Experiencing the Formalness: The Role of Contextual Cues in Consumers’ Luxury Perception and Lifestyle Preference

Zhenyu Jin

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EXPERIENCING THE FORMALNESS: THE ROLE OF CONTEXTUAL CUES IN CONSUMERS’ LUXURY PERCEPTION AND LIFESTYLE PREFERENCE

by

Zhenyu Jin

Bachelor of Science
Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, 2009

Master of Science
Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, 2012

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University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Xiaojing Yang, Major Professor

Abhijit Guha, Committee Member

Linyun W. Yang, Committee Member

Elise Chandon Ince, Committee Member

Xiaoyan Deng, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
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Abstract

Formalness, which refers to the sense of seriousness, importance, and significance, is a commonly-encountered experience in consumers’ daily lives and can influence consumer behavior in wide domains. Despite its ubiquitous nature, research on consumer experiences of formalness in marketing settings is limited. This dissertation investigates the sense of formalness in consumer behavior, exploring its antecedents and consequences in sensory marketing, luxury consumption, and consumer lifestyles.

Essay 1 identifies one of the antecedents and consequences of formalness sense by exploring how music used in marketing communications and retail environments can induce a sense of formalness in consumers, which in turn shapes product evaluation. Across five studies involving experiments and unstructured data (e.g., audio files) data analyses, this essay demonstrates that, compared with high-pitched music, low-pitched music used in commercials and retail settings can augment consumers’ perceived luxuriousness of the advertised products or services. This effect occurs because low- (vs. high-) pitched music can evoke a sense of formalness in consumers, which in turn elevates their luxury perceptions. The findings provide marketers with useful and actionable implications that a simple change in music pitch can systematically increase consumers’ luxury perception, thereby facilitating marketing strategies in advertising, branding, and promotion.
Essay 2 examines consumer preferences for a sense of formalness by exploring how fresh start reminders can motivate consumer preferences for formal versus casual product offerings. Employing multiple fresh start reminders readily available in consumer lives and prevalent in the marketplace, five studies, including evidence from real-world data, establish that reminding consumers about fresh starts increases their preferences for formal (vs. casual) styles in clothing, social activities, and lifestyles in general. By measuring and manipulating meaning-seeking motives, this research presents converging evidence of a meaning-seeking motive as the underlying mechanism. The findings shed new light on consumers’ style preferences, providing marketers with novel perspectives in developing effective strategies to promote products and services with different levels of formalness.
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Chapter 1 Cueing Formalness: The Augmenting Effect of Low-Pitched Music on Perceived Product Luxuriousness

What makes a product luxury? Prior consumer research in sensory marketing (see Krishna & Schwarz, 2014 for a review) has acknowledged various sensory cues, such as visual cues (Hag tetd & Patrick, 2008), olfactory cues (Madzharov, Block, & Morrin, 2015), and haptic cues (Ackerman et al., 2010), as crucial factors in the marketing of luxuries. For example, research suggests that more interstitial space in the store makes products look more prestigious (Sevilla & Townsend, 2016); brands with uppercase logos are judged more premium (Yu et al., 2021); physical coldness can increase consumers’ perceptions of a product’s luxuriousness (Park & Hadi, 2019). Absent from this literature is research examining the effect of auditory cues. Given the prevalence of music being used in commercials and retail environments, I look at the role of music pitch (high vs. how) as a sensory nudge in augmenting consumers’ perceived luxuriousness of the advertised products or services. Such an investigation is noteworthy because it extends the use of music as a meaningful, language-like tool in marketing (Bruner, 1990), providing important, actionable implications for marketers who can control the music pitch in marketing communications with relative ease and minimal monetary investment.

To foreshadow, I propose and demonstrate that, compared with high-pitched music, low-pitched music used in commercials or retail settings can elevate consumers’
luxury perception of the advertised product or services. This effect occurs because low-(vs. high-) pitched music can evoke a sense of formalness, which in turn translates into perceived luxuriousness.

Theoretical Background

**Music Pitch and the Sense of Formalness**

Among various musical elements such as tempo, genre, and volume (Areni & Kim, 1993; Kellaris & Kent, 1993; Smith & Curnow, 1966), music pitch receives considerable attention in consumer research because it is likely the first thing people can discern in any music pieces (Huang & Labroo, 2020), exerting far-reaching influences on consumers’ perceptual responses (Lowe & Haws, 2017), preferences, and choices (Huang & Labroo, 2020). Adding to this research stream, I propose that low- (vs. high-) pitched music used in commercials or retail settings can augment consumers’ luxury perception of the advertised products because low-pitched music can elicit a sense of formalness, an atmosphere that feels “serious and important” (Brandt, 2003; Morand, 1995, 1998), whereas high-pitched music often depicts a happy, playful, and friendly atmosphere (Bolinger, 1964; Bruner, 1990; Henver, 1937). Specifically, work on musicology suggests that low-pitched music often exudes serious, solemn, and dignified feelings (Auslander, 2006; Rigg, 1964; Wedin, 1972), and musicians across cultures often used low-pitched music in their work to render formal atmospheres among the audience (Huron, 2015). For example, describing the political scenario in the 1802s, the starting movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, which serves as the perfect vehicle
conveying the feeling of seriousness (Rehding, 2018), was written in the D minor mode, a type of musical scale that has been found to be lower in overall pitch compared with major modes (Huron & Davis, 2012). Relatedly, music commentators also associate minor-key in the lower octaves with a serious (not joking) feeling (Boltz, Ebendorf, & Field, 2009; Huron, 2008), conveying a sense of formalness. Furthermore, literature on facial expressions also supports our theorizing by suggesting that people who tend to produce lower vocal pitch often tilt their heads downward, dropping chins, and lower eyebrows (Huron, Dahl, & Johnson, 2009), which are in tandem with facial expressions reflecting affective states such as seriousness or situations in which people encounter formal occasions.

**Formalness and Perceived Luxuriousness**

Notably, a formalness sense is closely tied to the concept of expensiveness, an important defining feature of luxuries (Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 1990; Wang & Griskevicius, 2014; Wang, 2021). Indeed, consumers’ anecdotal life experiences largely suggest that formal objects are often perceived as expensive, supporting the formal-luxury link. For example, formal restaurants provide fine-dining experiences (e.g., full services, high-end décor) with foods and services expensively priced (Kung’u et al., 2022; Hsu, Byun, & Yang, 1997; Gualtieri, 2021). Seeing “formal attire” listed as the dress code of certain special events (e.g., a wedding, charity fundraiser or gala) usually entails buying expensive clothes, which is considered one of the biggest expenses in consumers’ financial budgets (Manes, 2019; The Shift, 2021). Moreover, high-end styling can show attendees’ respectful, serious (not joking) attitudes (Roach, 1997; Karl,
Hall, & Peluchette, 2013), perfectly compatible with the sense of formalness. Relatedly, practitioners in home furnishing and designing industries also suggest that formal (vs. informal or casual) designs, such as high ceilings, symmetric layouts, and classic furniture pieces, can create elegant, sophisticated, and luxurious vibes (Ganea, 2012; Modsy, 2020). More relevant to our research, North, Sheridan, and Areni (2016) suggest that hearing a specific music genre—classical music—can activate related concepts, including expensiveness and formalness, supporting our proposed formal-luxury link.

Given that low-pitched music induces a sense of formalness, and formalness is considered an important manifestation of luxury, I postulate that low- (vs. high-) pitched music used in a commercial or retail environments can lead consumers to perceive the advertised product or services as more luxurious. Indeed, marketing practitioners provide us with indirect support for our theorizing by insinuating that the high-pitched sound a product produces (e.g., a mascara tube produces a click when the top is twisted shut) feels cheap (Byron, 2012), inspiring us to predict that low-pitched auditory cues can make product luxury.

**Overview of Studies**

Using unstructured data—waveform audio files—extracted from real commercials, Study 1 provides initial evidence that the commercials’ overall pitch (operationalized as the average of fundamental frequencies of the commercials’ waveform audios) is negatively associated with the advertised products’ unit prices, which were treated as the proxy of product luxuriousness. Study 2 establishes the basic
effect that low-pitched music used in a jewelry commercial can increase consumers’ luxury perception of the advertised jewelry. Studies 3 and 4 provide consistent evidence for our proposed mechanism by measuring (Study 3) and manipulating (Study 4) participants’ sense of formalness in commercial and restaurant contexts, respectively. Study 5 further demonstrates our proposed effect in gift giving context, showing that gift givers are more likely to purchase the gift advertised in low-pitched commercials when the gift receiver loves luxury goods; such an effect is mitigated when gift receivers avoid luxury goods. Appendix A provides a summary of the studies.

Study 1: Field Observations of Real Commercials’ Auditory Pitch

Using unstructured (audio) data, Study 1 aims to provide preliminary support for our proposed low pitch–luxury link by investigating the auditory pitch of real commercials. I theorize that if low auditory pitch featured in commercials indeed leads to luxury perceptions, it makes sense that, at least at an intuitive level, managers are more likely to use lower-pitched background music (or sound) to advertise high-end products in commercials. Accordingly, I expected a negative association between the overall pitch featured in a commercial and the luxuriousness of the advertised product.

Data Collection and Measurements

I used the 100 Greatest Fragrances of All Time list (Fine & Manso, 2022), which was voted on by beauty industry insiders, and collected each fragrance’s officially-released commercial from YouTube.com. Seventeen fragrance commercials were not
available, leaving 83 fragrance commercials for the subsequent data analyses (for the full list of the fragrances and data used in analyses, see Appendix A).

**The Proxy of Overall Pitch: Waveform Audios’ Average Fundamental Frequency.**

The auditory pitch of a sound that people can perceive is associated with the sound wave’s fundamental frequency, a physical concept measured in Hertz (Hz) (Lowe, Loveland, & Krishna, 2019; Seebeck, 1841; Wightman & Green, 1974). Although the algebraic equation associating pitch with fundamental frequencies is complicated and vexatious (Stevens & Volkmann, 1940), prior research on acoustics suggests that, as a perceptual correlate of a sound signal’s fundamental frequency, a higher auditory pitch usually indicates a higher fundamental frequency (in Hz) (de Cheveigné, 2010; Oxenham, 2012; Ward, 1954; Semal & Demany, 1990). Logically, I use the average fundamental frequency of the waveform audio extracted from a commercial video as the proxy of the commercial’s overall auditory pitch. Specifically, I downloaded the 83 fragrances’ commercials in MP4 format and converted them into waveform audios in WAV format, such that all the audio files were processable for the Python-based sound analysis package Librosa (McFee et al., 2015). Librosa generated the average fundamental frequency of each audio file, with higher frequencies indicating higher overall pitch ($M_{\text{frequency}} = 245.87$ Hz, $SD = 132.89$ Hz). Because the average frequencies of all audios were positively skewed (skewness = 2.06), I used log-transformed frequencies in our data analyses.

**The Proxy of Product Luxuriousness: Price.** Prior research suggests that expensiveness is one of the most important characteristics of luxury goods (Gutsatz & Heine, 2018). Indeed, consumers often perceive high price as an indicator of luxury
brands (Kapferer, 1997; Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993; Vigneron & Johnson, 2017), and researchers also use price to manipulate luxuriousness in experiments (e.g., Sun, Bellezza, & Paharia, 2021). Thus, I use product retail price (without applying any discounts) as a proxy of product luxuriousness, with a higher price indicating more luxuriousness. Specifically, I collected the 83 fragrances’ unit prices (price per ounce; \( M_{\text{unit\ price}} = 83.51 \) per ounce, \( SD = 85.47 \)) mainly from the products’ official websites (80.72%); for fragrances whose price information was not available on their official websites, I obtained their price information from Sephora.com (8.43%), Amazon.com (4.82%), or Macys.com (6.02%). The raw price data was positively skewed (skewness = 3.60) and was thus log-transformed in our subsequent analyses.

**Control Measures.** Although I expect a negative association between the audios’ overall pitch (fundamental frequencies) and the fragrances’ unit prices, it is possible that the observed effects might be caused by factors other than the auditory pitch. To examine this possibility, I controlled variables that could affect product pricing strategies, including the fragrance brands (e.g., Chanel, Dior, Tom Ford; dummy-coded), the sex the fragrance was designed for (men, women, and unsex; dummy-coded), and the source of price information (e.g., official websites, Sephora.com, Amazon.com; dummy-coded). I also controlled for the key characteristics regarding the commercial audio, including audio tempo (in Beats per Minute; continuous; generated by the Python package Librosa), audio length (in seconds; continuous; log-transformed; skewness = 2.65), and the music type featured in the audio (e.g., jazz, pop, rock; dummy-coded).
Analyses and Results

I built two separate regression models with unit price as the dependent variable across models; independent variables included fundamental frequencies, control variables that could affect products’ prices (Models 2), and control variables relevant to audio characteristics (Model 3). As I expected (see Table 1), the commercial audios’ fundamental frequencies (overall pitch) are significantly and negatively associated with the advertised fragrances’ unit prices by controlling for those potential confounds (Model 1: \( b = -0.31, t = -2.15, p = .041 \); Model 2: \( b = -0.29, t = -2.18, p = .041 \)). I interpret that when the commercial audios’ overall pitch decreases by 1%, the products’ luxuriousness can increase by 0.29% when controlling for all those control variables (Model 2).

Discussion

Using unstructured (audio) data extracted from real commercials, Study 1 provides preliminary evidence that the fragrance commercials’ overall pitch is negatively associated with the advertised products’ luxuriousness, which is operationalized as unit price. These results suggest that marketers might intuitively use low auditory pitch in their commercials to exude luxury feelings. One limitation of this study is that, although all commercials contain background music, some of them accompany songs or human voices describing the product or brand; therefore, the fundamental frequencies generated by Librosa were not purely representing the commercials’ background music’s overall pitch. To solve this limitation, our experiments reported in the next sessions were designed to demonstrate the causal relations between pure background music and perceived luxuriousness, tending to provide marketers with useful insights into whether
and how simply adjusting music pitch could be used in a deliberate way to communicate the luxury perception of their products or services.

**Study 2: Basic Effect of Low-Pitched Music**

Study 2 aims to establish the basic effect that, compared with high-pitched music, low-pitched music used in commercials can increase perceived luxuriousness of the advertised product (jewelry). Given that this research focuses on music pitch rather than the pitch of songs or a human voice, across the subsequent studies, I created our auditory stimuli using pure music with different pitch height. Note that I did not exclude data for our primary analyses across studies except for the exploratory analysis in study 2 (see Appendix A for details).

**Method**

Four hundred fifty participants (54% female; $M_{age} = 39.46$ years) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) were randomly assigned to a three-cell (pitch height: low vs. original vs. high) between-subjects design.

Participants first received the music pitch manipulation disguised as a “commercial evaluation” task, in which I asked them to watch and evaluate a jewelry commercial for our future research purposes. Following the music pitch manipulation method used by Huang & Labroo (2020), I adjusted the music pitch featured in the commercial either upward (high pitch condition) or downward (low pitch condition) by 50% using Audacity software; music pitch in the original condition was unchanged. After
watching the video, participants rated their perceived luxuriousness of the advertised jewelry using four nine-point Likert scales (“The advertised jewelry is luxury/prestigious/attractive/high class”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 9 = “strongly agree”; averaged to form a luxury index; \( \alpha = .95 \); Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008).

