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Brand-Extended Self-Construal

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Brand-Extended Self-Construal

Recent research suggests consumers view brands anthropomorphically and often form self-connections with a particular brand. To date, however, no research has explored whether consumers vary with regard to their tendency to form such connections. In the current research, we conceptualize Brand-Extended Self-Construal (BESC) as the propensity for a consumer to include important brands as part of the self-concept. After developing a reliable and valid measure of the construct, we provide experimental evidence for the value of BESC as a consumer tendency. In a series of studies, we show that a consumer’s generalized tendency to form connections with brands meaningfully influences important aspects of brand attitudes and loyalty. Implications for brand management and future research regarding BESC are provided.
Brand management has long recognized the strategic benefits of anthropomorphizing brands to help focus and adjust brand image (e.g., Aaker 1996; Keller 1998; Plummer 1984). Brand personality has often been used in such a manner with Aaker (1997), for example, demonstrating that consumers view brands in terms of human traits (e.g., Levi’s jeans are rugged or Mercedes cars are sophisticated). More recent research has built upon this work showing that consumers often form a relationship (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998) or make a self-connection (Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003) with specific brands. This stream of research has identified factors impacting the nature of self-brand linkages (e.g., nature of the relationship, Aggarwal 2004; brand personality, Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; reference groups, Escalas and Bettman 2005; narrative processing of ads, Escalas 2004). Extant research, however, has yet to investigate whether consumers vary regarding the formation of such connections. In the current series of studies, we address this issue by investigating consumers’ general tendency to form connections with brands.

Research on human relationships (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000) suggests that individual differences exist concerning how consumer-brand connections may develop. Cross and colleagues provide evidence that people differ regarding how important others are incorporated into their self-concepts. In particular, some may construe their self-image as including close friends and relationships, while others may not. Analogously, we propose that consumers vary in their tendency to include important brands as part of their self-concept: we term this individual difference variable *brand-extended self-construal*. Herein, we conceptualize and develop a measure of this construct. The reliability and validity of this new measure are demonstrated using contemporary psychometric procedures and the importance of the construct
regarding brand attitudes and loyalty is experimentally shown. Implications for brand management and future research are discussed.

**BRAND-EXTENDED SELF-CONSTRUAL**

It has long been recognized that possessions can become an integral part of a person’s self-concept (e.g., James 1890). This basic premise is detailed in Belk’s (1988) influential treatment of the extended self, conceptualized as the “self-plus-possessions” (p. 140). We expand this basic idea to the inclusion of brands into a consumer’s self-concept. In particular, we define Brand-Extended Self Construal (BESC) as the propensity for a person to incorporate important brands into the self-concept. BESC is an individual difference variable representing consumers’ tendency to include brands as part of how they view themselves.

Recent social psychological studies explore the ways in which one’s self-concept can be differentially construed (Cross and Madson 1997; Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Singelis 1994). Of greatest relevance to our work is research by Cross and colleagues establishing that people (to a greater or lesser extent) include important others into their self-concepts. This Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) has been shown to influence a variety of social psychological processes. For example, relationally-interdependent persons are more likely to consider the consequences of their decisions on others, tend to describe themselves and close friends in terms of similar traits and values, and rely less on personal consistency as a source of mental well-being (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000; Cross, Gore, and Morris 2003; Cross, Morris, and Gore 2002). Given the previously noted observation that brands are often viewed anthropomorphically (Aaker 1997; Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998)
and that a person’s self concept often includes other people, a reasonable extension is that the self concept may also include brands.

The construct of BESC is also supported in consumer research regarding the meaning of possessions and brands. Work on possessions clearly indicates that objects are more or less likely to play a key self-defining role for consumers in their private and professional lives (Belk 1988, 1992; Tian and Belk 2005). This research, however, has mainly focused on possessions while only tangentially examining the role of brands regarding the self. Research on brands has done more to explore how consumers form relationships (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998) or self-connections (Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003) with a brand, but more research is required. Our conceptualization of BESC broadens existing perspectives regarding the link between brands and self-concept. Indeed, our perspective on this topic is unique to the literature, as explained directly below.

Two constructs arguably related to BESC are self-brand connections (Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003) and attachment to possessions (Ball and Tasaki 1992). Both constructs (and their associated measures) have been used to demonstrate that consumers can form a connection to a particular brand (Escalas and Bettman 2003) or object (Ball and Tasaki 1992). There is an important distinction between BESC and these aforementioned constructs. Specifically, BESC is viewed as a generalized tendency for people to include brands as a part of the self-concept, whereas these other constructs are restricted to a relationship with a specific brand or object. This exclusive focus on a specific brand is a common aspect of most brand relationship research (e.g., Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004), limiting our understanding of the broader nature of relationships between consumers and their brands. Without a doubt, people are likely to form connections with more than a single brand, just as a
person is likely to have more than one important person in his or her life. Thus, BESC provides a more comprehensive view that multiple brands can be integrated into the lives and self-concepts of consumers—a unique approach extending prior research.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

