The Perils of Self-Brand Connections

Consumer Response to Changes in Brand Image

by

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2

Abstract

Companies commit considerable resources to build brand associations that resonate with consumers' identities and facilitate strong consumer-brand bonds. This dissertation investigated a potential disadvantage of this popular strategy; specifically, how changes in brand image (e.g., due to brand acquisitions or repositioning) can decrease consumer identification with the brand.

Across five studies, this dissertation investigated consumer response to changes that incorporated new associations in brand image (Studies 1-3), and changes that reinforced existing salient brand associations (Studies 4-5). The results from the three first studies show that high degree self-brand connection consumers responded negatively to changes that incorporated new associations in brand image. This finding contrasts with existing research, which has consistently found that brand connections serve as a buffer against transgressions and negative brand information.

Counterintuitively, the results from the two last studies show that even changes that intensify salient brand associations can decrease consumer brand identification in some instances, depending on what part of the self the brand is connected to. When brand connection was based on ideal self-brand congruity (i.e., self-enhancement motives), the reinforcement of existing associations increased the brand's ability to signal an ideal identity, and, thus, the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement increased. However, when the brand connection was based on actual self-brand congruity (i.e., self-verification motives), changes in brand image reduced felt similarity between the actual self and the brand, such that the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification decreased.

This dissertation contributes to the literature by providing a different perspective on brand connections. While the extant research focuses primarily on the formation of strong consumer-brand bonds and the positive consequences of these bonds, current research demonstrates conditions under which companies may experience negative consequences of self-brand connections. Also, the current research demonstrates that consumers' reactions to changes in brand image depend on how strongly connected they feel to the brand and whether the connection is related primarily to their actual or ideal selves. This dissertation highlights a caveat for managers who try to balance the cultivation of consumer-brand bonds while also responding to market dynamics and growth opportunities.

3

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

1 Introduction

In their efforts to build and maintain strong brands, managers face several dilemmas. One essential dilemma is the trade-off between following the brand-building mantra of maintaining a consistent message versus a more flexible approach that adapts to market dynamics. On the one hand, to achieve a strong and unambiguous position, brands might maintain consistency in core associations and brand image over time (Keller, 1993). On the other hand, market dynamics such as new growth possibilities, changes in customers' preferences, and aggressive competition, sometimes warrant changes in brand image; away from the current brand image (repositioning through the incorporation of new associations), or towards increasing extremity of existing core associations (reinforcement of existing salient associations). Whether changes in core brand associations are due to a niche brand making the leap to mass markets, to managers making a strategic decision to capitalize on existing brand equity and pursue growth in new segments, or to a mature brand in need of revitalization, such changes risk the possibility of alienating the existing customer base. In this dissertation, I investigate consumer response to managerial actions that change core brand associations. Specifically, I question whether the degrees to which consumers have incorporated the brand in their identity projects influences their response to brand image change.

Consumers use brands to construct their self-concepts and their identities (Sirgy, 1982). One way consumers do this is by incorporating brands into their self-concept (i.e., forming self-brand connections) and by using the brands as signals of who they are or want to be (Escalas & Bettman, 2009). The value of consumer-brand bonds is well documented in the literature (MacInnis et al., 2009). Benefits to companies include increased brand loyalty, positive word of mouth and other pro-brand behaviors (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), increased willingness to pay price premiums (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), and longer relationships due to greater tolerance and willingness to forgive brand failures (Swaminathan, Page, & Gürhan-Canli, 2007), among other positive outcomes.

In contrast to the extant brand relationship literature (MacInnis et al., 2009), the current research investigates a potential disadvantage of strong consumer-brand bonds; consumer response to changes in brand image. The basic proposition is that consumers who have incorporated a brand into their

self-concept, perceive changes in brand image to be negative due to a decrease in the brand's ability to express self-identity.

Cases in which consumers have protested brand changes through both social media and brand boycotts provide supporting anecdotal evidence for consumers' conservatism and reluctance to welcome changes in brand image. For example, customers of the English juice maker Innocent protested when the Coca-Cola Company acquired a minority stake in the company. Despite promises that the juices would remain the same and Coca-Cola would not be actively involved in Innocent's operations, customers felt that the mere fact that Coca-Cola Company held a portion of ownership changed the "soul" and meaning of Innocent. Protests on Innocent's blog (www.innocentdrinks.co.uk) are illustrative:

> *Are you also re-branding as Corrupted?*
>
> *So sad. I imagine this is exactly how a cheated spouse feels. You have lost me as a fan.*
>
> *You ask how we feel—Bereaved is my answer. I am grieving for the loss of a good friend turned traitor.*

Similarly, Porsche fans revolted against the launch of the Porsche Cayenne because it did not fit their perceptions of what a Porsche was, is, and should continue being. Here, too, fans registered their feelings in social media and elsewhere, and commented volubly on Porsche's online forums (quoted in Deighton, Avery, and Fear [2011]):

> *Everything about the Cayenne is completely the opposite of what Porsche is and does.*
>
> *I just felt really sad. Now "soccer moms" can drive their kids around in a Porsche.*
>
> *It makes me embarrassed about owning a Porsche… kinda like that relative you don't want to admit sharing the same bloodline.*

Even though the highly involved customers who engage in these types of protests constitute a small portion of the total customer portfolio, they tend to be the strongest and most persistent voices of discontent and often influence other customer groups (Deighton, Avery, and Fear 2011). Quelling their influence sometimes takes a long time, with short and long-

term damage to brand equity as protests continue, in addition to the cost of tying up managers' attention and resources. The fear of negative reactions among core customers can make managers reluctant to develop the brand in line with market dynamics. Hence, the goal of cultivating strong consumer-brand bonds can limit managers' perceptions of strategic options and constrain growth.

1.1   Research Question

The objective of this dissertation is to investigate whether degree of self-brand connection influences consumer response to managerial actions that changes consumers' perception of the focal brand's image.

Companies can choose to change brand image for many reasons (seizing new market opportunities, attracting new market segments, revitalizing and strengthening positioning, and more) and by many means (acquisitions, re-positioning, strategic alliances, product deletion, for example). This dissertation research specifically investigates the effects of two strategic marketing decisions that can change consumers' perceptions of the brand: change of ownership and repositioning.

Brand image can also change in different ways. Obviously, brand image can change because new associations become linked to the mental representation of the brand. Conversely, brand image can also change due to weakening or reinforcement in the magnitude of existing salient associations. Suppose that the association most strongly linked to Mountain Dew is exciting. Both managerial actions that make Mountain Dew appear less exciting (i.e., a change from 70 to 60 on a 0-100 scale of exciting) and actions that make the brand even more exciting (i.e., a change from 70 to 80 on a 0-100 scale of exciting) represent a change in brand image. Intuitively, changes that intensify current brand associations seem non-controversial, and one could assume consumers even welcome them. However, I will argue that such changes can lead to negative responses among consumers who feel high degrees of self-brand connection, depending on what part of the self is connected to the brand. If brand connection is based on ideal self-brand congruity (i.e., self-enhancement motives), reinforcement of existing associations are considered positively as they increase the brand's ability to express an ideal self. That is, the brand's efficacy as a symbol of the ideal self increases. However, I expect the process to be different if brand connection is based on actual self-brand congruity (i.e., self-verification motives). In this case, changes that reinforce existing associations reduce felt similarity between actual self and the brand, and, thus, the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification decreases. Therefore, counter-

11

intuitively, when brand connections are based on consumers' self-verification (versus self-enhancement) motives, I expect brand identification to deteriorate when the brand changes to become "more of what it already is" (i.e., reinforcement of existing associations).

Therefore, to test these propositions, the research question for this dissertation is as follows:

How does self-brand connection influence consumers' response to changes in brand image due to;

a) incorporation of new brand associations?

b) reinforcement of existing salient brand associations?

1.2   Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three main parts: theoretical framework and hypotheses development, empirical evidence, and discussion of contributions and implications.

The theoretical framework discusses self-concept and identity rooted in perspectives from social psychology. Based on this understanding of the self, the dissertation reviews research on how consumers actively use brands to construct the self and signal identity (to signal prestige, affiliation, and divergence). Furthermore, I discuss research on consumer motivations and company benefits of self-brand connection, and identify consumer response to perceived change in the image of a brand that is integrated in their self, as a gap in the extant literature. While existing research has investigated how brand connections can serve as buffers against negative brand information and transgressions, little is known about consumer response when a brand that serves as an important identity marker changes its image. Hence, I discuss and develop hypotheses about consumer response to such changes. In doing this, I make two important distinctions. The first is between different types of changes in brand image. That is, changes that incorporate new associations in brand image (e.g., Mountain Dew incorporates "social responsible" as a key association) versus changes that reinforce existing brand association (e.g., Mountain Dew becomes even more "exciting" than it already is today). The second distinction is between brand connections to different aspects of self-concept. That is, a felt connection between the actual self and a brand versus a felt connection between the ideal self and the brand. In other words, I investigate how ideal self-brand connections (self-enhancement motives) and actual self-brand connections (self-verification motives) influence consumer response to changes in brand image.

Based on the extant research, I develop three main hypotheses and offer a conceptual framework for the relationships studied in this dissertation. The first hypothesis proposes that self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to changes that incorporate new associations in brand image, and that this effect is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an identity marker. Hypotheses 2 and 3 consider consumer reactions to changes that reinforce existing brand associations. Additionally, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 consider brand connections to different parts of self-concept (actual versus ideal self) and brand connections as means for fulfilling different self-goals (self-verification versus self-enhancement). Hypothesis 2 proposes that ideal self-brand connection positively influences consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations, and that this effect is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement. Conversely, Hypothesis 3 proposes that actual self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations, and that this effect is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification.

In the next parts, I present the conceptual framework and develop three hypotheses, report the results of five studies designed to test the hypotheses, and finally discuss the results, managerial implications, and avenues for further research.

13

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Self-Concept and Identity

No topic is more interesting to people than people. For most people, moreover, the most interesting person is the self.

(Baumeister, 1999)

People frequently use the term "self" in everyday life. Self is used to mean the person; him or herself. It is what people mean when they say "I." Most people have a clear understanding of what this self means, yet it is often experienced as difficult to articulate and explain the nature of one's self to others (Baumeister, 1999).

The concept of self is central in psychology and has been studied extensively from many different perspectives. The list of "self-topics" in the literature is vast and diverse and includes self-awareness, self-esteem, self-schema, self-control, self-monitoring, and more. A search on the term "self" in PsycInfo revealed over 180,000 references (an increase of 30,000 references since Leary and Tangney conducted similar search in 2001). The most frequent terms that appeared in the search were self-concept (more than 35,000 references), self-esteem (more than 20,000 references), and self-control (almost 10,000 references).

Even though the self is well researched and a common term in everyday life, it has proved hard to define precisely. According to Baumeister (1998), the self can better be viewed as an aggregate of loosely related subtopics rather than simply a single topic. Despite the different uses of the self, most researchers agree the fundamental quality that underlies the understanding of the self is the human capacity for *reflexive thinking*. That is, the psychological apparatus that allows an individual to take himself or herself as the object of attention and think consciously about it (Baumeister, 1999).

Most psychological phenomena studied in regard to the self involve at least one of three basic psychological processes: attention, cognition, and regulation (Leary & Tangney, 2003). In the current research, I focus on the cognitive processes of the self and people's perceptions about themselves (the self-as-knower); the self-concept. Self-concept is concerned with how we think about ourselves: who we once were, who we are, and who we may

become. It is our theory of our own personality and our answer to the basic question, "who am I?" (Markus & Cross, 1990).

We express self-concept, consciously and unconsciously, via an array of identities (also referred to as self-schemas; Markus, 1977), as a result of our beliefs, values, attributes, and resources (Howard, 2000). Reed II, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop (2012) define identity as "any category label to which a consumer self-associates either by choice or endowment." Self-identities include demographics, group affiliations, social roles (e.g., parent), consumption patterns (e.g., dieter), identifiers created by marketers (e.g., Pepsi generation), and more. Additionally, self-identities are numerous and fluid and vary over a consumer's lifetime and across consumption situations (Reed II & Bolton, 2005). Some identities are relatively stable and "objective" (e.g., father, son, Norwegian, etc.), while others are fluid and "subjective" (e.g., athlete, hipster, Mac user, etc.; Reed II et al., 2012).

Consumer research has a long tradition of studying consumers' consumption practices as identity expressive (e.g., Belk, 1988; Levy, 1959). In the following, I will review literature on consumers' use of possessions and brands to construct their identities and as signals in forming impressions of others.

2.2   Brands as Identity Markers

Since Veblen (1899) introduced the notion of conspicuous consumption, researchers have argued that consumers use products to communicate identity. Levy (1959) argued that people buy products not only for what they do, but also for what they symbolize. Csíkszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) discuss how people use possessions to create meaning and structure in their environments. They suggest that possessions are more than just the sum of their attributes; they help give direction and purpose, create order in consciousness, and enable people to attain their goals. Consumers use products to express who they are and how they want to be, as well as to form impressions of others based on the products they consume (Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982).

Brands assist the signaling process with visible logos and other identifiers (Berger & Ward, 2010). McCracken (1989) model of image transfer describes the process by which brands attain symbolic meaning. He argues that advertising, through its cultural references and symbols, provides meaning to brands. The meaning moves from brands to consumers, as consumers construct themselves through their brand choices, based partly on congruity between brand image and self-image. In this way, brands not only

help consumers express the self, but also serve as instruments used to construct self-identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2009; McCracken, 1989).

Brand image is the perception people have of the brand and incorporates people's beliefs, feelings, and expectations towards it. Brand image is often operationalized as the reflection of the brand's personality. That is, the set of human characteristics associated with a brand and the psychological nature of a particular brand as intended by its sellers (American Marketing Association 2014). The most frequently used measure of brand personality is Aaker's (1997) five dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. The dimensions consist of 15 facets, which again can be divided into 42 specific brand personality traits, as illustrated in Table 1.

Dimensions of Brand Personality

Dimensions	Facets	Traits
Sincerity	Down-to-earth	Down-to-earth, Family oriented, small-town
	Honest	Honest, sincere, real
	Wholesome	Wholesome, original
	Cheerful	Cheerful, sentimental, friendly
Excitement	Daring	Daring, trendy, exciting
	Spirited	Spirited, cool, young
	Imaginative	Imaginative, unique
	Up-to-date	Up-to-date, independent, contemporary
Competence	Reliable	Reliable, hardworking, secure
	Intelligent	Intelligent, technical, corporate
	Successful	Successful, leader, confident
Sophistication	Upper-class	Upper-class, glamorous, good-looking
	Charming	Charming, feminine, smooth
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy	*Outdoorsy, masculine, Western*
	Tough	Tough, rugged

Table 1: Dimensions of Brand Personality

Despite ongoing discussions about the specific dimensions and method of measuring (Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009), researchers and practitioners believe personality is a key element in brand image. Companies view personality as a key to differentiate, while consumer research has focused primarily on how the personality of a brand enables consumers to express their self-concept and identities. Research shows that consumers actively use brands in their identity projects to signal status and prestige, as well as affiliation to desired identities and groups and divergence from undesired identities and dissociative out-groups (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012).

2.2.1 Brands as Signals of Prestige

Consumption can be used to signal status and prestige (Braun & Wicklund, 1989). In essence, people signal success and status through conspicuous consumption of expensive products and brands (Richins, 1994), both in absolute terms and relative to the average costs of items in the product category (Fournier & Richins, 1991).

Recent research demonstrates that high-status consumers tend to avoid conspicuous displays of status and wealth. Rather, they prefer subtle signals and inconspicuous consumption to diverge from out-group people also consuming luxury brands, and signal affiliation with only those in the know (Berger & Ward, 2010; Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). Extending from this, Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan (2014) argue that nonconformity can serve as a particular form of targeted conspicuous consumption only conceived by those in the know. In domains where nonconformity is visible and potentially costly, those who diverge signal that they have the social position required to oppose norms. For instance, Bellezza et al. (2014) show that wearing red sneakers in a formal business setting or wearing gym clothes when shopping in a high-end luxury boutique, as visible and costly signals, leads to inferences of status and competence in the eyes of others who are knowledgeable about the norms in the specific setting.

2.2.2 Brands as Signals of Affiliation

Research has shown that consumers use brands instrumentally to signal affiliation with desired identities and others (Solomon, 1995). Escalas & Bettman (2003) found that consumers report higher brand connections when they perceive that a positively evaluated member group or an aspirational group use the brand. If many people in the same social group tend to use a particular brand it imbues that brand with symbolic value. If brands such as Vans and Vision are popular among skateboarders, people

tend to associate Vans and Vision with that social group. Thus, people who aspire to be seen as skateboarders, tend to adopt behaviors and brands used by that social group (i.e., Vans and Vision) in order to construct the desired social identity. Admirers of specific brands are also known to form brand communities that connect consumers with each other based on a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility centered on the brand (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001).

Marketers can utilize brand's affiliation signals in their marketing communications. For example, when consumers' ethnic identities are salient, consumers are more likely to respond to messages linking ethnicity to specific brands (Deshpande & Stayman, 1994; Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed II, 2002). Similarly, students increase their evaluations of an offering after being exposed to messages describing its relevance to students (Reed II, 2004).

However, recently Bhattacharjee, Berger, and Menon (forthcoming) argued that explicitly linking brands to consumer identity is not always the most effective. In a series of studies, they show that explicit identity marketing can backfire. For example, participants with a salient "green consumer" identity evaluated an advertising message for Charlie's All Purpose Soap negatively when it was explicitly identity-defining ("Charlie's: The only good choice for green consumers"), compared to when the message was less explicitly identity-defining ("Charlie's: A good choice for green consumers") or even neutral ("Charlie's: A good choice for consumers"). According to Bhattacharjee, Berger, and Menon (forthcoming), explicit identity-marketing messages increase the salience of external determinants of behavior, and, thus, reduce consumers' feeling of free choice in identity expression.

2.2.3   *Brands as Signals of Divergence*

Research has documented that consumers also use consumption practices and brands to signal how they diverge from others. The uniqueness literature (Fromkin, 1970; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977) shows that when people feel overly similar to others, they behave in ways that allow them to feel different (Byrne & Griffitt, 1969). In general, people tend to strive more to be unique in domains they find personally important (Campbell, 1986; Kernis, 1984). People with a chronic high need for uniqueness prefer to more permanently differentiate themselves from others (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

A related stream of research shows that consumers not only make unusual consumption and brand choices to ensure uniqueness; divergence can also be related to communicating desired identities and to avoid

18

undesired identities (Berger & Heath, 2007; Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011). Across four studies, Berger & Heath (2007) demonstrated that consumers avoid options and brands preferred by the majority more in product domains that are seen as symbolic of identity (e.g., music) and less in product domains that are not seen as symbolic of identity (e.g., backpacks).

Chernev et al. (2011) showed that if identity is threatened, the need to use brands as vehicles of self-expression increases. For example, in one of their studies, participants listed either brands that were personally relevant to them or their parents. In a subsequent task, those in the "my parents' favorite brands' condition distinguished more strongly between brands in domains symbolic of identity (e.g., sneakers, knit shirts, jackets, and watches) than those in the "my favorite brands" condition did. There were no such differences when participants evaluated brands in domains less symbolic of identity (e.g., soft drinks, paper towels, cereals, and sports drinks).

Similarly, White and Argo (2009) showed that consumers who are threatened with negative information about their social group (a negative stereotype) tend to avoid products associated with the threatened aspect of identity. That is, consumers use consumption practices (or avoidance of specific products and brands) to reduce their association with a negative identity. This notion is supported by the research of White & Dahl (2006, 2007), who showed that consumers avoid products associated with groups they want to disassociate themselves from. For example, they demonstrated that men avoid ordering a 10 oz steak when it is labeled "Ladies' cut" but not when it is labeled "Chef's cut" on the menu (White & Dahl, 2006).

Recently, Chan et al., (2012) found that consumers are able to reconcile conflicting motives for social group identification and individual uniqueness. The authors showed that consumers could assimilate with a desired social group by conforming to identity-signaling attributes (e.g., a specific brand), while they simultaneously differentiate on another dimension (e.g., version or color).

