

**SIMILAR OR COMPLEMENTARY:  
BRAND PERSONALITY AND BRAND  
ALLIANCE SUCCESS**

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Yichun Sherry Cai

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## ABSTRACT

The authors investigate the impact of partner brands' salient personality on brand alliance success in a hospitality context. Hospitality brands often collaborate with brands with a complementary personality to enrich their image or brands with a similar personality to deepen their image (pilot study). But our two experiments using both real and fictitious brands indicate that a brand alliance between partners of complementary personality can dilute their salient personality attributes (Study 1) and consumers are less willing to engage in word-of-mouth behavior (Study 2). Personality similarity results in higher perceived fit and greater word-of-mouth intentions, but not necessarily more positive attitudes toward the brand alliance or each partner brand (Study 2). The authors also find that brand alliances have a more positive spillover effect on consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions toward sincere brands than exciting brands while brand alliances between exciting brands are more likely to create buzz and perceived to have the highest fit. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* branding, brand alliance, brand personality, brand attitude, spillover effect, sincere brand, exciting brand

## **Biographical Sketch**

Yichun "Sherry" Cai is a Master of Science candidate at the Nolan School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University. Her academic interests include brand management and consumer behavior. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration at Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, with a concentration in marketing and a Minor in Applied Analytics. From 2018 to 2020, she gained work experience in marketing and hospitality. Her academic and practical experience encouraged and prepared her to pursue the research-based Master's degree in Hotel Administration at Cornell.

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# 1 Introduction

Brand names are valuable assets for companies. They represent unique associations with the products and services, as well as perceptions of quality and attitudes, all of which are closely related to the sales performance (Keller, 1993; Low & Lamb, 2000). Brand associations include not only product categories and tangible product properties (e.g., Haagen-Dazs sells creamy ice cream products in elegant packaging) but also intangible attributes beyond the offerings (Batra et al., 1993; Batra & Homer, 2004). These nonfunctional attribute associations, such as brand personalities, are especially worth attention today for brands to differentiate themselves in the increasingly competitive market. Facing a great number of brands offering similar products of similar quality and pricing, it is more likely than ever that consumers will select the ones that best resonate with their own personal image or reflect the characters they value most (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014). For example, brand personality perceptions, such as sincerity and excitement, build emotional connections between brands and their customers, strengthening their relationships in the long run (Aaker, 1996).

Brand extension and brand alliance are two popular marketing strategies that utilize and expand the brand associations, with the former involving a single brand and its extended offerings while the latter involving an additional partner brand (e.g., Aaker and Keller, 1990; Park et al., 1996). While brand alliances in product brands have attracted a proportionally large interest from researchers, barely any existing literature has touched upon the effect of brand collaborations in a hospitality context (exceptions: Boone, 1997; Tasci & Guillet, 2011; Denizci-Guillet & Tasci, 2010). However, conclusions of research on consumer products do not necessarily apply to services or hospitality products given their different attributes, such as the intangible nature of services (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989). The form of hospitality brand alliances

discussed is also limited. All of the three studies mentioned above are about hotel-restaurant alliances, for instance: Boone (1997) explores the characteristics of hotel-restaurant alliances from a managerial perspective with surveys and interviews while the other two studies examine consumers' evaluations of hotel-restaurant alliances in Asia. In contrast, our research evaluates the effectiveness of brand collaborations involving one hospitality brand, one partner product brand, and a collaborative hospitality offering. Specifically, we explore how consumers react to brand alliances differently in relation to the salient personalities of the partner brands. We also examine whether these brand alliances result in different spillover effects (favorable brand attitudes and visit intention) and personality profiles for each partner brand.

Our research is the first to examine the impact of partner brand personality combinations on brand alliance success, making empirical and innovative contributions to research on both brand alliance and brand personality. Controlling for the brand alliance activities, our studies reveal the variation of consumer attitude and spillover effects when the partner brands are sincere or exciting. In addition, we enrich the evaluation approaches of perceived partner fit by adding an indirect indicator – salience of sincerity and excitement – to the overall direct fit ratings by participants, a more traditional approach taken in the extant literature (e.g., Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Geuens & Pecheux, 2006; Thompson & Strutton, 2012; Decker & Baade, 2016). Our novel indicator of fit is also validated by participants' self-reported ratings of perceived brand fit. Furthermore, instead of evaluating the transfer of physical attributes, such as good taste of a chocolate product, we contribute to the scarce literature that focuses on the transfer of abstract associations, i.e., the perceived salience of brand personalities, which should play a more critical role for intangible service offerings. In fact, this emphasis on the potential favorable transfer of abstract associations is behind many real-life brand alliance projects in practice.

We also make contribution by using multiple methods. In addition to a study of a factorial design that compares the post-exposure ratings across multiple combinations, we also do a longitudinal study with a mixed design that incorporates the pre- and post-exposure attitude and personality perceptions as a within-subjects factor to increase power.

Empirical findings from our studies provide brand managers with practical guidance and inspiration for partner selection strategies. Our studies measure multiple brand alliance outcomes of interest: attitude toward the brand alliance and each brand, willingness to spread the word, salience of personality perceptions, and intention to book the hotel. The results reveal that brands of different personalities are more advantageous in some outcomes than the others. For example, while exciting partners can together create a buzz, they do not necessarily gain more positive brand attitudes from the brand alliance. It is thus important for managers to consider their prioritized marketing goals when selecting brand alliance partners.

In this paper, we first summarize the previous literature on brand alliance and brand personality. We then introduce two studies that test our theoretical predictions. We conclude with a general discussion of implications and suggestions for future studies.

## **2 Background Literature**

### **2.1 Brand Personality**

The important role of brand personality in marketing strategies has attracted attention in academia for decades (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2004; Smit, Bronner, & Tolboom, 2006; Sung & Kim, 2010). Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Inspired by the big five personality traits for humans and her factor analyses, she proposes a framework of five major brand personality dimensions: sincerity (e.g. down-to-earth and wholesome), excitement (e.g. daring and up-to-date), competence (e.g. reliable and successful), sophistication (upper class and charming), and ruggedness (e.g. outdoorsy and tough). This framework has facilitated many subsequent discussions on the causes and impacts of different brand personalities (e.g. Kim, 2000; Aaker 2004; Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016). For instance, Kim (2000) finds a positive correlation between brand attitudes and competence ratings in the apparel market context, and recognizes similarities in many brand attributes among the apparel brands that have similar personality ratings.

Among the five dimensions, sincerity and excitement capture the most variance in brand personality ratings and are the focus of a majority of relevant research (Aaker, 1997). Prior work has explored how consumers treat sincere and exciting brands differently in various circumstances and when one personality is more advantageous than the other (e.g., Swaminathan et al., 2008; O’Hern & Jiang, 2012). Many classic brands in the market have pursued a sincere personality, whether a small company aiming to contrast their warm image against more competitive players or a big corporation attempting a more approachable image (Aaker et al.,

2004). With the down-to-earth, honest, and wholesome personality, sincere brands have the advantage in establishing trust, positive quality perception, and strong long-term relationships (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2004). Similarly, Sung and Kim (2010) points out that sincerity ratings have more impact on brand trust than on brand affect. Exciting brands, on the other hand, can more easily differentiate themselves with their unique marketing efforts and the resulted associations (Aaker et al., 2004). Although the exciting brands have less competence in maintaining long-term relationships, excitement level positively contributes to consumers' perceived partner quality (Smit et al., 2007), generates more brand affect (Sung & Kim, 2010), and is immune to potential negative influence of transgression and sensory disconfirmation (Aaker et al, 2004; Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016). More recent work has also integrated the sincerity-excitement comparison with factors of other fields, such as psychology and art. For example, Swaminathan et al. (2008) discusses how people's different levels of avoidance and anxiety can moderate their preference of sincere vs. exciting brands. For example, exciting brands are preferred by individuals of high avoidance and high anxiety while sincere brands are preferred by those of low avoidance and high anxiety. O'Hern and Jiang (2012) finds that consumers' preference of professional creation (vs. customer creation) can be moderated by brand personalities. They prefer products designed by professionals when the brand has a sincere personality but they prefer products created by customers when the brand is exciting.

This research also has a focus on consumers' sincerity and excitement perceptions of brands. However, we make novel contributions in that, instead of looking at the impact of personalities of a single brand on its performance outcomes, we examine the interaction of two brands' personalities when they collaborate. In addition, we approach the sincerity and excitement ratings in a dynamic perspective rather than treating them as static predictor

variables, which is intuitive and meaningful because brand alliance activities we present may change consumer perceptions of the salience of each brand personality dimension such as sincere or exciting.

## **2.2 Brand Extension and Brand Alliance**

Brand extensions are an important marketing tactic to both leverage existing brand image and bring new associations to the original brand (Chun et al., 2015). Literature has mainly focused on the impact of perceived fit on favorability of the extensions; the better match between a brand and its extension, the more successful will the extension be (e.g., Aaker & Keller, 1990; Park et al., 1991). Researchers have proposed various interpretations of the fit between the parent brand and its extension. They argue that not only is the product-level similarity important but conceptual or personality consistency can also contribute positively to consumers' attitude toward the extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Park et al., 1991; Batra et al., 2010). Abstract, imagery match is especially critical when an existing brand extends to a new product category as the products or services are less related in concrete attributes (Batra et al., 2010). In this circumstance, consumers evaluate the extent to which the extension shares salient associations with the original brand. Existing literature has also discussed the potential spillover effects of brand extensions, that is, the positive or negative impact of the extensions back on the parent brands. John et al. (1998), for example, empirically demonstrates that brand extensions with low consistency can dilute the beliefs about the partner brand and its products. Chun et al. (2015), on the other hand, adds another layer that, while high-fit extensions are better for weak reputation

brands, brand extensions that are innovative yet lower in fit lead to more positive spillover effects on strong reputation brands.

Brand alliance, or co-branding, is a more complex form of brand extension. Park et al. (1996) also terms it as “composite brand extension”, defining it as the pairing of two or more brands to create a new, unique product. In line with this definition and reflecting a focus in the hospitality context, both of our studies pair one hotel brand and one partner brand from a compatible category to launch a new hospitality product or service.

Either short- or long-term, brand alliance has become an increasingly popular strategy for launching new products because of its potential benefits of both partner brands’ existing brand equity (Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Washburn et al., 2000). Brand alliance can take a variety of forms, such as joint promotions (e.g. bundled package), joint advertising (e.g. a campaign featuring products of both brands), and ingredient co-branding (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Washburn et al., 2000). In addition to the benefits of a single-brand direct extension, brand alliance can potentially transfer the positive associations and customer bases between the partners, as well as achieving synergy that goes beyond merely an addition of each brand’s own strengths (Leuthesser et al., 2003; Chang, 2009). Park et al. (1996) concludes that a co-branded product can possess an attribute profile that incorporates the more salient and better-performing attributes of the partner brands. In other words, by collaborating with a partner of different attribute salience, a header brand can enrich its extension’s associations and improve its performance perceptions, which is hard to achieve independently. Once consumers have formed attitudes toward the brand alliance, these impressions affect the subsequent attitudes toward each partner brand, with the header brand (vs. modifier brand) receiving more spillover effect from the brand alliance (Park et al., 1996). Yet these benefits are not readily achievable for all brand alliances;

in fact, about half of alliances are unsuccessful (Dyer et al., 2001). A brand alliance does not always improve its parent brands' image; it takes the risk of impairing their image as well (Geylani et al., 2005).

