasing intentions than other established forms of ethically themed advertising.

Naturally, not all leaders can be considered ethical. Some may lack the ethical management part; others, the ethical person part (Brown and Treviño 2006a). Therefore, when considering their leadership staff, companies seem well advised to appoint selectively (for the person part) and provide necessary training (for the management part). Such interventions will have consequences for both the internal (re employees) and external (re customers) dynamics, thus presenting companies with a double return on their investments in ethical leadership.

Limitations and Future Research

Beyond its implications for research and management, our study also features some limitations. First, our study design seems well suited to establishing the link between ethical leadership and purchasing intentions under controlled conditions. Although the predictive link between self-reported intentions and purchasing behavior is well established in the marketing and advertising literature (e.g., Barone et al. 2000; Grewal et al. 1997; Nan and Heo 2007), it would be interesting to replicate our findings with actual purchasing data in a field study. In this way, one could potentially integrate price sensitivities that arise from the company's ethical (mis)conduct.

Second, the primary purpose of our study was to investigate the effect of ethical leadership on purchasing intention, as well as the underlying process. However, in reality, customers are often subjected to various influences beyond information about ethical leadership (see, for example, Zeithaml 1988), which potentially entails certain trade-offs in their purchasing decisions. For future studies, one could employ conjoint analyses to study such possible trade-offs—for instance, between factors such as ethical leadership and product price or product/service quality (Barone et al. 2000). As such, knowing whether price elasticity changes in response to information about ethical

leadership could deepen the practical relevance of the observed phenomenon.

Third, and related to the above, both of our studies uncovered a rather large effect of ethical leadership and virtually no effect of ethical advertising. This finding could signal the relative importance of perceived ethical leadership over ethical advertising, or it could be the result of different experimental manipulation strength (Perdue and Summers 1986). That is, while our ethical leadership manipulation was a text that needed to be read in order to be fully understood, our ethical advertising manipulations were rather short and unobtrusive. While this discrepancy is not core to our theorizing, future studies may want to vary the manipulation strength of the two for added external validity. For instance, in reality, customers rarely receive such a condensed account of a CEO's ethical leadership; instead, they would have to distill the respective information themselves from lengthy TV interviews or reports on the company's leadership. Likewise, in practice, marketing campaigns are usually designed for repeat presentation across various channels. Future studies may want to mirror these realities to better account for the respective effects. In doing so, it would be interesting to see how consumers parse potential proxies of ethical leadership. For instance, would purchasing behavior be informed by an organization's general ethical climate (van Gils et al. in press) or by CEO pay ratios, i.e., the comparison between CEO pay and the mean/median employee salary within the same company (which US agencies are tentatively planning to publicly reveal; Evans 2015; Gavett 2015)?

Fourth, our studies only used small-ticket products/services. A possible extension would be to replicate these experiments by simulating purchase decisions involving products (or services) with a high value and/or a higher significance for the buyer's identity (Laurent and Kapferer 1985). For example, following the Volkswagen emission scandal, owning a Volkswagen car with a diesel engine could seriously harm one's self-concept of being environmentally conscious. Thus, potential car buyers might be inclined to look closer at the ethical standards of the company's management to avoid tarnishing their own self-concept. The consumer behavior literature already points to such interdependence between product involvement and consumer risk perception (see, for example, Dholakia 2001). Given that the consequences of buying a car, for example, are likely more identity-relevant compared to a parcel service, we would expect the product involvement and the associated consumer risk perception to be higher as well. By extension, we would expect the findings of our study to be even more pronounced for such high-involvement purchase decisions.

