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C. Whan Park, Deborah J. MacInnis,
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Brand Attachment: Constructs, Consequences, and Causes

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Abstract

This review examines four key issues involved in developing and establishing strong brand relationships with its customers. The first concerns the meaning of "brand attachment" and its critical consequences for brand equity. The second concerns outcomes of brand attachment to customers and the firm. The third concerns the causes of brand attachment. We articulate the process by which strong brand attachment is created through meaningful personal connections between the brand and its customers. We also articulate the identification and management of a strategic brand exemplar that allows the firm to create brand attachment and sustain and grow the brand's competitive advantages.

Contents

1

Introduction

Work on relationship marketing suggests that developing strong relationships between consumers and brands is important (Pine II et al., 1995; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Fournier and Mick, 1998; Webster Jr., 2000) given their implications for customer loyalty and price insensitivity (cf. Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Price and Arnould, 1999). In turn, these customer responses can lower costs and increase company revenues (Kalwani and Narayandas, 1995; Pine II et al., 1995; Price and Arnould, 1999).

Unfortunately, little is known about the factors that underlie strong brand relationships. This review attempts to articulate such factors by using the theoretical construct of brand attachment. Below, we define the construct of brand attachment and differentiate it from other constructs. As Figure 1.1 shows, we argue that brand attachment is critical to outcome variables that underscore the brand's value to the firm (see also Thomson et al., 2005). We also add to the literature by articulating the antecedents to strong brand attachments, articulating both the bases on which strong brand attachments form and the marketing activities that foster them. As Figure 1.1 shows, we posit that strong brand-customer attachments derive from the brand's success at

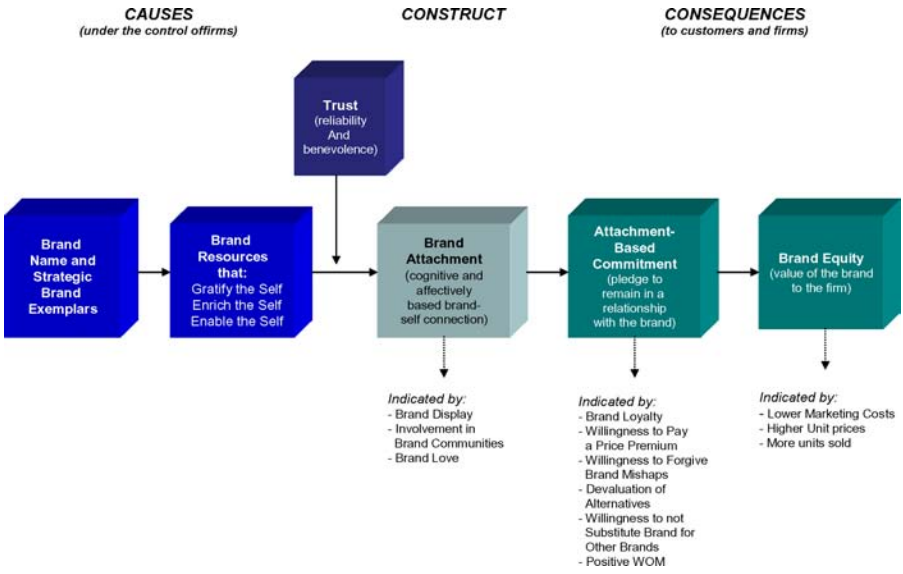

Fig. 1.1 Brand attachment: Construct, consequences, and causes.

creating strong brand self-connections by gratifying, enabling, and/or assuring the self. These successes are themselves contingent on the effectiveness of marketing activities that use affect, typicality, vividness, and rich information to foster a strong brand-self connection through a strategic brand exemplar.

The remaining sections of the review describe the attachment construct, its relationship to other constructs, the nature of brand-self connections, and the role of strategic brand exemplars in creating these connections. Theoretical and managerial issues follow in the discussion section.

2

The Attachment Construct

2.1 What is Attachment?

Bowlby's (1982) pioneering work on attachment in the realm of parent–infant relationships defined an attachment as an *emotion-laden target-specific bond* between a person and a specific object. The bond varies in strength, with some individuals exhibiting a weak bond with an attachment object and others exhibiting a strong bond. Bowlby proposed that human infants are born with a repertoire of behaviors (attachment behaviors) designed by evolution to assure proximity to supportive others (attachment figures) so as to secure protection from physical and psychological threats, promote affect regulation, and foster healthy exploration (see also Berman and Sperling, 1994; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005). However, inadequate and inconsistent maternal care during early childhood can alter one's abilities to form secure attachments with others throughout life. Different maternal practices can create different attachment styles in the child (e.g., avoidant, anxious/ambivalent) that, in turn, impact the child's relationships with others over the course of his or her life (Bowlby, 1973, 1988).

2.2 Brand Attachment

While research in psychology concentrates on individuals' attachments to other individuals (e.g., infants, mothers, romantic mates — see Weiss, 1988), extant research in marketing (Belk, 1988; Kleine III et al., 1989; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Kleine III et al., 1993) suggests that attachments can extend beyond the person–person relationship context. That research shows that consumers can develop attachments to gifts (Mick and DeMoss, 1990), collectibles (Slater, 2001), places of residence (Hill and Stamey, 1990), brands (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), and other types of special or favorite objects (Babad, 1987; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Richins, 1994).

Moreover, while the attachment concept has been studied in numerous contexts (romantic relationship, kinship, and friendship, etc.) and from varying perspectives (e.g., individual differences vs. relationship perspectives) (see Baldwin et al., 1996), we approach attachment from the perspective of an individual's relationship with the *brand as the attachment object*. In this context, we define attachment as *the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand with the self* (see Figure 1.1). Attachment denotes a psychological state of mind in which a strong cognitive and affective bond connects a brand with an individual in such a way that the brand is viewed as an extension of the self. The collection of characteristics, traits, and memberships that cognitively represent an individual in memory is generally described as the self-concept (Greenwald and Pratkanis, 1984). An attachment object becomes connected to the self when it is included as part of the consumer's self-concept. This relationship perspective differs sharply from a trait perspective on attachment where attachment reflects an individual difference variable characterizing one's systematic style of connection across relationships over time (i.e., secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant styles).

