**Attachment-Aversion (AA) model of customer-brand relationships ✰**

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**✰**The authors thank Aaron Ahuvia, Rajeev Batra, Allison Johnson, Deborah MacInnis, Vanessa Patrick and Gratiana Pol for their very helpful comments on previous versions of this article. They also thank Yeyi Liu and Gunjan Bhardwaj for their help in data collection and analyses.

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**Abstract**

The present paper proposes a customer-brand relationships model and empirically tests the following: (1) *brand-self distance and brand prominence* as representing customers’ attachment-aversion relationships (AA Relationships) with a brand, (2) key distinguishing differences between the AA Relationships measure and other alternative relationship measures (i.e., brand attachment, emotional valence and brand attitude strength) based on a set of dependent variables, (3) three key determinants of the AA Relationships and the underlying process between the AA Relationships and behavioral intentions and actual brand behaviors, and (4) customer age as moderating the customer-brand relationships specified in the nomological model of the AA Relationships. The results offer strong support for the unique and important contribution of the AA Relationships model as representing consumers' relationship valence with a brand and its salience.

*Keywords:* Attachment; Aversion; Customer-brand relationships; Pro-brand behaviors; Anti-brand behaviors

Since Fournier’s (1998) seminal anthropomorphic view of customer-brand relationships (as a conceptual foundation for the form and dynamics of customer-brand interactions), a research stream (Ahuvia, 2005; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005) building on and extending Fournier’s work has emerged in the marketing literature, including recent theoretical research that examined the similarity between person perception and brand perception (Fournier, & Alvarez, 2012; Keller, 2012; Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012; MacInnis, 2012). Of particular interest is the emergence of two closely related constructs from the recent work on customer-brand relationships: brand attachment (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005) and brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Batra et al., 2012). Both constructs describe *strong* and *positive* emotions toward a brand. While these two constructs are useful in their own right, still-pressing is the need to theoretically establish and empirically test a unifying *conceptual model* of customer-brand relationships that identifies determinants of the relationship *valence* and *salience*, the process of how the relationship valence and salience influence customers’ behavioral responses to a brand, and the types of behaviors that such relationship valence and salience are particularly strong in predicting.

While building on the previous work on brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998), brand attachment (Park et al., 2010) and brand love (Batra et al., 2012), the present paper proposes and empirically tests the *conceptual model* of customer-brand relationships by specifically addressing the following that constitutes the unique contribution of the present paper:

* Proposing that one’s perceived distance of a brand from one’s self and the perceived accessibility of the brand memories—called perceived *brand-self distance and brand prominence*, respectively—represents customers’ attachment-aversion relationships (AA Relationships) with a brand covering the entire range of relationship *valence* and *salience*. The AA Relationship is thus a higher order latent construct based on brand-self distance and brand prominence;
* Empirically examining the psychometric properties and diagnostic information of the AA Relationships (*brand-self distance and brand prominence*) measure;
* Identifying and testing key distinguishing differences between the AA Relationships measure and other alternative relationship measures (i.e**.,** brand attachment, emotional valence and brand attitude strength) based on a set of dependent variables (i.e., psychological consequences of feeling close to a brand, a brand’s mind and heart share, and behavioral intentions and actual behaviors that vary in their level of difficulty to enact);
* Identifying and testing empirically the determinants (i.e., enticing/annoying-the-self, enabling/disabling-the-self, and enriching/impoverishing-the-self benefits/liabilities) of the AA Relationships and the underlying process (i.e., motivational strength) between the AA Relationships and behavioral intentions and actual brand behaviors, and in so doing, empirically testing the nomological model (see Figure 1) of the AA Relationships; and finally;
* Examining if customer age (i.e., older versus younger customers) moderates the customer-brand relationships specified in the nomological model of the AA Relationships (Figure 1).

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Figure 1 here

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This paper first reviews the self-based customer-brand relationships literature, and then conceptualizes the AA Relationships as a theoretical basis for customer-brand relationships. Afterward, the paper presents hypotheses for the nomological model of the AA Relationships, reports its results, and discusses its implications for management practice and future research.

**Theory review**

*Theoretical basis for self-based customer-brand relationships*

The psychological self is an individualized unique identity of a person. Its schema contains *affective* and*cognitive* memories about one’s past and present experiences as well as one’s future plans and goals (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These memories are also structured as an ongoing narrative (Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004). The present paper develops its theoretical view of the customer-brand relationship based on the concept of the self since the self is one’s center of the universe and determines how information is processed and behaviors are enacted (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Among several theories (e.g., close relationship research; Clark & Reis, 1988) supporting the critical role of self-relevance in the customer-brand relationship, of particular importance is Aron and Aron’s (1986) self-expansion model. According to the model, people are motivated to enter and maintain close relationships to expand their *self* by including resources, perspectives, and characteristics of the *other* in the self that enhance their ability to accomplish their goals. This in turn leads to a cognitive reorganization that makes the other’s resources, perspectives, and identities seem as if they were one’s own. The principle is that by including the other in the self, the person acts and thinks as if some or all aspects of the other are partially the person’s own, thus expanding the self. In other words, the other is treated as the self or “including others in the self” (Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991, p. 19). Different theories support this view (see Aron et al. (1991) for a comprehensive review). Close relationships between the self and others have been expressed in the past in terms of the overlap between the two (Aron et al., 1991; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). The greater the overlap, the closer and more positive the relationship is. The authors of brand attachment (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005) and brand love (Batra et al., 2012) air the same view in their work. Finally, this view of the customer-brand relationships is also consistent with that of consumer culture theory (CCT) proposed by Arnould and Thompson (2005) who argue that consumers use brands to construct their sense of identity.

While the above brand-self overlap view focuses on the development of *strong* and *positive* relationships with a brand**,** it does not represent the brand-self distance concept. The degree of the brand-self overlap is different from the brand-self distance conceptually and measurement-wise because it does not include *strong* and *negative* relationships with a brand (e.g., see White, Breazeale, and Webster (2012) for the importance of brand avoidance). In fact, many consumers’ brand relationships are negative for various reasons, including a brand’s failure to meet individual needs (e.g., poor quality products), its association with a particular undesirable group (White & Dahl, 2007), or the inconsistency of brand image, values, or morals with those of consumers (Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009). Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) use the example of the National Rifle Association (NRA) to argue that consumers may also have deep-seated negative affect for a brand because what the brand stands for is in conflict with consumers’ values or concept of self. Also, a previously positive consumer-brand relationship can transform into a strongly negative relationship characterized by anti-brand behaviors (Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011) or brand enmity described by Fournier (1998) as an “intensely involving relationship characterized by negative affect and desire to avoid or inflict pain on the other” (p. 362). This present paper posits that when the self and a brand are very far from each other (i.e., far brand-self distance), the relationship is negative.

Our self-based customer-brand relationship theory assumes three key elements: (1) resources owned by a brand are positively (negatively) valenced when they are directly relevant to one’s goal (fear) of self-expansion (self-contraction); (2) acquiring positively valenced resources is accompanied by pleasure, further reinforcing consumers’ approach motivation while acquiring negatively valenced resources is accompanied by pain, causing avoidance motivation (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Strong & Aron, 2006); and (3) these resources are of many different types such as experiential (sensory), functional, and symbolic resources (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986).

*Conceptualizing the attachment-aversion (AA) relationships*

It follows that one will be attached and feel close to a brand when the brand is perceived as a means for self-expansion. This relationship is *brand* *attachment*. When a brand is perceived as a threat for self-contraction, one will be averse to the brand and feel distant from it. This relationship is *brand* *aversion*. Brand attachment and brand aversion represent opposite ends of the relationship spectrum at any point in time, while the transition from one end to the other is also possible over time (Johnson et al., 2011). According to research on intergroup conflict, relationships perceived as close are accompanied with feelings of love, loyalty, commitment, solidarity, brotherhood and sacrifice (Brewer, 1999), whereas relationships with partners or groups removed or far from the self are accompanied by feelings of contempt, frustration, hatred, and aggression (Mallick & McCandless, 1966). The relationship in the middle between the two ends is *brand indifference*. In this case, the relationship is neutral and lacks any motivational force for or against a brand. These AA Relationships have two key conceptual components (properties): the degree of *brand-self distance* and *brand prominence* (see Figure 1).

*Brand-self distance* Several previous works examine the role of self-concept connection on consumers (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Thomson et al., 2005), which is the extent to which brands reflect individuals’ self-concepts (i.e., “me-ness” of a brand). Being somewhat related to self-concept connection, *brand*-*self* distance is operationally defined as the perceived distance between a brand and the self. It refers to the valence of the relationship (a close relationship being positive while a distant/far relationship being negative). It is determined by the self-relevance (and not limited to self-concept only) of brand memory. When one does not have highly self-relevant cognitive and affective (personally meaningful) memories about a brand, one will not perceive a close brand-self relationship, but instead will be indifferent to the brand. If, however, brand memories are highly relevant to one’s self, one will feel closer to or farther from a brand than the indifference point, depending on the valence of the memories.

*Brand prominence* When personally relevant cognitive and affective memories about a brand are not highly accessible, one may not perceive the relationship with the brand as psychologically close or far as would be the case when memories are highly accessible (Collins, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998). In other words, the perceived brand-self distance is not as psychologically salient when memories are not as readily accessible as when they are. *Brand* *prominence* is operationally defined as the perceived memory accessibility of a brand to an individual.

For example, a brand which is highly self-relevant for one reason (e.g., making one’s life functionally convenient) may not be as accessible in memory as another brand which is equally self-relevant but highly accessible in memory for a different and more salient reason (e.g., self-identity-related). Thus, how easy and frequently brand thoughts are brought to mind influences the salience of the brand-self relationship. As Markus and Nurius (1986) note, some conceptions of the self such as “core” self are easily accessible while others vary in their accessibility, depending on the individual’s affective or motivational state (p. 957). Thus, in addition to perceived distance, the salience of that distance—termed *brand* *prominence*—facilitates the full representation of one’s AA Relationships with the brand.

