Deriving happiness through extraordinary or ordinary brand experiences in times of COVID-19 threat

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**Abstract**

The authors examined how the joint effect of brand experience type (ordinary vs. extraordinary) and COVID-19 threat on consumer happiness changed at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from five studies, with the COVID-19 threat and lockdown status measured as well as manipulated, suggest that COVID-19 threat exerts converse moderating influences on the extraordinariness–happiness relationship under no lockdown and lockdown. Under lockdown, threat attenuates the effect of brand extraordinariness on happiness; extraordinary brand experiences bring more happiness than ordinary brand experiences when the perceived threat of COVID-19 is low, but consumers derive comparable happiness from extraordinary and ordinary experiences when perceived threat is high. Under no lockdown, threat amplifies the positive effect of extraordinariness on happiness. Consumers rarely experience a large-scale lockdown due to a pandemic, and this research advances understanding of how consumer happiness from a brand experience changes with the trajectory of a pandemic.

**Keywords**

brand experience, consumer happiness, COVID-19 threat, lockdown
INTRODUCTION

From 2009 to 2015, Coca-Cola launched a worldwide campaign called “Open Happiness.” Since then, Coca-Cola has been promoting how their brand can bring happiness to consumers. Because being extraordinary increases brand coolness (Warren et al., 2019), companies often promote their brands to be associated with extraordinary experiences rather than ordinary experiences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). For example, Diet Coke’s “Stay Extraordinary” campaign encourages drinkers to get the most out of life by adopting an extraordinary lifestyle. Do consumers always perceive greater happiness with brands associated with extraordinary experiences? To the extent that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has brought people unprecedented, extraordinary times with negative connotations, should a brand such as Coca-Cola continue promoting an extraordinary brand experience?

Indeed, many brands have found it challenging to advertise in a sensitive manner to avoid alienating consumers who are struggling during the pandemic while maintaining a profitable business (Reply.com, 2020). Recent studies showed that consumers’ affective states have varied during the COVID-19 pandemic, and such variations impact consumers’ decision making (Jeong et al., 2021; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Furthermore, the social-distancing and lockdown policies during the pandemic have changed social interactions and information exchange, both of which influence consumer shopping behaviors (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers’ daily routines have been disrupted and extraordinary news has surfaced every day, causing them to miss their previous “ordinary” lives. In response, some companies have changed their advertising strategies to emphasize “ordinariness” in advertisements. For example, Aier Eye Hospital in China used the slogan “Respect ordinariness. Come on 2020. Both you and I are ordinary. Salute every ordinary person with dreams.” Should brands change their advertising tactics during the COVID-19 pandemic? Which tactic is more appropriate: featuring ordinariness or extraordinariness? Through this research, we investigated how consumers’ perceived threat of COVID-19 and local lockdown policies jointly influenced consumer happiness from different types of brand experiences (ordinary vs. extraordinary).

Through five studies conducted during different pandemic periods from May 2020 to December 2021, with study participants of both undergraduate students and Amazon Mechanical Turk participants all over the United States, we demonstrate that threat of COVID-19 exerts different influences on consumer happiness with ordinary and extraordinary brand experiences when there is a lockdown versus no lockdown.

The contributions of this research are threefold. First, we make a theoretical contribution to the branding advertising literature by distinguishing ordinary and extraordinary brand experiences and examining their impact on consumer happiness. To our knowledge, our research is among the first to test how consumers’ perceived threat from a pandemic affected their happiness derived from different types of brand experience. Second, we make an empirical contribution by testing the framework of happiness and experience type across a large US sample involving numerous brands in different industries. In addition to measuring subjective brand experiences, we manipulated experience ordinariness or extraordinariness through message framing to demonstrate robustness of the proposed effects. Finally, and most importantly, we collected data at different points of time during the COVID-19 pandemic that represent different statuses of lockdown. Our findings provide practical implications concerning how marketers or advertisers might manage communication strategies to promote consumer happiness, considering both consumer subjective perception of risk and an external intervention (i.e., like lockdown) that fundamentally disrupts life routines.
2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Extraordinary versus ordinary brand experiences and happiness

One of the most common means consumers pursue happiness is through purchases and consumption of commercially branded goods and services (Schmitt et al., 2015). With the increasing advantage of experiential marketing, brands extract greater value and build deeper connections with consumers when consumption is framed as an experience rather than as a single-purchase decision (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Brand experiences are consumers’ sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related experiences when they interact with the brands (Brakus et al., 2009).

In the current research, we examine happiness from a brand experience, defined as the extent to which a brand brings a happy, meaningful, and personally fulfilling experience to consumers. Our definition of happiness aligns with previous research on experiential psychology that suggests brand experiences are mediators between consumption and consumer happiness, with happiness representing consumers’ greatest emotional fulfillment, in the forms of both pleasure and meaning, induced at different brand contact points (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2015; Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018).

In particular, the distinction between extraordinary and ordinary experiences has received increasing attention from scholars in psychology and marketing (Arnould & Price, 1993; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Garcia-Rada & Kim, 2021). Following Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014), in this study, we categorized brand experiences into extraordinary and ordinary ones. We defined extraordinary experiences as uncommon, infrequent experiences that go beyond the realm of everyday life, whereas ordinary experiences are common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life. Importantly, research suggests that the perception of experience ordinariness or extraordinariness is subjective and depends on the situation (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Minton & Liu, 2019). In other words, a brand can be associated with both ordinary and extraordinary experiences. One person may find a brand to be ordinary, but another person may find it to be extraordinary. A brand that consumers encounter in daily life could also be framed to be associated with an extraordinary experience.

Prior research has demonstrated that the nature of experiences as either ordinary or extraordinary influences happiness, consumption, and social interactions. On one hand, extraordinariness is a positive characteristic that sets a brand apart from its competitors and makes a brand seem cooler (Warren et al., 2019). Extraordinary brands are suggested to be associated with experiences that are triggered by unusual events (Arnould & Price, 1993). Such extraordinary experiences have been referred to as peak experiences (Maslow, 1964) or as epiphanic experiences (Denzin, 1992), which include reaching life milestones, travel and culture, romantic love, and social relationships (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Research shows that consumers tend to engage in indulgent consumption (Minton & Liu, 2019) and overspend (Sussman & Alter, 2012) when the consumption experiences are extraordinary. Due to those positive connotations associated with extraordinary experiences, marketing practitioners tend to regard extraordinary experiences as superior and more impactful than ordinary experiences and often attempt to frame their brand as offering extraordinary experiences.

On the other hand, simple ordinary experiences can also afford happiness. Cultural meanings can be derived and social relationships can be established in ordinary retailing environments (Pecoraro & Uusitalo, 2014). Savoring simple, everyday experiences has been shown to...
facilitate lasting happiness (Quoidbach, Berry, et al., 2010; Quoidbach, Dunn, et al., 2010). Differently from young people who derive more happiness from extraordinary experiences, ordinary experiences are associated with greater happiness as people age (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014).

Extending this line of research, we proposed another factor to consider: threat. We focused on the role that the threat of a pandemic such as COVID-19 plays in determining the effect of ordinary versus extraordinary brand experience on happiness. We further considered how the joint effect of the COVID-19 threat and experience type on happiness depends on lockdown status during the pandemic.

