1

Consumer Reactions to Self-Expressive Brand Display

DAVID E. SPROTT

SANDOR CZELLAR

ERIC R. SPANGENBERG

DAVID RASKA*

Author Note

* David E. Sprott is Associate Dean for Graduate Programs and Boeing / Scott and Linda Carson Chair, College of Business, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-4730 (dsprott@wsu.edu). Sandor Czellar is Associate Professor, Department of Marketing, HEC Paris (czellar@hec.fr). Eric R. Spangenberg is Dean and Maughmer Freedom Philosophy Chair, College of Business, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-4730 (ers@wsu.edu). David Raska is a marketing Ph.D. candidate in the College of Business, University of Washington, Pullman, WA 99164-4730 (draska@wsu.edu).

Abstract

Brand names and other brand elements are often displayed on one's body or clothes for the purpose of personal value expression. Despite the frequency of such brand displays in the marketplace, we know little about how consumers respond to seeing brands in this fashion. A recent view of consumer brand identification—the concept of *brand engagement in self-concept* (BESC)—provides a unique perspective from which to explore how consumers react when seeing brands displayed by others. Across three experiments, we demonstrate a consistent pattern of findings indicating that consumers' reactions to others ostentatiously displaying brands as means of value expression are strongest for those with high BESC levels and with a high value focus during brand exposure. The research highlights important variations in consumers' responses to self-expressive brand stimuli associated with others; implications for branding practice and research are provided.

Considerable recent research has focused on the relationships between consumers and brands (e.g., Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Aggarwal 2004; Escalas 2004; Fournier 1998; Nguyen Chaplin and Roedder John 2005). Brands satisfy various self-defining consumer goals such as social approval or self-representation and help establish self-identity (Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998). Further, brands with distinct and desirable images are often used as a means of social and personal expression (Keller 1993), through which brand users communicate their identities to others within their social world (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005). Various forms of such self-expression can be witnessed in today's market, including participation in brand communities, joining online forums about particular brands, and displaying favorite brand logos as a tattoo or on clothing for others to see (Aggarwal 2004; Jensen Schau and Gilly 2003; Lindstrom 2005; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

This emerging area of inquiry provides the field with the beginnings of a solid understanding of how consumers use brands in their own lives for various self-expressive purposes. To date however, research has virtually neglected the related issue of how consumers respond to the self-expressive use of brands by others. Consumers are frequently exposed to brands associated with others, with recent work indicating that incidental brand exposure can affect consumers' own brand choices (Ferraro, Bettman, and Chartrand 2009). Often times, such brand encounters represent self-expressive brand displays via marketing communications from firms (e.g., seeing haute couture ads featuring fashion models sporting brand logo tattoos, or exposure to celebrity endorsers wearing brand logos) and in everyday consumer settings (e.g., interacting with others ostentatiously wearing name brand clothing). In three experiments, the current research addresses this specific issue in the first known investigations of how consumers react to situations wherein they observe others presenting brands in a self-expressive fashion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Across a variety of paradigms, extant research indicates that consumers often use brands for self-defining purposes (Aaker 1997; Escalas 2004; Fournier 1998; Nguyen Chaplin and Roedder John 2005; Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009). Recent research (and basic intuition) suggests that with this self-definitional process, some consumers may actively seek products with visible brand identification (Sprott et al. 2009). Some forms of brand identification go well beyond featuring brand elements on a brand's offerings. For example Ralph Lauren, in addition to their regular product lines, now market clothing with oversized pony logos. Indeed, some couture brands have relied upon consumers using brand symbols for self-definitional purposes for years.

Despite the long tradition of recognizing that consumers using brands as forms of expressing self-identity in the marketplace (Levy 1959), little is known regarding how consumers respond to situations where others use brand symbols as forms of brand identification. While researchers have explored how consumers respond to celebrity brand endorsers (Till and Shimp 1998), branded products used in films (Cowley and Barron 2008), incidental brand exposure (Ferraro et al. 2009), and how groups of consumers can join together to form brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), none of this research addresses the question of how consumers respond to others using brands in a symbolic fashion. The current set of studies seeks to address this gap in the literature while relying on a recently published global view of brand identity – namely, *brand engagement in the self-concept* (BESC; Sprott et al. 2009).

A prominent way to build brand identity is through developing and strengthening connections between consumers and their brands. These "self-brand connections" reflect the extent to

which people incorporate brands into their self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Marketing activities surrounding self-brand connections rely upon the observation that consumers partially construct their self-concepts through associations with possessions including products and brands (Belk 1988; Tian and Belk 2005). Researchers have begun to identify ways that marketing can build these self-brand connections including the use of brand narratives (Escalas 2004) and brand reference groups (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005). As a discipline, however, we have just scratched the surface of this compelling area with very little being known about which consumer segments are the most (or least) responsive to these types of branding strategies.

The dearth of knowledge on brands and the self-concept is attributable, at least in part, to the fact that traditional means of assessing self-brand connections focus on measurement of connections between people and a single brand (rather than sets of brands). In an effort to overcome this single-brand paradigm, we apply a recently developed view of self-brand connections and their role in consumer self-concept; we adopt Sprott et al.'s (2009) construct of brand engagement in self-concept (BESC)—defined as *a consumer's general propensity to include important brands in the self-concept*—for which these authors developed a psychometrically sound measure. This conceptualization is distinct from the typical treatment of self-brand connections in that it concentrates on a global consumer trait, that is, a generalized tendency of consumers to construe their self-concept in terms of their favorite brands (rather than focusing on a single brand).

We build on this new paradigm of brand engagement to develop predictions rearagarding which consumer segments would be most likely to respond favorably to others who display brands in a self-expressive way. Featuring a visible brand element on one's body or clothes carries two important intertwined messages to the perceiver: (1) the presence of a self-brand connection between the other person and the displayed brand, and (2) the motivation of personal

value expression by the means of the displaying brand elements. The first message regards a strong identification of the other consumer with the brand. Consumers with higher (vs. lower) BESC levels should generally respond more favorably to this message as brands are an important part of their own self-concepts (Sprott et al. 2009). The second message clearly indicates a tendency for explicit value expression, which represents a strong personal focus on values that is not necessarily salient to all high BESC consumers. We therefore postulate that consumers with higher levels of BESC (who are concerned about the value-expressive aspects of brand identification) will have more favorable attitudes toward the expressed brand identification of others.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We investigate the issues discussed above in a series of experiments (see Table 1 for an overview of studies). In studies 1 and 2, self-expressive brand display is manipulated as the presence (vs. absence) of a tattoo on the body of a consumer depicted in a brand advertisement. In these studies, we examine the interactive effects of BESC and personal focus on value expression (manipulated in study 1 and measured in study 2) on purchase likelihoods for the advertised brands. In study 3, we further extend the validity of our theorizing by examining the predicted relationships in a different context—namely, impressions of a new acquaintance wearing the perceiver's most (vs. least) favorite brand of clothing.

