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## Psychological underpinnings of brands

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## Abstract

Research in psychology has shown that even routinely experienced everyday objects such as brands can trigger cognitively engaging, emotional, and socially meaningful experiences. In this paper, we review three key areas where current advances reside: brands as passive objects with utilitarian and symbolic meanings, brands as relationship partners and regulators of personal relationships, and brands as creators of social identity with social group “linking value.” Research in these senses is grounded in a number of fundamental areas of cognitive, emotional, motivational, personality, interpersonal, and group psychology. Emerging areas for research are addressed as well.

Keywords: brands, personality, brand attachment, interpersonal relationships, brand communities, emotion, self-concept.

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## INTRODUCTION

Brands and branded products represent everyday objects that shape the life of people through consumption. Their discrete but constant presence in a whole set of occasions and interactions ensures part of what we are is built through their symbolic meaning and the rituals of consumption that come with them. Brands are a major concern for both business and society with new branded entities (e.g., smart products, ideas, persons) emerging together with traditional commercial brands. Moreover, brands start to be considered not only as a marketing tool but also a means for reaching relevant social outcomes (e.g., healthy lifestyle choices, sustainable behaviors).

Psychology, together with anthropology, semiotics, and sociology, has long studied brands as objects of value that contribute to shaping our sense of identity. It has provided, and keeps providing, the why behind the what in consumers behavior, long before the notion of *homo economicus* receded in favor of a more realistic acknowledgment of our human nature and ability to make choices with bounded rationality.

First, psychological studies on brands and branding can be traced back to the Fifties of the last century (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Over the decades, the literature has consolidated key psychological functions brands play as objects of value for people. They simplify the cognitive load in choice of alternatives, they build relationships and trust in repeated consumption, they signal identity to self and others, and they elicit daydreaming, emotions, and aspirations.

Research on brands and their effects and meaning for consumers has grown in proportion but is highly fragmented and lacking in integration. It also reflects uneven grounding in psychological theory. Furthermore, while much has been written on the psychological impact of brands on people, the proliferation of brands across economic fields beyond tangible products

and the changing nature of consumer-producer relationships mediated by technology leaves opportunities for further investigation, discovery of new constructs, or adaptation of foundational ones. In this sense, this paper intends to make a preliminary but necessary step of reviewing the milestone contributions on the topic, consolidating in a structured form, and interpreting the achievements in knowledge so that new research can progress in the field.

Included in this review is theoretically based, empirical research in psychology of brands published primarily in four journals (*Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Journal of Marketing*) during the last ten years (2009-2018). Research published outside the designated years or outside the four journals is included selectively and to the extent that it helps frame and clarify recent research on the topics addressed.

From such a review of the relevant literature on psychological underpinning of brands, it emerged quite clearly that the concept of “self” is useful to organize and make sense of many contributions. The concept of self is a broad and seminal construct in psychology, as such present in almost all orientations of our discipline. It hence provides an apt platform to let commonalities emerge across reviewed studies, while being articulated enough to let us differentiate among streams of contributions. In adopting the concept of self for this review, three aspects are explored: the personal self, the relational and interpersonal self, and the group self. Moreover, we refer to four motives underlining processes of self-definition which can be in turn linked to the three aspects of self.

First, the self-enhancement and self-verification motives. Self-enhancement is the motive to evaluate oneself favorably, which is often accompanied by positively evaluating things associated with the self (Baumeister, 1998; Leary, 2007). Self-enhancement has been implicated

in self-esteem, persistence, and achievement (Taylor, 1989) and in coping with stress and impediments to goal success and goal failure (Steele, 1988). Self-verification is the motivation to “verify, validate, and sustain... existing self-concepts” and “leads to stability in people’s self concepts and makes people feel that they understand themselves, thereby providing a reliable guide to thought and action that facilitates smooth, effective, and enjoyable interactions” (Leary, 2007, p. 324). Both self-enhancement and self-verification apply primarily to the personal self. By personal self, we refer to the experience of reflexive consciousness which is “conscious attention turning back toward its own source and gradually constructing a concept of oneself” (Baumeister, 1998, p. 680). A first-person perspective underpins the notion of a self and is reflected in self-consciousness and the ability to think or conceive of oneself as oneself (Baker, 2000). People construct a personal self by elaborating on brands perceived as passive objects with utilitarian and symbolic meanings for the self.

Second, the self-expansion motive functions to increase “physical and social resources perspectives, and identities that facilitate achievement of any goal that might arise” (Aron et al., 2001, p. 478). Here expansion occurs primarily with regard to the relational and interpersonal self. By relational and interpersonal self, we refer to how a person defines oneself in terms of dyadic connections to other persons, where the welfare of these others motivates the self and contributes to one’s own welfare. This is in contrast to the individual or personal self, wherein self-interest or one’s ego is the predominant motive (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Here people construct the self as an interpersonal being such that one’s relationship to a brand perceived as an active partner and one’s relationship with another person within a brand context alter and shape the self.

Third, the social identity maintenance and social identity expression motives reside in one's membership in a group and concern in-group solidarity and favorable comparisons with other groups so as to boost the welfare of the group, the members in it, and one's own self-worth (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). By group self, we mean internalization of norms and goals of a specific collective of individuals, such as a small reference group, large organization, or social category, and often involves expectations and relationships with role partners in the group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Here people construct the self through sharing knowledge, affect, and experience of the brand with members, considering the brand as a creator of social identity with social group "linking value".

These three aforementioned aspects of self and their underlying motives can also be thought of as a layered augmentation of identity. In this sense, they naturally help to frame the notion of brand and its psychological functions along a continuum from passive object to proactive agent of value. More specifically, we will refer to the brand as: (1) *a passive object with utilitarian and symbolic meanings*; (2) *an active relationship partner and a regulator of, and venue for, interpersonal relationships*; and (3) *a creator of social identity with social group "linking value"*. One role does not exclude the others; it is the breadth of the contribution to the definition of the identity of people that changes. For example, in group-based brand communities, social identity in the group co-mingles with interpersonal relationships, such as found through explicit roles, and with personal symbolic benefits. If the breadth of impact in defining the self is one dimension of analysis, the other dimension can be thought of as the valence or direction of impact. Brands and the three aspects of self are manifest in either positive or negative valence. Much research to date has had a positivity bias in the sense of emphasizing

favorable or desired aspects of brands. But brands can exhibit unfavorable or undesired consequences, which have been understudied in the literature.

As a summary and foreshadowing of the review, we offer Table 1 and the related Figure 1. Table 1 visually represents these two dimensions of analysis (breadth of impact on self and its valence), the consequential notions of brand with its psychological functions, as well as the main constructs reviewed in the current paper.