In sum, the symbolic meaning of a brand derives from the associations between the brand, its typical users, and its uses (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). Consumers' use of brands is influenced by their perceptions of themselves and the groups to which they belong (Bearden & Etzel, 1982), those they aspire to be like (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005), and those they do not want to be associated with (White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). When consumers use brands in their identity projects, a link bridges the brand and the self such that consumers sometimes incorporate the brand image in the mental representation of the self (Escalas & Bettman, 2009).

2.3   Self-Brand Connection: The Use of Brands in Self-Construal

Between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine, the line is difficult to draw

James (1890)

Several influential scholars have discussed relationships as overlaps of selves between partners. Jung (1958) argued that relationships create a greater wholeness, as they provide and develop otherwise unobtainable aspects of the self. Maslow (1954) stated that beloved others can be incorporated into the self, while McCall (1974) described attachment as the incorporation of others' actions and behaviors in the self (Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2004).

The self-expansion model suggests that people have a fundamental motivation for self-expansion by including others into their self-concepts (Aron & Aron, 1996). People are motivated to include others into how they see themselves to increase physical and social resources, perspectives, and identities that help fulfill self-needs such as self-verification and self-enhancement (Aron et al., 2004; Aron & Aron, 1986, 1996, 1997). Thus, in interpersonal relationships close partners include the other in the self (e.g., one's mother or spouse is a part of the self). That is, the mental representations of the self and the other overlap. How we see ourselves is based to some extent on how we see our close partners, and their resources, perspectives, and identities become incorporated into our self-concept (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

Based on the notion of including close others in the self, consumer researchers have documented that we also incorporate nonsocial entities (e.g., our possessions and brands) in our self-concept to construct, verify, and enhance identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Reimann & Aron, 2009).

2.3.1   *Self-Possession Connection: Inclusion of Possessions in the Self*

The idea that we incorporate possessions into our self-concepts and view them as part of our selves is not new. In 1890, James argued that we are the sum of all we can call ours (James, 1950). This understanding, that we are what we have, is perhaps one of the most powerful notions of consumer behavior (Belk, 1988). Belk (1988) argued that consumers sometimes incorporate possessions in their self as a means to construct identity. Thus, possessions can become a part of the "extended self" as they

reflect the identity of the possessor and, in turn, contribute to that identity. Kleine, Kleine, and Allen (1995) further developed this idea and defined material possession attachment as a property of the relationship between a specific individual and a specific material possession that has been psychologically appropriated, decommodified, and singularized through person-object interaction. Possession attachment reflects the extent of the "me-ness" associated with that possession. That is, how closely the possession is related to the self as well as the extent to which the possession is emotionally charged. Possessions help narrate people's life stories, either by reflecting desirable connections with others (e.g., photographs of people one used to be or are close to) or reflecting key aspects of a person's individuality (Kleine & Baker, 2004).

Sirgy (1982) took a self-perception approach when discussing the symbolic meaning of possessions. He argued that the cultural meaning of possessions is attributed to the people who use them. Thus, consumers make attributions about who they are and who others are based on what they consume. In this sense, if Rolex is a classy watch, people who wear a Rolex must be classy. Thus, if I own a Rolex, I must be classy too. Although originally discussed in the context of possessions, the theory extends to brands (as the example illustrates). In contrast to material possession, brands are intangible and not limited to one specific object with a special history and feelings attached to it. Thus, brand connection is not related to one irreplaceable object, but rather to personal bonds and feelings of oneness with the brand and what it symbolizes.

2.3.2   *Self-Brand Connection: Inclusion of Brands in the Self*

Consumers are known to appropriate brand associations, such as personality traits and user characteristics, and incorporate them into their self-concepts. The degree to which the consumer has incorporated the brand into the self-concept is referred to as self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Chaplin and John (2005) showed that children develop self-brand connections at an early age. The researchers gave schoolchildren the task of making personal collages that answered the question "who am I?" Results show that in third grade (the youngest group that participated), children used brand names and logos when defining who they are. As the children moved into adolescence, the number of brands used to describe themselves increased. Additionally, among the youngest children, brand connections were mostly related to familiarity and ownership, while among the older children, the connections were based more on similarities in personality, user stereotypes, and reference groups (Chaplin & John, 2005).

When consumers incorporate a brand into their identity projects, the brand is categorized as part of the self, such that brand associations are linked to mental representations of the self, and consumers develop a sense of oneness with the brand (Chaplin & John, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2010). Escalas and Bettman (2003) proposed that the closer brand associations are linked to the self, the more meaningful they are. They conceptualize and operationalize the consumer-brand linkage at the aggregate level of self-brand connections, rather than specific associations, as brand image often is a consequence of the constellation of the entire gestalt of associations.

While this dissertation studies self-brand connection specifically, consumer behavior research has applied several related constructs when analyzing consumer brand bonds. The most closely related constructs are summarized in Table 2.

Construct Name	Construct definition	Representative Literature
Brand Attitude	Individual's judgment of the extent to which a brand is good or bad	Park et al. (2010)
Brand Attachment	Strength of the bond connecting a brand with the self	Park et al. (2010)
Emotional Brand Attachment	Bond that connects a consumer with a specific brand and involves feelings (i.e., affection, passion, and connection) toward the brand	Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger (2011)
Brand Love	Degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular trade name	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006)
	Different cognitions (e.g., about self-identity), feelings, sense of connectedness and fit, and behaviors (e.g., frequent interactions and resource investments)	Batra et al. (2012)
Brand Prominence	Salience of the cognitive and affective bond that connects a brand to the self	Park et al. (2010)
Consumer -Company Identification	Identification with a company as an active, selective, and volitional act motivated by the satisfaction of one or more self-definitional needs	Bhattacharya & Sen (2003)
Consumer- Brand Identification	Customer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand	Lam et al. (2010)
	Consumer's perceived state of oneness with a brand	Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012)
Self-Brand Congruity	The degree of fit between consumer's self-concept and the brand's image	Sirgy (1982)
Self-Brand Connection	Extent to which an individual has incorporated a brand into his or her self-concept	Escalas & Bettman (2003)

Table 2: Consumer-Brand Bonds (adapted from Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)

Although related, self-brand connection is different from the purely emotional bonds that are conceptualized as emotional brand attachment (Malär mfl., 2011) and brand love (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Self-brand connection describes the degree to which consumers identify with and instrumentally use a set of brand associations to construct

and signal identity, not emotional attachment and affection per se. Batra et al. (2012) conceptualize brand love as consisting of self-brand integration (connection), but also emotional brand attachment and positive brand evaluations. In line with Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen (2012), however, I regard positive brand evaluations (i.e., brand attitude) as a mere evaluation of the brand, while self-brand connection is based on a felt identity match between the consumer and the brand.

Park et al. (2010) conceptualize brand attachment as a second-order construct where both self-brand connection and prominence are reflective indicators of brand attachment. That is, self-brand connection and brand prominence are symptoms, not the cause, of brand attachment. Brand prominence refers to how readily available positive feelings and memories about the brand are in consumers' minds (Park et al. 2010). This is not a part of the understanding of self-brand connection that is applied in this dissertation research.

Although rooted in organizational identity, the concepts of consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and consumer-brand identification (Lam et al., 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, et al., 2012) are closely related to self-brand connection. However, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) argue that consumer-company identification is narrower as it does not include motivations such as communicating one's identity to others and achieving one's desired self as guiding the brand connection.

Self-brand congruity (Sirgy, 1982) and self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2010) are both related to the felt "me-ness" of the brand and the degree to which the consumer instrumentally uses the brand associations to construct and signal identity. In this process, consumers incorporate the brand into the self such that the mental representation of the brand and the self overlap. Thus, self-brand congruity and self-brand connection are conceptualized as how well the associations linked to a particular brand match the consumers' self-concepts and, thus, the brand's efficacy in signaling consumer identities. Importantly, feeling strongly connected to a brand is not equivalent to a consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), as it does not imply that brands are active relationship partners. Rather, brands serve as vessels of symbolic meaning consumers use instrumentally to achieve goals motivated by the self (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

2.4   Consumer Motivations for Self-Brand Connections

The conceptualization of self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2010) has been mainly of a general

connection between the self and the brand. However, it is well established in self-theories that people can see themselves from different perspectives and with multiple selves (Markus & Kunda, 1986). Thus, self-concept is understood to consist of several distinct facets (e.g., the actual self, the desired self, the ought self, and more). While there are many conceptualizations of self-concept, I focused on two specific forms: ideal self and actual self.

The actual self is how we perceive ourselves to actually be (how we see ourselves), while the ideal self is a representation of the kind of person we aspire to become (how we would like to be). The study of how the actual selves and the ideal selves impact consumer evaluations and preferences has a long tradition (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Landon Jr., 1974). Several studies have demonstrated that consumers use brands to signal both who they are and what they aspire to become (Belk, 1988; Dolich, 1969; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). In fact, consumers can apply a portfolio of brands to express different aspects of their selves (Aaker, 1999). This highlights the importance of distinquishing between and tapping into motives and consequences of brand connections linked to different parts of the self, i.e., ideal self-brand connections, and actual self-brand connections. Ideal self-brand connections are based on perceived congruence between brand image and the ideal self, while actual self-brand connections are based on perceived congruence between the actual self and the brand image (Malär et al., 2011).

If the consumer perceives a brand to be part of his/her self-concept, the interactions with the brand should be subject to the influences of self-motives. In fact, research on self-brand connections has demonstrated that consumers incorporate brands into their self-concept due to self-motivations such as self-verification and self-enhancement (Escalas & Bettman, 2009). In the following, I will discuss these underlying consumer motivations for forming brand connections to the ideal self and the actual self. In doing this, I will argue that brand connections to the ideal self are rooted mainly in self-enhancement motives, while brand connections to the actual self are rooted mainly in self-verification motives.

2.4.1 Ideal Self-Brand Connections to Enhance the Self

Self-enhancement is the desire to maintain or increase the positivity of the self-concept and, thus, protect self-esteem (Leary, 2007). People strive to project a favorable self-identity and create positive impressions on others, and even to themselves by seeking favorable feedback (Schlenker, 1980).

Research in psychology has revealed that, due to the need for self-enhancement, the impressions people hold of themselves tend to be biased in

a positive direction (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). People tend to attribute positive events to their own qualities and behaviors and negative events to factors beyond their control (self-serving attributions; Blaine & Crocker, 1993). People may also implicitly self-enhance by evaluating things that are associated with them more positively (Leary, 2007). There are hosts of intriguing findings based on this phenomenon. For example, people tend to put a higher value on objects they own, compared to similar objects they do not own (the endowment effect; Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990). Also, people have a tendency to prefer letters that appear in their own name to letters that are not in their name, and the effect is particularly strong for their initials (Hodson & Olson, 2005). Similarly, it has been shown that consumers prefer fictitious brand names that resemble their own name to brand names that do not resemble their names (Brendl & Chattopadhyay, 2003).

Several studies have documented the use of consumption and brands as instruments to self-enhance. For example, Escalas & Bettman (2003) demonstrate that consumers who are motivated to self-enhance report stronger connections to brands associated with groups to which they aspire to belong. Escalas and Bettman (2003) argue that the appropriation of brand associations can be derived from the brand usage of reference groups. Hence, when aspirational groups use a particular brand, consumers can form connections to the brand in order to link themselves to the aspirational group and transfer the associations of the brand (and hence also the aspirational group) to them. For example, if a consumer aspires to be perceived as more rugged and tough and sees that people who embody these associations often use the Harley Davidson brand, he or she might want to acquire Harley Davidson products in order to be perceived as more rugged and tougher.

Similar effects have also been shown for celebrity endorsements. Consumers report higher self-brand connections for brands with images consistent with the image of a celebrity they aspire to be like, and report lower self-brand connection for brands with images consistent with celebrities they do not want to be associated with. The positive effect of celebrity endorsements is stronger for consumers with active self-enhancement goals (Escalas & Bettman, 2009).

Consumers also self-enhance by directly appropriating desired brand associations through brand usage. Park and John (2010) showed that when consumers use a brand, they feel the brand associations rub off on them. After carrying a Victoria's Secret shopping bag, female participants who believed personalities can change (entity theorists; Dweck, 2000) felt more feminine, better looking, and glamorous. Similarly, participants perceived themselves more intelligent, more of a leader, and harder working after using a MIT pen. The researchers argue that many consumers actively use brands

with appealing personalities to enhance self-perceptions (Park & John, 2010).

The aforementioned findings clearly reveal that self-enhancement motives influence consumers to connect with brands projecting associations that are central to their ideal self-representations. The more strongly a brand reflects associations congruent with an ideal consumer identity, the more efficiently the brand can fulfill consumers' self-enhancement goals. Thus, I posit that consumers' connection with brands that reflect aspirational and ideal selves (how they would like to be ideally) are based on self-enhancement motives.

2.4.2   *Actual Self-Brand Connections to Verify the Self*

Brands are not only used as instruments for self-enhancement. Consumers also use brands as instruments to achieve self-verification goals (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Self-verification theory proposes that people have a tendency to prefer and pursue information that is consistent with their existing self-views (Leary, 2007). This theory is based on the assumption that stable self-views give people a feeling of coherence, a sense that the world is predictable and controllable, and people are motivated to maintain this feeling. Therefore, people tend to interpret their experiences such that they confirm self-perceptions.

Self-verification motives influence behavior in at least three ways. They lead people to interact with others who confirm their self-concepts, behave in ways that elicit self-verifying feedback from others, and look for, see, and remember information that confirms their existing self-views (Leary, 2007). Hence, people are motivated to maintain relationships that confirm self-views, even if they are undesirable, and do not pursue relationships that conflict with their self-views (Swann, 1987).

The use of particular brands can become a part of this self-verification process, as brand choice is an expression of the personality and attributes embodied by a brand (Aaker, 1997). It has been shown that consumers sometimes incorporate brands into their self-concept to achieve self-verification goals. Escalas and Bettman (2003) demonstrated that consumers motivated to verify their self-concept showed stronger connections to brands associated with groups to which they already belong.

Other streams of research have put a lens on how consumers use consumption and brands to restore their sense of self following a self-threat. In particular, when a consumer's strength of association with a self-relevant identity is threatened, that consumer takes action to restore the self (Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011). Gao et al. (2009)

demonstrated that threats to an important self-view undermine confidence in that self-view (e.g., writing with a non-dominant hand threatens participants' confidence in their intelligence) and thereby leads consumers to choose products that restore confidence in their self-view. Participants who feel a threat to their intelligence are more likely to choose an intelligence-related product (fountain pen vs. M&M candies) in a subsequent task. Ward & Broniarczyk (2011) showed that buying a close (versus distant) friend an identity-contrary gift could itself threaten self-identity for the giver. An example would be to buy a Manchester City jersey as a gift for a close friend supporting them, while oneself being a dedicated Manchester United fan. The authors showed that after buying an identity-contrary gift for a close friend, givers engaged in behaviors that re-established their identity (e.g., reporting greater affiliation with the threatened identity and increased willingness to buy identity-expressive products). Consistent with self-verification theory (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Brian, 1992), the studies of Gao et al. (2009) and Ward & Broniarczyk (2011) demonstrate that, because products and brands are self-expressive, they can help restore self-views and verify identity.

The aforementioned research shows that brands can function as means for consumers to ensure stable self-views and as instruments consumers use either to confirm or restore their sense of self. The more strongly a brand reflects associations congruent with the actual self, the more efficiently the brand can fulfill consumers' self-verification goals. Based on this, I posit that brand connections between the actual self and the brand are based on motives to verify, validate, and sustain the existing self-concept (self-verification motive).

2.5   Company Consequences of Self-Brand Connections

From the company perspective, the literature shows that consumer self-brand connection increases consumer-brand relationship stability (Fournier, 1998). Park et al. (2010) demonstrated that self-brand connection, through brand attachment, encourages pro-brand behaviors such as recommending, defending, and always buying the new model from the brand. In their study of consequences of consumer-brand identification, Lam et al. (2010) documented that consumers who identify with a brand and perceive it as an important marker of group affiliation, are less likely to switch, even if a new and better brand is introduced.

Ferraro et al. (2013) show that self-brand connection buffers negative consequences of conspicuous brand usage. They examined how consumers' attention-getting use of a brand causes brand dilution on behalf

of observers. The results reveal that consumers who are not feeling connected to the focal brand, exhibit less favorable evaluations of the user and the brand, while high degree self-brand connection observers maintain favorable views of the brand in the face of a conspicuous brand user (Ferraro et al., 2013).

Additionally, a significant body of research shows that consumers' brand bonds safeguard the brand from the consequences of failure, negative information, and other transgressions (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000; Hess, Ganesan, & Klein, 2003). According to Swaminathan et al. (2007), negative brand information has less impact on high degree self-brand connection consumers compared to low degree self-brand connection consumers. Swaminathan et al. (2007) proposed that highly connected consumers are more likely to refute and counter-argue negative information about a brand to protect self-esteem and maintain a positive identity.

Cheng, White, and Chaplin (2012) recently proposed a competing account for why high degree self-brand connection participants uphold favorable brand evaluations after receiving information about a brand failure. They argued that highly connected consumers respond to brand failure as they do to personal failure. The argument is that positive brand evaluations are due to a need to restore self-evaluations following brand failure and not due to rejecting or re-interpreting the unfavorable information. Cheng et al. (2012) demonstrated that high degree self-brand connection participants reported lower self-esteem (compared to low degree self-brand connection participants) after learning about a brand failure (poor performance of a brand extension). However, when given the opportunity to self-affirm, participants reduce their brand evaluations. This finding implies that those who have incorporated the brand into their self-concept experience brand failure as a threat to their self. However, when high degree self-brand connection consumers have the opportunity to restore self-esteem, they no longer need to rely on a positive brand evaluation to maintain self-views.

Like Cheng et al. (2012), this dissertation investigates the effects of new brand information on self-concept, and particularly how self-brand connections do not always serve as a buffer. Unlike Cheng et al. (2012), I do not examine unintended or accidental brand transgressions or failures but intentional strategic marketing decisions that change brand image. Also, while the extant literature has investigated high degree self-brand connection consumers' responses to brand failures and transgressions that are inherently negative, I study intentional strategic marketing decisions that incorporate new positively valenced brand associations or reinforce existing associations. Hence, these are strategic marketing decisions that are meant to

strengthen the company or the brand, and yet I argue and find that high degree self-brand connection consumers respond negatively at times.

In contrast to the extant literature, the focus in this dissertation is not on how self-brand connections can safeguard the brand from the consequences of failures and transgressions but on consumer response to *change in the meaning* of an important identity marker caused by intended managerial actions. In such instances, I propose another underlying mechanism than counter-arguing negative information (Swaminathan et al., 2007) or protecting self-esteem (Cheng et al. 2012), both of which have been investigated in the previous literature. I propose that high degree self-brand connection consumers respond negatively to changes in brand image because such changes decrease congruence between the brand and the self, and thereby the brand's ability to serve as an identity marker decreases.

Avery (2012) discusses how the launch of Porsche Cayenne contaminated Porsche's masculine identity. In response, customers who relied on the gendered identity created distinct in-groups and out-groups of Porsche owners and used negative stereotypes to fight the gender bending of the brand (Avery, 2012). While Avery (2012) discusses strategies Porsche owners deploy to *preserve* a masculine gender identity based on interpretations of data from online forums, I apply controlled experiments to pinpoint how self-brand connections influence consumers' responses to strategic marketing decisions that *change* brand image. Furthermore, I investigate the effects of different types of changes in brand image (introduction of new associations versus reinforcement of existing associations), and differential processes and consumer responses based on whether the brand is connected primarily to the consumer's ideal or actual self, as will be discussed in detail in the next sections.

2.6 Consumer Response to Changes in Brand Image: Hypotheses Development

In the following, I develop hypotheses on consumer responses to changes that either incorporate new brand associations or reinforce existing associations in brand image.

2.6.1 Incorporating New Associations in Brand Image

Brand image can change because new associations become linked to the mental representation of the brand (i.e., incorporating new associations in brand image). I argue that consumer response to such changes depends on the degree to which consumers feel connected to the brand. For those feeling

low degrees of self-brand connection, brand image is not identity relevant. Thus, response to changes that incorporate new associations into brand image depends on such consumers' idiosyncratic preferences for the specific associations.

