

**SYMBOLIC BRAND TRANSGRESSION: A SOURCE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis begins by reviewing extant literature on the self-concept in consumption, and then extends to the formation of a relationship between one's self-concept and a given brand (*self-brand relationships*). The paper subsequently addresses the shortcomings of the literature with regards to how these relationships might be affected by *symbolic brand transgressions*. More precisely, the author examines the self-brand relationship through the theory of cognitive dissonance, where undesirable dissonance arises as a result of symbolic brand failure. Based on Festinger's (1957) dissonance reducing strategies, three consumer strategies are proposed: *coping*, *defending*, and *abandoning*. Through the manipulation of three transgression variables, this research does not find empirical support for the hypothesized relationships between different transgressions and these three consumer strategies, aside from that related to defense and relationship strength.

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## INTRODUCTION

Theory regarding the self-concept in marketing has evolved substantially over the last three decades. Particularly, the research has contributed to the understanding of consumer motivations (Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway 1986). A great deal of consumption can be attributed to an individual's attempt at lessening the gap between the *ideal* and *actual self-concept*, where the *ideal self-concept* refers to the qualities, beliefs and attributes one aspires to have (Solomon, Zaichkowsky, and Polegato 2008). Consumption becomes a means to bridge this gap via the symbolic attributes associated with a given product. Of these attributes, the brand is often of the utmost importance, as it provides a clear and concise vehicle by which an individual can communicate his/her self-concept to the surrounding social environment through its own symbolic elements (Griskevicius et al. 2007).

If a self-brand connection is formed based on the brand's ability to help communicate the individual's ideal self, the brand assumes a duty to maintain those symbolic qualities, and the individual now has a vested interest in the brand. Unfortunately, brands are not perfect and do make mistakes – referred to as “transgressions” by Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004). If the transgression leads to a deviation from the previously outlined set of attributes, how will the consumer react? Though select research has examined brand transgressions (Aaker et al. 2004; Paulssen and Bagozzi 2009), the authors focus primarily on utility-related transgressions rather than symbolic ones.

A closer examination of elite-athlete endorsements may help shed light on how consumers might react to a symbolic transgression. The initial connection between a brand and an athlete is created based on the brand's desire to communicate its similarities with the athlete's attributes (e.g. "top competitor"). When the athlete's image is questioned as the result of a transgression, the sponsors must reevaluate whether or not, or the degree to which, they will continue to endorse the athlete, as the athlete may no longer communicate the desired attributes that he/she entered the endorsement contract with. For example, the marital infidelity of Tiger Woods has resulted in mixed of reactions from his sponsors. While some decided to abandon the world-renowned golf celebrity, others were more cautious in their decisions and simply decreased his role in communications for the time being. Although some brands began by attempting to draw the public's attention to his athletic performance rather than his marital performance, this task became impossible as the scandal worsened.

This thesis examines a similar relationship that individuals form with brands, and the consequences of a brand violating the terms under which the relationship was. This research argues that relationship is based on the perceived consistency between an individual's ideal image (ideal self-concept) and the brand's image, and subsequently draws on *cognitive dissonance* theory to examine how an individual might react should a transgression occur. First, the implications of the self-concept on brands are outlined, followed by a summary of Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. The literature is then examined in terms of brand image transgressions, or *symbolic transgressions*, and highlights three proposed individual reactions, where the extent of the reaction is a function of the *magnitude* of the perceived dissonance: *coping*, *defending*, and *abandoning*. Then, the methodology for and

results of testing the propositions is described, followed by a discussion of implications, and suggestions for future research.

## **THE SELF-CONCEPT AND BRANDS**

### The Self-Concept Defined

The literature on the self-concept is rather extensive, as it is a topic of interest for both marketing and psychology. In order to properly understand the implications of the self-concept in the realm of branding, it is imperative that it first be clearly defined. Fortunately, though a vast number of definitions exist in the literature, they do not differ a great deal from one another. One's self-concept may be viewed as a collection of "images, schemas, conceptions, prototypes, theories, goals or tasks" (Markus and Wurf 1987, 301). Sirgy (1982, 1985) provides a more refined interpretation of the self as the sum of an individual's cognition and affect with regards to themselves as an object. Simply, the self-concept refers to the beliefs a person holds about him/herself, in terms of physical, cognitive, and affective attributes, and thus how he/she evaluates them as well (Markus and Nurius 1986).

Another generally accepted construct of the self-concept refers to the existence of both the ideal and actual self (Graeff 1996, 1997; Markus and Kunda 1986; McGuire and Padawer-Singer 1976; Sirgy 1982, 1985; Sirgy, Grewal, and Mangleburg 2000; Solomon, Zaichkowsky and Polegato 2008). The ideal self refers to the self one would aspire to possess, and is therefore a collection of the physical, cognitive, and affective attributes one *would like to* have. The most significant implications of ideal/actual selves lay in the discrepancy between the two (Jamal and



Goode 2001). The discrepancy is the source of much of an individual's behavior, as the need to bridge the gap is a result of one's need to develop and hold a positive attitude towards oneself – branded as self-esteem (Sirgy et al. 2000; Solomon, Zaichkowsky and Polegato 2008).

The literature generally accepts the notion that the self-concept is far more complex than the dyadic relationship described above. With respect to the internal organization of the self-concept, there are three general perspectives. The first argues a protectionist view, where an individual only surrounds him/herself with a physical and social environment that is consistent with the self-concept (Swann 1985; Swann and Hill 1982; Swann and Read 1981). Furthermore, the individual adopts only self-reinforcing information, while non-consistent information is rejected. The second perspective argues that the self-concept is a malleable and dynamic construct that allows the individual to reap the maximum social utility from their immediate environment (Markus 1977). The third perspective (which is adopted by this paper) relates to the *working self-concept* and postulates that there does exist a relatively static arrangement of selves, referred to as the *self-schema* (Markus and Kunda 1986; Markus and Wurf 1987). At the center of the schema lies the *actual self*, which is surrounded by a variety of alternate, or ideal, selves that vary in importance to the individual. *Symbolic interactionism* posits that the forming and the selection of an alternate self-concept is the result of social interactions within one's immediate environment (Hull and Levy 1979).

Individuals therefore strive to maximize self-esteem within a given environment, based on the selection of a self-concept that they believe will render maximum social utility. Consequently, individuals utilize consumption activities and particular brands to accomplish this esteem maximization task.

## Symbolic Meanings of Brands

In order for brands to be utilized as means for enhancing self-esteem, though, the brands must possess qualities that go beyond their physical attributes. More specifically, there must be symbolic meanings associated with a given brand name. The modern marketing literature has reflected this notion, as it has distanced itself from traditional economic theories of consumption, where individuals consume in a manner that maximizes their economic utility. Rather, research has increasingly focused on the symbolic benefits offered by a given brand and/or product – commonly referred to as hedonic consumption (Arnold and Reynolds 2003).

The symbolic needs of individuals are satisfied in a variety of ways by the brands they choose. More precisely, the literature refers to the process of acquiring goods and/or services to lessen the gap between their actual and ideal selves as *symbolic self-completion* (Solomon, Zaichkowsky and Polegato 2008). Once the brand is incorporated into the self-concept as a completion agent, the brand becomes part of the *extended self*, as the individual invests him/herself in the brand (Belk 1988). Fournier (1998) elaborates on the concept of self-investment by investigating the relationship-like qualities between brands and their consumers. For example, where one individual might perceive a can of tomatoes as nothing more than a processed vegetable, packaged in a sealed metal container, another might see that same can as a vehicle by which he/she can express his/her “Italian self” through the highest quality and best tasting meals (Fournier 1998). Though it may seem that the latter individual is evaluating the product on a utilitarian basis, the symbolic meaning of the brand goes far beyond quality and taste. Rather, it allows for a given self-concept to be fulfilled.

## Brand Image

The symbolic and physical attributes and associations that individuals associate with a given brand combine to form its *brand image*. Biel (1992) describes three broad components contributing to brand image: (1) *image of the provider of the product or service* – where the image of the manufacturer or corporation itself is transferred onto the image of the brand in question; (2) *image of the user* – where the attributes from typical users of the brand are considered when evaluating brand image; and (3) *image of the product or service itself* – where imagery is derived from the attributes, beliefs and qualities inferred from the product or service itself (e.g. the “high physical quality” perception of BMW automobiles themselves is transferred to the brand’s image). The framework, though, encapsulates the brand’s Gestalt rather than describing specifics as to how imagery is formed within each of the components.