It should be noted that brand-self distance and brand prominence are conceptually distinct and can be independent of each other. For example, while attachment and aversion are mirror-opposites on perceived brand-self distance, they both should be high in brand prominence; in distinction, indifferent relationships are characterized by low brand prominence and thus brand prominence forms a U-shape relationship over attachment-indifference-aversion. The two factors thus do not necessarily co-vary together. In addition, brand prominence adds very important diagnostic information regarding the psychological distance between a brand and the self. First, brand prominence offers important diagnostic information about the salience of the perceived distance. The more salient the perceived distance from a brand is to a consumer, the more prominent brand-related thoughts are. Second, while two individuals may indicate a similarly neutral stance in their self-distance from a brand, they may have very different psychological relationships with it. For one individual, being neutral represents the absence of positive and negative thoughts about a brand (i.e., indifference about the brand). For another individual, the neutral stance may represent his/her ambivalence resulting from mixed positive and negative thoughts about a brand (Priester & Petty, 2001), with the prominence of thoughts being higher in the latter case than in the former.

**Hypotheses development**

Considering that alternative models for representing customer-brand relationships exist, it is important to compare these models on a set of dependent variables that can help assess these models’ relative performance. The present study compares three alternative models – (1) brand attachment, (2) emotional valence, and (3) brand attitude strength - with the AA Relationships model based on a set of dependent variables. The first set of dependent variables pertains to psychological consequences of the close customer-brand relationship. The second and third sets of dependent variables include the mind and heart share of a brand, customers’ relationship motivational strength, and intentions to engage in brand behaviors of varying difficulty as well as actual behaviors.

*The AA Relationships and the psychological consequences of feeling close to a brand* According to prior research (Aron et al., 1991; Fournier, 1998), one’s feeling of closeness makes one also share positive (negative) feelings from the fortune (misfortune) of another person (in the present study’s case, a brand); this feeling of closeness also causes one to engage in external rather than internal attribution of blame when something goes wrong with the other (e.g., a brand). We expect the AA Relationships better predict the psychological consequences of feeling close to a brand (such as feeling happy (sad) when good (bad) things happen to a brand, and attribution of blame when something goes wrong with a brand) than other previous models. This expectation is due to the critical differences between the AA Relationships and other models.

Specifically, other previous models about the brand-customer relationship differ from the AA Relationships in several important ways. Park et al.’s (2010) brand attachment does not measure the brand-self distance. Instead, it only measures the degree of overlap between a brand and the self. In addition, it measures the degree of overlap over the neutral-high range while the AA Relationships measure the entire range of distance (positive and negative). Therefore, we expect that brand attachment (Park et al., 2010) does not predict the psychological consequences as well as the AA Relationships. The brand love-hate relationship also has a critical limitation since the self is not necessarily involved in that relationship (i.e., self-reference is not the defining criteria of the love-hate relationship; see Batra et al., 2012). In contrast, self is inherently implied in the AA Relationships since brand-self distance is one of its key components and serves as an important basis for the brand attachment-aversion relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Park et al., 2010). One may love a brand without necessarily feeling a close personal connection. For example, one may love a consumer electronics brand, a chocolate brand, or the Mona Lisa painting because of its great performance for its price, its great taste, or her enigmatic smile but may not necessarily perceive a high degree of personal connection with these.

When one feels personally attached or close to (aversive to or distant from) a brand, such a feeling is likely to be accompanied by love (hate). Therefore, the AA Relationships necessarily include love (hate), but love (hate) does not necessarily involve the AA Relationships. Based on this reasoning, we expect that the former is weaker in motivational strength to influence the psychological consequences of one’s close feeling than the latter. This leads to the following:

**H1a.** The AA Relationships (brand-self distance and brand prominence together) predict the psychological consequences of close feeling more strongly than brand attachment or the emotional valence relationship measure of love-hate.

It also stands to reason, due to inherent self-implications of the AA Relationships, that AA Relationships will predict the psychological consequence variables of feeling close better than brand attitude strength. Brand attitude strength represents one’s confidence with one’s brand evaluation. The strength in brand attitudes is about a consumer’s judgment of the goodness or badness of the brand, not the strength of the brand-self relationship. Brand evaluations can be either positive or negative without self-implications (Park et al., 2010). Thus, the affect resulting from brand evaluations is “cold” (Cohen & Areni, 1991), while the affect associated with the AA Relationships is “hot” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). This difference in affect suggests that the AA relationships is stronger in motivational strength in influencing psychological consequences of close feeling than brand attitude strength. Therefore:

**H1b.** The AA Relationships (brand-self distance and brand prominence together) predict the psychological consequences of close feeling more strongly than brand attitude strength.

*The AA Relationships and brands’ mind and heart share* As noted earlier, one’s cognitive and affective memories about a brand serve as the basis for one’s AA Relationships with a brand. Accordingly, the AA Relationships should determine the amount of space that a brand captures in one’s heart and mind relative to competing brands. Since mind share is based on one’s cognitive evaluations (e.g., quality or value-based) of a brand, and heart share is based on one’s emotions and feelings about a brand (Pitta & Franzak, 2008), the present study posits that the AA Relationships capture both the heart and mind share of a brand. In contrast, brand attachment is neither expected to capture mind share nor heart share as well as the AA Relationships because of its limited ability to cover the entire range (both positive and negative) of the relationship space. In addition,the love-hate-based emotional valence is more likely to reflect one’s affective relationship with a brand. That is, while both predict the heart share of a brand equally well, the AA Relationships predict the evaluation-based (cognitive) mind share better than the love-hate-based emotional valence. Thus:

**H2a.** The AA Relationships (brand-self distance and brand prominence together) predict a brand’s mind share more strongly than brand attachment or the emotional valence measure.

While the AA Relationships not only capture one’s cognitive evaluations but also one’s emotions toward or against a brand, the basis for brand attitude strength evaluations is primarily cognitive (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Therefore, while the present study expects brand attitude strength to predict a brand’s cognition-based mind share as well as the AA Relationships do, the latter will predict a brand’s emotion-based heart share better than the former. Formally:

**H2b.** The AA Relationships (brand-self distance and brand prominence together) predict a brand’s heart share more strongly than brand attachment or brand attitude strength.

*Three determinants of the AA Relationships*

A brand possesses many different functions, concepts, and characteristics (Reimann & Aron, 2009), which can be perceived as brand assets (liabilities) from the consumers’ perspective when the brand helps (hinders) consumers achieve their goals. And to the extent that a brand helps (hinders) consumers to achieve their goals, it becomes closer to (distant from) the self.

The present study proposes three different assets (liabilities) a brand may possess (see Figure 1). They are (1) enticing (annoying)-the-self, (2) enabling (disabling)-the-self, and (3) enriching (impoverishing)-the-self, or the “*3 Es*,” in short (Park, MacInnis, and Priester 2006). These three assets (liabilities) closely resemble those articulated by Park et al. (1986): experiential (hedonic), functional, and symbolic benefits. Richins (1994) similarly identified four different assets or values a brand may possess: (1) utilitarian value (functional usefulness), (2) enjoyment (a brand’s capacity to provide pleasure), (3) representation of interpersonal ties (symbolic representations or reminders of interpersonal ties, such as gifts from loved ones), and (4) identity and self-expression (expressing or reinforcing a sense of self, e.g., expressing personal values). Richins’ asset of utilitarian value corresponds to the “enabling-the-self” (functional) asset and her enjoyment asset fits the “enticing-the-self” asset. Finally, the last two of Richins’ assets are included in the “enriching-the-self” asset. In contrast to Park et al.’s (1986) and Richins’ (1994) noted brand assets, the 3Es in this present research are explicitly concerned with how each brand’s asset or liability relates to the customer’s own self (personally meaningful and beneficial). This distinction is important because a brand can offer functional or symbolic benefits that may not be understood as pertaining to one’s self.

*Enticing (annoying)-the-self via aesthetically/hedonically (dis)pleasing experiences* Experiential benefits relate to sensory (hedonic) pleasures (e.g., the taste of Godiva chocolate) or aesthetic pleasures (e.g., the friendly design of the Volkswagen Beetle) experienced from a brand. Such gratification (pain) can be delivered through any combination of sensory experiences—visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, olfactory, thermal, and/or kinesthetic. Krishna (2012) in her integrative review paper on the effect of senses on one’s perception, judgment, and behavior eloquently documents the powerful effects of sensory pleasure (displeasure) on consumers’ psychology. The psychological distance from a brand is short when a customer appreciates its sensorial or aesthetically pleasing qualities. Starbucks’ ability to build a brand that evokes pleasure from multiple sensory modalities (e.g., hot, strong tasting coffee with a pleasant aroma/a visually and aurally pleasing retail atmosphere allowing for relaxation and self-indulgence) exemplifies a brand that reduces the psychological distance through aesthetic/hedonic elements. The opposite is also true. When a brand has sensorial or aesthetically displeasing qualities, the psychological distance is far.

*Enabling (disabling)-the-self via product and service performance* The psychological distance between the self and a brand is also influenced by the extent to which a brand creates a sense of an efficacious and capable self, enabling a consumer to exert control over his or her environment so as to approach desired goals and avoid undesired ones. Creating a sense of efficacy is not only contingent on consistent and reliable product performance but also on its direct implications on one’s own assessment of the self. Psychological distance has been shown to be short when brands make individuals feel autonomous and in control of their selves (Giles & Maltby, 2004). For example, Swiss Army Knives’ versatile applications or Glock’s endurance in adverse conditions contribute to consumers’ close relationship with the brands by fostering in consumers a sense of mastery over their environment. This leads to a higher level of attachment. The opposite is also true. When a brand interferes with (or hinders one from) being efficient and attaining an able self, one is likely to be psychologically distant (aversive) to it.

*Enriching (impoverishing)-the-self via self-identity and self-expression* Some brands take on symbolic meaning, communicating to the self and others who one was, is, or wants to be (Belk, 1988). The critical aspect of the enriching-the-self asset is to please the spiritual self by symbolically representing one’s past, present, or ideal future self internally and/or externally (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). One’s identity when represented by brands can be privately appreciated and enjoyed or publicly expressed to the outside world (Richins, 1994). For example, place brands like one’s city, state, country of origin promote self-identity and maintain a coherent sense of self over time. Also, brands like Habitat for Humanity help consumers define themselves as concerned citizens communicating to others their environmental values. Other brands like Rolex or Giorgio Armani reflect one’s aspirations, hopes and ideal future self. In short, when a brand represents internally one’s coherent self or expresses externally one’s current or desired self, or reinforces one’s values or principles, it offers symbolic pleasure, thus enriching the self and leading to a higher level of attachment. However, when a brand impoverishes oneself by representing an identity that one is strongly opposed to or against, it becomes a target of one’s aversive reactions (Johnson et al., 2011), since, as noted earlier, consumers may also have deep-seated negative affect for a brand (e.g., the NRA).