In the following sections, we present a series of studies that were used to develop the BESC scale and provide evidence of its reliability and validity. We also provide experimental results that demonstrate the importance of BESC as an individual difference variable in key aspects of brand-related consumer behavior. Following initial item generation and selection, Study 1 develops an eight-item measure of the BESC construct. Study 2 demonstrates dimensionality and reliability of the BESC scale. Studies 3 through 7 investigate the construct validity of BESC. In particular, Study 3 examines the relationship of BESC to theoretically relevant constructs with two different samples. The next four studies demonstrate the importance of BESC with respect to brand attitudes and loyalty. Study 4 shows that BESC predicts differences between national and private brand attitudes. Study 5 experimentally tests BESC’s ability to predict consumers’ evaluations of a branded gift. Study 6 builds upon recent research and experimentally examines the moderating effect of BESC on the relation between brand relationship norms and brand attitudes. Study 7 is an experiment exploring the influence of BESC on brand loyalty. After presenting the methods and results of these studies, we discuss our findings and their implications for consumer research and brand management.
SCALE DEVELOPMENT

Initial Item Generation and Selection

An initial pool of 36 items was developed while considering extant branding and self-concept literatures (e.g., Belk 1988; Fournier 1998) and previously validated scales including RISC (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000), self-brand connections (Escalas 2004), and object attachment (Ball and Tasaki 1992). This item pool was given to nine consumer behavior research experts for review; all experts possessed psychometric expertise (Hardesty and Bearden 2004). Experts (provided with the definition of BESC) rated each item on a nine-point scale, anchored with “Does not tap construct” (1) and “Taps construct” (9). Space was provided for the experts to further comment on the items as they felt appropriate.

Results of expert review led to eleven items being dropped from the initial pool, including five items with a mean and median below the scale midpoint and six items identified as suspect by written comments from the experts (e.g., bad wording). Remaining items included four reverse-scored items, which was raised as a minor concern by one reviewer. Thus, seven additional reverse-scored items were created (based on rewording of the most highly ranked items from the expert review) resulting in 32 items, which were used for initial data collection.

Study 1: Scale Reduction

Method. The 32 initial scale items (utilizing seven-point scales anchored with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”) were administered to a sample of undergraduates in exchange for extra credit (N = 430).

Results. We first calculated item-to-remaining-total correlations for the 32 items of the scale. Seventeen items were eliminated due to item-to-total correlations of less than .70. A factor
analysis was conducted on the remaining 12 items, resulting in a single dominant factor explaining 67.6% of total variance (eigenvalue = 7.44; all the other factors < 1).

To derive the most parsimonious scale possible, we further reduced the number of items following the Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) procedure consisting of a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). This procedure does not jeopardize the psychometric characteristics of the scale. We first selected and dropped the item with the lowest item-to-total correlation. After that, we estimated two CFA models—one model was based on the original set of items, the other was based on the reduced set. Using these two models, we: (1) conducted a $\chi^2$ difference test; and (2) compared $AGFI$ indexes. If the $\chi^2$ test proved significant and if the $AGFI$ index increased, we kept the reduced scale for the next iteration. In the next iteration, we again eliminated the item with the lowest item-to-total correlation from the reduced scale, calculated the $\chi^2$ test and $AGFI$ and then accepted the newly reduced scale. Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) recommend stopping the iterations when one of two possible results is obtained: The $\chi^2$ test shows no significant difference between the models and/or the $AGFI$ decreases. For our analysis, the $AGFI$ reached this plateau at eight items ($AGFI = .89$) and we accepted this version as the final BESC scale (Table 1).

Study 2: Dimensionality and Reliability

Method. A sample of adult consumers completed the eight-item BESC scale to assess dimensionality of the scale and to measure test-retest reliability. The sample ($N = 229$) was
composed of university faculty and staff members who completed the BESC scale on two occasions separated by a two-month time delay.

Results. For the initial administration to this sample, the eight BESC scale items loaded on a single factor accounting for 72% of the variation in the measures and demonstrated high internal consistency (α = .94; see Table 1). Subsequent contact with this sample resulted in approximately half of the respondents (N = 118), due to availability, completing the scale for a second time. The BESC scale demonstrated acceptable test-retest reliability with the two administrations being significantly correlated after a 2 month delay, r = .62 (p < .001). The mean of the individual-item correlations was r = .51, all of which were significant (ps < .001).

SCALE VALIDATION

Study 3: Discriminant Validity

Method. To demonstrate the uniqueness of BESC as a construct and measure, we collected a series of valid and reliable measures potentially related to this new construct for groups of consumers who had also completed BESC. The first sample (N = 430, Study 1 participants) including undergraduates receiving extra credit completed BESC and the following scales: Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC, 11 items; Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000), Material Values (nine items; Richins 2004), Self-Esteem (10 items; Rosenberg 1965), Sentiment toward Marketing (20 items; Gaski and Etzel 1986), Satisfaction with Life (five items; Diener et al. 1985) and Self-Monitoring (13 items; Lennox and Wolfe 1984). A second sample of undergraduate students receiving extra credit (N = 107) responded to the following scales in addition to BESC: the short Bem Sex Role Inventory (nine masculine and nine feminine items;
Brems and Johnson 1990) and Self-Concept Clarity (11 items; Campbell et al. 1996). All items were measured on seven-point scales.