Often, the symbolic elements, or imagery, of a brand may be inferred and expressed from its *personality* (Keller 1993). The term *brand personality* refers to the association of human characteristics and attributes linked with a given brand (Aaker 1997). Specifically, Aaker (1997) presents five dimensions of brand personality: *sincerity*, *excitement*, *competence*, *sophistication*, and *ruggedness*. An individual, for example, might define a brand as *exciting* for a number of reasons. In considering the work of Biel (1992) presented above, if an individual perceives the typical consumer of the brand in question to have an exciting personality, that personality will subsequently be transferred onto the brand. The manner in which individuals utilize a brand’s personality and other symbolic elements (contributing to the brand’s image) in consumption choice may vary, but often relates to the perceived congruence or consistency between the individual’s self-concept and the brand’s image (Solomon, Zaichkowsky and Polegato 2008).

## The Image Congruence Hypothesis

This brand image consistency is highlighted by the *image congruency hypothesis*, which refers to the congruence, or lack thereof, between one of an individual's alternate selves and the brand image (Arnold and Reynold 2003; Graeff 1996; Sirgy 1982). More specifically, the hypothesis states that individuals will select a brand that best acts a means for self-reinforcement. Consumers are therefore motivated to evaluate brands in a manner that allows them to assess the degree to which a given brand is consistent with the self-concept they wish to express to their immediate social environment.

Let us then consider the self-schema, where there exist a number of alternative selves varying in importance to the individual (Markus and Kunda 1986; Markus and Wurf 1987), in a brand related context. For each alternate self, there exists a set of related behaviours that allow for the reinforcement and communication of that self-concept – of which brand consumption is part. Certain brands may help to communicate multiple selves, as there is no evidence that each alternate self is an entirely independent being. The relative importance of each self-concept will therefore contribute to the degree to which the individual will invest him/herself in a given brand. The recent plethora of investigation into brand communities has highlighted instances of extreme self-brand connections, where the distinction between the self-concept and the brand image is negligible (Solomon, Zaichkowsky and Polegato 2008). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) explore circumstances in which individuals not only utilize the meanings of brands as means to communicate their self-concept, but where brand image and self-concept become one in the same (e.g. purchasing a Saab vehicle for the transference of certain symbolic attributes onto one's self, versus becoming a "Saaber").

In the latter instance, there is an enormous individual investment in the chosen brand. The investment, though, is made under the assumption that it will promote what the individual perceives as the optimal level of social utility in his/her environment. Once the brand no longer suits that purpose, how might the individual react? Though there exists the possibility that a particular self-concept may no longer suit the utility optimization goals of the individual, this paper focuses solely on the case in which the brand no longer suits an identity that the individual perceives to render an adequate level social utility. Cognitive consistency theories provide insight into how such a reaction might transpire (Shaw and Costanzo 1982). Festinger's (1957) theory of *cognitive dissonance* is a dominant one, and will be outlined in the following section.

### **COGNITIVE CONSISTENCY: A SUMMARY FESTINGER'S THEORY**

Several cognitive consistency theories have emerged over the last century. The *p-o-x theory* (commonly known as *balance theory*), for example, examines the relationship between three elements within a given environment, referred to as a *triad* (Heider 1958). The theory states that individuals are motivated to maintain balance within the *triad* regarding the valence associated with each relationship. Though the theory is generally accepted within both the psychology and marketing literature, it does not suit the purposes of the present research, as it examines relationships purely in the form of valence. The present paper, though, seeks to examine the effect of sudden incongruence between the self-image and brand image as a result of a brand transgression. The theory of *cognitive dissonance* seems more appropriate as it examines relationships in terms of congruity rather than valence, while also providing for dissonance reducing strategies.

## Festinger's Theory

Similar to Heider's (1958) theory, cognitive dissonance theory also examines relationships among elements within a given environment. Rather than examining relationships within a triad, though, Festinger (1957) explores attitude change through relations between any two cognitive elements, provided that they are indeed related to each other in some way. Essentially, the theory posits that dissonance emerges when two related cognitive elements are not consistent with one another, and also, similar to Heider (1958), that individuals are motivated to reduce this dissonance as much as possible. For example, if someone were to be watching the snowstorm from inside, he/she would expect it to be cold outside. However, if he/she were to step outside and find that it is 25°C, dissonance would subsequently be created. The individual would then be motivated to reduce that dissonance by perhaps finding a way to explain the warm weather.

Relationships between elements are categorized as being *dissonant* (inconsistent), *consonant* (consistent), or *irrelevant* (a case where no consistency or inconsistency can be inferred, as the two cognitions have no relation). As not all relationships carry equal weight in an individual's environment, the degree to which the individual perceives the dissonance as uncomfortable varies as well. The theory posits that the perceived magnitude, and thus importance, of the dissonance between a pair of elements is a function of the degree of self-relevance of the dissonant relationship. For the "Saaber" described in Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), the smallest inconsistency between the individual's self-concept and the Saab brand would be amplified beyond that of most relational inconsistencies, as it is an instance of tremendous self-relevance.

## Sources of Dissonance

Festinger (1957) discusses four sources of dissonance: (1) *logical inconsistency*, (2) *cultural mores*, (3) *opinion generality*, and (4) *past experience*.

### *1. Logical Inconsistency.*

Dissonance may emerge from cognitive elements that violate logic. If an individual believes that the planet is flat (as opposed to round), but also believes that it is possible to travel from Europe to South America by travelling east, then these two cognitive elements are inconsistent. Due to the lack of logic between these two beliefs, an uncomfortable dissonance emerges within the individual.

### *2. Cultural Mores.*

Cultural norms or *mores* may also be the source of conflicting cognitive relations. Should a group of individuals be conversing loudly during the showing of a film in a movie theater, an inconsistent relationship is created, as cultural norms dictate that movie theaters are silent viewing experiences. If at the home of a close friend, speaking during the movie may not create such a dissonance. This highlights the contextual contingencies related to the perception of dissonance, where the same act in two distinct environments arouses a different level of dissonance.

### *3. Opinion Generality.*

Here, dissonance arises when one specific opinion is included in a more general one. Let

us again refer to the “Saaber” (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). Since the Saab product line is rather limited, there might not always be a choice suitable for the needs of that individual. If the “Saaber” were to find him or herself shopping for a “family car” to seat six, perhaps he will choose a brand that will better suit his specific needs at the time. Although his opinion that Saabs are the best automobiles in the world still holds, his opinion in this specific situation contradicts that notion. The selection of a non-Saab vehicle stimulates a state of dissonance.

#### *4. Past Experience.*

Dissonance can easily arise if an observed element is inconsistent with past experiences. When drinking a Coca Cola, for example, the consumer expects a certain taste and colour because of previous consumption experiences. Should a consumer be presented with a blue soda, for example, dissonance is subsequently created.

#### Managing Dissonance

The basic premise behind cognitive dissonance theory is that dissonance is an uncomfortable/undesirable state for the individual to find him/herself in. Certain behaviours therefore follow the emergence of dissonance to recreate a consonant relationship. Festinger (1957) examined such behaviours in terms of resistance to change. More precisely, his theory posits that within a given relationship of cognitive elements, consonance is restored by focusing efforts on the element of least resistance. In the case of a self-brand relationship, the brand is most likely to be the altered element, as the investment in a given identity or self-concept is



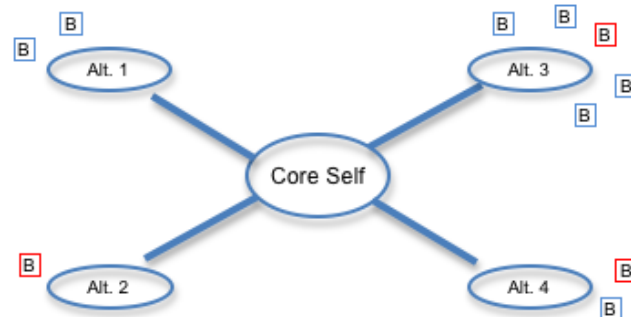
more often than not greater than one's investment in a brand and would therefore be more resistant to change.