The present study notes that although the 3Es described above all tap the relationship between a brand’s resources and the self, this does not necessarily mean that consumers automatically map them onto the brand-self distance. Not all self-relevant benefits are directly reflected in the brand-self distance. However, because of the three Es’ strong relevance to consumers’ self-related needs, each of the 3Es will have a positive influence on the AA Relationships primarily through its impact on the brand-self distance.1 Thus:

**H3a.** Each of the 3Es (enticing/annoying, enabling/disabling and enriching/impoverishing-the-self) significantly predicts the AA Relationships.

While each of the three brand assets (liabilities) is influential, it stands to reason that they differ from each other in their respective contribution to consumers’ AA Relationships with the brand. The enabling-the-self asset is important in the sense that the opposite (disabling-the-self liability) furthers the distance between the self and a brand. However, compared to the enriching-the-self asset, the enabling-the-self asset’s presence may not have as strong an impact on psychological distance because functional pleasure is not as strong in intensity and in sustainability as spiritual pleasure. Consumers are likely to get used to functional pleasure over time and take it for granted due to habituation of arousal reactions (Sharpless & Jasper, 1956). In contrast, as Johnson et al. (2011) indicated, when a brand has relevance to the goal of identity construction (i.e., presence of enriching-the-self resources), the brand’s self-relationship tends to be strong by having a significant impact on a person’s self-definition and emotional wellbeing. Besides, one’s own self-identity and well-being is frequently challenged in daily life and one is also frequently reminded of one’s weaknesses in reaching the desired or ideal self (e.g., “Just Do It!” by Nike). As a result, one becomes highly sensitive to the protection of the actual self and the need to improve oneself to become closer to the desired or ideal self. The present research also expects that the enticing-the-self asset is not as powerful as the enriching-the-self asset. Clearly, the annoying-the-self liability would cause greater psychological distance, and its powerful effects have also been richly documented (Krishna, 2012). However, the presence of the enticing-the-self asset may not have the same sustaining power as the enriching-the-self asset due to habituation to sensory cues (Phan et al., 2003; Sharpless & Jasper, 1956).Therefore:

**H3b.** Of the 3Es, the enriching (impoverishing)-the-self brand asset (liability) most strongly predicts the AA Relationships.

*The AA Relationships and behavioral intention/actual behavior hierarchy* Intentions to enact pro-or anti-brand behaviors vary, depending on the level of difficulty in performing such behaviors (*behavioral intention hierarchy*) (Park et al., 2010). Examining behavioral intentions and behaviors at varying levels of difficulty is important considering that brand managers would like their customers to enact various difficult-to-perform behaviors on behalf of their brands, in addition to purchase behaviors. Besides, examining multiple behavioral intentions and behaviors varying in the level of difficulty to enact offers additional information about one model’s prediction power relative to other models. Since the AA Relationships are motivational (Aron & Aron, 1986), the present study expects them to be related directly to the strength of the approach-avoidance motivation toward or against a brand (please see Figure 1). The stronger the attachment (aversion), the greater the willingness to enact difficult-to-perform pro-brand (anti-brand) behaviors becomes. As noted by Johnson et al. (2011), when a brand poses a threat to consumers’ self-identity, they may engage in different types of difficult-to-perform anti-brand behaviors (e.g., being the harshest critic of a brand). For the reasons noted earlier (brand attachment being a measure of overlap, as opposed to a measure of brand-self distance and the limited measure of the relationship range) we do not expect that the brand attachment measure predicts the willingness to enact difficult-to-perform pro-brand (anti-brand) behaviors as well as the AA Relationships. Brand attitude strength and the emotional valence measure of love-hate lack self-implications and thus do not have the same motivational strength as the AA Relationships. This leads to:

**H4a.** The AA Relationships predict consumers’ intentions to engage in difficult-to-enact pro- or anti-brand behaviors better than brand attachment, brand attitude strength or the emotional valence measure.

As intentions to perform behaviors vary, depending on the difficulty to enact them, so do actual behaviors in their level of enactment difficulty (*behavior hierarchy*). While behavioral intentions may be measured based on a wide range of possible but not frequently occurring behaviors, actual behaviors cannot, however, be measured based on the same set of behaviors, because some of these behaviors used for the behavioral intentions measure may not or only rarely occur in reality (e.g., willing to buy a brand despite its price increase by 20 percent). There is therefore a need to rely on a different set of behaviors that vary in their level of difficulty. The present paper identifies three types of behaviors that not only occur in reality but also vary in their level of difficulty to perform: (1) whether consumers buy a brand or not, termed *brand purchase*, (2) the share of the purchase of a brand relative to all other competing brands, termed *brand* *purchase* *share*, and (3) the share of the purchase of a brand relative to all other products in substitutable categories, including other directly competing brands, termed *need* *share*. Simply buying or not buying a brand (e.g., Starbucks coffee) is easier than spending more money on a brand than on other competing brands. In turn, spending more money on a brand than other competing brands (e.g., Starbucks coffee vs. Seattle’s Best, Maxwell House, and other coffee brands) is easier than spending more money on a brand than on brands in other substitutable product categories (e.g., Starbucks coffee vs. tea, water, soda, etc. brands), including competing brands in the same product category. It follows that the stronger the brand attachment or aversion, the more likely the enactment of difficult-to-perform behaviors. Therefore:

**H4b.** The AA Relationships predict consumers’ difficult-to-enact behaviors better than brand attachment, brand attitude strength or the emotional valence measure.

*Motivational strength as mediator between the AA Relationships and behavioral intention/actual behavior hierarchy* As noted earlier, a brand possesses self-expanding assets or self-contracting liabilities, and so consumers’ brand attachment or aversion is inherently motivational (approach-avoidance motivation) due to those self-implications (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Reimann & Aron, 2009). Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, the present study predicts the following:

**H5.** Motivational strength mediates the relationship between the AA Relationships and consumers’ behavioral intentions and actual behaviors.

*Customer age as moderator in the AA Relationships* While the above mediation of motivational strength accounts for the process underlying the effects of the AA Relationships on consumers’ behavioral intentions and behaviors, the present study also posits that the entire nomological model (Figure 1) is moderated by the age difference among customers. Prior research suggests that when mortality is salient, people form stronger emotional connections to brands (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Wong, 2009). We do not, however, propose that younger consumers do not develop as strong connections to brands as older consumers. In fact, as suggested by Fournier (1998), consumer-brand relationships may differ between older and younger consumers for a variety of reasons. Younger consumers may develop stronger brand connections than older consumers, depending on the nature of brands (e.g., iPhone, iPad, Versace, or Louis Vuitton). However, assuming that both younger and older consumers have already developed an on-going relationship (both are brand users) with a brand, we predict for the reasons discussed below that older consumers reveal a shorter brand-self distance than younger consumers.

We expect that older consumers reveal greater sensitivity to the enriching-the-self asset (pleasing the spiritual self through the internal representation of the coherent self or external expression of the actual or desired self) than younger consumers. According to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995; Charles & Carstensen, 2010), older consumers may reveal increased preferences for and investment in emotion-related goals when the future is perceived as limited compared to younger consumers. Since the achievement of emotionally meaningful goals becomes more important as people age (Yoon, Cole, & Lee, 2009), it would seem that older consumers have greater desire to relate the enriching-the-self asset of a brand to themselves than younger consumers, thereby reducing the distance between a brand and the self. Older consumers are thus more likely to maximize emotionally meaningful experiences by developing closer relationships with their existing network than creating new relationships with others in the same way as they are more reluctant to try new products than younger consumers (Yoon & Cole, 2008). In addition, older consumers may not be as picky or discriminating as younger consumers regarding the relationship quality as younger consumers. The former in fact may be more agreeable (see McCrae et al., 1999 for indirect evidence) with the relationship quality, more forgiving of the partner (Cheng & Yim, 2008), and are less likely to argue with others (Birditt, Fingerman, & Almeida, 2005) than the latter. Therefore, we expect that the spiritual self- pleasing benefits (e.g., helping one maintain a coherent sense of self or express one’s value, principle or aspiration to others, etc.) are much more readily appreciated by older consumers than by younger consumers. This would, in turn, lead to a shorter brand-self distance for older consumers than for younger consumers, particularly when they interact with a brand (e.g., grocery stores) on a regular basis.

On the other hand, younger consumers may be more emotionally responsive to sensory (e.g., visual or auditory) appeals than older consumers. Holbrook and Schindler (1994) found an inverted U-shaped relation between song-specific age and musical preference. Maximum musical preferences occurred to hits that were popular when respondents were 23.47 years old. Respondents’ preferences then steadily declined from that age on. In addition, they suggested that this U-shaped pattern may also exist for other hedonic products or experiences. Others (McCrae et al., 1999) also found that younger people respond to aesthetics more readily than older people. From these findings we infer that older consumers are less emotionally responsive to enticing-the-self benefits (sensory gratification) than younger consumers.

As far as the enabling-the-self asset of a brand is concerned (e.g., convenience of shopping or quality of products sold in a store), it is difficult to predict a priori which consumers would be more responsive to enabling-the-self asset. In the absence of any strong reasons to argue for one group over another, we expect that older and younger consumers do not differ from each other in the impact of this asset on the brand-self distance. Since we earlier predicted that the impact of the enriching-the-self asset of a brand is stronger on the brand-self distance than the other two assets (H3b), we expect that older consumers develop a shorter brand-self distance than younger consumers, thus leading to a greater level of brand attachment. Their stronger attachment will then influence their behaviors accordingly through their enhanced motivational strength. Thus:

**H6.** Older customers reveal stronger positive relationships between a) the 3Es and the AA Relationships, b) the AA Relationships and motivational strength, and c) motivational strength and behaviors than younger customers.

We tested our hypotheses in three studies, two lab experiments and one field study.2

**Study 1**

Study 1 develops a scale to measure the AA Relationships and then tests whether the AA Relationships are best represented by both brand-self distance and brand prominence together as sub-factors of the AA Relationships, and whether the AA Relationships predict psychological consequences of close feeling better than other alternative models (Hypotheses 1a and 1b).

