

Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength: Conceptual and Empirical Differentiation of Two Critical Brand Equity Drivers

Research has not verified the theoretical or practical value of the brand attachment construct in relation to alternative constructs, particularly brand attitude strength. The authors make conceptual, measurement, and managerial contributions to this research issue. Conceptually, they define brand attachment, articulate its defining properties, and differentiate it from brand attitude strength. From a measurement perspective, they develop and validate a parsimonious measure of brand attachment, test the assumptions that underlie it, and demonstrate that it indicates the concept of attachment. They also demonstrate the convergent and discriminant validity of this measure in relation to brand attitude strength. Managerially, they demonstrate that brand attachment offers value over brand attitude strength in predicting (1) consumers' intentions to perform difficult behaviors (those they regard as using consumer resources), (2) actual purchase behaviors, (3) brand purchase share (the share of a brand among directly competing brands), and (4) need share (the extent to which consumers rely on a brand to address relevant needs, including those brands in substitutable product categories).

Keywords: brand management, consumer behavior, marketing strategy, brand attachment, attitude strength

Academic researchers and practitioners in marketing have shown significant interest of late in studying consumers' attachment to brands (Chaplin and John 2005; Fedorikhin, Park, and Thomson 2008; Park and MacInnis 2006; Park et al. 2009; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thomson 2006). As a construct that describes the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand, attachment is critical because it should affect behaviors that foster brand profitability and customer lifetime value (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). At the same time, marketers have long invoked the constructs of attitude valence and strength as key antecedents to consumer behavior. We define attitude valence as the degree of positivity or negativity with which an attitude object (in the current context, a brand) is evaluated. We conceptualize brand attitude strength as the positivity or negativity (valence) of an attitude weighted by the confidence or certainty with which it

is held (i.e., the extent to which it is considered valid; see Petty, Briñol, and DeMarree 2007). Strong attitudes result from effortful thought about the attitude object (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), most often because of its personal relevance. This effortful thought and the confidence with which the attitude object is held guide behavior. Prior research has shown that brand attitude strength predicts behaviors of interest to firms, including brand consideration, intention to purchase, purchase behavior, and brand choice (Fazio and Petty 2007; Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith 1995; Priester et al. 2004).

The rich history of research on brand attitude strength raises questions about the need for a construct such as brand attachment. Does attachment provide value beyond measures of brand attitude strength? The answer to this question is elusive because research to date has not verified how brand attachment and brand attitude strength differ conceptually or empirically. Nor has research differentiated what unique consumer behaviors, if any, each predicts.

The current research makes three key contributions pertinent to these issues. First, we differentiate the brand attachment construct from brand attitude strength conceptually, arguing that the two constructs have distinct conceptual properties and entail different formation processes. Second, we validate this distinction empirically, developing a novel scale that maps the conceptual properties of brand attachment and assessing its relationship to attitude strength. Third, and most significantly, we empirically demonstrate

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that attachment and attitude strength have distinct behavioral implications. Brand attachment more accurately predicts intentions to perform behaviors that use significant consumer resources (time, money, reputation). It is also a stronger predictor of actual consumer behaviors than brand attitude strength. We observe these effects in terms of consumer purchase behavior, brand purchase share (i.e., choice among directly competing brands), and need share (i.e., choice among brands targeting similar needs), even after controlling for consumer inertia (i.e., past behaviors) and other potential factors. Beyond their theoretical significance, the results have significant managerial implications, suggesting that brand attachment serves as the ultimate destination for customer-brand relationships. As far as we are aware, this is the first article to examine this diverse set of behavioral outcomes from brand attachment, and it is the first to demonstrate these effects in relation to attitude strength.

Conceptual Distinction Between Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength

Attachment

Although research has examined attachment in interpersonal contexts, research in marketing suggests that consumers can also develop attachments to marketplace entities, including product brands (Fournier 1998; Keller 2003; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), celebrities (Thomson 2006), and special possessions (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Kleine and Baker 2004). Notably, despite the growing popularity of the attachment construct, the conceptual properties of this construct remain elusive (Park, MacInnis, and Priester 2006, 2009).

Conceptual properties. We define brand attachment as the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self. Consistent with attachment theory (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007), this bond is exemplified by a rich and accessible memory network (or mental representation) that involves thoughts and feelings about the brand and the brand's relationship to the self. Two critical factors reflect the conceptual properties of brand attachment: brand-self connection and brand prominence.

Brand-self connection. The idea that attachment involves a bond (with the brand included as part of the self) suggests that a critical aspect of attachment involves the cognitive and emotional connection between the brand and the self, defined here and elsewhere as brand-self connection (Chaplin and John 2005; Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003). By categorizing the brand as part of the self, a consumer develops a sense of oneness with the brand, establishing cognitive links that connect the brand with the self. Though cognitive in its representation, this brand-self linkage is inherently emotional (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005), involving myriad and potentially complex feelings about the brand, including sadness and anxiety from brand-self separation, happiness and comfort from brand-self proximity,

and pride from brand-self display. Consumers can be connected to a brand because it represents who they are (e.g., an identity basis) or because it is meaningful in light of goals, personal concerns, or life projects (an instrumentality basis; Mittal 2006).

Brand prominence. In addition to brand-self connection, previous research suggests that the extent to which positive feelings and memories about the attachment object are perceived as top of mind also serves as an indicator of attachment. According to Mikulincer (1998) and Collins (1996), positive memories about the attachment object (another person) are more prominent for people who are highly attached to an attachment object than for people who show weak attachment. The notion that brand-self connections develop over time and through experience suggests that brand-related thoughts and feelings become part of a person's memory and vary in the perceived fluency or the ease with which they are brought to mind. We call this component "brand prominence": Prominence reflects the salience of the cognitive and affective bond that connects the brand to the self. This salience is reflected by the perceived (1) ease and (2) frequency with which brand-related thoughts and feelings are brought to mind. Thus, consumers' attachment in relation to two brands with the same degree of brand-self connection is greater for the brand that they perceive as more prominent.

Importance of both indicators. Brand-self connection is a core component of attachment because it centrally reflects the definition of attachment as the bond connecting a person with the brand. However, we suggest that the inclusion of brand prominence adds precision in measuring the "strength" of the bond connecting the brand with the consumer. This is so for two reasons.

First, when thoughts and feelings about the brand are highly accessible, prominence may exert a disproportionately strong influence on decision making (Alba and Marmorstein 1987) and, ultimately, on consumer purchase behavior (Akçura, Gönül, and Petrova 2004). Specifically, consumers for whom brand-self connection is high and for whom associations are also prominent may be more likely to engage in relationship-sustaining behaviors than those for whom the brand-self connection is high but prominence is low. This is true because the brand's prominence makes relationship-sustaining activities salient as well. Thus, there may be greater behavioral commitment in the form of brand loyalty and other behaviors (e.g., positive word of mouth; more time, money, and energy spent on relationship-sustaining behaviors) when both brand-self connection and prominence are high. This logic is also consistent with prior work (Akçura, Gönül, and Petrova 2004; Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986; Alba and Marmorstein 1987), which suggests that the prominence of feelings and thoughts can affect behavior by inhibiting recall of other thoughts and feelings (Alba and Chattopadhyay 1986). As relationship-sustaining activities become more prominent, relationship-inhibiting behaviors may be reduced.

Second, we noted previously that consumers can develop a strong brand-self connection because (1) the brand is part of a person's self-conception and/or (2) it has

instrumental value. The former emphasizes brand–self connections in terms of who a person is and a person’s identity. It might be expected that when brands are identity based (e.g., a person’s iMac is viewed as part of who he or she is and what he or she stands for), prominence is high because self-activation and brand activation co-occur. If so, adding prominence may add little to the assessment of attachment because prominence and brand–self connection covary. However, prominence may serve as an important indicator of attachment when consumers are connected to a brand because of its instrumental value (i.e., a person’s iMac is important in fulfilling entertainment- and work-related goals). That is, when a brand has instrumental value, attachment should be stronger when brand-related thoughts and feelings are more versus less prominent. As prominence increases, brand-related thoughts and feelings are part of everyday life tasks, making brand attachment stronger.

Brand attachment and emotions. Emotions are often evoked when attachment is strong because emotions are inherent to brand–self connection and prominence factors. Indeed, the emotional nature of attachment has led to a measure of attachment based purely on emotions. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park’s (2005) three-factor model characterizes brand attachment in terms of three emotional components: (1) affection (characterized by the emotion items “affectionate,” “loved,” “friendly,” and “peaceful”), (2) passion (characterized by the items “passionate,” “delighted,” and “captivated”), and (3) connection (characterized by the items “connected,” “bonded,” and “attached”).