## CONSEQUENCES OF TRANSGRESSIONS

Before delving further into the consequences of transgressions, it is crucial that the concept of brand transgression be clearly defined. The literature has examined the consumer-brand relationship through the degree of fit between the self-concept and a brand's image (i.e., Arnold and Reynold 2003; Graeff 1996; Sirgy 1982). Where the individual chooses to patronize a brand because its image is congruent with the self-image he/she would like to fulfill, the brand is charged with the responsibility of upholding that image. A brand transgression is therefore any deviation from the brand's image at the time of patronage.

Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the literature up to this point, and serves illustrative purposes in this section of the paper. The figure is a parsimonious layout of the relationships between the *core self*, *alternate selves* (e.g. Alt. 3), and *brands*. There is no assumption of strength of relationships between the core self and its alternates. If we examine the first alternate self (Alt.1), the individual communicates that self-concept via two brands. The images of the two brands are currently consistent with that alternate self, and there is therefore a consonant self-brand relationship that requires no maintenance at this point in time.

FIGURE 1  
SELF SCHEMA WITH BRAND IMAGE (IN)CONGRUENCE



*B = brands utilized in communicating/reinforcing the alternative self-concept (e.g. Alt. 3 is reinforced via five brands). Those outlined in red are dissonant elements, while those in blue are consonant elements*

### Perceiving Dissonance

The third alternate self-concept (Alt. 3) utilizes five brands for self-completion purposes. One of the brands, though, has committed a transgression, and has thus led to a dissonant self-brand relationship. The individual, though, has four other brands communicating that alternate self-concept. Assuming that all five brands carry equal weight in completing the alternate self, that alternate self is not in immediate danger of being entirely unfulfilled. The second alternate self (Alt.2), though, seems in distress, as it only relies on a single brand as its communicative vehicle (e.g. the “Saaber”), and that brand has committed a transgression that renders the relationship dissonant.

Festinger (1957) posits that the degree to which the individual perceives a relationship to be dissonant is a function of the self-relevance of the relationship. The monogamous relationship between the brand and the second alternate self would therefore be an instance of

high self-relevance as compared with the polygamous scenario in the third alternate. This heightened self-relevance would therefore increase the perception of dissonance, and thus create greater discomfort for the individual. Subsequently, the individual is expected to allocate greater cognitive effort in resolving the dissonance in the relationship. More precisely:

**H1a:** The higher the self-relevance of a given brand, and thus the greater the perception of dissonance, the greater the response to one brand's symbolic transgression.

Although this paper does not delve extensively into literature regarding relationship maintenance, a particular construct from this literature provides further insight with regard to the proposition above – *quality of alternatives* (Johnson and Rusbult 1989). The construct is generally treated as an indicator of relationship commitment, where commitment decreases as the quality of relational alternatives rises (Johnson and Rusbult 1989). The consideration of this construct provides a caveat to Hypothesis 1, as the increased number of brands that communicate an alternate self provides desirable alternatives for the individual, and the individual would therefore be more apt to simply abandon the relationship rather than attempting to fix it.

**H1b:** As the self-relevance of the brand decreases, the likelihood that the individual abandons the brand increases.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b examine only the conditions under which an individual perceives dissonance, and whether the individual resolves the dissonance as a result. Festinger (1957), though, provides for more specific dissonance reducing strategies that are discussed in the following sections.

## Reducing Dissonance

The hypotheses presented in this section are made based on the assumption that the self-relevance of the brand is sufficient as to induce some sort of desire to mend the dissonant relationship. Festinger (1957) elaborates on the following three dissonance reducing strategies: (1) reduce the importance of dissonant cognition; (2) acquire new information about the element in question; and (3) change the element that is causing the dissonance. These strategies will be referred to as *coping*, *defending*, and *abandoning*, respectively.

### *1. Coping.*

In applying this strategy, the individual is lessening the importance of the cognition that originally caused the dissonance between the brand and the self-concept. Let us consider the current scandal involving the marital infidelity of Tiger Woods. Someone who identifies himself as a “Tiger Guy,” for example, must deal with the dissonance created by the actions of the athlete before comfortably continuing to consume the Tiger Woods brand (e.g., either through consumption of Tiger Woods branded products, or simple fan-based support). The *coping* strategy would have the individual downplay the importance of marital infidelity in the support of an elite athlete. In doing so, the individual is attempting to eliminate the cognition that caused the identity to be questioned in the first place, and thus recreates the consonant relationship that was once present. The degree to which an individual must work towards recreating that relationship, though, would adversely affect the relationship once consonance is restored. Post-consonance relationship strength would therefore be a function of the ease/difficulty by which a consumer can ignore negative publicity about a given brand, for example. This adverse affect of high-level reaction is unique to coping since no new linkages are drawn between the individuals

self and the brand. The individual is simply finding a way to manage the relationship rather than strengthen it via other means.

**H2:** Should the individual resort to a high level of coping as means of dissonance reduction, the strength of the self-brand relationship post-coping is less than those who resort to a low level of coping.

### *2. Defending.*

In *defending* a relationship following a symbolic transgression, the individual will attempt to draw upon new cognition, or information, to recreate a state of consonance. Let us examine the recent recall of Toyota automobiles, which would without a doubt create a sense of dissonance for its relationship partners (i.e., consumers). Those who chose to defend their self-Toyota relationship might draw upon the technological marvels that the company has achieved in the past decade. As a result, the individual might use these cognitions to justify the transgressions, as mistakes like this are just a byproduct of an extremely innovative company. The individual is therefore finding other reasons why the brand belongs in his/her self-schema, and in doing so reestablishes consonance. In searching for these cognitions, though, the individual might find that not only can he/she reestablish the consonance that once was, but that the relationship is stronger following the defense of the brand.

**H3:** Should the individual resort to a high level of defense as means of dissonance reduction, the strength of the self-brand relationship post-coping is stronger than for those who resort to a low level of defense.

### *3. Abandonment.*

Should the individual resort to *abandoning* the brand, he/she is acknowledging that the

dissonance created by the transgression is irreversible, as the individual has no motivation to restore consonance in relation to this brand given the current magnitude of dissonance.

Abandonment here is not the result of limited self-relevance as it is presented in the previous section. Rather, it may be the result of the transgression-related cognition being entirely incompatible with the alternate self it was originally linked with. Let us again consider the Tiger Woods scandal in the context of a “family-man” alternate self-concept. Supporting and relating to a serial adulterer, regardless of other cognitions the individual can acquire, might be impossible. In this case, the extent of the transgression is too pronounced, and no amount of other information about the athlete could outweigh the newly associated “womanizer” attribute. The individual is therefore forced to abandon the brand.

#### Strategy as a Function of Severity

Unfortunately, Festinger (1957) did not provide conditions under which an individual would select a particular dissonance reducing strategies outlined above. In a marketing context, though, perhaps we can organize them in a hierarchical fashion. In the *coping* context, for example, there must be a threshold where the transgression is impossible to downplay to the point where consonance can be achieved. At this point, the individual would downplay the relevance of the negative cognition (resulting from the transgression) as much as possible, but be forced to defend the relationship by finding other positive cognitions to reestablish consonance within the self-brand relationship. Finally, if neither strategy proves to be successful in eliminating dissonance to an acceptable level, the individual is left with no choice but to the abandon the brand. The abandonment becomes necessary in order to alleviate the potential

social costs of the now inconsistent/negative attributes of the brand being transferred onto the individual's self-concept.

**H4:** The strategy that restores consonance is dependent on the severity of the transgression – where *coping* is related to the least severe transgression and *abandonment* is related to the most severe transgression.

## METHOD

The transgression-related hypotheses were investigated via an experiment where the transgression, self-relevance of the brand, and self-relevance of the focal brand attribute are manipulated. More precisely, the experiment adopts a 2 (level of transgression: mild versus severe) x 2 (self-relevance of brand: low versus high) x 2 (self-relevance of transgressed attribute: low versus high) between participants design. Participants were presented with one of eight different scenarios and immediately asked to describe their response to the scenario (open-ended). Their reaction was then measured via a series of scale items measuring coping, defense or abandonment reactions. Five items were used to assess the “coping” reaction. Another five were used to assess “defense” reactions, and four were utilized to assess “abandonment.” BESC (Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg 2009), materialism (Richins 2004) and relationship strength (Aaker, Fournier, Brasel 2004) were also measured in the main study. The questionnaire concluded with manipulation checks (as pretested below) and the collection of demographic data (age, sex and language skills). Three pretests were conducted to gather stimuli and develop scales for the main experiment.

