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Graduate Program in Business
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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THE ROLE OF SELF-BRAND OVERLAP IN CONSUMER EVALUATIONS OF
BRAND PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

(Monograph format)

by

Kendra Alison Hart

Richard Ivey School of Business

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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Abstract

Branding research has begun to explore how loved brands are included in consumers' self-concepts. Such self-brand overlap can enable consumers to react to brand-relevant situations as though they were self-relevant. Synthesizing theories of self-other overlap and perspective taking, self-enhancement and self-protection, as well as brand portfolios, I articulate how self-serving biased cognitions can influence consumer attitudes and behaviours toward entire brand portfolios via the consumer's self-brand overlap with a single portfolio member.

Study 1 was designed to investigate how self-serving biases can positively affect consumer evaluations of multi-brand portfolios of which the consumer's focal brand is a member. Potential reasons for the resulting inconclusive findings are discussed and prospects for future research are suggested.

Study 2 was designed to investigate consumer interpretations of brand portfolio restructuring. Results indicate that consumers who have a high degree of self-brand overlap can interpret such brand portfolio management decisions as a personal rejection of themselves when the brand is eliminated, and personal acceptance or validation when their brand is retained after an elimination threat. Study 3 was designed to investigate the behavioural aftermath of such inferences. Partial results and prospects for future research are offered. Potential implications for brand managers and marketing theory are discussed.

Keywords: brand portfolios, self-other overlap, self-enhancement, self-protection, brand elimination

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Chapter 1: Background

1.1 The Value of Brands

Early researchers conceptualized the brand as a proprietary name or symbol that differentiates a firm's offering from similar competitive offerings (Hanby 1999). The brand or "mark" was meant as a guarantee of the product's source. This implicit guarantee of the source of the product signaled benefits such as a promise of quality or durability and expectation of consumption safety. Today, firms create brands in order to differentiate themselves from similar competitive offerings in the marketplace. From a managerial perspective, brands often demonstrate significant financial benefits due to consumers' willingness to pay a price premium for brand equity (Keller 1993). However, research has shown that brands can mean much more to consumers than a guarantee of quality and functional benefits. Brands can serve an emotionally satisfying, self-expressive role for consumers. Such differences in the roles that brands play in consumer lives impact the basis of consumer brand attitudes.

1.2 Consumer Brand Attitudes and Attitude Functions

Attitudes are a frequent topic for traditional psychologists and consumer researchers alike. An *attitude* is an individual's overall global evaluation of an *attitude object* – a product, a conceptual idea, an experience, etc. (Petty and Wegener 1998). Positive consumer attitudes towards brands are often the foundation of strategic decisions regarding brand extensions and brand alliances. Positive attitudes towards the brand can be leveraged to help speed consumer acceptance of any item bearing the brand name. However, the foundational basis and structure of attitudes are an increasingly important

area of enquiry (Petty and Wegener 1997). It would seem that not all attitudes are created equal.

A growing body of scholarly work within both the psychology and marketing literatures suggests that attitudes exist to serve a variety of psychological needs for the individual. In this way, attitudes have many different functions. Understanding the various psychological functions that attitudes serve is an important determinant in understanding consumer choice behaviour and opportunities for attitude change.

In a review of the literature, Shavitt & Nelson (2002) synthesize seminal work on the psychological functions of attitudes to help articulate the different motivations behind attitude creation. Attitudes have been thought to serve a need for knowledge and order, helping individuals to make sense of and organize their world in a psychologically consistent manner (Katz 1960). Attitudes have also been thought to serve a utilitarian function (Katz 1960; Smith et al. 1956), guiding people through choice processes by helping them understand the benefits and drawbacks of any attitude object. Attitudes can also serve a social-adjustive function, whereby holding or expressing certain attitudes can help one to establish some form of psycho-symbolic connection with individuals or social group to which one is (or desires to be) affiliated (Kelman 1961; Smith et al. 1956).

However, of particular interest to the present research presented herein, attitudes also serve a self-esteem maintenance function (Shavitt and Nelson 2002). Attitudes can help to serve needs of self-expression, as well as epistemic needs through which we understand who we (and others) are. In this way, attitudes can not only shape our self-

perception, but can also be motivated by the need or desire to see ourselves a certain way (Dunning 1999). However, before I begin the task of outlining the ways in which an individual's attitudes are shaped by self-esteem needs, I will first articulate the role that brands play within the self-concept and how this can influence brand-focused attitudes.

1.3 Brands and the Self

Research has shown that consumers can infer personality traits in brands (Aaker 1997). Such personality inferences might stem from marketing communications, images of typical brand users, or other message sources. Research into consumers' usage of and attraction to brands has focused on outlining how brand personality enables consumers to construct and express the self symbolically through brand usage, even at a young age (Chaplin 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2005). Consumers who see themselves in the personality of the brand can use the brand to help shape and communicate their desired self.

However, the literature has begun to expand beyond the idea of brands as merely *appealing* to one's self-concept, and look at ways in which the brand is *included* in the self-concept. Recent fMRI work (Reimann et al. 2012) has shown that inclusion of a loved brand into the self develops over time with repeated brand usage. Such findings are in line with behavioural-based research demonstrating that consumers integrate loved brands into the self in much the same way as they do their close friends and family (Trump and Brucks 2012). However, before I proceed to build upon these recent findings, I will first outline definitions of the self, and then move on to explain how such self-inclusion impacts consumers and marketers.

1.4 What is The Self?

Many scholars have identified that the literature does not contain a universally agreed-upon, single definition of “self”. There are many different definitions of the self, as well as many different cognitive and behavioural phenomena that it is purported to affect. In a review of the many ways in which “self” is conceptualized in the literature, Leary and Tangney (2012) identified the following five dominant themes under which the self is categorized as a construct.

Self as the total person: The term “self” is often used to refer to one’s own physical person, as in “I hurt myself”. Such usage is easily understandable and is pervasive in casual conversation. However, as Leary and Tangney (2012) point out, this does not generally capture the larger psychological construct that most academic researchers contemplate, and can lead to confusion between academic meanings of the word “self” and its more common uses in daily discourse. Thus it is important to note that researchers do not study the person *as a self*, but rather focus on each person as *having* a self.

Self as personality: Some researchers use the term “self” to discuss dimensions of an individual’s personality, and how these might distinguish one individual from another (Tesser 2002). As with using the term “self” to refer to the physical person, using “self” as a substitute for personality variables that make each individual unique can be misleading. However, this particular usage is less frequent than others.

Self as experiencing subject: There is an important distinction between two fundamental aspects of the self – the self as “I” and the self as “me” (Mead 1934). The “I” element of

the self is the aspect of the self as a knower or thinker. It is this element that is responsible for self-knowledge, self-reflection, self-assessment, etc. and is the center of an individual's conscious experience. It is the "I" that thinks one's thoughts, feels one's feelings and constructs a sense of who one is (Leary and Tangney 2012).

Self as beliefs about oneself: In contrast to the aforementioned self as "I", there is also widespread usage of the self as "me". Whereas the "I" self refers to the self as knower, the "me" self refers to the self as something that can be known (Mead 1934). In this sense, the self refers to the knowledge structures individuals have surrounding their attributes and abilities, as well as the thoughts and feelings that one has about that information. It is the "I" that constructs and reflects the knowledge of "me". Although the "me" self is often captured by terms such as the self-concept, self-image, self-beliefs and self-esteem, it is also frequently expressed simply as "self", further exacerbating confusion surrounding a clean definition of the self.

Self as executive agent: The self is not only a thinker, but also an actor that makes decisions, carries out and controls behaviours. It is the self that filters and attends to information, contemplates response, modifies thoughts and emotions, and controls or initiates action (Baumeister and Vohs 2012). In this way, this version of the self that is responsible for self-control or self-regulation can be conceptualized as influencing the executive functioning that coordinates cognitions, emotions and behaviour.

Leary and Tangney (2012) suggest that it is the last three themes – self as an experiencing subject, self as a set of beliefs, and self as executive agent – that are of primary interest to researchers. Furthermore, these three themes converge in their

relationship to an individual's ability to engage in reflexive thinking. The self is involved in how people experience the world, how they perceive themselves, and their ability to manage their actions. To this end, Leary and Tangney (2012) suggest that the self should be thought of as a set of psychological mechanisms that allow individuals to think consciously about themselves and behave in accordance with those thoughts.

A similar view is put forth by Morf & Mischel (2012) who outline the self as an organized system of knowledge and dynamic thought processes. It is a motivated thinking and acting system that is constructed and maintained primarily within interpersonal contexts rather than in isolation. Early theorists on the origins of the self have suggested that our sense of self develops as a function of social interaction (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). Theories discussing the "looking glass self" suggest that as we encounter other people throughout our life and observe their reactions to and evaluations of us, our own self-views are shaped (Cooley 1902). Thus, the notion of the self as an information processor that is embedded within and shaped by social context underlies the idea of the self-concept as an inherently social product. Thus, in this present work, I take the self to mean both an object about which a knowledge structure is created and an actor that thinks and feels. Because of this, it is capable of self-awareness, enabling the individual to reflect upon its own experiences and monitor its reactions. In this way the self not only constructs cognitive understandings and affective responses to life's events, but is also guided by them in subsequent thoughts and behaviours. This view suggests that individuals experience and interact with their interpersonal world in various self-motivated and self-guided ways, in part in pursuit of self-construction and self-preservation. However, before I expand on this point, I will first outline the ways in

which the self and brands interact, and then proceed to discuss how the self might influence consumer response to brand portfolio management decisions.

1.5 Brands as a Component of the Self

Consumer researchers have noted that consumers use material goods and consumption practices to help build their self-concepts and express their identities. Research on self-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2003) has begun to explicate how consumers use brand consumption and brand meaning to help construct and influence their own self-concepts. These findings have led into recent work on the degree to which consumers incorporate loved brands into their self-concept (Trump and Brucks 2012). These findings are founded upon the self-expansion model of close relationships (Aron and Aron 1986), which suggests that individuals are motivated to pursue emotionally close relationships in order to expand their self-concepts and perceived self-efficacy. By entering into close relationships, individuals are able to include the other person's resources, perspectives and identities into the self, and enhance their own self-concept. The result is a self-other overlap, where an individual's mental representations of his or her own self begin to merge with mental representations of the relationship partner. This can have interesting consequences for an individual's cognitive processes when differentiating between self and other. The prospect of self-brand overlap, in turn, offers thought-provoking extensions to the role of self-brand connections in consumer judgements of the brand portfolio.

Although initially conceived as a model of interpersonal closeness between two people, researchers have begun to use the self-expansion model (Aron et al. 1991) to stretch

beyond the traditional interpersonal relationship sphere and demonstrate that individuals have the capacity to include other admired entities in the self as well. Researchers have shown that people are able to include more distal entities such as in-groups (Schubert and Otten 2002; Tropp and Wright 2001) and personal heroes (Sullivan and Venter 2005) into the self-concept. Additionally, although not built upon the self-expansion model, Belk (1988) long ago suggested that material goods can also be included into the self. Most recently, researchers have begun to investigate the degree to which consumers incorporate loved brands into their self-concept (Trump and Brucks 2012). Thus, it is becoming more and more clear that people and objects with which we have a psychological connection can be included into our own individual cognitive representation of self.

In this research, I am drawing upon literature inspired by the self-expansion framework to suggest that the inclusion of brands into the self has important implications for brand portfolio management. However, before I extend the discussion of the impact of self-brand overlap on portfolio management decisions, I will first outline the basic tenets of the inclusion-of-other-in-self framework and highlight additional research on interpersonal empathy that suggests how such self-inclusion can alter an individual's social cognition.

1.6 Self-Other Overlap and Altered Cognition

The self-expansion model suggests that individuals in close relationships include the resources, perspectives and identities of their relationship partner into their own self-concept. The self-expansion model posits that one motivation for establishing close

relationships is that such relationships increase one's perceived self-efficacy by allowing individuals to access resources held by relationship partners, as if they were their own resources. These could include the physical (i.e. financial and material comforts), social (i.e. professional networks) and knowledge (i.e. information and skills) resources of the close other. This suggests that those who see the resources of a close other as their own will also see the results that their close other receives from those resources as affecting themselves. For example, *my close other's* loss of financial resources will have an effect on *me*; *my close other's* gain of new friendships will have a positive effect on *my own* social standing.

It is not difficult to understand how a close other's resources may impact the fortunes of the individual. However, it is less obvious how the perspectives and identities of the relationship partner come to affect the individual. Aron and colleagues (Aron et al. 2005; Aron et al. 2004) suggest that the inclusion of a close other's perspectives and identities into the self *stems from* the inclusion of the other's resources into one's own self-concept. When an individual comes to see his or her close other's resources as being essential to their own resources, it creates a cognitive reorganization, whereby the individual begins to categorize him or herself in a slightly different way. For example, if my partner has measurable wealth, or higher intelligence or more social connections, I begin to label myself as being more wealthy, intelligent, or popular than I might actually be. As I begin to see myself as having these assets and characteristics, there follows a slight change in my self-perception as I begin to adopt the identity that I would have if I held those resources in actuality. Thus the inclusion of a close other's identity into the self can lead individuals to become somewhat confused about who they truly are,

independent of their relationship partner. This can lead to self-referencing and difficulty making distinctions during “me” versus “not me” judgements.

The self-reference effect (Kuiper and Rogers 1979; Rogers et al. 1977) suggests that individuals encode self-relevant information much deeper into memory than information relevant to others. This is often demonstrated by faster recognition and retrieval of self-relevant versus other-relevant information. Using this response time measure to display overlap between self and other cognitive representations, research has shown response time patterns differ when an individual is making “me” versus “not me” judgements, and that these response latencies depend on the degree of social distance between self and other (Aron et al. 1991; Aron and Fraley 1999; Mashek et al. 2003; Smith et al. 1999). This means that the closer I feel to another person, the more our identities merge and the more difficulty I have identifying distinctions between that person and myself.

Most relevant to the goals of this present research, recent work (Trump and Brucks 2012) used the self-other overlap framework and response-time latency methodology to test the degree to which loved brands are included in the self. Across two studies, participants demonstrated that matched characteristics between the self and a loved brand were more accessible in memory than mismatched characteristics. This provides evidence of overlapping knowledge structures surrounding brands and the self, in keeping with the self-other overlap model. However, the self-brand overlap research looked only at response time latencies, which are meant to tap the degree of descriptive trait overlap between self and brand. It did not address the inclusion of the brand’s perspectives into the self which is also predicted by the self-other overlap model. Thus,

the degree to which consumers are able to take the brand's perspective in brand-relevant events remains to be seen.

Self-other overlap leads an individual to include a close other's perspective into the self (Aron et al. 1991), suggesting an increased ability to empathize with the other. Empathy can be construed as a vicarious response to the assumed emotions of another (Eisenberg and Miller 1987). Research has demonstrated that the act of taking another's perspective increases empathic response and self-other overlap (Davis et al. 1996; Galinsky et al. 2005). This means that when we purposefully try to imagine ourselves in another person's situation, our cognitive representations become increasingly entwined. Thus, we respond to affect-laden events as though they were happening to us, with a similar degree of awareness and affect intensity. Although the causal direction of those studies shows that perspective taking *leads to increased self-other merging*, it is arguable that the reverse causal direction might also hold true, with increased self-other overlap *leading to easier perspective taking*. This assumption is supported by research on empathy and perspective taking which has shown that individuals are more likely to selectively and strategically manage the information they reveal about a close friend versus someone less close to them (Schlenker and Britt 2001). These impression management behaviours stemmed from an increased ability to empathize with a close friend versus a stranger.

Understanding and explaining our own and other's behaviour is an important aspect of social interaction. Self-other overlap has been shown to lead to changes in the actor-observer perspective. People are frequently guilty of the fundamental attribution error – the tendency to attribute behaviour to individual trait variables and personality rather

than contextual variables that may influence individual behaviour (Ross 1977). However, such attributions occur more frequently when explaining the behaviours of others than when explain one's own behaviour. Research has reliably shown that individuals demonstrate a consistent difference when explaining their own behaviours versus that of another person. This actor-observer asymmetry suggests that we tend to explain our own behaviours as contingent upon the nuances of the situation in which we are acting, while we explain the behaviours we observe in others as being contingent upon stable personality dispositions (Jones 1976; Jones and Nisbett 1971). This change is attribution stems from a more intimate knowledge of our own minds than that of another person. However, the self-other overlap model suggests that not all "others" are created equal. Research has also shown individuals make more situational versus dispositional judgements for close versus non-close others (Aron et al. 1991; Aron and Fraley 1999), suggesting a greater ability to understand and predict the thoughts of close others, based on their overlap with the self. Taken together, the research on self-other overlap's role in perspective taking, empathy and actor-observer asymmetry suggests that individuals may be able to interpret and react to events as though they were the other.

The behavioural measures used in the self-other overlap tradition are not the only indication that self-other overlap can lead to an increase in perspective taking and blurred boundaries between self and close others. Recent work on the neural bases of empathy and differences in self-other processing offer some preliminary support for the idea that we see part of others in our self and part of our self in others. Researchers using fMRI studies to understand perspective taking (Ames et al. 2008) and theory-of-mind (Jenkins et al. 2008) have identified patterns of neural activation that map onto regions

known to be triggered by thinking of the self. This supports the idea that an individual's ability to understand and identify with others involves cognitive processes that are primarily used in contemplating the self. Research addressing the degree to which individuals are able to identify self versus another person (Kircher et al. 2001) found that there were some areas of similar brain activation when looking at photos of self versus other, with one area of activation being similar when making self versus stranger comparisons and close other versus stranger comparisons. The implication here is that there is some similarity in neural processing between self and close other when compared to a non-close other. This is consistent with the notion of self-other cognitive overlap.

In a review of both psychological and neuroscience literature, scholars (Decety and Sommerville 2003) have synthesized disparate findings to offer some support for a common but not identical (therefore, overlapping) set of mental representations between self and other. The authors argue that understanding others requires some degree of self-knowledge. However, they do not investigate how self-other processing might differ along lines of relational closeness, which is the essence of self-other overlap. A recent study addressing the role of self-other overlap in neural responses to performance errors demonstrated that observing another person making an error in a performance task resulted in vicarious activation of the neural self-performance-monitoring system (Kang et al. 2010). This effect was moderated by the degree of self-other overlap between the actor and the observer, as measured by the inclusion-of-other-in-self (IOS) scale (Aron et al. 1992). This indicates that increased self-other overlap increases vicarious neural activation of areas indicative of performance monitoring and social learning, and is

preliminary evidence linking fMRI results to the inclusion-in-self framework.

Furthermore, vicarious activation of self-relevant neural regions when observing others lends support to the idea that self-other overlap changes the actor-observer perspective as suggested by the inclusion-in-self model. This could be the basis for assuming similar degrees of vicarious activation of regions involved in other forms of observational learning and social cognition.

Thus there is converging theoretical support for the idea that individuals are able to see and feel events as their close other would. With recent evidence of self-brand overlap demonstrating that consumers have a harder time navigating the distinctions between self and a valued brand in a response-time task, there is preliminary evidence that consumers of loved brands include parts of that brand's identity in the self. This leads to difficulty delineating between where the individual ends and the brand begins. What remains to be seen is whether or not consumers go one step further and begin to take on the brand's perspective and react to brand-relevant events and relationships as though they were the brand.

How might taking the perspective of the brand influence consumer evaluations of brand portfolio management decisions? For consumers that include loved brands into the self, brand-relevant events become self-relevant. In this regard, individuals with a high degree of self-brand overlap may then fall prey to many of the same self-serving cognitive biases that affect self-perception when they are contemplating the brand. These self-serving biases are rooted in an individual's inherent need for positive self-esteem. In the following sections I will outline theories that propose why people need self-esteem, and

then discuss various cognitive strategies that people use to enhance and protect their self-esteem.

1.7 Self-Esteem Needs

Self-esteem is a person's evaluation of, or attitude toward, himself (James 1890). Extant literature demonstrates the effects of self-esteem on a wide variety of domains. Self-esteem is so central to proper functioning that recent research suggests that people value a boost to their self-esteem more than receiving a paycheck or seeing a best friend (Bushman et al. 2011). However, why does self-esteem exist? There are two dominant schools of thought that I will outline below: Terror Management Theory and Sociometer Theory.

Terror Management Theory (Solomon et al. 1991) suggests that the role of self-esteem is to help individuals manage existential anxieties. The theory proposes that self-esteem protects individuals from the worry that stems from the knowledge that they will someday die (Pyszczynski et al. 2004). This argument is built from the premise that, as humans evolved and developed increasingly sophisticated cognitive abilities, they became able to envision a future time and realized that death was inevitable. Such awareness of one's own mortality creates a debilitating sense of terror, which can lead to anxiety-induced inaction and a become threat to survival (MacDonald 2007). Terror Management Theory argues that this problem is overcome by the construction of cultural world views that provide a route to immortality. Cultural worldviews can offset the fear of one's own mortality by offering the promise of literal immortality (i.e. life after death)

or symbolic immortality (i.e. being remembered for great works) to individuals who maintain and live by its value systems.

Threats to one's worldview (i.e. challenging important beliefs and values), or the prospect of personally not living up to the culture's standards, elicits anxiety. Such anxiety manifests itself in fluctuations in self-esteem. However, people with stable self-esteem are shielded from terror by the knowledge that that they are living up to important cultural standards. If self-esteem stems from feeling that one is living up to the values of one's culture, then being a valuable member of a meaningful cultural system offers relief from existential anxiety.

Sociometer Theory (Leary et al. 1995) suggests that self-esteem exists to monitor and respond to signals of social inclusion and exclusion. Building upon theories articulating an individual's fundamental need to belong to social groups and relationships (Baumeister and Leary 1995), Sociometer Theory suggests that self-esteem is like an interpersonal gauge or thermostat that monitors the quality of people's interpersonal relationships. Sociometer theory suggests that people are motivated to value and maintain group membership and interpersonal relationships. This stems from an evolutionary basis, where group membership could help ensure one's safety and survival due to shared resources. Such survival could ensure successful reproduction and rearing of offspring. These goals would be difficult to achieve all by oneself in prehistoric times. Thus, although interpersonal relationships are emotionally rewarding in and of themselves, it is arguable that adaptive, evolutionary processes have created in us a fundamental need for social bonds (Baumeister and Leary 1995). To this end, Sociometer Theory (Leary and Baumeister 2000) suggests that self-esteem serves as an

internal monitor of one's level of social acceptance and value. According to the theory, state self-esteem gauges perceptions of one's level of social acceptance or value in the immediate situation. Fluctuations in the perception of social inclusion and acceptance will lead to fluctuations in self-esteem.

Thus, Terror Management Theory and Sociometer Theory both outline a basic premise for the existence of self-esteem. However, despite the differences inherent in these two theoretical perspectives, researchers suggest that these two approaches to the role of self-esteem converge in terms of their relation to one's sense of social value (MacDonald 2007). Thus, self-esteem hinges upon the perception that one is a good and valuable person, worthy of group membership and relationships, as well as cultural validation. These qualities are socially valued and can impact the individual on a basic level. Because of this, people are motivated to present themselves in a variety of self-enhancing ways, as well as undertake behaviours that protect their self-views.

1.8 Self-Serving Cognitive Biases

It has been argued that self-esteem is a central human need (Leary et al. 1995; Pyszczynski et al. 2004). Research suggests that people are motivated to amplify or protect their self-image in the service of their self-esteem needs (Leary 2007). Two primary versions of these motivated goals are called self-enhancement and self-protection, respectively. Self-enhancement can be construed as a pervasive tendency toward inflated self-positivity, manifesting in a series of self-evaluations and estimates of personal performance that are more generous than is objectively warranted. Conversely, self-protection refers to the pervasive need to prevent self-esteem from falling below an

acceptable level, or correct a drop in self-esteem back to its natural baseline. Put simply, self-enhancement and self-protection biases operate from the assumption that people want to feel good (or avoid feeling bad) about who they are. In addition, these self-image motives extend beyond the self to important others who are connected to the self, such as relationship partners (Alicke and Sedikides 2009). The following sections will outline several self-enhancing and self-protective cognitive biases to which individuals fall prey in the service of positive self-esteem.

1.8.1 Self-Enhancement

Theories of self-enhancement suggest that people are motivated to promote positive self-evaluations and estimates. Research on a variety of self-enhancement manifestations such as the above-average effect, selective processing and retention of self-relevant information, strategic social comparisons, and implicit egotism, to name a few, has demonstrated the ubiquity of this tendency.

People consider themselves to be above average in many domains (Alicke and Govorun 2005). Yet statistically, this cannot possibly be consistently true. When asked to rate themselves in comparison to other people in general, individuals consider themselves to be happier (Klar and Giladi 1999), healthier (Kircher et al. 2001; Larwood 1978), perform better in their jobs (Larwood and Whittaker 1977), and have higher morals (Messick et al. 1985; Rowatt et al. 2002; Sedikides and Gebauer 2010) than other people. When asked to contemplate the personal likelihood of future events, individuals expect more positive events and fewer negative events to happen to them than they would predict for others (Perloff and Fetzer 1986). People also describe themselves with more

positive terms, and less negative terms than they use to describe others (Alicke 1985; Brown 1986), as well as rating themselves more favourably than third party observers do (Colvin et al. 1995; Robins and Beer 2001; Zuckerman et al. 2004).

Researchers suggest that such unrealistic positivity is supported by motivated reasoning that creates and validates self-serving causal theories (Kunda 1990; Kunda 1987). For example, people are prone to attributing success and other favourable events to their own attributes and abilities, while attributing failures and other negative events to contextual factors operating outside of the self (Arkin et al. 1980). Such self-serving attributions also occur within collaborative groups. Research has shown that individuals are prone to feel that they are primarily responsible for group success, but less responsible for group failures than when compared to other members (Mullen and Riordan 1988). This tendency to blame others is in keeping with broader research on excuse making and deflecting self-blame in general (Darley and Goethals 1980; Kernis et al. 1992; Mehlman and Snyder 1985).

Such reticence when encountering negative self-relevant information is also reflected in the tendency to spend more time reading positive information about ourselves than negative information (Baumeister and Cairns 1992). Similarly, when facing the spectre of failure in an important domain, people will often resort to interpreting ambiguous feedback in a way that affirms the positivity of the self (Jacobs et al. 1971). In addition to motivated processing of self-relevant feedback, people demonstrate a tendency towards selective memory for positivity when thinking about self-relevant events. Individuals are prone to biased memory retrieval that accesses their successes more than failures, and positive self-relevant attributes better than negative ones (Skowronski

2011), and remember more positive events that are relevant to the self than similar events that are relevant to others (Skowronski et al. 1991).

Although individuals show a bias in the amount of self-positivity with which they compare themselves to others, there is also a strategic, self-serving bias in the types of social comparison they employ. When faced with the potential for negative evaluation in comparison to relevant peers, people may conduct fewer social comparisons (Gibbons et al. 1994) or prefer downward comparisons to inferior others and avoid upward comparisons with those who outperform them (Hakmiller 1966; Wills 1981). Such strategic selection of inferior comparison targets increases psychological adjustment and positive affect (Affleck et al. 1987; Hakmiller 1966). Similarly, research has shown that people prefer friends who do not excel in areas that are important to own their self-esteem because close friendships with others who outperform the individual in an area of self-importance is psychologically distressing (Tesser 1988). Such tactics allow people to indirectly self-enhance by association, or “bask in the reflected glory” of a close other’s success without being threatened by their own deficiencies (Cialdini et al. 1976).

However, self-enhancement strategies do not just involve biased evaluations and behaviours toward one’s own self. Theories of implicit egotism (Pelham et al. 2005) suggest that self-enhancement biases may unconsciously extend beyond the individual to external objects that are merely associated with the self. Perhaps some of the best known examples of this phenomenon are the endowment effect (Kahneman et al. 1990) and mere ownership effect (Beggan 1992), whereby an individual values objects more strongly once he owns these objects (i.e. these objects are “his”). Yet, despite the popularity of these theories, research has shown that such unconscious influence goes

beyond inflated valuations of the physical objects one owns and extends to other self-linked objects of evaluation.

Research on implicit attitudes (Greenwald and Banaji 1995) suggests that people have unconscious positive feelings about themselves that can influence social cognition.

When an individual encounters stimuli that in some way can be associated with the self, his inherent positive self-evaluations become automatically activated (Koole et al. 2001).

Because of this, an individual's inherent self-positivity can inflate his evaluations of a wide variety of seemingly coincidental objects, provided that they are objects that he unconsciously connects with the self. For example, research on the name letter effect (Nuttin 1985) has shown that individuals have a propensity to evaluate the letters in their own names more positively than other letters in the alphabet, with this tendency being strongest for one's own initials (Hodson and Olson 2005; Koole and Pelham 2003).

Research has also shown a significant correlation between an individual's own name and the name of the city in which they reside or the name of the careers that they choose to pursue (Pelham et al. 2002). Furthermore, research on interpersonal attraction has shown correlational evidence that individuals are more likely to marry individuals whose first or last names are similar to their own, and that experiment participants preferred other participants whose names shared letters with their own names (Jones et al. 2004).

Name letter effects also impact the ways in which people choose to spend their money.

Sharing initials with corporate names has been shown to influence stock investment decisions (Knewton and Sias 2010), and sharing an initial with the name of a

devastating hurricane increases disaster-relief donations (Chandler et al. 2008). Perhaps

most relevant to the goals of this present research are studies that show that people prefer

non-existent brands when the brand names resemble their own names than when the brands names have no such connection (Brendl et al. 2005). However, research has outlined boundary conditions for this intriguing phenomenon. In a study designed to assess the pervasiveness of the name letter effect, Hodson and Olson (2005) found that the effects did not hold for everyday attitude objects such as common food items, animals or leisure pursuits. The authors suggested that this phenomenon may be driven by the need to express one's self identity and values, and as such, holds primarily for attitude objects that can serve that function.