Afterward, participants responded to a manipulation check question by indicating their perceived pitch height of the music featured in the commercial (1 = “low”; 9 = “high”). The same manipulation check question was used across studies, and the results suggested that our manipulation of pitch height was successful (see Appendix A for details). As prior research suggests that music can induce arousal and alter mood in consumers, thereby influencing consumer behavior (Bruner, 1990; Smith & Curnow, 1966), I asked participants to assess their perceived arousal of the music (1 = “relaxing, depressing, drowsing;” 9 = “stimulating, upbeating, energetic”; \( \alpha = .74 \); adapted from Huang & Labroo, 2020) and mood (1 = “sad, bad, irritable, depressed”; 9 = “happy, good, pleased, cheerful”; \( \alpha = .96 \); Swinyard, 1993). In this and all subsequent studies, I report results from ANCOVAs with arousal and mood as covariates in the main text, but results from ANOVAs are available in Appendix A.

Results

Perceived luxuriousness. A one-way ANCOVA conducted on the luxury index, controlling for arousal and mood, revealed a significant effect on pitch height (\( F(2, 445) = 4.23, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .02 \)). Planned contrasts showed that participants in the low pitch condition reported stronger luxury perceptions (\( M_{\text{low-pitched}} = 7.55, SD = 1.36 \)) than those in the original pitch condition (\( M_{\text{original-pitched}} = 7.19, SD = 1.59 \); \( F(1, 445) = 6.44, p \)
= .012, η_p^2 = .01) or those in the high pitch condition (M_{high-pitched} = 7.21, SD = 1.55; F(1, 445) = 6.30, p = .012, η_p^2 = .01). No difference between the latter two conditions was found (F(1, 445) < 1, p = .955).

**Discussion**

Study 2 demonstrates our proposed effect by showing that low-pitched music used in the jewelry commercial can significantly increase consumers’ perceived luxuriousness of the advertised jewelry than high-pitched or original-pitched music. Furthermore, this study suggests that the observed effect was driven by the low-pitched music rather than the high-pitched music which might decrease consumers’ luxury perception. In the following studies, I show the evidence for our proposed mechanism.

**Study 3: Testing Mechanism–Measuring the Sense of Formalness**

Study 3 (preregistered; https://aspredicted.org/TYY_B6C) aims to examine the underlying mechanism of our proposed low-pitch–luxury effects by measuring participants’ sense of formalness. I propose that low- (vs. high) pitched music, when used in a commercial, induces a sense of formalness, which in turn increases the luxury perception of the product featured in the commercial. I also explore (as preregistered) if the effect of pitch height on perceived product luxuriousness extends to participants’ willingness to pay (WTP) for the product.

**Method**
Two hundred MTurk workers in the United States (59.5% female; M\text{age} = 40.04 years, SD = 12.63) were randomly assigned to a two-cell (pitch height: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Disguised as a “commercial evaluation” task, participants watched a wine commercial featuring either high-pitched or low-pitched background music, which was adjusted 50% up or down based on the original music pitch. A pretest using participants from the same subject pool (N = 80) showed that the music pieces used in the main study did not lead to different feelings of power (1 = “powerless;” 9 = “powerful”; \( p = .98 \)), comfort (1 = “discomforting;” 9 = “comforting”; \( p = .60 \)), pleasantness (1 = “unpleasant;” 9 = “pleasant”; \( p = .34 \)), suggesting that our proposed effects can be observed without these factors at play. After watching the commercial, participants evaluated the wine’s luxuriousness using the same scales (\( \alpha = .92 \)) as those used in Study 1 and indicated how much money they would be willing to pay for the wine. Afterward, participants answered questions assessing their sense of formalness after watching the commercial (“The video elicits a sense of formalness,” “The video elicits a sense of seriousness,” and “The video elicits a sense of importance”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 9 = “strongly agree”; averaged to form a formalness index; \( \alpha = .83 \)). Because the experience of processing disfluency (vs. fluency) can increase perceived competence and expected value of an agent (Thompson & Ince, 2013), it is possible that the low- or high-pitched music featured in the commercial causes processing (dis)fluency in consumers, which in turn influences their evaluation of the product. To rule out this account, I measured participants’ perceived fluency of the video (1 = “This video is difficult to process/understand,” and 9 = “This video is easy to process/understand”; averaged to form a fluency index; \( r = .91, p < .001 \)). As I did in
Study 1, I also measured participants’ perceived pitch height, arousal (α = .74) and mood (α = .96), and asked them to provide their demographics.

**Results**

*Perceived Luxuriousness.* A one-way ANCOVA conducted on the luxury index, controlling for arousal and mood, showed that participants in the low pitch condition perceived the wine featured in the commercial as more luxurious (M = 6.50, SD = 1.62) than those in the high pitch condition (M = 6.07, SD = 1.61; F(1, 196) = 6.06, p = .015, \( \eta_p^2 = .03 \)).

*The sense of Formalness and Mediation.* The same ANCOVA performed on the formalness index showed that participants in the low pitch condition (coded as 0) reported a stronger sense of formalness (M = 6.32, SD = 1.67) than those in the high pitch condition (coded as 1; M = 5.74, SD = 1.72; F(1, 196) = 7.58, p = .006, \( \eta_p^2 = .04 \)). More important, a mediation analysis confirmed our proposed mediating role of formalness (b = −.37, SE = .14; 95% CI [−.653, −.112]; PROCESS Model 4; Hayes, 2017). Ruling out the potential alternative account for the commercial fluency, no difference in the fluency index was found across conditions (F(1, 196) = 1.04, p = .309), and mediation test further confirmed that fluency does not mediate our proposed effect of music pitch on luxury perception ([−.067, .044]).

**Discussion**

As preregistered, I measured WTP to explore if the low pitch–luxury effect extends to influence consumers’ willingness to pay for the advertised product. Due to the
nature of the WTP measure, I removed seven outliers using the technique by Tukey (1977), leaving 193 observations for the particular analysis of WTP (skewness = 0.83).

As expected, the one-way ANCOVA revealed a significant difference on WTP ($M_{\text{low-pitch}} = $28.50, SD = 15.22; $M_{\text{high-pitch}} = $24.60, SD = 14.24; $F(1, 189) = 4.49, p = .035, \eta^2_p = .02$). Moreover, the mediation process “pitch–formalness–WTP” ($b = -5.09, SE = 4.35; 95\% \text{ CI } [-16.280, -0.391]$) and the serial mediation process “pitch–formalness–luxury perception–WTP” ($b = -1.70, SE = .98; 95\% \text{ CI } [-3.934, -0.173]$) consistently establish the sense of formalness as the underlying mechanism. I report results without data exclusion or covariates in Appendix A.

**Study 4: Testing Mechanism–Manipulating the Pitch–Formalness Association**

Study 4 (preregistered; https://aspredicted.org/CV9_2HL) aims to further test the proposed formalness mechanism through manipulation. I reason that if the underlying process is truly the sense of formalness, then our observed effect should be replicated when the association between low pitch and formalness is strengthened; however, when the low pitch–formalness link is weakened, our proposed effect should dissipate.

**Method**

Three hundred forty-eight undergraduate students (38.5% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.13$, SD = 1.13) from a large southeastern university were randomly assigned to a 2
(association reasoning: low-pitched music associated with formality vs. high-pitched music associated with formality) × 2 (pitch height: high vs. low) between-subjects design.

Participants first completed an ostensible “reasoning task” aiming to manipulate the association between music pitch and the sense of formality. Specifically, participants in the low- (high-) pitched music associated with formality condition explained why low- (high-) pitched music often elicited a sense of formality but high- (low-) pitched music often felt relatively informal or casual (see Appendix A for details). Afterward, participants completed a “simulation” task, in which they were randomly assigned to listen to a piece of high- or low-pitched music, which was adjusted 50% up and down in its pitch. A pretest (N = 78) showed that the music pieces used in the main study did not influence participants’ feelings of power (p = .46), comfort (p = .25), and pleasantness (p = .12). I asked participants to imagine that they were visiting a restaurant, which was playing the background music that they were listening to. I asked participants to experience the music as if they were at a restaurant. As in previous studies, I measured their perceived luxuriousness of the restaurant (α = .94), perceived pitch height, arousal (α = .68), and mood (α = .94). In addition, participants indicated how difficult they felt the reasoning task was (1 = “not difficult at all,” and 9 = “extremely difficult”) and then reported their demographics.

Results

Perceived Luxuriousness. An ANCOVA (pitch height × association reasoning) on the luxury index, with arousal and mood as the covariates, revealed a main effect of
music pitch ($M_{\text{low-pitched}} = 6.32$, SD = 1.51; $M_{\text{high-pitched}} = 5.55$, SD = 1.80; $F(1, 342) = 18.75, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$), replicating our previous findings that lower music pitch leads to increased perceived luxuriousness; no other main effects were observed. More important, the results revealed a significant interaction between music pitch and association ($F(1, 342) = 25.13, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .07$; see figure 1). Planned contrasts showed that, in the low-pitched music associated with formalness condition, participants who listened to the low-pitched music perceived the restaurant as more luxurious ($M = 6.62$, SD = 1.53) than those in the high-pitched music condition ($M = 5.02$, SD = 1.72; $F(1, 342) = 42.96, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11$). However, in the high-pitched music associated formality condition, no difference in their luxury perception was observed across the high and low pitch conditions ($M_{\text{low-pitched}} = 6.01$, SD = 1.43; $M_{\text{high-pitched}} = 6.08$, SD = 1.72; $F(1, 342) < 1, p = .769$).

The Difficulty of Reasoning. As one of the confound checks, the two-way ANOVA (association reasoning × pitch height) performed on the perceived difficulty of the reasoning task revealed a main effect of association reasoning, such that participants felt more difficult when reasoning the high-pitched music–formality association ($M = 5.38$, SD = 2.55) than those who reasoned the low-pitched music–formality association ($M = 4.42$, SD = 2.10; $F(1, 344) = 14.65, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$). No other main or interaction effects was observed ($ps > .215$). Such an effect supports our theorizing from a different angle by indicating that associating low- (vs. high-) pitched music with the sense of formality makes more logical sense among consumers. Results from the ANCOVA on the luxury index showed that our proposed effects held after controlling for the reasoning task difficulty.
Discussion

Using a process-by-moderation approach, Study 4 demonstrates that when the low-pitch–formalness link was enhanced, our proposed effect of low-pitched music pitch on luxury perception was replicated; when such a link was weakened by associating high-pitched music with formalness, our proposed effect dissipated. This study confirms the salience of the low-pitched music–formalness association as the underlying mechanism for the observed effects.

Study 5: Effects in Gift Giving Contexts

If high-pitched music, when used in a commercial, renders the advertised product more luxurious, then it should promote purchase intention in situations when luxury goods are desired (vs. undesired). In Study 5 (preregistered; https://aspredicted.org/HX8_9XC), I test this hypothesis using a gift-giving context, in which I examined if a gift giver was more likely to purchase the product (as a gift) advertised in a low- (vs. high) pitched commercial for the gift receiver who was described as either loving or avoiding luxury goods. I expect that people would be more likely to buy a gift advertised in a low-pitched commercial when the gift receiver loves luxuries; such an effect would dissipate if the gift receiver hates luxury goods.
Method

A total of 403 participants (48.6% female, M_{age} = 38.77 years, SD = 13.92) recruited from Prolific were randomly assigned to a 2 (gift receiver types: luxury lover vs. luxury avoider) × 2 (pitch height: low vs. high) between-subjects design.

Participants first imagined they were buying a gift for a friend who always loved (luxury lover condition) or avoided (luxury avoider condition) luxury goods (see Appendix A for details). Then, participants were randomly assigned to watch a high- or low-pitched commercial for an essential oil diffuser (pitch was adjusted 50% upward and 50% downward, respectively). A pretest (N = 82) showed that the music used in the commercial did not influence perceptions of power, comfort, and pleasantness of music (ps > .152). After watching the commercial, participants indicated how likely they were to purchase this product as a gift for this friend (1 = “very unlikely,” and 9 = “very likely”).

As a manipulation check for pitch height, participants indicated how high/low the music’s pitch was in the commercial (1 = “low,” and 9 = “high”). As I did in previous studies, I measured participants’ perceived arousal (α = .69) and mood (α = .95) and collected their demographics.

Results

Purchase Intention. A 2 (gift receiver types: luxury lover vs. luxury avoider) × 2 (pitch height: high vs. low) ANCOVA performed on purchase intention, controlling for arousal and mood, yielded a main effect of gift receiver types (M_{luxury lover} = 5.97, SD = 2.49; M_{luxury avoider} = 3.31, SD = 2.27; F(1, 397) = 125.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24) and a
marginally significant effect of pitch height (M_{low-pitched} = 4.65, SD = 2.69; M_{high-pitched} = 4.54, SD = 2.76; F(1, 397) = 3.51, p = .062, \eta_p^2 = .01). More important, I observed an interaction effect (F(1, 397) = 5.94, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .02; see figure 2). Planned contrasts showed that in the luxury lover condition, participants who watched the low-pitched commercial were more likely to purchase the product as a gift (M = 6.46, SD = 2.24) than those who watched the high-pitched commercial (M = 5.56, SD = 2.62; F(1, 397) = 8.93, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .02). However, in the luxury avoider condition, I did not observe any difference in purchase intention across the high and low pitch conditions (M_{low-pitched} = 3.20, SD = 2.08; M_{high-pitched} = 3.44, SD = 2.48; F(1, 397) < 1, p = .708).

**Discussion**

Study 5 identifies a downstream consequence of our proposed effect by showing that, in a gift-giving context, participants were more likely to buy the product advertised in the low-pitched commercial as a gift for a friend who loved luxury goods. However, such an effect was mitigated when the gift receiver did not like luxury goods.

**General Discussion**

Across five studies, I find convergent results showing that low-pitched music used in commercials or retail settings can increase consumers’ luxury perception of the advertised products or services. Specifically, using unstructured (audio) data of real fragrance commercials, I observe that commercials’ overall pitch (operationalized by the
commercial audios’ average fundamental frequencies) is negatively associated with the advertised products’ luxuriousness (operationalized by the fragrances’ unit prices). These field observations indicate that, in marketing practice, managers could have realized that low-pitched music can communicate products’ luxuriousness and thus intuitively used low-pitched commercials when advertising high-end products (Study 1). Using lab experiments, I demonstrate that low-pitched background music used in commercials for jewelry and wine (Studies 2 and 3) or a restaurant (Study 4) can increase consumers’ luxury perceptions of the advertised product offerings. I also find that the observed effect occurs because, compared with high-pitched music, low-pitched music can induce a sense of formalness and prompt formal-expensive association among consumers, thereby increasing their perceived luxuriousness of the products or services (Studies 3 and 4). Furthermore, I demonstrate that our proposed low-pitch–luxury effect has downstream consequences that consumers are more likely to buy the gift product advertised in a low-pitched commercial for a friend who loves (vs. avoids) luxury products.

