The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes

Simon Thériault

A Thesis
in
The John Molson School of Business
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science in Administration (Marketing) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2012

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Simon Thériault

Entitled: The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Administration (Marketing) complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Dr. Harjeet S. Bhabra (chair)

_____ Dr. H. Onur Bodur (examiner)

_____ Dr. Tieshan Li (examiner)

_____ Dr. Bianca Grohmann (supervisor)

Approved by:

_____

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____

Dean of Faculty

Date _____

Abstract

The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes

Simon Thériault

Products and brands are multi-layered and involve utilitarian (functional), hedonic (enjoyment-related), and symbolic (ego-significant) aspects. Although the symbolic function of brands has been investigated in the literature, there is no unifying dimension or measurement instrument available to evaluate brand symbolism. The purpose of this research was to resolve this gap in the literature and develop a valid, reliable and parsimonious scale measuring the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward product categories and brands within categories. Drawn from a comprehensive review of extant literature on branding, self-concepts and consumer behavior, an initial set of items was developed and refined to create a single-dimension scale composed of 34 items. Two additional studies were conducted to establish the unidimensionality, reliability, and validity of the scale. The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes proved to be unidimensional and independent to the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of consumer attitudes. The scale was also discriminated from other brand-related constructs, such as self-connection and brand engagement. It also successfully predicted several consumers' responses. As such, it unveiled the mediating role of self-connection between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand attitude. It confirmed, as well, the mediating role of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes between both consumers' need for uniqueness and brand engagement and overall brand attitude. Limitations, managerial implications and future avenues of research are discussed.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Grohmann for your help and constant encouragement. Merci Joëlle pour tout.

Table of contents

List of tables

Introduction

Products and brands are multi-layered and involve utilitarian (functional), hedonic (enjoyment-related), and symbolic (ego-significant) aspects. Although the literature provides a valid measure of the hedonic and utilitarian aspects of consumer attitudes toward brands (Voss et al. 2003), no such measure of the symbolic dimension exists. Branding nevertheless involves the strategic management of symbolic consumer attitudes through development and maintenance of brand personality (Aaker 1997), brand relationships (Fournier 1998), and cultural branding (Holt 2004). In fact, brand managers have successfully shaped brands that resonate with consumers by providing symbolic meaning, such as Harley Davidson and Apple that even developed into cultural icons (Holt 2002, 2004). Pressured by an increasingly competitive environment, most brands have tapped into symbolic meanings to further differentiate their offerings and position strategically – making symbolic properties an important means to overcome today's market challenges. As a result, some brands have developed strong brand equity by building on symbolic aspects and have benefited from advantages such as stronger consumer loyalty (Keller 2003) and premium price (Keller 2003, Roehm and Brady 2007). Given that brand equity arises partly from a brand's symbolic meanings (Keller 1993), it is surprising that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands has received little attention. Brand managers need to assess whether their brands are in fact perceived symbolic—as opposed to utilitarian or hedonic—in order to design and orient brand strategy accordingly. Measuring the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands is therefore highly relevant. No widely used, empirically

validated scale measuring brand symbolism exists. Addressing this need, this research aims at developing a measure that will assess the extent to which brands are perceived symbolic by consumers. Building on a definition of the symbolic (as opposed to the utilitarian and hedonic) dimension of consumer attitudes, the objective of this research is the (1) development, (2) refinement, and (3) validation of a scale measuring the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes in three studies.

Researchers have widely investigated different aspects of brand symbolism, such as brand personality (Aaker 1997, Grohmann 2009, Swaminathan et al. 2009), cultural branding (McCracken 1986, Holt 2002, 2004, Diamond et al. 2009), and brand relationships (Fournier 1998, Aggarwal 2004). Although the symbolic (i.e., ego-expressive) function of brands has been considered, there is no unifying dimension or measurement instrument available to evaluate brand symbolism (see different definitions and measures used by Aaker 1997, Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005, LeBoeuf and Simmons 2010). A well-developed definition of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes should strengthen future research on symbolic brands and potentially reconcile different findings in past literature. As further contribution, this research seeks to provide evidence that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes is unidimensional and is independent from the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of consumer attitudes (Voss et al. 2003). Some researchers have considered the symbolic and utilitarian dimensions of consumer attitudes as dependent (i.e., ends of one continuum; Childers 1992, Park et al. 1986). Others suggest that the utilitarian and symbolic dimensions are independent (Katz 1960, Aaker 1997), such that some brands are symbolic, utilitarian, symbolic and

utilitarian at the same time, or neither—a finding contrasting previous literature. Therefore, there is a clear need to reconcile these two perspectives and to relate the symbolic dimension to the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions discussed and measured in previous literature (Batra and Ahtola 1990, Voss et al. 2003). This research addresses this gap and aims at providing a valid, reliable, and generalizable measure of the symbolic dimension. This measure also constitutes a diagnostic tool for practitioners. Once the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes is clearly defined and its measure validated in relation to the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions, the resulting three-dimensional scale will allow brand managers to monitor the evolution of their brands' meanings and assess the effectiveness of marketing strategies in order to resonate with consumers and differentiate themselves (Holt, 2004)

Chapter 1: Literature review

1.1 Brand equity and brand associations

The concept of brand equity is critical for an understanding of the complex nature of symbolic brand consumption. In general, brand equity refers to the global effect of direct and indirect marketing initiatives onto a particular brand. Although many definitions of brand equity have been developed, that of Keller (1993) fits very well as it provides a consumer rather than a firm perspective, which emphasizes the outcomes – such as price and market share - rather than the driving factors of brand equity. In fact, Keller (1993) explains that customer-based brand equity "appears to hinge at its core on psychological associations with the brand" (p. 1). He defines the concept of customer-based brand equity as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. This conceptualization of brand equity encourages businesses to build brand knowledge, described as the "personal meanings about a brand stored in a consumer memory, that is, all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information" (Keller 1993). These personal meanings are derived from brand associations that consumers forge and associate to a brand. Brand associations are therefore created by consumers' encounters with brands (i.e., advertising, distribution, typical users, etc.). Many of these associations may emerge from the brand's constituencies and develop into brand meanings. Diamond and colleagues (2009) described the complexity of brand meaning by acknowledging that it is formed from a multitude of constituents and from the interactions between them. As they discovered, brand meanings can be

complementary and in some instances, even contradictory. They suggest that some brands thrive on such complex brand meanings, as brand meanings may be filled "with ambiguities consumers are driven to resolve" (Diamond et al. 2009, p. 131). Consequently, consumers and brands are in a constant brand meaning creation process because brand meanings are "redacted, recirculated, and replayed" (Diamond et al. 2009, p. 131).

1.2 Symbolic brand meanings

1.2.1 Symbolic brand consumption and personalities

One of the most notorious symbolic values of brands is their personality. Aaker (1997) has provided strong empirical evidence that brands can be defined by human personality traits. She finds that brands can be illustrated on five orthogonal personality dimensions, which approximate the "Big Five" dimensions of human personality, namely sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Brand personality characteristics may also include demographic characteristics such as age, class, and gender (Aaker 1997, Grohmann 2009). Interestingly, people infer human traits to objects (Aaker 1997). Hence, brands can be perceived as possessing human traits. In fact, consumers may see possessions as extensions of themselves (Belk 1988). The process by which personality traits are attributed to brands implies direct (i.e., through people associated to a brand, typical users, celebrities) and indirect (i.e., through advertising, product design, distribution channels) contacts with individuals (Aaker 1997). A primary role of brand personalities holds in that "the greater the congruity between the human characteristics that consistently and distinctively describe an individual's self-conception

and those that describe a brand, the greater the preference for the brand" (Aaker 1997, p. 348). As an individual's self-concept is multi-dimensional (Belk 1988), brand personality can relate to many aspects of the self, such as an actual self, an ideal self, possible self, and so forth (Aaker 1997). Aaker (1999) also discovered that some consumers could prefer brands personalities that are congruent with the situation they are in rather than with their self-concepts (e.g., I am at a hip club with a date, so I like exciting brands). In this investigation of brand symbolism, an important question is raised: why do consumers use brands for their personalities? Many researchers have acknowledged the idea that consumers may use brand personality as a tool to maintain (Belk 1988), enhance or create self-identities (Belk 1988), to express their self-concepts (Aaker 1997, Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005), and to signal a desirable image in order to facilitate social interactions and build relationships (Swaminathan et al. 2009).

1.2.2 Symbolic brand consumption immersed in relationships

Looking at Apple and Harley-Davidson aficionados, it appears that consumers emotionally bond and engage in relationships with brands. This implies that consumers choose brands for reasons beyond functional and hedonic benefits. Although brands are inanimate objects, it has been demonstrated that brands and consumers may enjoy relationships that approximate those of interpersonal relationships (Aggarwal 2004, Aggarwal and Law 2005, Fournier 1998). As such, sometimes considered asymmetrical, consumer-brand relationships are made of personal and impersonal properties and mimic relationships that fans may have with celebrities (Aggarwal 2004). In addition, brands may be considered members of a culture or a society, because consumers assess

consumer-brand relationships through social norms (Aggarwal 2004). It is worth noting that consumer-brand relationships possess multiple dimensions and forms, resulting in a variety of emotional bonds, such as friendly, addictive, love, and pure cult (Fournier 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Interestingly, consumer-brand relationships are shaped in accordance to the complete portfolio of brands consumer may have or prefer, and therefore, these relationships will be chosen for its ability to provide specific meanings that will enhance or create consumers' life projects. As Fournier (1998) explains, consumer-brands relationships occur when there is goal compatibility between brands and consumers rather than congruency between brands properties and consumers' personality traits. Meaningful relationships are determined by the "ego significance" of the chosen brands (Fournier 1998), an idea that supports Belk (1988) view that some possessions are more central to self than others. Consumer-brand relationships are explained in part by the idea that individuals qualify brands as active and interdependent relationship partners (i.e., brands nourish the relationship though their day-to-day marketing initiatives). But most importantly, the symbolic consumption of brands occurring via consumer-brand relationships is due to consumers engaging in relationships with their own meaning provisions and to the fact that relationships are purposive. By doing so, consumers will participate to relationships with brands and expect benefits (Aggarwal 2004, Fournier 1998). So far, the literature proposes the following findings on how consumer process symbolic meanings held into consumer-brand relationships. Fournier (1998) suggest that consumer-brand relationships shape and provide ego-related meanings to consumers in self-construction projects and more broadly, give meaning to consumers` lives. Fournier (1998) emphasizes the importance of daily situations in which

brands are used by consumers to make sense of their lives (e.g., "florals that make me feel romantic and attractive", p. 367).