Fit is one of the most commonly discussed factors that determines the success of brand alliances. The concept of fit in brand alliance is similar to that in the brand extension literature yet more complicated due to the additional relationship between the two parent brands. Four types of fit in brand alliance of focus are: (1) fit between partners' product categories, (2) fit between partners' brand images, (3) fit between the new product and the brands' images, and (4) fit between the new product and each partner brand's product category (Bouten et al., 2011). While only the latter two types are relevant to brand extensions, the former two types of fit – fit of product category and brand image between the partner brands – both positively contribute to brand alliance evaluations, and either one type of fit is sufficient for positive co-brand evaluations if the core brand has a high image (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Geuens & Pecheux, 2006). Product fit does not necessarily mean the more similar are the brands' offerings the better; when two brands are identical in product attributes, the lack of belief-revision limits the association transfer (Lee & Decker, 2016). Instead, a co-brand can achieve a more comprehensive attribute profile when the two partner brands moderately differ in attribute salience, while completely different partners have trouble building adequate connections to update each other's image (Park et al., 1996; Lee & Decker, 2016).

Compared to product fit, brand fit – the abstract, imagery fit between the two partners – is sometimes more important to co-branding success, especially when familiarity with the brands is high (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Geuens & Pecheux, 2006). In the cases when the co-branding goal of a host brand is to enter a less relevant category, however, marketers should instead use a

traditional brand extension perspective and pay more attention to the brand's imagery and product fit with the new extended products (Thompson & Strutton, 2012). The more the partner brands fit with their co-brand extensions, the more associations can be transferred, and the more successful the extensions can be (Park et al., 1996; Thompson & Strutton, 2012).

Familiarity with each partner brand and favorability of each of them both contribute to the effectiveness of brand alliances as well. When consumers are more familiar with a partner brand, their associations with this brand are more salient and easier to retrieve. Therefore, a more familiar brand contributes more than an unfamiliar partner to the alliance favorability (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Conversely, because the associations of an unfamiliar brand are less salient and easier to modify, it will receive stronger spillover effects from the alliance than its more familiar partner. Familiarity also moderates the impact of brand fit; brand fit has a smaller effect if the brands are lesser known (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Favorability of each brand also forms consumers' first impressions of the co-branded product, which is the foundation for their subsequent evaluations (Yeung & Wyer, 2005). The more positive the attitudes toward each brand, the higher favorability of the alliance; the higher favorability of the alliance, the more positive the postexposure attitudes toward each individual brand, indicating a positive spillover effect. (Simonin & Ruth, 1998).

### **2.3 Brand Alliance in Practice**

Brand alliances in various forms have become a popular marketing strategy in practice, resulting in products from co-branded credit cards to co-branded computers. More recently, brand alliances have been especially trendy in the fashion industry, usually combined with a limited-edition concept. One influential example is Louis Vuitton's collaboration with Supreme

in 2017. Although the French luxury brand and the American streetwear brand differed a great deal in customer base and brand concept, such an unexpected yet innovative collaboration won both brands a positive word of mouth and attracted attention from a big number of millennial consumers (Dimitrova et al., 2018). Hospitality brands are also interested in catching up with this trend. For example, Peninsula Hotel and Tiffany & Co jointly offered a special afternoon tea set; luxury skincare brand La Prairie created a branded amenity kit for Etihad Airways; Marriott's Marriott Bonvoy loyalty program gave additional loyalty points to members who rent vehicles with Hertz.

The potential benefits of brand names and brand alliances are desirable for service brands. Because of their less tangible nature, the quality of hospitality products can hardly be evaluated prior to consumers' visit or use (Ruekert & Rao, 1994). With this issue of information asymmetry, hospitality brand names are an especially important signal and guarantee of quality, as the brand names help consumers identify the service providers, who would be punished if their offerings do not match their brand promises. When a hospitality brand has trouble signaling quality of a new service product it intends to launch, an additional well-recognized brand name, especially a more tangible product brand, is likely to have the potential to effectively depict a more concrete idea of the offering, communicate the quality, and elevate consumers' confidence and attitude to a higher level (Ruekert & Rao, 1994). Notably, brand alliances, as they build connections with other brands, can also be a self-differentiation approach. Self-differentiation has been increasingly challenging for hospitality brands nowadays. From checking-in to checking-out, for example, a hotel guest can hardly tell whether it is a Marriott or Hyatt from the tangible attributes: decorations, facilities, amenities, etc. The increasing popularity of online booking systems has even exacerbated the commoditization of hospitality offerings as they

facilitate direct comparison of pricing, locations, and facilities, downplaying the value of brand names. Establishing unique associations and salient personalities through collaborations are thus nonnegligible potential approaches for hospitality brands to improve both customer acquisition and loyalty.

While brand collaborations may benefit hospitality brands, there are also additional challenges. In contrast to consumer product goods such as potato chips, hospitality products are not designed for daily use or exposure (Danizci-Guillet & Tasci, 2010). Consumers thus experience fewer interactions with these service brands, especially those in the luxury category, which leads to relatively lower brand familiarity, narrower association dimensions, and consequently less favorable compatibility perceptions between the hospitality brands and other brands (Tasci & Denizci, 2010; Tasci & Guillet, 2010). In addition, while product brands are able to explain the cooperative benefits in a few words (e.g. Oreo cookies-and-cream ice cream from Breyers), the intangible nature of service offerings makes it difficult to imagine and evaluate service brand collaborations if descriptive information is not adequate (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989).

Similar to that of consumer products, brand personality can vary widely within the hospitality industry. Many established hotel and airline brands, such as Westin, Sheraton, American Airlines, and United Airlines, are characterized by their sincere services (Aaker et al., 2004). They depict themselves as warm and caring friends, providing the most genuine help whenever needed. Although such brands occupy the vast majority of their categories, many exciting brands have emerged in recent years, attracting many customers, especially young customers, with their unique images (e.g., W Hotel, Moxy Hotels, Virgin Atlantic Airlines). In contrast to their classic competitors, these brands feature vibrant colors, atypical logos, and

energetic services (Aaker et al., 2004). W hotels, for instance, are famous for their trendy lobbies and live music performances with DJs. It is relatively easy for product brands to adjust their personalities seasonally with different packaging or store arrangement, and consumers can easily get exposed to such messages in time. Hershey's can be very exciting on Valentine's Day and Children's Day, but can also turn genuine and warm during the holiday season to fit the family theme. Changing brand personality is much harder for service brands, however. It can be quite costly to modify the facilities or train employees to provide their services with a different vibe. If either facilities or services were adjusted but the other did not, the brands would risk confusing their customers with an inconsistent image (Ruekert & Rao, 1994). Brand alliance is certainly a potential alternative approach. As a pilot study, we researched on real-world brand alliances involving at least one hospitality brand and plotted thirty examples based on the partner brands' relative salience of sincerity and excitement perceptions (see Figure 1). We find that hospitality brands have collaborated with both brands of different personalities to enrich their image and brands of similar personalities to deepen their image. In addition, they are more crowded on the sincerity dimension, but they have partnered with both sincere and exciting brands. Interestingly, none of our examples fall into the quadrant where an exciting hospitality brand collaborates with a sincere partner brand. Figure 1 does not give a full picture of the real-world cases but provides us with a preliminary understanding of practitioners' partner selection decisions. Then the questions arise: when a hospitality brand collaborates with a partner brand of similar personalities, are brand alliances effective in reinforcing their salient personalities? When the partners differ in their respective brand personality, do brand alliances enhance or dilute their existing personality perceptions? These questions remain unanswered by existing literature and are explored in our research.

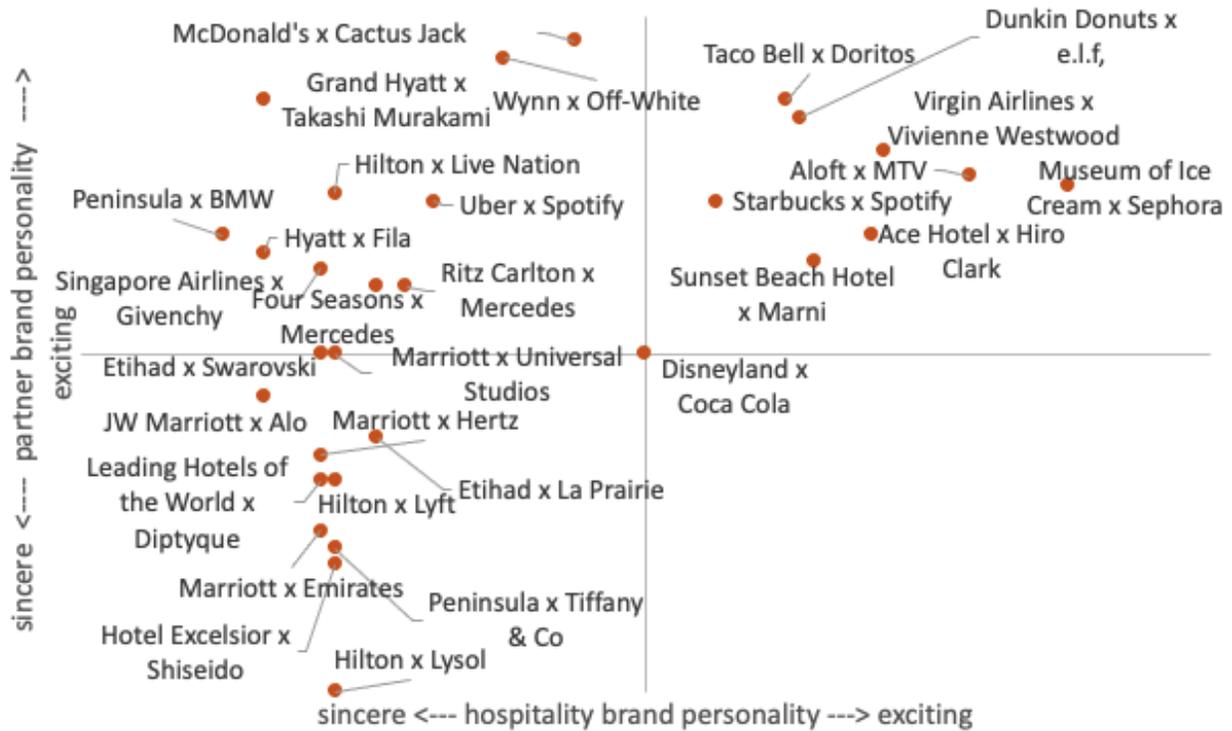


Figure 1. Hospitality alliance in practice

To study the impact of brand alliances on brand personalities and attitudes in a hospitality context, we conduct two studies. In Study 1, we explore the attitude and personality transfer when a sincere focal hotel brand collaborates with an exciting partner brand, in comparison to the identical service context in which no partner name is specified. In Study 2, we orthogonally manipulate the salient brand personality (sincere and exciting) of the focal and partner brands and create four partner personality combinations for brand alliances: sincere-sincere, sincere-exciting, exciting-sincere, and exciting-exciting. We then compare the brand alliance liking and the spillover effect on the focal and partner brands in terms of postexposure brand attitudes and personality perceptions.

