Accessible Signals: Affordable Consumption Strategies for Impression Management

by

Denny Ho Huynh

Business Administration
Duke University

Defense Date: March 28, 2025

Approved:

Keisha Cutright, Advisor

Tanya Chartrand, Co-chair

Gavan Fitzsimons

Gráinne Fitzsimons

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration in The Graduate School of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Consumers often use expensive, luxurious, or trendy products to make a good impression. In this dissertation, I examine cost-effective, accessible consumption strategies that help consumers and marketers create positive impressions and foster meaningful engagement. In my first essay, across eight studies, I show that behavioral tracking enhances social status, which in turn increases online engagement. This effect is mediated by perceptions of self-control. In my second essay, across seven studies, I demonstrate that repeated consumption raises performance expectations, which in turn increases investment intentions. This effect is mediated by perceptions of focus. Together, these essays highlight low-cost strategies for creating positive impressions and receiving engagement from others.

Dedication

In dedication to the adversity that inspired this research on social impressions and to my family and friends, who embrace every impression of me.

Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

Statistically, based on my upbringing, pursuing a Ph.D. was never expected of me, and I am profoundly grateful to those who made it possible. First and foremost, I thank my parents, Hai Ho and Thu Huynh, for taking the immense social, economic, and political risk of immigrating to the U.S. in pursuit of better opportunities. I would not be here without your sacrifices, and I am committed to honoring them in my academic and personal pursuits.

To my advisors—Keisha Cutright, Tanya Chartrand, and Gavan Fitzsimons—thank you for your guidance. I could have quickly fallen out during the pandemic, but you all remained committed to my progress. Keisha, thank you for your generous feedback and engagement, even when I fail to listen. I am a better listener and thinker because of you. Tanya, thank you for your enthusiasm for my research ideas. You made me excited to push them. Gavan, thank you for your patience on our various projects and career advice from admit day to now. I feel the future is more manageable and enjoyable after each meeting with you.

To additional Duke research mentors—Jim Bettman, Jordan Etkin, and Gráinne Fitzsimons—thank you for your support. Jim, thank you for believing in my idea papers. Jordan, thank you for teaching me how to think and write systematically. Gráinne, thank you for your expertise as a committee member.

Thank you also to all the Duke Marketing faculty. Your leadership, support, and the knowledge you share have been invaluable to me. Whether in passing in the office, at seminars, or conferences, I always find myself growing as a researcher and person from those interactions.

Similarly, I want to thank my co-authors—Ling-Ling Zhou, Jacqueline Pan, Katherine Du, and Eugenia Wu—for their attention and engagement in our projects. Despite the continuous obstacles, you all make it enjoyable to persist.

To the past and present Ph.D. students (including Management), thank you for contributing to a joyful environment where I can work, relax, and laugh. I look forward to planning reunions where we are not sleeping on air mattresses.

To the administrative staff and MJ Oles, thank you for your patience and guidance, even when I missed deadlines and receipts. I was able to lose myself into research and my career because you were exceptional at keeping me on track.

To the members of my lab at Clemson University—Nate Martin, Carolyne Greene, Andrew Poehlman, and Oriana Aragón—thank you for introducing me to the world of consumer behavior. I never thought I could generate ideas or run studies like the papers we read, so I am grateful for your support from the start.

Last but most certainly not least, thank you to my additional family and friends. Your eagerness to help, check-in, and celebrate (dennycon) means more than I can express. To my siblings, Eric Ho and Ashley Ho, thank you for handling household paperwork and translations when I'm offline. To my cousins—Julia Huynh, Trina Nguyen, Lilian Tran, and Jane Le—thank you for organizing holidays and trips that keep our family connected. To my Atlanta community—Ansley Branch, Lacey Jones, Rachel Parks, Rosendo Carrillo, Salem VanderStel, and the Volleywaps—thank you for providing me with the physical and emotional space to breathe. You all ground me in who I am and why I do this.

1. Introduction

Consumers use their consumption to shape the impressions they make on others, often turning to expensive and luxurious products. This dissertation explores more accessible, budget-friendly consumption strategies that can help consumers and marketers make positive social impressions.

In essay 1, I examine the interpersonal consequences of self-tracking ("Behavioral Tracking as a Status Symbol"). Rapid growth in the popularity of wearable tracking devices and apps has made self-tracking more shareable, visible, and conspicuous. Using field data and online studies, I find that self-tracking increases perceptions of social status. This occurs due to what self-tracking suggests about self-control. Observers infer that self-trackers have greater self-control, so they ascribe them higher status. Further, the studies identify key moderators of these effects (i.e., *who* does the tracking, *why* someone tracks, and *when* someone tracks), and importantly, downstream consequences for online user engagement.

In essay 2, I examine the performance impressions of repeated consumption ("How Repeated Consumption Shapes Performance Expectations"). Performers engage in repeated consumption—entrepreneurs wear the same outfits to work, athletes listen to songs on repeat for games, and actors eat the same meals on set. While repeated consumption has generally been found to lead to negative social consequences, I demonstrate that performers who are revealed to be engaging in repeated consumption are perceived to be better performers for their tasks at hand (e.g., work, sports). This occurs due to what repeated consumption suggests about focus. Observers infer that performers who engage in repeated consumption are more focused on their performances, so they expect them to be better performers. Further, the studies identify key moderators of these effects (i.e., consumption intentionality and task type), as well as downstream consequences for consumer investment.

2. Behavioral Tracking as a Status Symbol

Behavioral tracking is pervasive. From calories burned and water consumed to money spent and energy used, consumers track an increasingly broad range of personal metrics. Recent forecasts suggest that tracking technologies will reach 300 million users by 2027 (Statista 2023), with an ever-increasing array of apps, platforms, and other tools (e.g., wearables) enabling consumers to quantify and track additional aspects of their behavior.

Importantly, behavioral tracking is not only prevalent, but often public. Self-tracking often occurs in public spaces, and consumers are more frequently sharing their personal metrics with others (Kent 2018). Users of the fitness app Strava, for example, post information about their physical activities on social media, and apps like Goodreads allow consumers to share details about their reading achievements with fellow users. In fact, companies encourage such sharing. Apps and other technologies are increasingly leveraging social media integrations and incorporating new social features (Bellafante 2016) to make it easier for consumers to share their self-tracking data. Recent growth in the popularity of wearable tracking devices has only served to make self-tracking more shareable, visible, and conspicuous.

But while recent work in consumer behavior has begun to explore self-tracking's consequences for personal judgments and decisions (Etkin 2016; Hoang and Ng 2023; Silverman et al. 2022; Silverman and Barasch 2023; Zimmermann 2021), its interpersonal consequences have received less attention. What does self-tracking signal to others? How does self-tracking shape social perceptions, and with what implications?

In the current research, we propose that self-tracking can serve as a "status symbol." Eight studies spanning multiple common self-tracking domains demonstrate that consumers judge self-trackers to be higher status. Further, this occurs due to what self-tracking suggests about self-control. Specifically, consumers believe that those who self-track possess greater self-control, and, consequently, ascribe them higher status. The studies also identify key moderators of these effects (i.e., *who* does the tracking, *why* someone tracks, and *when* someone tracks), as well as demonstrate downstream consequences for user engagement (e.g., following a user or upvoting a post)—a phenomenon of importance to both marketers and consumers.[1]

The findings make several contributions. First, they deepen understanding around behavioral tracking. While self-tracking has a variety of important effects on motivation and decision making (Etkin 2016; Hoang and Ng 2023; Silverman and Barasch 2023; Zimmermann 2021), less is known about what it signals to others. Informing this question, we demonstrate that self-tracking can serve as a status symbol. This has important implications for both consumers (e.g., signaling status) and companies (e.g., signaling status to increase engagement with user-generated content).

Second, this work broadens our understanding of alternative status symbols (i.e., symbols that depart from owning expensive products; Bellezza 2023). While previous research on status has primarily focused on luxury consumption (Berger and Ward 2010; Cannon and Rucker 2019; Desmichel, Ordabayeva, and Kocher 2020; Nelissen and

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[1] We note that this work examines self-tracking as input to interpersonal judgments and decisions. That is, our primary interest is in how consumers use others' self-tracking as a cue to form judgments about them. We discuss how consumers' beliefs about self-trackers' intentions (e.g., to signal status) and their history with the tracked activity (i.e., successes or failures) may contribute as directions for future research in the General Discussion.

Meijers 2011), recent work has identified alternative signals (Bellezza 2023; Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014; Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2017). Adding to this work, we identify self-tracking as a novel alternative status symbol, driven by beliefs about self-control (vs. financial) resources.

Third, the findings shed light on the social consequences of self-control. While recent work has begun to explore self-control's role in person perception (e.g., signaling superior task performance and motivation; Koval et al. 2015; Righetti and Finkenauer 2011; Shea et al. 2013), we demonstrate novel implications for social judgments (i.e., status).

Finally, the findings contribute to an emerging literature on social cues and user engagement (Chung, Ding, and Kalra 2023; Valsesia and Diehl 2022; Valsesia, Proserpio, and Nunes 2020). As social media becomes an ever more popular forum for social interaction, it is important to understand the strategies consumers use to curate a positive image, and whether such tactics increase user engagement. Adding to this work, we identify self-tracking as a form of user-generated content that can boost user engagement (likes, replies, and views).

2.1 Status

Status refers to the extent to which one is "respected or admired by others" (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Status is distinct from related constructs such as power and socioeconomic background. Whereas power is based on control over valued resources, and socioeconomic background on income, education, and occupation, status is granted voluntarily (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Status affords numerous social, economic, and psychological benefits (see Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015 for a review), and consumers expend significant resources to gain status and signal it to other people (Belk 1985; Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015; Goor, Keinan, and Ordabayeva 2021; Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010).

Status is both subjective and relative. Consumers perceive others' status based on private knowledge or observable cues about their relative position on a valued dimension (Bellezza 2023; Nelissen and Meijers 2011). One important such dimension is economic capital, or wealth (Bellezza 2023; Bourdieu 1984). Wealth has long been associated with status and is integral to some status definitions (Scott, Mende, and Bolton 2013; Veblen 1899). Indeed, symbols of financial success, such as large homes, expensive cars, designer clothing, and jewelry, are widely accepted signals of status (Mandel, Petrova, and Cialdini 2006; Nelissen and Meijers 2011).

Although wealth is a relevant input, it is not the only valued dimension that people use to judge others' status. Indeed, as increases in economic mobility and income levels have reduced the importance of wealth-based hierarchies (Ordabayeva and Chandon 2011), other sources of capital, such as cultural and social, have become influential (Bellezza 2023; Bourdieu 1984). Consumers who possess domain-specific knowledge, for example, are afforded greater status (Berger and Ward 2010; Nelissen and Meijers 2011). Similarly, consumers who possess valued personal characteristics (e.g., ambition, autonomy, or creativity) are perceived as higher status, and conspicuous consumption choices that signal these characteristics (e.g., using time-saving gadgets, wearing non-conforming outfits, buying ephemeral luxury products) can increase status (Bellezza et al. 2014, 2017; Desmichel et al. 2020).

Importantly, high status individuals are particularly influential. Imitating or learning from others with high status provides significant social advantages. Consequently, it is to consumers' advantage to prioritize engagement with others based on their relative position on valued dimensions. Indeed, when consumers see someone as high status, they pay more attention to them (Foulsham et al. 2010), provide more help and support (Van der Vegt, Bunderson, and Oosterhof 2006), and are more compliant with their suggestions (Podolny 2005).

2.2 The Current Research

Extending these findings, we propose self-tracking can signal status. Self-tracking involves recording, analyzing, and reflecting on personal data (Neff and Nafus 2016). Someone might "track" their steps taken in a day or money spent in a week, for instance, by recording and analyzing those outputs (i.e., counting steps or dollars spent). Self-tracking does not require technology, but people often use apps, products, or other tools (diaries, spreadsheets, wearables, mobile apps, etc.; Harkin et al. 2016) to track their behavior.

We suggest self-tracking increases status due to what it suggests about self-control. Self-control refers to the capacity to override a predominant response tendency in favor of a more controlled one (Koval et al. 2015; Metcalfe and Mischel 1999). Consumers shopping for clothing or groceries, for example, can display greater self-control by inhibiting an undesired behavior (e.g., impulsive spending) in favor of a more controlled one (e.g., buying only essential items).

Importantly, self-tracking should be associated with self-control. Self-tracking provides detailed information about one's behavior (Etkin 2016). It provides tangible feedback on how much of something one has accomplished (e.g., steps taken or hours slept) or how consistent they are being over time (e.g., days in a row completing a target activity; Silverman and Barasch 2023; Silverman et al. 2022). As a result, self-tracking can help consumers identify discrepancies or gaps between their current and desired outcomes (Carver and Scheier 1982; Milkman 2012) and thus, take corrective actions (Harkin et al. 2016). Consumers could, for example, notice on their sleep-tracking app that they only slept for five hours the previous night, and accordingly, make plans to go to bed earlier tonight. For these reasons, self-tracking is considered an effective self-regulation strategy, providing concrete feedback that can help consumers behave more consistently with their longer term goals (Harkin et al. 2016; Hennecke and Bürgler 2022).

Building on these ideas, we suggest that observing *others* track their behavior should lead to similar inferences. Consumers infer others' self-control based on observing them regulate their behavior (e.g., place a cookie jar out of sight rather than within reach; Gennara, Peetz, and Milyavskaya 2023). Consumers with goals to reduce their spending might shop with cash rather than a credit card, for example, and by publicly employing such strategies, be perceived to have greater self-control (Gennara et al. 2023). Consequently, because self-tracking is associated with self-control (e.g., regulating one's behavior to achieve desired outcomes), we suggest that consumers may infer self-trackers have greater self-control. Upon observing that someone tracks their fitness or language learning activities (e.g., workouts or lessons completed), for example, consumers may infer that the person is more interested in regulating and improving on that dimension (compared to someone who performs, but does not similarly track, those activities).

We propose that inferring greater self-control in others should, in turn, increase their perceived status. Consumers value others' ability to control their behavior (Shea et al. 2013). They tend to trust people who work effectively towards their longer term goals (Righetti and Finkenauer 2011), and ostracize those who fail (e.g., succumb to temptations; Stavrova, Ren and Pronk 2022). Further, consumers prefer those with greater self-control as collaborators, friends, and romantic partners (Koval et al. 2015; VanDellen et al. 2015). Consequently, because self-control is a valued personal dimension,[2] we reason that cues that imply others have greater self-control should increase their perceived status. Indeed, a pilot study ($N = 150$) supports this suggestion. See Web Appendix A for details.

Note, although we propose self-tracking increases status, it is not immediately obvious that this would be the case. Prior work indicates that some consumers fear negative social repercussions from disclosing information about their health, fitness, and financial behaviors (Garbinsky et al. 2020; Melumad and Meyer 2020; White 2004). Consumers also tend to disapprove of others who brag about their achievements (Berman et al. 2015; Sezer, Gino, and Norton 2018), especially on social media (Valsesia and Diehl 2022). However, we suggest that, by increasing inferences of self-control, self-tracking serves as a positive status signal. See Figure 1.

Further, by increasing status, we suggest that self-tracking should increase consumer engagement. Consistent with prior work showing that status garners attention

[2] While self-control is a valued dimension, it does not increase all positive impressions. Righetti and Finkenauer (2011), for example, found that while strangers with greater self-control tend to be trusted more, they are not liked more. Consequently, we suggest that consumers may ascribe others' status based on inferences of self-control, without necessarily evaluating them more positively on other dimensions.

(Foulsham et al. 2010) and consumers treat high status individuals more favorably (Podolny 2005), we propose that consumers are more likely to engage with others who publicly display their self-tracking on social media (e.g., view, like, or respond to their posts).

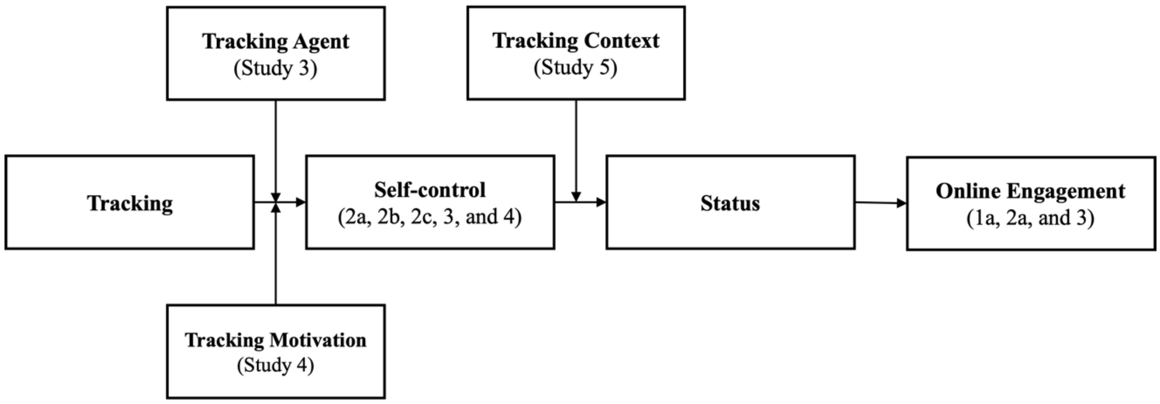

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

2.3 Conceptual Moderation and Boundary Conditions

Importantly, if self-tracking signals status by increasing inferences of self-control, as we suggest, then factors that weaken the relationship between self-tracking and self-control (a-link moderation), or between self-control and status (b-link moderation), should attenuate the predicted effects (see figure 1 for full conceptual model). These include aspects of the tracking agent (i.e., *who* does the tracking), tracking motivation (i.e., *why* someone tracks), and the context in which tracking occurs (i.e., *when* someone tracks).

2.3.1 Tracking Agent

First, we suggest the extent to which people take an active role in self-tracking should moderate the effects. While self-tracking is often highly agentic (e.g., people tracking their own behavior), it can also be less involved. In personal fitness, for example, consumers can track their workouts themselves, or have someone else do so on their behalf (e.g., a spouse or personal trainer; Fitzsimons, Finkel and Vandellen 2015). Self-tracking can also increasingly be performed by smart technologies, such that consumers rely on devices to record and analyze their activities without any personal effort required (Puntoni et al. 2021).

Importantly, if self-tracking signals status by increasing inferences of self-control, as we suggest, then when people take a less active role in self-tracking, its effects should be attenuated. Having self-control presumes that consumers are agentic and responsible for their own outcomes (Chambliss and Murray 1979; Heatherton and Nichols 1994; Hur, Koo, and Hofmann 2015). Indeed, when consumers don't make their own decisions or take personal responsibility, they tend to be perceived as having less self-control (Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010; Hur et al. 2015). Consequently, when self-trackers appear to lack agency (i.e., take a less active role in tracking their behavior), we reason that it should be less likely to suggest greater self-control, and thus the effects on perceived self-control (and status) should be attenuated.

2.3.2 Tracking Motivation

Second, we propose that the reason for self-tracking should moderate its effects. While self-tracking may be naturally associated with self-improvement (Kotabe and Hofmann 2015; Righetti and Finkenauer 2011), and indeed facilitates such objectives (Harkin et al. 2016; Hennecke and Bürgler 2022), consumers can also track their behavior for other reasons. Rather than to improve themselves (e.g., drink in moderation), for example, someone who tracks their alcohol consumption may do so to explore their preferences or capture tasting notes.

Importantly, if self-tracking signals status by increasing inferences of self-control, as we suggest, then if people engage in self-tracking for motivations other than self-improvement (e.g., hedonic pursuits), its effects should be attenuated. We have argued that self-tracking should increase inferences of self-control because it implies an interest in regulating and improving one's behavior. Tracking one's daily step count, for example, implies an interest in how much one walks and walking more. Consequently, when self-tracking does not follow from a desire to self-improve, we reason it should no longer suggest greater self-control, and thus its effects on perceived self-control (and status) should be attenuated.