For those feeling high degrees of self-brand connection, however, changes in brand image have identity implications. Such consumers have actively chosen the brand due to its current image and use the brand as an identity marker. If brand image changes, the match between the brand's image and consumer identity also changes; as such, the brand's ability to serve as an identity marker decreases. For highly connected consumers, changes in brand image lead to dissonance between self-identity and the brand. A change in brand image disrupts the brand's ability to signal identity. Thus, change in brand image is unsettling as it upsets the consumer's vision of his or her own reality, and continuing a close connection to the brand would imply not staying true to oneself. Consumers cope with this not only through negative attitudes to the change itself but also by reducing their felt brand connection and, thus, the prominence of the brand as a vehicle for self-expression. Based on this, I expect self-brand connection to negatively influence consumer response to changes that incorporate new associations into brand image, and that this effect is due to a decrease in the brand's efficacy as an identity marker in consumers' identity projects.

Hypothesis 1A:

Self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to changes that incorporate new associations in brand image

Hypothesis 1B:

The effect of self-brand connection on the response to changes that incorporate new associations in brand image is mediated through the brand's identity contribution

2.6.2   *Reinforcing Existing Brand Image Associations*

Brand image can change in ways other than only through incorporation of new associations. In particular, brand image can change due to weakening or reinforcement in the magnitude of existing salient associations. For example, Levi's can be considered a rugged brand. However, being rugged is not simply an either or. There are degrees of

ruggedness. For example, while Levi's is considered rugged, most consumers might perceive Harley Davidson as being even more rugged. Managerial actions making Levi's appear even more (or less) rugged than they currently are de facto represent a change in brand image. I argue that self-brand connection also might negatively influence response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations, depending on what part of the self the brand is connected to and, thus, the motivation underlying the brand connection.

Ideal Self-Brand Connections

I have argued that consumers' connection between their ideal selves and brands are based primarily on motives to enhance, improve, and develop self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Reinforcement of existing brand associations implies that the brand even more strongly projects the image high degree ideal self-brand connection consumers aspire to hold. Thus, I predict that consumers feeling high degrees of *ideal* self-brand connection (brand connection motivated by self-enhancement) will perceive changes that reinforce the existing brand image positively, as such changes increase the brand's ability to signal an ideal identity (the brand becomes "more of what I want to be like") and, thus, increases the brand's self-enhancement efficacy.

Hypothesis 2A:

Ideal self-brand connection positively influences consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations

Hypothesis 2B:

The effect of ideal self-brand connection on the response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement

Actual Self-Brand Connections

As consumers are motivated to maintain stable self-views, information about a brand to which they are strongly connected tends to be interpreted in line with current brand perceptions. Thus, consumers feeling high degrees of self-brand connection are motivated to defend their brand in

case of negative information (Swaminathan et al., 2007). However, if consumers perceive that brand image changes, the brand's ability to serve as an instrument for self-verification decreases. Changes in brand image, either by the introduction of new brand associations or reinforcement of existing brand associations, decrease the match between consumers' actual selves and the brand. Hence, maintaining a close brand connection would conflict with existing self-views. As the brand is incorporated into the self, a change in the brand implies a change in the self. Given the need for self-verification, high degree actual self-brand connection consumers are motivated to reduce the felt brand connection to maintain or restore a stable self-image (to self-verify).

Based on this, I predict that consumers feeling high degrees of *actual* self-brand connection (brand connection based on self-verification motives) will perceive both changes that incorporate new brand associations and changes that reinforce existing brand associations negatively. Any change in brand image is likely to reduce the perceived congruence between the brand and the actual self. As a result, brand image changes decrease the brand's efficacy as an instrument to confirm and verify the actual self (self-verification efficacy).

Hypothesis 3A:

Actual self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations

Hypothesis 3B:

The effect of actual self-brand connection on the response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification

2.6.3   Conceptual Model

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model of the variables and relationships investigated in this dissertation. The variable "change in brand image" captures both changes that incorporate new associations in brand image (Studies 1-3) and changes that reinforce existing salient brand associations (Studies 4-5). The variable "self-brand connection" captures both general self-brand connection (Studies 1-3) and connections related to different aspects of consumers' selves (i.e., actual-self versus ideal-self,

Studies 4-5). The mediator "identity contribution" conceptualizes the focal brand's efficacy as an identity marker (Study 3), and specifically the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification and self-enhancement of consumers' self-concept (Study 5). The dependent variable "response to brand change" is operationalized as including attitude to the brand change (acquisition or repositioning), change in brand attitude, and change in felt self-brand connection to the focal brand.
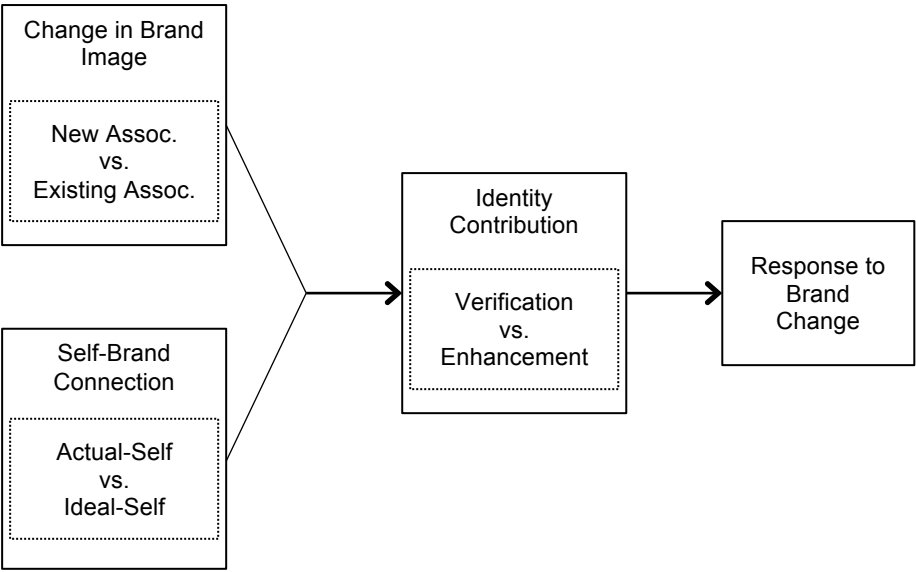

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

In the next chapter, I present the results of five studies designed to collectively capture the different aspects of the conceptual model and test the hypotheses.

3 Empirical Evidence

3.1   Overview of Studies

In the following, I report the results of five studies designed to test the hypotheses. The three first studies examine how degree of self-brand connection moderates consumer response to changes that introduce new associations in brand image, and as such answers Hypothesis 1. Studies 1-2 apply acquisition scenarios to manipulate brand image change. The studies use predefined brands (Study 1: Nike and Study 2: Starbucks) and describe the incorporation of different associations (Study 1: Glamorous, upper-class, and sophisticated, and Study 2: Family oriented, charming, and wholesome). Study 2 also includes measures of psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes (changes in prices, quality, and customer service), as these could be alternative explanations of the results. Study 3 uses a different context for brand image change than the previous studies; brand repositioning. In addition, Study 3 manipulates low and high self-brand connections and allows for idiosyncratic target brands (i.e., the results are not limited to a predefined target brand, but participants themselves select a brand to which they feel low or high degrees of self-brand connection). Study 3 also includes a process measure, identity contribution, tapping into perceptions of change in the efficacy of the focal brand as an identity marker.

Studies 4 and 5 examine consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand association and were designed to test Hypotheses 2 and 3. Study 4 applies a survey design measuring participants felt actual and ideal self-brand connection with Nike and reactions to changes in each of Aaker's (1997) 15 facets of brand personality. The dependent measure was an index of participants' response to changes in the three most descriptive personality traits (as evaluated in the first part of the survey). Study 5 manipulated ideal and actual self-brand connection and let participants self-select idiosyncratic target brands according to condition. In addition, Study 5 measured the two proposed processes directly; the target brand's self-verification efficacy and self-enhancement efficacy. Study 5 also includes measures of psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes (changes in prices, quality, and customer service), once again demonstrating that these are not likely explanations of the results.

Together, the studies provide evidence in support of Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. The studies build confidence in the results by replicating the effects, using different target brands (both predefined and idiosyncratic self-selected

brands), applying changes in different types of brand personality associations, both measuring and manipulating general self-brand connection, actual and ideal self-brand connection, including direct measures of the proposed processes, and controlling for two alternative explanations.

3.2   Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to test the proposition that self-brand connection moderates the effect of brand image change on consumer response. I utilized brand acquisitions as a context to study brand image change. Acquisitions are a highly used form of corporate development. In 2013, there were almost 80.000 acquisitions worldwide and the announced value of these acquisitions was more than $3.6 trillion (Zephyr Annual M&A Report 2014, www.zephyrdealdata.com). In addition, change of ownership has the potential to evoke new associations, as ownership is identified as a source of brand meaning (Keller 1993) and, thus, transforms the image of the acquired brand. In the study, the acquisition scenario was described such that the acquiring company used a house of brands strategy (Rao, Agarwal, & Dahlhoff, 2004) and kept the original target brand as part of their portfolio (the brand name was not changed). I chose this relatively unobtrusive acquisition strategy to avoid possible effects of reactions to a new brand name or other organizational changes. Companies usually deploy such a strategy to capitalize on the target brand's existing equity and potentially increase value through the acquisition.

3.2.1   Procedure

A class of undergraduate business students participated in a two-stage pretest. In the first part of the pretest, I asked participants to list five brands they really liked and identified with. I counted the number of times each brand was listed and identified the five most popular brands among participants. These were Nike, Starbucks, Audi, Diesel, and Levi's.

In the second part of the pretest (one week later), the same participants evaluated each of the five most popular brands on Aaker's (1997) 15 facets of brand personality (1-7 scale; 1 = Not at all descriptive and 7 = Very descriptive) and provided other traits (not listed; open-ended) they associated with the brand. The participants rated Nike's image (personality traits) highly and consistently; therefore, Nike was chosen as the target brand for the experiment. Nike scored highest on the traits "successful" (6.5), "up-to-date" (6.3), and "encouraging" (5.4), and lowest on "spiritual" (2.6), "down-to-earth" (3.1), and "glamorous" (3.5).

Next, I ran a 2 (stable associations vs. new associations) × self-brand connection (measured) mixed design experiment in two parts. The stable associations vs. incorporation of new associations in brand image conditions was manipulated between-subjects, while self-brand connection was measured. The participants were from the same population as the pretest (i.e., undergraduate business students).

The experiment was administered during a lecture at the business school. In the first session of the lecture, participants completed and handed in a questionnaire that collected demographic information and measured attitude and self-brand connection to Nike and two other filler brands. In the last session of the lecture (90 minutes later), participants read a newspaper article about the acquisition of Nike. The acquirer was a fictitious venture capital company named InvesTech Corp. (no other information about the acquirer was given). Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. I manipulated stable associations vs. new associations in brand image by the descriptions in the article. Otherwise, the questionnaires were identical. The acquisition was presented as friendly and welcomed by Nike's management in both conditions. The only difference was that, in the new associations condition, the acquisition was said to make Nike become more glamorous, upper class, and sophisticated (positively valenced). The users of a brand have been shown to have an important influence on brand image (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Keller, 1993). Thus, the new associations condition also specified that the changes in the Nike brand were due to the objective of reaching new luxury segments in the Asian market. The articles (manipulations) read as follows (see Appendix A for the actual manipulations in Norwegian):

Stable Associations Condition:

InvesTech Corp. acquires Nike!

After weeks of speculation and rumors, InvesTech Corp. confirms the acquisition of Nike. InvesTech Corp. has interests in several leading global brands. By including Nike in its portfolio, InvesTech Corp. definitely strengthens its position as the world's leading holding company. InvesTech Corp. will not disclose the cost of the acquisition.

Nike will not change

In the press release, InvesTech Corp. states that the acquisition of Nike is a mere financial placement, and InvesTech Corp. will not be involved in Nike's management. Philip Anderson, Nike's international strategic director is positive about the acquisition: "This will increase our financial strength and allow us to continue to build the Nike brand as before. Our customers will not experience any changes; the new owners will help us continue to deliver the same excellent quality and the existing Nike image," says Anderson.

New Associations Condition:

InvesTech Corp. acquires Nike!

After weeks of speculation and rumors, InvesTech Corp. confirms the acquisition of Nike. InvesTech Corp. has interests in several leading global brands. By including Nike in its portfolio, InvesTech Corp. definitely strengthens its position as the world's leading holding company. InvesTech Corp. will not disclose the cost of the acquisition.

A new direction for the Nike brand

In the press release, InvesTech Corp. states that it will develop the Nike brand in order to reach growing luxury segments in the Asian markets. The new strategy entails modifications in the visual profile, the types of products offered by Nike, distribution, and communication.

Nike will become more glamorous and exclusive

Philip Anderson, Nike's international strategic director, is positive about the acquisition: "This will increase our financial strength. The competence of InvesTech Corp. and synergies with the rest of their portfolio, will contribute to change and strengthen the brand. After the acquisition, Nike will become more glamorous and exclusive in order to reach new market segments. "Our customers will experience a difference, with such a strong owner backing us, we will still be able to deliver the same quality, while also becoming more glamorous, exclusive, and sophisticated in all our activities," says Anderson.

Finally, I measured the dependent variables (attitude toward the acquisition, the post attitude to Nike, and post self-brand connection to Nike), perceived change in the Nike brand image, perceptions of change in specific personality traits, and demographic information.

3.2.2 Measurements

I measured brand attitude before and after the information about the acquisition and attitude toward the acquisition with three items each (on three 1-7 semantic differential scales labeled "bad/good," "negative/positive," "unfavorable/favorable," based on Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). I calculated the difference in respondents' brand attitudes before and after the acquisition as a measure of change in brand attitude.

I measured self-brand connection with the 7-item scale developed by Escalas and Bettman (2003). The scale includes items such as "I can identify with the Nike brand," "Nike reflects who I am," and "I feel a personal connection with Nike," which were rated on a 7-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." I calculated change in self-brand connection as the difference between self-brand connection before and after the acquisition.

I measured perceived change in brand image with three items ("To what extent do you think the Nike brand will change after the acquisition…" "Not at all/To a large extent," "insignificant/significant," "No change/Considerable change;"1-7 scale, α= .95), and perceived change in individual personality traits (perceived change in each of Aaker's (1997) 15 facets of brand personality traits on a scale from - 3 = "Reduce," 0 = "No difference," and 3 = "Strengthen").

3.2.3 Data Preparation and Preliminary Tests

I combined the questionnaires from parts one and two of the experiment by matching the demographic information (gender, age, and postal code) and successfully paired 70 complete responses.

Principal Component Analysis and Scale Reliability Checks

Principal component analysis with oblique rotation of the items used to measure attitude toward the acquisition, brand attitude, and self-brand connection showed the expected structure (see Table 3, loadings under .3 are suppressed). The three components collectively account for 82.67 percent of

the variance in the data. The results showed satisfactory convergent (loadings > .5) and divergent (marginal cross-loadings < .3) validity. The correlations between the components were at low to moderate levels and the reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha > .7). Hence, I calculated the variables self-brand connection, attitude toward the acquisition, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection for use in the subsequent analyses.

Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix)

Component	Self-Brand Connection	Attitude to Acquisition	Brand Attitude
Eigenvalue	6.58	2.72	1.44
Variance Explained (total: 82.67 %)	50.63 %	20.94 %	11.11 %
Cronbach's Alpha	.93	.94	.96
Nike suits me well	.798		
Nike reflects who I am	.900		
I can identify with Nike	.834		
I consider Nike to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way I want to present myself to others)	.896		
I (can) use Nike to communicate who I am to other people	.822		
I think Nike (could) help(s) me to become the type of person I want to be	.847		
I feel a personal connection to Nike	.673		
Attitude toward the acquisition; Bad - Good		.934	
Attitude toward the acquisition; Negative - Positive		.955	
Attitude toward the acquisition; Unfavorable - Favorable		.942	
Attitude to Nike; Bad - Good			.938
Attitude to Nike; Negative - Positive			.976
Attitude to Nike; Unfavorable - Favorable			.929

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in four iterations.

Table 3: Study 1: Principal Component Analysis

Component	Self-Brand Connection	Attitude toward Acquisition	Brand Attitude
Self-Brand Connection	1.00		
Attitude toward Acquisition	.11	1.00	
Brand Attitude	.54**	.03	1.00

$* p < .1, ** p < .05, *** p < .01$

Table 4: Study 1: Component Correlation Matrix

In order to ease the interpretation of the results, I also calculated a composite of the three dependent variables: "Response to brand change." The composite variable was constructed as a mean index of the three dependent variables wherein the variable attitude toward the acquisition was recoded from 1-7 into -3 to 3, making the values comparable with the other two dependent measures (change in brand attitude and change in self-brand connection) and, thus, help interpretability of the composite variable. The Cronbach's alpha of response to brand change was .61, which is considered an acceptable internal consistency (Hair, 2010; Moss et al., 1998).

Regression Assumptions

I checked the degree to which the measured independent and dependent variables met general assumptions for parametric statistical test, such as normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

As depicted in Table 5, descriptive analysis showed that the measured variables (independent and dependent) all were satisfactorily normally distributed. Skewness and kurtosis for all the variables were within or very close to the normally accepted cut-offs (│1.00│). The standard errors were .29 for skewness and .57 for kurtosis. Inspection of histograms showed a reasonable normal distribution of the data. The normal Q-Q plots formed a reasonable straight line, and there was no evident clustering of points in the detrended normal Q-Q plots.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-Brand Connection	70	1.00	7.00	3.68	1.41	.13	- .49
Attitude toward Acquisition	70	1.67	7.00	3.95	1.11	.52	.69
Change in Brand Attitude	70	- 4.00	1.00	- 1.07	1.21	- .47	- .40
Change in Self-Brand Connection	70	- 2.86	1.71	- .26	.82	- .41	1.04
Response to Brand Change	70	- 1.32	3.14	.87	.83	- .46	.77

Table 5: Study 1: Descriptive Statistics

Visual inspections of plots between the measured independent variable (self-brand connection) and each of the dependent variables indicated acceptable linear relationships. Scatterplots of the residuals (*ZRESID against *ZPRED) did not show patterns of heteroscedasticity. The multicollinearity test showed acceptable Tolerance statistics but the VIF statistics indicated a potential threat that the effects of self-brand connection and the interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection could be suppressed in the regression analysis (Hair, 2010). That is, a potential Type II error. However, only the interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection is important to the hypothesis test, and this effect was not suppressed (as will be demonstrated in the next chapter). Thus, multicollinearity is not considered a problem for the hypothesis testing.

3.2.4 Results

ANOVA indicated that the manipulation of stable associations vs. the incorporation of new associations in brand image worked as intended. Participants in the stable associations condition considered the brand image to change significantly less than the participants in the new associations condition ($M_{\text{stable associations}}$ = 2.68 vs. $M_{\text{new associations}}$ = 4.83, $F(1, 69)$ = 73.87, p < .01).

As one of the independent variables was continuous (self-brand connection), I followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West

(1991) and Fitzsimons (2008) and conducted a series of multiple regressions to test the predictions. The independent variables were the experimental conditions (stable associations = 0, and inclusion of new associations = 1), self-brand connection (measured), and their interaction. I found the same results across all the dependent measures (attitude toward the acquisition, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection). For parsimony in reporting, I therefore illustrate and discuss the results of the composite dependent variable (response to brand change), while the details of the other dependent variables are reported in table 6.