Consistent with some prior literature, brand attachment is characterized by a strong linkage or connectedness between the brand and the self (cf. Schultz et al., 1989; Kleine III et al., 1993). Evidence of the connection is revealed by indexical (personalized) and affect based representations of the brand as part of the consumer's self-concept.

Such representations are highly salient and are automatically retrieved when the consumer activates his or her self-concept (Greenwald and Pratkanis, 1984). Evidence for the linkage between the brand and the self should be evident by behaviors that include brand display and consumers' desire to be in brand communities with others who share their brand-self connection (see Figure 1.1).

Consumer behavior researchers have recognized the importance of the consumer's self-concept and its relationship to brands and marketable entities. For example, Belk (1988) reveals that consumers' self-concepts are extended to things such as people, places, experiences, ideas, beliefs, and material possession objects. Kleine and Baker (2004) suggest that self-extension processes decommodify, singularize, and personalize particular material objects symbolizing autobiographical meanings, endowing them with personal meanings that connect the self and object (Belk, 1988). Statements like "mine," "part of me," "reflecting me," "expressing me," "an extension of myself," "aesthetically appealing to me," or "emotionally relating to me" all reflect different aspects of a brand-self connection.

Prior research on brand relationships has indirectly touched on the construct of brand attachment. For example, Fournier (1998) identified 15 types of consumer-brand relationships. While these relationships are described along several dimensions including love, commitment, intimacy and passion, feelings of attachment lie at the "core of all strong brand relationships" (Fournier, 1998, p. 636). Hence, one can ascertain that strong consumer-brand (and consumer–consumer) relationships, such as committed partnerships, best friendships, and secret affairs, are likely to be characterized by strong levels of attachment. Others, such as enslavements, arranged marriages, and marriages of convenience are likely to be characterized by low levels of attachment. The attachment construct may thus serve as a useful higher-order construct that discriminates among the relationship types identified by Fournier.

Attachment vs. Attitudes (Evaluation). Importantly, attachments differ from evaluation-based responses like brand attitudes and have effects that are more powerfully related to sustained, cross-time consumer brand behaviors and exchanges (Thomson et al., 2005). Attitudes

have traditionally been conceptualized as a person's evaluation of an object (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). That is, the construct of attitude captures the extent to which one likes or dislikes an object, that object ranging from brands to people to ideas to products. While both emotional attachment and attitudes include affective responses, a key differentiating feature involves the brand's linkage to the self. It is theoretically possible that one may have a favorable brand attitude but not connect the brand to one's self-relevant aesthetics, self-identity, or self-concept. In contrast, the brand's connection to one's self, one's identity, or self-concept is central to the emotional attachment construct (Mikulincer et al., 2001). As such, though the two constructs may be related, their differential conceptual properties should make them empirically distinct.

We also believe that attitudes and emotional attachments have fundamentally different effects (Park and MacInnis, 2006). Literature on attachment suggests that emotional attachments have strong motivational and behavioral implications such as proximity maintenance (wanting to be close to the attachment object), separation distress when the attachment object is removed, and a strong pro-attachment-object orientation (Bowlby, 1979; Hazan and Shaver, 1994; Feeney and Noller, 1996). These emotional and behavioral outcomes imply that an individual who is intensely attached to a person or object is likely to be committed to and willing to invest in, protect, and preserve interactions with that object (Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Van Lange et al., 1997). These emotional and behavioral implications are extremely relevant in a marketing context as they predict critical outcomes of interest to marketers, including, but not limited to (a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) favorable word-of-mouth, and (d) willingness to forgive the brand for mishaps.

Favorable attitudes do not necessarily imply such strong motivational or behavioral manifestations. Indeed, research shows that the link between attitude and behavior is contingent on a number of situational and dispositional factors (Sheppard et al., 1988; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993) and inconsistencies related to this direct link have been addressed by such ideas as the specificity-matching hypothesis (Ajzen

and Fishbein, 1980), the matching hypothesis (Miller and Tesser, 1989) and the typicality effect hypothesis (Lord et al., 1984).

Moreover, attitudes themselves can exhibit temporal instability, as seemingly insignificant changes in context and means of elicitation through priming or framing manipulations lead to altered accessibility of concepts and moods and hence attitudes of varying valence (see Sia et al., 1999; Cohen and Reed II, 2006, for more discussion). This view is partially consistent with a constructionist view of attitudes (Wilson and Hodges, 1992; Schwarz, 2006) which argues that individuals often have many and sometimes conflicting associations linked to an attitude object. The attitude they exhibit at any one time may not resemble the attitude they exhibit at a different time — and which attitude they exhibit may well depend on the subset of data to which they attend (Wilson and Hodges, 1992, p. 38). According to this view, attitudes are simple evaluations assembled from cued cognitions and feelings rather than stored evaluations that guide behavior (see Cohen and Reed II, 2006 for more discussion).

This question of the predictive ability of attitudes has been partially resolved by recognizing various dimensions of attitude and decoupling the valence component (how much one likes the object) from the strength component (how confident one is in their valence judgment (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Attitude strength reflects the extent to which an attitude is seen as valid (Petty et al., 2002), and is a function of how well the attitude object has been elaborated (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and is thus salient and held with confidence. Stronger attitudes are better elaborated, leaving the individual more confident about their judgment of the attitude object. Thus, while consumers are more likely to act on (e.g., try, purchase, use) attitude objects that they like (vs. dislike) the attitude-behavior linkage is strengthened by weighing the valence component by attitude strength (e.g., Priester et al., 2004). Strong and favorable attitudes may predict better behaviors than attitudes.