STUDY 1

Perhaps the most striking (and permanent) way to express brand identification is wearing a brand element directly on one's body. Although tattoos have traditionally been perceived as a risky social choice in Western cultures, they have increasingly become a part of contemporary

society as expressions of personal identity (Kjeldgaard 2005; Watson 1998). In the first experiment, we test our propositions by first measuring participants' BESC levels and priming (vs. not priming) their personal values. Purchase likelihoods are then measured regarding a brand being advertised by a consumer with or without a brand logo tattoo on their body.

In the context of brands, consumers incorporating names or logos of their favorite brands in a tattoo are explicitly expressing personal and relatively permanent bonds linking themselves with a brand (Aggarwal 2004). Compared to just a few years ago, it is not uncommon to observe such brand-related phenomena, with instances of tattooed logos including not only designer brands such as Chanel and Gucci, but also consumer electronics brands like Windows and Play-Station (Newsweek 2006). Further, brand tattoos are increasingly being used in promotional images. Relevant examples include William H. Macy's trademarked Apple tattoo in the movie *Wild Hogs*, tattooed models appearing in Captain Morgan's Rum advertisements, The Great Northern Brewing Company contest giving away a new Harley Davidson to the person with the biggest version of its "yahoo-in cowboy" logo, to name a few. Our expectation is that higher (vs. lower) BESC consumers' responses to people depicted with a brand tattoo would be conditional upon whether personal value focus has or has not been activated.

For various strategic reasons, firms emphasize different values in their brand identity strategy (Aaker 1997; Kapferer 2008). Even for the same brand, however, different consumer segments may diverge in their interpretations of an intended brand meaning (Allen, Fournier, and Miller 2008). Accordingly, a specific brand may evoke very specific life values in the eyes of a specific consumer. For this reason, instead of focusing on a singular value, we sought to activate a consumer's general value system prior to their brand ad evaluations (Kahle and Xie 2008; Schwartz 1992). Research indicates that activating people's centrally-held values increases the

likelihood of value-relevant information processing, choices and behaviors (Blankenship and Wegener 2008; Verplanken and Holland 2002). We therefore expect that a tattooed logo on the body of the modeled consumer is a value-expressive cue that should be particularly appealing to high (vs. low) BESC consumers, provided their personal value orientation is activated.

Method

Participants and procedure. This study was conducted in a classroom setting with under-graduate students participating for extra course credit (N = 190). Participants first completed a measure of BESC (Sprott et al. 2009) in a survey ostentatiously unrelated to the main experiment and were randomly assigned to a 2 (values: primed vs. not primed) × 2 (brand logo tattoo: present vs. absent) between-subjects design. The consumer model was randomly presented as either male or female and we also varied the brand name between-participants. We included the latter two manipulations to control for possible gender effects and differential consumer responses to brands with different positioning strategies.

In conditions where values were primed, participants rated the importance of various values and indicated which value was the most important following Kahle (1983). Participants then wrote in a few sentences about how they behaved in everyday life to achieve that value. When values were not primed, participants did not complete the preceding tasks. Next, participants examined a randomly assigned advertisement that included a consumer model for the brand, either male or female, with or without a tattooed brand logo (either Puma or Nike). Following ad exposure, participants indicated purchase likelihoods regarding the advertised brand.

To ensure success of the tattoo manipulation, participants answered a series of yes/no questions about the various attributes of the model shown in the advertisement. This manipulation check consisted of comparing response frequencies to a question about the presence or ab-

sence of a tattoo on the depicted consumer's body. The experiment ended with a demand artifact question and general measures about tattoos, including personal attitudes toward tattoos, whether the participant had a tattoo or not, and whether the participant knew a family member, friend or someone else with a tattoo. The latter questions were included to test our belief that in today's society tattoos are not perceived as a sign of marginal or deviant behavior but, instead, as a common means of expressing one's own values and identity.

Stimuli. Value focus was manipulated in a booklet containing Kahle's (1983) List of Values scale. The scale consists of nine values (sense of belonging, excitement, warm relationships with others, self-fulfillment, being well respected, fun and enjoyment of life, security, self-respect, and sense of accomplishment). Participants rated each value in terms of how important it was in their personal life (1 = very unimportant to 9 = very important). Following this, they indicated which value was the single most important value to them. To increase salience of personal values, participants wrote a few sentences regarding how they behaved in everyday life to achieve the specific life value. In the values not primed condition, participants did not complete the preceding priming tasks.

To insure believability of stimuli (i.e., realistic pictures and brand logo tattoos), two independent pretests from the same population used for the main study were conducted prior to the main experiment. In the first pretest (N = 39), general attitudes toward tattoos, brand logo tattoos, and pictures of brand logos were evaluated in order to select familiar logos. In the second pretest (N = 40), a different sample was used to select appropriate images and the final brands and logos. As a result of these pre-tests, two brands (i.e., Nike and Puma) and two ad models (i.e., male and female consumer images) were selected (see Figure 1). Accordingly, advertising stimuli included a photo of a single brand consumer (either male or female) who did or did not

have a brand (Nike or Puma) logo tattoo on his or her body. To stress the value-expressive nature

of the ads, the slogan "(This brand) is a part of me" was featured at the bottom of all the ads.

_____

Insert Figure 1 about here

_____

Measures. BESC was measured with the eight-item scale validated by Sprott et al. (2009)

and anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). The BESC scale showed a high lev-

el of internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$). The dependent measure included three semantic differential

items that assessed brand purchase likelihood in response to the question "What is the likelihood

that you will purchase Nike/Puma brand products in the near future?" (unlikely/likely, improb-

able/probable, and impossible/possible; $\alpha = .95$). Seven-point scales were used for all items.