### 2.2 Consumer responses to threats

Previous literature has shown that people might experience different categories of threat, such as economic, health, social, informational, and environmental threats, and these threats could be caused by experiencing actual events or by thinking about potential events (Campbell et al., 2020). When a consumer experiences a threat, whether actual or potential, it leads to some disruption in their lives in terms of their routines, norms, beliefs, and behaviors. Such disruption could make people view their world as insecure and unpredictable (i.e., ontological insecurity), and feel a lack of order or meaning in their lives (Laing, 2010), which motivates cognitive, affective, or behavioral responses to cope with the threat.

Indeed, consumers’ reactions to threats are well documented in the literature (for a systematic review, see Campbell et al., 2020); consumers respond to threats through adaptation, or through a range of responses that affect their consumption choice or behavior. One type of adaptation involves emotional reactions such as depression, fear, anger, or anxiety (Carver et al., 1989). Another adaptation can impact cognition and cognitive responses, such as a loss of control or increased materialism and consumption (e.g., Chaxel, 2016; Rindfleisch et al., 2009; VanBergen & Laran, 2016). Furthermore, consumers cope with threats using different strategies depending on the situation (Han et al., 2015). Consumers may revert to old habits to assert control and feel comfortable or change their choices to act differently from how they have typically acted. For example, Park et al. (2021) demonstrated that threat of COVID-19 increases consumers’ pattern-seeking in sequential choices because patterned choices help to restore control threatened by the infectious disease. Relatedly, Kim et al. (2021) found that experiences of COVID-19 threat activate safety-seeking motivations and thus lead to extremeness aversion in choice. Nevertheless, Lamberton and Wood (2020) proposed that the COVID-19 crisis could spark innovative means of solving problems, liberating both companies and consumers to try new ideas and embrace the imperfect. For instance, consumers might experiment with homemade products that they have always been afraid to try. Indeed, Galoni et al. (2020) suggested that under the threat of contagious disease, consumers opt for either more or less familiar products depending on whether the emotions of disgust and fear are aroused.

Extending the research on consumer experiences of threats, we examine how perceived threat of COVID-19 affects consumer preference for different types of brand experience, namely ordinary or extraordinary, and their happiness from different types of brand experiences. Following previous research (Campbell et al., 2020), we define COVID-19 threats as a subjective feeling people experience regarding the negative impacts that the COVID-19 outbreak has on their lives.
2.3 Effect of threat on happiness from ordinary versus extraordinary brand experiences at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic

The literature on experiential psychology and marketing suggests that people generally derive more happiness from extraordinary experiences than from ordinary experiences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; O’Brien & Smith, 2019). This is because memories of extraordinary and meaningful life events tend to exert strong impacts on self-definition, well-being, and life satisfaction (Zauberman et al., 2009). However, in the current research, we hypothesized that perceived threat of COVID-19 would moderate the experience-type effect on happiness. Although extraordinary experiences are considered positive and sublime, unrealistic expectations, troubling learning practices, and connecting with unfamiliar others involved in extraordinary experiences represent challenges and tensions that consumers must cope with when engaging in extraordinary experiences (Lindberg & Eide, 2015). Particularly, we predicted that those challenges may have made extraordinary experiences less attractive when consumers had to cope with the threat posed by infectious disease and the disruption to routine caused by the unprecedented interventions, such as mandatory lockdown, to contain the spread of COVID-19 virus.

Specifically, considering that threats prompt people to adapt or change their behaviors to cope with the threat (Campbell et al., 2020; Han et al., 2015), we proposed that the relative impact of extraordinary and ordinary experiences on happiness would depend on threats experienced under a different status of lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, and the lockdown and other drastic measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread were first perceived as highly abnormal. Routines, which are associated with ordinary experiences, give consumers a sense of protection against chaos (Giddens, 1991). When people experience threat under such an abnormal situation, they might resort to ordinary experiences to cope with the threat. Indeed, research shows that consumers opt for more familiar products or prefer repetition of similar events to restore a sense of control over outcomes when experiences of contagious diseases activate both the feelings of disgust and fear (Galoni et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021). It is possible that the perceived threat of COVID-19 on personal health, together with the disruption that the never-before-experienced lockdown posed on daily routines, makes one's negative feelings of fear and disgust salient and strengthens one's desire to regain a sense of control, thereby flattening the positive effect of extraordinariness on happiness. In other words, we hypothesized that, under lockdown, people would derive more happiness from extraordinary brands than ordinary brands when COVID-19 threat was low. However, when threat increased, ordinary experiences became increasingly associated with happiness because ordinariness is associated with routines, commonness and induces feelings of security and order. Formally, we predicted:

**H1.** COVID-19 threat exerts converse moderating influences on the extraordinariness–happiness relationship under no lockdown and lockdown, such that when lockdowns were in place:

**H1a.** People would derive more happiness from extraordinary brand experiences than from ordinary brand experiences when perceived threat of COVID-19 was low.

**H1b.** However, high threat would attenuate the effect of experience type on happiness because ordinary experiences were increasingly associated with happiness.
People might become used to the abnormal and start accepting infection-prevention measures as part of “the new normal” as the pandemic evolves. Indeed, compared to the start of the pandemic, fewer American people are reporting the same degree of fear, and many are demotivated about following the same prevention guidelines (Maddock, 2020). According to the hedonic treadmill theory, people briefly react to bad events, but as time passes, they return to neutrality (Diener et al., 2006). Indeed, a longitudinal study indicated that individuals adapted to life events in a surprisingly short time; bad life events affected happiness only if they occurred in the past 2 months and more distant past events did not predict happiness (Suh et al., 1996). Emotional reactions eventually return to a stable individual baseline even after major life events, such as spinal cord injuries, paraplegia, and death of a spouse (Diener et al., 2006). Hence, we predicted that the joint effect of brand experience type and COVID-19 threat on consumer happiness would change after the lockdown policies were lifted.

Boredom was reported as one of the most salient negative experiences of the lockdowns due to the monotonous and tedious life circumstances (Waterschoot et al., 2021; Zhai & Xue, 2020). Research suggests that boredom prompts people to engage in rule-breaking and risky behaviors (Boylan et al., 2021; Kılıç et al., 2020). Old routines were disrupted by the pandemic, and as a result, people are more likely to take risks for the sake of opportunities (Lamberton & Wood, 2020). Drawing on the literature, we expected that the effect of COVID-19 threat on happiness derived from extraordinary versus ordinary experiences would not remain the same after the lockdown restriction was lifted.

