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# Distribution of Consumer Support for Underdog Brands: A Systematic Review of the Underdog Effect

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The underdog effect refers to a positive attitude towards the underdog who lacks resources and opportunities but has passion and determination. Extensive research has been investigated how the underdog effect affects distributing consumer preference and purchase intention. The purpose of this study is to identify the theoretical basis on which the underdog effect is grounded by analysing the prior research in the underdog literature. **Research design, data and methodology:** This study organizes the literature on the underdog effect by analyzing a total of 33 journals published in the past 16 years. Constructs and variables were extracted from the selected articles through the content analysis on a systematic literature review. **Results:** This literature review reveals that identity theories served as an overarching theoretical lens when examining the underdog effect. Additionally, the underdog effect was rooted in theories of justice and equity to explain the relationship between underdog brand positioning and consumer preference. **Conclusions:** This paper paves the way for future research based on prior research and trend analysis of underdog brand positioning. This article also provides an insightful interpretation and synthesis of the theoretical underpinnings of the impact of underdog effects on consumers' overall brand evaluations.

**Keywords:** Underdog Effect, Underdog Positioning, Underdog Channel and Supply Strategy, Literature Review, Brand Preference Distribution

**JEL Classification Code:** D01, L19, M31

## 1. Introduction

Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *David and Goliath: Underdog, misfits, and the art of battling giants*, offers a new interpretation of obstacles and disadvantages from the battle between a shepherd boy, David, and a mighty warrior, Goliath. Three thousand years later, David's improbable victory exemplifies the role of adversities in miraculous success and motivation. Contemporary dictionaries define that an underdog is 1) a competitor thought to have little chance of winning a fight or contest, 2) a person, team, or

country that is thought to be in a weaker position than others, and, 3) less powerful person or thing that struggles against a more powerful entity (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Today, however, the term underdog is often considered optimistic and is usually attributed to positive expectations that the underdog eventually overcomes great odds to be successful. That is, underdogs are also portrayed with characters of never-give-up spirits in challenging discrepancies of resources and determination to overcome external disadvantages (Kim, Allison, Eylon, Goethals, Markus, Hindle, & McGuire, 2008; Paharia, Keinan, & Schor, 2011;

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Goldschmied & Vandello, 2009). Such figures and the selected triumphant underdogs have often been used in movies, sport, art, and academic domains. The underdog individuals or sports teams struggling to win in competition are described as heroes and hopeful figures. Further, scholars have investigated the phenomenon of underdogs in various fields such as social psychology, political science, and business.

The classification of underdog and top dogs initially comes from the context of sports arenas and has been widely used in politics and business competition including marketing and advertising (Jun, Sung, Gentry, & McGinnis, 2015; McGinnis & Gentry 2009). In sports psychology research, a tendency to support top dogs has been identified by the concept of “bask in reflected glory (BIRG)” (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Related research shows that most people tend to openly associate with ‘winner’ teams and elicit positive emotions about these connections. Conversely, people distance themselves from losing teams, and this is termed as “cutting off reflected failure (CORF)” (Wann, Keenan, Burnett, Martin, Smith, & Lantz, 2002). In addition to sports-related literature, studies on individual support for top dogs and underdogs in politics have been discussed. In fact, the term bandwagon effects and underdog effects were coined in the political literature to describe how voter tendencies can be affected when describing one candidate as a favorite and another as underdogs (Ceci & Kain, 1982). Specifically, Traugott and Lavrakas (2016) devise underdog effects theory as sympathy effects that describe some voters tend to support the candidate whose pre-election polls predict the loss of the elections. Much earlier, Simon (1954) reflects the notion of the underdog effect in the political environment and argues that people have a tendency to vote for a candidate who is expected to be defeated compared to the candidate who is highly anticipated in an election. Moreover, Goldschmied and Vandello (2009) suggest that political candidates positioned as underdogs generate significant influences on voting changes because they devise the image as a warm contender.

