Signaling to the Self and Others: Selective Use of and Connection With Brands

Danielle J. Brick, Duke University, USA
Tarje Gaustad, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1509969/volumes/v40/NA-40

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Signaling to the Self and Others: 
Selective Use of and Connection with Brands

Chairs: Danielle J. Brick, Duke University, USA
Tarje Gaustad, BI Norwegian Business School, USA

Paper #1: As Income Rises So Too Does Our Connection to “Tide”
Danielle J. Brick, Duke University, USA
Gavan J. Fitzsimons, Duke University, USA
Tanya L. Chartrand, Duke University, USA

Paper #2: Benefits Offered by High-End Counterfeits Influence Intentions to Purchase Counterfeits – The Role of Self-Presentation
Gülen Sarial-Abi, Koc University, Turkey
Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, Koc University, Turkey

Alison Jing Xu, University of Toronto, Canada
Shirley Y. Y. Cheng, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong
Tiffany Barnett White, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Paper #4: Identity Change: The Effects of Actual and Ideal Self-Brand Connections on Consumers’ Response to Brand Image Change
Tarje Gaustad, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway
Bendik M. Samuelsen, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway
Luk Warlop, BI Norwegian Business School / KU Leuven, Norway
Gavan J. Fitzsimons, Duke University, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW

Individuals use brands to construct their self-concepts and their identities. Once individuals have incorporated their brands into their self-image, individuals often use these brands as signals to others. These signals often function as status symbols. However, the use of brands as signals may also function as self-verification or self-enhancement tools (Escalas and Bettman 2003). In this session we explore beyond the many ways individuals use brands as signals to others. We examine ways in which individuals use brands as signals to themselves, and by doing so fulfill needs, including relational, functional, and identity relevant. In the first part of the session we examine how individuals use brands commonly thought of as status symbols to fulfill other, more basic needs. We then examine the ways in which individuals, who have fulfilled identity needs by incorporating brands into their self-image, react to a threat to the brand. Taken together, these papers present a novel, multicultural picture of the antecedents and consequences of the selective use of brands as a means of need fulfillment.

In the first part of the session, we examine situations in which many would expect brands to be used merely as status signals to others and yet, instead, are also being used to fulfill other, basic needs. In the first paper, Brick, Fitzsimons and Chartrand explore how wealthy individuals are using their favorite brands not to demonstrate their wealth, but rather to serve as relationship partners. Although many individuals often associate high-end, luxurious brands with the wealthy, they find that wealthy individuals report stronger brand relationships with brands that are less expensive, less publicly consumed and more likely to be consumer packaged goods.

They also find that it is connection with these brands that contributes to the strong brand relationships.

In the second paper, Sarial-Abi and Gürhan-Canli examine another, related area in their examination of who purchases high-end counterfeits. Intuitively, one might think that high-end counterfeits are only used as self-enhancement signals. However, Sarial-Abi and Gürhan-Canli find that this is not always the case, and that high-end counterfeits can fulfill other, practical needs. They examine how the functional and symbolic benefits offered by high-end counterfeits influence purchasing intentions, and that self-presentation goals determine on which aspects of the product individuals will place the most value.

Next, we move to consequences of the use of brands as a signal, particularly once those brands have been used to fulfill an identity-relevant need. Once individuals have incorporated brands into their identity, threats to the brand, including brand failure or changes in brand image, may be felt as a threat to the self. Xu, Cheng, and White support this theory in the third paper by their examination of the consequences of brand failure on self-esteem and subsequent attempts to restore the “shaken” self-view. They show that after a brand threat, consumers with high (but not low) self-brand connections are more motivated to pursue salient goals in an effort to correct the threat to their self-esteem.

Finally, Gaustad, Samuelsen, Warlop, and Fitzsimons expound upon the role that a change in the brand image can have on one’s esteem in their paper. In particular, they show that highly connected consumers experience brand and self-identity threat, not only as a result of the introduction of new traits to a brand image, but also, counter intuitively, as a result of reinforcement of current traits. The threat response is contingent upon the degree to which the brand primarily relates to consumers’ actual or ideal self.