First, although we agree that attachments are emotional, in contrast to Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005), the set of specific emotions underlying attachment is not central to our conceptualization (or measure) of attachment. Indeed, we are agnostic to the specific set of positive feelings linked to the brand. Feelings linked to brand–self connection and brand prominence could be numerous in type, and different feelings may be idiosyncratically linked to specific person–brand autobiographical meanings and their prominence. Such feelings could include those that Thomson, MacInnis, and Park note. However, they could also include joy, excitement, pride, contentment, relief, nostalgia, or any other feelings retrieved from brand–self memories.

Second, although passion may indeed characterize strong brand attachment as Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) suggest, the degree of passion linked to strong attachment may depend on the relationship’s evolutionary status. Research indicates that passion may wane as relationships progress (Ahuvia, Batra, and Bagozzi 2009). At the same time, relationship progression brings with it more brand–self experiences that should deepen the brand–self bond and enhance its salience. Thus, time may be associated with waning passion, but it may also be associated with enhanced attachment. Representing attachment based on passion may not fully capture all relationships characterized by strong attachment.

Third, attachment is more than emotions; it is reflected by mental representations (rich cognitive schemata) that include brand–self cognitions, thoughts, and autobiographical brand memories (Berman and Sperling 1994; Mikulin-

cer and Shaver 2007) that measures of emotions may not capture. As such, we do not include emotions as factors that indicate brand attachment. Instead, we reason that our two-factor model of attachment (brand–self connection and brand prominence) captures the emotions that accompany attachment.¹

Brand attachment and brand relationship quality. The brand attachment concept also shares some conceptual resemblance to Fournier’s (1998) seminal concept of brand relationship quality (BRQ). Both concepts propose similar outcomes (e.g., accommodations, devaluation of alternatives). Furthermore, Fournier’s concept includes brand–self connection as one of the six indicators of BRQ, assessing the “quality, depth, and strength” of a consumer’s relationship with a brand (Fournier 1998, p. 363). However, our measure is designed to reflect only the strength dimension as it pertains to brand–self connection. Moreover, BRQ is designed to accommodate a host of relationship types (e.g., best friends, kinships, dependencies, enslavements) and thus accommodates relationship types that can be positive, neutral, or negative. However, brand attachment neither specifies relationship type nor accommodates negative relationships.

Differentiating Brand Attachment from Brand Attitude Strength

Brand attachment and brand attitude strength share several similarities. Both are psychological constructs that reference a brand. Both involve assessments of “strength” (i.e., of the bond or the attitude). Both assume that high levels of their respective constructs are based on substantial processing regarding the brand. Both have implications for marketing-relevant consumption behaviors, such as brand purchase, repeat purchase, and willingness to recommend a brand. Moreover, we surmise that when consumers are strongly attached to a brand, they can also have a positive and strong attitude toward it. However, we regard brand attachment and brand attitude strength as distinct constructs because they differ in several fundamental respects.

First, the constructs differ in the nature of affect they implicate. Whereas attachment implicates “hot” affect from the brand’s linkage to the self (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007), strong brand attitudes reflect evaluations and “cold” affect (Cohen and Areni 1991) involving a judgment about the brand. This difference in affect has important implications for brand behaviors, as we discuss subsequently. In this sense, the constructs differ in their motivational power because attachment, unlike attitude strength, has emotional and self-implications that serve as more powerful drivers of behavior.

Second, although both constructs involve assessments of strength, the entity to which “strength” applies differs. With attachment, what is strong is the bond that connects the brand with the self. Bonds are stronger (1) as connections between the brand and the self become closer and (2)

¹Studies 2 and 3 compare our brand attachment measure with Thomson, MacInnis, and Park’s (2005) measure. Both studies strongly support the added value of the former over the latter. We do not report these results given space constraints.

as brand-related thoughts and memories become more prominent. With strong attitudes, what is strong is a person's judgment of the goodness or badness of the brand. Thus, with attachment, strength references the brand-self relationship. Such strength is indicated by the connection between the self and the brand and a *subjective* sense of brand prominence. With strong attitudes, strength references the attitude object and the confidence with which it is held. Such strength is often indicated by *objective* indicators of attitude accessibility. Moreover, the factors that lead to variation in strength differ. With strong brand attitudes, strength varies not as a function of brand-self connections or the prominence of brand thoughts but rather as a function of the confidence with which the judgment is rendered (Petty, Briñol, and DeMarree 2007).

Third, the constructs differ in their range of valence. Strong attitudes can range from positive to negative, such that attitude strength is conceptualized on a bipolar valence dimension. Thus, attitudes range from strong-positive to weak-positive to weak-negative to strong-negative. Positive and negative ends anchor the attitude strength continuum, and behavior is linked with either end of that continuum. In other words, just as strong positive attitudes predict behavior (e.g., purchase), strong negative attitudes also predict behavior (e.g., purchase avoidance). In contrast, attachments vary in strength from weak to strong. The opposite of strong attachment is weak attachment. What varies is not the valence of the attachment but rather the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self and its prominence.

Finally, whereas attachment is largely time dependent, brand attitude strength need not be. Specifically, attachment includes relationship-based working models (mental representations) that reflect prominent autobiographical and episodic memories pertaining to the self and the attachment object. Such models also include procedural knowledge about how the brand can regulate a person's emotions (Collins and Read 1994; Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). Such self-brand links develop over time (Mikulincer and Shaver 2003). In contrast, strong brand attitudes need not be time dependent. They are based on thoughtful processing (elaboration) and can be formed in a limited time. Because attachments develop over time while strong brand attitudes need not, attachment may reflect a more advanced stage of relationship development.

Predicting the Differential Impact of Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength

Having conceptually distinguished brand attachment from brand attitude strength, we now turn to understanding whether they predict different outcomes. This is a novel issue because prior research has not yet distinguished the differential effects each predicts. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) demonstrate that their measures of emotional attachment and attitude valence have distinct effects, with attachment better predicting brand loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium. However, their research does not study attitude strength. Because attitude strength is more closely tied to actual purchase behavior than attitude valence (Fazio 1995; Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith 1995; Priester et al. 2004), a more convincing case for the power

of attachment would be made if its impact were different from that of attitude strength.

Increasing research shows that attitude strength predicts purchase behavior, with the direction of the behavior (being inclined or disinclined toward purchase) varying as a function of whether attitude valence is strongly positive or strongly negative (Fazio 1995; Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith 1995). Most often studied are relatively simple behaviors, such as purchase intentions or product choice (Fazio, Powell, and Williams 1989; Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith 1995). We add to the literature by suggesting that within a given consumption context, behaviors can be conceptualized along a behavioral hierarchy that reflects their enactment difficulty. We conceptualize difficulty as the extent to which the behaviors expend economic, social, psychological, temporal, or physical resources. We use an extended version of self-expansion theory to develop these ideas. As we describe subsequently, our theorizing predicts novel behavioral outcomes that have not been linked with brand attachment or strong brand attitudes—specifically, intentions and actual behaviors, including actual purchase, brand purchase share, and need share. Self-expansion theory provides a basis for these predictions.

Self-Expansion Theory and Behaviors

Self-expansion theory (Aron et al. 2005) posits that people possess an inherent motivation for self-expansion, or a desire to incorporate others (here brands) into their conception of “self.” The more an entity (brand) is included in the self, the closer is the bond that connects them. Attachment develops over time as relationships between the self and the entity evolve. Over time, a cognitive reorganization takes place such that the self expands to include the entity. People develop a positive feeling of “oneness” with the entity (Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992) and tend to view the entity's resources as their own (Mittal 2006).

We add to self-expansion theory by proposing that consumers who are attached to brands are not just recipients of the brand's resources (i.e., consumers come to regard the brand's resources as their own); they also actively invest their own resources in the brand to maintain their brand relationship. Thus, consumers who are highly attached to a brand are more motivated to expend resources of their own in the process of self-expansion. Such resources include the allocation of (1) social resources, such as defending the brand to others and derogating alternatives (Johnson and Rusbult 1989); (2) financial resources, as evidenced by a willingness to pay a higher price for the brand (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005) or the willingness to devote a greater share of expenditures to the brand (rather than to other brands in the same or related product categories); and (3) time resources, as illustrated by involvement in brand communities and brand promotion through social media (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The more attached a person is to the brand, the more likely he or she is to move from an egocentric to a more reciprocal brand relationship that involves sharing resources with the brand. As such, consumers who are highly attached to a brand should treat the brand preferentially and engage in restorative behaviors that ensure brand relationship con-

tinuation (Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992; Aron et al. 2005; Mikulincer 1998).