Thus, there are many pathways by which people are able to inflate their sense of self-worth. However, self-enhancement strategies are only one side of the stable self-esteem coin. When faced with the potential for (or reality of) a threat to self-esteem, people will also employ a variety of self-protective strategies aimed at minimizing the perceived threat and returning to the self-perception status quo.

1.8.2 Self-Protection

When people face the prospect of their own weakness and failings, they encounter a threat to their self-esteem. Thus, a self-threat can be considered as a devaluation of one's self-concept or a weakening in self-regard as people face the prospect of not living up to their self-beliefs (Leary et al. 2009). Research has shown that self-threats can be internalized and influence the ways in which people see themselves. For example, research on self-fulfilling prophecies has demonstrated that in some contexts, people will live up to the negative expectations that others have of them (Fazio et al. 1981), yet in most instances, threats to one's self-concept trigger defensive self-protection strategies

aimed at psychologically reducing the perception of self-threat. In the following paragraphs I will outline some of these strategies.

I have previously outlined myriad evidence that suggests that people prefer to think positively of themselves. As a result, one clear sign of self-protection motivations is the degree to which people will go to avoid considering or accepting negative information about themselves (Mischel et al. 1973). Research on feedback seeking behaviours has shown that individuals are less interested in hearing performance feedback when they expect that it will be negative, or that they have underperformed relative to others (Hepper et al. 2011), as well as information that they deem might be seen as socially undesirable (Sanitioso and Wlodarski 2004). Furthermore, people least prefer negative feedback even when that feedback might be truthful, developmental and come from a friendly, non-adversarial source (Neiss et al. 2006).

However, even if an individual cannot avoid receiving negative feedback about the self, he can choose to ignore it. Research has shown that people spend less time reading written negative feedback (Baumeister and Cairns 1992) and also process negative information in a more shallow manner (Sedikides and Green 2000). This tendency towards shallow processing is further reflected in poorer memory for negative self-relevant events (Skowronski 2011; Skowronski et al. 1991) as individuals tend to repress knowledge that might cause distress (Erdelyi 2006). For example, research has shown that people have a weaker memory for their own personal bad behaviour as compared to their memory for the bad behaviours of others (D'Argembeau and Van der Linden 2008). In other words, although people have been shown to forget their own personal transgressions, they exhibit accurate recall for shameful behaviour in general. Furthermore, weaker memory

for self-relevant negative information as compared to other-relevant negative information appears to occur only for behaviours and attributes that are seen as highly diagnostic and central to the self-concept rather than peripheral attributes, further implicating the self-protective motivations of this phenomenon (Green and Sedikides 2004).

In addition to the ways in which people avoid or deny self-threatening information, people are also prone to various strategies to reframe the threatening event. One way to do this is to downplay the self-importance or diagnostic validity of the event. For example, individuals who underperform on an intelligence test are more keen to read diagnostic information that disparages the soundness of the test (Frey 1981). Similarly, people who have not progressed on personal abilities and attributes over time tend to downplay the importance of those qualities (Wilson and Ross 2001). This finding is in keeping with research demonstrating that people change their classification of what constitutes virtue or a vice depending on the traits they themselves have or lack (Dunning et al. 1991), and the tendency for these self-serving classifications increase in the face of negative feedback (Dunning et al. 1995).

However, people do not only question the relevance of tests and measures by which they are judged; they also question the merits of individuals who judge them. For example, participants taking part in a computer-based dating game were more prone to search for negative information about and devalue the attractiveness of their potential date after the person declined to select them, while those who were selected maintained their attractiveness estimations of their date (Wilson et al. 2004). By the same token, individuals vying for team membership who were chosen last by the team captain

reported harsher evaluations of the person making the selection, and questioned his or her judgement abilities (Bourgeois and Leary 2001).

Such findings blend nicely with larger research programs on social rejection, which is a threat to the global self-worth. Social rejection has been shown to result in not just self-defensive strategies, but offensive punishment strategies as well. For example, individuals facing the self-relevant threat of social rejection have subsequently demonstrated harsher evaluations of job candidates, as well as a greater willingness to inflict pain on others by blasting them with distasteful noise or dishing out hot sauce to people known to dislike spicy foods (McGregor et al. 1998; Twenge et al. 2001). This offensive behaviour can also extend to groups representative of the source of the threat. Self-threats such as personal insults can lead to prejudice towards perceived out-groups members such as ethnic minorities, women, etc. (Fein and Spencer 1997; Sinclair and Kunda 2000; Sinclair and Kunda 1999). Self-threats also impact how people interact with larger institutions. For example, people evaluate the procedural fairness of a decision-making process depending on the degree to which it protects firmly-held values and goals (Skitka 2002; Skitka 2003) and construe fairness differently on the basis of whether the event happens to them or to another person (Ham and van den Bos 2008).

Such judgement of fairness within a comparison context leads into the discussion of the strategic use of social comparisons in self-protection. Comparing one's self to a superior other (upwards social comparison) can threaten the self, particularly if the domain of performance is self-relevant (Tesser 1988). To this end, people may purposefully choose comparison targets who perform worse than they do themselves (downward social comparison) in order to boost their self-esteem (Wills 1981), or distance themselves

from friends who outperform them in an important domain (Tesser et al. 1984). People may also glorify the performance of others who outperform them in an attempt to normalize their own lack-lustre performance and establish their failure as commonplace (Alicke et al. 1997; Jordan and Monin 2008), thereby reducing the threat by establishing a new comparison standard under which the superior performer is an outlier.

1.9 Summary

Thus, people will go to great lengths to establish and maintain a certain level of self-esteem. Self-enhancement strategies allow individuals to overestimate their potential abilities, preferentially compare themselves to others, and offer inflated evaluations of objects linked to the self. Self-protection strategies allow people to strategically avoid or downplay negative information, as well as reframe negative events. These behaviours have been shown to operate in a rapid, automatic fashion (Roese and Olson 2007).

Perhaps because of this automaticity, it is interesting to note that these biases are also at work on people's perceptions of their own biases. In other words, self-enhancement and self-protection proclivities can lead people to believe that they are not engaging in such mental tricks. Pronin et al (2002) labelled this the "bias blind spot" and demonstrated that people think that they are above such phenomena.

However, knowing that consumers have the ability to include loved brands into their self-concept, and having established that people show a fair number of self-enhancing and self-protective strategies towards how they construe, process, and react to self-relevant objects and events, my research seeks to understand how such self-brand overlap might affect consumer reactions to brand management decisions.

1.10 Research Questions

The research herein seeks to build upon the aforementioned findings and assess the degree to which consumers experience brand related events in a personalized way, as though they were the brand. Using the self-other overlap model and inherent self-serving cognitive biases as a foundation, this research aims to address the following issues:

1. If including the focal brand into the self-concept serves as a conduit through which the larger brand portfolio is included as an in-group into the individual's self-concept; and if such in-group awareness affects the individual's evaluations of fellow in-group brands
2. if eliminating a brand can be inferred as personalized rejection or ostracism from the portfolio group, and
3. if such inferred rejection manifests itself in aggression towards the firm and the denigration of individual surviving brands.

In pursuit of this, the following chapters will outline the theoretical-grounded perspectives on these questions, and outline the methods I chose to empirically investigate them. In chapter 2, I will discuss the literature on brand extensions and extend this argument to the larger brand portfolio, carrying out a study designed to demonstrate the influence of self-enhancement and self-protection on items only tangentially associated with the self. In Chapter 3 I will outline how brand elimination from a portfolio can be construed as rejection or ostracism - a particular form of self-threat. In chapter 4 I outline theory suggesting the cognitive and behavioural results that

can stem from an individual's need to self-protect in the face of a perceived self-threat, and how this impacts the company and its other brands. Chapter 5 will sum up the research herein and discuss contributions.

Chapter 2: Self-Brand Overlap Extends to Brand Portfolios

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

Researchers are beginning to outline how the inclusion of close others into the self extends to including the other's group memberships into the self as well. This has interesting implications for how consumers might integrate brand portfolios into their self-concept through their relationship with the focal brand. In this chapter I will outline how self-other overlap can lead to inclusion of group members into the self, how this translates into including brand portfolios into the self, and how this affects consumer evaluations of brand portfolio members. However, before I outline the specific psychological mechanisms, I will first turn my discussion to the nature of brand extensions and brand portfolios.

2.2 Brand Extensions

Many companies looking to leverage the brand equity inherent in their brand names will try to stretch their brands as far as possible into new categories. A brand extension occurs when a new product is introduced into a category under an existing brand's name that has not previously operated in that category (Aaker and Keller 1990). Brand extensions are generally seen as a safer alternative to launching a new brand under an unknown name because extending the brand into a new category allows the firm to leverage existing brand equity and avoid building awareness and trust from scratch (Rangaswamy et al. 1993). However, not all brand extensions are successful. Research has identified a number of factors – both brand based and consumer based – that can impact the brand extension's success.

2.2.1 Brand-Based Factors in Brand Extension Success

Research has shown that generally, the most important factor in determining brand extension success is the perceived fit between important elements of the brand and its extension (Völckner and Sattler 2006). Perceived fit entails the degree to which the consumer perceives a similarity between the original and extended product (Aaker and Keller 1990). When consumers perceive a high degree of fit between the existing brand and the brand extension they are more likely to transfer brand attitudes toward the new brand extension (Boush et al. 1987). However, how one defines “fit” is a topic that has garnered a great deal of attention.

Fit can refer to a consistency in brand concept (Park et al. 1991). For example, brands such as Rolex or Häagen-Dazs, which are considered premium or luxury brands in their product categories, may be better fit to extend into categories that symbolically fit that concept (Bhat and Reddy 2001). Researchers have suggested that these effects may in fact be a part of a larger concept category - a brand usage goal (Martin and Stewart 2001). A brand usage goal such as athleticism would allow a brand such as Reebok to extend into athletic clothing. In these ways, brand concept fit can be more important than product category (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994; Park et al. 1991). Thus, brand extension success depends, in no small measure, on a perceived consistency between the original brand and the extension – whether that consistency is based on category or concept fit. However, there are important consumer-based factors in brand extension success as well. In particular, research on brand attachment (Fedorikhin et al. 2008) has suggested an underlying self-serving basis to attachment that drives increased evaluations of brand extensions across degree of brand fit.

2.2.2 Self-Enhancement and Brand Extensions

As outlined in Chapter 1, individuals are prone to take the perspective of a close other included in the self and react to other-relevant events as though they were self-relevant. When a loved brand is included in the self, it is arguable that the self-serving cognitive biases demonstrated to affect self-judgement may also impact consumer evaluations of self-relevant brand extensions. As I have reviewed, in terms of the personal self, individuals are prone to higher estimates of their own likelihood for success than they would be for others. Thus, it is arguable that the same biased optimism would operate on consumer evaluations of brand extensions.

Perhaps the best evidence for the biased role of the self in evaluating brand extensions comes from work examining the role of brand attachment in consumer evaluations of brand extensions. Researchers interested in brand attachment (Fedorikhin et al. 2008) investigated the differential impact of brand attachment over that of positive brand attitudes alone in consumer evaluations of brand extensions. Citing the conceptual differences between positive attitudes and emotional attachment, the authors found that brand attachment led to greater evaluations of brand extensions than positive brand attitudes alone. Of specific relevance to the present research, Fedorikhin and colleagues (2008) suggest that attachment leads to hot cognitive processing – a dimension that is in keeping with the automaticity of self-serving cognitive biases (Kunda 1990; Roese and Olson 2007). Furthermore, attachment leads to a sense of protection of and investment in the attachment object – a dimension that is in keeping with the preferential treatment shown to close others as an extension of self under the self-other overlap paradigm (Aron and Fraley 1999). Such similarities are not surprising, given that the authors explicitly

state that attachment is tied to the self, and that self-brand connections are a factor in attachment (Fedorikhin et al. 2008). Thus, it is arguable that these findings may be driven, in part, by the self's need for positive self-regard.

However, regardless of the promise of such findings, there is a limit to how far a brand concept can stretch. To avoid over-stretching the brand name and eroding its meaning, some companies turn to the use of multiple brands names within a corporate-endorsed portfolio as a way to leverage the positive associations of one brand onto another.

2.3 Brand Portfolios

A brand portfolio refers to the group of brands owned by a company. As previously mentioned, product brands are costly and effortful to develop, and face risks to their success. Thus, many companies try to reduce this risk by stretching the brand into new categories in order to leverage existing brand equity and increase acceptance rates for the new product. However, companies that try to stretch their brand too far encounter difficulties in having new brand extensions accepted, and run the risk of hurting the original brand (Loken and John 1993). Thus, many companies adopt a multi-brand portfolio, offering a variety of individually branded products that compete across multiple categories under different brand names.

Multi-brand portfolios can take many forms, ranging from a pure corporate-dominant strategy or “branded house”, where all brands share the same name as the corporation (i.e. Virgin), to a product-dominant strategy or “house of brands” where a company offers many product brands under different brand names (i.e. Proctor & Gamble), as well as a mixed strategy (Rajagopal and Sanchez 2004; Rao et al. 2004). The corporate-

dominant and product-dominant strategies can be thought of as polar ends of a continuum or brand relationship spectrum, with different strategies in between that combine these two brand levels (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Thus, brand portfolios often employ complex brand architecture to deal with relationships between brands within a portfolio (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Brand architecture is a system of organizing a hierarchy of brands within a multi-brand portfolio. It is a process of making horizontal linkages between a firm's various brands and vertical linkages to the corporate brand. Brand relationships spell out the type of driving role that brands play (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). One such architectural strategy that I will focus on in this research is the use of a corporate brand as a product brand endorser.

In addition to the clear value of individual brands, companies are beginning to see the management of their corporate name as a branded asset (Muzellec and Lambkin 2007). The corporate brand signifies the organization that creates and recommends the goods and services it offers to consumers. It includes dimensions such as the company's heritage; its resources, assets and capabilities; an organizational culture guided by the company's values and priorities; corporate citizenship initiatives and its performance record. In this way, the corporate brand is a knowledge structure of the organization, its people, processes and products (Aaker 2004). Thus, building a strong corporate brand image allows consumers to engage not only with its products, but to also have a relationship with the company itself, separate from its products (Aaker 2004). Many firms choose to leverage their company's good name by using it to endorse various product brands in their brand portfolio. However, an endorser brand strategy can also help strengthen the corporate brand as well, because successful or innovative brands can

also serve as a way to invigorate the corporate brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). These are some of the reasons that some companies choose to use their corporate brand as an endorser brand within their multi-brand portfolio, allowing them to offer a variety of distinct product brands that are all tied together by the corporate brand. In this way, companies can establish a sense of brand relatedness (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Jing et al. 2008) while still maintaining a degree of specialized focus among their product brands.

Thus, brand architecture includes both corporate branding and individual product branding, and the cross associations between them. Brand architecture that highlights the corporate brand as an endorser brand sets the stage for consumer engagement with the firm as well as the product brand. The corporate brand symbolizes the firm itself, its people, processes and values, and thus represents the organization steering the portfolio. Its use in an endorsed branding strategy can serve to focus the consumer's awareness on the organization that will stand behind the brand (Aaker 2004).

For example, General Electric (GE) is a large, multi-national corporation that offers a wide range of products and services. Such offerings range from household appliances to medical equipment to financial services (GE 2013). However, a review of their company website reveals that GE promotes itself as a company focused on innovation. Its corporate communications suggests that their real offering is "imagination". This means the imagination of its people, as well as flexible processes that encourage and harness imagination to help improve existing offerings and envision new ones. In this way, consumers are engaging in a relationship with the organization as much as the product brand itself.

Consumers are aware that the corporation makes the product offering, and the corporation makes portfolio strategy decisions. Traditional thinking suggests that positive attitudes toward the corporate brand and the product brands can positively influence other brands in the portfolio through their perceived relatedness. This awareness can facilitate consumer evaluations of product brands in two ways – through consumer-company identification as well as through a spillover effect from one product brand to another via their communal link to the corporate brand. However, I suggest that self-serving cognitive biases can also inflate consumer evaluations of brand portfolio members through the inclusion of brands – at both the corporate and product level – in the self.

2.3.1 Consumer-Company Identification

Bhattacharya and colleagues (Bhattacharya et al. 1995) first introduced the notion of consumer-company identification in an investigation of organizational identification of art museum members. Building upon Social Identification Theory (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 2001), and leveraging extant research on employee's organizational identification, these researchers have articulated a framework of consumer-company identification that suggests a series of biased, pro-company attitudes and behaviours that mimic many self-enhancement and self-protection strategies.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 2001) outlines the dynamics of intergroup behaviour, and suggests that a portion of one's self-concept is tied up in the social groups and categories to which they belong. Although conceived and published after the creation of social identity theory, Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al. 1987) is the

cognitive foundation of social identity. People have epistemic needs that drive them towards categorization as a means to understand their environment. Self-Categorization Theory suggests that people are able to perceive themselves as individuals as well as group members, and that these two levels of the self-concept are equally valid expressions of the self. Social identity, then, can be construed as the part of the individual's self-concept that is derived from their knowledge of their membership in a social group, and the value they place on that membership (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Social identity is therefore, in essence, tied to the collective self: the self as defined by its valued group memberships.

Although social identification traditionally refers to the awareness of one's self as a formal group member (i.e. an art museum member), Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) suggest that such identification can also extend to group memberships without any such formal relationship. Specifically, these researchers suggest that consumers have self-definitional concerns that encourage them to actively seek out organizations that represent important social values and positions. This is in keeping with research that suggests self-brand connections at the product level as an important part of consumer identity construction (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Consumers that identify with certain company image associations will be more likely to develop a sense of personal identification with the corporate brand. In this way, consumer-company identification is akin to self-brand overlap at the corporate level.

In keeping with self-serving biases, social-identity-based group identification encourages a degree of in-group preference. Because social identities are the representation of the self as a group member, it is possible to extend individual-level self-serving biases to the

collective self. In-group preference is a group-serving bias that occurs when people perceive themselves as members of social categories and project their self-serving biases onto their social groups. This results in a tendency to evaluate one's in-group more favorably than out-groups (Hewstone et al. 2002). Extant research has demonstrated an in-group preference that is in keeping with self-enhancement and self-protection strategies. For example, individuals tend to describe their own group with positive qualities such as being moral and efficacious, but ascribe undesirable characteristics to other groups (Long and Spears 1997). They also tend to embrace the beliefs and values that characterize their group (Terry and Hogg 1996), while trivializing group traits that are seen as unflattering (Ford and Tonander 1998).

However, such in-group favouritism is not constrained to social identity groups, but rather, can manifest itself even in transient group situations. Tajfel's (Tajfel 1982) minimal group paradigm demonstrates that in-group bias can occur even when groups are formed on the basis of meaningless categories. For example, researchers have found that individuals are more cooperative when they learn that others share the same birthday (Miller et al. 1998), or a personal aesthetic preference for certain painters (Diehl 1990). Thus, research suggests that even on the most trivial similarities, people will categorize themselves into in-groups and exhibit in-group bias.

Similar tendencies toward the company are suggested under the consumer-company identification framework (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). The framework suggests that identified consumers will demonstrate a preference for the company's products over those of competitors, and that this preference will usually withstand variations in product formulation or quality. As well, identified consumers will tend to be more supportive of

new product introductions, and are more prone to promote the company in a positive light and overlook or dismiss negative information. Such behaviours are symptomatic of self-serving biases that are extended to others that are included in the self. Thus, a consumer's level of identification with the corporate brand can positively inflate his or her evaluations of brand portfolio members in much the same way as a self-brand overlap inflates evaluations of a brand extension. However, although the consumer-company identification framework suggests how self-identification with the corporate brand can lead to self-serving biases of the entire brand portfolio, I suggest that there is also a less intuitive way by which an entire portfolio can be included in the self. Emerging research on the role of spillover effects in brand portfolios provides a basis by which a self-brand overlap with a product brand can lead to an inclusion of the entire portfolio in the self.

2.3.2 Spillover Effects

Researchers have examined the ways in which knowledge about a focal product brand can “spill over” to impact knowledge of other brands that might be linked to the focal brand in the consumer's memory. Such linkages could include brands engaged in a brand alliance (Simonin and Ruth 1998), competing brands (Roehm and Tybout 2006), and most recently, fellow brands within a company's multi-brand portfolio (Jing et al. 2008; Wang 2011). Such spillover is a function of the ways in which brands and associated concepts are stored in consumer memory.

Most relevant to this present research is the literature on spillover effects in a brand portfolio (Jing et al. 2008; Wang 2011), which builds upon Associative Network Theory

(Anderson 1983; Collins and Loftus 1975) as an explanatory mechanism for the effect. According to Associative Network Theory, information is stored in memory in a network of concept nodes and associated information. Contemplating a concept node triggers the memory of the associated information that is linked to the originating concept node. For example, thinking of the concept “dog” may trigger the idea of fur and barking, or the category of domestic pets, or a favourite childhood memory, depending upon one’s idiosyncratic way of encoding the concept.

Corporations that use an endorsed brand strategy for the multi-brand portfolio do so in an attempt to establish a degree of brand relatedness (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). The corporate endorser brand serves as a cue to consumers that each endorsed product brand is a member of a collective, and as such, consumers can come to cognitively integrate these brands together in an associative network. Thus, the research on spillover effects within a brand portfolio builds from the premise that brand representations are not cognitively independent (Jing et al. 2008). Awareness of a brand within an endorsed brand portfolio will trigger representations of the other member brands, to the degree that this knowledge is accessible in memory.

Thus, the literature demonstrates how knowledge of the various brand linkages within a portfolio can lead to a spillover of attitudes from one product brand to another, via their communal linkage to the corporate brand (Jing et al. 2008; Wang 2011). It is therefore arguable that the self-enhancement biases that are often extended to things associated with the self can extend to other brands in a portfolio for consumers who identify with the focal brand. In this regard, there is an argument to be made for an inclusion-in-self and self-enhancement spillover effect.

2.4 In-Group Preference and the Extended Contact Hypothesis

Researchers building upon the Aron et al. self-expansion framework (Aron and Aron 1986; Aron et al. 1991) suggest that some of our previous understanding of in-group preference might be driven by inclusion of group memberships into the self. This line of enquiry suggests that group identification may in fact be a type of close relationship that leads to the inclusion of the group into the self (Coats et al. 2000).

In a series of studies, Smith and colleagues (Smith et al. 1999; Smith and Henry 1996) tested reaction-time lags for self vs. group distinctions similar to the test performed under the traditional inclusion-in-self research. Participants were given a series of descriptive traits and asked whether these traits were representative of themselves as individuals or of the group to which they belonged. Reaction time measures found a delay when assessing traits that had previously been associated with the self or the group (but not both) indicating that participants had some degree of difficulty when trying to delineate between mental representations of the self and the group. These studies indicate that, in line with inclusion-in-self traditions, the in-group is included in the individual's self-representation. Thus, group inclusion in the self, and one's own inherent need for positive self-regard, may partially explain in-group preference.

However, inclusion of the group into one's self is not the only extension of the inclusion-in-self framework. There is evidence that suggests that the group memberships of close others (memberships that the individual does not himself hold) can be included in the self via the individual's relationship with another who holds those memberships.

Research has shown that individuals favour in-group members over out-group or non-

group members (Tajfel 1974). However, there is evidence that there are ways to reduce the perception of out-group status, and that this in turn can lead to reduced prejudicial treatment of non-in-group members. Allport's Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954) suggests that establishing contact with out-group members is one way in which to reduce the perception of differences and stifle intergroup conflict. Research has shown that such a phenomenon is driven by inclusion-in-the-self more so than the amount of exposure to or increased understanding of such individuals (Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe 2001). In other words, establishing a friendship with a member of an out-group (and thus this closeness will lead to an inclusion in the self of that out-group member) can lead the individual to reduce out-group biases and begin to treat the former out-group member as an in-group member.

In addition, researchers have suggested that an out-group can become included into the individual's self-concept even in the absence of any first-hand interaction with an out-group member. The extended contact hypothesis (Wright et al. 1997) suggests that it is enough for an individual to know that an in-group member (and thus someone who is included in the self) has a close relationship with a member of an out-group for the inclusion of the out-group into one's own self to occur. In other words, the friend of my friend is my friend, and therefore included in the self. Thus, there is theoretical support for the notion that group memberships, whether they be the individual's own memberships or the memberships of a close other, can become included in the self. This in turn encourages favourable treatment and cognitions towards the in-group members, much as one would bestow upon one's own self. To this end, I am suggesting that the knowledge of a loved brand's inclusion in a brand portfolio as a para-social group can

encourage consumers of that brand to express artificially inflated evaluations of the portfolio members as a function of biased self-evaluation. This effect should account for portfolio evaluations independent of mere positive brand attitudes alone.

However, in order to more accurately test and demonstrate the notion of self-serving biases on consumer evaluations of brand portfolio management decisions, the need for self-enhancement and self-protection must be neutralized. Research has shown that one potential means through which the self's need for self-enhancement can be neutralized (and thus isolated) is through the use of pre-emptive self-affirmation (Steele 1988).

2.5 Self-Affirmation Theory

One way to assess the degree of a self-serving bias underlying this effect is through the use of self-affirmation. Research on Self-Affirmation Theory (Steele 1988) addresses whether affirming the value or integrity of the self in an important domain can weaken the perception of self-threat in another domain. This, in turn, has been shown to influence an individual's otherwise defensive and self-serving response to a perceived threat.

Self-Affirmation Theory (Steele 1988) suggests that one of the over-arching goals of the self is to maintain a sense of self-integrity. In this context, integrity can be defined as the belief that an individual is an appropriate and worthwhile person. This view echoes the previously outlined role of self-esteem as articulated by Sociometer Theory (Leary and Baumeister 2000; Leary et al. 1995) and Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski et al. 2004). Judgements of what renders an individual appropriate and worthwhile (i.e. intelligence, socially responsible, beautiful, etc.) are socially defined, and will vary

across cultures and context. Thus, threats to self-integrity will vary across individuals, but the common denominator is that such threats arise from the perception that one has failed to meet an important social or cultural metric of value (Leary and Baumeister 2000; Pyszczynski et al. 2004).

Research has suggested that people have multiple selves that reside in many domains (Crocker and Knight 2005; Crocker and Wolfe 2001). Individuals have a variety of self-relevant domains such as a spouse, a parent, a gendered self, a religious ideologue, a professional identity, etc. Attached to these selves are important self-relevant goals and ideals that are activated when one perceives a threat to that particular self-image (i.e. being seen as a bad parent, or an unsuccessful professional, etc.) (Sherman and Cohen 2006). Thus, information that threatens one's self-perception as successful in an important domain threatens the need for self-integrity

In keeping with self-protection motives in response to self-threat, self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988) recognizes that a threat to self-integrity often motivates self-serving coping mechanisms. However, the theory also recognises that individuals can adopt defensive or non-defensive coping mechanisms. Because self-threats may serve as a warning sign of potential decreases in social acceptance, people can attend the information and use it as a guide to change their behaviour in favour of increasing social acceptance (Leary et al. 1995). However, such change may not be possible in certain domains, and this leaves the individual with the alternative to defend himself against the threat in other ways. An alternative to these direct, defensive tactics is to weaken the threat by strengthening the self in other domains. Specifically, self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988) suggests that affirming one's self in a domain other than the one under threat can weaken the

perceived threat. In this way, self-affirmation theory offers a tactic by which individuals can attenuate the self-threat in an indirect, non-defensive manner.

Due to the multiple domains in which self-worth is invested (Crocker and Knight 2005; Crocker and Wolfe 2001), people can compensate for failures in one domain by seeking out or emphasizing success in other domains, even if doing so is costly (Crocker and Park 2004). If the alternate domain is significantly valuable, then affirming one's success in that domain will over-ride the original threat, leaving behind a sense of heightened overall worth. Self-affirmations typically occur on dimensions that are personally valued and can include enacting praise-worthy behaviours (i.e. charitable giving, community involvement) or merely contemplating one's activities in a socially-valued domain (i.e. previous evidence of good citizenry, moral behaviours, etc.) (Sherman and Cohen 2006). In other words, acting upon or merely thinking about performing acts that are in keeping with one's set of important values (that are independent of the threat) allows individuals the opportunity to affirm the value of the self. This enables people to take a more general assessment of their self-worth (Wakslak and Trope 2009), and to put the imminent self-threat into a broader perspective. As such, the perceived self-threat is diminished and can then be evaluated in a more open-minded manner (Correll et al. 2004).

Self-affirmed people have been shown to demonstrate less egocentric devaluation of another person's intelligence than non-affirmed individuals (Beauregard and Dunning 1998). Self-image maintenance plays an important role in stereotyping and prejudice (Spencer et al. 1998). Self-affirmed individuals were less likely to negatively evaluate a person from a stigmatized group, while non-affirmed individuals were more likely to evaluate that person in line with traditional negative stereotypes (Fein and Spencer

1997). Correspondingly, self-affirmation has been shown to eliminate group differences in perception of racism against stigmatized groups (Adams et al. 2006).

Self-affirmation allows people to objectively evaluate information that would otherwise provoke a defensive reaction. For example, self-affirmation increases receptivity to threatening health information and decreases risk-taking behaviour (Reed and Aspinwall 1998; Sherman et al. 2000; van Koningsbruggen and Das 2009), decreasing bias (Klein and Harris 2009) and increasing sensitivity to argument strength (Correll et al. 2004).

Self-affirmation also restores depleted self-control for subsequent self-control tasks (Schmeichel and Vohs 2009).