**Theoretical Contributions and Practically Implications**

As prior research calls for creating multi-sensory experiences in luxury marketing (Wiedmann et al., 2013), our research demonstrates that auditory cues—music pitch—can systematically alter consumers’ luxury perception of the product offerings, contributing to research on sensory marketing and luxury consumption (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Madzharov, Block, & Morrin, 2015; Park & Hadi, 2019). Our research also adds to consumer literature that particularly examines sound or music and consumer behavior. For example, prior research suggests that high-pitched music can enhance
moral self-perception and thus increase healthy choices (Huang & Labroo, 2020); low-pitched background sound can nonconsciously prime a threat response, resulting in heightened anxiety among consumers (Lowe, Loveland, & Krishna, 2019). Our research adds to this stream of literature by showing that low-pitched music can induce a sense of formalness, enriching the embodied and referential meanings of music used in advertising and retail settings (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2005).

Practically, our research provides important, actionable implications for the areas of retailing, advertising, and brand management by suggesting that simply adjusting the music pitch in marketing communications can increase consumers’ luxury perception.

**Future Research Directions**

Our research unlocks several possibilities for future research. For example, though I studied how music pitch influences consumers’ luxury perception, future research could take our findings one step further by examining whether low-pitched music can systematically alter consumers’ choice preferences for more luxurious, high-end products. Along similar lines, researchers could also explore if low-pitched music can increase preferences for hedonic over utilitarian product offerings, as prior literature has shown that luxury products feature a great number of hedonic features (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009).

As I have investigated the moderating role of association reasoning in our research, future studies could examine other managerial and theoretical relevant boundary conditions for our proposed effect. I posit that low-pitched music increases luxury perception because it induces a sense of formalness. However, some music genres,
such as rock music, are intrinsically inappropriate for formal atmospheres. Accordingly, researchers could examine if our proposed effect attenuates when applying low-pitched rock music in commercials or retail environments. Relatedly, as classical music can activate the concept of formalness in memory (North, Sheridan, & Areni, 2016), future research could further compare different music genres (e.g., classical music, pop music, jazz) and examine whether our proposed effect is stronger or weaker for a particular music genre.

Researchers could also test if our proposed low pitch–luxury link can be demonstrated at a subconscious level by conducting an Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). As I found in Study 2 that participants perceived reasoning the association between low- (vs. high) pitched music and formalness as easier, I expect that the subconscious association between low-pitched (rather than high-pitched) music and the concept of luxury could be detected.

Future research could explore whether other sensory cues, such as lighting, color, and texture, that elicit a formal atmosphere can also elevate perceived luxuriousness. For example, research suggests that a dimly lit restaurant helps create a relatively fine-dining experience (Wansink & Van Ittersum, 2012; Park, Pae, & Meneely, 2010); tactile cues such as softness, slipperiness are associated with the perceived luxuriousness of leather materials (Kim, 2021). Researchers could seek out empirical evidence by establishing causal relations between such sensory cues and luxury perception.
Table 1.1 The Effect of Commercials’ Pitch on Products’ Luminousness (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Price</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commercials’ Pitch</strong></td>
<td>–.31*</td>
<td>–.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.15)</td>
<td>(.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex fixed-effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
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<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistic</td>
<td>2.57**</td>
<td>2.38*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. The boldfaced variable (commercials’ pitch) is the variable of interest. Robust standard errors were reported in the parentheses. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.
Note: *** $p < .001$; n.s. non-significant

Figure 1.2 Interaction between Music Pitch and Association (Study 4)
Note: * $p < .05$

Figure 1.3 Interaction between Pitch and Shopping Goal (Study 5)
Chapter 2 How to Influence Consumer Preferences for Formal Versus Casual Product Offerings?: The Role of Fresh Start Reminders

Choices between formal and casual styles abound in consumers’ day-to-day lives. The clothes consumers put on, the home furnishing items they acquire, the way they communicate with others, and even the social activities they participate in all vary significantly in the formal–casual continuum. Indeed, many brands have developed formal or casual product lines, catering to consumers’ different preferences and tastes. For example, ThinkPad is committed to a design that engenders formal, professional impressions (Trinh, 2020), whereas IKEA is more oriented toward a casual and inviting vibe (Kelly, 2016). Lululemon, a retail brand initially focused on a more casual, free-tailoring style of sportswear, has expanded to formal wear (Parisi, 2021); fast-casual restaurants increasingly offer more formal dining services (Gant, 2018). All these examples highlight a largely uninvestigated question: What drives consumer preferences for formal versus casual product offerings?

The sporadic literature on formal versus casual styles focuses mostly on its consequences, such as investigating how consumers’ dressing style (formal vs. casual) influences their self-perceptions (e.g., Peluchette & Karl, 2007) and how marketers’ communication styles (formal vs. casual) affect consumer evaluations (e.g., Choi, Liu, & Mattila, 2019; Gretry et al., 2017). However, less is known about the antecedents of consumer choice between formal and casual product offerings in general. Such an
investigation is crucial because it can provide a comprehensive understanding of consumers’ style preferences, imparting theoretical implications and novel perspectives in developing effective strategies to promote products and services with different styles.

In this research, I identify a contextual factor—fresh start reminders—that is readily available in consumers’ lives and prevalent in the marketplace and demonstrate that it can systematically influence consumer preferences for formal over casual styles in product offerings. Indeed, fresh start reminders, such as calendar landmarks (e.g., a new year), life transitions (e.g., getting a new job), and marketing communications (e.g., ads, commercials; see examples in Appendix B), are omnipresent in people’s day-to-day lives, reminding and encouraging people to “make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life” (Price et al., 2018). Moreover, fresh starts are particularly relevant to examining consumer preferences for formal versus casual styles because fresh start occasions often prompt people to introspect about their existing life experiences and to contemplate or justify their lifestyle-related choices (Schouten, 1991).

Our research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, investigating a frequently encountered dimension of product styles—formal versus casual, our research represents the first attempt to examine the antecedents of consumer preferences for formal versus casual product offerings, enriching the literature on consumers’ product style preferences (e.g., Cox & Cox, 2002; Huang & Sengupta, 2020; Jiang, Su, & Zhu, 2019). Second, our research contributes to the fresh start literature (e.g., Price et al., 2018) by documenting the role of fresh start reminders in shaping consumers’ subsequent decision making involving different product styles. Third, our work sheds new light on consumer meaning-seeking, an important element of consumer self-transcendence and
well-being (Rudd, Catapano, & Aaker, 2019), thereby enriching transformative consumer research (Mick, 2006).

**Theoretical Background**

*Formal versus Casual Product Offerings*

Product offerings in the marketplace vary significantly in their styles, or the overall impression that a product or service elicits. The formal-casual distinction is arguably one of the most important style variations (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999). Besides the apparel industry, differences along the formal-casual continuum also appear widely in interior designs (e.g., dark-color furnishings with symmetric layouts [formal] vs. light colors with asymmetric layouts [casual]; Nafie, 2020), business communications (e.g., “Thank you for conveying this positive feedback” [formal] vs. “Awesome. That’s what we like to hear” [casual]; Gretry et al., 2017), and social activities (e.g., formal conferences vs. causal gatherings).

Despite the lack of a clear definition, prior literature in apparel design (e.g., Hannover & Kühnen, 2002), linguistics (e.g., Meiners & Miller, 2004), and organizational behavior (Morand, 1998) has reached a consensus on the distinction between formal and casual styles. First, formal styles elicit an overall impression of seriousness, whereas casual styles seem more relaxed and playful. For example, Brandt (2003) documents that formal wearing (e.g., doctors with white coats and black ties) leads to more serious impressions. Morand (1998) suggests that being formal in the workplace signals a serious rather than a playful atmosphere. Second, the formal style is more planned, structured, and official, whereas the casual style feels less structured, less
official, and more spontaneous. For example, formal dining requires diners to follow certain etiquettes, while casual dining is more relaxing and involves less rule-following; a formal meeting often has planned procedures, whereas an informal meeting is more unstructured and feels spontaneous (Morand, 1995).

Except for the very little research examining chronic antecedents (e.g., gender, ethnicity, profession) of consumers’ formal versus casual clothing choices (Cardon & Okoro, 2009), extant literature on formal versus casual styles primarily examines its consequences. For example, Yan, Yurchisin, and Watchravesringkan (2011) document that formal (vs. casual) attire signals higher service quality (e.g., credible, knowledgeable) of employees. Gretry et al. (2017) find that using informal (vs. formal) language in business communications can increase trust when consumers are familiar (vs. unfamiliar) with the brand. Thus, little is known about how situational factors may alter consumer preferences for formal versus casual product offerings in general (including but not limited to clothing). In this research, I focus on fresh start reminders and examine how they shape consumer preferences for formal (vs. casual) product offerings.

**Fresh Start, Meaning-Seeking, and Preference for Formalness**

Fresh start refers to the thought of making a new beginning in life regardless of past or present circumstances (Price et al., 2018). I posit that reminding people about a fresh start prompts them to seek meaning in life. Fresh start metaphorizes a “reset button” that can shift people’s status quo. Such a “reset” opportunity often triggers introspections about one’s inner values and motives (Pronin, 2009). For example, Mick (2006) suggests that life’s transitional stages prompt people to reflect on how to make worthwhile
differences in the world. Page (2011) documents “the beginning of a career” as the best time for introspection because it instills profound insights into one’s meaning in life. Indeed, people often contemplate their life meaning particularly at the start point of the life journey, a perfect timing for people to reflect on their lives and engage in meaning-seeking (Thory, 2016). In addition, our theorizing (fresh start provokes meaning-seeking) is also supported by neuroimaging research, which shows that thinking about one’s past and future (something that fresh start often leads to) tends to fire up brain activity in the medial-temporal lobe (MTL), the same neural network that will also be activated when people strive to decipher the meaning of life (Waytz, Hershfield, & Tamir, 2015).

Drawing from literature on prototypicality and preference formation (Hasher & Zacks, 1984; Martindale & Moore, 1988), I further posit that meaning-seeking prompts consumers to prefer formal over casual options. Specifically, people encounter meaningful situations more frequently in conjunction with formal (rather than casual) objects. Anecdotes suggest that meaningful occasions, such as a gala dinner event, often require a formal dress code (Joe, 2021). Indeed, research shows that social activities (e.g., ceremonies, important meetings) that elicit a strong sense of meaningfulness often call for a formal atmosphere (Hobson et al., 2018), directing people to engage in formal conducts such as dressing formally (e.g., wearing a dress shirt and shoes), speaking formally (e.g., using polite language or formal adjectives; Brown & Levinson, 1987), and behaving formally (e.g., sitting uptight in chairs). Furthermore, formal objects can indeed help signal a sense of meaningfulness, making mental representations of formal options more readily accessible in meaning-seeking situations. For example, wearing formal (vs. casual) clothes help people signal their respectful, serious attitudes toward the occasions.
or events (Karl, Hall, & Peluchette, 2013; Roach, 1997). Relatedly, in communication, formal language (e.g., “Could you tolerate a slight imposition?” vs. “Mind if I butt in?” p.835) is often used to signal the importance of the occasion (Morand, 1995).

As consumer choices depend mainly on the extent to which the mental representations of an object are activated at the time of decision making (Martindale & Moore, 1988), and the extent (salience or promptness) of the activation is positively related to the frequency of occurrence and the representativeness of the object (Whitfield & Slatter, 1979; Zajonc, 1968), I reason that consumers will be more likely to prefer formal over casual styles in meaning-seeking situations. Stated formally:

H₁: Fresh start reminders increase consumers’ preference for formal (vs. casual) product offerings.

H₂: The effect described in H₁ is mediated by meaning-seeking. Specifically, fresh start reminders heighten meaning-seeking in consumers, which in turn increases their preferences for formal (vs. casual) product offerings.

**Overview of Studies**

Using Google Trends data, Study 1 provides preliminary evidence that people’s online searches containing the term “formal” (vs. “casual”) are more frequent at the outset of calendar cycles (e.g., a week, month, and year) but decrease as the days or months within each calendar cycle progress. Using different fresh start reminders, Study 2 establishes the basic effect that reminding consumers about fresh starts increases their preferences for formal (vs. casual) lifestyles (Study 2a) and dressing styles (Studies 2b).
Studies 3 and 4 provide consistent evidence for our proposed mechanism by measuring (Study 3) and manipulating (Study 4) participants’ meaning-seeking motives. Study 5 further demonstrates that our proposed effect is driven by increased preference for formal options and not by decreased preference for casual options. Appendix B provides a summary of all the studies.

**Study 1: Evidence from Google Trends Data**

Study 1 aims to provide initial support for our proposed effect by investigating whether fresh starts are associated with people’s online searches related to the term “formal” (vs. “casual”). Specifically, I use the outset of calendar cycles (e.g., a week, month, and year) as the proxy of fresh start reminders because people naturally want to make a fresh start at the beginning of a calendar cycle (Dai, Milkman, & Riis, 2014). People’s online searches related to a particular term are quantified by Google Trends as Search Volume Indices (SVIs), which can serve as the proxy of the public interest in the queries that include the term (Hu, Du, & Damangir, 2014). For example, the SVIs of the term “formal” indicate the popularity of queries that include the term “formal” (e.g., “formal dressing,” “designs that look formal”) in a given geographic area over a particular time span. I theorize that if fresh start reminders indeed trigger consumers’ preferences for formal options, consumers’ online searches that include the term “formal” (but not “casual”) should be more frequent at the beginning of each calendar cycle and decrease as the time progresses.
Because Google Trends allows users to extract the SVIs (of a given term) by specifying a particular track (e.g., Web Search, Google Shopping, YouTube Search, Image Search), I examine our predictions by collecting data from the Web Search (the default option) track and the Google Shopping track, respectively. Google Shopping is a Google service that allows users to search for products and compare prices among different vendors. I suggest that the SVIs obtained from the Google Shopping track can reflect the popularity of purchasing-related searches and thus are more relevant to consumption behavior, offering more marketing-relevant insights.

Methods

Because at the time of the study Google Trends only allowed daily SVIs to be extracted over a period of six months or less, I obtained the daily SVIs of the terms by setting the data extraction interval as six months. Specifically, in the Web Search track, I performed 36 data extraction attempts for the two focal terms “formal” and “casual,” respectively, such that each attempt captured the given term’s daily SVIs every six-month from January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2021 (36 six-month intervals in total). To rule out the potential alternative explanation that people might use Google search (for any terms) at the beginning of every calendar cycle more frequently, I performed additional data extraction (from the Web Search track) for the control term “weather,” for which people often search. As the daily SVIs from the Google Shopping track are available only from July 1, 2007, to December 31, 2021 (a period containing 29 six-month intervals), I accordingly conducted 29 data extraction attempts for “formal” and “casual” in the
Google Shopping track, obtaining their daily SVIs every six months as well (see Appendix B for data collection details).

I predict that the SVIs of the term “formal” (but not “casual”) will be highest at the beginning of a new week, month, and year but decrease as the time within each calendar cycle continues. Accordingly, I constructed five separate regression models, each of which was performed with the given term’s daily SVIs as the outcome variable and incorporated the following predictor variables: Day_Week, a continuous measure indicating the number of days elapsed since Monday of a given week (min = 1 [Monday], max = 7 [Sunday]); Day_Month, a continuous variable denoting the number of days elapsed since the first day of a given month (min = 1, max = 31); and Month_Year, a continuous variable representing the number of months elapsed since January of a given year (min = 1 [January], max = 12 [December]). Because the extracted daily SVIs were normalized and scaled within every data extraction interval (six months), I performed Models 1–3 with the fixed effects for the 36 six-month intervals (data from the Web Search track) and Models 4 and 5 with the fixed effects for the 29 six-month intervals (data from the Google Shopping track).