Results

Descriptive statistics and manipulation checks. Overall, participants reported average at-

titudes toward tattoos (M = 3.84, SD = 1.73) that were not significantly different from the scale

midpoint, t(189) = 1.29, ns. Further, 86 percent knew someone who had a tattoo, 62 percent of

the participants reported a family member with a tattoo, and 11 percent of the sample reported

having a tattoo themselves. These figures confirm our expectation and other research indicating

that tattoos are an accepted form of personal expression in contemporary society, not associated

with marginal or deviant behaviors as may have been the case in the not-so-distant past (Kjeld-

gaard 2005).

Further, the tattoo manipulation was successful. In the tattoo absent condition, 94 percent

of respondents said that they did not see a tattoo on the consumer model, while in the tattoo pre-

sent condition, 97.8 percent reported having seen one, $X^2 = 159.6$, *p* < .01. Responses to the de-

mand artifact question at the end of the session suggested that no participants linked the presumably unrelated survey (that included the BESC scale) with the main experiment.

Purchase likelihood. We performed a multiple linear regression following Aiken and West (1991). Purchase likelihood was regressed on the centered BESC measure, values (primed = 1, not primed = 0), brand logo (present = 1, absent = 0) and all the two- and three-way interactions between those independent variables. Gender and brand covariates were also included as fixed main effects in the regression model (Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer 2006). Two significant effects emerged from this regression analysis (R^2 = .20). The first was a main effect for the brand covariate, whereby participants provided higher purchase intentions for Nike than for Puma, t(187) = 3.82, *p* < .01. The second was a three-way interaction between BESC, values and brand logo, t(187) = 2.32, *p* < .05. To probe this interaction, we estimated four regression slopes at low (one SD below mean) vs. high (one SD above mean) BESC levels across the values primed vs. not primed conditions. The only significant slope emerging was the one estimated at the high BESC level in the values primed condition, t(187) = 2.75, *p* < .01; the other three slope tests were non-significant (low BESC, values not primed: t(187) = 1.77, ns; low BESC, values primed: t(187) = .78, ns; high BESC, values not primed: t(187) = .71, ns). These results indicate that if personal values are made salient prior to ad exposure, high BESC participants will report higher purchase likelihoods after viewing an ad featuring someone with a brand tattoo, compared to the same ad featuring a person without the tattoo (but with the same logo provided elsewhere in the picture).

—————————————

Insert Figure 2 about here

—————————————

Discussion

Results of study 1 lend support to our hypotheses about the conditions under which low (vs. high) BESC consumers react more or less favorably to ads featuring brand tattoos. In particular, high BESC consumers responded more favorably to brand advertisements featuring a person with a brand tattoo, if (at the same time) they were primed with values important to their self-concept. This study provides evidence that this consumer segment may perceive a brand tattoo as a cue that represents something of personal value. In contrast, consumers who are less likely to incorporate brands into the self-concept are less sensitive to such distinctions and their purchase likelihoods were unaffected by the presence/absence of a brand logo tattoo. These findings remained constant whether consumer model gender was male or female and whether the brand presented was Nike or Puma.

STUDY 2

The rationale we have developed thus far has emphasized the importance of brands for high BESC consumers who have had their personal values primed. In particular, we demonstrated in study 1 that when values are primed for those higher in BESC, consumer responses to an ostentatiously displayed brand are more favorable when an advertisement featured a consumer model with a brand logo tattoo as a value-expressive cue (as compared to an ad with someone having no such tattoo). In study 2, we extend these results by showing that the moderating effect of BESC also applies when personal values are measured (as a trait) instead of manipulated (as a contextual factor).

In terms of market segments likely to respond to brands as value expressive cues, the most interesting would be those that include consumers who tend to include brands in their self-

concept and who, at the same time, attach particular importance to value-expressive attitudes and behaviors. The literature in social psychology suggests that the extent to which consumers attach value-expressive functions to attitude objects is captured by their personal levels of self-monitoring (DeBono 2000, 2006). Self-monitoring is an individual propensity to adapt behavior to the requirements of social situations (Snyder 1974). Low self-monitors tend to project a stable self to others in diverse settings of social interaction, and their behavior is predominantly guided by inner beliefs and values rather than social influences (Gangestad and Snyder 2000). On the other hand, high self-monitors exert more expressive control over their social behavior than low self-monitors and frequently adapt their appearance and actions to specific situations and others.

Research in this domain has shown that high self-monitors attend more to cues such as physical appearance and attractiveness than low self-monitors (DeBono 2000); a finding most likely attributable to high self-monitors' concern for higher status (Gangestad and Snyder 2000). In an advertising context, high self-monitors tend to prefer brands that they perceive to be consistent with social situations and respond favorably to status-oriented product advertising claims (DeBono 2000; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992). On the other hand, the expression of personal attitudes and values is an important driver of behavior for low self-monitors, who are apt to respond favorably to persuasive messages that express personal attitudes and values (DeBono 1987, 2000).

Given that low self-monitors attach particular importance to value-expressive attitudes and behaviors, we propose that those consumers will react more favorably to ads featuring people with brand tattoos (vs. no brand tattoos) only if they possess, at the same time, higher levels of BESC. In contrast, consumers characterized by high levels of self-monitoring should not be more responsive to ads with a value-expressive cue (i.e., a brand tattoo) more than an ad without

such a cue. For these consumers, personal values are not as salient in evaluative processes and consequently have little impact on behavior. Finally, if a brand's target consumer segments are predominantly composed of low BESC persons, that is, consumers who tend not to include brands as part of their self-concept, then we do not expect such segments to react differentially with respect to ads that feature or do not feature brand tattoos.

Method

The experimental design closely followed that of study 1 with the only difference being operationalization of personal values. In study 2, values were measured as a continuous stable trait (i.e., self-monitoring), rather than manipulated as a contextual variable in the first study.

Participants and procedure. Data were collected in a lab with undergraduate students participating for extra credit (N = 131). Upon arrival at the lab, participants completed measures of BESC and self-monitoring in a survey presented as unrelated to the main experiment. For the experiment, research participants were randomly assigned to the tattoo present vs. tattoo absent conditions of a between-subjects design. The remainder of procedures was identical to those of study 1, except that none of the participants completed the value-priming task. Brand logos were manipulated via the same advertisements used in study 1 (see Figure 1). That is, participants in the experiment were exposed to a brand advertisement (Nike or Puma) that displayed a male/female consumer model either with or without a brand logo tattoo on his/her body.

