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ENTITATIVITY, ATTRACTION, AND BLAME

**Consequences of Perceiving Organization Members as a Unified Entity:  
Stronger Attraction, but Greater Blame for Member Transgressions**

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### Abstract

Are Uber drivers just a collection of independent workers, or a meaningful part of Uber's workforce? Do the owners of Holiday Inn franchises around the world seem more like a loosely knit group, or more like a cohesive whole? These questions examine perceptions of organization members' *entitativity*, the extent to which individuals appear to comprise a single, unified entity. We propose that the public's perception that an organization's members are highly entitative can be a double-edged sword for the organization. On one hand, perceiving an organization's members as highly entitative makes the public more attracted to the organization because people associate entitativity with competence. On the other hand, perceiving members as highly entitative leads the public to blame the organization and its leadership for an individual member's wrongdoing, because the public infers that the organization and its leadership tacitly condoned the wrongdoing. Two experiments and a field survey, plus three supplemental studies, support these propositions. Moving beyond academic debates about whether theories *should* treat an organization as a unified entity, these results demonstrate the importance of understanding how much the public *does* perceive an organization as a unified entity. As the changing nature of work enables loosely-knit collections of individuals to hold membership in the same organization, entitativity perceptions may become increasingly consequential.

*Keywords:* Entitativity; Organizational Attraction; Organizational Blame; Omission; Commission

**Consequences of Perceiving Organization Members as a Unified Entity:  
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The changing nature of work has altered what it means to be a member of a business organization. With 56% of Americans now working remotely, up from 43% before the COVID-19 pandemic (Gallup, 2017; Saad & Hickman, 2021), different members of the same organization have fewer opportunities to interact with each other. Team members on different continents can work together for years without ever meeting each other in person. The rise of organizations like Uber, Airbnb, and TaskRabbit have contributed to a surge in the number of “gig workers” – now representing 16% of the American workforce – many of whom set their own hours, decide how much to work, and lack a physical workplace (Iacurci, 2020). These trends mean that the workers comprising some business organizations may now appear to be more of a loosely-knit collection of individuals as opposed to a single, unified group.

Yet the degree to which the members of a particular organization comprise a single, unified group is subjective. For example, courtroom debates have raged over whether Uber drivers should be viewed as just a collection of independent contractors, or as a meaningful part of Uber’s workforce (e.g., Browne, 2021; Isaac & Singer, 2015). Similar questions can arise outside of the gig economy. Consider the hundreds of owners of Holiday Inn franchises around the world – do they seem more like a loose collection of independent operators who just happen to own the same brand of hotel, or do they seem more like a single group, united through their membership in the same organization?

Our central claim is that the public’s answers to such questions have important consequences for organizations. Drawing on social-psychological theory about group perceptions (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), as well as the social-actor perspective on

organizations (King et al., 2010), the present research examines how perceiving organization members as a unified, cohesive whole influences people's attraction to the organization, and how much they blame it when an organizational member transgresses. The extent to which a collection of individuals is perceived as a single, unified entity is known as *entitativity* (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). We propose that when people perceive organizational members as high in entitativity, they will be more attracted to the organization because they infer that it will be more competent at delivering goods and services. At the same time, when people perceive organizational members as highly entitative, they are more likely to blame the organization's leadership – as well as the organization itself – for an individual member's wrongdoing because they infer that the organization and its leadership encouraged or tacitly condoned the wrongdoing. In this way, the public's perceptions of entitativity may be a double-edged sword for organizations, inspiring positive judgments of the organization overall, but prompting negative judgments when an individual member transgresses.

Our focus on the outcomes of attraction and blame stems from foundational theory in social psychology that uses entitativity to explain impression-formation and causal attribution in intergroup contexts (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Building on this theory, we examine how entitativity explains the impressions people form of organizations (i.e., how attractive is it?) and the causal attributions they make when an organization member transgresses (i.e., who is to blame?). Attraction and blame are consequential outcomes for organizations. If the public finds an organization attractive, they will be more likely to buy its products and services, promote its brand, or even apply to work at it themselves (Cable & Turban, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2008). If the public blames an organization for a member's wrongdoing, they may protest it, boycott it, or

support sanctions. Thus, our focus on blame and attraction is motivated by both theoretical and applied considerations.

In developing and testing these ideas about entitativity, we make several contributions. First, we demonstrate that entitativity is a useful construct for organizational behavior scholars interested in predicting how people judge and perceive organizations. In so doing, we go beyond academic debates about whether an organization *should* be treated as a unified entity and demonstrate that how much the public *perceives* an organization as a unified entity has important consequences (King et al., 2010). Second, where prior work documents that people can have positive or negative reactions to entitativity in different groups (e.g., Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003; Dasgupta et al., 1999), we show that entitativity makes business organizations more attractive to outsiders overall, and we shed light on why. Third, we offer a nuanced understanding of why entitativity makes business organizations and their leaders seem more responsible when a member transgresses. We find that entitativity is more likely to signal that the organization and its leaders failed to prevent the wrongdoing (i.e., blame by *omission*) than it is to signal that the organization and its leaders actively facilitated the wrongdoing (i.e., blame by *commission*). Prior theorizing about entitativity, which focused on groups other than business organizations, would not have predicted this finding (e.g., Lickel et al., 2006). In short, we offer entitativity as a new lens for understanding public perceptions of organizations, we examine why and how entitativity perceptions matter for organizations, and our focus on business organizations offers new insights about entitativity beyond prior work that focused on social groups.

In the following sections, we explain the construct of entitativity, distinguish it from related organizational constructs, and develop hypotheses about entitativity's consequences for organizations.

## **Entitativity, Groups, and Organizations**

### ***Entitativity and Groups***

When we see a dog's head and tail on either side of a tree, we perceive a partially occluded dog rather than a disconnected head and tail. In this way, the human perceptual system sometimes groups component parts into a unified whole. The entitativity construct applies this logic to the perception of social collectives (Campbell, 1958). We perceive some collections of people as a single, unified group – focusing on the whole rather than on component members, as if they formed one entity. The more entitative a collection of individuals is, the more of a “real group” it appears to be (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). For example, 1,000 fans in a stadium wearing identical jerseys, chanting in unison, and displaying intense camaraderie would appear to be more of a real group than 1,000 pedestrians who happen to be walking within a few blocks of the stadium during the game. The fans and the pedestrians lie on either extreme of an entitativity continuum, but many social collectives – such as people living in the same neighborhood – fall in between (Lickel et al., 2000).

What makes people perceive a social collective as entitative is the behavior of its members. A flock of birds can look like a single being when the birds assemble in formation and synchronize their movements to reach the same destination. Similarly, a collection of individuals will seem like a unified entity when they coordinate among themselves, pursue shared goals, influence each other, display interdependence, and exhibit strong interpersonal bonds. Entitativity scholars call these behaviors group-member *interactivity* (Blanchard et al., 2020;

Brewer et al., 2004; Dang & Liu, 2020; Ip et al., 2006). In line with the theoretical argument that interactivity and entitativity are inextricably linked (Crump et al., 2010; Denson et al., 2006; Gaertner & Schopler, 1998; Lickel et al., 2003), empirical work tends to operationalize entitativity by measuring and manipulating perceptions of members' interactivity (e.g., Crump et al., 2010; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2018; Denson et al., 2006; Effron et al., 2018; Effron & Knowles, 2015; Newheiser et al., 2012; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007). In short, interactivity is the glue that cognitively transforms multiple individuals into a "real group" in people's minds.

### ***Entitativity and Organizations***

Because the central purpose of organizations is to coordinate members' behavior towards shared goals, people will perceive most organizations as at least somewhat entitative (Denson et al., 2006; Lickel et al., 2000). However, different people will perceive the same organization's entitativity differently, and the same organization can convincingly be presented as more or less entitative. In this respect, we view entitativity as an understudied aspect of an organization's *image* – external audiences' beliefs about the organization's traits (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Entitativity perceptions may be grounded in reality and relatively stable in the short-term, but – like other aspects of an organization's image – they are ultimately subjective and malleable (Elsbach, 2006; Scott & Lane, 2000).

Entitativity is theoretically distinct from several familiar organizational constructs. Although it is a component of an organization's image, entitativity differs conceptually from core aspects of image that prior work has examined, such as legitimacy, trustworthiness, and correctness (Elsbach, 2006), because entitativity is neither inherently positive nor negative (Abelson et al., 1998; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2018). Entitativity is also different from reputation – the public's affective evaluation of a firm relative to other firms (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990)



– because the members of reputable and disreputable firms alike can be perceived as a unified entity (see Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2018).

Entitativity is also distinct from, although related to, anthropomorphism, the tendency to endow a non-human entity with human-like characteristics (Epley et al., 2007). Perceiving organization members as entitative is a *necessary* condition for anthropomorphizing it. That is, once a collection of individuals appears to be a unified entity, it becomes possible to perceive that entity as generous, or rebellious, or human-like in other ways (Ashforth et al., 2020). At the same time, perceiving group members as entitative is not a *sufficient* condition for anthropomorphizing it. Ashforth et al. (2020, p. 33) give the example of how a hospital that is perceived as a unitary entity could be described without anthropomorphism as “a large, urban trauma center” (a “what” entity) or with anthropomorphism as “welcoming and caring” (a “who” entity).

Entitativity has rarely been applied to understanding how people judge organizations. Two exceptions are conceptual models based on members’ perceptions of their own group’s entitativity. Kreiner and colleagues (2006) predict that, as a coping mechanism, members of stigmatized professions come to view the members of their profession as highly entitative. Bartel and Wiesenfeld (2013) postulate that low entitativity among organization members interferes with these members’ ability to identify with the organization’s core characteristics. In contrast to these theoretical contemplations, we empirically examine entitativity perceptions of people *outside* an organization and the consequences of these perceptions.

The entitativity construct also factors into a debate among organizational theorists about whether organizations are best understood as simply aggregates of individuals (see Haslam et al., 2017) – what we would call a low-entitativity group – or as *social actors* (e.g., Foreman &

Whetten, 2002; Scott & Meyer, 1994) – “*entities* with distinctive properties that are comparable to individuals in their ability to act and change the environment” (King et al., 2010, p. 302, emphasis added). Whereas these scholars debate whether organizations *should* be considered social actors, other scholars assume that ordinary people outside of an organization *do* perceive organizations as such. For example, theorizing about corporate social irresponsibility (e.g., Folkes & Kamins, 1999) assumes that “perceivers view the corporation as if it were a cohesive individual to be held responsible for its behaviors and outcomes” (Lange & Washburn, 2012, p. 303). Similarly, theories of organizational reputation assume that external stakeholders perceive organizations as individuals capable of bearing responsibility (Ravasi et al., 2018). These theories are based on the (untested) proposition that the public perceives organizations as highly entitative. Going beyond this prior scholarship, we offer entitativity as construct for understanding how people perceive an organization’s status as a social actor— and instead of assuming that these people *do* perceive an organization as a social actor. We highlight that different individuals within a given society will have different perceptions about *how much* the members of a particular organization cohere into a unified entity. We next consider consequences of this variance in entitativity perceptions.

### **Consequences of Entitativity**

We propose that appearing entitative is a double-edged sword for organizations: When people outside an organization perceive its members as highly entitative, they feel more attracted to the organization in general, but also hold its senior management and the organization itself more responsible when an individual member transgresses. In this way, we predict, entitativity can make an organization “look good” or “look bad.” We discuss each prediction in turn.

#### ***Entitativity Increases Organizational Competence and Attractiveness***

It is well-established that people associate entitativity with competence (e.g., Clark & Thiem, 2015; Clark & Wegener, 2009; Dang & Liu, 2020; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Su, 2018; Newheiser & Dovidio, 2015; Vanbergen et al., 2020). The reason is that a collection of individuals becomes an entitative group by coordinating their behavior towards shared goals (e.g., Brewer et al., 2004; Crump et al., 2010; Denson et al., 2006; Ip et al., 2006; Yzerbyt et al., 2000). As Dang, Liu, Ren and Su (2018, p. 75) explain, “Because high entitativity group members are more internally organized and interact with each other more frequently, they are expected to be more efficient at coordinating their efforts and acting upon their plans.” Thus, the more entitative people think a group is, the more competent they think it will be in achieving its members’ shared goals.

