

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/B07/19 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL  
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR  
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)**

**Completion Report**

*(for completed projects only)*

<p><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <b>six</b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> <li>2. Completion report: within <b>12</b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> </ol>
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**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

On encouraging green living – When does a positive role model backfire

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**2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved**

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr CHU Maggie Ying-ying/ Assistant Professor	Lee Shau Kee School of Business & Administration / The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Dr WAN Chun-ying/ Associate Professor	School of Hotel and Tourism Management / The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Others	NA	NA

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i>
Project Start Date	1 January 2020	NA	
Project Completion Date	31 March 2021	26 February 2021	24 February 2021
Duration <i>(in month)</i>	15 months	14 months	24 February 2021
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 March 2022	26 February 2022	24 February 2021

## **Part B: The Final Report**

### **5. Project Objectives**

#### 5.1 Objectives as per original application

- 1. To investigate situations in which using a self-similar positive role model has undesirable consequences.*
- 2. To identify the underlying process by which exposure to a self-similar positive role model undermines the observer's self-evaluation.*
- 3. To provide insights into how to advocate green living by using role modeling strategy effectively.*

#### 5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: NA

Reasons for the change: NA

- 1.
- 2.
3. ....

#### 5.3 Realisation of the objectives

*(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)*

Two years ago, this project was proposed in view of the environmental issues caused by various consumption activities. From merely the consumption of meat, the use of electricity to driving, we damage the environment to varying degree. The outbreak of coronavirus in 2020 has further underscored the importance of keeping our planet healthy. Despite decades of efforts in educating the public on protecting the environment and saving precious resources, not much has been changed. People are still seen using single-use plastic items excessively and consuming goods in wasteful manner.

In this project, we evaluate the use of role modelling technique through a different lens. Role modelling has been commonly used in social marketing campaign in which a positive role model demonstrates to the audience various desirable behaviors, for example, recycling materials and repurposing leftovers. Our experimental studies show

that the use of positive role model can actually backfire. We found that when the situation leads consumers to doubt their standing on environmental friendliness, consumers are more likely to be affected by a role model – in a negative way (Objective 1). That is, the consumers would be less likely to engage in the pro-environmental behaviors advocated.

We have also examined the underlying mechanism of this effect. Our findings show that exposing to a social other who is highly environmentally friendly would alter the audience's self-perception (Objective 2). We found that the exposure to a positive role model would lead the consumers to perceive themselves as less environmentally friendly. As a result, they behave in accordance to such self-views. Ongoing studies are conducted to identify the situations in which the above effect would amplify (Objective 3). We predicted that when the advocated behaviors are less typical, consumers' intention to follow the role model would be further undermined.

To conclude, this project as a whole provided evidence that the use of positive role model could have unwanted effects on the audience. This tactic need to be used more cautiously than policy makers might have expected (Objective 3).

#### 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	<b>Addressed</b> <i>(please tick)</i>	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To investigate situations in which using a self-similar positive role model has undesirable consequences.	✓	100%
2. To identify the underlying process by which exposure to a self-similar positive role model undermines the observer's self-evaluation.	✓	100%
3. To provide insights into how to advocate green living by using role modeling strategy effectively	✓	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

*(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)*

This research looks into situations where a positive role model may lower consumers' intention to act in an environmentally-friendly manner. In three experimental studies, we investigated how the social comparison process influences consumers' self-perception and reduced their likelihood to engage in pro-environmental behaviors. Key findings are summarized as follows:

- It is clearly shown in our experiment that positive role models do not always have positive effect. Social comparison can occur in a subtle manner. A target audience in a societal marketing campaign may unconsciously compare him- or her-self with the role model. More importantly, we found that in situation where people are made to feel uncertain about how environmentally friendly they are (e.g. receiving bad score in an ecological footprint assessment), the comparison will lead to a contrast effect. That is, people become less likely to view themselves as someone who is as environmentally friendly as the role model.
- The effect we proposed in this project appears to be contingent on at least two preconditions. Aside from self-view uncertainty, we found that how similar the role model is to the audience is the other factor. More specifically, we found the contrast effect we proposed depends on the specific dimensions of similarity (wealth or quality of life). Our experiments show that consumers are less likely to identify with the role model when their living condition is similar to that of the role model. For example, when both the role model and the audience are from the advanced economies (Hong Kong versus Sweden), the audience are more likely to see themselves as environmentally unfriendly but this is not the case when their living conditions are dissimilar (Hong Kong versus Bangladesh).

A portion of the above findings have been reported and disseminated to the audience in the academic community through presentation at a recognized regional conference (see Part 9). When the data analysis of the final batch of experimental studies are completed, we will write up the manuscript and submit it to the Journal of Business Research.

### 6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action *(Maximum half a page)*

The project started in January 2020, a time when Hong Kong and the globe were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the safety of the research personnel and the participants, all the studies were conducted online; in-person laboratory sessions and field study could not be arranged. Future investigations can adopt a multitude of research designs so as to enhance the methodological rigor of the research.

In this research, we mainly examined the situations where the use of role model backfire. That is, the negative impact of the positive role will be magnified when the advocated behavior is atypical than it is typical. Future studies can also explore the conditions in which the negative impact can be alleviated.

## 7. Layman's Summary

*(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)*

Role modelling is a technique commonly used in societal marketing campaign to influence the public on picking up new habits or abandoning bad ones. Public service announcements often feature positive role models engaging in pro-environmental behaviors. Would audience follow suit? This is the question we attempt to address with this. We propose that this technique may not always be effective in motivating changes in consumer behaviors. Drawing on the social comparison theory and the self-perception theory, we examine the situations where the use of positive role model may backfire.

Our findings show that when consumers feel uncertain about whether they are environmentally friendly or not, seeing a highly environmentally friendly person (i.e., a positive role model) would lead them to perceive themselves as *not* environmentally friendly (i.e., "I'm not the kind of person who is conscious about environmental protection). As a result, they become less inclined to engage in any pro-environmental behaviors. Our findings also show that this effect is more likely to occur when the role model is similar to the audience, for example, the standard of living is similar.

**Part C: Research Output****8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
			✓	CHU Maggie Ying-ying*, WAN Chun-ying	On encouraging green living – When does a positive role model backfire / Journal of Business Research	No	Yes [Attachment]	Yes	Yes

**9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered**

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Nov/2020/Seoul (online)	On Encouraging Green Living – When does a Positive Role Model Backfire?	2020 Global Marketing Conference at Seoul	Yes	No	Yes	Nov/2020/Seoul (online)

**10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning**

*(Please elaborate)*

NA

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**11. Student(s) Trained**

*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
NA			

**12. Other Impact**

*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

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**13. Statistics on Research Outputs**

No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
					Type	No.
	1*	1	NA	NA	NA	

\*Manuscript in preparation for the submission to Journal of Business Research

**14. Public Access Of Completion Report**

*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

<b>Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
NA	