It should be noted, however that the strength construct itself lacks clarity as divergent views characterize the term (e.g., strength as attitude extremity vs. an independent dimension of valence; Converse, 1995). The extremity dimension seems inadequate as an indicator of

attachment because it reflects very positive evaluations or the confidence with one's evaluation is held, not the intense, hot, emotion-laden affect that characterizes strong brand relationships. Additional confusion exists regarding how the attitude strength construct should be measured (Wegener et al., 1995). Considering the uncertain status of attitude strength as a theoretical construct, we do not pursue any further distinction between brand attachment and attitude strength.

As we describe later, past research in person–person attachment shows that the attachment construct accounts for higher-order behaviors associated with commitment to a relationship. We therefore speculate that the attachment construct may offer a new theoretical perspective toward consumer behavior that goes beyond the traditional attitude construct and that it better accounts for higher-order consumer behaviors in an exchange context (between a firm and consumers).

Attachment vs. Commitment. Furthermore, although attachment bears some similarity to the commitment construct, we regard commitment and attachment as separate constructs. We define commitment in a manner consistent with its usage in the emotional attachment literature (e.g., Levinger, 1980) — as a decision or pledge to maintain a long-term relationship with a brand into the future. Commitment is a psychological pledge regarding future behavior. Attachment is a characteristic of a relationship between a consumer and a brand. This definition also resonates with that found in a marketing context, where the commitment construct has been primarily conceptualized in terms of intentions to remain loyal to (and hence maintain a relationship with) the brand in the future (Moorman et al., 1992; Ahluwalia et al., 2000). This definition also resonates with that proposed by Fournier (1998) who defines commitment as "the intention to behave in a manner supportive of relationship longevity" (p. 365).

Strong commitment derived from attachment toward the brand is revealed by a set of commitment-related behaviors that promote relationship maintenance acts (Miller, 1997; see Figure 1.1). Such behaviors include brand loyalty (Ahluwalia et al., 2000), forgiveness of mishaps, and brand advocating behaviors like positive word-of-mouth and the derogation of alternatives (Miller 1997; Finkel et al., 2002; Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004).

We argue that commitment is an outcome of attachment in brand (and other) relationships (see Figure 1.1). Brand attachment reflects a consumers' psychological state of mind (strong self-brand linkages and automatic retrieval of thoughts and feelings about the brand) while commitment reflects intention to engage in behaviors that maintain a brand relationship. Strong attachment should predict a pledge to continue with a relationship and bring with that pledge the emotional energy that creates a satisfying long-term relationship, including stronger forms of brand equity-relevant behaviors. Moreover, we propose that attachment is a more valuable destination for marketers than is commitment. Commitment may involve a pledge to stay in a relationship for a variety of reasons unrelated to attachment. Hence, there are attachment-based and non-attachment based forms of commitment (Johnson, 1991, what others have called affective-based commitment vs. normative and structural commitment). Individuals may be committed to a brand due to lack of competing alternatives or out of some sense of moral or contractual obligation to the company or its sales people.

Commitment formed through factors other than attachment may not be associated with strong forms of behavior like willingness to pay a price premium. Commitment not based on attachment will not have strong self-brand connections and automatic retrieval of thoughts and feelings about the brand.

Attachment vs. Love. Finally, attachment bears some similarity to the construct of love. The prototypical features of love (e.g., trust, caring, honesty, and friendship; see Fehr (1993)) are also likely to exist for strong attachments. However, love is an emotion that characterizes the attachment bond, not the attachment bond itself. Thus, while one may feel love in the presence of the attachment object, attachment is more than this feeling. Researchers have also identified different types of love (Sternberg, 1987; Fehr and Russell, 1991). Examples include friendship love, familial love, maternal love, romantic love, infatuation, sexual love, etc.). We anticipate that attachment reflects strong connections between the self and the brand regardless of the type of love (see Figure 1.1).

2.3 Why is Attachment Important to Brand Equity Management?

Though space limitations preclude a complete detailing of our logic, we posit that attachment is a critical driver of the financial value of the brand to the firm — "brand equity" (see Figure 1.1). According to various brand equity metrics (Ailawadi et al., 2003, the Interbrand model), the brand's financial value to the firm is typically affected by the brand's (a) unit price (P_t), (b) unit marketing costs (MC_t), and (c) the number of units sold (Q). These three components are directly tied to and reflect the nature and intensity of customers' attachment and commitment to a brand.

The stronger the customers' attachment and consequent attachment-based commitment to the brand, the higher the unit price that the brand can bear — that is, attachment is related to customers' willingness to pay a price premium (Van Lange et al., 1997; Thomson et al., 2005). Strong attachments also induce a devaluation of competing alternatives (Johnson and Rusbult, 1989), a willingness to forgive its mishaps (McCullough et al., 1998), a willingness to inhibit impulses to react destructively when being confronted with a partner's potentially destructive act (Rusbult et al., 1991), and a 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 (MC Component). Finally, strong attachments toward brands or individuals impact willingness to promote positive word-of-mouth, engage in brand display, 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) (Wieselquist et al., 1999; Thomson et al., 2005). Such outcomes should both impact the Q component and make the MC component more cost efficient.

3

What Causes Attachment?

3.1 Bases for Attachment

A person or an object (including a brand), becomes connected to the self when it is included in one's self concept — that is, the stable schema and memory-based category that represents the self. The interesting question is why some objects and persons become part of one's self memory. Aron et al. (2005) offer a motivational view that posits that the main benefit of including another in the self concerns resources. As a relationship forms, the attachment object makes his or her resources (hedonic, social, knowledge, etc.) available to the self. This in turn leads to a cognitive reorganization that makes the attachment object's resources seem as if they were one's own. Through this cognitive reorganization one comes to take on the other's perspectives and identities as one's own.