--Insert Table 1 about here--

Figure 1 further elaborates the dynamism between self and brand. The relationships between these entities are indicated with arrows and marked with the codes (1), (2a), (2b), and (3). Specifically, brand as object with utilitarian and symbolic meanings is shown as a resource used by the consumer to construct his/her self (1). Suffice it to refer here as an exemplar to how luxury brands have been studied, where symbolic meanings capture the value beyond the utilitarian or functional aspects. Brand as partner is shown as part of a relationship between the consumer and the brand itself (2a). Brand as regulator of, or venue for, interpersonal relationships is presented as a resource used by a consumer to strength his/her interpersonal relationships (2b). For example, Starbucks can be the favorite partner brand of coffee for a consumer and, at the same time, Starbucks can be also the consumer's partner favorite brand with positive effects on the interpersonal relationship. Last, brand as a creator of social identity is displayed as a resource with linking value within a group of persons (3). Classic studies are ones on Harley Davidson motorcycle communities; open source software platforms are more contemporary examples of brand communities (e.g., Linux, Python).

--Insert Figure 1 about here--



## **BRAND AS A PASSIVE OBJECT WITH UTILITARIAN AND SYMBOLIC MEANINGS**

Brands are vehicles for expression and means of self-enhancement and self-verification. People create personal identities by relating to functional and symbolic characteristics of brands. This happens in two ways. First, consumers see brands as having personality characteristics similar to people that are used to express the self. Second, in self-brand connections, consumers construct a self-concept that incorporates properties of brands and come to merge self-identity with brand identity to different degrees with different consequences. Thus not only are brands symbolic objects with personality traits, but they become part of the mental representation of self under certain conditions.

### **Brand Personality**

Aaker (1997) provided a theoretical and empirical foundation for the brand personality construct – “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347) – marking the actual point of origin for this stream of research. In her pioneering work, she shows that consumers characterize brands as having human-like personality traits captured by five global factors: sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness. Several other works have followed (see among others, Aaker et al., 2001; Caprara et al., 2001; Geuens et al., 2009; Grohmann, 2009; Sung & Tinkham, 2005; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006), identifying other possible personality traits consumers use to characterize brands. Moreover, Fiske et al. (2012, p. 207) suggested that the understanding of consumers’ responses toward brands “could be further enriched by having warmth and competence reflected in their foundation”. As a consequence, research provides evidences for the fact that brands are stereotyped in a similar way as individuals and groups (Aaker et al., 2010; 2012; Kervyn et al., 2012). However, as clearly illustrated by MacInnis and Folkes (2017), across different theoretical approaches, different

brands and different cultures, the majority of research converges on the diverse traits originally identified by Aaker (1997). Therefore, her general framework based on the five basic dimensions continues to provide a robust and general account of the perceptual space underlying brands. The framework also proves useful in understanding the self-expressive benefit of brands and consequently their ability to satisfy consumers' self-verification or self-enhancement motives. Brands, according to their associations with a specific set of personality traits, are in fact instrumental in helping consumers express their actual self, ideal self, or specific aspects of their self (Aaker, 1999).

**Factors affecting consumer responses to brand personality.** In order to better explore the several potential roles of brand personality in directing consumers' responses toward brands and appropriate marketing actions, most of the research available tries to understand the underlying mechanisms invoked under different circumstances and to identify moderators able to provide more specific insights into individual reactions. Specifically, the role of individual attachment style and implicit self-theories in relation to brand personality have been central in recent years.

Based on the research by Bowlby (1980) and Hazan and Shaver (1980), Swaminathan et al. (2009) investigated the relationship of brand personality and attachment styles to brand preference. Two attachment styles were studied: anxious attachment, where the view of self is largely negative, and avoidance attachment, where the view of other people is largely negative. Swaminathan et al. (2009) found that exciting brands are preferred more by consumers high in both anxiety and avoidance, whereas sincere brands are preferred more by consumers both high in anxiety and low in avoidance. Exciting brands are those that signal independence, uniqueness, and vitality; sincere brands are those that signal family orientation, nurturance, traditionalism,

and warmth under Aaker's (1997) brand personality classification. Anxious and avoidance attachment styles thus lead consumers to express their ideal selves and relationship ideals important to them through choice of brands that correspond to compatible personality characteristics.

Concerning the role of implicit self-theories, Park and John (2010) showed that some consumers develop more positive self-perceptions after using brands with distinctive and appealing personalities. For example, they perceive themselves as more good looking, feminine, and glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag, or more intelligent, hardworking, and a leader after using an MIT pen. However, they found that these effects are present only for consumers who hold specific beliefs about their personality and thereby function with implicit self-theories. Specifically, entity theorists (i.e., people with implicit self-theories marked by beliefs that personal qualities are fixed and do not change across time and situations) are affected by their brand experiences, resulting in more positive perceptions of themselves in terms of personality traits associated with the brands used. By contrast, incremental theorists (i.e., people with implicit self-theories marked by beliefs that personal qualities are malleable and can be improved through their own efforts) are not affected by their brand experiences.

In particular, the contrasting views about the self influence the way in which individuals approach self-enhancement. Entity theorists, in order to enhance the self, seek out opportunities to signal their positive qualities of the self to others. In this specific case, entity theorists consider brand experience as an opportunity to signal the self and are drawn to brands with unique and alluring personalities. They use a Victoria's Secret bag or an MIT pen as signaling devices, which precipitate more positive self-perceptions in line with the brand's personality. Further,

using alluring brands serves to reinforce favorable self-images, and this depends on whether one believes he/she is less able to improve qualities of self by self effort.

The implicit theories that consumers hold about personalities also affect consumers' responses to advertising for brands with personalities. Yorkston et al. (2010) found that incremental theorists consider brand personality traits malleable and respond more positively to messages that are inconsistent with the brand's personality, whereas entity theorists consider brand personality traits fixed. Park and John (2012) considered further what types of specific advertising appeals are perceived favorably by consumers with different implicit self-theories. For a given brand personality trait, they found that incremental theorists are more responsive to an advertising message that incorporates a self-improvement appeal for the brand, while entity theorists prefer an advertising message that incorporates a signaling appeal for the brand. In sum, these different streams of research highlight that consumers' beliefs about their own personality strongly affect their focus on specific brand personality traits and consequently the most effective marketing actions companies can organize to reach specific consumers to meet their needs.