From the perspective of consumers, competence is an attractive trait in a business organization. In other words, “Given that producing a high-quality offering is generally the aim of companies, high levels of competence should signal to consumers that companies offer high-quality products” (Aaker et al., 2010, p. 226). Research shows that when an organization seems highly competent, consumers are more eager to buy its products (Aaker et al., 2010) and even feel more loyalty towards its brand (Kervyn et al., 2012). All else equal, travelers would prefer to stay at hotels that offer an efficient check-in process, passengers would prefer to book rides with car companies whose drivers arrive on time and take the most efficient route, and people would rather purchase headphones from an electronics manufacturer that consistently makes reliable products. In short, people tend to be attracted to competent business organizations.

Given that more-entitative groups appear more competent, and given that people value competence in business organizations, we predict that people will be attracted to entitative business organizations. Consistent with this prediction, research shows that people react

positively to entitativity in some types of social groups (Dang & Liu, 2020; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2018). For example, people rate ally nations (Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003), their own ingroups (Castano, Yzerbyt, et al., 2003), and even trash-collecting robots (Fraune et al., 2020) more positively when they perceive these groups as more entitative. However, people react negatively to entitativity in other types of groups. Entitativity makes enemy nations seem more harmful (Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003), juvenile delinquents appear less worthy of help (Smith et al., 2013), and space aliens look more threatening (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016; Dasgupta et al., 1999). Presumably, these different results emerge because entitativity makes groups appear competent – and whereas people like competence in their allies, ingroups, and robot helpers, they fear competence in enemies, delinquents, and potential invaders from outer space (Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2018; Newheiser & Dovidio, 2015).

Given prior research suggesting that entitativity can either increase or decrease attraction to different types of social groups, it is important to empirically test our hypotheses about entitativity and attraction in the context of business organizations. People might fear competence in business organizations they perceive as harmful, much like they fear competence in their enemies – a possibility we will return to in the General Discussion. But because people value competence in business organizations overall (Aaker et al., 2010; Kervyn et al., 2012), we propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1). Perceiving organization members as entitative increases people's attraction to the organization.*

*Hypothesis 2 (H2). Perceptions of organizational competence mediate the link between entitativity and attraction.*

### ***Entitativity Increases Organizational Blame Following Member Wrongdoing***

Although entitativity may increase people's attraction to an organization in general, it may also intensify people's negative reactions to an organization when one of its members transgresses. Following a member's transgression, the public considers how much *collective responsibility*<sup>1</sup> to assign to the organization and its leadership (Lickel et al., 2003; Stenstrom et al., 2008; Wiesenfeld et al., 2008; Zemba et al., 2006). We propose that when an organization appears highly entitative, the public will hold it and its leaders more collectively responsible for an individual member's wrongdoing. For example, if a bank employee defrauded customers, the public might blame not only the employee in question, but also the bank's C-suite and the bank itself.

We suggest two complementary reasons why. First, a collection of individuals becomes an entitative group in part through coordinated action and mutual influence (i.e., interactivity). Thus, if one member of an entitative group transgresses, a reasonable assumption is that the transgression was directly influenced by – or could have been prevented by – other members (Lickel & Onuki, 2015). In other words, when an organization seems high in entitativity, observers should be less likely to believe that a transgressing member acted independently, and more likely to wonder who else might share responsibility for the member's behavior. Leaders have the greatest power when it comes to coordinating action, exerting influence, and modeling the way members should behave (Mawritz et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2009; Yaffe & Kark, 2011), and they are also the organization's most-salient representatives (van Knippenberg, 2011). Thus, when an organization's entitativity prompts people to hold someone accountable for a member's transgression, logically they would point to the organization's leadership. As a result, the more

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<sup>1</sup> We use the terms *blame* and *responsibility* interchangeably, although some theories distinguish between them Shaver, K. G. (1985). *The attribution of blame*. Springer-Verlag. .

entitative a group seems, the more blame the senior management is likely to receive for member wrongdoing.

Second, perceiving an organization as a coherent entity makes it possible to endow it with human-like traits, including the capacity for agency and intentionality (Ashforth et al., 2020; Sherman & Percy, 2010; Waytz & Young, 2012) – both of which are necessary conditions for bearing responsibility (Weiner, 1995). In other words, once an organization becomes a “social actor” in people’s eyes, it makes sense to blame an individual member’s wrongdoing not only on its senior management (e.g., “the C-suite caused the fraud”), but also on the organization itself (e.g., “the bank caused the fraud”). Outside of the management literature, some research has supported the claim that highly entitative groups are held as more responsible for their members’ behavior than are less-entitative groups (Denson et al., 2006; Effron et al., 2018; Stenstrom et al., 2008; Waytz & Young, 2012). For example, in the aftermath of the mass shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado, the more that people perceived the shooters’ peer group as entitative, the more responsible they held this group for the shooting, even though the peers had no direct involvement in the shooting (Lickel et al., 2003).

Within the management literature, research on organizational wrongdoing has focused on who *should* be held responsible – for example, the extent to which misconduct occurs because of “a few bad apples” (i.e., unethical employees) versus a “bad barrel” (i.e., a corrupt culture with corrupt leaders; Ashforth et al., 2008; Brass et al., 1998; Moore & Gino, 2013; Pinto et al., 2008; Treviño et al., 2006; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). Research has also examined how organizations strive to manage the public’s perceptions in the wake of wrongdoing (e.g., Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; McDonnell & King, 2013). However, the extant management research neglects the important question of what organizational characteristics lead the public to blame an

organization and its leaders for member wrongdoing. We argue that when an organization seems entitative, the public is more likely to regard it as a “bad barrel” that, along with its leadership, bears responsibility for members’ wrongdoing.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3): Perceiving organization members as entitative increases the blame directed at the organization and its leadership for member wrongdoing.*

As noted, one reason entitative organizations and their leaders should be held collectively responsible for member wrongdoing is because such groups are perceived as capable of influencing members’ behavior. But what is the nature of this influence? Prior work suggests two possibilities (Lickel et al., 2001; Lickel & Onuki, 2015; Lickel et al., 2003). First, observers may infer that the *actions* of an entitative organization or its representatives caused the members’ wrongdoing – a case of responsibility by *commission*. For example, an employee could have defrauded clients because management ordered it, or because the organizational culture encouraged it. Second, entitativity could make observers infer that the *inactions* of an organization or its representatives caused the wrongdoing – responsibility by *omission*. For example, leaders could have failed to prevent wrongdoing even though they knew (or should have known) about it, or an organization’s lack of monitoring or consequences for wrongdoing could tacitly condone it.

Social psychology research suggests that it is possible for both attributions of omission and commission to explain why people will blame a group for a group-member’s wrongdoing (Denson et al., 2006; Lickel et al., 2003; see also Sjöström & Gollwitzer, 2015). Participants who perceived the Columbine shooters’ peer group as highly entitative inferred that the group not only failed to prevent the killings (omission) but also encouraged the killings (commission; Lickel et al., 2003). What might people infer about omission and commission when a member of an organization transgresses? On one hand, organizations tend to be more formalized and

hierarchical than high school peer groups, so people may assume that if an organization member transgressed, someone must have ordered it (commission). On the other hand, people may assume that organizations and their leaders are more likely to have “turned a blind eye” to member wrongdoing (i.e., omission) than to have explicitly ordered it. News stories have revealed corrupt organizational cultures in which wrongdoing is mindlessly and routinely committed without thought or consequence – not directly encouraged, but tacitly condoned by leadership, social norms, and incentives (see Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Ashforth et al., 2008). Moreover, people may expect that ignoring wrongdoing without directly encouraging it is an appealing way for organizations to maintain the veneer of legitimacy while still profiting from wrongdoing, because this strategy allows “plausible deniability.”

Current theorizing does not offer a basis for predicting whether a given group’s entitativity will affect blame primarily through attributions of omission, commission, or both (Lickel et al., 2006; Lickel & Onuki, 2015). Moreover, prior research has not directly tested this question with organizations (Denson et al., 2006; Lickel et al., 2001; Sjöström & Gollwitzer, 2015). Thus, we hypothesized that both attributions would be significant mediators, allowing us to explore whether one or the other would be more relevant in organizational contexts.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4): Attributions of commission and omission mediate the link between perceptions of organization members’ entitativity and blame specified in H3.*

### **The Present Research**

We present six studies testing our hypotheses – three primary studies (Studies 1–3), and three conceptual replications to assess robustness (see Online Supplement). Study 1 uses an experimental design to test whether perceiving organization members as highly entitative makes the organization more attractive (H1), and whether perceptions of organizational competence mediates this relationship (H2). Study 2 uses an experimental design to examine if entitativity



perceptions increase the blame people assigned to senior management (H3) following a member's wrongdoing, and whether attributions of commission and omission mediate this relationship (H4). Finally, Study 3 captured naturally-occurring variation across people's entitativity perceptions to test our full double-edged sword model in a field survey (see Figure 1). Study 3 further assessed potential downstream consequences of entitativity. We predicted that, by making an organization seem more competent and thus more attractive, perceptions of entitativity would indirectly lead people to promote the organization. However, we also predicted that after learning about an employee transgression, entitativity perceptions would lead people to blame the same organization and to protest against it.

Verbatim study materials and the Online Supplement are available at [https://osf.io/reyb7/?view\\_only=599c27c648374294870bad5a49a4e118](https://osf.io/reyb7/?view_only=599c27c648374294870bad5a49a4e118). We report all experimental conditions, and we determined samples sizes in advance of data collection. Study 3 was pre-registered. The studies received ethics approval under protocol REC432 at London Business School. Data were analyzed using Stata versions 15 and 16.

### **Study 1**

This experiment tested whether people would rate a real organization – Holiday Inn – as more attractive when its members were described as high (vs. low) in entitativity (H1), and whether competence judgments would mediate this effect (H2). To test an alternative explanation, we also examined whether the effect could instead be mediated by judgments of the organization's warmth with, along with competence, is a fundamental dimension of how people perceive individuals and organizations (Aaker et al., 2012; Fiske et al., 2002). Some evidence suggests that entitativity can make warm groups seem warmer and cold groups seem colder (Dang, Liu, Ren, & Su, 2018). If participants initially perceived Holiday Inn as warm, describing

its members as entitative could make it seem even warmer, and thus increase attraction to it. Robust support for H2 would thus require demonstrating that the effect of entitativity on attraction is mediated by competence judgments above and beyond any mediation through warmth judgments.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

We posted slots for 200 responses on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk; Paolacci et al., 2010) – a sample size that has 80% power to detect a moderate effect of the entitativity manipulation on attraction,  $d = .40$ . Participants could only begin the study if they had heard of Holiday Inn, were in the US, and answered a reading-comprehension question correctly. Following our *a priori* exclusion criteria, we dropped two people in each condition for failing an attention check (described below).<sup>2</sup> There were no duplicate IP addresses or MTurk IDs. The final sample consisted of 196 people (62% female; 73% employed; 14% homemakers; 6% retired; 7% unemployed;  $M$  age = 39.36 years,  $SD = 12.71$ ).

### ***Procedure***

After reading a brief description of Holiday Inn and rating their familiarity with it, participants read a news article – bogus but realistically formatted – that highlighted Holiday Inn’s “top-notch service and efficiency” and attributed the company’s success to “innovative use of the franchise system.” Depending on randomly assigned condition, the article characterized Holiday Inn proprietors as either exhibiting or not exhibiting *interactivity*, the behaviors that turn a collection of individuals into a unified entity: information sharing, strong interpersonal bonds, mutual coordination, and shared norms rules and norms (Brewer et al., 2004; Crump et al., 2010;

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<sup>2</sup> The direction and significance of the results were identical without these exclusions.