Fifth, we measured and conceptualized dynamics around the facet of moral identity internalization, but not moral identity symbolization, which is more closely linked with self-presentation and public concern (Aquino and Reed 2002; Winterich et al. 2013a). We deliberately steered clear of the symbolization facet because we wanted to draw out the core moral dynamics without crossing into moral impression management. That said, there may be merit in investigating the dynamics around moral identity symbolization. For instance, high symbolizers may not respond with purchase variation across low-involvement products/services because these may seem less important for their public identity. However, they may respond to unethical/ethical leadership when deliberating about high-involvement products/services. That is not to say that individuals high in moral identity symbolization never let unethical/ethical leadership inform their purchasing behavior of low-involvement products/service, but here we would argue that "publicity" likely plays a crucial role. Put differently, moral identity symbolization may matter less for purchasing behavior when the prior "witnessing" of unethical/ethical CEO is private versus public. Indeed, we might anticipate an effect when the behavior of the CEO is public knowledge, or at least shared knowledge among the same group that is aware of the observer's purchase decisions. In that case, the CEO's display would incline the high-moral identity symbolization observer to uphold the moral standard in front of the others by refusing to buy products from the unethical CEO's company.

Lastly, we placed an individual's need for self-congruence as a central element in the process. While there is a plethora of research to support this perspective (for an overview, see Baumeister 2010), there is a competing perspective of (symbolic) self-completion (Wicklund and Gollwitzer 2013) that partly suggests that individuals may engage in behavior to compensate for past shortcomings, i.e., moral cleansing (Jordan et al. 2011; West and Zhong 2015). Our mediation and moderation results can be viewed as support for the former over the latter perspective, but it seems worthwhile to explore whether there are conditions under which this changes. These may include situations in which the product provides a clearer public signal of one's morality because it can be worn or is otherwise more presentable.

Conclusion

In a time of social media and online employer rankings, the deeds of those at the top can quickly circulate into public knowledge. As such, CEOs seem well advised to understand that their leadership of people inside the company may ultimately impact the engagement of people outside the company. Indeed, our study suggests that consumers' perceptions of leadership may drive their purchasing deliberations more than ethical advertising. Ethical leadership is thus not only an issue of moral consideration, but also a point of instrumental value to a company.

Funding This study was not funded by a third party.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest All authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in these studies that involved human participants aligned with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee, as well as with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent All individual participants in the studies provided informed consent.

Appendix 1: Manipulation of Ethical Leadership Based on van Gils et al. (2015)

High Ethical Leadership Description

While switching TV channels the other day, you ended up watching an interview with Alex Anderson and some of his employees.