2.3.3 Tracking Context

Finally, we suggest the context in which self-tracking occurs may also moderate its effects. While tracking may often occur in productive contexts (e.g., "work"; Etkin and Memmi 2021), it may also occur in more leisure-oriented ones. Indeed, while certain contexts may be associated with work (e.g., workplaces, fitness centers, weekdays, and morning routines), others evoke leisure by emphasizing hedonic pursuits or experiential benefits (e.g., vacations, music festivals, weekends, and nightlife; Etkin and Memmi 2021). Importantly, because consumers integrate such situational information into social evaluations (Belk 1975), they may react differently to the same cues (e.g., mentioning calories in conversation) in work-oriented (e.g., a causal lunch with colleagues) versus leisure-oriented contexts (e.g., a holiday feast with family).

Importantly, if inferences of self-control play the underlying role we suggest, then when self-tracking occurs in leisure settings, its effect on status should be attenuated. Leisure settings often encourage being "in the moment", having fun, and disregarding other obligations (Oh and Pham 2022). Thus, in leisure-oriented contexts, greater self-control may be less socially desirable. Indeed, refusing cake at a party can be perceived as a social offense (Liu et al. 2019), and consumers prefer the company of those who exhibit less self-control in leisure contexts (e.g., going on vacation or partying; Röseler et al. 2021). Consequently, while people may still engage in self-tracking in leisure settings (Keinan and Kivetz 2011), and self-tracking may still suggest greater self-control, because self-control should not increase status in such cases, we suggest that self-tracking's effect on status should be attenuated.

2.4 Overview of Studies

Eight studies test our predictions. Study 1a provides an initial test in a field setting, exploring whether Reddit posters who mention self-tracking are perceived as higher status and receive greater engagement (i.e., likes and replies). Study 1b tests the basic effect in a different self-tracking domain and a more controlled setting. Studies 2a-2c, 3, 4, and 5 test the proposed underlying process through mediation (i.e., measuring inferences of self-control) and moderation (e.g., manipulating the links between self-tracking and self-control, and self-control and status, respectively). In addition, studies 2b and 2c explore potential alternative explanations, testing whether self-tracking's effect is driven by inferences of self-control rather than other possibilities (e.g., subjective wealth and expertise). Further, studies 2a and 3 further examine whether, by signaling status, self-tracking has downstream consequences for user engagement (e.g., following a user or liking a post). All data, materials, and pre-registrations are available at: https://researchbox.org/1918&PEER_REVIEW_passcode=MMRUKC.[3]

2.5 Study 1a: Tracking Increases Status and User Engagement in the Field

Study 1a provides an initial naturalistic test of our theory. We collected comments from a Reddit.com forum about running accessories and recorded whether users spontaneously mentioned self-tracking in this organic online environment. To test the predicted relationships with status and user engagement, we used a mixed-methods approach, having a separate sample of online respondents evaluate each user's status based on their posted comment, and collecting the number of upvotes and replies each comment received. Consistent with our reasoning, we expected that users who mentioned self-tracking (vs. those who did not) would be evaluated as higher status and receive greater user engagement.[4]

2.5.1 Method

Eighty-three comments were recorded from an archived Reddit.com forum about running accessories (retrieved on November 11, 2024; https://tinyurl.com/483udmax). This forum had the largest number of user comments relative to other running accessory-related forums. In the forum description, a user asked, "What are your must-have running

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[3] Across experiments, we employed best practices regarding data cleaning. Following Meyvis and Van Osselaer (2018), we excluded observations containing (1) multiple IP addresses that appeared two or more times (i.e., duplicate or multiple entries), (2) attention check failures, and (3) outliers at least 2.5 deviations from the focal dependent variable. We report results for each experiment after data cleaning. See Web Appendix B for details.

[4] Because status and engagement were judged by different sets of people and collected separately, study 1a did not examine mediation. We test this in studies 2a and 3.

accessories/items you've purchased?" To control for comment length, we recorded the number of words in each post.

To measure status, we had a separate sample of online respondents (Prolific, N = 200; M_{age} = 36.23, 50.5% female, 46.0% male, 3.5% nonbinary) evaluate the status of each user, based on their comment. We adopted a "participants-within-stimuli" design, in which participants were randomly nested within comments. Of the 83 total comments, each participant viewed a random subset of 20, presented one at a time in random order. For each comment, participants evaluated the user's status (single-item question from Bellezza et al. 2017): "To what extent do you think this person is respected?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). By having participants evaluate multiple comments in random order and treating comment as a random factor, we can assess whether self-tracking's effect generalizes across comments (Brauer and Curtin 2018; Westfall, Kenny, and Judd 2014).

To capture user engagement, we recorded two user response metrics. Specifically, because other users can upvote ("like") and/or reply to the comments, number of upvotes and replies served as our measures of engagement.

Finally, a research assistant, blind to hypotheses, coded each comment on whether it mentioned self-tracking or not. In total, 36.1% of the comments mentioned self-tracking (n = 30); 63.8% of the comments did not (n = 53). We used this as the fixed effect in our models (0 = Control, 1 = Tracking).

2.5.2 Results

2.5.2.1 Status

We conducted a linear mixed-effects model with tracking as the fixed effect, controlling for comment length. Because participants viewed a subset of comments, both "participant" and "comment" were included as random factors (Westfall et al. 2014). As expected, self-tracking increased status ($F(1,83.33) = 11.09$; $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$). Compared to Reddit users who did not mention self-tracking ($M = 3.38$, SE = .32), those who did were perceived as higher status ($M = 4.09$, SE = .22).

2.5.2.2 Upvotes

We conducted a negative binomial regression on upvotes, controlling for comment length. The likelihood-ratio test of α indicated that upvotes exhibited overdispersion, confirming that a negative binomial regression model was appropriate ($p < .001$). As expected, self-tracking increased user engagement (Wald $\chi2(1) = 3.43$, $p = .064$). Compared to Reddit users who did not mention self-tracking ($M = 2.13$, SE = .21), those who did received more upvotes ($M = 2.77$, SE = .35).

2.5.2.3 Replies

We conducted a zero-inflated negative binomial regression (due to the presence of zeroes and overdispersion; $p < .001$ for the likelihood-ratio test) on comment replies, controlling for comment length. Consistent with the upvote results, self-tracking increased user engagement ($\chi2(1) = 4.19$, $p = .041$). Compared to Reddit users who did not mention self-tracking ($M = .79$, SE = .30), those who did received more replies ($M = 2.05$, SE = .60).

2.6 Study 1b: Tracking Increases Status

Building on the field evidence from study 1a, study 1b tests the basic effect in a more controlled setting. All participants read about a person using a new water bottle to help improve their nutrition (i.e., consume more electrolytes). We manipulated the water bottle's intended benefit (self-tracking vs. portability) and measured status. Consistent with study 1a, we predicted that self-tracking would increase status.

In addition, study 1b begins to explore other potential inferences based on self-tracking. Tracking may have multiple associations, and one could wonder whether other inferences—such as beliefs about doing more of the activity, commitment, or busyness—could play a role. To address this, we measured these beliefs and tested for any effects. We expected that, while self-tracking might influence these perceptions, they would not mediate the effect on status.

2.6.1 Method

Three hundred ninety-one Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 38.80, 47.3% female, 47.1% male, 5.1% nonbinary, .5% preferred not to state). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: tracking versus control.

Participants read a vignette about a gym goer (the target) who uses a certain water bottle to drink more electrolytes. To manipulate self-tracking, they were either told the bottle's volume markings help the target track his electrolyte consumption (tracking condition) or that the bottle helps him drink electrolytes on the go (control condition).

Next, participants evaluated the target's status. Specifically, they answered three questions (from Bitterly, Brooks and Schweitzer 2017): "To what extent do you think this person is… (1) respected by others? (2) is admired by others? and (3) is considered influential by others?" (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely; α = .86).[5]

For exploratory purposes, we measured beliefs about quantity ("How much electrolytes do you think this person consumes?" 1 = Very small amount, 9 = Very large amount), commitment ("To what extent do you think this person… (1) cares about consuming more electrolytes? (2) is trying to consume more electrolytes? (3) wants to improve their electrolyte consumption?" 1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so; α = .88), and busyness ("How busy do you think this person is?" "How much free time do you think this person has?" 1 = Not busy at all / Very small amount, 9 = Very busy / Very large amount; second question reversed; r = .55).

2.6.2 Results

2.6.2.1 Status

Consistent with the prior results, self-tracking increased status ($t(389) = -3.20$, p = .002, d = .32). Compared to the control (M = 5.75, SD = 1.04), participants in the tracking condition perceived the target as higher status (M = 6.11, SD = 1.15).

2.6.2.2 Alternative Inferences

Casting doubt on potential alternative inferences, there were no differences in beliefs about consumption quantity (M_{Track} = 2.85, SD = 1.08 vs. M_{Control} = 2.70, SD = 1.01; $t(389) = -1.36$, p = .174), commitment (M_{Track} = 8.00, SD = 1.08 vs. M_{Control} = 8.01,

[5] While influence has been conceptualized as a dimension of status, it has also been discussed as a downstream consequence (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Accordingly, for all studies that measured influence as part of status, we re-ran analyses excluding this item. Results held (see Web Appendix E). In addition, for robustness, we used a different status scale that did not include influence in studies 2b, 2c, 3, and 4.

SD = 1.02; $t(389) = .10$, $p = .920$), or busyness ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.68$, SD = 1.40 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.76$, SD = 1.33; $t(389) = .56$, $p = .579$).

2.7 Study 1a and 1b: Discussion

Studies 1a and 1b show that self-tracking can increase status. In both a naturalistic field setting (study 1a) and a more controlled experimental context (study 1b), consumers who tracked their behavior (vs. not) were perceived as higher status. In addition, self-tracking's effect on status generalized across multiple domains (fitness and nutrition) and modalities (i.e., including both high-tech and low-tech products) and was robust to different operationalizations (social media posts and stylized vignettes). Further, self-tracking did not impact beliefs about how much of something someone does, commitment to the activity, or busyness, suggesting that these alternative inferences do not play a meaningful role in the effect.

Importantly, study 1a demonstrates downstream consequences for user engagement. In addition to increasing perceived status, mentioning self-tracking led to greater user engagement, including receiving more upvotes and comment replies. Consequently, consistent with our theory, self-tracking's effect on signaling status has meaningful implications for attracting attention in online environments and increasing engagement with user-generated content.

Ancillary data suggests that these findings extend to online videos. In a follow-up field data set, we collected video thumbnails and measured engagement from a running micro-influencer's YouTube videos ($N = 145$), 14.5% of which featured her engaging in self-tracking. Consistent with study 1a, compared to video thumbnails that did not show self-tracking, those that did received more views (Wald $\chi 2(1) = 7.59$, $p = .006$), upvotes

(Wald $\chi2(1) = 4.82$ $p = .028$), and comments (Wald $\chi2(1) = 6.28$, $p = .012$). Notably, because the videos were created by a single YouTube user, these results suggest that self-tracking can be displayed repeatedly to increase user engagement. See Web Appendix C for details.

2.8 Study 2a: Testing the Proposed Underlying Process

Study 2a tests the proposed underlying process through mediation. Participants viewed a person's social media post about going on a run, and we manipulated whether the post included self-tracking information (i.e., the GPS output of their run). In addition to status, we assessed inferences of the target's self-control and tested whether this mediates the effect. We predicted that self-tracking would increase status, driven by inferences of greater self-control.

In addition, study 2a further examines downstream consequences for user engagement in a controlled experimental context (e.g., following the poster or engaging with their post).

2.8.1 Method

Study 2a was pre-registered (#136813). Five hundred seventy-four Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment ($M_{age} = 37.57$, 50.7% female, 47.2% male, 2.1% nonbinary/preferred not to state). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: tracking versus control.

First, we manipulated self-tracking. Participants viewed a social media post from Sam (the target) about going on a run. All participants viewed a screenshot with a map of the run and the caption, "I love running around the lake while listening to music!" In addition, in the self-tracking condition, the map image included GPS-tracking data of the route.

Second, participants evaluated Sam's status using the same three-item measure from study 1b ($\alpha = .89$).

Third, we measured the proposed underlying process (i.e., inferences of self-control). Participants answered an adapted version of Tangney et al. (2004)'s brief 13-item self-control scale (e.g., "To what extent do you think the person has iron self-discipline? 1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much; $\alpha = .89$; see Web Appendix F for all measures).

Finally, to further demonstrate downstream consequences for user engagement, we measured intentions to engage with the target and content online (adapted from Valsesia et al. 2020). Participants answered: "How likely or unlikely would you be to follow this person on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok)?" and "How likely would you be to engage with the post (i.e., like or comment on it)?" (1 = Very unlikely, 9 = Very likely; $r = .75$)

2.8.2 Results

2.8.2.1 Status

As predicted and consistent with the prior results, self-tracking increased status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.69$, SD = 1.40 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.10$, SD = 1.55; $t(572) = -4.75$, $p < .001$, $d = .40$).

2.8.2.2 Underlying Process

As predicted, self-tracking also increased inferences of self-control ($t(572) = -2.37$, $p = .018$, $d = .20$). Compared to the control ($M = 6.40$, SD = 1.01), participants in the tracking condition inferred that the target has greater self-control ($M = 6.60$, SD = 1.02).

Further, supporting our theory, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed a significant indirect effect. As predicted, self-tracking increased status by increasing inferences of self-control (ab = .05, CI_{95} = [.007, .105]).

2.8.2.3 User Engagement

Importantly, these effects had downstream consequences for user engagement ($t(572) = -2.21$, $p = .028$, $d = .18$). Compared to the control (M = 2.99, SD = 2.05), participants in the tracking condition expressed greater interest in engaging with the target on social media (M = 3.36, SD = 2.05).

Further, a serial mediation analysis (Model 6, Hayes 2017) confirmed that self-control and status sequentially mediate the effect on user engagement (ab = .03, CI_{95} = [.003, .062]).[6]

2.8.3 Discussion

Study 2a provides initial support for the proposed underlying process. Participants evaluated someone who tracked their run (vs. completed the same distance without tracking it) as higher status, and this was driven by greater inferences of self-control.

Importantly, the findings also further show downstream consequences for user engagement. Consistent with the field data results in study 1a, participants expressed greater interest in engaging with the target (e.g., following them or reacting to their post) when they tracked (vs. did not track) their behavior.

[6] Status (alone) also mediated self-tracking's effect on user engagement (ab = .31, CI_{95} = [.169, .476]).

2.9 Study 2b: Comparing Inferences of Self-Control and Wealth

Study 2b further examines the proposed underlying process. Similar to study 2a, we measured inferences of self-control and tested for mediation.

In addition, study 2b addresses a potential alternative explanation based on wealth. Wealth is a universally recognized marker of status (Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015), and because self-tracking often involves use of new, feature-rich technologies, it's possible that perceived wealth could drive the effect (Thompson and Norton 2011).[7] Consequently, we measured perceived wealth and examined its role. We expected that inferences of self-control would be a primary driver of self-tracking's effect.

2.9.1 Method

Study 2b was pre-registered (#194913). Three hundred ninety Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 39.73, 63.1% female, 35.1% male, 1.8% nonbinary). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: tracking versus control.

First, we manipulated self-tracking. Participants viewed a social media post from Jas (the target) about her sleep. All participants viewed a picture of Jas's smartwatch and the caption, "I went to bed early last night and felt very good waking up to the alarm!". In addition, in the tracking (control) condition, the smartwatch displayed a sleep tracking interface (sleep alarm interface).

[7] Further, self-control is a predictor of socioeconomic outcomes (Moffitt et al. 2011), suggesting that inferring greater self-control could also signal wealth.

Second, we measured status. Participants answered two questions about Jas: "To what extent do you think the person… (1) is respected by others? and (2) is admired by others?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; $r = .87$)

Finally, to test the proposed underlying process and explore the role of wealth, we measured inferences of self-control and wealth perceptions. To assess self-control, participants answered two questions about Jas (from Koval et al. 2015): "To what extent do you think the person… (1) has good self-control? and (2) has good self-discipline?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; $r = .90$). To assess wealth, participants answered two questions about Jas (from Bellezza et al. 2017): "To what extent do you think the person… (1) is financially wealthy? and (2) has a high income?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; $r = .87$). The order of the self-control and wealth measures was randomized.

2.9.2 Results

2.9.2.1 Status

As predicted and consistent with the prior results, self-tracking increased status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 4.65$, SD = .96 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.36$, SD = 1.05; $t(388) = -2.85$, $p = .005$, $d = .29$).

2.9.2.2 Underlying Process

As predicted, self-tracking also increased inferences of self-control ($t(388) = -2.34$, $p = .020$, $d = .24$). Compared to the control ($M = 4.92$, SD = 1.23), participants in the tracking condition inferred that the target (Jas) has greater self-control ($M = 5.20$, SD = 1.10).

Further, supporting our theory, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed a significant indirect effect. As predicted, self-tracking increased status by increasing inferences of self-control ($ab = .14$, $CI_{95} = [.023, .268]$).

2.9.2.3 Alternative Explanation

The effect on wealth was not significant (M_{Track} = 4.63, SD = 1.07 vs. M_{Control} = 4.44, SD = .97; $t(388) = -1.38$, $p = .170$). Further, a parallel mediation analysis with self-control and wealth included as mediators only revealed a significant indirect effect of self-control (self-control: *ab* = .13, CI_{95} = [.020, .239]; wealth: *ab* = .03, CI_{95} = [-.011, .073]).

2.9.3 Discussion

Study 2b further demonstrates the proposed process. Participants evaluated someone who used a sleep tracking (vs. alarm) app as higher status, driven by greater inferences of self-control.

Further, the results cast doubt on wealth as an alternative explanation. While wealth was positively correlated with status ($r = .38$, $p < .001$), self-tracking did not influence perceptions of wealth, and wealth did not mediate the effect.

2.10 Study 2c: Ruling out Additional Alternative Explanations

Study 2c further tests the proposed underlying process and casts doubt on additional alternative explanations. Beyond wealth, one could wonder whether self-tracking might suggest investing greater effort in an activity. Similarly, one could wonder whether consumers who self-track might be perceived as having greater expertise. Consequently, in addition to wealth, we measured perceptions of effort and expertise and tested whether they contribute to self-tracking's effect on status. Based on our theory and consistent with study 2b, we expected that inferences of self-control would be the primary driver.

In addition, while the prior studies demonstrate generalizability across several popular self-tracking domains (fitness, nutrition, and sleep), to show that the effect extends beyond health and fitness, in study 2c we examine language learning, testing whether tracking lessons (vs. using other reminders) increases status.

2.10.1 Method

Study 2c was pre-registered (#198183). Five hundred eighty-nine Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 42.47, 61.5% female, 37.5% male, 1.0% nonbinary/preferred not to state). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: tracking versus control.

First, we manipulated self-tracking. Participants viewed a social media post from Meg (the target) about her learning French. To hold past performance constant, all participants read in the caption that Meg had completed her lessons every day. In addition, in the tracking (control) condition, they viewed an image of Meg's activity tracker (reminder) that she uses to track (remind her about) her lessons (see Web Appendix D for stimuli). Second, we measured status using the same items from study 2b (r = .83).

