



Promoting Pi Day: Consumer Response to Special Day-Themed Sales Promotions

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Many firms now link discounts to “special days”—novel holidays/events not historically associated with promotions (e.g., Pi Day). Using a field study and laboratory studies, we explore consumers’ responses to special day-themed sales promotions. Specifically, we demonstrate that consumers respond more favorably to a discount celebrating a special day compared to the same discount with no link to the special day. Further, we show that consumers’ increased intentions to use special day-themed discounts are driven by their perceptions of the marketer’s creativity (both the originality and appropriateness dimensions) through a marketplace metacognition process. Thus, when a given special day-themed discount becomes commonplace in the marketplace (i.e., originality is low) or when there is low fit between the firm and special day (i.e., appropriateness is low), special day-themed promotions are no more effective than more traditional types of one-day sales. Finally, we develop a typology of special day-themed sales promotions and offer avenues for future research on how consumers respond to such promotional efforts.

Keywords Promotions; Discounts; Creativity; Holidays; Marketplace metacognition

Introduction

Consumers associate discounts with traditional holidays and sales events, including Thanksgiving/Black Friday, “Back to School,” and so on (Jespersen, 2017; Williams, 2015). Given that firms often benefit from promotions (e.g., increased sales, new customers, and more brand loyalty; Ailawadi & Gupta, 2014; Gedenk, Neslin, & Ailawadi, 2006), it is unsurprising that promotional calendars are expanding. Many firms now link discounts to non-traditional holidays and events like Pi Day or company-specific holidays (e.g., a founder’s birthday), which we refer to as “special days.”

In this research, we explore consumers’ reactions to special day-themed sales promotions, which we define as discounts linked to holidays/events not traditionally associated with sales and marketing. We demonstrate that consumers respond more favorably to a special day-themed discount compared to the same discount with no explicit link to the special day. Further, we show that consumers’ increased intentions to use special day-themed discounts are driven by their perceptions of the marketer’s creativity (both the originality and appropriateness dimensions) in linking the discount to the special day.

Creativity, Sales Promotions, and Special Days

Perceptions of creativity arise when consumers view something as both original/divergent and relevant/appropriate (Burroughs, Moreau, & Mick, 2008; Mehta & Zhu, 2016; Moreau & Dahl, 2005; Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz, & Darley,

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2007). Consumers likely perceive special day-themed sales promotions as original because they are linked to a temporal event not traditionally associated with sales/marketing (see pilot study results in Table 1 for supporting evidence; details in Appendix A). Interestingly, some holidays that consumers today consider traditional were initially special days not linked to commercial activity (e.g., Mother's Day was founded by a woman to honor her own late mother in 1905, but quickly became commercialized; Handwerk, 2014). In contrast, we focus on special days not yet widely associated

Table 1

MTurk Pilot Study (n = 150, 48.00% female; $M_{age} = 35.61$): *Consumer Perceptions of Frequency and Creativity of Traditional versus Special Day-Themed Promotions*

How many companies do you see using each of the following holidays for promotions? (1 = I see no companies using this holiday for promotions, 7 = I see many companies using this holiday for promotions)	M	SE
Traditional holidays/events		
Labor Day	5.49	.13
Memorial Day	5.65	.12
Fourth of July	5.59	.13
Black Friday	6.13	.13
Christmas	6.48	.09
Start of Summer	4.49	.15
Special days		
Pi Day	2.72	.15
Star Wars Day	3.09	.15
National Go Barefoot Day	1.77	.13
National Dog Day	2.19	.14
National Food Day	2.10	.13
A company-specific holiday	3.19	.16
<hr/>		
How creative would it be for a company to use each of the following holidays for a promotion? (1 = Not creative at all to use this holiday, 7 = Very creative to use this holiday)	M	SE
Traditional holidays/events		
Labor Day	3.07	.16
Memorial Day	2.91	.15
Fourth of July	3.15	.17
Black Friday	2.96	.17
Christmas	3.13	.18
Start of Summer	3.65	.17
Special days		
Pi Day	4.89	.15
Star Wars Day	4.83	.15
National Go Barefoot Day	4.83	.16
National Dog Day	4.89	.15
National Food Day	4.56	.15
A company-specific holiday	5.07	.14

with the marketplace, some of which may even have been created by marketers.