## 3 Study 1

### 3.1 Conceptual Framework

Our pilot study of hospitality brand alliances in practice (Figure 1) finds that more established hospitality brands are characterized as more sincere than exciting. As a move to rejuvenate their somewhat outdated image and acquire younger customers, many of the brands collaborate with partners of an exciting personality. We thus start our research by focusing on the effectiveness of this specific partner combination, i.e., a reputable sincere hotel brand collaborating with a cross-industry exciting partner brand to provide a new set of service offerings. In particular, Study 1 examines the enhancement or dilution effects of this brand alliance on brand attitudes and brand personalities in a hospitality context. This tested scenario aligns with the definition of brand alliance, or co-branding, in previous marketing literature; it is described as the pairing of two brands that results in a joint advertisement, product, or other outputs (e.g., Ruekert & Rao, 1994; Park et al., 1997; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Washburn et al., 2000).

*Value-adding new services.* Whether a hotel offers a new service with or without a specific partner, the new offering will benefit its brand attitude and reputation as long as it adds value. Therefore, we expect the hotel to experience an improvement, slight or significant, in brand attitude directly from the activity. Furthermore, merely launching the new services may have an impact on the personality perceptions of the focal hotel brand.

*Brand attitude.* Brand attitude is defined as the degree to which a brand is favorable to consumers according to their self-report. It is closely related to brand familiarity and quality perception because the trust that familiar brands signal and high quality positively affect the

evaluation (Holden and Vanhuele, 1999; Washburn et al., 2004; Aaker and Keller, 1990). Therefore, well-known brands and high-quality brands tend to have higher brand attitude. Familiarity also leads to more salient and stable associations, therefore guaranteeing the contribution of each brand's attitude to the brand alliance (Simonin and Ruth, 1998). Then, consumers' attitude toward the brand alliance is also likely to have a spillover effect on each partner brand.

*Complementarity and similarity of brand personalities.* Literature reviewed above indicates a positive impact of brand image and attribute complementarity on the evaluation of brand alliances (Bouten et al., 2011; Park et al., 1996). Complementarity means that the two brands share a common set of attributes or have certain connections in their brand associations, but the salience of the brand associations or attributes differs between the two brands. On the other hand, image similarity, another definition of fit, also positively correlates to the brand alliance liking (e.g., Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Geuens & Pecheux, 2006). If this is the case, the very different image profiles may harm consumers' attitude and offset the positive impact of value-adding services, familiarity, and quality perceptions. To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has discussed the complementarity of brand personalities. We term two partner brands differing in salience of sincerity and excitement – each brand being higher in one dimension than its partner – as being complementary in brand personalities, otherwise as being similar in brand personalities. Our prediction of its impact is mixed: consumers may like a brand alliance by two brands low in personality complementarity because the combination is surprising, innovative, and attractive to both consumers who prefer sincere brands and those who prefer exciting brands; they may also dislike such a brand alliance because they see the two brands as too different to fit together and cannot understand why they collaborate.

To sum up, we propose two competing sets of hypotheses about brand attitude transfer:

**H<sub>1a</sub>:** Partnering with an exciting partner brand improves the attitude toward a sincere focal brand.

**H<sub>2a</sub>:** Compared to providing the service independently, partnering with an exciting brand has a more positive impact on the attitude toward a sincere focal brand.

**H<sub>1b</sub>:** Partnering with an exciting partner brand does not improve the attitude toward a sincere focal brand.

**H<sub>2b</sub>:** Compared to providing the service independently, partnering with an exciting brand does not have a more positive impact on the attitude toward a sincere focal brand.

*Personality transfer.* Brand alliance has the potential benefit of both partner brands' positive associations (Leuthesser et al., 2003). A sincere hotel brand, for example, is perceived as trust-worthy and caring while an exciting partner brand is trendy and inspiring (Aaker, 1997). A single service offering combining these associations of the two brands may thus be both trust-worthy and trendy, which may subsequently spill over on both partner brands. As a result, the sincere hotel will be perceived as sincere as before and more exciting than before. While Park et al (1996) finds that the brand alliance will incorporate the more salient and better performing product attributes and therefore the less salient or worse performing attributes do not harm the alliance, it is not necessarily true in the case of personality attributes. Instead of image enhancement, a brand alliance with two partners of different personalities may also risk image impairment (Geylani et al., 2005). It is possible that consumers view the sincere hotel as less

sincere as before while the excitement perception does not change or further decreases. Thus, we propose two sets of competing hypotheses about sincerity and excitement perceptions:

**H<sub>3a</sub>:** Partnering with an exciting brand does not dilute the sincerity perception of a sincere focal brand.

**H<sub>3b</sub>:** Partnering with an exciting brand dilutes the sincerity perception of a sincere focal brand.

**H<sub>4a</sub>:** Partnering with an exciting brand enhances the excitement perception of a sincere focal brand.

**H<sub>4b</sub>:** Partnering with an exciting brand does not affect the excitement perception of a sincere focal brand.

## **3.2 Method**

*Pretest.* The purpose of the pretest was to select a sincere lodging brand and a partner brand from a compatible industry to form a partnership in which one partner is more exciting yet less sincere than the other. Qualified brands should also be moderate to high in familiarity and reputation to avoid potential impacts of negative pre-attitudes on the evaluations. We narrowed down the selection of partner brands to the fashion and automobile industries considering their complementarity with hotel services: while fashion designers have the potential to enrich the design of facilities and amenities, automobile manufacturers are able to provide convenience to the hotel guests. We chose five hotel brands, six fashion brands, and six automobile brands as the candidates for the first pretest, all of which were from the upscale segment.

Pretest participants ( $N = 68$ ) were randomly assigned to a group of eight or nine brands. All participants were US residents recruited on Prolific, an online research participant recruitment platform, and were paid for their participation. Participants first indicated their familiarity with (on a five-point scale), attitude toward (on a seven-point scale), and their perceived quality (on a seven-point scale) of each brand. They then evaluated the salience of the brands' personality attributes – sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness – based on Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale.

As a result, Ritz Carlton was chosen as the focal hotel brand and Porsche as the automobile partner brand. The participants indicated moderate familiarity ( $M = 3.37$ ), favorability ( $M = 5.08$ ), and service quality ( $M = 5.88$ ) of Ritz Carlton. Porsche was rated to be high in familiarity ( $M = 4.40$ ), favorability ( $M = 5.67$ ), and quality ( $M = 6.23$ ). Participants perceived Porsche ( $M = 6.33$ ) as significantly more exciting than Ritz Carlton ( $M = 5.12$ ),  $t_{34.273} = -3.71$ ,  $p < .001$ . Porsche ( $M = 5.00$ ) was also directionally less sincere than Ritz Carlton ( $M = 5.12$ ),  $t_{51.617} = 0.30$ ,  $p = .76$ . Ritz Carlton and Porsche were perceived to be similar on the rest of the personality dimensions: competence ( $M = 5.64$  and  $M = 6.04$ , respectively;  $t_{45.537} = -1.30$ ,  $p = .20$ ), sophistication ( $M = 5.68$  and  $M = 6.00$ , respectively;  $t_{49.209} = -0.89$ ,  $p = .38$ ), and ruggedness ( $M = 3.04$  and  $M = 3.89$ , respectively;  $t_{50.766} = -1.629$ ,  $p = .11$ ).

*Procedure.* The main study used a mixed design (see Figure 2), incorporating the service offering scenario (brand alliance vs. independent offering with no specified partners) as a between-subjects factor and the brand attitude and personality perceptions (before vs. after the service offering activities) as a within-subjects factor. We conducted a two-stage study with a one-week interval in between. In the first stage of the study, considering the high positioning of our selected brands, Ritz Carlton and Porsche, we invited five-hundred Prolific users to the first

stage who had household incomes of at least \$50,000 / year. We also made sure that the sample was evenly distributed by gender. In addition to Ritz Carlton and Porsche, we presented another three brands of various categories (Walmart, American Express, and Mercedes Benz) to avoid hypothesis guessing. The five brands were presented in a random order, and participants were asked to share their familiarity with, attitude toward, and quality and personality perceptions of each brand. The first three variables were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale while personalities were rated on a nine-point scale to better detect the differences. From the five-hundred responses collected in the first stage, we filtered out those who were unfamiliar with Ritz Carlton and/or Porsche and invited only those who self-reported their familiarity as moderate to high (4 or higher) to the second part of the study.

Out of the 307 qualified participants from Stage 1, 230 joined our Stage 2 survey. We randomly assigned the 230 online participants to one of the two conditions: Ritz Carlton-Porsche brand alliance (“treatment group”) vs. Ritz Carlton’s independent service without any specific partners (“control group”). The questionnaire first described the corresponding marketing activity to each participant. To encourage deeper processing of the material in their mind, we presented an open-ended question for brief opinions on the brand alliance or the independent new service. Participants then indicated their attitude toward the activities on a nine-point Likert scale (1 = “dislike it very much”, 9 = “like it very much”). We then asked the treatment group to rate on brand personality and attitudes toward the two partner brands, which served as post-collaboration (post-activity) measures; the control group only rated the brand personality and attitudes toward Ritz Carlton. For exploratory purposes, we collected the treatment group’s perceived similarity and fit between the personalities of Ritz Carlton and Porsche. We also

further validated our brand contribution scale and concluded the questionnaire with several demographic questions.

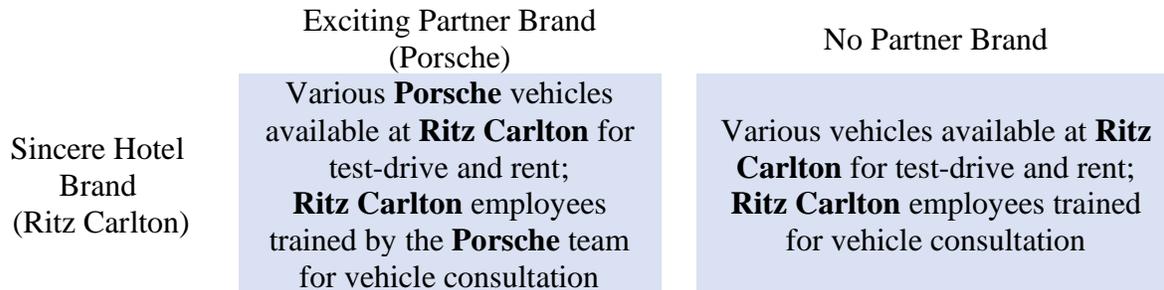


Fig. 2. Study 1: Experimental conditions

### 3.3 Results

Manipulation checks. 223 sets of answers remained valid after controlling for response quality. Before the brand alliance information, the treatment group ( $N = 112$ ) confirmed successful manipulation of brand personality difference: participants indicated Ritz Carlton ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) to be significantly more sincere than Porsche ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 2.18$ ),  $t_{111} = 3.307$ ,  $p = .001$ , while Porsche ( $M = 7.69$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) was significantly more exciting than Ritz Carlton ( $M = 6.42$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ),  $t_{111} = 8.449$ ,  $p < .001$ . The two groups did not report any difference in familiarity, quality perception, or personalities,  $p > 0.05$  for all. Despite our random assignment, however, the two groups differed significantly in their initial attitude toward Ritz Carlton. Specifically, the control group ( $M = 5.50$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) reported a higher favorability rating than the treatment group ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ),  $t_{221} = 2.137$ ,  $p = 0.034$ . To address this issue, we controlled for pre-exposure favorability of Ritz Carlton in subsequent analyses that compared personalities between the two groups. Detailed results of manipulation checks and the following analyses are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

