Social Influence on Post Purchase Brand Attitudes

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ABSTRACT
Self-determination and attribution theory form the basis for examining differences in brand attitudes following purchase decisions for a university education (Study 1) and an automobile (Study 2). In the first study, we examine differences in attitudes in those who recently entered the university (freshmen) vs. those whose entry is more distant (sophomores), testing for differences based on whether family or peers influenced the decision to enter the university. In Study 2, we test for differences in post purchase brand attitudes due to recent/distant purchase time, family and peer influence and consumption purpose (functional/hedonic). Brand attitudes remain highest for those who independently purchased an automobile for functional reasons. The worst-case brand attitude scenario occurs for distant functional purchases heavily influenced by family and friends. Implications for personal selling and advertising management, social persuasion theory and marketing pedagogy, and future research conclude the paper.

POST-PURCHASE BRAND ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE
Consumers purchasing expensive, high involvement products or services that are used or consumed over relatively long periods of time are likely to frequently revisit their purchase decision. With many products and services, the newness wears off and altered brand attitudes may lead to cognitive dissonance and subsequent switching behavior. As the consumer gains experience with the product or service, he becomes more intimately familiar with its benefits and drawbacks. Following a substantial investment in a new car, a university for an education, or membership in a private social club, an individual may acquire a different perception of the product or service after gaining experience with it.

Consumption decisions are frequently influenced by external sources, including market sources and personal sources. As individuals search for information that will either facilitate evaluation of alternatives leading to choice, or facilitate post-purchase evaluation of the alternative chosen, their perceptions may be colored by the opinions and input of others. While prior social influence research has focused principally on the initial purchase decision (information search, alternative evaluation, trial/purchase), little work has investigated the lasting influence of others on post-purchase evaluations of that decision. With respect to post-purchase evaluations, what differences in attitudes toward the product can be expected between individuals who make a relatively autonomous purchase decision and those whose initial purchase decision was heavily influenced by family or friends?

Social influence vs. Self-Determination
To persuade individuals to purchase their product or service, marketers frequently attempt to take advantage of social influences in personal selling, advertising and other promotional efforts. Using the opinions of others may provide an effective avenue to influence choice. Yet, self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1980) suggests that individuals are likely to ultimately be less satisfied when others direct brand choices. Borrowing theory from the growing stream of research regarding self-determination in the psychology literature, we contrast brand attitudes toward a given purchase between those who make brand choices influenced by family or peers and those whose decisions are more self-determined.

Specifically, in Study 1, we observe differences in attitudes toward a service currently being consumed by individuals who have recently made the purchase decision and those whose initial decision is less recent, contending that those whose initial decisions were largely determined by peers or family members are likely to have less positive post-purchase brand attitudes than will those whose initial decision was made with more autonomy.

Functional vs. Hedonic Consumption Purpose
In Study 2, we extend our examination of the role of initial peer and family influence in determining brand attitudes after purchase, while also accounting for the functional or hedonic purpose of the purchase. The functional/hedonic consumption context may affect the manner by which individuals evaluate the decision (O’Curry and Strahilevitz 2001). The interaction between consumption purpose (functional/hedonic) and social influence on brand attitudes has yet to be examined. For reasons of self-esteem and attributions made to protect one’s self-esteem, we expect to find that individuals who make relatively autonomous purchase decisions (viz., with less social influence) for hedonic consumption purposes to hold more positive brand attitudes than individuals who make socially (family or peer) influenced purchase decisions for utilitarian consumption purposes.

Importance of Research
This research is important for three reasons. First, from a theoretical perspective, research related to post-purchase attitudes has focused on individual differences (e.g., involvement, Richins and Bloch 1986, 1991), and/or processes (e.g., need for cognition, Cacioppo, Petty, Kao and Rodriguez 1986) that may influence attitude consistency or dissonance, but has not examined the role of social influence. Although the role of social influence in brand preference and choice behavior is well established, little has been done to examine differential effects of social influence on post-purchase attitudes. Second, from a pedagogical perspective, this research has focused mainly on the initial purchase decision. Third, from a marketing management perspective, post-purchase brand attitude is directly linked to repeat purchases of a brand. Consequently, situations or factors that might lead to an initial satisfactory transaction (i.e., via social influence on an individual’s brand choice) but that also lead to deleterious effects on long term brand attitude are apt to be of concern to marketing managers. Specifically, personal sales approaches that use peer or family reinforcement to influence an individual’s purchase of a minivan for its utilitarian benefits may lead the individual to subsequently hold a less positive attitude toward the brand purchased than that held by an individual who perceives that he autonomously purchased a minivan for the same utilitarian purpose.