Based on past research showing that distinctive or unexpected sales promotions are most likely to lead consumers to draw inferences about the brand (Raghubir & Corfman, 1999), we propose that special day-themed promotions lead consumers to activate their persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and think about why the marketer is offering the promotion. While the activation of persuasion knowledge often leads to negative reactions toward a firm as consumers try to cope with influence attempts from marketing agents (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008; Eisend & Tarrahi, forthcoming; Kirmani & Campbell, 2004), we propose that, in the case of special day-themed promotions, consumers' marketplace metacognitions (i.e., their thoughts about the actions of the marketer, a type of persuasion knowledge; Wright, 2002) instead lead them to recognize and appreciate the marketer's creativity in offering this type of promotion. These positive marketplace metacognitions about why the marketer is offering a special day-themed promotion (i.e., to celebrate the holiday) lead the consumer to reward this creativity with increased purchase intentions. We next elaborate on the reasoning behind this prediction.

Sales promotions have historically been characterized as influencing consumers through three routes: economic, informational, and affective (Raghubir, Inman, & Grande, 2004). We propose that special day-themed sales promotions create unique and unexplored informational and affective effects. While consumers sometimes make negative inferences about brands' value based on their use of promotions (Deval, Mantel, Kardes, & Posavac, 2013; Raghubir & Corfman, 1999; Raghubir et al., 2004), we propose that special day-themed promotions do not send negative signals about quality and value because consumers perceive their timing to be about the marketer choosing to "celebrate" the special day and not the need to unload unwanted product. Special day-themed promotions instead communicate information that the brand has put creative effort into providing an opportunity to celebrate the special day in a unique way, which also creates an affective benefit similar to the enjoyment consumers derive from promotional games (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000).

Given that consumers reward marketers for putting effort into promotional activities (Morales, 2005), we suggest that when consumers recognize a marketer's creativity in linking a discount to a special day, their purchase likelihood increases because they

appreciate this effort. We therefore predict that consumers reward marketers' creative effort in linking discounts to special days and providing a way to celebrate these holidays and that this positive effect on purchase intentions operates simultaneously through consumer perceptions of both originality and appropriateness (i.e., the two parallel underlying dimensions of creativity). For consumers to perceive a special day-themed promotion as truly creative, they must perceive it to be both relatively distinctive in the marketplace (because otherwise consumers will not attribute the promotion to unique creative effort on the part of the marketer) and a good fit with the special day (or it will not be perceived as an appropriate way to celebrate the holiday).

Thus, our theory suggests two boundary conditions for the effectiveness of special day-themed promotions on purchase intentions: disruption of either of the two parallel drivers of creativity. First, widespread use of a given special day for promotions across firms should attenuate the positive effect of one firm's special day-themed promotion because consumers no longer perceive it as a truly original creative effort. Second, a poor fit between the firm and special day should also attenuate the effectiveness of a special day-themed promotion because it no longer provides an appropriate celebration of the special day.

Across three studies conducted in the field (study 1) and the laboratory, we establish that consumers respond more favorably to special day-themed discounts compared to discounts of the same size without a link to the special day due to perceptions that special day-themed discounts are more creative. We further show that when a special day-themed discount becomes commonplace in the marketplace (i.e., originality is low; study 2) or when there is low fit between the firm and special day (i.e., appropriateness is low; study 3), special day-themed promotions are no more effective than more traditional one-day sales. Finally, we construct a typology of special days (Table 4) and highlight future research questions about special day-themed promotions.

Study 1

Study 1 is a field study using real customer behavior. We partnered with a firm to send a promotional email to its customers and manipulated whether the discount was linked to a company-specific special day.

Method

All 239 customers on a small firm's email list received an email offering a one-day 25% discount on dog gear (collars, harnesses, etc.). Customers randomly received one of two versions of the email (discount type: special day-themed vs. control). The special day-themed discount was in celebration of the anniversary of the day the company's founder rescued its canine mascot, Cooper. The subject line read "Save 25% Today As We Celebrate the Anniversary of Cooper's Rescue," and the email text included ". . .today, September 12th, is special because it's the 4th anniversary of the day we rescued our dog, Cooper. In honor of him and rescue dogs everywhere, we are offering you a great 25% discount on select DOG GEAR!" Customers in the control condition saw the same 25% discount and mention of celebrating dogs, but not the specific anniversary (see Appendix B for all studies' full stimuli). We analyze unique clicks on a "shop now" link in the email.