## Study 1: Manipulation checks, ANOVAs, and mixed ANCOVAs

Means	sincere hotel brand exciting partner brand Means (N = 112)		sincere hotel brand no partner brand Means (N = 111)		collaboration group		between-groups		interaction group x time F(1, 220)
	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest	pretest brand comparison t(111)	main effect time F(1,111)	pretest group comparison t(221)	main effect group F(1, 220)	
hotel familiarity	5.30	na	5.52	na	-4.753***	na	na	na	na
partner familiarity	5.75	na	5.86	na	na	na	na	na	na
hotel favorability	5.16	5.37	5.50	5.66	-2.381***	2.991*	-2.137**	4.980**	5.596**
partner favorability	5.41	5.53	5.68	na	na	na	-1.661*	na	na
hotel quality	6.04	na	6.14	na	na	na	na	na	na
partner quality	6.02	na	6.13	na	na	na	na	na	na
hotel sincerity	5.46	5.14	5.51	6.13	3.307***	2.826*	na	na	14.258***
partner sincerity	5.01	5.07	5.18	na	na	na	na	na	na
hotel excitement	6.42	6.37	6.26	6.77	-6.167***	na	na	na	6.073**
partner excitement	7.69	7.22	7.80	na	na	13.544***	na	na	5.550**

\* p &lt; .10

\*\* p &lt; .05

\*\*\* p &lt; .01

*Brand Attitude.* We expected the brand alliance between Ritz Carlton and Porsche to have a positive spillover effect on the attitude toward Ritz Carlton if their complementarity of brand personality does not harm consumers' evaluations ( $H_{1a}$  and  $H_{2a}$ ). Otherwise, we expected the negative impact would offset the positive initial brand favorability and the liking of the collaboration offering ( $H_{1b}$  and  $H_{2b}$ ). A repeated-measures ANOVA of the treatment group found that the postexposure brand attitude toward Ritz Carlton ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) was marginally higher than the preexposure brand attitude ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ),  $F_{1, 111} = 2.991$ ,  $p = .087$ , supporting  $H_{1b}$ . A mixed ANOVA of both groups did not find a group by timepoint interaction effect on attitude toward Ritz Carlton (Figure 3),  $F_{1, 221} = 0.155$ ,  $p = .694$ . It meant that the impact of the brand alliance and that of the independent service on attitude toward Ritz Carlton were the same, supporting  $H_{2b}$ . We also explored the attitude toward the partner brand, Porsche, and found a non-significant improvement ( $M_{pre} = 5.41$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ;  $M_{post} = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ),  $F_{1,111} = 1.024$ ,  $p = .314$ .

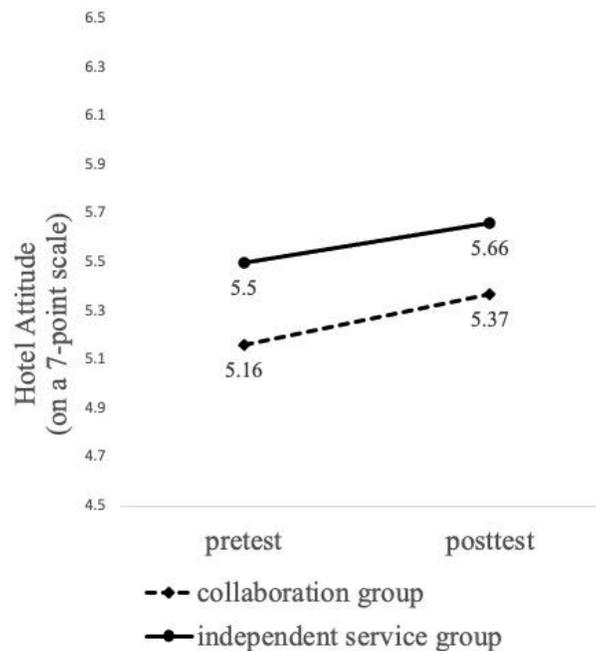


Figure 3. Study 1: Attitudes toward the Focal Brand (Hotel).

*Sincerity Perception.* Based on previous literature, we derived two competing predictions about the change of sincerity ratings. If only more salient personalities transferred to the less salient personalities and brands were immune to negative transfer, we would see no change in Ritz Carlton's sincerity rating after the brand alliance and the impact of the brand alliance on the sincerity rating would be the same as that of an independent service. Otherwise, the brand alliance would dilute the high sincerity rating of Ritz Carlton. We find that the treatment group experienced a marginal decrease in Ritz Carlton's sincerity rating ( $M_{pre} = 5.46$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 1.88$ ;  $M_{post} = 5.14$ ,  $SD_{post} = 1.89$ ),  $F_{1,111} = 2.826$ ,  $p = .096$ , indicating a slightly negative personality transfer from Porsche to Ritz Carlton on the sincerity dimension, supporting H3a on the .05 significance level. A mixed ANCOVA controlling for pre-exposure attitude toward Ritz Carlton found a significant group by timepoint interaction,  $F_{1,220} = 14.258$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . While sincerity rating marginally decreased in the brand alliance condition, it significantly increased in the independent service condition ( $M_{pre} = 5.51$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 2.00$ ;  $M_{post} = 6.13$ ,  $SD_{post} = 1.69$ ),  $F_{1,110} = 12.932$ ,  $p < .001$ . The brand alliance had a more negative impact on the change of Ritz Carlton's sincerity rating than the independent service. Our exploratory analysis on Porsche's sincerity rating found no change after the brand alliance ( $M_{pre} = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 2.18$ ;  $M_{post} = 5.07$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ),  $F_{1,111} = 0.083$ ,  $p = 0.774$ .

*Excitement Perception.* Because Porsche was perceived to be more exciting than Ritz Carlton, we expected Ritz Carlton's excitement rating to increase after the collaboration if personality transfer occurs (H4a), or otherwise remain the same (H4b). It turned out that Ritz Carlton's excitement rating did not change in the treatment group ( $M_{pre} = 6.42$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 1.75$ ;  $M_{post} = 6.42$ ,  $SD_{post} = 1.75$ ),  $F_{1,111} = 0.000$ ,  $p = 0.999$ .

= 6.38,  $SD_{post} = 1.74$ ),  $F_{1,111} = 0.065$ ,  $p = .800$ , supporting  $H_{4b}$ . The mixed ANCOVA found a significant difference in the impact of the two marketing activities on Ritz Carlton's excitement

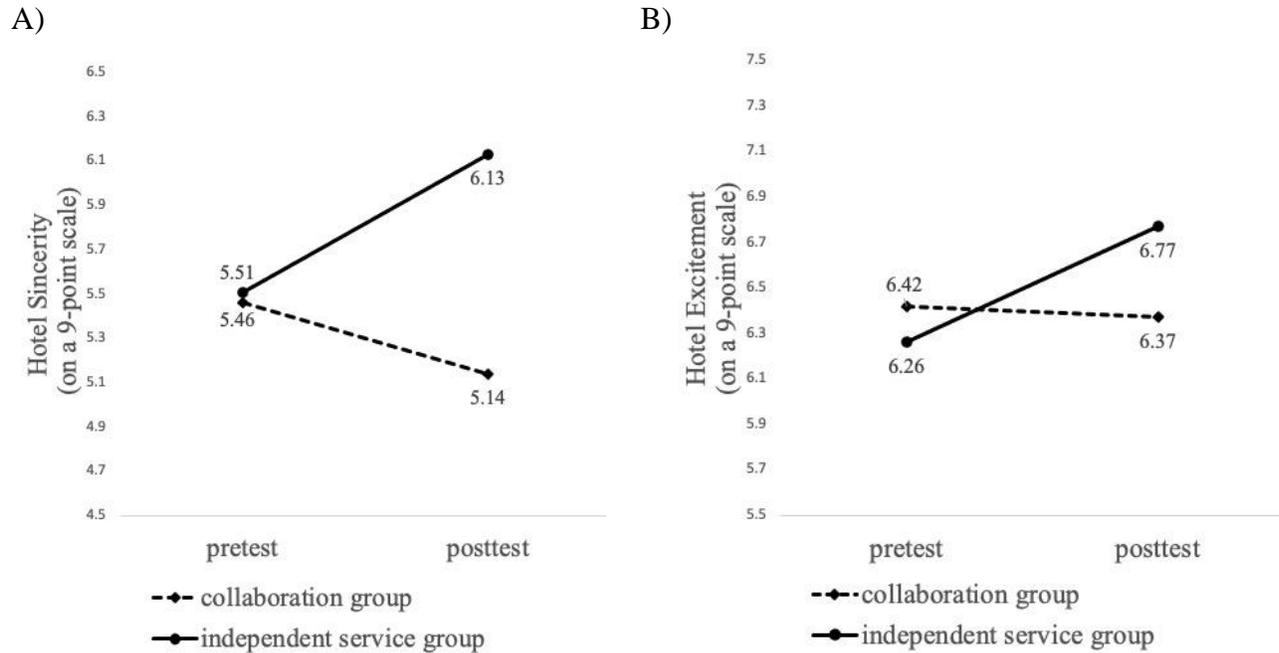


Figure 4. A. Study 1: Sincerity Perceptions of the Focal Brand (Hotel).  
 B. Study 1: Excitement Perceptions of the Focal Brand (Hotel).

rating,  $F_{1, 220} = 5.550$ ,  $p = 0.019$ . While Ritz Carlton was not perceived as more exciting after the brand alliance with Porsche, it was perceived to be more exciting after the similar services offered independently by the hotel ( $M_{pre} = 6.26$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 1.92$ ;  $M_{post} = 6.77$ ,  $SD_{post} = 1.67$ ),  $F_{1,110} = 6.269$ ,  $p = .014$  (Figure 4B). Therefore, we concluded that partnering with Porsche had a less positive impact on Ritz Carlton's excitement perception than offering the services independently. Another alarming finding was that the brand alliance significantly harmed Porsche's excitement perception ( $M_{pre} = 7.69$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ;  $M_{post} = 7.22$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ),  $F_{1, 111} = 13.544$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### 3.4 Discussion

The results of Study 1 (see Table 2 for details) reveal that, for a sincere hotel, partnering with an exciting partner brand risks personality dilution and is not necessarily a better choice than launching the new service alone. In our brand alliance example between Ritz Carlton and Porsche, the partnership only marginally improved the attitude toward Ritz Carlton and its impact was no better than that of a similar independent service offering. Porsche did not improve consumers' brand attitude from the alliance either. In other words, when the partners differ in their personality profiles, putting together two reputable brands do not necessarily enhance consumers' attitude toward them.

The findings of personality changes are also worth attention. Although previous literature on product-level attributes finds the composite extension to possess the more-salient and better-performing attributes of the parent brands (i.e., positive transfer; e.g., Park et al., 1996), our findings reveal a different pattern in the brand personality attributes. Although we did not directly measure the personality salience of the joint offering, the postexposure personalities of Ritz Carlton clearly and consistently reflected the potentially negative transfer. Collaborating with an exciting partner like Porsche marginally harmed a sincere hotel's sincerity perception, and this negative impact is even stark contrast to significant improvement resulted from the hotel's similar independent service offering. The brand alliance did not enhance the sincere hotel's excitement rating either. Ritz Carlton was perceived to be as exciting as it was before the collaboration in contrast to the significant increase in the exciting perceptions in the case of the independent service offering in the control condition. The brand alliance not only did not benefit the hotel brand as much but also brought concerns to the partner: the brand alliance harmed Porsche's excitement perception without improving its sincerity perception.