More importantly, the definition and focus of underdog and top dog research has received considerable attention in the business domain. A number of companies today have used underdog brand biographies to increase consumer choices for products and services (McGinnis & Gentry, 2017; Paharia et al., 2011). Furthermore, the underdog effect, which refers to consumers’ tendency to support and endorse underdogs due to the passion and determination to overcome lack of resources (Kim et al., 2008; Paharia et al., 2011), has been employed by firms when developing effective brand positioning strategies in promotion and distribution. For example, in relation to small local retailers who lack of technology and innovative skills often build partnership

with other local suppliers to acquire network capability as reducing middlemen and avoiding distribution channel cost (Sequeira, Weeks, Bell, & Gibbs, 2018).

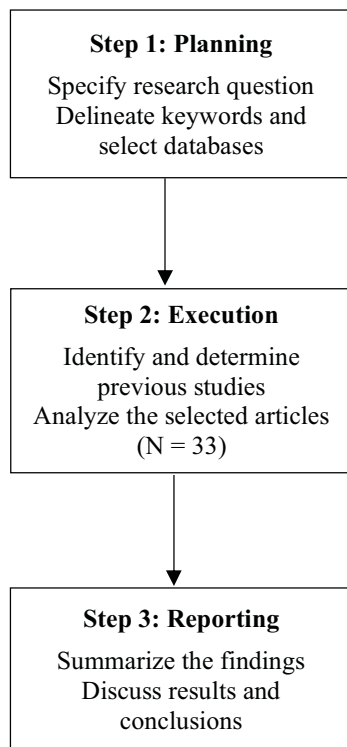
In line with this, the current paper aims to review the theories on which the underdog effect is based by analyzing the previous studies selected for the underdog effect. To do so, this paper organizes a total of 33 articles related to the topics of underdog brand positioning, published over the past 15 years between 2007 and 2021. The present paper contributes to the field of underdog brand positioning by answering the following research question: What are the theoretical foundations underlying the underdog effect research? In other words, to provide a better understanding of the underdog effect, the author attempts to analyze how the existing literature has been classified according to the different theoretical underpinnings from which the underdog effect was derived.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follow. First, the methodology section outlines the process of selecting and appraising relevant prior research. The author conducts a literature review of the underdog effect with a focus on underdog positioning and underdog biographies. Then, the following section provides the findings of a literature review analysis that identifies the theoretical underpinnings of the underdog effect. Finally, this paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications of the current study.

## **2. Methodology**

The current study conducts a search for journals and publications on “underdog”, “underdog effect”, and “underdog brand positioning” on Google Scholar. As one of the largest search engines available, the database offers convenience, reliability, and accessibility for researchers to gather a variety of sources (Gusenbauer, 2019). Specifically, the author systematized journal articles published between 2007 to 2022 in renowned journals such as *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Brand Management*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *Journal of Service Management*, and *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*.

From the search, a total of 33 papers were adopted as the final outcomes for the literature review analysis of this study. Based on the content analysis of the prior literature, the two main constructs of underdog positioning and underdog biographies are derived from the underdog effect, which underpins the theoretical concept. Figure 1 outlines the methodological approach used in this paper.



**Figure 1:** Steps of Systematic Literature Review in the Study

### 3. Findings: Theories of the Underdog Effect

#### 3.1. The Underdog Effect

Traditionally, underdogs are defined as weak and underprivileged, thus less likely to be favored. Whereas, top dogs are defined as a person or group in a position of authority especially through victory in competition (Kim et al., 2008; McGinnis & Gentry, 2009). Underdogs have appeared in various themes of history, literature, and movies by depicted as those who are expected to lose in the competition against top dogs that are endowed with abundant resources and power. However, the concept of the underdog effect takes a counterintuitive view of underdogs, by defining underdogs as a positive entity who possesses passion and determination despite external disadvantages and lack of resources (Paharia et al., 2011). The underdog effect focuses on the underdog's passion and determination to face overwhelming adversity (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009; Paharia et al., 2011), and this is known to be the main reason consumers support underdogs.