Therefore, when it comes to consumers' internal processes, consumer-brand relationships are very revealing. Because relationships may provide meanings that are rooted in psychological, social and cultural contexts, brands may become resources for consumers' life projects. Fournier (1998) has well synthesized key consumer motivations for brand relationships: relationships may resolve life themes; relationships may act on important life's projects such as role-changing events (e.g., college graduations) and stage transitions (e.g., midlife crisis); and relationships may hold socio-emotional meanings that may be used by consumers in a matter of psychosocial identity projects such as reassurance of self-worth, announcement of an image or social integration.

1.2.3 Symbolic brand consumption immersed in specific social contexts

Widely diversified, reference groups are fundamental sources of symbolic brand meanings. Building on prior research, Childers and Rao (1992) identify two specific types of reference groups: normative and comparative groups. The former refers to parents, teachers, and peers who provide the individual with norms, attitudes, and values through direct interaction. The latter relates to public figures, which are not in direct contact with individuals (e.g., sports, entertainment), that set standards of achievement that individuals use for comparisons. Through their common use of particular brands, some individuals may imbue symbolic meanings to brands because they are perceived as part of reference groups. Because individuals define themselves through group identity (Belk 1988) and because they behave according to social norms established by references

groups with which they identify (Childers and Rao 1992), consumers develop brand connections with brands that reference groups use—brand connections that may help consumers' self-identity projects (Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005). In particular, Edson-Escalas and Bettman (2005) explain that people use "brands whose images match references groups to which they belong to establish a psychological association with those groups" (p. 388). They also found that people will "reject social meanings that arise from outgroup brands" (p. 388). More generally, Childers and Rao (1992) suggest that consumers use comparative reference groups for self-appraisal and normative reference groups as sources of personal norms, attitudes and values. Therefore, consumers feed their self-construction projects with symbolic brand meanings arising from reference groups, and also use brands as a means to signal or express their social stance.

Unquestionably, brand consumption happens in a larger and more complex scope of social interactions than that of reference groups. The brand community literature cleverly explores the matter. The premise is based on a widely acknowledged notion that consumers' "lookalike interpersonal" relationships with brands create meanings. Rather than being dyadic, relationships in brand communities appear to be far more complex, composed of multiple participants and producing synergized brand relationships. In particular, findings indicate that consumers may relate to brands through their interactions with other consumers, brands, products and corporations within a community (McAlexander et al. 2002). In fact, consumers value their relationships with each of these participants and expect benefits from them - benefits that may be, for instance, psychological or utilitarian in nature. One important characteristic of brand communities

is that they involve the creation and negotiation of meanings (McAlexander et al. 2002, Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), which may be what consumers strive for. These brand meanings may therefore emerge from psychological needs. As a matter of fact, the brand community literature reveals several consumer motivations such as the need for community (i.e., developing interpersonal relationships, having a sense of belonging and importance), playing social roles (i.e., mentoring and performing for neophytes brand users), or self-expression.

1.2.4 Symbolic brand consumption immersed in cultures

Brand consumption also occurs at a cultural level in which meanings are carried and created via interactions between individuals and brands. We therefore find a rich and complex system of cultural referents imbued in brands. As "culture constitutes the world by supplying it with meaning" (McCracken 1986, p. 72), culture is a clear source of symbolic meanings. Varying widely, cultural properties have been presented via its textural (i.e., providing a cultural background to a brandscape) and textual quality (i.e., cultural characteristics as brand's narratives) (McCracken 1986). Cultural properties in brands take many forms, such as characteristics typically associated to specific sub-cultures, an age group, an ethnic population, and so on (McCracken 1986). The fact that brands can carry cultural properties has been widely studied and is well recognized in the literature. An important contribution in the cultural meaning creation process comes from McCracken (1986) who describes the process by which cultural properties is transferred from the culturally constituted world to consumers via goods, a dynamic that can also be applied to brands. According to McCracken, cultural referents are imbued in brands

through many mechanisms, such as those related to marketing initiatives (e.g., advertising, product design, distribution, public relation and spokespeople). Brand managers in fact develop narratives and stories that stage strategic cultural referents hoping that these stories resonate with their target consumers. Less obvious but nonetheless important is that cultural properties are indirectly tied to brands via several means such as reference groups, typical users, or celebrities.

Although researchers have divergent perspectives on cultural branding, they share a common view: Consumers use brands imbued with cultural referents for self-construction and signaling purposes. For instance, McCracken (1986) suggest that individuals engage in rituals that may help them in life transitions, such as helping children to become adults. He also underlines that brands are used for self-differentiation in that they can exhibit characteristics of cultural categories such as gender, status, lifestyles and so on. However, McCracken (1986) focuses on the fact that brands can carry already existing rather than newly created cultural properties. In order to remain relevant to consumers, brands need to create original cultural properties rather than bank on cultural referents initially sourced from the culturally constituted world (Holt 2002, 2004; Cayla and Eckhardt 2008). In this perspective, Holt (2002) conceives brands as a provider of cultural resources that consumers can use in their self-construction projects. For instance, Martin and colleagues (2006, cited in Diamond et al. 2009) investigated cultural meanings as a key determinant to brand communities, providing evidence that cultural meanings are used to develop collective identity. Along with other researchers (Diamond et al. 2009, Holt and Thompson 2004), they have specifically highlighted that consumers are using culturally constructed meanings to resolve specific culturally rooted

identity crises, cultural contradictions, moral conflicts or ambiguities. For instance, Cayla and Eckhardt (2008) present bands as symbolic devices that provide new ways for Asians to think about themselves. Furthermore, Holt (2002) examined consumers with significant anti-consumer culture attitudes and found that, although some consumers may have strong feelings against brands in general, they strategically use (or avoid using) specific brands for self-definition. Interestingly, this finding also reveals the use of particular brands as resources in the quest for personal sovereignty. To summarize the symbolic brand consumption at cultural level, there is a consensus on the idea that consumers opt for brands that show particular cultural properties that help them in their self-construction and signaling purposes.

1.3 Consumers` psychological processes

Having explored the different forms of symbolic brand meanings, we observe that consumers' selves are pervasive in brand consumption, determining consumption behaviors and redefining brand meanings. Investigating the topic, Belk (1988) proposes that "our possessions are a major contributor to and reflect of our identities" (p. 139). The self, which comprises multiple aspects (see also Linville 1987, cited in Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005), such as actual selves, possible selves (i.e., idea, ought), and social selves. The actual self refers to how a person perceives himself or herself (Sirgy 1982). The ideal self represents "the individual's hopes, dreams, and aspirations, or the constellation of skills, traits, and accomplishments that an individual ideally wishes to acquire" (Higgins 1987, Markus and Nurius 1986). Higgins (1994) describes the ought selves as individuals' representations of someone's (self or other) demands regarding their

duties, obligations, and responsibilities He refers to the perception of parents in order to elicit consumers ought selves. The social self is an individual's conception of how he believes other people see him (Wylie 1975, cited in Malhotra 1981). Belk (1988) further explores the complex network of self-concepts by highlighting that selves may be found at either an individual or a collective level (i.e., individual, family, community, social groups). We find in the literature that consumers' selves are also defined at a broader level such as in terms of cultures (i.e., culture, country, cities, sub-culture) in which we find specific values (i.e., moral and spiritual values, norms, belief, etiquette) and behaviors (i.e., rituals). In sum, consumers' selves reflect a variety of identity aspects, which are also called self-concepts. Self-concepts refer to "a set of self-schemas representing stable knowledge structures about the self that organize incoming self-related information and help people make sense of themselves in their environment" (Markus 1977, cited in Sprott et al. 2009). Not only may they be found disorderly organized rather than orderly organized within an individual, but some self-concepts may also be in contradictions within an individual (Diamond et al. 2009, Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Consumers seek brands that showcase properties that are congruent with their self-concepts. Building on the idea that consumers develop links between self-concepts and objects (Beggan 1992, Sirgy 1982; cited in Sprott et al. 2009), Edson-Escalas and Bettman (2005) further established that consumers develop self-brand connections when a brand helps consumers achieve goals that are motivated by the self, such as maintaining, enhancing or developing self-identities (Belk 1988). Even in cases of anti-

consumerism, Holt (2002) discovered that brands play a self-defining role for some consumers. The self is therefore essential to symbolic brand consumption.

The idea that consumers buy brands for self-construction projects is well accepted (Belk 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; cited in Nguyen-Chaplin and Roedder John 2005; Grohmann 2009). In the literature, self-construction projects may refer to maintaining, enhancing, and creating consumers' self-concepts (Belk 1988, McCracken 1986), as well as resolving conflicting consumers' self-concepts (Diamond et al. 2009, Holt 2004, Holt and Thompson 2004).

The concept of maintaining and protecting consumer's self-concepts refers to consumers purchasing brands to satisfy a self-consistency motive, which entails consumers "to act in ways that are consistent with his or her self-perception" (Sirgy 1985, p197). Sirgy (1982) also describes it as a positive self-congruency need, a motivational driver for consumer to purchase a positively valued product to maintain a positive self-image. Markus and Wurf (1987) specifies that consumers acting in a consistent way also means that they may seek to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity, thus maintaining a positive affective state about the self. Belk (1988) also notes the importance of possessions as a means to ensure continuity, explaining that "integral to a sense of who we are is a sense of our past" (p 148). In fact, a consumer's goal to maintain his self-concepts by using brands may refer to all mental representations of himself, including a wide variety of self-concepts. Consumers may also seek to protect their sense of self. In that case, consumers are inclined to avoiding particular consumption behavior that could threat their sense of self (Sirgy 1982). In that matter, this behavior is manifest

when consumers avoid dissonance generated from behavior/self-image belief discrepancies (Sirgy 1982; Banister et al. 2003), reject products with negative imagery (Sirgy 1982), avoid brand images that relate to their negative possible self (i.e., undesired self; Ogilvie 1987), and avoid being associated with out-groups (Hogg et al. 2009). According to Hogg and colleagues (2009), these behaviors may display feelings ranging from indifference to negativity and hostility.