When hospitality marketers carry out a brand alliance like our example, they are usually in the hope that their classic, sincere brand will be perceived younger and more exciting, and consequently more favored. However, the results of Study 1 offer a cautionary tale for them that the effect may sometimes go in the opposite direction: their brand may not achieve a higher excitement perception and may risk diluting their high sincerity perception. In addition, our results suggest that launching a new service without a partner brand can sometimes be more effective in improving personality perceptions and brand attitude. One possible explanation is that, when processing an independent new service, consumers put most of their attention on the service itself and transfer the evaluation of the service to the hotel brand. However, the brand alliance is more complex and involves more elements of concerns: compatibility of the partners, compatibility of the joint service with each partner, the brands' capability to carry out the service as promised, etc. Such uncertainty may disturb their positive attitude toward the new service and the effectiveness of the brand alliance.

## 4 Study 2

### 4.1 Conceptual Framework

To further explore the impact of brand personalities on brand alliance success and spillover effects, we independently manipulated brand personalities of the two partner brands in Study 2. That is, we compared four different personality combinations: a sincere hotel with a sincere partner, a sincere hotel with an exciting partner, an exciting hotel with a sincere partner, and an exciting hotel with an exciting partner.

*The Impact of Brand Personality and Fit on Attitudes toward Brand Alliance.* Study 1 results imply the potential backfire effect of a personality-mismatching partnership: the S-E alliance did not lead to a significant improvement in brand attitude or enhance the hotel's personality profile. Such conclusions seem to question the positive effect of personality complementarity on the brand alliance success, which in turn supports the importance of personality similarity. When the partners are similar in their personalities, the associations around them are more consistent when consumers process the pairing in their mind and, therefore, the collaboration makes more sense to them. In contrast, when the two partners have very different personalities, consumers may question why the brands choose to team up with each other (Park et al., 1996; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Similar to the manipulation by Park et al (1996), we expect the partner combinations with higher personality similarity (i.e., sincere-sincere and exciting-exciting) to be higher in fit, and the joint extension will consequently make more sense and receive more positive attitude. Consumers also have different associations and expectations about sincere and exciting brands. For example, they consider sincere brands to be more dependable and expect them to act in a consistent manner while they consider exciting

brands to be more unpredictable and expect them to act innovatively and less consistently (Sundar and Noseworthy, 2016). When two brands of different personality profiles collaborate with each other, consumers' attitude can be mixed: on one hand, they may trust the sincere brand yet do not expect it to interact with a partner inconsistent with its image; on the other hand, they may feel ready for surprises and even disconfirmation from the exciting brand yet their trust for an exciting brand may not be as high as that for a sincere brand. In summary, we hypothesize that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Consumers' attitude toward a brand alliance is more positive when a sincere hotel collaborates with a sincere partner brand than when a sincere hotel collaborates with an exciting partner brand.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Consumers' attitude toward a brand alliance is more positive when an exciting hotel collaborates with an exciting partner brand than when an exciting hotel collaborates with a sincere partner brand.

**H<sub>3a</sub>:** Consumers' attitude toward a brand alliance between a sincere hotel and an exciting partner brand is the same as their attitude toward a brand alliance between an exciting hotel and a sincere partner brand.

**H<sub>3b</sub>:** Consumers' attitude toward a brand alliance between a sincere hotel and an exciting partner brand is different from their attitude toward a brand alliance between an exciting hotel and a sincere partner brand.

*Spillover effects.* When the partners are similar in personalities and share more common associations, it is easier for consumers to connect the two brands in their mind, which facilitates

the transfer and enhancement of positive attitude from each brand. The positive associations extracted from the partners then get mixed in the brand alliance and eventually elevate the evaluations of each partner brand (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). In contrast, when the brands are not conceptually compatible, both the transfer from brands to the alliance and the transfer from the alliance back to the brands will be more difficult. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H4:** Consumers' attitude toward a sincere hotel is more positive after it collaborates with a sincere partner brand than after it collaborates with an exciting partner brand.

**H5:** Consumers' attitude toward an exciting hotel is more positive after it collaborates with an exciting partner brand than after it collaborates with a sincere partner brand.

**Personality Enhancement and Dilution.** Our Study 1 results show that an S-E brand alliance can dilute the sincerity perception of the focal sincere hotel; consumers may consider the partnership with a less sincere brand as an "insincere" behavior of the hotel. Similarly, it is likely that collaborating with a less exciting brand harms the energetic and young image of an exciting hotel. In contrast, collaborating with a brand of a similar personality may underscore such common attributes and further enhance the perception in consumers' mind:

**H6:** A sincere hotel is perceived to be more sincere after it collaborates with a sincere partner brand than after it collaborates with an exciting partner brand.

**H7:** An exciting hotel is perceived to be more exciting after it collaborates with an exciting partner brand than after it collaborates with a sincere partner brand.

## 4.2 Method

Study 2 used a 2 (hotel brand personality: sincere vs. exciting) x 2 (apparel brand personality: sincere vs. exciting) between-subjects factorial design. It compared the brand attitude and brand personality perceptions across the groups after a brand alliance.

*Pretests and Stimuli: Hotel Brand Personality.* Study 2 requires two hotel brands (sincere vs. exciting) and two partner brands of a compatible category (sincere vs. exciting). We conducted a series of pretests to select the most symmetrical combinations: ideally, each pair of variations should be similarly favored and their difference in sincerity and excitement should be of the same magnitude. To reduce the impact of irrelevant existing associations and thus minimize potential confounds, we created two hypothetical hotel brands with the same neutral name (“Hotel Genova”) and the same midscale pricing (\$150/night) yet different in decorative and service styles that reflect distinct personalities. For each hotel, we presented a short description along with one lobby picture and one guest room picture. In particular, the sincere hotel was depicted to provide genuine care for customers’ wellness, feature a welcoming design that conveys a relaxed feeling, and offer helpful services and wholesome meals and facilities. The lobby and guest room had a neutral tone and the furniture seemed comfortable to use. In contrast, the exciting hotel emphasized its trendy style and lively vibe from decorations to services: its facilities featured vibrant colors and bold lines, its employees were energetic, and it frequently host pop art exhibitions and music events. We randomly assigned our online participants ( $N = 170$ ) into one of the four conditions: a sincere hotel with two picture variations and an exciting hotel with two picture variations. The two variations we chose had no difference in brand attitude ( $M_{\text{sincere}} = 5.67$  on a seven-point scale,  $M_{\text{exciting}} = 5.82$ ,  $p = .574$ ). The sincere hotel was perceived as more sincere ( $M = 5.67$  on a seven-point scale) than exciting ( $M = 4.55$ ),

$p < .001$ , and the exciting hotel was perceived as more exciting ( $M = 6.07$ ) than sincere ( $M = 4.73$ ),  $p < .001$ . Also, the sincere hotel was perceived as significantly more sincere ( $M = 5.67$ ) than the exciting hotel ( $M = 4.73$ ),  $p = .001$ , while the exciting hotel was rated as more exciting ( $M = 6.07$ ) than the sincere hotel ( $M = 4.55$ ),  $p < .001$ .

*Pretests and Stimuli: Partner Brand Personality.* The other goal of our pretests was to select one sincere brand and an exciting brand from a compatible category as the hotels' partners. For each food and apparel candidate brand, we provided two photos of their signature products to help participants recognize the brands yet gave no written descriptions to avoid making too much impact on the brand associations. As a result, we selected the apparel brands Lacoste as the sincere partner and Marc Jacobs as the exciting partner. After filtering out the participants who had not heard of the brands, Lacoste ( $N = 58$ ,  $M = 4.34$ ) was rated as favored as Marc Jacobs ( $N = 49$ ,  $M = 4.10$ ),  $p = 0.310$ . Lacoste was also more sincere and less exciting ( $M_{\text{sincere}} = 4.29$ ,  $M_{\text{exciting}} = 3.66$ ) than Marc Jacobs ( $M_{\text{sincere}} = 3.49$ ,  $M_{\text{exciting}} = 4.57$ ), both  $p = .001$ .

*Main Study Stimuli: Brand Alliance Description.* Similar to Study 1, we also intended to provide a specific description of the brand alliance activity to build more concrete connections between the brands as well as minimize the impact of individuals' imagination of the joint offerings. One trendy brand extension of apparel brands in practice was to enter the home décor category (e.g., Zara, Kate Spade, Tommy Hilfiger). We thought this would be a very reasonable connection between hotel brands and apparel brands and developed our brand alliance description accordingly:

Recently, Hotel Genova started a collaboration with Lacoste/Marc Jacobs. The hotel team worked closely with Lacoste/Marc Jacobs designers to create an exclusive collection of bedroom

decors and accessories for their hotel rooms. From bed linen and throw pillows to pajamas and slippers, the two teams carefully selected comfortable materials and made the best of Lacoste's/Marc Jacobs' signature designs. In addition, they developed candles and diffusers with Lacoste's/Marc Jacobs' well-known fragrances. Hotel guests may also purchase the collaboration collection exclusively at the hotel's gift shop.

*Procedure.* Consumers ( $N = 500$ ) were recruited on Prolific to complete an online questionnaire and were rewarded upon completion. They were randomly assigned to one of four conditions of the 2 x 2 factorial design (see Figure 5). Each participant was first asked to read the hotel description and view the pictures. To reinforce their memory of the hypothetical stimuli, we asked them to briefly comment on the hotel brands. After learning about the hotel brands, each participant indicated their familiarity with their corresponding apparel brand on a seven-point scale, with two pictures to facilitate recognition. They were then introduced to the hotel-apparel brand alliance and asked to rate how much they liked the collaboration (1 = "dislike it very much", 7 = "like it very much") and whether it made sense for the two brands to create such a collaboration (1 = "does not make sense at all", 7 = "makes sense a lot"). We borrowed the latter question from Park et al (1996) as an indicator of perceived fit of the alliance and also encouraged a brief explanation of why they thought it made sense or not. After that, participants rated the post-exposure attitude toward each partner brand and their salience of sincerity and excitement, all on a seven-point scale. To enrich our analyses of brand alliance success, we then asked them to rate how likely they would share the collaboration with their family and friends and how likely they would consider the hotel when they travelled (1 = "not at all likely", 7 = "very likely"). We concluded the questionnaire with demographic questions.

	Sincere Hotel Brand (hypothetical)	Exciting Hotel Brand (hypothetical)
Sincere Partner Brand (Lacoste)	Exclusive Hotel Genova (sincere) x Lacoste hotel room decors and accessories	Exclusive Hotel Genova (exciting) x Lacoste hotel room decors and accessories
Exciting Partner Brand (Marc Jacobs)	Exclusive Hotel Genova (sincere) x Marc Jacobs hotel room decors and accessories	Exclusive Hotel Genova (exciting) x Marc Jacobs hotel room decors and accessories

Fig. 5. Study 2: Experimental conditions

### 4.3 Results

To make sure the associations with the real partner brands were valid and stable, we filtered out the participants who had not heard of the brands and based our analyses on the remaining sample (N = 410). The following results were based on factorial ANOVAs and post-hoc pairwise comparisons (see Table 2 for details).