### **Brand-Self Connections**

In addition to viewing brands as objects with personality traits and social perceptions, consumers may also perceive brands as being part of their mental representation of self. The extent to which consumers have incorporated specific brands in their self-concept is conceptualized by Escalas and Bettman (2003, 2005) as self-brand connections. When the symbolic properties associated with a brand are used to construct the self or to communicate the self-concept to others, a self-brand connection is formed. In effect, consumers define their psychological selves to include

brands, and one way to measure this is by asking respondents to express the degree of overlap between self identity and brand identity (Aron et al., 1992).

In their development of the construct, Escalas and Bettman (2003, pp. 346-347) examined reference groups as cultural sources of brand symbolism, where they found that consumers “are more likely to develop a self-brand connection when there is a strong usage association between a reference group and the brand, and there is also a strong connection between the reference group and the consumer’s self-concept. When this scenario exists, the consumer may appropriate user imagery and psychological benefit associations of the brand to meet a self-need”. Specifically, under self-verification, member groups have a larger effect on self-brand connections, while under self-enhancement, the effect of aspirational groups on self-brand connections is greater.

Further, Escalas and Bettman (2005) found that self-brand connections are lower for brands with images that are consistent with the image of an outgroup compared to brands with images that are inconsistent with an outgroup. They also showed that these effects are moderated by self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Brands with images consistent with an outgroup have a stronger negative effect for independent-based versus interdependent-based self-conceptual consumers. This differential effect is explained by the strong self-differentiation goals for consumers with independent self-concepts who are motivated to stand out from others, as opposed to consumers with interdependent-based self-concepts who are motivated to fit-in with others.

Finally, Shen and Sengupta (2018) recently demonstrated an interesting link between ways of consumer communication and self-brand connections. They showed that oral communication about the brand compared to written communication increases self-brand

connections. Specifically, this occurs because oral communication is associated with a greater focus on social interaction with the communication recipient than written communication. Oral communicators when communicating about a favored brand are more likely to express their self-related thoughts than written communicators, thereby increasing their self-brand connections.

**Effects of self-brand connections on brand evaluations and behaviors.** Whereas initial research mainly focused on the formation of self-brand connections, recent research has started to investigate the consequences of these connections. Research shows that high self-brand connections are able to benefit the brand in two main ways: a) increased defense against brand failure and b) positive behaviors toward the brand.

Research focusing on consumers' defense of brands is strongly connected with the "brand as self" conceptualization proposed by Cheng et al. (2012). They demonstrated that, when consumers perceive high levels of self-brand connections, brands are treated similarly to the way consumers treat their selves. Consequently, using self-threat as a theoretical account, Cheng et al. (2012) showed that consumers with high self-brand connections perceive failures of the brands (i.e., objectively negative brand performance or negative information) as personal failures, and in an effort to maintain a positive self-view, they react defensively to brand failures by evaluating the brand favorably, despite its poor performance. A common example of a brand failure might be the appearance of an independent review of cell phones that reveals one's own brand as inferior to the competitor. Interestingly, this defensive reaction is absent when consumers have other ways to maintain their positive self-view. Lisjak et al. (2012) confirm that when a brand that consumers are connected with is threatened, consumers defend it with high levels of positive attitudes in order to preserve the integrity of the self.

Concerning the effects of high levels of self-brand connection on positive behaviors toward the brand, Shen and Sengupta (2018) showed that increased self-brand connections resulting from speaking (versus writing) about the brand, generate greater willingness to wait for the brand in an out-of-stock situation. Trudel et al. (2016) reported greater tendencies to recycle (rather than trash) products by consumers with strong positive connections between brand and self. In particular, focusing on cola brands, they discovered that consumers with high self-brand connections to Coke are more likely to recycle cans of Coke than cans of Pepsi. In this case, trashing the can is symbolically similar to trashing a part of the self, given the strong association between brand and self. Consequently, consumers prefer much more to recycle it responsibly in such contexts.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The investigation of utilitarian and symbolic meanings of brands is a classic and important field of research. In this context, we highlight the relevance of brand personality as one of the constructs that most enabled progress in research. Thinking of brands as anthropomorphic – despite still passive – objects made them relatable and opened the doors to subsequent streams of research focused on investigating such relationships. The brand-self connection stream is one example of this, as it focuses on the outcomes of the match between identities (brand and self) and hints at the influencing factor of social groups. However, it explores this territory mostly from a cognitive psychology perspective and makes contributions on the role of the emotions in the next section a strong complement.

Last, this classic approach would still benefit from exploring the migration of established concepts into new negative valence territories (undermining rather than reinforcing the self) and in digital settings where fluid identities reduce possibility of a clear mapping of personality.

## **BRAND AS AN ACTIVE RELATIONSHIP PARTNER AND A REGULATOR OF, AND VENUE FOR, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The second level of the brand-dynamic we consider concerns the level of the social self that derives from the relationship between person and brand or interpersonal relationships. Self-expansion is a basic motive in these cases where one desires to expand one's efficacy through forming close relationships with others (Aron et al., 2001). Efficacy expands through shared resources, mutual perspectives (e.g., common values, goals), and overlapping identities where another person becomes part of the self, so to speak. Through interpersonal relations, one learns about, is influenced by the other, and influences the other in terms of brand adoption and use. The process is often accomplished jointly where the welfare of the other is taken into account. We consider four forms that this has occurred in consumer research: brand attachment, consumer-brand relationships, emotions towards brands, and brands as regulators of interpersonal relationships.

### **Brand Attachment**

Research has explored the positive consumer-brand relationship called brand attachment. Thomson et al. (2005) introduced the idea of emotional brand attachment that consists of mainly affective associations consumers generate with the brand: affection (warm feelings a consumer has toward a brand), passion (intense and aroused positive feelings toward a brand), and connection (a consumer's feelings of being joined with the brand). Later, Park et al. (2010) defined brand attachment as "the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self" (p. 2) and conceived of it as a unipolar concept that varies in strength from weak to strong (p. 4). Two "critical factors" or properties of brand attachment are brand-self connection and prominence.



Brand-self connection entails cognitive and emotional associations between brand and self and results in feeling a sense of oneness with a brand, a kind of identity. Brand prominence involves “the extent to which positive feelings and memories about the attachment object are perceived as top of mind” and “reflects the salience of the cognitive and affective bond that connects brand to self” (Park et al., 2010, p. 2). In other words, brand prominence might be considered the strength of the bond underlying brand attachment.

An extension of brand attachment was made by Park et al. (2013). These researchers reconceived brand attachment in terms of attachment-aversion relationships. When a brand functions as a means for self-expansion, it captures the sense of brand attachment originally specified by Park et al. (2010). People are motivated to enter and maintain close relationships with brands to expand their self. By including brand resources, perspectives, and characteristics in the self, people enhance their ability to accomplish their goals.