The concept of enhancing consumers' self-concepts refers to the enhancement and creation of self-concepts. Initially, Rosenberg (1979) proposed four principles that guide the development of self-concepts (reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions, and psychological centrality). More comprehensively, Kleine and colleagues (1995) developed a concept of self-development through possessions, as consumers seek autonomy and affiliation through possessions. Klein and colleagues (1995) explain that possessions reflect autonomy seeking when they evidence individual accomplishments, distinctiveness, uniqueness, independence, self-control, or other aspects of individual integrity (Schultz Kleine et al. 1989, cited in Kleine et al. 1995). Another aspect of individual integrity refers to consumers' need for authenticity (Palanski and Yammarino 2007, cited in Gosling and Huang 2009), which is driven by the need for feeling in control, connected and virtuous (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Affiliation seeking entails consumers motivated to maintain or develop interpersonal connections that also define the self. Affiliation seeking is apparent when possessions reflect connections with others (reference groups, membership groups, significant others, culturally constituted groups), with one's heritage or tradition, or with occasions spent with important others or reflect

being in touch with or cared for by others (Schultz Kleine et al. 1989, cited in Kleine et al. 1995). Kleine and colleagues (1995) explain that "individuals possess portfolios of attachments— each attachment reflecting different combinations of affiliation, autonomy seeking, and past, present, or future temporal orientation". Because possible selves are perceived as great motivational drivers for consumption behavior (Markus and Nurius 1986), we also attach great value to ideal and ought selves as additional drivers for self-enhancement. According to the literature, consumers enhancing their self-concepts do occur when consumers approach their ideal self-concepts (Sirgy 1982, Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2003). Implied in consumers' need for affiliation, consumers also seek to dissociate themselves from others, a need referred as social distinction. It is worth noting that consumers seek to enhance their positive self-regard; thus consumers tend to favor developing positive self-concepts - resulting in boosted self-esteem.

While former concepts are well established in the literature, the idea of resolving conflicting self-concepts through brand consumption has only emerged in the literature in recent years. For instance, Holt (2004) explains that consumers sometimes buy brands because they reconcile a cultural tension they are experiencing. In the same way, Diamond and colleagues (2009) find that consumers use brands to resolve ambiguities rooted in the cultural world. Although both studies do not specify the role of self-concept, they may actually refer to conflicting self-concepts consumers try to reconcile. Fournier (1998) has also underlined this concept via the assumption that brand helps consumers in life stage transitions, as it implies consumers dealing with slightly contradictory self-concepts. Interestingly, resolving conflicting self-concepts appear to act at all levels of

self, from an individual to a broader sense of self such as one rooted in a culture or a society.

The idea that individual signal their self-concepts through their consumption choices uncovers a deep and complex set of internal processes which this research explore. Important premises of this concept are both (1) the fact that consumers express themselves through their consumption of brands via nonverbal communication (Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982, cited in Aaker 1999), and (2) that people have the tendency to make inference on the basis of people's consumption choices (Aaker 1997). The literature uncovers three important dimensions of consumers' signaling needs: (1) to promote their selves and (2) to promote social affiliations. The first dimension of the signaling need is rooted in the desire that consumers have to signal their selves when consuming brands, also referred as self-projecting or self-promotion. Consumers prefer brands that can help them promote their different self-concepts (i.e., actual, ought, ideal, and social) and therefore express their identities. For instance, it has been well recognized that brand personality is a vehicle of consumer self-expression and can be instrumental in helping a consumer express different aspects of his or her self (Aaker 1997, Aaker 1999, Belk 1988, Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005, Johar, Sengupta, and Aaker 2005, Swaminathan et al. 2009). According to Edson-Escalas and Bettman (2003), consumers seek "to influence the reactions of others by developing a self-confirmatory social environment, which includes displaying identity cues such as driving a certain brand of automobile" (p. 341). The motivations associated with maintaining, protecting and enhancing self-concepts (i.e., seeking autonomy, seeking self-consistency) discussed

earlier are also potential material for signaling. Consumers may also use brands as a self-expression tool, allowing them to differentiate oneself and asserting one's individuality (e.g., Ball and Tasaki 1992, Belk 1988, Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995, McCracken 1989). It is important to note that the notion of consumers asserting individuality implies to assert their independence and their differentiation from other people (Kampmeier and Simon 2001). Another motive of self-expression is the need to express oneself for the intrinsic value of it, hoping to generate positive feedbacks and boost their self-esteem by showing polished aspects of themselves via brands.

As Holt (2002) puts it, the modern era of consumer capitalism was the first to rely upon the ideological premise that social identities are best realized through commodities. The literature suggests that consumers use brand to signal their self-concepts in the precise goal to communicate to its social environment (McCracken 1986). So as a second dimension to the signaling need, we find the idea that consumers seek to express social affiliations. As described earlier, Schultz Kleine and colleagues (1989) note that affiliation seeking is "apparent when possessions reflect connections with others, with one's heritage or tradition, or with occasions spent with important others or reflect being in touch with or cared for by others" (cited in Kleine et al. 1995). Consumers also seek to develop meaningful social affiliations with reference groups, membership groups, significant others (family, friends, peers), or other culturally constituted groups (i.e., sub-culture, ethnic groups, brand communities, age groups) Through possessions, individuals may also aim at dissociating themselves from particular social groups, a motive that refers to the need for social distinction (Gronow 1997, cited in Banister and Hogg 2003).

We can find such evidence of social affiliation (or dissociation) when consumers build self-confirmatory social environment by displaying a wide range of identity cues such as purchasing brands evoking specific social norms, cultural norms, values, lifestyles or any characteristics that are typical to brand users or to social groups. Edson-Escalas and Bettman (2003) suggest that conforming to social norms (i.e., personal and injunctive norms; Minton and Rose 1997) and adopting matching behavior are successful impression management techniques. Consumers will also opt for brands that facilitate social interactions. As such, consumers may enhance positive interpersonal relationships by using brands as a mediator (Diamond et al. 2009). In order to facilitate interpersonal relationships, Swaminathan and colleagues (2009) has found that consumers may avoid mismatched personality traits rather than seeking to identify themselves in specific brand traits. Fournier (1998) underlines that the symbolic meanings of brands may help social integration, may develop interpersonal relationships or even allow consumers to enact and play particular social roles.

Chapter 2: Scale development

2.1 Construct definition

Consumer attitude predisposes consumers to evaluate a product or brand positively or negatively (Katz 1960). Consumer attitude toward products and brands is considered a multi-dimensional construct - affected by symbolic, emotional and cognitive motivations. The literature is convincing with regard to the role of utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of attitudes on consumer behavior (Holbrook and Hirschman 1981; Voss et al. 2003). Katz (1960) suggests, however, that attitudes toward a brand (or a product) may have different motivational bases (i.e., a utilitarian function and a self-expressive function) in different people. In fact, Katz (1960) recognizes the multiple influences on attitudes and the different type of motivations that may be triggered (i.e., group pressures, contact with others) – making attitudes a complex and multidimensional construct. Therefore - in light of the branding, self-concepts, and more generally, consumer research literature - we define the symbolic dimension of consumers' attitudes toward brands as the attitudes function that captures consumers' motivation to maintain, protect, enhance, and resolve conflicting self-concepts, and signal their multiple selves – selves that may be found at an individual, social or cultural level.

2.2 Item generation and content validity

We generated an initial pool of items from an extensive review of extant literature on branding, self-concepts, psychology, and consumer behavior. We included and adapted a wide range of existing items found in the literature. We derived items from existing

concepts in order to gather a comprehensive set of items, ensuring greater content validity (Clark and Watson 1995). Some of the selected items were also reworded to create a linguistic style consistency for the scale (Brakus et al. 2009). Our initial pool of items resulted in more than 350 items intended to capture the facets of symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands. According to Devellis (2003)'s procedure, our set of items was reviewed by knowledgeable experts in order to maximize content validity. Precisely, we asked two experts (one expert has a Ph.D. in marketing and one expert is a Ph.D. candidate in marketing) to evaluate each item with regard to how well they believed it represented our construct. Experts were selected based on their expertise in consumer behavior, branding and scale development. They were presented with the definition of symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands and asked to rate each item on a seven-point scale with anchors 1 = "does not tap construct," and 7 = "taps construct." Items that received a rating of 3 or less by the majority of the experts were removed. The experts were also asked to assess the clarity and conciseness of the items. For that matter and for additional thoughts, space was provided to experts to comment on particular items. A total of 106 statements were retained.

2.3 Study 1 – initial administration and scale reduction

2.3.1 Pretest

To select the brands that would be used in the study, we asked undergraduate students (n = 39) from a Canadian university to list brands that they thought consumers purchase for symbolic reasons and to also list brands that they did not consider symbolic. The following definition of what constitutes a symbolic brand was provided: "Brands that are

symbolic communicate something about the user" (Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005). The pretest provided us with most of the brands needed. We complemented the set by adding a few well-known brands to ensure that our set of brands was comprehensive and representative. Specifically, we sought brands that (1) cover all aspects of the construct and a wide variety of symbolic brand meanings, (2) brands in diverse product categories, (3) brands that serve multiple functions (i.e., hedonic, utilitarian, symbolic-utilitarian), and (4) brands that were well-known and available in the United States. These precautions have the purpose of enhancing scale generalizability. Our final set of 12 brands was composed of six pairs of brands (Table 1). Six product categories were used in which we selected two brands. For each symbolic brand, we had a less symbolic competitor within its product category. Hence, the final brand selection was composed of Nike/Reebok (footwear), Levi's/Hanes (clothing), Apple/Microsoft (computers), Mercedes/Hyundai (cars), Kleenex/Great Value, and McCain/Great Value (food). By choosing a wide variety of brand categories, brands, and different levels of symbolism, our goal was to potentially generate variance and test the construct in a wider and more complex consumption context.