For publicly consumed products or services, we compare the perceptions of individuals who make relatively autonomous decisions versus those who make decisions highly influenced by peers or family. While we expect that decisions reinforced by family or
friends to produce initially relatively positive attitudes toward the product chosen, we expect that individuals who make more autonomous decisions to hold more positive attitudes toward the product in post-purchase evaluations than those who made the decision more so due to social influence. We first examine these relationships within the context of an individual’s decision to attend a specific university. We extend the analysis to the purchase of an automobile in Study 2.

**STUDY 1**

**Attributions & Self-Determination**

*Attributions.* Brand attitude research has long held that social norms are likely to influence purchase intentions and choice. Individuals may comply with the advice of others due to either normative or informational social influences. In the initial decision-making process for publicly consumed products, individuals make purchases that will provide social approval or negate disapproval (normative) or that are in agreement with others considered knowledgeable about the product category (informational). After the initial purchase, however, the user of the product gains information about the product that may or may not be in agreement with the normative and/or informational influence received at the point of purchase. To the extent that post-purchase dissonance occurs, an individual may attribute the difference between post-purchase attitude and purchase attitude to the influence of others who influenced the decision (i.e., Weiner 1986, 2000). Any notable shortcomings can be attributed to others in order to protect one’s self-esteem (“I knew I shouldn’t have listened to them. If I had done what I wanted I would have bought something else.”). In the case of product or service failure, we can expect that those highly influenced by others to purchase a brand may hold less positive brand attitudes when compared to those who make more autonomous decisions, as we now explain.

For self-esteem reasons, individuals who make more autonomous or self-determined decisions are motivated to maintain relatively consistent and positive purchase and post-purchase attitudes— even when product failure occurs. An individual who autonomously gathers information and decides to purchase a vacation package has only himself to blame if negative results occur. Rather than admitting a bad decision, for ego-defense reasons, people will seek to maintain a relatively positive attitude toward the purchase (“It really wasn’t such a bad cruise. It was fun spending an extra day in port.”). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this phenomenon frequently occurs in marital contexts when one independently makes what would otherwise appear to be a bad decision.

*Self-determination.* Self-determination theory holds that individuals have an innate need for autonomy, competence, and relevance (Deci and Ryan 2000). Sheldon, et.al. (2001) finds that these three aspects of self-determination (autonomy, competence and relevance) are the most salient needs (compared to other fundamental needs) in determining an individual’s “most satisfying events.” An individual will be most satisfied when s/he autonomously (rather than jointly) makes a good purchase decision, as it reinforces feelings of competence and personal relevance. In short, we are most satisfied when we get to determine the outcome of an event. Conversely, having to seek or wait upon another’s input or acquiescence may take some satisfaction out of what might otherwise be a relatively enjoyable purchase occasion.

Although social reinforcement of a purchase may lead to an initially high brand attitude, one can expect that in the post-purchase evaluation stage individuals will have a more positive attitude toward a product purchase when they have not been swayed by family or peer influence to select a particular brand. Based upon self-determination theory and attribution theory, we expect this effect to be most prominent after the passing of time, as the newness and accompanying purchase arousal wears off. Individuals begin with relatively positive brand attitudes at the point of purchase—or else they wouldn’t be making the purchase. Over time, variance in brand attitudes is likely to increase as some individuals have positive and some have negative post-purchase outcomes.

Thus, it is anticipated that individuals who have made recent purchases of a given product are likely to have more favorable brand attitudes than those whose purchase decisions are more distant. However, brand attitudes of those individuals who report that decisions were heavily influenced by family or peers are expected to be significantly lower as time passes, compared to those who report that initial purchase decisions were subject to less social influence. Hence, a time (recent/distant) X social influence (low/high) should obtain. Formally:

H1: Individuals whose purchase is more recent will have more positive brand attitudes than those whose purchase is more distant.

H2: For more distant purchases, brand attitudes of individuals who report that the purchase decision was subject to high social influence will deteriorate more so than those who report little social influence.