Dang & Liu, 2020; Ip et al., 2006). Varying descriptions of interactivity is a common approach to manipulating entitativity (Crump et al., 2010; Dang & Liu, 2020; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Su, 2018; Effron et al., 2018; Effron & Knowles, 2015; Newheiser et al., 2012).

In the *high-entitativity condition*, the article described the proprietors as a “tightly knit team” who share information with each other, coordinate the prices they charge based on a central algorithm, “develop strong ties with each other and with Holiday Inn management,” and “follow strict rules and norms” set by their parent company. Finally, the article compared Holiday Inn’s proprietors to a school of fish that all look the same and coordinate their movements, and included a picture of a school of fish (see Appendix 1 for verbatim materials).

In the *low-entitativity condition*, the article instead described Holiday Inn’s proprietors as “independent entrepreneurs” who “rarely communicate with each other” and make their own decisions about what to charge without strict guidance from their parent company. This article compared Holiday Inn’s proprietors to members of many different species of fish, each choosing its own path to swim, and included a picture of diverse fish (see Appendix 2).

Next, participants completed the following measures in the order listed.

### ***Measures***

**Attention check.** To ensure that participants had read and understood the article, we asked them how the Holiday Inn proprietors had been described: As many different species of fish, as a single species of fish, as species of fish who can survive on land, as species of fish threatened by big fish, or none of the above. (Recall that the high-entitativity article likened proprietors to a school of fish from the same species, whereas the low-entitativity article likened them to different species of fish). To encourage participants to think about the manipulation, we also asked them to describe how the members were like fish (free-response).

**Manipulation check.** To test whether the study successfully manipulated perceptions of entitativity, we administered an established six-item measure (Denson et al., 2006). Participants indicated how much they thought members of the organization (a) interact with each other, (b) control or influence each other, (c) have formal or informal rules, (d) have strong interpersonal bonds with each other, (e) share knowledge and information with each other, and (f) have common goals (1 = *Not at all*; 5 = *Extremely*;  $\alpha = .90$ ). “Members” of the organization was defined to participants as “proprietors, as well as managers and employees – anyone who can be considered as part of the Holiday Inn Company.”<sup>3</sup>

**Competence, warmth, and morality.** Participants used eleven items to rate Holiday Inn on the three fundamental dimensions on which people perceive organizations (Aaker et al., 2012; Aaker et al., 2010; Leach et al., 2007): competence (competent, effective, efficient, and capable), warmth (warm, friendly, and likeable), and morality (honest, sincere, trustworthy, and ethical;  $\alpha > .92$ ). As noted, we measured judgments of competence to test our mediation hypothesis (H2) and judgments of warmth to test an alternative explanation. The morality measure was exploratory. Participants responded on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*).

**Organizational attraction.** Next, participants completed a three-item measure of organizational attraction, indicating how positive or negative their impression of Holiday Inn was, how good or bad for consumers they thought it was, and how good or bad they thought it would be if Holiday Inn expanded its operations to new cities (scales from  $-3 = \textit{Very negative/bad}$  to  $3 = \textit{Very positive/good}$ ;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

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<sup>3</sup> Although this measure asks about the behaviors that make individuals appear to be a single entity, a potential limitation is that it does not assess perceptions of entitativity directly. Study 3 addresses this limitation by using a new measure of entitativity that was not available when we ran Study 1 Blanchard, A. L., Caudill, L. E., & Walker, L. S. (2020). Developing an entitativity measure and distinguishing it from antecedents and outcomes within online and face-to-face groups. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 23(1), 91-108. . Our results show that the two measures correlated highly ( $r = .78$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Table S1 in the Online Supplement reports descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations. The manipulation check showed that people perceived Holiday Inn proprietors as more entitative after reading the high-entitativity article ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) than after reading the low-entitativity article ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = .90$ ),  $t(194) = 18.30$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 2.63$ .

As predicted (H1), participants rated the organization as more attractive when it was described as high in entitativity ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) compared to low in entitativity ( $M = 1.84$ ,  $SD = .84$ ),  $t(194) = 2.45$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $d = .35$ . Consistent with H2, this effect was significantly mediated by perceptions of the organization's competence,  $b = .27$ , bias-corrected 95% CI = [.12, .43], computed with 5,000 bootstrap samples in a structural equation model (SEM). That is, the same organization appeared more competent when it was described as highly entitative, and the more competent it seemed, the more attracted people were to it. This effect remained robust when we added the other fundamental components of brand personality – warmth and morality – as parallel mediators,  $b = .13$  [.05, .26] (see Figure 2), suggesting that competence perceptions explained entitativity's effect on attraction above and beyond perceptions of warmth and morality.

The results of this parallel mediation model showed no support for the alternative explanation that people are attracted to organizations with entitative members because they perceive the organization as warm. That is, the indirect effect through warmth perceptions was not significant,  $b = .03$ , [−.07, .12]. Unexpectedly, we found a significant indirect effect through morality perceptions,  $b = .17$  [.04, .30], but this effect did not replicate in our follow-up study (see Study S1, below).

In sum, these results demonstrate that presenting organization members as more-

entitative makes the organization seem more attractive to potential consumers – an effect mediated by competence perceptions. We note that Study 1 provided a particularly conservative test of the hypotheses because participants in both conditions read that Holiday Inn was successful and efficient. Nonetheless, participants in the high-entitativity condition still perceived the organization as more competent and more attractive.

### **Supplemental Study S1:**

#### **Conceptual Replication of Study 1**

To test these results' robustness, Study S1 in the Online Supplement repeated the same procedure with a different, validated measure of organizational attraction (Highhouse et al., 2003) and two different organizations in the same industry – one a traditional franchise organization (Holiday Inn) and one a modern sharing-economy organization (Airbnb). In brief, the results provided convergent evidence for Study 1's findings. Specifically, participants ( $N = 552$ ) were more attracted to the relevant organization when it was described as high (vs. low) in entitativity, although this effect was only marginally significant,  $p = .08$ . Moreover, this effect was significantly mediated by perceptions of the organization's competence,  $b = .18$ , bias-corrected 95%  $CI = [.08, .30]$ , above and beyond perceptions of its warmth or morality, neither of which were significant mediators themselves.

#### **Study 2**

Studies 1 and S1 suggest that entitativity can make organizations “look good” by making them seem competent and attractive. Study 2 tests whether entitativity can also make an organization “look bad” by leading people to blame its leadership more for member wrongdoing (H3). Study 2 also tests whether this effect is mediated by beliefs that leadership caused the wrongdoing through actions (commission) and/or inactions (omission; H4). Participants read an

article describing organization members as either high or low in entitativity, read about several transgressions that its members could commit, and indicated how much they blamed the organization's senior management.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

We aimed to recruit 600 American MTurk participants – a sample size that provides 80% power to detect a small effect of entitativity on blame,  $d = .23$ . After running 80 people, we identified and fixed a programming error that assigned everyone to the low-entitativity condition, so we increased our target sample to 680. Participants were only able to begin the study if they had heard of the relevant organization (Airbnb or Holiday Inn, depending on condition), they passed a reading comprehension check, and they had not completed any previous study in this research program. We excluded 10 people for duplicate MTurk IDs or IP addresses (suggesting multiple responding), 7 who did not complete the study, 28 who failed the attention-check question mentioned below. The final sample size was 635 (57% female; 77% employed; 10% unemployed; 9% homemakers; 4% retired;  $M$  age = 36.25 years,  $SD = 11.85$ ). Significantly more people were excluded for failing the attention check in the high-entitativity condition ( $n = 21$ ) than in the low-entitativity condition ( $n = 7$ ),  $\chi^2(1) = 11.13$ ,  $p = .001$ , but the direction and significance of the results were identical when we retained these participants.

### ***Procedure***

Depending on random assignment, participants considered one of two organizations in the guest-accommodation industry: Holiday Inn or Airbnb. After reading a brief description the organization and rating their familiarity with it (filler item), participants completed the entitativity manipulation used in Studies 1 and S1 (see Appendix 1- 4 for verbatim text). That is,

depending on random assignment, they read a realistic news article describing the relevant organization as either high or low in entitativity. Then participants completed the following measures in the order listed. The design was thus a 2 (entitativity: high vs. low) X 2 (organization: Holiday Inn vs. Airbnb) factorial. The purpose of using two different organizations was to test whether the hypothesized effects of entitativity would generalize across different kinds of organizations. We did not have hypotheses about the interaction between organization and entitativity.

### *Measures*

**Attention and manipulation check.** To ensure participants had read the article, we administered Study 1's attention check. Then we administered the entitativity measure, described in Study 1, as a manipulation check.

**Blame, commission, and omission.** Participants next read about five misdeeds that proprietors of either Airbnb or Holiday Inn could plausibly commit: posting fake, positive reviews of their own property online; declining to provide guests with advertised amenities; violating local laws mandating smoke alarms; underpaying taxes; and touching up photos to make their property appear nicer than it actually is. The order in which the misdeeds appeared was randomized. For each misdeed, participants responded to a measure from previous research (Lickel et al. 2003) assessing *commission* (to what extent senior management [a] have directly or indirectly encouraged the driver's misdeed, and [b] feel privately glad about the misdeed), *omission* (to what extent senior management should have [a] prevented the misdeed, and [b] known about the misdeed), and *blame* (how [a] responsible and [b] accountable senior management should be held; 1 = *Not at all*, 5 = *Extremely*). Blame ( $\alpha = .87$ , averaged across



misdeeds) was our dependent measure, and commission and omission ( $\alpha_s = .88$  and  $.91$ , respectively) were potential mediators.<sup>4</sup>

## Results and Discussion

Table S2 in the Online Supplement reports descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations.

### *Manipulation Check*

As expected, participants perceived the relevant organization as more entitative when they had read the high-entitativity article ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) than when they had read the low-entitativity article ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = .83$ ),  $F(1, 631) = 959.95$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 2.48$ , for the main effect of entitativity in a 2 (entitativity: high vs. low) X 2 (organization: Airbnb vs. Holiday Inn). There was also a main effect of organization, such that Holiday Inn was perceived as more-entitative than Airbnb,  $F(1, 631) = 13.70$ ,  $p = .0002$ ,  $d = .20$ .<sup>5</sup>

### *Organizational Blame*

Supporting H3, people blamed the relevant organization more when it was framed as high versus low in entitativity ( $M_s = 3.30$  and  $2.88$ ,  $SD_s = 1.00$  and  $1.17$ ), as shown by a significant main effect of entitativity in the ANOVA described above,  $F(1, 631) = 22.69$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = .38$ . Participants also blamed Airbnb less than Holiday Inn,  $F(1, 631) = 85.57$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = .72$ ,

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<sup>4</sup> Participants also estimated how acceptable the average person would find each of the misdeeds, and how severely the average person thought the misdeeds deserved. These measures were included for exploratory purposes and not discussed further. At the end of the study, participants also completed Study 1's measure of organizational attractiveness. We considered this measure exploratory because participants had just reflected on multiple transgressions by the organization's members. Entitativity might increase attraction to the organization by making it appear more competent, as in Studies 1 and S1 – or entitativity might decrease attraction to the organization by making its leadership appear more blameworthy for the wrongdoings. Consistent with the possibility that both of these processes may have operated simultaneously, the results showed a significant indirect effect from entitativity, to greater blame, to less attraction, with no total effect of entitativity on attraction (see Online Supplement and General Discussion).

<sup>5</sup> The interaction term was marginally significant,  $F(1, 631) = 3.50$ ,  $p = .062$ , so we decomposed it with exploratory analyses. These showed the entitativity manipulation had a significant effect regardless of whether participants read about Airbnb ( $M_s = 3.89$  and  $2.21$ ,  $SD_s = .53$  and  $.78$ ),  $t(282) = 20.37$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 2.43$  or Holiday Inn ( $M_s = 4.21$  and  $2.31$ ,  $SD_s = .54$  and  $.86$ ),  $t(349) = 23.87$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 2.56$  (see Figure S1 in the Online Appendix).

which makes sense given that, as noted, the manipulation check showed that participants found Airbnb less entitative than Holiday Inn. The interaction term was not significant,  $F(1, 631) = 1.86, p = .173$ . Figure S2 in the Online Supplement displays the means.