The underdog effect appears when comparison with the top dog is clearly presented. The comparison requires a condition of which underdogs compete with top dogs to gain

the well-defined outcome such as larger market share. In addition, while both underdogs and top dogs are equally restricted by the competitive rules, compared to top dogs, underdogs face considerably fewer resources in terms of connections, knowledge, financing, and so on, but face more disadvantages and obligations (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009). More importantly, by showing the never-give-up attitude and a winning mentality, underdogs separate themselves from mere losers. This is to evoke the underdog effect regardless the lack of competitive resources (Kim et al., 2008; Paharia et al., 2011).

In the domains of marketing and consumer behavior, Paharia et al. (2011) conceptualized underdog brand biographies and suggested the use of underdog biographies has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions. The underdog biography describes the brand's status in terms of humble origins, resource scarcity, and a resolute struggle against odds, and this company-generated narrative emphasizes external disadvantage, and passion and determination as two dimensions underlying underdog biographies (Paharia et al., 2011). Accordingly, recent accumulated research has identified various consumer motivations for underdog preferences. As such, consumer characteristics involved in underdog disposition and self-brand identification have been adopted in the studies of Kao (2015) and Paharia et al. (2011) respectively to suggest the underdog appeals. Jun et al. (2015) also conducted a study in the context of psychological process underlying underdog support. They argued that individuals with the personal trait of strong empathic concerns are more likely to show favorable attitudes towards underdogs. Furthermore, the usefulness of the underdog effect and underdog brand biographies has been demonstrated through hopeful marketing strategies (Siemens, Smith, & Fisher, 2013).

As a preparatory phase, a comprehensive summary of the underdog literature on which the present study is based for further investigation is provided. Specifically, selected articles for the underdog effect literature are analyzed by segmenting the key constructs into antecedents that include underdog positioning and underdog biographies (Table 1). In addition, Table 2 summarizes the selected studies examining the effect of underdog themed antecedents on consumer responses. The author also classifies variables identified in previous studies that mediate or moderate the relationship between the underdog effect and consumer responses, in which purchase intention and consumer preference are often designated as outcome variables.

In short, based on the literature analysis of previous studies surrounding the underdog effect, this paper found that consumer evaluations of products and services positioned as underdogs are actually diverse. For example, in the domains of marketing and consumer psychology, prior research showed that the underdog effect mainly constitutes

relationships with key psychological processes of consumers' emotions, perceptions, and motivation. In addition, the effectiveness of underdog positioning in consumer evaluation can vary depending on brand characteristics such as product types and service categories.

Evidently, firms often create brand stories that highlight the characteristics of underdog traits because underdog brand biographies can increase consumer support and brand choice. When consumers identify themselves as underdogs, they are more likely to associate with underdog brands. In fact, consumers who believe that they themselves have passion and determination despite perceived external

disadvantages tend to prefer brands with underdog biographies (Kim, Park, & Stacey Lee, 2019; Li & Zhao, 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). In light of these findings, detailed theoretical explanations related to the underdog effect deserve discussion in depth. From the journals selected in this study, the author scrutinizes theories surrounding underdog effects for further analysis. In other words, the author can grasp the theoretical basis for explaining the underdog effect based on the previous studies scrutinized in this paper. In the next section, this article begins by focusing on self-identification and its impact on the underdog effect.