Besides offering an in-depth view, through the examination of antecedents and consequences, of the selective use of brands, this session also offers a broad view of this topic through the inclusion of multi-cultural studies. Submitters represent schools from a variety of nations, and this variety creates a large, diverse sampling population. As a result, this session presents a number of theoretical and practical contributions appealing to a broad audience, and should attract researchers with interests in topics as far ranging as consumer-brand relationships, goal pursuit, social identity, behavioral predictions (including charitable giving), and life satisfaction. In sum, this session has implications for a large, multicultural audience, and will further the conference’s mission of appreciating diversity.

All speakers (Brick, Sarial-Abi, White, and Gaustad) have agreed to participate if the proposal is accepted. Of note, all papers in this session are advanced and extensive data collection, including multiple studies for each paper, has been completed. We anticipate allowing 15 minutes for each presentation and 15-20 minutes of discussion regarding the session topic and individual presentations.
As Income Level Rises,
So Too Does Our Connection with “Tide”

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Individuals use brands to signal identity and self-concept; individuals also use brands as self-verification and self-enhancement tools (Escalas and Bettman 2003). As such, one might think wealthy individuals would be most loyal to high-end, luxury brands that, in effect, serve as status verification and self-enhancement signals to the self and others. However, we find this is not the case. Instead, we argue, that wealthier individuals are using brands for another reason—to serve as relationship partners. Instead of signaling status to others or even to themselves, wealthier individuals are choosing and using brands that fulfill basic relationship needs. As a result, wealthier individuals form stronger brand relationships, the strength of which is mediated by self-brand connection.

Why might wealthier individuals form stronger brand relationships? Past research has demonstrated that having money makes people more self-sufficient, less likely to turn to others for support (Vohs, Meade and Goode 2006), and that the mere presence of money can make people more distant, cold, and less willing to help others (Vohs, Meade and Goode 2008). These effects extend beyond the immediate context; higher socioeconomic status has been associated with signs of weaker social connections (Kraus and Keltner 2009). As the need for social relationships is fundamental to human psychology (Baumeister and Leary 1995), we argue that instead of turning to others, wealthier individuals are turning to their brands to fulfill this need. They are developing stronger brand relationships than less wealthy individuals, who are more likely to form stronger interpersonal relationships (Kraus, Côté and Keltner 2010).

In a first study, we examined whether wealthier individuals form stronger brand relationships and the types of brands they are forming these relationships with. Although there have been a few scales designed to measure relationship quality (e.g., Park, Kim and Kim 2009), some of these scales are relatively long and most do not contain all of the characteristics commonly found in interpersonal relationships we intended to study. Therefore, in order to test brand relationship strength we devised a Brand Relationship Measure for this study. The seven-item measure ($a=0.87$) was rated on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) scale. In order to evaluate the brands individuals were reporting on, two independent coders rated each of the brands reported on several characteristics (interrater reliability $a=.98$). If they are fulfilling an intrinsically-motivated, fundamental relationship need, we hypothesized the brands to which wealthier individuals are reporting as being most loyal would not be expensive, “keeping up with the Joneses” brands, often associated with social jockeying (Christen and Morgan 2005) or status signals. Instead, we hypothesized these brands would be less expensive, more privately consumed, and more likely to be consumer packaged goods (CPGs) than the brands to which less wealthy individuals are reporting as being most loyal.

One hundred six individuals ($N=71$ females, $Mage=41.2$ years, $SDage=13.5$) from an online source participated in this study. In line with our hypothesis, we found that wealthier individuals, as characterized by income, report a significantly stronger brand relationship with their brands. Providing additional support that wealthier individuals are forming relationships with brands that are not serving as a status signal, the brands wealthier individuals reported were significantly less expensive, less publically consumed, and more CPGs than less wealthy individuals.

Study 2 sought to replicate the findings from study 1 that wealthier individuals form stronger brand relationships, and also to explore our prediction that connection with the brand mediates the effect. One hundred one individuals were recruited and participated in this study from an online source ($N=68$ females, $Mage=35.7$ years, $SDage=13.8$). We used the same Brand Relationship Measure from study 1, and in order to test connection with the brand, we used Escalas and Bettman’s (2003) self-brand connection scale.

Replicating our initial findings, individuals with greater wealth, as measured by income level, reported significantly stronger brand relationships. Next, we examined our contention that connection with the brands mediates the effects of wealth on brand relationships. In line with our hypothesis, wealth significantly and positively predicted self-brand connection. Furthermore, brand connection positively predicted relationship strength. When self-brand connection is added to the model predicting wealth on the brand relationship measure, self-brand connection remains a significant predictor, but wealth is no longer significant. In order to test whether connection with the brand mediates the effect of wealth on brand relationship strength, we used a 5,000 resamples bootstrapping approach (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The bootstrapping technique did not contain zero, suggesting connection with the brand mediates the relationship between wealth and brand relationship strength.