The results did not show any effect of the experimental conditions (b = .53, $t(66)$ = 1.10, p = .30) or self-brand connection (b = .14, $t(66)$ = 1.67, p = .10). The null effect of the experimental conditions could be due to multicollinearity, as discussed above, yet this is not of importance to the hypothesis testing. Of importance to Hypothesis 1 A, the results showed a significant interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection on response to brand change (b = - .35, $t(66)$ = - 2.84, $p < .01$). The interaction is illustrated in Figure 2.
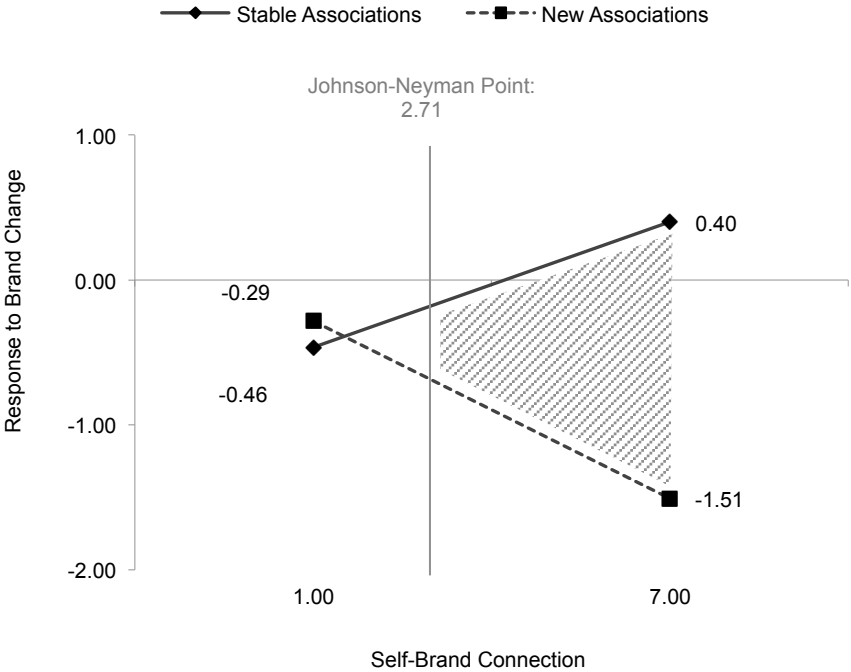

Figure 2: Study 1: Interaction

44

To explore the interaction, I tested the simple slopes of self-brand connection within the two experimental conditions (stable associations vs. new associations) (Aiken and West 1991; Fitzsimons 2008). As hypothesized (H1A), the results revealed that the simple slope of self-brand connection was significantly decreasing in the new associations condition (b = - .20, $t(66)$ = - 2.34, p < .03). In the stable associations condition, the simple slope of self-brand connection yielded a marginally significant positive effect (b = .14, $t(66)$ = 1.67, p = .10). The results indicate that the higher the brand connection, the more negatively participants react to acquisitions that incorporate new associations into brand image. Furthermore, the marginal positive effect of self-brand connection in the stable associations condition indicates that high degree self-brand connection consumers only respond negatively to acquisitions that changes brand image, not merely acquisitions in themselves.

I used the Johnson-Neyman technique to identify the range of self-brand connection for which the simple effect of the manipulation (stable associations vs. new associations) was significant (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, and McClelland 2013). That is, I analyzed at what degree of self-brand connection consumers responded significantly more negatively to changes that incorporate new associations compared to when associations remained stable. The analysis revealed that there was a significant negative effect of new associations (vs. stable associations) when self-brand connection was higher than 2.71 on the 1-7 scale (b_{JN} = - .42, $t(66)$ = - 1.99, p = .05), but not when self-brand connection was less than 2.71. As self-brand connection increased from this point (the area highlighted with grey lines in the graph), participants reacted increasingly negatively to the incorporation of new association into brand image. As illustrated in Table 6, the pattern of results was the same also when the three dependent variables were analyzed separately. The results support Hypothesis 1A.

Dependent Variable	Experimental Conditions x Self-Brand Connection	Simple Slopes Within Experimental Conditions		Johnson-Neyman Point
		Stable Assoc.	New Assoc.	
Attitude toward Acquisition	- .40**	.30**	- .10	2.69
Change in Brand Attitude	- .38**	.12	- .26*	2.92
Change in Self-Brand Connection	- .26*	.01	- .24**	3.54
Response to Brand Change	- .35***	.14	- .20**	2.71

*$p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 6: Study 1: Regressions Results (All Dependent Variables)

3.2.5 Discussion

The results of Study 1 support Hypothesis 1A. The results suggest that the stronger connection consumers feel toward a brand, the more negatively they react to new associations being incorporated into brand image. The new associations alter brand image to the extent that those consumers who deploy the brand in their identity projects experience that a central identity marker changes. That is, when consumers perceive image change in a brand that is a part of their self-concept, they feel that the brand no longer fits them as well as it did prior to the change. Hence, changes in brand image challenge and threaten highly connected consumers' self-views and, thus, these consumers respond by withdrawing from the brand relationship.

A possible alternative explanation for the results could be that they are not due to the brand becoming a less efficient instrument in consumers' identity projects, but rather that change in brand image leads to inferences about changes in quality, prices, and service level and that consumers who are highly connected to the brand respond more negatively to such marketing management changes. Another speculation could be that the results are driven by psychological reactance. This suggests that highly connected consumers respond more negatively, not because the brand's efficacy as an identity marker decreases, but because of a lack of control on the changes. If this is the causal mechanism, chronic psychological reactance should moderate the effects such that higher chronic psychological reactance would lead to even more negative reactions to changes in brand image.

46

To build confidence in the results and to provide support for the role of the identity explanation, Study 2 includes measures of both expectations of marketing management changes (i.e., expectations of changes in quality, prices, and service levels) along with chronic psychological reactance. In addition, Study 2 also applies a different target brand (Starbucks) and different measures of the dependent variables to increase robustness of the pattern of results.

3.3   Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and build confidence in the initial results. Study 2 does this by applying a different target brand and different measures for the dependent variables as in Study 1, as well as controlling for other factors that could influence the results (expectations marketing management changes and chronic psychological reactance).

3.3.1   Procedure

I conducted a pretest on a Web panel (N = 215, M_{age} = 35.8, 51% females) to identify a suitable target brand. The aim was to identify a brand with a consistent image across participants and with a variation in self-brand connection. The pretest was included as a filler task in another, unrelated study. The pretest measured several brands on a short version of Escalas and Bettman's (2003) self-brand connection scale (three items; "I can identify with Brand X," "Brand X reflects who I am," and "I feel a personal connection with Brand X"). In addition, participants gave open-ended associations and selected the three most descriptive traits from the full set of Aaker's (1997) 42 brand personality traits for each brand.

Based on the pretest, I chose Starbucks as the target brand. Starbucks was most strongly associated with the traits "trendy" (49%), "corporate" (33%), and "successful" (30%). Among the traits not descriptive of Starbucks was "family oriented" (2%), "charming" (2%), and "wholesome" (4%). The average self-brand connection with Starbucks was 35.6 (SD = 29.2), with participants on both extremes of the scale (0-100 sliding scale with a range of 98.3).

I ran a 2 (stable associations vs. new associations) × self-brand connection (measured) experiment. The experimental conditions were manipulated between subjects in a brand acquisition scenario, and the self-brand connection was measured. The data were collected on a Web panel with American respondents.

In the first part, participants rated their impressions of and connection to Starbucks (brand attitudes, open-ended associations with Starbucks, brand personality, and felt self-brand connection to Starbucks). Then, participants rated items on several filler scales, including a measure of chronic psychological reactance (Hong & Faedda, 1996). Directly following an instructional manipulation procedure (based on Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko 2009), participants read a scenario about the acquisition of Starbucks. The acquisition scenario was the same for both experimental conditions, except for the description about how the acquisition would affect the Starbucks brand. In the stable associations condition, the scenario said that the acquisition did not have any implications for the Starbucks image. In the new associations condition, the scenario said that the acquisition would make Starbucks become more family oriented, charming, and wholesome (pretested as non-descriptive of the current brand image). In both conditions, the scenario described the acquisition positively and welcomed by Starbucks.

Stable Associations Condition:

PRESS RELEASE

It's finally official. After weeks of speculation and rumors, InvesTech Inc. has declared it has acquired Starbucks.

InvesTech Inc. has interests in several leading global brands. By including Starbucks in its portfolio, InvesTech Inc. definitely strengthens its position as the world's leading venture capital company. InvesTech Inc. will not disclose the cost of the acquisition, but speculation is rife.

Starbucks will not change

Philip Wright, international strategic director of Starbucks, is positive about the acquisition: "This will increase our financial strength and allow us to continue to build the Starbucks brand as before. Our customers will not experience any change, but the new owners will help us continue to deliver excellent quality and the existing Starbucks image."

New Associations Condition:

PRESS RELEASE

It's finally official. After weeks of speculations and rumors, InvesTech Inc. has declared that it has acquired Starbucks.

InvesTech Inc. has interests in several leading global brands. By including Starbucks in its portfolio, InvesTech Inc. definitely strengthens its position as the world's leading venture capital company. InvesTech Inc. will not disclose the cost of the acquisition, but speculation is rife.

Starbucks will change

Philip Wright, international strategic director of Starbucks, is positive about the acquisition: "This will increase our financial strength. The competence in InvesTech Inc. and synergies with the rest of its portfolio, will contribute to change and strengthen the Starbucks brand.

After the acquisition, Starbucks will change its image to be much more family oriented, charming, and wholesome to capitalize on the increasingly important family segment. Our customers will experience a significant difference. With such a strong owner, we will still be able to offer excellent quality. The orientation of the Starbucks image towards the family will be emphasized in all our activities as well as in the atmosphere and interiors. The décor and layout of the coffee houses will also be given a more family oriented look and feel. We will change the image through new design and visual profile, in addition to changes in how Starbucks is portrayed in our communications and other marketing activities," says Wright.

After reading the scenario, participants rated their immediate reaction to the acquisition and the degree to which they felt the acquisition would influence their attitudes and connection to Starbucks. Participants also answered questions about expectations of marketing management changes (expectations of changes in quality, price, and service levels) after the acquisition, as this could be an alternative explanation of the findings in

Study 1. In the end, participants answered manipulation checks and were debriefed.

3.3.2 Measurements

The initial measurements of brand attitude, personality traits, and self-brand connection applied the same items as used in Study 1. The only difference was that Study 2 applied sliding scales that ranged from 0-100 on all questions.

Chronic reactance was measured using Hong & Faeddas (1996) 14-item scale. This scale includes items such as "I resist the attempts of others to influence me" and "I become angry when my freedom of choice is restricted" (α = 90) measured on a 0-100 sliding scale with the labels "Disagree" / "Agree."

Among the filler scales, I included one attention filter question ("On this particular question, do not give any answer, simply continue with the next question") to identify careless participants not reading the questions properly. In addition, I also included an instructional manipulation check prior to the acquisition scenario to identify participants who did not read the instructions properly. The procedure was adapted from Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko (2009) and included the following text and subsequent question:

Most modern theories of decision making recognize the fact that decisions are not made in a vacuum. Individual preferences and knowledge, along with situational variables can greatly impact the decision process. In order to facilitate our research on decision making we are interested in knowing certain factors about you, the decision maker. Specifically, we are interested in whether you actually take the time to read the directions. So, in order to demonstrate that you have read the instructions, please ignore the question and the mobile phone brands on the next page. Instead, simply write "mobile phone" in the "Other" box and proceed with the survey. Thank you very much.

Which of these mobile phone brands do you currently own? Check all that apply

> *- iPhone*

> *- Blackberry*

> *- Nokia*

(...)

- Other:

- None

Attitude to the acquisition was measured by "What is your immediate reaction to the acquisition of Starbucks," which was rated using three items anchored "Bad/Good," "Negative/Positive," and "Unfavorable/Favorable" on 0-100 sliding scales.

Instead of calculating change in brand attitude and self-brand connection from pre- and post-acquisition measurements as in Study 1, I measured directly how the acquisition would change participants' brand attitudes and self-brand connections. Hence, change in brand attitude after the acquisition was measured by "To what extent does the acquisition change your impression of Starbucks?" with three items anchored "Worse/Better," "Less positive/More positive," and "Less favorable/More favorable" (0-100 sliding scale). Change in self-brand connection was measured by "To what extent does the acquisition change the degree of connection you feel toward Starbucks," with three items anchored "Weaken/Strengthen," "Decrease/Increase," and "Reduce/Add to" (0-100 sliding scale).

As for the manipulation check, I measured perceived change in brand image change with four items ("To what extent do you think the acquisition will…" "change the image of Starbucks," "change the way other people see Starbucks," "change your impression of Starbucks," and "change the Starbucks brand?" These items were rated on a 0-100 sliding scale from "Not at all" to "Completely").

Expectations of marketing management changes were measured with three items ("To what extent do you think the acquisition will change the following at Starbucks…" "the quality of drinks (hot and cold)," "the prices," and "the service levels?" These items were rated on a 0-100 sliding scale from "Not at all" to "Completely").

3.3.3   Data Preparation and Preliminary Tests

Two hundred and fifty participants completed the survey. After removing participants who did not read the instructions and questions properly (44 participants (17.6%) failed one or both of the two attention filters), the final sample size was 206 participants (Age_{mean} = 34.9, 57% female).

Principal Component Analysis and Scale Reliability Checks

Principal component analysis (oblimin rotation) of the items used to measure initial self-brand connection, attitude toward the acquisition, change in brand attitude, change in self-brand connection, psychological reactance, and expectations of marketing management changes showed a four-component structure (see Table 7, loadings under .3 are suppressed). The items used to measure attitude toward the acquisition, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection converged in one common component. The other items gave the expected component structured.

The results showed satisfactory convergent (loadings > .5) and divergent (cross-loadings < .3) validity. The correlations between the components were at low levels, thus indicating satisfactory discriminant validity, and the reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha > .7). In total, the four components accounted for 67.94 percent of the variance in the items. Hence, I calculated the variables response to brand change (a composite variable consisting of the items used to measure attitude toward the acquisition, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection), psychological reactance, self-brand connection, and expectations of marketing management changes.

Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix)

	Response to Brand Change	Psychological Reactance	Self-Brand Connection	Marketing Management Changes
Eigenvalue	8.41	7.08	4.68	2.25
Variance Explained (total: 67.94 %)	25.47 %	21.46 %	14.19 %	6.82 %
Cronbach's alpha	.96	.98	.90	.86
Attitude toward the repositioning; Bad - Good	.918			
Attitude toward the repositioning; Negative - Positive	.929			
Attitude toward the repositioning; Unfavorable - Favorable	.934			
Change in Brand Attitude; Worse - Better	.947			
Change in Brand Attitude; More negatively - More positively	.960			
Change in Brand Attitude; More unfavorably - More favorably	.955			
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Weaken -Strengthen your feeling of connection?	.925			
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Decrease - Increase feeling of connection?	.930			
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Reduce - Add to your feeling of connection?	.932			
Regulations trigger a sense of resistance in me		.697		
I find contradicting others stimulating		.561		
When something is prohibited, I usually think, "That's exactly what I am going to do"		.665		
The thought of being dependent on others aggravates me		.595		
I consider advice from others to be an intrusion		.671		

I become frustrated when I am unable to make free and independent decisions	.709		
It irritates me when someone points out things that are obvious to me	.613		
I become angry when my freedom of choice is restricted	.701		
Advice and recommendations usually induce me to do just the opposite	.635		
I am content only when I am acting of my own free will	.636		
I resist the attempts of others to influence me	.601		
It makes me angry when another person is held up as a role model for me to follow	.655		
When someone forces me to do something, I feel like doing the opposite	.685		
It disappoints me to see others submitting to standards and rules	.700		
Starbucks suits me well		-.862	
I can identify with Starbucks		-.877	
Starbucks reflects who I am		-.943	
I feel a personal connection with Starbucks		-.919	
I (can) use Starbucks to communicate who I am to other people		-.875	
I think Starbucks (could) help(s) me to become the type of person I want to be		-.873	
I consider Starbucks to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)		-.899	
Expectation of Marketing Management Changes; The quality of drinks (hot and cold)			.847

		.886
Expectation of Marketing Management Changes; The prices		.886
Expectation of Marketing Management Changes; The service level		.875

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in four iterations.

Table 7: Study 2: Principal Component Analysis

Component	Response to Brand Change	Psychological Reactance	Self-Brand Connection	Marketing Management Changes
Response to Brand Change	1.000			
Psychological Reactance	.025	1.000		
Self-Brand Connection	-.072	-.164**	1.000	
Marketing Management Changes	-.100	.103	-.083	1.000

*$p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 8: Study 2: Component Correlation Matrix

Regression Assumptions

I checked the degree to which the measured independent and dependent variables met general assumptions for parametric statistical test, such as normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

Descriptive analysis is summarized in Table 9. Skewness and kurtosis for all the variables were within the normally accepted cut-offs ($|1.00|$). The standard errors were .17 for skewness and .34 for kurtosis. However, inspection of the histograms revealed that the variables self-brand connection and expectations of marketing management changes were somewhat skewed. A relatively large proportion of the respondents did not feel a connection to Starbucks. This is not surprising as few brands manage to build strong bonds with the general population. Still, the normal Q-Q plots formed a reasonably straight line for all the variables, and there was no evident clustering of points in the detrended normal Q-Q plots. Thus, the distributions of the variables were considered acceptable, given the inherent robustness in linear regression.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-Brand Connection	206	.00	100.00	27.76	25.35	.83	-.07
Psychological Reactance	206	.15	91.15	49.05	17.64	-.10	.20
Expectation of Marketing Management Changes	206	.00	100.00	28.51	24.43	.67	-.52
Response to Brand Change	206	.00	100.00	44.92	21.12	.11	.04

Table 9: Study 2: Descriptive Statistics

Visual inspections of plots between the measured independent variable (self-brand connection) and response to brand change indicated an acceptable linear relationship. Scatterplots of the residuals (*ZRESID against *ZPRED) did not show patterns of heteroscedasticity. The tolerance and VIF test of the regression model did not indicate any multicollinearity problems. Thus, the data were considered suitable for running parametric tests.

3.3.4 Results

The manipulation of the experimental conditions worked as intended. Participants in the stable associations condition perceived less change in brand image than those in the new associations condition ($M_{\text{stable association}}$ = 32.2 vs. $M_{\text{new associations}}$ = 66.7, F (1, 204) = 92.4, $p < .01$).

The key prediction was that the degree of self-brand connection would moderate consumer response to change in brand image. The moderation was expected to be such that the higher the degree of felt self-brand connection, the more negatively consumers would respond to new associations being incorporated into brand image. To test this prediction, I regressed the experimental conditions (stable associations = 0 and new associations = 1), self-brand connection, and their interaction on response to brand change.

As predicted, the results showed a significant interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection on response to brand change ($b = - .42$, $t(202) = - 3.67$, $p < .01$) (Figure 3). The result was also significant when including chronic reactance ($p = .49$) and expectations of marketing management changes ($b = - .12$, $t(200) = - 2.05$, $p < .05$) as covariates ($b = - .42$, $t(200) = - 3.65$, $p < .01$). I also conducted an analysis with chronic reactance and expectations of marketing management changes as factors to test whether they interacted with the stable associations / new associations manipulation. The results show that neither chronic reactance ($p = .88$) nor expectations of marketing management changes ($p = .13$) interacted with the brand image change manipulation.
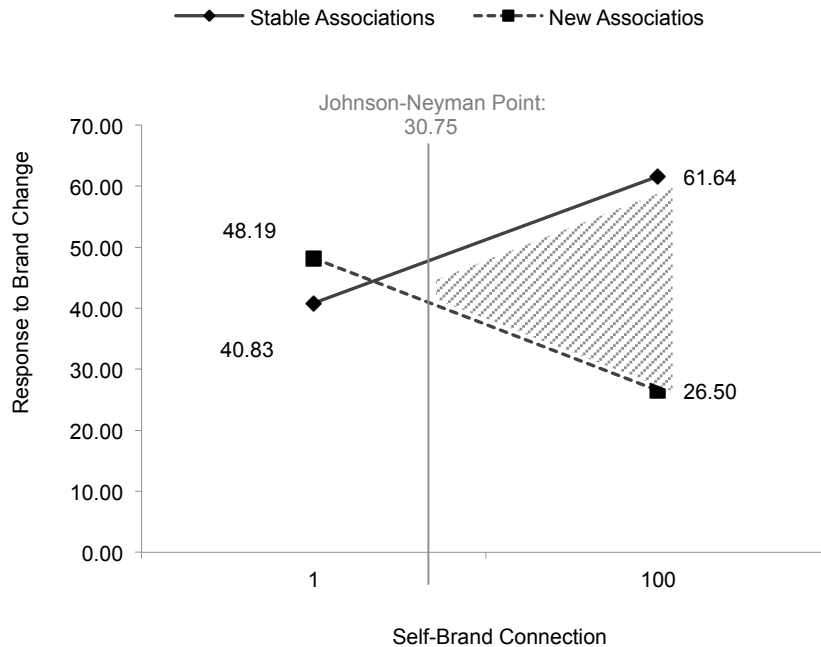
Figure 3: Study 2: Interaction

To explore the interaction between the experimental conditions and self-brand connection, I tested the simple slopes of self-brand connection within the two experimental conditions (stable associations vs. new associations) (Aiken and West 1991; Fitzsimons 2008). As hypothesized (H1A), the analysis showed that the simple slope of self-brand connection was decreasing in the new associations condition ($b = -.22$, $t(202) = -2.42$, $p = .02$). Thus, again the results indicate that the higher the brand connection, the more negatively participants react to acquisitions that incorporate new associations into brand image. In the stable associations condition, the simple slope of self-brand connection was increasing ($b = .21$, $t(202) = 2.84$, $p < .01$).