**Methodology**

Data were collected from subjects as part of a university’s annual student evaluation process at a medium-sized southern university. Overall, 419 freshmen and sophomores responded. Respondents were asked via a 5-point Likert scale (Disagree/Agree) the extent to which his/her decision to attend the university was due to family and friends (“I chose to attend this university because of my family.” “I chose to attend this university because of my friends.”). The reliability of single-item scales has been found to favorably compare with the use of multiple-item scales (Wanous, Reichers and Hudy 1997) when measuring constructs that are likely to be unambiguous to the respondent. Multiple-item scales are desirable for measuring more complex, multi-faceted constructs such as personality traits, attitudes and image perceptions.

Given the focus of this study, students’ attitude toward the university was measured via a 13-item standardized university image scale (source: University of Texas; http://www.utexas.edu/student/research/) employing six-point semantic differentials (α=9.09):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academically lax—</th>
<th>Services are unavailable—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academically rigorous</td>
<td>Services are accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal—Friendly</td>
<td>Prejudiced—Tolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic—Streamlined</td>
<td>No sense of community—Great sense of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile—Caring</td>
<td>Arbitrary—Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectually stifling—</td>
<td>Unrewarding—Rewarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectually stimulating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally stagnant—</td>
<td>Limited learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally enriching</td>
<td>—Variety of learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miserable—Enjoyable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summing the scores of the 13 items, student responses on this scale could range from 13 to 78. Subjects who intended to remain at the
university have significantly (F=5.48, p=.005) more positive attitudes toward the university (64.5) than do those who reported an intention to transfer (61.3) or were uncertain (61.7).

Since we are interested in examining those who have either high or low social influence, subjects who reported ambiguous social influences (e.g., “neutral” on the 5-point Likert scales) were removed. Thus, individuals reporting either low family or peer influence (e.g., “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree”) or high family or peer influence (e.g., “Agree,” “Strongly Agree”) were retained for analysis.

Observed differences in attitudes toward the service (university) over time between subjects may be due, in part, to factors not accounted for in this study. Further, we are relying upon respondents’ reports of the degree of family or peer influence after the fact, rather than observing it at the point of purchase. However, whether due to reality or selective/distorted perception, we are interested in the attributions and self-esteem maintenance processes individuals may employ in post-purchase evaluations.

Results
Table 1 displays the analysis of variance results from Study 1. The dependent variable is the respondent’s attitude toward the university. A 2 (year 1 vs. year 2) X 2 (low/high family influence) X 2 (low/high peer influence) three-factor design was employed in which the time since entering the university was a between-subjects factor and family and peer influences are within-subjects factors.

Main effects. As expected, subjects who recently entered the university (freshmen) have significantly more positive attitudes toward the university than do second-year students (66.7 vs. 62.6, F=5.83, p=.02), supporting H1. While not explicitly hypothesized, additional main effects emerge from this data. Individuals who reported that their families strongly influenced their decision to attend this university had significantly more positive attitudes toward the university than did those whose families did not exert much influence on their decision to attend (64.7 vs. 62.0, F=6.56, p=.01). Those who were strongly influenced by their peers to attend the university had somewhat less positive attitudes toward the university than did those for whom peers had little influence (64.2 vs. 62.0, F=3.53, p=.06).

Interactions. As anticipated, a two-way interaction emerged with subjects’ attitude toward the university between low/high family influence and recent/distant time passage since purchase decision (F=5.17, p=.02), supporting H2. The interaction appears to be driven by the relatively greater drop in attitude toward the university between the first and second year by those who were heavily influenced by family members (67.7-63.4=4.3) than for those whose families did not strongly influence their initial decision to attend the university (65.2-62.0=3.2). A similar two-way interaction (F=6.30, p=.01) occurs for those who were heavily influenced by peers to attend the university compared to those who were not. The attitude toward the university by those who were highly influenced by peers to attend drops from year one (freshmen) to year two (sophomores) at a greater rate (65.7-61.0=4.7), than does the attitude toward the university of those who were not much influenced by peers to attend (67.1-63.4=3.7).

Interestingly, family influence plays a greater role in determining the choice of the university than did peer influence (2.93 vs. 2.67, t417=4.20, p=.000).