Impact on Intentions to Perform Difficult Behaviors

We expect that consumers' intent to enact difficult behaviors along the behavioral hierarchy (those that use more of their own resources) is greater when attachment is strong (versus weak). This is so because a feeling of oneness is accompanied by hot affect, which is highly motivational (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). Because attached consumers view brands as part of themselves and have salient thoughts and feelings about the brand, they should be more willing to use greater resources of their own, resources that require the enactment of difficult behaviors to maintain that relationship. The greater the attachment, the more difficult the behavior the consumer is willing to enact to maintain the brand relationship. Attitude strength should be less able to predict these relationship-maintaining, -sustaining, and -restoring behaviors because the brand is not connected to the self and thus is less strongly linked to resource allocation for the purposes of sustaining a brand relationship. This novel extension of self-expansion theory leads us to predict the following:

H₁: Brand attachment is a better indicator of a consumer's intentions to perform difficult behaviors than brand attitude strength.

Impact on Actual Purchase Behavior

Whereas H₁ examines intentions, a long history of research shows that intentions and actions do not always correspond. This is because situational (e.g., brand unavailability), normative (e.g., social constraints), behavioral (e.g., habits), and financial (price increase) constraints may preclude people from actualizing intentions into behaviors (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Shepphard, Hartwick, and Warshaw 1988). When the behavior itself involves significant resources, enactment difficulty will be even higher. We posit that brand attachment acts as a stronger predictor of actual difficult-to-enact behaviors than strong brand attitudes. Strongly attached consumers incorporate a brand as part of their self and hold salient thoughts and feelings about it. On the basis of perceived oneness with a brand, consumers should be more motivated to enact relationship-sustaining behaviors that are difficult to perform than consumers with strong brand attitudes. Therefore, we predict the following:

H₂: Brand attachment is a better indicator of a consumer's actual purchase behavior than brand attitude strength.

Brand Purchase Share

We also expect that brand attachment better predicts a brand's purchase share, defined as the share of a brand among directly competing brands (i.e., if the number of competing brands a consumer purchases in a given product category is 0, the focal brand's purchase share is 100%). When consumers are strongly attached to a brand, competing brands will be less prominent and linked less strongly to the self. As a result, competing brands will be less likely to

be regarded as substitutes. Work in attachment theory and psychology indicates that people perceive attached objects as irreplaceable; other objects will not serve as substitutes (Bowlby 1980). Thus, a consumer who is strongly attached to a brand of running shoes (e.g., Nike) is less likely to use competing brands. In contrast, brand attitude strength does not necessarily have the same implications for brand purchase share. A person can have a strong positive attitude toward one brand while having a similar strong positive attitude toward another brand. Thus, we anticipate the following:

H₃: Brand attachment is a better indicator of brand purchase share (the share of a brand among directly competing brands) than brand attitude strength.

Need Share

We also expect that brand attachment better predicts the brand's share of use among substitutable alternatives, specifically, need share. For example, a consumer who is strongly attached to a brand of soft drinks is not only less likely to buy competing soft drinks but also less likely to buy other beverages (e.g., tea, coffee, water, juice). Likewise, a consumer who is attached to his or her iPhone may not only be more likely to allocate more monetary resources to it (than competing cell phone alternatives) but also be more likely to use the iPhone as a source of information and entertainment than use products from competing-needs categories (e.g., newspapers, television, magazines). The brands to which consumers are highly attached capture consumers' minds and hearts. Therefore, attached consumers are less likely to rely on alternatives, even in other categories that fill the same need. Thus, we predict the following:

H₄: Brand attachment is a better indicator of brand need share (the relative use of a brand compared with substitutable alternatives) than brand attitude strength.

Study 1: Measuring Brand Attachment

We developed a scale designed to map the conceptual properties of the brand attachment construct. We generated a set of items designed to tap brand-self connections and the prominence of brand thoughts and feelings. We generated ten indicators of attachment, five each for the brand-self connection and prominence components. Participants evaluated all items on 11-point scales anchored by "not at all" (0) and "completely" (10).

We analyzed consumers' responses to the ten-item scale using three different brands (Quaker Oats Oatmeal, Apple iPod, and a local university). Through exploratory factor analyses using oblique factor rotation, we reduced the ten-item scale to eight items. The full list of items constituting this scale and results pertinent to this pretest appears in Table 1.

Although the resultant eight-item scale (five items reflecting brand-self connection and three items representing brand prominence) is not unusually long for academic use, we wanted to develop a more parsimonious scale that would lend itself to marketing practice. Therefore, we selected items that best map the conceptual definition of the

TABLE 1
Study 1: Factor Loadings for the Two-Factor Model of Brand Attachment

Items	Three Different Stimuli					
	Quaker Oats Oatmeal		Apple iPod		University	
	Brand–Self Connection	Prominence	Brand–Self Connection	Prominence	Brand–Self Connection	Prominence
<i>To what extent is (brand name) part of you and who you are?</i>	.90	.37	.89	.48	.92	.52
<i>To what extent do you feel personally connected to (brand name)?</i>	.94	.39	.91	.51	.88	.53
To what extent do you feel emotionally bonded to (brand name)?	.92	.45	.90	.57	.91	.54
To what extent is (brand name) part of you?	.91	.41	.92	.54	.91	.48
To what extent does (brand name) say something to other people about who you are?	.75	.40	.75	.52	.84	.54
<i>To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward (brand name) often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?</i>	.41	.89	.57	.88	.56	.85
<i>To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward (brand name) come to your mind naturally and instantly?</i>	.46	.91	.53	.93	.52	.93
To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward (brand name) come to mind so naturally and instantly that you don't have much control over them?	.42	.90	.52	.91	.49	.92
To what extent does the word (brand name) automatically evoke many good thoughts about the past, present, and future?	.77	.52	.70	.74	.72	.70
To what extent to you have many thoughts about (brand name)?	.69	.61	.74	.60	.69	.63

Notes: Italicized items represent brand–self connection and prominence in the final attachment scale.

two attachment components based on statistical grounds (strong factor loadings and reliability tests). For brand–self connection, these items are as follows: (1) “To what extent is [Brand Name] part of you and who you are?” and (2) “To what extent do you feel that you are personally connected to [Brand Name]?” These items represent the identity and instrumentality bases of brand–self connection, respectively, that we described previously.

For brand prominence, the items are (1) “To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward [Brand Name] often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?” and (2) “To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward [Brand Name] come to you naturally and instantly?” These two items, which reflect myriad brand-relevant thoughts and feelings and the lack of control over their activation, capture the retrieval ease and frequency characteristic of brand prominence. Note that one of the two prominence measure items explicitly captures the frequency (“often”) of brand-related thoughts and feelings. We also phrased these two items to describe multiple (versus a single) thoughts and feelings, thus capturing the frequency aspect of brand prominence. The brand prominence measure does not distinguish

the valence of thoughts and feelings about a brand, because the distribution of positive versus negative feelings linked to the brand are reflected in the degree of brand–self connection.

Note that reducing the number of indicators (from eight to four) provides a more parsimonious scale without significant loss of reliability. Reduction also provides a more conservative test of our hypotheses.²

²To determine whether and to what extent the reduced set of items affected the reliability of each attachment component, we examined the change in alpha coefficient for the eight-item versus the more parsimonious four-item attachment scale. For brand–self connection, the alpha coefficients for the five-item scale were $\alpha = .95_{\text{oats}}$, $\alpha = .94_{\text{iPod}}$, and $\alpha = .95_{\text{university}}$, and the two-item scale coefficients were $\alpha = .92_{\text{oats}}$, $\alpha = .90_{\text{iPod}}$, and $\alpha = .86_{\text{university}}$. The alpha coefficients for the three-item brand prominence scale were $\alpha = .94_{\text{oats}}$, $\alpha = .94_{\text{iPod}}$, and $\alpha = .94_{\text{university}}$, and the two-item scale coefficients were $\alpha = .91_{\text{oats}}$, $\alpha = .90_{\text{iPod}}$, and $\alpha = .89_{\text{university}}$. We also compared Escalas and Bettman's (2003) seven-item brand–self connection measure ($\alpha = .96$) with our two-item scale ($\alpha = .95$) using a different sample of 221 respondents. Combined, these results reveal that reducing the number of indicators provides a parsimonious attachment scale that does not sacrifice reliability.

Study 2: Attachment and Attitude Strength as Distinct Constructs

We designed Study 2 to accomplish two things. First, we wanted to test the assumption that both brand–self connection and brand prominence are indicators of brand attachment. Second, we wanted to demonstrate that attachment and attitude strengths are empirically discriminable.