**Results**

The results of Model 1 (see Table 1) confirmed our prediction by showing that all the coefficient estimates were significantly negative, indicating that online searches containing the term “formal” were most frequent (higher SVIs) at the outset of a week (b = –.63, p < .001), a month (b = –.11, p < .001), and a year (b = –.19, p = .07) but decreased as each week, month, or year progressed. However, I found no such pattern for
the term “casual” (Model 2). The results of Model 3 indicated that the SVIs of “weather” did not systematically change the way the term “formal” did, ruling out the alternative explanation that people search any word more frequently at the beginning of calendar cycles.

I performed Models 4 and 5 using the SVIs obtained from the Google Shopping track. The results indicate that purchase-related queries that included the term “formal” were more frequent at the beginning of a week \( (b = -0.40, p = .003) \) and a year \( (b = -0.97, p < .001) \) but decreased as the days in each week and the months in each year progressed (Model 4). I found no such pattern for the term “casual.”

**Discussion**

Using Google Trends data, Study 1 provides preliminary evidence that online searches that include the term “formal” (in both Web Search and Google Shopping tracks) are more frequent at the outset of calendar cycles—natural reminders of fresh starts—but decrease as time progresses. For robustness check purposes, I conducted additional analyses by varying the data extraction interval. That is, I obtained the SVIs over the period of every three months (vs. six months). The results showed consistent patterns with the results of Study 1. Alternatively, I regressed the terms’ daily SVIs on the independent variables (Day\_week, Day\_month, and Month\_year) by recoding them as dummy (vs. continuous) variables and obtained convergent results (see Appendix B for the robustness check analyses). Taken together, Study 1 provides initial support for our proposed effect that fresh start reminders systematically influence consumer preferences for formal (vs. casual) product offerings.
Study 2: The Main Effect of Fresh Start Reminders

In this section, I present two studies to examine the effect of fresh start reminders in different decision-making contexts. In Study 2a, I remind participants about fresh starts using quotes and examine their subsequent choice related to formal versus casual lifestyles. In Study 2b, I attempt to replicate our proposed effect by framing the outset of a calendar landmark (a new semester) as either a fresh start or an ordinary time and by measuring participants’ preferences between the formal versus casual dressing style.

Study 2a: Lifestyle Preference

Methods. One hundred seventy-two undergraduate students (61.0% female; \( M_{\text{age}} = 22.8 \) years, \( SD = 4.85 \)) from a large southwestern university in the United States participated in a one-way, two-cell (reminders: fresh start vs. control) between-subjects design for course credit. Note that I used consistent data-screening criteria in Studies 2–5 and reported the results from the final sample in our main studies (see Appendix B for the screening questions used and the results before and after data exclusion across studies). I randomly assigned participants to one of the two conditions.

Under the cover story of evaluating reading materials, I asked participants to help us pretest some quotes for our future research. Participants in the fresh start condition read a list of ten quotes about fresh starts (e.g., “Whatever their past, people can look forward to a fresh start”), while those in the control condition read ten randomly selected quotes that bore no relevance to fresh starts (e.g., “Color is a power that directly influences the soul”; for all manipulation materials used across studies, see Appendix B).
I conducted separate tests to show that the quotes used in the fresh start (vs. control) condition indeed reminded participants about fresh starts and made them want to make fresh starts (see Appendix B). Afterward, participants provided feedback on their feelings and thoughts about the quotes.

I disguised our dependent measure as a separate task of pretesting some short articles with different topics (in reality, there were only two topics—formal lifestyle and casual lifestyle). I informed participants that they needed to select a topic before proceeding to pretest the article. For our focal measure, I presented participants with two topics (with brief descriptions): formal lifestyle and casual lifestyle (for all dependent measures used across studies, see Appendix B). Consistent with the cover story, participants read and evaluated the article that they had selected. I also measured participants’ mood in this and all subsequent studies (1 = “sad/bad/irritable/depressed,” and 7 = “happy/good/pleased/cheerful”; α = .94; Swinyard, 1993). Finally, I collected participants’ demographic information and thanked and debriefed them.

Results. Logistic regression performed on participants’ choices (formal = 1, casual = 0) showed that participants in the fresh start condition (coded as 1) were more likely to choose the article about formal lifestyle than those in the control condition (coded as 0; 34.1% vs. 17.9%; b = .87, SE = .36, Wald = 5.70, p = .017), providing support for H₁. Our manipulation did not influence participants’ mood (F < 1, p = .874).

Study 2b: Dressing Style Preference in a Virtual Meeting Setting

Method. I conducted this study at the beginning of the Fall semester, enabling the new semester to serve as a natural reminder of a fresh start. Moreover, I made our tests
more conservative by reducing the new semester–fresh start association in the control condition. Two hundred fifty-three undergraduate students (65.6% female; M_\text{age} = 20.22 years, SD = 1.37) from a large southeastern university in the United States participated in a one-way, two-cell (reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality [control]) between-subjects design for course credit. They were assigned to conditions at random.

I manipulated the fresh start (vs. ordinality) reminders under the disguise of a reasoning task, in which I described the beginning of the new semester as either a fresh start (fresh start condition) or just an ordinary time (control condition) (see Appendix B). I asked participants to elaborate on why they thought it was a fresh start or an ordinary time. Afterward, I told participants to imagine that their department would host a virtual gathering and that they needed to select a virtual avatar to represent themselves in the gathering. I then provided participants with a set of six avatars in varying clothing styles, from casual to formal, consistent with their sex. Specifically, three avatars were in more formal clothes, and the other three were in more casual clothes (adapted from Cutright, Srna, and Samper 2019; see Appendix B). Participants were allowed to choose only one avatar from the six options.

Results. I coded participants’ responses such that 0 represents choice from the three casual avatars and 1 represents choice from the three formal ones. The logistic regression results showed that 87.1% of the participants in the fresh start condition (vs. 76.7% in the control) chose the avatars in formal clothes (b = .72, SE = .34, Wald = 4.45, p = .035). Our manipulation did not influence participants’ mood (F < 1, p = .759).
Discussion

Using different fresh start reminders (quotes and a new semester), I demonstrate that reminding consumers about fresh starts increases their preferences for formal (vs. casual) styles in lifestyles and dressing styles. I conducted a supplementary study (Appendix B) to replicate our findings using the “Monday” context (the beginning of a week), a more frequent calendar event every consumer may encounter. In the following studies, I show the evidence for our proposed mechanism.

Study 3: Testing Mechanism—Measuring Meaning-Seeking

The purpose of Study 3 is threefold. First, I examine the proposed mechanism by measuring participants’ meaning-seeking motives. Second, I use a more conservative manipulation by comparing “fresh start” with the generic “start,” a conceptually similar but distinct construct. I posit that, compared with fresh start, a generic start (e.g., starting a class session, starting a meal plan) entails relatively neutral emotions and contains fewer connotations than what fresh start carries. Accordingly, a generic start (unlike the start of a calendar cycle or life role) is less likely to activate meaning-seeking in consumers, and therefore our proposed effect should not emerge. Third, Study 3 aims to boost the robustness of our findings by extending the decision-making context to social activities and to augment the ecological validity of our proposed effect by embedding fresh start reminders in ads.
Methods

Three hundred twenty-four undergraduate students (53.1% female; \( M_{\text{age}} = 20.33 \) years, \( \text{SD} = 1.41 \)) from a large southeastern university in the United States participated in this study for course credit. I randomly assigned participants to a one-way, three-cell (reminders: fresh start vs. generic start vs. control) between-subjects design that embedded the reminders in print ads.

Participants first completed an ad evaluation task aimed to manipulate fresh start reminders. In the fresh start condition, I provided participants with a set of ads embedded reminders (e.g., headlines) about fresh starts. For example, one of the ads promoted a meal plan with the headline FRESH START; in the other two conditions, however, I showed participants the same meal plan ad with a modified headline LET’S START (generic start condition) or HEALTHY STYLE (control condition) (see Appendix B for the ads used). Afterward, participants evaluated the ads (1 = “bad/unfavorable/negative,” and 7 = “good/favorable/positive”; \( \alpha = .89 \)) and shared with us their feelings and thoughts about the ads.

Next, in a seemingly unrelated “consumer preference” survey, I asked participants to imagine that they were to make up their minds about a book club to join. Participants read materials about two alternative book clubs featuring either formal or casual atmosphere:

Book Club A: It is a more casual book club that meets monthly online. The determination of the books to read is based on members’ casual discussions before the meeting. During each meeting, discussions will be relatively informal,
and everyone can bring up discussion questions. Because the meetings will be virtually held, participants are free to behave casually. The dress code is relatively more casual. The meetings of the book club and the discussions are aimed to provide a relaxing time for the members.

Book Club B: It is a more formal book club that meets monthly online. The determination of the books to read is based on a formal vote of the members of the book club. During each online meeting, discussions will revolve around the questions prepared by the discussion leader. Although the meetings will be virtually held, participants are required to behave professionally. The dress code is relatively more formal (shirts and pants, etc.). The meetings of the book club and the discussions are aimed to provide a deep understanding of the book.

Participants then chose the book club they wanted to join. To measure participants’ meaning-seeking motive, I asked them to recall the print ads and share their thoughts when they made decisions about the book clubs (“I wanted to do something that gives me a sense of meaningfulness,” “I was looking for something that gives me a feeling of importance,” and “I was looking for something that gives me a sense of significance”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”; α = .90; averaged to form the meaning-seeking index). Finally, participants provided their demographic information.
Results

Consumer preference. I dummy-coded the conditions by assigning the fresh start condition as the reference group (dummy 1: fresh start = 0, generic start = 1; dummy 2: fresh start = 0, control = 1). The results of the logistic regression performed on participants’ choices (formal [Book Club B] = 1, casual [Book Club A] = 0) showed a significant effect of our manipulation ($\chi^2(2) = 12.48, p = .002$). Specifically, participants in the fresh start condition were more likely to join the formal book club (18.4%) than those in the generic start condition (6.1%; $b = -1.24$, SE = .47, Wald = 7.10, $p = .008$) and those in the control condition (5.6%; $b = -1.34$, SE = .49, Wald = 7.41, $p = .006$). I found no significant difference in the choice share of attending the formal book club between the generic start condition and the control condition (Wald = .03, $p = .866$). These results indicate that our proposed effect of fresh start reminders on formal product offering preference was replicated (represented by dummy 2: fresh start vs. control) and that such an effect was unique to reminders of fresh start rather than the closed concept “start” (represented by dummy 1: fresh start vs. generic start).

Meaning-seeking. The ANOVA performed on the meaning-seeking index revealed a significant effect of our manipulation ($F(2, 321) = 8.76, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05$). Specifically, participants in the fresh start condition reported a greater meaning-seeking tendency ($M = 5.21, SD = 1.22$) than those in the generic start condition ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.47; F(1, 321) = 13.50, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$) and those in the control condition ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.39; F(1, 321) = 13.09, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$). I found no significant difference in the meaning-seeking index between the generic start condition and the control condition ($F < 
These results confirm our theorizing that reminders of fresh start (vs. generic start) activate consumers’ meaning-seeking motive.

Mediation analysis. To demonstrate the mechanism, I performed a mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4; Hayes, 2017) with 5,000 bootstrapping iterations. The results revealed that the relative indirect effect of fresh start conditions on consumer choice (formal = 1, casual = 0) through meaning-seeking was significant (dummy 1: b = −.35, SE = .19, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [−.79, −.07]; dummy 2: b = −.35, SE = .20, 95% CI = [−.81, −.06]), providing support for H2.

Discussion

Incorporating fresh start reminders in ads and expanding the decision-making context to social activities, Study 3 further boosts the ecological validity of our proposed effect. In addition, Study 3 provides a conservative test for our theorizing by comparing fresh start with generic start, demonstrating that our proposed effect is unique to fresh starts. More important, Study 3 examines the underlying mechanism by showing that reminders of fresh start induce meaning-seeking in consumers, which in turn leads to stronger preferences for formal options.

Study 4: Testing Mechanism—Manipulating Meaning-Seeking

The primary objective of Study 4 is to provide additional support for our proposed mechanism by manipulating participants’ meaning-seeking motive. I predict that if participants are instructed beforehand to seek out things that elicit meaningfulness, our
proposed effect will dissipate. That is, participants in both the fresh start and control conditions should show comparable preferences for formal options; however, when such an intervention is not applied, our proposed effect should be replicated.

Methods

Study 4 featured a 2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control) × 2 (motives: meaning-seeking vs. control) between-subjects design and took place at the beginning of 2021. Three hundred twenty-one MTurk workers (61.1% women; M_age = 43.38 years, SD = 14.08) in the United States participated in this study for a nominal payment and were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

In the first part of the survey, participants were asked to finish a “reasoning task,” in which I framed the beginning of the new year as either a fresh start (fresh start condition) or an ordinary time (control condition) (see Appendix B). As in the previous studies, participants in both conditions wrote about why they thought it was a fresh start (or an ordinary time) of the year. Afterward, participants proceeded to a seemingly unrelated decision-making task. Participants in the meaning-seeking condition were asked to choose things that elicited feelings of meaningfulness, importance, significance (adapted from Mead & Williams, 2020), while those in the control condition did not receive such instructions. Participants then indicated their preferences in the three consumption scenarios, and each scenario included a pair of product offerings—one more formal and the other more casual. For example, one of the scenarios asked participants to imagine that they were shopping for a shirt and choosing between a dress shirt and a button-down shirt (see Web Appendix B). I asked participants to assume that the two
options in each pair were equal otherwise (e.g., price) except for the described differences. Finally, I measured participants’ mood (α = .96) and collected their demographic information.

**Results**

I summed up participants’ responses (formal = 1, casual = 0) to create a preference index ranging from 0 to 3, with higher scores denoting stronger preferences for formal options. The 2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control) × 2 (motives: meaning-seeking vs. control) ANOVA on the preference index revealed a significant effect of motives (F(1, 317) = 172.32, p < .001, η² = .35) and a significant interaction between reminders and motives (F(1, 317) = 7.15, p = .008, η² = .02; Figure 1). Replicating our previous findings, the planned contrasts showed that, without showing the meaning-seeking instruction, participants in the fresh start condition reported stronger preferences for formal product offerings (M = 1.04, SD = 1.01) than those in the control condition (M = .60, SD = .75; F(1, 317) = 7.44, p = .007, η² = .02). However, when participants were instructed to seek meaningfulness, there was no significant difference in the preference index (M_{fresh start} = 2.23, SD = 1.12; M_{control} = 2.38, SD = 1.02; F < 1, p = .325). Our manipulation did not influence participants’ mood (F < 1, p = .633).

**Discussion**

Study 4 provides further evidence for the underlying mechanism through a process-by-moderation approach (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). I found that the effect of fresh start reminders on formalness preference disappeared when participants in both
the fresh start and control conditions were induced to engage in meaning-seeking; however, such an effect was replicated when the instructions about meaning-seeking were absent.

**Study 5: Consumer Responses to Formal Stimuli**

The goal of Study 5 is to answer the following question: Is the observed effect driven by increased preference for formalness or decreased preference for casualness? I reason and predict that if the observed effect is driven by increased preference for formal stimuli, consumers will respond to the formal product offerings more favorably on exposure to fresh start (vs. control) reminders; meanwhile, there would not be a difference in consumers’ responses to casual product offerings regardless of whether they encounter fresh start reminders or not. In addition, this study applies an additional consequential measure to examine our proposed effects.

