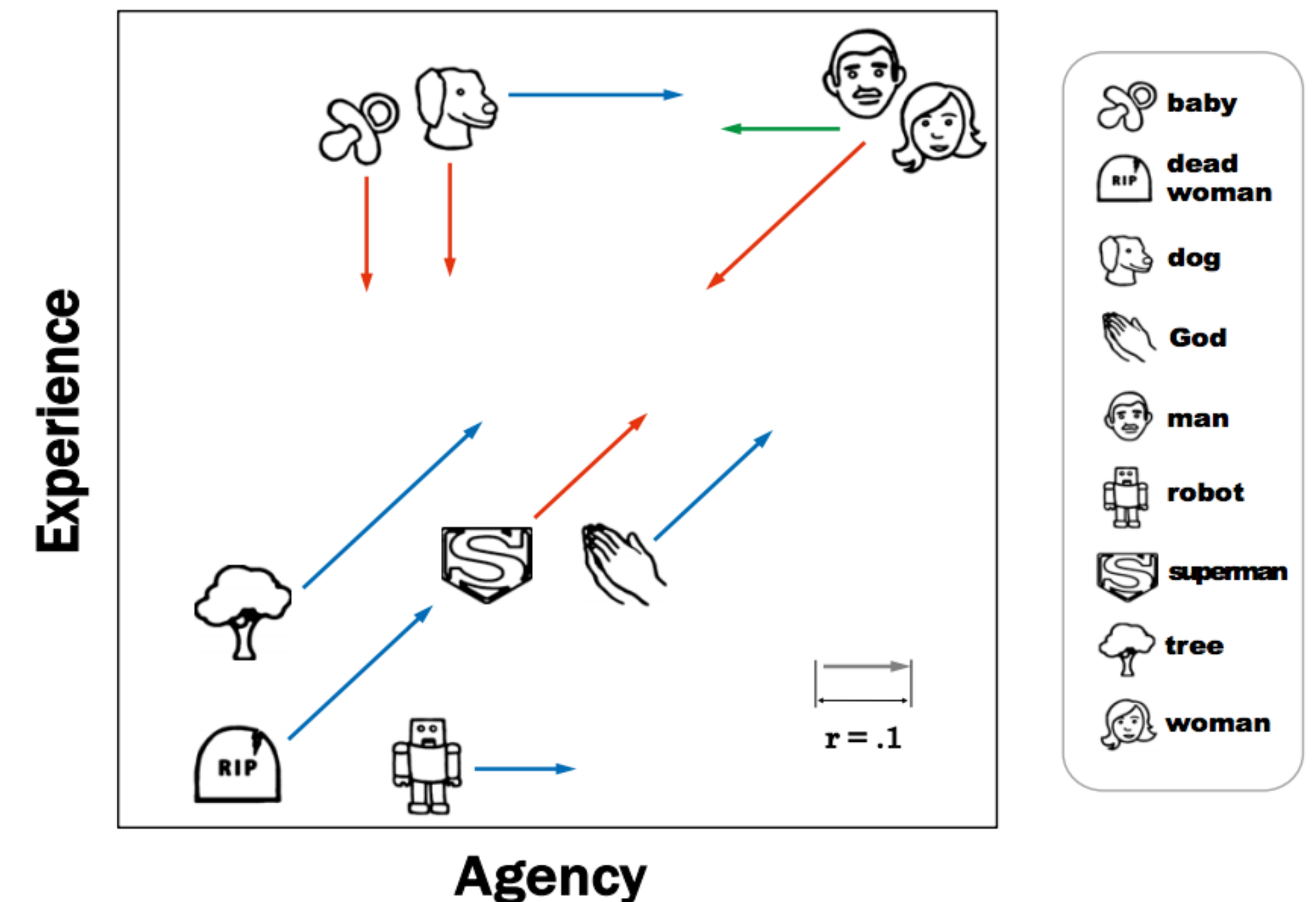


# “Ouch!” When and why food anthropomorphism negatively affects consumption



# Background

- > **Anthropomorphism** is a process of inductive inference by which consumers attribute a humanlike mind to nonhuman entities.
- > Doing so has **various consequences** for the nonhuman entity. For example, the anthropomorphized object is granted experience (i.e., the perceived **capacity to sense and feel**).
- > **What are the consequences of this inference on consumption?**



# The Consumer Psychology Problem

- > Anthropomorphism is a **widely used communication strategy** – especially popular to promote food products. For example, M&M uses humanized candies as brand mascots, Nestlé promotes its cinnamon toast crunch cereal product by making the cereals appear alive, and Dunkin' Donuts recently introduced a smiley face donut.
- > Despite the popularity of this communication strategy, we know relatively little about **how anthropomorphizing food products affects consumption**.
- > Moreover, **prior research** suggests that food anthropomorphism **enhances consumption**.
- > When reading prior research, I started to wonder whether people really want to eat a product with a face on it.



# The Research Question

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- > The central research question is **how anthropomorphizing food products affects consumption.**
- > The prediction is that food **anthropomorphism negatively affects consumption** (H1).
- > This negative effect occurs because anthropomorphizing a food product grants it the perceived **capacity to feel pain**, which, subsequently, deteriorates consumption because it increases perceived **immorality of consumption** (H2).
- > Lastly, in-line with this mechanism, the negative effect should vanish for **cold-hearted** (vs. warm-hearted) consumers (H3) and **purchase** (vs. consumption) decisions (H4).



