

**The Impact of Brand Familiarity on Self-Brand Connections, a Mediator
between Narrative Ads and Consumers' Brand Attitudes.**

Yubo Dai

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By: Yubo Dai

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originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____	Chair
Dr. Saif Ullah	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Onur Bodur	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Tieshan Li	
_____	Supervisor
Dr. Bianca Grohmann	

Approved by _____

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

Date _____

Abstract

The Impact of Brand Familiarity on Self-Brand Connections, a Mediator between Narrative Ads and Consumers' Brand Attitudes.

Yubo Dai

Brands use advertisements that tell a story (i.e., narrative ads) to illustrate the positive outcomes that consumers could achieve by consuming their products. When consumers relate ad narratives to their life stories, a link is expected to build between the brand and the consumers' self-identity. This self-brand connection is positively related to consumers' brand attitudes. A different body of literature suggests that consumers tend to have more brand associations that connect to the story elements in narrative ads for a familiar brand rather than an unfamiliar brand. This thesis seeks to contribute to current knowledge by investigating whether and how brand familiarity affects the relation between narrative ads, subsequent self-brand connections, and consumers' brand attitudes.

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Introduction

Humans regard storytelling as the most common way to communicate (Lien & Chen, 2013). People capture and organize most of the information in their daily lives through temporally and rationally related sequences of events in the form of narratives (Bruner, 1986, 1990). Stories connect the pieces of people's lives based on causal inferences. Individuals take a series of actions to achieve a particular goal and outcomes will follow (Pennington & Hastie, 1986). In general, people use narratives to understand what they do and who they are.

Marketers employ the psychology of narratives to get consumers mentally involved in their advertisements. Escalas (1998) conducted a content analysis and showed that approximately a quarter of television ads are in narrative format in the United States. The ads tell stories to hook viewers into the viewing process and accordingly impact their perception of these ads in a more favourable way (Escalas, Moore & Britton, 2004). Since consumers tend to imagine themselves in the sequences of events of product use (Adaval & Wyer, 1998), advertisers use the narrative ads to explain the positive outcomes that consumers could achieve through consuming the brand's products. For example, Coca-Cola launched a narrative advertisement called "Bring Me Home" in China just during Chinese New Year with Liu Xiang, a famous Chinese athlete. The character in this ad was too busy to go home for the reunion with his family during this biggest festival in China. However, he somehow felt confused when he was served with a plate of dumplings that were cooked in a Western style and was given fork to eat them in a Chinese restaurant in Paris. Suddenly, someone put on the table where he was served a can of Coke which he drank immediately, and two cartoon figures brought him back to China to celebrate the New Year. The whole family, ready for a big family meal, felt surprised and excited when seeing him show up unexpectedly. The character ended the ad by saying "nothing is better than going

back home” with a bottle of coke held in his hand. The ad was very impressive and became a huge success in China as it used a story about Chinese New Year to emotionally capture consumers’ attention during the festival. Narrative ads provide consumers with an obvious picture of the intent of the ads by stimulating them to immerse themselves in a narrative mode of thinking, which can create meaning for brands. Coca-Cola attached associations such as home, family reunion, and celebration to the brand in this ad. Through the narrative format, the ad conveyed the message that consumers could achieve the goal of feeling like going home while drinking Coca-Cola.

Consumers are creative story builders (Escalas, 2004). They incorporate incoming stories into stories they have in memory (Shank & Abelson, 1995). Furthermore, narrative theory suggests that people interpret their experiences and relate to the world around them by narrating, or telling stories (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Narrative ads present story elements with goals, actions and outcomes involving the brand associations that consumers can connect to their self-related goals. When consumers use brand associations to construct their self-identity and present their self to others, a connection between the consumer’s self and the brand has been formed (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Escalas (2004) proposed that self-brand connections serve as a mediator between narrative processing and consumer’s brand attitudes. Lien and Chen (2013) asserted that the persuasive effect of the narrative storyboard did not work through self-brand connections in their research. Escalas (2004) used storyboard advertisements of Kodak and American Express, two highly familiar brands, to manipulate narrative processing, while unfamiliar brands were used in the experiment conducted by Lien and Chen (2013). The different levels of brand familiarity may cause the divergent results of creating self-brand connections through narrative ads (Lien and Chen, 2013). Consumers are more likely to map

incoming stories of familiar brands onto their self-concept. Therefore, it is worth investigating the moderating role of brand familiarity.

The current paper aims to fill this research gap by examining whether brand familiarity moderates the effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections. This article first discusses narrative ads, self-brand connections and brand familiarity. Then, a set of hypotheses will be developed and tested in an experiment. The thesis concludes with a discussion of implications and future research directions.

Literature Review

Narrative Advertising

Researchers refer to narrative ads as drama ads (Deighton, Romer & McQueen, 1989; Wells, 1989) or transformational advertising (Puto & Wells, 1984). Advertisers use story-like scenarios to present a slice of life (Mick, 1987, p. 250). Narrative ads include events, characters and temporal sequence of character reactions to story events (Boller & Olson, 1991). Padgett and Allen (1997) defined narrative ads as advertising with storied stimuli that contained “causally/chronologically connected events enacted by characters, actors with motives, an event sequence, and a setting that has physical, social, and temporal components” (p. 53). Wentzel, Tomczak, and Herrmann (2010) concluded that the content component, such as characters, actions, and motives, and the structural component constituted the narrative ads. The structural component has the features of chronology and causality (Escalas, 1998, 2004). Synthesizing the ideas of the rhetorical elements (Burke, 1969) and structural components (Escalas, 1998, 2004),

Kim, Ratneshwar and Thorson (2017) elaborated that a narrative ad referred to an advertisement that told a story with the following elements: “who, what, when, where, why, how, and chronology” (p. 284).