Results. Correlations between BESC and the other scales are reported in Table 2. The correlations between BESC and RISC, BESC and Self-Monitoring, and BESC and Material Values were positive and significant. The correlation between BESC and the other scales did not reach conventional significance levels.

Given the correlation between BESC and Material Values ($r = .42$), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses to determine discriminability between the two measures. Specifying Material Values items to load on one factor and BESC items to load on a second, two tests of discriminant validity were performed. The two factors were constrained to correlate perfectly in a first model and the correlation was allowed to be estimated in a second model (Bagozzi, Yi, and Phillips 1991). A $\chi^2$ test indicated that the second model provided a significantly better representation of the data than the first one ($\chi^2 = 32.63, p < .01$). In the unconstrained model, the average variance extracted of .54 was greater than the squared correlation between the two factors, which totaled .22 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Therefore, these analyses confirm that BESC and Material Values scales measure distinct theoretical constructs.

Overall, Study 3 suggests that high BESC consumers are plausibly more materialistic than low BESC consumers. Albeit to a lesser degree, high BESC consumers also tend to be more relationally-interdependent and higher on self-monitoring than their low BESC counterparts.
**Study 4: BESC and Attitudes toward National/Private Label Brands**

Material possessions that consumers use for self-extension purposes are often characterized by distinctive value-expressive features (Belk 1988; Tian and Belk 2005). Likewise, brands that consumers incorporate as part of their self-concept may have a distinctive identity. Thus, high (vs. low) BESC consumers should have more favorable attitudes toward brands that invest heavily into building a strong personal identity (e.g., national brands) than toward brands that have a less differentiated marketing strategy (e.g., private labels). In line with this rationale, Study 4 investigates whether the BESC construct is predictive of consumer attitudes toward national brands and private labels.

**Method.** A sample of undergraduate students (\( N = 143 \)) participating in exchange for extra credit rated three brands of orange juice—Tropicana, Florida’s Natural (national brands) and Safeway (private label)—on a five-point scale (poor/one of my favorites). None of the participants had taken part in previous BESC studies. The BESC scale was administered before the brand ratings as part of an unrelated survey instrument (\( \alpha = .93; M = 4.41, SD = 1.12 \)).

**Results.** Participants were separated into two groups based on a median split on BESC (\( Mdn = 3.50 \)). A MANOVA was estimated with the three brand ratings as dependent variables and BESC (low vs. high) as a between-participants factor. The multivariate test was significant by Hotelling’s criterion, \( F (3, 141) = 4.37, p < .01 \). Specifically, high BESC participants rated the national brand Tropicana (\( M = 3.75 \)) more favorably than low BESC participants (\( M = 3.44 \)), \( F (1, 143) = 5.01, p = .03 \). The same pattern of rating was observed for the national brand Florida’s Natural (\( M = 3.83 \) vs. \( M = 3.47 \)), \( F (1, 143) = 7.58, p = .01 \). High- and low BESC participants, however, similarly evaluated the Safeway store brand as less favorable (\( M = 2.73 \) vs. \( M = 2.86 \)), \( F (1, 143) = .85, p > .35 \).
Study 5: BESC and Consumer Attitudes toward and Salience of Branded Gifts

Study 4 demonstrated that BESC can be predictive of consumer brand attitudes. Study 5 further explores this issue in a gift giving context—an often-studied aspect of consumer behavior with a long and theoretically diverse tradition in marketing (e.g., Belk 1976; Joy 2001; Mick and Demoss 1990; Sherry 1983). Prior research has proposed and/or demonstrated a number of personal and situational factors that influence a gift recipient’s response to a gift (e.g., Sherry 1983), but little research (to our knowledge) has investigated how a brand name *per se* influences gift evaluation. Study 5 examines how BESC influences consumers’ responses to a branded gift given to them during the holiday season. Specifically, we expected high (vs. low) BESC consumers to have more favorable attitudes toward gifts of their most favorite brand than toward gifts of their least favorite brand.

An additional goal of this experiment was to investigate salient brands for consumers varying in terms of BESC. If brands are included in one’s self concept, we would expect those high in BESC to have more top-of-mind brands relative to low BESC consumers. Thus, salient brands related to the gift exchange context were also measured in this study.

Method. The sample for Study 5 included consumers (*N* = 77) recruited from faculty and staff members at the university where the sample from Study 2 was drawn. None of the participants had taken part in previous studies. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental gift receipt conditions: Least favorite brand vs. most favorite brand. Presented as part of an ostensibly unrelated survey, participants initially completed the eight-item BESC scale (*α* = .94; *M* = 2.51, *SD* = 1.24). Participants were then presented with a gift exchange scenario and asked to read it carefully while imagining themselves in the situation. The scenarios were the same between conditions except for reference to the branded item:
You meet a close friend before the holidays to exchange gifts with one another since you will not be together during the holidays this year. You have wanted a new MP-3 player (a portable audio-player that plays digitized music) for some time now. Before the holidays, you had been talking with your friend about your desire for this item. You are hopeful that your friend may have gotten you this for the holidays. But you would be happy with any gift from this person.