**Table 1:** Summary of Selected Studies: The Underdog Effect, Underdog Biographies, and Underdog Positioning as Independent Variables

| Author(s)                  | Year | Journal                                    | Independent Variable(s)              | Mediator(s)/ Moderator(s)   | Outcome(s)  |
|----------------------------|------|--|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Vandello et al.            | 2007 | Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin | Underdog effect                      | Domains (Olympic matches, Israeli-Palestinian conflict)<br>Perception of effort<br>Resources equality | Attitudes   |
| Kim et al.                 | 2008 | Journal of Applied Social Psychology       | Underdog effect                      | Domain (sport/business)<br>Artists (inexperienced/ experienced)<br>Self-relevance                     | Sympathy and rooting for, and identified with underdogs |
| Paharia et al.             | 2011 | Journal of Consumer Research               | Brand biographies                    | Consumer brand identification, Nationality, Self vs. Others   | Consumer preference<br>Purchase intention               |
| Staton, Paharia, and Oveis | 2012 | Advances in Consumer Research              | Brand biographies                    | Emotion (pride/compassion)<br>Socioeconomic status (strong/weak)                                      | Consumer preference                                     |
| Kirmani et al.             | 2017 | Journal of Marketing                       | Underdog positioning                 | Competence, morality, and warmth traits<br>Empathy  | Choice of service providers                             |
| Shirai                     | 2017 | Cornell Hospitality Quarterly              | Brand biographies                    | Consumption domain (hedonic/utilitarian)<br>Retail crowding (adequately [un]crowded)                  | Consumer evaluations                                    |
| Shin Legendre et al.       | 2017 | Journal of Consumer Marketing              | Brand positioning<br>Brand localness | Political orientation   | Purchase intentions<br>WTP a price premium              |
| Li and Zhao                | 2018 | Asia Journal of Social Psychology          | Brand biographies                    | Product type (hedonic/functional)   | Brand identification                                    |
| Kao                        | 2019 | Journal of Product & Brand Management      | Brand storytelling                   | Envy (malicious/benign)<br>Psychological distance (proximal/distance)                                 | Brand preference  |
| Kim et al.                 | 2019 | Psychology & Marketing                     | Brand biography                      | Brand transgression, Perceived anger  | Forgiveness intentions                                  |
| Nagar                      | 2019 | Journal of Marketing Communications        | Brand biographies                    | New vs. established brand<br>Type of consumption (public/private)                                     | Consumer attitude and behavior                          |
| Delgado-Ballester          | 2020 | Journal of Product & Brand Management      | Underdog brand storytelling styles   | Empathic feelings<br>Immersion in the story   | Consumer brand identification                           |
| Han and Kim                | 2020 | Marketing intelligence & planning          | Brand positioning                    | Equality (prosocial/pro-self)<br>Scarcity (demand/supply)   | Purchase intention (PI)<br>PI of prosocial              |
| He, Yu, and Chen           | 2020 | Journal of Business Research               | Brand positioning                    | Lay theory of achievement (incremental/entity)<br>Consumer self-concept (pragmatic /idealistic)       | WOM intention<br>WOM behavior                           |

|                            |      |                                     |                   |   |  |
|----------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Tang and Tsang             | 2020 | Journal of Business Research        | Brand positioning | Personal control<br>Perceived inspiration<br>Shopping orientation<br>Causal attribution | Consumer preference<br>Purchase intention<br>WTP |
| Nagar                      | 2021 | Journal of Marketing Communications | Brand biographies | Mode of consuming counterfeit (public/private)  | Copycat evaluation                               |
| Schmidt and Steenkamp      | 2021 | Journal of Brand Management         | Underdog effect   | -   | Underdog brand management                        |
| Tezer, Bodur, and Grohmann | 2022 | Psychology and Marketing            | Brand biographies | Perceived risk<br>Narrative transportation  | Purchase intention                               |