*Method*

*Participants and design* 200 undergraduate students of a university in Great Britain completed a paper and pencil questionnaire. Study 1 was in a group setting and used Manchester United Football Club as the focal brand based on a pretest (*n* = 51) indicating that people’s relationship with it varied widely in valence.

To measure the AA Relationships, Study 1 developed five items mapping the conceptual definition of the brand-self distance of the AA Relationships. Study 1 developed this pool of items by modifying Park et al.’s (2010) uni-polar attachment scale and (1) changing it to a bi-polar scale and (2) adapting items of their brand-self connection scale to better reflect the distance concept between a brand and the self. On the basis of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results Study 1 selected the two following 11-point scale items that were anchored by: (1) = “Manchester United is far away from me and who I am”, (11) = “Manchester United is very close to me and who I am,” and (1) = “I am personally disconnected from Manchester United” to (11) = “I am personally connected to Manchester United” (*r* = .88). These two items attempted to capture the relationships between three different types of a brand’s benefits and the self (i.e., enticing-the-self, enabling-the-self, and enriching-the-self benefits).

Before finalizing the two items for perceived brand-self distance, Study 1 tested if they fully reflected one’s relationship valence. Pretest results (*n* = 225) confirmed that the farther a brand is from the self (closer to the self), the more negatively (positively) valenced the relationship is, based on a battery of eleven relationship measures (e.g., (-4) = “The brand is like an enemy to me” to (4) = “The brand is like a friend to me”). Detailed results of this pretest can be found in the Appendix.

For brand prominence the present paper used the following two items: “To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?” and (2) “To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United come to mind so naturally and instantly that you don’t have much control over them?” (*r* = .93), anchored by (1) = “not at all” and (11) = “completely.” These two prominence items captured the accessibility and frequency of brand thoughts. Study 1 also measured brand prominence again, this time specifying the valence of thoughts and feelings (e.g., “To what extent are your *negative* thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?” and “To what extent do your *negative* thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United come to you so naturally and instantly that you don’t have much control over them?” (*r* = .91), anchored by (1) = “not at all” and (11) = “completely”). Since the brand-self distance reflects the valence of the relationship and the brand prominence reflects the salience of the valence, there was no evidence that specifying the valence of thoughts and feelings in brand prominence again was necessary. Nevertheless, Study 1 used these additional measures of brand prominence to examine its diagnostic information (to distinguish brand indifference from brand ambivalence).

Brand attachment was measured with Park et al.’s (2010) four-item attachment scale; “To what extent is Manchester United part of you and who you are?”, “To what extent do you feel that you are personally connected to Manchester United?”, “To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?”, “To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United come to you naturally and instantly?” (α = .90), anchored by (1) = “not at all” and (11) = “completely.” While brand-self distance of the AA Relationships is substantially different from brand-self connection of Park et al.'s (2010) brand attachment conceptually and measurement-wise, brand prominence was basically the same between the two. The brand prominence measure of the present paper and Park et al.’s (2010) brand prominence measure only differ in the second item. Considering that both items were equally effective in reflecting brand prominence (see Park et al., 2010, Table 1), we consider them to be the same measure of brand prominence.3 Brand attitude strength was measured as a single-order factor reflecting the multiplicative product of attitude valence weighted by the confidence/certainty with which this attitude is held (Park et al., 2010). Attitude valence was measured with three items (α = .89), indicating the extent to which participants viewed the brand as (5) = “good” versus (-5) = “bad,” (5) = “favorable” versus (-5) “unfavorable,” and (5) = “positive” versus (-5) = “negative.” Attitude confidence was measured with two items; “How confident are you about your thoughts and feelings about Manchester United?” anchored by (1) = “not at all confident” to (11) = “extremely confident” and “How certain are you about your thoughts and feelings about Manchester United?” anchored by (1) = “not at all certain” to (11) = “extremely certain” (α = .97). The emotional valence relationship measure was: (1) = "I deeply hate Manchester United” to (11) = “I deeply love Manchester United.”

The psychological consequence variables of close feeling (i.e., sharing positive (negative) feelings from the fortune (misfortune) of the brand and external rather than internal attribution of blame) were measured with “To what extent do you feel happy when good things happen to Manchester United?”, “To what extent do you feel sad when bad things happen to Manchester United?” (α = .89) and “To what extent do you think that when something goes wrong with Manchester United, it does not reflect its true quality?” anchored by (1) = “not at all” to (11) = “completely.” Finally, to test whether or not brand-self distance and brand prominence together reflect participants’ own understanding of brand attachment-aversion, participants were asked to indicate their brand attachment-aversion with the following measure: (1) = "I am strongly averse to Manchester United” to (11) = “I am strongly attached to Manchester United.”

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Table 1 here

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*Results*

*Psychometric properties and diagnostic information of the AA Relationships measure* Study 1 conducted two CFAs on the items representing the AA Relationships with a brand, one in which the brand-self distance and the prominence factors were allowed to correlate (*r* = .78; χ2(1) = 15.08, *p* < .05) and one in which these two factors were forced to be perfectly correlated (χ2(2) = 512.77, *p* < .001). The chi-square change was significant (Δχ2(1) = 497.69, *p* < .001), showing that the two factor model with brand-self distance and brand prominence as two separate factors favors the AA Relationships more than a one-factor model.

Study 1 also conducted structural equation models (SEM) to test the impact of the AA Relationships represented by both components in a second order vis-à-vis first order (brand-self distance × brand prominence) on: (1) feeling happy (sad) when something good (bad) happens to the brand, (2) attribution of blame, and (3) participants’ own interpretation of the brand attachment-aversion relationship. While both revealed satisfactory fit, the fit of the second-order model was stronger than the fit of the first-order model for each dependent variable (Δχ2(2) = 110.32–184.55; all Δχ2, *p*s < .001).

In addition, SEMs were performed to test whether both components in a second order represent the AA Relationships better than the brand-self distance alone. The results (Table 1) show that the two-component solution of the AA Relationships predicts better the three psychological consequence variables of close feeling than the brand-self distance factor alone. Of particular interest is that the two-component solution of the AA Relationships (brand-self distance and brand prominence) predicts participants’ own report of brand attachment-aversion better than the brand-self distance factor alone.

Finally, Study 1 explored the diagnostic role of brand prominence for the measure of the AA Relationships. As noted before, Study 1 expected brand prominence to be high when people have either a strong positive or strong negative relationship with a brand, and brand prominence to be low when people are indifferent toward a brand. ANOVA results showed that brand prominence does not differ between high and low brand-self distance groups (*M*s = 7.21 versus 6.99; *t*(198) = .42*,* *p* = n.s.). That is, thoughts and feelings toward a brand are equally likely to come automatically and naturally to someone’s mind when he/she has a strongly positive or negative relationship with a brand.

Furthermore, brand prominence can help differentiate the AA Relationships people may have with a brand when indicating a neutral stance in their brand-self distance, such as brand indifference from brand ambivalence. The data gained from participants indicating a neutral brand-self distance was split into two groups: one high and one low in brand prominence. For the high group, both positive (*M* = 4.85) and negative (*M* = 4.12) brand thoughts and feelings were relatively high, indicating ambivalence (Priester & Petty, 2001), whereas the low group registered low positive (*M* = 1.64; *t*(33) = 4.76, *p* < .001) and negative brand thoughts (*M* = 1.71; *t*(33) = 5.07, *p* < .001), indicating indifference. Ambivalence indicates how indecisive or conflicted people are with respect to an object (Priester & Petty, 2001). An ANOVA showed that participants in the ambivalence group are less confident with and certain about their thoughts about the brand (“How confident are you about your thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United?” and “How certain are you about your thoughts and feelings toward Manchester United?”, *r* = .85) than participants in the indifference group (*M*s = 4.12 and 5.42; *t*(33) = 5.39, *p* <.05). Ambivalent participants are also less confident and certainthan participants attached (*M* = 8.15; *t*(137) = 7.30, *p* < .001) or averse to the brand (*M* = 7.66; *t*(31) = 5.13, *p* < .001).

*Testing hypotheses 1a and 1b* As shown in Table 1, the two-component based AA Relationships measure was a stronger predictor of the psychological consequence variables of close feeling than brand attachment4 and the emotional valence measure5 as well as brand attitude strength, supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b.The AA Relationships also predicted participants’ own report of brand attachment-aversion better than brand attachment, the emotional valence, and brand attitude strength measures.

*Discussion*

Study 1 supports a second-order representation of consumers’ AA Relationships with a brand with brand-self distance and brand prominence as separate factors. The AA Relationships based on both brand-self distance and brand prominence better captured the following than the brand-self distance factor alone: (1) feeling happy (sad) when good (bad) things happen to the brand, (2) external versus internal blame attribution, and (3) consumers’ own understanding of brand attachment-aversion. Study 1 also finds that the AA Relationships act as better predictors of the psychological consequence measures of close feeling and respondents’ own report of brand attachment-aversion than brand attachment, an emotional valence measure and brand attitude strength measure. Together, brand-self distance and brand prominence also differentiate between consumers’ brand ambivalence and brand indifference. Thus, brand prominence not only helps measure the salience of the brand-self distance, but also adds important diagnostic information.

**Study 2**

Study 2 assessed the ability of the AA Relationships compared to brand attachment, the emotional valence measure and brand attitude strength to capture both a brand’s heart and mind share (Hypotheses 2a and 2b). Moreover, Study 2 tested the 3Es’ absolute and relative predictions of the AA Relationships (Hypotheses 3a and 3b) and assessed whether the AA Relationships measure better predicts intentions to engage in difficult-to-enact pro-brand behaviors than brand attachment, the emotional valence measure, and brand attitude strength (Hypothesis 4a). Finally, Study 2 examined the nomological network of the AA Relationships and assessed the extent to which consumers’ relationship motivational strength explains the effects of the AA Relationships on intentions to engage in pro-brand behaviors of varying difficulty (Hypothesis 5).

*Method*

*Participants and design* 367 undergraduate students volunteered to take part in Study 2 as part of a regular course. Study 2 was conducted in a group setting and the focal brand was Apple iPhone.