*Perceived Fit.* A 2 (hotel brand personality) x 2 (partner personality) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect between hotel brand personality and partner personality ( $F_{1,406} = 17.761, p < .001$ ). While there was a directionally better fit for the sincere-sincere pair (M = 4.57, SD = 1.64) compared to the sincere-exciting pair (M = 4.24, SD = 1.85;  $p = .161$ ), the exciting-exciting pair (M = 5.50, SD = 1.40) was perceived to fit significantly better than the

Study 2: ANOVAs and LSD pairwise comparisons.

	sincere hotel brand sincere partner brand Means (N = 99)	sincere hotel brand exciting partner brand Means (N = 106)	exciting hotel brand sincere partner brand Means (N = 107)	exciting hotel brand exciting partner brand Means (N = 98)	main effect hotel personality F(1, 406)	main effect partner personality F(1, 406)	interaction hotel x partner personality F(1, 406)
Perceived fit	4.57 <sup>d</sup>	4.24 <sup>d</sup>	4.43 <sup>d</sup>	5.5 <sup>abc</sup>	11.540 <sup>***</sup>	4.967 <sup>**</sup>	17.761 <sup>***</sup>
Brand alliance favorability	4.66	4.42	4.59	4.73			
Willingness to share the brand alliance	2.91	2.41 <sup>d</sup>	2.90	3.22 <sup>c</sup>	4.612 <sup>**</sup>		4.888 <sup>**</sup>
Hotel favorability	5.29 <sup>d</sup>	5.3d	5.01	4.93 <sup>ab</sup>	6.809 <sup>***</sup>		
Hotel stay intention	4.90 <sup>d</sup>	4.79	4.46	4.32 <sup>a</sup>	6.569 <sup>**</sup>		
Hotel sincerity	5.20 <sup>cd</sup>	5.19 <sup>cd</sup>	4.61 <sup>abd</sup>	4.19 <sup>abc</sup>	35.126 <sup>***</sup>		
Hotel excitement	4.79 <sup>cd</sup>	4.91 <sup>cd</sup>	5.73 <sup>ab</sup>	5.78 <sup>ab</sup>	48.680 <sup>***</sup>		
Partner favorability	4.60 <sup>b</sup>	4.17 <sup>ac</sup>	4.65 <sup>b</sup>	4.43		6.518 <sup>**</sup>	
Partner sincerity	4.38 <sup>b</sup>	4.63 <sup>acd</sup>	4.68 <sup>bd</sup>	4.04 <sup>bc</sup>	6.789 <sup>***</sup>	26.352 <sup>***</sup>	
Partner excitement	4.34 <sup>d</sup>	4.59 <sup>cd</sup>	4.19 <sup>bd</sup>	5.05 <sup>abd</sup>		14.661 <sup>***</sup>	4.434 <sup>**</sup>

\* p < .10      <sup>a</sup> significantly different from the sincere-sincere group (p < .05)

\*\* p < .05      <sup>b</sup> significantly different from the sincere-exciting group. (p < .05)

\*\*\* p < .01      <sup>c</sup> significantly different from the exciting-sincere group. (p < .05)

<sup>d</sup> significantly different from the exciting-exciting group. (p < .05)

exciting-sincere pair ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Notably, the exciting-exciting condition was perceived to fit significantly better than all other three conditions, all  $p < 0.001$ .

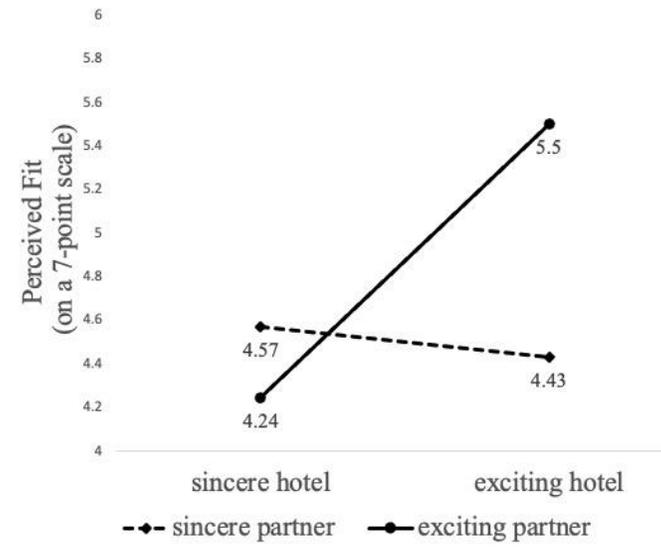
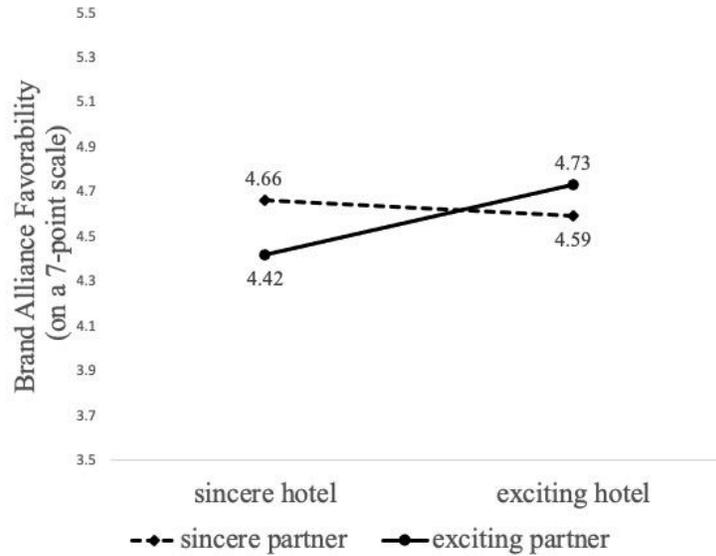


Figure 6. Study 2: Perceived Fit

*Brand Alliance Favorability.* Considering the potential benefit of personality similarity and dilution effect of personality complementarity, we predicted that consumers would prefer the two brand alliances with partners of similar personalities than the two alliances with partners of different personalities ( $H_1$  and  $H_2$ ). We were unsure, however, whether the attitude toward the two dissimilar alliances would be the same ( $H_{3a}$  and  $H_{3b}$ ). The 2 x 2 ANOVA revealed no main effect of hotel personality ( $F_{1, 406} = 0.812$ ,  $p = .368$ ), no main effect of partner personality ( $F_{1, 406} = .103$ ,  $p = .749$ ), and no hotel by partner interaction ( $F_{1, 406} = 1.975$ ,  $p = .161$ ). Overall, consumers exhibited equally favorable attitudes toward all four brand alliances although there was a directional support for our matching hypotheses. That is, the sincere-sincere brand alliance ( $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) generated a directionally more favorable attitude than the sincere-exciting brand alliance ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ;  $p = .223$ ), and the exciting-exciting brand alliance ( $M =$

4.73, SD = 1.37) generated a directionally more favorable attitude than the exciting-sincere brand collaboration (M = 4.59, SD = 1.39;  $p = .443$ ). The two mismatching partner pairs also resulted in the same collaboration liking ( $M_{\text{Sincere-Exciting}} = 4.42$ , SD = 1.36;  $M_{\text{Exciting-Sincere}} = 4.59$ , SD = 1.39),  $p = .379$ . These results did not support H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> but supported H<sub>3a</sub>.

A)



B)

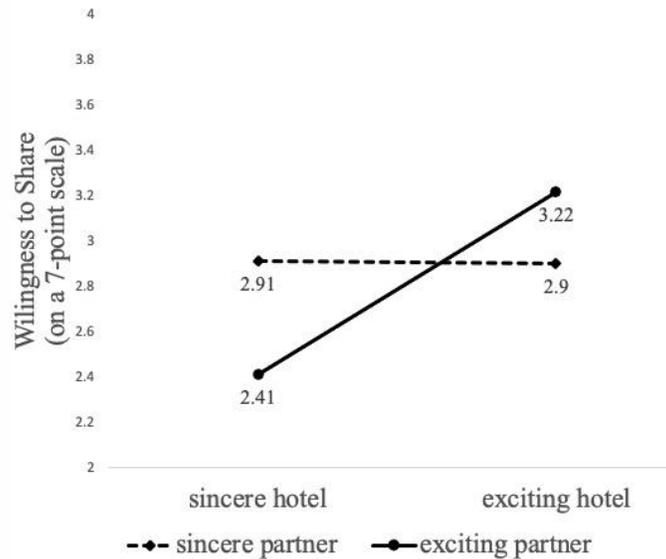


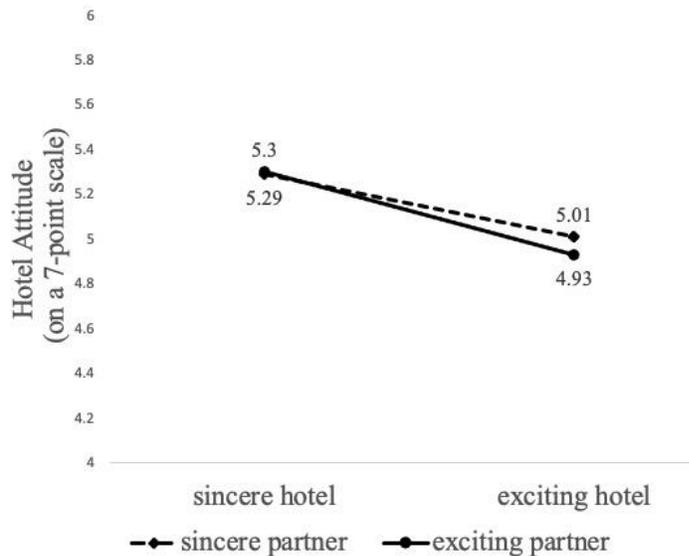
Figure 7. A. Study 2: Brand Alliance Favorability. B. Study 2: Willingness to Share.

*Willingness to Share.* We collected participants' willingness to spread the word as another factor of brand alliance success; it implies a highly positive evaluation of the collaboration and would ultimately improve the brands' reputation by word of mouth. A factorial ANOVA found that participants had significantly different willingness to share the collaboration across the conditions,  $F_{3, 406} = 3.253, p = .022$ . A 2 x 2 ANOVA revealed that overall, they were more willing to share if the hotel was exciting than sincere, , but this main effect of hotel brand personality was qualified by the significant interaction effect ( $F_{1,406} = 4.612, p = .032$ ), supporting the personality matching hypotheses,  $F_{1,406} = 4.888, p = .028$ . Specifically, participants' willingness to share was marginally higher when the sincere hotel collaborated with a sincere partner brand ( $M = 2.91, SD = 1.87$ ) than when it collaborated with an exciting partner ( $M = 2.41, SD = 1.78$ ),  $p = .059$ . Participants' willingness to share was also directionally higher when the exciting hotel collaborated with an exciting partner ( $M = 3.22, SD = 1.98$ ) than when it collaborated with a sincere partner ( $M = 2.90, SD = 1.97$ ),  $p = .0219$ . In addition, collaborating with an exciting partner brand (Marc Jacobs) resulted in a significantly higher willingness to share if the hotel was also exciting ( $M = 3.22, SD = 1.98$ ) than if it was sincere ( $M = 2.41, SD = 1.78$ ),  $p = .002$ .