**Table 2:** Summary of the Antecedents of the Underdog Effect on Consumer Responses and Mediating/Moderating Variables

| Author(s)                          | Year | Journal                                   | Antecedent(s)   | Mediator(s)/ Moderator(s)   | Consumer Response(s)   |
|------------------------------------|------|---|---|---|--|
| McGinnis and Gentry                | 2009 | Journal of Business Research              | Empathy, nostalgia, individuality, freedom of choice, inspiration   | -   | Underdog support   |
| Siemens et al.                     | 2013 | American Marketing Association            | Oppositional and hopeful strategies   | -   | Underdog support<br>Purchase intention<br>Brand trust  |
| Paharia, Avery, and Keinan         | 2014 | Journal of Marketing Research             | Presence of large competition   | Competitive salience<br>Purchase activism   | Purchase interest<br>Online review<br>Number of purchased items  |
| Jun et al.                         | 2015 | International Journal of Advertising      | Underdog advertising  | Empathic concern<br>Empathic response   | Brand attitude   |
| Kao                                | 2015 | Journal of Consumer Behaviors             | Consumers' underdog disposition   | Underdog biography (explicit/implicit),<br>Brand status (emerging/established)                          | Brand preference   |
| Boyatos, Smith, and Kim            | 2017 | Thinking Skills and Creativity            | Successful underdog story   |   | Creativity   |
| Goldschmied, McDaniel, and Ramirez | 2017 | Journal of Marketing behavior             | Type of products (underdog/favorite)  | Gender<br>Feedback  | Choices  |
| McGinnis, Gao, Jun, and Gentry     | 2017 | Journal of Service Management             | Self or other oriented perspective  | Commence underdog affection   | Underdog support in commerce   |
| Bradley, Lawrence, and Ferguson    | 2018 | Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly | Distribution of resources (underdog/top dog)  | Observability (public/private)  | Charity preference   |
| Zourrig and Hedhli                 | 2018 | International Journal of Consumer Studies | Motivations (empathy, freedom of choice, inspiration, self-identification, individuality, social justice) | Consumers' roles (pro- vs. con-underdog)  | Rooting for (against) underdogs  |
| Jin and Huang                      | 2019 | Journal of Consumer Psychology            | Appeal type (underdog, top dog, and top dog on the ropes)   | Power<br>Perceived instrumentality (power expression/restoration)                                       | Attitude towards the advertised brands<br>Brand attitudes and purchase intentions<br>Quality perceptions |
| Gao and McGinnis                   | 2020 | Journal of Small Business                 | Underdog experience (empathy, balance maintenance, uniqueness, admiration, hope, self-extension)          |   | Underdog affection   |
| Nurmohamed                         | 2020 | Academy of Management Journal             | Underdog expectation from others  | Desire to prove others wrong<br>Credibility of observers  | Performance  |
| Siemens et al.                     | 2020 | Journal of Advertising                    | Successful underdog positioning   | Authenticity<br>Founder involvement<br>Sell/no-sell decision<br>Reason for selling (high/low communion) | Consumer support   |

### 3.2. Identification Theory

People choose to associate with those who are successful and distance themselves from groups that are viewed unfavorably and perceived to have negative identities (Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994; Schimel, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, O'Mahen, & Arndt, 2000). Within research on social status, individuals of higher status are seen as more influential, competent, and worthy than low-status individuals or groups (Ridgeway, 2003). Conversely, low-status individuals and groups are more likely to be subject to bias and negative stereotypes and are more likely to be considered worthless and incompetent (Ridgeway, 2001). Therefore, it appears to be at risk of aligning oneself with underdogs to the extent that underdogs share characteristics of low-status entities. Following this logic, it is reasonable to assume that people would not want to associate with underdogs. In addition, according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), individuals are motivated to achieve positive self-esteem by affiliating with groups that can influence their self-evaluation. Social identity theory suggests that when people observe uneven competition, they identify with groups that are more likely to succeed, in order to achieve positive self-esteem (top dogs). Positive social identity is also enhanced when individuals compare their group favorably with others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Given this, theories of identification make predictions about which groups people are more likely to identify with.