The AA Relationships, brand attachment, emotional valence, brand attitude-strength, and the psychological consequence variables of the AA Relationships were measured identically to Study 1. To test a brand’s mind share, participants responded to two questions: “Assuming that you have a total of 100 points to assign product value (product quality) to all brands that you know, how many points do you assign to the Apple iPhone brand?” (*r* = .90 between product value and product quality). To test a brand’s heart share, participants responded to two questions: First, “Assuming that you have a total of 100 points of love available to assign to all brands that you know, how many points do you assign to the Apple iPhone brand relative to all other brands you know of? 100 points means the highest degree of love and 0 point means the highest degree of hate.” And, second, since prior research indicates that the closeness of interpersonal relationships can be mapped onto temperature measurement (e.g., Williams & Bargh, 2008; Ijzerman & Semin, 2009), participants also responded to the following question: “Assume that you have a total of 100 points available to describe the temperature (hot or cold) of your feelings toward all brands that you know. How many points would you assign to the Apple iPhone brand to indicate the warmth of your feelings toward the Apple iPhone brand relative to all other brands you know of? 100 points means very hot and 0 point means very cold” (*r* = .87).

Study 2 assessed the 3Es with a set of items chosen from a series of pretests to ensure they accurately corresponded to enriching, enticing, and enabling customers. For enriching brand customers, the final items were (1) “To what extent does the Apple iPhone express who you are as a person?”, (2) “To what extent does the Apple iPhone represent who you want to be?”, and (3) “To what extent does the Apple iPhone reinforce your deepest values?” (α = .95). For enticing brand customers, the items were (1) “To what extent is the Apple iPhone appealing to you?”, (2) ”To what extent is the Apple iPhone attractive to you?” (α = .94). Finally, for enabling brand customers, the items were: (1) “To what extent does the Apple iPhone help you manage problems in your daily life?” and (2) “To what extent is the Apple iPhone functionally satisfying to you?” (α = .93). All items were anchored by (1) = “not at all” to (11) = “completely.”

Motivational strength was measured for each of three relationship stages using bi-polar items: (1) approaching a brand (“How intensely do you want to approach (avoid) the Apple iPhone?”, (1) = “intensely avoid” to (11) = “intensely approach,” with the mid-point as “neutral”); (2) maintaining the current relationship (“How much do you want to maintain (terminate) your relationship with the Apple iPhone when it has a problem?”, (1) = “readily terminate” to (11) = “readily maintain,” mid-point = “neutral”); and (3) further strengthening the current relationship (“How much do you want to strengthen (destroy) the reputation of the Apple iPhone?”, (1) = “readily destroy” to (11) = “readily strengthen,” mid-point = “neutral”) (α = .90). Study 2 computed an average score of the three items and validated it with a one-item overall brand relationship motivational strength measure (“Please summarize your overall relationship with the Apple iPhone”, (1) = “avoid relationship” to (11) = “promote relationship,” mid-point = “maintain relationship”) (*r* = .85).

Participants completed two 11-point behavioral intention scale items for each of ten different brand behaviors. The first item measured the perceived difficulty of performing each behavior ((1) = “not at all” to (11) = “extremely”). The second item tested participants’ intentions to perform the behavior in the future ((1) = “not at all” to (11) = “very likely”). The four most difficult behaviors were “defending Apple iPhone when others speak negatively about it,” “participating in an Apple iPhone charity event donating time,” “participating in an Apple iPhone charity event donating money,” and “always buying the new model of Apple iPhone” with difficulty levels of 8.50, 8.24, 8.22, and 8.15, respectively. Moderately difficult behaviors included “switching from Apple iPhone to non-Apple smart phone,” “recommending Apple iPhone to other people,” and “forgiving Apple iPhone if it malfunctions” with difficulty levels of 5.31, 5.08, and 5.06, respectively. Easier to perform behaviors were “Waiting 4-6 weeks to buy Apple iPhone,” ”buying Apple iPhone,” and “visiting Apple iPhone website” with difficulty scores of 3.72, 3.25, and 2.46, respectively.6 The three levels of perceived enactment difficulty were significantly different from each other (*p* < .05) and behaviors as part of the three levels loaded on different factors in a CFA.

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Table 2 here

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*Results*

Two CFAs demonstrated that the chi-square change between the model in which the brand-self distance and prominence factors were allowed to correlate (*r* = .87; χ2(1) = 3.70, *p* < .05) and the model in which the two factors were forced to be perfectly correlated was significant (Δχ2(1) = 420.50, *p* < .001). In addition, the results again showed that the two factor model with brand-self distance and brand prominence as two separate factors favors the AA Relationships more than a one-factor model. Study 2 also confirmed that the second order factor model predicts the AA Relationships better than the first order factor model. The measurement results in Study 2 replicated Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

As hypothesized, the AA Relationships measure had a greater predictive power of a brand’s mind share (γ = .74 versus γ = .32; *z* = 24.71, *p* < .001) and heart share (γ = .95 versus γ = .37; *z* = 44.75, *p* < .001) than brand attachment (Table 2). SEM results further showed that the AA Relationships and the emotional valence measure predict a brand’s heart share equally well (γs = .89 and .78; *z* = 2.21, *p* = n.s.), while the AA Relationships predict the mind share of a brand better than the emotional valence measure (γs = .76 and .29; *z* = 21.58, *p* < .001). Also, AA Relationships and brand attitude-strength equally predict a brand’s mind share (γs = .70 versus .64; *z* = 3.86, *p* = n.s.) while AA Relationships predict a brand’s heart share better than brand attitude-strength (γs = .96 versus .21; *z* = 31.47, *p* < .001) (see Table 2). These results support Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Individual items of the 3Es cleanly loaded on their intended factors with low cross loadings. Study 2 simultaneously estimated the 3Es on the AA Relationships in a SEM, showing that the extent to which a brand is perceived as (1) enriching/impoverishing (γ = .53, *p* < .001), (2) enticing/annoying (γ = .31, *p* < .001), and (3) enabling/disabling the self (γ = .13, *p* < .001) predicts the AA Relationships, supporting Hypothesis 3a. Furthermore, the (1) enriching (impoverishing)-the-self brand asset (liability) was more strongly related to the AA Relationships than (2) and (3) (*z*s = 6.25 and 10.40, *p*s < .05, respectively), in line with Hypothesis 3b.

As shown in Table 2, AA Relationships predict intentions to engage in difficult-to-enact brand behaviors better than the brand attachment (γ = .86 versus γ = .45; *z* = 72.97, *p* < .001) and the emotional valence measure (γ = .89 versus .38; *z* = 25.84, *p* < .001) as well as brand attitude strength (γ = .90 versus .31; z = 27.58, *p* < .001). While AA Relationships also predicted moderately difficult behaviors better than brand attachment (γ = .89 versus γ = .33; *z* = 53.44, *p* < .001), emotional valence (γ = .82 versus γ = .46; *z* = 19.67, *p* < .001), and brand attitude strength (γ = .89 versus γ = .42; *z* = 26.42, *p* < .001), these measures predicted easier behaviors equally well (see Table 2). Together these results support Hypothesis 4a. Study 2 replicated these results with the AA Relationships represented in a first-order model. As in Study 1, the second-order representation of the AA Relationships fits the data better.

Finally, an SEM analysis tested the hypothesized nomological model (Figure 1). Each of the 3Es significantly influenced the AA Relationships, with (1) enriching(impoverishing)-the-self demonstrating a greater impact than (2) enticing(annoying)- (γs = .52 and .31, respectively; *z* = 6.09, *p* < .05), and (3) enabling(disabling)-the-self (γ = .12; *z* = 12.35, *p* < .001). AA Relationships in turn impacted motivational strength (γ = .96, *p* < .001). Intentions toward most difficult to enact brand behaviors, moderately difficult, and easier behaviors were influenced by motivational strength (γs = .92, .87, .72, respectively, *p*s < .001), which supports Hypothesis 5. The hypothesized nomological model also fits the data better (χ2(163) = 728.7; comparative fit index (CFI) = .96; normed fit index (NFI) = .95; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .087 (.080 - .091)) than potential alternative models7, including a rival model using brand attachment as opposed to the AA Relationships measure in the hypothesized nomological model (χ2(163) = 1113.5; CFI = .93; NFI = .92; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .116 (.109–.123)).

*Discussion*

Using a different brand, Study 2 replicated the psychometric properties of the AA Relationships scale observed in Study 1. Additionally, Study 2 showed that the AA Relationships predicted a brand’s mind and heart shares better than brand attachment. AA Relationships also captured a brand’s mind share more strongly than an emotional valence measure, while both equally predicted a brand’s heart share. Compared with brand attitude strength, the AA Relationships more strongly predicted a brand’s heart share, and predicted a brand’s mind share equally well. Furthermore, Study 2 demonstrated the significant role of the 3Es as determinants of the AA Relationships. Of the 3Es, the enriching- (impoverishing)-the-self brand asset (liability) most strongly influenced the AA Relationships. Study 2 supported the hypotheses that the AA Relationships predict intentions to engage in difficult-to-enact pro- brand behaviors better than brand attachment, attitude strength or the emotional valence measure. We also found that AA Relationships, brand attachment, emotional valence, and attitude strength predict willingness to engage in easier to enact pro-brand behaviors equally well. Finally, the results revealed that motivational strength mediates the relationship between the AA Relationships and consumers’ behavioral intentions.

**Study 3**

Study 3 further examines the nomological network of the AA Relationships by including additional variables that Study 2 did not investigate. They are measures of intentions to engage in anti-brand behaviors as well as actual brand behaviors (Hypotheses 4a-b and 5). Study 3 also tests whether customer age moderates the customer-brand relationships specified in the nomological model of the AA Relationships (Hypothesis 6).

*Method*

*Participants and design* A large grocery store chain with over 55,000 employees in 33 countries collaborated for Study 3 by providing contact details of 2,500 randomly selected customers from its loyalty scheme program. Each customer received a cover letter (reassuring participants about strict confidentiality of individual responses), survey, one prepaid return envelope, and a booklet of four Christmas themed stamps as a token of appreciation for their participation. A one-week follow-up with a second wave of mailings, obtained a total 739 usable responses for an effective response rate of 29.56%.