Results and Discussion

A chi-square test revealed that customers who received the special day-themed discount were significantly more likely to click the link (23 times, 19.3%) compared to those who received the control discount (12 times, 10.0%; $\chi^2 = 4.16, p = .041$). The company owner also informed us that the special day-themed discount click-through rate was above the average for previous, more traditional promotional emails (~10%). The owner also confirmed that although previous email campaigns were not a major source of sales, the special day-themed discount yielded \$95.59 in sales, compared to \$0 from the control discount. While potential limitations arise from the field setting and use of a compelling personal story in the special day condition, the findings suggest that linking a discount to a company-generated special day can positively impact real customer behavior.

Study 2

In study 2, we test the effectiveness of special day-themed promotions in a controlled setting using a different special day and provide evidence for our proposed process using both moderation and mediation, focusing on originality while holding appropriateness (i.e., fit) constant. To do so, we manipulate distinctiveness of the promotion in the marketplace and measure perceptions of originality.

If many companies in the same product category offer the same special day-themed promotion, consumers should be less likely to attribute any one company's promotion to creative effort and hence less likely to reward the company with a purchase due to a lack of perceived originality.

Method

Throughout the two weeks leading up to National Picnic Day (April 23rd), 281 undergraduates from two American universities (55.87% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.66$) participated in this study, which used a 2(Discount type: special day-themed vs. control) \times 2(Promotion distinctiveness: low vs. high) between-subjects design. Participants first read a news article titled "Springtime Sales Roundup" about sales being offered by picnic-related retailers. In the low promotion distinctiveness condition, participants read that most picnic-related retailers were offering the same type of promotion this month (either a National Picnic Day Sale or Annual One-Day Sale). In the high distinctiveness condition, participants instead read that although many picnic-related retailers were offering sales this month, only one was offering a National Picnic Day Sale [Annual One-Day Sale]. See Appendix C for a successful manipulation check of promotion distinctiveness.

Participants next saw an email from a fictitious picnic-related retailer (whose name was hidden ostensibly for market research purposes) offering a 30% discount valid "one-day only" described as either a "National Picnic Day Sale" or an "Annual One-Day Sale." They then reported purchase intentions, rated the marketer on the originality dimension of creativity (measures adapted from Moreau & Dahl, 2005), and reported how much they believed the company was offering the promotion in order to unload inventory (measures adapted from Lichtenstein, Burton, & O'Hara, 1989). See Table 2 for all measures. All laboratory studies concluded with other non-focal measures, including demographics.

Results and Discussion

A 2(Discount type) \times 2(Promotion distinctiveness) ANOVA on purchase intentions revealed no main effect of discount type ($F(1, 277) = .85, p = .36$) and a significant main effect of promotion distinctiveness ($M_{\text{low}} = 3.00, SE = .14$ vs. $M_{\text{high}} = 3.41, SE = .13; F(1, 277) = 4.65, p = .032, \eta_p^2 = .02$). As predicted, a significant interaction also emerged ($F(1, 277) = 9.45, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .03$). When the promotion was distinctive, purchase

intentions were higher for the special day discount ($M = 3.79, SE = .19$) compared to control discount ($M = 3.03, SE = .19; F(1, 277) = 8.07, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .03$). When the promotion was not distinctive, there was no effect of discount type ($M_{\text{special-day}} = 2.79, SE = .19$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 3.20, SE = .19; F(1, 277) = 2.29, p = .13$). Further, purchase intentions were actually lower for the non-distinctive special day discount versus the distinctive special day discount ($F(1, 277) = 13.73, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$), suggesting that participants penalized a firm for copying other firms' special day promotions. Purchase intentions did not significantly differ between the distinctive and non-distinctive control discounts ($F(1, 277) = .42, p = .52$).

We then conducted moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 7; Hayes, 2017) with discount type as the IV, perceived originality as the mediator, promotion distinctiveness as the moderator between the IV and mediator, and purchase intentions as the DV. As predicted, perceived originality ($b = .21, SE = .07, 95\% \text{ CI } [.087, .363]$) mediated increased purchase intentions for the special day (vs. control) promotion when distinctiveness was high ($b = .21, SE = .07, 95\% \text{ CI } [.087, .363]$), but not when distinctiveness was low ($b = .09, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.023, .214]$).