Nonetheless, the underdog effect can be explained based on the theory of self-identification. Identity may be formed in part by similarities people see between themselves and others (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010), and that most people identify themselves as underdogs, indeed. According to previous research, people have shown their preference towards underdogs with various motives and demonstrated support for underdogs because they can identify with underdogs (Jin & Huang, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Li & Zhao, 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). For instance, Paharia et al. (2011) argue that based on self-identification, the underdog effect occurs because people see themselves as underdogs, reflecting the underdog aspects of their own lives and creating a sense of similarity. A strong sense of identity with underdogs allows people to align themselves with the struggling underdog, which produces the underdog effect. In other words, people sympathize and identify with external disadvantages that underdogs face and yet willing to share the underdog's passion and determination to succeed in difficult situations.

In the marketing field, underdog effect can be explained by high perceived consumer-brand identification, one of the underlying motives to support underdog brands (Kao, 2015; Kim et al., 2019; Paharia et al., 2011). The identification-

based explanation of the underdog effect means that consumers feel a psychological unity with the brand based on how much the brand reflects their own identity. That is, consumers interact with a brand through their own underdog position. In the consumer choice literature, self-consistency refers to the degree of cognitive adaptation between self-concept and brand image (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Consumers choose brands that reflect their actual or ideal self-concept, and they believe that the high identification brand shares self-defining attributes with them (Sirgy 1982; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012). Consequently, consumers demonstrate positive responses to a brand when they perceive that their identity matches that of the brand (Reed II, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012). The following Table 3 provides some previous studies employing the theory of identity as an overarching theoretical lens when investigating the underdog effect.

**Table 3:** Underpinning theories of the underdog effect: Identity theories

| Theories                            | Studies   | Underdog effects   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Consumer Brand Identification (CBI) | Delgado-Ballester (2020)<br>Jin and Huang (2019)<br>Kim et al. (2019) | - Consumers strongly identify with underdog brands because they see themselves as underdogs.<br>- Consumers can relate themselves to the difficulties that underdog brands face.<br>- The underdog effect is associated with the notion that consumer identify with underdog brands (CBI). |
| Self-identification                 | Kao (2015)<br>Paharia et al. (2011)                                   | - Consumers identify with underdogs because of underdog aspects of their own lives.<br>- Consumers identify with external disadvantages of underdogs as theirs, and share their passion and determination to succeed in the face of adversity.   |
| Self-consistency                    | Kim et al. (2008)<br>Li and Zhao (2018)                               | - Consumers tend to buy underdog brands in which self-concept is consistent with images of underdog brands.  |
| Social identity                     | He, You, & Chen (2020)<br>Nurmohamed (2020)                           | - A positive social identity is formed when an individual compares themselves favorably with other groups with whom they see more influential, competent, and worthy than low-status groups.   |

### 3.3. System Justification Theory

There is a body of research that the underdog effect is

built on theories of the justice, fairness, and inequality (Allison & Burnette, 2009; Han & Kim, 2020; Kim et al., 2008; McGinnis & Gentry, 2009; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards, 2007; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Michniewicz, 2016). For instance, Kim et al. (2008) indicate that people are more likely to sympathize and identify with underdogs than top dogs because underdogs can satisfy their desire to actualize fairness and equality. To reduce cognitive dissonance, individuals tend to believe that the world is basically a fair and just place (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). System justification theory (SJT) states that individuals have a general motive to maintain the perceived fairness and justice (Jost et al., 2004; van der Toorn & Jost, 2014). More specifically, within socioeconomic systems, people seek to maintain perceived fairness, equality, and legitimacy in their own status quo when their beliefs in the idealistic image of the system are challenged (Shepherd, Chartrand, & Fitzsimons, 2015).

In the context of supporting underdogs, system justification theory helps explain the underdog effect because underdogs experience inequalities in direct competitions with top dogs as signaling external disadvantages that are perceived as unfair, and thus activate people’s concern of justice and equity. Generally, when competitions reveal injustice and disparities in power, people, as observers, decide which party to support according to their internal concepts of justice and deservingness (Han & Kim, 2020; Vandello et al., 2007, 2016). In other words, these observers may implicitly employ the sense of fairness to make their judgement on whom to support, especially when they have no control of changing the outcome directly. That is, they question the fairness of the distribution of rewards with respect to general principles of justice and legitimized norms (Lerner, 2003; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992).