Study 3 enhances the above findings by manipulating perceptions of wealth, and then asking participants to report on their brand relationships and connection with their brands. Supporting our hypothesis we find that individuals who feel wealthier report significantly stronger brand relationships, and that this is again mediated by connection with the brand. In study 4, we provide further evidence that wealthier individuals are not using their brands just to signal status to others or themselves. We again manipulate perceptions of wealth, but in this study we introduce a new set of brands and measure strength of the brand relationship and connection with the new brand. In addition, we expand upon the prior studies by evaluating the effects of the prior findings on consumer behavior outcomes. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Benefits Offered by High-End Counterfeits Influence Intentions to Purchase Counterfeits—The Role of Self-Presentation

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
In today’s economy, counterfeits are estimated to account for 7% of the whole world trade (World Customs Organization 2004). Previous research mainly investigates why consumers buy cheap knockoffs of the genuine brands (Wilcox et al. 2009). However, with increased technology, a new generation of counterfeits is emerging that is often more convincing than the cheap knockoffs with much higher prices (Holmes 2011). In this research, we investigate who would buy these high-end counterfeits and why.

Counterfeiting: Demographic factors influence intentions to purchase counterfeits. For example, females are more likely to be heavy buyers of counterfeit clothing and accessories (Cheung and Prendergast 2006). Social factors such as the presence of a friend buying a counterfeit influence one’s intention to buy counterfeits (Penz and Stöttinger 2005). Product and brand-related factors such as the selling price also enhances willingness to buy counterfeits (Lau 2006).

Functional Versus Symbolic Benefits: Individuals buy things for what they can do with them and for what those things mean to them (Keller 1993). Brand features or brand associations refer to attributes or benefits that consumers link to a brand and that, in their
minds, differentiate it from competitors (Dillon et al. 2001). Extant literature has focused on functional benefits (Domzal and Kernan 1992), as well as symbolic benefits offered by brands (Drolet and Aaker 2002).

Functional benefits are related to the more intrinsic aspects of product consumption and usually correspond to product attributes. High-end counterfeits offer high functional benefits. For example, they are made of high-quality materials, which increase their durability (Holmes 2011). On the other hand, symbolic benefits are related to the extrinsic advantages of product consumption. They usually correspond to non-product-related attributes and relate to underlying needs for social approval and personal expression (Park et al. 1986). Because symbolic benefits relate to underlying needs for social approval and personal expression, individuals who have high need for self-presentation should be more likely to purchase high-end counterfeits. However, are individuals who have low need for self-presentation ever likely to purchase high-end counterfeits?

Self-Presentation: Self-presentation is the goal-directed process of people controlling information about the self to influence the impression others form of them (Schlenker et al. 1996). Social actions required for self-presentation are consumption-oriented and depend upon individuals’ brands (Williams and Bendelow 1998). Consumers may self-persent by purchasing high-end counterfeits because counterfeits help them create identities and impress others (Hoe et al. 2003). This suggests that individuals who have high need for self-presentation should be more likely to purchase high-end counterfeits when these counterfeits offer them symbolic benefits. However, they should be less likely to purchase high-end counterfeits if these counterfeits offer them high functional benefits (e.g., quality) but low symbolic benefits (e.g., no logo).

Individuals who have low need for self-presentation are less concerned with impressing other people. Because they are less concerned with impressing others, what they expect from a brand is more likely to be related to the functional benefits. Given the possibility that some high-end counterfeits may offer as many functional benefits as the original brands, these individuals who need low self-presentation should be more likely to purchase high-end counterfeits when these counterfeits offer them symbolic benefits. However, they should be less likely to purchase high-end counterfeits if these counterfeits offer high functional benefits (e.g., quality) but low functional benefits.

Study 1 (N=100): Participants first received the self-presentation manipulation. Afterwards, they randomly received the functional and symbolic benefits manipulations. Dependent variables and control variables were then measured.