However, Park et al. (2013) add to this basic idea of self-expansion theory by proposing that consumers who are attached to brands are not merely recipients of the brand’s resources, but they also actively invest their own resources in order to maintain their brand relationships. Thus, consumers who are highly attached to a brand are more motivated to expend resources of their own (social, financial, and time resources) in the process of self-expansion. The more attached a person is to the brand, the more likely he or she is to move from an egocentric to a more reciprocal brand relationship that involves sharing resources with the brand. But when a brand functions as a threat for self-contraction, it introduces a new consequence, termed brand aversion. Park et al. (2013) re-configured measures of brand attachment in bipolar terms to represent attachment-aversion.

Based on the above-mentioned studies, consequences of brand attachment are the classic pro-brand behaviors, such as willingness to buy, brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium for the brand, and brand advocacy behaviors.

**Factors facilitating brand attachment.** Research has investigated factors affecting the generation of brand attachment, and during the review period, two main types of factors emerge: self-congruence on one side and individual characteristics in terms of fear and feeling of social-crowding on the other.

Malar et al. (2011) proposed that brand attachment is dependent on self-congruence (the fit between the actual or ideal self-image of a consumer and one's image of a brand). Overall, the effects of perceived actual self-congruence on emotional brand attachment were much stronger than the effects of perceived ideal self-congruence. Malar et al. (2011) speculated that the findings for the effects of perceived actual self-congruence might be explained by reaffirmation of one's genuine or real self as represented by psychological authenticity. The positive effect of self-congruence on brand attachment is also confirmed by Morhart et al. (2015), who identified self-congruence as a mechanism governing influence of brand authenticity on brand attachment.

When alone, people seek affiliation with others as a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Dunn and Hoegg (2014) investigated the role of fear in the creation of emotional attachment to brands. They found that consumers are more likely to become attached to brands when they experience fear in the absence of others, as a coping mechanism to alleviate fear. In such cases, consumers have a sense that the brand actually shares the fearful experience, and this creates a heightened sense of emotional attachment to the brand. In a sense, when alone and fearful, a brand can function vicariously as a mechanism for sharing one's experience and relieving anxiety.

Finally, Huang et al. (2018) show that, when consumers feel crowded in a shopping environment, they become more attached to brands. Brand attachment functions as a way to achieve or maintain basic needs for belongingness, which is lost in the impersonal environment of crowded shopping. It should be noted that Huang et al. (2018) investigate both emotional and brand attachment and thereby address aspects of generalizability of the effects they show. An interesting theoretical contribution of the study, beyond showing that crowding behavior can increase brand attachment, is that brand attachment can satisfy the need to belong when interaction with other people is thwarted.

*A critical view on brand attachment.* A cautionary note is in order because the concept and role of attachment in brand research have been used in multiple ways and imprecisely across the literature. Consider first attachment styles. Research into attachment styles by psychologists in recent years has spawned hundreds of studies and led to particular specifications of what attachment styles are and under what conditions they function and what consequences they have (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Some studies in consumer research explicitly draw upon attachment theory, while others, that take a more everyday but different conceptualization of attachment, reference attachment theory, thereby potentially misleading readers new to the area about the content and meaning of attachment. Some studies have focused on anxious and avoidance styles, excluding secure styles, but define secure in terms of anxious and avoidance. Nowadays, all three styles are typically scrutinized and manipulated or measured separately, and the early confounding in the literature of secure with anxious and avoidance is avoided. In addition, attachment styles are explicit coping mechanisms for dealing with stress or danger (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), but consumer research has yet to frame the functioning of attachment styles in stressful or threatening contexts. Importantly, the three attachment styles

function quite differently from each other in stressful and threatening environments. It should be pointed out as well that research into brand attachment that takes an everyday interpretation of attachment, simply as a kind of affective bond, does not fall under attachment theory as extensively studied by psychologists. As a consequence, there is both a need for more precision in brand attachment research and an opportunity to apply attachment theory in consumer research to advantage, for much consumption occurs in stressful or personally threatening situations where the well-developed coping styles studied by psychologists seem apt.

### **Consumer-Brand Relationships**

The idea that consumers think about their relationships with brands in a manner analogous to their relationships with people was pioneered by Fournier (1998), showing that meaningful relationships with brands can change consumer's self through expansion into new domains. Brand resources, perspectives, and identities are to some extent included in the consumer self with important benefits for her/his wellbeing. Many consumers, for example, have a strong brand relationship with Nike that is demonstrated by their affection and commitment towards the brand, as well as by the extent to which they feel that the coolness of the brand says something about who they are. Many of these consumers, when it is time to buy a new pair of jogging shoes, will not even consider alternative brands.

Brand relationships can serve higher-order identity goals and enable centrally held life projects and tasks. Yet they can also address functions lower on the need hierarchy by delivering against current concerns. As a consequence, some brand relationships are strong and positive (e.g., "committed partnerships" or "best friendships"), while others reflect relationships less emotional and salient (e.g., "teammates"). Considering different types of positive consumer-

brand relationships, two interesting dimensions of analysis refer to the relational norms that guide them and to the relative power that brands have over them.

Exchange and communal orientations are two relational norms that guide consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal, 2004). Under an exchange understanding, consumers follow *quid pro quo* rules, where benefits are given by a consumer of a brand in exchange for getting something of value back. Under communal rules, benefits are given to show concern for the needs of partners. In his pioneering work, Aggarwal (2004) showed that when consumers form relationships with brands they use, norms associated to the relationships formed act as a guide for brand assessments. Across three studies, he reported that conformance to, versus violation of, relational norms influences brand evaluations and willingness to engage in appropriate actions. For example, a mismatch between the type of relationship norm implied by the brand's action (i.e., exchange) and the type of relationship norm expected by consumers (i.e., communal) can damage the brand relationship. Relationship norms in the form of exchange and communal orientations have been associated with distributive fairness (overall fairness of an event by focusing on the distribution of the final outcome) and interactional fairness (the way people are treated during the interaction) by Aggarwal and Larrick (2012). They showed that the norms that guide the relationship between people and a brand (communal or exchange) affect fairness perceptions and, consequently, the positiveness of the relationship with the brand. The effects of relationship norms on fairness is also studied by Kwak et al. (2015), showing the effects of brand humanization on price fairness. Specifically, they explored how the nature of the relationship (communal vs exchange) influences the effects of brand humanization on perceived price fairness for agency-oriented vs communal-oriented consumers. Relying on the logic that relationship goals interact with people's personal orientation, they demonstrated different

patterns of effects of brand anthropomorphization on price fairness in case of a price increase or decrease. As in Aggarwal and Larrick (2012), the nature of the relational norm governing consumer-brand relationships strongly impacted the valence of individual reactions to different marketing actions performed by the companies that manage the brands.