Given that people distaste inequality and competitive situations of inequality provoke people’s sense of fairness and justice (Fehr & Schmidt, 1999; Messick, 1995), supporting the underdog may be one way to restore a sense of fairness. In addition, people’s concerns about fair outcomes can override selfishness, allowing them to experience greater utility with equality than favorable inequality (Camerer, 2003). In this sense, compared to more lucrative rivals, people are motivated to evaluate the performance of underdogs in a more positive light. Consequently, supporting underdogs and viewing their performance from a positive perspective clearly create a psychological balance that minimize the dissonance (Shin Legendre, Warnick, & Baker, 2018; Vandello et al., 2007, 2016).

Table 4 below summarizes a selection of the prior studies that have used the theory of justice and equity to explain the relationship between the underdog effect and consumer

response.

**Table 4:** Underpinning theories of the underdog effect: Justice and Equity theories

| Theories                          | Studies  | Underdog effects  |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| System Justification Theory (SJT) | McGinnis and Gentry (2009)<br>Shin Legendre et al. (2018)<br>Vandello et al. (2016)<br>Zourrig and Hedhli (2018) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SJT states that individuals have a general motive to maintain the perceived fairness and justice.</li> <li>- People believe that the world is basically a fair and just place, thus they are more likely to sympathize and identified with underdogs than top dogs.</li> <li>- Supporting underdogs can satisfy their desire for fairness and equality.</li> </ul> |
| Equality and Fairness             | Han and Kim (2020)<br>Kirmani, Hamilton, Thompson, and Lantzy (2017)<br>Vandello et al. (2007, 2016)             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is natural for people to support underdogs as they tend to achieve balance and equity to maintain balance and fairness.</li> <li>- When the unequal competition between underdogs and top dogs results in the imbalanced outcome, consideration of equality, fairness and deservingness leads to the greater supportive attitude towards underdogs.</li> </ul>  |

#### 4. Conclusion

The present study considers that the majority of brands are not strong market leaders, so employing underdog positioning is one of the effective strategies for companies. Studies of the underdog effect should focus on the lack of resources and market opportunities in which relatively small and less-established companies are generally perceived by consumers. Due to underdog affection, a company’s underdog status, for instance, can strengthen the sales of the underdog consumption experiences by effectively operating a company’s channel and supply chain strategy (Gao & McGinnis, 2020). Further, such consumer affection for underdog condition, which is motivated by a belief in the balance of market power, enables underdog firms to distribute products and services as viable alternatives to customers of dominant companies.

That is, companies can exploit the underdog effect by leveraging consumers’ concerns for justice and fairness, as evidenced by the systematic literature review conducted in this paper. Moreover, research may need to re-evaluate self-congruency, consumer socioeconomic level, and brand images as underlying processes of underdog effect while controlling for the perceived authenticity of the focal

products and services (Siemens, Weathers, Smith, & Fisher, 2020). In addition, further research should extend beyond external disadvantages, passion and determination to explore alternative mechanisms that account for the underdog effect on consumer preference, as perceptions of the benefits of underdogs are diluted across industries and cultures (Goldschmied, Galily, & Keith, 2018; Paharia et al., 2011). Alternatively, studies of the underdog effect should also incorporate motivational theories, such as self-efficacy theory (Han, Sembada, & Johnson, 2021), to explore boundary conditions that may limit consumers from supporting brands positioned as underdogs.

In short, across businesses such as brand positioning, advertising, distribution and logistics, the underdog effect results in a positive consumer response for brands facing underprivileged conditions while remaining enthusiastic and perseverant to overcome uncontrolled obstacles. Despite the limitations of the non-empirical paper, it is hoped that the explanations provided here has shed more light on the understanding of the conceptual background and managerial practices of underdog brand positioning.

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