*Post-Alliance Hotel Attitude and Visit Intention.* We then examined the effect of the brand alliances on the focal hotel brand attitudes and visit intention as part of the alliance spillover effect. Similar to the collaboration liking, we predicted that consumers would like the hotels more after they collaborate with partners of similar personalities (sincere-sincere and exciting-exciting) than after they collaborate with partners of different personalities (sincere-exciting and exciting-sincere), which corresponds to H<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>5</sub>. While the sincere hotel and the exciting hotel (remember they were fictitious brands) were rated equally favored before the

brand alliances in the pretest, the ANOVA of the post-alliance scores revealed a significant main effect of hotel personality,  $F_{1,406} = 6.809, p = .009$ . There was no main effect of partner personality,  $F_{1,406} = .081, p = .776$ , or interaction,  $F_{1,406} = .127, p = .722$ . That is, the sincere hotel was more favored on average after the collaboration regardless of the partner personality type, rejecting our personality matching hypotheses for the spillover effect (H4 and H5). Similarly, after learning about the brand alliance regardless of the partner type, participants reported a significantly higher intention to stay at the sincere hotel in the future ( $M = 4.94, SD = 1.66$ ) than at the exciting hotel ( $M = 4.39, SD = 1.94$ ),  $F_{1,406} = 6.569, p = .011$ . There was no main effect of partner type or interaction effect on visit intention,  $p = .488$  and  $.922$ , respectively. The beneficial effect of the personality matching in brand alliances—be it weak or strong—was observed in the perceptions of fit, brand alliance attitude, and willingness to share, the effect of personality matching in brand alliances was not operating on the spillover effect to the brand as measured with brand attitudes and visit intentions. Interestingly, the sincere brands seem to be most benefited by the collaboration effort.

A)



B)

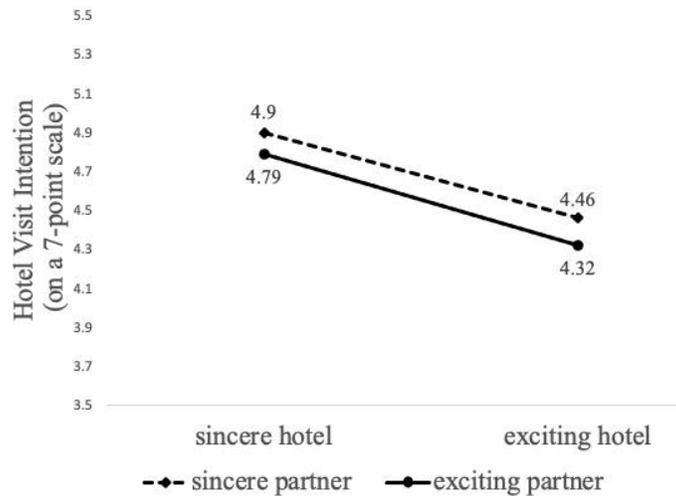
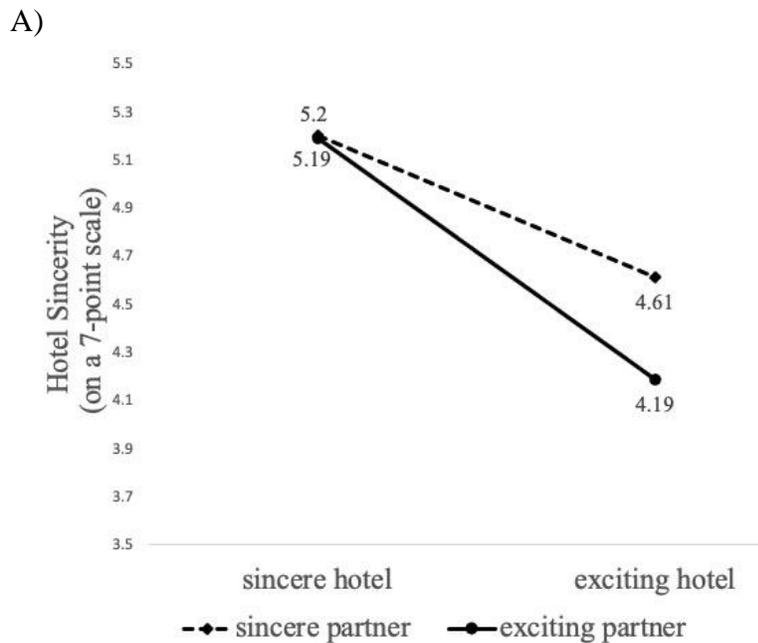


Figure 8. A. Study 2: Hotel Attitude. B. Study 2: Hotel Visit Intention.

*Hotel Personality.* In H<sub>6</sub> and H<sub>7</sub>, we predicted that the sincere hotel would be perceived as more sincere after collaborating with a sincere partner (vs. an exciting partner) while the exciting hotel would be perceived as more exciting after collaborating with an exciting partner (vs. a sincere partner). The ANOVA on hotel sincerity showed a significant difference across the groups,  $F_{3,406} = 13.040, p < .001$ . The main effect of hotel type indicated that the sincere hotel was still perceived more sincere than the exciting hotel after the collaborations,  $F_{1,406} = 35.126, p < .001$ . There was no main effect of partner type or interaction effect, both  $p > .10$ . Similarly, there was a significant difference in hotel excitement across the groups,  $F_{3,406} = 16.302, p < .001$  and the exciting hotel was perceived more exciting than the sincere hotel after the collaborations,  $F_{1,406} = 48.680, p < .001$ . There was no main effect of partner type or interaction effect either, both  $p > .10$ . The sincerity difference between sincere-sincere ( $M = 5.20, SD = 1.20$ ) and sincere-exciting ( $M = 5.19, SD = 1.12$ ) and the excitement difference between exciting-exciting ( $M = 5.78, SD = 1.40$ ) and exciting-sincere ( $M = 5.73, SD = 1.26$ ) were neither significant,  $p = .944$  and  $.800$ , respectively, rejecting H<sub>6</sub> and H<sub>7</sub>. This means that the focal brand’s salient personality—as manipulated with a fictitious scenario—was rather stable even after the

collaboration information. More specifically, a sincere hotel brand's sincere personality did not get diluted by a brand alliance with a complementary personality (i.e., exciting partner), and an exciting hospitality brand's exciting personality was not diluted by a brand alliance with a complementary personality (i.e., sincere partner). Notably, an exciting hotel brand's sincerity perception was significantly higher when it collaborated with a sincere partner brand than when it collaborated with an exciting partner,  $p = .030$ .

Furthermore, consistent with previous results on the personality matching predictions in our study, the results show that the sincere-sincere pair had the highest average sincerity rating ( $M = 5.20$ ) but the lowest excitement rating ( $M = 4.79$ ) among the four collaboration pairs and the exciting-exciting pair had the lowest sincerity rating ( $M = 4.19$ ) but the highest excitement rating ( $M = 5.78$ ).



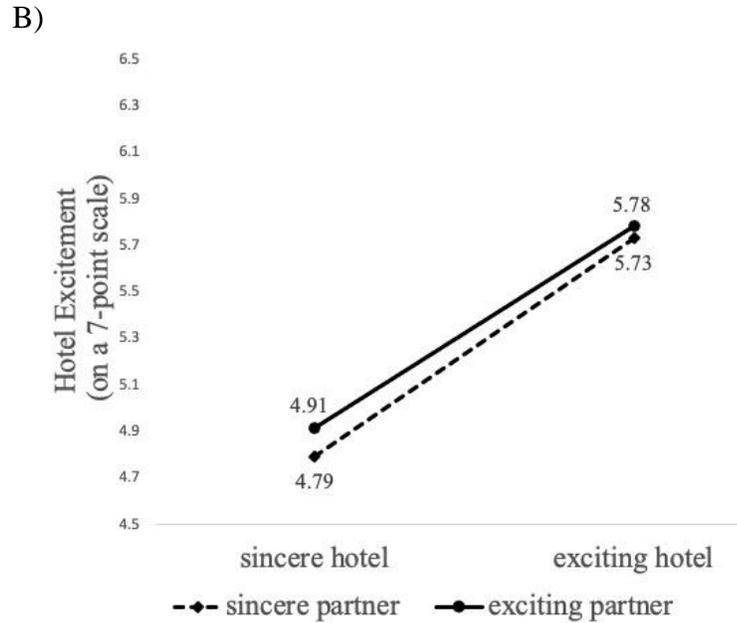


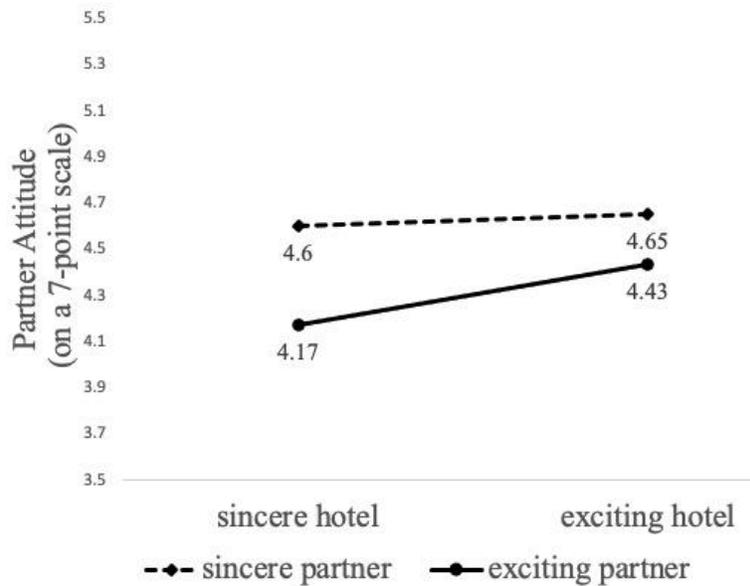
Figure 9. A. Study 2: Hotel Sincerity. B. Study 2: Hotel Excitement.

*Post-alliance partner attitude and personality.* Our exploratory analysis on the partner brand attitude also found the sincere partner, Lacoste, to be more favored after the brand alliances ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) than the exciting partner, Marc Jacobs ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $F_{1,406} = 6.518$ ,  $p = .011$ , despite the fact that they were equally favored before the alliance. As it was the case for the post-alliance focal brand attitudes where we observed a beneficial spillover effect to the sincere (vs. exciting) focal brands after brand alliances, the effect of brand alliances on the spillover effect for the partner brand also exhibited a beneficial effect to sincere (vs. exciting) brands.

When it comes to personality perceptions, Lacoste, a sincere partner, was still perceived to be more sincere ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) and less exciting ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) than Marc Jacobs ( $M_{\text{sincere}} = 3.83$ ,  $SD_{\text{sincere}} = 1.42$ ;  $M_{\text{exciting}} = 4.81$ ,  $SD_{\text{exciting}} = 1.42$ ) after the brand alliances, both  $p < .001$  (i.e., main effects of partner brand personality). The difference in post-alliance

excitement ratings was more significant after collaborating with the exciting hotel than the sincere hotel,  $F_{1,406} = 4.434$ ,  $p = .036$  (i.e., an interaction effect). Specifically, Lacoste, a sincere partner brand, was perceived to be equally not as exciting regardless of brand alliances ( $M_{\text{sincere-hotel}} = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ;  $M_{\text{exciting-hotel}} = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ),  $p = .447$ , whereas Marc Jacobs, an exciting partner brand, experienced a significant positive boost on the exciting personality dimension when it collaborated with an exciting hotel brand ( $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) than with a sincere brand ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ),  $p = .027$ . Interestingly, however, the partners were rated more sincere after collaborating with the exciting hotel ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) than after collaborating with the sincere hotel, likely due to the contrast effect in perceptions ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ),  $F_{1,406} = 6.789$ ,  $p = .010$ .