To the extent that extraordinary experiences are riskier while ordinary experiences are more certain (Ratner et al., 1999), we predicted that experienced threat would amplify the positive effect of extraordinariness on happiness when people became accustomed to the pandemic. Specifically, under lockdowns, people who felt threatened were likely to be drawn to ordinary, familiar experiences to cope with insecurity caused by the abnormal lockdowns and other drastic infection-control measures. Contrarily, after people adapted to the new normal and the lockdowns were coming to an end, boredom and tediousness likely made people who felt threatened become open to extraordinary experiences. Formally, we predicted:

\[ H2. \text{ After the lockdown restriction was lifted, the general positive effect of extraordinariness on happiness would resume and COVID-19 threat would heighten the effect of experience type on happiness.} \]

3 | METHODOLOGY

We conducted five studies with over 1500 American adults to examine the joint effect of COVID-19 threat and lockdown status on happiness provided by an ordinary or extraordinary brand experience. These studies were conducted in different stages of the pandemic. In Studies 1A and 1B, with the data collected during May and June of 2020 when most US states were under mandatory lockdown because of COVID-19, we found that heightened threat eliminated the positive effect of extraordinariness on happiness from a brand or consumption experience. Study 2 was conducted around the end of October 2020, when most states had lifted the lockdown restrictions, and revealed a converse threat effect on happiness; perceived threat amplified the positive effect of extraordinariness on happiness. In Studies 3 and 4, we directly manipulated COVID-19 threat as well as lockdown status during time periods further away from ending of nationwide lockdown and replicated the proposed interaction effect of
COVID-19 threat and lockdown status on consumer happiness from ordinary versus extraordinary brand experiences found in Study 2. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the study participants and the time period of data collection for each study.

3.1 Study 1A

3.1.1 Participants and methods

We recruited 395 American adults (53.9% female, mean age = 40.87, age range = 18–89) between May 18 and 19, 2020 using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). We paid respondents $0.50 for participating. MTurk is a popular online platform for data collection, and MTurk data have been found to be comparable in quality to data collected from professional panels or student subject pools (Kees et al., 2017).

Participants were informed that the survey contained two parts; the aim of Part 1 was to understand consumer brand perceptions, and Part 2 contained a set of questions about the COVID-19 pandemic. In Part 1, we randomly assigned participants to one of the two brand sets, each containing five brands (Set 1: Facebook, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Gillette, Pepsi; Set 2: Mercedes Benz, BMW, Audi, Gucci, Adidas). For each of the five brands, participants saw the logo of each brand and indicated their perceived happiness from the overall brand experience using three items: the extent to which they thought the brand brought them a happy, meaningful, and personally fulfilling experience (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). They then rated the brands to be associated with ordinary or extraordinary experiences on a five-point scale (1 = extraordinary, 5 = ordinary). We reverse-coded the item, so the higher the score, the more extraordinary a brand experience was. We measured subjective perceptions about extraordinariness of brand experiences because experiences with the same brand might differ across individuals. For each participant, we took an average of the ratings for the five brands they were assigned to rate, which created an aggregate brand evaluation index on happiness from a brand experience, experience extraordinariness, and brand familiarity.

In the second part of the survey, we measured perceived threat of COVID-19 by asking two questions: “To what extent does the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak cause a negative impact on your ordinary life (usual and within the realm of your regular everyday life)” and “To what extent does the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak cause a negative impact on your extraordinary life (unusual and beyond the realm of your regular everyday life”; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Participants also indicated whether there was a lockdown policy in their local country (“Is there any lockdown policy in your county now? By lockdown, we mean some stay-at-home orders in your local country, in which residents are asked to shelter in place and go out only for essential services like buying food and medicine”; 1 = yes, 0 = no), and the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the suggestion of social distancing in public places (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Finally, participants reported their demographics.

3.1.2 Results

Happiness from a brand experience

We took an average of the three items measuring happiness from a brand experience (\( \alpha = 0.96 \)) to form a happiness index and took an average of the two items measuring the negative impact
| Study sample | Study 1A | Study 1B | Study 2 | Study 3 | Study 4 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 395 General adults | 195 General adults | 279 General adults | 69 Undergraduates | 592 General adults |
| Time period of data collection | May 18–19, 2020 | May 25–June 12, 2020 | October 23–28, 2020 | December 8–10, 2021 | December 10–13, 2021 |
| Percent (%) | Percent (%) | Percent (%) | Percent (%) | Percent (%) | Percent (%) |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Male | 46.1 | 33.8 | 37.1 | 58.0 | 32.3 |
| Female | 53.9 | 66.2 | 63.2 | 42.0 | 66.6 |
| Others | N/A | N/A | 0.7 | 0.0 | 1.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Racial background | | | | | |
| Caucasian/White | 81.8 | 73.8 | 81.7 | 71 | 77.2 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 3.8 | 5.6 | 5.4 | 5.8 | 4.7 |
| Black or African American | 6.6 | 11.3 | 7.9 | 1.4 | 10.3 |
| Native American or American Indian | 1.3 | 2.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.5 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5.1 | 5.1 | 2.5 | 17.4 | 4.9 |
| Others | 1.5 | 1.5 | 2.5 | 4.3 | 2.4 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Marital/relationship status | | | | | |
| Married | 46.7 | 39.0 | 43.3 | N/A | 42.4 |
| Widowed | 2.3 | 1.0 | 2.2 | N/A | 0.8 |
| Divorced | 7.3 | 8.2 | 10.0 | N/A | 7.9 |
| Separated | 1.0 | 2.6 | 1.8 | N/A | 1.4 |
| Single | 25.1 | 31.3 | 24.0 | N/A | 28.2 |
| Living with a partner in a committed relationship | 10.1 | 12.8 | 13.3 | N/A | 14.5 |
| In a serious or committed relationship, but not living together | 6.6 | 5.1 | 5.4 | N/A | 4.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | N/A | 100.0 |
| Annual household income in 2019/2020 | | | | | |
| Less than $19,999 | 12.9 | 14.4 | 14.7 | N/A | 17.7 |
| $20,000–$49,999 | 30.1 | 21.5 | 27.2 | N/A | 33.8 |
of COVID-19 ($r = 0.65, p < 0.00$) to form a COVID-19 threat index. The interaction effect of experience extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat on the happiness index was consistent among participants who were assigned Brand Set 1 and those who were assigned Brand Set 2. Thus, we aggregated the two conditions for the following analyses. We regressed the happiness index on experience extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, and their interactions, controlling for brand set ($Set 1 = 0, Set 2 = 1$). The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.0968, MSE = 1.71, F[4, 390] = 10.45, p = 0.00$; Model 1, Table 2). Both COVID-19 threat ($b = 0.20, SE = 0.04, t = 4.62, p = 0.00$) and brand set ($b = 0.45, SE = 0.14, t = 3.24, p = 0.00$) had a significant main effect. Importantly, the interaction effect of extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat was significant ($b = 0.09, SE = 0.04, t = 2.11, p = 0.03$). Specifically, when COVID-19 threat was low (1 SD below the mean), the higher the brand experience extraordinariness, the greater happiness participants derived from the brand ($effect = 0.26, SE = 0.11, t = 2.41, p = 0.02, CI_{95} [0.0471, 0.4644]$). In contrast, when the COVID-19 threat was high (1 SD above the mean), the effect of extraordinariness on happiness was rendered insignificant ($effect = 0.04, SE = 0.09, t = 0.40, p = 0.69, CI_{95} [-0.2237, 0.1483]$). The overall results were consistent without including brand set as a covariate (Model 0, Table 2).

