

## **The Effects of Self-Brand Connections on Brand Attachment**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of self-brand connections (SBCs) on brand attachment. The author proposes two types of SBCs: those that are created through marketing systems (brand-based self-brand connections, [BBSBC]) and those that are created by the individual (consumer-based self-brand connections, [CBSBC]). To investigate the influence of these SBCs on brand attachment, this study analyses survey data through the use of structural equation modelling. The results show that both BBSBC and CBSBC have positive effects on brand attachment but that the influence of CBSBC is stronger. Furthermore, in the context of durable consumer goods, CBSBC have a stronger effect on brand attachment when fast-moving consumer goods and services are compared. For fast-moving goods, BBSBC and CBSBC affect brand attachment at the same level.

**Keywords:** Brand attachment, self-brand connections, self-concept, brand relationships, consumer values, brand values.

## **1. Introduction and Objectives**

Creating brand attachment is a key branding issue in marketing today as it is a critical driver of strong brand relationships (Fournier 1998, 2009; Chaplin and John 2005; Park et al. 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Malar et al. 2011; Schmitt 2012). Brand attachment is defined as the strength of the bond that connects a brand with the self (Park et al. 2009a). Consumers develop brand attachment that is connected to their self-concept, and these self-brand connections affect the strength of the brand attachment (Park et al. 2009a, 2009b). Self-brand connections reflect the degree to which the brand is used to express a significant aspect of self (Fournier 1998). Self-brand connections can be generated from brand meanings (Escalas and Betman 2009; Fournier 2009) and can be based on public and personal brand meanings (McCracken 1986; Richins 1994; Allen et al. 2009).

According to Allen et al. (2008), McCracken's (1986) model implies that there are two primary delivery mechanisms for the product and the brand that create meaning. The first is the shared meaning that is created through marketing and cultural traditions; the second is the more personalized brand meaning that is constructed by the individual. Holt (2002) mentions that consumers even twist brand meanings, diverting them into unintended directions and resignifying them in surprising ways. He states that consumers no longer want to receive brand value created by a marketer; rather, brand value is now created by the consumers themselves.

This study distinguishes between public and personal meanings of brand and conceptualizes two types of self-brand connections (brand-based self-brand connections [BBSBC], and consumer-based self-brand connections [CBSBC]). To date, no studies have examined the differences between these two viewpoints and their influence on brand attachment. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of BBSBC and CBSBC (in other words, brand value and consumer value) on consumer brand attachment.

## **2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

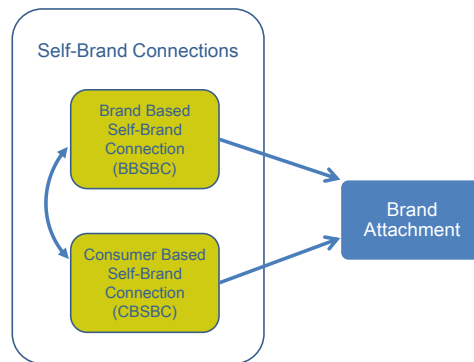
### ***Conceptual Framework***

Theoretical arguments support the influence of self-brand connections on brand attachment (Chaplin and John 2005; Park et al. 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Malar et al. 2011). Based on McCracken's (1986) idea, this study proposes a conceptual framework that links two distinct self-brand connections (BBSBC and CBSBC) to brand attachment (Figure 1).

BBSBC is conceptualized as the extent to which the brand meaning that is created by a marketer connects to a consumer's identity, purpose, life theme, or values (such as an individual's goal in life being in sync with Nike's 'Just Do It' message), and CBSBC is the extent to which the brand meaning that it created by a consumer connects to the consumer's

identity, purpose, life theme, or values (such as Reebok being a symbol of Karen's vitality, independence, and self-efficacy, as described in Fournier [1998]). The dependent variable is brand attachment, which is defined as the strength of the bond that connects the brand with the consumer.