You are the first to open your gift. As you open it, you realize that your friend has bought you a new MP3 player of the specifications you had talked about. It is exactly the item you had desired. However [Further], the brand of MP3 player is one of your least [most] favorite brands of electronics.

After reading the scenario, participants completed a six-item semantic differential scale assessing their attitudes toward the gift (bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, negative/positive, dislikable/likable, unfavorable/favorable, dissatisfying/satisfying; $\alpha = .96$). These ratings employed seven-point scales and were averaged to form a measure of the dependent variable. Another question asked participants to list their most favorite brands of electronics. Finally, a question asked participants to describe in their own words the purpose of this research project. This question served as a check for potential demand artifacts. The same check was also implemented in Studies 6 and 7 reported in subsequent sections. No evidence of the participants guessing the true purpose of the experiment was found in any of these studies.

**Results.** Initial analyses examined the number and types of favorite brands listed by high and low BESC consumers. Participants were divided into two groups based on a median split on BESC ($Mdn = 2.25$). As expected, high BESC consumers listed more favorite brands ($M = 2.25$) than low BESC consumers ($M = 1.18$), $t(75) = 2.78, p < .01$. The summed total number of
brands listed also differed between the two groups with high BESC consumers listing a wider variety of brands ($N = 28$) than low BESC consumers ($N = 22$).

Regarding the main purpose of this experiment, an ANOVA model was estimated with gift attitudes serving as the dependent variable, and the gift treatment (least vs. most favorite brand) and BESC (low vs. high) serving as independent variables. Although main effects were not significant ($ps > .39$), the gift treatment $\times$ BESC interaction was significant, $F (1, 73) = 10.78, p < .01$ and is depicted in Figure 1. Follow-up contrasts indicated that high BESC participants evaluated their “most favorite brand” gifts more positively than their “least favorite brand” gifts, $F (1, 73) = 4.85, p < .05$. The opposite pattern of effects emerged for low BESC participants, $F (1, 73) = 5.98, p < .05$.

Study 6: BESC and Consumer Response to Brand Relationship Norms

The previous two studies have investigated the impact of BESC on brand attitudes. We continue this line of inquiry in Study 6 by investigating how brand relationship norms influence attitudes with a long-term brand partner. Recent research by Aggarwal (2004) contends that consumers can form at least two types of relationships with brands (i.e., exchange or communal) and has demonstrated that those relationships guide how consumers interpret actions of the brand. Benefits between relationship partners (e.g., a consumer and a brand) differ between exchange and communal relationships, such that benefits are given in exchange relationships so as to get something in return (e.g., “accepting help with money is preferred to no payment”; Aggarwal 2004, p. 89) while benefits in communal relationships are provided out of concern for...
the partner (e.g., “accepting help with no monetary payment is preferred”; Aggarwal 2004, p. 89).

We build upon Aggarwal’s findings by measuring BESC, manipulating brand relationship norms, and assessing participants’ brand attitudes. Regarding relationship type, Aggarwal does not predict (nor find) a main effect of relationship type on brand attitudes in his experiments. We suggest that the lack of a main effect in those studies was due to the lack of a measure accounting for the individual differences captured by BESC. We propose that as an individual difference variable, BESC should moderate the effect of brand relationship norm on brand attitudes. Important brands make up more of the self-concept of high BESC consumers than of low BESC consumers. Therefore, we expect that high (vs. low) BESC consumers should be more likely to form and appreciate both exchange and communal relationships with those brands. For this reason, we expect to see no significant effect of brand relationship norm on the favorable brand attitudes for these consumers. We do expect, however, brand relationship norms to affect how low BESC consumers view brands. As noted previously, in communal relationships partners provide benefits in order to show a concern for the partner’s needs; in contrast to exchange relationship norms whereby partners are concerned about what is received in response to provided benefits. Since low (vs. high) BESC consumers should be less concerned about brands and brand actions, it is likely that these consumers will only form more favorable attitudes toward brands that proactively seek to form a genuine relationship with customers. On the basis of this rationale, we expect low BESC consumers to form more favorable attitudes toward brands exhibiting communal (vs. exchange) relationship norms.

Method. Participants were undergraduate students \( N = 120 \) earning course credit for completing the experiment; none had taken part in any previous BESC studies. Participants were
randomly assigned to one of two experimental relationship conditions: Exchange vs. communal. Presented as an ostensibly unrelated survey, participants completed the eight-item BESC scale prior to the experiment ($\alpha = .92; M = 4.51, SD = 1.12$). Upon completing the BESC scale, participants were presented with one of the below consumer banking scenarios drawn from Aggarwal’s Experiment 1 (2004, p. 91):

(Exchange Relationship) You have been banking with Grove Bank for the last five years. You have used the bank quite extensively and have been very happy with their efficiency and the quality of their services. You have taken a loan from the bank and in fact they were able to get the paperwork done quite quickly. Their interest rates are also among the best. You also use their credit card because they offer a large credit limit and very good interest rates. Grove Bank also periodically makes some offers to you that appear to be of great value. In the past, whenever you have gone to the bank you have had your work done very fast – they respect your time and get the job done fast. Their executives seem to be quite well trained and smart. Overall your experience with Grove Bank has been excellent.