Finally, to test the proposed underlying process and explore potential alternatives, we measured beliefs about self-control, expertise, wealth, and effort. To assess self-control participants evaluated Meg on four dimensions (from Marr, Pettit and Thau 2019): self-control, self-restraint, willpower, and persistence (1 = Not at all, 7 = A great deal; α = .93). To assess expertise, participants rated Meg on two items (from D'Angelo and Valsesia 2023): (1) expert at French and (2) knowledgeable at French (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much; r = .70). To assess wealth, participants answered the same measure from study 2b ($r = .88$). To assess effort, participants answered “How much effort is the person putting into making sure she learns French? (1 = Very little effort, 7 = Very high effort). The order of these items was randomized.

2.10.2 Results

2.10.2.1 Status

As expected, self-tracking increased status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 4.93$, SD = .97 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.76$, SD = 1.05; $t(587) = -2.09$, $p = .037$, $d = .17$)

2.10.2.2 Underlying Process

Consistent with studies 2a and 2b, self-tracking increased inferences of self-control ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.63$, SD = .94 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.17$, SD = 1.17; $t(587) = -5.20$, $p < .001$, $d = .43$). Further, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) demonstrated that inferring greater self-control mediated the effect on status ($ab = .24$, $CI_{95} = [.150, .331]$).

2.10.2.3 Alternative Explanations

Self-tracking increased perceptions of expertise ($M_{\text{Track}} = 3.22$, SD = 1.18 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 2.92$, SD = 1.20; $t(587) = -3.02$, $p = .003$, $d = .25$), wealth ($M_{\text{Track}} = 4.21$, SD = 1.01 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.01$, SD = 1.05; $t(587) = -2.46$, $p = .014$, $d = .20$), and effort investment ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.69$, SD = 1.20 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.29$, SD = 1.40; $t(587) = -3.71$, $p < .001$, $d = .31$).

Importantly, a parallel mediation analysis with all constructs included as parallel mediators supported self-control as the strongest underlying driver. The indirect effect of expertise was not significant ($ab = .02$, $CI_{95} = [-.004, .044]$). The indirect effects of wealth ($ab = .04$, $CI_{95} = [.006, .077]$) and effort ($ab = .04$, $CI_{95} = [.002, .081]$) were significant, but self-control had the largest indirect effect (*ab* = .18, CI_{95} = [.104, .263]). Pairwise comparisons confirmed that the differences in indirect effect sizes were significant (self-control vs. wealth: C = .16, CI_{95} = [.086, .248]; self-control vs. effort: C = .14, CI_{95} = [.057, .240]).

2.10.3 Discussion

Study 2c further demonstrates the proposed underlying role of self-control. As predicted and consistent with the prior studies, participants evaluated someone who tracked her language lessons as higher status, driven by greater inferences of self-control.

The findings also cast further doubt on potential alternative explanations. Although beliefs about wealth and effort contributed to self-tracking's effect on status, results support self-control as the stronger underlying mechanism. For a pre-registered replication in a different activity domain (tracking vegetable servings) that test additional alternative explanations, see Web Appendix G.

Together with studies 2a and 2b, study 2c underscores the generalizability of the phenomenon. Self-tracking increased status, driven by greater inferences of self-control, both for activities related to fitness (running; study 2a) and health (sleep; study 2b) as well as unrelated domains (language learning; study 2c). Importantly, this implies that inferences of self-control are based on what self-tracking suggests about an interest (and willingness) in regulating one's behavior, rather than any specific domain in which such self-regulation occurs.

2.11 Study 3: Moderating Role of Agency

Study 3 has two objectives. First, it further examines the proposed underlying process through moderation. We have argued that self-tracking signals status by increasing inferences of self-control. Having self-control, however, presumes that consumers are agentic and responsible for their own outcomes (Chambliss and Murray 1979; Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010; Heatherton and Nichols 1994; Hur et al. 2015). Consequently, if our theory is correct, then when people play a less active role in self-tracking (i.e., are less personally responsible, or agentic), consumers should no longer infer they have greater self-control and higher status.

To test this, participants read about an individual managing their finances, and we manipulated whether that person uses a spreadsheet to track their spending (high-agency condition), an AI assistant to track their spending (low-agency condition), or simply reviews their monthly bank statements (control condition). Consistent with previous studies, we predicted that self-tracking would increase status, driven by greater inferences of self-control. Importantly, we predicted that using an AI assistant to track, which surrenders personal agency to automation (Puntoni et al. 2021), would attenuate these effects.

Second, study 3 further explores downstream consequences for user engagement. All participants read a comment from a fictional user on AskReddit (see Web Appendix D), a popular sub-forum of Reddit in which members can submit open-ended questions for comment. We asked participants to vote on the posted comment and predicted that self-tracking (but not AI-tracking) would increase positive engagement (i.e., upvotes).

2.11.1 Method

Study 3 was pre-registered (#172254). Two hundred ninety-three Prolific panelists who indicated using Reddit on a regular basis (once a month) in the prescreening filters participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 36.39, 42.0% female, 53.2% male, 4.1% nonbinary, .7% preferred not to state). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three tracking conditions: high-agency versus low-agency versus control.

First, we manipulated self-tracking. All participants viewed a fictional AskReddit forum that posed a question for users to answer. The question asked, “What is a good personal finance habit that you have?” and participants viewed the response of a user (the target) who replied in the forum. In the high-agency condition, the response read: “I use a free spreadsheet template to log and track my spending.” In the low-agency condition, the response read: “I use a free software that has an AI assistant that automatically logs and tracks my spending.” In the control condition, the response read: “I use my online banking portal to retrieve my banking statements.”

Second, we measured status and self-control. Using a different scale for robustness (Yu, Hays and Zhao 2019), participants answered four questions about Jenna: “To what extent do you think the person… (1) is highly respected? (2) has a good reputation? (3) is looked up to? and (4) is admired?” (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely; α = .95). To assess self-control, participants answered the same items from study 2c (α = .95).

Third, we measured downstream consequences for user engagement. Specifically, participants answered: “If you had to vote on the user’s post, what would your vote be?” (Upvote, No Vote, Downvote).[8]

Finally, participants completed a tracking manipulation check (“To what extent do you think the user's spending activity is being monitored or tracked?” 1= Not at all, 9

[8] We also measured, “How interested would you be in viewing the user’s comments in other forums/threads?” (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). See Web Appendix E for details.

= Very much so) and an agency manipulation check ("To what extent do you think the user personally manages his finance himself?" 1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). Results confirmed that both the high-agency and low-agency conditions successfully influenced perceptions of tracking (vs. control), and that the low-agency (vs. high-agency) condition reduced perceptions of taking an active role in tracking. See Web Appendix E for details.

2.11.2 Results

2.11.2.1 Status

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect on status ($F(2,290) = 10.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$). As predicted, compared to the control ($M = 5.70$, SD = 1.03), participants in the high-agency condition rated the target as higher status (albeit marginally; $M = 6.07$, SD = 1.17; $t(290) = -2.13$, $p = .086$, $d = .25$). In the low-agency condition, however, participants rated the target as lower status relative to the control ($t(290) = 2.43$, $p = .041$, $d = .29$) and the high-agency condition ($M = 5.28$, SD = 1.41; $t(290) = -4.55$, $p < .001$, $d = .53$).

2.11.2.2 Underlying Process

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect on self-control ($F(2,290) = 24.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$). As predicted and consistent with the prior results, compared to the control ($M = 6.68$, SD = 1.32), participants in the high-agency condition inferred that the target has greater self-control ($M = 7.19$, SD = 1.20; $t(290) = -2.58$, $p = .028$, $d = .30$). In the low-agency condition, however, participants inferred the target has less self-control relative to the control ($t(290) = 4.34$, $p < .001$, $d = .51$) and the high-agency condition ($M = 5.82$, SD = 1.60; $t(290) = -6.91$, $p < .001$, $d = .81$).

Further, supporting our theory, separate bias-corrected mediation analyses (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed that self-control mediated high-agency's effect on increasing status relative to the control condition (ab = .14, CI_{95} = [.041, .244]) and the low-agency condition (ab = .86, CI_{95} = [.607, 1.135]). In addition, self-control mediated low-agency's effect on decreasing status versus the control (ab = -.47, CI95 = [-.696, -.243]).

2.11.2.3 User Engagement

A multinomial logistic regression revealed a significant effect on voting (χ^2 = 25.93, $p < .001$; see Figure 2). Compared to the control (42.9% of votes), participants in the high-agency condition gave the target's post more upvotes (65.7%; χ^2 = 10.26, p = .001). Participants in the low-agency condition, however, gave fewer upvotes relative to the high-agency (38.5%; χ^2 = 10.37, p = .001) and control conditions (χ^2 = .01, p = .916).[9]

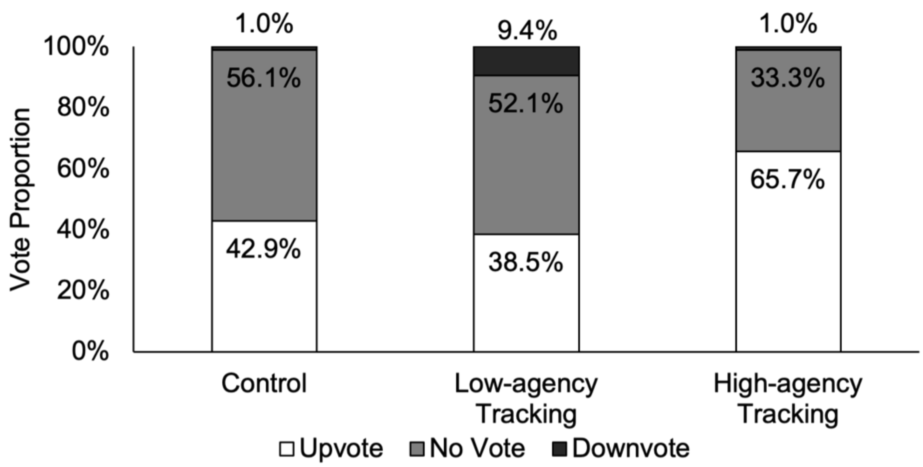

Figure 2: Agentic Self-tracking Boosts User Engagement (Study 3)

[9] Notably, participants gave more downvotes in the low-agency condition (9.4% of votes) relative to the high-agency (1.0%; albeit marginally, χ^2 = 2.72, p = .098) and control conditions (1.0%; χ^2 = 4.58, p = .033). There was no difference in downvotes between the control and high-agency conditions (χ^2 = .128, p = .721).

To test for serial mediation (Model 6, Hayes 2017), social media engagement was coded as a linear variable (Downvote = -1, No Vote = 0, Upvote = 1). As expected, self-control and status sequentially mediated the effect of high-agency on social media engagement relative to the control (*ab* = .02, CI_{95} = [.006, .048]) and low-agency conditions (*ab* = .15, CI_{95} = [.063, .242]). In addition, self-control and status sequentially mediated the effect of low-agency versus control (*ab* = -.09, CI_{95} = [-.165, -.037]).

2.11.3 Discussion

Study 3 provides further support for the proposed underlying process by showing that manipulating agency moderates self-tracking's effect. Consistent with the prior results, when the target was actively involved in tracking their behavior (i.e., highly agentic), participants inferred that the target had greater self-control, and as a result, ascribed him higher status. When the target was less actively involved (i.e., relying on an AI agent to track), however, self-tracking no longer increased inferences of self-control, and thus, did not increase status.

In addition, study 3 further demonstrates downstream consequences for user engagement (i.e., upvoting the target's comment). Consistent with studies 1a and 2a, participants gave more upvotes when the target was actively engaged in tracking their behavior (vs. control). However, when the target was less actively involved, this effect was eliminated.

Interestingly, less agentic tracking also reduced inferences of self-control (and decreased status) relative to the control condition. In addition, it encouraged more downvotes relative to the other conditions. Although these negative effects were not anticipated, they are consistent with the recent finding that AI users may be perceived as lazy (Schlager and Nindl 2020). Importantly, supporting our theory, results underscore that self-tracking signals status by increasing inferences of self-control.

2.12 Study 4: Moderating Role of Self-improvement Motivation

Study 4 further tests the proposed underlying process through mediation and moderation. We have argued that while self-tracking is naturally associated with a desire to improve or achieve along the tracked dimension (Allard and White 2015), consumers can also track their behavior for reasons unrelated to self-improvement (e.g., to record tasting experiences; Silverman and Barasch 2023). Because self-control is inferred from actions that facilitate self-regulation (Kotabe and Hofmann 2015; Righetti and Finkenauer 2011), if our theory is correct, then when self-tracking does not follow from self-improvement, self-tracking should no longer increase inferences of self-control, and thus, status.

To test this possibility, participants viewed a social media post by an individual who either "tracked" their caffeine consumption, or not, and we manipulated the salient motivation for doing so (i.e., self-improvement vs. non-self-improvement). Consistent with the previous studies, in the self-improvement condition, we predicted that self-tracking would increase status, driven by greater inferences of self-control. Importantly, in the non-self-improvement condition, we predicted these effects would be attenuated.

2.12.1 Method

Study 4 was pre-registered (#197477). Three hundred ninety-four Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 39.85, 59.8% female, 38.6% male, 1.6% nonbinary). Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (self-improvement vs. non-self-improvement motivation) × 2 (tracking vs. control) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated the motivation for self-tracking. All participants viewed a social media post from an individual named James (the target) about caffeine. In the self-improvement condition, James's post mentioned wanting to manage his caffeine consumption to get better sleep. In the non-self-improvement, his post mentioned wanting to manage his caffeine consumption to explore his taste preferences.

Second, we manipulated self-tracking. In the tracking condition, the post mentioned James tracking the caffeine content in his coffee. In the control condition, the post mentioned James buying half-caffeinated coffee.

Third, we measured status using the same two-item measure from studies 2b and 2c (r = .80) and self-control using the same two-item measure from study 2b (r = .89).

Finally, participants completed a tracking manipulation check and motivation manipulation check, which supported the manipulations (see Web Appendix E for details).

2.12.2 Result

2.12.2.1 Status

A 2 (motivation) × 2 (tracking) ANOVA revealed the predicted interaction (F(1,382) = 5.66, p = .018, η_p^2 = .01; see Figure 3). There were no main effects of tracking (F(1,382) = 2.11, p = .147) or motivation condition (F(1,382) = 1.43, p = .233).

Consistent with the prior results, in the self-improvement condition, self-tracking increased status (M_{Track} = 4.52, SD = .85 vs. M_{Control} = 4.18, SD = .82; t(382) = -2.71, p = .035, d = .28). In the non-self-improvement condition, however, this effect was attenuated

($t(382) = .64$, $p = .919$). When self-tracking did not follow from a motivation to improve, it no longer signaled status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 4.20$, SD = .85 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.28$, SD = .91).

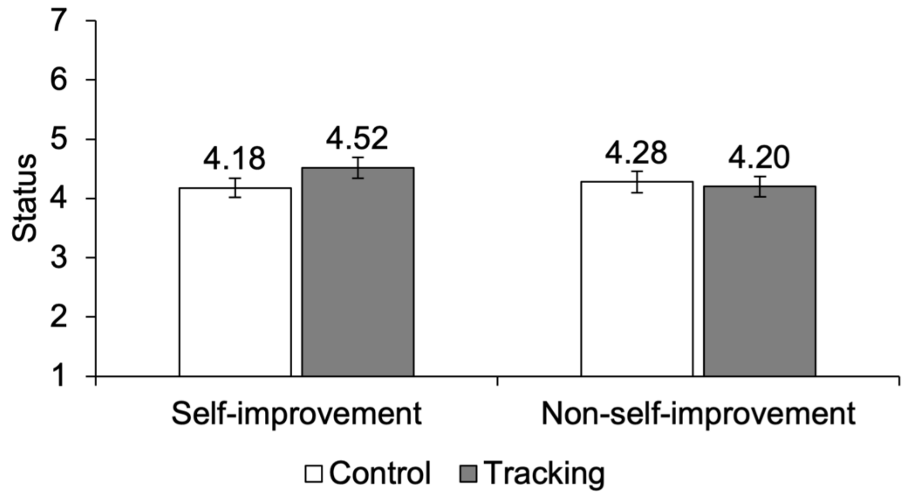

Figure 3: Self-tracking Motivation Moderates the Effect on Status (Study 4)

2.12.2.2 Underlying Process

A similar 2 × 2 ANOVA on self-control revealed a main effect of tracking ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.12$, SD = 1.02 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.84$, SD = 1.10; $F(1,382) = 6.93$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), qualified by the predicted interaction ($F(1,382) = 10.66$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). There was no main effect of motivation ($F(1,382) = .28$, $p = .598$).

Consistent with the prior results, in the self-improvement condition, self-tracking increased inferences of self-control ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.33$, SD = 1.03 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.69$, SD = 1.14; $t(382) = -4.17$, $p < .001$, $d = .43$). In the non-self-improvement condition, however, this effect was attenuated ($t(382) = .43$, $p = .974$). As predicted, when self-tracking did not follow from a motivation to improve, it no longer increased inferences of self-control ($M_{\text{Track}} = 4.92$, SD = .97 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.98$, SD = 1.05).

2.12.2.3 Moderated Mediation

To test for moderated mediation, we used a bias-corrected bootstrapping to generate 95% confidence intervals around the indirect effect of self-control in each motivation condition (Model 7 in Hayes 2017). Supporting our theory, results revealed a significant overall index of moderated mediation (*Index* = -.23, CI_{95}: [-.393, -.087]). When driven by a self-improvement motivation, self-tracking signaled status by increasing self-control (*ab* = .21, CI_{95} = [.107, .328]). When driven by a non-self-improvement motivation, however, the indirect effect was not significant (*ab* = -.02, CI_{95} = [-.120, .074]).

2.12.3 Discussion

Study 4 further demonstrates the proposed underlying process by moderating the relationship between self-tracking and self-control in a different way. Consistent with the prior results, when the target tracked his behavior out of a desire to self-improve (i.e., achieve better sleep quality), participants inferred that the target had greater self-control, and as a result, ascribed him higher status. When the target's self-tracking was driven by a non-self-improvement motivation (i.e. explore taste preferences), however, these effects were attenuated: Participants no longer inferred that the target had greater self-control, and thus, did not ascribe him higher status. Together with study 3, the findings show that self-tracking's effect on signaling status depends on whether the target's role in tracking their behavior (study 3) and salient reason for tracking their behavior (study 4) facilitate inferences of self-control.

2.13 Study 5: Moderating Role of the Tracking Context

Study 5 further tests our theory by examining the relationship between self-control and status. We have argued that while self-control is often a desired characteristic, in certain contexts—i.e., ones that encourage hedonic or indulgent behaviors (i.e., leisure; Oh and Pham 2022; Röseler et al. 2021)—greater self-control can be less socially desirable (Liu et al. 2019). Consequently, if inferences of self-control play the underlying role we suggest, then in more leisure-oriented environments, cues that suggest one is opting to exercise self-control (i.e., self-tracking) should be less likely to increase status.

To test this possibility, participants considered a target that either tracked their behavior (running a race), or not, and we manipulated the context. Specifically, for half of participants, we explicitly framed the race as leisure (i.e., carefree, fun, and enjoyable in its own right; Etkin and Memmi 2021) and examined the impact on status. We expected that absent additional information (baseline condition, similar to previous studies), self-tracking would increase status, but that framing the tracking context as more leisurely would attenuate this effect.

2.13.1 Method

Seven hundred seventy-seven Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 40.56, 47.4% female, 50.2% male, 2.2% nonbinary, .3% preferred not to state). Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (tracking: tracking vs. control) × 2 (context: baseline vs. leisure-frame) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated self-tracking. All participants imagined that they were a spectator of a large community running event and were given information about a certain runner (the target) at the start of the race. In the tracking condition, participants read the runner was starting his stopwatch app to keep track of his time (tracking condition). In the control condition, they read that he was starting his music app (control condition). See Web Appendix D for stimuli.