Method

Participants and design. One hundred eight undergraduate marketing students completed a booklet in exchange for partial course credit. The booklet asked respondents to report their thoughts and feelings toward Apple iPod. We administered the survey in a group setting (30–40 per group).

Measures. Participants provided all responses on 11-point scales anchored by “not at all” (0) and “completely” (10). We used the four-item brand attachment scale (for indicators of brand–self connection, $r = .91$; for indicators of brand prominence, $r = .71$). Two items measured separation distress: “To what extent would you be distressed if the iPod were discontinued?” and “To what extent is it difficult to imagine life without the iPod?” ($r = .82$).

We assessed brand attitude strength by attitude valence and a set of items regarded as corresponding with strength. Respondents indicated the extent to which they viewed the Apple iPod as “good” (+5) versus “bad” (–5) and “positive” (+5) versus “negative” (–5) and the extent to which they “liked it” (+5) versus “disliked it” (–5) ($\alpha = .73$). These items indicate attitude valence.³ Respondents used five additional items to rate the extent to which the Apple iPod is (1) important to them and (2) self-relevant, as well as the extent to which they (3) have thought about the brand, (4) are confident with their brand evaluation, and (5) are certain regarding their brand evaluation ($\alpha = .73$). These items are commonly used with attitude valence to indicate attitude strength (Krosnick et al. 1993).

We assessed brand attitude strength as a single-order factor reflecting the multiplicative product of attitude valence weighted by the confidence/certainty with which this attitude is held.⁴ The results are unchanged when all five aforementioned items are included. All subsequent analyses use only attitude certainty and confidence as indicators because the joint product of attitude valence weighted by confidence and certainty is most consistent with the conceptual definition of brand attitude strength (Briñol and Petty 2009). Notably, the results are similar when we assessed brand attitude strength (1) as the average of the items indicating attitude valence and confidence/certainty or (2) as a two-factor model with valence and confidence/certainty as separate second-order factors.

³We do not report the results for attitude valence in isolation, because (1) our focus is on attitude strength and (2) attitude strength is more likely to be empirically similar to attachment. Thus, focusing on attitude strength provides a more rigorous test of the unique effects of attachment.

⁴We converted the 0–10 scale to a 1–11 scale to avoid a statistical bias.

Test of Assumptions

Importance of the two-factor brand attachment model.

We conducted two confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) of the items representing attachment, one in which we allowed both the brand–self connection and the prominence factors to correlate ($r = .37$; $\chi^2(3) = 18.37$) and one in which we forced them to be perfectly correlated ($\chi^2(4) = 223.11$). The chi-square change ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 204.74$, $p < .001$) reveals that the first analysis fits the data better, confirming the two-factor attachment model.

Evidence for convergent and discriminant validity. To verify that brand attachment and brand attitude strength are discriminable constructs, we conducted two CFAs, one in which we allowed both constructs to correlate ($r = .66$; $\chi^2(3) = 3.80$) and one in which we forced the two factors to be perfectly correlated ($\chi^2(4) = 27.70$). The difference between the two models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 23.90$, $p < .001$), suggesting that brand attachment and brand attitude strength are related but empirically distinct. These results also demonstrate that the brand attachment scale meets the criteria of convergent and discriminant validity because it is related to but distinct from brand attitude strength. Had attachment been simply a stronger form of attitude strength, we would likely not have observed distinct factors.

Separation distress is regarded as an emotional indicator of attachment (Bowlby 1980; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). That is, the more attached a person is to an entity, the more distress he or she feels at the prospect of losing the relationship with that entity. Separation from (loss of proximity to) an attachment object creates emotional distress, inducing negative feelings such as depression, anxiety, and a loss of self. Adults reveal distress from attachment figure loss (e.g., Berman and Sperling 1994; Simpson 1990), whereas in a consumer context, loss of possessions is also mourned. Indeed, Bowlby (1980) regards separation distress as a natural concomitant of attachment. As Hazan and Zeifman (1999, p. 351) note, “separation distress ... is the data from which the existence and regulator role of the attachment behavioral system is inferred.” Thus, the existence of separation distress is regarded as evidence for the existence of attachment. The 1985 “New Coke” fiasco and the death of Michael Jackson illustrate two such examples of the relationship between brand attachment and separation distress.

Therefore, the validity of the brand attachment scale would be evidenced by showing a relationship between attachment (and its components) and separation distress. We performed a regression analysis to examine whether brand–self connection and prominence as indicators of attachment both independently predict this known indicator of attachment (separation distress). The results reveal two main effects (i.e., brand–self connection: $\gamma = .50$, $F(1, 104) = 15.6$, $p < .001$; prominence: $\gamma = .63$, $F(1, 104) = 11.4$, $p < .001$). The interaction was not significant ($F(1, 104) = .02$). These results strongly suggest that brand–self connection and brand prominence independently contribute to the

prediction of separation distress as indicators of brand attachment.⁵

Finally, we performed an analysis with a set of models to show that brand attachment is more strongly related to separation distress than brand attitude strength. Although consumers with strong brand attitudes are confident in their brand assessments, brand attitude strength is less likely to be strongly related to separation distress than attachment because it does not reflect a strong bond between the brand and the self. Thus, evidence for the differential relationship of these constructs to separation distress would provide further evidence that our measure of attachment demonstrates convergent validity because it is more strongly related to a known behavioral indicator of attachment.

A set of structural equation models compared brand attachment and brand attitude strength in relation to separation distress. A model representing attachment as indicated by brand–self connection and prominence as second-order factors showed that brand attachment is more strongly related to separation distress ($\gamma = .98$) than brand attitude strength ($\gamma = .02$; $z = 4.39$, $p < .001$; see Figure 1, Panel A). We replicated these results when we represented attachment with a first-order model, with brand–self connection and prominence fixed as a single-order factor ($\gamma = .74$ versus $\gamma = .27$) for attachment and brand attitude strength, respectively ($z = 3.94$, $p < .001$; see Figure 1, Panel B). In further support of a second-order model of attachment, the fit of the first-order model ($\chi^2(12) = 85.00$) was not as strong as that of the second-order factor model ($\chi^2(10) = 11.50$), and the difference in fit between the models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 73.50$, $p < .001$). This analysis is important because it supports the notion that the two indicators of attachment are best represented as subscales of the higher-order attachment construct. Furthermore, a factor analysis shows that our two-factor-based brand attachment measure, brand attitude strength, and separation distress all loaded on separate factors. As Table 2 shows, all items loaded significantly on their predicted factors with minimal cross-loadings, suggesting that attachment and attitude strength exhibit discriminant validity. These results provide additional evidence that attachment is not simply a stronger form of

⁵This independence of brand–self connection and prominence is also supported by the unique role of brand prominence. We noted previously that when brand–self connection is instrumentality (versus identity) based, brand prominence would add precision in the measurement of attachment. To test this idea, we split the data into two groups: One group scored high on the “part of me and who I am” and low on “personally connected” indicators of brand–self connection, and the other group scored high on the brand–self connection indicator of “personally connected” and low on “part of me and who I am.” As we expected, for the former group, the ability of brand attachment to predict separation distress was equally high regardless of whether attachment included brand–self connection and brand prominence or brand–self connection alone ($\gamma = .99$ versus $\gamma = .91$, $ps < .001$, respectively). However, for the latter group, brand attachment was a better predictor ($p < .05$) of separation distress when it included both brand–self connection and prominence than brand–self connection alone ($\gamma = .99$, $p < .001$ versus $\gamma = .61$, $p < .05$, respectively). These results confirm the unique role of brand prominence in measuring brand attachment.

attachment. Had one been a stronger form of another, we would not have observed such discrimination.

Discussion

Study 2 supports the assumption that brand–self connection and prominence both contribute to the measurement of brand attachment. It also supports a second-order representation of attachment (with brand–self connection and brand prominence as separate indicators), which in turn supports the notion that the two subscales are subsumed within the attachment construct. Finally, it supports our conceptualization of attachment and brand attitude strength as related but distinct constructs both from a measurement perspective and in terms of their ability to predict separation distress.

Study 3

We designed Study 3 to replicate the results regarding key assumptions of our two-factor-based brand attachment model using a different brand. In doing so, we test H_1 .

Method

Participants and design. One hundred forty-one undergraduate marketing students completed a booklet in exchange for partial course credit. The booklet included items designed to indicate brand attachment, brand attitude strength, separation distress, and intentions to perform a set of ten behaviors that varied in enactment difficulty. The focal brand was Nike shoes. We conducted the survey in a group setting.