Figure 1  
Conceptual Framework



### ***Hypotheses***

We have developed four hypotheses related to the impact of BBSBC and CBSBC on brand attachment based on the self-verification theory (Swann 1983) and the self-enhancement theory (Swann et al. 1987). The self-verification theory is a social psychological theory that asserts that people want to be known and understood by others according to their firmly held beliefs and feelings about themselves. Self-enhancement is a type of motivation that works to make people feel good about themselves and to maintain their self-esteem. Self-enhancement theory assumes that people are motivated to increase their feelings of personal worth (Swann et al., 1987). These motives drive people to seek information and to approach their aspirations in a way that enhances their self-esteem (Higgins 1987). Because of these motives, consumers seek information about brands that connect to their beliefs and feelings of personal worth, ultimately resulting in positive feelings and generating an emotional attachment to the brand (Malar et al. 2011).

H1: BBSBC has a positive effect on brand attachment.

H2: CBSBC has a positive effect on brand attachment.

It is assumed that the period of time that goods are in the possession of the consumer affects CBSBC and brand attachment. For example, the influence that CBSBC has on brand attachment is different among fast-moving consumer goods, durable goods, and service brands. In the case of durable goods, the attachment to a brand increases because the consumer interacts with the brand over a long period of use or possession. In the case of fast-moving goods and services, the consumer is less likely to feel personal commitment to a

particular brand, and therefore the attachment to the brand decreases because it is limited to a short period of use or possession.

H3: CBSBC for durable consumer goods has a stronger effect on brand attachment when compared to fast-moving consumer goods and services.

It is thought that the self-production effect (the self-generation effect) affects the impact of the self-brand connections to the brand attachment. The self-production effect refers to the belief that information that is actively produced by oneself is more easily memorized than information that one is given passively (Greenwald 1980). For example, a nice restaurant that you accidentally find is remembered more clearly than a nice restaurant recommended by your friend. The self-generation effect is similar to the ‘I designed it myself’ (Franke et al. 2009) and ‘I made it myself’ effects (Troye and Supphellen 2012). These effects assume that people tend to value the thing they produce more than the finished product. Based on the self-generation effect, consumers may become more attached to brands with a self-brand connection that they create.

H4: CBSBC has a stronger effect on brand attachment than BBSBC.

### **3. Method**

#### ***Data Collection and Procedure***

The two exploratory studies (interviews and an Internet survey) were conducted to understand the self-brand connections construct and to generate items for a scale. First, 10 structured questions interview about connections between self and brands was conducted with 6 women and 6 men between the ages of 19 and 58. We generated 17 indicators, 6 for the BBSBC and 11 for the CBSBC, including self-brand connection scales from previous studies (Fournier 2009; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Aaker et al. 2004; Albert et al. 2009). In addition, we used the empirically validated items from Fournier’s (2009) love/commitment scale to create a brand attachment scale.

The data collection was carried out via an Internet survey. Respondents followed a link to an online questionnaire that randomly assigned them to a brand. The 38 brands were chosen from Interbrand rankings (the 50 most valuable Japanese brands in 2012 and the best global brands in 2011). Each respondent answered the questions for only one brand in each of three industry categories (fast-moving consumer goods, durable consumer goods, and service consumer goods). They first reported their familiarity with the brand according to Kent and Allen’s (1994) brand familiarity scale. If the respondent reported an overall brand familiarity of at least 3.5 (5=‘maximum familiarity’ and 1=‘no familiarity’), then they continued to

complete the survey for the corresponding brand. If the brand familiarity was below 3.5, a new brand was randomly assigned. This procedure was adapted from the work of Malar et al. (2011). The respondents then evaluated the BBSBC, BBSBC, and brand attachment items using a five-point Likert scale (5='strongly agree' and 1='strongly disagree'). This procedure resulted in 200 participants (with an equal number of men and women between the age of 20 and 60 years old).