Non-narrative ads, on the other hand, are often labelled as argumentative ads (Boller, 1988; Boller & Olson, 1991; Padgett & Allen, 1997), informational ads (Puto & Wells, 1984), expository ads (Smith, 1995; Wentzel et al., 2010), factual ads (Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1997; Polyorat, Alden & Kim, 2007), lecture ads (Wells, 1989), or an unorganised list of information (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). Non-narrative ads provide a description of product or service features and benefits in a fact-based way (Milton, 1974; Polyorat et al., 2007; Wentzel et al., 2010;).

When it comes to this dichotomy of advertisements, Puto and Wells (1984) put forward the informational/transformational dichotomy. Informational advertising provides factual information, which is immediately essential to the target consumers, while a transformational advertisement transforms the consuming experience with the advertising brand by relating the experience of using the brand to a typical set of psychological features, which would not be linked to the brand experience to the same extent without the exposure to the advertisement. Puto and Wells (1984) indicated that informational and transformational advertisements were not mutually exclusive. They were exhaustive categories of advertisements.

Deighton and colleagues (1989) proposed that ads have the forms of either arguments or dramas, or are hybrids. They followed the argument of Wells (1989) and concluded that drama ads led viewers to process claims by drawing them into the action the characters portray. Drama ads enable consumers to become “lost” in the story, brand experiences and feelings of the characters. To the contrary, argument ads attempt to persuade consumers by providing evidence that can be judged and verified objectively. They have no plot nor characters. The indicative

mood of argument ads is relatively explicit towards what and why audiences should believe.

Drama ads, on the other hand, have characters to present a plot. Drama ads persuade consumers through the subjunctive mood with the power of empathy. There are also some mixed forms of advertisements, such as narrated drama or dramatized argument (Deighton et al., 1989).

Boller (1988) put forth a dichotomy of argumentative ads versus narrative ads. Later scholars have widely accepted this classification (e.g., Chang, 2009; Padgett & Allen, 1997). Whereas the drama ads enable consumers to observe directly the plot acted out, the narrative ads refer more generally to those ads with a foundation of a story (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Padgett and Allen (1997) considered the argumentative/narrative dichotomy to be more beneficial since consumers tend to better understand the direct observation of action and written/oral representations through the narrative mode of thought. In their opinion, narrative ads include the case of drama ads, which is a specific presentation format to convey a story as well as songs, dances, and mimes. Escalas (2004) supported this claim by suggesting that narrative advertising contained some other types of advertisement such as drama ads, transformational ads, and slice of life ads. In order to get a full picture of the distinct effects, this article employs the narrative (vs. non-narrative) ads dichotomy rather than the drama (vs. argumentative) ads distinction.

Narrative Processing

In narrative ads, characters act out the events with causality and chronology, whereas non-narrative ads present logical arguments. This implies a content and structural distinction in narrative ads, which have a content including characters, actions and setting and a form commonly known as plot (the causal event sequence) (Padgett & Allen, 1997). The structure of

narratives allows narrative processing to create meaning (Escalas, 2004). Narrative thought structures events into a temporal (Bruner, 1986, 1990) and relational (Stein & Albro, 1997) dimensions, and causal inferencing can be constructed (Polkinghorne, 1991). The events happen over a period (Bruner, 1986, 1990). The episodes in narratives structure time into a beginning, middle, and end (Escalas, 2004). Characters respond to the initial events by developing goals that lead to a series of actions and are finally followed by certain outcomes (Pennington & Hastie, 1986). The narrative structure connects different components by establishing relations between them. Since narratives have a temporal dimension, causal inferences between these narrative elements exist. That is, the meaning of an event is the effect of its role in a plot (Polkinghorne, 1991). The meaning emerging from the narrative structure enables consumers to generate causal inferences (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008).

People store narrative explanations as causal knowledge structures or event prototypes (Lalljee, Lamb & Abelson, 1992; Fiske, 1993). Narrative forms of mental representation play an essential role in comprehending incoming information by linking it to the event prototypes stored in consumers' memory (Schank & Ableson, 1995). In the process of cognizing, individuals use mental simulation to make meaning (Fiske, 1993). People not only form an understanding of the story conveyed but also imagine themselves in the same circumstance (Chang, 2009). That is to say, consumers have the tendency to imagine the sequences of events involving the use of products (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Polyorat et al., 2007). During the exposure to narrative ads, consumers seek the similarities between their own self-identity and that presented by ad characters and build empathic relationships with the ad characters (Boller & Olson, 1991). Viewers "try on" the identity of ad characters and imaginatively experience the story from the affective and cognitive perspectives (Boller & Olson, 1991, p. 165). The authenticity of the

action portrayed by actors and the extent to which the advertisement hooks consumers as well as the extent to which the feelings and events a consumer could relate are the factors that characterize empathetic processing (Kim & Thorson, 2017). As the consumer's identification deepens, empathetic processing is intensified, and the consumer feels more connected to the ad characters. This connection can boost their vicarious participation, which will generate mental and physical reactions. In short, consumers process narrative ads by building empathetic relationships with the ad characters and vicariously experience personal relevance with the advertised brands (Boller & Olson, 1991).

Self-Brand Connections

Narrative advertising enables consumers to get cognitively and affectively involved in an ad (Chang, 2009). Narrative psychology indicates that individuals have a "natural propensity" to think in a story format and relate their interpretations of people and their actions by telling a story (Padgett & Allen, 1997, p. 53). When consumers process new information, they relate it to their personal stories that are characterized by similar goals, actions and outcomes (Schank & Ableson, 1995). People understand new information by connecting the incoming information to their existing experiences in memory (Schank, 1990; Schank & Ableson, 1995). Specifically, consumers store experiences that can relate to the self in their memory since people have the tendency to use self-related stories to build their identity (Kerby, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1991). The goal of the narrative mode of thought is to understand and construct meaning (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Past literature has paid attention to the role of narratives in the information processing by demonstrating that the favourable impact of narratives stems from the similarity between the narrative structure and experiences in consumers' daily life (Adaval & Wyer, 1998), but does not

touch the meaning-making role of narratives. Through processing an advertisement in a narrative mode, consumers search for motives, actions and outcomes to match episodes stored in their memory. This process provides the foundation for the formation or strengthening of the self-brand connection, a meaningful connection between the consumer's self and the advertised brand (Escalas, 2004).