A)



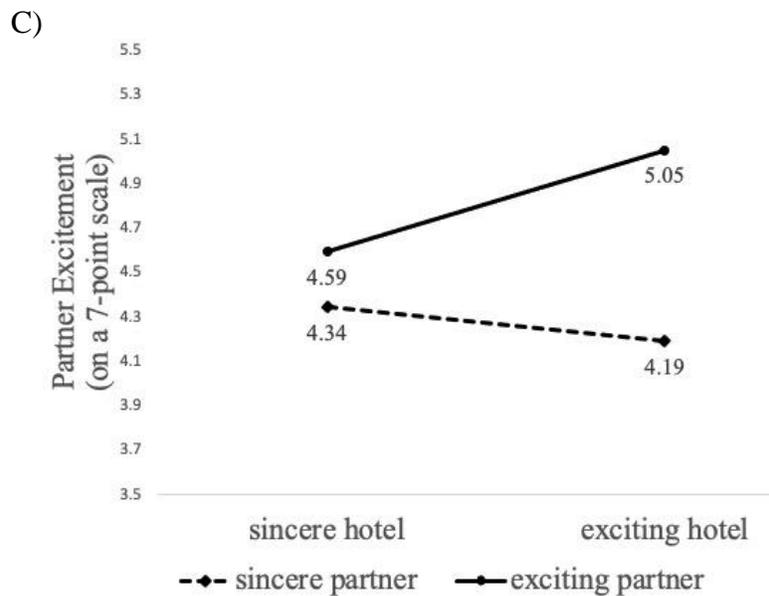
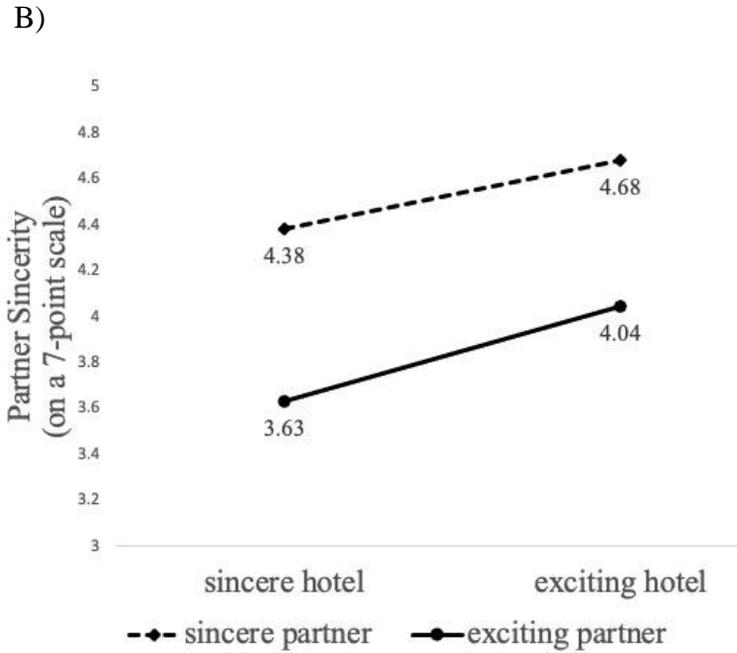


Figure 10. A. Study 2: Partner Attitude. B. Study 2: Partner Sincerity. C. Study 2: Partner Excitement.

#### 4.4 Discussion

We based our Study 2 hypotheses on the assumptions that (1) consumers would respond more positively to a brand alliance when the partners matched in their brand personality than not,

and (2) these matching salient personality attributes would be further reinforced because of the brand alliance. These assumptions reflected both theoretical predictions extended from similar concepts in literature (e.g., image transfer) and strategic goals of brand alliances in practice. However, we found that the matching partners were perceived to fit better together yet did not necessarily achieve a more positive attitude toward the collaboration or the brands; the impact of the collaboration on further strengthening the brands' existing salient personality did not seem consistently significant either. Nevertheless, the results presented an interesting picture.

*Exciting brands.* Overall, consumers think it makes the most sense (i.e., perceive the highest fit) when an exciting hotel collaborates with another exciting brand to create a joint extension, compared to other partner personality combinations. One plausible explanation, as reflected in participants' open-ended comments, is that consumers expect exciting brands to make innovative moves, such as a cross-industry collaboration in our example, while expect sincere brands to remain consistent and conservative with what they are expert at. The presence of one or more sincere brands as a partner in the brand alliance may raise doubt about why the partnership forms. In addition, consumers tend to be more willing to share a brand alliance they learn about if it is executed by an exciting hotel (vs. a sincere hotel) and the willingness is directionally the highest if the partner brand is also exciting. This pair, therefore, has the most advantage in generating buzz if this is the goal of the brand alliance. Despite the high perceived fit and interest in sharing, the exciting brands do not necessarily win a more positive attitude toward the collaboration and the brands, or a higher visit intention for the focal hotel.

*Sincere brands.* As reported in the results section, the sincere hotel and the sincere partner brand are both more favored than their exciting counterparts after the brand alliance. Considering their equal favorability in the pretests between the exciting and sincere brands, we

may conclude that sincere brands can gain more positive attitude change than exciting brands from brand alliances. Previous literature argues that consumers tend to perceive sincere brands as more dependable and thus trust their quality (e.g., Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2004). It is possible that consumers are more confident about the sincere brands' ability to carry out the new offerings as promised, which in turn improves the brand attitudes as a positive spillover effect. We also noticed that participants reported a higher intention to stay at the sincere hotel (vs. the exciting hotel) after the brand alliances and the sincere-sincere partnership had the highest rating in their intention to stay. This pattern is very different from participants' willingness to share the information, suggesting that buzz and customer acquisition do not necessarily go hand in hand. One possible explanation for the acquisition advantage of the sincere-sincere condition is the nature of the hotel industry. Comfort and caring services that make travelers "feel at home" can be a prioritized criteria for many consumers, so facing a hotel brand name they never heard about in our experiment, our participants could have felt safer to try the sincere hotel brand that also partnered with an established sincere brand compared to the other options.

## **5 General Discussion**

The results of Studies 1 and 2 reveal that personality similarity or complementarity does not guarantee all aspects of brand alliance success for hotel brands. Despite the wish to transfer positive salient personality attributes between the partners, complementarity of brand personalities may risk a dilution of the brands' existing personalities (Study 1). Consumers may feel confused about the low-fit combination and thus are less likely to spread the word (Study 2). Specifically, the alliance between a sincere hotel and an exciting partner not only results in a negative personality transfer (Study 1) but is also rated the lowest in consumer attitude toward

the alliance, perceived fit, and willingness to share the alliance (Study 2). In contrast to a complementary partnership, brands intend to further enhance their existing personalities through brand alliances with partners similar in image. Study 2 results reveal, however, that such partnerships do not necessarily result in higher salience in the targeted personality attributes (i.e., a further increase in brand sincerity or excitement). Rather, Studies 1 and 2 find a more complex and nuanced picture of the impact of personality similarity or complementary on consumers' attitude toward the brand alliance or the brands involved. For complementarity, we find that a sincere hotel partnering with an exciting brand results in merely a marginal improvement in the attitude toward the hotel yet no change in the attitude toward the partner brand (Study 1). Similar and complementary partner combinations are also evaluated equally favorably in terms of both the brand alliance and the brands (Study 2).

The backfire of complementary alliances is reflected in the results of both studies. The decrease in personality perceptions captured in Study 1 is extended to word-of-mouth intentions in Study 2, a behavioral indicator of undesirable impact. It is notable that our use of real, well-known brands adds credibility to the dilution effect detected in Study 1: consumers have concrete, strongly held associations with real, familiar brands, which are not easy to be changed.

In addition to the impact of personality similarity and complementarity, consumers' different expectations of sincere and exciting brands are also reflected in the results of Study 2. Because exciting brands are perceived to be more open to innovative ideas and are associated more with fun, consumers consider the partners to fit best together when both are exciting. They are also most willing to share such collaborations with family and friends. On the other hand, sincere brands, especially sincere hotel brands, are considered reliable; although innovations

such as brand alliances are not necessarily authentic to their image, consumers will likely trust their new offerings, which further elevates brand favorability.

Our studies are one of the first in literature to evaluate the impact of brand personalities on brand alliance success. Although much research has highlighted fit and in particular brand fit as an important factor in partner selection, we enrich the definition of fit by bringing in brand personality dimensions and discuss personality similarity and complementarity of different partner personality combinations. In addition, we adopt a novel approach by examining brand personalities with a dynamic perspective. That is, we use it both as a predictor and as a dependent variable that changes over time due to the brand alliance. By testing both hotel-automobile and hotel-fashion alliances across the two studies, we also broaden the scarce literature on hospitality brand alliances that has focused mostly on more traditional hotel-restaurant and hotel-retail-store collaborations.

Our results should inspire further exploration and validation. While many hospitality practitioners have launched brand alliance projects with cross-industry partners, relevant research still lags behind and has a relatively narrow focus. Indeed, the impact of brand alliance can be different for product brands and hospitality brands considering their very different nature; it is therefore important to explore and examine the potential determinants of brand alliance success in the hospitality context in particular. Our surprising findings that neither personality similarity or personality complementarity promises brand alliance success and that the nature of different personalities corresponds to different consumer expectations of the alliance in the first place are interesting points to start.

Our findings have strong practical implications. From a managerial perspective, brand alliance is an increasingly popular marketing strategy to transfer positive associations between

the partners or strengthen their jointly salient associations, which ultimately improve brand attitudes. In the hospitality context, for example, Ritz Carlton may collaborate with Porsche, hoping to be perceived to be more exciting and attract more young customers. Our findings, however, reveal the possibility of backfire and dilution of their salient sincerity image. In addition, our studies suggest that it is straightforward to determine whether selecting a similar or complementary partner will result in better brand alliance outcomes; and new services launched without a partner can sometimes be even more favorable than brand alliances. When initiating brand alliance projects, we suggest managers to consider the different essence of sincere and exciting brands as well as the prioritized goals (buzz creation, image transfer, favorability improvement, etc.), in addition to the similarity or complementarity of the two brands' image. Our findings can be a reference of potential outcomes of partnering with different types of brands.

Our research is not without limitations and presents further opportunities for future research. Despite our effort of using two different partner categories (i.e., automobile and fashion), our results do not necessarily apply to other industries or brands. Further replication with various brand combinations is needed to improve external validity. Second, consumers' attitudes and reactions toward the brand alliance depend a great deal on the brand associations but can also vary due to the specific new offerings that the partners present; chances are our conclusions do not hold for alternative brand alliance activities. Third, use of real brands and use of fictitious brands have both advantages and disadvantages. Real brands have more accurate and solid impressions on consumers yet at the same time can bring biases from previous interaction experiences; fictitious brands control and manipulate specific attributes with less bias while the associations are weak and thus easier to modify than in real cases. Another limitation of our

studies is that we only tested consumers' immediate reactions to the brand alliance and the brands involved; the impact can be different in the long run, which is of more interest for businesses in reality. Researchers could study how the impact of partner brands' personalities on each other's brand associations evolves over time.

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