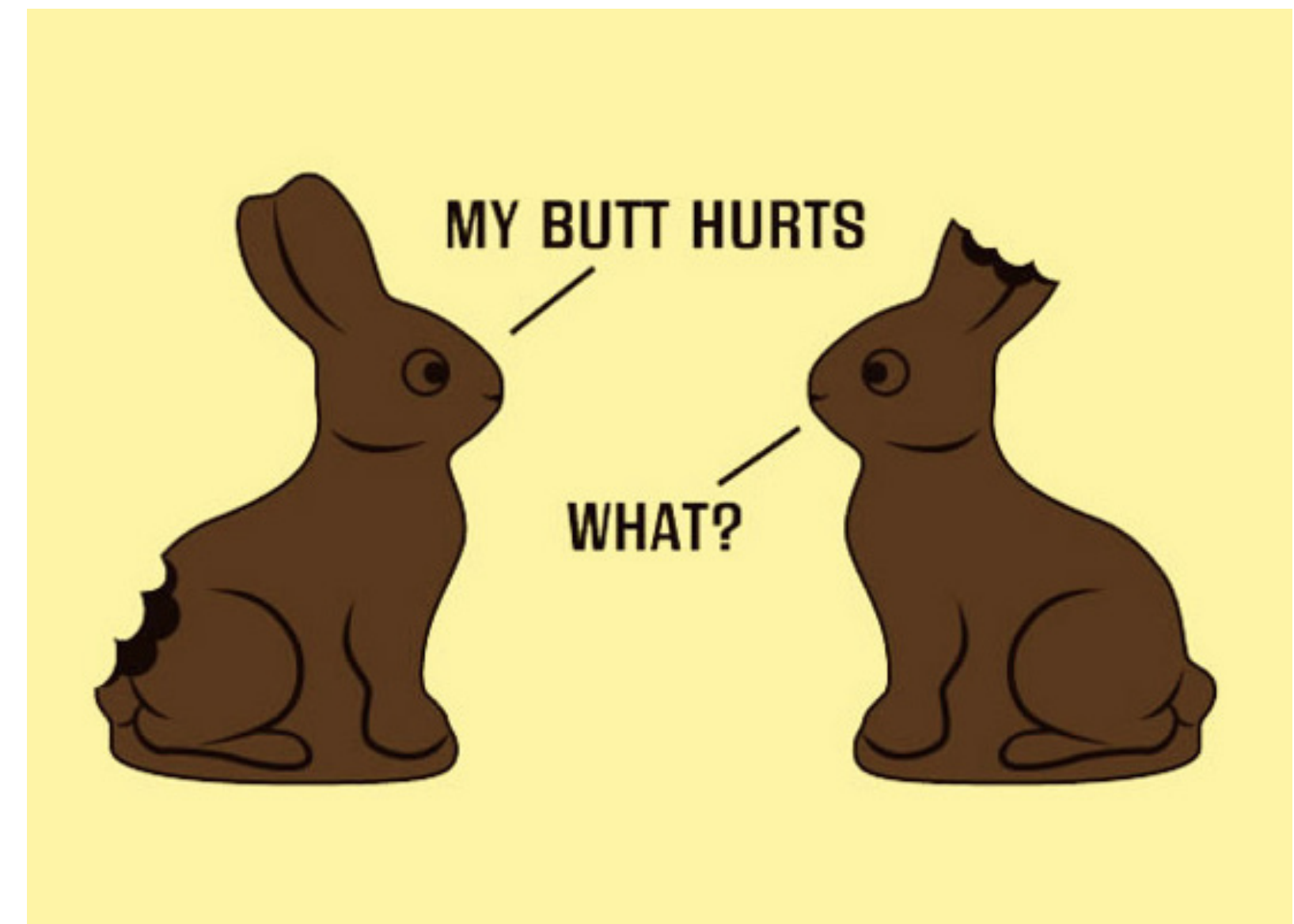
# Methods and Studies

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- > **Five experimental studies** (and several replications) were conducted to provide evidence for the suggested effects.
- > The first two studies show that food **anthropomorphism negatively affects consumption desire** (Study 1) and actual **consumption choices** (Study 2)
- > The next two studies (Studies 3 and 4) examine **why this negative effect occurs** and **for which consumers** this effect occurs.
- > The last study (Study 5) identifies a relevant **boundary condition** to this effect.

# Key Results

- > The results of the studies suggest that although anthropomorphizing food products **encourages purchase** but, at the same time, carries negative downstream consequences – **reducing consumption amount and experience.**
- > This negative effect occurs because anthropomorphizing grants the consumption object the perceived **capacity to feel pain** which, consequently, increases **immorality of consumption** of such a product
- > In support of this mechanism, I show that this negative effect attenuates for **purchase decisions** and **cold-hearted individuals.**



# Takeaways and Implications

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- > This study is the first to demonstrate that **food anthropomorphism might backfire**. This insight is important considering that prior research suggests that food anthropomorphism can increase consumption.
- > Moreover, this research highlights the importance of understanding **consumers' pre- and post-purchase responses** as preference shifts might occur.
- > Organizations thus should consider **whether their primary goal is to encourage purchase or consumption** and adapt their communication strategy accordingly.