### *Measures*

We analyzed consumers' responses to the 17-item scale using different brands. The items were subjected to a set of exploratory factor analyses using oblique factor rotation. Based on our sample size, any factor loading greater than .50 was assumed to have practical significance (Hair et al. 1995). The final set of items reflected a two-factor solution (with eigenvalues greater than 1.0), and all 17 items remained.

The first factor was BBSBC. The items were as follows: (1) 'I really sympathize with and value the product/service of this brand'; (2) 'This brand's concept and actions appeal to my identity'; (3) 'This brand's concept and actions give me pleasure and energy'; (4) 'The concept of this brand matches the theme of my life'; (5) 'This brand adds a pleasant surprise to my life'; and (6) 'This brand makes an impression on me'.

The second factor was CBSBC. The items were as follows: (1) 'This brand brings me good luck'; (2) 'This brand has meanings and values that only I can understand'; (3) 'This brand reflects who I am'; (4) 'When I think about this brand, it reminds me of various personal memories'; (5) 'This brand reminds me of a phase in my life'; (6) 'This brand makes a statement about what's important to me'; (7) 'I think this brand helps me become the type of person I want to be'; (8) 'By using this brand, I'm part of a shared community'; (9) 'This brand deepens my relationships with family and friends'; (10) 'This brand develops relationships with others'; and (11) 'I think this brand supports me'.

These alpha reliability coefficients were  $\alpha_{\text{BBSBC}} = .910$  and  $\alpha_{\text{CBSBC}} = .949$ . The scale items of BBSBC and CBSBC were checked using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the measure validation. The CFA results indicated a strong degree of fit ( $\chi^2 = 625.499$ ,  $df = 118$ , normed fit index [NFI] = .923, comparative fit index [CFI] = .936, Tucker Lewis index [TLI] = .927, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .085).

The dependent variable of brand attachment was measured using Fournier's (2009) 7-item love/commitment scale ('The brand and I are perfect for each other', 'Really love the brand', 'Thought of not being able to use this brand disturbs me', 'Very loyal to the brand', 'Willing to make sacrifices to keep using the brand', and 'Unique feelings for this brand'). The alpha reliability coefficient of brand attachment was  $\alpha_{\text{brand attachment}} = .887$ .

Appendix A provides a complete list of the measures and their psychometric properties. Table 1 presents the correlations of the framework variables. Overall, our measurement scales

showed sufficient reliability and validity. For all constructs, the Cronbach's alpha reliability exceeded the threshold value of .7 recommended by Nunnally(1973).

**Table 1**  
**Correlations of Framework Variables (Pearson's Correlation Coefficient)**

	1	2	3
1 Brand Based Self-Brand Connection			
2 Consumer Based Self-Brand Connection	.789**		
3 Brand Attachment	.843**	.852**	

\*\*p≤.01.

#### 4. Results and Findings

Structural equation modelling was used to test the conceptual framework (see Figure 1). BBSBC and CBSBC were allowed to correlate in our structural equation model. We checked the model fit of the basic model and different industries (fast-moving consumer goods, durable consumer goods, and services). The results suggested that the basic model fits the data well ( $\chi^2 = 1073.943$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $NFI = .905$ ,  $CFI = .923$ ,  $TLI = .915$ ,  $RMSEA = .079$ ).

We checked the model fit for different industries, and the results suggested that all three industries models also fit the data (fast-moving consumer goods:  $\chi^2 = 562.811$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $NFI = .856$ ,  $CFI = .908$ ,  $TLI = .897$ ,  $RMSEA = .086$ ; durable consumer goods:  $\chi^2 = 551.9052$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $NFI = .869$ ,  $CFI = .918$ ,  $TLI = .909$ ,  $RMSEA = .085$ ; services:  $\chi^2 = 728.390$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $NFI = .821$ ,  $CFI = .868$ ,  $TLI = .839$ ,  $RMSEA = .105$ ).