The other relevant dimension of consumer brand relationships refers to the main roles brands can play in their relationships. Servant and partner brands are the two power roles considered by research in a brand context (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Kim & Kramer, 2015). Consumers sometimes regard brands as their servants (outsourced providers of benefits by working for the consumer so to speak) and see themselves as masters over the brand. For example, the Discovery Channel provides knowledge, Volvo safety. In other cases, consumers and brands are kinds of partners co-producing mutual benefits so to speak. For instance, Kellogg can be a partner for a healthy lifestyle. Anticipated power roles can serve as motivated preparation where consumers assign servant or partner expectations to brands with which they interact. Aggarwal and McGill (2012) studied the automatic behavioral effects of priming partner or servant brands characterized by different levels of liking. When priming, for partner brands that are liked, they found that consumers are more likely to assimilate their behavior to the brand image; whereas for partner brands that are disliked, consumers are more likely to contrast their behavior from the brand image. For example, for the Kellogg brand, the healthy partner brand, it was found that the likelihood to take the stairs instead of the elevator was greater when the brand was liked, but was less when the brand was disliked. Assimilative behaviors are for consumers the most effective way to interact with a liked partner brand; by contrast, contrastive behaviors are the most effective way to persuade a disliked partner brand to go away. When the brand was perceived as a servant, the pattern reversed. For servant brands that are liked, consumers are

more likely to contrast their behaviors since this is the most effective way to signal the need for the brand. Finally, for servant brands that are disliked, consumers tend to behave in an assimilative manner in order to remove the need for the brand.

Most of the work on consumer-brand relationships has been focused on the positive side. However, some positive relationships can evolve and change over a series of interactions in response to contextual changes, and they can move in the negative direction towards relationships of strong aversion, filled with enmity, antipathy, or rancor (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012, 2013). An interesting piece of evidence is provided by Johnson et al. (2010) that investigated how consumers, once in a positive consumer-brand relationship, become strongly anti-brand oriented. They demonstrated that self-relevance in a consumer-brand relationship is related to greater likelihood of anti-brand actions if the relationship fails. These anti-brand behaviors are diverse: from complaining to third parties, to negative word of mouth, to illegal actions such as theft, threats, and vandalism. By contrast, a self-neutral prior brand relationship is negatively related to these behaviors because self-esteem is not affected by the relationship's dissolution, and consumers prefer disengagement in order to maintain a positive self-image.

### **Consumer Emotions Toward Brands**

In addition to brands as sources of attachment with emotional content and brands as relational partners, people experience specific emotions toward brands. Below we first examine research investigating love and hate towards a brand and then briefly turn to emerging research combining neuroscience and psychology to understand emotional aspects relating to brands and their evaluation.

The study of brand love and brand hate has arisen quite recently, but not much has been done experimentally. Instead, focus has been on the measurement of brand love and brand hate

and their relationship to antecedents and consequents in survey contexts. As a result, we only briefly summarize this research, which has nevertheless identified important aspects of brand love and brand hate for future experimental research (see also recent research on brand coolness, Warren et al., 2019). In an extensive qualitative study and survey investigation of a prototype-like conceptualization of brand love, Batra et al. (2012) found that people experience their love for brands through an array of affective, cognitive, evaluative, self-concept, and behavioral responses. Fourteen distinct responses were found in all: passionate desire to use the brand, willingness to invest in it, past involvement with the brand, desired self-identity, current self-identity, life meaning, attitude strength related to frequent thoughts, intuitive fit emotionally with the self, attachment, positive affect, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, overall attitude valence, and attitude certainty/confidence. A hierarchical confirmatory factor representation of brand love was found to mediate the effects of perceived brand quality on brand loyalty, propensity to spread positive word of mouth, and resistance to negative information about the brand. The original brand love scale had 59 items, but a more parsimonious scale with 26 items (and shorter 13 and 6 item versions) has been recently validated (Bagozzi et al., 2017). One value of the 14-factor characterization of brand love is that individual dimensions of it can serve as targets or ways to create or change brand love as an organized depiction of the concept. In addition, each of its dimensions can have differential effects on dependent variables of interest, which can be studied experimentally. People clearly experience love towards at least some brands to different degrees.

Brand hate, too, has sparked a lot of interest recently. Zarantonello et al. (2016) developed an 18-item scale to measure six dimensions of brand hate: anger, contempt/disgust, fear, disappointment, shame, and dehumanization. The first two dimensions are forms of active



brand hate, the last four passive forms of brand hate. Brand hate was represented in a hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis model and found to predict complaining behavior, negative word of mouth, protest actions, and patronage reduction/cessation towards the offending brands studied. Similar to brand love, brand hate can function as an individual difference variable or provide criteria for creating hate towards competitor brands, reducing hate towards a proprietary brand, or channeling consumer reactions to consumption of brands. Given the possible tension or relationship between brand love and brand hate (e.g., ambivalence), an opportunity exists for investigating persuasive communication tactics to influence consumption of brands through regulating love and/or hate towards target brands.

**Neuroscience and emotions.** A promising area for future research is the study of neuro-cognitive processes as they relate to brand behaviors. Reimann et al. (2012) and Esch et al. (2012), identified specific regions in the brain that are activated when emotional and cognitive processes are involved in decision making. Neuroscience methods also provide alternatives to self-report measures of emotions and ways to validate measurement scales (Dietvorst et al., 2009). However, it should be acknowledged that to date some commercial firms have overpromised what such measures can reveal and how they can be used validly. In addition to the fMRI studies noted above, EEG has been used to investigate the effects of social facilitation and emotions on reactions to luxury brands (Pozharliev et al., 2015). A challenge confronting neuroscience approaches to the investigation of psychological processes is how to relate brain activation to self-conscious processes, which has not been done much to date (Bagozzi, 2011; Bagozzi & Lee, 2019).

## **Brands as Regulators of Interpersonal Relationships**

Brands are not merely relationship partners, but also are used to regulate relationships between people. Brick et al. (2018), within close relationships, introduced the concept of brand compatibility, defined as the extent to which partners have similar brand preferences, and explored its significance for psychological wellbeing. They found that, for individuals who experience low power in their relationships, brand compatibility positively predicts life satisfaction: when brand compatibility is higher, life satisfaction is higher; however, when brand compatibility is low, life satisfaction is reduced.