Summary. The two-way interactions point to the finding that the individuals with the worst attitudes toward the university are those in their second year who reported being highly influenced by their peers to attend the university (61.0). While individuals heavily influenced to attend the university by their families have the highest initial attitude toward the university (67.7) in their first year, those in their second year who reported being heavily influenced by family members experience a substantially lower attitude (63.4), although this attitude is more positive than other second-year students whose family did not influence the choice (62.0). These numbers are not particularly surprising, given the recurring problem of student (customer) retention in this and other settings.

Given the nature of this study (between-subjects), these results mainly indicate that there is a difference between first and second year students’ attitudes toward the university, and that increasingly negative attitudes are associated with individuals who initially had greater family and peer support to attend the university. Interestingly, it appears that individuals who did not attend due to peer influence have generally more positive attitudes (in year one or two) than those influenced by peers to attend. This is not the case with family influence.

A university education represents a relatively functional consumption context, although this may differ by individual and university. To the extent that the university experience was intended as more hedonic or functional might shed some light as to the relative role of family and peer influence. In the next study, we examine a different purchase context (automobile purchase) while

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-Way Interaction (F=5.17, p=.02, e²=.042)</th>
<th>Low family influence</th>
<th>High family influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year One</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Two</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-Way Interaction (F=6.30, p=.01, e²=.018)</th>
<th>Low peer influence</th>
<th>High peer influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year One</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Two</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Effect</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time since purchase (F=5.83, p=.02, e²=.029)</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
accounting for the purchase intent (functional/hedonic) and family/peer influence.

**STUDY 2**

**Functional/Hedonic Context**

Hedonic consumption refers to situations in which the product or service is experienced for fun, pleasure, arousal, or excitement (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Functional products or services provide utilitarian benefits. Although some products or services may hold functional or hedonic value in the same way for most people (e.g., auto repair vs. amusement parks), the functional/hedonic nature of a given product or service may differ based on (a) individual consumption preferences and purposes, (b) situations, and (c) the role of buyer/user.

First, individual consumption preferences and purposes may differ such that one individual seeks functional rewards while another seeks hedonic rewards for the same product, as when one member of the family desires reliability, safety, and value from an automobile and another seeks speed, power, and status. Second, the consumption situation or context may lead an individual to at one time prefer functional benefits (comfortable and durable jeans) and at another time prefer hedonic benefits (fashionable, name-brand/status jeans) for a specific product. Third, individuals may assume different roles in purchase situations (e.g., computer) such that as a user one may seek more hedonic features (game ports, videogame graphics, soundcard, TV monitor compatibility, etc.), while as a buyer one may care more about functional aspects (price, repair record, etc.). Most consumption situations are unlikely to be purely functional or hedonic. Rather, individual purposes and preferences, situations, and the buyer/user role may lead an individual to seek primarily functional or hedonic benefits from the consumption experience. In sum, not all individuals will perceive a given product or service purchase as functional or hedonic. Instead, variance is likely to exist across individuals for a specific product purchase.

The functional or hedonic consumption purchase may serve to moderate the effects of family or peer influence on one’s brand attitude for two reasons. First, situational purchase involvement may provide some arousal for even functional purchases. Compared to hedonic purchases, functional purchases that are dictated by family and friends may take away whatever pleasure one might derive from the shopping experience. In contrast, one’s attitude toward the brand is likely to be most positive when the outcome is self-determined and when the purchase is hedonic, as when an individual makes an independent purchase of a sports car, athletic equipment, apparel, or other products/services consumed for personal pleasure. In short, in terms of brand attitude, the worst-case scenario is a functional purchase heavily influenced by friends and family and the best-case scenario is a hedonic purchase self-determined without friends or family influence. Second, in varying degrees, a shopper’s self-esteem is connected to the efficacy of the shopping experience (Hanley and Wilhem 1992). In the hedonic, autonomous purchase context, the purchase is likely to be of personal importance to the individual (e.g., purchase of an expensive tennis racquet). In order to protect one’s self-esteem, individuals in this context are apt to maintain a relatively positive brand attitude. Conversely, in the functional, socially-influenced purchase context, the purchase does not have high personal relevance (“It wasn’t that important to me anyway.”) and the buyer is able to attribute a poor decision to the influence of others (“If they hadn’t told me to buy that brand, I wouldn’t have.”).

Thus, a three-way interaction between purpose (functional/hedonic), family influence (low/high) and peer influence (low/high) is anticipated:

H1: Brand attitudes will be higher for hedonic purchases made with low family or peer influence than for functional purchases made with high family or peer influence.