Table 2, we report the parameter estimates of our basic model, which confirmed a strong positive relationship between BBSBC and brand attachment ( $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, BM} = .388^{**}$ ). The parameter estimates in the different industries model also confirmed a strong positive relationship between BBSBC and brand attachment ( $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{consumer goods}} = .472^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{durable goods}} = .315^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{services}} = .383^{**}$ ), which supports H1.

The parameter estimates of the basic model confirmed a strong positive relationship between CBSBC and brand attachment ( $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, BM} = .643^{**}$ ), and the parameter estimates in the different industries model also confirmed a strong positive relationship between CBSBC and brand attachment ( $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{consumer goods}} = .527^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{durable goods}} = .723^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{services}} = .671^{**}$ ), which supports H2.

To test H3, we compared the parameter estimates for CBSBC on brand attachment in different industries. The results confirmed that for durable consumer goods, CBSBC has the strongest effect on brand attachment when CBSBC is compared in the fast-moving consumer goods and services ( $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{consumer goods}} = .527^{**}$ ,  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{durable goods}} = .723^{**}$ ,  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{services}} = .671^{**}$ ). To check the validity of the hypothesized model across different industries, we conducted multiple-group analysis and ran the main model separately for the

different subgroups. The results were stable across the categories. When an unconstrained model was compared with a constrained model (all CBSBC path coefficients in different product categories were constrained to be equal), these differences were significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 6.022$ ,  $\Delta df = 2$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). Therefore, H3 is supported.

To test H4, we compared the parameter estimates for BBSBC and CBSBC on brand attachment. The results confirmed that CBSBC has a stronger effect on brand attachment than BBSBC ( $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, BM} = .388^{**}$ ,  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, BM} = .643^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{consumer goods}} = .472^{**}$ ,  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{consumer goods}} = .527^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{durable goods}} = .315^{**}$ ,  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{durable goods}} = .723^{**}$ ;  $\gamma_{BBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{services}} = .383^{**}$ ,  $\gamma_{CBSBC \rightarrow BA, \text{services}} = .671^{**}$ ). Multiple-group analysis was used to check the validity of the difference between these parameters. When an unconstrained model was compared with a constrained model (the two BBSBC and CBSBC path coefficients were constrained to be equal), the difference in the basic model was strongly significant ( $\chi^2 = 11.380$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). In different industries, the difference in durable consumer goods and services was strongly significant, but the difference in fast-moving consumer goods was not significant (consumer goods:  $\Delta\chi^2 = .155$ ,  $\Delta d.f. = 1$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ; durable goods:  $\Delta\chi^2 = 8.684$ ,  $\Delta d.f. = 1$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ; services:  $\Delta\chi^2 = 8.576$ ,  $\Delta d.f. = 1$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). These results show that CBSBC has a stronger effect on brand attachment than BBSBC for durable consumer goods and services, whereas BBSBC and CBSBC affect brand attachment at the same level for fast-moving consumer goods. Thus, H4 is partially supported.

**Table 2**  
**Results of Hypotheses Testing**

	BBSBC→Brand Attachment	CBSBC→Brand Attachment
	Standardized Estimate	Standardized Estimate
Basic Model	.388**	.643**
Basic Model in Different Industries		
Fast-moving consumer goods	.472**	.527**
Durable consumer goods	.315**	.723**
Services	.383**	.671**

\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of two types of self-brand connections (BBSBC and CBSBC) on brand attachment. Our findings confirmed our prediction that BBSBC and CBSBC have positive effects on brand attachment (H1 and H2). In durable consumer goods, CBSBC has a stronger effect on brand attachment when compared in fast-moving consumer goods and service (H3), and CBSBC has a stronger effect on brand attachment than BBSBC for durable consumer goods and services, whereas BBSBC and CBSBC affect brand attachment at the same level for fast-moving consumer goods (H4).