Measures. Seven-point items were used for all scaled measures. As in study 1, BESC was measured with the Sprott et al. (2009) eight-item scale. Self-monitoring was measured with the Lennox and Wolfe (1984) scale comprising 13 seven-point items. The BESC and self-monitoring scales both showed high levels of internal consistency (α = .94 and .82, respectively). In addition, we ascertained that self-monitoring and BESC were two distinct constructs by correlating

the two scales and found no significant relationship between them (r = .028, ns). The dependent measure was the same as in study 1 and measured participants' brand purchase likelihood (α = .94).

Results

     Descriptive statistics and manipulation checks. Participants reported significantly higher than midpoint attitudes toward tattoos, M = 4.42, t(130) = 3.11, *p* < .01. Similar to study 1, 22 percent of participants reported having a tattoo and 89 percent reported knowing a family member who had a tattoo. Indeed, with a single exception, all participants reported knowing someone who had a tattoo. The tattoo manipulation was successful, such that in the tattoo absent condition, 83.8 percent of respondents said they didn't see a tattoo on the person portrayed in the ad, while in the tattoo present condition, 94.9 % reported having seen one, χ^2 = 123.5, *p* < .001. Again, no demand effect was observed.

     Purchase likelihood. Brand purchase likelihood was regressed on BESC, self-monitoring and brand tattoo condition (0 = tattoo absent; 1 = tattoo present). The significant effects emerging from this regression (R^2 = .12) were BESC, t(128) = 2.71, *p* < .01 and a three-way interaction between brand tattoo, self-monitoring and BESC, t(128) = –1.99, *p* < .05. (As in Study 1, the model gender and brand covariates were included in an initial model but were not significant and were dropped from further analyses). To probe the interaction, we estimated four regression slopes at low (one SD below mean) vs. high (one SD above mean) BESC levels across low vs. high self-monitoring levels. The only significant slope emerging was the one estimated at high BESC/low self-monitoring level, t(128) = 2.10, *p* < .05; the other three slope tests were non-significant (low BESC/low self-monitoring: t(128) = .96, ns; low BESC/high self-monitoring: t(128) = 1.14, ns; high BESC/high self-monitoring: t(128) = –1.47). These results support our

theorizing and mirror those of study 1 regarding the nature of consumers who favorably react to an ad featuring a brand logo tattoo (namely, those higher in BESC with a stronger values focus).

_____

Insert Figure 3 about here

_____

Discussion

Results of study 2 provide further support for the hypothesized interaction between BESC and values on consumer responses to value expressive brand elements. Consistent with study 1, participants with higher levels of BESC responded more favorably only to ads featuring a person with a brand tattoo, if they were also low in self-monitoring. In contrast, and irrespective of their level of BESC, high self-monitors (i.e., less value-focused) remain unaffected by the presence or absence of a brand tattoo. In addition, low self-monitors who are not concerned with brands (i.e., lower in BESC) were unaffected by the tattoo manipulation. Overall, results of study 2 confirm our basic proposition that people who are not predisposed to incorporate brands into their self-concepts are unlikely to be affected by value-expressive brand cues. Thus, consumers impacted by such cues are those for whom brands are important, making up part of their personal value structures.

STUDY 3

In studies1 and 2, we demonstrated that consumers for whom brands are more or less important to the self-concept may, depending on their values, respond quite differently to brand elements serving as value expressive cues. In particular, we demonstrated the hypothesized interaction between BESC and values in the context of brand advertisements featuring tattooed vs.

non-tattooed people. One could argue, however, that despite increased acceptance of tattoos in contemporary society, brand logo tattoos may still reflect individual value expression in a rather extreme fashion. Also, exposure to a single ad ostentatiously featuring a person with (or without) a tattoo might have made our manipulation particularly salient. In study 3, we sought to generalize our findings to less extreme forms of brands displayed by others in more general contexts. Thus, we investigated consumer reactions to others wearing self-expressive brand elements in everyday social interaction. Specifically, we examined people's first impressions of an unknown person wearing the evaluator's favorite (or least favorite) clothing brand at a social gathering. As in study 2, we measured participants' value focus via the self-monitoring scale.

Method

Participants and procedure. The sample included undergraduate students ($N = 91$) participating in lab sessions for partial course credit. Upon arrival at the lab, participants completed measures of BESC (Sprott et al. 2009) and self-monitoring (Lennox and Wolfe 1984) in a battery of measures ostentatiously unrelated to the main experiment. Participants then read the following experimental scenario about meeting a new person at a friend's party:

> "You go to a party at a friend's house on a Friday evening for a Spring barbecue. A couple of your friends are responsible for making the party happen. You arrive at the party and know everyone there, except for one person whom you have never met before. The new person is a (fe)male and is similar in age to you. Although you are not sure, the person appears to be a college student who is attending [name of school]. S(H)e looks like a person who has lived most of his life in [location of school]. The person is dressed for a Spring barbecue: a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt, and sandals. You decide to go over and introduce yourself to this person. On your way over, you notice a brand name on his sweat-

shirt. This brand is one of your *most (least)* favorite brands of clothing. As you reach out to shake the person's hand, you have formed your first impression of him."

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions manipulating the brand of clothing (least versus most favorite brand) worn by the person the scenario described having met at the party. To control for possible gender effects regarding first impressions of strangers, gender of the new person was randomly assigned. After reading the scenario, participants rated their first impression of the new person in terms of competence and likeability on a four-item, seven-point scale (dislikeable/likeable, incompetent/competent, unhappy/happy and shy/self-confident; Forgas and Bower 1987).

Measures. As in study 1 and 2, all scaled items were measured on seven-point scales. The dependent measure was an average of four items measuring first impressions of the person (α = .78). As in the previous studies, the measures of self-monitoring (α = .79) and BESC (α = .94) proved internally reliable. As in study 2, self-monitoring and BESC comprised distinct constructs; there was no correlation between the two scales (r = .078, ns).