Table 1. Stimuli

Symbolic brands	**Less symbolic brands**
Levi's	Hanes
Nike	Reebok
Apple	Microsoft
McCain	Great Value (Wal-Mart private label)
Mercedes	Hyundai
Kleenex	Great Value (Wal-Mart private label)

2.3.2 Procedure and sample

The initial pool of items was administered to consumers, so we can refine the scale based on our assessment of its psychometric properties. A total of 106 items constituted our initial pool of items. We administered the set of items to a Web panel composed of adults living in the United States. After removing incomplete questionnaires, we were able to use 284 questionnaires (48.9% male; M_{age} = 48.8 years old; Caucasian/white: 75 %). Using a seven-point Likert scale (1 "strongly agree" and 7 "strongly disagree"), respondents were asked to evaluate their level of agreement with each statement in regards to a given brand. Each respondent had to be at least somewhat familiar with the brand in order to complete the questionnaire. For that matter, we asked respondent to rate their familiarity with the brand on a seven-point scale, where 1 meant "not at all familiar" and 7 "very familiar". Respondents had to indicate at least "3" on the scale to proceed with the survey.

2.3.3 Results

As a first step, exploratory factor analysis (extraction method: Principal Component Analysis, no rotation) was conducted to both explore the dimensionality of the construct and reduce the scale to a more parsimonious set. The data showed that Exploratory Factor Analysis could be conducted, as KMO was greater than .5 (.98) and Bartlett's test was significant. A one-factor structure emerged from the analysis: the first factor accounted for 74.7% of the variance explained. The second and third factor accounted for only 4.8% and 1.9% of the variance explained respectively. However, we observed five Eigenvalues greater than one, suggesting that five factors should be retained (Nunnally and Bernstein

1994). We also noticed that the Scree plot would indicate limiting the extraction to two factors. As no clear indication of an optimized factor structure emerged, we had to further refine the scale and provide a better model fit. We therefore decided to retain items that showed factor-loadings and item-to-total correlations equal or greater than .7 and also to remove items that cross-loaded on multiple factors (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). A total of five items were removed. It is worth noting that we did not observe any items that substantively cross-load on the various factors. For a more parsimonious scale, we removed additional items by only selecting items with factor loadings above .9, resulting in a scale of 34 items (Appendix A). We conducted factor analysis, from which emerged a one-facture structure according to the Scree plot, to the absence of Eigenvalues greater than one and to substantive amount of variance explained by the first factor (84.88%). The model provided a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .99$). Looking to provide further evidence on the scale validity, we tested to see whether symbolic and less symbolic brands were perceived as predicted. Results for most pairs of symbolic/less symbolic brands were in the expected direction (Table 2). Overall, there was a difference between brands that were hypothesized as symbolic and brands hypothesized as less symbolic (Table 3).

Table 2. Symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands – within product categories

Independent sample t-test				
Brands	***mean***	***sd***	***t***	***p-Value*** *(2-tailed)*
Levi's	4.93	2.09	1.57	.12
Hanes	4.11	1.58		
Nike	4.97	2.35	.056	.53
Reebok	4.58	1.74		
Apple	4.60	1.82	-1.54	.12
Microsoft	3.94	1.53		
Hyundai	4.13	1.43	.234	.82
Mercedes	4.01	1.56		
Kleenex	5.29	1.90	1.99	.05
Great Value	4.25	1.81		
Tide	4.86	2.00	1.04	.30
Great Value	4.25	1.81		

Table 3. Symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands – symbolic vs. less symbolic brands

Independent sample t-test				
Brands	***mean***	***sd***	***t***	***p-Value*** *(2-tailed)*
Symbolic brands (Levi's, Nike, Apple, Mercedes, Kleenex, Tide)	4.79	1.89	2.75	.01
Less symbolic brands (Hanes, Reebok, Microsoft, Hyundai, Great Value)	4.19	1.74		

2.4 Study 2 – assessing discriminant validity

In this study, we sought to provide indications of discriminant validity. The first investigation aims at distinguishing two crucial functions of consumer attitudes, which have been conceptualized as two poles of the same dimension: utilitarian and symbolism. Based on the literature, the relation between both functions is unclear. On the one hand,

some researchers have conceived symbolic and utilitarian consumer attitudes as opposed poles of a same dimension (Park et al. 1986; Johar and Sirgy 1991). For instance, Johan and Sirgy (1991) suggest that, while symbolic and utilitarian properties are distinct in nature, they are part of the same dimension. Similarly, Park and colleagues (1986) have suggested that, in order to optimize the effectiveness of a branding strategy, brand managers should focus on only one brand concepts (i.e., symbolic, hedonic, utilitarian). This implies that brand concepts are not compatible with each other. However, both articles fail to support their proposed framework with empirical evidence. Other researchers have had difficulties to clearly distinguish symbolic from utilitarian dimensions of consumption. In fact, Childers and Rao (1992) were not able to distinguish empirically self-expressive values (i.e., symbolic) from utilitarian values. But by using only self-expressive values, their result might have been biased by a too narrowly defined symbolism. On the other hand, some researchers suggest that brands are composed of a mixture made from utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic properties - implying that the symbolic dimension is an independent dimension of consumer attitudes (Katz 1960, LeBoeuf and Simmons 2010). In fact, Aaker (1997) identified brands that are perceived as both highly functional and symbolic. We therefore proposed that these two functions, utilitarian and hedonic, are independent.

We are also interested in exploring the relationship between hedonic and symbolic dimensions of consumer attitudes toward brands. The hedonic dimension of consumer attitudes refers to “facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products” (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982,

p. 92). Without elaborating on the nature of the relationship between symbolic and hedonic consumption, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) discussed their communalities: "patronage decisions regarding hedonically consumed product are based on the symbolic elements of the product rather than their tangible features" (p. 97) or highly hedonic product such as a novel or a play are "selected on its ability to transport the consumer to a more desirable reality and/or to help in coping with unpleasant emotional dilemma." (p. 97). Later on, researchers have provided valid measurement scales for hedonic consumption (Voss et al. 2003), scales that ignored the symbolic dimensions of consumer attitudes toward brands. More recent research has studied the experiential aspect of consumption and, similar to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), included the symbolic aspects of brand consumption. It is especially obvious in the work of Brakus and colleagues (2009) who propose a "social" dimension to their brand experience construct. However, they failed to address comprehensively the nature of symbolism within their construct. To date, no research provided empirical confirmation to support that hedonic and symbolic dimensions were independent.

As the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands is intimately related to the self-concept literature, this study also explores its relationships with several additional brand-related constructs: overall brand attitude, self-connection (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004), brand engagement (Sprott et al. 2009), interdependent and independent self-construals (Singelis 1994) and material value (Richins 2004). Brand attitude is conceived as an overall evaluation of a brand, which is based on a wide range of aspects that are salient for a consumer. Among these many associations, we find the symbolic

benefits associated to a brand (Keller 1993). If the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands and brand attitude are related, they are conceptualized as different constructs in nature as the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands target a specific and narrower aspect. Self-connection is of great importance in regards to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands, as it "indicates strength through activation of the person's identity system" (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004, 7). Reflecting more than the inclusion of brands within consumers' sense of self, the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands also reflects the actual behaviors and motivations that consumers engage when consuming symbolic brands (i.e., enhancing, protecting, signaling self-concepts). Therefore, we expect the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands to be related to self-connection, although both are independent constructs. Brand engagement is presented as "a generalized view of brands in relation to the self, with consumers varying in their tendency to include important brands as part of their self-concepts" (Sprott et al. 2009, p. 92). Like self-connection, this construct reveals how consumers include their favorite brands into their sense of self. As the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands also measures the self-defining role of specific brands, both constructs will be related. However, neither brand engagement provides insights on a given brand (brand engagement is conceptualized as an individual factor), nor they capture the process by which consumers include brands into their self-concepts. Therefore, both constructs will show indications of orthogonality. Seeking evidence that our construct taps into the social and self-differentiation dimensions of brand consumption, we included the measurement of independent and independent self-construals. As Edson-Escalas and Bettman (2005)

explains, “Independent self-construal goals include both independence (i.e., self-determination) and differentiation (i.e., distinctiveness), whereas interdependent self-construal goals focus on aspects of self shared with some subset of others, enhancing maintenance of relationships” (Edson-Escalas and Bettman, 2005, p380). In fact, they found stronger self-differentiation goals for consumers with more independent self-concepts. We therefore expect respondents with predominant independent self-construals to perceive brands more symbolic than respondents with predominant interdependent self-construals do. As respondents with interdependent self-construals are more inclined to grant importance to cues that serve social purposes, they should perceive symbolism only for brands that convey these types of social cues. In fact, these social cues may refer to different social dimensions such as a family, a reference group, a membership group, a culture, etc. Therefore, if respondents with interdependent self-construals identify brands as symbolic, this would provide indication that our construct captures different social dimensions. Finally, we investigated the concept of material value, which Richins and Dawson (1992) describe “as a value that influences the way that people interpret their environment and structure their lives”. In fact, material value is viewed as a medium by which some consumers defines themselves, others, and important goals in life such as happiness and life satisfaction (Richins 2004). Playing a self-defining role, some brands are imbued with intangible, symbolic benefits that are valued by consumers. Brands then become valued resources with respect to materialism. We therefore expect that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands relates to the material value construct.

2.4.1 Sample, procedure and measures

The survey was administered via a Web panel composed of adults living in the United States (52% male; Average age: 50.5 years old; Caucasian/white: 83%). Each respondent was asked to answer questions regarding two randomly assigned brands. Several measures were administered (Table 4). Of 537 questionnaires, we removed incomplete questionnaires, which resulted in a final sample of 204 (for a total of 403 brands answered). The stimuli consisted of four brands, which were selected according to their perceived symbolism. We specifically included two pairs of brands, each composed of one symbolic brand and one less symbolic brand found in the same product category. We selected Nike (symbolic) and Reebok (less symbolic) in the athletic shoes category. The brands Sony (symbolic) and Panasonic (less symbolic) were taken from earlier studies, which showed that these brands were not perceived equally symbolic (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012). Respondents were only presented with brands they rated as somewhat familiar in a screening question (i.e., scale point of at least three on a scale anchored 1 = "not familiar at all" and 7 = "very familiar"). Overall, brands did not differ in familiarity (M_{Sony} = 5.41, M_{Reebok} = 5.50, $M_{Panasonic}$ = 5.17, M_{Nike} = 5.43, $F_{3,399}$ = 1.359, $p < .255$).