These results show that a self-brand connection based on brand meaning created by an individual is more important for generating brand attachment than self-brand connections based on a public brand meaning created by a marketer. This trend is particularly strong for durable consumer goods brands. In contrast, for fast-moving goods brands, the self-brand connection based on a public brand meaning created by a marketer is important for generating brand attachment as well as the self-brand connection based on personalized brand meaning created by the individual.

### ***Managerial Implications***

In brand management practice, creating brand value and consumer value are considered the central brand variables for strong brand relationships. On the other hand, consumer co-creation figures prominently in contemporary marketing theory, where co-production has been offered as the cornerstone of a new dominant logic for marketing (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Vargo and Lusch emphasize the consumer's continuous and dynamic role in the use, maintenance, repair, and adaptation of product/services in accordance with his/her unique needs, usage situations, and behaviours. Our findings support their view that the value that is created by the individual is more important than the value that is created through marketing systems for building brand relationships. It means that the need of the marketing suggestion for consumers to add a personal meaning of the brand.

In addition, our findings show that consumers have a higher tendency to give a personal meaning to a brand related to durable consumer goods. It means that the need of the marketing suggestion for consumers to add a personal meaning of the brand is more important for the durable consumer goods. Although brand value and consumer value are equally important for forming brand attachment for fast-moving consumer goods, it means that the need of the marketing suggestion for consumers to add a personal meaning as well as a public meaning of the brand created by a marketer are important for durable consumer goods.

### ***Limitation and Further Research***

One limitation of the current study is that measures of BBSBC, CBSBC, and brand attachment are examined. Brand royalty, brand commitment, brand love, brand attachment, and self-brand connections have been suggested in previous work, empirical tests have been performed for each, and effects have been confirmed. However, these concepts are very similar, and more argument and examination regarding these concepts and measurement validities are needed.

This study investigated the relationship between self-brand connections and brand attachment; therefore, future research should include the elucidation of the factors that affect this relationship, such as product involvement, brand knowledge, brand consumption experience, and personality traits.



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## Appendix A

		Mean	SD	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Brand Based Self-Brand Connection</b>	(1) I really sympathize with and value the product/service of this brand	3.12	.963	.914	.910
	(2) This brand's concept and actions appeal to my identity	3.02	.927	.857	
	(3) This brand's concept and actions give me pleasure and energy	3.11	1.001	.742	
	(4) The concept of this brand matches the theme of my life	2.95	.979	.709	
	(5) This brand adds a pleasant surprise to my life	2.82	.955	.685	
	(6) This brand makes an impression on me	2.74	.978	.625	
<b>Consumer based Self-Brand Connection</b>	(1) This brand brings me good luck	2.30	.993	.920	.949
	(2) This brand has meanings and values that only I can understand	2.58	1.068	.877	
	(3) This brand reflects who I am	2.57	.988	.822	
	(4) When I think about this brand, it reminds me of various personal mem	2.58	1.048	.774	
	(5) This brand reminds me of a phase in my life	2.65	1.022	.770	
	(6) This brand makes a statement about what's important to me	2.46	1.027	.717	
	(7) I think this brand helps me become the type of person I want to be	2.63	.964	.696	
	(8) By using this brand, I'm part of a shared community	2.55	.993	.684	
	(9) This brand deepens my relationships with family and friends	2.72	1.044	.667	
	(10) This brand develops relationships with others	2.47	.961	.653	
	(11) I think this brand supports me	2.64	1.012	.603	
<b>Brand Attachment (Fournier 2009)</b>	(1) The brand and I are perfect for each other	2.85	.989		.887
	(2) Really love the brand	2.64	.959		
	(3) Thought of not being able to use this brand disturbs me	2.85	1.002		
	(4) Very loyal to the brand	2.41	.992		
	(5) Willing to make sacrifices to keep using the brand	2.93	.948		
	(6) Unique feelings for this brand	2.59	1.094		