Summarizing, when people are given the opportunity to assert their global self-worth through self-affirmation their predilection for biased, self-serving defensiveness goes away. Self-affirmation allows individuals to prove their worth, better equipping them to deal with the potential self-threat. As such, they are more likely to approach the threat in a level-headed manner and focus on the reality of the perceived threat rather than the distraction of self-protection. Thus, self-affirmation should enable the individual to consider the prospect of a self-relevant failure in a more balanced, less defensive manner.

Companies that seek to grow their brand portfolio can do so by adding new product brands to categories in which they may or may not be presently operating. New brands can be a risky move for an organization if the market does not view the company as a competent competitor in the new product category. New product brand offerings, particularly in categories that bear little similarity to the focal brand, carry a higher risk

of failure due to the market's skepticism of the company's ability to produce a quality product. Consumers who are faced with the prospect of new brands added to the brand portfolio must consider the possibility that the new brand is not a suitable fit with the focal brand and that this could affect the new brand's success. Thus, implicit in the evaluation of a new brand is the likelihood of brand failure, which is a potential self-threat for consumers with a high degree of self-brand overlap. Such consumers should be motivated to self-protect by willfully ignoring such possibilities and demonstrating higher evaluations and more positive behaviours towards sibling brands than those consumers who rate the focal brand highly on utilitarian attitudes alone. Self-affirmation may reduce the need to self-protect via inflated evaluations of potential sibling brands. If denial of or resistance to self-threatening information (such as the possibility of a self-relevant brand failure) is reduced or eliminated after self-affirmation, then we can infer that it was originally motivated by the self.

2.6 Summary

Based on the aforementioned literature, I am proposing that self-brand overlap can lead to an inclusion of the brand portfolio into the self. As such, consumers that are high on self-brand overlap will extend to the members of the portfolio many of the self-serving biases they would extend toward the focal brand itself. Specifically, I suggest the following hypotheses:

H1a: Those with a high self-brand overlap will have higher attitudes toward sibling brands than those with high attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1b: Those with a high self-brand overlap will exhibit a slower rate of decline in attitudes toward the sibling brand across decreasing degrees of brand fit than those high in attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1c: Those high in self-brand overlap who are required to self-affirm will have lower attitudes toward sibling brands than those high in self-brand overlap who are not required to self-affirm.

H1d: Those with a high self-brand overlap will have greater willingness to purchase the sibling brand than those with high attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1e: Those with a high self-brand overlap will exhibit a slower rate of decline in willingness to purchase the sibling brand across decreasing degrees of brand fit than those high in attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1f: Those high in self-brand overlap who are required to self-affirm will have willingness to purchase the sibling brand than those high in self-brand overlap who are not required to self-affirm.

H1g: Those with a high self-brand overlap will have greater propensity for positive word of mouth than those with high attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1h: Those with a high self-brand overlap will exhibit a slower rate of decline in propensity for positive word of mouth across decreasing degrees of brand fit than those high in attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1i: Those high in self-brand overlap who are required to self-affirm will have propensity for positive word of mouth than those high in self-brand overlap who are not required to self-affirm.

H1j: Those with a high self-brand overlap will have greater brand forgiveness than those with high attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1k: Those with a high self-brand overlap will exhibit a slower rate of decline in brand forgiveness across decreasing degrees of brand fit than those high in attitudes toward the focal brand alone.

H1l: Those high in self-brand overlap who are required to self-affirm will have less brand forgiveness than those high in self-brand overlap who are not required to self-affirm.

2.7 Study 1

2.7.1 Method

Study 1 is a 2 (high vs. low self-brand overlap) X 3 (low vs. medium vs. high brand fit) X 2 (self-affirmation vs. no self-affirmation) factorial between-subjects design. Study subjects were paid participants recruited through Qualtrics survey panels.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (low vs. high self-brand overlap) in which they were either asked to think of a brand that they either use purely for its functional performance or for its self-expressive qualities. In each condition,

respondents were then asked to imagine that this was how they felt about a previously unknown brand (“Techsys” cell phone). This task was meant to help participants project their feelings for a favourite brand onto this new generic brand. Following this self-brand overlap manipulation, respondents were asked to complete manipulation checks, which consisted of a six-item measure of brand attitude and the concentric circles measure of self-brand overlap (adapted from Aron et al. 1992).

After the manipulation checks, participants were randomly assigned to one of two (self-affirmation vs. no affirmation) self-affirmation manipulations. Participants in the self-affirmation condition were asked to consider and write out a list of their positive qualities. Participants in the no-affirmation condition completed a memory task asking them to list the things they had eaten that day. This is a common manipulation used within the self-affirmation paradigm (McQueen and Klein 2006).

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of three brand fit manipulations (low vs. medium vs. high) wherein they learned that “TAPAT” (the company behind the “Techsys” brand) was considering launching another product line within their portfolio and wanted to gauge consumer response to the proposed new brand. Participants read a product description about the “Onano” brand which outlined the specifications of either a MP3 player (high fit), a DVD player (medium fit), or a guitar (low fit). These product groupings and a similar manipulation have been used successfully in previous research on brand extensions (Fedorikhin et al. 2008) and were judged to be suitable for this study.

Subsequent to the brand fit manipulation, participants were asked to complete a seven item measure of their attitude toward the new brand, a six item measure of their likelihood of engaging in positive word of mouth about the new brand, and a seven item measure of the likelihood that they would forgive the new brand after hearing news of inferior performance.

Final questions in Study 1 consisted of standard demographic questions such as the participant's age, gender, first language and a request for any final thoughts or comments about the study.

The complete protocol for this study can be found in Appendix B.

2.7.2 Data Cleaning

Study 1 had 363 respondents recruited through a paid online participant panel (Qualtrics). Six people were eliminated from the analysis for not properly completing (skipping over) the manipulation check. All other missing values were replaced with the series mean before analysis began. Completion times ranged between 1.28 (mm.ss) and 1051.18 (mm.ss) ($N=410$, $M_{TIME}=13.06$, $SD_{TIME}=56.27$). At a minimum, 5 minutes was considered a reasonable floor for study completion time, and 60 minutes a ceiling completion time. This was based on the norm of having 60 minutes as the maximum time allowed in a research lab where participants are physically present, ensuring that the online participants were held to the same procedural standards as traditional in-lab participants. Participants whose completion time was deemed to take too long ($N=11$) or too little time ($N=131$) to complete were eliminated from the analysis, leaving 215

respondents ($N_{\text{Female}}=123$, $M_{\text{AGE}}=50.8$) in the dataset with an average completion time of 9.06 (mm.ss).

A manipulation check tested the degree of self-brand overlap adapted from the original inclusion in self scale (Aron et al. 1992). The scale is a seven-item measure consisting of a series of increasingly overlapping circles meant to represent increasing interpersonal closeness and self-other merging. It is measured on a scale of 1 through 7, where 1 represents minimal self-other overlap designated to two circles barely touching each other. The highest rating (7) is represented by two circles almost entirely overlapped with each other to visually represent extreme closeness and self-other overlap. As interpersonal closeness and self-other overlap increases, the visual depiction of the two circles in each scale item increasingly overlapped each other.

Within the low overlap condition the scores ranged between 1 and 7, ($N=101$, $M_{\text{LOW}}=4.10$, $SD_{\text{LOW}}=1.73$). Scores also ranged between 1 and 7 in the high overlap condition ($N=114$, $M_{\text{HIGH}}=4.68$, $SD_{\text{HIGH}}=1.71$). There was a significant difference between these two groups $t(213) = -2.49$, $p=0.01$, and therefore no further data cleaning was performed. A frequency distribution (Table 1) details the range of scores in each self-brand overlap condition.

Table 1
Self-Brand Overlap Scores (A)

Low Overlap			High Overlap		
Rating	N	Cumulative	Rating	N	Cumulative
1	8	8	1	8	8
2	14	22	2	8	16
3	15	37	3	9	25
4	19	56	4	18	43
5	21	77	5	31	74
6	16	93	6	24	98
7	8	101	7	16	114

2.7.3 Scale Creation

2.7.3.1 Attitude toward the Original Brand

After random assignment to the low or high self-brand overlap condition, respondents were asked to rate their attitude toward their chosen focal brand. Six items (like, good, pleasant, favourable, superior, excellent) were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.87. Reliability analysis presented a Cronbach's $\alpha=0.96$.

2.7.3.2 Attitude toward the Sibling Brand

After the brand fit manipulation, respondents were asked to rate their evaluation of the new "Onano" brand. Seven items (This is a good product, I like the product, I feel positive toward the product, The product is nice, The product is pleasant, The product is attractive, I approve of the product) were run through a principal components analysis

with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.78 with a Cronbach's $\alpha=0.96$.

2.7.3.3 Willingness to Purchase Sibling Brand

Respondents were asked to estimate the likelihood that they would buy the new "Onano" product described, if they were looking to purchase such a product. Six items (Likely, Existent, Probable, Certain, Definitely would buy, Probably) were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.90 with a Cronbach's $\alpha=0.97$.

2.7.3.4 Positive Word of Mouth

Respondents were asked the likelihood of telling others positive evaluations of the new "Onano" brand. Three items (I would recommend this brand to others, I would share positive information about this brand with others, I would say good things about this brand to others) were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.96. Reliability analysis demonstrated a Cronbach's $\alpha=0.96$.

2.7.3.5 Brand Forgiveness

Respondents were asked to imagine going to the store to purchase a new MP3 player, DVD player, or guitar and hearing negative feedback about the product from another shopper in the store. Seven items (I would probably give this brand a chance, I would probably buy the brand despite the other person, I would be less likely to try the brand, I would forgive the brand and try it, I would discount this person's opinion, I would

wonder if this person used the product correctly, I would question this person's expertise) were used to measure the degree to which participants would stay committed to the brand and downplay any negative information received. The items were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. Two components emerged, with the second component containing only the reverse coded item (I would be less likely to try the brand). As such, only the items found within component 1 were retained and used in the computation of the scale. All factor loadings were greater than 0.76, with a Cronbach's $\alpha=0.92$.

2.7.4 Analysis

This study tests the effect of self-brand overlap on various consumer responses to brand portfolio decisions, independent of brand attitudes. As such, the data is analysed using ANCOVA with original brand attitude entered as a covariate. But first, initial analysis to establish the covariance of attitudes with self-brand overlap demonstrated that those in the high overlap condition reported higher attitudes toward the original brand ($N=114$, $M_{HIGH}=5.33$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.26$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=101$, $M_{LOW}=4.94$, $SD_{LOW}=1.27$). Independent t-tests showed that this difference was significant $t(213)=-2.293$, $p=0.023$. The two items had a positive correlation= 0.46 , $p<0.001$.

2.7.4.1 Attitude toward the Sibling Brand

Self-brand overlap is posited to be a stronger driver of sibling brand evaluations than mere attitudes alone (H1a). Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher evaluations of sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap.

Furthermore, this was predicted to decline more slowly across levels of fit for those in

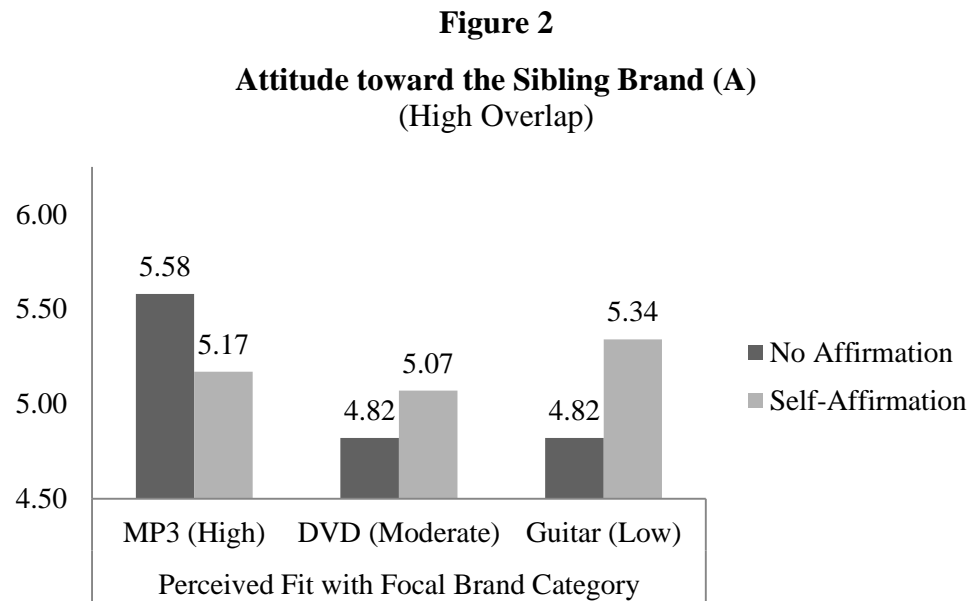
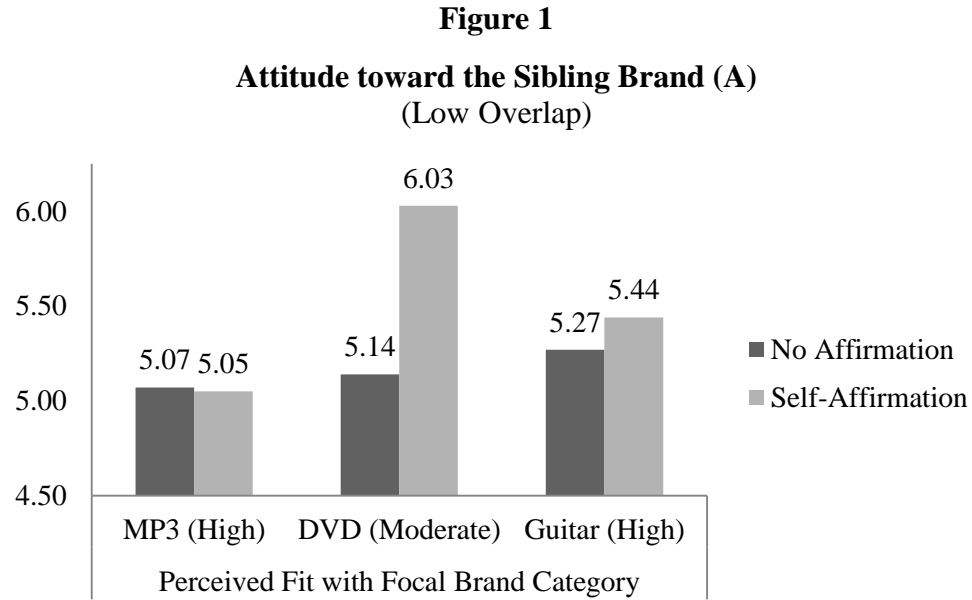
the no-affirmation condition than for those who have self-affirmed (H2a). An ANCOVA with attitude toward the sibling brand as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap, brand fit and self-affirmation were entered as independent measures, with attitude toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of prior attitudes toward the focal brand was a significant predictor of attitudes to the proposed sibling brand $F(1,202)=45.15, p<0.001$.

The main effect of self-brand overlap was significant $F(1,202)=4.51, p=0.04$. Those in the high overlap condition reported higher attitudes toward a sibling brand ($N=114, M_{HIGH}=5.33, SD_{HIGH}=1.26$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=101, M_{LOW}=4.94, SD_{LOW}=1.29$), providing some preliminary support for H1a.

As well, the main effect of self-affirmation was marginally significant $F(1,202)=2.898, p=0.09$. Those in the self-affirmation condition reported higher attitudes toward sibling brands ($N=103, M_{AFFIRMATION}=5.10, SD_{AFFIRMATION}=1.26$) than those in the non-affirmation condition ($N=112, M_{NOaffirmation}=5.19, SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.26$). This finding runs counter to the pattern hypothesized in H1c.

Analysing a main effect of fit uncovered that although those evaluating the moderate fit DVD player reported higher evaluations ($N=78, M_{DVD}=5.05, SD_{DVD}=1.34$) than those in the high fit MP3 player condition ($N=65, M_{MP3}=5.41, SD_{MP3}=1.14$) and low fit Guitar condition ($N=72, M_{Guitar}=5.01, SD_{Guitar}=1.30$), this effect was not significant $F(2,202)=0.509, p=0.602$.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 (below) provide a graphical representation of the individual scores across conditions.



Simple effects analysis discovered a few significant differences. There was a marginally significant difference ($p=0.09$) in attitudes toward the sibling brand between the high fit (MP3) ($N=21$, $M_{MP3}=5.58$, $SD_{MP3}=1.29$) and low fit (Guitar) ($N=21$, $M_{Guitar}=4.82$, $SD_{Guitar}=1.06$) for high self-brand overlap participants in the self-affirmation condition.

There was a significant difference ($p=0.03$) between the high fit (MP3) ($N=13$, $M_{MP3}=5.05$, $SD_{MP3}=0.95$) and moderate fit (DVD) ($N=18$, $M_{DVD}=6.03$, $SD_{DVD}=1.19$) for low self-brand overlap participants in the self-affirmation condition. There was a marginally significant difference ($p=0.08$) between the no-affirmation ($N=17$, $M_{NOaffirmation}=5.14$, $SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.23$) and the self-affirmation ($N=27$, $M_{AFFIRMATION}=6.03$, $SD_{AFFIRMATION}=1.19$) for low self-brand overlap participants in the moderate fit (DVD) condition.

There was a significant difference ($p=0.005$) in attitudes toward the sibling brand between the low self-brand overlap ($N=18$, $M_{LOW}=6.03$, $SD_{LOW}=1.19$) and high self-brand overlap ($N=27$, $M_{HIGH}=5.07$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.34$) participants within the self-affirmation, moderate fit (DVD) condition. There was a marginally significant difference ($p=0.07$) between low self-brand overlap ($N=25$, $M_{LOW}=5.27$, $SD_{LOW}=1.23$) and high self-brand overlap participants ($N=21$, $M_{HIGH}=4.82$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.06$) in the no affirmation low fit (Guitar) condition. All other simple effects were non-significant.

2.7.4.2 Willingness to Purchase Sibling Brand

Self-brand overlap induced self-serving biases are posited to motivate greater willingness to purchase a sibling brand than mere attitudes alone (H1d). Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher willingness to buy sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap (H1e). An ANCOVA with willingness to purchase the sibling brand as the dependent measure was used to test this. Self-brand overlap, brand fit and self-affirmation were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the

original brand as a covariate. Results show that the covariate of previous attitudes was a significant predictor in the model $F(1,202)=29.84, p<0.001$.

The main effect of self-brand overlap was significant $F(1,202)=4.48, p=0.04$, with those in the low overlap condition claiming higher likelihood of buying the proposed sibling brand ($N=101, M_{LOW}=5.07, SD_{LOW}=1.41$) than those in the high self-brand overlap condition ($N=114, M_{HIGH}=4.81, SD_{HIGH}=1.53$) condition. This finding runs counter to that hypothesized in H1d. However, the main effect of self-affirmation was non-significant $F(1,202)=0.23, p=0.64$. The main effect of sibling brand fit was also non-significant $F(2,202)=0.60, p=0.55$.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 (below) provide a graphical representation of the individual scores across conditions. .

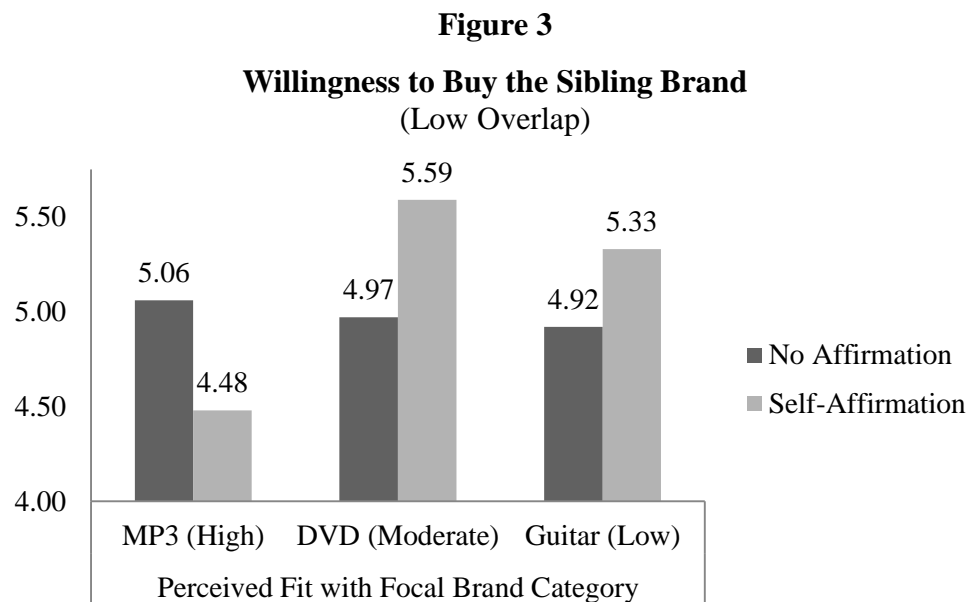
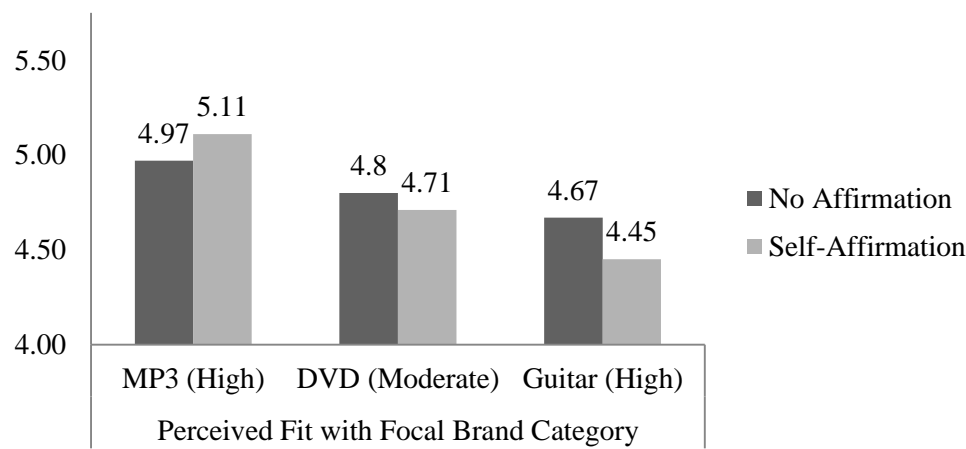


Figure 4
Willingness to Buy the Sibling Brand
 (High Overlap)



Simple effects analysis discovered a few significant differences. There was a significant difference ($p=0.039$) in willingness to buy the sibling brand between the high sibling fit (MP3) ($N=13$, $M_{MP3}=4.48$, $SD_{MP3}=1.47$) and moderate sibling brand fit ($N=18$, $M_{DVD}=5.59$, $SD_{DVD}=1.26$) for those with a low self-brand overlap within the self-affirmation condition. Furthermore, there was a significant difference ($p=0.05$) between the same aforementioned high brand fit (MP3) condition and the low brand fit (Guitar) ($N=16$, $M_{Guitar}=5.33$, $SD_{Guitar}=1.38$) for those with low self-brand overlap within the self-affirmation condition.

There was a significant difference ($p=0.03$) in reported willingness to buy the sibling brand between the low self-brand overlap ($N=16$, $M_{LOW}=5.33$, $SD_{LOW}=1.38$) and high self-brand overlap ($N=10$, $M_{HIGH}=4.45$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.32$) participants within the moderate brand fit (DVD) self-affirmation condition. A similar, but only marginally significant difference ($p=0.06$) was found within the low brand fit (Guitar) self-affirmation condition with low self-brand overlap participants reporting a higher willingness to buy

the sibling brand ($N=16$, $M_{LOW}=5.33$, $SD_{LOW}=1.38$) than high self-brand overlap participants ($N=10$, $M_{HIGH}=4.45$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.32$).

All other simple effects were non-significant.

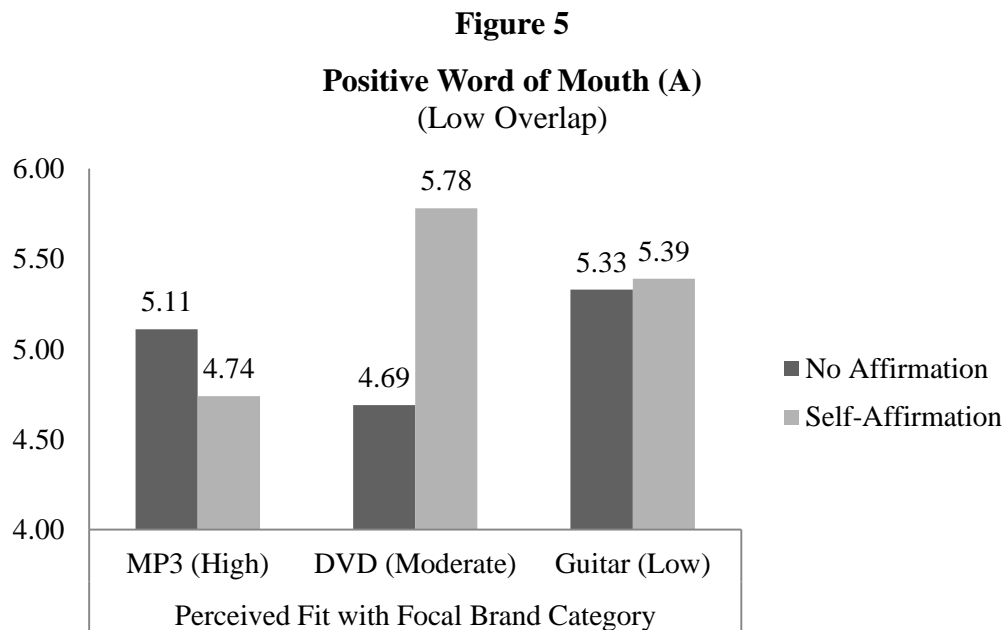
2.7.4.3 Positive Word of Mouth

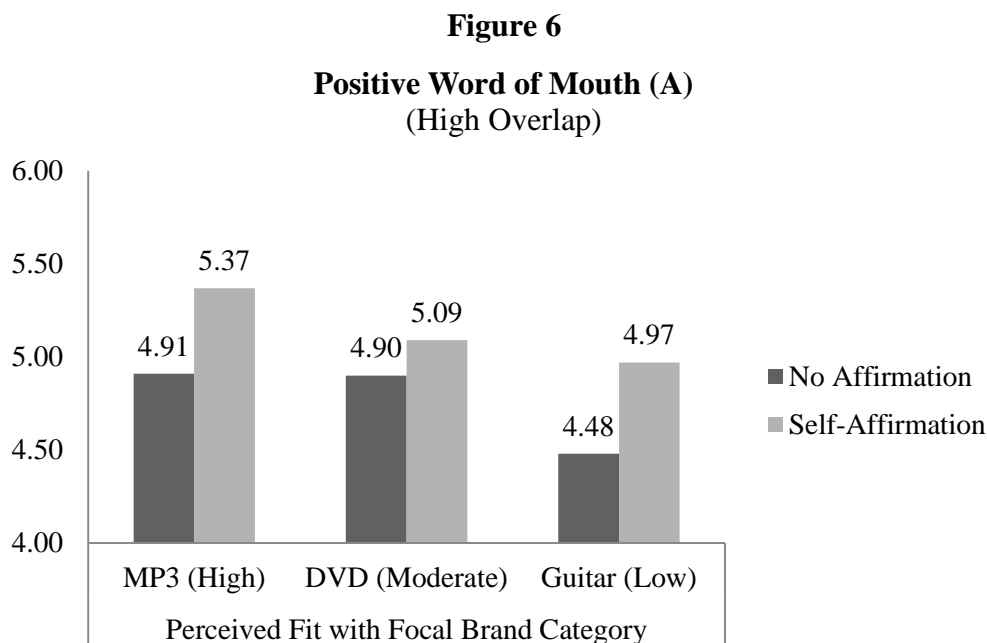
Self-brand overlap is suggested to increase willingness to spread positive word of mouth more so than mere attitudes alone (H1g). Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher likelihood of word of mouth than those low in self-brand overlap (H1h). An ANCOVA with positive word of mouth as the dependent measure was used to test this. Self-brand overlap, brand fit and self-affirmation were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of prior attitudes toward the focal brand was a significant predictor of willingness to engage in positive word of mouth $F(1,202)=31.07$, $p<0.001$.

There was a marginally significant $F(1,202)=3.39$, $p=0.07$ main effect of self-affirmation on willingness to spread positive word of mouth. Those in the self-affirmation condition ($N=103$, $M_{AFFIRMATION}=5.25$, $SD_{AFFIRMATION}=1.42$) reported greater willingness for positive word of mouth than those in the no affirmation condition ($N=112$, $M_{NOaffirmation}=4.91$, $SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.59$). Additionally, there was a marginally significant $F(1,202)=3.47$, $p=0.06$ main effect of self-brand overlap on positive word of mouth. Those low in self-brand overlap ($N=101$, $M_{LOW}=5.21$, $SD_{LOW}=1.49$) reported greater likelihood for positive word of mouth than those in the high self-brand overlap condition ($N=114$, $M_{HIGH}=4.95$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.54$).

The main effect of sibling brand fit was non-significant $F(2,202)=0.46, p=0.63$. In fact, the mean averages for each degree of sibling brand fit were almost indistinguishable from each other. Those in the moderate brand fit (DVD) condition ($N=78, M_{DVD}=5.12, SD_{DVD}=1.49$) reported greater likelihood for positive word of mouth than either the low fit (Guitar) ($N=72, M_{MP3}=5.05, SD_{MP3}=1.46$) or high fit (MP3) ($N=65, M_{Guitar}=5.05, SD_{Guitar}=1.63$) conditions.