Finally, in line with our theorizing that special day-themed promotions do not send negative signals about quality/value, a 2(Discount type) \times 2(Promotion distinctiveness) ANOVA on beliefs that the company was using the promotion to unload unwanted product only revealed a main effect of discount type ($F(1, 277) = 14.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$). Participants believed this significantly less for the special day ($M = 4.33, SE = .11$) versus control discount ($M = 4.91, SE = .11$). No main effect of promotion distinctiveness ($F(1, 277) = .030, p = .58$) or interaction emerged ($F(1, 277) = .41, p = .52$), and these beliefs did not mediate in either promotion distinctiveness condition.

Study 2 provides evidence via moderation that consumers respond favorably to special day-themed promotions because they reward marketers' creativity in linking discounts to special days. When many companies in the same product category offer the same special day-themed promotion, consumers no longer respond as favorably to a single company's promotion because it becomes less attributable to the focal company's creative effort and is likely seen as a copy-cat promotion. Study 2 specifically demonstrates that the originality dimension of creativity drives the positive effect of special day-themed promotions on purchase intentions when fit between the

Table 2
ANOVA Results for Study 2

	Means				ANOVA results		
	High promotion distinctiveness		Low promotion distinctiveness		Main effect of discount type	Main effect of promotion distinctiveness	
	Special day-themed discount	Control discount	Special day-themed discount	Control discount		Interaction	
<i>Purchase intentions</i> "How interested would you be in purchasing any product using this promotion" (1 = Not interested at all, 7 = Extremely interested) and "How likely are you to take advantage of this sale to buy something from the company" (1 = Not at all likely, 7 = Extremely likely; $r = .85$).	3.79	3.03	2.79	3.20	$F(1, 277) = .85$ $p = .36$	$F(1, 277) = 4.65$ $p = .032$	$F(1, 277) = 9.45$ $p = .002$
<i>Perceived originality</i> "How original [novel] [innovative] do you believe it is for this company to offer the promotion" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very; $\alpha = .92$)	3.83	2.97	2.95	2.57	$F(1, 277) = 13.43$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 277) = 14.07$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 277) = 2.04$ $p = .16$
<i>Belief that company is using promotion to push inventory</i> "I think that the company is offering this sale. . .in order to sell out current inventory to make room for new products," ". . .because some of their inventory has been there too long," ". . .because they have undesirable items in their inventory that they need to sell quickly" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; $\alpha = .90$)	4.32	5.00	4.33	4.82	$F(1, 277) = 14.41$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 277) = .30$ $p = .58$	$F(1, 277) = .41$ $p = .52$

firm's offerings and special day is high. In study 3, we manipulate the appropriateness dimension of creativity (operationalized as degree of fit between the firm's offerings and the special day).

Study 3

In study 3, we provide additional evidence for the effectiveness of special day-themed promotions and demonstrate the role of appropriateness (i.e., the second dimension of creativity) by manipulating fit

between the special day (National Food Day) and the type of company offering the promotion (online grocer vs. clothing company). We also assess both the originality and appropriateness dimensions of creativity, testing them as parallel mediators, while ruling out alternative mediating mechanisms.

Method

On National Food Day (October 24th), 400 participants (56.50% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.16$) participated

in this MTurk study, which used a 2(Discount type: special day-themed vs. control) \times 2(Company type: groceries vs. clothing) between-subjects design. All participants browsed the ostensible website for either online grocery or clothing retailer. Specifically, they browsed three separate pages of food [clothing]. A pretest showed no baseline differences in evaluations of the two retailers (see Appendix D for details). After browsing the first page, participants saw an email from the retailer with a 30% discount valid for “today only” as part of a “National Food Day Sale” or “Annual One-Day Sale.”

After viewing the first page of products and the email, participants indicated how interested they would be in purchasing a food [clothing] item “using this promotion” (1 = not interested at all, 7 = extremely interested). They then browsed the second and third page of products and answered the same question after each page. These three items were averaged into a purchase intentions composite ($\alpha = .78$). See Appendix D for alternative analysis approaches for these purchase intention measures.