Second, we manipulated the context in which self-tracking occurred. In the baseline condition, no further information was provided. In the leisure-frame condition, we made the race seem like leisure by emphasizing its focus on enjoyment. Participants read: "You know that the event is meant to be fun and carefree, so it encourages the participants to not worry about any goals and focus on having a good time. The event is about being in the moment, enjoying running for the sake of it, and feeling free."

Finally, we measured status using the measures from studies 1b and 2a (α = .91).[10]

2.13.2 Results

A 2 (tracking) × 2 (context) ANOVA revealed a main effect of tracking ($F(1,773) = 15.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), qualified by a marginal interaction ($F(1,773) = 3.45$, $p = .064$). There was no main effect of context ($F(1,773) = 1.53$, $p = .217$).

As expected and consistent with the prior results, in the baseline context condition, self-tracking increased status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.97$, SD = 1.35 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.45$, SD = 1.08, $t(773) = -4.07$, $p < .001$, $d = .29$). Importantly, in the leisure-frame condition, this effect was attenuated ($t(773) = -1.45$, $p = .466$). When the context made exhibiting high self-control less socially desirable, self-tracking no longer signaled status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.71$, SD = 1.45 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.53$, SD = 1.11).

[10] We also asked, "To what extent do you think the person's phone usage is socially inappropriate?" (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). See Web Appendix E for details.

2.13.3 Discussion

Underscoring the proposed underlying process, study 5 demonstrates the important role of self-tracking context (i.e., the environment in which tracking occurs) in determining its effect. Consistent with the prior results, absent additional information, someone who tracked their behavior was seen as higher status. When such tracking occurred in a more leisurely context, however, this effect was eliminated. Consequently, when contextual factors reduce the social desirability of exhibiting high self-control, self-tracking may no longer signal status. Together with studies 3 and 4, these results provide strong support for our full conceptual model (figure 1) by demonstrating relevant theoretical moderators of the predicted effects.

2.14 General Discussion

Advances in technology have made self-tracking more prevalent, public, and conspicuous. Many companies that offer tracking capabilities—from Apple, Samsung, and Google to Garmin, Duolingo, and Headspace—now have social integrations that allow self-tracking to be shared both narrowly (e.g., with friends and family) and broadly (e.g., on social media; Kent 2018). But while self-tracking has been shown to help consumers manage and achieve personal goals, what does it signal to others? How do consumers evaluate others who track their behavior, and with what implications?

Eight studies demonstrated that consumers judge people who track their behavior as higher status. Across multiple activity domains (e.g., running, sleep, language learning, personal finances), manipulations of self-tracking (e.g., GPS tracking, volume markings, tracking magnets), and different ways of learning about a target's self-tracking activities (i.e., direct disclosure and indirect observation via social media posts), self-tracking increased status.

Results also supported the proposed underlying process. Self-tracking increased status by increasing inferences of self-control (studies 2a, 2b, 2c, 3, and 4). Further, factors that influenced whether self-tracking increased inferences of self-control (i.e., the a-link; studies 3 and 4), and whether self-control implies higher status (i.e., the b-link; study 5) moderated the effects.

Importantly, the studies also identified downstream consequences for user engagement on social media, using both field data (study 1a) and experiments (studies 2a and 3). Consumers were more likely to engage with online content posted by others that signaled status through self-tracking.

2.14.1 Theoretical Contributions

This work makes four main contributions. First, it furthers understanding of behavioral tracking. As self-tracking has become more prevalent, researchers have begun to investigate its psychological and behavioral impacts. As discussed, most work to-date has focused on consequences for the self (Etkin 2016; Hoang and Ng 2023; Silverman and Barasch 2023; Zimmermann 2021). While these findings have provided valuable insights, self-tracking does not occur in a social vacuum, and recent social media integrations have only served to make self-tracking more observable and public. As a first step, we demonstrate that self-tracking can serve as a status symbol, increasing the perceived status of others who self-track.

Second, this work furthers understanding of how conspicuous consumption shapes status. While extant research has predominantly focused on luxury consumption as a means to status (e.g., purchasing expensive products and designer goods; Cannon and Rucker 2019; Desmichel et al. 2020; Nelissen and Meijers 2011; Veblen 1899), recent research has identified alternative signals (see Bellezza 2023 for a review). As increases in income levels and access to credit have allowed more consumers to buy things they could not have bought previously, the signal value from wealth-based consumption has become weaker (Berger and Ward 2010). As a result, other sources of capital, such as cultural and social, have become more influential (Bellezza 2023). Contributing to this emerging research stream, we show that self-tracking signals status by increasing inferences about non-financial (i.e., self-control) resources. Consequently, even self-tracking that does not involve expensive, sophisticated products (e.g., using a water bottle with volume markings, study 1b) can increase status.

Third, this work extends research on self-control perceptions and social judgments. While past research has primarily focused on non-hierarchical evaluations (e.g., trust, partner preferences; Righetti and Finkenauer 2011; Shea et al. 2013), recent research has begun to explore how self-control perceptions can signal superiority on certain dimensions (e.g., task performance and motivation; Koval et al. 2015). Contributing to this nascent stream of work, our findings demonstrate that self-control can likewise suggest superiority on an important social dimension (i.e., status). Further, our findings underscore that social judgments of self-control are context-dependent (Liu et al. 2019; Röseler et al. 2021), and that in situations where self-control is less socially desirable, greater self-control no longer confers higher status (study 5).

Fourth, we contribute to the emerging research on cues that increase online engagement (Chung, Ding and Kalra 2023; Valsesia and Diehl 2022; Valsesia et al.

2020). By demonstrating that self-tracking affects social judgments (i.e., status), which, in turn, influence online interactions (i.e., likes, following, replies, and views), we contribute to the burgeoning literature on factors that shape engagement with user-generated content. Though prior work finds that conspicuous use of brands and posting about material goods lead to less engagement (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013; Valsesia and Diehl 2022), our findings highlight that the conspicuous use self-tracking products can increase engagement (e.g., 20.5% of Reddit comments mentioned the Garmin smartwatch, study 1a). Further, our findings highlight the importance of being perceived as actively involved in self-tracking for positive online engagement (i.e., AI-tracking prompted more negative responses, study 3).

2.14.2 Practical Implications

Our findings also have practical implications and suggest new directions for future research. Market interest in behavioral tracking is substantial. By 2029, for example, more than one in four Americans will own a wearable tracking device (Statista 2024). While self-tracking's intuitive appeal lies in its purported ability to change behavior, our findings suggest a novel way that companies might frame its potential benefits. In addition to increasing performance or persistence, companies can market self-tracking's interpersonal benefits for desired social perceptions (i.e., status). Portraying self-tracking in an aspirational way, or adding luxury elements to tracking technologies (e.g., precious stones or metals) may be a particularly effective means to engage status-seeking consumers and, in turn, deliver those ends. Brands that target status-seeking consumers (e.g., luxury), for example, may consider cultivating associations with self-tracking (e.g., Gucci x Oura Ring, Kate Spade's smartwatch bands), or integrating self-tracking features into certain product lines (e.g., Louis Vuitton's Tambour Watch).

In addition, marketers care a great deal about getting consumers to post about their experiences and engage with online content, and our findings offer insights on both fronts. First, while consumers may sometimes be reluctant to share their health, fitness, and financial activities (Garbinsky et al. 2020; Melumad and Meyer 2020; White 2004), our findings highlight that doing so can boost social judgments. Consequently, by associating self-tracking with status in their marketing communications, firms may encourage consumers to post about such activities (and associated product use). Second, our findings demonstrate that posting about self-tracking can increase user engagement on social media. Consequently, by portraying sales or brand representatives (i.e., "influencers") as high status, firms may boost consumers' engagement with their content (Scott et al. 2013; Valsesia et al. 2020). Importantly, to encourage positive user engagement (i.e., upvotes), posts should make clear that one is actively involved in self-tracking (vs. reliant on technology; study 3) and that they are doing so to improve their behavior (study 4).

Relatedly, our findings inform the design of marketing communications. Marketers are increasingly seeking high-status "micro influencers" to promote certain products and brands (Valsesia et al. 2020). Our findings suggest that individuals who post about self-tracking may be perceived in this way (high status), and thus have the potential to encourage greater online engagement. Strategies such as embedding self-tracking cues into video thumbnails, for example, may increase user engagement (see ancillary

YouTube field data analysis in Web Appendix C) and may therefore offer impactful opportunities to showcase the products and brands.

The findings also have implications for consumers. First, they suggest a novel way to signal status. As discussed, status affords many benefits, including social, economic, and psychological (see Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015 for a review). Accordingly, consumers are often motivated to signal status and make consumption choices and decisions along these lines (Han et al. 2010). Consequently, making this more public—particularly among consumers who already engage in self-tracking—may be a simple way to achieve higher status. Notably, while consumers could be concerned that disclosing self-tracking could be embarrassing or perceived as bragging (Sezer et al. 2018), our findings suggest that self-tracking signals status despite these possibilities.

Importantly, self-tracking may be a particularly cost-effective way to signal status. We found that even inexpensive, basic ways to track one's behavior (i.e., volume markings to track consumption; study 1b) can increase status, suggesting that conspicuous self-tracking may allow consumers of both ample and more limited means to signal it. Although lower income consumers may be less likely to display alternative status symbols (Bellezza 2023), due to their focus on more traditional symbols (Han et al. 2010), they may particularly benefit from doing so.

Further, although behavioral tracking is appealing to consumers, recent work suggests it can have mixed effects (e.g., increasing performance while reducing enjoyment; Etkin 2016). By demonstrating effects on social judgments, our findings advance consumer understanding of the potential consequences of self-tracking, and thus decisions around whether and what to track.

2.14.3 Future Research Directions

The findings point to several additional directions for future research. First, future work could build on the current findings by exploring other potential moderators or boundary conditions. While our main interest was in how consumers evaluate others who track their behavior, other information may shape such evaluations. Cues about self-trackers' intentions (e.g., to signal status or other desired qualities), for example, may moderate the effect. Salient self-presentation motives tend to dilute status signals (Ferraro et al. 2013), so believing that someone disclosed their self-tracking to intentionally signal status might undermine its effect. Similarly, background on self-trackers' behavioral history (e.g., whether they been successful or struggled in the past) might influence whether self-tracking signals status. On one hand, past failures may attenuate inferences of self-control. On the other, overcoming past failures may suggest even greater willpower, and thus strengthen the effect.

Second, it would be interesting to explore how self-tracking influences social behaviors. While the current research focuses on how self-tracking shapes social judgments, other work has explored how consumption can affect social behaviors. Wearing formal attire, for example, can enhance self-confidence (Cutright, Srna, and Samper 2019) while luxury consumption can decrease self-confidence (Goor et al. 2020). Building on these findings, future work could examine how self-tracking affects consumers' subsequent social behaviors. An exploratory analysis with a large, national secondary dataset representing over 50,000 adult consumers revealed that self-tracking was associated with greater confidence ($\beta = .07$, $t = 11.93$, $p < .001$). See Web Appendix I for details.

Finally, future work could consider whether consumers expect that self-tracking would increase their status. As a preliminary test, we randomly assigned participants (N = 199) to one of two judgment-target conditions (self vs. other) and asked them to report how sharing the tracking of various activities (step count, food calories, sleep, heart rate, etc.) would increase their own versus someone else's status (see Web Appendix J). Results revealed that participants had lower expectations that self-tracking would increase their own status relative to someone else's ($M_{\text{Self}} = 3.25$ vs. $M_{\text{Other}} = 3.91$; $t(198) = -4.18$, $p < .001$). Future work could further explore this self-other perceived status bias, and if consumers do in fact anticipate that self-tracking has less impact on their own status, test interventions that may debias such beliefs.

2.14.4 Conclusion

Behavioral tracking is increasingly prevalent and public. Many consumers regularly share their self-tracking activities with family, friends, and online communities, and rapid growth in the popularity of wearable tracking devices has made self-tracking ever more visible and conspicuous. The current research is among the first to demonstrate that self-tracking has meaningful social consequences. By increasing inferences of others' self-control, self-tracking signals status. Consequently, beyond its psychological and behavioral impacts on the self, self-tracking has novel implications for interpersonal judgments and decisions.

3. How Repeated Consumption Shapes Performance Expectations

Performers engage in repeated consumption—Steve Jobs repeatedly wore his black turtleneck, LeBron James repeatedly listens to one song, and Jennifer Aniston repeatedly eats the same meal. Though consumers may perceive these performers as boring individuals for engaging in repeated consumption, consumers also seem to praise them for being successful performers in their respective roles for doing so. Even Barack Obama during his presidency, for example, talked openly about wearing the same suit repeatedly. Though consumers perceived him as dull for repeating his outfits, they commended him for being a smart and productive president (Pozen 2012).

While research in consumer behavior has begun to explore certain interpersonal—and often negative—judgments of repeated consumption (e.g., boring; Engeler and Barasz 2021; Gershon and Smith 2020; Ratner and Kahn 2002), might repeated consumption also impact performance judgments? And if so, how and with what implications?

In the current research, we propose that repeated consumption can increase performance expectations. Seven studies spanning multiple consumption domains and task domains demonstrate that individuals with a focal task[11] (performers) who engage in repeated consumption are perceived to perform better at the task. This occurs due to what repeated consumption suggests about cognitive focus. Specifically, consumers believe that performers who repeat their consumption are more focused on the task at hand, and consequently, consumers expect them to do better at the task. Importantly, we also identify key moderators of these effects and demonstrate downstream consequences for consumer engagement (e.g., performance investment).

[11] We use the term task to refer to the activity to be done which can be as broad as a job or as specific as a single action.

The findings make three main contributions. First, whereas past research has explored the negative social judgments from repeated consumption (Engeler and Barasz 2021; Gershon and Smith 2020; Ratner and Kahn 2002), only recently has research started to explore the positive judgments (Sela et al. 2019). The present research builds on this work by demonstrating the positive performance judgments from repeated consumption.

Second, our findings inform cues that suggest cognitive focus. Substantial research has explored strategies to enhance focus in addition to the consequences of being focused (e.g., Pieters and Wedel 2004). Despite extensive literature documenting the drivers and outcomes from focus, little research has examined whether consumers can make inferences of focus in *others* and whether there are consequences of doing so.

Finally, this work contributes to the practice of marketing by demonstrating how consumption cues can shape performance expectations and engagement. While prior work has focused on how physical characteristics (e.g., gender, attractiveness, hand gestures) can signal performance (Brooks et al. 2014; Clarke, Cornelissen, and Healey 2019), our findings demonstrate how consumption can also influence performance expectations. In doing so, the present work has important implications for performers and marketers who want to increase audience engagement in their performances and communications.

3.1 Repeated Consumption

Repeated consumption is the act of consuming a stimulus that "one has already consumed in full in the past (O'Brien 2021)." It is distinct from related constructs such as habits or routines by involving the free choice to re-experience a stimulus versus doing so through automatic tendencies (Neal, Wood, and Quinn 2006). In a given moment, it can involve making a choice that was previously chosen in a relative past (e.g., yesterday) or sequentially making the same choice over and over (e.g., non-variety-seeking; for a review, see Kahn and Rafieian 2022).

Accordingly, one might wonder how the time interval between consumption episodes relates to repeated consumption. Listening to one song repeatedly, for example, can occur once a day over the next five days, or it can occur back-to-back. Relatedly, it can occur at different levels ranging from as broad as a genre to as specific as a lyric. Importantly, consistent with prior work (O'Brien 2021), we argue that beyond the objective time interval or category level, it is whether the consumption is *perceived* as repeated. Indeed, consumers can perceive more or less repetition between the same stimulus depending on the framing (for a review, see Galak and Redden 2018).

Notably, prior work on repeated consumption has explored the negative judgments of repeated consumption. Consumers who reuse jokes or choose the same brand repeatedly, for example, are perceived as boring, inauthentic, and untrustworthy (Engeler and Barasz 2021; Gershon and Smith 2020; Ratner and Kahn 2002). As a result, consumers make more novel choices in the presence of others to be viewed more favorably (Ariely and Levav 2000; Ratner and Kahn 2002).

While it is well established that consumers face negative social judgments from repeated consumption, much remains to be learned about whether (and how) repeated consumption might influence other evaluations and whether there are any positive judgments. Notably, repeated consumption occurs within various performative contexts. In addition to workplace contexts, as previously discussed, Engeler and Barasz (2021), for example, find that repeated brand consumption also occurs in sports contexts. Though they found that runners who wear repeated brands are trusted less for running gear recommendations, whether the runners' repeated consumption influences judgments of their running abilities remains to be explored.

3.2 The Current Research

We propose that repeated consumption prior to or alongside the focal task increases performance expectations for that task. In other words, we predict that by learning that performers engage in repeated consumption, consumers will expect them to perform better. Performance expectations—expectations held by consumers about others' success on a task—have critical implications from whether a service provider is approached to whether a sports athlete has an engaged audience. Consumers form these expectations based on whether the performers possess relevant qualities. Qualities such as professionalism and educational prestige, for example, influence performance expectations (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994; Spence 1973). Therefore, consumption choices that signal these qualities (e.g., wearing formal attire and university-related accessories) can increase the performance expectations held by consumers (Johnson and Roach-Higgins 1987).

We suggest that repeated consumption increases performance expectations due to what it suggests about focus. Focus refers to the narrowing of attention toward the focal task (Derryberry and Tucker 1994). Because attention is limited in capacity (Kahneman 1973), focus is characterized as inhibiting the processing of less relevant information for more task-relevant information (Gorn, Pham, and Sin 2001; Harmon-Jones, Price, and Gable 2012; Wilcox and Prokopec 2019). Accordingly, focus can be influenced by factors prior to (e.g., in preparation for) or alongside the task (e.g., multitasking; Han and Broniarczyk 2021).

Further, repeated consumption is associated with focus. Relative to novel experiences, repeated experiences offer familiar stimulus features that require fewer cognitive resources to process (Nunes, Ordanini, and Valsesia 2015). Consequently, this allows consumers to dedicate more cognitive resources (i.e., focus) to the task at hand (Keeler and Cortina 2020; Liang, Huang, and Su 2023). Listening to music on repeat, for example, improves focus on a task (Keeler and Cortina 2020; Margulis 2014). As such, repeated consumption, by being familiar and predictable, is preferred when consumers are preoccupied with stressful occasions (Cutright 2012). The pressures of college, for example, often increase preferences for familiar comfort foods (Kandiah et al. 2006).

Based on the association between repeated consumption and focus, we argue that consumers will make similar inferences and evaluate performers' focus based on the extent to which they engage in repeated consumption. Specifically, when performers are shown as engaging in repeated consumption, we suggest that consumers should perceive them as more focused on the task at hand. For example, if a runner is observed to be wearing the same brand repeatedly, we suggest that consumers will interpret the repeated consumption as an indication that the runner is dedicating their focus towards running more so than towards the aspects of consumption (e.g., choosing thoughtfully, impression management, etc.).

We propose that inferring greater focus in performers should, in turn, increase the performance expectations made by consumers. Performance expectations can be influenced by word-of-mouth (e.g., online reviews; Babić Rosario et al. 2016), rankings

(Pope 2009), observed preparation (Rifkin, Du, and Cutright 2023), gender (Brooks et al. 2014), and stereotypes (Steele and Aronson 1995). Because many aspects of a performance impose high cognitive demands on the performers (Campbell 1988; Diamond 2013), we reason that performers who are perceived to be focused should increase consumers' expectations of their performance.

Further, by increasing performance expectations, we suggest that repeated consumption should increase consumer engagement. Consistent with prior work demonstrating that consumers are attracted to and invest in individuals with performance potential (Clarke et al. 2019; Tormala, Jia, and Norton 2012), we propose that consumers are more likely to engage with those who are observed to be repeating their consumption through investment intentions.