Figure 5 and Figure 6 (below) provide a graphical representation of the individual scores across conditions.





Simple effects analysis uncovered a few significant differences in the willingness to spread positive word of mouth. There was a marginally significant difference ($p=0.06$) in between the moderate sibling brand fit (DVD) ($N=18$, $M_{DVD}=5.78$, $SD_{DVD}=1.40$) and the high sibling brand fit (MP3) ($N=13$, $M_{MP3}=4.74$, $SD_{MP3}=1.50$). There was also a marginally significant difference ($p=0.07$) between the no-affirmation ($N=17$, $M_{NOaffirmation}=4.69$, $SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.62$) and self-affirmation ($N=18$, $M_{NOaffirmation}=5.78$, $SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.4$) within the low self-brand overlap, moderate brand fit (DVD) conditions.

There was a significant difference in the willingness to spread positive word of mouth ($p=0.02$) between low self-brand overlap ($N=25$, $M_{LOW}=5.33$, $SD_{LOW}=1.48$) and high self-brand overlap ($N=21$, $M_{HIGH}=4.48$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.66$) participants within the low brand fit (Guitar) no-affirmation condition. There was also a marginally significant ($p=0.09$) difference between those with a low self-brand overlap ($N=18$, $M_{LOW}=5.78$, $SD_{LOW}=1.40$)

and high self-brand overlap ($N=27$, $M_{HIGH}=5.09$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.57$) within the moderate brand fit (DVD) no-affirmation condition.

All other simple effects were non-significant.

2.7.4.4 Brand Forgiveness

Self-brand overlap is posited to be a stronger driver of brand forgiveness in the face of negative information than mere attitudes alone (H1j). Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to withstand the sway of negative product information for the proposed sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap (H1k). Further, this effect should be attenuated by self-affirmation (H1l). An ANCOVA with attitudes toward the sibling brand as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap, brand fit and self-affirmation were entered as independent measures, with attitude toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of prior attitudes toward the focal brand was a significant predictor of brand forgiveness $F(1,202)=25.59$, $p<0.001$.

There were no significant main effects on brand forgiveness. Analysis of the main effect of brand fit revealed almost identical scores across conditions. Those in the low brand fit (Guitar) ($N=72$, $M_{Guitar}=4.45$, $SD_{Guitar}=1.22$) reported only a slightly higher tendency for brand forgiveness than those in the moderate fit (DVD) ($N=78$, $M_{DVD}=4.38$, $SD_{DVD}=1.35$) and high fit (MP3) ($N=65$, $M_{MP3}=4.37$, $SD_{MP3}=1.53$) conditions. These differences were not significant $F(2,202)=0.56$, $p=0.58$. There was also a non-significant effect of affirmation on tendencies for brand forgiveness $F(1,202)=2.26$, $p=0.13$. Those in the self-affirmation condition ($N=103$, $M_{AFFIRMATION}=4.55$, $SD_{AFFIRMATION}=1.33$) reported

higher tendencies for brand forgiveness than those in the non-affirmation condition (N=112, $M_{NOaffirmation}=4.33$, $SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.38$). Lastly, those in the high self-brand overlap condition (N=114, $M_{HIGH}=4.33$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.30$) reported lower tendencies for brand forgiveness than those in the low self-brand overlap condition (N=101, $M_{HIGH}=4.48$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.42$), but this was again non-significant.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 (below) provide a graphical representation of the individual scores across conditions.

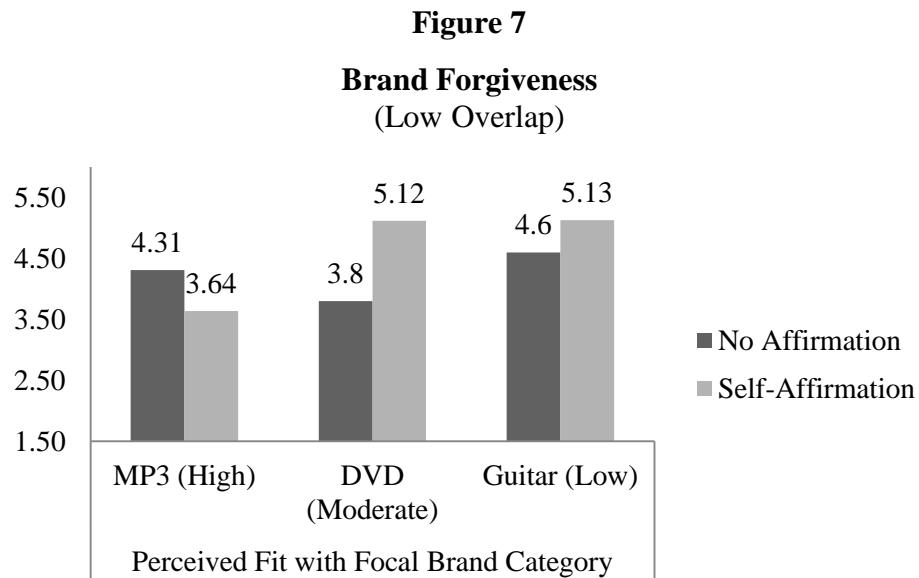
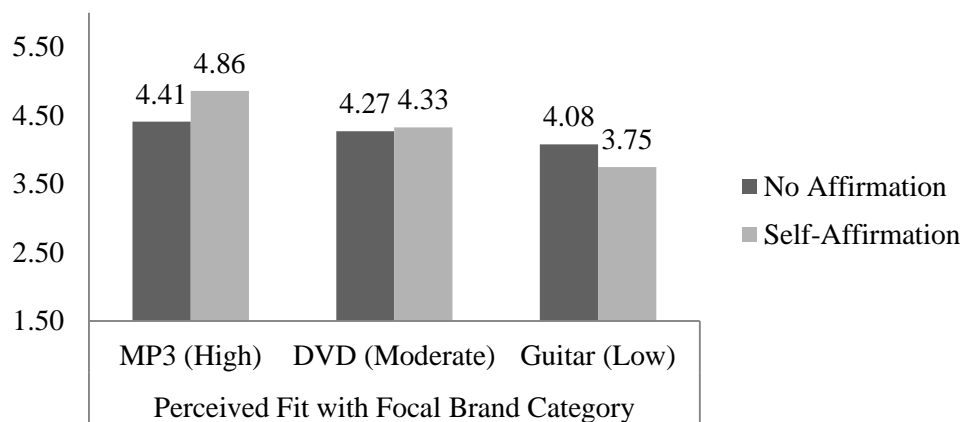


Figure 8
Brand Forgiveness
 (High Overlap)



Simple effects analysis identified several sets of statistically significant differences in reported brand forgiveness. There was a significant difference ($p=0.002$) between the high fit (MP3) ($N=13$, $M_{MP3}=3.64$, $SD_{MP3}=1.34$) and moderate fit (DVD) ($N=18$, $M_{DVD}=5.12$, $SD_{DVD}=1.28$) conditions for low self-brand overlap participants in the self-affirmation condition. The same aforementioned high fit (MP3) condition was also significantly different from the low fit (Guitar) ($N=16$, $M_{Guitar}=5.13$, $SD_{Guitar}=1.03$) condition for low self-brand overlap participants within the self-affirmation condition. There was a significant difference ($p=0.007$) in reported brand forgiveness between no-affirmation ($N=17$, $M_{NOaffirmation}=3.80$, $SD_{NOaffirmation}=1.30$) and self-affirmation ($N=18$, $M_{AFFIRMATION}=5.12$, $SD_{AFFIRMATION}=1.28$) within the low self-brand overlap, moderate brand fit (DVD) conditions. There was also a significant difference ($p=0.02$) between the low self-brand overlap participants ($N=13$, $M_{LOW}=3.64$, $SD_{LOW}=1.34$) and high self-brand overlap participants ($N=21$, $M_{HIGH}=4.41$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.70$) within the self-affirmation, high brand fit (MP3) conditions.

There was a significant difference ($p=0.03$) in reported brand forgiveness between those with a low self-brand overlap ($N=18$, $M_{LOW}=5.12$, $SD_{LOW}=1.28$) and high self-brand overlap ($N=27$, $M_{HIGH}=4.32$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.38$) within the self-affirmation, moderate brand fit (DVD) conditions. Lastly, there was a significant difference ($p=0.003$) between those with a low self-brand overlap ($N=16$, $M_{LOW}=5.13$, $SD_{LOW}=1.03$) and high self-brand overlap ($N=10$, $M_{HIGH}=3.75$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.11$) within the self-affirmation, low brand fit (Guitar) condition. All other simple effects were non-significant. This test provided no support for H1j-H1l.

2.7.4.5 Correlations of Dependant Variables

Study 1 tested the degree to which self-brand overlap affects consumer attitudes and behaviours towards sibling brands within a larger brand portfolio. The dependent variables under study (attitude towards the sibling brand, willingness to buy, positive WOM and brand forgiveness) are distinct behaviours, yet may have some conceptual overlap. In the interest of transparency, I have performed a correlational analysis and reported the results in Table 2.

Table 2

Dependant Variables Correlations (A)

		Attitude toward Sibling Brand	Willingness to Buy	Positive WOM	Forgiveness
Attitude toward Sibling Brand	Pearson Correlation	1	0.759**	0.745**	0.503**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	215	215	215	215
Willingness to Buy	Pearson Correlation	0.759**	1	0.847**	0.642**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	215	215	215	215
Positive WOM	Pearson Correlation	0.745**	0.847**	1	0.682**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	215	215	215	215
Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.503**	0.642**	0.682**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	215	215	215	215

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

2.8 Discussion

The goal of this study was to demonstrate that inclusion of the brand into the self can in turn lead to the inclusion of the brand portfolio into the self, which is a novel perspective. Inclusion of the brand portfolio into the self via self-brand overlap with a focal brand should manifest itself in increased biased evaluations of sibling brands with differing rates of decline across increasing degrees of brand fit. However, the analysis reported herein does not bear out that story. Instead, what is found is a series of non-significant and counter-theoretical patterns.

There are several possible reasons for these unexpected and counter-theoretical results. First, the superior effect of self as demonstrated in previous research on brand attachment (Fedorikhin et al. 2008) should have been robust enough to hold in this new context. It is surprising that attitudes towards the sibling brand were highest for the moderate fit DVD player, when theory suggests that the high fit MP3 player should be most preferred. This is coupled with the fact that common sense dictates that in today's technological marketplace, the notion of a company with expertise in cell phones branching out into MP3 players is not far of a stretch. However, this study asked participants to think of a real life brand that they use and then project these feelings onto a new, unknown and artificial brand. Avoiding the use of real brands and relying on participants to have the appropriate cognitive and imagination skills to perform this task correctly may be expecting too much. Unlike the original manipulation upon which this present manipulation was based (Fedorikhin et al. 2008), this present study also includes the additional tasks of imagining that the fake brand is part of a corporate portfolio (under a new, unknown artificial name) and connected to a proposed new brand, again under unknown artificial names. Some of the open-ended feedback questions collected at the end of this study suggested that participants had difficulty keeping the different fake brand names straight and that the task was too abstract to properly comprehend. Although such comments were few, it is a legitimate criticism and could have some factor in explaining these non-significant findings.

Second, it is arguable that self-affirmation may have offered a boost to self-esteem such that biased processing of information increased. Research using self-affirmation as a technique for reducing self-serving biases exposes participants to blatant threatening

information. In this study, self-affirmation was intended to neutralize participant's need for self-enhancement and self-protection, thereby reducing the natural inflated evaluations of self-related items. However, only the brand forgiveness measure exposed participants to any explicit negative brand information. All other measures relied upon participants speculating on the possibility of the brand's functional inferiority. Thus, self-affirmation in this context may have boosted self-esteem to a point beyond which participants are not able to spontaneously and internally generate the possibility of a brand's weak performance. As well, the self-affirmation and memory manipulation may have placed too much of a cognitive load on participants, further exacerbating the problem of abstract manipulations with fake brands.

If this study had been successful, it would have contributed to both the brand portfolio literature and the original self-other overlap source literature as well, suggesting that the tenets of the extended contact hypothesis do not just operate in social groups, but extend to para-social relationships as well. However, future research can re-address these issues with a study that utilizes real-life brands and current users to ensure a less abstract manipulation. Furthermore, the addition of a self-affirmation/no-affirmation free factor to use a comparative baseline might offer increased insight into the effect of self-affirmation on participants. Although this study has succeeded in only offering minimal partial support for some hypotheses, there is still ample theoretical justification for future studies that have more refined manipulations.

Chapter 3: Ostracism and Interpersonal Rejection

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

The previous two chapters outlined how self-brand overlap can impact consumer perception of strategies used to enlarge the brand portfolio. However, companies also undertake to reduce their portfolio as well. Research has suggested that self-esteem can serve as a monitor of interpersonal rejection and group exclusion. In this chapter I will turn the discussion towards the dimensions of felt rejection and suggest how brand elimination decisions could be inferred as a form of personal rejection. However, I will first outline a company's rationale for deleting certain brands from their portfolio.

3.2 Brand Deletion

Brand deletion can be an important part of brand portfolio strategy, and there can be both organizational and environmental drivers of brand deletion (Varadarajan et al. 2006).

The assumption is that a small number of brands not only account for the lion's share of a firm's profits, but can also play a large role in the formation of a company's image and reputation. Thus, managers must consider pruning their brand portfolio of underperforming brands in an attempt to free up financial resources and reinvest in strengthening stellar brands. The authors stipulate a series of criteria (based on financial and operational resource constraints) that can help managers to understand when, which and why certain brands should be dropped. However, one important omission from the discussion is the role of consumers, and how their personal identification with brands and their understanding of the interconnectivity of brands within portfolios might influence their reaction to brand deletions. Further, managers need to understand how

such decisions can affect subsequent consumer response to both the corporation and the remaining members of the portfolio.

Previous research has demonstrated that brand deletion may be accepted by consumers when they understand that retaining the brand is no longer in the company's best interests (Mao et al. 2009). However, such research uses experimental stimuli that rely upon hypothetical scenarios discussing fake brands. I suggest that real-life brand elimination has personal effects on consumers of that brand and is therefore met with different reactions. Research has shown that assessments of social justice are moderated by the personal relevance of the situation (Ham and van den Bos 2008), demonstrating that people draw stronger conclusions about the fairness and justice of an event when the justice-implying event happened to them or a close friend versus an event that happened to a stranger. Thus, suggesting that consumers are less upset when brand elimination is necessitated by the company's goals may not hold true when consumers identify with the brand.

3.3 Perceived Rejection

As I have previously mentioned, research has shown that humans have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister and Leary 1995). As social animals, humans seek out interpersonal attachments and group affiliations, and often strive to protect their relationships from external threats and potential dissolution. Researchers have suggested that, due to these needs, humans have developed a "sociometer" – a special attention system that monitors how others react to them, and warns them when there is a perceived threat of displeasure or rejection from others (Leary et al. 1995). The perceived threat of

potential rejection serves as a motivation to adjust one's behaviour and hopefully re-establish social approval. Extensive research has shown that human beings have an aversive reaction to even the smallest possibility of rejection.

However, despite its centrality to interpersonal functioning, the rejection construct has been difficult to pin down. Rejection has been both broadly and inconsistently defined in the literature. As a broad behavioural category, rejection has been considered to include more specific expressions such as ostracism, stigmatization, betrayal, unrequited love, abandonment and emotional neglect (Leary 2001). However, leading researchers in the field (Leary 2005; Williams 2007) agree that despite their own personal working definitions, various definitions and operationalizations have a significant degree of conceptual overlap, and often demonstrate similar behavioural responses in victims.

Here, I will briefly review two dominant, yet interconnected, research areas focusing on interpersonal rejection and discuss their applicability to the context of brand elimination.

Leary (1990) outlines the act of rejection as demonstrating levels of *inclusionary status*. A person's inclusionary status is observed by the degree to which others seek to include an individual on a social level. The full range of inclusionary status runs from *maximal inclusion* where others actively and purposefully seek out an individual's company, to *maximal exclusion*, where others actively and purposefully ostracise and exclude another from their company. In between these two extremes lie gradations of acceptance or rejection, where others may include or exclude an individual, with varying degrees of awareness and intent to do so. Although such a conceptualization is useful in understanding the ways in which one may *be rejected*, it does not fully demonstrate why people might *feel rejected*. We may experience similar instances of rejecting acts in

differing contexts or have rejecting acts perpetrated by different sources, and this may, in turn, lead to different perceptions of rejection.

Building upon his earlier work on the act of rejection, Leary (2001) suggests that *perceptions of rejection* lie in the degree to which an individual feels his or her relationship with another is valuable or important to that other individual. The notion of *relational evaluation* highlights the differential value we place on various relationships. Each of us values some relationships more than others, and we often value our relationships differently than do the partners with whom we share those relationships. This suggests that our perception of rejection (and not just the act of rejection) differs along a continuum of relational evaluation; we view the relationship as having degrees of importance or value. Thus, feeling accepted implies that we perceive our relationship as being important and valuable to our relationship partner, and feeling rejected implies that we do not perceive our relationship to be important and valuable to our partner. Often, these perceptions are comparative judgements of our relational value as held to some referent, such as our desired value, our perceived value at a previous point in time, or the value we perceive our relationship partners place on other relationships.

These two views of the act and perception of rejection highlight an interesting contrast. The perception of rejection is a subjective evaluation that may or may not reflect the intent of our relationship partners. Thus, much of the literature addressing the different manifestations of interpersonal rejection address the various ways victims perceive and infer rejection, even when rejection has not occurred from an objective standpoint. Leary (2001) suggests that people feel accepted when their perceived relational value exceeds some minimum level, but feel rejected when they perceive that their relational value falls

below that same level. The challenge is in unearthing what those various minimum levels are. Although some forms of rejection are obvious (i.e. a divorce, losing one's job, religious excommunication) others are more benign and subject to interpretation (i.e. an unreciprocated Christmas card, a lack of friendly greeting in the morning). In this research, I am suggesting that a company's decision to eliminate a brand may be one more criterion on which an individual might gauge his or her degree of rejection by a firm. If consumers feel that their relationship with the firm (or the brand's value to the firm) has been devalued relative to their desired value, or to a previous point in time, or as compared to the value they infer that the company places on others, they may interpret this as a form of rejection.

However, as mentioned previously, the construct of rejection is relatively broad and has many sub-definitions in the literature. Perhaps a more specific type of rejection that is applicable to the context of brand elimination in the notion of ostracism. Ostracism is generally thought of as the act of being ignored or excluded by an individual or a group (Williams 2007; Williams and Zadro 2001), and can occur in any situation where living creatures organize themselves into social collectives. Animal packs, ethnic tribes, religious groups, political alliances, even family relationships all provide opportunities and insights into ostracism as a tool for individual-level discipline and group cohesion. Acts of ostracism can be seen as explicit (i.e. political exile, familial disownment) or more subtle displays of exclusion (i.e. the silent treatment).

Researchers (Gruter and Masters 1986) have argued from an evolutionary perspective that ostracism serves as a tool for community growth and survival. Groups would expel weak or otherwise deviant members from the group in an effort to eliminate the burden

placed on stronger members, maintain group norms, and strengthen the gene pool. This perspective is echoed in the rationale behind eliminating underperforming brands.

Dropping weaker brands in order to strengthen the remaining portfolio is the essence of brand on brand ostracism. Individuals who have strong self-brand overlap may feel the emotional effects of ostracism as though they themselves had been personally expelled.

It has been proposed (Williams 2009) that ostracism not only impacts generalized affect levels, but can also threaten four basic psychological needs. Specifically, ostracism threatens an individual's *need to belong* because it suggests a separation of self from others. It also threatens an individual's *need for positive self-esteem*. Ostracism is an all-encompassing rejection and often leads victims to ruminate about their situation, leading to lowered self-regard. The *need for control* is also threatened as ostracism is a unilateral decision made by others with no option for the victim's input. Lastly, ostracism threatens an individual's *need for recognition and meaningful existence* because ostracism is like a social death where one is rendered invisible and inconsequential. Thus, for those who are ostracised, such expulsion and resulting isolation can be psychologically and physiologically threatening.

At its most extreme and basic level, ostracism can render an individual friendless and at the mercy of the environment – whether it be the physical or economic environment. The resulting lack of support and resources can greatly impair an individual's ability to thrive and possibly even survive. As a result, researchers have suggested that humans have developed an ostracism-detection system, and that such a system likely co-evolved with the increasing use of ostracism as a social tool (Spoor and Williams 2006). To say that human beings have such an instinctual social threat detection system is consistent with

the sociometer hypothesis mention earlier (Leary et al. 1995). Although several studies have looked at the psychological and behavioural reactions to obvious and explicit ostracism, such as deliberate exclusion from group play (Van Beest et al. 2011; Williams and Jarvis 2006), or obvious exclusion from group conversation (Zadro et al. 2005), other studies have begun to look at the degree to which ostracism is detected in more benign and ambiguous contexts such as conversational disagreement (Zadro et al. 2005), unreturned text messaging (Smith and Williams 2004) and avoiding eye contact (Wirth et al. 2010). I am suggesting here that a firm's decision to eliminate a brand from their portfolio may be one more context in which ostracism is inferred.

3.4 Summary

Brand deletion can be upsetting for loyal customers. However, I believe that for some consumers, the reactions go beyond mere negative mood. The research on perceived social rejection suggests that individuals can interpret rejection in even the most innocuous situations. Due to the potential for perspective-taking when consumers integrate brands into the self, I suggest that brand deletion can lead to a sense of personal rejection for these consumers. Thus, I put forth the following hypotheses:

H2a: Consumers in the brand deletion condition will perceive greater personal rejection than consumers in the brand retention condition.

H2b: Under a brand deletion situation, consumers high on self-brand overlap will perceive greater personal rejection than consumers high on brand attitudes alone.

H2c: Under a brand retention situation, consumers high in self-brand overlap will perceive greater personal acceptance than consumers high on brand attitudes alone.

3.5 Study 2

3.5.1 Method

Study 2 is a 2 (low vs. high self-brand overlap) X 2 (brand retention vs. brand elimination) factorial between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to a self-brand overlap manipulation that asked them to choose a brand from a list of 33 real-life brands that they would choose either for their functional performance or for their self-relatedness. Participants were then asked to write something about the brand and why they choose it, in order to further stimulate their self-brand overlap awareness. Following this self-brand overlap manipulation, respondents were asked to complete manipulation checks consisting of a six-item measure of brand attitude and the concentric circles measure of self-brand overlap.

After the manipulation checks, participants read a passage that describes the larger brand portfolio of which their chosen brand is a member. They learned about the company that makes the brand, some of the other brands held within that portfolio, and the company's decision to downsize the portfolio. Participants are then randomly assigned to learn that their chosen brand has been targeted for deletion, or has been retained in the portfolio at the expense of another brand. Thus, the implication is that their brand is either accepted or rejected, compared to a referent (other brands) and is in keeping with the theme of relational devaluation and ostracism.

Subsequent to the brand elimination manipulation, participants were asked to complete a 12 item measure of perceived ostracism that was adapted from Zadro et al (2005), and a 24 item measure of relational evaluation and rejection (Buckley et al. 2004).

Final questions in Study 2 consisted of standard demographic questions such as the participant's age, gender, first language and a request for any final thoughts or comments about the study.

The complete protocol for this study can be found in Appendix C.

3.5.2 Data Cleaning

Data collection for study 2 received 223 completed responses. Participants were Western University students who completed the study for partial course credit. Two people were eliminated from the analysis for not properly completing (skipping over) the self-brand overlap manipulation check. One additional respondent was eliminated for failing to complete more than half of the items in any one scale. Completion times fell between 4.32 (mm.ss) and 50.48 (mm.ss) which was judged to be acceptable minima and maxima given the length of the study and the maximum time allowed for subjects in a behavioural lab. All other missing values were replaced with the series mean before analysis began, leaving 220 respondents ($N_{\text{Female}}=142$, $M_{\text{AGE}}=18.8$) with an average completion time of 8.19 (mm.ss).

A manipulation check consisted of a measurement of the degree of self-brand overlap as outlined by a series of increasingly overlapping circles, adapted from Aron et al. (1992). Within the manipulated "low overlap" condition the measured scores ranged between 1

and 7, ($N=114$, $M_{LOW}=2.69$, $SD_{LOW}=1.34$). In the manipulated “high overlap” condition the measured scores ranged between 2 and 6, ($N=106$, $M_{HIGH}=3.56$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.43$) (Table 3).

Table 3
Self-Brand Overlap Scores (B)

Low Overlap			High Overlap		
Rating	N	Cumulative	Rating	N	Cumulative
1	19	19	1	9	9
2	43	62	2	19	28
3	25	87	3	22	50
4	12	99	4	25	75
5	12	111	5	22	97
6	2	113	6	9	106
7	1	114	7	0	106

An independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the two groups $t(213.65)=-4.62$, $p<0.001$. Therefore, due to the significant difference between the two overlap conditions, no further data cleaning measures were taken.

3.5.3 Scale Calculation

3.5.3.1 Attitude toward the Original Brand

After random assignment to the low or high self-brand overlap condition, respondents were asked to rate their attitude toward their chosen focal brand. Six items (like, good, pleasant, favourable, superior, excellent) were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.75. Reliability analysis presented a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.93$.

3.5.3.2 Perceived Ostracism

A principal components analysis with a promax rotation was conducted on the 12 ostracism items adapted from Zadro et al. (2005). The twelve items are outlined in Table 3.

Table 4

Ostracism Scale Items (A)

1) I feel poorly accepted by the company
2) I feel as though I have a connection with the company
3) I feel like an outcast to the company
4) I feel good about myself
5) I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer
6) I feel somewhat inadequate
7) I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision
8) I feel in control of my options
9) I feel that I can change the company's decision
10) I feel that my existence had some effect on the company's decision
11) I feel nonexistent to the company
12) I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company

Items 2, 4, 8, 9, and 10 were subsequently reverse-coded to compensate for the difference in direction valence relative to the majority of scale items. Initial results presented a pattern matrix with three emergent components (see Table 4).

Table 5**Ostracism Pattern Matrix (A)**

	Component		
	1	2	3
I feel somewhat inadequate	.734	.041	.107
I feel that my existence had some effect on the company's decision (Reverse coded)	-.730	.403	.131
I feel that I can change the company's decision (Reverse coded)	-.724	.329	.108
I feel poorly accepted by the company	.681	.246	.221
I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision	.674	.149	.248
I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer	.645	.248	.120
I feel as though I have a connection with the company (Reverse coded)	-.622	.084	.391
I feel like an outcast to the company	.612	.271	-.058
I feel non-existent to the company	.072	.917	-.175
I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company	.050	.900	-.154
I feel good about myself (Reverse coded)	.035	-.152	.812
I feel in control of my options (reverse coded)	.053	-.230	.774

The recoded items seemed to cause some disturbance in the factor loadings outlined in the rotated matrix (Table 5), and were subsequently dropped from a second analysis. After dropping the recoded items, a new rotated component matrix displayed two emergent components (see Table 6).

Table 6**Ostracism Pattern Matrix (B)**

	Component	
	1	2
I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision	.823	-.058
I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer	.792	.003
I feel somewhat inadequate	.783	-.109
I feel poorly accepted by the company	.779	.090
I feel like an outcast to the company	.640	.108
I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company	-.014	.931
I feel non-existent to the company	.011	.930

In the interest of parsimony and unidimensionality, an “ostracism” scale was created that consisted of only the items contained in the first factor. All but one item had loadings greater than 0.7. The lowest loading factor “I feel like an outcast by the company” was judged to be conceptually similar to the spirit of the ostracism measure, and was therefore included in the computation of the ostracism scale. Thus, the ostracism scale consisted of five items, and had a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.82$.

3.5.3.3 Perceived Rejection and Acceptance

A principal components analysis with a promax rotation was conducted on the 24 items within the relational evaluation and rejection scale (Buckley et al. 2004). Participants were asked to think about the company’s decision to delete their preferred brand and then asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of items describing their feelings about the news. Each item was rated on a scale from 1 to 7, with 7 representing a high degree of agreement with that descriptor. The 24 items are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7**Rejection/Acceptance Scale Items**

Irritated	Happy	Hurt	Anxious	Depressed	Excluded
Annoyed	Delighted	Pained	Nervous	Dejected	Accepted
Angry	Cheerful	Injured	Tense	Sad	Valued
Mad	Pleased	Wounded	Uneasy	Down	Rejected

Initial results presented a rotated component matrix with three emergent components

(see Table 8).

Table 8**Rejection/Acceptance Pattern Matrix (A)**

	Component		
	1	2	3
Wounded	1.036	-.248	.037
Injured	.996	-.170	.038
Anxious	.886	-.086	.074
Nervous	.837	.069	-.019
Tense	.822	.037	.035
Dejected	.804	.143	-.013
Depressed	.722	.196	.030
Uneasy	.701	.206	-.007
Excluded	.620	.263	-.124
Pained	.619	.344	.017
Rejected	.605	.233	-.065
Annoyed	-.101	1.008	.025
Irritated	-.114	1.005	.034
Angry	.065	.900	.025
Mad	.132	.827	.047
Down	.402	.575	-.030
Sad	.404	.558	-.066
Hurt	.416	.532	-.013
Happy	-.069	-.004	.925
Delighted	.014	.032	.925
Pleased	-.021	-.047	.918
Cheerful	.048	-.021	.897
Valued	-.005	.014	.858
Accepted	.082	.105	.795

Looking at the items loading heavily on the second component (Annoyed, Irritated, Angry, Mad, Sad, Down) it appears that such terms are not exclusively associated with the “rejection” construct. These items imply a series of negatively valenced emotions that could be felt by consumers facing a brand deletion, regardless of whether or not they felt rejected. Terms like “angry”, “mad”, or “sad”, etc. could be felt by consumer who will simply be affected by the future unavailability of their favourite brand, causing them to miss out on the functional benefits of that brand and requiring them to make the effort to find a replacement. Thus, for the purposes of this present research, these items cannot confidently be included in the “rejection” construct. As such, these items were eliminated from a subsequent principal components analysis. The second attempt at factor analysis demonstrated two emergent factors, “rejected” and “accepted” accordingly (see Table 9).