### ***Omission and Commission***

Next, we examined whether perceptions of omission and/or commission could explain participants' tendency to blame a high-entitativity organization more than a low-entitativity organization for member wrongdoing. We computed an SEM with paths from entitativity, to perceptions of omission and commission in parallel, to organizational blame, with a dummy code for the specific organization included as a control (see Figure 3). We also computed bias-corrected 95% CIs using 5,000 bootstrap samples.

The results revealed that, consistent with H4, judgments of omission and commission both significantly and independently mediated an indirect effect of the entitativity manipulation on blame,  $b = .38 [.25, .52]$  and  $b = .03 [.01, .06]$ , respectively. However, the indirect effect via omission on blame was significantly larger for omission than commission,  $b = .35 [.23, .48]$  for the difference between the two effects. This finding suggests that entitativity's effect on organizational blame was driven more by perceptions that the relevant organization had failed to prevent its members' wrongdoing than that it had actively encouraged the wrongdoing.

## **Study S2:**

### **Conceptual Replication of Study 2**

To improve confidence in the robustness of Study 2's results, we ran a replication study with 300 MTurk participants judging a different organization: Uber. The results supported the same main conclusions (see Online Supplement). Specifically, participants blamed Uber's senior management more for a variety of misdeeds that Uber drivers could commit when they had read

an article describing Uber as highly entitative than when they did not. As in Study 2, the effect was better mediated by ascriptions of omission than by ascriptions of commission. However, whereas ascriptions of omission and commission were both significant mediators in Study 2, only the mediation effect through omission was significant in Study S2.

### Study 3

The studies thus far demonstrate how entitativity can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, entitativity increases organizational attraction – an effect mediated by the belief that entitative organizations are highly competent (Studies 1 and S1). On the other hand, when a member transgresses, entitativity increases how much an organization’s leaders get blamed – an effect mediated by a belief that the leaders “turned a blind eye” to these transgressions (i.e., omission; Studies 2 and S2).

The goal of Study 3 was to increase external validity while testing our full model. We focused on Uber, and recruited participants in major markets where Uber operates. Rather than experimentally manipulating entitativity perceptions, we relied on naturally occurring variance. We predicted that the more entitative participants thought Uber was, the more competent they would find it, and thus the more attracted they would be to it (H1 and H2) – but that, based on inferences of omission, they would also blame its *senior leadership* more for individual members’ transgressions (H3 and H4). We also tested whether people would blame Uber *as an organization* more for individual members’ transgressions when they viewed Uber as more-entitative. Finally, we examined potential behavioral consequences of attractiveness and blame. Specifically, we examined whether Uber’s attractiveness would lead people to seek information about how to promote the organization – and whether holding Uber responsible for wrongdoing would lead people to seek information about how to protest it, even for unrelated wrongdoings.

## Method

We pre-registered the hypotheses, sample size, measures, and analyses at <https://aspredicted.org/d39t6.pdf>. The full text of our measures is in Appendix 5, and complete materials are posted at [https://osf.io/reyb7/?view\\_only=599c27c648374294870bad5a49a4e118](https://osf.io/reyb7/?view_only=599c27c648374294870bad5a49a4e118)

## *Participants*

We hired a survey company (Lucid) to recruit 600 people who had heard of Uber and lived in one of three large U.S. cities where Uber operates: 200 people in New York, 200 in Chicago, and 200 in San Francisco. This sample size offers 80% power to detect a small correlation,  $r = .11$ . Participants could not begin the study if they failed two reading comprehension questions, or a CAPTCHA check that screens for bots, or if they said they did not live in one of the three targeted cities, or if they had an IP address outside of the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Following our pre-registered exclusion criteria, we dropped 21 of the 622 participants who began the study because they did not respond to at least 25% of the scale items for the dependent measures or mediators. No one met our exclusion criteria of taking less than 1/3 of the median time to complete the study, or submitting data from a duplicate IP address or participant ID. The final sample was thus 601 people (44.67% female; 66.83% employed, 21.00% retired, 8.17% unemployed, 4.00% homemakers;  $M$  age = 49.06,  $SD$  = 16.43). The average participant was very familiar with Uber ( $M$  = 3.69,  $SD$  = 1.19 on a scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely*).

After indicating their familiarity with Uber, participants completed the below measures in the listed order. Participants indicated whether they had ever booked a ride with Uber, and if so, many rides they booked in a typical month (coded 0 = no rides, 1 = 1–3 rides, 2 = 4–8 rides, 3 = 9–15 rides, 4 = more than 15 rides). As filler items, we asked participants to briefly describe their

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<sup>6</sup> We did not implement our pre-registered intention to prevent participants on mobile devices from beginning the study because the survey company informed us that this would slow data collection.

opinion about Uber and whether they had ever worked as an Uber driver.

### *Measures*

**Entitativity.** We used two measures to assess perceptions of Uber members' entitativity. The term "members" was defined to participants as "the employees, managers, and drivers who work for Uber." The first measure was the 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ) that we used as a manipulation check in Studies 1 and 2 (Denson et al., 2006), because it assesses perceptions of the theoretically- and empirically-grounded characteristics of entitative groups (e.g., interaction, interpersonal bonds, knowledge-sharing, and common goals among Uber members). The second measure (Blanchard et al., 2020) assessed entitativity directly by asking about the extent to which group members form a unified, coherent group. The three items on this scale were: "Members of this organization are a unit," "Members of this organization are a group," and "Members of this organization feel like a group to me" (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Competence.** Participants next rated Uber's competence on the four-item measure described in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Organizational attractiveness.** We assessed how attracted participants were to Uber using two measures: Study 1's three-item measure, which captured general attitudes towards Uber (e.g., "How positive or negative is your overall impression of Uber?";  $\alpha = .91$ ), and the Highhouse et al. (2003) scale used in Study S1, which specifically measured attraction to Uber's services (e.g., "Uber is attractive to me for booking a ride";  $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Support.** We then administered a behavioral-intention measure of participants' support for Uber. The measure was inspired by the observation that companies have a keen interest in encouraging consumers to promote brands on social media (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2020). We told

participants that many people like Uber's services and want to spread the word among their friends. Then we asked, "Would you like to learn more about what you can do promote Uber's brand?" and told participants that if they selected "yes" they would receive further information on using social media to promote Uber.

**Blame, omission, and commission.** Participants next responded to two wrongdoings that Uber members had committed: employees booking fake rides with competitors to cut into the competitors' profits and driver availability, and a driver overcharging customers by taking longer routes. The order of the wrongdoings was randomized. For each wrongdoing, participants completed the measures of commission, omission, and blame described in Study 2. This time, however, we included two versions of each measure. The first asked participants to judge Uber's management, as in Study 2 (e.g., "How responsible should **Uber's management** be held?"), whereas the second asked for judgments of Uber overall (e.g., "How responsible should **Uber as an organization** be held?"). As pre-registered, we created the three blame composites by averaging across the two wrongdoings for each of the two versions (Uber's management:  $\alpha_{Commission} = .86$ ,  $\alpha_{Omission} = .69$ ,  $\alpha_{Blame} = .75$ ; Uber:  $\alpha_{Commission} = .81$ ,  $\alpha_{Omission} = .69$ ,  $\alpha_{Blame} = .74$ ).

**Protest.** Finally, we administered a behavioral-intention measure of participants' willingness to protest against Uber. Specifically, we listed several transgressions allegedly committed by "some drivers" (e.g., overcharging for rides) and "some employees" (e.g., committing gender discrimination), and we noted that "many people have protested against Uber on social media." Then we asked "Would you like to learn more about what you can do to protest against Uber?" and told participants that if they clicked "yes" they would receive information at the end of the study about how to protest Uber on social media.

**Demographics.** At the end of the study, participants reported their demographics.

## Results

Table 1 reports the results of CFA analysis. The eight factor model demonstrated a good fit,  $\chi^2(432) = 1307.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .95; TLI = .94, RMSEA = .058, and this model had a significantly better fit in comparison to the other models. Table 2 reports descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations.

### *Analytic Approach*

As expected, our two measures of entitativity were highly correlated ( $r = .78$ ,  $p < .05$ , see Table 2). For consistency with Studies 1 and 2, the main text presents the results of the Denson et al. (2006) measure, but the conclusions were identical when we used the Blanchard et al. (2020) measure instead (see Tables S3 and S4 in the Online Supplement).

First, we tested the overall relationship between entitativity and our key outcomes – attraction (H1) and blame (H3) – using OLS regression. Then we tested the model shown in Figure 4 using Stata's *gsem* (Generalized Structural Equation Model) command (StataCorp, 2019). Because the behavioral-intention measures of supporting Uber and protesting against Uber were both binary (i.e., *yes* or *no*), we modeled the paths to these variables using logistic regression. To compute indirect effects, we multiplied the relevant paths together, using 5,000 bootstrap resamples to compute bias-corrected 95% CIs (Rijnhart et al., 2019). For consistency with our main studies, the model operationalized attractiveness as Study 1's three-item measure attraction, and used Study 2's measures of blame, omission, and commission ascribed to *senior management*. However, as we report below, the conclusions were identical when we instead used Study S1's measure of attraction to Uber's services, or the measures of blame, omission, and commission ascribed to *Uber as an organization*.

As per the pre-registered robustness check, we report all analyses after adding following

control variables: age, gender, familiar with Uber, and typical frequency of booking Uber.

However, removing the control variables does not change any of the conclusions (see Table S5 in the Online Supplement).

### ***Entitativity Predicts Greater Organizational Attractiveness***

Supporting H1, participants who perceived Uber members as more entitative were more attracted to Uber, regardless of which measure of attraction we analyzed,  $b = .67, p < .001$  for Study 1's measure, and  $b = .63, p < .001$  for the Highhouse et al. (2003) measure used in Study S1.

Supporting H2, perceptions of organizational competence mediated this link between entitativity and attractiveness. That is, the more entitative people thought Uber members were, the more they viewed Uber as competent – and the more competent they found Uber, the more attracted they were to it (see Figure 4). This indirect effect was significant for both measures of attraction – for the measure from Study 1,  $b_{Indirect} = .50, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.38, .63]$ , and for the measure from Study S1,  $b_{Indirect} = .46, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.46, .68]$ .

Finally, consistent with the possibility that entitativity perceptions are associated with meaningful behaviors, the results showed that people who perceived Uber as more-entitative were more likely to request information about how to promote Uber on social media,  $b = 1.06, p < .001$ . Moreover, the data were consistent with our theorized process (see Figure 4). Specifically, we observed a significant, positive indirect effect from perceptions of entitativity, to perceptions of competence, to attractiveness, to promoting Uber – regardless of whether we used Study 1's measure of attraction,  $b = .34, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.17, .51]$  or Study S1's measure of attraction,  $b = .23, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.12, .37]$ .

### ***Entitativity Predicts Greater Organizational Blame***



Supporting H3, people who perceived Uber members as more entitative blamed Uber and its leadership more for individual members' wrongdoing. That is, consistent with Studies 2 and S2, higher entitativity scores predicted greater blame to Uber's management,  $b = .26, p < .001$ , as well as greater blame to Uber as an organization,  $b = .28, p < .001$ .

Supporting H4, attributions of both commission and omission mediated the relationship between entitativity and blame. That is, when people perceived Uber's members as more entitative, they also thought that Uber's management (a) had failed to prevent individual members' wrongdoing (omission) and (b) also had actively encouraged the wrongdoing (commission) – two attributions that were both positively correlated with blame (see Figure 4). The resulting indirect effects were significant for omission,  $b = .22, p < .001, 95\% CI = [.14, .30]$ , and also for commission,  $b = .03, p < .001, 95\% CI = [.02, .06]$ . However, as in both our previous studies testing this hypothesis (i.e., Studies 2 and S2), the indirect effect through omission was significantly larger,  $b = .18, p < .001, 95\% CI [.11, .25]$  for the difference between the two indirect effects.