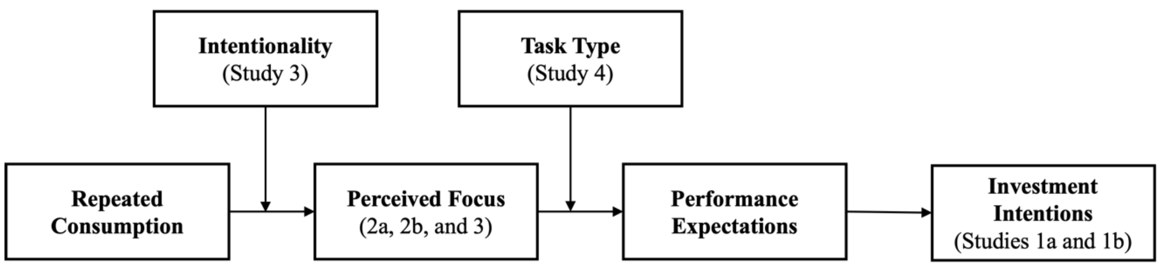

Figure 4: Conceptual Model

3.3 Conceptual Moderation and Boundary Conditions

Importantly, if repeated consumption does increase performance expectations by increasing perceptions of focus, as we suggest, then factors that weaken the relationship between repeated consumption and focus (a-link moderation), or between focus and performance (b-link moderation), should attenuate the predicted effects (see figure 4 for full conceptual model).

3.3.1 Intentionality

First, we suggest that the extent to which performers intentionally engage in repeated consumption should moderate the effects. While repeated consumption is often intentionally chosen, it can also be unintentional. When selecting a restaurant, for example, consumers can eat at a repeated restaurant either because they wanted to or because they had to because of external constraints (e.g., other restaurants were closed).

Importantly, if repeated consumption signals performance by increasing perceptions of focus, as we suggest, then when repeated consumption is unintentional, its effects should be attenuated. Being focused presumes that the performers are managing their attention through intentional choices. Indeed, when the choices are out of their control due to external constraints, they can experience attentional overload, which lessens focus (Cutright 2012). Consequently, when repeated consumption is chosen unintentionally, we reason that it should be less likely to suggest greater focus, and thus, the effect on perceived focus (and performance expectations) should be attenuated.

3.3.2 Cognitive Flexibility

Finally, we suggest that whether the task is perceived to require cognitive flexibility may also moderate its effects. Cognitive flexibility refers to the adaption of cognitive processes to new and unexpected environmental conditions and is thus opposite from cognitive rigidity (Canas et al. 2003; Diamond 2013). Importantly, a task can vary in terms of whether it requires cognitive rigidity or flexibility. Whereas cognitively rigid tasks are objective, rational, and systematic, cognitively flexible tasks are subjective, creative, and experiential (Castelo, Bos, and Lehmann 2019; Longoni, Bonezzi, and Morewedge 2019). Within a news media company, for example, some tasks require cognitive rigidity, such as copy-editing, and some tasks require cognitive flexibility, such as idea generation (Keeler and Cortina 2020).

Importantly, if perceptions of focus play the underlying role we suggest, then when repeated consumption occurs in tasks that require cognitive flexibility (flexible tasks), its effect on performance expectations should be attenuated. Though narrow attention (i.e., focus) is beneficial to cognitively rigid tasks (rigid tasks), it can be detrimental to flexible tasks. Because success in flexible tasks sometimes requires the processing of unrelated information to make novel connections (e.g., brainstorming), a broader (vs. narrower) attention is more beneficial (Baas, De Dreu, and Nijstad 2008). Thus, in flexible tasks, greater focus may be less suggestive of performance. Indeed, consumers expect artists who engage in more rational processing to have lower value in the market (Kokkoris and Stavrova 2024). Consequently, while performers may still engage in repeated consumption during flexible tasks, and repeated consumption may still suggest greater focus, because focus should not increase performance evaluations in such cases, we suggest that repeated consumption's effect on performance expectations should be attenuated.

3.4 Overview of Studies

Seven studies test our predictions. Studies 1a-1c examine the basic effect across three consumption domains: clothing, music, and movies. Importantly, studies 1a and 1b explored downstream implications, testing how repeated consumption influences consumer engagement through monetary investments by consumers (e.g., wagering on the performance), a phenomenon of importance to both marketers and performers (Cotte and Latour 2009). Studies 2a-2b measure the proposed underlying process and potential alternative explanations, testing whether the effect is driven by perceptions of focus. Studies 3 and 4 further investigate the proposed underlying process through mediation (i.e., measuring perceptions of focus) and moderation (e.g., manipulating whether repeated consumption suggests greater focus and whether greater focus increases performance, respectively).

Importantly, across studies, “repeated consumption” was consistently operationalized as consuming a stimulus that has already been consumed in full in the past. As discussed, regardless of the time interval between consumption, the predictions are based on whether the consumption is perceived as repeated. In studies 1a and 2a, for example, the repeated condition involved choosing a stimulus from a distant past (e.g., choosing a movie that was watched years ago). Beyond a distant past, in studies 1b and 2a, the repeated condition involved choosing a stimulus from an immediate past through an assortment context (e.g., choosing a color that was chosen seconds ago). Consequently, while the exact consumption stimuli differed across studies, the manipulations consistently embodied our definition.

Across experiments, we employed best practices regarding data cleaning. Following Meyvis and Van Osselaer (2018), we excluded observations containing (1) multiple IP addresses that appeared two or more times (i.e., duplicate or multiple entries), (2) attention check failures, and (3) outliers at least 2.5 deviations from the focal dependent variable. We report results for each experiment after data cleaning. See Web Appendix K for details.

3.5 Study 1a: Clothing

Study 1a tests our main prediction. The uniform combinations American football teams wear for each game (i.e., helmet, jersey, and pants) are often reported by news media before the game (Sheeran 2024). Inspired by this, in study 1a, participants viewed a news headline about a football team's choice of uniform combination for an upcoming game. Half of the participants were told that the team had never worn the uniform combination before, while the other half were told that the team had worn the uniform combination many times before. We predicted that, compared to the non-repeated condition (never worn combination), participants in the repeated condition would expect the team to perform better.

In addition, study 1a explores downstream consequences for monetary investment using an incentive-compatible choice. More specifically, all participants were given a bonus payment, which they could use to place a bet on the team, and we tested whether repeated consumption would influence betting behavior.

3.5.1 Method

One hundred ninety-five Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 47.51, 52.6% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: repeated versus control.

First, we manipulated repeated consumption through a news headline about an American football team (the target) named the Scarlet Eagles. Participants were either shown the headline, "Scarlet Eagles to Choose a Uniform Combination They've Never Worn Before for Week 3 Game vs. Sparrows" (control condition) or the headline, "Scarlet Eagles to Choose a Uniform Combination They've Worn Many Times Before for Week 3 Game vs. Sparrows" (repeated condition).

Second, participants indicated how they expected the team to perform. Participants answered two questions about the team: (1) To what extent do you think the Scarlet Eagles will win the game? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so) and (2) How would you assess the odds of the Scarlet Eagles winning the game? (1 = Very low, 7 = Very high; $r = .78$).

Third, to explore downstream consequences, we measured bet placements with an incentive-compatible choice. We told all participants that they would receive a $0.10 bonus payment, which they could wager for $0.20 if the team won. Participants were asked whether they wanted to bet their bonus (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

Finally, participants completed a manipulation check ("To what extent do you think the team is choosing to repeat a uniform combination?" 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Supporting our manipulation, responses were higher in the repeated (vs. control) condition ($M_{\text{Repeat}} = 6.03$, SD = 1.12 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 2.62$, SD = 1.82; $t(193) = -15.82$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.27$)[12]. At the end of the survey, all participants were debriefed that the headline was fictional, and all participants were given a bonus of $0.20 for their participation.

[12] The manipulation check was successful across all studies where measured; for brevity, we report the results in the remaining studies in Web Appendix M.

3.5.2 Results

3.5.2.1 Performance

Repeated consumption increased performance expectations ($t(193) = -2.75$, $p = .006$, $d = .39$). Compared to the control ($M = 4.12$, SD = .65), participants in the repeated condition expected the target (Scarlet Eagles) to perform better at their game ($M = 4.40$, SD = .76).

3.5.2.2 Investment Intentions

A binary logistic regression revealed that repeated consumption increased bet placements (Wald $\chi^2 = 8.54$, $p = .013$). Compared to the control (44.3%), participants in the repeated condition placed more bets (62.2%). Further, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed a significant indirect effect. Repeated consumption increased bet placements by increasing performance expectations ($ab = .24$, CI_{95} = [.061, .521]).

3.6 Study 1b: Music

While study 1a demonstrated that repeated consumption increases performance expectations, one may wonder whether differences in coordination or planning effort have driven the effect. The repeated (vs. new) uniforms, for example, could be perceived as more planned (vs. spontaneous), which could influence performance expectations (Rifkin et al. 2023). To hold effort constant, in study 1b, participants viewed an athlete's social media post about listening to music on autoplay before his match. We manipulated repeated consumption by describing the autoplay as either "auto-repeat" or "auto-shuffle." Consistent with study 1a, we predicted that participants in the repeated condition would expect the boxer to perform better.

In addition, study 1b examines whether the effect of repeated consumption applies to a shorter time interval between consumption episodes. By manipulating repeated consumption through the automated assortment of songs the athlete listens to, study 1b tests the generalizability of repeated consumption's effect on performance.

3.6.1 Method

Study 1b was pre-registered (#168007). One hundred ninety-six Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 47.51, 52.6% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: repeated versus control.

First, participants viewed a social media post from Jordan (the target), who was described as a boxer. We manipulated repeated consumption through the text in his social post. Participants either read "I listen to one song on auto-repeat before matches" (repeated condition) or "I listen to various songs on auto-shuffle before matches" (control condition).

Second, participants indicated how they expected Jordan to perform. Participants answered two questions adapted from the previous study about Jordan: (1) To what extent do you think the person will win his upcoming match? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so) and (2) How would you assess the odds of the person winning his upcoming match? (1 = Very low, 7 = Very high; r = .85).

Finally, to explore downstream consequences, we measured betting interest on Jordan's performance. Participants answered two questions about their betting interest: (1) To what extent would you be interested in placing a monetary bet on the person to win their upcoming match? and (2) To what extent do you think gambling on the person to win their upcoming match is a good idea? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; r = .87).

3.6.2 Results

3.6.2.1 Performance

As predicted, repeated consumption increased performance expectations ($t(194) = -4.41$, $p < .001$, $d = .63$). Compared to the control ($M = 4.18$, SD = .64), participants in the repeated condition expected the target (Jordan) to perform better at his boxing match ($M = 4.69$, SD = .94).

3.6.2.2 Investment Intentions

Consistent with prior results, these effects had downstream consequences for betting interest ($t(194) = -2.68$, $p = .008$, $d = .38$). Compared to the control ($M = 2.28$, SD = 1.40), participants in the repeated condition expressed greater interest in betting on the target ($M = 2.87$, SD = 1.62). Further, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed a significant indirect effect. Repeated consumption increased betting interest by increasing performance expectations ($ab = .44$, $CI_{95} = [.215, .714]$).

3.7 Study 1c: Movie

While the results of studies 1a and 1b are supportive, one could also wonder whether ritual consumption plays a role. The performers in the repeated condition in the prior studies, for example, may have been perceived as engaging in an established pre-match ritual more than the performers in the control condition, which may have boosted performance expectations. Because ritual consumption involves an already established sequence of behaviors before an activity (Wang et al. 2021), Study 1c involves a performer participating in the activity for the first time to r ule out this possibility.

3.7.1 Method

Study 1c was pre-registered (#182548). Three hundred ninety-two Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 37.84, 62.5% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: repeated versus control.

First, participants considered the case of Sarah (the target), who is running a half-marathon. We indicated that it was Sarah's *first* half-marathon to rule out the possibility that she may have an established ritual—as Sarah has not run a half-marathon before, she could not have an established ritual before the race. To manipulate repeated consumption, we told participants that the night before, Sarah either watches either a movie that she had seen many times before (repeated condition) or a movie that she had never seen before (control condition).

Finally, participants indicated how they expected Sarah to perform on her first half-marathon. Participants answered two items about Sarah's half-marathon performance (adapted from Rifkin et al. 2023): 1 = Worse than other runners/Slower than average time, 7 = Better than other runners/Faster than average time (r = .88).

3.7.2 Results

As expected and consistent with the prior studies, repeated consumption increased performance expectations ($t(390) = -4.02$, $p < .001$, $d = .41$). Compared to the control (M = 4.21, SD = .89), participants in the repeated condition expected the target (Sarah) to perform better at her first-half marathon (M = 4.62, SD = 1.11).

3.8 Studies 1a—1c Discussion

Taken together, studies 1a–1c demonstrate that repeated consumption can increase performance expectations. Across three consumption domains—clothing, music, and movies—participants expected performers who repeated their consumption to perform better. Notably, repeated consumption's effect generalized across multiple activities (i.e., American football, boxing, and running). Notably, the effect was robust to different operationalizations (i.e., news headlines, social media posts, and stylized vignettes).

Further, the studies reveal downstream consequences for performance expectations. In study 1a, participants placed more bets on the game when the performers were repeating their uniform combinations (vs. not repeating). Consistent with study 1a, participants in study 1b had greater betting interest in the match when the performer was listening to music on auto-repeat (vs. auto-shuffle).

3.9 Study 2a: The Underlying Role of Focus

Study 2a tests the proposed underlying process through mediation. Participants viewed a runner's color choices in clothing, and we manipulated whether his color choices were repeated or not. In addition to performance expectations, we assessed perceptions of the runner's focus towards running and tested whether this mediates the effect. We predicted that repeated consumption would increase performance expectations and that perceptions of greater focus would drive this.

3.9.1 Method

Study 2a was pre-registered (#183105). Three hundred eighty-five Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment ($M_{age} = 42.02$, 56.9% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: repeated versus control.

First, participants read about Jack (the target), who is purchasing a running outfit for his marathon race. Participants were told that Jack was buying a headband, jersey, compression briefs, shorts, and socks. To manipulate repeated consumption, we showed participants five images of the clothing items that Jack picked. The five clothing items were either all shown in the same color (repeated condition) or different colors for each item (control condition). The clothing set in the repeated condition was randomized to be all blue or all red; we collapsed across the repeated color in the analyses as pre-registered (see Web Appendix K).

Second, participants indicated how they expected Jack to perform on the marathon using the same two-item scale from study 1c (r = .88).

Finally, we measured the proposed underlying process. To assess perceptions of focus, participants rated their agreement with the following: (1) I feel like this person is mentally focused on the race; (2) I feel like this person is mentally concentrated on the race (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; r = .95).

3.9.2 Results

3.9.2.1 Performance

As predicted and consistent with prior results, repeated consumption increased performance expectations (t(383) = -2.70, p = .007, d = .27). Compared to the control (M = 4.18, SD = 1.00), participants in the repeated condition expected the target (Jack) to have a better performance on his marathon (M = 4.48, SD = 1.22).

3.9.2.2 Underlying Process

Repeated consumption also increased perceptions of focus (t(383) = -3.40, p = .001, d = .35). Compared to the control (M = 4.66, SD = 1.31), participants in the repeated condition perceived the target as more focused (M = 5.13, SD = 1.41). Further, supporting our theory, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed a significant indirect effect. Repeated consumption increased performance expectations by increasing perceptions of focus (*ab* = .23, CI_{95} = [.091, .363]).

3.10 Study 2b: Ruling Out Alternative Explanations

Study 2b has three main objectives. First, study 2b explores a different consumption domain. To examine generalizability beyond clothing, music, and movie consumption, study 2b investigates food consumption.

Second, while the prior studies demonstrated generalizability across several activities (American football, boxing, and running), one could wonder whether the effect extends to activities that do not involve sports. To test this, in study 2b, we examined financial reporting. All participants read about an employee ordering lunch to eat while working on a financial report, and we manipulated repeated consumption by indicating that the lunch was one she'd eaten many times before (repeated condition) versus one she'd never eaten before (control condition). Consistent with the prior results, we predicted that repeated consumption would increase performance expectations.

Third, study 2b examines the proposed underlying process. Similar to study 2a, we measured perceptions of focus and tested for mediation. In addition, we tested perceptions of self-control as an alternative explanation. Because repeated consumption can suggest self-control through behavioral rigidity (Ainslie 1975) and being perceived as having greater self-control increases performance expectations (Koval et al. 2015), one could wonder whether self-control might contribute to the effect.

3.10.1 Method

Study 2b was pre-registered (#188255). One hundred ninety-seven Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 36.67, 56.3% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: repeated versus control.

First, participants read about Barbara (the target) ordering food delivery for lunch on her mobile app while working on a financial report. To manipulate repeated consumption, we told participants that Barbara either ordered a meal she had eaten many times before (repeated condition) or ordered a meal she had never eaten before (control condition).

Finally, we measured our dependent variables. To assess performance expectations, participants rated their expectations of Barbara's report along the following dimensions (Lalwani and Shavitt 2013): quality, reliability, and dependability (1 = Very low, 7 = Very high; $\alpha = .94$). To assess perceptions of focus, participants answered two questions about Barbara: To what extent do you think the person demonstrates… (1) mental focus? and (2) concentration? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; $r = .89$). To explore a potential alternative explanation, we measured perceptions of self-control with three questions (Marr et al. 2019): To what extent do you think the person demonstrates… (1) self-control? (2) self-restraint? and (3) willpower? (1 = Not at all, 7 = A great deal; $\alpha = .93$). The order of all the dependent variables was counterbalanced.

3.10.2 Results

3.10.2.1 Performance

As predicted and consistent with prior results, repeated consumption increased performance expectations ($t(195) = -3.56$, $p < .001$, $d = .51$). Compared to the control (M

= 5.50, SD = 1.01), participants in the repeated condition expected the target (Barbara) to perform better at writing the report (M = 5.98, SD = .87).

3.10.2.2 Underlying Process

As expected, repeated consumption also increased perceptions of focus ($t(195) = -2.21$, $p = .029$, $d = .31$). Compared to the control (M = 5.37, SD = 1.15), participants in the repeated condition perceived the target as more focused (M = 5.72, SD = 1.08). Further, supporting our theory, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed a significant indirect effect. As predicted, repeated consumption increased performance expectations by increasing perceptions of focus (ab = .20, CI_{95} = [.023, .381]).

3.10.2.2 Alternative Explanation

Casting doubt on a potential alternative, there was no difference in perceptions of self-control (M_{Repeated} = 5.03, SD = 1.30 vs. M_{Control} = 4.80, SD = 1.25; $t(195) = -1.28$, p = .203). Consequently, a parallel mediation analysis with focus and self-control included as parallel mediators supported focus as the primary underlying process. The indirect effect of focus was significant (ab = .14, CI_{95} = [.016, .280]), while the indirect effect of self-control was not (ab = .05, CI_{95} = [-.029, .156]).

3.11 Studies 2a and 2b Discussion

Taken together, studies 2a and 2b demonstrate that repeated consumption can increase performance expectations and support the proposed underlying process of focus. In both studies, participants expected the performers who engaged in repeated consumption to perform better, and this was driven by perceptions that the performers were more focused. In addition, repeated consumption's effect was robust to other consumption domains (i.e., food) and activities unrelated to sports (i.e., work-related tasks).

Further, the results cast doubt on an alternative explanation. Although perceptions of self-control increases performance expectations (Koval et al. 2015) and was positively correlated with it in study 2b ($r = .63$, $p < .001$), repeated consumption did not influence perceptions of self-control, so self-control did not drive (i.e., mediate) the effect.