I used the Johnson-Neyman technique for the critical test of the contrasts between the experimental conditions (stable associations vs. new associations) at different degrees of self-brand connection (Spiller et al. 2013). The analysis revealed that there was a significant negative effect of the experimental conditions when self-brand connection was equal to or higher than 30.75 on a 0-100 scale ($b_{JN} = -5.71$, $t(202) = -1.97$, $p = .05$), but not when self-brand connection was less than 30.75. Hence, the results indicate that at high degrees of self-brand connection (>30.75) consumers

respond significantly more negatively to changes that incorporate new associations in brand image compared to when associations remain stable.

Together, the findings show that participants who felt high (versus low) degrees of self-brand connection responded more negatively when the acquisition led to new associations being incorporated into brand image. Accordingly, the results replicate Study 1, also when using a different target brand and controlling for alternative explanations (psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes), and support Hypothesis 1A.

3.3.5 Discussion

Study 2 replicates the findings from Study 1 by demonstrating that the stronger connection consumers feel toward the target brand, the more negatively they react to changes that incorporate new associations into brand image. Furthermore, the results show that neither expectations of marketing management changes nor chronic psychological reactance explain the effects, which lends little support to these alternative accounts.

In the first two studies, I used predefined, well-known brands (Nike and Starbucks) and measured participants' self-brand connections. To increase causal interpretability and external validity, I manipulated low and high self-brand connection and let participants select the focal brand individually in Study 3. Furthermore, the manipulations in Studies 1 and 2 suggest the changes in brand image will help the brand reach new customer segments. Thus, the results could be due to customers who are high in self-brand connection not wanting the brand to expand and reach new customers, rather than through brand image changes per se. To rule this out as an alternative explanation, the scenario used in Study 3 (as well as Studies 4, and 5) does not include any expansion or targeting of new customer segments. Study 3 also applied a different type of image change scenario (repositioning) to help generalize the findings regarding identity changes beyond those due to brand acquisitions. To address Hypothesis 1B, Study 3 also included change in the brand's ability to serve as an identity marker (identity contribution) as a process measure.

3.4 Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 was to replicate and build confidence in the effects found in the two first studies by using idiosyncratic brands and a different type of scenario manipulating brand image change. Study 3 was also designed to test the proposed process (identity contribution) directly.

3.4.1   Procedure

I conducted a single-factor (low vs. high self-brand connection) experiment with a brand-repositioning scenario on a Web panel with American respondents. First, low versus high self-brand connection was manipulated by randomly exposing participants to one of the following instructions:

Low self-brand connection:

Can you think of any brands you use regularly without them being particularly "like you"? That is, brands you like and use that do not symbolize your identity; do not represent who you are or who you want to become?

Please think of brands you are satisfied using without feeling any strong personal connection to them. Now, pick the one you feel fits this description best and enter its name on the next page.

High self-brand connection:

Do you have any favorite brands you feel a special connection to because they are "like you are"? That is, brands that symbolize your identity; represent who you are or who you want to become?

Please think of brands you really like and feel a strong connection to because they fit your identity perfectly. Now, pick the one brand you feel the strongest connection to and enter its name on the next page.

The individual brand name participants entered was automatically linked to the rest of the survey and used as the target brand for that particular participant.

Next, participants answered scales about brand attitude, self-brand connection, and personality of "their brand," as well as two other filler brands. The three least descriptive personality traits reported when evaluating "their brand" was automatically linked to the change scenario later in the survey. Participants also answered filler scales and the two attention filters that were used in Study 2. The instructional manipulation filter (Oppenheimer et al., 2009) directly preceded the change scenario. All

participants read the same scenario about the repositioning of "their" brand. The brand name and the three least descriptive personality traits (as selected by the participant when evaluating the brand) were automatically embedded into the scenario:

> *Imagine the news reports relating to the decision by the management of (brand name) to change the brand.*

> *Management says they will change the (brand name) brand to portray an image as more (least descriptive personality trait 1), (least descriptive personality trait 2), and (least descriptive personality trait 3). "Our existing customers will experience a considerable difference in the (brand name) brand, including changes in the type of products/services offered, how (brand name) will be portrayed in advertising, the design and visual profile, and other marketing activities. The goal is to create a new brand image for (brand name)," the management says.*

Participants answered scales with the process measure (identity contribution, meaning the brand's efficacy as an identity marker after the repositioning), and the same dependent measures as in Study 2. Finally, participants filled in demographic information and were debriefed.

3.4.2   Measurements

Initial brand attitude and self-brand connection were measured with the same questions as in the previous studies. For brand personality, participants selected the three most descriptive and three least descriptive traits for "their brand" based on the full list of Aaker's (1997) 42 brand personality traits. The three least descriptive traits were automatically embedded into the repositioning scenario.

Attitude to repositioning was measured by *"What is your immediate reaction to the announced changes in (brand name)'s image"* with three items anchored "Bad/Good," "Negative/Positive," and "Unfavorable/Favorable" on a 0-100 sliding scale.

Change in attitude after the repositioning was measured with "To what extent would the changes in brand image change your impression of (brand name) to be...?" with three items anchored "Worse/Better," "Less positive/More positive," and "Less favorable/More favorable" (0-100 sliding scale). Change in self-brand connection was measured with "To what extent would the changes in brand image change the degree of connection you feel

toward (brand name)?" with three items anchored "Weaken/Strengthen," "Decrease/"Increase," and "Reduce/Add to" (0-100 sliding scale).

The brand's identity contribution was measured with four items: "(Brand name) will no longer fit me as well as it did before," "(Brand name) will become less 'like me'," "How (brand name) communicates who you are to others will change," and "(Brand name) will no longer have the same meaning to me." These items were anchored "Disagree/Agree" on a 0-100 sliding scale.

For the manipulation check, I measured perceived change in brand image with three items: "To what extent do you think the acquisition will… "change the image of (brand name)," "change the way other people see (brand name)," and "change your impression of (brand name)" on a 0-100 sliding scale from "Not at all" to "Completely."

3.4.3   Data Preparation and Preliminary Tests

One hundred and fifty-two participants completed the study. After removing participants who failed to respond correctly to the attention filters (22 participants (14.5%) failed both or one of the two attention filters), the final sample size was 130 participants (M_{age} = 35.01; 55.4% females).

Principal Component Analysis and Scale Reliability Checks

Principal component analysis (oblimin rotation) of the items used to measure the independent and dependent variables (attitude toward the repositioning, change in brand attitude, change in self-brand connection, initial brand attitude, and identity contribution) showed a three-component structure. In the initial solution two of the items used to measure identity contribution ("(Brand) will no longer fit me as well as it did before" and "(Brand) will become less 'like me'") cross-loaded on two components. To improve divergent validity, I omitted these two variables from further analysis. Principal component analysis with the remaining items also produced a three-component solution but without cross-loadings (Table 10, loadings < .3 are suppressed).

As in Study 2, the items used to measure attitude toward the repositioning, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection converged in one common component, while the items measuring initial brand attitude and the brand's identity contribution formed two distinct components.

The results showed satisfactory convergent (loadings > .5) and divergent (cross-loadings < .3) validity. The correlations between the

components were at low to moderate levels and the reliability was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha / Spearman-Brown prediction was .59 or higher). In total, the three factors accounted for 90.8 percent of the variance in the items. Hence, I calculated the variables response to brand change (a composite variable consisting of the items used to measure attitude toward the repositioning, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection), brand attitude, and identity contribution.

Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix)

Component	Response to Brand Change	Brand Attitude	Identity Contribution
Eigenvalue	9.33	2.15	1.23
Variance Explained (total: 90.8 %)	66.67%	15.36%	8.78%
Cronbach's alpha / Spearman-Brown prediction	.99	.94	.59
Attitude toward the repositioning; Bad - Good	.945		
Attitude toward the repositioning; Negative - Positive	.932		
Attitude toward the repositioning; Unfavorable - Favorable	.938		
Change in Brand Attitude; Worse - Better	.945		
Change in Brand Attitude; More negatively - More positively	.948		
Change in Brand Attitude; More unfavorably - More favorably	.960		
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Weaken - Strengthen your feeling of connection?	.947		
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Decrease - Increase feeling of connection?	.963		
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Reduce - Add to your feeling of connection?	.966		
Attitude toward (Brand); Bad - Good		.924	
Attitude toward (Brand); Negative - Positive		.945	
Attitude toward (Brand); Unfavorable - Favorable		.950	

How (Brand) communicates who you are to others will change (reversed)	.971
(Brand) will no longer have the same meaning to me (reversed)	.852

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in five iterations.

Table 10: Study 3: Principal Component Analysis

Component	Response to Brand Change	Brand Attitude	Identity Contribution
Response to Brand Change	1.00		
Brand Attitude	-.40**	1.00	
Identity Contribution	.45**	.13	1.00

*$p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 11: Study 3: Component Correlation Matrix

ANOVA Assumptions

I checked the degree to which the measured independent and dependent variables met general assumptions for ANOVA, such as normal distribution of variables, homogeneity of variance, and independence of observations.

Table 12 shows descriptive statistics for the variables included in the analysis. The variables response to brand change and identity contribution were both normally distributed. Initial brand attitude was skewed and kurtotic. This was as expected, since participants were instructed to select a brand they liked. The non-normality of brand attitude is not considered crucial for the hypothesis tests. Initial brand attitude is only included to control for differences between the experiential conditions, and not as an explanatory variable in the analysis, and results will be reported both with and without controlling for brand attitude. The standard errors were .21 for skewness and .42 for kurtosis.

Levene's test of equality of the error variances was not significant, indicating homogeneity of variance. In order to obtain independence of the

observations, participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Attitude	130	3.00	100.00	84.24	16.40	-1.90	4.73
Identity Contribution	130	.00	100.00	42.83	29.68	.36	-.83
Response to Brand Change	130	.00	100.00	33.32	24.48	.59	-.20

Table 12: Study 3: Descriptive Statistics

3.4.4 Results

Based on the instructions (low vs. high self-brand connection manipulation), participants listed a host of brands from several different categories, including Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Dove, Victoria's Secret, Tide, Nike, Reebok, Toyota, Ralph Lauren, Apple, Microsoft, Mountain Dew, McDonalds, Levi's, Kraft, Google, and many more. Several brands appeared in both the low and high self-brand connection conditions, across participants.

ANOVA showed that the manipulation of low and high self-brand connection worked as intended ($M_{\text{Low SBC}}$ = 38.14 vs. $M_{\text{High SBC}}$ = 68.14, $F(1, 128)$ = 74.43, $p < .01$). Brand attitude was favorable in both conditions but significantly higher in the high self-brand connection condition ($M_{\text{Low SBC}}$ = 79.05 vs. $M_{\text{High SBC}}$ = 88.96, $F(1, 128)$ = 12.94, $p < .01$). Hence, initial brand attitude was included as a covariate in the subsequent analysis.

Next, I ran ANCOVA, with the experimental condition as the independent variable, initial brand attitude as a covariate, and response to brand change as the dependent variable. As expected, the results showed differences in response to the brand image change ($M_{\text{Low SBC}}$ = 41.41 vs. $M_{\text{High SBC}}$ = 25.95, $F(2, 127)$ = 6.31, $p < .02$). The difference was also significant without brand attitude as covariate ($F(1, 128)$ = 14.25, $p < .01$). The result is illustrated in Figure 4. This result again supports Hypothesis 1A and further builds confidence in the proposition that degree of self-brand connection negatively influences response to changes that incorporate new association in brand image.
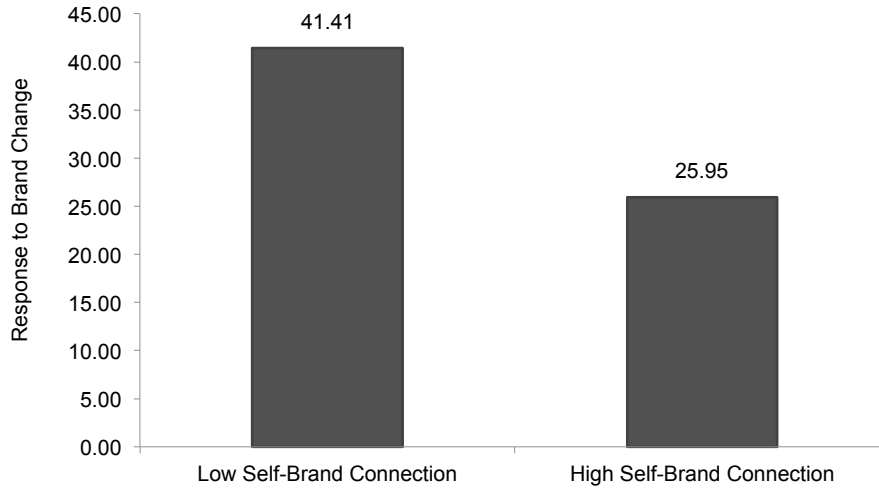
Figure 4: Study 3: Main Effect

To test Hypothesis 1B, I included identity contribution as a mediating variable. The prediction was that the higher degree of self-brand connection, the more participants perceive that a change in brand image decreases the brand's identity contribution. Further, I posit that identity contribution has a positive effect on response to brand change, such that decreased identity contribution would have a negative impact on response to brand change (Hypothesis 1B).

I used Hayes' (2013) indirect script for bootstrapping (Model 4) with 5,000 resamples for the mediation analysis. The results are illustrated in Figure 5. The analysis showed that self-brand connection had a negative effect on identity contribution (a path: $b = -19.13$, $t(127) = -3.70$, $p < .01$). In turn, identity contribution had a positive effect on response to brand change (b path: $b = .31$, $t(126) = 4.58$, $p < .01$). The indirect effect of self-brand connection through identity contribution was significant (ab path: $b = -6.01$ percent confidence interval excluding zero: -11.23 to -2.44). The direct effect of self-brand connection was not significant when identity contribution was included as a mediator (c' path: $b = -5.11$, $t(126) = -1.21$, $p = .23$). The results suggest an indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010), which is consistent with full mediation in Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure, and, thus, supports Hypothesis 1B.
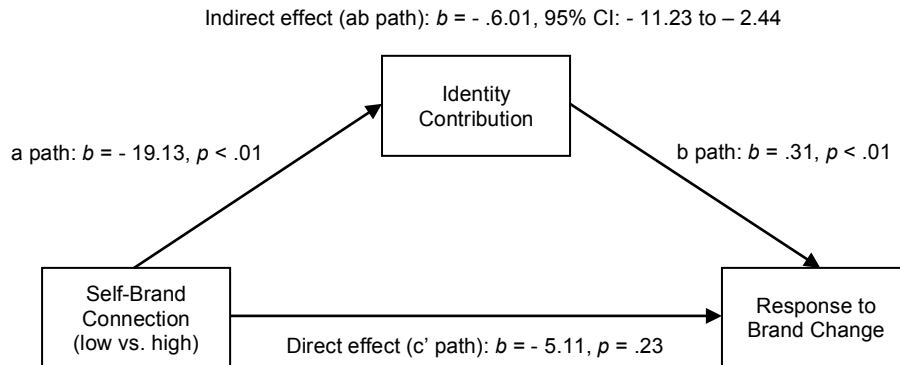
66

Indirect effect (ab path): *b* = - .6.01, 95% CI: - 11.23 to – 2.44

```
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │    Identity     │
                        │  Contribution   │
                        └─────────────────┘
      a path: b = - 19.13, p < .01        b path: b = .31, p < .01

┌─────────────────┐                            ┌─────────────────┐
│   Self-Brand    │                            │  Response to    │
│   Connection    │───────────────────────────▶│  Brand Change   │
│  (low vs. high) │  Direct effect (c' path):  │                 │
└─────────────────┘   b = - 5.11, p = .23      └─────────────────┘
```

Figure 5: Study 3: Mediation – Identity Contribution

3.4.5   Discussion

Study 3 replicates the finding that consumers who have incorporated a brand into their self-concept, respond negatively to changes in brand image and reduce their feelings of connection to the brand. In Study 3, I manipulated, rather than measured, self-brand connection. This study also directly tests Hypothesis 1B. That is, whether a decrease in the brand's identity contribution is the underlying mechanism causing the effects. The results supported a model where the brand's identity contribution mediated the effect of low versus high self-brand connection on response to brand change. Those participants who were highly connected to the brand reported a decrease in how well the brand helped construct and signal their selves. Thus, they responded negatively and decreased their evaluation of, and felt connection to, the brand. The results support Hypothesis 1B.

By applying a repositioning scenario, Study 3 extends the two previous studies and demonstrates that the effects are not specific to brand acquisitions; rather, the results are related to changes in brand image. Study 3 also demonstrates that idiosyncratic brand characteristics do not account for the results, rather, the effects cross a host of different brands. These findings suggest that identity and brand connection are central factors in explaining the results.

Together, the results from Studies 1-3 support Hypotheses 1A and 1B. The results show that high degree self-brand connection consumers respond negatively to new associations being incorporated into brand image, even though the changes are positively valenced. Although the associations are positive in and of themselves, they represent a change in the existing

brand image. Hence, those who identify strongly with the current brand associations and deploy the brand in their identity projects respond negatively to such changes as the match between the self and brand image decreases. Thus, incorporation of new brand associations decreases the brand's efficacy as an identity signal.

Based on these insights, I posit that because highly connected consumers value and connect with the current brand image, they will perceive all changes away from this image negatively. That is, I predict that consumers feeling high degrees of self-brand connection respond negatively, not only to changes that lead to new brand associations being incorporated in the brand image, but also to changes that reinforce existing associations such that the brand becomes "more of what it already is." High degree self-brand connection consumers have incorporated the current brand image as part of their selves. If brand image changes, an important identity marker, almost a part of who they are, changes. There is some evidence that people are more reluctant to enhance existing personal traits believed to be more fundamental to their self-concept than they are for traits considered less fundamental to their self-concept (Riis, Simmons, & Goodwin, 2008). Presumably, people do not want to change, even for the better, if it involves changing their fundamental selves.

Therefore, I expect that high degree self-brand connection consumers could react negatively to all deviations from the existing brand image, including changes that reinforce existing brand associations, as the brand is fundamental to identity. Consumers feeling low degrees of self-brand connections, however, will be indifferent, or even respond positively, to reinforcement of existing associations, as the brand is not fundamental to identity. However, I speculate that consumers' reactions to such brand image change depend on what part of the self the brand is related to, and hence the motivations underlying the brand connection. More precisely, I argue that the response to reinforcement of existing brand associations is contingent on whether consumers feel connections to the brand because it matches their ideals and aspirations (ideal self-brand connection based on self-enhancement motives) or because the brand matches who they are (actual self-brand connection based on self-verification motives).

For consumers deploying the brand in a self-enhancing manner, changes that reinforce existing brand associations increase the brand's ability to signal an ideal identity. Such changes make the brand become even more strongly associated with the aspirational identity and, thus, the brand's efficacy as an identity marker increases in self-enhancement projects. For consumers deploying the brand in self-verification projects, however, changes in brand image (both those changes incorporating new associations and those changes reinforcing existing associations) reduce the actual self-

brand congruence. Changes in brand image make the brand less like the consumer's actual self and, thus, decrease the brand's efficacy as an identity marker in self-verification projects. Study 4 investigates these propositions, previously stated formally in Hypothesis 2A-B and Hypothesis 3 A-B.