In the human infant, attachment forms when a primary caregiver provides resources relevant to the needs of the infant on a continuing and consistent basis. In the human infant, these resources can be linked to mother's ability to *gratify* the infant through comfort, sustenance (derived from food), sleep, sensory stimulation (oral, gustatory,

tactile auditory, visual), and the removal of sensory and biological discomforts. They can also be linked to the mother's ability to help the child understand their independent identity and how and to whom they are related (e.g., family vs. strangers). They can also be linked to the mother's *enabling actions* that allow the child to develop a sense of efficacy and control over his environment so as to achieve independent outcomes, engage in exploration, and master independent experiences (e.g., a child's engagement in various exploratory behaviors in the presence of his/her mother). Finally, they include *security* derived from knowing who is acting in one's best interests and hence who can be relied on (trusted) to provide resources relevant to the child's needs (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005).

Analogously, we propose that three resource types (hedonic, symbolic, and functional) are particularly relevant in an attachment context (see Figure 1.1). Specifically, a consumer perceives a brand as being personally significant and connects the brand to the self when it offers hedonic resources — when it *gratifies* the self by providing sensory, hedonic or aesthetic pleasure (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005). Brands are also linked to the self when they offer symbolic resources, *enriching* the self by defining or expressing the actual or desired self (Kleine and Baker, 2004; Chaplin and Roedder John, 2005) and differentiating the self from others. And they become linked to the self when they offer functional resources, *enabling* a sense of self-efficacy and allowing the pursuit and achievement of mastery goals. Finally, they become linked to the self when they can be consistently relied upon (*trusted*) to provide these resources. We elaborate on each resource type below. Marketing activities can foster attachment and create strong self-brand connections when they jointly provide resources relevant to consumers' needs.

Gratifying-the-Self through Aesthetic/Hedonic Experiences. Brands can play a powerful role when they can be consistently relied on to provide gratification (pleasure) through aesthetic or hedonic elements that have immediate mood-altering properties. Such gratification can be delivered through any combination of sensory experiences — visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, olfactory, thermal, equilabratory, and/or kinesthetic. Aesthetics portrayed through various brand elements are

important resources in this regard. Here, the brand-self connection is based on one's appreciation of a brand's pleasing aesthetic qualities and attractiveness (Goldman, 2005). Brands with such qualities play a primitive and efficacious role in diverting attention from external and potentially distracting negative stimuli or thoughts to the self and emotions relevant to pleasure.

"Environmental branding," which combines mood, look, and sensory perception through the environment and front-line personnel can literally delight the five senses and provide memorable brand experiences. Starbucks' ability to build a brand that evokes pleasure from multiple sensory modalities (e.g., hot, strong tasting coffee with a pleasant aroma) set in a visually and aurally pleasing retail atmosphere that allows for relaxation and self-indulgence is a good example of a brand that targets brand-self connections through aesthetic/hedonic elements. The Apple Store which combines an inviting, minimalist environment with sleek Apple products that can be seen, felt, used, and experienced provides another example of a brand that can gratify the self. Disneyland evokes a similar connection to the self. From the visually clean, organized, and friendly walk down Main Street, to the thrilling rides on Space Mountain and Star Tours, to the Disneyland Parade, Disney delights the senses, focuses attention on the self and the here and now and provides strong mood-altering properties. Strong brand-self connections thus evolve through aesthetic and hedonic elements of brands that evoke sensory gratification for the self. Aesthetic/hedonic experiences *thus gratify the self.* The coordination of the sensory elements of a brand is particularly important for evoking an emotional connection between the self and a brand.

Enriching-the-Self through Brand Concept Internalization. A brand can also *enrich* the self through its *symbolic* representation. Some brands take on symbolic meaning communicating to the self and to others who one was, who one is, and/or who one wants to be. Here, brands enable brand-self connections by symbolically representing one's ideal past, present, or future self (Markus and Nurius, 1986). They may reflect various parts of one's identity such as the groups to which one belongs, the life goals and core beliefs/values that one holds dear,

the lifestyles one adheres to, or the causes one believes are significant (Shavitt and Nelson, 2000; Lydon et al., 2005). At least three routes characterize the manner in which brands can enrich the self through symbolic self-representation.

First, brands can enrich the self by serving as an anchor to and symbolically representing one's core *past self*. Such brands foster a sense of one's origin, history and core self, providing a basis from which current selves are viewed and future selves are framed. They provide a sense of security and comfort by referencing times of safety. They have the capacity to evoke feelings of bittersweet nostalgia, fondness, and satisfaction. They access rich, if not selective, memories about the past (Kaplan, 1987; Snyder, 1991). They keep one's past alive and thus relate to later-life tasks of maintaining a sense of continuity, fostering identity, protecting the self against deleterious change, strengthening the self, and helping the individual retain a positive self-image. Place brands like one's city, state or country of origin or college are representative of such brands (Joy and Dholakia, 1991; Oswald, 1999). Brands related to music, sport halls of fame, athletes, celebrities, museums, or brands used by one's parents (Moore-Shay and Lutz, 1988; Oswald, 1999) create strong connections with consumers through their linkage with past and oftentimes ideal past selves. For example, music with a nostalgic appeal elicits memories about gratifying aspects of adolescence that bring back the aura of happy past days, old neighborhoods, former love relationships, and personal milestones (Kaplan, 1987).