3.12 Study 3: Moderating Role of Intentionality

Study 3 examines the proposed underlying process through moderation and mediation. We have argued that repeated consumption enhances performance expectations by increasing perceptions of focus. Possessing focus, however, presumes that the performers are perceived to be making intentional choices to manage their attention. Consequently, if our theory is correct, when performers engage in repeated consumption unintentionally, consumers should no longer perceive them to have greater focus, attenuating repeated consumption's effect on performance.

3.12.1 Method

Study 3 was pre-registered (#188093). Five hundred eighty-seven Prolific panelists participated in exchange for payment ($M = 40.76$, 53.6% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three consumption conditions: intentionally repeated versus unintentionally repeated versus control.

First, all participants read a vignette about Barbara (the target), who buys chips from the vending machine throughout the day while working on a financial report. To manipulate repeated consumption, we told that the target either has been selecting the same bag each time (intended repeat condition), selecting the same bag each time because of limited supply (unintended repeat condition), or selecting a different bag each time (control condition). Further, participants were shown images of her selection, so participants either saw four bags from different brands (i.e., Cheetos, Doritos, Fritos, and Lay's) in the control condition or four bags from the same brand (i.e., all Doritos) in the two repeated conditions (see Web Appendix L for stimuli).

Second, participants indicated their performance expectations through the quality measures from study 2b ($\alpha = .92$).

Finally, we measured perceptions of focus using another scale for robustness. Participants evaluated Barbara's attention on the report along the following dimensions (Cutright 2012): overwhelmed (r), scattered (r), distracted (r), confused (r), preoccupied (r), and focused (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; $\alpha = .87$).[13]

3.12.2 Results

3.12.2.1 Performance

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant effect on performance expectations ($F(2,585) = 5.14$, $p = .006$, $\eta_{p2} = .02$). As predicted, compared to the control ($M = 5.26$, SD = 1.08), participants in the intended repeat condition expected the target (Barbara) to perform better at writing the report ($M = 5.58$, SD = 1.02; $t(585) = -3.05$, $p = .007$, $d = .25$). Participants also expected the target to perform better in the intended repeat condition relative to the unintended repeat condition ($M = 5.33$, SD = .97; $t(585) = -2.38$, $p = .046$, $d = .20$). There was no difference between the control and unintended repeat condition ($t(585) = -.67$, $p = .780$).

[13] We also measured the perceived healthiness of the choice and ran a parallel mediation analysis with focus. The results supported focus as the primary underlying process (see Web Appendix M).

3.12.2.2 Underlying Process

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect on focus ($F(2,585) = 14.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_{p2} = .05$). As expected and consistent with the prior results, compared to the control ($M = 4.43$, SD = 1.22), participants in the intended repeat condition perceived the target as more focused ($M = 5.08$, SD = 1.24; $t(585) = -5.23$, $p < .001$, $d = .43$). Participants also perceived the target to be more focused in the unintended repeat condition relative to the intended repeat condition ($M = 4.66$, SD = 1.21; $t(585) = -3.41$, $p = .002$, $d = .28$). There was no difference between the control and unintended repeat condition ($t(585) = -1.83$, $p = .162$).

Further, supporting our theory, separate bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) revealed that focus mediated intended repeat consumption's effect on increasing performance expectations relative to the control ($ab = .15$, $CI_{95} = [.090, .219]$) and relative to the unintended repeat condition ($ab = .17$, $CI_{95} = [.071, .283]$). Focus did not mediate the unintended repeat condition's effect on performance expectations relative to the control ($ab = .11$, $CI_{95} = [-.005, -.234]$).

3.12.3 Discussion

Study 3 provides further support for the proposed underlying process by showing that manipulating consumption intentionality moderates the effect. Consistent with the prior results, when the target intended to repeat her consumption, participants inferred that she was more focused and, as a result, expected her to perform better. When the target did not intend to repeat her consumption (i.e., limited options), repeated consumption no longer increased perceptions of focus and, thus, did not increase performance expectations.

3.13 Study 4: Moderating Role Cognitive Flexibility

Study 4 further tests our theory by examining the relationship between focus and performance expectations. We have argued that while focus is often a quality that increases performance, in particular tasks—i.e., ones that require more cognitive flexibility (i.e., creativity)—greater focus can be detrimental to performance (Baas et al. 2008). Consequently, if perceptions of focus play the underlying role as we suggest, in tasks requiring more cognitive flexibility, cues that suggest a performer is focused should be less likely to increase consumers' performance expectations.

To test this possibility, participants considered a performer who either repeats his consumption (songs on repeat) or not, and we manipulated the task type. Specifically, for half of the participants, we explicitly framed the task as requiring cognitive rigidity; for the other half, we framed the task as requiring cognitive flexibility (i.e., creativity). We expected that repeated consumption would increase performance expectations in rigid tasks, but in flexible tasks, the effect would attenuate.

3.13.1 Method

Study 4 was pre-registered (#186234). Three hundred ninety-four participants participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 37.66, 61.4% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (task type: rigid vs. flexible) × 2 (consumption: repeated vs. control) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated the task type. All participants read about a student named Sam (the target) competing in a business pitch competition. In the rigid condition, participants were told that the pitch's success depends on thinking inflexibly and sticking to the technical details (rigid condition). In the flexible condition, participants were told the pitch's success depends on thinking flexibly and being creative (flexible condition).

Second, we manipulated repeated consumption. Participants read that Sam is preparing his pitch by listening to songs on auto-shuffle (control condition) or one song on auto-repeat (repeated condition).

Finally, participants indicated how they expected Sam to perform at the pitch competition. Participants answered three items (adapted from Rifkin et al. 2023): 1 = Worse than other students/Low in quality/Below audience's expectations, 7 = Better than other students/High in quality/Above audience's expectations (α= .94).

3.13.2 Results

A 2 (task type) × 2 (consumption) ANOVA revealed a main effect of task type (F(1,390) = 4.61, p = .032, η_{p2} = .01), qualified by a significant interaction (F(1,390) = 14.38, p < .001, η_{p2} = .04). There was no main effect of consumption (F(1,390) = .75, p = .387).

As predicted, in the rigid condition, repeated consumption increased performance expectations. Compared to the control (M = 4.02, SD = 1.29), participants in the repeated condition expected the target to perform better at the competition (M = 4.60, SD = 1.44; t(390) = -3.28, p = .006, d = .33). In the flexible condition, however, this effect was attenuated (t(390) = 2.09, p = .160). Compared to the control (4.76, SD = 1.11), participants in the repeated condition did not differ in their performance expectations (M = 4.39, SD = 1.10).

3.13.3 Discussion

Underscoring the proposed underlying process, study 4 demonstrates the important role of the task type in determining its effect. When the task required cognitive rigidity, consistent with prior results, performers who repeated their consumption were expected to perform better. When the task required cognitive flexibility, however, this effect was attenuated. Together with study 3, these results strongly support our full conceptual model (figure 4) by demonstrating relevant theoretical moderators of the predicted effects.

3.14 General Discussion

Performers widely adopt repeated consumption. Entrepreneurs wear the same outfits while delivering investment pitches, athletes listen to the same songs before important sports matches, and actors eat the same meals on a film set. Though they may be perceived as socially dull, consumers seem to commend their performances. Current research suggests that repeated consumption signals performance.

Seven studies demonstrated that consumers judge performers who engage in repeated consumption to perform better at their tasks. Across multiple consumption domains (e.g., clothing, music, movies, food), task domains (e.g., sports, reporting, business pitches), and manipulations of consumption (e.g., news headlines, social media posts, stylized vignettes), we demonstrate that repeated consumption increased performance expectations. Further, repeated consumption's effect was robust to multiple ways of measuring performance expectations (e.g., winning odds, work quality).

Results also supported the proposed underlying process. Repeated consumption increased performance expectations by increasing perceptions of focus (studies 2a, 2b, and 3). Importantly, though behavioral rigidity is associated with self-control, only the focus mediated the effect of repeated consumption on performance (study 2b). Further, factors that influenced whether repeated consumption increased perceptions of focus (i.e., the a-link; studies 3) and whether focus implies better performance (i.e., b-link; study 5) moderated repeated consumption's effect. Specifically, whether repeated consumption signaled performance depended on the extent to which the performer intentionally chose to engage in repeated consumption (study 3) and the extent to which the task required cognitive rigidity (study 5).

Notably, the studies also identified downstream consequences for monetary investments (studies 1a and 1b). Consumers expressed more interest in betting on performers who repeated their consumption (study 1b) and placed more bets when given the opportunity to do so (study 1a).

3.14.1 Theoretical Contributions

This work makes three main contributions. First, it furthers understanding of the social consequences of repeated consumption. As discussed, most work has focused on repeated consumption's negative consequences (Engeler and Barasz 2021; Gershon and Smith 2020; Ratner and Kahn 2002; Sela et al. 2019). Consumers who eat the same thing over and over, for example, are perceived as boring, dull, and less trustworthy.

While these findings have provided valuable insights, repeated consumption does not occur independently. Consumers' increasing desire to be busy and to multitask (Bellezza et al. 2017; Han and Broniarczyk 2021) have only made repeated consumption more prevalent in performative contexts. Consequently, repeated consumption may have novel implications for how consumers judge performers. We demonstrate that repeated consumption can signal performance, increasing consumers' performance expectations of performers who engage in repeated consumption. In doing so, our findings inform the performative meaning of repeated consumption and shed light on how consumers perceive and interact with performers who engage in repeated consumption.

Second, our work takes a unique perspective on the role of focus. Prior work has primarily examined how consumption can influence consumers' attentional focus and, consequently, their consumption-related behaviors (e.g., Pieters and Wedel 2004). The music consumers listen to and the attire they wear, for instance, can influence their ability to focus and thus influence how they shop (Adam and Galinsky 2012; Ahlbom et al. 2023). In contrast, the present research examines how consumers evaluate others' consumption and consequently make inferences about others' focus.

Finally, this work informs research on how consumption cues can shape performance expectations. While extant research has primarily focused on how formality, prestige, and luxuriousness of products can increase performance expectations (e.g., purchasing formal attire and high-end accessories; Johnson and Roach-Higgins 1987; Nelissen and Meijers 2011), recent work has identified alternative strategies to signal performance (see Bellezza 2023 for a review). Golfers, for example, who wear unconventional attire (e.g., wearing a colorful tie to an event) are perceived as better performers than those who wear conventional attire (study 3, Bellezza et al. 2014). In addition to what performers wear or own, we demonstrate that consumption in other domains (e.g., music, food, colors) can also shape performance expectations. Building on these findings, we identify repeated consumption as a novel cue that can signal performance. Further, our findings underscore that performance judgments from focus perceptions are activity-dependent, and that performance in which the activities involve more cognitive flexibility, greater focus no longer increases performance expectations (study 4).

3.14.2 Implications and Future Directions

Across diverse industries (e.g., sports, entrepreneurship, politics), communicating the performers' focus and how they will perform is critical to audience engagement and monetary funding. Though repeated consumption can lead to perceptions of being uninteresting (Ratner and Kahn 2002), our research suggests that they lead to greater performance expectations. Accordingly, consumers are often motivated to signal performance and make consumption choices and decisions (Hester and Hehman 2023). Consequently, making repeated consumption more public may be a simple way to signal performance and receive the downstream engagement benefits.

Future work could build on the current findings by exploring other boundary conditions. While our primary interest was how consumers evaluate others who repeat their consumption, other information may shape such evaluations. Cues about intentions (e.g., to signal performance or other desired qualities), for example, may moderate the effect. Salient self-presentation motives tend to dilute impressions (Ferraro et al. 2013), so believing that someone disclosed their repeated consumption to signal their performance might undermine its effect. Similarly, background on repeat consumers' behavioral history (e.g., whether they have been successful or struggled in past performances) might influence whether repeated consumption signals performance. On the one hand, past failures may attenuate inferences of focus. On the other, overcoming past failures may suggest even greater focus and thus strengthen the effect.

Further, repeated consumption may be a particularly cost-effective way to signal performance. We found that even inexpensive, simple ways to repeat consumption (i.e., listening to music on auto-repeat; study 1b) can increase performance expectations, suggesting that conspicuous repeated consumption may allow consumers of both ample and more limited means to signal it. Future work could consider whether consumers expect repeated consumption to signal performance.

Importantly, our findings inform the design of marketing communications. Though repeated consumption is generally unappealing to consumers (Kahn and Rafieian 2022; McAlister and Pessemier 1982), our findings suggest a novel way companies might frame its potential benefits (O'Brien 2021). Portraying repeated consumption in a performative way may be a particularly effective means to engage consumers who care about performance impressions and, in turn, deliver those ends. Brands that target performance-seeking consumers (e.g., Nike), for example, may consider cultivating associations with repeated consumption (e.g., matching sets). Future work could examine how consumers evaluate brands who encourage repeated consumption and its subsequent behaviors.

3.14.3 Conclusion

Repeated consumption is common across various performative contexts, from daily tasks to professional settings and sports. The current research is among the first to demonstrate that repeated consumption shapes performance judgments by enhancing perceptions of others' focus. As a result, beyond its negative interpersonal consequences, repeated consumption offers novel implications for how performances are evaluated and engaged.

4. Conclusion

Consumers often purchase expensive luxury goods to make a positive impression on others. In my dissertation, I demonstrate more accessible, budget-friendly ways to achieve similar goals. In essay 1, I demonstrate that behavioral tracking can signal social status. This effect is driven by enhancing perceptions of self-control. In essay 2, I demonstrate that repeated consumption can signal performance. This effect is driven by enhancing perceptions of focus. Together, these essays highlight cost-effective strategies for impression management.

5. Appendices

5.1 Appendix A: Between Self-control and Status

Method

One hundred fifty Amazon Mechanical Turk panelists participated in exchange for payment (M_{age} = 38.20, 32.7% female, 66.7% male, .7% nonbinary/preferred not to state). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three self-control conditions: low versus moderate versus high.

First, we manipulated self-control. All participants read a vignette about a person named Sam (the target) who was described either having low self-control, moderate self-control, or high self-control. Following Shea, Davisson, and Fitzsimons (2013), we embedded statements from the Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al. 2004) in the target's description to describe their self-control. Four negative statements were embedded in the low condition, two negative and two positive statements were embedded in the moderate condition, and four positive statements were embedded in the high condition (see table below for vignettes).

Second, we measured status (Bitterly, Brooks, and Schweitzer 2017). Participants answered three questions at the target: To what extent do you think Sam is… (1) a respected person? (2) an admired person? and (3) an influential person? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; α = .94).

Third, as a manipulation check, we measured inferences of self-control. Participants answered three questions about the target: To what extent do you think Sam is someone who demonstrates… (1) self-control? (2) willpower? and (3) persistence? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; α = .96).

Results

Manipulation check. A one-way ANOVA on self-control revealed a significant effect ($F(2,147) = 136.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .65$). Participants in the high self-control condition ($M = 5.83$, SD = .93) rated the target as having greater self-control than in the moderate condition ($M = 4.47$, SD = .96; $t(147) = -6.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.03$), and participants in the moderate self-control condition rated the target as having greater self-control than in the low condition ($M = 2.38$, SD = 1.29; $t(147) = -9.61$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.59$).

Status. A one-way ANOVA on status revealed a significant effect ($F(2,147) = 25.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$). Participants in the high self-control condition ($M = 5.12$, SD = 1.17) rated the target as higher status compared to the moderate condition ($M = 4.46$, SD = 1.17; $t(147) = -2.67$, $p = .023$, $d = .44$), and participants in the moderate condition rated the target as higher status compared to the low condition ($M = 3.42$, SD = 1.31; $t(147) = -4.19$, $p < .001$, $d = .69$).

Self-Control Condition	Vignette
Low	Sam is a 28-year-old living in a small city who has a good job and an active social life. Sam does not have strong self-discipline. Sam has difficulty working toward long-term goals, is unable to resist temptations, and has trouble concentrating.
Moderate	Sam is a 28-year-old living in a small city who has a good job and an active social life. Sam has moderate self-discipline. Sam can work toward long-term goals, but occasionally is unable to resist temptations and sometimes has trouble concentrating.
High	Sam is a 28-year-old living in a small city who has a good job and an active social life. Sam has strong self-discipline. Sam can work effectively toward long-term goals, is good at resisting temptations, and does not have trouble concentrating.

5.2 Appendix B: Exclusions Across Studies

Across studies, we employed best practices regarding data cleaning. Following Meyvis and Van Osselaer (2018), we excluded observations containing (1) multiple IP addresses that appeared two or more times (i.e., duplicate or multiple entries), (2) attention check failures, and (3) outliers at least 2.5 deviations from the focal dependent variable.

Study	**Original Sample**	**Final Sample**	**Exclusion Criteria Description**	**Pre-registered**
1B	400	391	Standard	Not pre-registered
2A	598	574	Standard	aspredicted.org/cmk3-sqw6.pdf
2B	400	390	Standard	aspredicted.org/9gs6-s5bg.pdf
2C	600	589	Standard	aspredicted.org/p3d9-tct9.pdf
3	299	293	Standard	aspredicted.org/hwcx-99zz.pdf
4	400	386	Standard	aspredicted.org/png4-rvcg.pdf
5	800	777	Standard	Not pre-registered

5.3 Appendix C: YouTube Field Data

Data

We scraped a micro-influencer's YouTube account on November 24, 2024 (about 51,000 subscribers; tag hidden for anonymity). This micro-influencer user was selected for two reasons. First, as YouTube users can group their videos into playlists, this user grouped all her publicly available running videos into one playlist (N = 145). This allowed us to control for content type in the analyses. Second, the user creates custom thumbnails for her running videos in which some thumbnails included self-tracking (e.g., GPS output of her run) and some did not (see figures below). Notably, the list of videos spanned over about five years. The oldest video was posted on November 1, 2019, and the latest video was posted on October 15, 2024.

Next, we collected the video thumbnail, view count, upvote count, and comment count. We also collected video length (minutes), posting date (number of days between video date and scraping date), title length (word count) as control variables. Finally, a research assistant, blind to the hypotheses and measures, coded each video thumbnail on whether it included self-tracking or not. In total, 14.5% of the thumbnails featured self-tracking information (N = 21), and 85.5% of the thumbnails did not (N = 124). We used this coding as the fixed effect in our models (0 = Control, 1 = Tracking).

Results

View Count. We conducted a negative binomial regression on the view count. The likelihood-ratio test of α indicated that the view count exhibited overdispersion, confirming that a negative binomial regression model was appropriate ($p < .001$). Consistent with our hypothesis, self-tracking increased views without inclusion of control variables (Wald $\chi2(1) = 7.59$, $p = .006$). Compared to videos without self-tracking thumbnails (*M* = 21,234, SE = 1,274), videos with self-tracking thumbnails received more views (*M* = 32,782, SE = 4,779). The inclusion of the control variables did not change the statistical significance of self-tracking's effect on view count (Wald $\chi 2(1) = 7.92$, $p = .005$).

Upvote Count. We conducted a negative binomial regression on the upvote count ($p < .001$ for the likelihood-ratio test). Consistent with the previous result, self-tracking increased upvotes without inclusion of control variables (Wald $\chi 2(1) = 4.82$, $p = .028$). Compared to videos without self-tracking thumbnails (*M* = 652, SE = 28.4), videos with self-tracking thumbnails received more upvotes (*M* = 838, SE = 88.8). The inclusion of the control variables did not change the statistical significance of self-tracking's effect on upvote count (Wald $\chi 2(1) = 5.10$, $p = .024$).