**Methods**

Study 5 featured a 2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control) × 2 (outfit styles: formal vs. casual) between-subjects design. Two hundred forty-eight undergraduate students (42.7% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.44$ years, $SD = 1.71$) from a large southeastern university in the United States participated in this study for course credit. They were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

In the first part, I used the same cover story and the same manipulation as in Study 2a. Specifically, participants first reviewed a list of fresh start (vs. random) quotes...
and provided their feedback (see Appendix B). Next, under the cover story of evaluating social media posts, I informed participants that an influencer published some outfit curation posts on Instagram. Depending on the condition assigned, participants viewed either formal or casual outfit posts (see Appendix B for the posts used). Afterward, I measured participants’ interest in the outfits (“I am interested in these outfits” and “I want to know more about these outfits”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”; \( r = .79, p < .001 \); averaged to form the interest index) and their willingness to follow the influencer on Instagram (“I plan to follow this fashion account on social media”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”). Finally, I measured participants’ mood (\( \alpha = .92 \)) and collected their demographic information.

**Results**

I ran 2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control) \( \times \) 2 (outfit styles: formal vs. casual) ANOVAs on participants’ outfit interest and willingness to follow the influencer, respectively. The results revealed a main effect of reminders on both outfit interest (\( M_{\text{fresh start}} = 3.82, \text{SD} = 1.73; M_{\text{control}} = 3.44, \text{SD} = 1.70; F(1, 244) = 4.24, p = .041, \eta^2_p = .02 \)) and willingness to follow the influencer (\( M_{\text{fresh start}} = 2.46, \text{SD} = 1.78; M_{\text{control}} = 2.01, \text{SD} = 1.45; F(1, 244) = 6.86, p = .009, \eta^2_p = .03 \)). I also found a main effect of outfit styles on both outfit interest (\( M_{\text{formal}} = 3.84, \text{SD} = 1.77; M_{\text{casual}} = 3.43, \text{SD} = 1.66; F(1, 244) = 4.43, p = .036, \eta^2_p = .02 \)) and willingness to follow the influencer (\( M_{\text{formal}} = 2.47, \text{SD} = 1.87; M_{\text{casual}} = 2.01, \text{SD} = 1.35; F(1, 244) = 6.59, p = .011, \eta^2_p = .03 \)).

More important, the results revealed significant interactions between reminders and outfit styles (outfit interest: \( F(1, 244) = 12.68, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .05 \); willingness to
follow: $F(1, 244) = 19.70, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .08$; Figure 2). Planned contrasts showed that in the formal outfits condition, fresh start (vs. control) reminders led to greater outfit interest ($M_{\text{fresh start}} = 4.48, SD = 1.74; M_{\text{control}} = 3.29, SD = 1.61; F(1, 244) = 15.16, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06$) and greater willingness to follow the influencer ($M_{\text{fresh start}} = 3.22, SD = 2.14; M_{\text{control}} = 1.83, SD = 1.30; F(1, 244) = 23.91, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .09$). However, such effects disappeared in the casual outfits condition for both outfit interest ($M_{\text{fresh start}} = 3.28, SD = 1.54; M_{\text{control}} = 3.60, SD = 1.79; F(1, 244) = 1.18, p = .279$) and willingness to follow ($M_{\text{fresh start}} = 1.84, SD = 1.10; M_{\text{control}} = 2.20, SD = 1.57; F(1, 244) = 1.73, p = .190$). I did not find significant interaction effects on mood ($F(1, 244) = 1.92, p = .167$).

**Discussion**

Study 5 provides further support for our proposed effect by examining consumer responses to formal (vs. casual) product offerings on exposure to fresh start reminders (vs. control). I found that when encountering fresh start reminders (vs. control), participants showed greater interest in formal outfits and reported greater willingness to follow the influencer who posted formal outfits; however, I did not observe such an effect when participants evaluated casual outfits. These results confirm that the observed effect is indeed due to increased preferences for formal offerings rather than decreased preferences for casual offerings.

Because fresh starts often occur together with status change (e.g., changing jobs), I also examined whether fresh start reminders would lead to habit changing as an alternative explanation for our findings. I reason that if fresh start reminders indeed trigger a mere changing or switching behavior, consumers who normally prefer a more
formal dressing style would also want to switch to a more casual style upon exposure to fresh start reminders. In Study 5, I asked participants to report their daily dressing style at the end of the survey and conducted additional data analyses. The results (reported in Appendix B) indicated that participants who reported wearing a more formal style did not show increased interest in casual outfits or decreased interest in formal outfits, casting doubt on habit switching as an alternative account.

**General Discussion**

Across five studies, I find converging evidence that reminding consumers about fresh starts increases their preferences for formal (vs. casual) product offerings. Specifically, real-world data from Google Trends suggest that consumers search for formal- (vs. casual-) related items more often at the beginning of a week, month, and year—occasions when consumers are most likely to make fresh starts—than as the calendar cycle progresses (Study 1). I demonstrate that fresh start reminders increase consumer preferences for formal (vs. casual) product offerings in an array of decision-making contexts, including lifestyles (Study 2a), dressing styles (Studies 2b and 4), and social activities (Study 3). Furthermore, I show that the observed effect occurs because fresh start reminders activate meaning-seeking in consumers, thereby elevating their preferences for formal product offerings (Studies 3 and 4). In addition, I also show that our proposed effect is driven by increased preferences for formal options (Study 5). I find these effects using different fresh start reminder types, including quotes (Studies 2a and 5), ads (Study 3), and the framing of the outset of a calendar cycle (Studies 2b and 4).
Theoretical Contributions

Our research provides several theoretical advances. First, by examining the antecedents of consumer preference for formal versus casual product offerings in an array of decision-making contexts, our research contributes to the literature that focuses mainly on the consequence of offering formalness in limited domains (e.g., apparel and communication domains; Choi, Liu, & Mattila, 2019; Cutright, Srna, & Samper, 2019; Furnham, Chan, & Wilson, 2014; Gretry et al., 2017; Peluchette & Karl, 2007), enriching the aesthetics and product style preference literature (Cox & Cox, 2002; Huang & Sengupta, 2020; Jiang, Su, & Zhu, 2019). In addition, our studies extend the scope of research on product styles at the gestalt level (e.g., design typicality, design complexity, aesthetic [in]congruity; Cox & Cox, 2002; Landwehr, Wentzel, & Herrmann, 2013; Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2011), thereby adding to the large body of literature investigating product style dimensions at the component level (e.g., color, shape; Deng, Hui, and Hutchinson 2010; Sevilla & Kahn, 2014).

Second, our work contributes to the fresh start literature by showing that fresh start reminders can shape consumption activities, extending the repertoire of consequences of fresh starts. Although prior research has found that fresh starts influence people’s behavior, such as increasing aspirational behaviors (e.g., saving, dieting) or promoting procrastination behaviors (i.e., exerting less effort to pursue their ongoing goals) (Dai, Milkman, & Riis, 2014; Koo et al., 2018), our work advances this literature by suggesting that thinking about fresh starts affects people’s consumption behavior, increasing their preferences for formal (vs. casual) styles in products or services. To the
best of our knowledge, our work represents the first attempt to examine the consequence of fresh starts regarding consumers’ product style preferences, thereby contributing to fresh start literature.

Third, our research enriches the understanding of *meaning in life* (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Rudd, Catapano, & Aaker, 2019; Steger, Oishi, & Kesebir, 2011). Previous consumer research has unpacked the different ways people pursue meaningfulness, such as helping or forgiving others, performing rituals, and collecting extraordinary experiences (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Keinan & Kivetz, 2011; Rudd, Catapano, & Aaker, 2019; Wang, Sun, & Kramer, 2021). Our work goes beyond these investigations by introducing simple environmental cues—fresh start reminders—that can activate consumers’ meaning-seeking motives, a positive psychological situation that improves their well-being (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). These findings increase the actionability of improving consumer transformation and suggest that adopting formal product offerings can promote consumers’ mental health by satisfying their meaning-seeking motives. Accordingly, our research provides insights into the literature on transformative consumer research (Mick, 2006).

**Practical Implications**

Our research provide marketers with a novel perspective in developing strategies to promote product offerings with different levels of formalness. Specifically, I suggest that formal product offerings are particularly attractive to consumers undergoing fresh starts, and that marketers can thus advertise such products by reminding consumers about fresh starts. For example, fashion brands that sell mostly formal outfits and accessories
(e.g., Banana Republic, Hugo Boss) can enhance their brand images by incorporating fresh start reminders in advertising (see Study 3) or promote their products more heavily at the beginning of a new calendar cycle, such as Monday, the first day of a month, the new year, or a new semester (see Studies 1, 2b, 4, and the supplementary study in Appendix B). Salespeople who strive to promote formal product offerings can intentionally remind buyers about fresh starts using quotes (see Studies 2a and 5) in marketing communications.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Our work opens several avenues for future investigations. In this research, I documented the effect of fresh start reminders on consumer preference for formal product offerings in various domains (e.g., clothing, communication, social activity). Future research could further explore additional decision-making contexts in which formal and casual styles are of relevance. For example, marketing research on typeface design (Henderson, Giese, & Cote, 2004) suggests that people perceive fonts such as Times New Roman, Georgia, and Century Schoolbook as more formal than fonts such as Informal Roman. In addition, Torrez, Wakslak, & Amit (2019) contend that people perceive visual cues (e.g., pictures) as less formal than verbal cues (e.g., words, language). In connection with our current findings, messages delivered by formal fonts and verbal cues should also be susceptible to the influence of fresh start reminders. Accordingly, future research could examine, for example, whether fresh start reminders can increase an audience’s favorability of print advertisements designed using more verbal cues and formal fonts.
Another avenue for future research derives from our theorizing that fresh start reminders activate consumers’ meaning-seeking motives. Recent research on meaningless stimuli in consumer research documents that meaningless descriptors (i.e., words without understandable semantic meanings, such as *rooibos* soap, *civet* oil, and *chelating* shampoo; Baskin & Liu, 2021) and unnecessary packaging (e.g., packaging a baseball using a transparent box; Doering, Burson, & Gershoff, 2020) can increase product value and price judgments. These findings prompt an interesting question: Will *fresh start*–induced meaning-seeking make people less likely to choose a product option containing meaningless symbols (e.g., an unnecessarily packaged product that contains labels with meaningless descriptors)?
Table 2.1 OLS Regressions to Predict Daily SVIs for the Terms (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Google Trends tracks:</th>
<th>Web Search (default option)</th>
<th>Google Shopping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google Trends searched terms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day_Week</td>
<td>-.63*** (.09)</td>
<td>-.40** (.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.67*** (.06)</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.38*** (.07)</td>
<td>(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day_Month</td>
<td>-.11*** (.02)</td>
<td>-.04 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.01 (.01)</td>
<td>-.02 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.03* (.02)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month_Year</td>
<td>-.19* (.11)</td>
<td>.97*** (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.78*** (.06)</td>
<td>.13 (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.03 (.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed effects for each six-month interval</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>5,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. $R^2$</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistic</td>
<td>52.29***</td>
<td>224.59***</td>
<td>154.57***</td>
<td>79.31***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The values reported in the table represent the estimated coefficients from the models, and the values in parentheses represent the standard errors of the coefficients. OLS = ordinary least squares. ‘p < .10; ’p < .05; ’’p < .01; ’’’p < .001.
Figure 2.1 The Interaction Effect of Fresh Start Reminders and Meaning-Seeking on the Preference Index (Study 4).
Figure 2.2 Interaction Effect of Fresh Start Stimuli and Product Style on Consumers’ Outfits Interest

***p < .001; N.S. = nonsignificant.
***p < .001; N.S. = nonsignificant.

Figure 2.3 Interaction Effect of Fresh Start Stimuli and Product Style on Consumers’ Willingness to Follow
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## Appendix A Stimuli and Supplementary Materials for Chapter 1

### Table A.1 Summary of Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Stimuli (medium)</th>
<th>Results with and without covariates</th>
<th>Manipulation checks and Controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1</td>
<td>Fragrance commercials</td>
<td>When the commercial audios’ overall pitch decreases 1%, the products’ luxuriousness can increase 0.29% when controlling for all those control variables.</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Study 2 | Jewelry 1d | Perceived luxuriousness as DV:  
M<sub>high-pitch</sub> = 7.21, SD = 1.55  
M<sub>normal</sub> = 7.19, SD = 1.59  
M<sub>low-pitch</sub> = 7.55, SD = 1.36  
F(2, 445) = 4.23, p = .015, η<sup>p</sup><sub>2</sub> = .02  
Without covariates:  
F(2, 447) = 2.71, p = .068, η<sup>2</sup> = .01 | High-pitched 5.12 6.33 5.24  
Normal 5.99 6.39 5.17  
Low-pitched 6.57 5.92 5.43  
F(2, 447) = 22.62 3.89 1.73  
p-value <.001 .021 .117 |
| Study 3 | Wine (video) | Perceived luxuriousness:  
M<sub>high-pitch</sub> = 6.07, SD = 1.61  
M<sub>low-pitch</sub> = 6.50, SD = 1.62  
F(1, 196) = 6.06, p = .015, η<sup>p</sup> = .30  
Without covariates:  
F(1, 198) = 3.52, p = .062, η<sup>p</sup> = .02  
Formalness:  
M<sub>high-pitch</sub> = 5.74, SD = 1.72  
M<sub>low-pitch</sub> = 6.32, SD = 1.67  
F(1, 196) = 7.58, p = .006, η<sup>p</sup> = .04  
Without covariates:  
F(1, 198) = 5.96, p = .015, η<sup>p</sup> = .02  
WTP  
M<sub>high-pitch</sub> = 28.50, SD = 15.22  
M<sub>low-pitch</sub> = 24.60, SD = 14.24 | High-pitched 6.16 5.75 5.30  
Low-pitched 4.37 5.20 5.09  
F(1, 198) = 84.12 6.56 1.16  
p-value <.001 .011 .282 |
### Study 4: Restaurant (audio)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction effect on Perceived luxuriousness:</th>
<th>F(1, 342) = 25.13, p &lt; .001, η_p^2 = .07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contrasts:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For low-pitch-formalness condition:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M_{low-pitched} = 6.62, SD = 1.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M_{high-pitched} = 5.02, SD = 1.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(1, 342) = 42.96, p &lt; .001, η_p^2 = .11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For high-pitch-formalness condition:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M_{low-pitched} = 6.01, SD = 1.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M_{high-pitched} = 6.08, SD = 1.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(1, 342) &lt; 1, p = .769</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Without covariates:

Interaction:

F(1, 344) = 23.55, p < .001, η_p^2 = 0.6

Main effect of pitch height:

M_{low-pitched} = 4.05, SD = 1.29
M_{high-pitched} = 5.02, SD = 1.48
F(1, 344) = 42.57, p < .001

Main effect of association reasoning:

M_{low pitch is formal} = 4.48, SD = 1.41
M_{high pitch is formal} = 4.59, SD = 1.53
F(1, 344) < 1, p = .475

Interaction:

F(1, 344) < 1, p = .841

---

**Mediation:** Pitch $\rightarrow$ formalness $\rightarrow$ luxury

b = $-0.37$, SE = 0.14, 95% CI [-0.6599, -0.1026]