The first pretest was designed to compile a list of brands that would be suitable for use in the main experiment, and consisted of two major sections: (1) a series of brand-related open-ended questions, and (2) a series of importance ratings for a provided list of brands. In the first portion, participants were first asked to list and rank brands that they perceived as important to their identities. Finally, the participants were instructed to describe the specific attributes of the listed brands that rendered them important. In the second portion of the pretest, participants indicated the extent to which a given brand (from a list of 17) was important to them.

The second round of pretesting was aimed at gaining a richer understanding of the attributes that brand-self relationships are built on and to explore the possibilities and causes for symbolic transgressions. These goals were fulfilled through the use of three in-depth interviews. The interview was structured in a way that first examined the individual and their self-view. The transition into "brand talk" occurred through the discussion of participants' current and past activities and lifestyle, as many of these activities manifest themselves through a series of products/brands. Once a small set of brands was uncovered, the participants were asked to describe their relationships with the brands. Utilitarian motives (i.e., fast, durable, etc.) were not explored further, while symbolic motives (i.e., status, prestige, etc.) were given particular attention. Level of loyalty and possible transgressions were then discussed along with brand attributes.

Through the information gathered in the first and second pretests, possible self-brand relationships and transgression scenarios were created. More precisely, scenarios were designed for all possible conditions in the main experiment. All scenarios were pretested in the third pretest to ensure the manipulations were interpreted as intended. Self-relevance of the brand was measured using a seven-item scale used in Escalas and Bettman (2003). Items included "This



brand reflects who I am,” and “I feel a personal connection to this brand.” Severity of the transgression was measured using a three-item scale applied in Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004). Finally, self-relevance to the transgressed attribute was captured through a modified version of the “self-connection” construct developed in Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004). Each participant was exposed to four conditions and asked to evaluate them. The order of the conditions was random.

## RESULTS

### Pretest 1 – Brand Selection

A total of 17 participants completed questionnaires (mean age = 24 years). In the open-ended component, brands Nike and Apple were mentioned most frequently (Apple = 9 times or 52.94%; and Nike = 8 times or 47.06%). Although high deviations in the rating dependent variable might have caused the lack of significant difference in rating between all variables (i.e., Wilk’s Test renders  $p = .14$ ), testing for a mean difference in importance ratings to the midpoint in the second portion of the pretest reveals that Apple was in fact rated as an important brand amongst the student sample ( $M_{\text{Apple}} = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ;  $p = .02$ ). When brand name is treated as a between-subject variable, multiple comparisons of the means reveal no significant differences between Apple and other brands when the Scheffé method is used (Appendix A). Differences, however, appear to be marginally significant when brands are compared using the Tukey HSD (Appendix B).

## Pretest 2 – Brand Story Interviews

A total of three graduate students were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes each. Below are brief descriptions of findings per participant.

### *1. Foreign Student*

This participant in her mid-twenties had just arrived from the United States, although she originated from the Ukraine. She was currently going through an adjustment period in learning not only the Canadian culture, but also the cultural mores of a Canadian graduate student. Her main resource for self-expression was *quality* clothing, highlighting that she would never “hunt for bargains” if she could avoid it. She prided herself on paying a premium for premium clothes, and often finds herself wearing a “better” brand than those around her in order to stand out and define herself to those around her. Two of her principle brands were Banana Republic and Kenneth Cole because their brand images are consistent with how she views herself – confident, happy, and driven. More precisely, she sees herself as “part of who Banana Republic and Kenneth Cole want in their stores.” Possible sources of transgressions were described as anything that would alter what she viewed as the consumer targets of the brands (i.e., communications targeting another segment, change in level of “prestige atmosphere” in stores, diversification of merchandise). When asked how she would react should that image be tarnished, she pointed out that her reaction would certainly depend on the magnitude of the change, where a small change would have her “take the tags off” and a more severe one would force her to “quietly deal with it and find somewhere else to shop.”

### *2. The Ex- "Skater"*

The majority of the conversation with this male in his late twenties revolved around his lifestyle in high school, where he was an avid member of the "skater" counter-culture. In this context, brand visibility was not only extremely high, but could gain or lose acceptance into the culture simply by wearing the right or wrong brands. According to the participant, a brand's success depended on its classification within the skater culture. If a brand were classified as consistent with the spirit of the skater movement, it would be accepted (i.e., Burton and AirWalk). He specifically referred to a "code" that members lived by, and in order for a brand to coexist in that world, it needed "to respect the code too." If a brand were to all of a sudden violate this code, it fell under the classification of "a sellout," and would not dare be worn by anyone who wanted a chance to be part of the culture. This code could be broken/respected in three ways: (1) Quality and durability – "a skater product has to take a skater beating"; (2) Distribution channels – an accepted brand cannot be distributed through a "sellout store like Sports Experts"; (3) Sponsorship – if a sponsored event or person is a sellout, the brand falls under that category as a consequence. Consumers of a newly sellout brand could either "cover their boards with more stickers" until their next purchase, or defend their brand's position by wearing it proudly and showing its capabilities.

### *3. The Expert*

The third participant was a female in her early twenties who has had the same core group of friends since she was in high school. Although many aspects of her identity have changed over the years, one aspect has remained constant – being the "expert" among her friends. This expert identity permeated to her consumption habits, as she would consume brands that enabled her to fulfill that identity in that given product category. Two product categories were discussed

as examples: cosmetics and tea. She declared loyalty to MAC cosmetics and David's Tea. Common to both was the distribution method for each of these brands – company owned retail outlets. This method of distribution ensures that the personnel is well educated and can therefore educate the participant on the details of her purchases – providing two ways in which the brand helps her fulfill her expertise-dependant identity. First, the knowledge of the staff that is passed onto her gives her the “ammunition” to remain an expert in that field, and she can go on to demonstrate that expertise by helping her friends make purchases and consume the products. Second, the perceived expertise associated with the brand allowed her to signal that she “only consumes the best.” She provided two ways in which these brands could disappoint her, and thus cause her to reevaluate her relationships with them. A transgression could occur if the “image becomes diluted through less specialized stock” (i.e., if MAC began to sell clothing), or if the companies lost control over their distribution. Her rationale for the second transgression relates to the fact that “these brands should not be available everywhere, especially if the company has little control over the service environment and the knowledge of the staff.” As with the other participants, her reaction to such transgressions would be dependent on the magnitude of the error, but noted that she would not hesitate on picking another brand in case of transgressions, as she does not want her expert image to be damaged as a consequence. She did state, however, that she is in fact “accountable to the brand,” meaning that she couldn't “just pack up and leave right away.”

The discussions with the participants confirmed that consumers do consume for reasons that have little to do with the physical product itself, and as a result, they may reconsider their relationship with a brand for symbolic failure rather than physical product failure. These transgressions are in fact based on the self-image they would like to project versus the qualities

of the brands that might have been negatively affected. Common amongst all answers is the issue of the correct distribution channels for a given product and its communications.

Essentially, the participants were extremely concerned with how a given brand was positioned through controllables such as the retail environment, the brand's target market, and/or the brand's choice of spokespeople. The manipulations utilized later in this research were developed from the areas of concern described in these interviews.

### Pretest 3 – Testing Manipulations

A total of 59 respondents (mean age = 23 years) were presented with brand scenarios developed from results in the first and second pretests. For the severity of the transgression, those in the high severity condition ( $M_{high} = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) perceived the transgression as more severe than those in the low severity ( $M_{low} = 2.98$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) condition ( $t = 5.04$ ,  $df = 57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Participants in the high self-relevance of the brand ( $M_{high} = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) condition perceived the described brand as more self-relevant than those in the low relevance ( $M_{low} = 2.31$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) condition ( $t = 7.81$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For self-relevance of the transgressed attribute, those in the high self-relevance condition ( $M_{high} = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ), compared with those in the low self-relevance condition ( $M_{low} = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), perceived the attribute to be more relevant ( $t = 5.09$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p < .01$ ). All manipulations were therefore supported.