(Communal Relationship) You have been banking with Grove Bank for the last five years. You have used the bank quite extensively and have been very happy with the quality of their services. When you first joined school, you had opened an account with them. You still remember how thrilled you were when you got your first credit card from them. You have always associated the bank with positive feelings since you often visit the bank whenever you receive money from home. The bank has always treated you well. Over the past few years, whenever you have visited the bank you have had a very pleasant and warm interaction. They seem to be taking a personal interest in you, and
have often taken the initiative to suggest ways to better manage your funds in the bank. Overall your experience with Grove Bank has been memorable.

Following Aggarwal (2004), after reading the scenario, participants completed a three-item semantic differential scale assessing their attitudes toward the brand (dislike/like, dissatisfied/satisfied, unfavorable/favorable; α = .95). The average of these three items served as the dependent variable. Participants also completed two Likert-type items as a manipulation check (“In my opinion, Grove Bank is like a close friend;” “In my opinion, Grove Bank is like a family member;” r = .78). All measures employed seven-point scales.

Results. Participants were divided into two groups based on a median split on BESC (Md\(n\) = 4.50). The experimental manipulation was successful with participants perceiving the brand presented in a communal relationship as being more like a friend or family member (M = 4.54) than when presented in an exchange relationship (M = 3.81), t (118) = 2.90, p < .01. To test our prediction regarding a potential relationship type × BESC interaction, we conducted an ANOVA model with brand attitudes as the dependent variable and relationship type (exchange vs. communal) and BESC (high vs. low) as the two independent variables.

Results showed a significant main effect of BESC on brand attitudes, F (1,116) = 10.84, p = .001, such that high (vs. low) BESC consumers generally had more favorable brand attitudes. Similar to Aggarwal (2004), the main effect of relationship type was not significant (p > .38). The relationship type × BESC interaction, however, was significant, F (1, 116) = 3.86, p = .05, the nature of which is depicted in Figure 2. Follow-up contrasts found that relationship type had no effect on the favorable attitudes of high BESC participants, F (1,116) = .60, p > .44. The relationship manipulation did have an effect on low BESC consumers such that the brand was
preferred most when presented as a communal (vs. exchange) relationship partner, $F (1, 116) = 4.07, p = .05$.

Study 7: BESC and Brand Loyalty

Study 6 shows us that consumers who incorporate important brands into their self-concept are likely to have favorable attitudes toward a brand irrespective of the nature of the relationship exhibited by the brand (communal vs. exchange). Study 7 investigates whether BESC may influence the nature of brand relationships over time. We explore this possibility in the context of new product introduction, seeking to determine whether high BESC persons are more long-term oriented in their relationship with brands than low BESC persons, that is testing whether BESC is predictive of brand loyalty. In particular, we examine whether consumers are willing to wait for their favorite brand to produce a new product (in comparison to buying a currently available brand with which consumers are unfamiliar). We hypothesize that BESC is predictive of brand loyalty such that low BESC persons would prefer purchasing their favorite brand only if the waiting time is short and that high BESC persons would prefer buying their favorite brand irrespective of the waiting time.

Method. Participants ($N = 126$) included students who had not been involved in other research regarding BESC receiving course credit for their participation. The BESC scale ($\alpha = .93; M = 3.63, SD = 1.25$) was administered to participants before the experiment via an unrelated survey. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions related to the length of waiting time for their favorite brand: One month vs. three months vs. six
months. The manipulation was contained in a scenario depicting the decision to purchase a new product:

Assume that you have been in the market for a portable DVD entertainment system, which includes the DVD player and a small LCD screen. You recently read in the newspaper that a new portable DVD technology will soon be available. The new technology features significant improvements in terms of image, sound quality, shock resistance and overall reliability. It will also make a portable DVD player much lighter and easier to handle. The product was developed by a group of electronics manufacturers who will all offer a product based on the new technology in the near future. All brands will market their portable DVD players at around the same price (approximately 400 dollars) during the first year of production.

The first brand to market the product is a brand that you have never heard of before. Your favorite brand of electronics will also market the product, but your favorite brand will not be available for one [three or six] month(s).

Participants were asked to take their time to imagine themselves in the scenario and then to respond to a seven-point scale measuring preference to wait (“Buy the currently available brand now” = 1 to “Wait one [three or six] month(s) and buy my favorite brand” = 7). Responses on this scale served as the dependent variable.