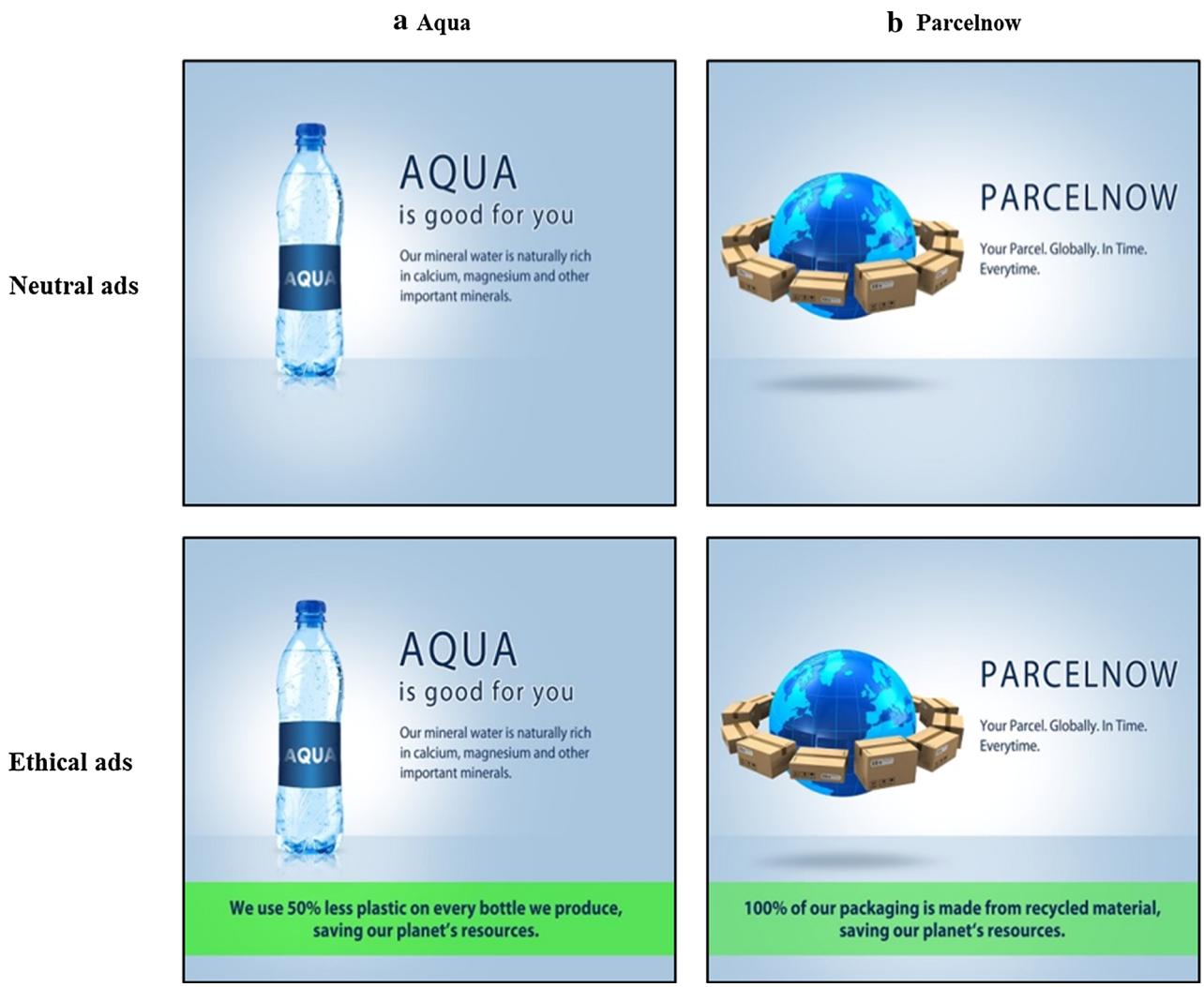
From his remarks throughout the interview, you could tell that Alex Anderson not only lives his personal life in an ethical way, but also manages the company ethically. That means that he appeared to be a reliable person who asks himself what is the right thing to do before making decisions. As a leader, he also seemed to take honest and balanced decisions in his work. He appeared to listen to what employees have to say and to keep their interest in mind when deciding. Moreover, he reported to discuss the importance of ethical norms at Aqua/Parcelnow and to discipline employees who violate ethical standards. You gained the impression that he defines success not only in terms of results, but also in the way the results are obtained. All in all, Alex Anderson seemed to set an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.