Beyond the functional properties, brands have symbolic benefits to consumers (Levy, 1959). In this regard, brands meet consumers' psychological needs (Escalas & Bettman, 2014). People engage in consumption behaviours to communicate the self and construct their self-concepts (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Goffman, 1959; Kleine, Kleine & Kernan, 1993; Richins, 1994; Schembri, Merrilees & Kristiansen, 2010). Brands provide emotional and self-expression benefits to consumers. The set of brand associations in the consumer's mind acts as an essential component of the brand equity (Aaker, 1991). The positive and unique associations of brands in the consumer's memory serve to build a favourable brand image (Keller, 1993). When consumers use brand associations to construct their self-identity and present their self to others, a connection between consumers and the brand has been formed (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). This connection between the consumer's mental representation of self and brands has been defined as self-brand connections and reflects the extent to which a brand becomes associated with the consumer's self-concepts (Escalas & Bettman, 2014).

Consumers are able to develop relationships with brands, which act as an active relationship partner (Fournier, 1998). Escalas and Bettman (2014) distinguished self-brand connections from the brand relationship concept proposed by Fournier (1998). Fournier (1998) identified six dimensions of brand relationship quality. In this model, "self-connection" is one of the six dimensions (p. 366). Self-connection indicates that brands reveal actively one significant

part of consumers' self through carrying out the identity-related duties (Fournier, 1998). It is the most similar the concept to self-brand connections. The self-brand connection concept suggests that brands carry a set of symbolic meanings and that consumers use appropriate brand symbolic properties to satisfy their psychological needs, such as self-construction and self-expression (Escalas & Bettman, 2014). Consumers are the active partner in the consumer-brand relationship, while brands are not construed as active participants. Escalas and Bettman (2014) considered the passive role of brands in the relationship with consumers as the major difference between the self-brand connection concept and brand relationship framework since Fournier (1998) regarded brands as an active relationship partner.

In the process of using brands' symbolic properties to build consumers' self-identity, consumers choose brands with meanings that match their self-concepts, and the connections to brands become meaningful through this process (Escalas & Bettman, 2014). At the aggregate level of self-brand connections, Escalas and Bettman (2003) conceptualized and operationalized the linkage between brand associations and consumers' mental representation of self (Krugman, 1965). Self-brand connections measure "the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept" (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 340).

Brand Familiarity

Self-brand connections are conceptualized and operationalized based on the linkage between consumers' self and brand associations appropriated by consumers (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Consumers tend to have different levels of associations for brands with which they have different experiences, which is closely related to brand familiarity. Brand familiarity refers to the

extent to which a consumer's direct and indirect experiences with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Baker, Hutchinson, Moore and Nedungadi (1986) defined brand familiarity as a uni-dimensional construct. It reflects the amount of time that consumers spend on any type or content of processing the information about the brand. Consumers are supposed to accumulate more product-related experiences for familiar brands than unfamiliar brands (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). Brand familiarity reflects other constructs including the consumer's expertise, existing knowledge, and strength of their belief (Ha & Perks, 2005).

Brand familiarity reflects the individual's brand knowledge structure, which is the sum of existing brand associations in consumers' mind (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Associations for a familiar brand come from consumption experiences, word of mouth about related products, or the consumer's prior exposure to the advertising of this brand. People may already have some impressions about the features and meanings carried by this brand. Consumers may not have as many associations with unfamiliar brands as with familiar brands since they lack these kinds of experiences with brands (Campbell & Keller, 2003). For familiar brands, people are supposed to have more brand associations in their mind that could be used to connect to their self-identity.

Individuals have more retrieval cues when they have greater brand knowledge, which produces stronger traces in their memory (Keller, 1987). During the processing of narrative ads, people tend to match the sequences of events in ads with their own experiences stored in their memory. People show a greater willingness to allocate attention to the information in ads for familiar than for unfamiliar brands (Kent & Allen, 1994). For familiar brands, they assign more cognitive resources to search for similarities between their self and advertised brands.

Consumers with higher levels of experience with a brand retain a more developed schema of the

brand, which is defined as a hierarchical network of associations for a brand (Peter & Olson, 1987). These associations may make it easier for consumers to build connections to brands.

In the past literature, Lien and Chen (2013) conducted an experiment to test the persuasive effect of the storyboard narrative ad. The results showed that self-brand connection did not mediate this effect. Consumers did not necessarily incorporate brands using narrative ads into their self-concept. They used unfamiliar brands, however, while Escalas (2004) used familiar brands to draw the conclusion that self-brand connections mediated the effect of narrative processing on the consumer's brand attitudes. It is possible that the divergent findings arose because participants in Escala's (2004) research had more brand associations (for familiar brands) to match story elements in the narrative ads with their self-identity, whereas participants in Lien and Chen's (2013) study were less able to relate to narrative ads featuring unfamiliar brands. This article aims at resolving these contradictory findings by examining the moderating role of brand familiarity in the mediation process between narrative ads and consumer responses to the brand.

Hypotheses

Narrative ads are supposed to trigger narrative processing, which connects brands to consumers' self, as consumers match the incoming information to their personal experience stored in memory (Schank & Ableson, 1995). People search for a match between motives, actions and outcomes depicted in a narrative ad and their experiences. In doing so, they appropriate brand associations and link these to their self-identity. During the exposure to the

narrative ads, consumers are likely to process information from the perspective of the characters and vicariously participate in the sequences of events presented. They are supposed to experience the character's feelings (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Some consumers may not differentiate between their self-identity and the identity of the character with whom they are empathizing (Boller & Olson, 1991). This process of empathizing with characters in narrative ads may strengthen self-brand connections (Kim et al., 2017). In narrative ads, characters portray a story to represent values and goals that consumers can achieve through the consumption of the advertised brand. If consumers incorporate the ad narratives onto their own life stories including desirable actions to realize the same goals, a link is expected to build between the brand and consumers' desire to achieve the outcomes (Escalas, 2004). The temporal and relational dimension of the narrative structure enables consumers to get mentally involved in the story. The matching process is supposed to act as the basis for the formation or strengthening of self-brand connections. Therefore, narrative ads are expected to enhance self-brand connections.