These findings suggest that even very simple forms of compatibility can affect important psychological phenomena. For people low in power, even something as seemingly mundane as brand compatibility within a close relationship influences people's satisfaction with their lives. In the same research stream but with an opposite valence, Brick and Fitzsimons (2017) show that within close relationships individuals low in relationship power can respond to frustration with their partner through oppositional brand choice. Specifically, consumers in a relationship low in power choose a brand for themselves that is in opposition to the one they believe their partners prefer. In three different studies, the authors demonstrated that people use brands and brand choices to manage interpersonal relationship factors, including emotions within relationships. In general, in taking a dyadic perspective on consumers' preferences for brands, the above two studies begin to introduce an interesting social and interpersonal perspective on branding and consumer behavior as suggested by Simpson et al. (2012).

## **Concluding Remarks**

As witnessed by the numerous contributions above, the idea of brand as an active relationship partner and a regulator of, and venue for, relationships has provided the greatest variety of

concepts and approaches in consumer brand research to date. Brand attachment proved to be a foundational but inconsistently defined construct, where the gap between branding and psychology literature calls for more scrutiny. At the same time, while it has the merit of focusing attention on the intensity of (positive or negative) emotional bonding, brand attachment shows limited ability to define a typology of bonds. More articulated typologies can be found in the parallel workstreams of consumer-brand relationships and consumer emotions towards the brands. While the idea of brand as an active relationship partner provides the most articulated view of what dynamic is established between consumer and brands, it also faces the risk of overstating the relevance and intensity of such relationships. In this sense, the investigation of ambivalent relationships or – even better – low attachment relationships would be appropriate to stress-test the typologies and learn how the self is built when the relationship is loose or unstable (e.g. in on-line environment or routine purchases). Last, in this section we covered the recent work done on (and notion of) brands as regulators of interpersonal relationships. While such an approach fits research on the interpersonal self, it also constitutes a bridge for the topic reviewed in the next section of this paper. In fact, the focus of this work shifts from the relationship with the brand to the relationship with other people and the brand. The brand here plays the role of helper in relationships with others. The next section will expand such idea by considering a group of others rather than a single person, and augmenting the role of brand from helper to facilitator of social behavior in collectives.

### **BRAND AS A CREATOR OF SOCIAL IDENTITY WITH SOCIAL GROUP “LINKING VALUE”**

Whereas dyadic relationships reflect a kind of social self based on a balance of welfare between two entities in interaction, going from self-benefit to mutual benefit to other benefit,

depending on the specific dynamics and conditions of the relationship, welfare in a brand community results from group membership and social identity, where benefits accrue from comparisons to outgroups, building within group bonds, and fulfilling role responsibilities within the group. A second kind of social self in groups stems from affiliations to a collective. Three kinds of consumer collectives can be identified: small-group brand communities based on friendship and face to face sharing, large-group gatherings where people celebrate with many others, most of whom are strangers and often encompassing thousands of people, such as brand fests, and mediated collections of brand fans through impersonal venues such as online discussions or blogs.

### **Brand Communities**

Brand communities are “specialized, non-geographically bound communities, based on structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006a, p. 45). In small group brand communities, such as Harley-Davidson motorcycle friendship groups, the magic and mystique of owning and riding the motorcycle as a brand intermingle with shared affective bonds and a web of face-to-face social interactions in what might be called “tribalism plus linking value” (Cova, 1997). Members of such groups regularly commune for expressive purposes, such as recreational group rides, and to achieve specific aims related to community service, winning rallies and related contests, protesting political issues, partaking in joint meals or socializing at taverns, shopping together, and fundraising for social causes. Three qualities of small group brand communities, which are facilitated by face-to-face interactions, are promotion of a shared conscious of kind, performance together of rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility to the group and even the brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). By contrast to network-based brand communities, which Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, p. 415) characterize as

“explicitly commercial” and where brand-related activities predominate and social interactions are mediated, small group brand communities are marked by amorphous mixes of personal and social group requisites, often vaguely or indirectly linked to the commercial side of the brand and having subordinate brand effects. Other nuances of small group brand communities can be found in qualitative studies (e.g., Cova & Cova, 2002; McAlexander et al., 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995)

To date most studies of brand communities have been descriptive or survey-based. For example, studies can be found of network-based communities (Adjei et al., 2010; Chan & Lee, 2010; Muniz & Schau, 2005), customer communities (Algesheimer et al., 2010), and brandfests (Schouten et al., 2007). More explicit group processes have been studied through the representation of social identity with groups, especially in terms of identification with, affective commitment to, and group-based self-esteem through brand-centered small friendship groups (Bagozzi & Dholokia, 2006 a,b).

Some empirical research occurs as well on brand community participation from the point of view of consumers in terms of antecedents and from the point of view of brands in terms of consequences (Hook et al., 2018). Brand communities depend on shared values and mutual experiencing of a brand by members, as well as interpersonal and group processes building affiliative ties and commitments. Brand communities have consequences for self (e.g., self-expressive outcomes), the brand community itself (e.g., group activities and shared accomplishments), and the brand (e.g., brand loyalty, resistance to negative information about a favored brand, positive word of mouth communication).

Bagozzi et al. (2012) studied the extended identities of consumers as individuals through their multiple links to small group face-to-face brand communities, virtual on-line communities,

and the brand and organization itself in the form of symbolic ties. The ordering of identity in a gradient of decreasing psychological distance from self, to small group, to virtual community, to brand, and finally to organization, for aficionados of Ducati motor bikes, was found to channel support for brand and organization in the form of positive actions such as the inclination to provide feedback to the company, resistance to negative information against the brand, social promotion of the brand, and decisions to engage in activities supporting the brand. This study shows the integration of multiple social identities and how they influence complex reactions of small-ground members to a brand. Although most studies of brand communities have been survey-based, Tsai and Bagozzi (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental investigation of small group brand communities nested in a large web-based virtual community, where an expanded model of goal-directed behavior (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001) was used to explain actual behavior in a multimethod, longitudinal investigation with moderators and method bias and non-response bias controlled.

### **Evolving Models of Brand Consumption in Social Groups**

Social groups constitute important contexts for decision making by consumers. Early research in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the role of families in consumption. Researchers either treated one member of a family as the unit of analysis or else averaged responses of multiple family members, such as couples and their children. The underlying theories used to explain consumption were simplistic, focusing on attitudes and a small number of related mental states such as family member expectations and family brand choice.