Measures. We measured brand attachment, brand attitude strength, and separation distress in a manner identical to Study 2. Respondents again completed two 11-point scale items for each of ten behaviors. The first item assessed the perceived difficulty of performing each behavior (0 = “not at all,” and 10 = “extremely”). The second assessed respondents’ intentions to perform the behavior in the future (0 = “not at all,” and 10 = “very likely”). The ten behaviors were (1) buying Nike shoes; (2) switching from Nike to non-Nike shoes; (3) recommending Nike shoes to other people; (4) buying Nike shoes for friends or family; (5) frequently using products with a Nike logo; (6) paying more for Nike shoes than for non-Nike shoes; (7) defending Nike when others speak poorly about it; (8) waiting for several months to buy Nike shoes rather than buying a non-Nike shoe right now; (9) spending money, time, and energy to participate in activities to promote Nike; and (10) always buying the new model of Nike shoes when it becomes available.

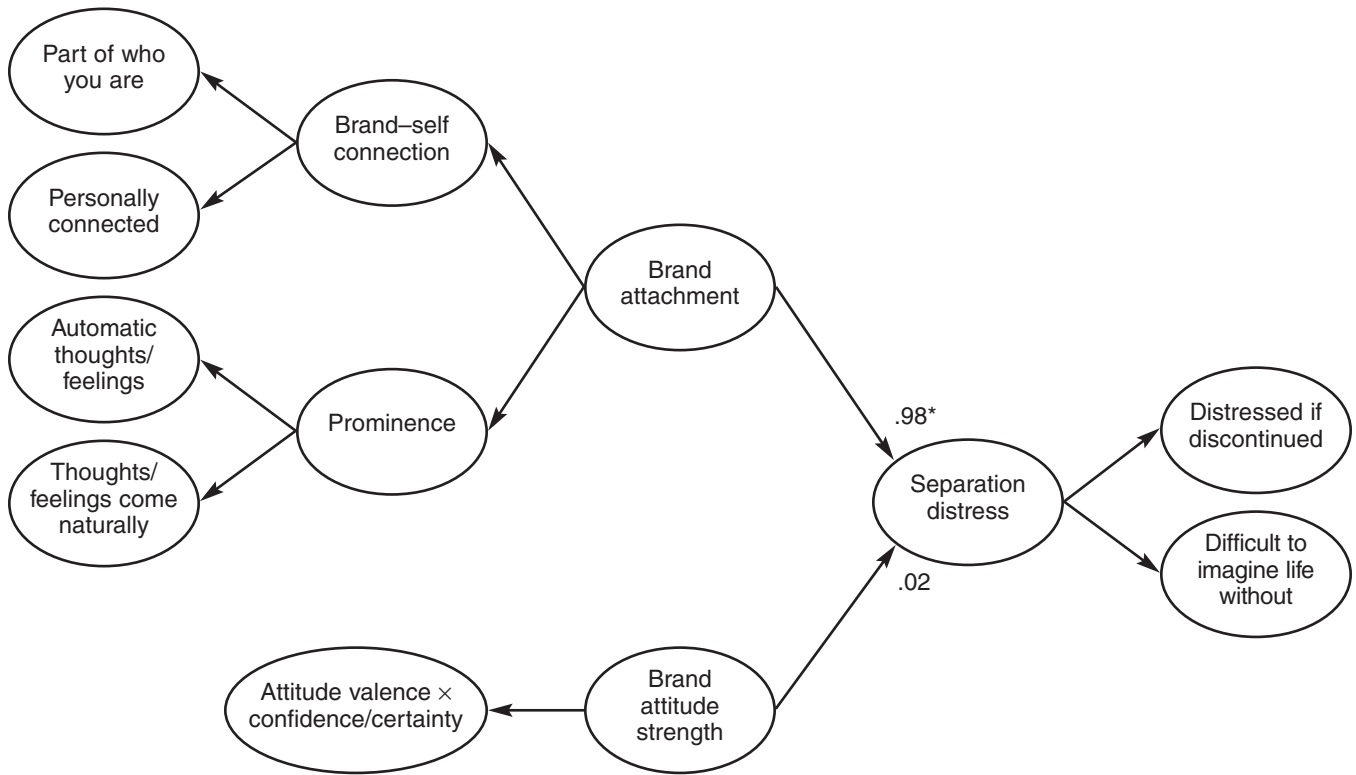
Results

Measurement results. We conducted two CFAs on the items representing brand attachment, one in which we allowed both the prominence and the brand–self connection factors to correlate ($r = .67$; $\chi^2(1) = 3.84$, $p < .05$) and one in which we forced them to be perfectly correlated ($\chi^2(2) = 48.70$, $p < .001$). The chi-square change was significant ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 44.86$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that the first representation fits the data better. These results confirm that a

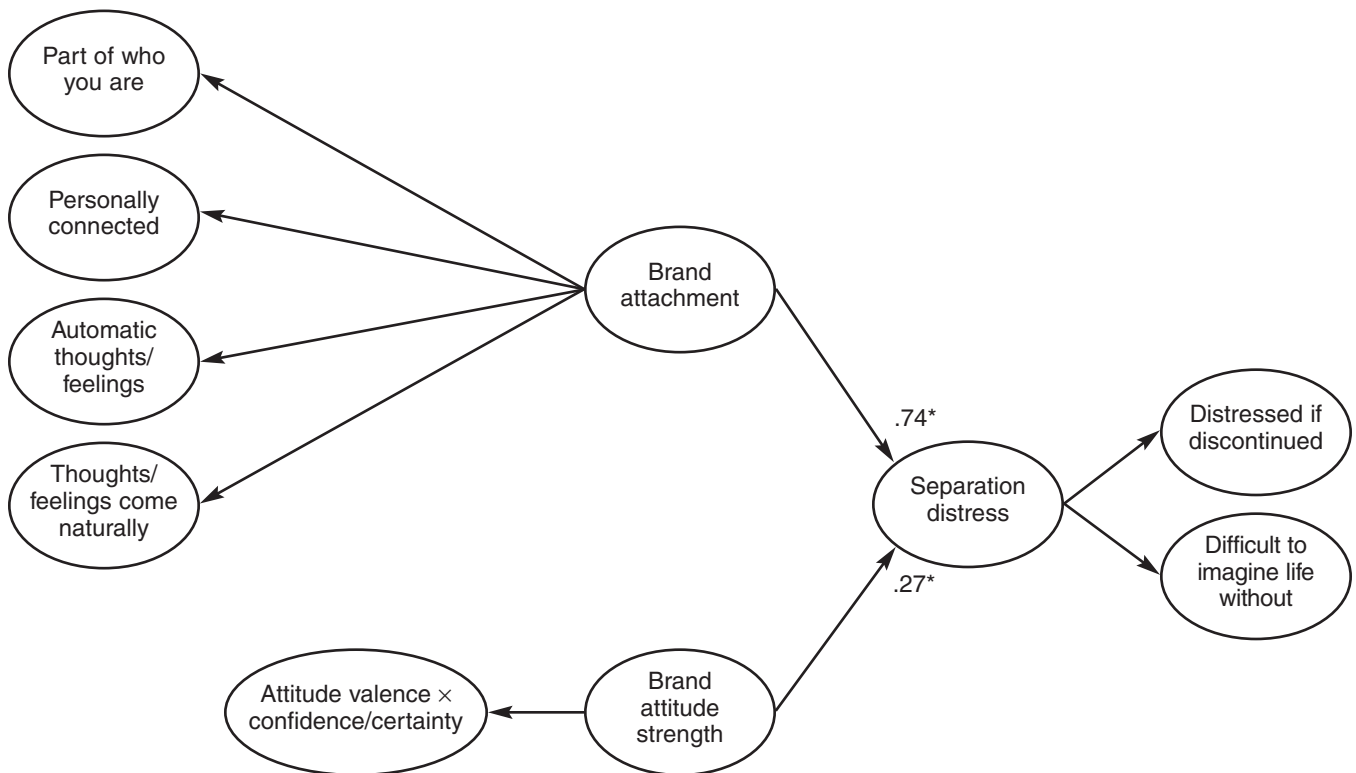
FIGURE 1

Study 2: Simultaneous Estimation of Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength on Separation Distress

A: The Second-Order Model



B: The First-Order Model



*Significant at $p < .05$.