Study 3 made important changes to several of Study 2’s key measures.8 These changes tested whether Study 2’s results were replicable with bi-polar scales and different descriptions of certain critical measures. First, Study 3 measured 3 Es with bi-polar scales. Specifically, enriching (impoverishing)-the-self brand asset (liability) was measured, as follows: “To what extent does [brand name] misspeak or express who you are as a person?” (-4) = “misspeaks” to (4) = “expresses;” “To what extent does [brand name] misrepresent or represent who you want to be?” (-4) = “misrepresents” to (4) = “represents;” “To what extent does [brand name] undermine or reinforce your deepest values?” (-4) = “undermines” to (4) = “reinforces” (α = .87). Enticing (annoying)-the-self brand asset (liability) was measured, as follows: “To what extent is [brand name] unappealing or appealing to you?” (-4) = “unappealing” to (4) = “appealing;” “To what extent is [brand name] unattractive or attractive to you?” (-4) = “unattractive” to (4) = “attractive” (α = .93). Finally, enabling (disabling)-the-self brand asset (liability) was measured, as follows: “To what extent is [brand name] functionally unsatisfying or satisfying to you?” (-4) = “unsatisfying” to (4) = “satisfying;” “To what extent does [brand name] hinder or help how you manage problems in your daily life?” (-4) = “hinders” to (4) = “helps” (α = .89).

Second, Study 3 measured pro- or anti-brand behavioral intentions differently from Study 2 which only measured respondents’ pro-brand behavioral intentions with a uni-polar scale (“not at all” – “completely”). Study 2 did not fully measure behavioral intentions toward both pro-brand and anti-brand behaviors. In order to ensure that Study 2’s results generalized to anti-brand behaviors, Study 3 rephrased each of Study 2’s behaviors so that respondents could indicate either a pro-brand behavior (i.e., in favor of the sponsoring store) or anti-brand behavior (i.e., in favor of competing stores). The most realistic anti-brand behaviors were if respondents engaged in behaviors in favor of competing stores as opposed to the sponsoring store (e.g., “In the future, which store would you be more likely to shop at, [brand name] or another store?” (-4) = “another store” to (4) = “[brand name];” “In the future, which would you be more likely to do, spend time at [brand name] charity events or spend time at another store’s charity events?” (-4) = “spend time at another store’s charity events” to (4) = “spend time at [brand name’s] charity event;” “In the future, which would you be more likely to do, recommend [brand name] to others or recommend another store?” (-4) = “recommend another store” to (4) = “recommend [brand name]”).

Furthermore, Study 3 measured *mind share* and *heart share* with slightly modified measures from Study 2. First, rather than participants assigning points to the target brand and all other brands they were aware of, participants assigned points to the target brand, two other very well-known competing brands, and all remaining other brands they were aware of. The reason for this change was to ensure that Study 2’s results would not vary with the number of brands competing with the focal brand for points. Second, Study 3 used a uni-polar scale so that the *heart share* measure would be consistent with the *mind share* measure in wording. Specifically, the brand’s *mind share* was measured with “Assuming that you have a total of 100 points to assign *value* to all store brands that you know of, how many points would you assign to [brand name]? The more points assigned, the more value the store is offering to you,” and “Assuming that you have a total of 100 points to assign *quality* to all store brands that you know of, how many points would you assign to [brand name]? The more points assigned, the higher the store is in quality” (*r* = .90). In addition, respondents indicated the brand’s *heart share* by assigning love and temperature points to the collaborating brand relative to two competing brands and all other brands the participants were aware of (e.g., “Assuming that you have a total of 100 points of *love* available to assign to all store brands that you know of, how many points would you assign to [brand name]? The more points assigned, the more you love that store,” and “Assume that you have a total of 100 points available to describe the *temperature (warmth) of your feelings* toward all store brands that you know. How many points would you assign to [brand name] to indicate the warmth of your feelings? The more points assigned, the warmer you feel toward that store” (*r* = .89)).

Consumers’ motivational strength with a brand was again measured for each of the three relationship stages. Study 3 used a uni-polar scale because of the participating firm’s concern with the use of a bi-polar scale (e.g., “destroy” the reputation of the brand as an anchor point) and secondly, all respondents were customers of the participating firm, and thus it was not deemed necessary to use a bi-polar scale. The approach-maintenance-strengthening motivation was sufficient to test the motivational strength: “How intensely do you want to approach [brand name]?” (-4) = “not at all” to (4) = “very intensely;” “How much do you want to maintain (terminate) your current relationship with [brand name]?” (-4) = “readily terminate” to (4) = “readily maintain;” and “How much do you want to further strengthen your current relationship with [brand name]?” (-4) = “not interested in strengthening” to (4) = “very interested in strengthening” (α = .89). Study 3 computed an average score of the three items and validated it with a one-item overall motivational strength measure with a brand relationship (“Please summarize your overall relationship with [brand name]” (-4) = “avoid relationship,” (0) = “maintain relationship” and (4) = “strengthen relationship” (*r* = .87)). Finally, Study 3 followed general practice in marketing research and used 50 years as the lower bound for classifying consumers as “older” (50+) versus “younger” (e.g., Yoon & Cole, 2008).

*Brand purchase behavior* The collaborating store provided actual customer purchase data which contain the total amount of actual purchases made by each survey participant between January 2010 and March 2011. The questionnaire was collected in December 2010. Therefore, using the time period when the questionnaire was collected as a baseline, we had two different measures of the purchase amount: (1) the total amount of purchases made by each participant between January 2010 and December 2010 termed as actual *past purchase amount,* and (2) the total amount of actual purchases made between January 2011 and March 2011termed as *future purchase amount*.

The *brand purchase* measure captured whether or not a participant shopped at least once at a collaborating store between January 2010 and December 2010. Brand *purchase share* and *need share* measures were based on the self-report of each participant. Specifically, participants indicated how much they spend (“How much do you spend at [brand name] per month?”) at the collaborating brand and how much they spend at other grocery stores. The *brand purchase share* measure was the money spent at the collaborating brand over the total amount of money spent at all grocery stores per month. Participants also indicated how much they spend eating out instead of cooking and eating at home per month. The *need share* measure was the money spent at the collaborating brand over the total amount of money spent at all grocery stores plus money spent on eating out instead of cooking and eating at home. We list these behaviors in Figure 1. Interestingly, survey participants’ actual past (January 2010 – December 2010) purchase amount were highly correlated with the measures of brand purchase share (*r* = .85) and need share (*r* = .81) (the higher actual purchase amount, the higher the brand purchase and need shares are likely to be), further strengthening the validity of the latter two measures.

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Tables 3-5 and Figures 2A-B here

*---------------------------------------------*

*Results*

The results of Study 3 replicated Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Moreover, as shown in Table 3, SEM results demonstrated that the AA Relationships are a better predictor of a brand’s mind share (γ = .56 versus γ = .30; *z* = 25.59, *p* < .001) and heart share (γ = .87 versus γ = .35; *z* = 46.23, *p* < .001) than brand attachment. AA Relationships were also better able to capture a brand’s heart share than brand attitude-strength (γs = .90 versus .29; *z* = 25.85, *p* < .001), while being an equal predictor of brand mind share (γs = .79 versus .72; *z* = 1.94, *p* = n.s.). In addition, the AA Relationships and the emotional valence measure predicted the heart share of a brand equally well (γs = .86 and .79; *z* = 3.39, *p* = n.s.), while the AA Relationships were better predictors of a brand’s mind share than the emotional valence measure (γs = .78 and .30; *z* = 19.73, *p* < 001). The AA Relationships also predicted the relationship motivation strength better than other measures (see Table 3). In addition, Study 3 demonstrated that the AA Relationships measure predicted customers’ intentions to engage in the most difficult-to-enact pro- or anti-brand behaviors better than brand attachment (γs = .80 versus .33; *z* = 21.42, *p* < .001), attitude strength (γs = .92 versus .31, *z* = 34.74, *p* < .001) as well as the emotional valence measure (γs = .92 versus .36; *z* = 32.75, *p* < .001). The same results were obtained for moderately difficult-to-enact behaviors while no difference was noted among four measures for easier behaviors (Table 3). This supports Hypothesis 4a.

Since all survey participants shopped at the collaborating store at least once in the past (before December 2010), it was not possible to test the relative predictive performance of the AA Relationships and other measures on brand purchase.9 Thus, the relative predictive power of several competing measures on behaviors (Hypothesis 4b) was tested on the basis of only brand purchase share and need share variables. As shown in Table 4, SEM results revealed that the AA Relationships predicted brand purchase share better than brand attachment (γs = .85 versus .20, *z* = 56.62, *p* < .001), the emotional valence measure (γs = .94 versus .53, *z* = 28.64, *p* < .001), and attitude strength (γs = .94 versus .41, *z* = 31.68, *p* < .001). The AA Relationships also predicted brand need share better than brand attachment (γs = .89 versus .20, *z* = 56.62, *p* < .001), the emotional valence measure (γs = .92 versus .56, *z* = 27.97, *p* < .001), and attitude strength (γs = .93 versus .44, *z* = 32.59, *p* < .001). Finally, the AA Relationships also were stronger predictors of actual future purchase amount than brand attachment (γs = .80 versus .22, *z* = 38.98, *p* < .001), the emotional valence measure (γs = .95 versus .53, *z* = 28.14, *p* < .001), and attitude strength (γs = .95 versus .47, *z* = 32.10, *p* < .001), supporting Hypothesis 4b.10

Study 3 tested the moderating effect of customer age in the conceptual model using the multigroup approach. ANOVA results indicated that older customers indicated higher levels of attachment on the AA Relationships continuum than younger customers (*M*s = 12.04 vs. 6.17, respectively; *t*(737) = 3.81, *p* < .001).11 Prior to examining the moderating influence of customer age, metric invariance was examined. Factor loadings were indeed invariant (i.e., the configural invariance model with factor loadings different within each group fit the data significantly better than a model with measures constrained to be equal across the two (“older” and “younger”) customer groups) (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998).