### Main Study – Results

184 respondents completed the questionnaire across all eight conditions. The eight scenarios are included in Appendix C. The average age of the sample was 41 years old. In

addition to pretesting the manipulations, manipulation checks were included at the end of the study. Analysis of these checks (identical scales as those used in pretesting) reveals that the manipulations did not produce significant differences of means. The high versus low severity conditions ( $M_{high} = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .82$ ;  $M_{low} = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) did not differ significantly ( $t = -.069$ ,  $df = 179.46$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The high versus low brand self-relevance conditions ( $M_{high} = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ;  $M_{low} = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) were not significantly different from one another ( $t = .36$ ,  $df = 179.82$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Finally, high versus low self-relevance of the transgressed attribute ( $M_{high} = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ;  $M_{low} = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) did not differ significantly ( $t = .77$ ,  $df = 176.44$ ,  $p > .05$ ). If only participants with high BESC or materialism scores are considered (distinguished via median split), the manipulation results above remain true ( $p > .05$ ). The reliability for the scales measuring all three manipulations were strong ( $\alpha_{severity} = .84$ ,  $\alpha_{relevance} = .97$ ,  $\alpha_{attribute} = .91$ ).

Items used to measure coping, defense and abandonment were also acceptably reliable ( $\alpha_{coping} = .73$ ,  $\alpha_{defense} = .86$ ,  $\alpha_{abandon} = .91$ ). In effort to further examine these scale items, principle component analysis was conducted. The examination of eigenvalues revealed only two principle components in contrast to the approach of the three taken by this research. The two revealed components explain 63.77% of the variance in the data. The component matrix in Figure 2 reveals that items originally associated with coping and abandonment load on the first component, and items mostly associated with defense load on the second component. In line with the theoretical framework used in this research, the analysis considers three response strategies (coping, defense, and abandon).

FIGURE 2  
COMPONENT MATRIX FOR REACTION ITEMS

Item	Category	Component	
		1	2
<i>Be less vocal about the use of E-Machine products</i>	Coping	.62	-.43
<i>Discreetly continue consuming E-Machine products</i>	Coping	.67	.07
<i>Lessen the visibility of E-Machine logos</i>	Coping	.74	-.33
<i>Identify myself with select qualities of E-Machine rather than the brand as a whole</i>	Coping	.54	.37
<i>Internally discount the importance of the negative events</i>	Coping	.61	.40
<i>Continue to publicly consume E-Machine</i>	Defense	.30	.77
<i>Explain to those around me why E-Machine remains strong, regardless of the events</i>	Defense	.43	.73
<i>Publicly discount the importance of the negative events</i>	Defense	.63	.33
<i>Defend choice of E-Machine as I would defend my identity</i>	Defense	.46	.71
<i>Increase my knowledge of the product category, so as to publicly identify E-Machine as the best</i>	Defense	.44	.71
<i>Immediately stop consuming E-Machine products</i>	Abandon	.72	-.49
<i>Advise those in my environment that I've stopped consuming E-Machine</i>	Abandon	.73	-.49
<i>Sever all ties between myself and E-Machine</i>	Abandon	.75	-.38
<i>No longer consider E-Machine for future purchases</i>	Abandon	.70	-.54

To evaluate H1(a), an overall reaction index was computed by summing the mean values of each reaction strategy. This index reflects to what extent participants manifested any type of reaction to the brand transgression. Those participants in the high self-relevance of the brand condition reported a mean reaction of 2.81 ( $SD = .63$ ) compared to those in the low self-relevance of the brand condition ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .84$ ). There is therefore no support for H1(a), as those in the high self-relevance condition did not differ significantly from those in the low ( $t$

= .05,  $df = 182$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Similarly, those exposed to the high versus low self-relevance condition did not rate abandonment related measures higher ( $M_{high} = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ , vs.  $M_{low} = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ;  $t = .67$ ,  $df = 182$ ,  $p > .05$ ). There is thus no support for H1(b).

In order to evaluate H2 and H3, a median split of the reaction measures was done to classify the reaction (coping and defense, respectively) as either high or low. This now categorized data was compared against *relationship strength*. In the case of coping, there was no significant difference between the relationship strength scores in either high or low coping categories ( $M_{high} = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .83$ , vs.  $M_{low} = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ;  $t = 1.12$ ,  $df = 181$ ,  $p > .05$ ). There is, however, observed differences in the relationship scores for defense and abandonment. In the case of defense, those in the high defense category had a significantly higher relationship strength score than those in the low defense category ( $M_{high} = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .79$ , vs.  $M_{low} = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .79$ ;  $t = 8.31$ ,  $df = 181$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Those in the high abandonment category scored lower in the relationship strength metric ( $M_{high} = 3.09$ ,  $SD = .93$ , vs.  $M_{low} = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .89$ ;  $t = -2.39$ ,  $df = 181$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There is therefore no support for H2, but support for H3.

Finally, H4 was tested by comparing the coping and abandoning score means across the transgression severity conditions. There was no observed difference in means for either coping ( $p_{coping} = .95$ ) or abandonment ( $p_{abandon} = .31$ ) between the high severity condition ( $M_{coping} = 2.79$ ,  $SD_{coping} = .69$ ,  $M_{abandon} = 2.37$ ,  $SD_{abandon} = 1.06$ ) and the low severity condition ( $M_{coping} = 2.80$ ,  $SD_{coping} = .98$ ,  $M_{abandon} = 2.21$ ,  $SD_{abandon} = 1.17$ ). There is therefore no support for H4.



## DISCUSSION

The premise behind this research is that consumers do consume for reasons that have little to do with the physical product itself, and as a result, they may reconsider their relationship with a brand for issues that are equally symbolic. This was in fact confirmed through the in-depth interviews conducted with the three participants. The purpose of the present research, though, is not to prove the existence of such brand-failure related behavior, but rather to examine the specific reactions of individual consumers to such failures and to further understand the consequences on the individual's self-brand relationship.

The manipulations, developed through a series of three pretests, were all validated before the administration of the questionnaire in the main study. The Apple brand was already a strong candidate for this research prior to the first round of pretesting, as it is currently one of the most symbolically rich brands in the market. As a result, the scenarios described during the interviews were easily adaptable to the Apple brand. Conversely, the low self-relevant brand, E-Machine, is almost an unknown utilitarian product. This provided for highly polarized brands stories, which was reflected in the results of the third pretest.

The observed results in the third pretest, though, did not repeat themselves in the main study. While the manipulations were developed through the responses in the interviews, and further validated through checks in the questionnaire administered in the third pretest, the manipulation checks provided in the main study reveal that the participants did not perceive significant differences across all conditions: self-relevance of the brand; severity of the

transgression; and self-relevance of the transgressed attribute. All measures remained constant across the studies, however the samples did differ. The mean age for pretests one and three was 24 and 23 years, respectively. The ages are reflective of the undergraduate/graduate university population from which the sample was drawn. Conversely, the mean age for the main study's sample was nearly twice that of the pretests – 41 years old. Fournier's (1998) brand relationship research did in fact uncover differences in brand-related behavior between older and younger subjects. The inability for the developed manipulations to alter subjects' perceptions in the desired manner could therefore be related to this sample difference.

To explore this non-effect, BESC and materialism constructs, collected as individual difference variables, were used as a filter for participants when analyzing the data. Theoretically, this was an attempt to eliminate those who may not have the capacity to think about brands on the symbolic and intimate level this research is examining. Participants measuring low on the BESC scale, for example, are generally less apt to incorporate a brand into their self-concept. It would therefore be difficult for them to visualize the scenarios asked of them in the study. Similarly, if an individual does not place very much value on brands and possessions with respect to their identities, they might not observe the same differences as an individual who places great importance on their belongings. There was no apparent difference, though, with respect to perception of the manipulations across the high or low rated BESC and/or materialism participants ( $p$ 's > .7). Such filtering of respondents would therefore not have increased the ability of the provided manipulations to produce an effect.

A deeper examination of the reaction items (*coping, defense and abandon*) through principle component analysis gave light to perhaps a different model than the tri-reactionary one proposed by this research. Results indicate that using only two components would sufficiently

explain the observed variance in the data. The significance of this two-component model is found in the manner in which the scale items load on these two components. The majority of the coping and abandonment items load on the same factor, while defense items load on the other. What the items in coping and abandonment have in common is a relatively passionless, passive response to the transgression. Defense items, however, demand a more active response to the transgression. There might therefore be a simpler reactionary model underlying in this realm of behavior – active versus passive reaction to a symbolic transgression. This opportunity is discussed further in the Limitations and Future Considerations section of this research. With respect to the scale items themselves, the reliability measures were rather encouraging across all three reactions. These items were developed from the interviews conducted in the second pretest and performed well in their first administration.