3.5   Study 4

The purpose of Study 4 was to investigate the effects of ideal self-brand connection (i.e., brand connections based on self-enhancement motives) and actual self-brand connection (i.e., brand connections based on self-verification motives) on consumers' reactions to changes that reinforce the existing brand image.

3.5.1   Procedure

Based on the pretest described in Study 1, I chose Nike as the target brand. I conducted a survey on a Web panel with American respondents. First, participants answered scales measuring brand attitude, actual and ideal self-brand connection, and brand personality of Nike. After some unrelated filler tasks, including the instructional manipulation attention filter, participants read a hypothetical scenario about the reinforcement of Nike's brand image:

> *Imagine that the news report states that the management of Nike has decided to reposition and change Nike's brand. That is, the company has decided to change the image and values Nike represents. This does not include changing the types of products or the general quality, but how Nike is portrayed (i.e., the values and image Nike communicates – the personality of Nike).*

Then, the participants rated their attitudes to change in each of the different brand personality traits they evaluated in the first part of the survey, filled in demographic information, and finally were debriefed.

3.5.2   Measurements

Brand attitude was measured with three items "Bad/Good," "Negative/Positive," and "Unfavorable/Favorable" on 0-100 sliding scales based on Haugtvedt & Petty (1992).

69

I adapted the measures and procedure from Malär et al. (2011) for actual and ideal self-brand connection and designed a two-step approach. First, I instructed the participants to think about the personality of Nike; to think about Nike as if it were a person and to think of human characteristics they associated with the brand. Then, I instructed participants to think about their own personality and their actual self, before they indicated the extent to which they felt congruity between Nike and their actual self ("The personality of Nike is consistent with how I see myself (my actual self)" and "The personality of Nike is a mirror image of me (my actual self)" on a 0-100 sliding scale, where 0 = "Disagree" and 100 = "Agree").

Next, participants completed the same exercise, but thought about their ideal self, how they ideally would like to be, and then the felt congruence with the personality of the Nike brand and their ideal self ("The personality of Nike is consistent with how I ideally would like to be (my ideal self)" and "The personality of Nike is a mirror image of the person I ideally would like to be (my ideal self)" on a 0-100 sliding scale, where 0 = "Disagree" and 100 = "Agree"

In the first part of the survey, participants evaluated the personality of Nike by assessing the descriptiveness of several traits adapted from Aaker's (1997) dimensions of brand personality (1-7 scale, 1 = "Not at all descriptive" and 7 = "Extremely descriptive"). The results revealed that Nike was most strongly associated with the traits "successful" ($M = 6.1$), "leader" ($M = 5.9$), "winner" ($M = 5.8$), "confident" ($M = 5.8$), and "up-to-date" ($M = 5.8$). Therefore, I calculated an overall, averaged index of the attitude to change in these five associations ("How would you respond if you learned that Nike decided to change the brand personality from what it is today to become much more…" on a 0-100 sliding scale, where 0 = "Negative" and 100 = "Positive") as the dependent variable.

3.5.3   Data Preparation and Preliminary Tests

Two hundred participants completed the survey. Since the data were collected online, I included the instructional manipulation procedure developed by Oppenheimer et al. (2009). Twenty-eight participants (14%) failed the attention filter and, thus, the final sample size was 172 participants ($M_{age} = 35.1$; 56% females).

Component Analysis and Scale Reliability Checks

I ran principal component analysis (oblimin rotation) with the items used to measure ideal and actual self-brand connection (independent variables) and attitude toward reinforcement of existing associations

(dependent variable). The items "leader" and "confident" were omitted from the principal component analysis due to high cross-loadings. The results of the regressions did not change whether these items were included or excluded from the dependent variable. The final component solution with the remaining items is reported in Table 13.

Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix)

Component	Ideal SBC	Attitude toward Reinforcement of Existing Assoc.	Actual SBC
Eigenvalue	3.44	2.32	.48
Variance Explained (total: 89.23 %)	49.20 %	33.15 %	6.90 %
Cronbach's alpha / Spearman-Brown prediction	.93	.88	.96
The personality of NIKE is consistent with how I IDEALLY would like to be (my ideal self)	.94		
The personality of NIKE is a mirror image of the person I IDEALLY would like to be (my ideal self)	.97		
The personality of NIKE is consistent with how I see myself (my actual self)			.96
The personality of NIKE is a mirror image of me (my actual self)			.82
Up-to-date		.83	
Winner		.93	
Successful		.92	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in five iterations.

Table 13: Study 4: Principal Component Analysis

Initially, the principal component analysis only converged into two components based on Kaiser's criterion (i.e., eigenvalue > 1, Kaiser, 1960). However, Jolliffe (1972; 1986) argue for more flexible extraction of components and recommends eigenvalue > .7 as a general criterion when using principal component analysis. Increasing the number of components decreases parsimony but naturally increases the variance explained. In

addition, the number of components extracted should not only be based on statistical rules of thumb but the variables' psychological meaningfulness (face validity) and managerial meaningfulness should also be considered (Rust, Lemon, & Zeithaml, 2004). Extracting three components, allowing an eigenvalue of .48 for the third component, gave a solution consistent with expectations and provided the variables necessary to test the hypotheses. The correlations between the components were at low to moderate levels (Table 14). And, as the results will show, the two variables actual self-brand connection and ideal-self brand connection influence the dependent variable differently. Thus, including a third component is warranted given the objective of testing the subtle differences and interplay between actual and ideal self-brand connection, which can be considered two facets of general self-brand connection, on the dependent variable.

In the three-component solution, the results showed satisfactory convergent (loadings > .5) and divergent (cross-loadings < .3) validity. In total, the three components accounted for 89.23 percent of the variance in the items. Hence, I calculated the variables actual self-brand connection, ideal self-brand connection, and attitude toward reinforcement of existing associations.

Component	Ideal SBC	Attitude toward Reinforcement of Existing Assoc.	Actual SBC
Ideal SBC	1.00		
Attitude toward Reinforcement of Existing Assoc.	.174**	1.00	
Actual SBC	.677***	.017	1.00

*$p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 14: Study 4: Component Correlation Matrix

Regression Assumptions

I checked the degree to which the measured independent and dependent variables met general assumptions for parametric statistical test, such as normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

Table 15 shows the descriptive statistics. The variables actual self-brand connection and ideal-self brand connection were both somewhat

kurtotic. The standard errors were .18 for skewness and .37 for kurtosis. Inspection of the histograms showed that the high kurtosis score was due to several participants not feeling a connection to the target brand. This is not surprising, given the use of a predefined brand. Although a cluster of participants reported low degrees of brand connection (ideal and/or actual), the histogram showed a reasonable normal distribution (thus the low skewness statistics). Also, the normal Q-Q plots formed reasonably straight lines for all the variables, and there was no evident clustering of points in the detrended normal Q-Q plots. Naturally, there was a correlation between actual and ideal self-brand connection ($r = .68$) but the multicollinearity statistics were acceptable (tolerance = 0.46, VIF = 2.19). Therefore, the variables were considered acceptable for regression analysis.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Actual Self-Brand Connection	172	.00	91.00	33.40	26.36	.33	- 1.09
Ideal-Self Brand Connection	172	.00	100.00	42.76	30.89	.04	- 1.22
Attitude toward Reinforcement of Existing Associations	172	2.00	100.00	66.35	19.78	- .37	- .21

Table 15: Study 4: Descriptive Statistics

3.5.4 Results

I conducted regressions with the index of attitude to change in existing brand associations as a dependent measure (successful, winner, and up-to-date), and degree of actual self-brand connection and degree of ideal self-brand connection as independent variables. The results revealed a positive effect of ideal self-brand connection ($b = .22$, $t(169) = 3.15$, $p < .01$, Figure 6) and a negative effect of actual self-brand connection ($b = - .16$, $t(169) = - 1.95$, $p < .05$, Figure 7). The results give initial support for Hypothesis 2A and Hypothesis 3A.
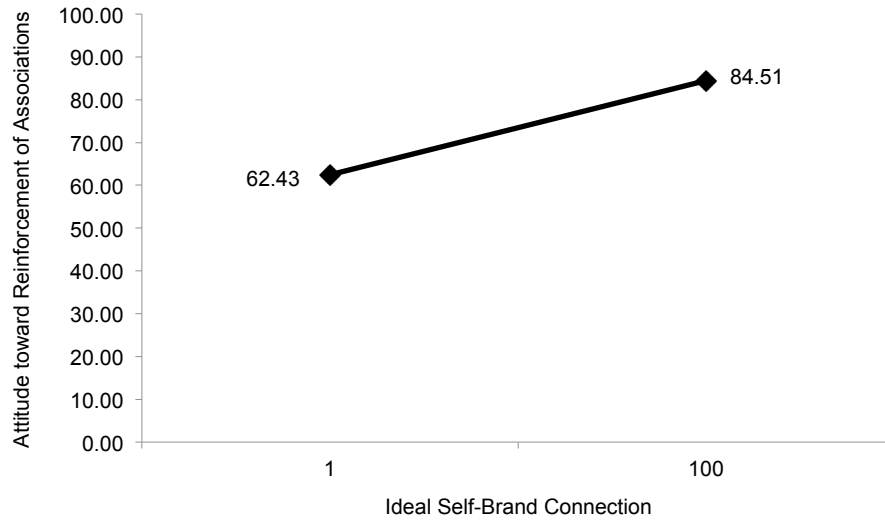
Figure 6: Study 4: Ideal Self-Brand Connection – Attitude toward Reinforcement of Existing Associations
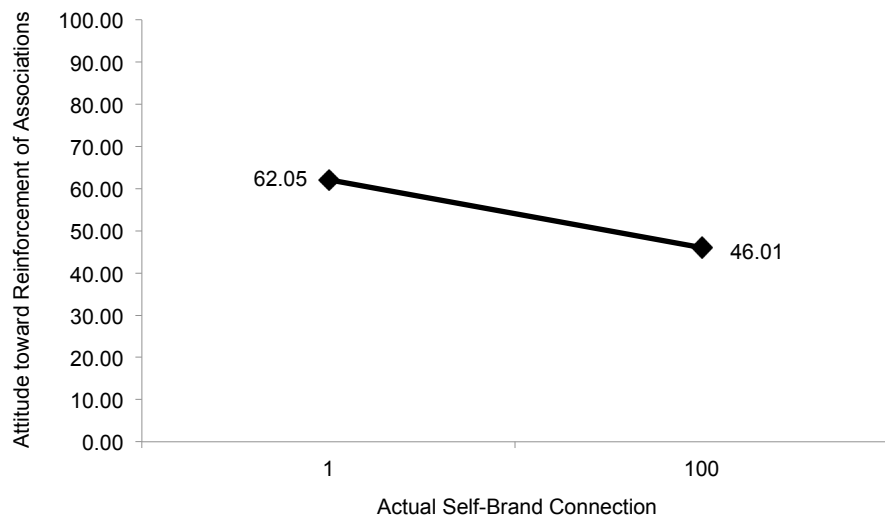

Figure 7: Study 4: Actual Self-Brand Connection – Attitude toward Reinforcement of Existing Associations

3.5.5 Discussion

The results from Study 4 suggest that type of self-brand connection moderates response to managerial actions that reinforce existing brand associations. Consumers who feel a connection primarily between their ideal self and the brand respond positively, while consumers who feel a connection primarily between actual self and the brand respond negatively to changes that reinforce existing brand associations.

I argue that the results are due to two different underlying processes, contingent on whether the motivation for the brand connection is based on self-enhancement or self-verification motives. When brand connection is based on ideal self-brand connection (i.e., self-enhancement motives), reinforcement of existing associations increases the brand's ability to signal an ideal identity, and, thus, the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement increases. However, when brand connection is based on actual self-brand connection (i.e., self-verification motives), changes in brand image reduce felt similarity between the actual self and the brand, such that the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification decreases. The final study was designed to test these proposed processes.

3.6 Study 5

The purpose of Study 5 was to replicate the effects of ideal and actual self-brand connections on consumers' reactions to changes that reinforce the existing brand image across several different brands and to control for alternative explanations (expectations of marketing management changes and psychological reactance). In addition, the objective was also to directly investigate the processes leading to different consumer responses (self-enhancement efficacy and self-verification efficacy).

3.6.1 Procedure

I conducted a single-factor (ideal vs. actual self-brand connection) between-subjects design on a Web panel with American respondents. All participants first read a short explanation of the two different types of brand connections (linked primarily to the ideal self vs. the actual self) and were then asked to come up with two or three examples of brands for each type. The participants were then randomly assigned to either an ideal self-brand connection group or an actual self-brand connection group and asked to write the name of the one brand with which they felt the strongest ideal or actual self-brand connection (according to condition). The brand names

given by the participants were automatically merged into the rest of the questionnaire and used as a target brand idiosyncratic to each participant. To further strengthen the manipulation, participants were asked to briefly describe either what it was about the brand that made it fit "your ideals and aspirations for a future you (ideal self)" or "who you are today (actual self)" according to condition.

Participants answered scales measuring the degree of ideal and actual self-brand connection (both scales for both conditions, counterbalanced) and selected the three associations most descriptive of "their" brand among the list of 42 brand personality traits developed by Aaker (1997). Participants also completed scales measuring initial brand attitude and general self-brand connection and some filler tasks; among these were a measure of chronic psychological reactance.

Next, participants read a scenario about a repositioning that reinforced the existing associations of "their" brand. The scenario was the same for all participants, except for the brand names and associations described as changing; all (name and associations) automatically linked to participants' answers from prior survey questions.

Imagine a news report stating that the management of (brand name) has decided to reposition and change the (brand name) brand.

The management says it will change the (brand name) brand to portray an image even more (personality trait 1, personality trait 2, and personality trait 3) than it already is. "Our existing customers will experience a considerable difference in the (brand name) brand, ranging from changes in how it is portrayed (brand name) in advertising and other communications, the visual profile and design, and other marketing activities. The goal is to create a new, reinforced brand image," says the management.

Having read the scenario, participants answered scales measuring attitude to the change in brand image, change in brand attitude, and change in self-brand connection, as well as participants' expectations of marketing management changes (expectations of changes in quality, price, and service levels). Furthermore, I included two scales independent of condition to investigate the underlying processes. One scale measured the degree to which the changes in brand image changed the self-enhancement efficacy of the brand. That is, how the reinforcement of existing brand associations would influence the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement. The other scale measured the degree to which the changes in brand image

changed the brand's self-verification efficacy. That is, how the reinforcement of existing brand associations would influence the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification. Finally, I collected demographic information and debriefed participants.

3.6.2 *Measurements*

Initial brand attitude and general self-brand connection was measured similarly as in Study 1, except that the current study applied 0-100 sliding scales. Chronic psychological reactance was measured with Hong and Faedda's (1996) scale (14 items, such as "I resist the attempts of others to influence me" and "I become angry when my freedom of choice is restricted" on 0-100 sliding scales) as in Study 3.

Attitude to the repositioning was measured with three 0-100 semantic differential sliding scales labeled "bad/good," "negative/positive," "unfavorable/favorable." Change in brand attitude and change in self-brand connection directly measured how the repositioning would change participants' brand attitudes and self-brand connections (e.g., "To what extent does the changes in brand image change your impression of (brand name) to be…" with three items anchored "Worse/Better," "Less positive/More positive," and "Less favorable/More favorable").

Participants' expectations of marketing management changes were measured with three items ("To what extent do you think the changes will affect the following at (brand name)…? the quality, the prices, and the service levels" with 0-100 sliding bars anchored "Not at all" and "Completely").

The target brand's self-enhancement efficacy (the degree to which the changes in brand image changed the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement) was measured with the items ("The changes will make (brand name) become more the way I like it," "The changes will make (brand name) fit my ideal even more than it did before," and "As I see it, (brand name) can never be too much (personality traits)"). The target brand's self-verification efficacy (the degree to which the changes in brand image changed the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification) was measured with three items ("If (brand name) changes, it will no longer not fit me as well as it did before," "Any changes make (brand name) become less "like me," and "I like (brand name) the way it is today and do not want it to change"). I recoded the scale to facilitate the interpretation of the results.

3.6.3 Data Preparation and Preliminary Tests

Two hundred and fifty participants completed the study. Since the data were collected online, I included two attention filters. One filter was the instructional manipulation procedure developed by Oppenheimer et al. (2009), and the other was a "blue dot" inspired question ("On this particular question, do not give any answer, simply continue with the next question"). Forty-three participants (17.2%) failed to respond correctly to at least one of the two attention filters, which resulted in a final sample size of 207 participants (M_{age} = 33.3; 59% females).

Principal Component Analysis and Scale Reliability Checks

I ran principal component analysis (oblimin rotation) with the items used to measure the mediators and the dependent variable (the independent variable was manipulated and dichotomous). One item ("As I see it, (brand) can never be too much (three most descriptive traits)) was omitted from the component analysis due to cross-loadings. The results of the regressions did not change whether this item were included or excluded from the self-enhancement efficacy variable. The final component solution with the remaining items is reported in Table 16.

Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix)

Component	Response to Brand Change	Self-Verification Efficacy	Self-Enhancement Efficacy
Eigenvalue	10.01	1.28	.66
Variance Explained (total: 85.35 %)	71.50 %	9.15 %	4.70 %
Cronbach's alpha / Spearman-Brown pred.	.98	.83	.94
Attitude toward the repositioning; Bad - Good	.735		
Attitude toward the repositioning; Negative - Positive	.740		
Attitude toward the repositioning; Unfavorable - Favorable	.665		
Change in Brand Attitude; Worse - Better	.915		
Change in Brand Attitude; More negatively - More positively	.891		
Change in Brand Attitude; More unfavorably - More favorably	.914		
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Weaken - Strengthen your feeling of connection?	.984		
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Decrease - Increase feeling of connection?	.979		
Change in Self-Brand Connection; Reduce - Add to your feeling of connection?	.988		
If (brand) changes, it will no longer not fit me as well as it did before		.857	
Any changes make (brand) become less "like me"		.899	
I like (brand) the way it is and do not want it to change		.755	
The changes will make (brand) become more the way I like it			-.769
The changes will make (brand) fit my ideal even more than it did before			-.758

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in six iterations.

Table 16: Study 5: Principal Component Analysis

The analysis converged into two components with eigenvalues above one. However, extracting three components, allowing an eigenvalue of .66 for the third component, gave a solution that allowed a test of the hypotheses. The eigenvalue of component three is considered acceptable based on Jolliffe's (1972, 1986) criterion for principal component analysis. Also, as argued earlier, the number of components included in the model should be guided by psychological meaningfulness and analytical usefulness, not merely eigenvalue (Rust at al., 2004). The correlations between the components were between moderate and low levels (Table 17). Therefore, a three-component solution was applied for the further analyses.

In the three-component solution, the results showed satisfactory convergent (loadings > .5) and divergent (cross-loadings < .3) validity. In total, the three factors accounted for 85.35 percent of the variance in the items. Hence, I calculated the variables self-verification efficacy, self-enhancement efficacy, and response to brand change (reinforcement).

Component	Response to Brand Change	Self-Verification Efficacy	Self-Enhancement Efficacy
Response to Brand Change	1.00		
Self-Verification Efficacy	- .584***	1.000	.323
Self-Enhancement Efficacy	- .610***	.323***	1.000

$* p < .1, ** p < .05, *** p < .01$

Table 17: Study 5: Component Correlation Matrix

Regression Assumptions

I checked the degree to which the measured independent and dependent variables met general assumptions for parametric statistical test, such as normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

As shown in Table 18, descriptive analysis showed that the variables were satisfactorily normally distributed. Skewness and kurtosis for all the variables were below the normally accepted cut-off ($|1.00|$). The standard errors were - .17 for skewness and .34 for kurtosis. Inspection of the histograms showed a reasonable normal distribution of the data. The normal Q-Q plots formed a reasonable straight line, and there was no evident clustering of points in the detrended normal Q-Q plots.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-Verification Efficacy	207	.00	100.00	63.85	23.53	-.54	-.28
Self-Enhancement Efficacy	207	.00	100.00	55.45	26.31	-.26	-.44
Response to Brand Change	207	.00	100.00	61.44	22.08	-.14	-.18

Table 18: Study 5: Descriptive Statistics

Inspections of plots between self-verification efficacy and self-enhancement efficacy on response to brand change showed acceptable linear relationships. Scatterplots of the residuals (*ZRESID against *ZPRED) did not show patterns of heteroscedasticity and there was no indication of multicollinearity.