Results. Participants were separated into two groups based on a median split on BESC (\(Mdn = 3.75\)). An ANOVA model was estimated with preference to wait as the dependent variable and waiting time (one, three, six months) and BESC (low vs. high) as between-participants factors. The main effect of waiting time (\(F(1, 120) = 6.02, p < .01\)) and the
interaction between waiting time and BESC ($F(1, 120) = 3.40, p < .05$) were significant; there was no main effect of BESC ($p > .18$). The interaction is depicted in Figure 3.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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Consistent with our expectations, planned contrasts revealed that low BESC respondents only preferred to wait to buy their favorite brand when waiting time was one month vs. three or six months, $F(1, 120) = 16.56, p < .001$. High BESC participants, however, preferred buying their favorite brand irrespective of length of wait, $F(1, 120) = .34, p > .56$.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Brand-extended self construal—a consumer’s general propensity to include important brands in the self concept—has been conceptualized and we have reported a series of studies developing a reliable and valid eight-item measure for this construct. In summary, based on our correlational results, consumers high (as compared to low) in BESC are more likely to possess a relational interdependent self-construal, be influenced by situational determinants, and be materialistic. The construct validity provided by these correlational findings is augmented with our experimental results, which demonstrate that BESC interacts with brand-related factors to influence brand attitudes and brand loyalty. As a whole, this body of empirical work substantially develops the nomological network for BESC.

It is important to note that the BESC construct is unique to the literature given that other seemingly related scales (i.e., self-brand connections, Escalas and Bettman 2003 and attachment to possessions, Ball and Tasaki 1992) focus exclusively on connections with a single, particular
brand or product as opposed to our more global approach to the role of brands in the self-concept. A number of benefits are realized with our more generalized approach and are subsequently detailed in this section. We turn now to synthesize our evidence regarding the BESC scale’s reliability, validity, and interpretation, followed by managerial implications of our findings and directions for future research.

The Reliability and Validity of BESC

Our survey and experimental studies demonstrate the eight-item BESC scale to be a reliable and valid measure showing the measure to be consistently psychometrically strong. In terms of reliability, the scale evidenced consistently high Cronbach’s alphas across six studies involving different samples (average $\alpha = .93$ for Studies 2 through 7). Evidence of the scale’s intertemporal reliability is shown in Study 2 with test-retest reliability of $r = .62$, with two months intervening between collections of the BESC scale from the same participants. Additionally, the wording of items (see Table 1) argues strongly for the face validity of the BESC scale in addition to the procedures used in generating and purifying scale items (as reported in Studies 1 and 2).

In terms of criterion validity, the BESC scale performed as expected with meaningful brand-related criteria. Our basic expectation was that consumers who include brands to a greater extent in their self-concepts (i.e., persons rating high in BESC) should differentially recall their favored brands given the centrality of such brands in the self, as compared to low BESC persons. Study 5 supported this expectation for brands of electronics recalled by high BESC consumers. Our conceptualization of BESC also suggests that generally favored brands should be evaluated more favorably by high (versus low) BESC persons since it is these brands that would be more likely to be connected to their self concepts. Given the generally favorable view of national
brands compared to store brands (Richardson, Dick and Jain 1994; Rosen 1984), we proposed that high BESC consumers would be more likely to include national (versus store) brands in their self-concepts and we should therefore witness differential evaluations for such brands. Findings of Study 4 supported this postulation, finding that high BESC consumers rated national brands of orange juice more favorably than did those low in BESC. There were no differences, however, in the generally negative evaluation of store brands across high and low BESC consumers.

We demonstrated the construct validity of BESC in several studies that differed methodologically. Given evidence that consumers can (and often do) view and treat brands anthropomorphically, a positive relationship between BESC and the importance of other people in the self-concept as measured by the RISC scale (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000) was predicted. The survey-based results of Study 3 showed BESC to be positively and significantly correlated with RISC. The modest correlation ($r = .15$) suggests that the person more likely to incorporate others in their self-concept is also more likely to incorporate brands in their self concept (i.e., higher BESC); yet these relationships are likely distinct elements of the self.

BESC was also positively correlated with the self-monitoring scale (Lennox and Wolfe 1984). As a point of review, self-monitoring (Snyder 1974) is an individual difference variable representing the influence of various factors on people’s behavior, with low self-monitors being influenced by dispositional factors and high self-monitors being affected by situational factors. While a number of important differences exist between low and high self-monitors (see Gangestad and Snyder 2000 for a review), prior research demonstrates that low self-monitors are more likely to be influenced by messages making appeals to values (i.e., attitudes serving a value-expressive function) while high self-monitors are affected more by appeals to status (i.e., attitudes serving a social-adjustive function; see Lavine and Snyder 1996). Given that brands
often serve a social-adjustive function in our society, the correlation between BESC and self-monitoring was reasonably expected to be positive and significant.

The correlation in Study 3 shown between BESC and Material Values was positive and significant; however, we maintain that these two constructs are conceptually and empirically distinct. The concept of Material Values is defined as “the importance of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states” (Richins 2004, p. 210). This definition is quite different from BESC, which is viewed as the propensity for a consumer to include close brands in the self concept. Supportive of our interpretation are results of the confirmatory factor analyses reported for Study 3 demonstrating discriminant validity of BESC and differentiation from the Material Values scale.