Table 5 reports moderation results. Figure 2A shows the path coefficients for older customers in the AA Relationships model, and Figure 2B shows the path coefficients for younger customers. As expected, for older customers, the enriching-the-self brand asset had a significantly stronger influence on AA Relationships than for younger customers (γ = .68 versus .53, respectively; when this path was constrained to be equal across the two groups (younger and older customers), the chi-square significantly increased (Δχ2(1) = 30.2, *p* < .001)). In contrast, for younger customers, the enticing-the-self brand asset had a stronger impact on AA relationships than for older customers (γ = .27 versus .39, respectively; again, constraining this path to be equal across the younger and older customer groups, increased the chi-square significantly (Δχ2(1) = 19.0, *p* < .001)), while the influence of the enabling-the-self brand asset on AA Relationships did not vary across customer groups (γ = .26 and .26, respectively; constraining this path to be equal across the two groups did not result in a significant increase in the chi-square (Δχ2(1) = .10, *p* = n.s.), which indicates that the effect does not differ for younger and older customers). Finally, for older customers (vs. younger customers), the impact of the AA Relationships on motivational strength (γ = .93 and .82, respectively; Δχ2(1) = 12.4, *p* < .001), and the influence of motivational strength on brand purchase share (γ = .36 and .25, respectively; Δχ2(1) = 836.7, *p* < .001), and need share (γ = .32 and .23, respectively; Δχ2(1) = 830.3, *p* < .001) was stronger than for younger customers. Age also acted as a significant moderator in the hypothesized nomological model of the AA Relationships when intentions to engage in pro- and anti-brand behaviors and future purchase amount were used as dependent variables. Taken together these results support Hypothesis 6.

*Discussion*

Study 3 examined the AA Relationships’ nomological network using a different brand and real customer purchase data. It replicated the results of Studies 1 and 2. Using bi-polar scales, Study 3 showed that each of the 3Es significantly influences the AA Relationships, and among the 3Es, the enriching (impoverishing)-the-self brand asset (liability) has the strongest impact. Study 3 also supported the mediating role of customer brand motivational strength in the relationship between the AA Relationships and actual brand purchase behaviors. Customer age emerged as a significant moderator in the nomological model of the AA Relationships.

**General discussion**

*Overall summary* The present research identified and empirically tested the attachment-aversion model of customer-brand relationships. The AA Relationships measure, with its two components (brand-self distance and brand prominence), has strong psychometric properties. Results support a second-order representation of the AA Relationships, with brand-self distance and brand prominence as component factors. Together, brand-self distance and brand prominence not only predict psychological consequences of feeling close (feeling happy (sad) when good (bad) things happened to a brand, external (vs. internal) blame attribution) and consumers’ own understanding of brand attachment-aversion better than brand-self distance alone, but also help to differentiate consumer brand ambivalence and indifference. Brand prominence thus adds important diagnostic information, and both brand-self distance and brand prominence together effectively represent consumers’ AA Relationships with a brand.

The AA Relationships also predict a brand’s mind share better than an emotional valence measure while both predict a brand’s heart share equally well. Conversely, the AA Relationships predict the mind share of a brand equally as well as attitude strength, while they predict a brand’s heart share better than brand attitude strength. The AA Relationships predict both mind and heart shares better than brand attachment. Moreover, the AA Relationships’ predictive power of behavioral intentions and of actual behaviors which are difficult to enact is significantly stronger than that of brand attachment, brand attitude strength and the emotional valence measures. In addition, there exists empirical support for the 3Es as determinants of the AA Relationships, and support for the mediating influence of motivation strength in the AA Relationships-behavioral intention/actual behavior linkage. The entire nomological model of the hypothesized AA-based customer-brand relationship also demonstrates satisfactory fit.

Finally, moderation analyses show significant differences between the older and younger customer groups in the relationships between the 3Es, the AA relationships, motivational strength and behaviors. The results suggest that older consumers are more emotionally responsive to enriching-the-self benefits and the opposite is true for enticing-the-self benefits of a brand, while both are similarly responsive to enabling-the-self benefits of a brand.

*Managerial implications* In addition to its predictive power of behavioral intentions and actual behaviors, the AA Relationships measure also offers important diagnostic information about the status of a brand's relationship with customers. A brand-self distance measure clearly offers important information about where a brand stands in relation to its customers. Extant brand attachment measures can help assess varying degrees of positive customer-brand relationships but fail to capture the negative relationship that customers can have with a brand. In contrast, the AA Relationships measure can fully reflect one’s relationship valence and is thus able to offer additional important information to brand managers. How to reduce the distance between customers and a brand in turn requires firms to examine how much value customers perceive from the current offering of a brand with respect to each of the 3Es (i.e., enticing-the-self, enabling-the-self, and enriching-the-self). This examination offers important information about the future direction for brand management to create a closer perceived distance between a brand and its consumers. The brand prominence measure provides important information about the salience of brand-self distance. How *often* customers are reminded of a brand's resources (benefits) appears to be as important as how *well* the 3Es are presented to customers in an integrated and complementary fashion.

Furthermore, by comparing the brand-self distance measure with the brand prominence measure, managers may identify how many customers are relatively indifferent to or feel ambivalent toward a brand. How to convert indifference to strong attachment requires very different marketing actions from how to reduce or eliminate negative brand thoughts while at the same time preserving or even enhancing positive brand thoughts. In addition, while the entire nomological model of the customer-brand relationship pertains to both older and younger consumers, older consumers reveal stronger positive response to the AA Relationships than the younger consumers. Of note is the fact that for younger consumers the influence of the enticing-the-self benefit on their AA relationships is stronger than for aged consumers while the opposite is true with the enriching-the-self benefit. This finding clearly offers important implications and points to customer age as a basis for market segmentation opportunities. Finally, monitoring consumers’ AA Relationships with a brand over time and taking necessary actions to move a customer toward strong brand attachment may be a valuable control device to either maintain or improve a brand's health.

While the present paper confirms the many advantages that strong consumer-brand relationships offer (e.g., stable brand loyalty, expanding market boundaries via high need share, enhancing marketing efficiency through favorable word-of-mouth communication, lower price sensitivity), these advantages oblige managers to sustain a consistent level of strong brand attachment over time. Strong customer-brand attachment is not immune to competing alternatives, customers’ changing tastes and preferences, or firm misappropriation (e.g., the use of lower quality ingredients, unjustifiably frequent price increases). The fact that strong love can turn to strong hate demonstrates that strong brand attachment can change to strong brand aversion (Johnson et al., 2011). Simply stated, strong brand attachment does not guarantee an enduring loyalty. A firm must continue improving and communicating its resources (benefits) to ensure a stable and positive relationship with its customers.

*Future Research* The preceding discussion about a firm’s responsibility not to misappropriate customers’ strong brand attachment against their interests raises an important future research issue about why and how the AA Relationships with a brand evolve over time. Specifically, there appear to be several different types of customer-brand relationship dynamics over time. Some of these interesting types include the following: (1) a *slow build-up* of the relationship that starts weakly but strengthens over time, (2) a rapidly emerging strong customer-brand relationship that is maintained over time, (3) a rapidly emerging strong customer-brand relationship that gradually weakens over time, and (4) a rapidly emerging strong customer-brand relationship that just as quickly dies out. Examining and understanding the causes and implications of these different types of customer-brand dynamics is important to helping managers sustain a long-term brand attachment relationship with their customers.

The second important issue the present study did not address is when consumers’ strong brand attachment liberates or constrains a firm's future business activities with its brand (e.g., brand's repositioning, brand extensions). For example, while customers' strong brand attachment offers many important advantages, it may be a disadvantage if customers dictate a brand's future growth moves. One possible factor that may shed light on consumers' desires to get involved directly in the brand's future business activities is what drives their brand attachment. If their attachment is based heavily on enriching-the-self benefits, consumers may more willingly dictate a brand's future moves because they believe it is an integral part or vital extension of themselves. Yet if customers’ attachment is driven heavily by enabling-the-self (functional) benefits, consumers may let a brand dictate its own future without their direct involvement. Again, future research may address this issue by asking when and why customers do get involved in the brand's future business activities.

The third future research issue is to examine when younger consumers reveal stronger attachment to a brand than older consumers. Although the present research found older consumers’ greater brand attachment through its enriching-the-self benefits than younger consumers, this finding may require more careful scrutiny. First, as noted earlier, it is important to distinguish love (or passion) from attachment in the sense that while younger consumers may love a brand and be passionate about it in the short-term, it may not necessarily mean that they relate themselves to a brand. They may love a brand simply because it effectively allows them to convey their social status to others while it does not resonate with them in terms of its relevance to their actual or ideal self. Second, there may also be more variations in the strength of brand attachment among younger consumers than among older consumers, depending on the nature of the enriching-the-self benefits. While older consumers may be less discriminating and picky in their response to the enriching-the-self benefits (asset) of a brand than younger consumers, and are more readily responsive to those benefits, younger consumers may develop a stronger level of brand attachment than older consumers if and when the enriching-the-self benefits particularly resonate with them. What types of the enriching-the-self benefits will trigger strong brand attachment from younger consumers is an interesting future research issue.

Fourth and finally, future research needs to identify a set of factors other than customer age that either moderates or causes differences in the relationships between the three determinants (i.e., the 3Es) and the rest of the variables specified in the nomological model (Figure 1). For example, individual difference variables (e.g., propensity to attachment), situational variables (e.g., the number of brands in other product categories individual consumers are strongly attached to, whether or not a consumer experienced prior attachment to another brand in the same product category), or context variables (e.g., attachment to product brands, firm brands, or human brands) may help to better understand the richness of the process involved in the development of the customer-brand relationships.

**Endnotes**

1 While the 3Es should influence the brand-self distance through their assets or liabilities, they may not have the same degree of influence on brand prominence as other factors such as exposure frequency to a brand through advertising and in-store display, etc.

2 Study 1 results were replicated in another study following the same design and using Nike as the focal brand (n = 269). Space constraints did not permit reporting this additional study.

3 We also confirmed that the prominence items used for AA Relationships did not differ from Park et al.’s (2010) brand prominence items across multiple dependent measures used in Study 1.

4 We note that when brand attachment was directly compared with the emotional valence measure and brand attitude strength based on the second-order model, it was the stronger predictor of outcome variables than attitude strength and the emotional valence measure across the three different studies.

5 The results across our studies were replicated with emotional valence as a two-component construct based on love-hate and brand prominence. Furthermore, the present study compared the impact of the brand-self distance measure and the emotional valence measure indicated by love-hate on the dependent variables noted in Study 1and found that brand-self distance acted as the better predictor of these variables *(p*s < .05).