Second, brands can enrich the self by symbolically representing one's *current self*-reflecting who one is and what one believes. A person derives *meaning* from close relationships and other life goals that reflect his or her core beliefs, values, and role identities (Shavitt and Nelson, 2000; Lydon et al., 2005). Brands like the Body Shop help consumers define themselves as concerned citizens and communicate to others their values of the environment and nature. Consumers who donate to philanthropic organizations like Amnesty International, Habitat for Humanity, and Doctors without Borders do the same. Such brands provide a link to consumers' ideal selves by representation of consumers' values and beliefs. Other brands enrich one's current self by connecting

the individual to other consumers who share their values and beliefs (Kozinets, 2001).

Finally, brands can take on symbolic meaning representing who one is or wants to be, linking the brand to an ideal *future* self. Such brands reflect one's aspirations, hopes, and ideal future self. For some consumers, such brands are linked with status, success, and achievement — as would be the case for brands like Rolex and Hummer. However, other ideal future selves pave the way for self-enrichment through different brand meanings. One's ideal future self as someone who is healthy (e.g., Atkins), athletic (Nike), famous (e.g., American Idol), or a good parent (e.g., Parents Magazine) involve other brands whose linkage to an ideal future self enriches the self.

Brands can enrich the self through any or all three routes. For example, Harley Davidson evokes strong brand-self connections by linking the self to deeply held values like freedom and machismo. And it involves accoutrements that work with the motorcycle to express personal identity and values. Usage of the brand creates linkages to personal experiences that are part of one's nostalgic past. It evokes connectedness to others who are members of various Harley groups. It evokes position within a social hierarchy of other Harley owners and hence creates possible future selves for aspiring Harley owners (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Many lifestyle brands transcend the product-only customer relationship and have developed emotional and long-term bonds with a target market. Ralph Lauren's customers strongly believe that the legendary RL brand accurately symbolizes a posh and upscale lifestyle. These loyal customers purchase active lifestyle brands not for what they are (their function utility), but rather for what they represent. Although they know that they are not Lance Armstrong or Michael Jordan, some consumers form a personal link to the best athletes in the world by believing that they are the best they can be when they wear Nike shoes and "Just Do It." With the Body Shop, some consumers define themselves as a concerned citizen of the environment and nature. *Symbolic brand concept internalization thus enriches the self.*

Enabling the Self through the Product and Service Performance. Strong attachments can also form when a brand creates a sense of an

efficacious and capable self, enabling consumers to exert control over his or her environment so as to approach desired goals and avoid undesired ones. Creating a sense of efficacy is in turn contingent on product performance attributes that consistently and reliably enable task performance. If and when a brand is not able to serve the consumers' needs effectively through reliable functional performance, the basic assumption behind the attachment would be violated. Consumers' beliefs in a brand's competence are therefore critical for the attachment formation and its sustainability. Such brands also impact emotions like hopefulness, efficacy, and optimism regarding daily distress management, one's ability to cope with life problems, and emotional stability (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005).

For example, FedEx's overnight delivery assurance and Swiss Army Knives' versatile applications must have contributed to the consumers' attachment to these so-called functional brands by fostering a sense of mastery over one's environment. Note that product functions are not restricted to objectively discernible product performance features. They also include how such functions are delivered and serviced. To illustrate, Target's pharmacy inserted a magnifying glass inside the medication's package to help customers read about product dosages, side effects, and drugs that should be avoided. We include both objective product functions and other services associated with the purchase and use of the brand in the notion of product functional performance. Through self-related mastery experiences such brands enable the self by facilitating control and efficacy in attaining (avoiding) desirable (undesirable) outcomes. *Product and service performance thus enables the self.*

Self-assuring Trust with a Brand (or Brand Owner). The extent to which a child develops strong emotional attachments with its mother depends not only on the mother's ability to provide the resources noted above. It also depends on her ability to do so consistently, and hence to foster a sense that she can be trusted to act in the child's best interests. Analogously, we believe that the consumers will develop strong attachments to a brand when they believe it can be relied upon to consistently deliver its resources and when the brand holder (the firm) is perceived to have the consumers' best interests at heart.

Consistent with research in psychology, the term we use to provide this sense of security is trust. We define trust as the expectation that the brand can be relied upon to behave in a benevolent manner and to be responsive to one's needs (Holmes, 1989; Sorrentino et al., 1995; Wieselquist et al., 1999). Expectations of benevolence and responsiveness imbue a sense of confidence that the brand will act in ways that are consistent with the customer's desired goals even in the face of future relationship uncertainties (Rempel et al., 2001). When customers believe that the firm puts customer interests ahead of the firm's and that it strives to enhance customer welfare they should become more emotionally attached to it because they trust its efforts.

Considerable literature supports the moderating role of trust shown in Figure 1.1; (e.g., Rempel et al., 1985; Mikulincer, 1998; Delgado-Ballester and Munera-Aleman, 2001; Rempel et al., 2001; Hess and Story, 2005; Esch et al., 2006). Additional research shows that trust is instrumental to the desire to maintain a long-term commitment to the entity (e.g., Burke and Stets, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002; Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Esch et al., 2006). It also predicts actions designed to foster the customer's relationship with the entity (Wieselquist et al., 1999).

There are a number of reasons as to why trust predicts these positive effects on attachment, commitment, and pro-relationship behaviors. First, like attachment and commitment, trust is a relationship variable. It evolves over time and is based on past experiences and prior interactions. The emergence of trust comes through diagnostic situations — that is, situations that reveal the benevolence and responsiveness of the attachment entity. Attachment (and commitment) cannot survive without trust because the lack of trust leaves individuals vulnerable to risks about an uncertain outcome (Morgan and Hunt 1995; Coulter and Coulter, 2002). Diagnostic situations that imbue a sense of trust reduce these perceptions of vulnerability to future risk and hence increase the individual's willingness to become dependent on (attached to and committed to) a long-term relationship with the entity (Wieselquist et al., 1999).

