Self-Brand Connections: An Exploratory Study into Construct Validity and Gender Effects

David J. Moore, University of Michigan
Pamela Miles Homer, California State University, Long Beach.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The fundamental premise of the Self-Brand Connection construct is that when brand associations are used to construct one's self or to communicate one's self to others, a strong connection is formed between the brand and the consumer's self identity (Escalas 2004). The purpose of this study was threefold: first, we test the reliability and the validity of the Self-Brand Connection Scale (Escalas 1996; Escalas 2004), designed to measure such types of self-brand associations. The second objective was to examine the extent to which self-brand connections are positively related to brand evaluations as well as the interesting concept of attitude strength (Krosnick and Schuman 1988; Krosnick et al. 1993). Lastly, we test the impact of the Self-Brand Connections scale within the context of a *gendered* brand. For this purpose we selected the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), a sub-brand of the parent brand, the NBA. This brand has been strategically crafted to appeal to female consumers and thus provided an ideal opportunity to examine whether females will show stronger self-brand connections for this type of brand than their male counterparts.

Hypotheses

H1: *Self-brand connections are positively related to brand evaluations.*

H2: *Females will exhibit higher self-brand connections relative to their male counterparts.*

H3: *Self-brand connections are positively related to attitude strength.*

H4: *Higher self-brand connections will enhance brand evaluations and attitude strength for both males and females, but the incremental contribution of increased connections will be greater for females when evaluating a female-gendered brand (i.e., there will be a significant interaction between self-brand connections and gender on brand evaluations and attitude strength).*

Method and Results

Two separate (survey) studies (N=150 and N=260) measured brand evaluations (i.e., brand attitudes and brand beliefs), Self-Brand Connection, and attitude strength.

First, the results (using Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Lisrel 8.53) showed that a single factor structure representing the Self-brand Connections scale emerged in both studies and factor item loadings were impressively high. Nevertheless, relatively low AVEs (average variance extracted) seemed to indicate that the self-brand connections construct may be in need of further refinement. Attempts to establish discriminant validity suggest that the self-brand concept was differentiated from brand attitudes only in the second study.

Second, the results confirm that self-brand connections are positively related to *brand attitudes* and *brand beliefs*, a finding that is consistent with the work of Escalas (2004) who provided a conceptual basis for the distinction between self-brand connections and brand attitudes. She points out that whereas consumers may agree that a certain brand possesses a high level of quality, that brand itself may not be linked to one's self concept and may therefore receive a low self-brand connection rating. Our study has

therefore provided some degree of support for the discriminant validity of the self-brand connections construct.

Third, self-brand connections showed a very strong relationship to *attitude strength* (Krosnick and Schuman 1988; Krosnick et al. 1993). According to Krosnick and Petty (1994), strong attitudes tend to be: (a) persistent over time, (b) resistant to change, (c) likely to have strong impact on information processing, and (d) more likely to have a strong impact on behavior. If this relationship between self-brand-connections and attitude strength is valid, one should predict a range of important hypotheses in future research. For example, consumers with strong self-brand connections should be characterized as having more persistent attitudes to their favorite brands and these attitudes may be more resistant to change. Consequently, these consumers may therefore be more loyal to the brand that is closely linked to their self-concept.

Fourth, *Gender Differences in Response to the 'Gendered' Brand*. Females exhibited higher self-brand connections relative to their male counterparts. Higher self-brand connections did enhance brand evaluations and attitude strength for both males and females, but the incremental contribution of increased connections was greater for females when evaluating the female-gendered brand. In other words, there was a significant interaction between self-brand connections and gender on brand evaluations and attitude strength. These findings showing a linkage between the female *gendered* brand and the female respondents of this study are consistent with the notion of a 'match' or 'gender fit' reported in previous research on the 'matching' requirements for celebrity effectiveness (e.g., Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990).

Future Directions

Our results regarding the relationship between self-brand connections and gender represent an important contribution to the emerging literature on self-brand connections (Escalas 2004, Escalas and Bettman 2003) and other areas of brand attachment (Fournier 1998). The most obvious extension would be a study whereby *product gender* is manipulated to determine if both males and females form self-brand connections to gendered brands, which in turn enhance brand evaluations and attitude strength. If the 'gender match' we found for females is robust, males should exhibit stronger self-brand connections to a male 'gendered' brand, which in turn, impact brand evaluations. More basically, future research may investigate whether for certain types of brands, self-brand connections may be stronger for one gender versus the other. As mentioned above, research on self-brand connections might also focus on attitude strength and its relationship to brand loyalty.

References

Escalas, Jennifer Edson (1996), "Narrative Processing: Building Connections Between Brands and the Self," unpublished dissertation, Duke University, June 1996.

Escalas, Jennifer Edson (2004), "Narrative Processing: Building Consumer Connections to Brands," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14 (1), 168-180.

Escalas, Jennifer Edson and James R. Bettman (2000), "Using Narratives to Discern Self-Identity Related Consumer Goals and Motivations," in *The Why of Consumption: Perspective on Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*, ed. Ratti Ratneshwar, David Mick, and Cynthia Huffman, New York, NY: Routledge Press, 237-258.

Escalas, Jennifer Edson, and James R. Bettman (2003), "You are What They Eat: The Influence of Reference Groups on Consumers' Connections to Brands," *Journal of Consumer Psychology,* 13 (3), 339-348.

Fournier, Susan (1998), "Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (March), 343-373.

Kahle, Lynn R. and Pamela M. Homer (1985), "Physical Attractiveness of the Celebrity Endorser: A Social Adaptation Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11 (March), 954-961.

Kamins, Michael A. (1990), "An Investigation into the 'Match-Up' Hypothesis in Celebrity Advertising: When Beauty May be Only Skin Deep," *Journal of Advertising*, 19 (1), 4-13.

Krosnick, J.A. (1988), "The Role of Attitude Importance in Social Evaluation: A Study of Policy Preferences, Presidential Candidate Evaluations, and Voting Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 196-210.

Krosnick, J.A., D.S. Boninger, Y.C. Chuang, M.K. Berent, and C.G. Carnot (1993), "Attitude Strength: One Construct or Many Related Constructs?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 1132-1151.