The manipulations difficulties outlined earlier translated into difficulty in hypothesis testing. The first hypothesis (a & b) examined both the overall response to a transgression and an individual's propensity to abandon the brand as a function the self-relevance of the brand. There were, however, no significant differences found across the self-relevance conditions for both total response and abandonment.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 examined relationship strength with respect to the dissonance reducing method utilized. The median split of the measured responses allowed for the data to be viewed in categorical form, where the individual's reaction could be identified and compared with the measured relationship strength. As stipulated in the conceptual development of this research, relationship strength is found to be significantly higher for those individuals who resorted to defending the brand than for those who were categorized as low defense. Relationship strength was significantly lower for those who were categorized as high

abandonment as compared with low abandonment. The results demonstrate that there is indeed correlation between the dissonance reducing method chosen by the individual and the strength of that individual's relationship with a given brand. What the results do not capture, however, is the directionality of the relationship. This discussed further in the Limitations and Future Considerations section of this research.

The final hypothesis examined coping and abandonment as a function of the severity of the transgression. As with the first hypothesis, the examination of H4 is hindered by the lack of measured differences between the severity conditions. As a result, this research cannot conclude that the dissonance reducing strategy is related to the severity of the transgression.

## CONCLUSIONS

It appears that the marketing literature has missed an extremely important aspect in consumer-brand relationships. More precisely, the literature lacks an understanding of how a brand might transgress on a symbolic level rather than on a transactional one. This research not only addresses the existence of a symbolic brand transgression, but also explores consumer maintenance strategies based on the assumption that the transgression creates a state of dissonance for the consumer. Festinger's (1957) proposition of *cognitive dissonance*, combined with the marketing literature regarding symbolic self-completion through the consumption of brands, proposes the following three consumer strategies: *coping*, *defending*, and *abandoning* – where the strategy selected is a function of the magnitude of the subsequent dissonance. This research examines but the tip of the iceberg of a complex consumer reaction to his/her failed

partner – the brand. Although empirical evidence for the proposed relationships between the strategies and brand scenarios was not found in the main study, several findings from the pretests and the main study open several paths from which future research could build.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS**

This research is the first attempt at examining the reactions to brand transgression at the symbolic level. Although the data lacks significant statistical support for the majority of the hypotheses, the strength of the conceptual development supporting these hypotheses is such that they should not simply be discounted and disregarded in future research. More precisely, the lack of significant effects in the pretested manipulations indicates that participant minds and emotions did not follow the methodological framework and process of this research as intended. Sample differences, such as in terms of age, could be the cause of the discrepancy between the effectiveness of the manipulations in pretests and in the main study. Simply replicating the presented methodology to test the hypotheses while controlling for sample age would allow for a better understanding of dissonance reducing strategies following a symbolic transgression.

While controlling for age across pretest and main study samples would aid in the effectiveness of the manipulations, the increased effectiveness of this control variable in and of itself merits further investigation. Should the developed manipulations work for undergraduates around twenty years old, but show no effect for a middle-aged population, the causes for this inconsistency would need to be explored further. The potential observed differences might be

simply explained by the chosen brands themselves and/or the presented scenarios. The more compelling argument, though, might be related to the qualitative findings in Fornier (1998), where the older participant was far less likely to experiment with a variety of brands than was the younger one. This finding, coupled with the lack of effect for the older population in this research's manipulations, could indicate that the malleability of a person's self-brand relationship schema is a function of one's age.

Other than age, there might be other influential variables mediating or moderating the presented response framework. The moderator proposed by this research relates to self-relevance, which is contingent on the brand and transgression elements. Other fixed individual difference variables, though, might also moderate selected strategies. Overall *brand loyalty* of a particular individual should be examined as a possible moderating variable. Those who exhibit very low loyalty, and subsequently high brand switching behaviour, might be less apt to devote the cognitive effort involved in *coping* and *defense*, therefore resorting to *abandonment* more often than highly brand loyal individuals.

The scale items used to assess the three dissonance reducing strategies were rather strong in their first administration, as per the outlined statistical analysis. The principle component analysis revealed that there are in fact only two components that sufficiently explain the variance in the data. It would appear that cope/abandon load on the first component and defense stands alone. In examining the conceptual frameworks of coping and abandoning, the common thread between them relates to the lack of creating new linkages between the brand and their alternative selves. Although the implications to the brand are vastly different for an individual who copes and one who abandons following a deviation from the brand's image, the collected data appears to have uncovered this similarity. Rather than examining the phenomenon of

reactions to symbolic transgressions via the presented triad, there is perhaps a dyadic one instead – passive versus active consonance reestablishment, where the passive method refers to what this research has defined as coping and abandonment.

With respect to the defense dissonance reduction strategy, this thesis found that relationship strength was stronger for individuals who defended strongly (high defense) than for those who defended mildly (low defense). While this does confirm the expectations of the literature, the analysis does not provide for the directionality of the relationship between defense and relationship strength with the brand. In other words, has the individual defended because of their strong relationship with the brand? Or has the individual strengthened their relationship with the brand as a result of defending it?

Future research should also explore the symbolic transgression itself more closely. While this research focuses more on the consumer reaction to such a brand failure, there is no consideration of the elements and variables that the transgression is comprised of (other than their conception). The source of the information leading to the transgression, for example, is one element that may account for the variance in the consequences of brand failure. Moreover, there might be a process by which consumers recognize and process the negative information they receive, and relationship maintenance strategies may vary in each stage of the process. As such, marketers of the focal brand will be provided with further insight into how they can repair the damaged relationship.

Similarly, brand recovery methods following a symbolic transgression must be explored further. While an individual is involved in *coping*, for example, how might the brand aid the individual in lessening the importance of the transgression-related information? Should an

individual be involved in the *defense* of his/her self-brand relationship, how might the brand supply new information that the individual can introduce into the dissonant relationship? There seems to exist three key elements involved in the transgression recovery: (1) *recovery content* – the content of the marketing communications themselves; (2) *recovery vehicle* – the communication vehicle by which marketers transmit the desired content; and (3) *recovery timing* – when the communications will be transmitted. Each of these elements might result in different self-brand relation maintenance outcomes. Marketers might only be able to encourage *defense* through a personal message, thus eliminating mass advertisement as a recovery option. Furthermore, there must be an infrastructure in place to reach that individual if mass marketing does not suit. A case might therefore be made for *transgression recovery readiness* – preemptive preparation of infrastructure in case of brand failure.

Finally, though this thesis has addressed the self-brand relationship in a consonant/dissonant state, there may be value in evaluating the relationship in terms of an interpersonal one. Perhaps a person's interpersonal relational-conflict behaviour can predict their chosen conflict reducing strategies with regards to self-brand relationships. Should an individual hold close bonds and relationships with those in their immediate environment that are rarely severed, will a similar dedication be observed when a consumed brand is involved in symbolic transgression? Compared to the framework addressed in this paper, the examination of the self-brand relationship as an interpersonal one could possibly provide a more in-depth understanding of consumer reactions to symbolic transgression and its associated conflict.