**Time Influence**

As in Study 1, individuals who have made more recent purchases are expected to have more positive brand attitudes than do those whose decision is less recent. In keeping with self-determination and attribution theory, we expect that those who have made relatively independent recent purchase decisions will hold the most positive brand attitudes. Those with the poorest brand attitudes are expected to be individuals who were subject to heavy influence by family and friends to purchase a specific brand and where more time has passed since the purchase. Hence, a three-way interaction is expected between time (recent/distant), family influence (low/high) and peer influence (low/high). As time passes, the value of the brand opinions of others is likely to have deteriorated and any product defects attributed to their poor judgment.

H2: For more distant purchases, individuals reporting that the purchase decision was subject to high social influence will have less positive brand attitudes than those reporting less social influence.

**Methodology**

For consistency with the sample drawn from Study 1, subjects (N=143) on a college campus who had purchased an automobile were surveyed. Respondents reported the brand of the automobile purchased, its original price, and the date (month/year) of the purchase, and whether family or friends were present at point of purchase. Subjects were asked the purpose of the automobile purchase: purely for practical purposes—purely for enjoyment (7-point semantic differential). Family influence and peer influence were each measured with items asking, “In this purchase, to what extent was your decision influenced by family members (friends) to buy the brand you selected?” Responses were recorded on 7-point “no influence—very much influence” scales.

**Social influence validity check.** The presence of family members or peers at the point of purchase increases the likelihood that individuals will report that family or peers influenced the purchase decision. Of course, the individual may disregard their input or the family members or peers may provide limited input. In general, however, we would expect that the presence of family members or peers is likely when their influence is reported. The data indicates that those who indicated that family members were present at the point of purchase reported higher family influence than those without family members present at the point of purchase (4.73 vs. 3.33; F=3.03, p=.08). Subjects who reported that friends were present at the point of purchase were more likely to report that friends influenced their brand decision than those without friends present at the point of purchase (3.32 vs. 2.21, F=8.22, p=.005).

As a second validity check on the sources of social influence, subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed (7-point Likert Scale) with the statement, “I chose this brand completely on my own.” This response was negatively correlated with the extent of reported family influence (r=-.42, p=.00), but uncorrelated with peer influence (r=.02, n.s.).

**Brand attitude.** Attitude toward the brand was measured with an established scale developed by Maheswaran and Sternthal (1990). The seven-item scale (bad—good, outmoded—advanced, inferior—superior, not as good as competing brands—as good as competing brands, not useful—useful, a product I’ll not try again—a product I’ll try again, not a good value—a good value) produced acceptable reliability (alpha=.93).
### Results

Table 2 displays the results of the effects on brand attitude from a four-factor design utilizing a 2 (functional/hedonic) X 2 (recent/distant purchase) X 2 (low/high family influence) X 2 (low/high peer influence) ANCOVA, where the price of the vehicle purchased is the covariate. Using a median split, subjects were categorized as having a functional/hedonic purchase, low/high family influence and low/high peer influence. Since the actual purchase date of the vehicle was recorded, recent purchases were categorized as those within the past 12 months and distant purchases as those 13 months and greater. Given the likely price/quality relationship with brand attitude (e.g., $40,000 Lexus vs. $2000 Chevrolet), the price of the vehicle is included as a covariate control.

#### Main effects.

As expected, subjects’ brand attitudes were more positive for those who made recent purchases (43.4) than less recent purchases (38.3; F=3.69, p=.03, $^{2}=.02$). The price paid for the automobile, entered as a covariate, is positively related to attitude toward the brand ($^{2}=.177, p<.01$). The quadratic form of time since purchase is positively related to brand attitude ($^{2}=.224, p<.01$), as illustrated by the convex line in Figure 1. An interaction term (time x family x peer) is also negatively related to brand attitude ($^{2}=.231, p=.02$). The three variables (time, time^2, time x family x peer) account for 11.4% of the variance in brand attitude in this regression model. Hence, brand attitude is curvilinearly related to time since purchase, with the strongest effect occurring for those who made recent purchases and the least for those who made distant purchases.