Second, trust also creates an intimacy goal (Mikulincer, 1998). It acts as a secure base from which the individual can seek greater inti-

macy by taking future risks that add dependency. Third, trust creates a more abstract understanding of the entity as part of the self. That is, it promotes conceptualizing the entity as "us" or "we" as opposed "me" or "I." Thus, trust fosters the development of the entity as part of one's extended self. This sense of "we-ness" should foster a sense that one is attached to the entity. Finally, trust heightens attachment by providing a disincentive to the consumer to leave the brand relationship. By leaving the brand relationships, one faces uncertainties and vulnerabilities that are not faced by the current brand relationship.

While the discussion above posits that brand attachment can be created through gratifying, enriching or enabling the self, these routes are not mutually exclusive. Hence any or all combinations of routes may foster strong attachments. The greater the number of associations and the stronger each associative link is, the stronger the brand attachment becomes (Carlston, 1992). Notably though, these associations will not lead to attachment if the brand cannot be trusted to provide these resources on a consistent basis or if the brand holder is perceived as acting in ways that suggests that they do not have consumers' best interests at heart.

4

Mental Representation of Brand Memory

As Figure 1.1 suggests, the brand's resources (benefits) that gratify, enable and enrich the self can be represented in the consumer's self-schema; a mental representation, which connects the brand to the self. Figure 1.1 also suggests that a firm can guide these mental representations both by the resources (benefits) that link the brand to the self and by selecting a strategic brand exemplar that provides a visual exemplar of the brand's meaning.

Mental representations, including representations of the self and the brand, can include semantic or abstract representations such as category characteristics, beliefs, values, and abstract affect, as well as episodic memories linked to specific experiences with the object (Sia et al., 1999). Episodic memories are concrete and vivid; specific instantiations as opposed to their more abstract semantic-based counterparts (Carlson and Smith, 1996). Episodic representation may be constructed by actually perceiving the stimulus object, imagining it, being told about it second-hand, etc. (Smith, 1998, p. 411).

Based on the views of a number of theorists, Sia et al. (1999) noted that people make judgments about abstract concepts (e.g., brands) by using specific remembered instances (exemplars). They also noted

that people find it easier to reason with concrete examples than with semantic abstractions, especially when they are familiar with a particular judgment task. Because it is often impossible to engage in an exhaustive search of all relevant information stored in memory when making a judgment, the outcome of search will be influenced by the relative accessibility of those exemplars that come to mind. They demonstrated that episodes are highly accessible and thus have a powerful impact on attitude formation, attitude change, and attitude-behavior consistency.

Episodic memory, and hence exemplars that come to mind, are often visually represented (Brewer, 1988). Thus, specific episodes become like instances or exemplars of the brand category. Exemplars in psychology have been examined primarily in natural or social categories (e.g., an oak is a member of the tree category; Bill Clinton is a member of the politician category).

In contrast to the aforementioned categories, the category of a brand does not have readily agreeable members that define the brand category itself. While brands can be identified in terms of the specific product categories with which a brand is associated (Loken et al., in press; Loken et al., 2002; Mao and Krishnan, in press; Ng and Houston, 2006), brands do not have to be limited to particular product categories. Specifically, a category of a brand such as Heinz may include Heinz pickles, Heinz ketchup, etc. as its members. It also may include other visually represented instances or exemplars (e.g., the late Mr Heinz) as its members, too. The Timex brand category includes the exemplar of a wrist watch, but also exemplars that reflect the vivid torture test-associated scenes shown in its commercials.

Since a brand category does not have naturally defined category members, it resembles an ad hoc category (Barsalou, 1983). Importantly then, the firm can play a powerful role in deciding on which salient exemplar to associate with the brand. Often these exemplars are reflected by brand symbols. It is easy to find brand symbols that have uniquely distinctive characteristics and that may be called exemplars. For example, one may associate brands like Hello Kitty, Marlboro, Harley-Davidson, and Godiva with their vivid prototypic exemplars (i.e., the cute and appealing cat, the rugged looking western cowboy,

the freedom-loving, tough, sunglass-clad motorcyclist, and the high status chocolate wrapped in a precious looking packaging, respectively).

There are many symbols consumers can easily identify, and associate with brands. They include the bulging arm of Arm and Hammer, the Morton Salt Girl, Aunt Jemima, Tony the Tiger, Charlie the Tuna, Quaker Oats Oatmeal, American Airlines among others. Notably though, not all exemplars are equally effective at fostering and representing a brand-self connection. For example, consider the exemplar of the cute looking cat of the Hello Kitty brand category and the smiling grandfather, Colonel Sanders of the KFC brand category. The two exemplars differ in the strength of their memory associations and the level of emotional connection consumers have toward them. Therefore, a critical question concerns how a firm can establish and visually represent the brand in a way that reflects the brand's resources and fosters strong brand attachment. In other words, how can a firm identify a strategic brand exemplar that complements the brand name and the meanings linked to it?

5

Strategic Brand Exemplars

Although there is a considerable debate over what an exemplar is and what it is not, we define a strategic brand exemplar as the most salient, highly accessible and strong brand-self connecting visual symbol or image that represents a brand in the minds of consumers. A strategic brand exemplar is not simply a logo or a symbol used simply for identification purposes. Developing a brand exemplar that is "strategic" requires a firm to identify a visually vivid symbol or image that reflects and reinforces the brand's positioning and establishes a self-brand connection with customers. As pointed out earlier, this visual symbol does not have to be a member product of a brand category. It can be any image that is understood by consumers as the most salient representation of a brand category.