Low Ethical Leadership Description

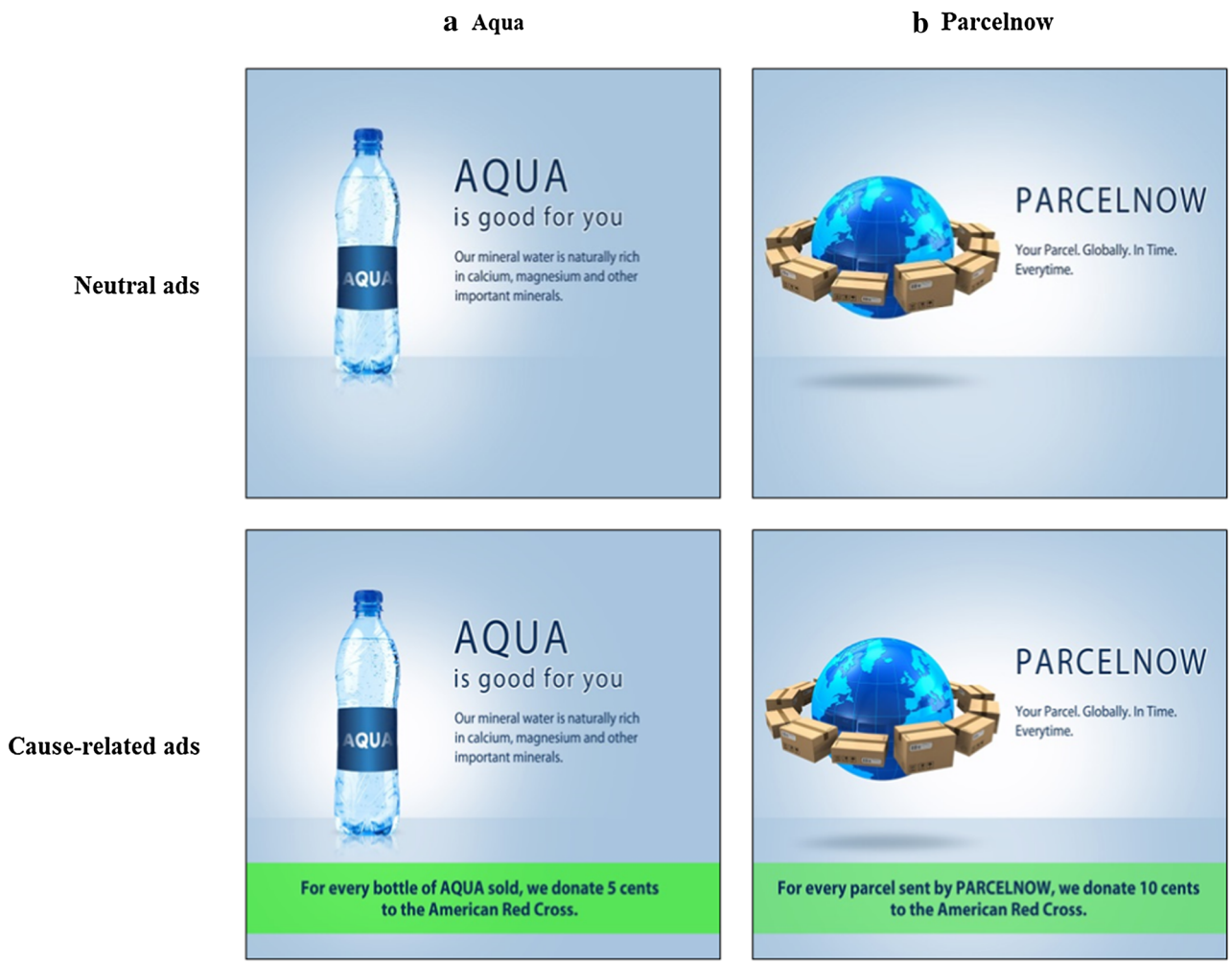
While switching TV channels the other day, you ended up watching an interview with Alex Anderson and some of his employees.

From his remarks throughout the interview, you could tell that Alex Anderson cares neither about living his personal life in an ethical way nor about managing his company ethically. That means that he did not really appear to be a reliable person who asks himself what is the right thing to do before making decisions. It seemed that in his work he does not always take honest and balanced decisions. He appeared neither to listen to what employees have to say nor to keep their interests in mind when deciding. Moreover, he reported never to discuss the importance of ethical norms at Aqua/Parcelnow and not to pay attention to whether employees behave in accordance with ethical standards. You gained the impression that he defines success only in terms of results and does not care about the way results are obtained. All in all, Alex Anderson seemed not to be a good example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.

Appendix 2: Manipulation of Ethical Advertising in Study 1



Appendix 3: Manipulation of Ethical Advertising in Study 2



References

Aaker, D. A. (1996). Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California Management Review, 38*(3), 102–120.

Aquino, K., & Reed, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*(6), 1423–1440.