Table 9**Rejection/Acceptance
Pattern Matrix (B)**

	Component	
	1	2
Dejected	.914	-.011
Pained	.905	-.026
Depressed	.878	.016
Hurt	.872	-.104
Uneasy	.867	-.020
Nervous	.862	-.002
Excluded	.834	-.153
Tense	.832	.061
Injured	.825	.118
Rejected	.803	-.101
Wounded	.799	.134
Anxious	.793	.119
Pleased	-.080	.934
Happy	-.090	.930
Delighted	.017	.927
Cheerful	.011	.911
Valued	-.003	.845
Accepted	.139	.790

In the interest of parsimony, further items (Anxious, Tense, Nervous, Uneasy and Depressed) that were judged to not closely align with the “rejection” construct were eliminated. These items imply a series of fear based anticipatory emotions rather than retrospective focused emotions, and were deemed to be inconsistent with the notion of “rejection” as utilized in this research. However, research suggests that rejection can trigger neural correlates with physical pain recognition (Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004) and as such, items that represented pain were kept in the rejection scale. In specific, Pained, Injured, Dejected, Hurt, Wounded, Excluded and Rejected were retained (Table 10).

Table 10
Rejection/Acceptance
Pattern Matrix (C)

	Component	
	1	2
Pained	.905	-.008
Dejected	.885	.023
Hurt	.885	-.079
Injured	.862	.135
Excluded	.858	-.128
Wounded	.836	.150
Rejected	.830	-.080
Pleased	-.069	.932
Happy	-.087	.932
Delighted	.009	.931
Cheerful	.010	.915
Valued	-.003	.851
Accepted	.129	.805

As such, the two factors (rejection and acceptance) were created. The “Felt Rejection” scale consisted of seven items (Pained, Injured, Dejected, Hurt, Wounded, Excluded, Rejected) all with factor loadings greater than 0.83 and a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.94$. The “Felt Acceptance” scale consisted of six items (Delighted, Pleased, Happy, Cheerful, Valued, Accepted) all with factor loadings greater than 0.80 and a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.95$ (Table 10).

3.5.4 Analysis

This study tests the effect of self-brand overlap on consumer response to brand elimination, independent of brand attitudes. As such, the data is analysed using ANCOVA with original brand attitude entered as a covariate. Initial analysis to establish the covariance of attitudes with self-brand overlap demonstrated that those in the high overlap condition reported higher attitudes toward the original brand ($N=106$, $M_{HIGH}=5.59$, $SD_{HIGH}=0.87$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=114$, $M_{LOW}=5.03$,

$SD_{LOW}=1.16$). Independent t-tests showed that this difference was significant $t(218)=-6.09, p<0.001$. The brand attitude and self-brand overlap items had a positive correlation= $0.43, p<0.01$

3.5.4.1 Perceived Ostracism

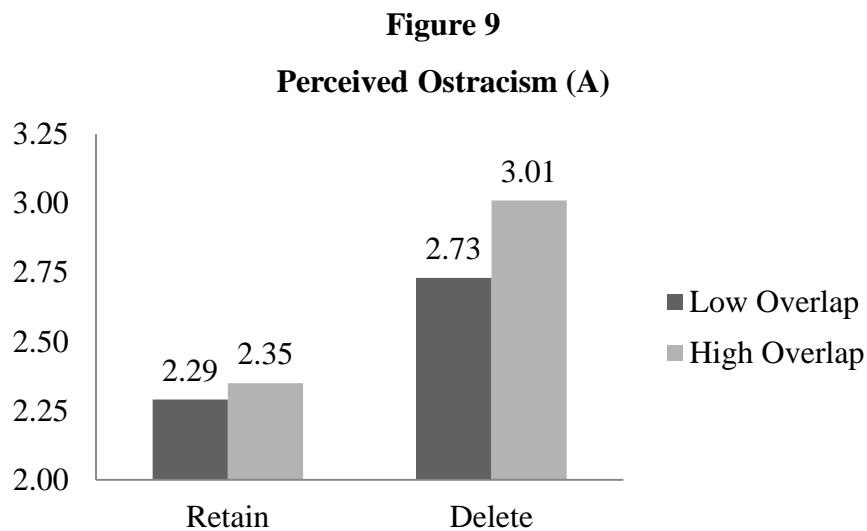
Self-brand overlap is posited to lead to taking the perspective of the brand, and as such, lead to a perception of ostracism as exemplified by expulsion from the portfolio group when the brand is eliminated from the portfolio. This is expected to be higher for those high in self-brand overlap than those scoring lower on that measure. Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher evaluations of sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with perceived ostracism as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap and the company's brand retention or elimination decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. Original attitudes toward the brand were non-significant $F(1,215)=0.15, p=0.70$.

Results show a main effect of the retention decision (whether the brand is kept in the portfolio or deleted from it) on perceptions of ostracism. Those who learned that their brand was eliminated from the portfolio felt a higher sense of ostracism ($N=109, M_{DELETE}=2.88, SD_{DELETE}=1.34$) than those in the retention condition ($N=111, M_{RETAIN}=2.31, SD_{RETAIN}=1.06$). This effect was significant $F(1,215)=11.08, p=0.001$, offering support for hypothesis 2a.

There was no main effect of self-brand overlap on perceptions of ostracism. Although those in the high overlap self-brand overlap condition experienced a greater sense of

ostracism ($N=106$, $M_{HIGH}=2.72$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.28$) than those in the low overlap self-brand overlap condition ($N=114$, $M_{LOW}=2.48$, $SD_{LOW}=1.19$), this effect was non-significant $F(1,215)=1.27$, $p=0.26$.

The interaction effect of retention and self-brand overlap was non-significant $F(1,215)=0.44$, $p=0.51$. However, this is a curious finding given the nature of the graph presented in Figure 9 (below).



Simple Effects Analysis indicated a significant difference $F(1,215)=7.68$, $p=0.006$ between those in the brand retain ($N=47$, $M_{RETAIN}=2.35$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.07$) vs. brand deletion conditions ($N=59$, $M_{DELETE}=3.01$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.37$) within the high overlap condition. However, results indicated a marginally significant difference $F(1,215)=3.69$, $p=0.06$ between perceived ostracism for those in the retain ($N=64$, $M_{RETAIN}=2.29$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.06$) vs. delete conditions ($N=50$, $M_{DELETE}=2.73$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.29$) within the low self-brand overlap condition.

Furthermore, results revealed no significant difference $F(1,215)=0.14, p=0.71$ between perceived ostracism for those in the low overlap ($N=64, M_{LOW}=2.29, SD_{LOW}=1.06$) vs. high overlap conditions ($N=47, M_{HIGH}=2.35, SD_{HIGH}=1.07$) within the brand retention condition. Results also indicated no significant difference $F(1,215)=1.63, p=0.20$ between those in the low overlap ($N=50, M_{LOW}=2.73, SD_{LOW}=1.29$) vs. high overlap conditions ($N=59, M_{HIGH}=3.01, SD_{HIGH}=1.37$) within the brand elimination condition.

Thus, these results indicate that consumers who identify highly with a brand that is eliminated from a brand portfolio can infer this management decision as a form of personal ostracism or expulsion from a group. Those low in self-brand overlap report only a marginally significant difference in perceptions of ostracism across the brand retention or elimination decisions. However, those who score high on self-brand overlap perceive a stronger sense of ostracism when their brand is eliminated from the larger portfolio, suggesting a floor below which the degree of self-brand overlap has no influence. These results offer support for hypotheses H2a and H2b.

3.5.4.2 Perceived Rejection

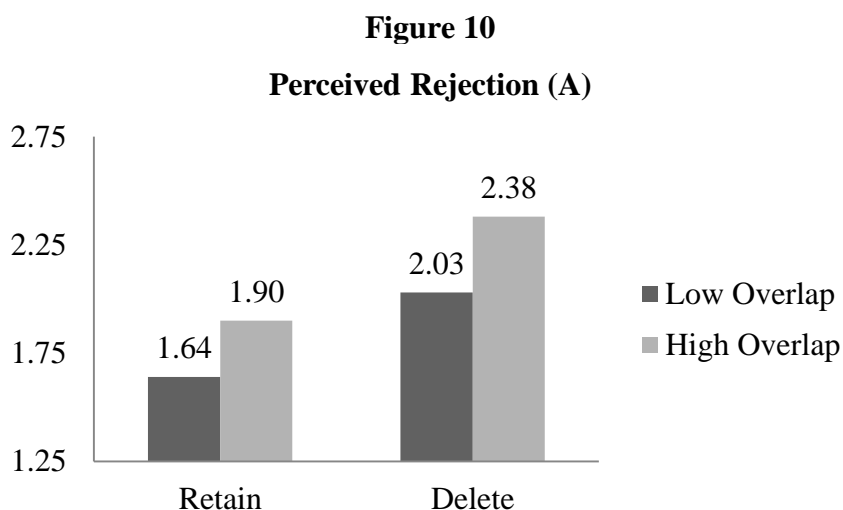
Self-brand overlap is posited to lead to taking the perspective of the brand, and as such, lead to a perception of personal rejection when the brand is eliminated from the portfolio. This is expected to be higher for those high in self-brand overlap than those scoring lower on that measure. Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher evaluations of sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with perceived rejection as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions (Figure 10). Self-brand overlap and the company's brand retention

or elimination decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. Original attitudes toward the brand were non-significant $F(1,215)=0.17, p=0.68$.

Results show a main effect of the retention decision on perceptions of personal rejection. Those who learned that their brand was eliminated from the portfolio felt a higher sense of rejection ($N=109, M_{DELETE}=2.22, SD_{DELETE}=1.26$) than those in the retention condition ($N=111, M_{RETAIN}= 1.75, SD_{RETAIN}=1.10$). This effect was significant $F(1,215)= 7.495, p=0.007$ and offers support for hypothesis 2a.

The main effect of self-brand overlap was not significant $F(1,215)= 2.61, p=0.11$. Those in the high overlap self-brand overlap condition experienced a greater sense of rejection ($N=106, M_{HIGH}=2.17, SD_{HIGH}=1.31$) than those in the low overlap self-brand overlap condition ($N=114, M_{LOW}=1.81, SD_{LOW}= 1.07$). The interaction effect of retention and self-brand overlap was non-significant $F(1,215)= 0.09, p=0.77$.

Figure 10 (below) provides a graphical representation of the individual scores across conditions.



Similar to the ostracism scale, simple effects analysis indicated a significant difference $F(1,215)=4.44, p=0.04$ between those in the retain ($N=47, M_{RETAIN}=1.90, SD_{RETAIN}=1.22$) vs. delete conditions ($N=59, M_{DELETE}=2.38, SD_{DELETE}=1.35$) within the high overlap condition. However, results indicated only a marginally significant difference $F(1,215)=3.10, p=0.08$ between perceived rejection for those in the retain ($N=64, M_{RETAIN}=1.64, SD_{RETAIN}=0.99$) vs. delete conditions ($N=50, M_{DELETE}=2.03, SD_{DELETE}=1.14$) within the low overlap condition.

Furthermore, results indicated no significant difference in perceived rejection $F(1,215)=0.97, p=0.33$ between those in the low overlap ($N=64, M_{LOW}=1.64, SD_{LOW}=0.99$) vs. high overlap conditions ($N=47, M_{HIGH}=1.90, SD_{HIGH}=1.22$) within the retain condition. However, results indicated no significant difference $F(1,215)=0.97, p=0.33$ between those in the low ($N=50, M_{LOW}=2.03, SD_{LOW}=1.14$) vs. high overlap ($N=59, M_{HIGH}=2.38, SD_{HIGH}=1.35$) within the deletion condition.

Thus, under a different measure of “rejection” these results again indicate that consumers who identify highly with a brand that is eliminated from a brand portfolio can infer this as a personal rejection by the company. Those low in self-brand overlap do not report any significant difference in perceptions of rejection across the brand retention or elimination decisions. Again, only those who score high on self-brand overlap perceive a sense of rejection when their brand is eliminated from the larger portfolio, suggesting a floor below which the degree of self-brand overlap has no influence on consumer perceptions of brand management decisions. These results offer further partial support for hypothesis H2a, and reinforce the previously found support for hypothesis H2b.

3.5.4.3 Perceived Acceptance

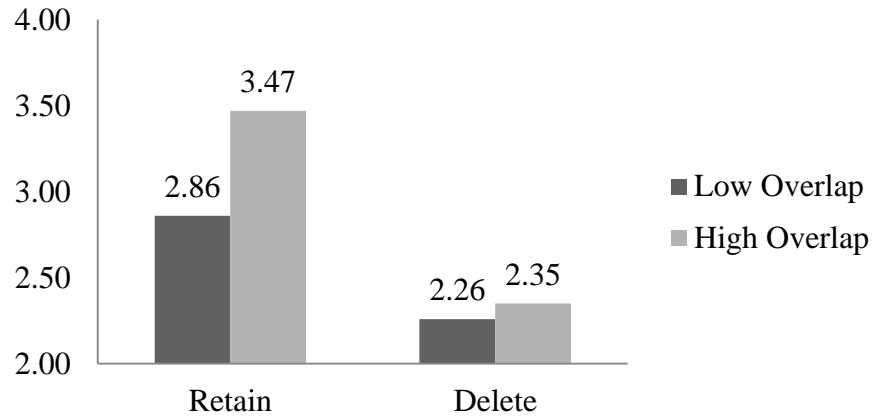
Self-brand overlap can lead to taking the perspective of the brand, and as such, lead to a perception of personal acceptance when the brand is retained within the portfolio at the expense of another brand. This is expected to be higher for those high in self-brand overlap than those scoring lower on that measure. Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher perceptions of personal acceptance than those low in self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with perceived acceptance as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap and the company's brand retention or elimination decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. Original attitudes toward the brand were non-significant $F(1, 215)=0.51, p=0.48$.

Results show a main effect of the retention decision on perceptions of Perceived Acceptance (see Figure 11). Those who learned that their brand was retained in the portfolio felt a higher sense of Acceptance ($N=111, M_{RETAIN}=3.12, SD_{RETAIN}=1.38$) than those in the deletion condition ($N=109, M_{DELETE}= 2.31, SD_{DELETE}=1.20$). The effect was significant $F(1,215)=23.94, p<0.001$.

The main effect of self-brand overlap was not significant $F(1,215)=2.32, p=0.11$. Those in the high overlap self-brand overlap condition experienced a greater sense of acceptance ($N=106, M_{HIGH}=2.85, SD_{HIGH}=1.41$) than those in the low overlap self-brand overlap condition ($N=114, M_{LOW}=2.60, SD_{LOW}=1.29$).

Figure 11 (below) provides a graphical representation of the individual scores across conditions.

Figure 11
Perceived Acceptance (A)



The interaction effect of retention and self-brand overlap on perceived acceptance was again non-significant $F(1,215)=2.20$, $p=0.14$. Simple effects analysis showed that there was no significant difference $F(1,215)=0.03$, $p=0.86$ between low ($N=50$, $M_{LOW}=2.26$, $SD_{LOW}=1.06$) and high ($N=59$, $M_{HIGH}=2.34$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.31$) overlap conditions when their brand is deleted. However, there is a significant difference $F(1,215)=4.80$, $p=0.03$ between low ($N=64$, $M_{LOW}=2.86$, $SD_{LOW}=1.40$) and high ($N=47$, $M_{HIGH}=3.47$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.28$) overlap conditions when they learn that their brand is retained within the portfolio. Furthermore, the analysis showed significant differences $F(1,215)=6.03$, $p=0.02$ in perceptions of acceptance between those in the retain condition ($N=64$, $M_{RETAIN}=2.86$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.40$) and those in the delete condition ($N=50$, $M_{DELETE}=2.26$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.06$) within the low overlap condition. Within the high overlap condition there was also a significant difference $F(1,215)=19.63$, $p<0.001$ between those who have had their brand eliminated ($N=59$, $M_{DELETE}=2.36$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.31$) and retained ($N=47$, $M_{RETAIN}=3.47$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.28$).

Thus, consumer's perception of felt acceptance (the conceptual inverse of rejection) stems from surviving a brand deletion decision and increased self-brand overlap. Not only do those who survive a brand deletion decision feel more valued and accepted than those whose brand is deleted, this effect is further exacerbated by the degree to which the brand is included in the self. These results offer support for hypothesis H2c.

3.5 Discussion

The findings in this study contribute to the literature in several ways. The company making the brand deletion decision is looking to eliminate specific brands from their portfolio, not specific customers. In many cases, consumers have no real relationship with the companies making such decisions other than an anonymous relationship mediated by the purchase of the company's product brands. The ability of participants high in self-brand overlap to interpret the brand deletion decision as a personal form of ostracism or rejection irrespective of any personal relationship they might have had with the corporation adds to the branding literature by highlighting a new subtle dimension along which consumer-corporation relationships may exist in the mind of consumers. These relationships with the corporate endorser exist by proxy of the product brand, and suggest that some consumers can be more personally invested in brand management decisions than previously thought. Furthermore, this study gives back to the self-other overlap literature by demonstrating perspective taking of non-human others. As well, it enhances the literatures on rejection and ostracism by demonstrating a new, non-interpersonal domain in which individuals can perceive rejection.

Chapter 4: Blanket Effects of Rejection on the Corporation

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

Research on the consequences of perceived interpersonal rejection suggests that rejection can lead to aggression towards the rejecter. This has potential implications for how consumers might react after internalising brand deletion as a personal rejection. In this chapter I will review research on the aftermath of perceived rejection, and outline how rejected consumers may aggress towards the firm. Specifically, I will suggest that perceived rejection may lead to a defection from any future dealings with the firm and hostility towards remaining brands as a symbol of the organization that made the deletion decision.

4.2 The Pain of Rejection

Intuition would tell us that social rejection should be an emotionally distressing experience for most people. One would expect that sadness, anger and confusion should be the normal response. However, research has begun to suggest that in addition to emotional pain, rejection triggers physiological pain as well. We really *can* suffer from “hurt” feelings (Eisenberger 2012).

Research addressing pain overlap theory suggests that the emotional pain individuals experience when they face social rejection or exclusion is similar to that of physical pain (Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004). Evolutionary perspectives suggest that humans have developed a pain response system in order to comprehend and anticipate harmful situations. Historically, humans have needed to rely on others for shared resources and

group protection, and thus, the possibility of social rejection and exclusion can be a potentially harmful state. Sociometer theory (Leary et al. 1995) suggests that humans have developed a sense for anticipating impending rejection as a warning signal to alter their behaviour in line with group norms. Thus it follows that human brain should cognitively recognize and process rejection signals in much the same way as it would process cues signalling physical danger. To this end, research is beginning to outline the ways in which perceptions of rejection can trigger similar neural processes as those that are engaged when experiencing physical harm (Eisenberger et al. 2006; Kross et al. 2011). Furthermore, research on the physiological responses to rejection show that rejected individuals exhibit higher levels of salivary cortisol than accepted individuals, and that this hormone secretion correlates highly with psychological distress (Blackhart et al. 2007).

However, in addition to the physiological effects of perceived rejection, research shows that there are interesting cognitive effects as well. In a series of studies, scholars have shown that an expectation of rejection and exclusion from important relationships has a negative effect on memory and reasoning skills (Baumeister et al. 2002). In a study analyzing the effect of anticipated rejection on intelligence, participants who were randomly and falsely told that their scores on a seemingly reliable and valid personality test indicated that they were likely to end up alone in life performed worse on a measure of general knowledge and intelligence compared to those participants who were told that they would end up living a life filled with important relationships, or a control group that was told they would likely die in an accident in the future. In a study on memory, participants who were told that they would end up alone in life performed worse on a

memory task than the non-rejected participant group and the control group. Further, analysis showed that this poor performance for the rejection group was a function of poor memory recall and not inhibited information encoding, suggesting that perceived rejection affects executive functioning, which is considered to be responsible for more difficult mental processing such as memory retrieval. This effect was further substantiated in a study that demonstrated that participants in the rejection condition performed poorer on a logical reasoning task than participants in the other two conditions. Taken together, the implication of these studies (Baumeister et al. 2002) is that perceived or anticipated rejection can impair cognitive abilities for those that are rejected.

Complex, controlled processes such as memory retrieval and logical reasoning are important higher-order processes commonly included in executive functioning; but so too is self-regulation (Baumeister and Dewall 2005). Self-regulation is the ability to exert control over one's thoughts and actions. It is an important component of social functioning in so far as individuals must often control their behaviours and actions in order to maintain civil relationships. However, research has shown that social rejection can lead to a weakening of self-regulation processes, with the logical extension that a break-down in self-regulation, if extreme enough, could lead to further social exclusion for the rejected individual. Studies have found that participants who anticipate rejection persevere less on a frustrating puzzle task than those in the acceptance and control conditions, and they also eat more fatty, unhealthy foods, regardless of taste, than those who are not rejected (Baumeister et al. 2005). Rejected individuals are also more likely to view life as being less meaningful than non-rejected individuals (Stillman et al. 2009),

and report greater levels of lethargy and misperceptions of time flow (Twenge et al. 2003). Thus, research shows that rejection can have important influences on the cognitive processes of the rejected individual. Poorer memory, weakened intelligence and complex reasoning, coupled with weakened self-regulation and listlessness, can have important effects of the rejected individual's subsequent thoughts and behaviours following a perceived rejection.

4.3 Reactions to Rejection

One frequent reaction to social rejection is aggression towards the rejecter. Rejection can lead to either pro-social behaviours, such as supplicating attempts to regain acceptance and affiliation, or anti-social behaviours such as hostility and aggression. Williams and Nida (2011) suggest that, when there are no perceived options for regaining acceptance, individuals will turn to anti-social behaviours as a way to restore self-esteem. Williams (2007) has suggested that ostracism, as an extreme form of rejection, threatens basic needs such as the need for control and the need for meaningful existence. Research has shown that aggression towards a rejecter offers the rejected individual a sense of control and meaningfulness by forcing others to recognize the individual's existence.

Several studies have shown that those who experience some form of social rejection are more willing to punish the perpetrator (or another person as proxy) than those who feel no rejection. In one study, participants were lead to believe that they had been either accepted or rejected by a peer (Buckley et al. 2004). The participants were then given the opportunity to select audio files for the peer to listen to, with rejected participants selecting more unpleasant files for the peer to listen to. Other researchers have shown

how this tendency also influences aggression towards innocent others (Twenge et al. 2001). Participants were randomly assigned to either an acceptance or rejection condition and then given the opportunity to control the amount of unpleasant noise that a fellow participant (but not a rejecter) was exposed to. Those in the rejected condition exposed the fellow participant to more noise than those not in the rejection condition. This suggests that rejected individuals show higher tendencies for aggression, even against those that have not rejected them.

This tendency is further demonstrated, and perhaps partially explained, by research demonstrating perceived entitativity in social rejection. Entitativity is the phenomenon of viewing a collection of individuals as a cohesive whole, as if they were a singular entity (Campbell 1958). Entitativity is driven by many factors, such as similarity of individuals, the degree of interdependence, interaction and shared goals and outcomes of members (Dasgupta et al. 1999; Gaertner and Schopler 1998; Knowles and Bassett 1976). Thus, perceived groupings can serve to create multiple victims of aggression (Gaertner et al. 2008). If the rejecter's group membership is salient during the rejection, the victim may see group membership as being interchangeable, and may include all group members in the representation of the rejection incident. This can lead any entire categorical group member to be the victim of rejection-induced aggression. At its most extreme, research has suggested that perceived rejection underlies such forms of mass violence as high-profile school shootings (Gaertner and Iuzzini 2005).

4.4 Brand Portfolios and Entitativity

Brand portfolios can be seen as a collective group, if by nothing other than through their link to the corporate brand. If the brand can be construed of as a social category, then each product brand is a representative member. When the organization makes and communicates a brand elimination decision, it makes the corporate brand and the awareness of a portfolio of other brands salient in consumers' minds. When affected consumers encounter other brands in the portfolio, endorsed by the corporation, the endorsement triggers awareness of group membership for the retained brands. This is in keeping with Associative Network Theory (Collins and Loftus 1975) introduced in Chapter 2, which outlines how concepts are linked in memory. Thus, a product brand endorsed by the corporation can serve as a representative of the company that eliminated the brand. Because of this, product brands within the portfolio can serve as a proxy for aggression against the firm, to the extent that their group membership is made salient.

Interpersonal rejection has been shown to lead to social aggression. As such, it is arguable that perceived rejection may lead to aggressive actions towards the firm. Current research on attachment styles and brand relationships provides some support for this claim. Research outlining the role of insecure attachment in predicting aversive reaction to the company after the dissolution of a relationship is somewhat in keeping with the arguments presented herein (Thomson et al. 2012). Insecure attachment has been shown to correlate with rejection sensitivity - a chronic fear of rejection that creates a hyper-vigilance towards rejection cues, and a heightened tendency to infer rejection cues in ambiguous events (Feldman and Downey 1994). Thus, such research suggests the

potential for reacting aggressively towards the firm when perceived rejection is an influence.

Research shows that consumer aggression can take both a direct and an indirect form (Grégoire et al. 2010). Direct forms can include complaining, insulting a representative, violating company property, etc. Indirect forms can include negative word of mouth (WOM), publicly derogating the firm, and switching for an inferior alternative to spite the company. I am thus suggesting that perceived rejection may be strong enough to trigger negative behaviours towards the firm such as company derogation and negative WOM. Further, I suggest that this effect may be strong enough to spill over into sibling brand avoidance.

Previous research has shown that self-relevance is an important factor in predicting consumer aggression after a consumer-brand relationship ends (Johnson et al. 2011). Such research demonstrates that consumer revenge and retaliatory actions stem from a need to restore self-worth after the break-up of a self-relevant consumer-brand relationship. The research contained in this study argues a similar idea – that consumers with a high degree of self-brand overlap feel personally rejected by the firm and need to restore their feelings of self-worth by aggressing against the rejecter. However, my argument differs in that that it looks at an indirect consumer-company relationship that is mediated by a self-brand overlap with a single portfolio member. The corporation is a third party with which the consumer may have minimal, if any, interaction. The relationship with the focal brand doesn't end *per se*, instead it is severed by the corporation when it decides to kill off the brand. In addition, I introduce the notion of derogating survivor sibling brands. When a company eliminates a brand in favour of

retaining other brands, it establishes a sense of competitive rivalry whereby consumers of the losing brand are motivated to cognitively devalue surviving brands. I discuss this notion further in the next section.

4.5 Rejection and Social Comparison

Rejection is an aversive emotional state and it implies some sort of social failing.

Rejection can lead the individual to ruminate about what went wrong and possibly extend the negative effects of rejection by conjuring up various alternative explanations, further inflating the threat (Williams 2007). Thus, rejection by others can lead to a discrepancy between what the individual believes about himself and the demonstrated beliefs of others about the individual. Because of this incongruence between self-other beliefs, rejection can encourage a motivated decline in self-awareness (Twenge et al. 2003). Such deliberate avoidance of self-awareness becomes a defence mechanism against the discomfort of accepting one's shortcomings. In addition, researchers have found that, as self-awareness decreases after a rejection, other-awareness increases. As much as we are loathe to focus on our own shortcomings after rejection, we are eager to focus on others in the social environment who have not been rejected in an attempt to understand the reasons behind their acceptance (Hess and Pickett 2010).

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger 1954) suggests that people have a strong drive to evaluate themselves on many performance measures. However, some performance domains are ambiguous, and as such, often do not have any objective basis for evaluation. Thus, when an individual seeks to evaluate himself in such a domain, he must resort to a social comparison of his performance against that of others in the social environment. For example, a runner who wants to evaluate his speed and likelihood for

winning a race does not have any objective, non-social basis for evaluating his performance. His best option for gauging his likelihood of winning the race is to compare his performance to others against whom he might compete. Thus, people who want to understand the reasons for their rejection might compare themselves and their behaviours against that of other people in order to pinpoint their mistake.

However, social pressures can emerge from the comparison process. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger 1954) suggests that a perceived discrepancy between one's own performance and that of another creates a pressure to reconcile the difference by bringing the two to the same level. This could mean that the social comparison works as a guide for improving one's own performance to meet that of the comparison target, or it could also mean trying to reposition the comparison target to be in line with the individual. Bringing the other person in line with one's own performance could mean many things such as sabotaging another's performance or derogating their opinions in order to inflate one's own self in comparison.

To this end, I suggest that consumers who feel personally rejected after a brand deletion will turn their attention to other brands that survived the portfolio reduction. In order to maintain their self-esteem, these consumers will look to surviving sibling brands in the portfolio to help understand why they were retained while the consumer's own brand was not, and subsequently derogate the sibling brand's value in an attempt to lower their superior performance (in terms of acceptability) and repair their own damaged self-esteem. Thus, previous inflated evaluations of sibling brands can become deflated.