3.6.4 Results

ANOVA showed that participants in the ideal self-brand connection condition felt significantly higher ideal brand connection than those in the actual self-brand connection condition ($M_{ideal\ sbc}$ = 78.40 vs. $M_{actual\ sbc}$ = 63.94, $F(1, 205)$ = 23.68, $p < .01$), and that participants in the actual self-brand connection condition felt higher actual self-brand connection than did those in the ideal self-brand connection condition ($M_{ideal\ sbc}$ = 46.79 vs. $M_{actual\ sbc}$ = 77.20, $F(1, 205)$ = 113.26, $p < .01$). ANOVA with initial overall self-brand connection as the dependent variable showed differences between the two experimental conditions. Participants in the ideal self-brand connection condition felt a significantly lower self-brand connection than did those in the actual self-brand connection condition ($M_{ideal\ sbc}$ = 67.80 vs. $M_{actual\ sbc}$ = 73.80, $F(1, 205)$ = 5.10, $p < .03$). Since the purpose of this study was to investigate how ideal versus actual self-brand connection influenced response to reinforcements of brand image, I included general self-brand connection as a covariate in the subsequent analysis.

ANCOVA showed significant differences between ideal and actual self-brand connection on response to brand change ($M_{ideal\ sbc}$ = 65.60 vs. $M_{actual\ sbc}$ = 57.17, $F(1, 204)$ = 9.44, $p < .01$, Figure 8). As expected, the difference was such that those who felt congruity between their ideal self and the brand responded more positively to the reinforcement of brand image compared to those who felt congruity between their actual self and the

81

brand. The covariate (self-brand connection) had a marginal positive effect ($F(1, 204) = 3.66$, $p = .057$). The difference between conditions was also significant when chronic reactance ($p = .13$) and expectations of marketing management changes ($p < .01$) were included as covariates ($F(3, 202) = 5.34$, $p < .03$). I also conducted an analysis with chronic reactance and expectations of marketing management changes as factors to test whether they interacted with the ideal self-brand connection / actual self-brand connection manipulation. The results showed that neither chronic reactance ($p = .49$) nor expectations of marketing management changes ($p = .37$) interacted with the experimental conditions. Hence, the results do not lend support to the two alternative explanations.
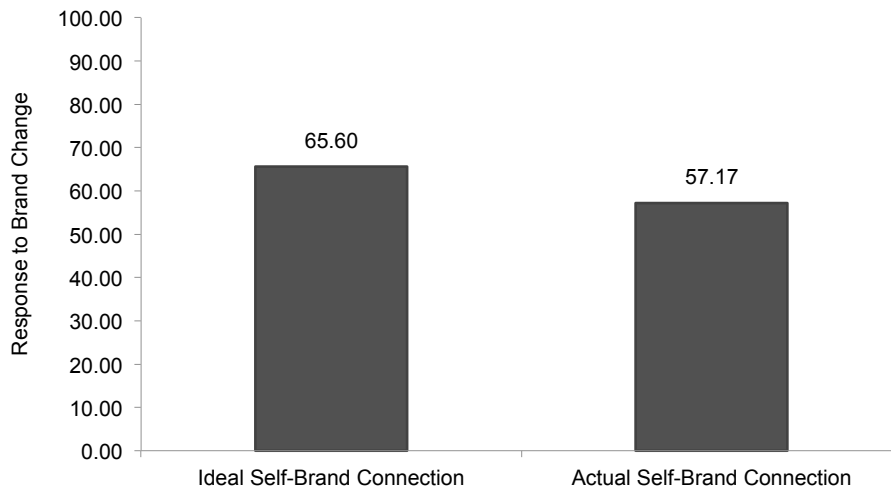
Figure 8: Study 5: Main Effect

To test the proposed processes, I conducted bootstrapping mediation analyses using Hayes' (2013) indirect script (Model 4) with 5,000 resamples. Remember that the predictions were that high degree ideal self-brand connection consumers respond positively to changes that reinforce existing brand associations because such changes increase the brand's self-enhancement efficacy. Furthermore, that consumers feeling high degrees of actual self-brand connection respond negatively to such changes because they decrease the brand's self-verification efficacy. Hence, my specific interest lies in investigating whether different degrees of ideal self-brand connection and actual self-brand connection are mediated through the two

processes, self-enhancement efficacy and self-verification efficacy, and influence response to brand change. Therefore, I conducted two bootstrapping analyses, one with ideal-self brand connection (measured) as the independent variable, and one with actual self-brand connection (measured) as the independent variable. In both cases the analysis included both self-enhancement efficacy and brand self-verification efficacy as two separate mediators, and response to brand change as the dependent variable.[1]

A separate analysis of degree of ideal self-brand connection (Figure 9) showed a positive effect on self-enhancement efficacy (a_2 path: $b = .25$, $t(207) = 3.12$, $p < .01$), while the effect on self-verification efficacy was insignificant (a_1 path: $b = - .08$, $t(207)$, $- 1.16$, $p = .25$). The effects of self-enhancement efficacy (b_2 path: $b = .51$, $t(207) = 13.20$, $p < .01$) and self-verification efficacy (b_1 path: $b = .34$, $t(207) = 8.03$ $p < .01$) on response to brand change were both positive. The bootstrapping showed that the effect of ideal self-brand connection on response to brand change was mediated through self-enhancement efficacy (a_2b_2 path: $b = .13$, 95 percent confidence interval excluding zero: .04 to .22), while the mediation through self-verification efficacy was not significant (a_1b_1 path: $b = - .03$, 95 percent confidence interval including zero: - .08 to .02). The direct effect of ideal self-brand connection on response to brand change was not significant when the mediators were included in the model (c' path: $b = - .01$, $t(207) = - .31$, $p = .75$), indicating indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). The results of interests remained the same also when psychological reactance and expectation of marketing management changes were included as covariates (please see Appendix F for detailed results).

The results indicate that the higher the felt ideal self-brand connection, the more participants perceive that the brand's self-enhancement efficacy increases, and, thus, the more positively they respond to changes that reinforce existing brand associations. The results support Hypothesis 2A and 2B.

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[1] A mediation analysis including the experimental conditions (dichotomos variable) as the focal predictor, self-verification efficacy and self-enhancement efficacy as mediators, and response to brand change as the dependent variable, also showed the expected results (please see Appendix F for detailed results)
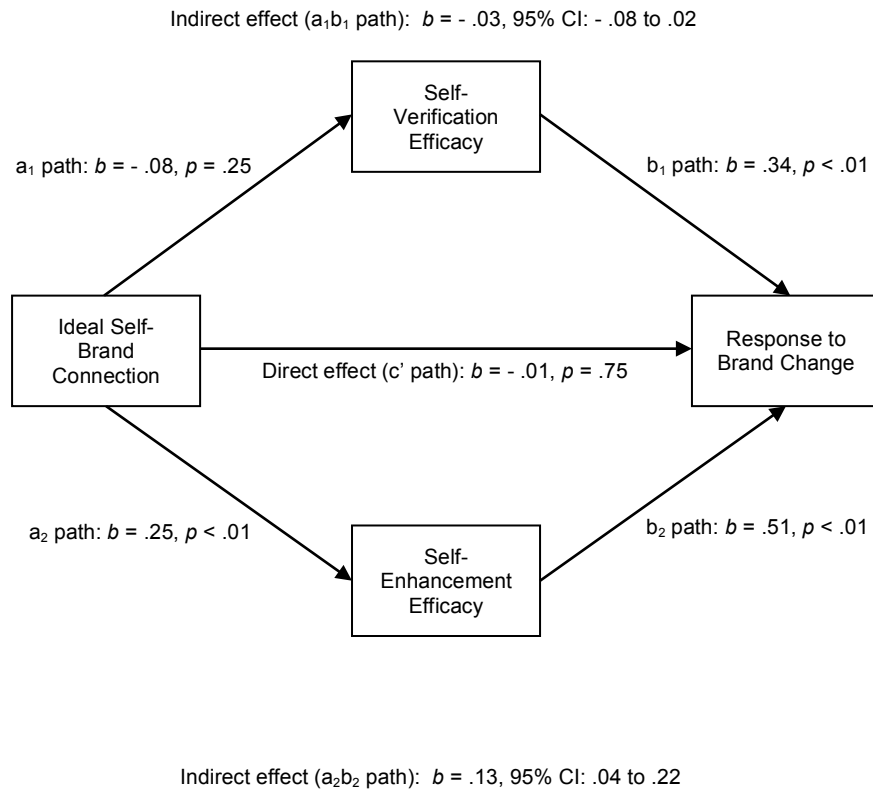
Indirect effect (a_1b_1 path): $b = -.03$, 95% CI: -.08 to .02

Self-
Verification
Efficacy

a_1 path: $b = -.08$, $p = .25$

b_1 path: $b = .34$, $p < .01$

Ideal Self-
Brand
Connection

Direct effect (c' path): $b = -.01$, $p = .75$

Response to
Brand Change

a_2 path: $b = .25$, $p < .01$

Self-
Enhancement
Efficacy

b_2 path: $b = .51$, $p < .01$

Indirect effect (a_2b_2 path): $b = .13$, 95% CI: .04 to .22

Figure 9: Study 5: Mediation – Ideal Self-Brand Connection

As expected, bootstrapping analysis with degree of actual self-brand connection (Figure 10) showed a negative effect on self-verification efficacy (a_1 path: $b = -.25$, $t(207) = -3.99$, $p < .01$), while the effect on self-enhancement efficacy was not significant (a_2 path: $b = -.04$, $t(207) = -.52$, $p = .60$). The effects of self-verification efficacy (b_1 path: $b = .36$, $t(207) = 8.55$ $p < .01$) and self-enhancement efficacy (b_2 path: $b = .50$, $t(207) = 13.52$, $p < .01$) on response to brand change were both positive. Critical to the predictions, the effect of actual self-brand connection on response to brand change was negatively mediated through self-verification efficacy (a_1b_1 path: $b = -.09$, 95 percent confidence interval excluding zero: $-.15$ to $-.04$), while the mediation through self-enhancement efficacy was not significant (a_2b_2 path: $b = -.02$, 95 percent confidence interval including zero: $-.10$ to $.06$). The direct effect of actual self-brand connection on response to brand change was marginally significant when the mediators were included in the model (c' path: $b = .07$, $t(207) = 1.92$, $p = .06$). The results of interest remained the same also when psychological reactance and expectation of marketing management changes were included as covariates (please see Appendix F for detailed results).

Strictly interpreted, the results indicate indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). However, the direct effect of actual self-brand connection is marginally significant. Independently of the effect being partly or fully mediated, the results indicate that the higher the felt actual self-brand connection, the more participants perceive that the brand's self-verification efficacy decreases, and, thus, the more negatively they respond to changes that reinforce existing brand associations. The results support Hypothesis 3A and 3B.

Indirect effect (a_1b_1 path): $b = -.09$, 95% CI: $-.15$ to $-.04$
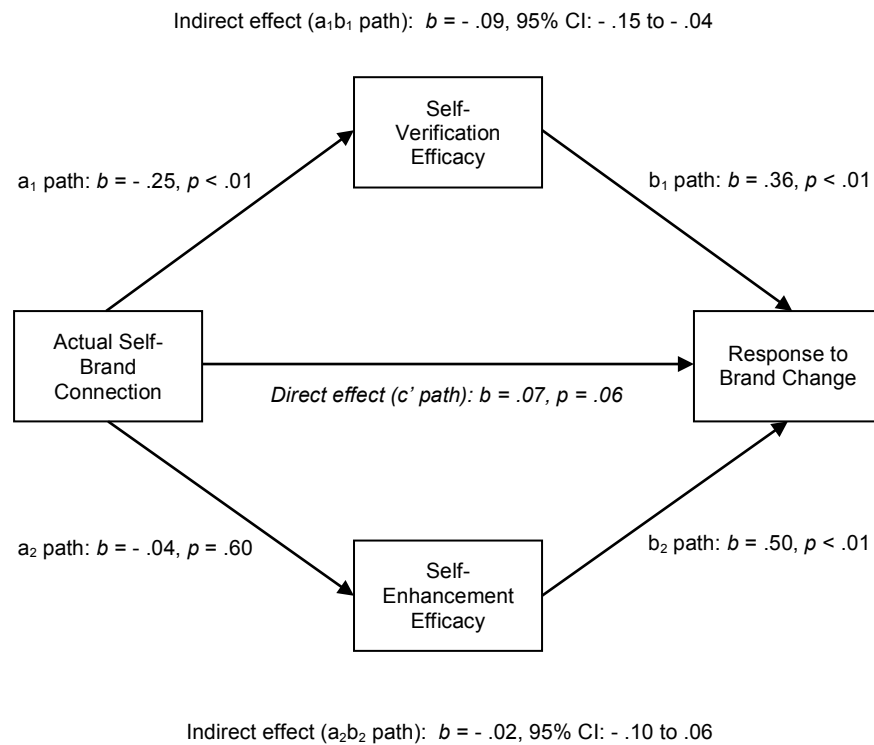
Figure 10: Study 5: Mediation – Actual Self-Brand Connection

Indirect effect (a_2b_2 path): $b = -.02$, 95% CI: $-.10$ to $.06$

3.6.5 *Discussion*

Study 5 extends the findings from Study 4 in several ways. Firstly, in Study 5, participants chose the target brands, extending the findings across multiple brands, categories, and types of brand associations. Study 5 also investigated the underlying processes and demonstrated that ideal self-brand connection leads to more positive reactions to changes that reinforce the existing brand image because such changes increase the brand's ability to signal an ideal identity (i.e., the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement increases). However, actual self-brand connection leads to more negative reactions because changes in brand image reduce the brand's self-verification efficacy. Study 5 also demonstrated that expectations of marketing management changes or chronic psychological reactance did not have any effect, neither directly or as moderators, which lends little support to these alternative accounts.

The results from Studies 4 and 5 suggest that consumer response to changes that reinforce the existing brand image depend on whether the brand

is connected to the ideal or actual self. The results suggest that consumers who feel congruity between their ideal self and the brand (brand connection based on self-enhancement motives) respond positively to the reinforcement of existing brand associations. Changes that reinforce existing brand associations increase the consumer's ability to signal a desired identity through the brand (the brand image becomes "more of what I want") and, thus, make it a more efficient self-enhancement instrument. However, for consumers who feel actual self-brand connection (brand connection based on self-verification motives), a change in brand image reduces the perceived match between the brand and the self. Thus, these consumers respond more negatively to changes in brand image, including changes that reinforce existing associations, because such changes reduce the consumer's ability to verify and validate the actual self through the brand.

4　Main Discussion

In this final chapter, I first summarize the findings and then discuss theoretical contributions and managerial implications of this dissertation. Finally, I highlight shortcomings of the research and discuss avenues for future research in order to address some of the limitations and increase knowledge on self-brand connections and market dynamics.

4.1　Summary of Findings

Studies 1-3 examined how self-brand connection moderates consumer response to changes that introduce new associations in brand image. These studies were designed to address Hypothesis 1 A-B:

Hypothesis 1A:

Self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to changes that incorporate new associations in brand image

Hypothesis 1B:

The effect of self-brand connection on the response to changes that incorporate new associations in brand image is mediated through the brand's identity contribution

In Study 1 the focal brand was Nike and change in brand image was manipulated in an acquisition scenario where a fictitious venture capital company acquired Nike. In the incorporation of new brand associations condition, Nike was said to become more glamorous, upper class, and sophisticated (pretested as not descriptive of Nike). Study 2 followed the same design but the change scenario described less comprehensive changes and applied a different target brand (Starbucks), as well as changes in different brand personality traits (family oriented, charming, and wholesome). Study 2 also included measures of psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes (changes in prices, quality, and customer service), as these could be alternative explanations of the results. Study 3 used a different context for brand image change than the

previous studies; brand repositioning. In addition, Study 3 manipulated low and high self-brand connections and allowed for idiosyncratic target brands (i.e., the results are not limited to a pre-defined target brand but participants themselves selected a brand to which they felt low or high degrees of self-brand connection). Study 3 also included a process measure, identity contribution, tapping into the focal brand's efficacy as an identity marker.

Together, the three initial studies provided evidence in support of Hypothesis 1 A-B. The results show that self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to new associations being incorporated into brand image. The effects are evident even when changes in brand image are of positive valence. Even though the associations are positive in and of themselves, they represent a change in the existing brand image, and thus are viewed negatively by those who identify with the brand. When brand image changes, the match between the brand and consumer identity also changes, decreasing the brand's efficacy as an identity signal. Hence, those who identify strongly with the current brand associations, and deploy the brand in their identity projects, respond negatively. Studies 1-3 provide confidence in the results by replicating the effects across three studies, using different target brands (Nike, Starbucks, and idiosyncratic self-selected brands), applying changes in different types of brand personality associations, both measuring and manipulating self-brand connection, including a direct measure of the proposed process, and controlling for two alternative processes.

Studies 4 and 5 examined how different types of self-brand connection (i.e., ideal self-brand connection and actual self-brand connection) influences consumer response to changes that reinforced existing brand association and were designed to test Hypotheses 2 and 3:

Hypothesis 2A:

Ideal self-brand connection positively influences consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations

Hypothesis 2B:

The effect of ideal self-brand connection on the response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement

Hypothesis 3A:

Actual self-brand connection negatively influences consumer response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations

Hypothesis 3B:

The effect of actual self-brand connection on the response to changes that reinforce existing brand associations is mediated through the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-verification

Study 4 applied a survey design measuring participants' degree of ideal and actual self-brand connection with Nike and reactions to changes in each of Aaker's (1997) 15 facets of brand personality. The dependent measure was an index of participants' response to changes in the three most descriptive personality traits (as evaluated in the first part of the survey). Study 5 manipulated ideal and actual self-brand connection and let participants self-select idiosyncratic target brands according to condition. In addition, Study 5 measured the two proposed processes directly; the target brand's self-enhancement efficacy and self-verification efficacy. Study 5 also included measures of psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes (changes in prices, quality, and customer service), once again demonstrating that these are not likely explanations of the results.

Together, Studies 4-5 provide evidence in support of Hypotheses 2 and 3. Consumers' connection between their ideal selves and brands are based primarily on motives to enhance, improve, and develop self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Reinforcement of existing brand associations implies that the brand even more strongly projects an aspirational self-image for consumers feeling high degrees of ideal self-brand connection. Thus, consumers feeling high degrees of *ideal* self-brand connection perceive changes that reinforce the existing brand image positively, as such changes increase the brand's self-enhancement efficacy and ability to signal an ideal self-identity. However, consumers feeling connected to a brand based on *actual* self-brand congruence (brand connection based on self-verification motives) negatively perceive changes in brand image as well as changes that reinforce existing salient brand associations. Changes in brand image are likely to reduce the experienced congruence between the brand and the actual self such that the brand's efficacy as an instrument to confirm and

verify the actual self decreases. Maintaining a close brand connection would be conflicting with existing self-views. Thus, consumers feeling high degrees of actual self-brand connection are motivated to reduce the felt brand connection to maintain a stable self-image.

The studies build confidence in the results by replicating the effects across two studies, using different target brands (Study 4: Nike, Study 5: Idiosyncratic self-selected brands), applying reinforcement in different types of brand personality associations, both measuring and manipulating ideal and actual self-brand connection, including a direct measure of the proposed processes, and controlling for two alternative explanations.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

Consumers value brands for more than just their intrinsic attributes; brands also serve as vessels of symbolic meaning that help consumers achieve goals motivated by the self. Consumers use brands conspicuously, as signals to express, validate, and enhance identity (Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2009). During this process, consumers categorize the brand as part of the self, such that brand associations are linked to the mental representations of the self and develop a sense of oneness with the brand; self-brand connections. While the vast majority of studies on self-brand connections have focused on their development and characteristics (Chaplin & John, 2005; Park et al., 2010), and benefits for companies (Swaminathan et al.,, 2007; Lam et al., 2010), current research contributes to the literature by investigating a disadvantage of self-brand connections.