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## APPENDIX A

## BRAND RATING COMPARISONS OF MEANS – SCHEFFE

(I) brand	(J) brand	Sig.	(I) brand	(J) brand	Sig.	(I) brand	(J) brand	Sig.
Nike	Lululemon	0.99	Pepsi	Nike	1	Roots	Nike	1
	Levis Jeans	1		Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1
	Smirnoff Vodka	0.969		Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	1
	Absolute Vodka	0.997		Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1
	Molson Beer	0.957		Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	0.957		Molson Beer	1		Molson Beer	1
	Heineken	1		Budweiser	1		Budweiser	1
	Corona	1		Heineken	1		Heineken	1
	Coca Cola	1		Corona	1		Corona	1
	Pepsi	1		Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	1
	Apple	0.998		Apple	0.602		Pepsi	1
	Dove	1		Dove	0.998		Apple	0.878
	Roots	1		Roots	1		Dove	1
	Honda	1		Honda	1		Honda	1
	Volkswagen	1		Volkswagen	1		Volkswagen	1
	Ford	0.985		Ford	1		Ford	1
Lululemon	Nike	0.99	Apple	Nike	0.998	Honda	Nike	1
	Levis Jeans	1		Lululemon	0.24		Lululemon	1
	Smirnoff Vodka	1		Levis Jeans	0.943		Levis Jeans	1
	Absolute Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	0.146		Smirnoff Vodka	1
	Molson Beer	1		Absolute Vodka	0.362		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	1		Molson Beer	0.122		Molson Beer	1
	Heineken	1		Budweiser	0.122		Budweiser	1
	Corona	1		Heineken	0.841		Heineken	1
	Coca Cola	1		Corona	0.849		Corona	1
	Pepsi	1		Coca Cola	0.849		Coca Cola	1
	Apple	0.24		Pepsi	0.602		Pepsi	1
	Dove	0.957		Dove	1		Apple	0.878
	Roots	1		Roots	0.878		Dove	1
	Honda	1		Honda	0.878		Roots	1
	Volkswagen	0.997		Volkswagen	0.993		Volkswagen	1
	Ford	1		Ford	0.205		Ford	1

Levis Jeans	Nike	1	Dove	Nike	1	Volkswagen	Nike	1
	Lululemon	1		Lululemon	0.957		Lululemon	0.997
	Smirnoff Vodka	0.999		Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	1
	Absolute Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	0.904		Smirnoff Vodka	0.99
	Molson Beer	0.999		Absolute Vodka	0.985		Absolute Vodka	0.999
	Budweiser	0.999		Molson Beer	0.878		Molson Beer	0.985
	Heineken	1		Budweiser	0.878		Budweiser	0.985
	Corona	1		Heineken	1		Heineken	1
	Coca Cola	1		Corona	1		Corona	1
	Pepsi	1		Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	1
	Apple	0.943		Pepsi	0.998		Pepsi	1
	Dove	1		Apple	1		Apple	0.993
	Roots	1		Roots	1		Dove	1
	Honda	1		Honda	1		Roots	1
	Volkswagen	1		Volkswagen	1		Honda	1
	Ford	1		Ford	0.943		Ford	0.996
Smirnoff Vodka	Nike	0.969	Ford	Nike	0.985	Molson Beer	Nike	0.957
	Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1
	Levis Jeans	0.999		Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	0.999
	Absolute Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1
	Molson Beer	1		Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	1		Molson Beer	1		Budweiser	1
	Heineken	1		Budweiser	1		Heineken	1
	Corona	1		Heineken	1		Corona	1
	Coca Cola	1		Corona	1		Coca Cola	1
	Pepsi	1		Coca Cola	1		Pepsi	1
	Apple	0.146		Pepsi	1		Apple	0.122
	Dove	0.904		Apple	0.205		Dove	0.878
	Roots	1		Dove	0.943		Roots	1
	Honda	1		Roots	1		Honda	1
	Volkswagen	0.99		Honda	1		Volkswagen	0.985
	Ford	1		Volkswagen	0.996		Ford	1
Absolute Vodka	Nike	0.997	Coca Cola	Nike	1	Budweiser	Nike	0.957
	Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1
	Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	0.999
	Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1
	Molson Beer	1		Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	1		Molson Beer	1		Molson Beer	1
	Heineken	1		Budweiser	1		Heineken	1
	Corona	1		Heineken	1		Corona	1
	Coca Cola	1		Corona	1		Coca Cola	1
	Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1
	Apple	0.362		Apple	0.849		Apple	0.122
	Dove	0.985		Dove	1		Dove	0.878
	Roots	1		Roots	1		Roots	1
	Honda	1		Honda	1		Honda	1
	Volkswagen	0.999		Volkswagen	1		Volkswagen	0.985
	Ford	1		Ford	1		Ford	1
Corona	Nike	1	Heineken	Nike	1			
	Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1			
	Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	1			
	Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1			
	Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1			
	Molson Beer	1		Molson Beer	1			
	Budweiser	1		Budweiser	1			
	Heineken	1		Corona	1			
	Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	1			
	Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1			
	Apple	0.849		Apple	0.841			
	Dove	1		Dove	1			
	Roots	1		Roots	1			
	Honda	1		Honda	1			
	Volkswagen	1		Volkswagen	1			
	Ford	1		Ford	1			

## APPENDIX B

## BRAND RATING COMPARISONS OF MEANS – TUKEY HSD

(I) brand	(J) brand	Sig.	(I) brand	(J) brand	Sig.	(I) brand	(J) brand	Sig.
Nike	Lululemon	0.578	Smirnoff Vodka	Nike	0.382	Budweiser	Nike	0.324
	Levis Jeans	1		Lululemon	1		Lululemon	1
	Smirnoff Vodka	0.382		Levis Jeans	0.906		Levis Jeans	0.868
	Absolute Vodka	0.768		Absolute Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1
	Molson Beer	0.324		Molson Beer	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	0.324		Budweiser	1		Molson Beer	1
	Heineken	0.999		Heineken	0.992		Heineken	0.986
	Corona	0.999		Corona	0.985		Corona	0.975
	Coca Cola	0.999		Coca Cola	0.985		Coca Cola	0.975
	Pepsi	0.959		Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1
	Apple	0.822		Apple	0		Apple	0
	Dove	1		Dove	0.181		Dove	0.145
	Roots	1		Roots	0.975		Roots	0.959
	Honda	1		Honda	0.975		Honda	0.959
	Volkswagen	1		Volkswagen	0.578		Volkswagen	0.511
Ford	0.511	Ford	1	Ford	1			
Lululemon	Nike	0.578	Absolute Vodka	Nike	0.768	Heineken	Nike	0.999
	Levis Jeans	0.975		Lululemon	1		Lululemon	0.999
	Smirnoff Vodka	1		Levis Jeans	0.996		Levis Jeans	1
	Absolute Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	0.992
	Molson Beer	1		Molson Beer	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	1		Budweiser	1		Molson Beer	0.986
	Heineken	0.999		Heineken	1		Budweiser	0.986
	Corona	0.998		Corona	1		Corona	1
	Coca Cola	0.998		Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	1
	Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1
	Apple	0.002		Apple	0.004		Apple	0.108
	Dove	0.324		Dove	0.511		Dove	0.98
	Roots	0.996		Roots	1		Roots	1
	Honda	0.996		Honda	1		Honda	1
	Volkswagen	0.768		Volkswagen	0.906		Volkswagen	1
Ford	1	Ford	1	Ford	0.998			

Levis Jeans	Nike	1	Molson Beer	Nike	0.324	Corona	Nike	0.999
	Lululemon	0.975		Lululemon	1		Lululemon	0.998
	Smirnoff Vodka	0.906		Levis Jeans	0.868		Levis Jeans	1
	Absolute Vodka	0.996		Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	0.985
	Molson Beer	0.868		Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Budweiser	0.868		Budweiser	1		Molson Beer	0.975
	Heineken	1		Heineken	0.986		Budweiser	0.975
	Corona	1		Corona	0.975		Heineken	1
	Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	0.975		Coca Cola	1
	Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1
	Apple	0.27		Apple	0		Apple	0.115
	Dove	0.999		Dove	0.145		Dove	0.985
	Roots	1		Roots	0.959		Roots	1
	Honda	1		Honda	0.959		Honda	1
Volkswagen	1	Volkswagen	0.511	Volkswagen	1			
Ford	0.959	Ford	1	Ford	0.996			
Coca Cola	Nike	0.999	Dove	Nike	1	Volkswagen	Nike	1
	Lululemon	0.998		Lululemon	0.324		Lululemon	0.768
	Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	0.999		Levis Jeans	1
	Smirnoff Vodka	0.985		Smirnoff Vodka	0.181		Smirnoff Vodka	0.578
	Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	0.511		Absolute Vodka	0.906
	Molson Beer	0.975		Molson Beer	0.145		Molson Beer	0.511
	Budweiser	0.975		Budweiser	0.145		Budweiser	0.511
	Heineken	1		Heineken	0.98		Heineken	1
	Corona	1		Corona	0.985		Corona	1
	Pepsi	1		Coca Cola	0.985		Coca Cola	1
	Apple	0.115		Pepsi	0.822		Pepsi	0.992
	Dove	0.985		Apple	0.959		Apple	0.645
	Roots	1		Roots	0.992		Dove	1
	Honda	1		Honda	0.992		Roots	1
Volkswagen	1	Volkswagen	1	Honda	1			
Ford	0.996	Ford	0.27	Ford	0.709			
Pepsi	Nike	0.959	Roots	Nike	1	Ford	Nike	0.511
	Lululemon	1		Lululemon	0.996		Lululemon	1
	Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	1		Levis Jeans	0.959
	Smirnoff Vodka	1		Smirnoff Vodka	0.975		Smirnoff Vodka	1
	Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1		Absolute Vodka	1
	Molson Beer	1		Molson Beer	0.959		Molson Beer	1
	Budweiser	1		Budweiser	0.959		Budweiser	1
	Heineken	1		Heineken	1		Heineken	0.998
	Corona	1		Corona	1		Corona	0.996
	Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	1		Coca Cola	0.996
	Apple	0.023		Pepsi	1		Pepsi	1
	Dove	0.822		Apple	0.145		Apple	0.001
	Roots	1		Dove	0.992		Dove	0.27
	Honda	1		Honda	1		Roots	0.992
Volkswagen	0.992	Volkswagen	1	Honda	0.992			
Ford	1	Ford	0.992	Volkswagen	0.709			
Apple	Nike	0.822	Honda	Nike	1			
	Lululemon	0.002		Lululemon	0.996			
	Levis Jeans	0.27		Levis Jeans	1			
	Smirnoff Vodka	0		Smirnoff Vodka	0.975			
	Absolute Vodka	0.004		Absolute Vodka	1			
	Molson Beer	0		Molson Beer	0.959			
	Budweiser	0		Budweiser	0.959			
	Heineken	0.108		Heineken	1			
	Corona	0.115		Corona	1			
	Coca Cola	0.115		Coca Cola	1			
	Pepsi	0.023		Pepsi	1			
	Dove	0.959		Apple	0.145			
	Roots	0.145		Dove	0.992			
	Honda	0.145		Roots	1			
Volkswagen	0.645	Volkswagen	1					
Ford	0.001	Ford	0.992					