Results

Impressions of a stranger. Impression of the stranger was regressed on BESC, self-monitoring and brand condition (0 = least favorite brand; 1 = most favorite brand). The significant effects emerging from this regression (R^2 = .23) were brand condition, t(90) = 3.80, *p* < .01, a two-way interaction between BESC and self-monitoring, t(90) = 2.56, *p* < .05, and the three-way interaction between brand condition, self-monitoring and BESC, t(90) = –2.45, *p* < .05. (Model gender as a covariate was non-significant and was therefore dropped from the analyses). To probe this latter interaction, we estimated four regression slopes at low (one SD below mean) vs. high (one SD above mean) BESC levels across low vs. high self-monitoring levels (Figure 4).

The significant slopes emerging were those estimated at high BESC/low self-monitoring level, t(90) = 2.90, *p* < .01 and at low BESC/high self-monitoring level, t(90) = 2.92, *p* < .01; the other two slope tests were non-significant (low BESC/low self-monitoring: t(90) = –.04, ns; high BESC/high self-monitoring: t(90) = 1.14, ns; high BESC/high self-monitoring: t(128) = .53, ns).

_____

Insert Figure 4 about here

_____

Discussion

In study 3, we explored the interactive effects of BESC and self-monitoring on percep-tions of other people wearing branded clothing as a means of brand display. The results of this study showed that participants who were low in self-monitoring and high in BESC evaluated an unknown person more favorably when that person was wearing the participant's most (vs. least) favorite brand of clothing. Although conducted in a different setting using distinct dependent measures, these results are highly consistent with those of the first two experiments. However, an unexpected finding emerged whereby high self-monitors who reported lower levels of BESC were also favorably impacted by the brand manipulation. While additional research is necessary to understand this effect, we speculate that this finding may be due to the particular social con-text implemented in our scenario (i.e., a party). It may be that in such a context, when brands do not play a central role in a person's self-concept, those brands then may act as social cues regard-ing approach/avoidance behaviors (which would be of greater importance to high self-monitors). Overall, the results of study 3 provide further support for our proposition that people with a high propensity to incorporate important brands into their self-concept rely primarily upon brands as

value expressive cues, if at the same time their inner values and motives guide their perceptions (i.e., low self-monitors).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

People often use elements of a brand (e.g., a brand name, a logo) as a means of expressing their self-identities to others. While the importance of such actions have long been recognized in the marketing literature (e.g., Levy 1959), little research has examined consumers' responses to those displaying a brand in a self-expressive fashion. The current research addresses this question by exploring people's reactions to others who overtly display brand elements.

Results of our three studies are remarkably consistent. In particular, we demonstrate across multiple contexts that, depending upon their value focus during brand exposure, higher (vs. lower) BESC consumers react differently to the presence (vs. absence) of brand self-expression by other consumers. Study 1 demonstrates that consumers with higher (vs. lower) levels of BESC respond more favorably to ads featuring consumers with (vs. without) brand tattoos, provided that personal values are made particularly salient immediately prior to exposure. Study 2 replicated and extended these findings showing the same effect when value focus is measured (via a self-monitoring scale) as opposed to manipulated. In study 3, we explore our theoretical rationale in an everyday social situation—namely, consumer response to others who are wearing branded clothing—and find a nearly identical pattern of effects. Overall, results across the three experiments consistently show that a positive response to other's brand self expression is particularly manifest by those higher in brand engagement in self-concept with a strong personal focus on values.

Implications and Future Research

The relationship between consumers and brands has been increasingly demonstrated in the literature (Aaker 1997; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998, 2005; Sprott et al. 2009). As earlier noted, however, we know very little about how brands displayed by others might influence consumer responses to that same brand. Ferraro et al. (2009) show, even incidental brand exposures in everyday social life can significantly influence consumer behaviors. In the current set of studies, we investigated brand encounters in a particular context, whereby consumers reacted to situations where another consumer displayed the brand with clearly self-expressive purposes. Our findings bear implications for several related areas in branding research.

Value-Expressive Brand Display and Consumer Self-Monitoring

In studies 1 and 2, we established a meaningful pattern of results related to the interaction between brand engagement in self-concept and concern for personal value expression in response to an ad depicting a consumer with (or without) a brand tattoo. As predicted, participants who had values primed (in study 1) or who were guided by inner beliefs and values (i.e., low self-monitors in study 2) responded more favorably to advertisements that featured a consumer model with a brand tattoo (compared to a non-tattooed version), but only when their behavior was guided by a general propensity to integrate important brands into their self-concept. For this segment of consumers, a brand tattoo appears to constitute a plausible means of expressing deeply held personal values, thus becoming an important brand cue affecting brand purchase likelihood. This finding is particularly interesting when considered from the perspective of prior self-monitoring research that has shown low self-monitors to judge products in terms of quality and functionality, effectively stripping products of their image-creating and status laden aura (DeBono 2000; Gangestad and Snyder 2000).

Interestingly, high BESC participants without primed values (study 1) or those less concerned about the value-expressive functions of objects (i.e. high self-monitors, study 2) were unaffected by the tattoo manipulation within the brand advertisement. It appears that the tattoo did not trigger value expressive thoughts for these consumers. These null findings, however, may be explained by research showing that high self-monitors are less concerned about the value-expressive functions of objects than the social-adjustive functions (DeBono 2000). For this reason, it may be that our experimental advertisements did not provide sufficient social information that could have been used to evaluate the pros and cons of a brand tattoo in terms of social norms. This suggests that if positive social information about brand tattoos was provided prior to brand exposure (e.g., endorsement by important spokespersons or reference groups), high self-monitors with high levels of BESC may favorably respond to an ad featuring a brand tattoo. Conversely, we may observe a particularly negative response from these consumer segments if the tattooed brand ad is preceded by negative social information regarding brand tattoos (e.g., a popular press release about tattoos going out of fashion). These questions are open for future research.

Study 3 provides similar results in a different context—that is, the perception of others who are displaying a brand on their clothing in a social setting. Consistent with studies 1 and 2, those participants in study 3 who were low in self-monitoring and high in BESC more favorably evaluated an unknown person when that person was wearing the participant's most (vs. least) favorite brand of clothing. As noted previously, an unexpected finding emerged in this study whereby participants who were high self-monitors and low in BESC also responded favorably to the brand manipulation. The party situation depicted in study 3 may account (at least in part) for this finding, since brands in this context are more likely to serve as a social cue (which would be

important for high self-monitors in this social setting). Future research might investigate this further by applying our experimental design in a non-social setting, thereby minimizing social cues associated with the brand.