Aquino, K., Reed, A., Thau, S., & Freeman, D. (2007). A grotesque and dark beauty: How moral identity and mechanisms of moral disengagement influence cognitive and emotional reactions to war. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 43*(3), 385–392.

Avey, J. B., Palanski, M. E., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2011). When leadership goes unnoticed: The moderating role of follower self-esteem on the relationship between ethical leadership and follower behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics, 98*(4), 573–582.

Avey, J. B., Wernsing, T. S., & Palanski, M. E. (2012). Exploring the process of ethical leadership: The mediating role of employee voice and psychological ownership. *Journal of Business Ethics, 107*(1), 21–34.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 3*(3), 192–209.

Barkan, R., Ayal, S., & Ariely, D. (2015). Ethical dissonance, justifications, and moral behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 6,* 157–161.

Barone, M. J., Miyazaki, A. D., & Taylor, K. A. (2000). The influence of cause-related marketing on consumer choice: Does one good turn deserve another? *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 28*(2), 248–262.

Baumeister, R. F. (2010). The self. In R. F. Baumeister & E. J. Finkel (Eds.), *Advanced social psychology: The state of the science* (pp. 139–175). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Becker-Olsen, K. L., Cudmore, B. A., & Hill, R. P. (2006). The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 59*(1), 46–53.

Bernerth, J. B., & Aguinis, H. (2016). A critical review and best-practice recommendations for control variable usage. *Personnel Psychology, 69*(1), 229–283.

Blasi, A. (1984). Moral identity: Its role in moral functioning. In W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior and moral development* (pp. 128–139). New York: Wiley.

Bono, J. E., & Judge, T. A. (2003). Self-concordance at work: Toward understanding the motivational effects of transformational leaders. *Academy of Management Journal, 46*(5), 554–571.

Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006a). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *Leadership Quarterly, 17*(6), 595–616.

Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006b). Socialized charismatic leadership, values congruence, and deviance in work groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(4), 954.

Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 97*(2), 117–134.

Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's mechanical turk a new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 6*(1), 3–5.

Butcher, M. (2011). In confidential email Samwer describes online furniture strategy as a 'Blitzkrieg'. http://techcrunch.com/2011/12/22/in-confidential-email-samwer-describes-online-furniture-strategy-as-a-blitzkrieg/.

Carrigan, M., Szmigin, I., & Wright, J. (2004). Shopping for a better world? An interpretive study of the potential for ethical consumption within the older market. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 21*(6), 401–417.

Cheng, J. (2011). Woman fired for bashing boss on facebook wins settlement. http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2011/02/company-employee-settle-over-facebook-comments-about-boss/.

Cobb-Walgren, C. J., Ruble, C. A., & Donthu, N. (1995). Brand equity, brand preference, and purchase intent. *Journal of Advertising, 24*(3), 25–40.

Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression: Correlation analysis for the behavioral science* (3rd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Coyle, J. R., & Thorson, E. (2001). The effects of progressive levels of interactivity and vividness in web marketing sites. *Journal of Advertising, 30*(3), 65–77.

Creyer, E. H. (1997). The influence of firm behavior on purchase intention: Do consumers really care about business ethics? *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 14*(6), 421–432.

Crump, M. J., McDonnell, J. V., & Gureckis, T. M. (2013). Evaluating Amazon's mechanical turk as a tool for experimental behavioral research. *PLoS ONE, 8*(3), e57410.

Damon, W., & Hart, D. (1992). Self-understanding and its role in social and moral development. In M. Bornstein & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Developmental psychology: An advanced textbook* (3rd ed., pp. 421–464). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Davis, J. J. (1994). Good ethics is good for business: Ethical attributions and response to environmental advertising. *Journal of Business Ethics, 13*(11), 873–885.

De Hoogh, A. H., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2008). Ethical and despotic leadership, relationships with leader's social responsibility, top management team effectiveness and subordinates' optimism: A multi-method study. *Leadership Quarterly, 19*(3), 297–311.

Den Hartog, D. (2015). Ethical leadership. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 2*(1), 409–434.