H1: Narrative (versus non-narrative) ads will enhance self-brand connections.

Self-brand connections should have a positive impact on brand attitude. While forming the connections between brands and the consumer's self-identity, consumers get mentally involved in the story told in the narrative ads. They begin to search for the brand attributes that are consistent with their self-identity to present their self and construct their self-identity. Since the advertised brand helps them to achieve self-related goals, consumers are likely to respond positively to these brands that they are willing to connect to (Escalas, 2004). Therefore,

consumers with higher self-brand connections are expected to show a more favourable attitude towards the brand.

H2: Self-brand connections will be positively related to consumers' brand attitudes.

Consumers use brand associations coming from narrative processing to construct their self-identity (Escalas, 2004). In the experiment of Escalas (2004), participants viewed a storyboard advertisement of Kodak or American Express. These two brands were selected as they were highly familiar to most of participants. Participants, therefore, had a set of brand associations stored in their memory. The result of this experiment showed that self-brand connections serve as a mediator between narrative processing and consumer's brand attitudes. However, Lien and Chen (2013) conducted an experiment with unknown brands, and the persuasive effect of narrative storyboard did not work through self-brand connections. Since participants did not have any experiences with these brands, it would be difficult for them to build self-brand connections after only one ad exposure (Lien and Chen, 2013). Therefore, it is highly possible that the mediating effects of self-brand connections are expected to be more or less moderated by brand familiarity.

Brand familiarity reflects consumers' brand knowledge structures, which refers to the brand associations that store in a consumer's memory (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Consumers tend to have more associations with the brands that they store more knowledge and related experience in memory. However, they lack many associations for the brands with which they do not have enough experience. Brand familiarity reflects consumers' direct and indirect

experiences with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Therefore, consumers are supposed to have more brand associations that connect to the story elements in narrative ads for a more familiar brand. Narrative processing is supposed to enhance self-brand connections since viewers tend to match the components in the sequences of events in narrative advertising with their similar experiences and existing brand associations stored in memory. Brand familiarity, therefore, is supposed to moderate the enhancing effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections. Familiar brands, which carry more related brand knowledge and experience, are likely to receive more enhancing effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections than unfamiliar brands.

H3: Brand familiarity will moderate the effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections with the familiar brand demonstrating higher self-brand connections than the unfamiliar brand.

Consumers recall more information after they view narrative ads than non-narrative ads (Tun, 1989). Past literature indicates that self-brand connections are positively related to consumer's attitude (Escalas, 2004; Moore & Homer, 2008). In the context of services, narrative (versus non-narrative) ads appear to be more useful in generating more intense affective reactions (Padgett & Allen, 1997). In addition, narrative ads generate more favourable service evaluations, and stronger purchase intentions than non-narrative ads (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Mattila, 2000). Consumers evaluate narrative ads more positively than non-narrative ads since the narrative ads trigger narrative processing, which is similar to consumers' information processing in their daily life (Escalas, 2004; Polyorat et al., 2007). Ads present a story that

enables viewers to think in a narrative mode by encouraging them to focus on story elements rather than logically analyzing the brand features, critiquing the brand, or even comparing the brand attributes with the competitive brands (Escalas, 2004). Non-narrative ads, on the other hand, prime a more analytical thought (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). Consumers tend to think rationally during the exposure to non-narrative ads. They evaluate the ad's argument in a more piecemeal fashion. Another critical function of narrative ads refers to its ability to get consumers cognitively and affectively involved in the story (Chang, 2009). The ads tell stories to hook viewers into the viewing process and make them produce a more positive attitude (Escalas, Moore & Britton, 2004). Therefore, consumers are likely to express more favourable attitudes toward the brands in the narrative ads than non-narrative ads.

H4: Narrative (versus non-narrative) ads will result in more positive brand attitudes.

Methodology

This experiment uses storyboards to control the content of ads and to manipulate the narrative structure (Escalas, 2004). This study utilizes a 2 x 2 between-subjects design. We present four storyboards crossing narrative and non-narrative versions over two brands (familiar versus unfamiliar). We first conducted a pretest to confirm that narrative ads lead to narrative processing. The experiment then measured the self-brand connections, brand attitude, and some control variables. Before the exposure to the storyboard, participants filled out a questionnaire

measuring brand familiarity and covariates, including prior self-brand connections and prior brand attitude.

Advertisement Stimuli

The study uses a digital camera as the target product, a relatively familiar product category (Lien & Chen, 2013). In the condition of the familiar brand, the brand name “Canon” was indicated on the advertising. In the case of the unfamiliar brand, the experiment showed the identical digital camera as the familiar brand version, except for the inclusion of a fictitious brand name (“Procan”) in order to avoid the influence of the product design.

This study captured some screenshots from a real-world advertisement produced by Canon and modified these scenes for different conditions. Narrative ads imply that characters act out the events with causality and chronology, whereas non-narrative ads present logical arguments (Padgett & Allen, 1997). In the narrative version, the advertisement showed a series of pictures in chronological order. The ad’s story involved a young man expressing his love to a young lady who is taking pictures, then some people taking pictures of the marriage of this young couple, followed by the young man running to take pictures of their newborn baby, and finally this couple taking pictures together of their little daughter. In the non-narrative condition, the advertisement presented the same scenes but in a non-chronological order.