BESC and Specific Self-Brand Connections

Although prior research has demonstrated the importance of self-brand connections regarding a consumer's response to a brand and its marketing activities, the current work is the first to demonstrate how such self-brand connections can also influence consumer reactions to others who are associated with a brand. While extant literature has focused almost exclusively on singular self-brand connections, such as the bond between a consumer and the Nike brand (e.g., Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005), the current series of experiments suggests the importance of considering generalized self-brand connections as well (Sprott et al. 2009). This more comprehensive approach views brand-self connections in terms of a propensity to include multiple, important brands as a part of the self-concept, rather than forming singular connections with a particular brand. Herin we demonstrated the applicability of this generalized approach by showing that high BESC consumers (with a particular values focus) responded more favorably to brand ads (study 1 and 2) or social situations (study 3) explicitly featuring self-brand connections, as compared to those lower in BESC. Additional research should certainly investigate the relationship between the generalized, trait-based approach advocated by the BESC construct and the development of specific self-brand connections. For example, it would be valuable to explore the links between specific brand concept strategies (Park, Jaworski, and McInnis 1986) and the resulting likelihood of a brand being included in the self-concepts of high vs. low BESC consumers.

Understanding Boundary Conditions and Underlying Mechanisms

Findings from the current research are consistent across a variety of contexts and dependent measures, yet future research could usefully explore different settings whereby consumers are likely to encounter others who are displaying a brand name or logo (e.g., brand placements in a movie, brand spokespersons). Specific features of the brand encounters could thus be identified that are more or less likely to generate positive consumer evaluations of the brand (the level of social visibility of the encounter, the type and number of brands and people involved, and so forth). Such research would help to establish generalizability and explore the boundary conditions for our reported effects. Relatedly, research could explore new contexts wherein BESC is likely to play a role in how consumers respond to alternative types of brand-relevant settings (e.g., the purchase of branded goods from a sales associate, or the exchange of a branded gift between two people). Finally, research that examines the process underlying the reported effects would be useful. For instance, recent developments in the field of implicit association measures could be beneficially employed to better understand the links between the strength of consumer-brand connections and consumer response to seeing others use brands in a value-expressive fashion (Petty, Fazio, and Briñol 2009).

Conclusion

The connection between the self-concept and a brand is emerging as an important dimension of consumer behavior. Although other scholars have demonstrated the importance of self-brand connections regarding consumers' response to brands and their marketing activities, the current work is the first to demonstrate how such self-brand connections can also influence how a person reacts to other people associated with a brand. Of course, our research only scratches the surface on this topic and more investigative work is required to realize more fully the role others play in consumer's responses to a brand and vice versa.

REFERENCES

Aaker, Jennifer L. (1997), "Dimensions of Brand Personality," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34 (August), 347-56.

——, Susan Fournier, and Adam S. Brasel (2004), "When Good Brands Do Bad, " *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (June), 1-16.

Aggarwal, Pankaj (2004), "The Effects of Brand Relationship Norms on Consumer Attitudes and Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (1), 87-101.

Aiken, Leona S. and Stephen G. West (1991), *Multiple Regression: Testing and Interpreting Interactions.* Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Allen, Chris T., Susan Fournier, and Felicia Miller (2008), "Brands and Their Meaning Makers," in *Handbook of Consumer Psychology*, Curtis P. Haugtvedt and Paul M. Herr and Frank R. Kardes, Eds. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Belk, Russell (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (September), 139-68.

Cowley, Elizabeth and Chris Barron (2008), "When Product Placement Goes Wrong," *Journal of Advertising*, 37 (1), 89-98.

Blankenship, Kevin L. and Duane T. Wegener (2008), "Opening the Mind to Close It: Considering a Message in Light of Important Values Increases Message Processing and Later Resistance to Change," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94 (2), 196-213.

DeBono, Kenneth G. (2000), "Attitude Functions and Consumer Psychology: Understanding Perceptions of Product Quality," in *Why We Evaluate? Functions of Attitudes*, Gregory R. Maio and James M. Olson, Eds. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

——— (2006), "Self-Monitoring and Consumer Psychology," *Journal of Personality*, 74 (3), 715-37.

——— (1987), "Investigating the Social-Adjustive and Value-Expressive Functions of Attitudes: Implications for Persuasion Processes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52 (2), 279-87.

Escalas, Jennifer E. (2004), "Narrative Processing: Building Consumer Connections to Brands," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14 (1&2), 168-80.

——— and James R. Bettman (2003), "You Are What They Eat: The Influence of Reference Groups on Consumers' Connections to Brands," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13 (December), 339-48.

——— (2005), "Self-Construal, Reference Groups, and Brand Meaning," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (December), 378-89.

Ferraro, Rosellina, James R. Bettman, and Tanya L. Chartrand (2009), "The Power of Strangers: The Effect of Incidental Consumer Brand Encounters on Brand Choice," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (February), 729-41.

Forgas Joseph P. and Gordon H. Bower (1987), "Mood Effects on Person-Perception Judgments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53 (1), 53-60.

Fournier, Susan (1998), "Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (March), 343-73.

Gangestad, Steven W. and Mark Snyder (2000), "Self-Monitoring: Appraisal and Reappraisal," *Psychological Bulletin*, 126 (4), 530-55.

Homburg, Christian, Nicole Koschate, and Wayne D. Hoyer (2006), "The Role of Cognition and Affect in the Formation of Customer Satisfaction: A Dynamic Perspective," *Journal of Marketing*, 70 (July), 21-31.

Kahle, Lynn R. (1983), *Social Values and Social Change: Adaptation to Life in America,* New York: Praeger.

——— and Guang-Xin Xie (2008), "Social Values in Consumer Psychology," in *Handbook of Consumer Psychology*, Curtis P. Haugtvedt and Paul M. Herr and Frank R. Kardes, Eds. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kapferer, Jean-Noël (2008), *The New Strategic Brand Management*. London and Philadelphia: Kogan Page.

Keller, Kevin Lane (1993), "Conceptualizing, Measuring and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity," *Journal of Marketing*, 57 (January), 1-22.

Kjeldgaard, Dannie (2005), "'Consuming the Fashion Tattoo," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 32, 172-177.

Lennox, Richard D. and Raymond N. Wolfe (1984), "Revision of the Self-Monitoring Scale," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46 (6), 1349-64.