Dholakia, U. M. (2001). A motivational process model of product involvement and consumer risk perception. *European Journal of Marketing, 35*(11/12), 1340–1362.

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 12*(1), 8–19.

Eisenbeiss, S. A. (2012). Re-thinking ethical leadership: An interdisciplinary integrative approach. *Leadership Quarterly, 23*(5), 791–808.

Eisenbeiss, S. A., & Giessner, S. R. (2012). The emergence and maintenance of ethical leadership in organizations. *Journal of Personnel Psychology, 11*(1), 7–19.

Eisenbeiss, S. A., van Knippenberg, D., & Fahrbach, C. M. (2015). Doing well by doing good? Analyzing the relationship between CEO ethical leadership and firm performance. *Journal of Business Ethics, 128*(3), 635–651.

Erikson, E. H. (1964). *Insight and responsibility*. New York: Norton.

Evans, P. (2015). S.E.C approves rule on C.E.O. pay ratio. The New York Times. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/06/business/dealbook/sec-approves-rule-on-ceo-pay-ratio.html?_r=1.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gavett, G. (2015). Is your CEO's high salary scarding away customers? Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2015/06/is-your-ceos-high-salary-scaring-away-customers

Giessner, S. R., & van Knippenberg, D. (2008). "License to fail": Goal definition, leader group prototypicality, and perceptions of leadership effectiveness after leader failure. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 105*(1), 14–35.

Giessner, S. R., Van Quaquebeke, N., van Gils, S., van Knippenberg, D., & Kollée, J. A. J. M. (2015). In the moral eye of the beholder: The interactive effects of leader and follower moral identity on perceptions of ethical leadership and LMX quality. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6,* 1126.

Glynn, M. A., & Raffaelli, R. (2010). Uncovering mechanisms of theory development in an academic field: Lessons from leadership research. *Academy of Management Annals, 4*(1), 359–401.

Grewal, D., Kavanoor, S., Fern, E. F., Costley, C., & Barnes, J. (1997). Comparative versus noncomparative advertising: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, *61*, 1–15.

Hair, J. F., Anderson, R. E., Tatham, R. L., & Black, W. C. (1998). *Multivariate data analysis* (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Hustvedt, G., & Dickson, M. A. (2009). Consumer likelihood of purchasing organic cotton apparel: Influence of attitudes and self-identity. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 13*(1), 49–65.

Jacoby, J., & Sassenberg, K. (2011). Interactions do not only tell us when, but can also tell us how: Testing process hypotheses by interaction. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 41*(2), 180–190.

Jahdi, K. S., & Acikdilli, G. (2009). Marketing communications and corporate social responsibility (CSR): Marriage of convenience or shotgun wedding? *Journal of Business Ethics, 88*(1), 103–113.

Jennings, P. L., Mitchell, M. S., & Hannah, S. T. (2015). The moral self: A review and integration of the literature. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 36*(S1), S104–S168.

Jordan, J., Mullen, E., & Murnighan, J. K. (2011). Striving for the moral self: The effects of recalling past moral actions on future moral behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37*(5), 701–713.

Kalshoven, K., & Boon, C. T. (2012). Ethical leadership, employee well-being, and helping. *Journal of Personnel Psychology, 11*(1), 60–68.

Kalshoven, K., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2009). Ethical leader behavior and leader effectiveness: The role of prototypicality and trust. *International Journal of Leadership Studies, 5*(2), 102–120.

Keller, K.-L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1–22.

Lacitis, E. (2013). Bitter Barista loses job over snarky blog about customers, boss. http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/bitter-barista-loses-job-over-snarky-blog-about-customers-boss/?fb_action_ids=487899281268262&fb_action_types=og.recommends&fb_source=other_multiline&action_object_map=%257B%2522487899281268262%2522:205598109587084%257D&action_type_map=%257B

Laurent, G., & Kapferer, J.-N. (1985). Measuring consumer involvement profiles. *Journal of Marketing Research, 22*(1), 41–53.