Without covariates:

Mediation:

b = $-0.33$, SE = 0.15, 95% CI [-0.6465, -0.0693]

---

**Manipulation checks:**

ANOVA (association reasoning $\times$ pitch height) on perceived pitch height:

Main effect of pitch height:

M_{low-pitched} = 3.37, SD = 1.90
M_{high-pitched} = 7.03, SD = 1.84
F(1, 344) = 351.97, p < .001

Main effect of association reasoning:

M_{low pitch is formal} = 4.76, SD = 2.58
M_{high pitch is formal} = 5.62, SD = 2.60
F(1, 344) = 19.38, p < .001

Interaction:

F(1, 344) < 1, p = .425

---

ANOVA (association reasoning $\times$ pitch height) on arousal:

Main effect of pitch height:

M_{low-pitched} = 4.05, SD = 1.29
M_{high-pitched} = 5.02, SD = 1.48
F(1, 344) = 42.57, p < .001

Main effect of association reasoning:

M_{low pitch is formal} = 4.48, SD = 1.41
M_{high pitch is formal} = 4.59, SD = 1.53
F(1, 344) < 1, p = .475

Interaction:

F(1, 344) < 1, p = .841
### Study 5: Essential Oil Diffuser (video)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction effect on purchase intention:</th>
<th>F(1, 397) = 5.94, p = .015, $\eta^2_p = .02$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contrasts:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The luxury lover condition:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M_{low-pitched} = 6.46, SD = 2.24$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M_{high-pitched} = 5.56, SD = 2.62$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(1, 397) = 8.93, $p = .003, \eta^2_p = 0.02$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The luxury avoider condition:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M_{low-pitch} = 3.20, SD = 2.08$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M_{high-pitch} = 3.44, SD = 2.48$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(1, 397) &lt; 1, $p = .708$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Without covariates:**

**Interaction:** 
F(1, 399) = 5.82, $p = .016, \eta^2_p = 0.01$

**Contrast:**

- The luxury lover condition: 
  F(1, 399) = 6.98, $p = .009, \eta^2_p = .02$
- The luxury avoider condition: 
  F(1, 399) < 1, $p = .463$

### Control variable:

ANOVA (association reasoning × pitch height) on mood:

**Main effect of pitch height:**

- $M_{low-pitched} = 5.05, SD = 1.28$
- $M_{high-pitched} = 5.12, SD = 1.31$
- F(1, 344) < 1, $p = .611$

**Main effect of association reasoning:**

- $M_{low-pitch is formal} = 5.05, SD = 1.30$
- $M_{high-pitch is formal} = 5.13, SD = 1.29$
- F(1, 344) < 1, $p = .586$

**Interaction:**

- F(1, 344) < 1, $p = .332$

### Manipulation checks:

ANOVA (gift receiver types × pitch height) on perceived pitch height:

**Main effect of pitch height:**

- $M_{low-pitched} = 3.77, SD = 1.58$
- $M_{high-pitched} = 6.26, SD = 1.51$
- F(1, 399) = 261.38, $p < .001$

**Main effect of gift receiver types:**

- $M_{luxury lover} = 5.21, SD = 2.04$
- $M_{luxury avoider} = 4.85, SD = 1.93$
- F(1, 399) = 1.24, $p = .267$

**Interaction:**

- F(1, 399) = 2.72, $p = .10$

### Control variable:

ANOVA (gift receiver types × pitch height) on arousal:

**Main effect of pitch height:**

- $M_{low-pitched} = 4.79, SD = 1.47$
- $M_{high-pitched} = 5.41, SD = 1.52$
- F(1, 399) = 16.51, $p < .001, \eta^2_p = .04$

**Main effect of gift receiver types:**

- $M_{luxury lover} = 5.21, SD = 1.50$
Luxury avoider = 5.00, SD = 1.55
F(1, 399) = 1.23, p = .268
Interaction:
F(1, 399) < 1, p = .895

Control variable:
ANOVA (gift receiver types × pitch height) on mood:
Main effect of pitch height:
M_{low-pitched} = 5.11, SD = 1.25
M_{high-pitched} = 5.21, SD = 1.19
F(1, 399) = 2.95, p = .087
Main effect of gift receiver types:
M_{luxury lover} = 5.34, SD = 1.19
M_{luxury avoider} = 5.12, SD = 1.24
F(1, 399) = 2.77, p = .097
Interaction:
F(1, 399) < 1, p = .775
Table A.2 List of the 100 Greatest Fragrances of All Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Fragrances/Perfumes</th>
<th>Commercial Availability</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Fragrances/Perfumes</th>
<th>Commercial Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chanel No. 5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Guerlain Habit Rouge</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Le Labo Santal 33</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Guerlain Samsara</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thierry Mugler Angel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Guy Laroche Drakkar Noir</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frédéric Malle Portrait of a Lady</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Halston</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chanel Coco Mademoiselle</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Hermès Terre d’Hermès</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dolce &amp; Gabbana Light Blue</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Houbigant Quelques Fleurs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dior Eau Sauvage</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Hugo Boss Bottled</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tom Ford Black Orchid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Jean Paul Gaultier Classique</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Giorgio Armani Acqua di Gio</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Jean Paul Gaultier Le Male</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Calvin Klein CK One</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Jo Malone London English Pear and Freesia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Guerlain Shalimar</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Jo Malone London Sage Wood and Sea Salt</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Issey Miyake L’Eau d’Issey</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Juicy Couture Viva La Juicy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>YSL Opium</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Kenzo Flower by Kenzo</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Dior J’Adore</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Lancôme La Vie Est Belle</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Clinique Aromatics Elixir</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>Lancôme Trésor</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Maison Francis Kurkdjian Bacarrat Rouge</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs Daisy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Frédéric Malle Carnal Flower</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Nina Ricci L’Air du Temps</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Narciso Rodriguez for Her</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Paco Rabanne 1 Million</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Viktor &amp; Rolf Flowerbomb</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Paloma Picasso</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Acqua di Parma Colonia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Penhaligon Halfeti</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Annick Goutal Eau d’Hadrien</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Philosophy Amazing Grace</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Aramis</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Ralph Lauren Polo</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Kilian Paris Good Girl Gone Bad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Rochas Femme Rochas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Kilian Paris Love Don’t Be Shy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Thierry Mugler Alien</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Byredo Gypsy Water</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Tom Ford Fucking Fabulous</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Byredo Mojave Ghost</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Tom Ford Neroli Portofino</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Cacharel Anais Anais</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>Tom Ford Ombre Leather</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Calvin Klein Eternity</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>Tom Ford Oud Wood</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Calvin Klein Obsession</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Tom Ford Soleil Blanc</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Carolina Herrera Good Girl</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Tom Ford Tobacco Vanille</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Cartier Declaration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Tom Ford Tuscan Leather</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Chanel Bleu</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>YSL Black Opium</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Chanel Chance</td>
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<td>Yves Saint Laurent Paris</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Chanel Cristalle</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>Estée Lauder Youth Dew</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Chanel No 19</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Bulgari Eau Parfumée Au Thé Vert</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Clinique Happy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Comme des Garcons 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Clinique Calyx</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Creed Aventus</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Demeter Dirt</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Davidoff Cool Water</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Escentric Molecules Molecule 01</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 40  | Dior Diorissimo                     | Yes                     | 90  | Estée Lauder Private Collection Tuberose Gardenia | No |}
| 41  | Dior Fahrenheit                     | Yes                     | 91  | Ex Nihilo Fleur Narcotique          | No                      |
| 42  | Dior Miss Dior                      | Yes                     | 92  | Frédéric Malle Musc Ravageur        | No                      |
| 43  | Diptyque Philosykos                 | Yes                     | 93  | Glossier You                        | No                      |
| 44  | Donna Karan Cashmere Mist           | Yes                     | 94  | Guerlain L’Heure Bleu              | No                      |
| 45  | Estée Lauder Beautiful              | Yes                     | 95  | Guerliant Vetiver                  | No                      |
| 46  | Estée Lauder Pleasures              | Yes                     | 96  | Heretic The Herbalist               | No                      |
| 47  | Estée Lauder White Linen            | Yes                     | 97  | Jo Malone Peony and Blush Suede     | No                      |
| 48  | Fracas by Robert Piguet             | Yes                     | 98  | Le Labo Another 13                 | No                      |
| 49  | Giorgio Beverly Hills               | Yes                     | 99  | Serge Lutens Féminité du Bois      | No                      |
| 50  | Gucci Bloom                         | Yes                     | 100 | Bath and Body Works Cherry Blossom  | No                      |
Manipulation of Pitch–Formalness Associations (Study 4)

Low-pitched music–formalness Manipulation:

Occasions such as ceremonies or some formal social events often play relatively low-pitched background music to create atmospheres. Recent research on music shows that low-pitched music elicits a sense of formalness, making people perceive the environment as formal and serious; however, high-pitched music feels more casual or informal.

Please write a short paragraph to explain why you think low-pitched music elicits a sense of formalness and high pitched music is perceived as relatively informal. Please provide sufficient details using your knowledge, intuition, or examples.

High-pitched music–Formalness Manipulation:

Occasions such as ceremonies or some formal social events often play relatively high-pitched background music to create atmospheres. Recent research on music shows that high-pitched music elicits a sense of formalness, making people perceive the environment as formal and serious; however, low-pitched music feels more casual or informal.

Please write a short paragraph to explain why you think high-pitched music elicits a sense of formalness and low-pitched music is perceived as relatively informal. Please provide sufficient details using your knowledge, intuition, or examples.
Giver Receiver Type Manipulation (Study 5)

**Luxury Lover Condition:**

Imagine you are buying a gift for a friend who always LOVES luxury goods because using luxury products makes them feel prestigious. Between two product options, this friend would certainly pick the one that has MORE of a luxury feel.

Thus, you are looking to buy a gift that feels luxury.

**Luxury Avoider Condition:**

Imagine you are buying a gift for a friend who always AVOIDs luxury goods because using luxury products makes them feel inauthentic. Between two product options, this friend would certainly pick the one that has LESS of a luxury feel.

Thus, you are looking to buy a gift that doesn't feel luxury at all.
Appendix B Stimuli and Supplementary Materials for Chapter 2

Examples of Fresh Start Reminders in the Marketplace

Consumers frequently encounter situations reminding them about fresh starts. For example, life transitions (e.g., moving to a new city, attending university, switching jobs), temporal landmarks (e.g., the outset of a week, month, year, or semester; a birthday), and even the acts of a self-inspiring rituals (e.g., encouraging selves using the quote, “Anyone can make a fresh start if you want”) all call for fresh starts. Such reminders are especially effective and thus prevalent in today’s tumultuous world in which fresh starts are often demanded and desirable.

Furthermore, marketers also frequently appeal to consumers by incorporating fresh start reminders (e.g., ads, visual images, videos) in their promotion activities. For example, *Le Creuset*, a cookware brand, launched an email campaign, “Start Fresh with Winter Neutrals,” to promote their seasonal sale (Milled 2021); *NTUC FairPrice*, a supermarket chain in Singapore, released a TV commercial, “A Fresh Start,” nudging people to make a fresh start following the COVID-19 pandemic (SocialSamosa 2020). In addition, other social organizations and influencers also frequently incorporate fresh start appeals in their communications and campaigns. For example, universities remind students about fresh starts at the beginning of new semesters (Duke University 2021), and political candidates remind voters about fresh starts in their campaigns (the “A Fresh Start for America” slogan by George W. Bush 2000; the “Fresh Start” TV ad by Joe Biden 2020). Please see additional Marketing examples in the table below.

Table B.1 Additional Marketing Examples of Ads with Fresh Start Reminders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brands/Organizations</th>
<th>Medium &amp; Released Time</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Visual images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brands/Organizations</td>
<td>Medium &amp; Released Time</td>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Visual images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pond’s (An American brand of beauty and health care products, currently owned by Unilever)</td>
<td>Magazine 1965</td>
<td>Vintage 1960s beauty advertisement, Pond’s New Fresh-Start, with the model (later, she turned actress) Veronica Hamel. (<a href="https://www.pinterest.com/pin/320740804695394942/">https://www.pinterest.com/pin/320740804695394942/</a>)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Pond's New Fresh-Start" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAA Insurance (An insurance agency)</td>
<td>Magazine cover 2019</td>
<td>AAA Insurance launches a campaign called “Fresh Start.” (<a href="https://www.pinterest.com/pin/242279654940652372/">https://www.pinterest.com/pin/242279654940652372/</a>)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="AAA World Start" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshpet (A dog and cat food manufacturing company)</td>
<td>Facebook posts Online films Internet banner 2019, 2020</td>
<td>Freshpet launches a campaign Freshpet Fresh Start 2020 Donation Giveaway. (<a href="https://freshpet.com/fresh-start/">https://freshpet.com/fresh-start/</a>)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Freshpet Fresh Start 2020 Donation Giveaway" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brands/Organizations</td>
<td>Medium &amp; Released Time</td>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Visual images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
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</table>
# Table B.2 Summary of Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Main purpose</th>
<th>Fresh start reminders (IV)</th>
<th>Consumer Preference/choice DV(s)</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To provide preliminary evidence using the Google Trends data.</td>
<td>Day_Week, Day_Month, and Month_Year</td>
<td>- Daily search volume indices (SVIs) of the terms “formal,” “casual,” and “weather” in the Web Search track. - SVIs of “formal” and “casual” in the Google Shopping track.</td>
<td>Consumers searched for formal- (vs. casual-) related items (queries that include the term “formal”) more at the beginning of a week, month, and year than as the calendar cycle progressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>To show the main effect: fresh start reminders lead to increased preference for formal (vs. casual) product offerings.</td>
<td>- Quotes (reminders: fresh start vs. control) - The beginning of a semester: (reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality)</td>
<td>- Lifestyle Choose an article about formal (vs. casual) lifestyle to read - Dressing style in a virtual meeting setting Choose an avatar with formal versus casual clothes</td>
<td>- <strong>Study 2a:</strong> P\text{fresh start} = 34.1%, P\text{control} = 17.9% b = .87, SE = .36, Wald = 5.70, p = .017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Study 2b:</strong> P\text{fresh start} = 87.1%, P\text{control} = 76.7% b = .72, SE = .34, Wald = 4.45, p = .035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To provide the process evidence by measuring and by manipulating meaning-seeking.</td>
<td>- Advertisements Reminders: fresh start vs. generic start vs. control</td>
<td>- Book club Choose a book club with formal versus casual vibe to join - Measuring meaning-seeking</td>
<td>- <strong>Choice</strong> P\text{fresh start} = 18.4%, P\text{start} = 6.1%, P\text{control} = 5.6% \chi^2(2) = 12.48, p = .002. - <strong>Mediation</strong> dummy1 (fresh start = 0, generic start = 1): 95% CI [−.79, −.07] dummy1 (fresh start = 0, control = 1): 95% CI [−.81, −.06]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mturk</td>
<td>- A new year: (reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality) - meaning-seeking manipulation: (Meaning-seeking vs. control)</td>
<td>- Dressing style Shoes (leather shoes vs. sneakers) Watch (professional style vs. casual style) Shirts (dress shirt vs. button-down shirt)</td>
<td>- <strong>Interaction effect:</strong> F(1, 317) = 7.15, p &lt; .001; \eta^2_p = .02 - <strong>Planned contrasts:</strong> - meaning-seeking condition M\text{fresh start} = 2.23, SD = 1.12 M\text{control} = 2.38, SD = 1.02 F &lt;1, p = .325 - control M\text{fresh start} = 1.04, SD = 1.01 M\text{control} = .60, SD = .75. F (1, 317) = 7.44, p = .007, \eta^2_p = .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>- To test whether our proposed effect is driven by increased</td>
<td>- Quotes (reminders: fresh start vs. control) - Consumer interests in the outfits - Willingness to follow the influencer</td>
<td><strong>Interest in outfits:</strong> F(1, 244) = 12.68, p &lt; .001; \eta^2_p = .05 Planned contrast: Formal outfits condition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Main purpose</td>
<td>Fresh start reminders (IV)</td>
<td>Consumer Preference/choice DV(s)</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preference for formal options or decreased preference for casual options</td>
<td>- Social media posts (outfits: formal vs. casual)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To explore the consumers’ downstream behavioral intentions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Replication    | To replicate the main effect using a different fresh start reminders (Monday)| - Transition type: job change vs. retirement.   | - Dressing style  
Shoes (leather shoes vs. sneakers)  
Watch (professional style vs. casual style)  
Shirts (dress shirt vs. button-down shirt) |                                                                                                                                          |
| Study          |                                                                    | - The beginning of a week:  
(reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality)         |                                                                                               | M_{fresh \ start} = 1.17, SD = .96  
M_{control} = .90, SD = .92  
F (1, 174) = 3.50, p = .063, η_p^2 = .02 |                                                                                                                                          |
|                |                                                                     |                                                 |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                          |
|                |                                                                     |                                                 | Casually outfits condition:  
- M_{fresh \ start} = 3.28, SD = 1.54  
M_{control} = 3.60, SD = 1.79  
- F(1, 244) = 1.18, p = .279 |                                                                                                                                          |
| Results        |                                                                     |                                                 | Willingness to follow:  
F(1, 244) = 19.70, p < .001; η_p^2 = .08  
Planed contrast:  
Formal outfits condition:  
- M_{fresh \ start} = 3.22, SD = 2.14  
M_{control} = 1.83, SD = 1.30  
- F(1, 244) = 23.91, p < .001, η_p^2 = .09  
Casually outfits condition:  
- M_{fresh \ start} = 1.84, SD = 1.10  
M_{control} = 2.20, SD = 1.57  
- F(1, 244) = 1.73, p = .190 |                                                                                                                                          |
|                |                                                                     |                                                 |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                          |
Data Collection and Robustness Check (Study 1)