4.6 Summary

I suggest that those who perceive personal rejection by the firm will be more likely to engage in negative WOM and hostile cognitions towards the firm than those who are not rejected, and that those who are rejected will be more inclined to avoid innocent sibling brands (as a proxy for the company that rejected them) than those who are rejected. When given the opportunity, those who are not rejected will favour sibling brands over competitors as a function of their identification with the brand portfolio, while those who have been rejected will favour competitors to former sibling brands, as a function of their perceived rejection from the brand portfolio. Specifically, I propose the following hypotheses:

H3a: Consumers who have their brand deleted will have more negative feelings towards the corporation than those who have their brand retained

H3b: Under a brand-elimination situation, consumers high in self-brand overlap will have more negative feelings towards the corporation than consumers high in brand attitudes alone.

H3c: Consumers who have their brand deleted will engage in less positive word of mouth than those who have their brand retained.

H3d: Under a brand-elimination situation, consumers high in self-brand overlap will engage in less positive WOM than consumers high in attitudes alone.

H3e: Under a brand-elimination situation, consumers high in self-brand overlap will evaluate sibling brands less positively than consumers high in attitudes alone.

H3f: Under a non-elimination situation, consumers high in self-brand overlap will evaluate sibling brands more positively than consumers high in attitudes alone.

H3g: Consumers who have their brand deleted will be more willing to defect to competing brands when they are made aware of a brand's connection to the corporation.

H3h: Under a brand elimination situation, consumers high in self-brand overlap will be more willing to defect to the corporation's competition than consumers high in brand attitudes alone.

H3i: These negative effects (H3a-H3e & H3g-H3h) will be mediated by a consumer's perceived rejection by the firm.

4.7 Study 3

4.7.1 Method

The study is a 2 (high vs. low self-brand overlap) x 2 (retained vs. deleted brands) x 2 (portfolio awareness vs. no company awareness) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (low vs. high self-brand overlap) in which they were either asked to think of a brand that they either use purely for its functional performance or for its self-expressive qualities. In each condition, respondents

were then asked to project this feeling onto a previously unknown brand (“Luneon” shampoo and body wash). Following this self-brand overlap manipulation, respondents were asked to complete manipulation checks consisting of a six-item measure of brand attitude and the concentric circles measure of self-brand overlap.

After the self-brand overlap manipulation checks, participants read a passage that informs them of the company that makes the brand, that the company holds other unnamed brands within the portfolio, and the company’s decision to reduce the size of the portfolio. Participants were then randomly assigned to imagine that the “Luneon” brand (upon which they had projected their feelings for their own brand) has been targeted for deletion, or has been retained in the portfolio at the expense of another brand. This manipulation is meant to replicate the brand portfolio management news and subsequent feelings triggered in Study 2. Subsequent to the brand deletion manipulation, participants were asked to complete a 12 item measure of perceived ostracism that was adapted from Zadro et al (2005), and a 24 item measure of relational evaluation and rejection (Buckley et al. 2004). Participants then answered a three item measure of their overall impression of the corporation and a three item measure of the likelihood that they would spread positive word of mouth about the corporation.

Participants were then asked to imagine going to the store to buy laundry detergent, only to find that their preferred brand was out of stock. They were then presented with information about two other previously unknown brands that were available for purchase. Participants were randomly assigned to either a corporate aware condition or a corporate unaware condition. In the corporate aware condition, participants were randomly assigned to either learn that one available brand of detergent belonged to the

brand portfolio of the company that deleted (or retained) the focal “Luneon” brand and the other brand belonged to a major competitor of the corporation. In the corporate unaware condition, participants were introduced to the same available brands as in the corporate aware condition but any mention of connection to the deleted/retained focal brand and its parent company were omitted. Therefore, in both the corporate aware and unaware condition, participants encountered almost identical scenarios in which they had to choose a replacement brand for an item they needed, but only the corporate aware condition mentioned the link between one available brand and the corporation that had deleted/retained the original focal brand with which they had a connection. Participants in the corporate unaware condition remained ignorant of any corporate associations for the two brand options presented to them.

Participants then answered a four item measure of brand attitudes (I like this product, I feel positive toward this product, This product is nice, This product is attractive) for each of the two brand options presented to them. Participants then answered a one-item measure that asked them to rate which brand was better, with each brand serving as the anchor at opposite ends of the scale. These options were counterbalanced in their presentation in order to avoid any left-hand bias in the horizontal scale. As with the previous studies, final questions in Study 3 consisted of standard demographic questions such as the participant’s age, gender, first language and a request for any final thoughts or comments about the study.

The complete protocol for this study can be found in Appendix D.

4.7.2 Data Cleaning

As in Study 1, participants were recruited through a Qualtrics online participant panel. Data collection for study 3 received 245 completed responses. Three people were eliminated from the analysis for not properly completing (skipping over) the self-brand overlap manipulation check. Four additional respondents were eliminated for failing to complete more than half of the items in any one scale.

As in Study 1, participants whose completion time was deemed to take too long or too little time to complete were eliminated from the analysis. 5 minutes was considered a reasonable floor for study completion time, and 60 minutes a ceiling completion time. As in study 1, these cut-off points were based on the norm of having 60 minutes as the maximum time allowed in a research lab where participants are physically present, ensuring that the online participants were held to the same procedural standards as traditional in-lab participants. Participants whose completion time was deemed to take too long ($N=6$) or too little time ($N=38$) to complete were eliminated from the analysis.

All other missing values were replaced with the series mean before analysis began, leaving 194 respondents ($N_{\text{Female}}=103$, $M_{\text{AGE}}=44.7$) with an average completion time of 9.22 (mm.ss).

As with the previous studies, a manipulation check consisted of a measurement of the degree of self-brand overlap as outlined by a series of increasingly overlapping circles, adapted from Aron et al. (1992). Within the manipulated “low overlap” condition the measured scores ranged between 1 and 7, ($N=102$, $M_{\text{LOW}}=4.26$, $SD_{\text{LOW}}=1.77$). In the manipulated “high overlap” condition the measured scores ranged between 1 and 7,

($N=92$, $M_{HIGH}=4.63$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.84$). A frequency distribution outlines these values (Table 11).

Table 11
Self-Brand Overlap Scores (C)

Low Overlap			High Overlap		
Rating	N	Cumulative	Rating	N	Cumulative
1	7	7	1	9	92
2	16	23	2	4	83
3	10	33	3	8	79
4	15	48	4	21	71
5	30	78	5	18	50
6	12	90	6	13	32
7	12	102	7	19	19

An independent samples t-test showed a non-significant difference between the two groups $t(192)=-1.41$, $p=0.16$. This non-significant difference in one of the key manipulations demonstrates a failure to properly manipulate differences between high and low self-brand overlap, and suggests that any differences between these two groups on the dependent variables under study could be merely coincidental.

4.7.3 Scale Calculation

4.7.3.1 Ostracism

Considering the challenges posed by the reverse coded items in the original ostracism scale, as adapted from Zadro et al. (2005) and used in study 2, all negatively worded items in this study were reworded to ensure that they conformed to the same direction valence. Specifically, items 2,4,8,9 and 10 were reworded for this study to reflect the

negative tone of the other items. A principal components analysis with a promax rotation was conducted on the 12 Ostracism items (Table 12).

Table 12

Ostracism Scale Items (B)

1)	I feel poorly accepted by the company
2)	I feel as though I have a connection with the company
3)	I feel like an outcast to the company
4)	I feel good about myself
5)	I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer
6)	I feel somewhat inadequate
7)	I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision
8)	I feel in control of my options
9)	I feel that I can change the company's decision
10)	I feel that my existence had some effect on the company's decision
11)	I feel non-existent to the company
12)	I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company

Initial results presented a pattern matrix with two emergent components (see Table 13).

Table 13
Ostracism Pattern Matrix (C)

	Component	
	1	2
I feel bad about myself	1.032	-.284
I feel somewhat inadequate	1.006	-.192
I feel poorly accepted by the company	.854	.044
I feel like an outcast to the company	.746	.197
I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer	.657	.320
I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision	.657	.314
I do not feel in control of my options	.647	.259
I feel as though I have no connection with the company	.415	.412
I feel that my existence had no effect on the company's decision	-.073	.960
I feel non-existent to the company	-.005	.933
I feel that I cannot change the company's decision	-.175	.900
I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company	.073	.899

Thus, an “ostracism” scale was created that consisted of seven items loading on the first factor, retaining most of the items used in the ostracism scale from study 2 as well as additional items. All loadings were greater than 0.64. A reliability analysis reported a Cronbach's $\alpha=0.93$.

4.7.3.2 Perceived Rejection and Acceptance

As in Study 2, a principal components analysis with a promax rotation was conducted on the 24 items within the relational evaluation and rejection scale (Buckley et al. 2004). However, unlike in Study 2, this factor analysis resulted in two clean components emerging in the “rejected” and “accepted” domains accordingly (see Table 14).

Table 14Rejection/Acceptance
Pattern Matrix (D)

	Component	
	1	2
Pained	.939	.015
Hurt	.934	-.073
Angry	.933	-.100
Sad	.929	-.043
Dejected	.928	.050
Down	.928	.035
Injured	.917	.117
Tense	.912	.107
Nervous	.912	.132
Depressed	.907	.148
Uneasy	.894	.121
Mad	.887	-.173
Wounded	.880	.165
Irritated	.866	-.213
Excluded	.835	-.163
Annoyed	.826	-.276
Anxious	.808	.222
Rejected	.802	-.114
Happy	-.008	.961
Pleased	.028	.957
Delighted	-.003	.956
Cheerful	.002	.949
Valued	-.010	.926
Accepted	.048	.899

As in Study 2, the same items that did not closely align with the “rejection” construct were eliminated resulting in a more parsimonious scale. In keeping with the item elimination rationale outlined in Study 2, items that reflected a series of negatively valenced emotions that could be felt independent of the “rejection” construct (i.e. sad, angry, mad, etc.) and items that indicated a series of anticipatory, fear based emotions

rather than retrospective focused emotions (i.e. tense, nervous, uneasy, etc.) were deemed to not fully fit with the notion of “rejection” as articulated in this research. Such items were eliminated, leaving only the same items used in Study 2. Thus, the two factors (rejection and acceptance) were created. The “Felt Rejection” scale consisted of seven items (Hurt, Pained, Injured, Dejected, Wounded, Excluded, Rejected) all with factor loadings greater than 0.80 and a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.95$. The “Felt Acceptance” scale consisted of six items (Delighted, Pleased, Happy, Cheerful, Valued, Accepted) all with factor loadings greater than 0.89 and a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.97$ (Table 14).

4.7.3.3 Attitude toward the Corporation

Respondents were asked their attitude toward the corporation. Three items (Good, Favourable, Satisfactory) were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.90 with a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.93$.

4.7.3.4 Positive Word of Mouth

Respondents were asked their likelihood of engaging in positive word of mouth. Three items (I would recommend TAPAT Corporation’s products, I would say positive things about the corporation, I would defend the TAPAT Corporation to other people) were run through a principal components analysis with promax rotation. One component emerged with all factor loadings greater than 0.94 with a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.94$.

4.7.3.5 Attitude toward the Sibling Brand

Respondents were presented with a choice scenario in which they evaluated a brand made by the company that makes their focal brand. After exposure to product information, respondents were asked to evaluate the sibling brand product. For each product, respondents were asked to answer four items (I like this product, I feel positive toward the product, The product is nice, The product is attractive). Each group of four items was run through a principal components analysis with a promax rotation. When asked to rate *the company's product*, the four items loaded on a single factor, with all loadings greater than 0.83 and an alpha=0.91. The measure will be used by itself, as well as a component of the preference for competitive brands measure.

4.7.3.6 Preference for Competitive Brands

As mentioned previously, respondents were presented with a choice scenario in which they evaluated two brands available for purchase. One brand was made by the company, and one by a competitor. After exposure to product information, respondents were asked to evaluate each product. For each product, respondents were asked to answer four items (I like this product, I feel positive toward the product, The product is nice, The product is attractive). Each group of four items was run through a principal components analysis with a promax rotation. When asked to rate *the competitor's product*, the four items loaded on a single factor, with all loadings greater than 0.86 and an alpha=0.94. Two scale measures were subsequently created to represent the attitude towards the company's (sibling) brand and attitude toward competitor's brand, respectively. Following this, a composite measure meant to represent a preference for the competitor's

brand over the company's own brand was created by subtracting the attitude toward the own brand rating from the attitude toward the competitor brand rating. Thus, the preference for competitor brand ("competitive preference") is a scale centered around zero, with positive values representing a preference for the competition, and a negative value representing a preference for the company's own brand.

4.7.4 Analysis

This study tests the effect of self-brand overlap on consumer response to brand elimination, independent of utilitarian brand attitudes. As such, the data is analysed using ANCOVA with original brand attitude entered as a covariate. Initial analysis to establish the covariance of attitudes with self-brand overlap demonstrated that those in the high overlap condition reported higher attitudes toward the original brand ($N=83$, $M_{HIGH}=5.54$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.16$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=90$, $M_{LOW}=4.87$, $SD_{LOW}=1.14$). Independent t-tests showed that this difference was significant $t(171)=-3.82$, $p<0.001$. The two items had a positive correlation= 0.51 , $p<0.001$

4.7.4.1 Perceived Ostracism

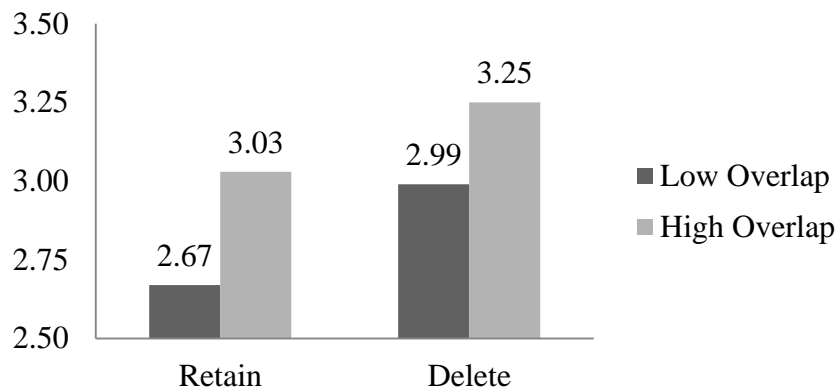
As in study 2, self-brand overlap is posited to lead to taking the perspective of the brand, and as such, lead to a perception of ostracism as exemplified by expulsion from the portfolio group when the brand is eliminated from the portfolio. This is expected to be higher for those high in self-brand overlap than those scoring lower on that measure. Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher evaluations of sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with perceived ostracism as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand

overlap and the company's brand retention or elimination decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of initial attitudes toward the focal brand was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.01$, $p=0.91$.

The data showed the expected directionality (see Figure 12), but lacked significant effects. The main effect of brand retention and deletion showed that those in the delete condition reported a higher feeling of ostracism ($N=91$, $M_{DELETE}=3.12$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.55$) than those in the retain condition ($N=103$, $M_{RETAIN}=2.84$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.48$), but this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=1.47$, $p=0.23$. Furthermore, the main effect of overlap showed that those in the high overlap condition reported higher scores for perceived ostracism ($N=92$, $M_{HIGH}=3.14$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.66$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=102$, $M_{LOW}=2.81$, $SD_{LOW}=1.35$), but this effect was also non-significant $F(1,189)=1.94$, $p=0.16$. Predictably, the interaction between retention and self-brand overlap was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.058$, $p=0.81$.

There were no significant simple effects. The analysis reported the difference between the low self-brand overlap ($N=56$, $M_{LOW}=2.67$, $SD_{LOW}=1.23$), and high self-brand overlap condition ($N=47$, $M_{HIGH}=3.04$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.72$) within the brand retention condition to be $p=0.23$, which is the highest significance level of all simple effect conditions.

Figure 12
Perceived Ostracism (B)



Thus, although there is clear evidence of the predicted directionality present in the data pattern, the effect is not significant. This could be due to the use of fake brands and projected feelings similar to the problems identified in Study 1. This could also be simply a question of small cell sizes and low power. Future research could compensate for these shortcomings with larger cell sizes and the use of real-life brands.

4.7.4.2 Perceived Rejection

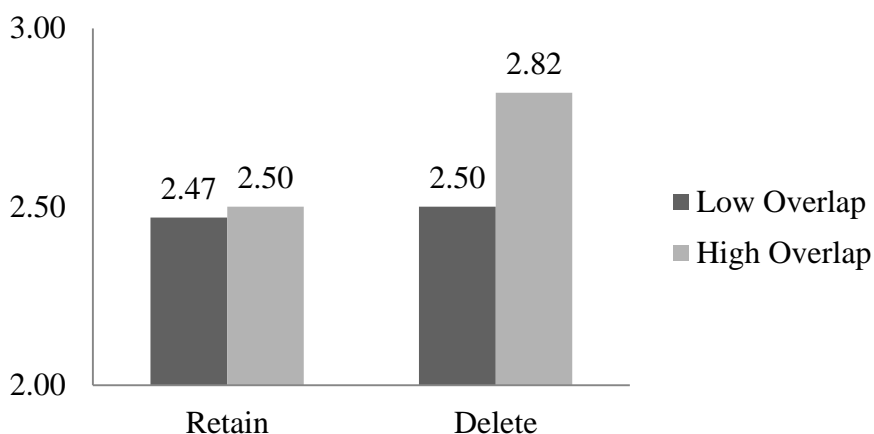
As in study 2, self-brand overlap is posited to lead to taking the perspective of the brand, and as such, lead to a perception of personal rejection when the brand is eliminated from the portfolio. This is expected to be higher for those high in self-brand overlap than those scoring lower on that measure. Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher evaluations of sibling brands than those low in self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with perceived rejection as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap and the company's brand retention or elimination decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the

original brand as a covariate. The original attitude toward the focal brand was not a significant predictor of rejection $F(1,189)=0.50, p=0.48$.

As with the ostracism measure, the data analysis for perceptions of personal rejection showed the expected directionality (see Figure 13), but lacked significant effects.

Although the main effect of the retention/elimination decision demonstrated that those in the delete condition reporting higher levels of perceived rejection ($N=91, M_{DELETE}=2.66, SD_{DELETE}=1.61$) than those in the retain condition ($N=103, M_{RETAIN}=2.48, SD_{RETAIN}=1.63$), the result was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.64, p=0.42$. Similarly, the main effect of self-brand overlap showed those in the high overlap condition reporting higher perceptions of rejection ($N=92, M_{HIGH}=2.66, SD_{HIGH}=1.72$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=102, M_{LOW}=2.48, SD_{LOW}=1.52$), but this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.38, p=0.54$. The interaction between the retention decision and self-brand overlap was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.33, p=0.57$.

Figure 13
Perceived Rejection (B)



Simple effects analysis showed that those in the retain condition reported a higher degree of perceived rejection ($N=47, M_{RETAIN}=2.50, SD_{RETAIN}=1.64$) than those in the delete

condition ($N=45$, $M_{DELETE}=2.82$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.81$) within the high overlap condition $F(1, 189)=0.80$. However, this result was non-significant ($p=0.34$), which is the highest significance level of all simple effects comparisons.

Again, as with the Ostracism measure, there is clear evidence of the predicted directionality present in the data pattern, the effect is not significant. Future research using larger cell sizes and real-life brands might correct this problem.

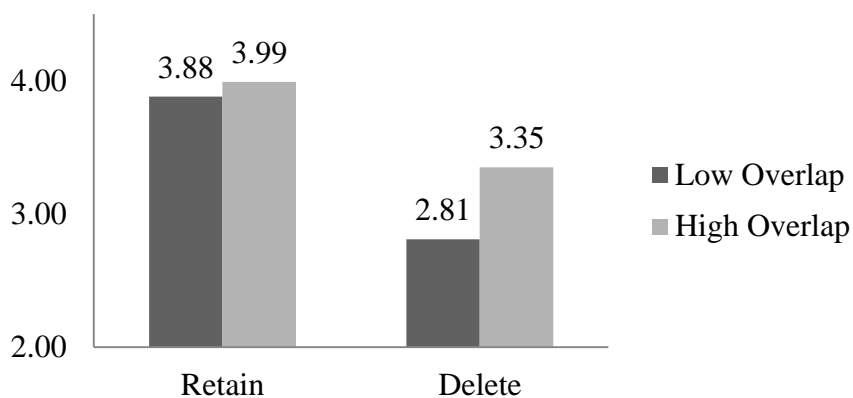
4.7.4.3 Perceived Acceptance

As in study 2, self-brand overlap can lead to taking the perspective of the brand, and as such, lead to a perception of personal acceptance when the brand is retained within the portfolio at the expense of another brand. This is expected to be higher for those high in self-brand overlap than those scoring lower on that measure. Thus, participants high in self-brand overlap were predicted to have higher perceptions of personal acceptance than those low in self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with perceived acceptance as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap and the company's brand retention or elimination decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of initial attitudes toward the focal brand was significant $F(1,189)=5365$, $p=0.018$.

The main effect of the retention decision on perceptions of acceptance was significant $F(1,189)=11.97$, $p=0.001$, with those in the retain condition reporting higher levels of perceived acceptance ($N=103$, $M_{RETAIN}=3.93$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.54$) than those in the delete condition ($N=91$, $M_{DELETE}=3.08$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.83$). The main effect of self-brand overlap showed the expected directionality, with those in the low overlap condition reporting

lower levels of acceptance ($N=102$, $M_{LOW}=3.39$, $SD_{LOW}=1.64$) than those in the high overlap condition ($N=92$, $M_{HIGH}=3.68$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.82$) although this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.96$, $p=0.33$. The interaction was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.55$, $p=0.46$.

Figure 14
Perceived Acceptance (B)



Simple effects analysis showed a significant difference in felt acceptance within both the low and high self-brand overlap conditions. For low self-brand overlap participants, those in the retain condition reported higher levels of felt acceptance ($N=56$, $M_{RETAIN}=3.88$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.43$) than those in the delete condition ($N=46$, $M_{DELETE}=2.81$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.70$). This result was significant $F(1,189)=9.23$, $p=0.03$. Within the high overlap condition, there was also a marginally significant difference $F(1,189)=3.54$, $p=0.06$ between the two retention conditions. Those in the retain condition reporting higher levels of felt acceptance ($N=47$, $M_{RETAIN}=3.99$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.67$) than those in the delete condition ($N=45$, $M_{DELETE}=3.35$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.93$).

In addition, there were no significant differences between the self-brand overlap conditions within the brand retention and deletion conditions. Within the brand deletion

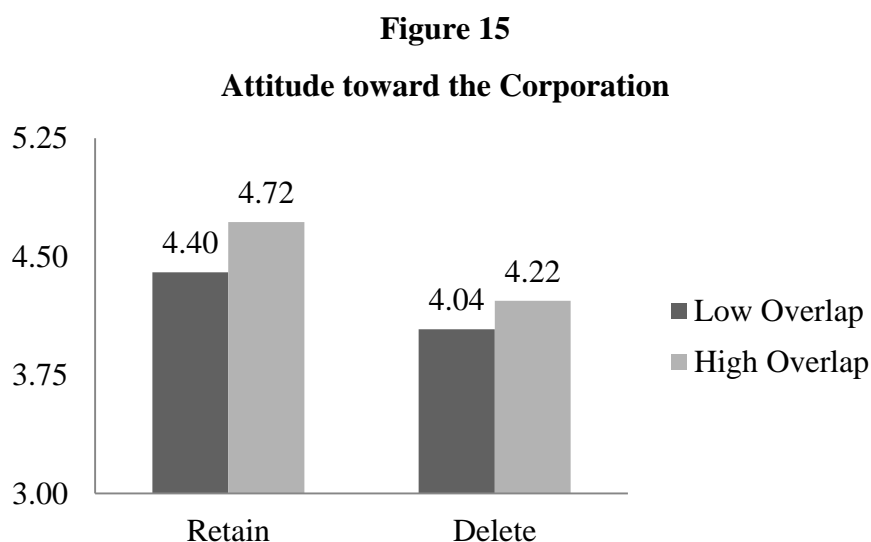
condition, those with a high degree of self-brand overlap reported greater perceptions of perceived acceptance ($N=45$, $M_{HIGH}=3.35$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.93$) than those low in self-brand overlap ($N=46$, $M_{LOW}=2.81$, $SD_{LOW}=1.69$), but this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.139$, $p=0.24$. Within the brand retention condition, those with a high degree of self-brand overlap reported greater perceptions of perceived acceptance ($N=47$, $M_{HIGH}=3.99$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.67$) than those low in self-brand overlap ($N=56$, $M_{LOW}=3.88$, $SD_{LOW}=1.43$), but this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=.033$, $p=0.86$.

4.7.4.4 Attitude toward the Corporation

The brand elimination decision is expected to influence consumer attitudes toward the corporation (H3a), and this effect will be further influenced by the degree of self-brand overlap (H3b). Thus, participants who have their brand eliminated are expected to hold a more negative view of the corporation than those whose brand was not eliminated. This effect is expected to be highest for those with a high self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with attitudes toward the corporation as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap and the brand deletion decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of initial attitudes toward the focal brand was significant $F(1,189)=24.42$, $p<0.001$.

The main effect of the retention/deletion decision on attitudes toward the corporation showed that those in the retention condition reported higher attitudes toward the corporation ($N=103$, $M_{RETAIN}=4.55$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.36$) than those in the delete condition ($N=91$, $M_{DELETE}=4.13$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.61$). This effect was marginally significant

$F(1,189)=3.46, p=0.064$. The main effect of self-brand overlap showed that those in the low overlap condition reported lower levels of positive attitude toward the corporation ($N=102, M_{LOW}=4.24, SD_{LOW}=1.47$) than those in the high overlap condition ($N=92, M_{HIGH}=4.48, SD_{HIGH}=1.52$), but this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.14, p=0.71$. The interaction between retention and self-brand overlap was also non-significant $F(1,189)=0.39, p=0.53$.



Simple effects analysis showed only one marginally significant difference. Specifically, within the high self-brand overlap condition, those who saw their brand retained by the company reported higher attitudes toward the corporation ($N=47, M_{RETAIN}=4.72, SD_{RETAIN}=1.37$) than those who saw their brand deleted from the portfolio ($N=45, M_{DELETE}=4.22, SD_{DELETE}=1.63$). This effect was only marginally significant $F(1,189)=2.97, p=0.086$. Within the low self-brand overlap condition, those who saw their brand retained by the company also reported higher attitudes toward the corporation ($N=56, M_{RETAIN}=4.40, SD_{RETAIN}=1.43$) than those who saw their brand deleted ($N=46, M_{DELETE}=4.04, SD_{DELETE}=1.60$). However, this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.79,$

$p=0.38$. Within the delete condition, there was no significant difference between high and low self-brand overlap $F(1,189)=0.03, p=0.87$. Within the retain condition, there was again no significant difference between low and high self-brand overlap conditions $F(1,189)=0.54, p=0.46$.

Thus, this test provides support for the main effect of brand deletion decisions on consumer attitudes toward the corporation (H3a) but does not provide clear support of the moderating effect of self-brand overlap within the brand deletion condition (H3b). Although the original hypotheses predicted that attitudes toward the corporation would be mediated by perceived rejection (H3i), the lack of statistically significant findings for perceived ostracism and rejection precludes undertaking any mediation analysis.

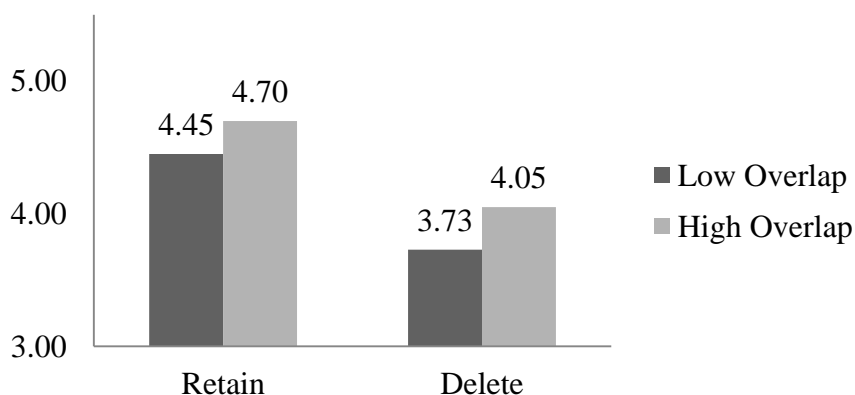
4.7.4.5 Positive Word of Mouth

The brand elimination decision is expected to influence consumer likelihood of positive word of mouth (H3c), and this effect will be further influenced by the degree of self-brand overlap (H3d). Thus, participants who have their brand eliminated are expected to be less likely to spread positive word of mouth than those whose brand was not eliminated. This effect is expected to be highest for those with a high self-brand overlap. An ANCOVA with word of mouth as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. Self-brand overlap and the brand deletion decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The attitude toward the focal brand covariate was significant $F(1,189)=25.79, p<0.001$.

The main effect of the retention decision showed that those in the delete condition reported lower propensity to engage in positive word of mouth ($N=91, M_{DELETE}=3.89$,

$SD_{DELETE}=1.75$) than those in the retain condition ($N=103$, $M_{RETAIN}=4.57$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.37$). This effect was significant $F(1,189)=8.81$, $p=0.003$. However, the main effect of self-brand overlap showed directional results contrary to expectations, with those in the high overlap condition reporting greater likelihood of positive word of mouth ($N=92$, $M_{HIGH}=4.38$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.62$) than those in the low overlap condition ($N=102$, $M_{LOW}=4.13$, $SD_{LOW}=1.56$), although this effect was non-significant $F(1,189)=0.19$, $p=0.66$. This counter-theoretical directionality cannot be interpreted as indicative of any flaw in the theory, given the failure of the manipulation to adequately establish significant difference between the high and low self-brand overlap condition groups. There was no significant interaction effect between the brand retention and self-brand overlap condition $F(1,189)=0.016$, $p=0.89$.