Table 4. Measures

Measures	***Scale/Anchors***	***Author(s)***
Symbolic dimension	Seven-point Likert scale strongly disagree/strongly agree	
Hedonic and utilitarian dimensions	Semantic differential seven-point scale	Voss et al. (2003)
Brand attitude	Semantic differential seven-point scale	
Self-connection	Seven-point Likert scale strongly disagree/strongly agree	Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004)
	Seven-point Likert scale	Sprott et al. (2009)

Brand Engagement	strongly disagree/strongly agree	
Material Value	Five-point Likert scale strongly disagree/strongly agree	Richins (2004)
Independent and interdependent self-construals	Seven-point Likert scale strongly disagree/strongly agree	Singelis (1994)

The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands – psychometric properties. Examining the data structure, KMO (.99) and Bartlett's ($p < .00$) tests provide sufficient evidence that we can proceed with exploratory factor analysis. We therefore conducted an exploratory factor analysis (extraction method: Principal Component Analysis; no rotation), resulting in a one-factor structure. The first factor explained 85.1% of the variance. The examination of the scree plot and the Eigenvalues greater than one suggests only one factor. All factor loadings were above .85. The set of 34 items also show good internal consistency ($\alpha = .99$).

2.4.2 Results

The primary objective of this study is to provide indications that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes differs from several related constructs found in the branding literature. We specifically explored the matter by examining their correlation with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and whether they loaded on a distinct factor-structure from the symbolic dimension using factor analysis.

Table 5. Cronbach's alpha

Measures	*Cronbach's alpha*
Symbolic dimension	.99
Hedonic dimension	.89
Utilitarian dimension	.90
Brand attitude	.98
Self-connection	.96
Brand Engagement	.98
Material Value	.90
Independent self-construal	.85
interdependent self-construal	.86

Table 6. Correlation between constructs

Measures	Symbolic	Utilitarian	Hedonic	Brand attitude	Self-connection	Brand engagement	Material value	Interdependent self-construal
Utilitarian	.40**	1						
Hedonic	.53**	.79**	1					
Brand attitude	.40**	.77**	.78**	1				
Self-connection	.92**	.43**	.52**	.44**	1			
Brand engagement	.70**	.28**	.39**	.23**	.69**	1		
Material value	.39**	.15**	.19**	.12*	.39**	.53**	1	
Interdependent self-construal	.46**	.33**	.32**	.31**	.46**	.33**	.05	1
Independent self-construal	.16**	.18**	.12*	.16**	.18**	.18**	-.03	.40**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Utilitarian and hedonic dimensions. To provide evidence that the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of consumer attitudes are distinct dimensions from the symbolic dimension,

we conducted a factor analysis and observed that items associated to hedonic and utilitarian constructs did not load on the symbolic dimension, suggesting they are independent dimensions. Both scales showed great internal consistency (utilitarian: α = .89; Hedonic: α = .90). As expected, the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was not highly correlated to both utilitarian (r = .40, p < .01) and hedonic dimensions (r = .53, p < .01) of consumer attitudes (Table 6).

*Brand attitude***.** As we consider that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes differs from brand attitude, we examined their relationship. The brand attitude scale showed proper factor-structure (one factor as expected) and good internal consistency (α = .98). Its items loaded on a separate factor as did the items of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. As expected, the positive correlation (r = .40, p < .01) between both scales suggests they are associated (Table 6). But as the correlation is moderate (below .5), the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand attitude show clear indication that they tap into different aspects of attitude.

Self-connection. We also explored whether the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands is discriminant from Aaker and colleagues (2004)'s self-connection scale (α = .96). Exploratory factor analysis results were not conclusive, suggesting that self-connection scale and the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes scale might measure the same latent construct. In fact, items from the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and self-connection loaded on the same factor. We ran further analyses at the brand level, and we observed similar results. Not surprisingly, we noticed that self-connection and the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes scales are highly correlated (r = .92, p < .01; Table 6). Thus, these results do not provide clear indication that these

constructs are discriminated.

Brand engagement. We investigated the relationship between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand engagement (α = .98). The results from exploratory factor analysis suggested both scales were not entirely discriminated, as items from the brand engagement scale loaded on both factors. It is worth noting that none of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes items loaded on the factor associated to brand engagement. Not surprisingly, both scales were found to be strongly correlated (r = .70, p < .01), which tend to indicate that these scales tap into a very similar construct (Table 6). Although there is indication that both construct may be discriminated, further analysis should be performed to provide such empirical evidence.

Material value. We also investigated the relationships between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and material value (α = .90). Most of the scale's items did not load on the same factor as the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. For those who did load on the factor associated to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes, none were above .5. In regards to correlation between both scales, there is a good indication that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and material value measure different constructs, as we only found moderate correlation (r = .40, p < .01; Table 6). Therefore, these results tend to indicate that both scales measure different constructs.

Interdependent self-construal. Inter-dependent self-construal scale presented good internal consistency (α = .85). Exploratory factor analysis provided good indication that both constructs are discriminated, as items from respective scales did not load significantly on the same factor. Also, we found moderate correlation with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes scale (r = .46, p < .01; Table 6). Thus, we can conclude

that both constructs show clear indication of discriminant validity.

Independent self-construal. We also examined the relationship between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and independent self-construal (α = .86). Exploratory factor analysis provided a good indication that both constructs remained different in nature. In fact, no items from the independent self-construal scale loaded on the factor associated with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. The examination of the correlation between both scales also suggested that these scales measured different constructs, as we found weak correlation with independent self-construal (r = .16, p < .01; Table 6). Thus, we can conclude that both constructs show a good indication of discriminant validity.

Independent vs. interdependent self-construal. Respondents with higher interdependent self-construals showed higher perceived symbolism than respondents with lower interdependent self-construals (respectively 3.79 vs. 2.7, t =-6.52, p < .00). We also compared the mean difference between both self-construals. Based on median splits, respondents were divided into high and low groups for each self-construal type. Respondents who were high in independent and low in interdependent were considered to be predominantly independent, while respondents who were high in interdependence and low in independence were considered to be predominantly interdependent. Respondents who were high on both or low on both scales were eliminated from the data set, for a total of 153 respondents ($M_{independent\ self\text{-}construal}$ = 5.75, n = 88; $M_{interdependent\ self\text{-}construal}$ = 5.26, n = 65). Unexpectedly, we observed that respondents with predominant interdependent self-construals perceived more symbolism in brands that those with predominant independent self-construals (respectively $M_{symbolic\ dimension}$ = 3.53, $M_{symbolic\ dimension}$ = 2.35, t = -4.99, p <

.00). First, this result provides further evidence of the construct's validity. Because interdependent self-construals are more sensitive to cues that promote a sense of belonging, this finding reflects that our measure captures social aspects of brand consumption, potentially providing evidence that brands' cultural properties are captured. Second, it also provides further insights on our brand selection. As our selection is composed of mainstream brands (i.e. Nike, Sony, and Gap), consumers with independent self-construal may not perceive these mainstream brands as suitable resources to differentiate themselves, hence it would explain their low ratings of brand symbolism.

2.5 Study 3 – assessing predictive validity

In study 3, our primary objective is to provide evidence that our construct accurately measures the a priori symbolism of existing brands, which prior research has identified as carrying (more or less) symbolic properties (H1). We specifically seek such construct validity not only within (by selecting a symbolic brand and a less symbolic brand per category) but also across product categories. Selecting our stimuli, we also kept in mind that product categories are not perceived as equally symbolic. To provide a richer range of contexts in which our construct applies, we therefore searched for brands in product categories that Aaker (1997) has identified as more symbolic (clothing), more utilitarian (electronics), and both utilitarian and symbolic (athletic shoes, beverages). Most of all selected brands were taken from Torelli and Ahluwalia (2012) and Grohmann (2009), which confirmed the brands' symbolic properties. The selection was also based on consumers' familiarity with brands. Although Grohmann (2009) had selected brands with ratings of at least 50% familiarity in an Equitrend study from 2006, Torelli and

Ahluwalia (2012) did not provide such indication for all their brands. Moreover, consumers' familiarity with their selected brands may have shifted since their studies have been conducted. Therefore, we compensated for this lack of information by evaluating each brands in terms of consumer familiarity.

Table 7. Stimuli

Symbolic brands	***Less symbolic brands***
Nike athletic shoes (Grohmann 2009)	New Balance athletic shoes (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012)
Polo Ralph Lauren clothing (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012)	Gap clothing
Gatorade (Grohmann 2009)	Aquafina (Grohmann 2009)
Sony television (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012)	Panasonic television (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012)

As study two was not conclusive, this research seeks to provide evidence that our construct is discriminated from constructs that tap into related concepts: brand engagement and self-connection (H2). This research also attempts to show that our construct behave according to the different findings in prior research. First, we investigate whether the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes predicts three consumer responses that are known to be positively influenced by symbolic motivations: brand attitude, brand trust and brand loyalty (H3) (Fournier 1994, Aaker 1997, Grohmann 2009, Sprott et al. 2009). Specifically, we measured two aspects of brand loyalty: purchase and attitudinal loyalty. We used the scales operationalized by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) to measure each aspect. Furthermore, this study aims at providing more insights on the relationships between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and

self-connection. As consumers use brands as tools for self-construction, the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes will likely be linked to self-connection. In other words, a brand that is connected to the self is likely to be perceived as symbolic. We therefore expect that self-connection plays a mediation role between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and an outcome of branding, such as brand (H4). This research also seeks to provide further evidence that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes responds as expected with regard to brand engagement and consumers' need for uniqueness. Sprott and colleagues (2009) define brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) as "a generalized view of brands in relation to the self, with consumers varying in their tendency to include important brands as part of their self-concepts". As consumers' brand engagement are higher, we expect that the perception of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes to be also higher. Tian and colleagues (2001) describe consumers' need for uniqueness as "an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others that is achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity" (p. 50). We expect that both brand engagement and the need for uniqueness will positively influence the perception of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (H5). Conceptually, brand engagement and the need for uniqueness will not influence any branding outcomes. However, they may do so when the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes allows consumers to pursuit self-defining goals and to include brands in their self-concepts. Once brands are part of the consumer's self, brand loyalty may occur. Thus, we expect that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes will mediate the relationship between both brand engagement and need for uniqueness and brand loyalty

(H6).