Pretest

Sample

The pretest was conducted online with a sample of adult consumers recruited by an online market research company (Research Now). We eliminated twelve participants from the

data set since they wrote down nonsensical responses, such as random numbers or strings of letters in the thought protocol test. There was one participant who completed the questionnaire twice and was also removed from the data set. In addition, we took a reasonable amount of time into consideration in order to eliminate responses that took unreasonably long or not long enough. A three-minute cut-off was used to ensure that participants had enough time to process the content of the ads, write down their thoughts, and answer additional questions. A total of thirty-two participants were left in the final data set, with sixteen participants in the narrative advertisement condition and sixteen participants in non-narrative advertisement condition.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to either the narrative or the non-narrative storyboard advertisements condition with the brand Canon or “Procan”. They were led to believe that they were participating in an experiment to investigate what consumers thought about an advertisement. The pretest first replicated the thought protocol procedures designed by Escalas (2004) to examine the extent to which these ads evoke narrative processing. Participants viewed one of the four versions of advertisements and then wrote down what they saw and what they were thinking while they looked at the advertisement. A three-item measure captured the narrative nature of the ads. Participants answered some demographic questions in the final part. A student from a university in the United States who had no knowledge about this study coded the thought protocols later.

Measures

Except for the thought protocol, three items served as manipulation checks of narrative processing. Participants were asked to point out the extent to which the advertisement told a story using three items adapted from Escalas (2004) (“The ad told a story,” “The ad had a beginning, middle, and end,” “The ad showed the personal evolution of one or more characters,” $\alpha = .82$). A seven-point scales anchored from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) were used to measure these items.

After participants completed these questions, one coder blind to the study design and purpose coded their thought protocols. The coder used six items measured on seven-point scales, adapted from the narrative structure coding items developed by Escalas (2004) to code the extent to which these thoughts reveal a well-developed story (“These thoughts/this ad consists of actors engaged in actions to achieve goals.” “These thoughts/this ad lets you know what the actors are thinking and feeling.” “These thoughts/this ad provides you with insight about the personal evolution or change in the life of a character.” “These thoughts/this ad explains why things happen, that is, what caused things to happen.” “These thoughts/this ad has a well-delineated beginning, middle, and ending.” “These thoughts/this ad focuses on specific, particular events rather than on generalizations or abstractions.”).

Results

The coded narrative structure ($\alpha = .85$) scores were significantly different between the two conditions, $M_{narrative} = 4.07$, $M_{non-narrative} = 2.76$, $F(1, 30) = 11.76$, $p < .005$. The result indicates that participants who watched the narrative advertisement received significantly higher narrative processing scores than those who watched the non-narrative version. The advertisement with narrative structure arouses more narrative processing than the advertisement without that

structure. Both the narrative and non-narrative condition manipulation checks (i.e., the three-item self-report scale) were also significantly different, $M_{narrative} = 6.23$, $M_{non-narrative} = 5.10$, $F(1, 30) = 6.37$, $p < .005$. It confirms that the narrative storyboard ad version told a story while the non-narrative advertisement did not.

Experiment

Sample

A random sample of adult participants was recruited through an online consumer panel (Research Now). Two responses were removed from the dataset since one participant completed the questionnaire twice. A total of 467 usable responses were included in the analysis. This sample included 230 female participants (49.3%), 223 male participants (47.8%), and 2.9% indicated another status (e.g. nonbinary, prefer not to say). The age range of 25 to 34 years old accounted for the majority of the sample (25.3%), followed by the range of 35 to 44 years old (18%), 45 to 54 years old (18%), 17.6% were 18 to 24 years old, 15% were 55 to 64 years old, and 6.2% were age 65 or older.

Procedure

Similar to the experiment designed by Escalas (2004), the questionnaire indicated that there were two separate experiments undertaken in order to make participants believe that the measurement in the first part of the experiment did not relate to the second part. In the first part, participants completed a questionnaire to measure their prior self-brand connections, prior brand attitudes, and brand familiarity towards the two target brands. The prior self-brand connections and prior brand attitudes were used as covariates.

The participants were then led to believe that they began to do a second experiment, where they viewed one of the four advertisements. After the exposure to the advertisements, participants filled out a questionnaire including measures of brand attitude and self-brand connection. Their likelihood of purchase, attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the ad claims and product category involvement were also measured to see if they need to be controlled.

Measures

Three brand familiarity items were measured on a 7-point numeric scale, anchored by familiar/unfamiliar, inexperienced/experienced and knowledgeable/not knowledgeable (Machleit, Allen & Madden, 1993). In addition, since we included six covariates into the model, participants might get tired of spending a long time on similar items. Only three seven-point scale items with the highest item-to-total correlation were chosen to measure prior self-brand connection from the Escalas and Bettman (2003) seven-item scale (“Brand X reflects who I am,” “I can identify with Brand X,” “I feel a personal connection to Brand X”). This shortened scale was used following the procedures employed by Escalas (2004) in order to prevent participant fatigue. These items were measured on 7-point scales anchored from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Participants indicated their prior attitude towards the brand, as well as attitude towards the brand and the ad after the exposure to the advertisement on a three 7-point semantic differential scale (very unfavorable/very favorable, very bad/very good, and very negative/very positive) (Escalas, 2004).

We used the same seven-item scale as Escalas and Bettman (2003) developed to measure the self-brand connection (“Brand X reflects who I am,” “I can identify with Brand X,” “I feel a personal connection to Brand X,” “I use Brand X to communicate who I am to other people,” “I

think Brand X helps me become the type of person I want to be,” “I consider Brand X to be ‘me’,” “Brand X suits me well”).

Participants reported their purchase likelihood of the target camera using one seven-point scale item (“How likely would you be to purchase and/or use this digital camera?”) (Escalas, 2004). Three 7-point bi-polar adjective items were used to record how participants evaluated the ad claims (not believable/believable, unpersuasive/persuasive, not informative/informative) (Yoon, Bolls & Lang, 1998). Personal involvement with the product category was assessed with ten seven-point semantic differential items (unimportant/important, boring/interesting, irrelevant/relevant, unexciting/exciting, means nothing/means a lot to me, unappealing/appealing, mundane/fascinating, worthless/valuable, uninvolving/involving, not needed/needed) (Zaichkowsky, 1994).