Our study participants found Brand Set 1 to be more familiar than Brand Set 2 ($r = -0.41, p < 0.01$), and reported greater happiness from more familiar brands ($r = 0.16, p < 0.01$). Therefore, we conducted another regression controlling for brand familiarity. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.15, MSE = 1.61, F[5, 389] = 13.73, p = 0.00$; Model 2, Table 2). Extraordinariness ($b = 0.13, SE = 0.07, t = 1.88, p = 0.06$) had a marginally significant main effect. COVID-19 threat ($b = 0.18, SE = 0.04, t = 4.33, p = 0.00$), brand set ($b = 0.72, SE = 0.14, t = 4.92, p = 0.00$), and brand familiarity ($b = 0.29, SE = 0.06, t = 4.93, p = 0.00$) had significant main effects.

| Study 1A | Study 1B | Study 2 | Study 3 | Study 4 |
|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Study sample | Time period of data collection | Percent (%) | Percent (%) | Percent (%) | Percent (%) |
| 395 General adults | May 18–19, 2020 | 29.7 | 31.9 | 25.4 | N/A | 23.2 |
| 195 General adults | May 25–June 12, 2020 | 10.9 | 11.3 | 13.2 | N/A | 10.5 |
| 279 General adults | October 23–28, 2020 | 10.9 | 17.4 | 15.1 | N/A | 10.6 |
| $More than$ $150,000$ | | 5.6 | 3.6 | 4.3 | N/A | 4.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | N/A | 100.0 |
| Working status | | | | | |
| Work from home | 51.1 | 48.7 | 36.2 | N/A | 35.3 |
| Work in office | 15.4 | 18.5 | 28.0 | N/A | 32.4 |
| Unemployed | 17.5 | 22.6 | 19.0 | N/A | 15.0 |
| Full time student | 4.3 | 2.1 | 3.2 | N/A | 4.2 |
| Others | 11.6 | 8.2 | 13.6 | N/A | 13.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | N/A | 100.0 |

TABLE 1 (Continued)
TABLE 2  Happiness from a brand experience as a function of experience extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, brand set, and lockdown status (Study 1A)

| Source of variation                     | Model 0 |           |           |           | Model 1 |           |           |           | Model 2 |           |           |           | Model 3 |           |           |
|-----------------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|
|                                         | Coeff   | SE        | t         | p         | Coeff   | SE        | t         | p         | Coeff   | SE        | t         | p         | Coeff   | SE        | t         | p         |
| Constant                                | 4.51    | 0.07      | 67.50     | 0.00      | 4.29    | 0.09      | 46.08     | 0.00      | 2.46    | 0.38      | 6.43      | 0.00      | 4.07    | 0.15      | 27.96     | 0.00      |
| Brand set (Set 1 = 0, Set 2 = 1)        |         |           |           |           | 0.45    | 0.14      | 3.24      | 0.00      | 0.72    | 0.15      | 4.93      | 0.00      | 0.41    | 0.14      | 2.97      | 0.00      |
| Brand familiarity                       |         |           |           |           |         |           |           |           | 0.29    | 0.06      | 4.93      | 0.00      |         |           |           |           |
| Extraordinariness                       | 0.18    | 0.07      | 2.53      | 0.01      | 0.11    | 0.07      | 1.50      | 0.14      | 0.13    | 0.07      | 1.88      | 0.06      | 0.25    | 0.17      | 1.50      | 0.13      |
| COVID-19 threat                         | 0.18    | 0.04      | 4.28      | 0.00      | 0.20    | 0.04      | 4.62      | 0.00      | 0.18    | 0.04      | 4.33      | 0.00      | 0.06    | 0.08      | 0.71      | 0.48      |
| Extraordinariness × COVID-19 threat     | -0.11   | 0.04      | -2.43     | 0.02      | -0.09   | 0.04      | -2.12     | 0.03      | -0.09   | 0.04      | -2.00     | 0.05      | 0.12    | 0.10      | 1.22      | 0.22      |
| Lockdown status                         |         |           |           |           |         |           |           |           | 0.29    | 0.15      | 1.93      | 0.05      |         |           |           |           |
| Extraordinariness × lockdown status     |         |           |           |           |         |           |           |           | -0.10   | 0.18      | -0.53     | 0.60      |         |           |           |           |
| COVID-19 threat × lockdown status       |         |           |           |           |         |           |           |           | 0.17    | 0.10      | 1.80      | 0.07      |         |           |           |           |
| Extraordinariness × COVID-19 threat ×  |         |           |           |           |         |           |           |           | -0.27   | 0.11      | -2.48     | 0.01      |         |           |           |           |

Abbreviations: Coeff, coefficient; SE, standard error.
Importantly, the interaction effect of extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat remained significant ($b = -0.09$, SE = 0.04, $t = -2.00$, $p = 0.05$) after controlling for brand familiarity.

**Moderating effect of lockdown status**

At the time of data collection, 72.9% of our study participants ($N = 288$) were under mandatory lockdown in their local county. Compared to participants who were not under lockdown (27.1%, $N = 107$), participants under lockdown perceived greater negative impacts of COVID-19 ($M_{\text{lockdown}} = 4.90$, SD = 1.55, $M_{\text{no-lockdown}} = 4.29$, SD = 1.56; $F[1, 393] = 12.11$, $p = 0.001$) and agreed with the social distancing policy to a greater extent ($M_{\text{lockdown}} = 6.19$, SD = 1.28, $M_{\text{no-lockdown}} = 5.81$, SD = 1.62; $F[1, 393] = 5.91$, $p = 0.02$). Considering the significant differences between the lockdown and no-lockdown groups, we examined the moderating effect of lockdown status. We regressed the happiness index on extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, lockdown status ($\text{under lockdown} = 1$, $\text{no lockdown} = 0$), and their interaction terms, controlling for brand set (Set 1 = 0, Set 2 = 1). The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.13$, MSE = 1.67, $F[8, 386] = 6.97$, $p = 0.00$; Model 3, Table 2).

The results revealed a significant main effect of lockdown status ($b = -0.29$, SE = 0.15, $t = -1.93$, $p = 0.05$) and brand set ($b = 0.41$, SE = 0.14, $t = 2.97$, $p = 0.003$). The two-way interaction effect of COVID-19 threat and lockdown status was marginally significant ($b = 0.17$, SE = 0.10, $t = 1.80$, $p = 0.07$). Importantly, the three-way interaction effect was significant ($b = -0.27$, SE = 0.11, $t = -2.48$, $p = 0.01$; Figure 1). Specifically, the interaction between extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat was mainly manifested among the group of participants under lockdown (effect = -0.15, $F[1, 386] = 8.97$, $p = 0.003$); participants who perceived low threat of COVID-19 derived greater happiness from extraordinary brand experiences than from ordinary ones, but those who perceived high COVID-19 threat derived comparable happiness from extraordinary and ordinary brand experiences. In contrast, among the no-lockdown group, the interaction effect of COVID-19 threat and extraordinariness became insignificant (effect = 0.12, $F[1, 386] = 1.48$, $p = 0.22$).

**Ancillary findings**

Previous research suggests that older (younger) people tend to appreciate ordinary (extraordinary) experiences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Thus, we regressed the happiness index on extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, lockdown status, and their interaction terms, with age as a covariate. The result revealed a nonsignificant main effect of age ($p = 0.88$). The three-way interaction remained significant ($p = 0.01$) after controlling for age.