The nomological validity of the BESC scale is further supported by our experimental findings regarding the interaction of BESC with other theoretically meaningful constructs and the associated influence on brand attitudes (Studies 4, 5 and 6) and brand loyalty (Study 7). The two attitudinal studies focus on distinct attitude objects (a branded gift in Study 5 and a bank in Study 6), yet BESC clearly plays a role in how consumers evaluate these offerings. For example, in Study 5, we found that people high in BESC evaluated a gift more favorable if it was also their most (vs. least) favorite brand of electronics. Beyond showing that brands influence the evaluation of gifts (a unique contribution of this study), we show in Study 5 that BESC plays a role in how consumers respond to brand when evaluating an object. We also found that not only attitudes, but also brand loyalty patterns are affected by the BESC construct in Study 7. In particular, we found that high (vs. low) BESC consumers are more likely to wait longer to purchase a new product from a favorite brand of electronics rather than immediately buy an alternative brand with a desired innovation.
Findings from Study 6 demonstrate that the emerging concept of brand-person relationships fits within the nomological network of BESC (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998). In this study, we demonstrated the interactive effect of BESC and relationship type (communal vs. exchange) on brand attitudes. In particular, we found that those persons high in BESC responded favorably to the brand irrespective of the relationship, but that low BESC consumers cared about the type of brand relationship (with higher attitudes emerging for the communal brand relationship). In this setting, low BESC consumers respond similar to high BESC consumers (desiring to form bonds with a brand) when confronted with a communal brand. These findings are an important extension to the findings of Aggarwal (2004) and suggest an area for future research discussed below.

Implications for Brand Management

The current research provides brand managers further support for the notion that consumers can (and often do) form self-connections with brands. While prior research focuses on a consumer’s singular connection or relationship with a specific, or particular, brand (e.g., Escalas 2004; Aggarwal 2004), our work demonstrates a generalized tendency for segments of consumers to construe their self-concept in terms of their favorite brands. This basic finding suggests that brand managers need to consider more broadly how consumers build connections with brands and to think about their specific brand in the context of competing brands. If, for example, a high BESC consumer does not form a connection with a manager’s brand, the person may still likely form a connection to potential competitor brands in the marketplace (cf. Fournier 1998). Thus, managers must actively consider how best to insure their brand is included as part of consumers’ self-concepts (and not merely evoked set) and how to inhibit competing brands from building such connections.
Our results suggest that consumer propensity to include brands as part of the self-concept is associated with improved brand attitudes and increased consumer loyalty. Thus, there are clear beneficial outcomes for managers if they focus marketing activities on increasing the likelihood that their brands are included in consumers’ self-concepts. To do this, however, it is imperative that brand managers have a clear understanding of how their consumers involve brands as part of their self-concept (i.e., their level of BESC). Thus, managers may wish to track the level of BESC within important market segments. Depending upon the level of BESC held by a particular segment, the brand manager should focus on fine tuning strategic marketing activities regarding the brand and segment. Brand managers may employ several approaches to promote the inclusion of specific brands as part of consumer self-concept. Extant research suggests for example that managers should focus on invoking narrative processing in marketing communications (Escalas 2004). Other useful approaches can be developed from Keller’s (1993) model of customer-based brand equity. For example, managers may find it useful to influence the quality and/or quantity of mental processing of brand-related communications in attempts to form or strengthen “self-brand” associations.

Results of the current research suggest a potential caveat to these approaches since it appears that high (vs. low) BESC consumers could be more likely to include higher quality brands as part of the self-concept. As such, managers of store brands or national brands suffering poor reputations may reasonably be less concerned about whether their brands will be included in consumers’ self-concepts. Indeed, such firms may not even want their brands to be included in consumers’ self concepts, if those brands are decidedly not part of who their customers are or want to be.
Future Research

The construct of brand-extended self-construal and the BESC scale measuring this construct provides several opportunities for future inquiry. As with any new construct, additional research can further enhance our understanding of the development of, and potential outcomes associated with, BESC. For example, research could focus on how BESC links to consumer involvement profiles across product categories (Laurent and Kapferer 1985), how BESC develops over time and whether intergenerational influences exist regarding the formation of BESC (Olsen 1995). Such research would be useful in aiding marketers who wish to promote a stronger sense of BESC in their target markets. Further research is also needed to look for additional outcomes of BESC not explored in the current research. Useful dependent variables might include brand awareness, brand image, purchase intentions and choice.

Another direction of inquiry is the investigation of cognitive structures as a function of consumers’ reported BESC level. In this respect, investigations may include mapping typical brand associations that dominate the long-term memory of low vs. high BESC consumers and studying the strength of these brand associations (Keller 1993). These insights may be complemented by research expanding upon results of our Study 5 that explores the number and types of brands included in the self-concept across several different product categories.

Research examining the role BESC plays in more traditional areas of brand management would also prove insightful. An obviously useful avenue of inquiry would be exploration of the importance of BESC in consumer responses to brand extensions and/or alliances. The basic conceptualization of our construct would imply that high BESC consumers should be more responsive to extensions, especially for brands that are strongly related to those consumers’ self-concepts. This effect would be analogous to a human relationship setting wherein it is more
probable that a person will like a friend of a friend because of pre-existing connections. An experiment, for example, could test the brand evaluations of high and low BESC consumers for strong versus weak brands (e.g., Kellogg’s vs. Kroger cereals) and an alliance with a known other partner brand (e.g., SunMaid raisins).