An ANOVA on intentions to purchase counterfeits yielded a significant self-presentation by benefits interaction (F(1, 96) = 13.26, p < .001). Participants who have high (vs. low) need for self-presentation have higher intentions to purchase counterfeits when they think about symbolic brand benefits (3.76 vs. 2.43; F(1, 96) = 7.9, p < .05). On the other hand, participants who have low (vs. high) need for self-presentation have higher intentions to purchase counterfeits when they think about functional brand benefits (3.22 vs. 1.89; F(1, 96) = 7.82, p < .05).

Study 2 (N=200): Participants first received the self-presentation manipulation. Afterwards, they randomly received the functional and symbolic benefits manipulations. The order of the benefits manipulations was counterbalanced. Dependent variables and control variables were then measured.

An ANOVA on intentions to purchase counterfeits revealed a significant three-way interaction of self-presentation, functional benefits, and symbolic benefits (F(1, 192) = 5.56, p < 0.05). When functional benefits are high, individuals who have low (vs. high) need for self-presentation are more likely to purchase high-end counterfeits if these counterfeits offer low symbolic benefits (3.96 vs. 2.89, F(1, 192) = 7.24, p < .05). However, intentions to purchase high-end counterfeits did not vary as a function of low (vs. high) need for self-presentation when high-end counterfeits offer high functional and symbolic benefits (3.74 vs. 3.82, F(1, 192) = .13, p > .72).

Moreover, when functional benefits of high-end counterfeits are low, individuals who have low (vs. high) need for self-presentation are less likely to purchase high-end counterfeits if these products offer high symbolic benefits (2.72 vs. 3.86, F(1, 192) = 7.69, p < .05). However, intentions to purchase high-end counterfeits did not vary as a function of low (vs. high) need for self-presentation when high-end counterfeits offer low functional and symbolic benefits (2.61 vs. 2.53, F(1, 192) = .12, p > .73).

General Discussion: In this research, we extend the literature on intentions to purchase counterfeits by examining high-end counterfeits specifically. Second, we extend the literature by demonstrating that functional and symbolic benefits offered by high-end counterfeits influence purchase intentions. Finally, we demonstrate that those individuals who have low need for self-presentation are also likely to purchase high-end counterfeits when these counterfeits offer them functional benefits. Focusing on how improvements in functional (vs. symbolic) benefits offered by high-end counterfeits influences brands’ long-term profitability would be an important research focus. More research with different methodologies is required to understand the impact of counterfeit consumption on consumers.

Taking More Money and Donating More Money: The Influence of Self-Threat on Goal-Pursuit

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Believing that the self is a capable and lovable person is a basic human need (Branden 1969) and is essential to individuals’ subjective wellbeing (Taylor and Brown 1988). However, it seems inevitable for us to encounter incidents that threaten this belief, even in consumption contexts. For example, consumers may feel shame about their appearance when they view an ad featuring attractive models (Gulas and McKeage 2000) or feel incompetent when they realize that they paid more than others for an identical item (Argo, White, and Dahl 2006). Having a favorite brand could also be a source of self-threat when the beloved brand fails (Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). For those who want to be unique, realizing one’s favorite brand is also liked by a large number of consumers could also pose a threat (Imak, Vallen, and Sen 2010).

Of course, human beings are not passive victims of various threats. In response to these threatening incidents, individuals are often motivated to restore a positive self-view through biased information processing or biased attributions (for a review, see Sherman and Cohen 2006). Unfortunately, many of these defensive responses are maladaptive because they promote an inaccurate understanding of the self and the world. We propose and test a beneficial consequence of experiencing self-threat. Specially, we suggest that self-threat can elicit a general motivation that urges people to pursue salient goals that they consider to be important. Moreover, pursuing important goals can boost individuals’ threatened self-esteem.

Experiment 1 was a 2 (Self Threat: Threat vs. No-Threat) x 2 (Salient Goals: Help Others vs. Pursue Self-Interest) between-participant design. Self-threat was manipulated using a RAT task and the salient goal was manipulated through participating in either a “Buyer-Seller Game” (the “self-interest” condition) or a “Donor-Donee Game” (the “help others” condition). The results of Experi-
ment 1 are consistent with our hypothesis that self-threat motivates individuals to pursue the goal that was made salient by the context (significant goal by self-threat interaction, $F (1, 75) = 6.06, p < .02$). Significant planned contrasts revealed that when the goal to pursue self-interest was made salient in the Seller-Buyer Game, self-threat increased the amount of money that participants decided to keep for themselves ($M_{\text{threat}} = 9.00$ vs. $M_{\text{no threat}} = 7.96$). However, when the goal to help others was made salient by the Donor-Donee Game, self-threat increased the amount of money that participants decided to give to others themselves ($M_{\text{threat}} = 4.73$ vs. $M_{\text{no threat}} = 6.06$). Moreover, even though the manipulation of self-threat decreased participants’ self-esteem, this effect was completely eliminated following successful goal pursuit.