1. Data Collection

In Study 1, I extracted the daily SVIs of the terms “formal,” “casual,” and “weather,” respectively, over every six-month interval ranging from January 1, 2004, to December 31, 2021, from the Web Search track. Similarly, I extracted the daily SVIs of the terms “formal” and “casual,” respectively, over every six-month interval ranging from July 1, 2007, to December 31, 2021, from the Google Shopping track. Each six-month interval represents a data extraction attempt.

For example, data extraction for the term “formal” from the Web Search track followed the procedure below:

Attempt 3: extracting the daily SVIs between January 1, 2005, and June 30, 2005.

... Attempt 35: extracting the daily SVIs between January 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021.
Attempt 36: extracting the daily SVIs between July 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021.

I repeated these procedures to extract the SVIs of “formal,” “casual,” and “weather” from the Web Search track and those of “formal” and “casual” from the Google Shopping track (R codes are available on request).

2. Robustness Check: Extracting the Daily SVIs Over Every Three-Month Interval

I changed the data extraction interval to every three months and conducted the same regression analyses.

Specifically, I performed 72 data extraction attempts for the terms “formal,” “casual,” and “weather” in the Web Search track, with each data extraction attempt capturing the given term’s daily SVIs over every three months from January 1, 2004, to December 31, 2021 (i.e., a period containing 72 three-month intervals). The daily SVIs of the terms “formal” and “casual” from the Google Shopping track were available from July 1, 2007, to December 31, 2021, when setting the interval as a three-month period. Accordingly, I conducted 58 data extraction attempts for the terms “formal” and “casual” in the Google Shopping track.

I constructed five separate regression models, with the terms’ daily SVIs as the dependent variables and using the same independent variables as in Study 1 (Day_Week, Day_Month, and Month_Year). Because the data extraction interval was set to a period of three months, Models 1–3 were performed with the fixed effects for the 72 three-month intervals, and Models 4 and 5 were performed with the fixed effects for the 58 three-month intervals. Table S3.1 showed that the results were consistent with those of Study 1. Specifically, the results of Model 1 showed that all the coefficient estimates were significantly negative, indicating that the online searches containing the term “formal” were most frequent at the outset of a week \( (b = -.67, p < .001) \), a month \( (b = -.11, p < .001) \), and a year \( (b = -1.94, p < .001) \), but decreased as each week, month,
or year progressed. However, I found no such pattern for the terms “casual” and “weather” in Models 2 and 3, respectively.

The results of Models 4 and 5 indicated that consumers’ purchasing-related queries that include the term “formal” were more frequent at the beginning of a week (\(b = -0.44, p = .002\)), a month (\(b = -0.05, p = .10\)), and the first month of a year (\(b = -1.14, p = .001\)), but decreased as each week, month, or year progressed (Model 4); however, I found no such pattern for the term “casual.”

### Table B.3 OLS Regressions to Predict Daily Search Volume for Various Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Google Trends tracks: Google Trends searched terms:</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web Search (default option)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed effects for each three-month interval</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>5,298</td>
<td>5,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistic</td>
<td>35.94***</td>
<td>109.31***</td>
<td>87.43***</td>
<td>42.88***</td>
<td>54.70***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. — The values reported in the table represent the estimated coefficients from models, and the values in parentheses represent the standard errors of the coefficients.

\(p = .10\) \(p < 0.05\); \(p < 0.01\); \(p < 0.001\)

### 3. Robustness Check: Recoding Independent Variables as Dummies

In Study 1, the independent variables (Day_Week, Day_Month, and Month_Year) were coded as continuous variables. In this analysis, however, I recoded the independent variables as dummies by identifying the first one-third of a week (Monday and Tuesday), of a month (first ten days in the month), and of a year (from January to April) as the fresh start periods (coded as 1). Accordingly, the rest of such periods (from Wednesday to Sunday, from the 11th day to the last day of the month, and from May to December) were identified as non-fresh-start periods (coded as 0). Five separate regression models were performed, with the terms’ daily SVIs (the same as used in Study 1) as the dependent variables and the dummy-coded “Day_Week,” “Day_Month,” and “Month_Year” as the independent variables. Moreover, I used the same fixed effect models as in Study 1. Note that, because the fresh start periods in each calendar cycle were coded as 1 and the non-fresh-start periods were coded as 0, the positive (rather than negative) coefficients estimated in the model would signal greater SVIs of a given term during the fresh start periods.

As expected, the results supported our predictions (see Table S3.2). Specifically, for the data from the Web Search track, the coefficient estimates of Model 1 were all significantly positive, indicating that, compared with the non-fresh-start periods (coded as 0), the online searches that include the term “formal” increased during the fresh-start periods (the first one-

87
third of each calendar cycle; coded as 1). However, I found no such patterns for the terms “casual” and “weather,” respectively, in the Web Search track. For the SVI obtained in the Google Shopping track, the results replicated the patterns revealed in Model 1, such that the purchasing-related online searches that included the term “formal” increased in the fresh-start periods.

Table B.4 Regressions on the SVIs of Terms with Dummy-coded Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Google Trends tracks:</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google Trends searched terms:</td>
<td>Web Search (by default)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Google Shopping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day_Week_dummy</td>
<td>1.83***</td>
<td>–4.40***</td>
<td>–1.51***</td>
<td>1.64**</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.37)</td>
<td>(.25)</td>
<td>(.31)</td>
<td>(.61)</td>
<td>(.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day_Month_dummy</td>
<td>1.37***</td>
<td>–.53*</td>
<td>–.53*</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.36)</td>
<td>(.24)</td>
<td>(.30)</td>
<td>(.57)</td>
<td>(.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month_Year_dummy</td>
<td>17.47***</td>
<td>–5.81***</td>
<td>1.12**</td>
<td>7.54***</td>
<td>–2.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.54)</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
<td>(.41)</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed effects for each six-month interval</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>5,298</td>
<td>5,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistic</td>
<td>91.62***</td>
<td>200.68***</td>
<td>154.19***</td>
<td>81.47***</td>
<td>109.90***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.— The first one-third of a week, month, and year were coded as 1, representing fresh starts. The values reported in the table represent the estimated coefficients from models, and the values in parentheses represent the standard errors of the coefficients.

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01; ****p < .001
Data Screening Criteria and Results Comparison

I used the same data screening criteria across studies: Participants who failed the attention check questions were excluded. Our attention check questions include multiple types.

Attention check question used in Studies 2a, 2b, 3, and 5:
- “For attention check purpose, please choose the rightmost [or leftmost or a specific] option to this item.”

Attention check question used in Study 2b:
- Imagine you are having dinner in a restaurant. To make sure you are paying attention, please ignore this question without choosing any of the options.
  □ A French restaurant
  □ An American restaurant

Attention check question used in Study 4
- Please recall the instructions of the decision-making tasks you have completed. In those instructions, we asked you to choose the option that elicits a feeling of __________?
  □ importance, significance, and meaningfulness
  □ sadness
  □ none of the above

Across studies, the number of cases excluded did not differ significantly in the results. The table below shows the results of the focal effect with and without data exclusion across studies.
Table B.5 Results Before and After Data Exclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>All sample</th>
<th>Effect of Fresh Start reminder (All sample)</th>
<th>Final Sample</th>
<th>Effect of Fresh Start reminder (Final sample)</th>
<th>No. of Excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 2a</td>
<td>2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control)</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>(P_{\text{fresh start}} = 32.0%, \ P_{\text{control}} = 22.1%) (b = .51, \ SE = .32, \ Wald = 2.56, \ p = .11)</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>(P_{\text{fresh start}} = 34.1%, \ P_{\text{control}} = 17.9%) (b = .87, \ SE = .36, \ Wald = 5.70, \ p = .017)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2b</td>
<td>2 (reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality)</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>(P_{\text{fresh start}} = 87.7%, \ P_{\text{control}} = 76.5%) (b = .79, \ SE = .34, \ Wald = 5.50, \ p = .019)</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>(P_{\text{fresh start}} = 87.1%, \ P_{\text{control}} = 76.7%) (b = .72, \ SE = .34, \ Wald = 4.45, \ p = .035)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3</td>
<td>3 (reminders: fresh start vs. start vs. control)</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>(P_{\text{fresh start}} = 15.5%, \ P_{\text{start}} = 7.5%, \ P_{\text{control}} = 7.6%) (\chi^2(2) = 6.58, \ p = .037)</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>(P_{\text{fresh start}} = 18.4%, \ P_{\text{start}} = 6.1%, \ P_{\text{control}} = 5.6%) (\chi^2(2) = 12.48, \ p = .002)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 4</td>
<td>2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control) × 2 (motives: meaning-seeking vs. control)</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>Interaction: (F(1, 359) = 6.13, \ p = .014, \eta^2_p = .02) (M_{\text{fresh start}} = 2.11, \ SD = 1.20) (M_{\text{control}} = 2.25, \ SD = 1.07) (F(1, 359) &lt; 1, \ p = .371) (M_{\text{fresh start}} = 1.14, \ SD = 1.03) (M_{\text{control}} = .72, \ SD = .84) (F(1, 359) = 6.65, \ p = .010, \eta^2_p = .02)</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>Interaction: (F(1, 317) = 7.15, \ p = .008, \eta^2_p = .02) (M_{\text{fresh start}} = 2.23, \ SD = 1.12) (M_{\text{control}} = 2.38, \ SD = 1.02) (F(1, 317) &lt; 1, \ p = .325) (M_{\text{fresh start}} = 1.04, \ SD = 1.01) (M_{\text{control}} = .60, \ SD = .75) (F(1, 317) = 7.44, \ p = .007, \eta^2_p = .02)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 5</td>
<td>2 (reminders: fresh start vs. control) × 2 (outfits: formal vs. casual)</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>Interest in outfits: (F(1, 281) = 8.25, \ p = .004, \eta^2_p = .03) (Willingness to follow: (F(1, 281) = 14.46, \ p &lt; .001; \eta^2_p = .05)</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>Interest in outfits: (F(1, 244) = 12.68, \ p &lt; .001; \eta^2_p = .05) (Willingness to follow: (F(1, 244) = 19.70, \ p &lt; .001; \eta^2_p = .08)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication study</td>
<td>2 (reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>(M_{\text{fresh start}} = 1.15, \ SD = .94) (M_{\text{control}} = .94, \ SD = .95) (F(1, 198) = 2.50, \ p = .116, \eta^2_p = .01)</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>(M_{\text{fresh start}} = 1.17, \ SD = .96) (M_{\text{control}} = .90, \ SD = .92) (F(1, 174) = 3.50, \ p = .063, \eta^2_p = .02)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manipulations, Dependent Measures, and Materials Used in Studies 2–6

Study 2a

In this part, please help us evaluate some quotes which will be used in our future research. Please read and try to understand the meaning of the quotes, and then evaluate them based on our instructions.

The fresh start condition:
1. Whatever their past, people can look forward to a fresh start.
2. Be willing to be a beginner every single morning.
3. Every single day someone is able to start a new adventure, meet new people, or do something they never thought they could.
4. If one day doesn’t go as planned, you always have the next day to start new.
5. A rainbow perfectly represents a fresh start after a low. The storm has passed, and the rainbow represents a clean slate.
6. Something that is seemingly ruined can have a fresh start when effort and patience are used.
7. A mistake in the past will not constrain life opportunities because a fresh start allows one to fully get rid of the past.
8. Anyone can make a fresh start if they want to.
9. Regardless of present circumstances, we need to erase any imperfections and start anew.
10. Every day is a fresh start. Every morning we wake up is the first day of our new life.

The control condition:
1. Color is a power that directly influences the soul.
2. Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky.
3. A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you.
4. Animals are such agreeable friends—they ask no questions; they pass no criticisms.
5. Life without love is like a tree without blossoms or fruit.
6. Pleasure in the job puts perfection in work.
7. We travel not to escape life, but for life not to escape us.
8. The important thing is not to stop questioning.
9. Happiness depends upon ourselves.
10. There is never a time or place for true love. It happens accidentally, in a heartbeat, in a single flashing, throbbing moment.

In general, what do you think of these quotes? (e.g., What are these quotes about? what do you think of them?)
Dependent Measure:

In this part of the survey, we would like you to pretest a reading material for our future research. We will provide you with reading materials on different topics (the same length and the same degree of difficulty). Please choose one topic to read based on your preference, and we will then show you the article you have selected on the next page.

Which one will you choose to read?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: Formal lifestyles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(About why and how people should follow formal lifestyles, such as formal wear, formal dining, and formal communications.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: Casual lifestyles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(About why and how people should follow casual lifestyles, such as casual wear, casual dining, and casual communications.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: the options were randomly presented in the experiment)

<As mentioned in the cover story, we showed participants the article based on their choice and measured their evaluations of the reading material.>

---

For those who selected the article about formal lifestyles

**Make Your Life a Formal Affair**

LIFESTYLE

Whenever you can, live formally!