Comment Count. We conducted a negative binomial regression on the upvote count ($p < .001$ for the likelihood-ratio test). Consistent with the previous result, self-tracking increased upvotes without inclusion of control variables (Wald $\chi 2(1) = 6.28$, $p = .012$). Compared to videos without self-tracking thumbnails (*M* = 74.14, SE = 3.81), videos with self-tracking thumbnails received more upvotes (*M* = 103.86, SE = 12.90). The inclusion of the control variables did not change the statistical significance of self-tracking's effect on upvote count (Wald $\chi 2(1) = 7.24$, $p = .007$).

	Online Engagement Dependent Variables					
	View Count		**Upvote Count**		**Comment Count**	
	b (SE)		*b* (SE)		*b* (SE)	
Predictor						
Tracking	$.43^{**}$ (.16)	$.38^{**}$ (.15)	$.25^{*}$ (.11)	$.25^{*}$ (.11)	$.34^{*}$ (.14)	$.34^{**}$ (.13)
Control Variables						

Video Length (minutes)		$.03^{**}$ (.01)		$.02^{***}$ (.006)		$.02^{*}$ (.01)
Video Title Length (word count)		-.03 (.02)		$-.03^{\dagger}$ (.01)		$-.04^{*}$ (.02)
Date Posted (number of days)		$.0005^{**}$ (.0002)		.0002* (.0001)		.0001 (.0001)
Observations	145	145	145	145	145	145
R^2	.05	.20	.03	.16	.04	.11

†p < .10 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

5.4 Appendix D: Self-tracking Stimuli Across Studies

Study	Control Condition	Self-tracking Condition
1b (2-cell)	Imagine a regular gym goer who owns the following bottle, so he can drink more electrolytes to ease soreness and speed up recovery. He chose this specific bottle because it is portable, which helps him drink electrolytes on the go. 	Imagine a regular gym goer who owns the following bottle, so he can drink more electrolytes to ease soreness and speed up recovery. He chose this specific bottle because it has milliliter volume markings, which helps him track the exact amount of electrolytes he drinks. 

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(2-cell)</td>
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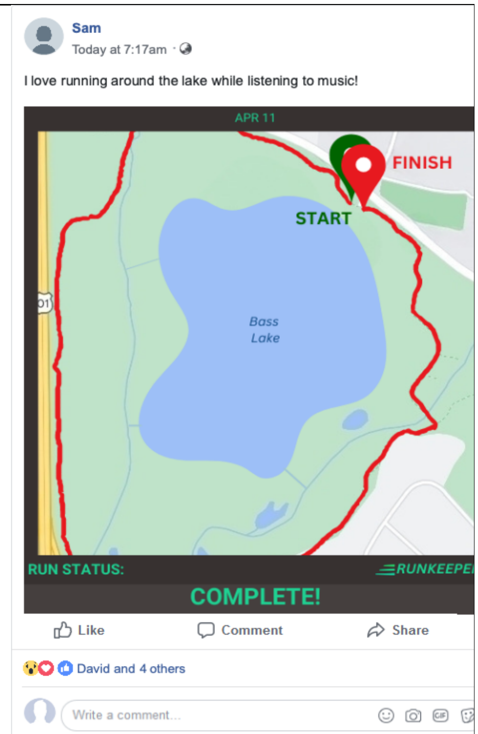
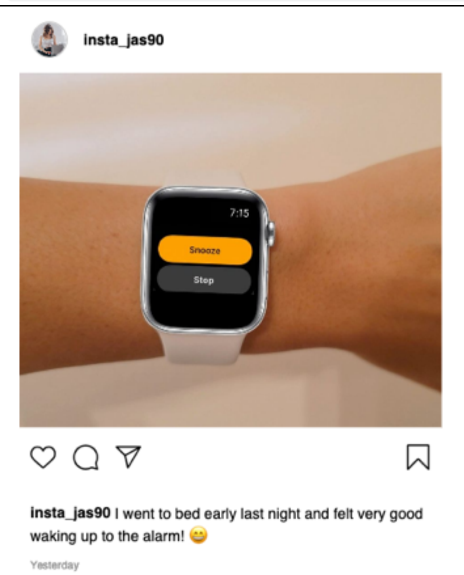
<td>
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b
(2-cell)</td>
<td>
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<td>
</td>
</tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr>
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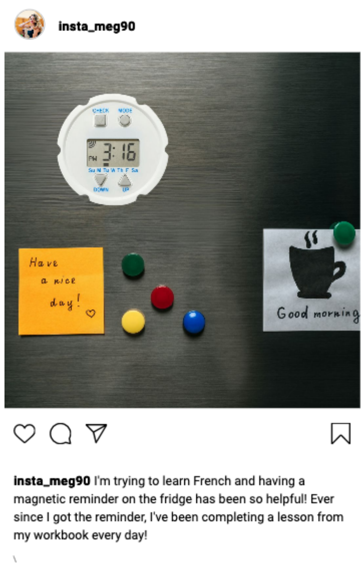
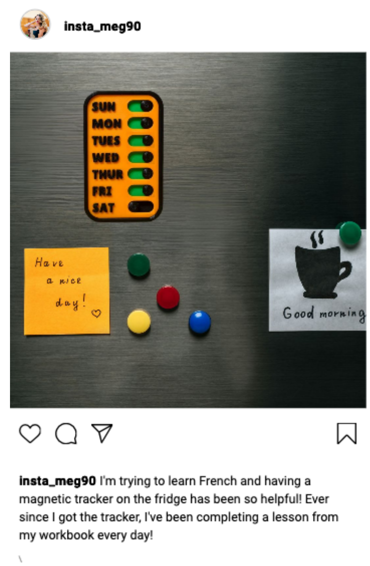
(2-cell)</td>
<td>
</td>
<td>
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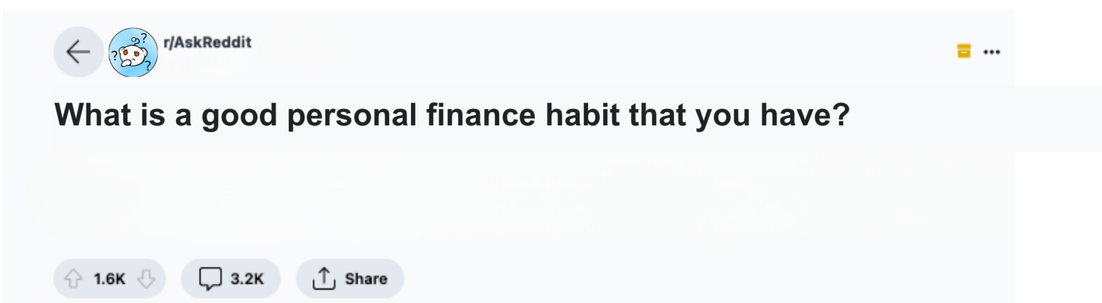
<td colspan="2">
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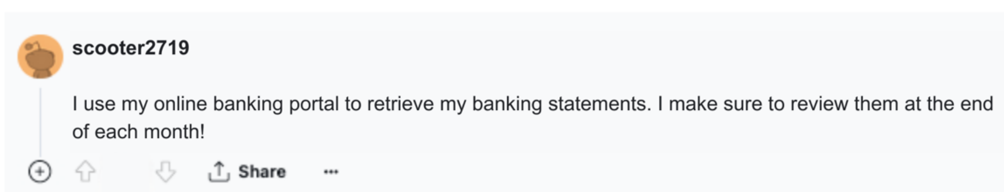
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>
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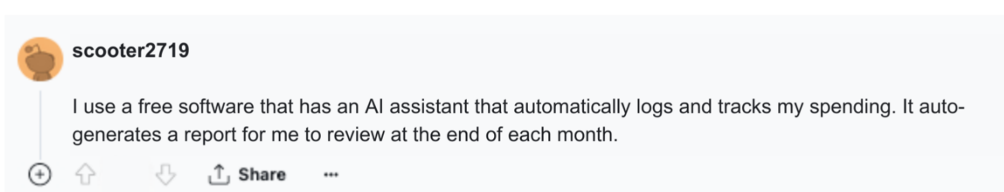
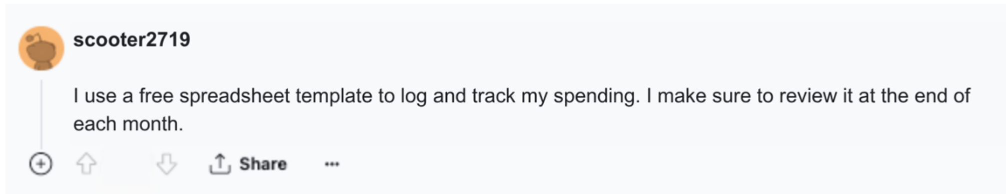
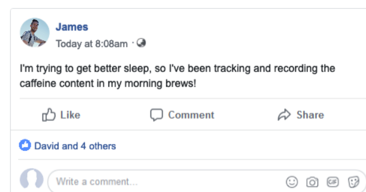
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-agency Tracking</td>
<td>
</td>
</tr>
</table>

High-agency Tracking	

Study 4 (2 × 2)		
	Control	Self-track
Self-improvement Motivation		
No Self-improvement Motivation		

Study 5 (2 × 2)		
Instructions: Imagine that you are a spectator of a large community 5K road running event in which participants sign-up to run and jog around town.		
	Control	Self-track
Baseline Context	You observe a participant doing the following as the race begins:  You notice that he ties his shoes, puts on headphones for music, and	You observe a participant doing the following as the race begins:  You notice that he ties his shoes, puts on headphones for music, and

	starts the MUSIC app on his phone. On the run, he only uses the music app and no other apps, so he occasionally checks it to manage the volume.	starts his STOPWATCH app on his phone. On the run, he only uses the stopwatch app and no other apps, so he occasionally checks it to keep track of his time.
Leisure Context	You know that the event is meant to be fun and carefree, so it encourages the participants to not worry about any goals and focus on having a good time. The event is about being in the moment, enjoying running for the sake of it, and feeling free. You observe a participant doing the following as the race begins:  You notice that he ties his shoes, puts on headphones for music, and starts the MUSIC app on his phone. On the run, he only uses the music app and no other apps, so he occasionally checks it to manage the volume.	You know that the event is meant to be fun and carefree, so it encourages the participants to not worry about any goals and focus on having a good time. The event is about being in the moment, enjoying running for the sake of it, and feeling free. You observe a participant doing the following as the race begins:  You notice that he ties his shoes, puts on headphones for music, and starts his STOPWATCH app on his phone. On the run, he only uses the stopwatch app and no other apps, so he occasionally checks it to keep track of his time.

5.5 Appendix E: Supplemental Measures and Analyses

Study 1b

Status. Status was evaluated with a two-item measure: To what extent do you think this person is… (1) respected by others? (2) admired by others? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely; $r = .69$). Compared to the control ($M = 5.93$, SD = .99), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 6.18$, SD = 1.15) rated the target as higher status ($t(389) = -2.33$, $p = .020$, $d = .24$).

Influence. Influence was evaluated with a single-item measure: To what extent do you think this person is considered influential by others? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely). Compared to the control ($M = 5.39$, SD = 1.52), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 5.95$, SD = 1.40) rated the target as more influential ($t(389) = -3.78$, $p < .001$, $d = .38$).

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think this person measures or tracks their electrolyte consumption? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). Compared to the control ($M = 7.12$, SD = 1.47), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 8.39$, SD = 1.01) rated the target as more engaged with tracking ($t(389) = -10.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.02$).

Study 2a

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent does the person measure or track their running activity? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). Compared to the control ($M = 6.30$, SD = 1.88), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 7.94$, SD = 1.28) rated the target as more engaged with tracking ($t(572) = -12.12$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$).

Study 2b

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person tracks her sleep activity? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Compared to the control ($M = 5.58$, SD = 1.18), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 6.40$, SD = .81) rated the target as more engaged with tracking ($t(395) = -8.11$, $p < .001$, $d = .81$)

Study 2c

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think this person tracks her French learning? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Compared to the control (M = 5.42, SD = 1.51), participants in the self-tracking condition (M = 6.30, SD = 1.08) rated the target as more engaged with tracking (t(587) = -8.16, p < .001, d = .67).

Study 3

User interest. We measured interest in user with a single-item measure: How interested would you be in viewing the user's comments in other forums/threads? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). A one-way ANOVA did not reveal a significant effect (F(2,290) = 2.05, p = .131). Compared to the control (M = 4.22, SD = 2.13), participants in the high-agency condition (M = 4.86, SD = 2.16) did not significantly differ in user interest (though there was a directional pattern; t(290) = -1.99, p = .116, d = .23). Participants in the high-agency condition did not differ in user interest from the low-agency condition (M = 4.45, SD = 2.40; t(290) = -1.28, p = .405), which did not differ from the control condition (t(290) = -.70, p = .765).

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the user's spending activity is being monitored or tracked? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect (F(2,290) = 12.73, p < .001, η_p^2 = .08). Compared to the control (M = 6.22, SD = 2.09), participants in the high-agency tracking condition (M = 7.35, SD = 1.72) rated the target as more engaged with tracking (t(290) = -4.38, p < .001, d = .51). Participants in the high-agency tracking condition did not differ from the low-agency tracking condition (M = 7.35, SD = 1.57;

t(290) = .002, *p* = 1.00), which was greater than the control condition (*t*(290) = -4.38, *p* < .001, *d* = .51).

Agency. The agency manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the user personally manages his finance himself? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect on ($F(2,290) = 82.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$). Participants in the high-agency tracking condition (*M* = 7.84, SD = 1.09) did not differ in their ratings of the target's agency from the control condition (*M* = 7.63, SD = 1.37; *t*(290) = -.90, *p* = .643). Participants in the high-agency tracking condition rated the target as having more agency than the low-agency tracking condition (*M* = 5.17, SD = 2.19; *t*(290) = -11.57, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.36), which was lower than the control condition (*t*(290) = 10.65, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.25).

Study 4

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person tracks his caffeine intake? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a main effect of tracking ($M_{\text{Track}} = 6.11$, SD = 1.15 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.59$, SD = 1.25; $F(1,382) = 18.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$). There was no main effect of motivation (*F*(1,382) = .01, *p* = .919) and no interaction effect (*F*(1,382) = .68, *p* = .411).

Motivation. The self-improvement motivation manipulation check was a four-item measure: To what extent do you think the person… (1) wants to achieve success? (2) wants to do better? (3) strives to be better? and (4) wants to prosper? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so; α = .91) A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a main effect of improvement motivation ($M_{Improve} = 5.61$, SD = .97 vs. $M_{Non\text{-}improve} = 5.29$, SD = .93, $F(1,382) = 11.09$,

$p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), qualified by an interaction ($F(1,382) = 7.43$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). There was no main effect of tracking ($F(1,382) = .31$, $p = .576$).

In the improvement condition, compared to the control ($M = 5.45$, SD = .99), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 5.77$, SD = .92) rated the target more motivated (marginally; $t(382) = -2.33$, $p = .093$). In the non-improvement condition, there was no significant difference between the control condition and self-tracking condition ($M_{\text{Track}} = 5.19$, SD = .89 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.39$, SD = .95, $t(382) = 1.52$, $p = .427$).

Study 5

Status. Status was evaluated with a two-item measure. Participants rated the target on two dimensions wedded to status: respected and admired (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely; $r = .79$). A 2 (tracking) × 2 (context) ANOVA revealed a main effect of tracking ($M_{\text{Control}} = 5.61$, SD = 1.12 vs. $M_{\text{Track}} = 5.98$, SD = 1.40; $F(1,773) = 16.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1,773) = 4.25$, $p = .040$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$). There was no main effect of context ($M_{\text{Baseline}} = 5.86$, SD = 1.28 vs. $M_{\text{Leisure}} = 5.74$, SD = 1.28; $F(1,773) = 2.46$, $p = .118$). In the baseline condition, compared to the control ($M = 5.58$, SD = 1.12), participants in the self-tracking condition ($M = 6.14$, SD = 1.36) rated the target as higher status ($t(773) = -4.33$, $p < .001$, $d = .31$). In the leisure-frame condition, however, this effect was attenuated ($M_{\text{Control}} = 5.65$, SD = 1.13 vs. $M_{\text{Track}} = 5.83$, SD = 1.43; $t(773) = -1.42$, $p = .485$).

Influence. Influence was evaluated with a single-item measure. Participants indicated the extent they considered the target influential (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely). A 2 × 2 ANOVA on influence revealed a main effect of tracking ($M_{\text{Control}} = 5.23$, SD = 1.30 vs. $M_{\text{Track}} = 5.55$, SD = 1.66; $F(1,773) = 8.79$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$). There was no main effect of context (M_{Baseline} = 5.40, SD = 1.49 vs. M_{Leisure} = 5.37, SD = 1.52; $F(1,773)$ = .22, p = .642) and no interaction ($F(1,773)$ = 1.43, p = .233). In the baseline condition, compared to the control (M = 5.18, SD = 1.31), participants in the self-tracking condition (M = 5.63, SD = 1.60) rated the target as higher status ($t(773)$ = -2.94, p = .018, d = .21). In the leisure-frame condition, however, the effect was not significant (M_{Control} = 5.28, SD = 1.30 vs. M_{Track} = 5.47, SD = 1.73; $t(773)$ = -1.26, p = .591).

Social norm violation. Participants indicated the extent to which the target violated social norms with a single-item measure: "To what extent do you think the person's phone usage is socially inappropriate?" (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed no main effect of tracking (M_{Control} = 2.66, SD = 2.41 vs. M_{Track} = 2.85, SD = 2.54; $F(1,773)$ = 1.06, p = .305), no main effect of context (M_{Baseline} = 2.72, SD = 2.56 vs. M_{Leisure} = 2.79, SD = 2.39; $F(1,773)$ = .08, p = .781), and no interaction ($F(1,773)$ = 1.59, p = .207).

Tracking. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person measures or tracks their running activity? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so). A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a main effect of tracking (M_{Control} = 5.01, SD = 2.33 vs. M_{Track} = 7.88, SD = 1.44; $F(1,773)$ = 428.78, p < .001, η_p^2 = .36) and a main effect of context (M_{Baseline} = 6.50, SD = 2.31 vs. M_{Leisure} = 6.39, SD = 2.49, $F(1,773)$ = 4.09, p = .043, η_p^2 = .01), qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1,773)$ = 6.31, p = .012, η_p^2 = .01). In the baseline condition, compared to the control (M = 5.24, SD = 2.28), participants in the self-tracking condition (M = 7.76, SD = 1.60) rated the target as more engaged with tracking ($t(773)$ = -12.84, p < .001, d = .92). In the leisure-frame condition, the pattern remained consistent (but the effect was stronger). Compared to the control (M

= 4.79, SD = 2.35), participants in the self-tracking condition (*M* = 8.00, SD = 1.23) rated the target as more engaged with tracking ($t(773) = -16.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.18$).

5.6 Appendix F: Adapted Brief Self-control Scale

13-item Self-Control (adapted from Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone 2004; 1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much so)

1. To what extent do you think the person is good at resisting temptation?
2. To what extent do you think the person has a hard time breaking bad habits?
3. To what extent do you think the person is lazy?
4. To what extent do you think the person says inappropriate things?
5. To what extent do you think the person does certain things that are bad for them if they are fun?
6. To what extent do you think the person refuses things that are bad for them?
7. To what extent do you think the person wishes they had more self-discipline?
8. To what extent do you think people would say that the person has iron self-discipline?
9. To what extent do you think pleasure and fun sometimes keep the person from getting work done?
10. To what extent do you think the person has trouble concentrating?
11. To what extent do you think the person is able to work effectively toward long-term goals?
12. To what extent do you think the person can't stop themselves from doing something, even they know it is wrong?
13. To what extent do you think the person often acts without thinking through all the alternatives?

Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 13 are reverse scored in the survey coding prior to the analyses.

5.7 Appendix G: Study 2c Replication

Method

Study G was pre-registered (#132580). Seven hundred eighty-one Prolific participants (M_{age} = 38.52, 49.2% female, 48.7% male, 2.2% nonbinary/preferred not to state) were randomly assigned to a tracking condition: tracking vs. control.

First, we manipulated self-tracking. Participants read a vignette about Chloe (the target) who is trying to eat a more balanced diet by subscribing to a recipe e-newsletter.

They were either told that Chloe uses a spreadsheet to track her vegetable servings (tracking condition) or reviews the recipes' ingredient list (control condition).

Second, we measured status. Participants evaluated Chloe's status on three dimensions wedded to status: respected, admired, and influential (1 = Not at all, 9 = Extremely; $\alpha = .87$).

Third, we measured inferences of self-control. To limit response fatigue, we used an abbreviated scale (Marr et al. 2019) that evaluated Chloe on (1) self-control (2) self-restraint (3) willpower and (4) persistence (1 = Not at all, 9 = A great deal; $\alpha = .91$).

Finally, to explore potential alternative inferences, we measured beliefs about commitment, effort, and advance planning. To assess commitment, participants rated their agreement with the following (adapted from Klein et al. 2001): (1) It is hard for this person to take this goal seriously (reverse scored); (2) The person does not care if they achieve this goal or not (reverse scored); (3) The person is strongly committed to pursuing this goal; (4) It wouldn't take much for the person to abandon this goal (reverse scored); and (5) The person think this is a good goal to shoot for (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .69$). To measure effort and advance planning, participants answered "How much effort is the person putting into eating a balanced diet?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) and "How much in advance do you think the person makes plans on what to eat?" (1 = Not in advance at all, 7 = Extremely in advance), respectively.

Results

Status. As expected and consistent with the prior results, self-tracking increased status ($M_{\text{Track}} = 6.16$, SD = 1.13 vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 5.97$, SD = 1.07; $t(779) = -2.50$, $p = .013$, $d = .18$).

Underlying process. As predicted, self-tracking increased inferences of self-control (M_{Track} = 7.32, SD = 1.01 vs. $M_{Control}$ = 6.90, SD = 1.02; $t(779) = -5.84$, $p < .001$, $d = .42$). Further, a bias-corrected mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes 2017) demonstrated that inferring greater self-control mediated the effect on status (*ab* = .23, CI_{95} = [.146, .314]).

Alternative explanations. Consistent with the notion that tracking has multiple associations, self-tracking increased perceptions of the target's commitment to eating a more balanced diet (M_{Track} = 5.71, SD = .77 vs. $M_{Control}$ = 5.50, SD = .83; $t(779) = -3.64$, $p < .001$, $d = .26$), effort investment (M_{Track} = 6.06, SD = .81 vs. $M_{Control}$ = 5.74, SD = .90; $t(779) = -5.13$, $p < .001$, $d = .37$), and planning (M_{Track} = 5.60, SD = .90 vs. $M_{Control}$ = 5.42, SD = .98; $t(779) = -2.68$, $p = .007$, $d = .19$).

Importantly, a parallel mediation analysis with self-control, commitment, effort, and advance planning included as parallel mediators supported self-control as the primary underlying process. The indirect effect of self-control was significant (*ab* = .24, CI_{95} = [.155, .328]), while the indirect effects of commitment (*ab* = -.01, CI_{95} = [-.037, .019]), effort (*ab* = .03, CI_{95} = [-.006, .066]), and planning (*ab* = -.01, CI_{95} = [-.031, .008]) were not.

5.8 Appendix H: Study 3 Serial Mediation Results

Indirect Effects	Control vs. High-agency Tracking	Control vs. Low-agency Tracking	Low-agency Tracking vs. High-agency Tracking
Track → Self-control → Engagement	.002 [-.017, .019]	-.04 [-.116, .017]	.09 [-.016, .200]
Track → Status → Engagement	.01	.01	-.01

	[-.013, .030]	[-.044, .065]	[-.058, .032]
Track → Self-control → Status → Engagement	.02 [.006, .048]	-.09 [-.165, -.037]	.15 [.063, .242]

5.9 Appendix I: Self-tracking and Self-confidence

Data

We compiled a unique dataset of lifestyle statements, attitudes, and demographic variables from two sources: (1) consumer data from Simmons Local Consumer Insights (based on private surveys to over 50,000 U.S. adult consumers; Simmons 2023) aggregated by zip code and (2) demographic information from the US Census aggregated by zip code. We collected the latest available data (2023), retrieved in December 2024.

Tracking. First, we collected tracking behavior by a single-item measure of consumers' agreement to the following statement: "I rely on a mobile app to keep track of my fitness habits" (1 = Disagree completely, 4 = Agree completely).

Confidence. Second, we collected confidence with a single-item measure of consumers' agreement to their self-concepts as "self-assured, confident, and secure" (1 = Disagree completely, 4 = Agree completely).

Control Variables. Finally, we collected demographic characteristics as control variables from the US Census. We collected data on age (median age), gender (the percentage of the population that are female), ethnicity (percentage of the population that is white), education (proportion of the population aged 25 or more that has a least a bachelor's degree), and income (median household income). The final dataset with complete observations comprised of 33,774 zip codes.

Results

See below for results. First, we regressed confidence on self-tracking (Model 1). The regressions revealed that self-tracking was significantly associated with confidence ($\beta = .22$, $t = 35.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$). We then included the set of control variables as predictors (Model 2). The results were similar with the inclusion of the control variables ($\beta = .07$, $t = 11.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$).

	DV = Confidence	
	Model 1	Model 2
Predictors		
Tracking IV	.22*** (.006)	.07*** (.006)
Control Variables		
Median Age		.12*** (.007)
% Female		.04** (.014)
% White		-.39*** (.005)
% Bachelor's degree		.08*** (.007)
Median Income		-.05*** (.005)
Area Population		.02*** (.003)
Observations	28,565	28,121
Adjusted R^2	.04	.24

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Notes: DV = dependent variable

5.10 Appendix J: Status Expectations from Self-tracking Disclosures

Given data privacy concerns and a general reluctance to share private information (Garbinsky et al. 2020; Melumad and Meyer 2020; White 2004), it's possible that consumers expect to gain less status themselves (vs. others) from disclosing their self-tracking. Further, similar to how consumers believe that product efficacy is higher for other people than for themselves (Polman et al. 2022), it is reasonable that consumers might also believe that others would garner more status from disclosing self-tracking than they would themselves. In this supplemental study, we test this possible asymmetry.

Method

One hundred ninety-nine Prolific participants (M_{age} = 32.75, 58.3% female, 40.2% male, 1.5% nonbinary) were randomly assigned to a judgment-target condition: self versus other.

First, we manipulated the judgement target. In the "self" condition, we asked participants to evaluate their own status upon disclosing self-tracking across 20 activities (walk step count, food calories, sleep, heart rate, etc.; see table below). In the "other" condition, we asked participants to evaluate others' status upon disclosing tracking the same 20 activities.

Finally, we measured status. We used two measures, per activity, based on the condition: "To what extent do you think [you/they] would be admired by others for sharing [your/their] tracking activity?" and "To what extent do you think [you/they] would be respected by others for sharing [your/their] tracking activity?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). As an example, for step count, we asked participants the extent to which they or other people would gain status (i.e., respect and admiration) "if [you/other people] were to track [your/their] step count from walking with an app and shared [your/their] tracking activity with others…" We chose to use 20 activity stimuli to exceed the recommended 16 that allows for reasonable power to detect a reliable effect (Westfall et al. 2014).

Results

We averaged participants' responses to the two status items to create one perceived status measure per activity (correlations per activity ranged from .81 to .95). With "participant" and "activity" as random factors and "judgment-target" as a fixed factor, the fixed-effects results from the linear mixed-effects model (Barr 2013; Brauer and Curtin 2018) revealed that participants believed self-tracking disclosures from others gained more status than those from themselves ($M_{\text{Other}} = 3.91$ vs. $M_{\text{Themselves}} = 3.25$, $t(198) = -4.18$, $p < .001$). Of the 20 individual activities, 17 activities were either significant ($p < 0.05$) or marginally significant ($p < 0.10$).

Activity	**Self**	**Others**	**cohen's *d***	***t***	***p***
VOLUNTEERING TIME	3.96	5.41	0.86	6.08	< .001
HIKING DISTANCE	3.50	4.81	0.86	6.03	< .001
WEIGHT	3.23	4.21	0.59	4.13	< .001
PLACES TRAVELED	3.77	4.70	0.57	4.06	< .001
READING TIME	3.62	4.48	0.54	3.79	< .001
CALORIES BURNED FROM WORKING OUT	3.85	4.62	0.45	3.20	.002
FINANCIAL SAVINGS	3.32	4.10	0.44	3.14	.002
SERVINGS OF FRUIT	3.02	3.73	0.42	2.96	.004
STEP COUNT FROM WALKING	3.81	4.43	0.39	2.78	.006

CALORIES FROM EATING	3.02	3.65	0.38	2.68	.008
WORK PRODUCTIVITY	3.73	4.36	0.37	2.62	.010
SERVINGS OF VEGETABLES	3.24	3.86	0.36	2.51	.013
BUDGET FOR EATING OUT	2.81	3.25	0.27	1.93	.055
SHOPPING PURCHASES	2.76	3.18	0.27	1.91	.058
RESTING HEART RATE	2.76	3.18	0.26	1.84	.068
SLEEP	3.13	3.55	0.25	1.80	.074
DAILY WATER INTAKE	3.50	3.92	0.24	1.68	.095
TIME PLAYING VIDEO GAMES	2.35	2.61	0.18	1.30	.196
DEBT PAYMENTS	3.12	3.41	0.17	1.16	.246
SCREEN TIME ON THE PHONE	2.60	2.77	0.11	0.75	.455

5.11 Appendix K: Exclusion Across Studies

Across studies, we employed best practices regarding data cleaning. Following Meyvis and Van Osselaer (2018), we excluded observations containing (1) multiple IP addresses that appeared two or more times (i.e., duplicate or multiple entries), (2) attention check failures, and (3) outliers at least 2.5 deviations from the focal dependent variable.

Study	Original Sample	Final Sample	Exclusion Criteria Description	Pre-registered
1A	200	195	Standard	N
1B	201	196	Standard	Y
1C	399	392	Standard	Y
2A	200	199	Standard	Y
2B	400	385	Standard	Y
3	598	587	Standard	Y
4	400	394	Standard	Y

5.12 Appendix L: Repeated Consumption Stimuli Across Studies

Study	Control Condition	Repeated Condition
1A (2-cell)	**Scarlet Eagles to Choose a Uniform Combination They've Never Worn Before for Week 3 Game vs. Sparrows** Chris McKinson • October 8, 2024	**Scarlet Eagles to Choose a Uniform Combination They've Worn Many Times Before for Week 3 Game vs. Sparrows** Chris McKinson • October 8, 2024
1B (2-cell)		
1C (2-cell)	Imagine a person named Sarah who is running her <u>first</u> half-marathon (13.1 miles) tomorrow. In preparation for tomorrow's race, Sarah decides to take it easy tonight and watch a movie on Netflix. Sarah decides to watch a movie that **she has NEVER seen before.**	Imagine a person named Sarah who is running her <u>first</u> half-marathon (13.1 miles) tomorrow. In preparation for tomorrow's race, Sarah decides to take it easy tonight and watch a movie on Netflix. Sarah decides to watch a movie that **she has seen MANY times before.**
2A (2-cell)	Imagine a person named Barbara who is an accountant for a major company. Barbara has to write a detailed	Imagine a person named Barbara who is an accountant for a major company. Barbara has to write a detailed

	financial report which involves making many precise calculations and detailed financial graphs. The report is very critical to the company and is due by end of day. For lunch, she orders food to be delivered to her at the office because of the deadline. **On her food delivery app, Barbara orders a tasty meal that she has NEVER eaten before.** She eats the lunch while working on the report.	financial report which involves making many precise calculations and detailed financial graphs. The report is very critical to the company and is due by end of day. For lunch, she orders food to be delivered to her at the office because of the deadline. **On her food delivery app, Barbara orders a tasty meal that she has eaten MANY times before.** She eats the lunch while working on the report.
2B (2-cell)	Imagine a person named Jack who is training to run a marathon (26.2 miles). The day before the marathon, Jack goes into a Nike store to buy a race outfit. Specifically, Jack needs to buy a headband, jersey, compression briefs, shorts, and socks, so he goes into various sections of the store to get the items. Each section has the item in a variety of colors. Jack chooses a **different** color for each item. 	Imagine a person named Jack who is training to run a marathon (26.2 miles). The day before the marathon, Jack goes into a Nike store to buy a race outfit. Specifically, Jack needs to buy a headband, jersey, compression briefs, shorts, and socks, so he goes into various sections of the store to get the items. Each section has the item in a variety of colors. Jack chooses the **same** color for each item.  (presented color counterbalanced)

Study	Control	Unintended Repeat	Chosen Repeat
3 (3-cell)	Barbara who is an accountant for a major company. Barbara has to write a detailed financial report that involves making many precise calculations and detailed financial graphs. The report is	Barbara who is an accountant for a major company. Barbara has to write a detailed financial report that involves making many precise calculations and detailed financial graphs. The report is	Barbara who is an accountant for a major company. Barbara has to write a detailed financial report that involves making many precise calculations and detailed financial graphs. The report is

	very critical to the company. Barbara feels stressed, so she goes to the vending machine throughout the day to buy chips which she eats while working on the report. **The vending machine has a large variety of chips. Barbara selects a different bag each time throughout the day:**  Barbara submits the report before she leaves at 5pm.	very critical to the company. Barbara feels stressed, so she goes to the vending machine throughout the day to buy chips which she eats while working on the report. **The vending machine is almost out of stock and only has one option left. Barbara selects the same bag each time throughout the day because it is the only one in stock:**  Barbara submits the report before she leaves at 5pm.	very critical to the company. Barbara feels stressed, so she goes to the vending machine throughout the day to buy chips which she eats while working on the report. **The vending machine has a large variety of chips. Barbara selects the same bag each time throughout the day:**  Barbara submits the report before she leaves at 5pm.

Study 4 (2 × 2)		
	Control Condition	Repeated Condition
Baseline Context	Imagine a student named Sam who is in a student pitch competition. Sam will give a pitch to investors which will require Sam **to not think flexibly.** The success of a pitch will depend on the student's ability to memorize and stick to their script of technical details. Sam spends an hour preparing for the pitch by reviewing the script while listening to **various songs on auto-shuffle.**	Imagine a student named Sam who is in a student pitch competition. Sam will give a pitch to investors which will require Sam **to not think flexibly.** The success of a pitch will depend on the student's ability to memorize and stick to their script of technical details. Sam spends an hour preparing for the pitch by reviewing the script while listening to **one song on auto-repeat.**
Flexible Context	Imagine a student named Sam who is in a student pitch competition. Sam will give a pitch to investors	Imagine a student named Sam who is in a student pitch competition. Sam will give a pitch to investors

	which will require Sam **to think flexibly.** The success of a pitch will depend on the student's ability to be creative and respond to questions from the audience. Sam spends an hour preparing for the pitch by reviewing strategies while listening to **various songs on auto-shuffle.**	which will require Sam **to think flexibly.** The success of a pitch will depend on the student's ability to be creative and respond to questions from the audience. Sam spends an hour preparing for the pitch by reviewing strategies while listening to **various songs on auto-shuffle.**

5.13 Appendix M: Supplemental Measures and Analyses

Study 1b

Repeat. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the team is choosing to repeat a uniform combination? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Compared to the control (M = 2.62, SD = 1.80), participants in the repeat condition (M = 6.03, SD = 1.11) rated the target as more engaged with repeated consumption ($t(198) = -16.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.28$).

Study 1c

Repeat. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person made a repetitive movie choice? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Compared to the control (M = 1.89, SD = 1.46), participants in the repeat condition (M = 6.39, SD = .97) rated the target as more engaged with repeated consumption ($t(396) = -36.16$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.62$).

Study 2a

Repeat. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person made repetitive color choices? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Compared to the control (M = 1.60, SD = 1.22), participants in the repeat condition (M =

6.61, SD = 1.12) rated the target as more engaged with repeated consumption ($t(393) = -42.55$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.28$).

Study 2b

Repeat. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person made a repeated lunch choice? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). Compared to the control ($M = 1.94$, SD = 1.51), participants in the repeat condition ($M = 6.71$, SD = .82) rated the target as more engaged with repeated consumption ($t(198) = -27.76$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.93$).

Study 3

Repeat. The manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person repeatedly ate the same type of chips? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect ($F(2,595) = 733.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .71$). Compared to the control ($M = 2.38$, SD = 1.75), participants in the intended repeat condition ($M = 6.64$, SD = 0.90) rated the target as more engaged with repeated condition ($t(595) = -33.50$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.75$). Participants in the intended repeat condition did not differ from the unintended repeat condition ($M = 6.55$, SD = 0.98; $t(595) = -0.68$, $p = .776$), which was greater than the control condition ($t(595) = -32.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.70$).

Healthy. Perceptions of healthiness was measured with a single-item measure: How healthy do you consider the assortment of chips chosen by the person? (1 = Very unhealthy, 7 = Very healthy). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect ($F(2,585) = 4.74$, $p = .009$, $\eta_{p2} = .02$). Compared to the control ($M = 2.03$, SD = 1.23), participants in the intended repeat condition perceived the choices to be healthier ($M = 2.35$, SD = 1.39; $t(585) = -2.59$, $p = .027$, $d = .21$). In the unintended repeat condition ($M = 2.01$, SD

= 1.09), participants perceived the assortment to be less healthy relative to the chosen repeat condition (t(585) = -2.75, p = .017, d = .23). There was no difference between the control and unintended repeat condition (t(585) =.16, p =.986).

Importantly, a parallel mediation analysis with focus and healthiness included as parallel mediators supported focus as the primary underlying process. Though the indirect effect of focus (ab = .15, CI_{95} = [.088, .215]) and healthiness (ab = .02, CI_{95} = [.003, .045]) were both significant for the intended repeat condition relative the control condition, the contrast comparison revealed focus to play a stronger role ($ab_{focus} – ab_{health}$ = .13, CI_{95} = [.064, .194]). For the intended repeat condition relative to the unintended repeat condition, results were similar. Though both the indirect effect of focus (ab = .17, CI_{95} = [.068, .278]) and healthiness (ab = .04, CI_{95} = [.006, .072]) were both significant, the contrast comparison revealed focus to play a stronger role ($ab_{focus} – ab_{health}$ = .13, CI_{95} = [.026, .246]). Focus and healthiness did not mediate the unintended repeat condition's effect relative to the control.

Study 4

Repeat. The repetition manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the person made repetitive music choices? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a main effect of repeated consumption (M_{Repeat} = 6.13, SD = 1.50 vs. $M_{Control}$ = 2.72, SD = 1.71; F(1,394) = 448.52, p < .001, η_p^2 = .53). There was no main effect of cognitive requirements (F(1,394) = 3.40, p = .066) and no interaction effect (F(1,394) = .23, p = .633).

Flexibility. The cognitive flexibility manipulation check was a single-item measure: To what extent do you think the competition requires the participants to think flexibly? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much so). A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a main effect of cognitive requirements ($M_{\text{Flexibile}}$ = 6.26, SD = 1.09 vs. M_{Rigid} = 2.70, SD = 2.24; $F(1,394) = 403.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .51$). There was no main effect of repeated consumption ($F(1,394) = .08$, $p = .776$) and no interaction effect ($F(1,394) = .14$, $p = .704$).

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