Experiment 2 used a 2 (Self Threat: Threat vs. No threat) × 3 (Salient Goals: Saving Money vs. Spending Money on Luxurious Products vs. control) between-subjects design. Participants were given an opportunity to pursue a more important goal (i.e., saving money; $M_{\text{importance}} = 6.06$) or a less important goal (i.e., spending money on luxury products; $M_{\text{importance}} = 3.93$). When the goal was [not] important, threatened participants [did not] save[d] a greater amount of money than did control participants (threat × goal importance interaction = $F (1, 201) = 4.40, p < .04$). Moreover, only pursuing important an goal was self-affirming.

In Experiments 4 and 5, we induced self-threat exposing participants to negative brand information for brands with for which they had a high vs. low self-brand connection (SBC). Cheng, White, and Chaplin (2012) found that consumers with high self-brand connections to certain brands experienced a threat to their positive self-view upon receiving negative brand information. Extending these findings, we suggest that negative brand information should motivate high SBC consumers to pursue irrelevant goals (e.g., helping others) that are made salient by the situation. To test this possibility, we used the brand Adidas, which was one of the major business sponsors of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. After getting information about Adidas’ sponsorship, participants read either a negative commentary or a neutral commentary on this sponsorship. In Experiment 4, we found a significant brand information × SBC interaction ($\beta = .49, t = 2.46, p < .02$). Simple slope analysis revealed that when participants received negative information about Adidas, those who felt highly connected with the brand took more money for themselves ($\beta = .30; t = 2.01; p = .05$). However, when participants received neutral information about Adidas, the effects of SBC on the amount money that participants took was not significant ($\beta = -.26; t = -1.54; p > .10$).

In Experiment 5, we manipulated self-threat by providing negative brand information about Blackberry to high vs. low SBC respondents and measured their willingness to donate to UNICEF. As expected, the effect of SBC on the amount of donation was significant ($\beta = .51, t = 2.86, p < .02$), indicating that when participants received negative information about Blackberry, those who were highly connected to the brand donated more money to UNICEF. We also measured self-esteem in this study. As expected, receiving negative information about Blackberry decreased participants’ self-esteem when they were highly connected to the brand Blackberry. Moreover, it appears that this self-threat motivated participants to donate more to charity, which, in turn, boosted (restored) their self-esteem.

Conclusion. Individuals often take actions to self-affirm following threats to their positive self-view. We propose that: 1) self-threat can cultivate a general motivation to pursue salient goals; 2) this tendency could lead to behaviors with divergent implications when opposing goals are activated; and 3) goal importance moderates this effect. We tested the implications of this framework in the context of self-brand connections; we show that negative brand information poses a self-threat to consumers with a high self-brand connection (but not to those with a low self-brand connection) and motivates them to pursue the goals highlighted in the subsequent situation. In particular, following exposure to negative brand information, high SBC consumers donated more money when the goal to help was made salient, yet took more money when the salient goal was to pursue self-interest.

Identity Change: The Effects of Actual and Ideal Self-Brand Connections on Consumers’ Response to Brand Image Change

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In contrast to the extant literature (MacInnis et al. 2009), we investigate a potential disadvantage of strong of consumer-brand bonds. Consumers sometimes incorporate brands into their self-concept to construct and/or signal identity (self-brand connection, Escalas and Bettman 2003). We argue that for those consumers who have incorporated the brand into their self-concept, change in brand image can represent an identity-threat. Consumers cope with this threat, not only by reacting negatively to the change, but also by reducing their felt brand connection.

Study 1 applies brand acquisitions as the context. We propose that consumers’ reactions to an acquisition are contingent on whether or not it changes target brand image. Further, we expect self-brand connection to moderate this effect. Since strongly connected consumers incorporate the brand in their self-concept, a change in brand image is a forced change in the self and represents an identity-threat. Thus, we expect these consumers to reduce their connection if brand image change.