Figure 16
Positive Word of Mouth



Simple effects analysis showed a significant difference $F(1,189)=4.22$, $p=0.04$ between the retain ($N=56$, $M_{RETAIN}=4.45$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.27$) and delete ($N=47$, $M_{DELETE}=3.73$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.78$) decision within the low overlap condition. Within the high overlap condition there was also a significant difference $F(1,189)=4.59$, $p=0.03$ between the

retain ($N=47$, $M_{RETAIN}=4.70$, $SD_{RETAIN}=1.47$) and delete ($N=45$, $M_{DELETE}=4.05$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.72$) conditions in willingness to spread positive word of mouth.

Within the delete condition, there was no significant difference $F(1,189)=0.05$, $p=0.83$ between high ($N=45$, $M_{HIGH}=4.05$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.72$) and low ($N=46$, $M_{LOW}=3.73$, $SD_{LOW}=1.78$) overlap conditions. Within the retain condition, there was a non-significant difference $F(1,189)=0.18$, $p=0.68$ in willingness to spread positive word of mouth between low ($N=56$, $M_{LOW}=4.45$, $SD_{LOW}=1.27$) and high ($N=47$, $M_{HIGH}=4.70$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.47$) self-brand overlap conditions.

Thus, this test provides support for the main effect of brand deletion decisions on consumer propensity for positive word of mouth (H3c) but does not provide clear support of the moderating effect of self-brand overlap within the brand deletion condition (H3d). Although the original hypotheses predicted that positive word of mouth would be mediated by perceived rejection (H31), the lack of statistically significant findings for perceived ostracism and rejection precludes undertaking any mediation analysis.

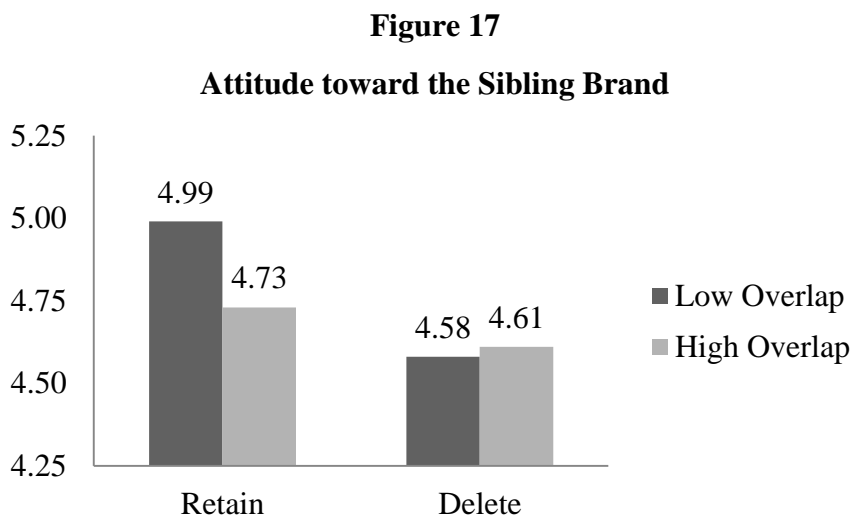
4.7.4.6 Attitude toward the Sibling Brand

The brand retention/elimination decision is expected to influence consumer attitudes toward the sibling brand. Thus, participants who are high in self-brand overlap are expected to hold a more negative view of the sibling brand when their focal brand is deleted than those high in focal brand attitudes alone (H3e). Conversely, participants who are high in self-brand overlap are expected to hold a more positive view of the

sibling brand when their focal brand is retained than those high in brand attitudes alone (H3e).

An ANCOVA with attitudes toward the corporation as the dependent measure was used to test these predictions. This test was performed on the subset of participants ($N=97$) who were presented with a sibling brand for evaluation and were made aware of the presented brand's connection to the corporate brand portfolio. Self-brand overlap and the brand deletion decision were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The covariate of initial attitudes toward the focal brand was a significant predictor of attitudes toward the sibling brand $F(1,92)=4.12, p<0.045$.

The main effect of the retention/deletion decision on attitudes toward the sibling brand showed that those in the retention condition reported higher attitudes toward the sibling brand ($N=55, M_{RETAIN}=4.87, SD_{RETAIN}=1.38$) than those in the delete condition ($N=42, M_{DELETE}=4.59, SD_{DELETE}=1.65$). This effect was non-significant $F(1,92)=0.38, p=0.54$. The main effect of self-brand overlap showed that those in the low overlap condition reported lower attitudes toward the sibling brand ($N=53, M_{LOW}=4.80, SD_{LOW}=1.45$) than those in the high overlap condition ($N=44, M_{HIGH}=4.68, SD_{HIGH}=1.56$), but this effect was non-significant $F(1,92)=0.20, p=0.66$. The interaction between retention and self-brand overlap was also non-significant $F(1,92)=0.007, p=0.94$.



Despite the appropriate directionality of the main effect of brand retention on positive word of mouth as displayed in the data (Figure 17) simple effects analysis showed no significant differences. As a result, this test found no support for H3e & H3f.

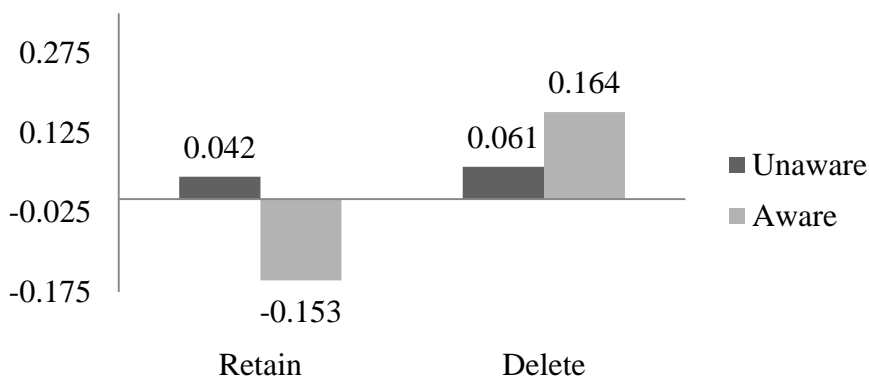
4.7.4.7 Preference for Competitive Brands

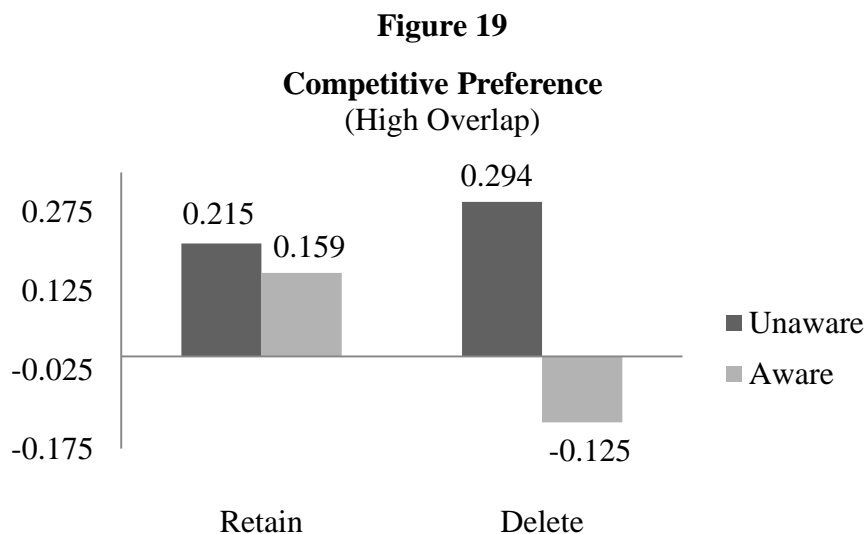
The brand elimination decision is expected to influence consumer perceptions of personal rejection and attitudes toward the corporation. In turn, these effects can lead to a deliberate avoidance of other brands remaining in the portfolio when their association to the corporation is known (H3g). This effect is expected to be highest for those with a high self-brand overlap (H3h). An ANCOVA with preference for competing brands as the dependent measure was used as an initial step towards testing these predictions. Self-brand overlap, the brand deletion decision and the degree of awareness of the corporate association were entered as independent measures, with attitudes toward the original brand as a covariate. The attitude toward the focal brand covariate was non-significant $F(1,185)=0.36, p=0.55$.

The main effect of the retention decision showed that those in the delete condition reporting a higher preference for the competitor brand ($N=91$, $M_{DELETE}=0.119$, $SD_{DELETE}=1.01$) than those in the retain condition ($N=103$, $M_{RETAIN}=0.054$, $SD_{RETAIN}=0.60$). However, this effect was non-significant $F(1,185)=0.08$, $p=0.79$. The main effect of self-brand overlap showed those in the high self-brand overlap condition reported a higher preference for the competitor brand ($N=92$, $M_{HIGH}=0.162$, $SD_{HIGH}=1.01$) than those in the low self-brand overlap condition ($N=102$, $M_{LOW}=0.014$, $SD_{LOW}=0.60$), although this effect was non-significant $F(1,185)=0.79$, $p=0.38$. The main effect of corporate awareness showed those in the unaware condition reported a higher preference for the competitor brand ($N=97$, $M_{UNAWARE}=0.158$, $SD_{UNAWARE}=0.88$) than those in the aware condition ($N=97$, $M_{AWARE}=0.011$, $SD_{AWARE}=0.75$), although this effect was non-significant $F(1,185)=1.39$, $p=0.24$.

Figure 18

**Competitive Preference
(Low Overlap)**





Furthermore, all interactions and simple effects were non-significant. Thus, this test provides no support for the main effect of brand deletion decisions on consumer preference for competing brand when the connection to the corporation is salient (H3g). It also does not provide support for the hypothesized moderating effect of self-brand overlap (H3h).

4.7.4.8 Correlations of Dependant Variables

Study 3 tested the degree to which consumers encountering a brand deletion decision may interpret the decision as a personal self-threat and in turn react negatively towards the corporation and its surviving brands, as moderated by self-brand overlap. The dependent variables under study (attitude towards the corporation, positive WOM, attitude toward the sibling brand and preference for competitive brands) are distinct behaviours, yet may have some conceptual overlap. In the interest of transparency, I have performed a correlational analysis and reported the results in Table 15.

Table 15
Dependent Variables Correlations (B)

		Attitude toward the Corporation	Positive WOM	Attitude toward Sibling Brand	Competitive Preference
Attitude toward the Corporation	Pearson Correlation	1	0.783**	0.429**	-0.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.347
	N	194	194	194	194
Positive WOM	Pearson Correlation	0.783**	1	0.435**	-0.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.669
	N	194	194	194	194
Attitude toward Sibling Brand	Pearson Correlation	0.429**	0.435**	1	-0.308**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	194	194	194	194
Competitive Preference	Pearson Correlation	-0.068	-0.031	-0.308**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.347	0.669	0.000	
	N	194	194	194	194

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.8 Discussion

Results from the ostracism and rejection measures showed the expected directionality without statistical significance. However, the impact of the brand retention decision on perceptions of acceptance was significant but not moderated by degree of self-brand overlap. Thus, participants who have their brand spared from elimination feel accepted by the corporation, regardless of the degree of identification they feel with the product brand. This is to be expected given the failure of the manipulation to properly establish a significant difference in self-brand overlap between the high and low self-brand overlap

conditions. Furthermore, those in the high overlap condition were more likely to hold negative views of the corporation than those low in self-brand overlap when their brand is eliminated. However, considering that this effect was only marginally significant, and the failure of the self-brand overlap manipulation, there is only a tenuous suggestion of a floor below which self-brand overlap has little influence on consumer evaluations of brand portfolio decisions. The effect of brand elimination and retention on likelihood to spread positive word of mouth was non-significant across all levels of self-brand overlap. As with Study 1, Study 3 used unknown fake brands which may be one reason behind the lack of significance for some of these measures. As with Study 1, future research could easily address these issues by using real-life brands and more concrete scenarios that help participants properly envision the situations described.

This research tried to show that consumers can react to non-personal corporate decisions as though they were directed at the individual personally. This in turn has the potential to impact evaluations of the corporation and remaining brands. The value of such findings lie in their contribution to the brand portfolio literature and attendant spillover effects by demonstrating one more instance where the salience of brand relatedness can have unanticipated negative consequences for the corporation.

Chapter 5: Summary and Implications

5.1 Motivation for the Research Questions

Brands are a valuable asset to companies. As such, brands also command a great deal of academic interest and scholarly enquiry. An emergent area of scholarly enquiry is the idea of brands as a component of the self. Leveraging this topic, the research outlined herein sought to address how the inclusion of a loved brand into one's self concept can influence consumer evaluations of the larger multi-brand portfolio via an individual's inherent self-serving biases.

In chapter 1, I outlined the role of social acceptance-based self-esteem in motivating self-serving biases. Good self-esteem is a basic need, and people are motivated to enhance or protect their self-perception in service of their self-esteem. Self-enhancement and self-protection biases entice individuals to see themselves in a more positive light than a more objective observation would allow. The various types of enhancement and protection strategies presented herein not only bias evaluations of our own self, but can impact evaluations of self-relevant others and objects as well. Thus, given the extendibility of such biases to self-linked others, and the growing body of literature investigating loved brands as a component of the self, chapter 1 outlined a theoretical foundation for examining the role of self-brand overlap in consumer response to brand portfolio management decisions.

5.2 The Studies

5.2.1 Study 1

In chapter 2 I introduced the topic of brand portfolios and argued that brand portfolios can benefit from an individual's self-serving biases due to the self-brand overlap between an individual and a single brand portfolio member. Brand equity is a powerful influence on consumer evaluations. As such, companies frequently try to stretch their brand names as far as possible in order to increase the likelihood of consumer acceptance. Organizations can also leverage their corporate name as an endorser across multiple sub-brands within the portfolio in an effort to establish inter-brand relatedness while maintaining individual brand distinctiveness.

Given this, I articulated two viable theoretical lenses – Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1974) and the Extended Contact Hypothesis (Turner et al. 2008) – for extending self-serving cognitive biases to entire brand portfolio members. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, brand portfolios can be thought of as a social category of which the consumer is a member. From this, individuals may come to see other brands as members of a brand-endorsed in-group and extend preferential, self-serving judgements to them. Similarly, under the Extended Contact Hypothesis, consumers may perceive sibling brands as linked to the brand with which they have a self-brand overlap, motivating them to include sibling brands into the self as well. Although such inclusion is less strong with each degree of separation, the resulting associative network of brand connections could enable spillover effects where self-serving biases extend to other brands within the portfolio as a function of their friendship with the focal brand.

The goal of chapter 2 was to demonstrate ways in which sibling brands could be inadvertent beneficiaries of biased cognitions due to strong self-brand overlap with another brand. Due to consumers' pervasive need to self-enhance and self-protect in the service of self-esteem, consumers who have a high degree of self-brand overlap should be more supportive of sibling brands as a reflection of their protection of the focal brand. These consumers should provide more positive evaluations of portfolio members, be more defensive and forgiving of portfolio member transgressions than other consumers, and more likely to advocate for sibling brands than would other consumers.

Study 1 was an experiment designed to test these claims. It attempted to use self-affirmation theory to neutralize the goal of self-enhancement, thereby teasing out the influence of the self on evaluations of sibling brands within a larger brand portfolio. However, an overwhelming majority of non-significant findings, coupled with unexpected and sometimes counter theoretical findings, suggests a flawed study.

Although study 1 failed to demonstrate empirical support for the stated hypotheses, the wealth of theoretical substantiation suggests that further, more refined investigation may be warranted. The potential benefits awarded to sibling brands from a self-brand overlap with a single brand could be useful for an organization. Beyond the obvious benefit of increased attitudes towards and acceptance of sibling brands, the possibility of consumers extending positive evaluations and defensive strategies in the face of brand transgressions could help firms facing negative publicity. It may not only help perceptions of sibling brands, but may also safeguard focal brands from the threat of vicarious stigma from negatively viewed sibling brands.

However, such benefits are not the only reason motivating further investigation of this proposed phenomenon. There are potential drawbacks to biased evaluations of sibling brands as well. Firms may have an inaccurate picture of the true attitudes towards their product offerings for this subset of consumers. Self-serving biases exist only so long as the self is invested in the brand. Once that link, or the brand's link to the portfolio, vanishes then so too might the consumer's motivation for the biases. Thus, firms might want to consider the degree to which (and how many of) their consumers have a self-brand overlap with any of their brands. Further investigation aimed at establishing this basic phenomenon is therefore an important step in better understanding the veracity of consumer attitudes toward brand portfolios.

5.2.2 Study 2

Chapter 3 began to examine the impact of severing a link between the brand and its portfolio. As brand portfolios grow and mature, organizations are continually pressed to make tough decisions about portfolio membership composition. Brands that do not meet specific strategic objectives may be eliminated in order to redirect resources towards other brands. In chapter 3 I articulated how such brand portfolio pruning is conceptually akin to social ostracism and personal rejection, and suggested that high self-brand overlapped consumers might perceive the company's decision to delete the brand as a rejection of them personally.

Ostracism is an extreme form of social rejection where an individual is expelled from and subsequently ignored by an entire group. Human beings are social animals.

Historically, we have needed social acceptance and group membership for both emotional and physical survival because group membership can improve access to

shared resources and social protection against predators and other dangers. However, ostracism is a form of social death that leaves individuals friendless, alone, isolated from group resources and support and thus, potentially vulnerable. The threat of ostracism discourages deviant behaviour and encourages socially acceptable and conformist behaviour.

Due to the potential dangers of such extreme social rejection, humans have developed instinctive social monitoring mechanisms to gauge their level of social acceptance. Such monitoring systems encourage people to perceive ostracism and rejection in situations where no such intention may have existed. Unreturned text messages or a less than enthusiastic greeting in the morning can be perceived as a type of rejection. It is possible too that some consumers may perceive the decision to delete (and thereby expel) their preferred brand from a brand portfolio as a personal rejection of them, via their degree of self-brand overlap with their brand.

Study 2 was an experiment designed to test this hypothesis. It found that for high overlapped consumers, the company's decision to delete their preferred brand from its portfolio was interpreted as personal rejection and ostracism. This finding did not exist for low overlapped consumers, suggesting a floor below which consumers do not fully identify and empathize with the brand.

Study 2 offers some initial insight into consumer interpretations of brand deletion decisions and demonstrates that although some brand consumers do not take such decisions personally, others do, and it opens the door to questions regarding how this

interpretation might lead to subsequent consumer behaviours regarding the corporation and its other brands.

5.2.3 Study 3

Chapter 4 leveraged these findings in an attempt to understand potential behavioural responses to brand deletion. Rejection is an emotionally aversive state that can feel similar to physical pain. Human beings are motivated to eliminate or at least attenuate pain, and as such, can act out in response to the social pain of rejection. Because rejection can lead to reductions in intelligence and complex reasoning, as well as weakened self-regulation capabilities, rejected individuals may try to assuage their pain in otherwise socially unacceptable ways.

Rejection can lead to aggression towards both the rejecter and similar others as a proxy for the rejecter. Thus, the instigator of any kind of rejection, as well as those who symbolically represent the rejecter in the mind of the rejected, can become victimized. In addition, when someone is rejected, he may turn his attention towards successful, non-rejected others for clues regarding the rationale behind their rejection and others' acceptance. Such individuals may be further motivated to derogate those same successful others in an attempt to undermine their assumed superiority and devalue their worth, reducing their perceived value and decreasing the gap between their social performance and that of the rejected individual.

Within the context of brand portfolios and brand deletion, affected consumers may feel rejected and subsequently alter their cognitions and behaviours towards both the parent and sibling brands. Aggression toward the parent brand can include behaviours such as

negative word of mouth and boycotting all sibling brands as a representation of, and punishment targeted towards, the corporation. Altered cognitions resulting from brand deletion can include the deliberate derogation of surviving sibling brands in an attempt to discredit or devalue their worth.

Study 3 was an experiment designed to test these claims. Although the data showed clear patterns occurring in the direction outlined by the hypotheses, statistical analysis could not offer statistically significant support. There were, however, some statistically significant findings. As in Study 2, the influence of brand retention on consumer perception of acceptance was supported. In addition, the influence of brand retention decisions was found to impact consumers' attitudes toward the corporation and propensity for spreading word of mouth. Although the hypothesized outcomes of brand deletion did not find empirical support in Study 3, there is some consolation to be found in the significant effects of brand retention which is the conceptual inverse of deletion. This provides additional encouragement for revisiting the goals of this study in future research.

If successful, future research will be able to demonstrate that brand deletion can cause a backlash towards innocent sibling brands either directly through anger targeted at the corporation, or indirectly through a motivated attempt to devalue and discredit sibling brands that are now seen as competitive rivals. Such findings would be useful for brand managers considering a brand portfolio reduction to better understand the full impact of such decisions on both consumers and their own future financial performance.

5.3 Implications for Practice

Taken together, the theories and studies presented herein had the potential to contribute to both theory and practice in multiple ways. In terms of marketing practice, managers should be aware that when consumers have a high degree of self-brand overlap with a single brand portfolio member, benefits will accrue to sibling brands over and above the goodwill transferred by mere positive attitudes alone. Consumers who have taken a loved brand into their self-concept can be prone to self-enhancement and self-protection cognitive biases. Self-enhancement biases motivate an individual to exhibit greater confidence in self-linked situations, while self-protection biases motivate defensiveness. When extended to sibling brands, consumers may be more confident and optimistic about brand quality, and may be more defensive of the brand in a time of crisis.

If future research can demonstrate empirical evidence for these claims, managers would be wise to exploit these tendencies. However, it is also valuable to note that such phenomena will probably manifest only so long as the brand and portfolio link exists. Eliminating this link could return these consumers back to a neutral position where the motivation to positively self-enhance is diminished, resulting in truer, unbiased evaluations. This implies that there is a possibility that marketers who survey consumers regarding attitudes toward sibling brands may have biased data for certain subsets of consumers. Brand portfolio management decisions that factor in this data may be vulnerable to inaccurate consumer insights. Furthermore, severing the brand and portfolio link can cause reactions that move beyond a neutral point into negative, damaging behaviours.

Brand deletion can serve to alienate some consumers. The research reported herein demonstrated that some consumers can feel ostracized or rejected when their brand is eliminated. Such perceptions of rejection have the potential to trigger both cognitive and behavioural backlashes that could affect surviving brands within the portfolio. Whether these brands are negatively impacted (either indirectly through consumer aggression against the corporation, or directly through a motivated devaluation of the sibling brand itself), there is potential for surviving brands to be at risk. If future research can establish empirical evidence for these claims, managers would be prudent to try to gauge the potential for neutral vs. negative consumer response, and factor this element into their strategic decisions. Understanding and potentially quantifying possible brand deletion ripple effects throughout the brand portfolio could be a valuable managerial insight.

Although the studies presented herein found support for only a subset of hypotheses, the directionality of some results suggests that future studies may prove successful.

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence drawn from real-world brand portfolio management decisions offers additional indication of the general phenomena I have outlined. I will highlight a real-life example to help contextualize some of the theories I have used and draw anecdotal parallels to some of my hypotheses.

5.3.1 The Case of General Motors' Brand Portfolio Reduction

Car brands offer great potential for self-definition and self-expression (Hogg and Michell 1996). They are high-involvement purchases that offer both functional performance, but also social status and personality signalling. Thus, for certain consumers, their car brand may be a part of their self-concept, influencing how they see themselves and how they try to signal their identity to others, differentiating themselves from consumers of other

brands. Given this, I will now turn my discussion towards the story of General Motors Corporation (GM) and its brand portfolio reduction in 2009 to help provide a real-world context through which some of my aforementioned hypotheses may find anecdotal support.

As a marketing strategy, GM employed a multi-division/multi-brand portfolio offering a variety of vehicles under different brand names (i.e. Chevy, Pontiac, Saturn, etc.) in order to appeal to a variety of market segments (More 2009). GM would use the brand equity inherent in their corporate brand to endorse, and thereby imbue, their sub-brands with positive consumer associations. This tactic would not only increase the credibility of its various sub-brands, but also help encourage inter-brand mobility for satisfied consumers who may be evolving out of one target segment and into another. The Chevy consumer of yesterday could become the Buick consumer of tomorrow.

However, with the financial crisis of 2008, North American automakers faced serious financial difficulties and sought government funding in order to avoid bankruptcy. Government bailout money was contingent on significant corporate restructuring to ensure future viability. In keeping with the framework laid out by Varadarajan et al (2006) suggesting that brand deletion is a viable growth strategy, GM was required to eliminate weak brands in an effort to strengthen their financial core. GM eliminated four brands (Saturn, Pontiac, Saab & Hummer) from their multi-brand portfolio and refocused their attention on a smaller set of brand offerings.

Although the financial necessity of the portfolio reduction is clear, the question of consumer reaction and retention still remains. One simple way to appraise consumer

attitudes toward such a brand portfolio reduction would be to listen to affected consumers discussing such events. I have read through a variety of such discussions posted on a popular Saturn brand community website and will discuss a brief overview of some of the more relevant statements pertaining to the hypotheses that I have outlined in this present research.

SaturnFans.com is an independent website created and managed by a Saturn enthusiast as a source of Saturn brand related information and a social hub for Saturn drivers to share information, advice and stories about their vehicles. News postings and discussion boards date back to 2002, and as such, provide a timeline of Saturn-related conversations that covers the trajectory of the brand's growth and demise. Similar brand communities have been the location of more in-depth qualitative consumer behaviour analyses (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005), and therefore, the Saturn brand community can be a useful source of first-person consumer perspectives on some of the brand portfolio management issues highlighted in this dissertation.

A survey of members of the Saturn brand community in October of 2009 (shortly after the Saturn brand's elimination was final) revealed that only 11% of Saturn owners expected to make their next new car purchase with the GM Corporation. Of the 967 respondents, another 21% thought that it was too early to tell, and 69% said that they would not make their next purchase with GM (Saturnalia 2009). Although this was an informal survey taken shortly after the brand's fate was sealed, later investigation revealed that there were a large number of consumers who were not returning to the GM fold for future purchases. In the first half of 2011, data showed that roughly 70% of both Pontiac and Saturn drivers purchasing a new vehicle defected to non-GM brands. The

only reversal of this trend came earlier in 2011 when GM offered a cash incentive to its “orphaned” customers, which helped the company to retain 57% of Pontiac consumers that were trading in their vehicle (Terlep 2011). There was no data reported for retention rates of Saturn owners under the cash incentive scheme, nor is there any indication of the normal retention rates of current GM drivers under the best of circumstances. However, a defection rate of 70% seems quite high, even to the most casual observer, and it is understandable that GM should be concerned about securing these consumers by transitioning them over to other brands within their portfolio.

Thus, the question remains as to what might be driving such defection rates. It would be expected that a certain number of drivers would simply prefer variety, and thus had no real allegiance to GM regardless of the fate of their chosen brand. However, it is also arguable that a subset of those consumers would otherwise be repeat buyers and there must be reasons for defection that stem from GM portfolio reduction decision.

Previously, I have suggested that consumers may feel personally rejected by the firms’ decision. Although GM was eliminating the Saturn brand from its portfolio, it was in no way looking to eliminate individual consumers. However, some consumers clearly felt like GM was no longer interested in keeping them on their client list. A member of the Saturn brand community with the username “bkskatersd” said:

“It’s clear that GM isn’t interested in my business, so NO, I won’t consider a GM product. I wish them luck, but my business will go elsewhere.” (bkskatersd 2009)

Such comments could be interpreted as indication that this consumer has seen this business decision as a personal rejection of him and his patronage, and therefore is in

turn rejecting the corporation. This was not an uncommon theme in the brand community postings during the aftermath of the brand deletion announcement. Other brand community members were more eloquent in articulating their reasoning. A member of the Saturn brand community with the username “specman” said:

“If GM sells or shuts down Saturn, I will be likely to never look at buying another GM vehicle. My disappointment in GM's decision to do so is larger than life. I love my Saturns, and no other GM brand will ever be able to replace them, at least not for me. I have owned seven (7) - yes seven Saturns. I have talked friends, family, and total strangers into buying Saturns (132 ppl to date). I have visited www.Saturnfans.com religiously and read every article posted to the news since the sites inception. I think GM needs to heavily reconsider what they choose to do with the Saturn brand. For if they do not, I for one, will likely stop supporting "all" GM brands.” (specman 2008).

Meanwhile, other members were more animated in their reactions. I have suggested in this dissertation that rejected consumers may choose to aggress against the parent brand and cognitively devalue surviving sibling brands in an effort to restore their wounded self. Some consumers spoke of rejection-like feelings and how this motivated them to want to act out against the corporation. There is also anecdotal evidence of consumers deliberately devaluing surviving brands, questioning their merits and the wisdom of the decision to retain those brands while deleting others. A member of the Saturn brand community with the username “pilotboy01” said:

“Let me give you a big hint before you make any rash decision GM, here it is...HATE IS LOVE REJECTED OR LOVE SCORNED! The Saturn fan base is

among the most loyal and loving fan bases of any car company, and you are about to reject and scorn our love for this company. You are about to try and save 3 of your brands out of nothing but stupid and misdirected tradition, when they currently make no sense as car companies. They are rebadges without innovation, identity, and future fan or loyalty base. Saturn has a bright innovative, original, and objective future if you can get rid of the divisions that don't make sense, for the future of the one that does. OTHERWISE MY VOICE MAY ONLY BE 1 OF 280 MILLION VOICES IN THIS COUNTRY, BUT I WILL MAKE SURE THAT AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE UNTILL THE DAY I DIE HERE THE CRY OF NEVER BUY A GM CAR OR TRUCK AGAIN!!!" (pilotboy01 2008).