Lyall, S. (2007). Annita Roddick, body shop founder, dies at 64. New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/12/world/europe/12roddick.html?_r=0.

Lykken, D. T. (1968). Statistical significance in psychological research. *Psychological Bulletin, 70*(3), 151–159.

MacInnis, D. J., Moorman, C., & Jaworski, B. J. (1991). Enhancing and measuring consumers' motivation, opportunity, and ability to process brand information from ads. *Journal of Marketing, 55*(4), 32–53.

Mason, W., & Suri, S. (2012). Conducting behavioral research on Amazon's mechanical turk. *Behavior Research Methods, 44*(1), 1–23.

Mayer, D. M., Kuenzi, M., Greenbaum, R., Bardes, M., & Salvador, R. B. (2009). How low does ethical leadership flow? Test of a trickle-down model. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 108*(1), 1–13.

Mayer, D. M., Aquino, K., Greenbaum, R. L., & Kuenzi, M. (2012). Who displays ethical leadership, and why does it matter? An examination of antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership. *Academy of Management Journal, 55*(1), 151–171.

Nan, X., & Heo, K. (2007). Consumer responses to corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives: Examining the role of brand-cause fit in cause-related marketing. *Journal of Advertising, 36*(2), 63–74.

Perdue, B. C., & Summers, J. O. (1986). Checking the success of manipulations in marketing experiments. *Journal of Marketing Research, 23*(4), 317–326.

Piccolo, R. F., Greenbaum, R., den Hartog, D. N., & Folger, R. (2010). The relationship between ethical leadership and core job characteristics. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31*(2–3), 259–278.

Preacher, K. J., Rucker, D. D., & Hayes, A. F. (2007). Addressing moderated mediation hypotheses: Theory, methods, and prescriptions. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 42*(1), 185–227.

Reed, A. (2004). Activating the self-importance of consumer selves: Exploring identity salience effects on judgments. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(2), 286–295.

Reed, A., & Aquino, K. (2003). Moral identity and the expanding circle of moral regard toward out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(6), 1270–1286.

Reibstein, D. J., Day, G., & Wind, J. (2009). Guest editorial: Is marketing academia losing its way? *Journal of Marketing, 73*(4), 1–3.

Reips, U.-D. (2000). The web experiment method: Advantages, disadvantages, and solutions. In M. H. Birnbaum (Ed.), *Psychology experiments on the internet* (pp. 89–117). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Rest, J. R. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory*. New York: Praeger.

Reuters. (2015). VW knew fuel usage in some cars was too high a year ago: Report. http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/29/us-volkswagen-emissions-polo-idUSKBN0TI0ML20151129?feedType=RSS&feedName=businessNews#YWldFwcUSM3kJ97g.97

Reynolds, S. J., & Ceranic, T. L. (2007). The effects of moral judgment and moral identity on moral behavior: An empirical examination of the moral individual. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92*(6), 1610.

Robinson, M. D., & Clore, G. L. (2001). Simulation, scenarios, and emotional appraisal: Testing the convergence of real and imagined reactions to emotional stimuli. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*(11), 1520–1532.

Rus, D., van Knippenberg, D., & Wisse, B. (2010). Leader self-definition and leader self-serving behavior. *Leadership Quarterly, 21*(3), 509–529.

Samu, S., & Wymer, W. (2009). The effect of fit and dominance in cause marketing communications. *Journal of Business Research, 62*(4), 432–440.

Schlegelmilch, B. B., & Pollach, I. (2005). The perils and opportunities of communicating corporate ethics. *Journal of Marketing Management, 21*(3–4), 267–290.

Sen, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Korschun, D. (2006). The role of corporate social responsibility in strengthening multiple stakeholder relationships: A field experiment. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 34*(2), 158–166.

Shapira, Z. (2014). Editorial statement. *Organization Science*. Retrieved from http://pubsonline.informs.org/page/orsc/editorial-statement.