The conclusions were identical when we examined attributions of omission, commission, and blame towards Uber as an organization (as opposed to Uber's management). The indirect effect was significant via both omission,  $b = .23, p < .001, 95\% CI = [.15, .32]$ , and commission,  $b = .02, p = .013, 95\% CI = [.01, .05]$ . Additionally, the indirect effect was stronger for omission than commission,  $b = .21, p < .001, 95\% CI = [.13, .30]$  for the difference between the two effects.

Finally, entitativity perceptions were associated with behavioral intentions: The more entitative people thought Uber was, the more likely they were to try to protest Uber on social media for its members' wrongdoing,  $b = .60, p < .001$ . However, the relationship between

entitativity and protest intentions was not significantly explained by the pathways we had predicted. That is, the indirect effect from entitativity, to omission, to blame, to protest intentions was not significant,  $b = .03$ ,  $p = .58$ , 95% CI [-.07, .14], and neither was the analogous indirect effect through commission,  $b = .003$ ,  $p = .60$ , 95% CI [-.01, .02]. The reason was that blame did not have a significant direct effect on protest behavior (see Figure 4).

Thus, it appears that when people perceive organization members as highly entitative, they are more inclined to blame and protest organizations and their leaders for a member's transgression – but they have different reasons for blaming than for protesting. As discussed above, the relationship between entitativity on *blame* was mediated by ascriptions of *omission*. By contrast, the effect of entitativity on *protest* was instead mediated by ascriptions of *commission*,  $b = .15$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI = [.07, .28] in a non-preregistered analysis that included both commission and omission as parallel mediators. People may blame organizations and leaders for member wrongdoing if they believe the organizations and leaders merely allowed the wrongdoing to occur (omission). But before people publicly protest the organization on social media, they may need to believe that the organization or its leaders actively encouraged the wrongdoing (commission).

## **Discussion**

Study 3 supports our theoretical model using natural variance in entitativity, offering high external validity and pointing to tangible consequences for organizations. To the extent that entitativity makes organizations seem competent and thus attractive, people may be more likely to promote its brand. However, to the extent that entitativity leads people to impute more collective responsibility for a specific act of member wrongdoing, people may be more likely to blame the organization's leadership – as well as the organization itself – for member

wrongdoing. We also found evidence that entitativity was associated with behavioral intentions. When participants perceived Uber members as more entitative, they were more likely to agree to promote the organization on social media – but were also more likely to agree to protest the organization on social media for its members’ transgressions. An important limitation is that this correlational study prevents causal inferences, but the results dovetail with the experiments, presented earlier, that do examine entitativity’s causal effect.

### **Study S3**

A pilot study run before Study 3 produced similar results ( $N = 300$  participants from major U.S. cities where Uber operates; see Online Supplement). Specifically, the more entitative participants believed Uber members were, the more likely they were to ask how to help promote Uber’s brand on social media – an effect mediated by perceptions of competence and organizational attractiveness. At the same time, the more entitative they found Uber, the more likely they were to blame it and ask how to protest it on social media for various member wrongdoings.<sup>7</sup>

### **General Discussion**

Are the members of a particular organization more like a single, cohesive entity – or are they more like a loose collection of individuals? Different observers outside the organization answer this question differently (Study 3), and their answers can be shaped depending on which facts about the organization are presented (Studies 1 and 2). The present research demonstrates that these entitativity perceptions are a double-edged sword for business organizations.

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<sup>7</sup> Recall that Study 3 did not find evidence of an indirect effect from entitativity to omission to blame to protest intentions. Study S3 could not test this indirect effect because it omitted the measures of omission and commission. However, Study S3 did find a significant indirect effect from entitativity to blame to protest intentions (i.e., without omission and commission in the model). Study 3 found the same indirect effect when it also omitted omission and commission from its model.

On one hand, the appearance of entitativity can make people regard an organization more positively (see Figure 1, top path). Perceiving an organization as entitative increased how attractive people found the organization (H1), and this effect was explained by people's tendency to associate entitativity with competence (H2) (e.g., Clark & Wegener, 2009; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Su, 2018). Entitativity perceptions also predicted people's behavioral intentions. People who perceived an organization as more entitative were also more likely to take steps to promote its brand on social media – an effect that was significantly mediated in serial by competence perceptions and attraction.

On the other hand, the appearance of entitativity can make people regard an organization more negatively when one of its members transgresses. We found that entitativity perceptions caused people to assign more blame for such transgressions to senior management, and were associated with assigning more blame to the organization itself (H3). People tended to infer that in entitative organizations, senior management – and the organization itself – failed to take appropriate steps to prevent the individual member's transgression (i.e., omission; H4), which statistically explained their blame attributions. They also tended to infer that in entitative organizations, senior management and the organization itself actually *encouraged* the wrongdoing (i.e., commission), but these inferences were a weaker and less reliable mediator than inferences about omission in our studies. Instead, in Study 3, these inferences explained why participants who viewed an organization's members as more entitative were more likely to ask how they could protest the organization on social media.

Attesting to the robustness and generalizability of these effects, support for our hypotheses emerged in three main studies (Studies 1–3), as well as in three close replications (Studies S1–S3; see Online Supplement). The experiments (Studies 1, 2, S1, and S2)

demonstrate that entitativity causally affects judgments of attractiveness and blame. The field studies (Studies 3 and S3) demonstrate that natural variance in people's entitativity perceptions predict these outcomes as well in the absence of experimental intervention. The results held across multiple, real organizations spanning different industries.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

One of our key contributions is to establish entitativity as a consequential aspect of an organization's image (Scott & Lane, 2000) that affects how the public thinks about and reacts to the organization. Although theorists have posited a role for entitativity in the social identity processes of people within an organization (Bartel & Wiesenfeld, 2013; Kreiner et al., 2006), prior work in the organizational behavior literature has not considered the role of entitativity in the judgment processes of people *outside* of an organization and, to our knowledge, entitativity has received no empirical attention in the organizational literature. We demonstrated how entitativity can be usefully applied to address core questions in organizational behavior: What determines people's attraction to an organization (see Lievens & Slaughter, 2016)? How does the public respond to organizational wrongdoing (e.g., Rhee & Haunschild, 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2012)?

More broadly, our work encourages organizational scholars to move beyond the debate about whether organizations *should* be treated as social actors – unified entities that have rights and responsibilities like individuals (e.g., Whetten, 2006) – and consider *how much* individuals *actually* perceive an organization as a unified entity in different circumstances. King et al. (2010, p. 293) argue, “Every organizational member is, to a degree, an extension and representative of the organizational actor.” We view this argument as a research question to be tested. Bringing the concept of entitativity to the organizational actor literature thus offers a solution to King et

al.'s (2010, p. 299) comment that “the field of organizational studies needs to be capable of distinguishing between organizational action and individual actions occurring within an organizational setting.” In our view, the field needs to distinguish between how much the *public* perceives a given action as “organizational” versus “made by an individual in an organizational setting” – and then examine the consequences of this distinction.

Consistent with the social-actor perspective, scholars who study corporate social irresponsibility (see Lange & Washburn, 2012) and organizational reputation (see Ravasi et al., 2018) assume that the public perceives organizations as unified entities. For example, drawing on attribution theory, Lange and Washburn (2012) assume that the public judges organizational wrongdoing as if they were judging the wrongdoing by a single individual. Our research highlights that such assumptions will not hold to the same extent among all members of the public, and will depend on how an organization is presented. That is, entitativity perceptions naturally vary and can be experimentally manipulated, and these perceptions shape how the public judges wrongdoing in an organization. We urge theorists to empirically test their assumptions about how the public perceives organization members' entitativity; to understand that these perceptions are best understood as a continuum rather than as a dichotomy (is or is not a social actor); and to broaden their theorizing about how the public reacts to less-entitative firms. In the public's mind, an organization is only tantamount to an individual if its members seem highly entitative (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Sherman & Percy, 2010).

Just as studying entitativity can reveal new insights about organizations, studying organizations can reveal new insights about entitativity. Based mainly on empirical work examining how people judge informal social groups like high school peers, prior theorizing did not theoretically or empirically address whether attributions of commission or omission better

explains the link between entitativity and collective responsibility (Lickel et al., 2006; Lickel & Onuki, 2015; Lickel et al., 2003). Our studies consistently found that omission was the dominant mechanism when participants judged how much a business organization should be blamed. We think that omission was a more salient attribution to participants than commission because they know that business organizations that blatantly encourage member wrongdoing risk incurring legal and reputational sanctions (Suchman, 1995). As a result, people may assume organizations and their leaders are more likely to “turn a blind eye” to member wrongdoing rather than to explicitly encourage it. Moreover, when considering organizations (as opposed to social groups), people may more readily associate wrongdoing with corrupt cultures in which leaders, norms, and incentives tacitly condone wrongdoing without necessarily giving it explicit encouragement (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Ashforth et al., 2008). In this way, people may think differently about entitativity and collective responsibility when judging informal social groups as compared to business organizations (cf. Denson et al., 2006).

### **Practical Implications**

Our research has practical implications for how organizations communicate their external images (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Our results raise the possibility that, as an aspect of an organization’s image, perceptions of entitativity can be strategically managed (Scott & Lane, 2000). For example, Studies 1, 2, 1S and 2S suggest that news articles highlighting different facts could alter potential customers’ perceptions of organizations’ entitativity. It remains an open research question whether organizations themselves can influence the public’s perception of entitativity outside of the lab, and whether exerting such influence could make an organization seem inauthentic. Nonetheless, our results suggest that emphasizing different organizational facts in publicity materials, interviews, and even court cases could shape the public’s perception.

Managing perceptions of an organization's entitativity may be especially important in the sharing economy, where a great deal of ambiguity surrounds whether members should be considered full-fledged employees or independent contractors (e.g., Isaac & Singer, 2015). For example, organizations like Uber, Airbnb, Handy, TaskRabbit, and UpWork use technology to coordinate the behavior of individual members, but members make most of their own decisions about when and how to work. The coordination makes the groups seem entitative while the members' independence makes them seem non-entitative. Organizations may be able to choose which perspective to present to the world. In fact, some of these organizations have argued that their members are independent contractors and not employees, presumably to avoid having to offer employment benefits. Our research suggests that these arguments may have unforeseen consequences, as an organization may not capitalize on the full potential of its image, but also may be less likely to be called upon to answer for its members' wrongdoing.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Like many studies in psychology and management, ours tested mechanism using measurement-of-mediation designs (Spencer et al., 2005). A limitation of such designs is that they can only speak to the correlations among the mediating and dependent variables, and not their causal relationships (Fiedler et al., 2011). For example, Study 1 showed that the causal effect of entitativity on attraction was mediated by competence judgments, but cannot address the causal relationship between competence judgments and attraction. Similarly, Study 2 cannot address the causal relationship among judgments of omission, commission, and blame. However, it is important to note that halo effects and common-method variance struggle to account for the relationship between the mediators and the dependent variables in our studies. These alternative explanations cannot easily explain why *only* judgments of competence – and not judgments of



morality and warmth – consistently mediated the effect of entitativity on attraction (Studies 1 and S1), or why judgments of omission mediated entitativity’s effects on blame better than commission did (Studies 2, S2, 3, and S3).