In addition, we found that lockdown and no-lockdown groups exhibited differential agreement with the social-distancing policy ($M_{\text{lockdown}} = 6.2$, SD = 1.24, $M_{\text{no-lockdown}} = 5.77$, SD = 1.70; $F[1, 393] = 7.65$, $p = 0.01$). Agreement with the social-distancing policy was also positively correlated with perceived COVID-19 threat ($r = 0.19$, $p = 0.00$).

3.1.3 | Discussion

Study 1A showed that COVID-19 threat moderated the effect of brand experience extraordinariness on happiness. Specifically, people who perceived low threat of COVID-19 derived greater happiness from brands associated with extraordinary experiences than from ones associated with ordinary experiences. In contrast, when the threat was high, people derived comparable happiness from extraordinary and ordinary brand experiences. Furthermore, the moderating effect of COVID-19 threat was mainly manifested among people who were under lockdown, rather than ones under no
lockdown. In Study 1A, we measured perceived experience extraordinariness of and happiness from existing brands. The correlational nature of the study was limited in testing the causal relationship between experience type and happiness. Therefore, in Study 1B, we attempted to replicate the finding of Study 1A by directly manipulating experience extraordinariness.

3.2 | Study 1B

3.2.1 | Participants and methods

One hundred and ninety-five American adults (66.2% female, mean age = 37.41, age range = 19–72) from MTurk participated in this study from May 25, 2020, through June 12, 2020, in exchange for a small monetary reward ($1.00).
We manipulated extraordinariness of a consumption experience and randomly assigned participants to the ordinary or extraordinary experience condition. As a cover story, participants were told that the purpose of the task was to understand how consumers think and feel about a coffee ad. We varied the body copy across the two experience conditions. Specifically, participants in the ordinary condition saw an ad message “joy is in routine moments, in ordinary days” (“joy is in unusual moments, in extraordinary days”; Appendix A; Figures A1 and A2). After viewing the campaign, participants reported perceived happiness by indicating the extent to which drinking the coffee brought them a happy, meaningful, and personally fulfilling experience (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). As a manipulation check for the brand experience manipulation, participants answered two questions: “This ad features an ordinary experience by drinking the coffee” and “This ad features an extraordinary experience by drinking the coffee” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Finally, participants responded to the two items measuring COVID-19 threat and indicated the lockdown status as Study 1A and reported demographics. During the time of data collection, 115 participants (59%) were under lockdown in their local country.

3.2.2 | Results

Manipulation check
The two items measuring ordinariness and extraordinariness of the coffee consumption experience were highly correlated (r = −0.29, p = 0.00). Thus, we reverse-scored the ordinariness item and took an average of the two items to form an aggregate consumption experience rating. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (ad appeal: ordinary vs. extraordinary) on the experience rating revealed a significant main effect of ad appeal (F[1193] = 27.04, p = 0.00), such that the ad featuring an extraordinary appeal (M = 4.67, SD = 1.34) was perceived to feature a more extraordinary experience than did the ad with an ordinary appeal (M = 3.63, SD = 1.47). The finding suggests a successful manipulation of experience type.

Expected happiness from a coffee consumption experience
We formed a happiness index (α = 0.90) and COVID-19 threat index (r = 0.63, p = 0.00) as in Study 1A. We regressed the happiness index on ad appeal (ordinary = 0, extraordinary = 1), COVID-19 threat, lockdown status (no-lockdown = 0, lockdown = 1), and their interactions. The overall model was significant (R² = 0.0932, MSE = 2.28, F[7, 187] = 2.75, p = 0.01). COVID-19 threat had a significant main effect (b = 1.12, SE = 0.30, t = 3.71, p = 0.00). The two-way interaction effect of ad appeal and COVID-19 threat (b = −1.03, SE = 0.43, t = −2.41, p = 0.02) and the interaction effect of COVID-19 threat and lockdown status (b = −0.69, SE = 0.21, t = −3.34, p = 0.001) were significant. The main effects of ad appeal and lockdown status, as well as the ad-appeal × lockdown-status interaction effect, were nonsignificant (p > 0.1). Importantly, the three-way interaction was significant (b = 0.63, SE = 0.28, t = 2.25, p = 0.03; Figure 2). Specifically, among participants under lockdown, COVID-19 threat moderated the experience type effect on happiness (F[1187] = 4.52, p = 0.03), such that participants reported greater happiness with the extraordinary ad than the ordinary ad when perceived threat was low (−1 SD from the mean; effect = 1.15, SE = 0.45, t = 2.54, p = 0.01), whereas participants reported comparable happiness with the ordinary and extraordinary ad when perceived threat was high (+1 SD from the mean; effect = −0.12, SE = 0.38, t = −0.33, p = 0.74).
Among participants under no lockdown, the threat × experience-type interaction effect was nonsignificant ($F_{[1187]} = 1.27, p = 0.26$).

We performed another regression analysis with ad appeal, COVID-19 threat, lockdown status, and their interactions as the independent variable and happiness as the dependent variable, controlling for age. The three-way interaction effect remained significant ($p = 0.02$), whereas age had a nonsignificant main effect ($p = 0.34$).

### 3.2.3 Discussion

By directly manipulating experience type using ordinary versus extraordinary ad appeal, in Study 1B we replicated the finding of Study 1A, such that the joint effect of COVID-19 threat
and experience type on happiness was mainly exhibited among participants under lockdown. The findings across Studies 1A and 1B support our hypothesis that for people who feel highly threatened by COVID-19, extraordinary, external infection-control measures (e.g., lockdowns) attenuate the premium happiness that extraordinary experiences contribute.

Although we found a nonsignificant moderating effect of threat on happiness from ordinary versus extraordinary experiences under nonlockdown, it is possible that the sample size of the no-lockdown group was too small to reveal the effect (i.e., most Americans at the time were under mandatory lockdown). Therefore, we conducted Study 2 when the lockdown restriction had been mostly eased in the United States to further examine the role of lockdown status. Furthermore, we intended to explore the mechanism underlying the proposed effects.

3.3 Study 2

3.3.1 Participants and methods

In exchange for a monetary reward ($0.95), 279 American adults (63.1% female; mean age = 40.56, age range = 19–77) from MTurk participated in this study between October 23 and 28, 2020.

The design of this study was similar to that of Study 1A. In the first part of the study, participants were presented with the top 15 best global brands (Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google, Samsung, Coca-Cola, Toyota, Mercedes Benz, McDonald’s, Disney, BMW, Intel, Facebook, IBM, Nike) according to Interbrand (https://interbrand.com/best-global-brands). For each brand, participants indicated their perceived happiness from the brand experience using the same three-item scales as Study 1A and rated extraordinariness of the brand experience on a seven-point scale (1 = very ordinary, 4 = equally ordinary and extraordinary, 7 = very extraordinary). Differently from Study 1A, we explicitly labeled the midpoint of the extraordinariness scale because adding a midpoint (a) decreased tendencies to choose extreme response categories in a rating scale (Weijters et al., 2010), and (b) allowed participants to capture experiences with a brand that were both ordinary and extraordinary. In addition, differently from Study 1A where people were randomly assigned to one of the two brand sets that differed in brand familiarity and some other possible features, all participants in Study 2 responded to a larger, diverse set of brands. Participants also reported brand familiarity using the same measures as those used in Study 1A.