Simmons, C. J., & Becker-Olsen, K. L. (2006). Achieving marketing objectives through social sponsorships. *Journal of Marketing, 70*(4), 154–169.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9*(3), 287–300.

Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., Mangleburg, T. F., Park, J.-O., Chon, K.-S., Claiborne, C., et al. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self-image congruence. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 25*(3), 229–241.

Spencer, S. J., Zanna, M. P., & Fong, G. T. (2005). Establishing a causal chain: Why experiments are often more effective than mediational analyses in examining psychological processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 89*(6), 845–851.

Tenbrunsel, A. E., & Smith-Crowe, K. (2008). 13 ethical decision making: Where we've been and where we're going. *Academy of Management Annals, 2*(1), 545–607.

Treviño, L. K. (1992). Experimental approaches to studying ethical-unethical behavior in organizations. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 2*(2), 121–136.

Treviño, L. K., Brown, M., & Hartman, L. P. (2003). A qualitative investigation of perceived executive ethical leadership: Perceptions from inside and outside the executive suite. *Human Relations, 56*(1), 5–37.

van Gils, S., Van Quaquebeke, N., van Knippenberg, D., van Dijke, M., & De Cremer, D. (2015). Ethical leadership and follower organizational deviance: The moderating role of follower moral attentiveness. *Leadership Quarterly, 26*(2), 190–203.

van Gils, S., Hogg, M. A., Van Quaquebeke, N., & van Knippenberg, D. (in press). When organizational identification elicits moral decision-making: A matter of the right climate. *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Van Quaquebeke, N., Kerschreiter, R., Buxton, A. E., & van Dick, R. (2010). Two lighthouses to navigate: Effects of ideal and counter-ideal values on follower identification and satisfaction with their leaders. *Journal of Business Ethics, 93*(2), 293–305.

Van Quaquebeke, N., Van Knippenberg, D., & Brodbeck, F. C. (2011). More than meets the eye: The role of subordinates' self-perceptions in leader categorization processes. *Leadership Quarterly, 22*(2), 367–382.

Walker, T. (2013). Not available in XL: Abercrombie & Fitch CEO Mike Jeffries accused of only wanting 'thin and beautiful people'. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/not-available-in-xl-abercrombie-fitch-ceo-mike-jeffries-accused-of-only-wanting-thin-and-beautiful-8608022.html

Walumbwa, F. O., & Schaubroeck, J. (2009). Leader personality traits and employee voice behavior: Mediating roles of ethical leadership and work group psychological safety. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94*(5), 1275.

Walumbwa, F. O., Mayer, D. M., Wang, P., Wang, H., Workman, K., & Christensen, A. L. (2011). Linking ethical leadership to employee performance: The roles of leader-member exchange, self-efficacy, and organizational identification. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 115*(2), 204–213.

West, C., & Zhong, C. B. (2015). Moral cleansing. *Current Opinion Psychology, 6,* 221–225.

Wicklund, R. A., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2013). *Symbolic self completion*. New York: Routledge.

Winterich, K. P., Aquino, K., Mittal, V., & Swartz, R. (2013a). When moral identity symbolization motivates prosocial behavior: The role of recognition and moral identity internalization. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 98*(5), 759.

Winterich, K. P., Mittal, V., & Aquino, K. (2013b). When does recognition increase charitable behavior? Toward a moral identity-based model. *Journal of Marketing, 77*(3), 121–134.

Yechiam, E., Barron, G., Erev, I., & Erez, M. (2003). On the robustness and the direction of the effect of cause-related marketing. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 2*(4), 320–332.

Yoon, Y., Gürhan-Canli, Z., & Schwarz, N. (2006). The effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities on companies with bad reputations. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 16*(4), 377–390.

YouTube. (2006). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn4daYJzyls.

Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: A means-end model and synthesis of evidence. *Journal of Marketing, 52*(3), 2–22.