Following prior work, Studies 1 and 2 manipulated entitativity perceptions by describing members as exhibiting a high or low degree of *interactivity* – that is, by varying how much members coordinated their behavior, pursued shared goals, exhibited interdependence, and influenced each other (e.g., Crump et al., 2010; Dang, Liu, Ren, & Gu, 2018; Denson et al., 2006; Effron et al., 2018; Effron & Knowles, 2015; Newheiser et al., 2012; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007). For some scholars, interactivity among members is inextricably linked with entitativity (Crump et al., 2010; Denson et al., 2006; Gaertner & Schopler, 1998; Lickel et al., 2003). Other scholars agree that interactivity is a central “route” to entitativity, but also suggest that similarity among group members (i.e., homogeneity) could be an additional route (e.g., Brewer et al., 2004). The present research focused on interactivity rather than homogeneity for several reasons. Empirically, entitativity perceptions correlate more highly with members’ interactions than with members’ homogeneity (Blanchard et al., 2020; Crump et al., 2010; Ip et al., 2006; Lickel et al., 2000). Theoretically, it remains unclear whether homogeneity is better conceptualized as an antecedent to entitativity or to essentialism – a related though distinct construct in the groups literature (Blanchard et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2004). Finally, both empirically and theoretically, entitativity is more closely related to interactivity than to homogeneity when a group is defined by “what members do” as opposed to “who members are” (Rutchick et al., 2008), and business organizations are defined in large part by what members do (e.g., coordinate their behavior to provide goods or services). For these reasons, our investigation of organizational entitativity focused on the link between entitativity and member interactivity

rather than on the (contested) link between entitativity and homogeneity. Importantly, we also found support for our theoretical model when we measured perceptions of entitativity directly in Study 3 rather than manipulating group members' interactivity. Future research can further examine whether these results emerge in studies that vary organization members' homogeneity (e.g., whether members wear similar uniforms).

We have argued that entitativity affects organizational attractiveness because people perceive entitative organizations as more competent, and because people generally value competence in business organizations (Aaker et al., 2010; Kervyn et al., 2012). As noted, however, not everyone will value competence in every business organization. If you have fallen behind on your loan repayments, for example, you might hope that the debt-collection agency is too incompetent to seize your assets. Our theorizing does not predict a positive effect of entitativity on attraction in such contexts. Future research might even find that entitativity can *reduce* attraction to organizations that people find harmful, much like entitativity increases negative reactions to enemies, delinquents, and space aliens (Castano, Sacchi, et al., 2003; Dasgupta et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2013). If a chain of marijuana dispensaries appears highly entitative, people should perceive it as highly competent at providing marijuana to consumers. Such competence might increase attraction to the dispensaries among marijuana users, but *decrease* attraction among anti-marijuana advocates.

Whereas we focused on how people outside of an organization react to the appearance of entitativity, future research should also examine the reactions of people inside the organization. We suspect that members' perceiving their organization as highly entitative can have both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, members should identify more strongly with an organization they perceive as entitative (Castano, 2004; Yzerbyt et al., 2000), which

likely improves employee motivation and retention. Conversely, members may experience decreases in organizational entitativity as a social identity threat (Bartel & Wiesenfeld, 2013) which should undermine motivation. On the negative side, previous work has shown that perceiving a demographic ingroup as entitative can make people feel justified enacting negative behaviors against outgroups (Effron & Knowles, 2015). Perhaps working for an entitative organization can similarly license employees to treat competitors unfairly or unethically.

Moving beyond our focus on the transgressions of rank-and-file organization members, future research should also examine how an organization's entitativity affects judgments of leaders who transgress. From the perspective of people outside the organization, entitativity may *reduce* condemnation of a transgressing leader by making the organization itself seem more blameworthy (see Effron et al., 2018). But from the perspective of people inside the organization, entitativity may *increase* condemnation of a transgressing leader. People are more inclined to excuse a transgression if it is committed by an ingroup leader than by an ingroup non-leader or by an outgroup member (Abrams et al., 2013), but this effect attenuates when people are highly motivated to protect their ingroup's image (Travaglino et al., 2016). By increasing identification with the ingroup (Castano, 2004), entitativity could motivate members to protect their organization's image by condemning a transgressing leader.

We showed that members' entitativity makes organizations more attractive overall (Studies 1, S1, 3, and S3) – but how does entitativity affect an organization's attractiveness after a member has transgressed? Our theorizing does not make clear predictions. On the one hand, entitativity might increase attraction to the organization by making it appear more competent, as in Studies 1 and S1. On the other hand, because entitativity makes an organization and its leaders seem more blameworthy for member wrongdoing, entitativity could *decrease* attraction to an

organization in the aftermath of member wrongdoing. Or perhaps both processes could operate simultaneously and cancel each other out, resulting in no net effect of entitativity on attractiveness after member wrongdoing. Exploratory analyses in Studies 2 and S2 were most consistent with this last possibility: Once we called participants' attention to member wrongdoing, the entitativity manipulation no longer increased their attraction to the relevant organization, and we found an indirect effect from greater entitativity to greater blame to less attraction (see Footnote 4, Additional Analysis for Study 2 in the Online Supplement, and Study S2 in the Online Supplement). However, future research is needed to confirm whether member transgressions really do dampen the effect of entitativity on organizational attractiveness.

Our reliance on online samples is both a limitation and a strength. On the one hand, our decision to recruit participants over the Internet puts some constraints on generalizability. On the other hand, we recruited exactly the kind of people our research question focuses on: potential customers who could learn about and judge organizational attractiveness and members' misdeeds. For example, Studies 3 and S3 featured people who knew about Uber and who live in cities where more than ten thousand Uber drivers operate (Badger, 2015). The public's judgments of organizations should matter to corporate leaders and policymakers who care about public opinion.

A final limitation is that all studies were conducted with American participants and organizations. Although groups may be perceived as more-entitative overall outside of individualistic cultural contexts (see Haslam et al., 2013), entitativity perceptions influence how people perceive groups in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures (e.g., Dang & Liu, 2020; Fraune et al., 2020). Thus, we expect our results to generalize outside of the U.S. Our effects might be even larger in some collectivistic contexts; our theorizing hinged on people's tendency

to perceive interacting group members as a single entity, and this tendency is even stronger in Japan than in the U.S. (Kurebayashi et al., 2012). Future research should examine these possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

Is a particular organization more of a loose-knit group of independent individuals, or more of a single, unified whole? The answer to this question is subjective. As a result, the public will have varied perceptions about the entitativity of a given organization's members, and these perceptions can be influenced. The present research reveals that these perceptions can be a double-edged sword. People are generally attracted to organizations whose members appear entitative – but blame the organization more when one of those members transgresses.

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## TABLES

**Table 1**

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis in Study 3

Model	Description	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Comparison with Model 1	
							$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$
Model 1 <sup>a</sup>	Eight Factor Model	1307.48	432	.95	.94	.058		
Model 2 <sup>b</sup>	Five Factor Model	4216.64	485	.79	.77	.113	2909.16*	53
Model 3 <sup>c</sup>	Four Factor Model	4605.02	489	.77	.75	.119	3297.54*	56
Model 4 <sup>d</sup>	Three Factor Model	5163.66	492	.74	.72	.126	3856.18*	59
Model 5 <sup>e</sup>	Single Factor Model	9688.51	495	.48	.44	.176	8381.03*	62

*Notes.*  $N = 600$ . CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA - root-mean-square error of approximation; \*  $p < .05$ . <sup>a</sup> Eight Factor Model – Entitativity two separate factors for both measures, Competence, Two separate factors for attraction reflecting two different measures, Commission, Omission and Blame; <sup>b</sup> Five Factor Model – Commission and Omission combined into a single factor, Two measures of Entitativity and Attitudes combined into two separate individual factors; <sup>c</sup> Four Factor Model – Commission, Omission and Blame measures combined into a single factor with Competence, two measures each of Entitativity and Attraction as the other three factors; <sup>d</sup> Three Factor Model – Commission, Omission, Blame as one factor, Competence and Attraction combined into a single factor with Entitativity as the other factor; <sup>e</sup> All measures combined into one factor.

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics and Pairwise Correlations in Study 3

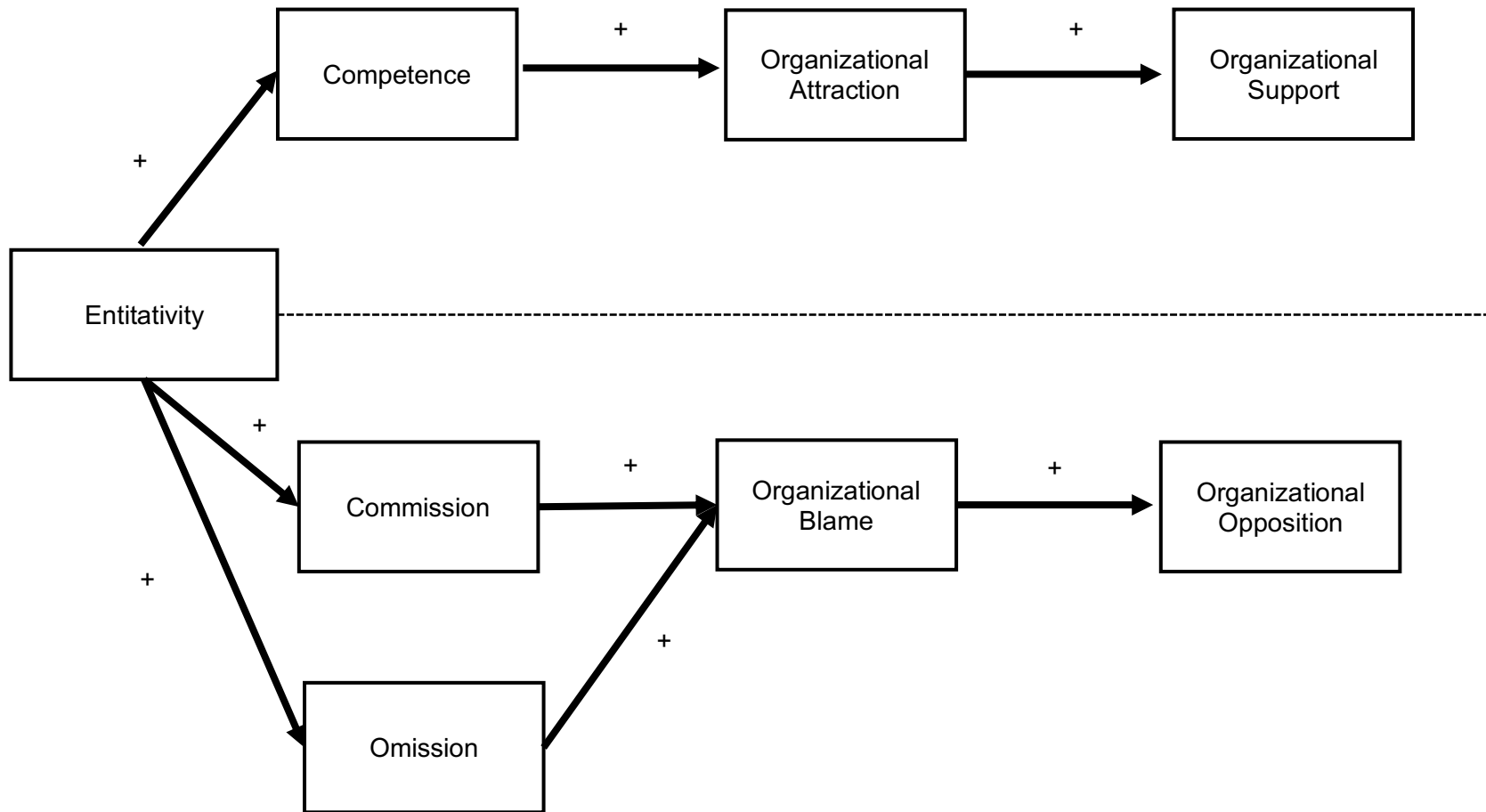
Variables	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
(1) Age	49.06	16.43	-																
(2) Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.45	0.50	0.06	-															
(3) Entitativity 1 <sup>b</sup>	3.33	0.90	-0.34*	-0.21*	(.90)														
(4) Entitativity 2 <sup>c</sup>	4.48	1.65	-0.32*	-0.18*	0.78*	(.91)													
(5) Competence	3.86	0.87	-0.25*	-0.11*	0.64*	0.57*	(.91)												
(6) Attraction <sup>d</sup>	5.03	1.39	-0.20*	-0.09*	0.53*	0.50*	0.68*	(.87)											
(7) Attraction - Attitudes <sup>e</sup>	1.62	1.30	-0.19*	-0.12*	0.55*	0.55*	0.73*	0.79*	(.91)										
(8) Blame Mgmt	3.8	0.98	-0.01	-0.12*	0.29*	0.24*	0.25*	0.17*	0.16*	(.75)									
(9) Blame Uber	3.82	0.97	-0.00	-0.10*	0.30*	0.23*	0.27*	0.17*	0.16*	0.89*	(.74)								
(10) Omission Mgmt	3.73	0.91	-0.07	-0.11*	0.34*	0.26*	0.30*	0.21*	0.21*	0.74*	0.70*	(.69)							
(11) Omission Uber	3.75	0.90	-0.05	-0.10*	0.35*	0.24*	0.33*	0.23*	0.24*	0.75*	0.76*	0.81*	(.69)						
(12) Commission Mgmt	2.75	1.27	-0.38*	-0.15*	0.37*	0.32*	0.15*	0.08*	0.10*	0.40*	0.38*	0.38*	0.37*	(.86)					
(13) Commission Uber	2.72	1.23	-0.33*	-0.14*	0.35*	0.31*	0.15*	0.10*	0.11*	0.40*	0.39*	0.37*	0.39*	0.91*	(.81)				
(14) Promote <sup>f</sup>	0.42	0.49	-0.42*	-0.21*	0.52*	0.51*	0.38*	0.41*	0.43*	0.16*	0.13*	0.16*	0.19*	0.37*	0.35*	-			
(15) Protest <sup>f</sup>	0.24	0.43	-0.29*	-0.18*	0.33*	0.33*	0.12*	0.13*	0.17*	0.18*	0.18*	0.19*	0.19*	0.40*	0.38*	0.51*	-		
(16) Familiar	3.69	1.19	-0.46*	-0.18*	0.50*	0.40*	0.49*	0.40*	0.38*	0.18*	0.19*	0.19*	0.22*	0.30*	0.30*	0.38*	0.25*	-	
(17) Times	1.59	0.86	-0.34*	-0.22*	0.43*	0.40*	0.28*	0.17*	0.26*	0.22*	0.18*	0.20*	0.21*	0.38*	0.35*	0.42*	0.18*	0.34*	-