Further evidence supporting the idea of motivated devaluation of surviving sibling brands comes from a member of the Saturn brand community with the username “Wulfear”:

“GMs decision to kill both Saturn and Pontiac and keep old fart Buick are some of the dumbest ideas I’ve seen since the travesty surrounding the Oldsmobile debacle. When was the last time you saw anyone in a Buick showroom who wasn’t one step away from an assisted living residence? With thinking like that, they are DOOMED to failure and deservedly so.” (Wulfear 2009)

Thus, there is anecdotal evidence that consumers may take brand deletion decisions as decisions aimed personally towards them. However, not all consumers are so affected. In fact, some community members identified that others were being driven by emotional reactions and advocated for a more cool-headed approach to the question. A member of the Saturn brand community with the username “Saturn_69” said:

“As Saturn owners, we have bought GM products, correct? And we are happy with those products? As a whole, and judging by the repeat buyers I’d have to say yes. So, logically and rationally, why would you NOT buy another GM product? Because of some irrational sense of betrayal? Because we’re emotionally attached to a machine whose brand name is no longer available? If GM makes a good car that meets your needs, why not buy it? People just aren’t thinking clearly enough yet to answer this poll with any real thought. They’re answering with their emotions.” (Saturn_69 2009)

Thus, looking at some of the comments posted in the aftermath of a brand deletion announcement, it is possible to observe dialogue mimicking the thoughts and behaviours outlined in the hypotheses presented in this dissertation. Although such comments are brief and open to interpretation, they do lend support to the overall goals and intent of the research presented herein. Such real-world observations reinforce the value of pursuing these questions further.

5.4 Implications for Theory

Study 1 attempted to demonstrate how self-serving cognitive biases can impact consumer attitudes toward and evaluations of sibling brand members of the corporate endorsed brand portfolio. Despite a lack of empirical support in study 1, there is still theoretical support for future studies. Had study 1 been successful in its pursuit, it would have enhanced the research on both Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1974) and the Extended Contact Hypothesis (Turner et al. 2008) by suggesting that such theories could be extended to parasocial relationships and groupings. Such findings would also enhance research on spillover effects in brand portfolios by suggesting that self-serving,

motivated cognitive biases can spread to sibling brands via an associative cognitive network. Furthermore, if future research can provide evidence for the hypotheses presented in Study 1, the literature on both self-brand overlap and brand portfolios would be enhanced by evidence suggesting that entire brand portfolios can be included in the self via a consumer's self-brand overlap with a single member brand.

Study 2 successfully demonstrated that those high in self-brand overlap can perceive brand deletion as a form of personal rejection. The findings in Study 2 enhance the extant literature on ostracism and interpersonal rejection by demonstrating one more domain in which consumers can perceive rejection in the behaviour of others.

Furthermore, it enhances the literature on self-brand overlap, self-other overlap, and empathy by suggesting that consumers can take the perspective of a brand and feel the pain of rejection as if they were the brand. Study 2 also adds to the limited literature on brand deletion by demonstrating that explanations for the business necessity of brand deletion do not necessarily neutralize consumer interpretations of brand management decisions as previous research has suggested (Mao et al. 2009). Thus, consumer interpretations of and reactions to such brand deletion decisions may in fact be multifaceted and more research into this underdeveloped area is required.

Lastly, Study 3 sought to build upon these findings and demonstrate how perceptions of rejection via brand deletion can manifest into negative behaviours affecting the entire portfolio. Although the data analysis did not find significant results, the data patterns displayed the appropriate directionality, implying that further studies could be fruitful. If future research can provide empirical evidence for the hypotheses outlined in chapter 4, it will enhance the literature on motivated cognition and self-evaluation maintenance by

extending what is currently known about social comparisons and deliberate repositioning of competitive rivals to the domain of brand portfolios, suggesting that brand portfolio members are not just siblings, but rivals as well. Furthermore, these potential findings could also serve to enhance the literature on spillover effects in brand portfolios by demonstrating one more instance where the associated network connecting brands within the mind of the consumer can invite negative spillover effects impacting innocent brands. In such an instance, the goal of mutual benefit between brands within a brand portfolio is undermined, suggesting that there are times when consumer awareness of brand interconnectivity should be minimized.

5.5 Closing Comments

Although there is limited empirical support for some of the hypotheses presented in this dissertation, there is both theoretical support and anecdotal evidence in support of re-enquiry to establish the potential advantages and disadvantages of both self-brand overlap and promoting multiple brands as a connected portfolio group. Taken together, these theories and studies have the potential to offer new insights into consumer identification with product brands and how such identification impacts not only evaluations of the corporation that offers them, but also the other brands to which they are connected. From a theoretical perspective, the prospect of including brand portfolios into the self is particularly provocative and these studies attempted to highlight a new way in which cultivating brand relatedness may have unforeseen consequences on the organization.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval



Richard Ivey School of Business
The University of Western Ontario

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: June Cotte

Re PhD Candidate: Kendra Hart

Review Number: 018/11 BREB

Protocol Title: Consumer Evaluations and Brand Portfolios

Ethics Approval Date: July 13, 2011

Expiry Date: July 13, 2012

Documents Reviewed and Approved: Ethics Protocol, Information Letter, Consent Form, Recruitment Announcements, Survey Instrument

This is to notify you that The Ivey School of Business Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Signature:

Associate Dean - Faculty Development & Research

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.



Richard Ivey School of Business
The University of Western Ontario

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: June Cotte

Re PhD Candidate: Kendra Hart

Review Number: 018/11 BREB

Protocol Title: Consumer Evaluations and Brand Portfolios

Ethics Approval Date: July 17, 2012

Expiry Date: July 17, 2013

Documents Reviewed and Approved: Notification of Revision

This is to notify you that The Ivey School of Business Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

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Signature:

Associate Dean - Faculty Development & Research

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Appendix B: Study 1 Protocol

Introduction:

HIGH OVERLAP CONDITION: Brands can mean many things to many people. Sometimes, we like brands because they represent who we are, or who we would like to be. Sometimes we choose a brand only for what it can do for us, for its function.

Currently there is a brand of cell phone on the market that we will call “Techsys”. It is a well-known, top-of-the-line brand with an appealing design and excellent quality. In fact, you may own a “Techsys” brand cell phone already, and are pleased with how well it works, how well it looks, and how durable it is. Overall, you have a favorable attitude towards this brand.

Actually, to help you understand what we mean, we are asking you to think about a product you have that you really like. It is the kind of brand that reflects you well, and gives you a feeling that it is almost part of yourself or an extension of yourself. Now, imagine that this is exactly how you feel about the “Techsys” brand.

Please take a minute to think about this.

LOW OVERLAP CONDITION: Brands can mean many things to many people. Sometimes, we like brands because they represent who we are, or who we would like to be. Sometimes we choose a brand only for what it can do for us, for its function.

Currently there is a brand of cell phone on the market that we will call “Techsys”. It is a well-known, top-of-the-line brand with an appealing design and excellent quality. In fact, you may own a “Techsys” brand cell phone already, and are pleased with how well it works, how well it looks, and how durable it is. Overall, you have a favorable attitude towards this brand.

Actually, to help you understand what we mean, we are asking you to think about a product you have that you really like. However, it is the kind of brand that does NOT reflect you well, and does NOT give you a feeling that it is almost part of yourself or an extension of yourself. Now, imagine that this is exactly how you feel about the “Techsys” brand.

Please take a minute to think about this.

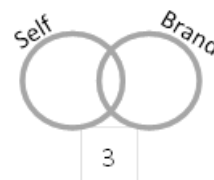
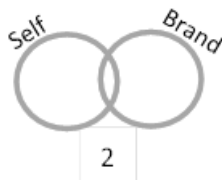
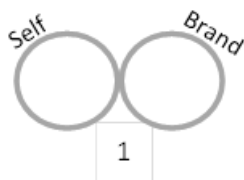
Question 1:A scale to measure brand attitudes

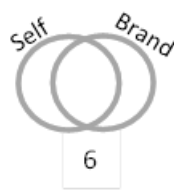
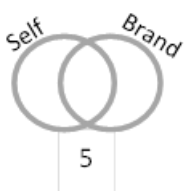
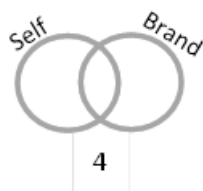
Thinking about the brand, please indicate the number on each item below that best corresponds with your evaluation of the brand.

Dislike 1	2	3	4	5	6	Like 7
Bad 1	2	3	4	5	6	Good 7
Unpleasant 1	2	3	4	5	6	Pleasant 7
Unsatisfactory 1	2	3	4	5	6	Satisfactory 7
Unfavourable 1	2	3	4	5	6	Favourable 7
Inferior 1	2	3	4	5	6	Superior 7
Poor 1	2	3	4	5	6	Excellent 7

Question 2:Self-Brand Overlap Scale *adapted from (Aron et al. 1992)*

Overlapping circles can be used to visually represent the degree to which someone or something fits with who we think we are. Looking at the images below, please select the pair of overlapping circles that best represents the degree to which the brand represents you.





Self-Affirmation Manipulation:

We'd like to you take a few moments to think about yourself and all of the positive, desirable qualities you might have. Are you funny? Dependable? Smart? Please take a few minutes to think about and write down as many things as you can.

We are interested in understanding how easy it is for people to recall recent events. Please take a few minutes to think about and write down everything that you have eaten in the last 24 hours.

Portfolio Fit Manipulation:

In today's economy, many companies offer several different products and brand names within a larger brand portfolio. Some companies are better at it than others. The TAPAT Corporation, the company behind the "Techsys" brand, is considering adding a new brand to their portfolio, but wants to understand how customers will evaluate this potential new offering before it hits the marketplace. The following is one such proposed product that the people at TAPAT are considering. Please take a few moments to read about the product and then answer a few questions about your opinions of the product.

The "Onano" MP3 player lets you store hours of your favorite music and video in the built-in memory. Or listen to the latest hits with the FM tuner. Movies and videos look impressive on the bright 2" colour LCD screen. Record your lectures or your grocery list using the video recording feature and integrated microphone with adjustable bit rate.

The "Onano" Blu-ray DVD player makes your movies look even better with a full HD picture. Every colour and fine detail is brought out, even in standard definition DVDs which can be played in near HD quality. It delivers a full HD resolution for both 2D and 3D images, so everything you see will look real enough to touch.

The "Onano" guitar has the look and sound quality that appeals to first time players and professionals alike. The Onano's styling is considered the classic go-to shape for bluegrass, folk, rock, country, and everything in-between. The sound is commanding when required, but its balanced sound means that at any volume, you can be heard and hear yourself well, too.

Please take a few moments to think about this product.

Question 3:

The TAPAT Company is interested in your evaluation of the Onano brand. Please rate your opinion of Onano on each of the following:

This is a bad product 1	2	3	4	5	6	This is a good product 7
I dislike the product 1	2	3	4	5	6	I like the product 7
I feel negative toward the product 1	2	3	4	5	6	I feel positive toward the product 7
The product is awful 1	2	3	4	5	6	The product is nice 7
The product is unpleasant 1	2	3	4	5	6	The product is pleasant 7
The product is unattractive 1	2	3	4	5	6	The product is attractive 7
I disapprove of the product 1	2	3	4	5	6	I approve of the product 7

Question 4: Assuming that you were looking to purchase a product from this product class, what is the likelihood that you would purchase this product?

Unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Likely 7
Non-existent 1	2	3	4	5	6	Existent 7
Improbable 1	2	3	4	5	6	Probable 7
Uncertain 1	2	3	4	5	6	Certain 7
Definitely would not buy 1	2	3	4	5	6	Definitely would buy 7
Probably not 1	2	3	4	5	6	Probably 7

Question 5: Thinking about TAPAT's Onano brand of MP3 player / DVD player / Guitar:

I would recommend this brand to others

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would share positive information about this brand with others

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would say good things about this brand to others

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Question 6: Imagine that you are preparing to buy a new MP3 player / DVD player / Guitar.

While at the store considering TAPAT's new Onano brand, a stranger mentions to you they had tried the brand and found it to be somewhat defective. Considering this:

I would probably give this brand a chance

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would probably buy the brand despite the other person's experience

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would be less likely to try the brand

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would forgive the brand and try it

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would discount this person's opinion

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would wonder if this person used the product correctly

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I would question this person's expertise

Not at all							Very much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Question 7: What is your gender?

Question 8: What is your age?

Question 9: Is English your first language?

Question 10: Please take a moment to provide any feedback you would like to give us about this research

Appendix C: Study 2 Protocol

Introduction:

HIGH OVERLAP CONDITION: Brands can mean many things to many people. Sometimes, we like brands because they represent who we are, or who we would like to be. Sometimes we choose a brand only for what it can do for us, for its function. Please select one of the following brands that best represents you, how you see yourself, or who you would like to be.

LOW OVERLAP CONDITION: Brands can mean many things to many people. Sometimes, we like brands because they represent who we are, or who we would like to be. Sometimes we choose a brand only for what it can do for us, for its function. Please select one of the following brands that best represents a brand you use, but which you don't think really represents you, how you see yourself, or who you would like to be.

****Here, participants will see a list of brands that are part of a larger corporate portfolio****

P&G brands: Old Spice, Pantene, Herbal Essences, Cover Girl, Ivory, Olay, Cheer, Tide, L'Oreal

L'Oreal brands: L'Ancome, Maybelline, L'Oreal, The Body Shop, Garnier

Unilever brands: Dove, St. Ives, Suave, Sunsilk, TRESemme, Skippy, Ben & Jerry's, Breyer's

Kellogg's: Corn Flakes, Froot Loops, Rice Krispies, Special K

Estee Lauder brands: Estee Lauder, MAC, Aveda, Clinique

Billabong brands: Billabong, Von Zipper, Element

Question 1: Please take a minute to think about the brand you have selected. For example, tell us about this brand and why you use it? (*Open-ended question designed to stimulate self-brand connection awareness if it exists for the participant*)

Question 2:

A scale to measure brand attitudes

Please indicate the number on each item below that best corresponds with your evaluation of the brand:

Dislike 1	2	3	4	5	6	Like 7
Bad 1	2	3	4	5	6	Good 7
Unpleasant 1	2	3	4	5	6	Pleasant 7
Unsatisfactory 1	2	3	4	5	6	Satisfactory 7
Unfavourable 1	2	3	4	5	6	Favourable 7
Inferior 1	2	3	4	5	6	Superior 7
Poor 1	2	3	4	5	6	Excellent 7

Question 3Self-Brand Connection Scale (Escalas 2004)

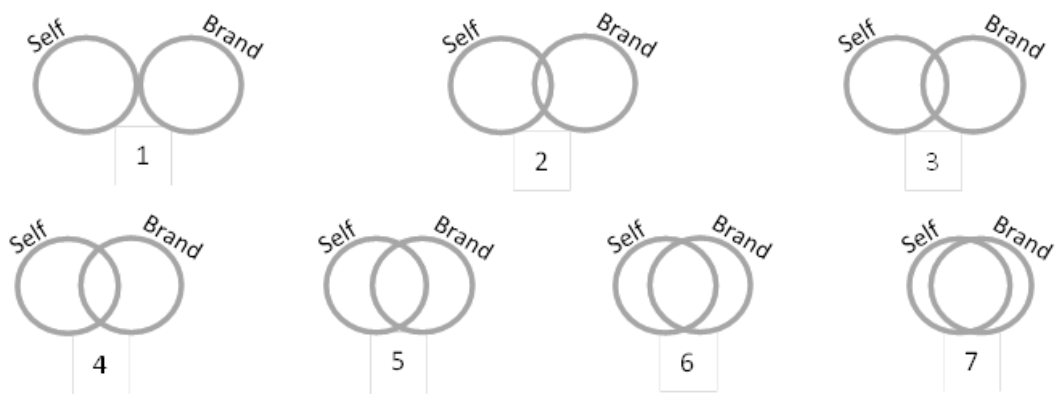
The brand reflects who I am Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Well 7
I can identify with the brand Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Well 7
I feel a personal connection to the brand Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much So 7
I (can) use the brand to communicate who I am to other people Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Well 7
I think the brand (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be Not at all							Extremely Well 7

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I consider the brand to be “me” (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)						
Not “me”						“me”
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The brand suits me well						
Not at all						Extremely Well
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Question 4:

Self-Brand Overlap Scale *adapted from (Aron et al. 1992)*

Overlapping circles can be used to visually represent the degree to which someone or something fits with who we think we are. Looking at the images below, please select the pair of overlapping circles that best represents the degree to which the brand represents you.

Manipulation:

Brand X is owned and manufactured by company X. Company X is a large company that creates and markets many other brands as well, such as Brand A, Brand B, and Brand C. Recently, the company has re-evaluated the assortment of brands in their portfolio and have decided that they need to eliminate some of their brands and re-orient the company in a different direction. They have decided that *your brand X no longer fits with the direction the company wants to pursue and they are going to stop making your brand* (OR *your brand X fits well with the direction the company wants to pursue, and that they are going to eliminate another brand A*). Please take a minute to think about the company’s decision.

Question 5: Thinking about the company’s decision to eliminate the brand, please rate the degree to which you are presently feeling the following:

Ostracism scale adapted from (Zadro et al. 2005)

I feel poorly accepted by the company (<i>belongingness</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel as though I have a connection with the company (<i>belongingness</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel like an outcast to the company (<i>belongingness</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel good about myself (<i>self-esteem</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer (<i>self-esteem</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel somewhat inadequate (<i>self-esteem</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision (<i>control</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel in control of my options (<i>control</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel that I can change the company's decision (<i>control</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel that my existence had some effect on the company's decision (<i>meaningful existence</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel non-existent to the company (<i>meaningful existence</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7
I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company (<i>meaningful existence</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Question 6: Thinking about the company's decision to eliminate the brand, please rate the degree to which you are presently feeling the following:

Relational Evaluation and Rejection Scale (Buckley et al. 2004)

<i>Anger items</i>	<i>Happiness items</i>	<i>Hurt Feelings items</i>	<i>Anxiety items</i>	<i>Sadness items</i>	<i>Rejection items</i>
Irritated	Happy	Hurt	Anxious	Depressed	Excluded
Annoyed	Delighted	Pained	Nervous	Dejected	Accepted
Angry	Cheerful	Injured	Tense	Sad	Valued
Mad	Pleased	Wounded	Uneasy	Down	Rejected

Each word listed above is rated on the following seven-point scale:

Not at all						Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix D: Study 3 Protocol

Introduction:

HIGH OVERLAP CONDITION: Brands can mean many things to many people. Sometimes, we like brands because they represent who we are, or who we would like to be. Sometimes we choose a brand only for what it can do for us, for its function.

Currently, there is a brand of shampoo and body wash on the market that we will refer to as “Luneon”. It is a well-known, top-of-the-line brand that is appealing and of excellent quality. In fact, you may already buy the “Luneon” brand of shampoo and body wash, and are pleased with how well it works, how well it smells, and how effective it is. Overall, you have a favorable attitude towards this brand.

Actually, to help you understand what we mean, we are asking you to think about a product you have that you really like. It is the kind of brand that reflects you well, and gives you a feeling that it is almost part of yourself or an extension of yourself. Now, imagine that this is exactly how you feel about the “Luneon” brand.

LOW OVERLAP CONDITION: Brands can mean many things to many people. Sometimes, we like brands because they represent who we are, or who we would like to be. Sometimes we choose a brand only for what it can do for us, for its function.

Currently, there is a brand of shampoo and body wash on the market that we will refer to as “Luneon”. It is a well-known, top-of-the-line brand that is appealing and of excellent quality. In fact, you may already buy the “Luneon” brand of shampoo and body wash, and are pleased with how well it works, how well it smells, and how effective it is. Overall, you have a favorable attitude towards this brand.

Actually, to help you understand what we mean, we are asking you to think about a product you have that you really like. However it is the kind of brand that does NOT reflect you well, and does NOT give you a feeling that it is almost part of yourself or an extension of yourself. Now, imagine that this is exactly how you feel about the “Luneon” brand.

Question 1:

A scale to measure brand attitudes

Thinking about the brand, please indicate the number on each item below that best corresponds with your evaluation of the brand.

Dislike

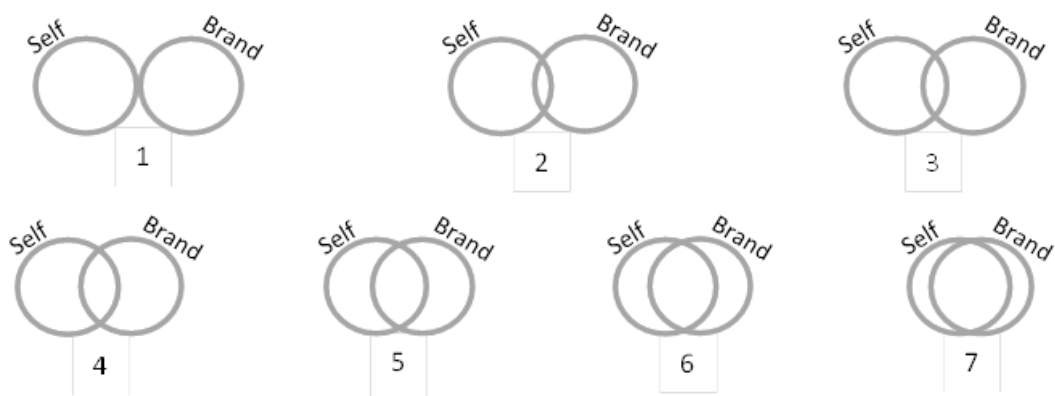
Like

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bad 1	2	3	4	5	6	Good 7
Unpleasant 1	2	3	4	5	6	Pleasant 7
Unsatisfactory 1	2	3	4	5	6	Satisfactory 7
Unfavourable 1	2	3	4	5	6	Favourable 7
Inferior 1	2	3	4	5	6	Superior 7
Poor 1	2	3	4	5	6	Excellent 7

Question 2:

Self-Brand Overlap Scale adapted from (Aron et al. 1992)

Overlapping circles can be used to visually represent the degree to which someone or something fits with who we think we are. Looking at the images below, please select the pair of overlapping circles that best represents the degree to which the brand represents you.



Manipulation:

The “Luneon” brand is owned and manufactured by the “TAPAT” Corporation. TAPAT is a company that creates and markets many other brands as well. Recently, the company has re-evaluated the assortment of brands in their portfolio and have decided that they need to eliminate some of their brands and re-orient the company in a different direction. They have decided that the “Luneon” brand no longer fits with the direction the company wants to pursue and they are going to stop making the “Luneon” brand. Please take a minute to think about the company’s decision.

The “Luneon” brand is owned and manufactured by the “TAPAT” Corporation. TAPAT is a company that creates and markets many other brands as well. Recently, the company has re-evaluated the assortment of brands in their portfolio and have decided that they need to eliminate some of their brands and re-orient the company in a different direction. They have decided that the “Luneon” brand fits well with the direction the company wants to pursue, and that they are going to eliminate another brand instead. Please take a minute to think about the company’s decision.

Question3: Thinking about the company’s decision to eliminate the brand, please rate the degree to which you are presently feeling the following:

Ostracism scale adapted from (Zadro et al. 2005)

I feel poorly accepted by the company (*belongingness*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I feel as though I have no connection with the company (*belongingness*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I feel like an outcast to the company (*belongingness*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I feel bad about myself (*self-esteem*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I feel that the company fails to see me as a worthy customer (*self-esteem*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I feel somewhat inadequate (*self-esteem*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

I feel somewhat frustrated by the decision (*control*)

Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
I do not feel in control of my options (<i>control</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
I feel that I cannot change the company's decision (<i>control</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
I feel that my existence had no effect on the company's decision (<i>meaningful existence</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
I feel non-existent to the company (<i>meaningful existence</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
I feel as though my existence is meaningless to the company (<i>meaningful existence</i>)							
Not at all							Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7

Question 4: Thinking about the company's decision to eliminate the brand, please rate the degree to which you are presently feeling the following:

<u>Relational Evaluation and Rejection Scale (Buckley et al. 2004)</u>					
<i>Anger items</i>	<i>Happiness items</i>	<i>Hurt Feelings items</i>	<i>Anxiety items</i>	<i>Sadness items</i>	<i>Rejection items</i>
Irritated	Happy	Hurt	Anxious	Depressed	Excluded
Annoyed	Delighted	Pained	Nervous	Dejected	Accepted
Angry	Cheerful	Injured	Tense	Sad	Valued
Mad	Pleased	Wounded	Uneasy	Down	Rejected
<i>Each word listed above is rated on the following seven-point scale:</i>					
Not at all					Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6
					7

Question 5: Thinking about the TAPAT Corporation, please answer the following.

My overall impression of the TAPAT Corporation is:

Bad						Good
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Unfavourable							Favourable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Unsatisfactory							Satisfactory
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Question 6: Thinking about the TAPAT Corporation, please answer the following:

I would recommend TAPAT Corporation's products to someone who seeks my advice
Not at all
1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Much
7

I would say positive things about the TAPAT Corporation to other people
Not at all
1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Much
7

I would defend the TAPAT Corporation to other people who speak negatively of it
Not at all
1 2 3 4 5 6 Very Much
7

Awareness Manipulation:

Aware: Imagine that, tomorrow, you need to go the supermarket to buy laundry detergent. The brand that you normally buy is presently out of stock, and you don't have time to go to another store to get it. Instead, you notice two new brands that you've never heard of before, both equally priced, and decide to try one of them. "Durian" detergent is made by the TAPAT Corporation. "Cupari" detergent is made by the ONANO Corporation, a major competitor to the TAPAT Corporation. The two brands are advertised as follows:

TAPAT's Durian laundry detergent is specially designed to help power out your tough stains, leaving your laundry looking clean and fresh. It contains active enzymes that break down common stains while protecting your fabric. Durian laundry detergent has a fresh scent and leaves clothing looking – and smelling great.

ONANO's Cupari laundry detergent is specially formulated for today's lifestyle. It traps dirt and rinses it away clean every time. Designed to power out dirt and odors, Cupari's formula is designed to let fibers slide back into shape easily. It keeps your clothes looking good and smelling fresh.

Unaware: Imagine that, tomorrow, you need to go the supermarket to buy laundry detergent. The brand that you normally buy is presently out of stock, and you don't have time to go to

another store to get it. Instead, you notice two new brands that you've never heard of before, both equally priced, and decide to try one of them. The two brands - "Durian" and "Cupari" are advertised as follows:

Durian laundry detergent is specially designed to help power out your tough stains, leaving your laundry looking clean and fresh. It contains active enzymes that break down common stains while protecting your fabric. Durian laundry detergent has a fresh scent and leaves clothing looking – and smelling great.

Cupari laundry detergent is specially formulated for today's lifestyle. It traps dirt and rinses it away clean every time. Designed to power out dirt and odors, Cupari's formula is designed to let fibers slide back into shape easily. It keeps your clothes looking good and smelling fresh.

Question 7: When thinking about TAPAT's Durian / ONANO's Cupari / the Durian / the Cupari detergent brand:

I dislike this product							I like this product
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I feel negative toward the product							I feel positive toward the product
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
This product is awful							This product is nice
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
This product is unattractive							This product is attractive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Question 8: How do the brands compare to each other?

(TAPAT's) Durian is better than (ONANO's) Cupari							(ONANO's) Cupari is better than (TAPAT's) Durian
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Question 9: What is your gender?

Question 10: What is your age?

Question 11: Is English your first language?

Question 12: Please take a moment to provide any feedback you would like to give us about this research

Appendix E: Curriculum Vitae

Kendra Hart C.V.

EDUCATION

Master of Business Administration Dalhousie University, 2007

Bachelor of Business Administration Brock University, 2004

RESEARCH

Conference Activity

Hart, K., Goode, M. R., & Thomson, M., "Say No More! Experiential Consumption and the Spoiler Effect of Positive Word of Mouth", Association for Consumer Research Conference, St. Louis, MO., October 2011

Hart, K., "Until Death Do Us Part: Consumer Response to Brand Elimination", Association for Consumer Research Conference, St. Louis, MO., October 2011

Hart, K., Goode, M. R., & Thomson, M., "Friends Who Tell Stories: The Liability of Positive Word of Mouth in Impacting Consumer Choice of Hedonic Experiences", Society for Consumer Psychology Conference, Atlanta, GA., February 2011

Chowdhury, S., & Hart, K., "The Global Luxury Hospitality Industry and the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts", Administrative Sciences Association of Canada Conference, Ottawa, ON., June 2007

Book Chapters

Chowdhury, S., & Hart, K. (2008). "The Global Luxury Hospitality Industry and the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts." In Strategic Management: Cases for Competitiveness & Globalization, 3rd Canadian Ed. Eds. Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, Sheppard and Rowe.

Teaching Cases Authored

Hart, K., & Thomson, M., “The Pop Shoppe” Cases A & B. Registered with Ivey Publishing, 2011.

Hart, K., & Thomson, M., “The Pop Shoppe” Teaching Note. Registered with Ivey Publishing, 2011.

TEACHING & RELATED EXPERIENCE:

2012-2013	Lecturer, DAN Management & Organization Studies, Western University MOS2320 – Principles of Marketing MOS3322 – Integrated Marketing Communications
2010-2013	TA, University of Ontario Institute of Technology
2009-2013	TA, Ivey Business School, Western University
2003-2013	TA, Brock University

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

The American Marketing Association (AMA)
 The Association for Psychological Science (APS)
 The Association for Consumer Research (ACR)
 The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA)
 The Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP)

SCHOLARSHIPS & RESEARCH GRANTS

Year: 2011-2012

Source: Ontario Graduate Scholarship, \$15,000

Year: 2011-2012

Source: C. B. “Bud” Johnston Scholarship, \$5,000

Year: 2007-2011

Source: Ivey Plan for Excellence, \$82,000