TABLE 2
Study 2: Factor Analysis of Brand–Self Connection, Prominence, Attitude Strength, and Separation Distress

Indicators	Factor Loadings ^a			
	Factor 1: Brand–Self Connection	Factor 2: Prominence	Factor 3: Attitude Strength	Factor 4: Separation Distress
Factor 1: To what extent is iPod part of you and who you are?	.99	.02	.03	.05
Factor 1: To what extent do you feel personally connected to the iPod?	.85	.03	.04	.12
Factor 2: To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward iPod often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?	.07	.97	.04	.04
Factor 2: To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward iPod come to you naturally and instantly?	.18	.78	.04	.11
Factor 3: Attitude valence multiplied by certainty and confidence.	.03	.00	.98	.01
Factor 4: To what extent would you be distressed if the iPod was discontinued?	.09	.11	.08	.88
Factor 4: To what extent is it difficult to imagine life without the iPod?	.13	.07	.03	.88

^aThe percentages of variance explained by the four factors are 63.44%, 14.03%, 8.33%, and 5.23%, respectively, with a total variance explained of 91.03%.

two-factor model (represented by brand–self connection and brand prominence) indicates brand attachment better than a one-factor model.

We conducted two CFAs, one in which we allowed brand attachment (represented by brand–self connection and prominence) and attitude strength to correlate ($r = .80$; $\chi^2(3) = 5.10$, $p > .05$) and one in which we forced the two constructs to be perfectly correlated ($\chi^2(4) = 53.40$, $p < .001$). The difference between the two models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 48.30$, $p < .001$), further supporting the notion that brand attachment and attitude strength are related but empirically distinct constructs. The results further demonstrate the convergent and discriminant validity of the brand attachment scale as represented by both prominence and brand–self connection. Attachment, as indicated by the two subscales, is related to but empirically distinct from attitude strength.⁶ We obtained results consistent with those in Study 2 for separation distress (we do not report the results given space constraints).

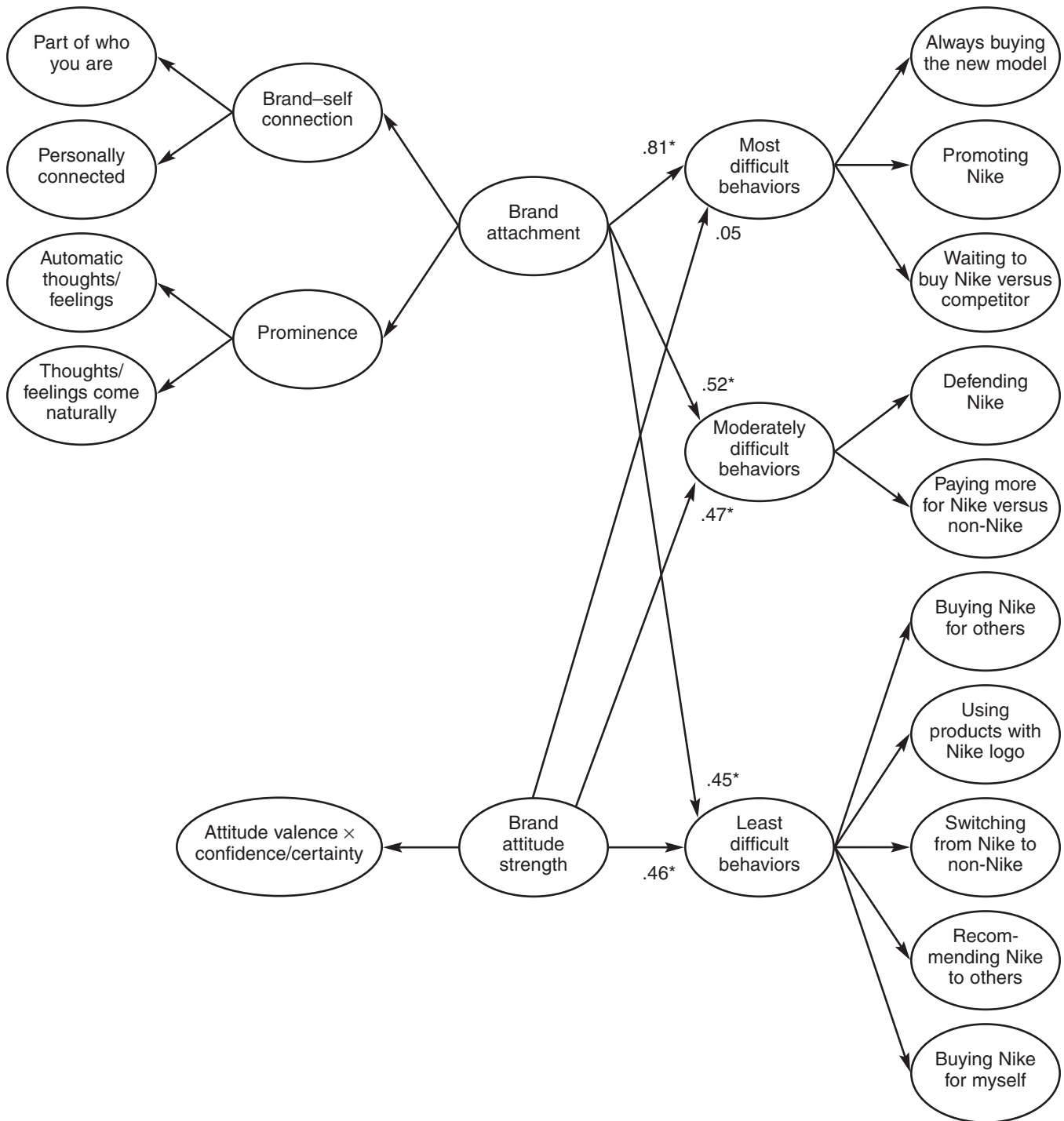
Test of H_1 . To test whether attachment is a better indicator of a consumer's intent to perform difficult behaviors (H_1), we first validated that the behaviors we examined indeed varied in difficulty. Respondents' assessments of the perceived difficulty of performing each of the ten measured yielded the following: The three most difficult behaviors were "always buying the new model"; "spending money, time, and energy to promote Nike"; and "waiting to buy

Nike versus buying an alternative brand," with difficulty levels of 5.87, 5.65, and 5.39, respectively. The second category included the following two behaviors: "defending Nike when others speak poorly of it" and "paying more for Nike versus non-Nike shoes," with difficulty scores of 4.93 and 4.44, respectively. The third category included five behaviors: "buying Nike shoes for others," "using products with a Nike logo," "switching from Nike to non-Nike shoes," "recommending Nike to others," and "buying Nike shoes for oneself," with difficulty levels of 3.80, 3.53, 3.52, 3.51, and 3.21, respectively. The three categories representing different levels of the behavior hierarchy were significantly different from one another in their level of difficulty at the .05 level.

A model estimating brand attachment and brand attitude strength simultaneously supports H_1 (see Figure 2). Consistent with H_1 , brand attachment better predicts intentions to engage in behaviors regarded as most difficult ($\gamma = .81$, $p < .001$) than brand attitude strength ($\gamma = .05$, $p > .05$). The difference between the two coefficients was significant ($z = 3.87$, $p < .01$). Brand attachment also better predicts moderately difficult behaviors ($\gamma = .52$, $p < .01$) than brand attitude strength ($\gamma = .47$, $p < .01$). Again, the difference between the γ coefficients is significant ($z = 2.91$, $p < .01$). Combined, these results strongly support H_1 . Though not hypothesized, we found that brand attitude strength ($\gamma = .46$, $p < .01$) was as strong a predictor as brand attachment ($\gamma = .45$, $p < .01$) of brand behaviors regarded as least difficult to perform ($z = .07$, $p > .05$). We discuss this finding further in the "General Discussion" section.

⁶Factor analyses show that all brand–self connection, brand prominence, attitude strength, and separation distress items load cleanly on their hypothesized factors.

FIGURE 2
Study 3: Simultaneous Estimation of Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength on Behavioral Intentions



*Significant at $p < .05$.

In addition, we compared the predictive power of two attachment models, one with both brand-self connection and brand prominence, as indicators of attachment, and one with only the brand-self connection component. This analysis explores whether brand prominence as an indicator of brand attachment is necessary for the prediction of behavioral intentions. The results show no significant difference

in the one-component (brand-self connection) versus the two-component (brand-self connection and prominence) brand attachment measure's predictive ability of behaviors: most difficult to perform ($\gamma = .84$ and $.82$, $p < .001$, respectively), moderately difficult to perform ($\gamma = .87$ and $.82$, $p < .001$, respectively), and least difficult to perform ($\gamma = .82$ and $.77$, $p < .001$, respectively). The difference in coefficient

cients and model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(7) = 10.62$; $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 5.31$; $\Delta\chi^2(11) = 6.90$; $p > .05$, respectively) was not significant. This result is noteworthy, and we explore it further in Study 4 and the “General Discussion” section.