Notes: N = 601; \*  $p < .05$ ; Internal consistency reliabilities appear in parentheses along the diagonal; <sup>a</sup> Categorical variable: 0 = Male, 1 = Female; <sup>b</sup> Entitativity measure based on members' interactivity (Denson et al., 2006); <sup>c</sup> Entitativity measure on Uber as a unit (Blanchard et al., 2020); <sup>d</sup> Attraction scale from Highhouse et al., 2003; <sup>e</sup> Attraction measure based on general attitudes towards Uber; <sup>f</sup> Categorical variable: 1 = Yes, 0 = No.

FIGURES

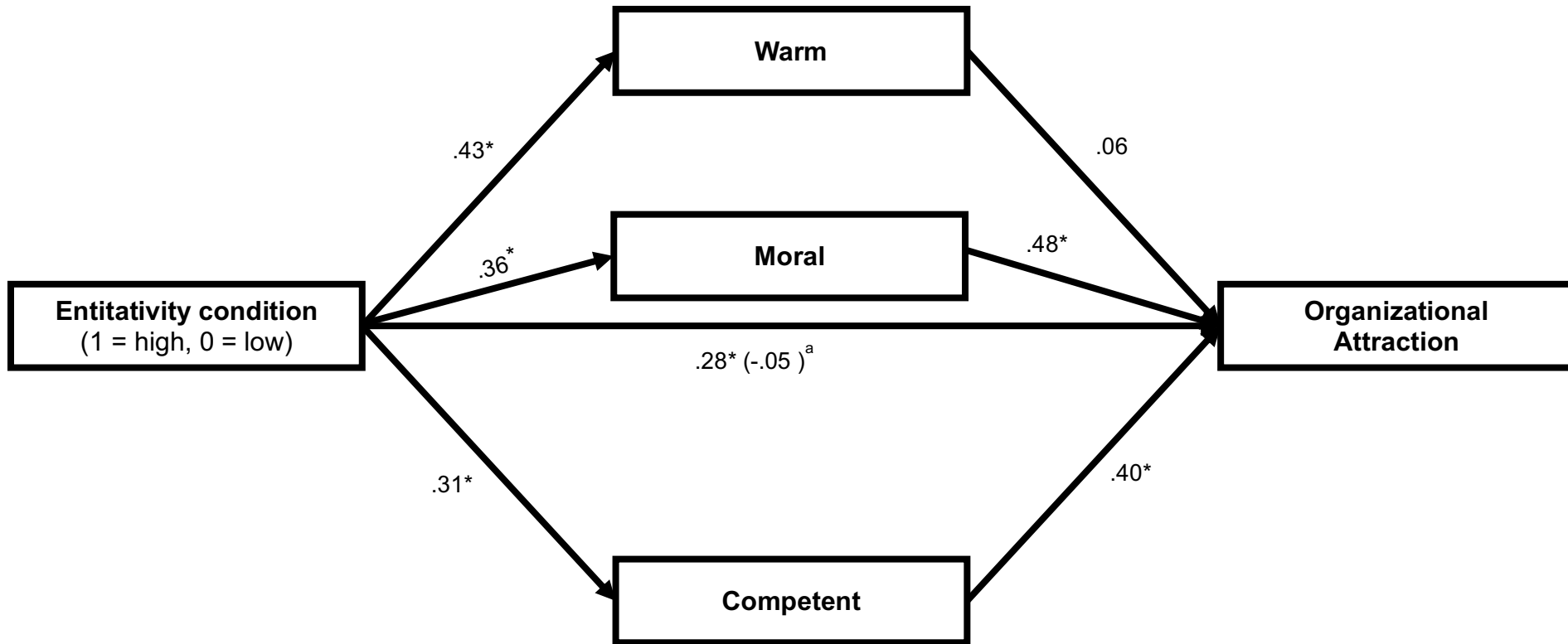
Figure 1

Conceptual model depicting the double-edged nature of entitativity. Entitativity can make an organization “look good” in general (model above the dotted line), but “look bad” following employee misconduct (below dotted line).



**Figure 2**

Path Diagram in Study 1

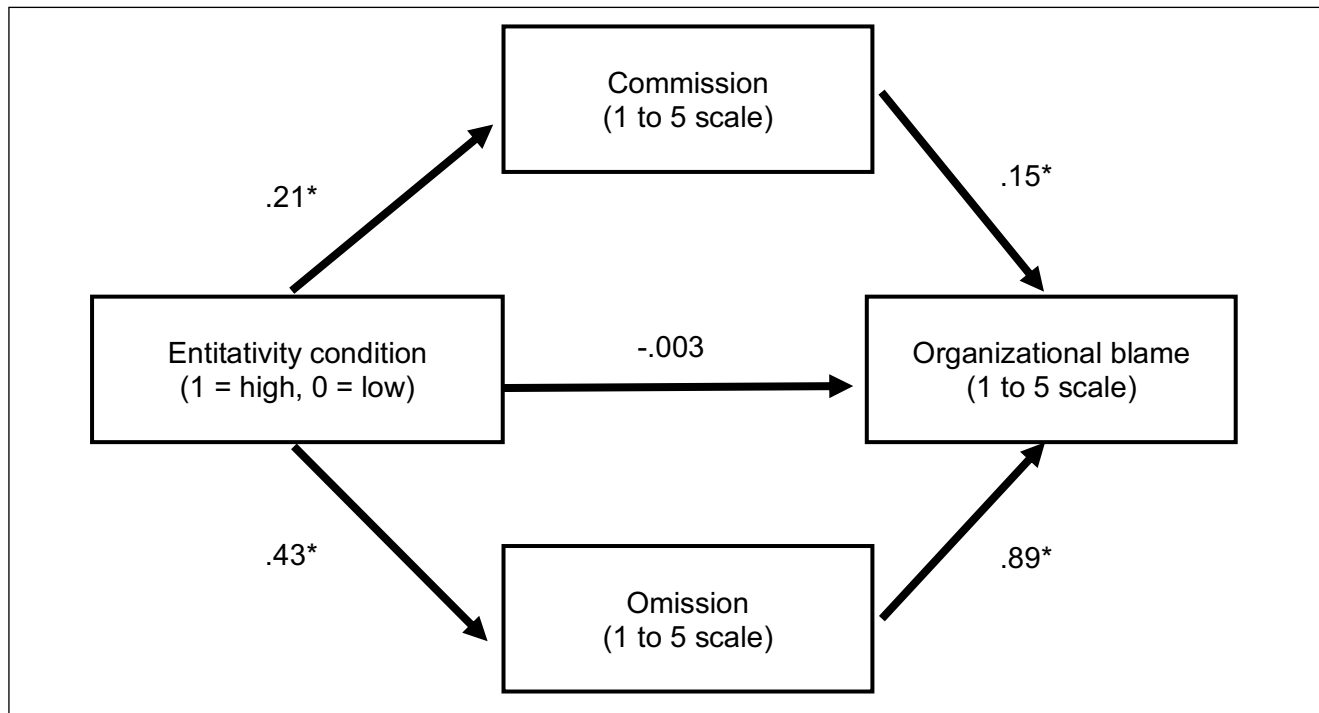


*Note:* Unstandardized regression coefficients; <sup>a</sup>Direct effect of IV on DV after accounting for the three indirect effects; \*  $p < .05$