Results

As shown in Table 1, there was a statistically significant difference of the prior self-brand connection ($\alpha = .91$) between the narrative advertisement condition ($M_{narrative} = 4.87, SD = 1.36$) and non-narrative advertisement condition ($M_{non-narrative} = 3.20, SD = 1.82$) ($t(465) = 11.22, p < .001$). Similarly, a statistically significant difference of the prior brand attitude ($\alpha = .87$) was found between the narrative condition ($M_{narrative} = 5.78, SD = 1.41$) and non-narrative condition ($M_{non-narrative} = 4.01, SD = 1.60$) ($t(465) = 12.70, p < .001$).

We did not find a statistically significant difference of the purchase likelihood, the ad attitude ($\alpha = .96$), the ad claims ($\alpha = .87$), and the personal involvement with the product category ($\alpha = .97$), between the narrative advertisement condition and non-narrative advertisement condition.

TABLE 1
The Difference of Covariates between the Narrative Advertisement Condition and Non-Narrative Advertisement Condition

	Advertisement Condition	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p
Prior self-brand connection	Narrative	232	4.87	1.36	11.22	465	.00
	Non-Narrative	235	3.20	1.82			
Prior brand attitude	Narrative	232	5.78	1.41	12.70	465	.00
	Non-Narrative	235	4.01	1.60			
Purchase likelihood	Narrative	232	4.91	1.76	1.31	465	.19
	Non-Narrative	235	4.68	1.95			
Ad attitude	Narrative	232	5.75	1.36	.88	465	.38
	Non-Narrative	235	5.63	1.49			
Ad claims	Narrative	232	5.67	1.26	1.46	465	.14
	Non-Narrative	235	5.49	1.42			
Product category involvement	Narrative	232	5.36	1.36	.91	465	.36
	Non-Narrative	235	5.24	1.53			

Manipulation Checks

Three seven-point items adapted from Escalas (2004), served as the measurement of the degree to which participants perceive that the ad presents a story (“the ad told a story,” “the ad had a beginning, middle, and end,” “the ad showed the personal evolution of one or more characters”, $\alpha = .91$). The narrative ad received significantly higher scores on the story

manipulation check than the non-narrative ad ($M_{narrative} = 5.34$, $M_{non-narrative} = 4.85$, $F(1, 465) = 13.12$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis

We conducted the moderated mediation analysis with “Process” using Model 7 (5,000 samples; Hayes, 2013) including two significant covariates (i.e., prior self-brand connections and prior brand attitudes). Table 2 summarizes the hypotheses tested. Narrative ads (coded 1) versus non-narrative ads (coded -1) negatively and significantly affect self-brand connections, $\beta = -.69$, $p < .001$. This result is opposite the findings of Escalas (2004). H1 is not supported in this research.

The results indicate that self-brand connections have a positive effect on consumers’ brand attitudes, $\beta = .60$, $p < .001$. Therefore, H2 is supported by the data.

Brand familiarity was predicted to moderate the effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections with the familiar brand demonstrating higher self-brand connections than the unfamiliar brand. The results indicate that the interaction effect is not significant, $\beta = .05$, $p = .135$. Thus, the data failed to support H3. It shows that familiar brands do not necessarily receive more enhancing effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections than unfamiliar brands.

Narrative (versus non-narrative) ads do not significantly result in more positive brand attitude, $\beta = -.05$, $p = .397$. H4 is not supported. There is no direct significantly positive relationship between narrative ads and brand attitude.

TABLE 2
Tests of Moderated Mediation Hypotheses

Mediator Variable Model (DV = Self-brand connections)				
Predictors	β	<i>SE</i>	t-value	p-value
Ad version (Narrative vs. Non-narrative)	-.69	.15	-4.50	.000
Brand familiarity	.19	.04	4.39	.000
Ad version X Brand familiarity	.05	.03	1.50	.135
Prior brand attitude	-.01	.05	-.18	.856
Prior self-brand connection	.48	.05	9.35	.000
$R^2 = .39, p < .001$				
Dependent Variable Model (DV = Brand attitude)				
Predictors	β	<i>SE</i>	t-value	p-value
Self-brand connections	.60	.04	15.52	.000
Ad version (Narrative vs. Non-narrative)	-.05	.06	-.85	.397
Prior brand attitude	.39	.04	9.21	.000
Prior self-brand connection	-.28	.05	-6.20	.000
$R^2 = .49, p < .001$				
Conditional Indirect effect at Brand familiarity				
Mediator	Condition	β	Boot <i>SE</i>	Boot 95% CI
Self-brand connections	Unfamiliar brand	-.38	.07	-.53 to -.24
	Familiar brand	-.24	.04	-.33 to -.16

General Discussion

This research examined whether brand familiarity moderates the positive effect of narrative advertisements on consumers' brand attitude and the mediating role of self-brand connections. In this research, consumers' self-brand connections had a positive effect on attitudes towards the brand. Stronger self-brand connections resulted in favourable brand evaluations. Nonetheless, a moderating effect of brand familiarity was not supported, and the

narrative advertisement did not result in significantly greater brand attitude. Early research suggests that ads with narrative scenes versus vignette scenes enhance self-brand connections (Escalas, 2004) whereas the result of this study showed that narrative ads had a negative effect on self-brand connections. Several plausible explanations may be accounting for this unexpected statistically significant relationship between narrative ads and self-brand connections.