Levy, Sidney J. (1959), "Symbols for Sale," *Harvard Business Review*, 117-124.

Lindstrom, Martin (2005), "Extreme Loyalty: Show Off Your Brand Tattoos," *Media Asia* (February 25), 24.

Muniz Jr., Albert M. and Thomas C. O'Guinn (2001), "Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (4), 412-432.

Nguyen Chaplin, Lan and Deborah Roedder John (2005), "The Development of Self-Brand Connections in Children and Adolescents," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (June), 119-29.

Orth, Ulrich R. and Lynn R. Kahle (2008),"Intrapersonal Variation in Consumer Susceptibility to Normative Influence: Toward a Better Understanding of Brand Choice Decisions," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 148 (4), 423-48.

Park, C. Whan, Bernard J. Jaworski, and Deborah McInnis (1986), "Strategic Brand Concept-Image Management," *Journal of Marketing*, 50 (July), 135-45.

Petty, Richard E., Russell H. Fazio, and Pablo Briñol (2009), *Attitudes: Insights from the New Implicit Measures.* New York: Psychology Press.

Schau, Jensen Hope and Mary C. Gilly (2003), "We Are What We Post? Self-Presentation in Personal Web Space," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30 (December), 385-404.

Schwartz, Shalom H. (1992),"Universals in the Content and Structure of Values - Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 1-65.

Shavitt, S., Tina M. Lowrey, and S. P. Han (1992), "Attitude Functions in Advertising: The Interactive Role of Products and Self-Monitoring," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 1 (4), 337-64.

Snyder, Mark (1974), "Self-Monitoring of Expressive Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30, 526-37.

Sprott, David E., Sandor Czellar and Eric R. Spangenberg (2009), "Brand-Extended Self-Construal," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46 (February), 92-104.

Tian, Kelly and Russell W. Belk (2005), "Extended Self and Possessions in the Workplace," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (September), 297-310.

Till, Brian D. and Terence A. Shimp (1998), "Endorsers in Advertising: The Case of Negative Celebrity Information," *Journal of Advertising*, 27 (1), 67-82.

Verplanken, Bas and Rob W. Holland (2002), "Motivated Decision Making: Effects of Activation and Self-Centrality of Values on Choices and Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82 (3), 434-47.

Watson, Joel (1998), "'Why Did You Put that There?: Gender, Materialism and Tattoo Consumption, " *Advances in Consumer Research*, 25, 453-460.

TABLE 1

OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES

Study	Brand	Context	Symbolic Brand Expression	Personal Values Expression	Brand Engagement	Dependent Variable
1	Nike and Puma	Consumer pictured in brand advertisement with(out) tattoo.	Tattooed vs. Non-Tattooed	Manipulated	Measured	Purchase Likelihood
2	Nike and Puma	Consumer pictured in brand advertisement with(out) tattoo.	Tattooed vs. Non-Tattooed	Measured	Measured	Purchase Likelihood
3	Most vs. Least Favorite Brand	Scenario about meeting a new person wearing clothing brand.	Most vs. Least Favorite Brand	Measured	Measured	Person Perceptions