Participants then rated perceptions of the marketer on the two dimensions of creativity, originality, and fit (i.e., appropriateness). We also measured other potential informational, affective, and economic routes to persuasion (Raghubir et al., 2004) as alternative processes. See Table 3 for all measures. Finally, participants completed an instructional manipulation check (IMC) and a company type manipulation check.

Results and Discussion

Data from 32 participants were removed for data quality purposes as indicated by their failure of a word problem IMC (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020; Dennis, Goodson, & Pearson, 2020). Data from six additional participants were removed for incorrectly recalling the type of company. Results substantively replicate when all participants are included (see Appendix D).

A 2(Discount type) \times 2(Company type) ANOVA on purchase intentions revealed no main effect of discount type ($F(1, 358) = 1.32, p = .25$) and a significant main effect of company type ($M_{\text{grocer}} = 4.66, SE = .12$ vs. $M_{\text{clothing}} = 4.22, SE = .11; F(1, 358) = 7.52, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .02$). As expected, a significant interaction also emerged ($F(1, 358) = 4.18, p = .042, \eta_p^2 = .01$). In the grocer condition (high fit), participants who saw the special day discount reported significantly greater purchase intentions

($M = 4.92, SE = .16$) versus those who saw the control discount ($M = 4.40, SE = .17; F(1, 358) = 4.99, p = .026, \eta_p^2 = .01$). In the clothing company condition (low fit), no effect of discount type emerged ($M_{\text{special-day}} = 4.14, SE = .16$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 4.29, SE = .16; F(1, 358) = .41, p = .52$).

We then conducted moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 7; Hayes, 2017) with discount type as the IV, perceived originality and fit as parallel mediators, company type as the moderator between the IV and each mediator, and purchase intentions as the DV. For the grocer, the special day-themed (vs. control) discount had positive indirect effects on purchase intentions through both perceptions of originality ($b = .13, SE = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.035, .231]$) and appropriateness ($b = .06, SE = .03, 95\% \text{ CI } [.008, .121]$). For the clothing company, while the special day-themed (vs. control) discount still had a positive indirect effect on purchase intentions through perceptions of originality ($b = .20, SE = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.105, .310]$), it had a significantly *negative* indirect effect on purchase intentions through perceptions of appropriateness ($b = -.24, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.356, -.134]$). These two opposite indirect effects offset each other to produce the null total effect of discount type on purchase intentions in the clothing company condition.

Thus, when consumers perceive high fit between a firm and a special day-themed promotion, both dimensions of creativity drive increased intentions to use the promotion. However, when consumers perceive low fit, even though special day-themed promotions still have a positive indirect effect on purchase intentions through perceptions of originality, the special day-themed discounts have a negative indirect effect on purchase intentions through perceptions of inappropriateness, and this ultimately hurts purchase intentions enough to cancel out any positive effect of originality.

In order to explore alternative processes that could underlie the effect of special day-themed sales promotions on purchase intentions, we analyzed responses to several other measures inspired by Raghubir et al.’s (2004) framework. It is possible that consumers who receive special day-themed discounts may feel they are unique or in an exclusive subset of consumers receiving the promotion (Barone & Roy, 2010a, 2010b), an alternative affective route to such promotions’ effectiveness. A 2(Discount type) \times 2(Company type) ANOVA on consumer feelings of exclusivity revealed that participants who saw the special day-themed discount felt marginally more exclusive ($M = 3.43, SE = .13; F(1, 358) = 2.96, p = .09$,