In the second part of Study 2, participants answered the same set of questions measuring the threat of COVID-19, lockdown status, and agreement with social-distancing policy as used in Study 1A. As in Study 1A, we formed the indices of happiness (α = 0.97) and COVID-19 threat (r = 0.74, p = 0.00) by taking an average of the scores of the relevant measurement items and used the indices for the following analyses.

To explore the underlying mechanism, we included the measure of self–brand connection (“How do you feel personally connected to this brand?” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Brands are suggested to be triggers for consumer experiences, which could foster consumer happiness both in the form of pleasure and in the form of meaning (Schmitt et al., 2015), and consumers incorporate a brand into their self-concept (i.e., self–brand connections) to meet the needs of self-enhancement or self-verification (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). To cope with the COVID-19 threat, consumers may resort to brands that help create hedonic or meaningful experiences. To the extent that experiences contribute to the meaning of one’s life (Arnould & Price, 1993;
Campos et al., 2016) and meaning in life is associated with happiness (Steger & Kashdan, 2013), we expected that the extent to which consumers feel connected with the brand that brings an ordinary or extraordinary experience would underlie the joint effect of experience extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat on consumer happiness.

3.3.2 | Results

**Happiness from a brand experience**

We regressed the happiness index on experience extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, and their interaction. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.50$, MSE = 0.67, $F[3, 275] = 93.09$, $p = 0.00$; Model 1, Table 3). Experience extraordinariness ($b = 0.76$, SE = 0.05, $t = 16.08$, $p = 0.00$) and COVID-19 threat ($b = 0.06$, SE = 0.03, $t = 2.09$, $p = 0.04$) exerted a significant main effect. The interaction effect of experience extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat was significant ($b = 0.05$, SE = 0.02, $t = 1.95$, $p = 0.05$). Specifically, we found that people generally derived greater happiness from extraordinary brand experiences than from ordinary ones, and perceived threat of COVID-19 amplified the premium that extraordinary experiences contribute to consumer happiness. The positive effect of experience extraordinariness (i.e., negative effect of experience ordinariness) on happiness was stronger when perceived COVID-19 threat was high (+1 SD from the mean; effect = 0.84, SE = 0.06, $t = 13.38$, $p = 0.00$) than when it was low (−1 SD from the mean; effect = 0.68, SE = 0.06, $t = 10.50$, $p = 0.00$; Figure 3).

Another regression with brand familiarity as a covariate revealed consistent results. There were significant main effects of experience extraordinariness ($b = 0.70$, SE = 0.05, $t = 14.50$, $p = 0.00$), COVID-19 threat ($b = 0.06$, SE = 0.03, $t = 2.03$, $p = 0.04$), and brand familiarity ($b = 0.22$, SE = 0.06, $t = 3.70$, $p = 0.0003$). The interaction effect of extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat remained significant after controlling for brand familiarity ($b = 0.05$, SE = 0.02, $t = 1.95$, $p = 0.05$; Model 2, Table 3).

**Moderated mediation via self-brand connection**

We performed another regression on perceived connection to a brand with experience extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, and their interaction as predictors. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.54$, MSE = 0.75, $F[3, 275] = 108.63$, $p = 0.00$; Table 3). Extraordinariness ($b = 0.84$, SE = 0.05, $t = 16.79$, $p = 0.00$) and COVID-19 threat ($b = 0.11$, SE = 0.03, $t = 3.57$, $p = 0.0004$) had significant main effects. The two-way interaction ($b = 0.09$, SE = 0.03, $t = 3.41$, $p = 0.0007$) was significant, such that the positive effect of brand experience extraordinariness on happiness was stronger when perceived COVID-19 threat was higher (Figure 4).

To assess whether self–brand connection mediated the interaction effect between brand extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat on happiness, we used the SPSS bootstrapping macro by Hayes (2017, PROCESS Model 7) with 5000 bootstrap samples. The index of moderated mediation was significant ($b = 0.06$; SE = 0.03, CI$_{95}$ [0.0183, 0.0999]), indicating that COVID-19 threat moderated the mediation through self–brand connection. Specifically, compared with ordinary brand experiences, extraordinary brand experiences resulted in greater self–brand connection, and therefore higher happiness. The indirect effect of extraordinariness on happiness via self–brand connection was stronger when the COVID-19 threat was high ($b = 0.65$; SE = 0.07, CI$_{95}$ [0.5280, 0.7897]) than when it was low ($b = 0.45$; SE = 0.07, CI$_{95}$ [0.3185, 0.5935]).
Ancillary findings

At the time of data collection, lockdown restrictions had been mostly eased in the United States. Only 18.3% of our study participants \( (N = 51) \) were under lockdown in their local county. When comparing the lockdown and no-lockdown groups, we found no significant differences in terms of the perceived negative impacts of COVID-19 \( (M_{\text{lockdown}} = 4.83, SD = 1.60, M_{\text{no-lockdown}} = 4.54, SD = 1.77; F[1, 277] = 1.18, p = 0.28) \) and agreement with social-distancing policy \( (M_{\text{lockdown}} = 6.71, SD = 2.10, M_{\text{no-lockdown}} = 7.12, SD = 1.66; F[1, 277] = 2.38, p = 0.12) \).

We also regressed happiness on experience extraordinariness, COVID-19 threat, and their interaction term, with age as a covariate. The age main effect was nonsignificant \( (p = 0.40) \). The extraordinariness \( \times \) COVID-19 threat interaction effect rendered marginally significant \( (p = 0.06) \).
3.3.3 | Discussion

The findings from Study 2 showed that the effect of COVID-19 threat on happiness from extraordinary versus ordinary brand experiences was different after lockdown restrictions had been lifted. The interaction effect of brand experience extraordinariness and COVID-19 threat observed in late October 2020, when the lockdown restrictions had been mostly eased, revealed that people derived greater happiness from extraordinary brand experiences than from ordinary ones, and the extraordinariness effect on happiness was stronger when perceived COVID-19 threat was higher. Furthermore, perceived personal connection to a brand was identified as a mediator underlying the interaction effect of COVID-19 threat and extraordinariness on happiness.

Overall, the findings across Studies 1 and 2 support our hypotheses that the joint effect of COVID-19 threat and lockdown status on happiness from extraordinary versus ordinary experiences varied in different stages of the pandemic. After lockdown restrictions were eased at the later stage of the pandemic, the general belief that extraordinariness produces happiness resumed, and increased threat prompted people to opt for extraordinary experiences in the pursuit of happiness. In the next set of studies, we attempted to test robustness of the findings in Studies 1 through 2 by experimentally manipulating threat of COVID-19 and lockdown status.

3.4 | Study 3

3.4.1 | Participants and methods

We conducted the study during December 8–10, 2021, soon after the new variant Omicron was declared a new coronavirus variant of concern. Seventy-seven undergraduates from a US university participated in the study in partial fulfillment of a class requirement. Eight participants...
who failed the attention checks\(^2\) were excluded, leaving a sample of 69 (42% female; mean age \(= 20.22\), age range \(= 19–27\)) for the final analysis.