Given that we obtained a North American sample to do the data analysis, although the spokespeople in the storyboard ads were Asian, the cultural differences in the spokespeople and the audience of the ad may have led to a lack of identification with the characters in the narrative and subsequently to lower self-brand connections. We chose an Asian ad in order to avoid prior thoughts about the ad in case that participants had seen the ad before the exposure to the stimuli in the experiment; however, this choice may have made it difficult for participants to see the similarities between their identity and the identity of ad characters. In other words, the narrative ads only demonstrated limited ability to motivate consumers to form an empathic relationship with the ad characters (Boller & Olson, 1991). Prior research looked into the positive effect of the race congruity between viewers and ad characters on customers' ability to identify the ad characters, purchase intention, as well as the ad attitudes among black and white audience (Appiah, 2001; Brumbaugh, 2009; Schlinger & Plummer, 1972; Simpson, Snuggs, Christiansen & Semples, 2000; Szybillo & Jacoby, 1974; Whittler, 1989). It is highly possible that the North American viewers perceive themselves less similar to the Asian characters in the ads, and tend to identify more strongly with characters of similar ethnicity. That is to say, during the exposure to the narrative ads with Asian characters, North American participants are less likely to process information from the perspective of the characters and experience their feelings. As consumers did not identify with the characters to a great extent, empathic processing was limited, and the

connection to the ad characters was hard to build (Boller & Olson, 1991). This matching process acts as the basis for the formation of self-brand connections, and the current study failed to stimulate the viewers' identification with ad characters. Therefore, narrative ads did not enhance self-brand connections.

Another possible factor to explain this result is that we presented the digitally captured scenes in one page with a corresponding order number, which is not enough to ensure that the participants will read it from the first one to the last scene. Since the events happen in a time order and this temporal narrative structure allows for narrative processing to create meaning, the viewers should have structured the ad elements into a beginning, middle, and end when they see the narrative version, and this thought enables causal inferencing (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Escalas, 2004). Participants watched the nine scenes at their own pace during one ad exposure in the current study. In the early research conducted by Lien and Chen (2013), participants were also allowed to read the scenes according to their preferred reading speed. Both two studies failed to support that the narrative ads create or strengthen self-brand connections; this hypothesis was supported, however, in the experiment designed by Escalas (2004). Escalas (2004) gathered all the participants in a classroom equipped with a theatre-style screen, which automatically presented each ad scene for 15 seconds. In this way, viewers were controlled to process the ad information from the designed order and the narrative storyboard ad sufficiently primed narrative thoughts of the participants. The temporal dimension of the narrative structure should have been well manipulated with sufficient stimulus to enable consumers to get mentally involved in the narrative ad.

We presented the narrative advertisement in a format of photographs instead of videos in the questionnaires, the format of ads may be the third alternative explanation to this result.

Escalas (2004) digitally captured the scenes from the real-world ads and showed them to participants with projectors. That experiment was conducted more than a decade ago when printed ads with pictures still occupied a large proportion of their daily ad exposure. This ad consuming habit may have changed over time. Lien and Chen (2013) replicated the storyboard design, and narrative ads did not function through the self-brand connection to implement the persuasive effect. While one recent study used directly TV commercials to stimulate narrative processing, it turned out that narrative ads produced a strong emotive response by transporting participants into the narrative situations with identifiable characters (Kim et al., 2017).

Processing the ad information with motion pictures could be more concrete than that with static scenes for current consumers. The ads in printed storyboard form require users to allocate more cognitive resource to process the information than televised ads would (Lien and Chen, 2013).

The ads in video format could show substantial content and vivid characters, which increase the possibility to engage viewers in incorporating the plots into their life stories. With new formats of ads continuing to appear, the storyboard with captured scenes in this study may be out of fashion among today's consumers. It potentially increases the uncertainty of the effect on self-brand connections for static narrative scenes.

Contribution

Theoretical Contribution

The current study extends the findings of Escalas (2004) by investigating to what extent brand familiarity moderates the effects of narrative ads on self-brand connections. When brand familiarity serves as a predictor of self-brand connections in an alternative model, it positively and significantly affects self-brand connections ($\beta = .19, p < .001$). The result may

demonstrate part of the reason why participants did not form connections to the unknown brand after only one ad exposure in an early study (Lien and Chen, 2013). The present research did not find support for a possible moderating role played by brand familiarity in the effect of narrative ads on self-brand connections but found that self-brand connections result in a favourable brand attitude, as the literature suggested (Escalas, 2004).

The conceptual framework compares the narrative ads and non-narrative ads. Narrative ads, also labelled as drama ads (Deighton, Romer & McQueen, 1989; Wells, 1989) or transformational advertising (Puto & Wells, 1984), or a slice of life (Mick, 1987, p.250). Non-narrative ads often refer to argumentative ads (Boller, 1988; Boller & Olson, 1991; Padgett & Allen, 1997), informational ads (Puto & Wells, 1984), expository ads (Smith, 1995; Wentzel et al., 2010), factual ads (Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1997; Polyorat, Alden & Kim, 2007), lecture ads (Wells, 1989), or an unorganised list of information (Adaval & Wyer, 1998). In addition, this research further provides some significant thoughts about the dichotomy of advertisements. Puto and Wells (1984) asserted the informational/transformational dichotomy. Deighton and colleagues (1989) put forth that ads had the forms of either arguments or dramas or hybrids of both. Moreover, Boller (1988) proposed a dichotomy of argumentative ads versus narrative ads. Researchers can gain insight into the mechanism of narrative structure and the effects of these many different types of advertising based on this primary framework.

Managerial Contribution

Marketers may need to take brand familiarity into consideration if the firm intends to use narrative advertisement to cultivate the brand attitude of target consumers. Self-brand connections may lead to the enhancement of positive brand attitudes (Escalas, 2004). Consumers

have a set of associations in their mind; self-brand connections may serve as a “psychological manifestation” of the brand equity for consumers (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 347). Advertisers could create a narrative structure to produce self-brand connections to viewers in markets with consumers who are familiar with their brand since brand familiarity affects positively self-brand connections. For firms at an early stage or entering a new market, marketers may face target consumers who are not familiar with their brand and less likely to feel connected to the brand. The firms may need to consider other advertising strategies to better develop their brand associations and increase their brand equity according to their budget.