Living formally does not have to take the beauty or the spontaneity out of living but in fact it can enhance it. Below are a few ideas for welcoming in a bit more formality. Have a look:

**Wear formally.** Prepare yourself with a terrific suit, a crisp shirt, a bow tie, and pair of dress leather shoes. These bring dignity and class to your life, no matter how mundane your life is.

**Eat formally.** Each meal that you sit down for is an opportunity to eat well.

**Create rituals to look forward to.** Maybe every Saturday morning you wake and stroll down to your favorite coffee shop for a tasty treat and chat with a good friend, or you play checkers with your brothers or sisters every Sunday evening front of the fire or perhaps you take a bubble bath and savor a glass of wine at Monday has wrapped up. Take time to discover the activities that you enjoy doing either alone or with those you love and make them regular occurrences that something to look forward to.

These are just a few gems of advice Jennifer Scott shares in her book, *Less from Madame Chic*. Without hesitation I highly recommend her book if you seeking to live a life filled with quality, contentment, and formality.

---

For those who selected the article about casual lifestyles

**Make Your Life a Casual Affair**

LIFESTYLE

Whenever you can, live casually!

Living casually does not have to take the beauty or the spontaneity out of living but in fact it can enhance it. Below are a few ideas for welcoming in a bit more casualness. Have a look:

**Wear casually.** Prepare yourself with a sporty hoodie, a button-down shirt, and pair of sneakers. These bring comfortableness and approachableness to your life no matter how mundane your life is.

**Eat casually.** Each meal that you sit down with family or close friends is an opportunity to enjoy casualness.

**Create interactions to look forward to.** Maybe you wake up and stroll down your favorite coffee shop for a tasty treat and chat with a good friend on Saturday mornings, or you play checkers with brothers or sisters every Sunday evening. Take time to discover the activities that you enjoy doing either alone or with those you love and make them frequent occurrences that something to look forward to.

These are just a few gems of advice Jennifer Scott shares in her book, *Less from Madame Chic*. Without hesitation I highly recommend her book if you seeking to live a life filled with joy, happiness, and casualness.
Before we start, please let us know some basic information about you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy reading the material.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in the topic of the reading material.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I back the opinions mentioned in the reading material</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study 2b**

Before we start, please let us know some basic information about you.

In this part, we will provide you with some reading materials, and you will be asked to write a short paragraph on the provided topic based on our instructions.

The fresh start condition

We are only two weeks into this semester, and many of you are still settling down to the new semester. The beginning of a new semester represents an opportunity for you to make a fresh start. “Fresh start” refers to the belief that people can make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life, regardless of their past or present circumstance.

Please write a short paragraph with the title *It’s a Fresh Start of the New Semester*. Hints: You can share with us why it is time for a fresh start and what you would do to make a fresh start at the beginning of the new semester.

The control condition

We are already two weeks into this semester, and many of you have already gotten used to the ordinary routines of the everyday life of this semester. “Ordinary” means normal and not special or different in any way.

Please write a short paragraph titled *It’s an Ordinary Time of the New Semester*. Hints: You can share with us why it is ordinary and what you would do during this ordinary time of the semester.
**Dependent Measure:**

Suppose your department is going to host a virtual gathering. You are expected to join the gathering by selecting an avatar to present yourself in the virtual gathering. Please choose ONE avatar from the six alternatives with different clothing styles presented below.

Please treat the virtual gathering as a face-to-face meeting and conduct yourself as if you were physically present in the meeting room.

*Male participants were presented with the following pictures>*

![Male Avatars](image1)

*Male participants were presented with the following pictures>*

![Female Avatars](image2)

**Study 3**

In this part, we will provide you with a group of print ads to evaluate. Please review the materials by paying close attention to the themes of the ads and answer questions that follow.
The fresh start condition (one ad per page)
The start condition (one ad per page)
The control condition (one ad per page)

Please indicate your overall evaluation of the ad you just reviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unfavorable</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorable</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, what do you think of these ads? (e.g., What are these ads about? what do you think of them?)

Dependent Measure:

In this part, we will provide you with some decision-making contexts, in which you need to choose between two alternative options. Below you can find the descriptions of two book clubs. Please read through them carefully and make a choice.

Book Club A
It is a more casual book club that meets monthly online. The determination of the books to read is based on members’ casual discussions before the meeting. During each meeting, discussions will be relatively informal, and everyone can bring up discussion questions. Because the meetings will be virtually held, participants are free to behave casually. The dress code is relatively more casual. The meetings of the book club and the discussions are aimed to provide a relaxing time for the members.

Book Club B
It is a more formal book club that meets monthly online. The determination of the books to read is based on a formal vote of the members of the book club. During each online meeting, discussions will revolve around the questions prepared by the discussion leader. Although the meetings will be virtually held, participants are required to behave professionally. The dress code is relatively more formal (shirts and pants, etc.). The meetings of the book club and the discussions are aimed to provide a deep understanding of the book.

Which club would you like to join?

□ Book Club A □ Book Club B

Mediator Measure:
<Participants assigned to the fresh start condition read this:>
In part 1, you went through some ads that encourage customers to make a fresh start, such as the ad about a meal plan, a healthy lifestyle, a financial program, etc. Making a fresh start means that people can get a new beginning, have a new start, and chart a new course in life.

Then you chose the book club you prefer to join.

Please focus on the feelings and thoughts you had when making the choice, and share
with us your feelings and thoughts by indicating your agreement with the following statements.

<Participants assigned to the start condition read this:>
In part 1, you went through some ads that encourage customers to start a meal plan, a healthy lifestyle, a financial program, etc.

Then you made a choice on the book club you prefer to join.

Please focus on the feelings and thoughts you had when making the choice, and share with us your feelings and thoughts by indicating your agreement with the following statements.

<Participants assigned to the control condition read this:>
In part 1, you went through some ads about a meal plan, a healthy lifestyle, a financial program, etc.

Then you made a choice on the book club you prefer to join.

Please focus on the feelings and thoughts you had when making the choice, and share with us your feelings and thoughts by indicating your agreement with the following statements.

<All participants responded to the following measures of meaning-seeking motive>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to do something that gives me a sense of meaningfulness</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was looking for something that gives me a feeling of importance</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was looking for something that gives me a sense of significance</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study 4**

In this part, we will provide you with some reading materials, and your task is to write a short paragraph to share with us your feelings and thoughts pertinent to the provided material.

The reading material will be randomly presented.

**The fresh start condition**

It’s Time to Make a Fresh Start

Fresh start refers to the belief that people can make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life, regardless of their past or present circumstance.
Temporal landmarks (e.g., the start of a new week/month/year) often make people want to make a fresh start in their lives.
This is the first week of the year, a fresh start time of the year.

Please write a short paragraph about the time for fresh starts.
Hints: Why is it a time for a fresh start? What kind of activities would you have? What would you like to do for your fresh start?

The control condition:
It’s Just an Ordinary Time of the Year

An ordinary time means that the time is normal and not special or different in any way. Any time (e.g., each day of a week, each week of a month, each month of a year) is actually ordinary in terms of calendar cycles. This is the first week of the year, just an ordinary time, and no different from any other time of the year.

Please write a short paragraph about this ordinary time.
Hints: why is it an ordinary time? What kind of life routines would you have? What would you like to do for these routines?

The meaning-seeking condition:

Below, we will provide you with some shopping scenarios, in which you need to choose between two alternative options. Please assume the two options in each scenario are equal otherwise (e.g., price, quality, brand, etc.) except for the described difference.

When you are deciding what to select, please choose the option that elicits a feeling of importance, significance, and meaningfulness.

The control condition

Below, we will provide you with some shopping scenarios, in which you need to choose between two alternative options. Please assume the two options in each scenario are equal otherwise (e.g., price, quality, brand etc.) except for the described difference.

Dependent Measure:

Imagine you are browsing in a shoe shop and going to buy a pair of shoes. You have two options to choose from. Which one would you prefer?
□ leather shoes
□ sneakers
Suppose you are going to buy a watch. You have two options to choose from. Which one would you prefer?
□ A watch that looks professional and business style
□ A watch that looks sporty and casual

Imagine you are shopping in a department store and want to buy a shirt. Which one of the following styles would you prefer?
□ A dress shirt (dressed together with suits)
□ A button-down shirt (dressed together with jeans, khakis)

<Note: the options were randomly presented in the experiment>

**Study 5**

Before we start, please let us know some basic information about you.

Your gender:
- Female
- Male

Your age:

In this part, please help us evaluate some quotes which will be used in our future research.
Please read and try to understand the meaning of the quotes, and then evaluate them based on our instructions.

The fresh start condition and the control condition
- see Study 2a

Next page will show some selected outfits posted by an Instagram influencer.
Please go through those posts, and click ">" button when you feel ready to evaluate.

Formal outfits:
<Male participants see this>
<Female participants see this>
Casual outfits:
<Male participants see this>

<Female participants see this>
Dependent Measure:

To what extent do you agree or disagree the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these outfits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to know more</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about these outfits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Daily dressing style measure:

In general, what is your clothing style in daily lives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>definitely casual</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably casual</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casual for sure</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitely formal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably formal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal for sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manipulation Check across Studies

I conducted separate tests to verify that our manipulation materials used in studies indeed reminded participants about fresh starts and made them want to make fresh starts. Specifically, in each test, I randomly assigned participants to the experimental conditions and presented them with the materials. Participants were then asked to rate on two-item, seven-point Likert scales (“The material reminds me about fresh starts;” and “The material makes me want to make a fresh start”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”). In the following table, I present the results of the pretests.

Table B.6 Manipulation Check across Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study (N)</th>
<th>Mean values across conditions</th>
<th>ANOVA results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 2a N = 109</td>
<td>Mfresh start = 6.02, SD = 1.21</td>
<td>F(1, 107) = 24.86, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mcontrol = 4.71, SD = 1.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2b N = 78</td>
<td>Mfresh start = 5.72, SD = 1.10</td>
<td>F(1, 76) = 26.70, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mcontrol = 4.19, SD = 1.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3 N = 120</td>
<td>Mfresh start = 6.18, SD = .91</td>
<td>F(2, 117) = 6.77, p = .002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mgeneric start = 5.46, SD = 1.14</td>
<td>Contrasts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mcontrol = 5.23, SD = 1.51</td>
<td>fresh start vs. generic start: p = .008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fresh start vs. control: p = .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>generic start vs. control: p = .404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 4 N = 85</td>
<td>Mfresh start = 5.89, SD = 1.02</td>
<td>F(1, 83) = 67.67, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mcontrol = 3.11, SD = 1.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 5 Manipulations are the same as Study 2a</td>
<td>Mfresh start = 6.28, SD = .74</td>
<td>F(1, 98) = 82.63, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication study N = 100</td>
<td>Mcontrol = 3.38, SD = 1.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Replicating the Main Effect Discussed in Study 2

The purpose of this study is to replicate the main effect using a different fresh start context and different dependent measures.

Methods. I conducted this study on a random Monday, which enabled us to naturally remind participants about fresh starts. Note that Monday could serve as a natural reminder of a fresh start. Accordingly, in our control condition, I attempt to dampen this “fresh start” association with Monday by emphasizing its ordinality, thus providing a more conservative test for our theorizing.

One hundred seventy-six Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers (58.5% female; $M_{age} = 39.50$ years, $SD = 13.84$) in the United States participated in a one-way, two-cell (reminders: fresh start vs. ordinality [control]) between-subjects design for a nominal payment. Participants first completed a “reasoning task,” in which I randomly assigned them to read instructions depicting Monday as either a fresh start (fresh start condition) or just an ordinary day (control condition) of the week. Then, participants wrote their thoughts about why they thought Monday was a fresh start (an ordinary) day.

Afterward, participants proceeded to an ostensibly unrelated task assessing “consumer preferences.” Specifically, participants indicated their product preferences in three decision-making scenarios, and each scenario included a pair of product offerings—one more formal and the other more casual (e.g., a dress shirt vs. a button-down shirt). I asked participants to assume that the two options in each pair were equal otherwise (e.g., price) except for the described differences. Then, participants indicated their choices.

Results. Because the choice share across scenarios showed consistent patterns (see Table 2 for scenario-specific results), I summed up their responses (formal = 1, casual = 0) to create a preference index ranging from 0 to 3, with higher scores denoting stronger preferences for formal options. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) (reminders: fresh start vs. control) performed on the preference index revealed a marginal significant effect ($M_{fresh\ start} = 1.17$, $SD = .96$; $M_{control} = .90$, $SD = .92$; $F(1, 174) = 3.50$, $p = .063$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), indicating that participants in the fresh start (vs. control) condition were more likely to choose formal product offerings. Though our manipulation marginally influenced participants’ mood ($M_{fresh\ start} = 5.22$, $SD = 1.48$; $M_{control} = 5.59$, $SD = 1.29$; $F(1, 174) = 3.18$, $p = .076$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), analysis of covariance performed on the preference index with mood as a covariate confirmed that our proposed effect held ($F(1, 173) = 3.62$, $p = .059$, $\eta^2_p = .02$).

Table B.7 Percentage of Choosing Formal (vs. casual) Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Fresh start</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shirt: a dress shirt (vs. a button-down shirt)</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Shoes: leather shoes (vs. sneakers)</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Watch: professional &amp; business style (vs. sporty &amp; casual style)</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Supplementally, the repeated measure logistic regression (Huang and Sengupta 2020) yielded the same but more significant results: On average, participants in the fresh start condition were more likely to choose the formal options than those in the control condition (38.9% vs. 30.1%; $b = .39$, $SE = .18$, Wald = 4.55, $p = .033$).
Additional Data Analyses for Study 5

In Study 5, I also measured participants’ daily dressing style using a three-item, seven-point scale (“In general, what is your clothing style in daily lives?”; 1 = definitely casual/probably casual/casual for sure; 7 = definitely formal/probably formal/formal for sure; α = .94). The ratings were averaged to form a daily dressing style index ranging from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating a more formal dressing style. The average rating (N = 248; M = 2.50, SD = 1.31) was significantly lower than the mid-point (“4”; t = –17.98, p < .001), suggesting that people’s dressing style leaned toward being casual.

Seeking to rule out “habit changing” as an alternative explanation, I conducted additional analyses using data in the fresh start condition (N = 123), with outfit style (formal vs. casual) as the independent variable, the dressing style index as the moderating variable (continuous), and participants’ interest in the outfits and their willingness to follow the social media influencer as two separate dependent variables. I theorize that, if habit-changing explained our findings, I should expect consumers who normally prefer a more formal (casual) dressing style to switch to a more casual (formal) style upon exposure to fresh start reminders. That is, participants who reported higher (lower) scores in their daily dressing style index should be more interested in casual (formal) outfits.

The results showed no interaction of outfit styles with daily dressing style index on either the outfit interest (b = –.01, SE = .22, t = –.03, p = .97; see Figure H.1) or the willingness to follow the influencer (b = .23, SE = .23, t = 1.00, p = .32; see Figure H.1). Specifically, participants who reported higher scores in their daily dressing style (i.e., more formal) did not show increased interest in casual outfits or decreased interest in formal outfits; similarly, they did not reveal more willingness to follow the social media influencer who posted casual outfits. Taken together, these results ruled out “habit changing” as an alternative explanation.

Figure B.1 The Interaction Between Outfit Styles and Dressing Style Index