We first manipulated perceived threat of COVID-19 by having participants read a newspaper article with a topic related to either COVID-19 (the high-threat condition) or sports (the control condition; adapted from Park et al., 2021; Appendix B; Figures B1 and B2). Specifically, participants in the high-threat condition read an article titled “The Highly Contagious Omicron Variant is a New COVID-19 Threat,” suggesting that the new variant, together with the prevalence of the Delta variant and the sluggish vaccination, may further threaten public health. In contrast, participants in the control condition read an article titled “Nets Adding Another All-Star in LaMarcus After Buyout with Spurs,” discussing the NBA buyout market. After reading the article, participants wrote down three thoughts about the article and answered the attention check question asking about the topic of the article (food/sports/health: COVID-19/music/business).

Next, we presented participants with the ordinary and extraordinary ads used in Study 1B, one at a time (with the order of presentation counterbalanced), and asked participants to indicate their agreement/disagreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) on a series of statements measuring perceived happiness (“Drinking the coffee will bring me a happy experience”) and ad extraordinariness and ordinariness (“This ad features an ordinary/extraordinary experience of drinking coffee”) for each ad. Participants also reported their attitude toward each ad on five-point semantic differential scales: unattractive–attractive, bad–good, low–high in quality, dislike–like, and inferior–superior. Finally, as a manipulation check for the threat manipulation, participants indicated their perceived threat of COVID-19 (“To what extent do you feel threatened by the coronavirus [COVID-19] pandemic?”; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). They also reported the lockdown status in their local county, their agreement with the social-distancing policy,\(^3\) and demographics, as in previous studies.

### 3.4.2 Results

**Manipulation checks**

A one-way ANOVA (COVID-19 threat: high vs. control) on the measure of perceived threat of COVID-19 revealed a significant main effect \(F[1, 67] = 4.57, p = 0.04\), such that participants in the high-threat condition \((M = 4.41, SD = 1.79)\) reported a higher perceived threat than did those in the control condition \((M = 3.54, SD = 1.58)\). The result suggests a successful threat manipulation.

We formed an aggregate ad extraordinariness index for each ad by taking an average of the ad extraordinariness item and the reverse-scored ad ordinariness item \(r_{\text{ordinary-ad}} = -0.68, r_{\text{extraordinary-ad}} = -0.70\). A repeated measures ANOVA with threat as a between-participants factor, ad type as a within-participants factor, and the ad extraordinariness indices as the dependent variable showed a significant ad-type effect \(F[1, 67] = 118.60, p = 0.00\), such that the extraordinary ad \((M = 5.62, SD = 1.70)\) was indeed perceived to be more extraordinary than the ordinary ad \((M = 2.15, SD = 1.47)\). The threat main effect \(F[1, 67] = 2.65, p = 0.11\) and the interaction effect between threat and ad type \(F[1, 67] = 1.61, p = 0.21\) were nonsignificant.

**Relative happiness from an extraordinary versus ordinary consumption experience**

A relative happiness with extraordinary (vs. ordinary) ad was formed by taking an average of the happiness from the extraordinary ad and reverse-scored happiness from the ordinary...
ad. Higher scores indicated a higher relative happiness with the extraordinary ad compared to the ordinary ad. We then performed a one-way ANOVA on the relative happiness index. The result showed a significant threat effect ($F[1, 67] = 5.10, p = 0.03$), such that participants in the high-threat condition ($M = 4.32, SD = 0.68$) reported a greater relative happiness with the extraordinary ad over the ordinary ad, compared with ones in the control condition ($M = 4.01, SD = 0.43$).

**Ad attitude**

For each ad, we formed an aggregate ad attitude index by taking an average of the five attitude items ($\alpha_{\text{ordinary-ad}} = 0.85, \alpha_{\text{extraordinary-ad}} = 0.89$). A repeated measures ANOVA on the attitude indices, with ad type as a within-participants factor and threat as a between-participants factor, showed nonsignificant main effects of threat and ad type and nonsignificant interaction effect ($p$'s $> 0.15$). This finding suggests that ad attitude did not differ by ad type nor by the threat manipulation.

3.4.3 | Discussion

Study 3 contained data observed after the COVID-19 pandemic entered the second year. At the time of Study 3, lockdown restrictions were mostly lifted and many people were ready to embrace the post-pandemic life. We manipulated threat of COVID-19 amid Omicron becoming a new variant of concern and found that heightened threat increased expected relative happiness from an extraordinary experience over an ordinary experience, replicating what was found in Study 2. In the next study, we simultaneously manipulated COVID-19 threat and lockdown status to examine their distinct impacts on happiness from extraordinary versus ordinary experiences.

3.5 | Study 4

3.5.1 | Participants and methods

We recruited 593 American adults who were under no lockdown in their local county and state via MTurk from December 10–13, 2021 (with a compensation of $1.00). One participant who failed the question checking of the topic of the news article in the threat manipulation task (same as Study 3) was excluded, leaving a sample of 592 (66.6% female; mean age = 40.74, age range = 19–78) for the final analysis.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions from a 2 (COVID-19 threat: high vs. control) $\times$ 2 (lockdown: absent vs. present) between-participants design. We manipulated COVID-19 threat using the same news article reading task as Study 3. After reading the news article, participants provided their thoughts, responded to the attention-check question asking the topic of the article, and responded to the threat-manipulation check. To manipulate lockdown status, we presented participants in the lockdown-present condition with a scenario in which they imagined that, due to a spike of COVID-19 cases in their local state, the state government decided to reimpose some stay-at-home orders to contain the spreading of virus. After reading and imagining being in the scenario, participants briefly described how they would feel or think when being in the situation. Participants in the lockdown-absent condition...
did not read or write anything. Next, as a seemingly unrelated task, participants were presented with the extraordinary and ordinary coffee ads (same as Study 3), side by side, and indicated their relative preference between the two ads on a nine-point scale, with 1 (9) representing a preference toward the ordinary (extraordinary) ad. Finally, participants indicated their agreement with the social-distancing policy and reported demographics.

3.5.2 | Results

Manipulation check
A 2 (COVID-19 threat: high vs. control) × 2 (lockdown: absent vs. present) ANOVA on perceived threat of COVID-19 showed a significant threat main effect ($F[1, 588] = 9.43, p = 0.002$). Participants in the high-threat condition ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.93$) reported a greater perceived COVID-19 threat than did those in the control condition ($M = 3.93, SD = 1.95$), suggesting a successful manipulation of COVID-19 threat.

Relative preference for extraordinary ad over ordinary ad
Another two-way ANOVA on the ad-preference measure showed a marginal main effect of lockdown ($F[1, 588] = 2.88, p = 0.09$), such that participants in the lockdown-present condition ($M = 4.01, SD = 3.11$) reported a greater preference toward the extraordinary ad than did those in the lockdown-absent condition ($M = 3.62, SD = 2.89$). The threat main effect was nonsignificant ($p = 0.20$). Importantly, a marginally significant two-way interaction between COVID-19 threat and lockdown emerged ($F[1, 588] = 3.32, p = 0.069$). Specifically, when lockdown was absent, high-threat group ($M = 3.98, SD = 2.93$) reported a greater preference toward the extraordinary ad than did the control group ($M = 3.21, SD = 2.80; F[1, 588] = 4.66, p = 0.03$). In contrast, the high-threat group ($M = 3.95, SD = 3.17$) and control group ($M = 4.08, SD = 3.05$) reported a comparable ad preference when lockdown was present ($F[1, 588] = 0.15, p = 0.70$; Figure 5).
Age and relative preference for the extraordinary ad over the ordinary ad was negatively correlated \((r = -0.08, p = 0.04)\). That is, older people exhibited lower relative preference for the extraordinary ad, which is consistent with previous research (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Thus, we performed a 2 (COVID-19 threat) \(\times\) 2 (lockdown) analysis of covariance, with age as a covariate. The main effect of lockdown \((F[1, 587] = 2.91, p = 0.09)\) and the threat \(\times\) lockdown interaction \((F[1, 587] = 2.97, p = 0.09)\) remained marginally significant.