5.1 Characteristics of Strategic Brand Exemplars

As discussed earlier, brand attachments are fostered when the brand can (1) gratify the self through hedonic and aesthetic qualities, (2) enable the self by fostering a sense of efficacy and control, (3) enrich the self by providing symbolic meanings that define one's identity,

and (4) can do so reliably and with the customer's interests at heart. A brand's visual symbol should also reflect and augment these benefits by offering the same benefits. Hence, a strategic brand exemplar should foster such connections.

Specifically, a strategic brand exemplar should possess self-gratifying property with its sensory/perceptual and symbolic aesthetics, and communicate them to customers. Consumers must be able to relate it to their personal aesthetic taste, and their actual or desired self. While "spokes-characters" all brand symbols that can serve to identify and differentiate the brand, they may not be called strategic brand exemplars unless they also offer the opportunity to convey the brand's hedonic and aesthetic benefits. The visual symbol of Hello-Kitty appears to have this hedonic and aesthetic quality.

Second, a strategic exemplar should reflect brand functions that enable consumers to effectively manage their own lives. As noted earlier, creating brand connection through product functions requires that consumers appreciate the brand's effort to foster their well being and welfare, thus making them feel it as part of their lives (e.g., Coca Cola as an indispensable item for hamburgers or meals). It is not just product functions that consumers find reliable and effective, but the added attention and care imbued in the product itself and accompanied by its use (e.g., making Coca-Cola available as a six-pack so that the entire family can enjoy it). One effective way to create brand-self connection through the enabling mode is to represent the core benefits of a brand in terms of "when" (time of usage), "where" (place of usage), "how" (the manner in which a brand is used), "why" (reason for its use), and/or "whom" (target customers) the brand is linked to the self. When the brand symbol illustrates the brand's specific usage context, consumers can relate it to themselves and their usage of brands. The brand symbol then not only serves to differentiate the brand from competing alternatives, it also offers a connection with consumers.

Third, a strategic exemplar should reflect who the consumer is by its linkage with the consumers' identity, values, and ideals. The swoosh symbol of Nike is symbolic and effective at creating a linkage with consumers' identity. Coke's "Teach the World to Sing" campaign united the

brand with consumers around the world who valued harmony, peace, and caring.

Finally, a strategic exemplar should be associated with a feeling of trust (benevolence) with a brand or its holder (e.g., a firm). Coca-Cola's advertising theme of "It's the real thing." promotes the authenticity and trust of its visual symbol. A visual symbol should also possess elements that elicit a feeling of trust from customers with its symbolic appeal (e.g., Mercedes Benz, Hallmark, Planter's peanut man). In this case, it is not a brand name or a firm as a brand holder who helps a brand's visual symbol become trustworthy. Rather, it is the visual symbol itself that helps a brand holder be viewed as trustworthy.

It should be noted that the key characteristic for a strategic brand exemplar is its ability to connect the brand to the self. While it should serve to identify the brand and differentiate it from others, the goal of the strategic brand exemplar is fostering connection. Note also that while it is possible for brand attachment to occur only through one or two of the three modes, we posit that the most effective strategic exemplar creates a consumer-brand linkage on multiple bases. It creates a strong connection with consumers primarily through its ability to create hedonic/aesthetic brand self linkages, (e.g., Hello Kitty, Mickey Mouse) or reflect the consumer's identity (e.g., Harley-Davidson, Body Shop, Steinway, Rolex), induces a sense of efficacy and control in attaining functional performance goals (e.g., Michelin, Swiss Army Knife) and promotes and sustains trust (e.g., a lonely repairman of Maytag). We posit that the presence of all qualities help a brand symbol truly become a strategic brand exemplar.

Table 5.1 shows the key criteria that need to be met in order for a brand's visual symbol to serve as a strategic brand exemplar. This requirement may be difficult to execute in the short term, and may thus need to be developed incrementally over time and with aid of a long-term plan. These criteria would also serve useful guidelines for the decision of whether a brand should rely on its existing symbol or develop its own uniquely new symbol that will be most effective at creating identification, differentiation, and connection.

For example, Apple may decide that it will rely on the female silhouette exemplar as iPod's strategic brand exemplar. To do so, Apple

Table 5.1 Criteria for a strategic brand exemplar.

I.	Identification:
	1. Vividness: Is a visual symbol of a brand prominent and salient from customers' view?
	2. Typicality: Does a visual symbol of a brand serve as the most typical/representative member of a brand category?
II.	Differentiation: Does a visual symbol convey strongly differentiating product benefits?
III.	Connection:
	1. Self-gratifying aesthetics: Does the brand symbol reflect the brand's aesthetic pleasing benefits?
	2. Self-enabling product functions: Does the brand symbol directly convey the brand's role at enhancing efficacy and control over performance goals?
	3. Symbolic Aesthetics: Does the brand symbol connect the brand with a consumer's past, current, or future identity?
	4. Self-assuring trust with a brand (or a brand holder): Does the brand symbol evoke a feeling of trust?

needs to make it the most typical instance of the iPod brand category. It must also convey its symbolic qualities, convey a rich set of memory associations about iPod's product benefits and services through it, and endow it with trust. Performing these tasks requires that Apple carefully engage in ongoing management and of attention to the exemplar.

5.2 Benefits of a Strategic Brand Exemplar

Strategic brand exemplars offer a number of benefits. First, because they are visual representations of the brand and its connection to the self, exemplars become more strongly linked to the self and hence accessible from memory. An exemplar that is rich in self-relevant information and strongly affective in character is more likely to be highly accessible and regarded as typical of the brand category (Barsalou, 1983). Its accessibility makes it used readily to identify the brand and differentiate it from others. Accessibility also makes brand retrieval more likely, suggesting the brand enjoys a greater likelihood of being included in a consideration set. The visual redundancy between the brand symbol and brand-self-connection increases both retrieval of the brand and why it is self-relevant, and hence the types of attachment and commitment-related behaviors that should be associated with the brand.