Seventy undergraduate students participated in a 2 (no change/change) × self-brand connection (measured) mixed design experiment. First, we measured attitude and self-brand connection to Nike and other filler brands. Then (one hour later), participants read a newspaper article about the acquisition of Nike. The acquirer was a fictitious venture capital company. Statements in the article manipulated no change/change in brand personality due to the acquisition. We conducted multiple regressions with the experimental conditions (no change/change), self-brand connection (continuous), and their interaction as independent variables.

The results showed an interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection on attitude to the acquisition ($\beta=-.40, t=-2.44, p<.02$) and, more interestingly, also on both change in attitude ($\beta=-.38, t=-2.03, p<.05$) and change in self-brand connection ($\beta=-.26, t=-.194, p=.057$) to the target brand. Investigations of the interactions confirmed the predicted significance of slopes, as well as contrasts between no change/change at high levels of self-brand connection.

The results indicate that consumers react more negatively to change in brand image the greater connection they have with the brand. Further, strongly connected consumers experience brand image change as a threat to their self and withdraw from the brand relationship.

The first experiment investigated brand image change through the introduction of new traits. However, brand image can also change by reinforcement of existing traits. There is some evidence that consumers are reluctant to enhance existing traits that are fundamental to their self-concept (Riis et al. 2008). Hence, we expect consumers with strong self-brand connection to react negatively to every devia-
tion from the existing brand image, even to reinforcement of existing salient traits.

Based on pretests, we chose ‘Diesel’ as the target brand for study 2. The traits most strongly associated with Diesel were rugged, tough, masculine and daring (pretest). We therefore used these strongly associated traits to examine reactions to change through reinforcement of established traits. Except for the use of established (vs. new) traits, the procedure was similar to study 1. Thirty-six undergraduate students completed the study.

Multiple regression revealed an interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection on attitude to the acquisition ($\beta=-.71$, $t=-2.70$, $p<.02$), as well as on change in attitude ($\beta=-.68$, $t=-2.05$, $p<.05$) and change in self-brand connection ($\beta=-.37$, $t=-2.51$, $p<.02$). Investigations of the interactions confirmed the predicted significance of slopes, as well as contrasts at low and high levels of self-brand connection.

The results indicate that strongly connected consumers react negatively and show threat response, not only to introduction of new traits, but also to change through reinforcement of existing brand associations. Next, we investigate whether this effect is valid for all brand connections or whether it depends on which part of the self-concept the brand primarily connects (actual or ideal self).

In study 3, we investigate the hypothesis that whether the brand is primarily connected to consumers’ actual or ideal self influences reactions to brand image change. We hypothesize that for consumers’ feeling congruence between their actual self and the brand, all brand image changes are negative because they decrease the felt congruence between the self and the brand. However, for consumers feeling congruence between their ideal self and the brand, reinforcement of the existing brand image can be positive as it increases the brands ability to signal an ideal identity.

One hundred and seventy-two participants completed a survey on an online web panel (American participants age median = 35.1, 56 % females). First, we measured brand attitude, actual and ideal self-brand congruity, as well as brand personality. After some filler tasks, participants read a hypothetical scenario about the re-positioning and change in Nike’s brand image. Lastly, we measured participants’ attitudes to change in different personality traits of Nike.

We conducted multiple regressions with an index of attitude to change in the five most descriptive traits (based on the personality evaluation in the first part of the survey: successful, leader, winner, confident, and up-to-date) as a dependent measure, with degree of actual self-brand congruity (continuous) and degree of ideal self-brand congruity (continuous) as independent variables.

The results revealed a negative effect of actual self-brand congruency ($\beta=-.15$, $t=-2.16$, $p<.04$) and a positive effect of ideal self-brand congruency ($\beta=.26$, $t=4.65$, $p<.01$). The results indicate that consumers’ response to reinforcement of existing salient traits depends on whether the brand is connected to the consumers’ actual self or ideal self.

Overall, we find support for the hypothesis that consumers who use the brand to construct and/or signal their identity demonstrate identity-threat responses to brand image change. They are more negative to brand image change (than those who are less connected to the brand) and react by withdrawing from the relationship. We also demonstrate that if the connection is based on congruence between the actual self and the brand, all changes in brand image are perceived as negative. However, if the brand connection is based on congruence between the ideal self and the brand, changes through reinforcement of existing brand traits are perceived as positive.