More recently in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Simpson et al. (2012) proposed a new dyadic perspective, wherein for two people in a relationship such as a family, individual

attitudes and other psychological states explain choices of the people in the dyad as a unit. This is a promising approach, but three challenges are in need of attention: (1) a theory specifying how attitudes, beliefs, and other psychological states of individuals in the dyad can be incorporated, absorbed, or reconciled to produce preferences of each person in the dyad, (2) a theory explaining how preferences of each individual influence goals or outcomes of the dyad as a whole, and (3) how to overcome violations of statistical independence inherent in dyadic relations of this sort and how to represent differences in roles in dyads, hierarchical arrangements, and equality (Bagozzi, 2012).

Kenny has developed an approach to dyadic relationships, termed the social relationships model (SRM), that overcomes the statistical problems noted above and goes further to expand the level of detail underlying dyadic relationships in groups (e.g., Kenny et al., 2006). In one variant of the model, called the round-robin design, each person in a group rates or makes a judgment about a psychological state or action occurring between each pair of other members in the group. For instance, “imagine a family member consisting of a child (C), mother (M), and father (F) and that we wish to measure the degree of felt frustration during a time when the family is making a consumption decision such as what restaurant to choose for dinner... Under a round-robin design, C estimates M’s frustration with F and F’s frustration with M” (Bagozzi, 2012, p. 316), and likewise for M and for F, to give 6 measurements of frustration in each dyad as estimated by family members outside a specific dyad but in the same family. The SRM allows for a decomposition of effects in dyadic relationships in a group. For example, influence among members of a group, with sufficient measures, can be decomposed into actor, partner, individual reciprocity, actor-actor synchrony, partner-partner synchrony, relationship effects, dyadic reciprocity effects, and group level effects. A limitation of a variance decomposition approach is

that it does not address how social influence transpires so as to offer explanations of social behavior.

Another approach to investigating social influence in groups is to use key informants to provide information on psychological states of group members and assemble the information within a test of hypotheses at the group level. The key informant method was first used by anthropologists and refined by sociologists (Seidler, 1974). For example, in joint decision making, family members might form mutual intentions (we-intentions), where each member expresses his or her shared volitions (e.g., “We intend to vacation together at Disney World next summer”) (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002). The variables in such theories as the theory of planned behavior or the model of goal-directed behavior can be operationalized with key informant reports by members in a group, and the theory tested at the group-level. To employ such an approach, it is necessary that each key informant provides judgments of each partner in the group on each variable in the theory such as provided by the round robin design noted above, plus provides additional information on the degree that the self shares beliefs, attitudes etc. with other group members. Drawing on principles from plural subject theory in philosophy, it is possible to ground group processes and hypotheses through key informant information (Bagozzi, 2005). The foundation from plural subject theory can be summarized briefly as follows. Philosopher Gilbert (1992) defines a social group as one where “each of a certain set of persons must correctly view himself and the rest, taken together, as ‘us\*’ or ‘we\*’” (p. 151), and where a kind of intentionalism occurs such that “individual human beings [in a group] must see themselves in a particular way in order to constitute a collectivity” (p. 12). Group members see each other as sharing in the action of a verb; for instance, deciding together to embark on a joint trip to a brandfest. Using the general notion of “attitudes” in philosophy, which refers broadly to such



mental events or states as evaluations, beliefs, intentions, and emotions, philosopher Tuomela (2002, p. 3) cogently captured the essence of collective intentionality: “a person has a we-attitude A (say a goal, intention, or belief) if he has A and believes in addition that there is a mutual belief in the collective that the members have A”. In other words, shared goals, attitudes, emotions, decisions, etc. constitute the variables entering a group-based theory, and the members of a group are conscious of each other and themselves jointly holding shared mental states such as we-intentions. It should be noted that the key informant method can be used to provide information on group properties as a whole, and is not limited to use for properties of individuals in groups which are aggregated. An example of the use of the key informant approach to plural subject theory and group consumption can be found in Algesheimer et al. (2018).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The idea of brands as linking value for social identity has generated an important stream of research and one that pushes the breadth of self-definition to its outer boundaries. While social and group-related aspects of identity formation are not new, the focus on brands as central actors in such processes is. Given its recent emergence, this is an area where opportunities for new contributions are needed. At the same time, the affirmation of the apps-economy, with mediating platforms as successful business models for services brands, constitutes an ideal vehicle of study for future research. Finally, such a framework could prove fruitful in the investigation of more and more prominent types of brands and branding that promote social value: movements for collective responsibility (e.g., climate-change), opinion leaders or more broadly people with several linked followers having social welfare consequences, and institutions that have impact on society through their core purposes and designs of brands.

## DISCUSSION

Research on brands and their psychological significance has increased greatly in recent years, yet provides considerable opportunity for developing new perspectives grounded in basic psychological theory. The present paper offers an initial contribution in developing such perspectives by taking the necessary and preliminary step of reviewing the existing relevant research on the topic from the past decade and highlighting its recurring structural themes, operational constructs, findings and theoretical contributions. The concept of self, its three senses and their associated motives proved to be a useful framework for organizing and systematizing advancements in brand research so that main achievements could be consolidated and new areas of development identified.

In particular, the paper showed that extant research can be categorized into these areas: (1) brand as a passive object with utilitarian and symbolic meanings, (2) brand as an active relationship partner and a regulator of, and venue for, interpersonal relationships, and (3) brand as a creator of social identity with social group “linking value”. For each of these three areas, main conceptualizations and opportunities to expand are highlighted here.

In reference to (1), a number of psychological constructs has been consistently successful in progressing understanding of how brands define the self, including the function of attachment styles and implicit self-theories for brand personality; self-brand cognitive connections and their effects on brand evaluations, defenses against brand failure, and other brand-related behaviors. At the same time, this field presents an opportunity to expand investigation to a few aspects currently under-represented.

First, one opportunity exists by overcoming the positivity bias that focuses this stream of research only on positive interactions with brands. In fact, we found that research available on

the negative side of consumer-brand integration was significantly limited, especially in comparison to that conducted on the positive side. This asymmetry is understandable, particularly considering the marketing field: companies and institutions are chiefly interested in the practical consequences of positive forms of cognitive and affective processes and reactions. On the other hand, this asymmetry is difficult to justify on a theoretical level given that, in order to better understand and explain consumer-brand behaviors, the inclusion of negative aspects is also of much importance in everyday life. Future research is needed on this negative side of brand behavior, such as exhibited by attempts to avoid or reduce consumption, protect the environment, and leave simpler lives. Negative effects that could be investigated include also those from the brand to the self. The positivity bias could also be overcome by showing how brands can contribute to undermining, devaluing, and deteriorating—rather than building—the self. Investigation on the negative valence spectrum could prove useful in understanding psychological processes and behaviors such as addiction, or “captive” usage of brands and forced loyalty.