Discussion

Study 3 replicates the measurement effects we observed in Studies 1 and 2. In addition, and consistent with H_1 , the study supports the idea that brand attachment better predicts consumers’ intentions to enact difficult behaviors than brand attitude strength. These results further confirm the idea that brand attachment and brand attitude strength are different constructs that have different behavioral outcomes. Finally, we find that the two- and one-component brand attachment measures predict intent to perform behaviors equally well. Because Study 3 relies on intentions to perform behaviors versus the actual performance of such behaviors, Study 4 extends Study 3 by examining the importance of brand–self connection and prominence as indicators of attachment. Study 4 also tests the remaining hypotheses using actual purchase data.

Study 4

Method

Study 4 involved the collaboration with a large European retail bank listed on the stock exchange. The bank serves more than 15 million customers across 17 international markets. Because people’s investments, and in some cases life savings, are involved, this context is ideal for testing the ability of both constructs to predict difficult behavior.

We obtained contact details for 2000 customers who were randomly selected from one of the firm’s branch networks. Before our quantitative study, we conducted 41 telephone interviews with randomly selected customers. Our aim was to discuss the meaning of the items that constituted our measures with customers and reduce item ambiguity. A subsequent pretest of the questionnaire with 52 randomly selected customers explicitly asked participants to point out any ambiguity in responding to individual questions. We deemed such pretesting to be necessary because the original scale was developed in the United States and tested among U.S. consumers. Use of the scale in Europe necessitated minor wording changes to ensure question clarity.

We then mailed a finalized version of the questionnaire with an informative cover letter, a prepaid return envelope, and a thank you note with a small book of commemorative stamps worth \$3 as an incentive. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study, assured that individual responses would not be shared with anyone outside the research team, and thanked the participant. Three weeks after the first mailing, we followed up with a small thank you card for participation and again sent the same questionnaire to those who did not respond to the first mailing. Our sampling effort generated 701 responses. We dropped four questionnaires because of insufficient questionnaire completion. The final set of 697 usable responses reflected a 34.85% effective response rate. We compared early and late responses, following Armstrong and Overton’s (1977) recommended

procedure. We found no indication of response bias. Moreover, a check with a manager from the collaborating firm revealed that the demographic profile of respondents was representative of the firm’s customer base.

Measures. Measures of brand attachment, brand attitude strength, and separation distress were identical to those used in the prior studies.

Dependent measures. We operationalized actual purchase by collecting purchase data on the individual customer from the collaborating firm. We measured actual purchase behavior by summing the sales of all investment products (e.g., investment funds) for each individual customer over the most recent six-month period after the survey. We operationalized brand purchase share by asking respondents to indicate how many banks (in addition to the collaborating firm) they are currently using for their various financial services (e.g., checking account, savings, investments, loans). When respondents indicated that they exclusively use the collaborating firm brand, we noted purchase share as 100%. We measured need share by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they use the collaborating firm for all their financial services. Questions included the following: “To what extent out of 100% do you use [company name] for all your financial services (savings, investments, loans, etc.)? If you use only [company name] for your financial services, you indicate 100%. If you use more than one financial service institution, including non-banking institutions such as investment firms, insurance companies, etc., indicate the percentage of your use of [company name] among all the financial service institutions.”

Control variables. We also collected data on several control variables. To predict changes in actual behavior that are not driven by consumer inertia, we included past purchase, which was collected similarly to our customer purchase behavior measure and accounted for the six months before our survey, as a predictor. We also accounted for gender and relationship length. Prior research has indicated the role of relationship length as a likely proxy for customer inertia (Colgate and Lang 2001) and the positive effect of gender on brand choice (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991).

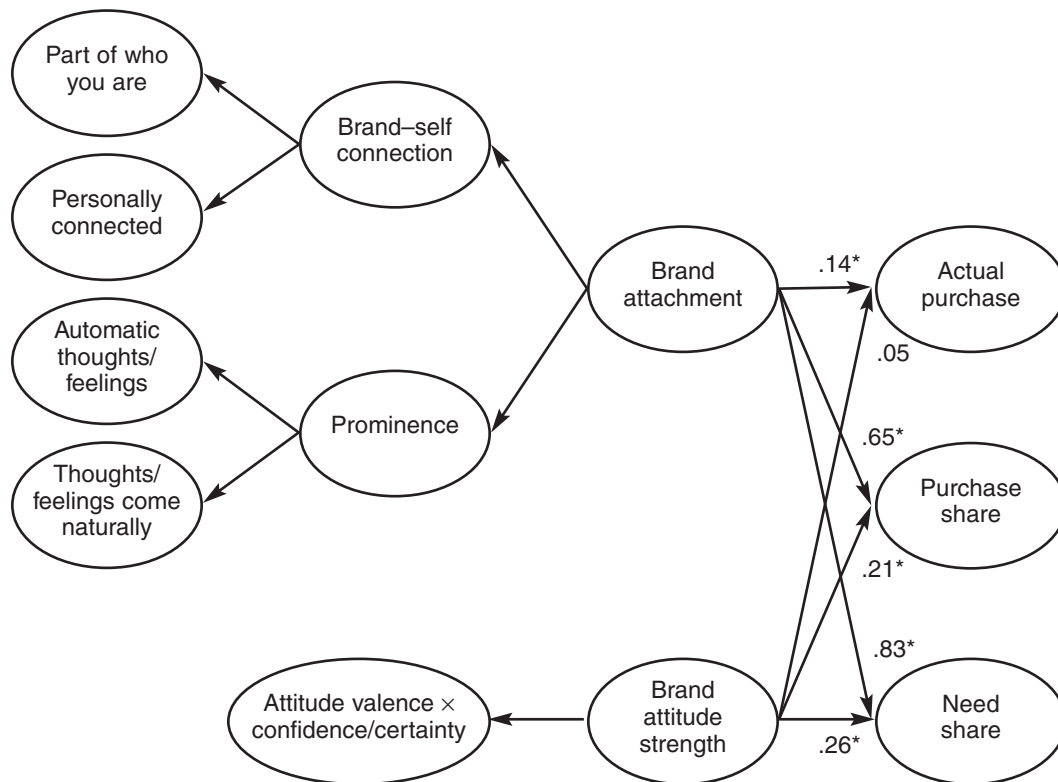
Results

The results replicated the previous studies, which tested the assumptions underlying (1) the conceptual properties of brand attachment, (2) the two-factor model and the second-order model of brand attachment, (3) the measure’s discriminant and convergent validity in relation to brand attitude strength,⁷ and (4) the stronger relationship between

⁷We provide further evidence that brand attachment is not simply strong brand attitude in Study 4, in which we observe that attitude strength and attachment differ in time dependency. In Study 4, relationship length does not discriminate between consumers who have strong versus weak attitude strength ($M = 18.29$ and 16.35 ; $t(66) = .74$, $p = .46$). In contrast, relationship length is significantly related to attachment. Customers with high brand attachment have a longer relationship with the brand than customers whose brand attachment is low ($M = 19.38$ and 14.03 ; $t(66) = 2.11$, $p < .05$). This result offers further support that brand attachment and attitude strength behave differently.

Test of H_2 : actual customer purchase behavior. To test whether brand attachment predicts actual customer purchase behavior (sales as reported by the company) better than brand attitude strength, we used a model in which attachment was represented by prominence and brand–self connection as second-order factors. The results revealed that brand attachment significantly predicts actual behavior ($\gamma = .14, p < .01$), even after we accounted for past behavior ($\gamma = .60, p < .001$), relationship length ($\gamma = .03, p > .05$), and gender ($\gamma = .02, p > .05$). Brand attitude strength does not predict actual customer behavior ($\gamma = .05, p > .05$) (Figure 3). The difference between the coefficient for attachment and brand attitude strength was significant ($z = 2.44, p < .01$). The result that brand attachment is a stronger predictor of actual customer behavior than brand attitude strength is in line with our prediction. A set of analyses comparing only brand–self connection with brand–self connection and prominence as indicators of attachment showed that the latter model demonstrated better prediction ($\gamma = .11$ versus $\gamma = .18, ps < .001$, respectively; $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 49.83, p < .001$). These results suggest that attachment (as represented by both brand–self connection and brand prominence subscales) successfully predicts actual purchase, confirming that both are useful predictors of actual behavior.