Such exemplars also support flexible extension boundaries through an exemplar-based *fit* judgment (exemplar matching), as opposed to the feature-based *similarity* judgment. Exemplar-based fit judgments tend to be more holistic and more inclusive in a way similar to configural based judgments (see Fiske and Pavelchak, 1986, for a discussion). For example, by bringing two products (the parent product and an extension product) under the same exemplar (e.g., the same lonely repairman touting the functional performance of his product), the brand extension may be categorized as belonging to the parent brand category, being thus able to overcome the potential problems associated with dissimilar extensions. Although it may not be called a strategic brand exemplar in the strictest sense, the Hello Kitty exemplar (e.g., the cute looking cat with other related associations) seems to allow many seemingly dissimilar product categories together (e.g., baby and kid's furniture, women's camisoles/tanks, video games, coffee makers, body jewelry, cookbooks, automotive accessories, clocks, bracelets, bath linens, camping and hiking gear, bowling equipment, women's panties, toasters, hair care, etc.). In this case, the Hello Kitty exemplar appears to serve as an organizing category under which seemingly dissimilar products are all housed without diluting its core meaning.

Alternatively, because of their rich memory associations, exemplars may allow consumers to find a fit between a parent brand and a brand extension. To illustrate, some consumers may have highly developed knowledge linked to the Hello Kitty exemplar. They may thus be able to retrieve whatever information is contained in the exemplar to make sense in light of the extension product category. In this way, rather than examining the similarity between the parent product and its extension product, consumers may create meaning from the exemplar that fits the extension product category. Based on this view (richer memory associations), one may also understand why symbolic brands with highly vivid exemplars can extend to seemingly dissimilar product categories (Park et al., 1991). The rich set of associations linked to the exemplar may allow consumers to identify or create bases that connect the brand and its extension.

Finally, strategic brand exemplars may also enhance the parent brand. Specifically, exemplar-based line and brand extensions would

strengthen the salience, vividness and the memory association of the strategic brand exemplar itself. Going back to the Hello Kitty brand, the more extensions it makes, the more vivid and meaningful its exemplar may become. Its application to a variety of usages appears to make its exemplar more interesting and less boring through the exemplar variety. Also, extensions of symbolic brands with strong exemplars to many dissimilar products may make the exemplars more *complete* (e.g., a tough freedom-seeking man not only rides Harley-Davidson motorcycle but also drinks coffee with a Harley-Davidson mug).

Increasing the extension boundary of a brand through a strategic brand exemplar would increase the consumer's exposure to and use of the exemplar. To the extent that consumers are exposed to and use these exemplars often and recently, their accessibility will be greatly facilitated. This increased accessibility makes them highly salient in memory, affecting consumers' judgment. Reyes et al. (1980) showed that accessible information is more vivid, better recalled, and has a greater influence on juror verdicts. Thus, it appears to be quite possible that strategic brand exemplars not only facilitate dissimilar brand extensions (positive extension effects) but also strengthen the parent brand through such extensions (positive feedback effects).

6

Discussion

This review examined four key issues involved in developing and establishing strong brand relationships with customers. The first concerns the cultivation of brand attachment — a distinctive higher-order construct that bears critical implications for the enhancement of a brand's equity (see Figure 1.1). The second concerns the consumer and firm-based outcomes that arise from strong brand attachment. The third concerns process by which brand attachments form — specifically, their role in gratifying, enriching, and enabling the self and their benevolent relationship with the consumer. The final issue explored the importance of the strategic brand exemplar as an embodiment of the brand and hence a tool by which brand sustainability, competitive advantage and growth can be realized. The essential requirement needed to realize this opportunity is the firm's choice of a strategic brand exemplar and the careful strategic management of that exemplar over time.

Effective management of the brand's visual symbol alone can help customers identify and differentiate the brand from competing alternatives. For example, the Intel-Inside brand symbol fosters identification and differentiation of the brand from competitors. By linking the self to its visual symbol, Intel could also have established an emotional connection with its customers.

A relevant question to which we alluded earlier concerned when a firm should decide to retain an existing symbol as its strategic brand exemplar or whether it should develop a unique symbol as its strategic brand exemplar. We suggest that this decision can be based on the criteria listed in Table 5.1. If the existing symbol fits the criteria noted in Table 5.1, it may serve as a strategic brand exemplar. If, however, the fit is low, it would be better for the new product brand to develop its own symbol as its strategic brand exemplar. While the existing logo may be used on packaging, the new logo may be highlighted and prominently associated with the brand so as to achieve brand connection.

While we acknowledge how difficult it is for firms to create strong brand attachment, we suggest that attachment is a human behavior. Depending on how a brand is positioned and portrayed to customers, it still can elicit strong self-relevant emotional reactions from customers. For example, Tums offers very tangible benefits to customers with its ability to handle stomach acid. There is a direct interface between Tums and its customers with respect to what it does to their selves (e.g., offering comfort and security). This benefit alone may serve a base from which it can foster brand attachment.

Although brands can theoretically be successful without establishing an emotional connection with their customers, success and competitive advantage can be further enhanced by the help of strategic brand exemplars that create these linkages. Going back several generations one can identify successful brands that have defied the decline stage of their product life cycle. Despite enormous competitive pressures, they have nevertheless successfully maintained their strong relationships with customers. Examples include Morton Salt, Planter's peanuts, Aunt Jemima syrup, Green Giant vegetables, Barbie dolls, Tiffany and Co, Campbell's Soup, Fruit of the Loom, and the Swiss Army Knife. One wonders whether these brand symbols are simply one of many identifying features associated with these brands or whether they serve as strategic brand exemplars that are highly effective for differentiation and brand-self connections. If the former is true, they still have strategic opportunities to make their logos or symbols more effective as strategic brand exemplars.

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