Second, another opportunity exists by consistently applying and validating the theoretical achievements from this stream of research to the study of new technologies that represent peculiar venues of self-definition. Suffice to mention here the hyper-personalization and hyper-targeted communication that platforms such as social-media and instant messaging offer to brands that need to come in contact with consumers. In this sense, the frequency of interaction and the depth of flexibility and adaptation could accelerate existing psychological processes and amplify the intensity of their outcomes. More needs to be understood in this area.

In reference to (2), the following constructs showed consistent application to define the relationships with brands and between people through brands: brand attachment as cognitive and

emotional facets, and its dependence on such antecedents as congruence of self and brand images, reactions to fear, social crowding, and its effects on such consequences as purchase; consumer-brand relationships, mainly grounded in relational norms and power roles; consumer emotions towards brands, manifest in compound emotions (e.g., love, hate); and brands as regulators of interpersonal relationships.

Contributions here seem to explore a wider spectrum in valence. In fact, we presented contrasting accounts wherein in some cases brands were positively framed as important elements for consumer identity creation and relationship exchanges, and in other cases they were negatively perceived and activated aggressive consumer behaviors. However, the opportunity arises to investigate the effect of ambivalence. No research could be found (at least in the review period and based on the selection criteria) that considers possible tensions and contradictions associated by consumers with their favorite brands. To reveal ambivalence and its etiology in consumer accounts of their partner brand would be an interesting direction for future research.

Furthermore, but also as one way to address the previous point, more recent contributions from positive psychology (for a review, see Ryan and Deci, 2001) and psychology of emotions are needed to expand this field. Although some research addresses emotional aspects of brands, most research to date has taken a cognitive orientation. Future research should hence focus more on connecting brand constructs to the happiness and well-being of people. Brick and Fitzsimons (2017) and Brick et al. (2018) demonstrate that some brand constructs can have important downstream consequences for life satisfaction, but additional work is needed in this specific area. Schmitt et al. (2015) propose that brands, by evoking specific experiences, can create pleasurable and meaningful moments of happiness, and ultimately foster consumer well-being. From research reviewed in this paper, much revolved around brands and relevant consumer

reactions in terms of key marketing metrics (e.g., brand loyalty, intentions, word of mouth).

However, marketers have the opportunity to develop offers that enhance happiness and quality of life, while also performing positively on key policy metrics such as satisfaction, loyalty, etc. The role of basic emotions, self-conscious emotions, moral emotions, and positive emotions in brand behavior are fruitful areas for study in this regard. Opportunities to investigate emotions such as pride, happiness, and life-satisfaction would complement the prevalent cognitive approach.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that a new world with intelligent branding of things is coming into being, as smart devices (voice assistants, appliances, cars, robots, watches, etc.) continue their rapid convergence with artificial intelligence and deep learning models. This emerging world will likely impact our perception and experience of brands. For example, consumers could be more open to see branded objects as partners and in human-like terms because they will become able to perform and even replace functions that previously required human skills. Relevant and significant new research streams in this area are highly needed, with particular attention given to issues of alienation, dehumanization, empowerment, human reconciliation, and propitiation.

In reference to (3), this area represents the most emerging one where contributions are still sparse, offering mostly exploratory understanding and mapping of the topic. Hence, further research could move our understanding from a speculative stage into deeper conceptualization, quantification, and validation; in so doing it could identify more in detail valid constructs useful to articulate the role of brands across cultures and geographies. Such perspectives and contexts on how brands create the group self have also potential to be the most suitable to understand new forms of branding. Suffice it here to expand thinking to platform-based businesses (e.g., e-bay, facebook, twitter), or diffused businesses without material assets (Uber, AirB&B) that could be

researched from a psychological stand-point through this emerging stream of work. Last, but not least, the field could provide theoretical foundation and explanation of emerging trends in business management such as brand purpose that focuses on the positive contributions that brands bring to communities as a whole. To date, no systematic understanding of the psychological processes ignited by such business initiatives can be found in the literature.

On a closing note, the concept of self, in its three senses developed in this review, and their associated motives were useful in order to highlight specific and distinctive trajectories that could expand our understanding of brands and psychological processes. At the same time, however, from such a review a few considerations can also be made that could prove fruitful and valid across each of the areas. In particular, after such a review a call for greater emphasis on conceptual and methodological foci can be made:

- *Greater emphasis on the objects of study.* The research we reviewed dealt nearly exclusively with physical products, and only occasionally with services. More generally, brands can be applied to experiences, ideas, and persons (e.g., politicians, athletes, celebrities), but we know little about the psychological foundations of such intangible brands. Whilst seminal contributions on brand experience conceptualization and measurement have been carried out (Brakus et al., 2009), future research could further develop the brand experience concept and focus on the psychological mechanisms through which brand-related stimuli trigger a branded consumer experience. Another direction for future research pointed-out by our editor is the investigation of attachments to both brands and celebrities. These could spill-over or influence mutually bonding with a brand or celebrity on each other. Cognitive balance theory might be applied here in terms of person-brand, person-celebrity, and celebrity-brand connections.

- *Greater emphasis on varied methodological approaches.* Most research to date has used traditional experimentation and paper and pencil methods to record effects of brand behavior. A need exists to investigate neuroscience (e.g., fMRI, EEG), hormonal (e.g., cortisol, testosterone), and genetic procedures for studying psychological aspects of brand behavior. Such approaches have been used in organizational behavior (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 2013; Bagozzi & Lee, 2019; Bagozzi & Verbeke, 2020) but not much in consumer branding research to date.

We believe that such emphases would broaden research on brands and their psychological underpinnings, whilst proving vital in ensuring the findings from each of the areas of the self-concept mentioned in this paper have enough robustness and generalizability to keep pace with most modern manifestations of brands across the world and explain their psychological relevance in informed and novel ways.

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Table 1. Sense of self, valance of impact and derived notions of brand

B R E A D T H  O F  I M P A C T	<b>Group self</b>	Brand as a creator of social identity with social group "linking value"	
		-	Brand communities
	<b>Inter-personal self</b>	Brand as a creator of social identity with social group "linking value"	
		Brand aversion Negative consumer brand relationships Consumer negative emotions toward brand	Brand attachment Positive consumer brand relationships Consumer positive emotions toward brand Brand compatibility; oppositional brand choice
		Brand as a passive object with utilitarian and symbolic meanings	
	<b>Personal self</b>	-	Brand personality Brand-self connection

←----- VALENCE OF IMPACT -----→

Figure 1. Self-brand dynamic