Integral to BESC is the self-concept of consumers. Research focused on BESC and this aspect of social and consumer psychology could yield greater insight into how our new construct operates. One avenue for such research would be to explore the motivational aspects of construing one’s self-concept in terms of brands. Extant literature suggests that there are two basic motivations for forging links between a person’s self-concept and an object, including self-consistency (Sirgy 1982) and self-enhancement (Beggan 1991). Research exploring these two basic motivations in the context of BESC could be particularly useful for brand managers of firms desiring to influence this process. Further, it would likely prove useful to explore alternate manifestations of the self-concept (future self, ideal self, actual self, etc.) in reference to BESC to determine if brands play more or less of an influence under these differing conceptualizations of the self.

Researchers should investigate moderators and boundary conditions under which BESC exerts a particularly strong impact on the variables of interest. One obvious moderator to explore is the congruity between brand image and consumer self concept. Much academic research in marketing clearly suggests that congruity of various marketing-related stimuli influences consumer behavior (e.g., type of promotion and product category, Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent 2000). In the context of BESC, it would follow that self-brand image congruity should be a much more salient aspect of brands for high (compared to low) BESC consumers.
Finally, future researchers could also explore how BESC is related to other constructs shown to correlate with the measure in the current research. For example, our research demonstrated positive correlations between BESC and self-monitoring. Self-monitoring has been shown to influence many types of consumer behavior and to affect how consumers respond to different types of product-related cues. In particular, research by DeBono (2000) finds that high self-monitors are more likely to use brand and image-related attributes when judging product quality than low self-monitors. BESC may be a useful moderator to explore in this context.

**Conclusion**

The role of possessions, objects and brands in the lives of consumers has long been recognized by marketers as an important element of the human condition. Our conceptualization of brand-extended self construal builds upon this tradition by demonstrating a reliable and valid measure of the propensity to include brands as part of the self-concept. Taken together, the body of empirical evidence we present substantially develops the nomological network for this construct and provides a deeper appreciation for the fact that brands can play important roles in the lives of consumers. Our work is a contemporary extension of Belk’s (1988) concept of the extended self and recent research on self-brand connections and brand relationships. We are confident that the concept of brand-extended self construal and the attendant BESC scale will prove useful to marketing scholars and managers alike.
Table 1

BESC ITEMS: FINAL SCALE ITEMS AND RELIABILITY INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Study 1&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Study 2&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor Loadings&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Item-Total Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I have a special bond with the brands that I like.</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I often feel a personal connection between my brands and me.</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Part of me is defined by important brands in my life.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the brands I most prefer.</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I can identify with important brands in my life.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. There are links between the brands that I prefer and how I view myself.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My favorite brands are an important indication of who I am.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explained variance (%)<sup>d</sup>       71.5       72.0
Average variance extracted (%)<sup>e</sup> 67.5       70.6
Coefficient alpha                         .94        .94

<sup>a</sup> Undergraduate students, N = 430
<sup>b</sup> University and faculty staff members, N = 229, first administration
<sup>c</sup> CFA loadings
<sup>d</sup> EFA results
<sup>e</sup> Fornell and Larcker (1981)
Table 2

STUDY 3 RESULTS:

CORRELATION BETWEEN BESC AND OTHER MEASURED CONSTRUCTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (Cross, Bacon, and Morris 2000)</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>.15 (^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Values (Richins 2004)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>.42 (^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem (Rosenberg 1965)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>–.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentiment toward Marketing – Product (Gaski and Etzel 1986)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>–.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentiment toward Marketing – Advertising (Gaski and Etzel 1986)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentiment toward Marketing – Price (Gaski and Etzel 1986)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentiment toward Marketing – Retailing (Gaski and Etzel 1986)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Monitoring (Lennox and Wolfe 1984)</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>.14 (^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Life (Diener et al. 1985)</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>–.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Bem Sex Role Inventory - Masculinity (Brems and Johnson 1990)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>–.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Bem Sex Role Inventory - Femininity (Brems and Johnson 1990)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>–.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Concept Clarity (Campbell et al. 1996)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) \(p < .05\)
\(^b\) \(p < .01\)
Figure 1

STUDY 5 RESULTS:

BESC × LEAST/MOST FAVORITE BRAND INTERACTION

Gift Attitudes

6.60

5.97

5.72

6.79

Least Favorite

Most Favorite

Experimental Brand Treatment
Figure 2

STUDY 6 RESULTS:

BESC x RELATIONSHIP NORMS INTERACTION

![Graph showing the interaction between BESC and relationship norms on brand attitudes. The graph compares high BESC (dashed line) and low BESC (solid line) with exchange and communal relationship treatments. The y-axis represents brand attitudes ranging from 5.0 to 7.0. The x-axis represents experimental relationship treatments with labels for exchange and communal. At high BESC, the line shows a slight decrease in brand attitudes from 6.66 to 6.50. At low BESC, the line shows an increase from 5.91 to 6.31.](image-url)
Figure 3

STUDY 7 RESULTS:

BESC × WAITING TIME INTERACTION

Preference
To Wait
For Favorite Brand

7.0
6.0
5.0
4.0
3.0
2.0

One Month
Three Months
Six Months

Experimental Treatment

High BESC
Low BESC

5.46
4.86
4.57
3.43
4.67
4.05
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