Table 3
ANOVA Results for Study 3

	Means				ANOVA results		
	Grocer		Clothing company		Main effect of discount type	Main effect of company type	Interaction
	Special day-themed discount	Control discount	Special day-themed discount	Control discount			
<i>Purchase intentions</i> (measure described in main text)	4.92	4.40	4.14	4.29	$F(1, 358) = 1.32$ $p = .25$	$F(1, 358) = 7.52$ $p = .006$	$F(1, 358) = 4.18$ $p = .042$
<i>Perceived originality</i> "How original do you believe it is for this company to offer the promotion?" (1 = Not at all original, 7 = Very original)	3.92	3.19	3.80	2.65	$F(1, 358) = 25.58$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 358) = 3.29$ $p = .07$	$F(1, 358) = 1.24$ $p = .27$
<i>Perceived fit</i> "To what extent do you believe the promotion was appropriate for the company to offer?" (1 = Not at all appropriate, 7 = Very appropriate) and "To what extent do you believe the promotion fits well with the type of company?" (1 = Does not fit at all, 7 = Fits very well; $r = .78$)	5.68	5.27	4.07	5.64	$F(1, 358) = 16.13$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 358) = 18.20$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 358) = 46.25$ $p < .001$
<i>Alternative creativity measure^a</i> "The advertiser is creative" and "The advertiser is clever" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely; $r = .91$)	3.92	3.37	3.60	3.31	$F(1, 358) = 5.44$ $p = .020$	$F(1, 358) = 1.13$ $p = .29$	$F(1, 358) = .50$ $p = .48$
<i>Consumer feelings of exclusivity</i> "After receiving the ad, to what extent do you feel:" (1 = Not at all unique, 7 = Very unique) and (1 = Not at all exclusive, 7 = Very exclusive; $r = .84$)	3.64	3.22	3.28	2.95	$F(1, 358) = 2.96$ $p = .09$	$F(1, 358) = 4.24$ $p = .040$	$F(1, 358) = .06$ $p = .80$
<i>Liking for the company</i> "To what extent do you like this company?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so)	5.05	4.43	4.76	4.60	$F(1, 358) = .20$ $p = .58$	$F(1, 358) = 7.34$ $p = .007$	$F(1, 358) = 2.54$ $p = .11$
<i>Perceived company quality</i> "After receiving the ad, do you believe that the company (i.e., its products, operations, etc.) is: (1 = Very bad, 7 = Very good)"	5.14	4.66	4.98	4.71	$F(1, 358) = .19$ $p = .66$	$F(1, 358) = 8.64$ $p = .004$	$F(1, 358) = .72$ $p = .40$

Table 3
Continued

	Means				ANOVA results		
	Grocer		Clothing company		Main effect of discount type	Main effect of company type	Interaction
	Special day-themed discount	Control discount	Special day-themed discount	Control discount			
<i>Perceived time length of promotion</i> "How would you describe the length of time for which the company's promotion is valid?" (1 = Very short, 7 = Very long)	2.40	2.64	2.05	2.03	$F(1, 358) = 8.48$ $p = .004$	$F(1, 358) = .42$ $p = .52$	$F(1, 358) = .57$ $p = .45$
<i>Belief that the promotion gives a reason to purchase from the company</i> "After receiving the ad, to what extent do you believe the promotion gives you a reason to purchase products from the company?" (1 = Doesn't provide a reason at all, 7 = Provides a very strong reason)	5.29	4.64	5.06	4.74	$F(1, 358) = .13$ $p = .72$	$F(1, 358) = 8.37$ $p = .004$	$F(1, 358) = .99$ $p = .32$
<i>Perceived frequency with which company offers discounts</i> "How common do you believe it is for this company to offer promotions?" (1 = Very uncommon, 7 = Very common)	4.23	4.94	4.12	5.34	$F(1, 358) = .72$ $p = .40$	$F(1, 358) = 33.14$ $p < .001$	$F(1, 358) = 2.32$ $p = .13$

^aThis alternative measure assesses a layperson's understanding of "creativity," which focuses on cleverness and imagination. For example, Merriam-Webster defines creativity as "having the skill and imagination to create new things" and lists "clever" as a synonym (Merriam-Webster).

$\eta_p^2 = .01$) than those who saw the control discount ($M = 3.12$, $SE = .13$). A significant main effect of company type ($F(1, 358) = 4.24$, $p = .040$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$) indicated that those who viewed the grocer ($M = 3.46$, $SE = .13$) felt more exclusive than those who viewed a clothing company ($M = 3.09$, $SE = .13$). No interaction ($F(1, 358) = .06$, $p = .80$) emerged. These results suggest that feelings of exclusivity may also drive the effects of special day-themed promotions on increased purchase intentions, but, when entered as a parallel mediator alongside perceived originality and fit in a moderated mediation model, feelings of exclusivity did not significantly mediate the relationship between

discount and purchase intentions for either company type (grocer: $b = .02$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-.009, .068]$; clothing: $b = .02$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-.012, .056]$).