**Figure 3**

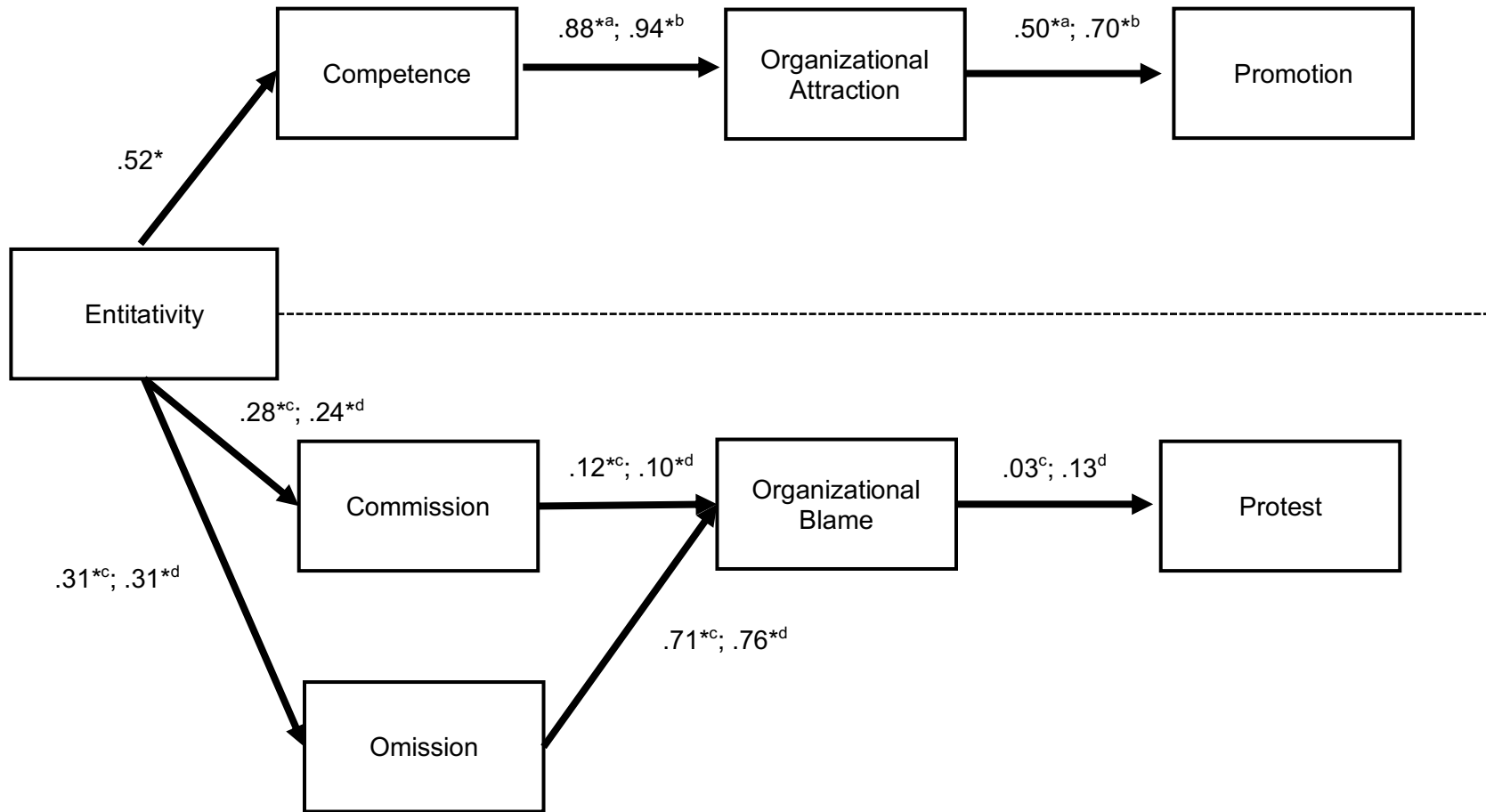
Path Diagram in Study 2



*Note.* Values are unstandardized coefficients. \*  $p < .05$

**Figure 4**

Path Diagram in Study 3



*Note.* Values are unstandardized coefficients. \*  $p < .05$ ; <sup>a</sup> Highhouse scale as a measure of attraction; <sup>b</sup> Attitudes towards Uber as a measure of attraction; <sup>c</sup> Ascriptions of commission, omission and blame directed at Uber’s management; <sup>d</sup> Ascriptions of commission, omission and blame directed at Uber as an organization.

## **APPENDIX 1: Holiday Inn - High Entitativity Condition**

### **Holiday Inn's Success Secret: Coordinated Proprietors**

By CRAIG ROBERTS

Published: February 18, 2015

By any measure, Holiday Inn is rich and successful. One of the most highly valued hotel franchises, Holiday Inn's estimated revenue was over \$6 billion in 2015.

What makes Holiday Inn so successful? Although many factors have played a role, Holiday Inn's main competitive advantage is its innovative use of the franchise system to coordinate its hotel proprietors. Hotel proprietors not only use the Holiday Inn brand, but are linked together with all other Holiday Inn proprietors, creating a tightly knit team. In other hotel chains, hotel proprietors receive little guidance from the parent company about how to set up the rooms or attract guests. Not Holiday Inn proprietors. As members of the Holiday Inn team, they can share tips with each other about everything from furnishing and color schemes to what amenities to offer. An algorithm uses data about supply and demand to compute the exact price that proprietors should charge for different dates. Chat rooms and community gatherings encourage proprietors to develop strong ties with each other and with Holiday Inn management. And Holiday Inn has strict rules and norms, such as the requirement that all hosts respond to guest requests within 24 hours.

If Holiday Inn proprietors were like fish in the sea, they would be all the same species of fish – each fish would look similar, and coordinate their movements to swim together in a school. In other words, Holiday Inn's success is largely due to its proprietors working together. By connecting and sharing information with proprietors, Holiday Inn fosters top-notch service and efficiency.

## **APPENDIX 2: Holiday Inn - Low Entitativity Condition**

### **Holiday Inn's Success Secret: Independent Proprietors**

By CRAIG ROBERTS

Published: February 18, 2015

By any measure, Holiday Inn is rich and successful. One of the most highly valued hotel franchises, Holiday Inn's estimated revenue was over \$6 billion in 2015.

What makes Holiday Inn so successful? Although many factors have played a role, Holiday Inn's main competitive advantage is its innovative use of the franchise system, which enables it to turn hotel proprietors into independent entrepreneurs. Hotel proprietors use the Holiday Inn brand, but essentially operate their own business, with much more independence than traditional franchise hotels. In traditional hotel chains, proprietors must follow strict guidelines from the parent company. Not Holiday Inn proprietors. As independent business owners, they make their

own decisions about everything from furnishings and color schemes to how much to charge per night and what amenities to offer. Holiday Inn proprietors rarely communicate with each other and are unlikely to even meet, which keeps their focus on customers rather than internal politics. And because guests provide feedback to each individual property, each proprietor has an incentive to maintain his or her personal reputation.

If Holiday Inn proprietors were like fish in the sea, they would be many different species of fish – each fish would look different, and make its own decisions about where to swim. In other words, Holiday Inn's success is largely due to its proprietors working independently. By encouraging proprietors to be independent, Holiday Inn fosters top-notch service and efficiency.

### **APPENDIX 3: Airbnb - High Entitativity Condition**

#### **Airbnb' Success Secret: Coordinated Hosts**

By CRAIG ROBERTS

Published: February 18, 2015

By any measure, Airbnb is rich and successful. One of the most highly valued private technology start-ups, Airbnb's estimated revenue was over \$6 billion in 2015.

What makes Airbnb so successful? Although many factors have played a role, Airbnb's main competitive advantage is its innovative use of technology to coordinate people who work as proprietors of short-term rental properties. This technology links together all Airbnb proprietors around the world, essentially creating a tightly knit team. Operators of traditional bed and breakfasts receive no guidance about how to set up the rooms or attract guests. Not Airbnb proprietors. As members of the Airbnb team, they can share tips with each other about everything from furnishing and color schemes to what amenities to offer. An algorithm uses data about supply and demand to compute the exact price that proprietors should charge for different dates. Chat rooms and community gatherings encourage proprietors to develop strong ties with each other and with Airbnb management. And Airbnb has strict rules and norms, such as the requirement that all hosts respond to guest requests within 24 hours.

If Airbnb proprietors were like fish in the sea, they would be all the same species of fish – each fish would look similar, and coordinate their movements to swim together in a school. In other words, Airbnb's success is largely due to its proprietors working together. By connecting and sharing information with proprietors, Airbnb fosters top-notch service and efficiency.

### **APPENDIX 4: Airbnb - Low Entitativity Condition**

#### **Airbnb' Success Secret: Independent Hosts**

By CRAIG ROBERTS

Published: February 18, 2015

By any measure, Airbnb is rich and successful. One of the most highly valued private technology start-ups, Airbnb's estimated revenue was over \$6 billion in 2015.

What makes Airbnb so successful? Although many factors have played a role, Airbnb's main competitive advantage is its innovative use of technology, which enables anyone to work as an independent proprietor of short-term rental properties. This technology allows proprietors to essentially operate their own hotel, with much more independence than traditional franchise hotels. In traditional hotel chains, hotel proprietors must follow strict guidelines from their parent company. Not Airbnb proprietors. As independent business owners, they make their own decisions about everything from furnishings and color schemes to how much to charge per night and what amenities to offer. Airbnb proprietors rarely communicate with each other and are unlikely to even meet, which keeps their focus on customers rather than internal politics. And because guests provide feedback to each individual property, each proprietor has an incentive to maintain his or her personal reputation.

If Airbnb proprietors were like fish in the sea, they would be many different species of fish – each fish would look different, and make its own decisions about where to swim. In other words, Airbnb's success is largely due to its proprietors working independently. By encouraging proprietors to be independent, Airbnb fosters top-notch service and efficiency.

### **APPENDIX 5: Scale Items Used in Study 3**

#### **Entitativity Scale (Denson et al., 2006)**

1. To what extent do members of this organization interact with each other?
2. To what extent can the behavior of members of this organization be controlled or influenced by other members of this organization?
3. To what extent do members of this organization have formal or informal rules?
4. To what extent are there strong interpersonal bonds among members this organization associated with Uber?
5. To what extent do members of this organization share knowledge and information with each other?
6. To what extent do members of this organization have common goals?

#### **New Entitativity Scale (Blanchard et al., 2020)**

On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree, please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. Members of this organization are a unit.
2. Members of this organization are a group.
3. Members of this organization feel like a group to me.

#### **Competence**

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do each of the following words describe Uber:

1. Competent
2. Effective
3. Efficient
4. Capable

### **Attraction (General Attitudes)**

1. How positive or negative is your overall impression of Uber? (-3 = Very negative to + 3 = Very positive)
2. Overall, how good or bad for consumers do you think Uber is? (-3 = Very bad to + 3 = Very good)
3. Overall, how good or bad do you think it would be if Uber's business expanded to new cities? (-3 = Very bad to + 3 = Very good)

### **Attraction (Highhouse et al., 2003)**

On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree, please answer the following. Suppose you want to hail a ride. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

1. Uber would be a good option to book
2. I would not be interested in booking Uber except as a last resort
3. Uber is attractive to me for booking a ride
4. I would be interested in learning more about what various options Uber can provide for ride booking
5. Booking a ride with Uber is very appealing to me

### **Promotion**

1. Many people really like Uber's services and want to spread the word among their friends. Would you like to learn more about what you can do promote Uber's brand? (Yes or No)

### **Fake rides transgression**

One of Uber's competitors is a company called Lyft. Like Uber, Lyft allows people to hail cars from their smart phones. According to a newssource, "ridesharing service Lyft claims that 177 Uber employees have ordered and cancelled about 5,560 rides since October last year, thereafter cutting into profits and driver availability."

Suppose this claim about Uber employees booking and cancelling fake rides on Lyft is true.

### ***Blame Uber Management***

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely, please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. To what extent would Uber's management be privately glad?
2. To what extent would Uber's management have directly or indirectly encouraged these employees to book and cancel fake rides on Lyft?
3. To what extent should Uber's management have prevented the employees from booking and cancelling fake rides on Lyft?
4. To what extent should Uber's management have known that these employees were booking and cancelling fake rides on Lyft?
5. How responsible should Uber's management be held?
6. How much should Uber's management be held accountable?

### ***Blame Uber as an Organization***

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely, please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. To what extent would Uber as an organization be privately glad about the fake rides?
2. To what extent would Uber as an organization have directly or indirectly encouraged these employees to book and cancel fake rides on Lyft?
3. To what extent should Uber as an organization have prevented the employees from booking and cancelling fake rides on Lyft?
4. To what extent should Uber as an organization have known that these employees were booking and cancelling fake rides on Lyft?
5. How responsible should Uber as an organization be held?
6. How much should Uber as an organization be held accountable?

### **Overcharging transgression**

Uber drivers can take longer routes with their passengers, thus overcharging them. Passengers can track their route on their smart phones which in theory should reduce overcharging, but in practice, passengers rarely check their route. Overcharging passengers, of course, means that drivers makes more money.

If an Uber driver overcharged a passenger by taking a longer route.

### ***Blame Uber Management***

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely, please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. To what extent would Uber's management be privately glad?
2. To what extent would Uber's management have directly or indirectly encouraged the driver to overcharge the customers?

3. To what extent should Uber's management have prevented the driver from overcharging customers?
4. To what extent should Uber's management have known that this driver was overcharging customers?
5. How responsible should Uber's management be held?
6. How much should Uber's management be held accountable?

### ***Blame Uber as an Organization***

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely, please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1. To what extent would Uber as an organization be privately glad?
2. To what extent would Uber as an organization have directly or indirectly encouraged the driver to overcharge the customers?
3. To what extent should Uber as an organization have prevented the driver from overcharging customers?
4. To what extent should Uber as an organization have known that this driver was overcharging customers?
5. How responsible should Uber as an organization be held?
6. How much should Uber as an organization be held accountable?

### **Protest**

Uber has been in the news on several occasions recently because some drivers drove unsafely, overcharged for rides, sexually assaulted passengers and because some employees allegedly committed gender discrimination and booked fake rides with competitors. As a result, many people have protested against Uber on social media. Would you like to learn more about what you can do to protest against Uber? (Yes or No)