Chernev et al. (2011) argued that building self-expressive brands increases competition as it expands alternatives from brands with similar attributes to all brands (and behaviors) that can signal consumer identity. They proposed that consumers' need for self-expression is finite and can be satiated when consumers are exposed to self-expressive brands and self-expressive behaviors. Another peril of building self-expressive brands and competing for consumer identity is the captive nature of a strong brand image. Brand associations are "sticky." Consumers are motivated to maintain existing brand perceptions, which make it difficult to manage brand associations and adapt to new market trends and possibilities. Even more critical, current research argues that if the brand makes decisions that are not in line with consumer perceptions of the brand, those consumers who are most involved in the brand (often the most valuable and important customers) would respond negatively and reduce their connection to the brand to maintain self-identity. This finding stands in contrast to previous research finding consumer-brand bonds to be a buffer that safeguards the

brand from the consequences of transgressions and negative brand information.

The explanation for the unusual finding in this dissertation lies in the very nature of brand information. Previous research has looked at responses to negative brand information. For high degree self-brand connection consumers, negative information about the brand spill over to the self, as the brand is incorporated into the self-concept. Thus, high degree self-brand connection consumers are motivated to counter-argue and defend the brand in order to maintain a positive self-view. In the current research, however, the self is not threatened by negative brand information but rather consumers perceive that the *meaning* of the brand changes. In this case, the match between the brand's image and consumer identity also changes; as such, the brand's ability to serve as an identity marker decreases. For highly connected consumers, changes in brand image lead to dissonance between self-identity and the brand. Thus, high degree self-brand connection consumers are motivated to withdraw from the brand to maintain a stable self-identity.

Furthermore, this dissertation develops extant perspectives on connections between different parts of consumers' self-concepts and brands. Self-brand congruence is defined as the perceived fit between the consumer's self and the brand's personality (Sirgy, 1982). This congruence can differ across different parts of a consumer's self, such that a consumer might perceive a high degree of congruence between the brand and the ideal self, at the same time as the congruence between the actual self and the brand is perceived as low, or vice versa (Malär et al., 2011). This dissertation offers a conceptualization linking brand connection to different parts of a consumer's self with self-motives. Specifically, I argue that brand connections based on perceived fit between the ideal self and a brand are grounded in self-enhancement motives, and brand connections based on perceived fit between the actual self and a brand are grounded in self-verification motives.

Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to the literature by showing that the different conceptualizations of self-brand connections have important behavioral consequences. This dissertation demonstrates that high degree self-brand connection consumers' response to changes that reinforce brand image is contingent on what part of the self (ideal versus actual) the brand is connected to and, thus, the motivation underlying the brand connection (self-enhancement motives versus self-verification motives).

The results show that consumers who feel ideal self-brand connection respond positively to changes that reinforce the existing brand image. Such changes increase the brand's ability to signal a desired identity, and the brand becomes even stronger on the ideal traits the consumer

initially connected with. Thus, consumers feeling high degrees of ideal self-brand connection (brand connection based on self-enhancement motives) welcome changes that reinforce the existing brand image, as such changes increase the brand's ability to signal an ideal identity (the brand becomes "more of what I want to be like") and, thus, increases the brand's efficacy as an instrument for self-enhancement. However, for consumers feeling high degrees actual self-brand connection, a change in brand image reduces the perceived match between the brand image and the self. High degree actual self-brand connection consumers have connected with the present brand image; thus, any change in that image will decrease the brand's ability to construct and signal the actual self. Hence, these consumers respond less positively to changes in brand image, even if the change involves the brand becoming "more of what it already is." The higher degree of actual self-brand connection, the more negatively consumers respond to such changes.

4.3 Managerial implications

Many companies try to build symbolic brand associations that resonate with consumers' identities and, thus, facilitate self-brand connections. There are several benefits to reap from such brand connections, but there are also some pitfalls. Markets are dynamic and new technology can change consumer preferences and alter the competitive arena. To stay competitive and seize new opportunities, brands need to adapt and change continuously, not only their product offerings, but also how they are perceived in the marketplace. However, the current research shows that customers who have incorporated the brand into their self-concept respond negatively to changes in brand image. Even if these consumers might constitute a relatively small part of the customer portfolio, they might have a strong influence on others.

While the current research focused on brand acquisitions and repositioning, the basic mechanisms and consequences are likely to apply to consumer responses to brand image changes in general (i.e., strategic alliance, brand extensions, product deletion, and also other changes in brand image that are not due to intended actions by managers). Based on this, one could argue that self-expressive brands should focus only on consistency and avoid all changes in brand image. This might be a sensible short-term strategy, but it can result in stagnation and reduce competitiveness in the long run. It is not given that a few fans should dictate brand strategy. Companies can experience "relationship myopia" such that the focus on existing customers reduces their strategic scope and condenses development and growth. Thus, managers face the difficult task of balancing the trade-off

between dynamic brand strategy adapting and utilizing growth opportunities versus building a strong, consistent position among existing core consumers.

Consistency in brand image does not mean managers should avoid making any changes in their marketing programs. In fact, it is possible and necessary to adapt to changes in the market place whilst building a consistent brand image. Brands can implement many strategic and tactical decisions, such as introducing new products, new advertising campaigns, changing distribution, and more, yet still keeping the perceived brand image unchanged, as long as changes occur within the consumers' perceptions of the existing brand position (Keller, 1999). Thus, managers need to understand the degree to which different strategic marketing decisions and tactical actions influence and possibly change consumers' overall brand perceptions.

Critical insight from the current research is that the motivation behind a brand connection influences response to changes in brand image. If this connection is based on motives to verify the self, to be seen as coherent and consistent (self-verification motive), all changes in brand image will be perceived negatively. This means consumers who use the brand to construct and signal their authentic self will also respond negatively to changes that reinforce the existing brand image (e.g., when a tough brand becomes even tougher). However, if the connection is based on self-enhancement motives, changes that reinforce the existing brand image will be perceived positively.

In practice, managers can view this from a brand positioning perspective. A brand positioned on values related to authenticity, being genuine and real, should be managed with the goal of image consistency, whereas a brand positioned on aspirational values would benefit from implementing changes that reinforce the existing image. Thus, managers should be proactive in understanding brand perceptions and how the brand is used in consumers' identity projects, before implementing marketing actions that could alter the brand positioning. They should not avoid developing their brands, but they should understand the risks and ensure a managed process based on insights into expected consumer reactions and consequences ex ante.

4.4   Limitations and further research

The experiments in this research used fictitious scenarios to manipulate the experimental conditions. At first glance, one could question whether some of the manipulations could influence response among particularly involved and reflected participants. The argument would be that participants who answered high on the self-brand connection scale at the

beginning of the study, felt that they were expected to respond negatively to changes in brand image at the end of the study, despite of all the other questions, filler task, time delays, instructions etc. The combination of studies in this dissertation were designed to reduce potential demand effects by using different manipulations (in Study 2 the scenario was presented as genuine articles in real online newspapers, while the manipulations were presented as hypothetical scenarios in the other studies) and different measures (e.g., before and after measures vs. direct change measures) across the studies, randomizing the order of variables within constructs, applying filler tasks, and including breaks (as long as 90 minutes in one of the studies) between the different parts of the data collection.

In addition, for demand to serve as an explanation, it would have to be so that only those reporting high degrees of self-brand connection while also in the change in brand image condition should feel a strong expectation to respond negatively. That is, their answers should be due to feelings of demand and not based on their own evaluations. None of the other participants should feel a similar expectation. This would have to be the case for both the scenarios describing changes that incorporate new associations in brand image and the scenarios describing changes that reinforce existing associations in brand image. It is particularly difficult to understand why high degree self-brand connection consumers would feel an expectation to respond negatively to changes that reinforce the existing brand image. Furthermore, to speak to the results, certain participants (only the high degree actual self-brand connection participants and none of the other participants) would have to feel an expectation that they should respond similarly negatively to some, but not all, of the process questions (self-verification efficacy but not self-enhancement efficacy). At the same time, these participants should *not* feel similar expectations on how to answer questions about the other consequences of the scenario (e.g., marketing management changes).

Taken together, the arguments above undermine demand effects as an alternative explanation for the results attained in this dissertation. Actually, one could argue that finding consistent effects across five experimental studies in an artificial setting speaks to the magnitude and importance of the phenomena.

The current research focused on underlying mechanisms to explain consumers' responses to changes in brand image. In doing this, I applied controlled experiments and hypothetical scenarios to manipulate the experimental conditions and isolate causal effects. The designs applied prioritized internal validity before external validity. Further research should go beyond hypothetical scenarios to actual case studies. Such studies could explore self-brand connections and consumer responses to brand image

95

change over time (initial response and development). In doing so, an interesting additional aspect to investigate is social influence among consumers and groups. This could include investigating the influence of expectations and behaviors of in-group and out-group members on individual responses.

The studies reported in this dissertation all employed changes in brand image caused by either a brand acquisition or repositioning. Of course, there could be specific characteristics with these contexts and specific scenarios used that do not apply to other contexts or types of changes in brand image. Thus, further research should investigate different types of scenarios and changes due to different types of brand actions (i.e., brand alliances, brand extensions, and more). Additionally, rather than investigating only the effects of consumers' evaluation of the focal brand, future research could study the effect of changes on the evaluation of competitors and other alternatives. Further research should also study the brand's role, intentions, and control of changes in brand image. One could speculate that consumers respond differently to changes attributed to external (not attributed to the brand itself) and internal (attributed to the brand's deliberate actions) causes. Scenarios used in the current research could involve repositioning (deliberate change caused by the brand) and acquisitions (not necessarily under the control of the company). However, in all scenarios used, brand owners were positive toward the change. Even though they might not impact brand image per se, attributions about whether the image changes are enforced against the brand could influence consumer responses.

The initial image of the focal brand and salient personality traits could also influence response to changes in brand image. Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) studied brand personality (sincere vs. exciting) and response to brand transgressions. They found that sincere brands suffered the most from weak transgressions, while exciting brands actually showed signs of reinvigoration. The current research investigated consumer responses to change in brand image across several brands with different personalities. In Studies 3 and 5, participants chose a target brand, which ensured a wide range of differently positioned brands. Still, it could be said that some personality traits have an optimum level (more is not necessarily better) while others monotonically increase (more is always better). Further research should investigate if there are different types of brand personality traits (optimum vs. orthogonally increasing) and examine their interaction with motivation for brand connections (self-verification and self-enhancement) in response to change in brand image.

The current research followed a cognitive account to investigate brand connections and reactions to changes in brand image. Another avenue

96

of research is consumers' affective responses to strategic brand actions. If a consumer incorporates a brand into his/her self-concept, that consumer's identity will merge with the brand such that what happens to the brand will be felt as self-relevant for the consumer. In this sense, if the brand is successful, the highly connected consumer will probably also feel successful. Likewise, if the brand fails, the highly connected consumer will probably feel that he/she also has failed. Thus, in addition to consumers' perceived change in self-brand identity match, the brand's role in an acquisition scenario might influence affective responses. Extended from Cialdini et al. (1976), I speculate that acquiring another brand might be associated with "winning," while being acquired might be associated with "losing." Changes in brand image could be the same, but how consumers feel about the change and their affective response might be different if "their" brand (incorporated into self-concept) is acquired (reflected failure; Cialdini et al., 1976) or acquires the other (basking in reflected glory; Cialdini et al., 1976). This could, of course, also be related to the notions of self-serving effects for success and failure from attribution theory (Zuckerman, 1979) and perhaps be moderated by the type of event or action that leads to image change (e.g., an admirable attempt that leads to failure vs. defeat due to poor performance or even misconduct), characteristics of the consumers, and characteristics of the relationship.

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Appendix

A: STUDY 1 - MANIPULATION: No Change

A: STUDY 1 - MANIPULATION: Change

B: STUDY 2 - MANIPULATION: No Change

PRESS RELEASE

It's finally official. After weeks of speculation and rumors, InvesTech Inc. has declared it has acquired Starbucks.

InvesTech Inc. has interests in several leading global brands. By including Starbucks in its portfolio, InvesTech Inc. definitely strengthens its position as the world's leading venture capital company. InvesTech Inc. will not disclose the cost of the acquisition, but speculation is rife.

Starbucks will not change

Philip Wright, international strategic director of Starbucks, is positive about the acquisition: "This will increase our financial strength and allow us to continue to build the Starbucks brand as before. Our customers will not experience any change, but the new owners will help us continue to deliver excellent quality and the existing Starbucks image."

B: STUDY 2 - MANIPULATION: Change

PRESS RELEASE

It's finally official. After weeks of speculations and rumors, InvesTech Inc. has declared that it has acquired Starbucks.

InvesTech Inc. has interests in several leading global brands. By including Starbucks in its portfolio, InvesTech Inc. definitely strengthens its position as the world's leading venture capital company. InvesTech Inc. will not disclose the cost of the acquisition, but speculation is rife.

Starbucks will change

Philip Wright, international strategic director of Starbucks, is positive about the acquisition: "This will increase our financial strength. The competence in InvesTech Inc. and synergies with the rest of its portfolio, will contribute to change and strengthen the Starbucks brand.

After the acquisition, Starbucks will change its image to be much more family oriented, charming, and wholesome to capitalize on the increasingly important family segment. Our customers will experience a significant difference. With such a strong owner, we will still be able to offer excellent quality. The orientation of the Starbucks image towards the family will be emphasized in all our activities as well as in the atmosphere and interiors. The décor and layout of the coffee houses will also be given a more family oriented look and feel. We will change the image through new design and visual profile, in addition to changes in how Starbucks is portrayed in our communications and other marketing activities," says Wright.

C: STUDY 3 - MANIPULATION

Imagine the news reports relating to the decision by the management of (brand name) to change the brand.

Management says they will change the (brand name) brand to portray an image as more (least descriptive personality trait 1), (least descriptive personality trait 2), and (least descriptive personality trait 3). "Our existing customers will experience a considerable difference in the (brand name) brand, including changes in the type of products/services offered, how (brand name) will be portrayed in advertising, the design and visual profile, and other marketing activities. The goal is to create a new brand image for (brand name)," the management says.

D: STUDY 4 - MANIPULATION

Imagine that the news report states that the management of Nike has decided to reposition and change Nike's brand. That is, the company has decided to change the image and values Nike represents. This does not include changing the types of products or the general quality, but how Nike is portrayed (i.e., the values and image Nike communicates – the personality of Nike).

E: STUDY 5 - MANIPULATION

Imagine a news report stating that the management of (brand name) has decided to reposition and change the (brand name) brand.

The management says it will change the (brand name) brand to portray an image even more (personality trait 1, personality trait 2, and personality trait 3) than it already is. "Our existing customers will experience a considerable difference in the (brand name) brand, ranging from changes in how it is portrayed (brand name) in advertising and other communications, the visual profile and design, and other marketing activities. The goal is to create a new, reinforced brand image," says the management.

F: STUDY 5 – MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Dichotomous dependent variable (actual self-brand connection = 0 and ideal self-brand connection = 1) – Mediation analysis controlled for general self-brand connection:
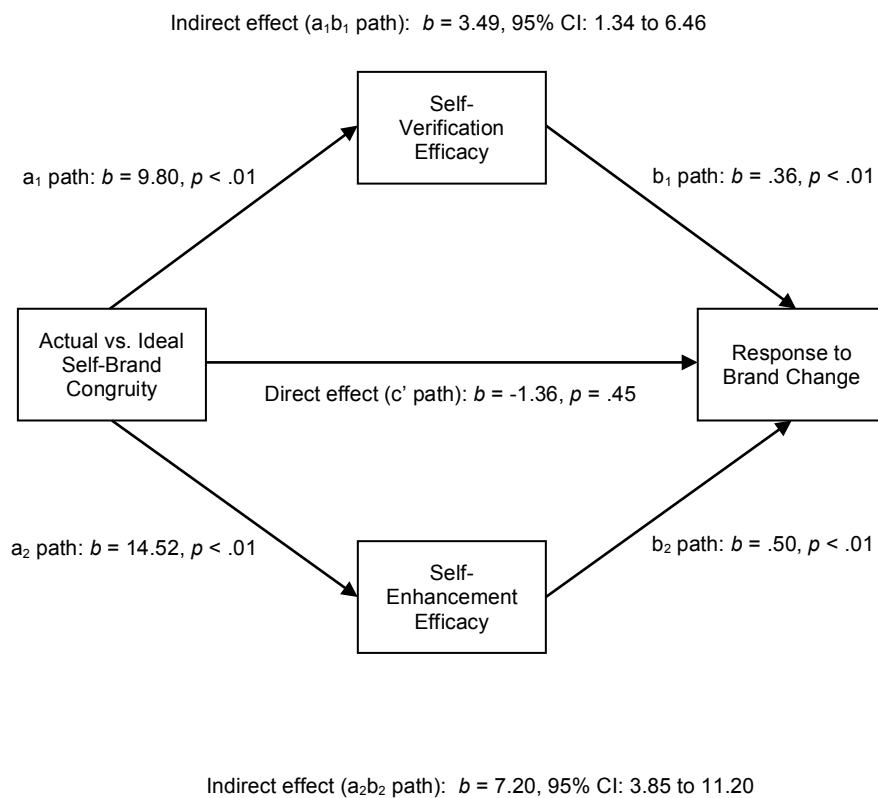
Indirect effect (a_1b_1 path): $b = 3.49$, 95% CI: 1.34 to 6.46

Indirect effect (a_2b_2 path): $b = 7.20$, 95% CI: 3.85 to 11.20

Dichotomous dependent variable (actual self-brand connection = 0 and ideal self-brand connection = 1) – Mediation analysis controlled for alternative explanations (psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes) and general self-brand connection:

Indirect effect (a_1b_1 path): $b = 2.28$, 95% CI: .50 to 4.63

```
                            ┌─────────────┐
                            │    Self-    │
                            │ Verification│
                            │   Efficacy  │
                            └─────────────┘
   $a_1$ path: $b = 7.31$, $p < .02$        $b_1$ path: $b = .31$, $p < .01$

┌─────────────┐                              ┌─────────────┐
│ Actual vs.  │                              │             │
│  Ideal      │   Direct effect (c' path):   │ Response to │
│ Self-Brand  │──  $b = -.34$, $p = .84$   ─▶│Brand Change │
│ Congruity   │                              │             │
└─────────────┘                              └─────────────┘

   $a_2$ path: $b = 8.39$, $p < .01$        $b_2$ path: $b = .45$, $p < .01$
                            ┌─────────────┐
                            │    Self-    │
                            │ Enhancement │
                            │   Efficacy  │
                            └─────────────┘
```

Indirect effect (a_2b_2 path): $b = 3.77$, 95% CI: 1.31 to 6.35

Ideal self-brand connection – Mediation analysis controlled for psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes:

Indirect effect (a_1b_1 path): $b = -.04$, 95% CI: $-.10$ to $-.01$

Self-Verification Efficacy

a_1 path: $b = -.15$, $p <$

b_1 path: $b = .30$, $p < .01$

Ideal Self-Brand Connection

Direct effect (c' path): $b = -.03$, $p = .49$

Response to Brand Change

a_2 path: $b = .12$, $p < .05$

Self-Enhancement Efficacy

b_2 path: $b = .46$, $p < .01$

Indirect effect (a_2b_2 path): $b = .06$, 95% CI: .01 to .12

Actual self-brand connection – Mediation analysis controlled for psychological reactance and expectations of marketing management changes:

Indirect effect ($a_1 b_1$ path): b = - .08, 95% CI: - .13 to - .04

a_1 path: b = - .24, p < .01

b_1 path: b = .32, p < .01

Self-Verification Efficacy

Actual Self-Brand Connection

Direct effect (c' path): b = .05, p = .12

Response to Brand Change

a_2 path: b = - .02, p = .76

Self-Enhancement Efficacy

b_2 path: b = .45, p < .01

Indirect effect ($a_2 b_2$ path): b = - .01, 95% CI: - .07 to .05

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