There are also other potential economic and informational routes, including inferences and judgments about the company and its promotions, through which a special day-themed sales promotion may be effective, including greater liking for the brand (Naylor, Raghunathan, & Ramanathan, 2006) and perceptions of brand quality. However, a 2(Discount type) \times 2(Company type) ANOVA on liking for the company produced only a significant main effect of company type ($F(1, 358) = 7.34$,

Table 4
Typology of Special Days, Illustrative Future Research Questions, and Managerial Implications

Special day type	Examples	Likely consumer response	Illustrative future research questions related to originality	Illustrative future research questions related to appropriateness
National/international special days external to the firm	<p>Grassroots/unofficial holiday not linked to any organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pi Day (3/14) • Star Wars Day (5/4) • National Picnic Day (4/23; study 2) <p>Official holiday linked to a non-profit or national organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Food Day(10/24; study 3) 	<p>Positive consumer response most likely for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special days with easy to understand/intuitive names or purposes • Consumers familiar with the holiday when name or purpose is less clear (e.g., Pi Day) • Relevant industry/product applications (e.g., a pizza restaurant's Pi Day discount) • Holidays not already in widespread use in marketing promotions. For example, Pi Day and Star Wars Day have been popularized through social media (CNN, 2018). Although our pilot study suggests wear-out has not yet occurred for these two special days, discounts linked to them may become less effective if perceived originality decreases, as suggested by our distinctiveness manipulation in study 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can special day-themed discounts backfire (i.e., lead to negative consumer reactions) when consumers do not understand the originality in linking the special day and date (e.g., not knowing why Pi Day is March 14th)? • Can a firm proactively educate its consumers about lesser-used special days before offering a promotion on the actual date to increase their effectiveness? • Many "national days" were founded by an organization that may own the copyright, requiring a firm to partner with an external organization. Will consumers find using the special day for a promotion less original if the day was founded by a non-profit and is being used by a for-profit firm? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can firms with no link to the special day "create" appropriateness in other ways (e.g., offering 31.4% off any product for Pi Day)? • How does the effectiveness of appropriateness created by different associations for the discount (e.g., product category appropriateness, appropriateness of the amount of the discount) differ? Are they more effective when combined? • How important is the fit between the specific product or product category eligible for the discount versus the appropriateness of the firm overall? • When a special day overlaps with a traditional holiday, will consumers perceive a discount focused on the special day instead of the traditional holiday as less appropriate (e.g., a restaurant offering a discount on salad items on July 4th, American Independence Day, for "National Caesar Salad Day")?
Holiday founded and "celebrated" by a for-profit firm	<p>National Swimsuit Day (created by Lands' End in 2017; occurs the Tuesday before Memorial Day Weekend)</p>	<p>Consumer response likely depends on whether they interpret the holiday as "marketer-created," activating persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and marketplace metacognitions (Wright, 2002) that result in negative judgments of the promotion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will consumers embrace firm-founded national days as original or simply as profit-generating attempts? • What new persuasion knowledge might consumers generate about special days and the originality behind them as a result of knowing a special day is firm-founded? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does indicating the source of the special day as the firm itself increase appropriateness? • Even if fit with the product category is relatively low, can a firm make a novel special day-themed discount seem appropriate if they created the holiday?

Table 4
Continued

Special day type	Examples	Likely consumer response	Illustrative future research questions related to originality	Illustrative future research questions related to appropriateness
Company-specific holiday based on company-related event	Anniversary of company's founding, birthday of founder, other day of significance for the firm (study 1)	<p>Response likely to be positive, however:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company's core customers may react most positively • May not be as successful for reaching new customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the creation of company-specific special days influence broader perceptions of the company/brand, such that it seems more original? • How often can companies offer discounts around company-related special days before customers experience wear-out? • What is the relative effectiveness of company-specific special day-themed promotions for new versus repeat customers (to whom the promotion will seem less original over time)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is appropriateness easier to achieve in creating this type of special day-themed promotion for companies with a well-known founder or mascot? • Are company-specific holidays seen as more appropriate for products/product categories with stronger company associations (e.g., products with the company's logo on it or for the company's prototypical offering)?
Holiday based on specific customer and company interaction	Anniversary of customer's first purchase with the company (Appendix E study); anniversary of when customer first "liked" the firm on social media	<p>Response likely to be positive, however:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only able to offer to customers who have built a history with the company • Less positive response possible for customers with data privacy concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do perceptions of originality fade more quickly for these customer-oriented special day-themed discounts than other types of special day-themed promotions? • How can a firm effectively create new special days of this type that are perceived to be original? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does consumer involvement in the product category determine the appropriateness of these types of special day-themed sales promotions (i.e., would a customer who infrequently makes purchases in the category not respond as favorably)? • Do these types of promotions create greater self-brand connections when appropriateness is high?
Holiday based on consumer characteristic unrelated to the company	Customer's birthday; customer's wedding anniversary	<p>Response likely to be positive, however:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to imitate, so limited advantage • Less positive response possible for customers with data privacy concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this the type of special day most likely to lose its perceived originality because it is very easy for firms to imitate and no longer particularly original given wide access to this information? • How many of these discounts from a single firm before they become ineffective due to lower perceived originality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does fit between the product/industry matter or is appropriateness determined differently for this type of special day? • Are these promotions more effective if the discount is general or tied to a specific, relevant product (e.g., birthday bouquet) to fit the occasion?