3.5.3 | Discussion

In Study 4, we experimentally manipulated both threat of COVID-19 and lockdown status and showed that increased threat led to preference for an extraordinary ad over an ordinary ad when lockdown was absent, but an imagined lockdown eliminated the threat effect on ad preference. The finding mirrored what was found in previous studies when both COVID-19 threat and lockdown status were measured.

4 | CONCLUSION AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 outbreak affects both ordinary and extraordinary experiences. Ordinary experiences are disrupted by keeping social distance and avoiding many daily activities like visiting friends and gathering in churches. Wearing masks and washing hands have become the “new normal” in everyday experiences. Meanwhile, people must face extraordinary experiences, such as mandatory lockdown, working at home, virtual meetings for work or socialization, the infection of an acquaintance, and so on. Under these unprecedented circumstances, consumer behaviors have changed, and their happiness is dampened. Furthermore, the pandemic is evolving and consumer responses to the threat of COVID-19 might not be the same at different stages of the pandemic (when lockdowns were in place vs. removed). Therefore, marketing practitioners need to reconsider their branding and marketing communication strategies, whether to adopt a tactic featuring ordinariness or extraordinariness, to communicate with consumers in threats more effectively.

The current research examines the joint impact of the COVID-19 threat and brand experience (ordinary vs. extraordinary) on happiness when consumers are at different statuses of lockdown due to COVID-19. Our findings suggest that the COVID-19 threat exerts converse moderating influences on the extraordinariness–happiness association under lockdown as opposed to no lockdown. Specifically, when people were under lockdown during the early stage of the pandemic (i.e., mid-May 2020), they extracted more happiness from extraordinary than from ordinary brand experience when perceived threat from COVID-19 was low. However, when the threat from the pandemic was high, ordinary experiences produced as much happiness as extraordinary experiences. After the lockdown restrictions had been mostly lifted (i.e., late October 2020 and afterwards), people gained more happiness from extraordinary brand experiences, and perceived threat intensified the positive effect of brand-experience extraordinariness on happiness.

4.1 | Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

This paper offers several theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to the branding and advertising literature by examining the differences between ordinary and extraordinary brand
experiences and their impact on consumer happiness. In addition, our paper is the first to show that people can extract happiness from brands even when they are facing threats. Second, we made an empirical contribution by testing the framework of happiness and brand experience (ordinary vs. extraordinary) across a large US sample referring to brands in different industries. Most of the previous literature focuses on happiness from experiential consumption, but not from consumer experiences with a brand. Our research fills this gap by showing the effect of brand experience on happiness. We measured subjective perception of extraordinariness associated with a brand experience as well as manipulated brand experience ordinariness and extraordinariness using message framing in an advertisement. Third, we made a unique contribution to the threat literature by collecting data at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread threats felt by consumers on economic, health, and financial levels, which has affected consumer behavior in the marketplace. Most of the previous literature on threat focuses on only one kind of threat. Our research complements the previous literature by showing the effect of a combination of threats. Moreover, our research disentangles the impacts of subjective perception of threat and an external intervention (i.e., lockdown) during the pandemic. Across five studies, we demonstrated that lockdown status moderates the interaction effect of brand experience type and COVID-19 threat on consumer happiness. Consumers rarely experience a large-scale lockdown due to a pandemic, and this research enables us to study how lockdown policy shapes consumer happiness.

Managerially, our research provides important implications for marketing practitioners by shedding light on how companies should adjust their marketing communication strategies during and after the pandemic. Specifically, when lockdown policies are in place, companies are recommended to associate their brands with ordinary experiences in advertisements to promote consumer happiness from a brand experience, especially for consumers experiencing high pandemic threat. Conversely, our findings also suggest that featuring extraordinary brand experiences in advertisements might better promote consumer happiness within countries that have lifted COVID-19 restrictions. Our research also provides insights into how brand experiences could promote consumer well-being and happiness during public crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively influenced mental well-being and caused negative emotions including stress, fear, anger, depression, and boredom (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Zhang & Ma, 2020). This work reveals that marketing has the potential to exert a positive impact on consumer mental health and overall well-being (Minton, 2022).

Furthermore, our results are implicative for government and policy makers who want to help people mentally recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Although reported cases and deaths are declining globally and several countries have lifted restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, and new variants have increased uncertainty. When consumers are facing high threat and their daily lives are disrupted by abnormal events, consumption of ordinary experiences is associated with increasing happiness. However, after the restrictions are lifted and consumers go about their everyday life, extraordinary experiences will be superior to ordinary ones in promoting happiness.

4.2 Limitation and future research directions

The current research is not free of limitations. First, although we attempted to collect data at different points of time during the pandemic and expected that people adapted to the new normal of COVID-19 gradually, the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is dynamic and evolving;
therefore, the results may not be stable and must be further verified by future research. Second, we did not have a priori prediction on how age might moderate the joint effect of COVID-19 threat and lockdown status in the current research. We treated age as a control variable in our studies because the effect of age on preference between ordinary and extraordinary experiences has been shown in previous research (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Future research could further examine the moderating role of age or generation differences in how consumers respond to ordinary and extraordinary experience in the face of threats.

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ENDNOTES
1 As an initial exploration, we wanted to keep the questionnaire brief to increase response rate while exploring a diverse set of brands. Therefore, we randomly assigned participants to a set of five brands, instead of having them evaluate all 10 brands. Acknowledging the limitation and the potential effect of set differences, in Study 2, we enlarged the number of brands examined and had all participants evaluate 15 different brands.

2 We applied three attention checks throughout the questionnaire. One attention-check question asked participants to indicate the topic of the article (either COVID-related or sports-related) used for the COVID-19 threat manipulation. The other two attention-check questions asked participants to select a certain response as the answer to a decoy question. We excluded eight participants who failed either of the three attention checks.

3 Two participants indicated that a lockdown policy was in place in their local county. The significance of the results did not change after excluding the two participants, so we reported the results with the two participants included. In addition, agreement of social-distancing policy did not differ between the high-threat \((M = 5.71, SD = 1.93)\) and control \((M = 5.37, SD = 2.18)\) condition \((F[1, 67] = 0.45, p = 0.50)\).

4 Manipulations of COVID-19 threat and lockdown status did not have a main effect nor an interactive effect on agreement with social-distancing policy.

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APPENDIX A: ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY AD CAMPAIGNS FOR STUDY 1B

FIGURE A1  Ordinary appeal condition

FIGURE A2  Extraordinary appeal condition
APPENDIX B: RESEARCH STIMULI FOR THE COVID-19 THREAT MANIPULATION IN STUDY 3

FIGURE B1  Control condition

FIGURE B2  High threat condition