Test of H₄: brand need share. We tested H₄ by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they use the collaborating firm for all their finance services, even services that are performed by other institutions (e.g., investment firms, insurance companies). Structural equation models



show that attachment represented by both prominence and brand–self connection as second-order factors was a significantly stronger predictor of brand need share ($\gamma = .83$, $p < .001$) than strong brand attitudes ($\gamma = .26$, $p < .001$; $z = 11.86$, $p < .001$) (see Figure 3). Past behavior ($\gamma = .02$, $p > .05$), relationship length ($\gamma = .03$, $p > .05$), and gender ($\gamma = .02$, $p > .05$) had no significant effects. These results support H₄. We also compared a model that represented attachment by only brand–self connection with a model in which both brand–self connection and prominence were indicators of attachment. Again, we observed that the two-factor brand attachment model predicted brand need share more strongly than brand–self connection alone ($\gamma = .82$ versus $\gamma = .29$, $ps < .001$, respectively; $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 49.20$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The use of real purchase data in Study 4 supports H₂–H₄ and helps us generalize the findings to a context that involves actual customer behavior. Study 4 demonstrated that brand–self connection and brand prominence both indicate attachment and that the inclusion of both predicted company reported sales, brand purchase share, and need share more strongly than brand–self connection alone. They also outperformed brand attitude strength as predictors of these outcomes. We observed these effects even when accounting for alternative factors. Taken together, the results of Study 4 corroborate the important role of brand attachment and strongly support the notion that brand attachment and brand attitude strength are different constructs that have different outcomes related to behavior, brand purchase share, and need share.

General Discussion

Summary and Implications

The objective of this article was to address the critical but unexplored question whether brand attachment adds value as a construct of interest to marketing and consumer researchers compared with that of brand attitude strength. Building on prior work on attachment and the self-expansion theory, this article makes three significant contributions. The first is a conceptual contribution that articulates the properties of brand attachment and distinguishes this construct from brand attitude strength. The second is a measurement contribution. We developed a managerially viable scale that taps the indicators of brand attachment. We also demonstrate that (1) both the brand–self connection and the prominence dimensions are critical and nonredundant indicators of attachment; (2) the scale is strongly related to a known emotional indicator of attachment, separation distress, in support of the scale's convergent validity; and (3) the brand attachment scale (as represented by brand–self connection and prominence) is empirically related but distinct from brand attitude strength, in support of its convergent and discriminant validity. The third is a significant managerial contribution. We hypothesize and find that the more strongly consumers are attached to a brand, the more willing they are to forsake personal resources to maintain an ongoing relationship with that brand. Thus, they are willing to express an

intent to engage in difficult behaviors—those that require investments of time, money, energy, and reputation—to maintain (or deepen) a brand relationship. In addition to behavioral intent, we show that attachment represented by both brand–self connection and prominence is a significantly better predictor than brand attitude strength of actual behaviors. In terms of brand purchase and need share in particular, managers have much to gain by an effort to build stronger brand attachment.

In addition to the managerial implications, the results of the current research offer other important managerial and further research implications. Although the brand attitude strength construct may capture a brand's mind share of a consumer, attachment is uniquely positioned to capture both heart and mind share. The finding that attachment better predicts actual behavior than brand attitude strength is of significant importance to managers. Brand attitude strength does not fully reflect the extent to which a brand has successfully captured a consumer's heart. Therefore, when assessing customer–brand relationships, managers should incorporate brand attachment in their brand evaluation matrices. Linking attachment with responses to brand attitude measures and actual purchase data will give managers a more detailed picture of how current brand management efforts are related to future sales.

Further Research

Although our findings are provocative, they raise additional research issues. Given the uniquely strong effects of brand attachment shown here, additional research is needed on how marketers can enhance brand attachment (by fostering brand–self connection and prominence).

In addition to studying brand attachment antecedents, further research might examine the relative impact of brand attachment and brand attitude strength on several metrics of brand equity. According to various metrics, a brand's financial value to the firm is typically affected by the brand's (1) unit price (P_U), (2) unit marketing costs (MC_U), and (3) the number of units sold (Q). Close examination of these three components suggests that they are directly tied to and reflect the nature and intensity of customers' attachment to a brand. Thus, the stronger the brand attachment, the higher the unit price the brand can bear (willingness to pay a price premium; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Strong attachments also induce a devaluation of competing alternatives (Johnson and Rusbult 1989) and result in greater willingness to stay in the relationship (Drigotas and Rusbult 1992). These intentions and behaviors all influence the stability of the Q component and reduce the costs of customer retention. Finally, strong attachments toward brands affect brand loyalty and willingness to promote a brand and engender a relative insensitivity to reciprocity by one's partner (e.g., active marketing effort by a brand to reinforce or appreciate its customers' loyalty; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Such outcomes should affect the Q component and make the MC component more cost efficient. Attitude strength may be less strongly related to these brand equity metrics. Thus, although prior research suggests that strong brand attitudes can be an important driver of brand equity (which we do not dispute), we propose that there is added

value to examining attachment because it may predict brand equity drivers (e.g., price, unit marketing costs and the number of units sold) more strongly than do strong brand attitudes.

Additional research is also needed to shed light on several results we observed in Studies 3 and 4. One issue is that whereas brand attachment in Study 4 best predicted the results when attachment was indicated by both brand–self connection and prominence, in Study 3, only brand–self connection was necessary. Two reasons may underlie these results. First, Study 3 predicted intentions, whereas Study 4 predicted actual behaviors. Perhaps prominence is unnecessary as an attachment indicator when only intentions (versus behavior) are assessed. Second, perhaps for most respondents in Study 3, the brand (Nike) is more identity based than instrumentality based. We reason that brand prominence contributes more when attachments are based on the brand’s instrumentality in goal achievement. However, further research should examine the boundary conditions under which prominence plays a role as a critical indicator of attachment.

Another noteworthy result comes from Study 3, which showed that brand attitude strength and attachment are equally good as predictors of easy-to-perform behaviors such as brand switching. It is possible that when behaviors are easy to perform, either attachment or strong attitudes predict behavior. It is also possible that brand attitude strength better predicts movement away from a brand (e.g., switching) than attachment because strong negative attitudes predict brand rejection. Attachment may better reflect approach (than avoidance) responses.

Further research should also compare the brand attachment measure we developed here with the pictorial measure of the inclusion of another person in the self that Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) developed. That measure represents closeness in terms of the degree of pictorial overlap between the self (represented as a circle) and another person (represented as a different circle). The greater the overlap in the circles, the closer the person is to the other. Applied to brands, we speculate that Aron and colleagues’ (2005) measure corresponds closely with the brand–self connection component of attachment and, in particular, with items that reflect the identity overlap (versus instrumentality) of the brand.

Research might also examine whether brand attitude strength and brand attachment reflect different stages of a

brand relationship, each of which must be managed to strengthen brand equity. Indeed, Study 4 provides evidence of such time dependence with brand attachment (see n. 7). Perhaps the first stage of brand attachment entails relationship establishment, which develops through brand purchase. This stage is best represented by positive brand attitudes. Such attitudes may become strong when they are based on thoughtful processing. When the brand offers resources in the service of self-expansion, consumers may subsequently develop strong connections between the brand and the self as well as mental models of the brand and the self, from which brand-related thoughts and feelings are easily and frequently accessed. At this second stage, strong brand attitudes develop into brand attachments. It is perhaps at this point that the positive relationship between self-associations with a brand and brand attitudes converge (Gawronski, Bodenhausen, and Becker 2007; Greenwald et al. 2002; Prestwich et al. 2010; Tietje and Brunel 2005; Zhang and Chan 2009). The act of choosing an object can result in the creation of associations between the self and the chosen object (Gawronski, Bodenhausen, and Becker 2007; Tietje and Brunel 2005). The brand’s prominence and its linkage to the self may influence consumers to invest resources of their own in the service of maintaining a brand relationship. Such resources are revealed by brand loyalty, brand defense, and other behaviors that are difficult to perform and require the use of valued resources. These behaviors are typical outcomes of brand attachment. According to this perspective, attitude strength and brand attachment are not competing constructs. Rather, they may represent different stages of a brand–customer relationship. Both are critical. Whereas brand attachment may represent a more desirable destination for managers than strong brand attitudes, the development of strong brand attitudes may be a relevant and necessary step.

Finally, in this article, we emphasize attachment as a positive bond between the consumer and the self. Other research suggests that consumers can have strong negative dissociations between the brand and the self. Such negative dissociations can result in brand relationships described as enmities (Fournier 1998) and motivations to inflict harm on the brand (as is true with “bad behavior” from sports fans). Further research on these strong aversive brand relationships as the counterpart of strong attachment relationships is necessary.

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