2.5.1 Sample, procedure, and measures

The survey was administered via a Web panel composed of adults living in the United States (50% male; Average age: 50 years old; Caucasian/white: 74.5%). Each respondent was randomly assigned to one brand (between-subject design). Brands were presented randomly. For the measurement of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes, self-connection, and brand loyalty, respondents were asked to evaluate their level of agreement with statements from each construct using a seven point scale (1 "strongly disagree" and 7 "strongly agree"). For the measurement of brand trust, we used a seven-point scale, with slightly different anchors (1 = "very strongly disagree" and 7 = "very strongly agree"; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). For the measurement of brand attitude, we used a semantic differential scale composed of three pairs of bipolar adjectives (negative/positive, dislike/like, favorable/unfavorable; Grohmann 2009). All scale showed great internal consistency (Table 8). Of 363 questionnaires, we removed incomplete questionnaires and achieved a sample size of 200. Eight brands served as stimuli (Table 7). Respondents were only presented with brands they had rated as familiar in a screening question (i.e., rating of three or above on a seven-point familiarity scale in which 1 = "not at all familiar" and 7 = "very familiar").

Table 8. Cronbach's alpha and correlation coefficients

Measures	*Cronbach's alpha*	*Correlation with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes*
Symbolic dimension	.99	1
Brand attitude	.94	.47***
Brand trust	.93	.66***
Brand loyalty	.93	.65***
Self-connection	.97	.86***
Brand engagement	.96	.57***
Need for uniqueness	.97	.50***

****p < .001 (2-tailed)*

2.5.2 Results

H1: Brands and product categories hypothesized as more symbolic are perceived more symbolic than those hypothesized as less symbolic.

To provide evidence for predictive validity, we analyzed the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes means. First, we compared means between pairs of brands (i.e., Gatorade vs. Aquafina), which expected to differ in terms of symbolism, but we could not find any statistically significant difference (Table 9). There was no statistically significant difference across product categories expected to differ in the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (i.e., clothing vs. beverages; Table 10). We then compared the mean for the set of symbolic brands with the mean for the set of "less symbolic" brands – the analysis showed no statistically significant differences (Table 11). We further investigated different factors that may generate abnormal level of variance, which could blur the distinction between symbolic and less symbolic brands. We looked

at current users, past users, frequency of use, self-connection, brand attitude, familiarity of the brand evaluated and we did not observe significant mean differences when controlling for these factors. Greater sample size and refinement of the symbolic scale by means of SEM may resolve this issue.

Table 9. Symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes – within product categories

Independent sample t-test				
Brands	***mean***	***sd***	***t***	***p-Value*** *(2-tailed)*
Nike athletic shoes	2.78	1.77	-1.33	.19
New Balance athletic shoes	3.41	1.59		
Polo Ralph Lauren clothing	3.04	1.88	-.78	.44
Gap clothing	3.44	1.79		
Gatorade beverages	3.71	1.71	.37	.72
Aquafina beverages	3.55	1.52		
Sony television	3.57	1.69	.30	.77
Panasonic television	3.43	1.79		

Table 10. Symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes – between product categories

Independent sample t-test				
Brands	***mean***	***sd***	***t***	***p-Value*** *(2-tailed)*
Clothing (Polo Ralph Lauren, Gap)	3.24	1.83	-.42	.68
Athletic shoes (Nike, New Balance)	3.09	1.69		
Clothing (Polo Ralph Lauren, Gap)	3.24	1.83	-1.13	.26
Beverages (Gatorade, Aquafina)	3.63	1.60		
Clothing (Polo Ralph Lauren, Gap)	3.24	1.83	-.73	.47
Television (Sony, Panasonic)	3.50	1.72		
Television (Sony, Panasonic)	3.50	1.72	.38	.70
Beverages (Gatorade, Aquafina)	3.63	1.60		
Television (Sony, Panasonic)	3.50	1.72	-1.19	.24
Athletic shoes (Nike, New Balance)	3.09	1.69		
Beverages (Gatorade, Aquafina)	3.63	1.60	-1.62	.11
Athletic shoes (Nike, New Balance)	3.09	1.69		

Table 11. Symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes – symbolic brands vs. less symbolic brands

Independent sample t-test				
Brands	***mean***	***sd***	***t***	***p-Value*** *(2-tailed)*
Symbolic brands (Gap, Gatorade, Aquafina, Sony)	3.57	1.75	-1.68	.10
Less symbolic brands (Nike, New Balance, Polo Ralph Lauren, Panasonic)	3.16	1.66		

H2: The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes shows indications of discriminant validity in regards to brand engagement, self-connection and need for uniqueness.

Before investigating the matter, we ran reliability analyses and found that all scales used in this study showed great internal consistency (Table 8). Looking at correlation coefficients between scales (Table 8), we found that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes is correlated with brand engagement ($r = .57$, $p < .00$), self-connection ($r = .86$, $p < .00$) and the need for uniqueness ($r = .50$, $p < .00$). Conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (extraction method: Principal Component Analysis, no rotation) with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand engagement scales, results showed that both scales were not entirely discriminated, as items from brand engagement loaded on the factor associated to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. However, none of the items from the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes loaded significantly (factor loadings above .4) on the factors associated to brand engagement. Thus, as the correlation coefficient remains moderate, we consider that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes shows proper indication of discriminant validity in regard to brand engagement. Conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (extraction method: Principal Component Analysis, no rotation) with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and

the need for uniqueness scales, results showed that none of the items from the need for uniqueness scale loaded significantly (factor loadings above.7) on the factor associated to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. Also, none of the items from the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes scale significantly loaded on the factors associated to the need for uniqueness. In fact, the correlation between both constructs rather suggests that they are related but remain entirely different in nature, as the theoretical conceptualization proposes. Finally, we conducted Exploratory Factor Analysis (extraction method: Principal Component Analysis, no rotation) with the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and self-connection scales. Results showed that items from the self-connection scale loaded on the same factor associated to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. In addition, the correlation between both constructs is strong. Thus, we cannot provide indication that these two construct are discriminated. Further analyses, such as CFA (SEM), would need to be conducted to in order to establish the proof of discriminant validity.

H3: The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes has a positive effect on brand attitude, brand trust and brand loyalty.

To provide evidence of predictive validity, we investigated whether our construct could accurately predict brand attitude, brand trust and brand loyalty. We first investigated correlation between all constructs (Table 8). We found strong correlation between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and the outcome measures – brand attitude, brand trust, brand loyalty. Exploring further the relationship between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and the outcomes measures, we regressed the symbolic

dimension of consumer attitudes scores (dependent variable) against the discussed outcomes (independent variable; Table 12). As predicted, we found that brand attitude, brand trust and brand loyalty were predicted by the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes ($\beta_{attitudes} = .40$, $p < .00$; $\beta_{trust} = .71$, $p < .00$; $\beta_{loyalty} = .63$, $p < .00$). Hypothesis 3 was therefore supported.

Table 12. Effects of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on consumer responses

Measures	***Symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes***	
	β	***t***
Brand attitude	.40	7.41***
Brand trust	.71	12.38***
Brand loyalty	.63	11.87***

****p < .001*

H4: Self-connection mediates the relationships between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand attitude.

Using multiple linear regressions, we conducted a mediation analysis in which the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was the independent variable, self-connection was the mediating variable, and brand attitude the dependent variable. Following Baron and Kenny (1986)'s procedure, the analysis was conducted in four phases: (1) the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was regressed on brand attitude, (2) the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was regressed on self-connection, (3) self-connection was regressed on brand attitude, and (4) the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and self-connection were regressed on brand attitude. We found a significant effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on brand attitude ($\beta = .40$, SE =

.06, $p < .00$), a significant effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on self-connection ($\beta = 1.01$, SE = .04, $p < .00$), and a significant effect of self-connection on brand attitude ($\beta = .40$, SE = .05, $p < .00$). Highlighting the mediation role of self-connection, the relationship between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand attitude became insignificant when including self-connection ($\beta_{symbolism} = .00$, SE = .18, $p > .97$; $\beta_{self\text{-}connection} = .40$, SE = .10, $p < .00$; Table 13) into the model, which still showed a significant association. A Sobel test confirmed that the indirect effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on brand attitude via self-connection was significantly different from zero (Sobel test = 6.45, SE = .06, $p < .00$). This result suggested that hypothesis 4 is supported. More importantly, this finding also provides support to the idea that our construct and the self-connection are indeed discriminated.

Table 13. The effect of self-connection and the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on brand attitude

Linear regression model and variables	*Coefficient estimate*	*SE*	*p-Value*
R^2 (.27)			
Constant	4.02	.20	.00
Symbolic dimension	.00	.12	.972
Self-connection	.40	.10	.00

H5: Brand engagement and consumers' need for uniqueness have a positive effect on the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes.

Using linear regression, we investigated two individual factors that could be associated to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. We regressed the means for consumers' need for uniqueness and brand engagement scales (as independent variables) on the

symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (dependent variable) (Table 14). Brand engagement (β = .44, $p < .00$) and the need for uniqueness (β = .51, $p < .00$) predicted the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. These results supported hypothesis 5.

Table 14. The effect of individual factors on the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes

Measures	***β***	***t***
Brand engagement	.44	6.39***
Need for uniqueness	.51	4.11***

****p < .001*

H6: The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes mediates the relationships between consumers' need for uniqueness and brand loyalty and between brand engagement and brand loyalty.