FIGURE 1

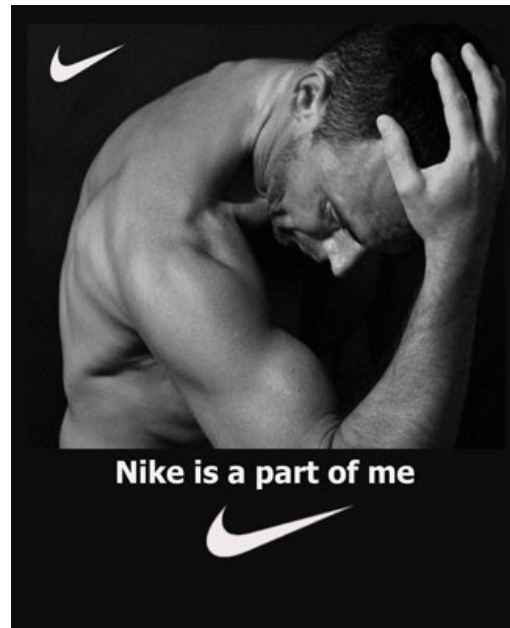## EXPERIMENTAL MATERIALS IN STUDY 1 & 2

FIGURE 2

BRAND PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD AS A FUNCTION OF VALUE PRIMING, BRAND

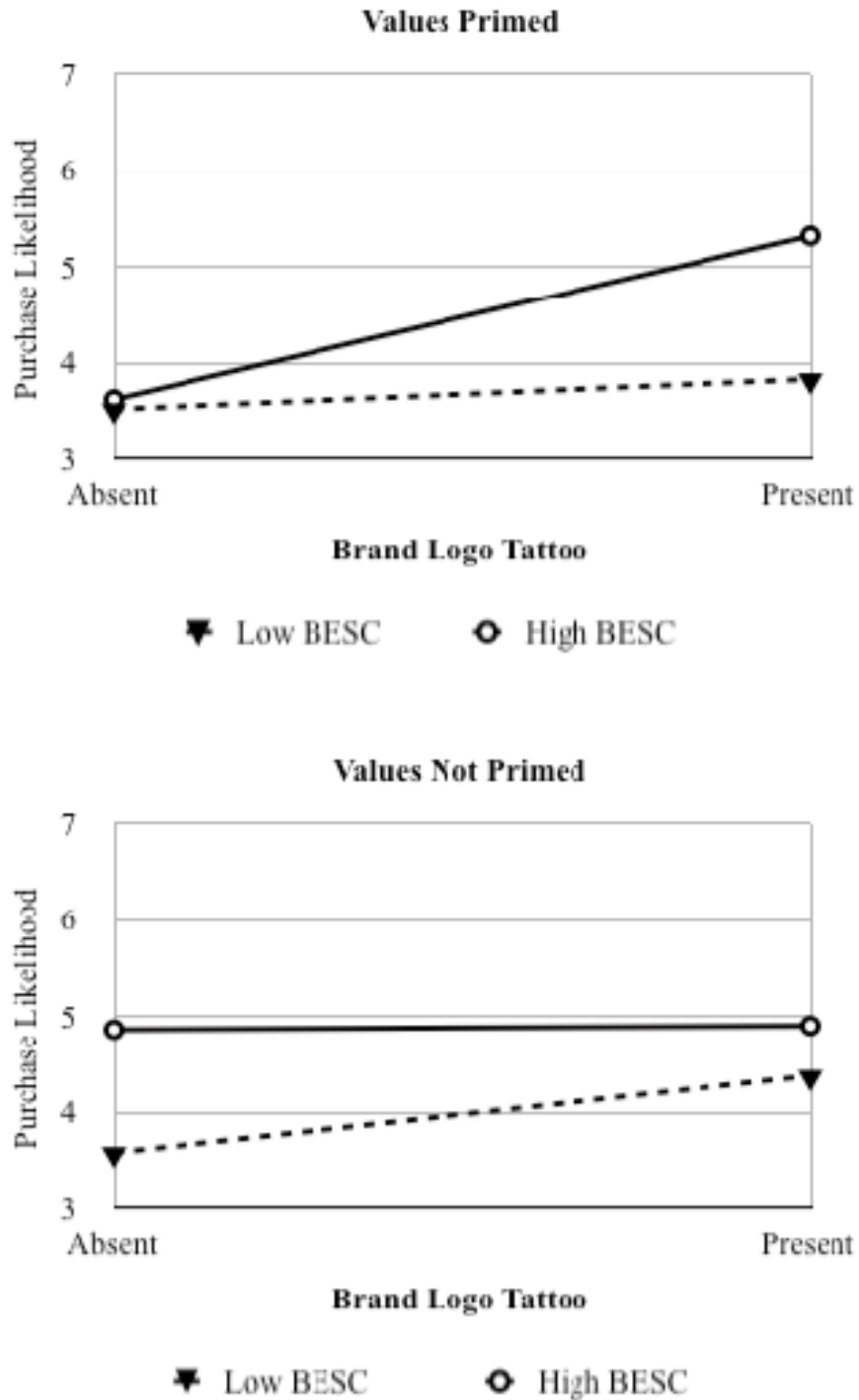TATTOO PRESENCE AND LEVEL OF BESC (STUDY 1)

FIGURE 3

BRAND PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD AS A FUNCTION OF SELF-MONITORING, BRAND

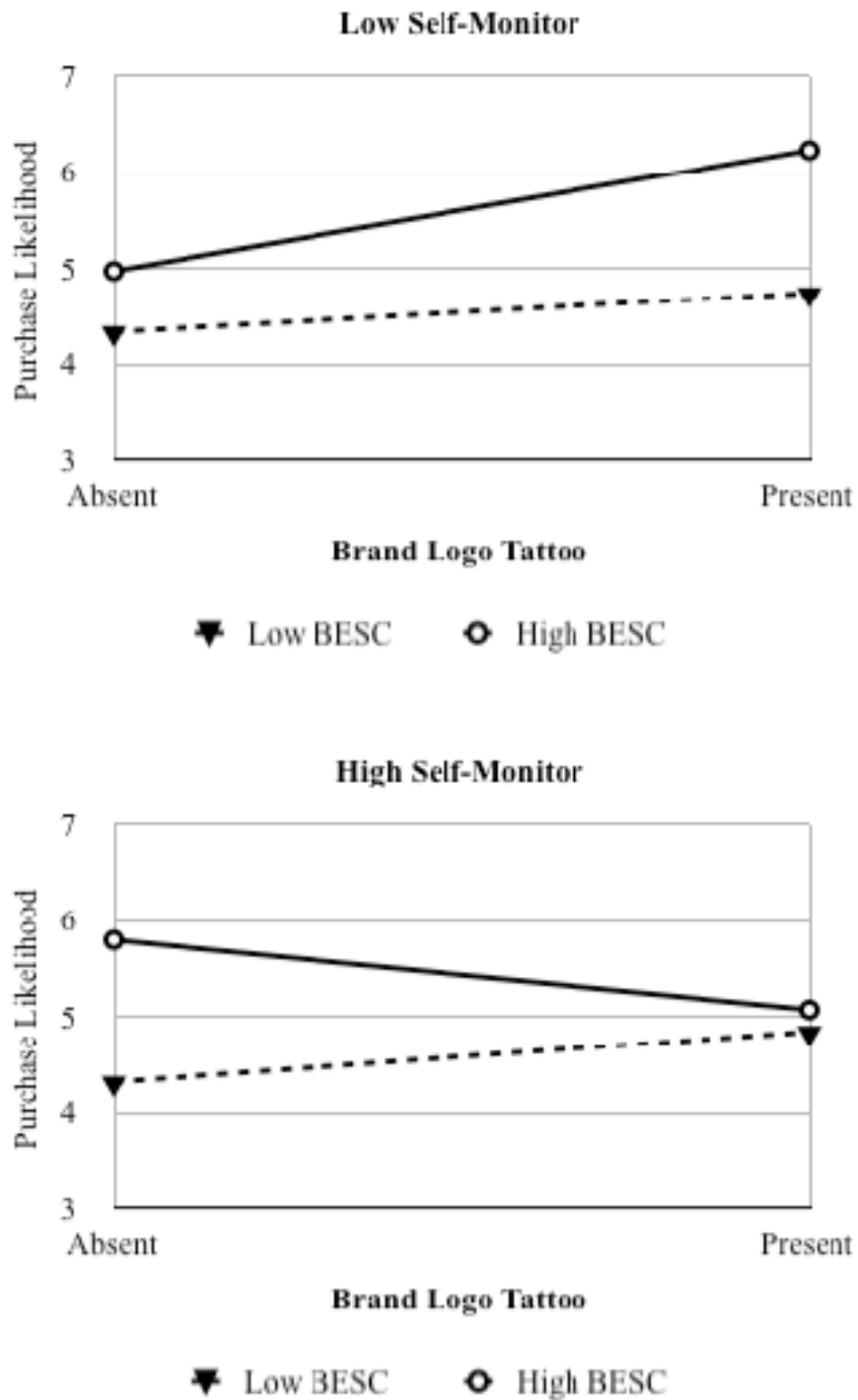TATTOO PRESENCE AND LEVEL OF BESC (STUDY 2)

FIGURE 4

IMPRESSIONS ABOUT A STRANGER AS A FUNCTION OF SELF-MONITORING,

BRAND CONDITION AND LEVEL OF BESC (STUDY 3)

Low Self-Monitor

High Self-Monitor