$p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), such that participants liked the grocer ($M = 4.91$, $SE = .10$) more than the clothing company ($M = 4.51$, $SE = .10$). No significant main effect of discount ($F(1, 358) = .20$, $p = .58$) or interaction ($F(1, 358) = 2.54$, $p = .11$) emerged. Therefore, special day-themed sales promotions do not seem to increase purchase intentions simply by increasing liking for the company. Further, a $2(\text{Discount type}) \times 2(\text{Company type})$ ANOVA on perceived quality revealed similar results. Only a significant main effect of company type emerged ($F(1, 358) = 8.64$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), such that the grocer ($M = 5.06$, $SE = .09$) was perceived as higher quality than the clothing company ($M = 4.69$, $SE = .09$), perhaps due to the particular high-end products shown for the grocer (e.g., cashews, quinoa). No significant main effect of discount type ($F(1, 358) = .19$, $p = .66$) or interaction ($F(1, 358) = .72$, $p = .40$) emerged. Therefore, special day-themed promotions do not seem to increase purchase intentions by increasing perceptions of the company's quality. We also rule out several other alternative processes in Appendix D (results summarized in Table 3): Consumers do not appear to believe special day-themed promotions (vs. more traditional one-day sales) are more scarce in terms of time availability or offer more of a reason to buy. The use of special day-themed promotions also does not appear to signal to consumers that the firm offers promotions less frequently overall.

General Discussion

The results of a field study and laboratory studies demonstrate that special day-themed sales promotions increase click-through rates and purchase intentions compared to more traditional one-day sales. We provide evidence that these benefits of special day-themed promotions are driven by consumers' perceptions of the marketer's creativity, in terms of both originality and appropriateness, in linking the discount to the special day. This effect generalizes to two different types of special days: company-specific special days and national special days. An additional study in Appendix E generalizes the findings to a third type, a special day created by a company–customer interaction (i.e., anniversary of customer's first purchase). There is virtually no end to the special day-themed discounts that marketers can concoct (see Appendix F for marketplace examples).

Our research extends the literature on sales promotions (Ailawadi & Gupta, 2014; Chandon et al.,

2000; Raghurir & Corfman, 1999) by documenting a novel type of promotion (i.e., discounts linked to special days). We further show that special day-themed discounts increase purchase intentions by signaling the marketer's creativity, contributing to the literatures on creativity in marketing and marketplace metacognition. Although work has explored the effects of perceived creativity in ad copy (unrelated to special days; Reinartz & Saffert, 2013; Smith et al., 2007), our work is the first, to our knowledge, to explore how consumers' perceptions of marketers' creativity in linking a sales promotion to a specific date can influence consumption behavior.

Additionally, in Table 4, we develop a typology of special day-themed sales promotions as guidance for marketers and offer avenues for future research related to both dimensions of creativity (i.e., originality and appropriateness). Although we demonstrated two boundary conditions for the effectiveness of special day-themed sales promotions, future research could potentially explore additional moderators and new types of special days. Future research could also explore the effectiveness of special day-themed promotions where fit between the holiday and firm offerings is more ambiguous than in our studies. Future work could also examine whether a company's reputation for repeatedly using special day-themed promotions could increase general liking for the firm (an effect we did not observe after a single special day promotion in study 3). Given the newness of this line of research, we hope the present findings and typology motivate additional work in this burgeoning area.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Appendix S1. Additional details, analyses, and studies.

Appendix S2. Methodological data appendix.