#### Interactions.

As anticipated, a three-way interaction (F=4.4, p=.02) emerged between family influence (low/high), peer influence (low/high) and purpose (functional/hedonic), supporting H1 in this study. The interaction is driven primarily by the combined effects of high family influence and high peer influence on the purchase of automobiles used primarily for functional purposes, representing the poorest attitude (34.0) toward the brand of vehicle owned. Conversely, individuals who bought vehicles primarily for hedonic purposes with little family or peer influence reported the most positive attitudes (43.3) toward the brand of car/truck that they owned.

Individuals who have negative brand attitudes are good candidates for trade-ins after their auto loan is paid off. Hence, those who keep their cars longer than four years are likely to have relatively positive brand attitudes. Consequently, a modified 2 X 2 X 2 model examining only those who made automobile purchases within the past four years reveals a three-way interaction (F=3.90, p=.05) between family influence (low/high), peer influence (low/high) and time since purchase (recent/distant). A dramatic difference exists between those who were subject to heavy family and peer influence in a recent (within past 12 months) purchase (45.8) and those whose purchase decision was more distant (13-48 months ago), but heavily influenced by family and peers (33.0).

#### Curvilinear analysis.

Figure 1 represents the curvilinear relationship between brand attitude and time since purchase for those subjects whose last purchase was within the previous 72 months. Time since purchase is negatively related with brand attitude ($^{2}=.224, p<.01$). The quadratic form of time since purchase is positively related to brand attitude ($^{2}=.224, p<.01$), as illustrated by the convex line in Figure 1. An interaction term (time x family x peer) is also negatively related to brand attitude ($^{2}=.231, p=.02$). The three variables (time, time^2, time x family x peer) account for 11.4% of the variance in brand attitude in this regression model. Hence, brand attitude is curvilinearly related to time since purchase, with the strongest effect occurring for those who made recent purchases and the least for those who made distant purchases.

#### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3-Way Interaction (F=4.40, p=.02, $^{2}=.03$)</th>
<th>Low Family Influence</th>
<th>High Family Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional Purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low peer influence</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High peer influence</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hedonic Purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low peer influence</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High peer influence</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>41.4</td>
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<th><strong>Main Effect</strong></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time since purchase (F=3.69, p=.03, $^{2}=.02$)</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Covariate</strong></th>
<th>Price range: $800-$49,000, x = $14,550</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-Way Interaction (F=3.20, p=.05, $^{2}=.03$)</td>
<td>Low Family Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low peer influence</td>
<td>45.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>High peer influence</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years 2-4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low peer influence</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High peer influence</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
attitudes decrease at an increasing rate (exacerbated by the coincidence of family and peer influence) before increasing after four years from purchase.

Less variance exists in brand attitudes in the first few months following purchase within this sample, but brand attitudes become more dispersed after the first year. Thus, although subjects initial brand attitudes are not equivalent, the data suggest that they are relatively similar (e.g., high) close to the point of purchase.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The findings of the first and second study support the premise that family and peer influence may produce relatively positive initial brand attitudes, but that in many cases time appears to wound all heels. That is, as time passes since the initial purchase, individuals tend to have less positive brand attitudes than do those who made recent similar purchases. The findings suggest that the shortcomings of the brand and/or the shortcomings afforded by the information or normative social influence of family or friends are assessed over the passing of time and may lead to deteriorating brand attitudes. At the same time, individuals may be apt to attribute poor decisions to the presence or influence of others. In any case, comparing the attitudes of those heavily influenced by family and peers in a purchase decision with those who report making more independent decisions reveals more positive brand attitudes held by the latter.

**Pedagogy.** Treatments of social influence in marketing literature, particularly consumer behavior and marketing management texts, typically assign no valence to using social influence as a means to complete marketing exchanges. The findings of these studies indicate that a long-term risk may exist in using this route of persuasion. In keeping with self-determination theory, the data suggest that the brand is most likely to be enhanced in the mind of an individual when s/he believes the purchase decision was made based on his or her own will and competency. From a relationship marketing standpoint, the seller’s appeal to one’s family or peers to influence or reinforce a purchase decision could potentially harm the relationship. Given that brand attitude is strongly related to purchase behavior, a weakened brand attitude will lead to a weaker seller-buyer relationship.