## APPENDIX C

### MAIN EXPERIMENT CONDITIONS

#### 1. *High SR (Apple) x High Severity (Deviation of current pers.) x High Attribute (Innovation)*

You have been a customer of Apple's for as long as you can remember and are a proud consumer of the brand. Not only do you consistently keep yourself on the forefront of the new products and related news, but you also act as an advocate of the brand to those around you. In fact, you have convinced many others to purchase Apple products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about Apple is that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, Steve Jobs, President and CEO of Apple, has become the face of the brand. He has been widely hailed as the man who single handedly brought Apple to its current state, and has thus taken the role of spokesperson for the brand as well.

Last week, though, news broke that he was found with a significant amount of confidential information belonging to competitors. As it turns out, Steve Jobs has been illegally acquiring competitive information for quite some time. Although there are no concrete links that have been drawn between the acquired information and the development Apple's products, the media is now beginning to question whether the innovative nature of Steve Jobs' accomplishments was pure genius (as previously thought), or simply a result of having access to privileged information.

#### 2. *High SR (Apple) x High Severity (Deviation of current pers.) x Low Attribute (Style)*

You have been a customer of Apple's for as long as you can remember and are a proud consumer of the brand. Not only do you consistently keep yourself on the forefront of the new products and related news, but you also act as an advocate of the brand to those around you. In fact, you have convinced many others to purchase Apple products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about Apple is that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, Steve Jobs, President and CEO of Apple, has become the face of the brand. He has been widely hailed as the man who single handedly brought Apple to its current state, and has thus taken the role of spokesperson for the brand as well.

One thing he is commonly recognized for is a "unconventional" and "modern" style that epitomizes Apple's image. However, over the past several weeks, you've noticed a distinct change in his appearance. Rather than sporting his usual black jeans and turtleneck, he has been wearing full business suits that resemble that of politicians.

3. *High SR (Apple) x Low Severity (Deviation from target audience) x High Attribute (Innovation)*

You have been a customer of Apple's for as long as you can remember and are a proud consumer of the brand. Not only do you consistently keep yourself on the forefront of the new products and related news, but you also act as an advocate of the brand to those around you. In fact, you have convinced many others to purchase Apple products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about Apple is that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, Apple's marketing campaigns have focused largely on the innovative nature of the brand. Not only was the focal point of the ads based on the innovative nature of the brand, but also it appeared as though they were designed to appeal to innovative consumers – a group in which you considered yourself a part of.

Recently, though, Apple has launched an entirely ad new campaign, and it appears that their audience has changed. Rather than targeting the select innovative followers of the brand such as yourself, Apple has taken a much broader approach and is using a communication strategy that speaks to all in the electronics market.

4. *High SR (Apple) x Low Severity (Deviation from target audience) x Low Attribute (Style)*

You have been a customer of Apple's for as long as you can remember and are a proud consumer of the brand. Not only do you consistently keep yourself on the forefront of the new products and related news, but you also act as an advocate of the brand to those around you. In fact, you have convinced many others to purchase Apple products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about Apple is that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, Apple's marketing campaigns have focused largely on the stylish nature of the brand. Not only was the focal point of the ads based on the style-orientation of the brand, but it also appeared as though they were designed to appeal to stylish, fashion-forward individuals.

Recently, though, Apple has launched an entirely new campaign, and it appears that their audience has changed. Rather than targeting the select fashionable followers of the brand, Apple has taken a much broader approach and is using a communication strategy that speaks to all in the electronics market.

5. *Low SR (E-Machine) x High Severity (Deviation of current pers.) x High Attribute (Innovation)*

You have been a customer of E-Machine, an electronics company, for about a year. So far, you are very satisfied with the performance of their products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about E-Machines that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, Michael Brian, President and CEO of E-Machine, has become the face of the brand. He has been widely hailed as the man who single handedly brought E-Machine to its current state, and has thus taken the role of spokesperson for the brand as well.

Last week, though, news broke that he was found with a significant amount of confidential information belonging to competitors. As it turns out, Michael Brian has been illegally acquiring competitive information for quite some time. Although there are no concrete links that have been drawn between the acquired information and the development E-Machine products, the media is now beginning to question whether the innovative nature of Michael Brian's accomplishments was pure genius (as previously thought), or simply a result of having access to privileged information.

*6. Low SR (E-Machine) x High Severity (Deviation of current pers.) x Low Attribute (Style)*

You have been a customer of E-Machine, an electronics company, for about a year. So far, you are very satisfied with the performance of their products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about E-Machines that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, Michael Brian, President and CEO of E-Machine, has become the face of the brand. He has been widely hailed as the man who single handedly brought E-Machine to its current state, and has thus taken the role of spokesperson for the brand as well.

One thing he is commonly recognized for is a “unconventional” and “modern” style that epitomizes E-Machine's image. However, over the past several weeks, you've noticed a distinct change in his appearance. Rather than sporting his usual black jeans and turtleneck, he has been wearing full business suits that resemble that of politicians.

*7. Low SR (E-Machine) x Low Severity (Deviation of target audience) x High Attribute (Innovation)*

You have been a customer of E-Machine, an electronics company, for about a year. So far, you are very satisfied with the performance of their products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about E-Machines that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, E-Machine marketing campaigns have focused largely on the innovative nature of the brand. Not only was the focal point of the ads based on the innovative nature of the brand, but also it appeared as though they were designed to appeal to innovative consumers – a group in which you considered yourself a part of.

Recently, though, E-Machine has launched an entirely ad new campaign, and it appears that their audience has changed. Rather than targeting the select innovative followers of the brand such as yourself, E-Machine has taken a much broader approach and is using a communication strategy that speaks to all in the electronics market.

8. *Low SR (E-Machine) x Low Severity (Deviation of target audience) x Low Attribute (Style)*

You have been a customer of E-Machine, an electronics company, for about a year. So far, you are very satisfied with the performance of their products.

The aspect that you find to be most appealing about E-Machine is that it would seem as though they can innovate at a rate that their competitors cannot approach. This innovative image fits perfectly with how you would like to see yourself – a young person who is always one step ahead of others.

Over the past several years, E-Machine marketing campaigns have focused largely on the stylish nature of the brand. Not only was the focal point of the ads based on the style-orientation of the brand, but it also appeared as though they were designed to appeal to stylish, fashion-forward individuals.

Recently, though, E-Machine has launched an entirely new campaign, and it appears that their audience has changed. Rather than targeting the select fashionable followers of the brand, E-Machine has taken a much broader approach and is using a communication strategy that speaks to all in the electronics market.