Using multiple linear regressions, we conducted two mediation analyses in which consumers' need for uniqueness and brand engagement were the independent variables, the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was the mediating variable, and brand loyalty the dependent variable. Following Baron and Kenny (1986)'s procedure, the analysis was conducted in four phases: (1) need for uniqueness/brand engagement were regressed on brand loyalty, (2) need for uniqueness/brand engagement were regressed on the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes, (3) the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was regressed on brand loyalty, and (4) need for uniqueness/brand engagement and the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes were regressed on brand loyalty.

Consumers' need for uniqueness (Table 15). We found a significant effect of need for uniqueness on brand loyalty (β = .59, SE = .12, $p < .00$), a significant effect of need for uniqueness on the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (β = .93, SE = .11, $p < .00$),

and a significant effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on brand loyalty (β = .63, SE = .05, p < .00). Highlighting the mediation role of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes, the relationship between need for uniqueness and brand loyalty (β = 6.58E-03, p > *.95*) became insignificant when including the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (β = .63, p < .00) into the model. A Sobel test confirmed that the indirect effect of need for uniqueness on brand loyalty via the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was significantly different from zero (Sobel test = 6.77, SE = .07, p < .00). This result suggested that hypothesis 6 is supported.

Brand engagement (Table 16). We found a significant effect of brand engagement on brand loyalty (β = .47, SE = .07, p < .00), a significant effect of brand engagement on the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (β = .59, SE = .06, p < .00), and a significant effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on brand loyalty (β = .63, SE = .05, p < .00). Highlighting the mediation role of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes, the relationship between brand engagement and brand loyalty (β = .11, p > *.11*) became insignificant when including the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes (β = .57, p < .00) into the model. A Sobel test confirmed that the indirect effect of brand engagement on brand loyalty via the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was significantly different from zero (Sobel test = 7.6, SE = .05, p < .00). This result suggested that hypothesis 6 is supported.

Table 15. Effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on the relationship need for uniqueness-brand loyalty

Linear regression model and variables	***Coefficient estimate***	***SE***	***p-Value***
R^2 (.42)			
Constant	2.49	.29	.00
Symbolic dimension	.63	.06	.00
Need for uniqueness	6.58E-03	.11	.00

Table 16. Effect of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes on the relationship brand engagement-brand loyalty

Linear regression model and variables	***Coefficient estimate***	***SE***	***p-Value***
R^2 (.42)			
Constant	2.25	.25	.00
Symbolic dimension	.57	.07	.00
Brand engagement	.11	.07	.11

Chapter 3: Conclusion

3.1 General discussion

Researchers have widely investigated different aspects of brand symbolism, such as brand personality (Aaker 1997, Grohmann 2009, Swaminathan et al. 2009), cultural branding (McCracken 1986, Holt 2002, 2004, Diamond et al. 2009), and brand relationships (Fournier 1998, Aggarwal 2004). Although the symbolic function of brands has been considered, there is no unifying dimension or measurement instrument available to evaluate brand symbolism (see different definitions and measures used by Aaker 1997, Edson-Escalas and Bettman 2005, LeBoeuf and Simmons 2010). The purpose of this research was to resolve this gap in the literature and develop a valid, reliable and parsimonious scale measuring the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. Drawn from a comprehensive definition of the construct, an initial set of items was developed, and then refined to create a single-dimension scale composed of 34 items. We provided indications of the scale's discriminant validity as we demonstrated that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes differed in nature from overall brand attitude, brand engagement, material value, consumers' need for uniqueness and self-connection. Furthermore, this research also provided evidence of predictive validity as it was demonstrated that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes behaves properly in regards to several brand-related constructs known to be associated. As a matter of fact, we observed that our construct predicts accurately important consumers' responses that are related to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes; namely, brand attitude, brand trust and brand loyalty. We also confirmed the mediation role of self-connection in

the relationship between the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and brand attitude, providing at the same time empirical evidence that these two constructs are in fact discriminated. We further explored two individual-level factors that are conceptually linked to the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. We provided evidence that not only the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes was predicted by brand engagement and the need for uniqueness, but also that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes mediated the relationship between these two individual factors and brand attitude, as the literature suggested. As another key contribution, this research provided a good indication that the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes is unidimensional, independent, and mutually exclusive to the utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of consumer attitudes, a finding that reconciles the literature. Finally, this research also contributes at the academic level. The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes is conceived as an important factor that influence and interact with several components of consumers' behaviors and cognitive responses. Seeking to control this effect, researchers have assessed the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes using a wide range of definitions and proxy, making it difficult (and possibly biased) to compare findings across studies. This scale will allow researchers to not only properly measure the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes, but it will also provide a common ground for the analysis of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes effects.

3.2 Managerial implications

With a clearly defined symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes from which is operationalized a valid measure, brand managers may monitor the evolution of the

perceived symbolism of their brands and assess the effectiveness of marketing strategies in order to resonate with consumers (Holt, 2004). Imbedded in a multiple-dimensional model composed of the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of consumer attitudes, this diagnostic tool may also help brand managers to select proper strategies, as brands necessitate distinct strategies whether they are filled with meanings that are more utilitarian, hedonic or symbolic in nature (Park et al. 1986). Furthermore, monitoring the symbolic dimension of a brand may help to properly orient strategies according to competitors within the brand's category. LeBoeuf and Simmons (2010) have discovered that the nature of the dominant attitude function (utilitarian, hedonic or symbolic) associated to a product category may shift at the brand level, when products are branded. For instance, they observed that products within a product category associated with symbolic attitudes were perceived more utilitarian, whereas products within a product category associated with utilitarian attitudes were perceived more symbolic. As the "function-matching" appeals is likely to have an advantage over "function-mismatching" appeals (Katz 1960), brands would need to match their brand appeals to the dominant function they are associated with (and not necessarily to that of the product category). For instance, a brand within a product category strongly associated to the symbolic function of attitude may benefit from displaying utilitarian or hedonic rather than symbolic appeals. Therefore, measuring the symbolism for both the product category and the brand would provide a better perspective on its competitive environment and allow brand managers to address more effectively the marketing challenges with which they are confronted.

We find several other reasons why brand managers would be motivated to monitor the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. As such, assessing a brand's symbolism may highlight new business opportunities or strategic issues. As symbolic brands are rewarded with benefits such as more loyal and engaged customers and price premiums, they will offer greater leeway when designing strategies (i.e., high price strategies, more risky advertising campaign). For instance, when considering brand extensions, it may be well-advised to assess a brand's symbolism as symbolic brands are more stretchable than functional brands (Basu and Roedder 2010).

3.3 Limits and future research

Although a 34-items scale is adequate and manageable, a primary objective for future research would be to further refine the scale to a more parsimonious size. Looking closely at the explained variance and the internal consistency, we observed that there is still room for further improvement. Plus, this refinement could also address the partial lack in predictive validity, as our scale may not properly capture and distinguish different level of symbolism between brands in general and between brands within or across product categories. A possible explanation is that some items within the final sets may have generated unnecessary variance and would need to be removed, an explanation that could be confirmed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis or Structural Equation Analysis. Another explanation may be that our sample size might have been too small to measure such consumers' internal processes. Therefore, future research should investigate these matters and further refine our measure of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes. The full development of such scale would also require further

validity assessment. As the literature suggests (Clark and Watson 1995), a valid measure needs to be confronted and respond properly to a complex network of associated constructs (i.e., nomological validity). Although some of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes antecedents and outcomes were explored, our findings would need to be confirmed through experiments in which variables are controlled. Further research should also address the generalizability of the scale by investigating more brands within a product category, more diverse product categories and service brands.

Future research would need to confirm that particular aspects of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes are captured by our construct. In fact, our research does not provide insights on whether the scale captures the distinction between consumers that rate brands as low in symbolism and consumers who dissociate themselves from the brands evaluated. On the one hand, further research could be performed to provide evidence on the matter. On the other hand, a scale that measures the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes and dissociative response at the same time may be difficult to operationalize. It could be revealed that both concepts require separate measures. Future research could help clear this ambiguity. Another issue would be to explore more thoroughly whether the social aspects of branding are captured by the scale. We indeed provided evidence that our construct captured the social aspect of brand consumption. For instance, we found that respondents with predominant interdependent self-construals, which are more sensitive to cues that reflect social bonding rather than self-differentiation, perceived our stimuli significantly more symbolic than did those with predominant independent self-construals. However, we did not provide evidence that our scale captured more subtle

aspects of social motivations in brand consumption. As such, Swaminathan and colleagues (2006) observed that consumers may choose brands for the sole purpose of facilitating interactions with others, a behavior that may not necessitate any self-connection to brands. Although our scale does tap into the social aspect of brand consumption (i.e., items were developed to reflect group membership, reference groups, etc.), we do not provide such empirical evidence. It could be also interesting to investigate a wider range of brands that carry different type of social cues (i.e., cultural, social, individual), an avenue of research that may reveal the individual, social and cultural sub-dimensions of the symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes.

Finally, as LeBoeuf and Simmons (2010) have exposed the relationships between the attitude functions of product category and those of its constituent brands, the interpretation of the perceived symbolism would require the consideration of the nature of the attitude functions that are associated with the product category. Moreover, brands are often found in multiple product categories, which may not necessarily be associated all to the same attitude functions. In some cases, this factor could have an important effect of the measurement of the symbolic dimension and would need to be controlled. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to explore this potentially complex circumstance and uncover the proper strategic responses. Related to the topic, another interesting avenue of research would be the comparison between the measurement of different functions of attitude (symbolic, hedonic, and utilitarian) associated to different product categories and that of its respective brands. In their research, LeBoeuf and Simmons (2010) have only investigated the utilitarian and symbolic functions of attitudes, ignoring all other possible

combinations. As the symbolic, the hedonic and the utilitarian dimension of consumer attitude have proved to be independent (from each other), it would necessarily be interesting to explore more thoroughly the matter; for instance, investigate whether brands within product categories that are perceived mainly hedonic are associated symbolic or utilitarian functions of attitude and explore the several factors that may play a role in this product category-brand relationship.

Bibliography

Aaker, Jennifer (1997), "Dimensions of Brand Personality," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34 (August), 347-356.

Aaker, Jennifer, Susan Fournier, and S. Adam Brasel (2004), "When Good Brands Do Bad," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (June), 1–16.