**Buying cycle and post-purchase attitudes.** The relationship between passing of time since purchase and brand attitude found in Study 2 offers interesting context-specific implications. As Figure 1 shows, time2 intersects time just after 48 months, or at the time when a typical car loan expires. Buyers’ brand attitudes appear to decline up until the point of deciding if they are going to get a new car or not after paying off their loan. This data shows that those who have kept their cars beyond 48 months have more positive brand attitudes than those whose car purchases were within the past 12-48 months, and begin to approach the level of brand attitudes of those whose purchases were made within the past 12 months. An obvious explanation for the curvilinear effect seen here is that those who decide to keep their vehicle beyond 4 years are those who have maintained relatively positive attitudes. Alternately, some individuals may conclude that they cannot afford (or prefer not) to purchase a new vehicle and then compensate to reduce cognitive tension by upgrading their opinion of the vehicle they are still driving (“This car isn’t so bad after all. At least it’s paid for.”).

From a broader perspective, marketers must recognize the typical customer buying cycle for a product/service and seek to build brand equity that will lead to repatronage during that time. Information systems that collect customer-specific data regarding purchase decision criteria to be used in follow-up marketing communications to (a) reinforce key product/service characteristics and (b) determine quality expectation gaps in need of remedy would be an avenue of maintaining positive brand attitudes. For those individuals who were heavily influenced by family and friends to make a purchase, follow-up communications that seek to convert the buyer may be necessary to achieve repatronage. From a segmentation standpoint, it may be useful for sellers to recognize that a segment of their current customers (if brand selection was heavily influenced by family and friends) may have attitudes more similar to non-customers.

**Functional vs. Hedonic Selling Contexts.** The findings of the second study indicate that the selling situation may dictate the most effective means to building and keeping brand preference. High family and peer influence in the more hedonic purchase resulted in a relatively high brand attitude (41.4) compared to high family and peer influence for a more functional purchase (34.0). Interestingly, those who make functional brand choices influenced by family or friends have nominally lower brand attitudes (40.3 and 40.5, respectively) than that held by those who report being influenced by neither family nor friends. The same pattern is seen in the 3-way interaction with time, family, and peer influence. Thus, it may be that such purchases represent brand selections that were meant to please family and friends, but that ultimately please no one—or at least not the buyer. Brand choices meant to please one group (family or friends) may produce less conflict and relatively less internal conflict.

In general, sellers of functional products and services may do best to steer the individual to choices that s/he personally prefers, with less deference to family and friends. Appeals relative to “this [car] has what you wanted” and “you’ve made a good choice” rather than “others will approve” and “your spouse and kids will like it” are apt to generate stronger brand attitudes since they enhance feelings of autonomy and competency.

**Reframing purchase decisions.** In Study 2, those who made hedonic purchases and reported little influence by family or friends hold the most positive brand attitudes. Some purchases may be more functional than hedonic for most individuals (e.g., oil change). Yet, in more ambiguous person/product/situations, persuasive attempts to frame the decision for the individual to independently recognize hedonic benefits (“This family sedan has 282 horsepower and goes 0-60 in 6.8 seconds.”) in what might otherwise be a more functional purchase may lead to more positive brand attitudes. Further, even in the most functional of purchases, the purchase context may be repositioned to offer hedonic benefits that help maintain brand attitudes (viz., O’Curry and Strahtilevitz 2001). An express lube operator may offer spacious waiting areas with comfortable chairs, television, and quality snacks while customers get their oil change that makes the visit pleasant to the individual, even if the individual is carrying out the functional purchase under the influence of his/her spouse. In sum, generating hedonic brand benefits to the individual buyer is likely to result in relatively lasting, positive brand attitudes.

**Limitations and Future Research**

We relied upon individuals’ reports of social influence at the initial purchase, inferring attribution behavior in a between-subjects design. The subjects were primarily young (under 30 years old) and within a single region or subculture, such that we are unable to extrapolate these findings across age groups and cultures. Within-subjects extensions of this research would benefit from a longitudinal design across a wider typology of subjects. Gathering brand attitude data at the point of purchase would provide a benchmark to measure deviations from initial brand attitudes over time. Examining the role of social influence in other sample frames covering a broader cross-section of individuals (viz., age, culture, gender, etc.) would aid in the generalizability of these results.
Future research examining the role of group influences (e.g., identification) may offer insight into social situations where that influence helps to maintain brand attitudes over time. Research that compares and contrasts the role of different sources of social influence (informational, normative, group identification) for different product purchases (e.g., functional/hedonic) may shed light on appropriate methods of persuasion in different contexts.

REFERENCES