Limitation and Future Research

As addressed previously, many limitations in this experiment need consideration. First, we presented Asian spokespeople to North American participants, it resulted in a lack of identification with the characters in the narrative ads. Future research could consider the race congruity, it would be meaningful to investigate if consumers feel more connected to the characters of the same race rather than to those in another ethnic group during the exposure to narrative ads.

Second, participants only received one exposure to the storyboards with all the scenes in one page rather than motion pictures or television commercials. Additional studies should examine the effect of narrative ads in some other forms, such as web or television ads. Third, we did a regression analysis with the ad narrative scores measuring the degree to which participants perceive that the storyboard ad presents a story. These scores served as the manipulation checks in the main analysis. These narrative scores ($\beta = .523, p < .001$) and brand familiarity ($\beta = .243, p < .001$) were positively and significantly related the self-brand connections (see Table 3

for details). This result is not consistent with the findings obtained from the coded advertising conditions (narrative ad = 1, non-narrative ad = -1). The three scales that were designed to measure the extent to which participants perceived the ad as containing a story may not have fully captured the attributes of the ad narrative structure. Future research could explore if other variables exist to explain this process.

Moreover, the experimental manipulations used in this study consisted of identical images. It was only the order of scenes that changed in the narrative versus non-narrative advertisement. The scenes in non-narrative ads presented the characters' actions without chronological progression (Escalas, 2004). In this process, the content of the advertisement was controlled, and alternative explanations regarding the emotional tone and content of the advertisements were ruled out. However, the nature of the non-narrative advertisement may have resulted in a weak manipulation, compared to the narrative ad condition. A suggestion to improve the study design would be to use a stronger non-narrative ad that would include more images of products instead of people, as well as descriptions of the product features and benefits.

Lastly, the present experiment failed to find support for a moderating effect of brand familiarity. Advertising research involves cognitive resources of viewers, and the creation of self-brand connections requires consumers to be empathic with the story embodied in the ads. This process, as well as brand familiarity, have been proven to be part of the neural activity (Madan, 2010). If future research repeated this experiment, combined with neuroimaging techniques, it would be informative to examine how consumers respond to these advertising and marketing strategies on a neural level.

TABLE 3

Regression Analysis with the Ad Narrative Scores

Independent variables	Dependent variables	β	p
Narrative scores	self-brand connections	.52	.000
Brand familiarity	self-brand connections	.24	.000

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Storyboard ad design

The study uses a digital camera as the target product. One familiar brand “Canon” and a fictitious brand “Procan” are placed on the product. The researcher captures some screenshots from a real-world ad produced by Canon and modifies these scenes for two conditions. In one version, the storyboard shows a series of pictures in chronological order with certain central characters. The ad’s story involves a young man expressing his love to a young lady who is taking pictures, some people taking pictures for the marriage of this young couple, the young man running to take pictures of their newborn baby, and finally this couple taking pictures together for their little daughter. In the other condition, the storyboard presents the same scenes but in a non-chronological order and the appearances of the characters have been changed so that participants would not regard these characters as the same individuals in the different scenes.

Pretest

Step 1: Participants view one of the storyboards.

Step 2: Participants write down what they have seen and what they are thinking about the advertisement.

Step 3: Questionnaire (seven-point scales) (Escalas, 2004).

1. The ad told a story.
2. The ad had a beginning, middle, and end.
3. The ad showed the personal evolution of one or more characters.

Step 4: Participants submit their thought protocols and questionnaire.

Step 5: One coder uses six items measured on seven-point scales (Escalas, 2004) to code the thought protocols.

1. These thoughts/this ad consists of actors engaged in actions to achieve goals.
2. These thoughts/this ad lets you know what the actors are thinking and feeling.
3. These thoughts/this ad provides you with insight about the personal evolution or change in the life of a character.
4. These thoughts/this ad explains why things happen, that is, what caused things to happen.
5. These thoughts/this ad has a well-delineated beginning, middle, and ending.
6. These thoughts/this ad focuses on specific, particular events rather than on generalizations or abstractions.”

Demographics

- What is your gender?
- How old are you?
- What was your total household income last year?
- What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Experiment

Step 1: Brand ratings questionnaire (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Machleit, Allen & Madden, 1993)

1. Three 7-point brand familiarity scale
 - familiar/ unfamiliar
 - inexperienced/experienced
 - knowledgeable/not knowledgeable
2. Brand X reflects who I am.
3. I can identify with Brand X.

4. I feel a personal connection to Brand X
5. Three 7-point brand attitude scale
 - very unfavorable/very favorable
 - very bad/very good
 - very negative/very positive

Step 2: Participants view one of the storyboards (the “second experiment”).

Step 3: Questionnaire (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Escalas, 2004).

1. Three 7-point brand attitude scale
 - very unfavorable/very favorable
 - very bad/very good
 - very negative/very positive
2. Three 7-point ad attitude scale
 - very unfavorable/very favorable
 - very bad/very good
 - very negative/very positive
3. Brand X reflects who I am.
4. I can identify with Brand X.
5. I feel a personal connection to Brand X.
6. I use Brand X to communicate who I am to other people.
7. I think Brand X helps me become the type of person I want to be.
8. I consider Brand X to be “me”.
9. Brand X suits me well.
10. The ad told a story.

11. The ad had a beginning, middle, and end.
12. The ad showed the personal evolution of one or more characters.
13. How likely would you be to purchase and/or use this digital camera?
14. Three 7-point attitude towards the ad claims scale
 - not believable/believable
 - unpersuasive/persuasive
 - not informative/informative
15. Ten seven-point semantic differential items to measure the personal involvement with the product category
 - unimportant/important,
 - boring/interesting
 - irrelevant/relevant
 - unexciting/exciting
 - means nothing/means a lot to me
 - unappealing/appealing
 - mundane/fascinating
 - worthless/valuable
 - uninvolving/involving
 - not needed/needed
16. Demographics
 - What is your gender?
 - How old are you?
 - What was your total household income last year?

- What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Appendix B - Advertisement stimuli