Aggarwal, Pankaj (2004), "The Effects of Brand Relationship Norms on Consumer Attitudes and Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (June), 87-101.

Aggarwal, Pankaj, and Sharmistha Law (2005), "Role of Relationship Norms in Processing Brand Information," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (3), 453-464.

Ball, Dwayne A. and Lori Tasaki (1992), "The Role and Measurement of Attachment in

Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 1 (2), 155–72.

Basu Monga, Alokparna, and Loraine Lau-Gesk (2007), "Blending Cobrand Personalities: An Examination of the Complex Self," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 44 (3), 389-400.

Belk, Russell (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (September), 139-168.

Beverland, Micheal B., and Francis J. Farrelly (2010), "The Quest for Authenticity in Consumption: Consumers' Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to Shape Experienced Outcomes," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (5), 838-856.

Bhat, Subodh, and Srinivas K. Reddy (1998), "Symbolic and Functional Positioning of Brands," *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 15 (1), 32-43.

Brakus, J. Josko, Bernd H. Schmitt, and Lia Zarantonello (2009), "Brand Experience: What is it? How is it Measured? Does it Affect Loyalty?" *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (3), 52-68.

Cayla, Julien and Giana M. Eckhardt (2008), "Asian Brands and the Shaping of an Imagined Transnational Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (2), 216-230.

Childers, Terry L., and Akshay R. Rao, "The Influence of Familial and Peer-Based Reference Groups on Consumer Decisions," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (2), 198-211.

Diamond, Nina, John F. Sherry Jr., Albert M. Muniz Jr., Mary Ann McGrath, Robert V. Kozinets, and Stefania Borghini (2009), "American Girl and the Brand Gestalt: Closing the Loop on Sociocultural Branding Research," *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (3), 118-134.

Edson-Escalas, Jennifer, 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), 339-48.

Edson-Escalas, Jennifer, and James E. Bettman (2005), "Self-Construal, Reference Groups, and Brand Meaning," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (3), 378-389.

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

Gosling, Mark, and Heh Jason Huang (2009(, "The Fit Between Integrity and Integrative Social Contracts Theory," *Journal of Business Ethics,* 90 (3), 407-417.

Grohmann, Bianca (2009), "Gender Dimensions of Brand Personality," *Journal of Marketing Research,* 46 (1), 105-119.

Higgins, E. Tory (1987), “Self-discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect,” *Psychological Review*, 94, 319-340.

Higgins, E. Tory, Roney, Christopher J. R., Crowe, Ellen and Charles Hymes (1994), “Ideal Versus Ought Predilections for Approach and Avoidance: Distinct Self-regulatory Systems,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2, 276-86.

Hirschman, Elizabeth C. and Morris B. Holbrook (1982), "Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods, and Propositions," *Journal of Marketing*, 46 (Summer), 92-101.

Hogg, M., Banister, E., & Stephenson, C. (2009), “Mapping Symbolic (Anti-) Consumption,” *Journal of Business Research*, 62 (2), 148-159.

Holbrook, Morris B. and Elizabeth C. Hirschman (1982), "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (September), 132-40.

Holt, Douglas (2002), “Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectic Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (June), 70-90.

Holt, Douglas B. (2004), How Brands Become Icons. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business

School.

Johar G.. Venkataramani, Jaideep Sengupta, and Jennifer L. Aaker (2005), "Two Roads to Updating Brand Personality Impressions: Trait Versus Evaluative Inferencing," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 42 (4), 458-469.

Johar, J. S., and M. Joseph Sirgy (1991), "Value-Expressive Versus Utilitarian Advertising Appeals: When and Why to Use Which Appeal," *Journal of Advertising*, 20 (3), 23-33.

Kampmeier, Claudia, Simon, Bernd (2001), "Individuality and Group Formation: The Role of Independence and Differentiation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81 (3), 448-462.

Katz, Daniel (1960), "The Functional Approach to the Study of Attitudes", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24, 163-204.

Keller, Kevin Lane (1993), "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity", *Journal of Marketing*, 57 (January), 1-22.

Kleine, Susan S., Robert E. Kleine, III. and Chris T. Allen (1995), "How Is a Possession 'Me' or 'Not Me'? Characterizing Types and an Antecedent of Material Possession Attachment," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (4), 327-3.

Kleine, Susan Schultz and Stacey Menzel Baker (2004), "An Integrative Review of Material Possession Attachment," *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 1-35.

LeBoeuf, Robyn A., and Joseph J. Simmons (2010), "Branding Alters Attitudes Functions and Reduces the Advantage of Function-Matching Persuasive Appeals," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47 (2), 348-360.

Malhotra, Naresh K. (1981), "A Scale to Measure Self-Concepts, Person Concepts, and Product Concepts," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18, (4), 456-464.

Markus, Hazel and Nurius, Paula (1986), "Possible Selves," *American Psychologist*, 41 (9), 954-69.

Markus, Hazel, and Elissa Wurf (1987), "The Dynamic Self-concept: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Annual Review Psychology*, 38, 299-337.

McAlexander, James H., John W. Schouten, and Harold F. Koenig (2002), "Building Brand Community," *Journal of Marketing*, 66 (January), 38-54.

McCracken, Grant (1986), "Culture and Consumption: Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (June), 71-84.

McCracken, Grant (1989), "Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16 (3), 310-321.

Minton, Ann P., and Rose Randall L. (1997), "The Effects of Environmental Concern on Environmentally Friendly Consumer Behavior: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Business Research*, 40 (1), 37-48.

Monga, Alokparna Basu and Loraine Lau-Gesk (2007), "Blending Cobrand Personalities: An Examination of the Complex Self," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 44 (3), 389-400.

Muniz Jr. Albert M. and Thomas C. O'Guinn (2001), "Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (March), 412-433.

Nguyen-Chaplin, Lan, and Deborah Roedder John (2005), "The Development of Self-Brand Connections in Children and Adolescents, "*Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (1), 119-129.

Nunnally, J.C. and I. H. Bernstein (1994), *Psychometric Theory* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Ogilvie, Daniel M. (1987), "The Undesired Self: A Neglected Variable in Personality Research," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52 (2), 379-385.

Park, C. Whan, and V. Parker Lessig (1977), "Students and Housewives: Differences in Susceptibility to Reference Group Influence," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4 (2), 102-110.

Park, C. Whan, Bernard J. Jaworski, and Deborah J. MacInnis (1986), "Strategic Brand Concept – Image Management," *Journal of Marketing*, 50 (October), 135-145.

Rose, Gregory M., and Linda M. Orr (2007), "Measuring and Exploring Symbolic Money Meanings," *Psychology & Marketing*, 24 (9), 743-761.

Rosenberg, M. (1979), "Conceiving the Self," Basic Books, New York, NY.

Simsek, Ömer Faruk, Berna Yalınçetin (2010), "I feel unique, therefore I am: The development and preliminary validation of the personal sense of uniqueness (PSU) scale," *Personality and Individual Differences*, 49, 576–581

Singelis, Theodore M. (1994), "The Measurement of Independent and Interdependent Self-construals," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 20 (5), 580-591.

Sirgy, M. Joseph (1982), "Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (3), 287-300.

Sirgy, M. Joseph (1985), "Using Self-Congruity and Ideal Congruity to Predict Purchase Motivation," *Journal of Business Research*, 13 (3), 195-206.

Sprott, David E., Sandor Czellar, and Eric R. Spangenberg (2009), "The Importance of a General Measure of Brand Engagement on Market Behavior: Development and Validation of a Scale," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46 (1), 92-104.

Swaminathan, Vanitha, Karen M. Stilley, and Rohini Ahluwalia (2009), "When Brand Personality Matters: The Moderating Role of Attachment Styles," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (6), 985-1002.

Tian, Kelly Tepper, William O. Bearden, and Gary L. Hunter (2001), "Consumers' Need for Uniqueness: Scale Development and Validation," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28 (1), 50-66.

Timmor, Yaron, and Tal Katz-Navon (2008), "Being the Same and Different: A Model Explaining New Product Adoption," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 7 (3), 249-262.

Voss, Kevin E., Eric R. Spangenberg, and Bianca Grohmann (2003), "Measuring the Hedonic and Utilitarian Dimensions of Consumer Attitudes," Journal of Marketing Research, 40 (August), 310–320.

Wilcox, Keith, Hyeong Min Kim, and Sankar Sen (2009), "Why Do Consumers Buy

Counterfeit Luxury Brands?" *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46 (2), 247-259.

Wilkie, William (1986), Consumer Behavior. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Appendix

Appendix A. The symbolic dimension of consumer attitudes toward brands - final scale

	Items
1	This brand reflects how I distinguish myself from others
2	This brand signals something about the kind of person I would like to be
3	This brand tells people about pure, true or authentic values that I cherish
4	This brand represents something I hope to become
5	This brand expresses who I am to others
6	I consider this brand to be a part of who I am
7	This brand helps me communicate who I am
8	This brand helps me further define myself
9	This brand embodies what I stand for
10	This brand tells others something I would love to become
11	This brand makes a statement about what is important to me
12	This brand signals to people something that is very close to who I am
13	This brand promotes what I am as a person
14	This brand helps me express my rare characteristics
15	This brand shows my affiliation to a community of like-minded consumers
16	This brand tells people about who I am or who I have always been
17	This brand signals to people something that fits with who I am
18	This brand can tell that I am accomplished
19	This brand embodies what people like me stand for
20	The fact of owning or using this brand says something about the kind of person I am
21	This brand expresses an important aspect of me
22	The fact of owning or using this brand says something about the kind of person I ought to be
23	This brand shows people a part of who I am
24	This brand shows people the kind of person I am
25	This brand reflects who I am
26	This brand is an important indication of who I am
27	This brand helps me work on how I want to present myself to others
28	I feel that owning this brand strengthens particular aspects of myself
29	This brand shows my ties with people I aspire to be like
30	This brand helps me embody the type of person I aspire to be like
31	This brand says a lot about the kind of person I would like to be
32	This brand helps me work on the kind of person I would like to be
33	This brand makes me feel like I am staying true to myself
34	This brand embodies something I want to become