6 The fact that “waiting 4-6 weeks” was indicated as an *easier* behavior whereas “switching to other non Apple iPhone” was considered as *moderately difficult* is reflective of the positive link that Apple iPhone managed to build with most respondents.

7 We compared the performance of the hypothesized model with several rival models (e.g., direct paths from the 3Es, the AA Relationships, and motivational strength to behavioral intentions; attitude strength as a mediator between the AA Relationships and motivational strength; attitude strength as a mediator between the 3Es and the AA Relationships). The fit of the hypothesized model was significantly better than that of any rival model, supporting the nomological validity and the hypothesized mediating role of motivational strength.

8 Unless stated otherwise, Study 3 used (-4) and (4) as anchor points as opposed to (1) and (11) in Study 2.

9 In other words, every participant in the survey purchased from the collaborating store during the time period January-December 2010 at least once, and thus there was no variance for brand purchase, which did not allow us to examine brand purchase (whether customers bought from the brand or not) as a dependent variable. Note also that results for actual past purchase amount as a dependent variable do not differ from the ones noted in the text with future purchase amount (*p*s = n.s.).

10 As in Study 2 the hypothesized nomological model fit the data better than any rival model in support of Hypothesis 5. Study 3 replicated the results of rival model analyses with behavioral intentions, brand purchase share and need share as well as future purchase amount as different dependent variables.

11 The AA Relationships score was computed as the multiplicative product of brand-self distance, ranging from -4 to 4, weighted by brand prominence, ranging from 1 to 11. Thus the lowest (highest) AA Relationships score was -44 (44).

**Appendix**

*Brand-self distance pretest*

*Participants and procedure* 225 undergraduate students volunteered to participate in a pretest as part of a regular course. The pretest was designed to examine if the two brand-self distance items fully reflected one’s relationship valence. Participants were randomly assigned to one of ten different groups and asked to fill out a booklet of questions.

On the first page of the booklet was the following text for the different groups respectively: (First group) “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that it is 50 miles away from yourself?” (n = 29);

(Second group) “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that it is 100 miles away from yourself?” (n = 20);

(Third group) “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that it is 1 yard away from yourself?” (n = 23);

(Fourth group) “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that there is no distance between you and a brand?” (n = 23).

The other three groups (groups 5, 6 and 7) were given the two brand-self distance items (-4 = “I am personally disconnected from the brand”, 4 = “I am personally connected to the brand” and -4 = “The brand is very far away from me and who I am”, 4 = “The brand is very close to me and who I am”, with mid-points “indifferent” = 0) pre-coded as follows: (Fifth group) “Assuming that you evaluated your relationship with a brand on the following two items and replied as indicated below: “0” = indifferent (n = 22); (Sixth group) -4 = “I am personally disconnected from the brand”, “The brand is very far away from me and who I am” (n = 20), and (seventh group) 4 = “I am personally connected to the brand”, “The brand is very close to me and who I am” (n = 23).

Finally, three additional groups (groups 8, 9 and 10) received the two self-connection items of Park et al.’s (2010) brand attachment scale (“To what extent is the brand part of you and who you are?”, “To what extent do you feel personally connected to the brand?”) pre-coded as “completely” (Group 8; n = 21), “not at all” (Group 9; n = 19), and “moderately” (Group 10; n = 20) with numerical anchors of 4, -4, and 0, respectively.

Participants then replied to a battery of eleven relationship measures (i.e., -4 = “I am strongly averse to the brand” 4 = “I am strongly attached to the brand”; -4 = “I strongly dislike the brand,”4 = “I strongly like the brand;; -4 = “The brand is like an enemy to me,” 4 = “The brand is like a friend to me;” -4 = “I have very cold feelings for the brand,”4 = “I have very warm feelings for the brand;” -4 = “I am very unhappy with the brand,” 4 = “I am very happy with the brand;” -4 = “The brand makes me feel awkward,” 4 = “The brand gives me a cozy-feel;” -4 = “My relationship with the brand is very uncomfortable,” 4 = “My relationship with the brand is very comfortable;” -4 = “All I have for the brand is contempt,” 4 = “All I have for the brand is respect;” -4 = “I am not at all loyal to the brand,” 4 = “I am very loyal to the brand;” -4 = “I deeply detest the brand,” 4 = “I deeply adore the brand;” and -4 = “The brand disgusts me,” 4 = “I worship the brand,” with all mid-points, 0 = “indifferent.”

*Results*

ANOVA results using the mean of the eleven relationship measures as a dependent variable showed that the group given the two brand-self distance items (part of the AA Relationships measure) pre-coded as “I am personally disconnected from the brand” and “The brand is very far away from me and who I am” indicated their relationship with the brand similarly *negatively* in valence as the group given “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that it is 100 miles away from yourself?” (*M*s = -2.15 and -2.06; *t*(42) = .16*,* *p* = n.s.). Further, the group who was given the two brand-self distance items pre-coded as “I am personally connected to the brand” and “The brand is very close to me and who I am” indicated their relationship with the brand similarly *positively* in valence as the group who was given “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that it is 1 yard away from yourself?” and the group who responded to “no distance” between the self and a brand (*M*s = 3.05, 3.25, and 3.05, respectively; *t*(45) = .36 and .72, *p*s = n.s.). Relationships with brands considered far from (close to) the self revealed more negativity (positivity) (*M*s = -2.16 ( 3.13); *t*(46) = 12.50*,* *p* < .001). The group indicating a mid-point in its brand-self distance and medium distance (i.e., “50 miles away”) showed similarly indifferent responses to the brand (*M*s = .73 and .57; *t*(49) = .62*,* *p* = n.s.).

In contrast, while the group given Park et al.’s (2010) brand attachment self-connection items pre-coded as “completely” indicated a similarly positive brand relationship as the group that responded to “Assuming that the total distance between yourself and a brand is one hundred miles, how would you describe your feelings toward a brand when you think that it is 1 yard away from yourself?” and the group that responded to “no distance” between the self and a brand (*M*s = 3.09, 3.25, and 3.05, respectively; *t*(42) = 1.20 and .21, *p*s = n.s.), the group given Park et al.’s (2010) brand-self connection items pre-coded as “not at all” indicated a similarly indifferent response to the brand as the group that responded to their relationship being “50 miles away” or brand-self distance items pre-coded as “moderately” (*M*s = .45, .73, .69; *t*(39) = .87, *t*(37) = .72, *p* = n.s.).

The results thus offer strong support for the argument that the two brand-self distance items as part of the AA Relationships measure fully reflects one’s relationship valence. The results also indicate that brand-self distance (part of the AA Relationships) is different from brand-self connection (part of the brand attachment measure). While the former captures the entire range of customer-brand relationships, the latter only captures the neutral-to-positive customer-brand relationships. That is, low levels of brand-self connection of the Park et al.’s (2010) brand attachment measure reflect a *neutral* relationship with a brand, while low levels of brand-self distance of the AA Relationships capture the *negative* relationship consumers have with a brand.

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Table 1

Study 1: The AA Relationships outcomes.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Manchester United  (n = 200) | Happy (sad) for good (bad) things | External (vs. internal) blame attribution | Attached-averse |
| AA Relationships | γ = .98, *p* < .001 | γ = .96, *p* < .001 | γ = .99, *p* < .001 |
| Brand-self distance | γ = .66, *p* < .01 | γ = .65, *p* < .01 | γ = .69, *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. brand attachment | γ = .93 vs. γ = .46;  *z* = 37.43, *p* < .001 | γ = .88 vs. γ = .53;  *z* = 22.43, *p* < .001 | γ = .94 vs. γ = .59;  *z* = 21.76, *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. emotional valence | γ = .96 vs. γ =.60;  *z* = 18.52, *p* < .001 | γ = .93 vs. γ =.61;  *z* = 17.04, *p* < .001 | γ = .97 vs. γ =.65;  *z* = 17.21, *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. attitude strength | γ = .92 vs. γ = .54;  *z* = 19.92, *p* < .001 | γ = .90 vs. γ =.55;  *z* = 19.98, *p* < .001 | γ = .98 vs. γ =.55;  *z* = 20.63, *p* < .001 |

Table 2

Study 2: AA Relationships, brand mind share, brand heart share, and behavioral intentions.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Apple iPhone  (n = 367) | Mind Share | Heart Share | Very difficult behaviors | Moderately difficult behaviors | Easier behaviors |
| AA Relationships | γ = .89,  *p* < .001 | γ = .98,  *p* < .001 | γ = .96,  *p* < .001 | γ = .90,  *p* < .001 | γ = .74,  *p* < .001 |
| Brand-self distance | γ = .71,  *p* < .001 | γ = .74,  *p* < .001 | γ = .69,  *p* < .001 | γ = .81,  *p* < .001 | γ = .68,  *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. brand attachment | γ = .74 vs.  γ = .32;  *z* = 24.71,  *p* < .001 | γ = .95 vs.  γ = .37;  *z* = 44.75,  *p* < .001 | γ = .86 vs*.*  γ = .45;  *z* = 72.97,  *p* < .001 | γ = .89 vs.  γ = .33;  *z* = 53.44,  *p* < .001 | γ = .74 vs.  γ = .71;  *z* = 1.51,  *p* = n.s. |
| AA Relationships  vs. emotional valence | γ = .76 vs.  γ = .29;  *z* = 21.58,  *p* < .001 | γ = .89 vs.  γ = .78;  *z* = 2.21,  *p* = n.s. | γ = .89 vs.  γ = .38;  *z* = 25.84,  *p* < .001 | γ = .82 vs.  γ = .46;  *z* = 19.67,  *p* < .001 | γ = .70 vs.  γ = .68;  *z* = 1.04,  *p* = n.s. |
| AA Relationships  vs. attitude strength | γ = .70 vs.  γ = .64;  *z* = 3.86,  *p* = n.s. | γ = .96 vs.  γ = .21;  *z* = 31.47,  *p* < .001 | γ = .90 vs.  γ = .31;  *z* = 27.58,  *p* < .001 | γ = .89 vs.  γ = .42;  *z* = 26.42,  *p* < .001 | γ = .73 vs.  γ = .65;  *z* = 2.96,  *p* = n.s. |

Table 3

Study 3: AA Relationships, brand mind share, brand heart share, relationship motivational strength, and behavioral intentions.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Field study  (n = 739) | Mind share | Heart share | Relationship motivational strength | Very difficult behaviors | Moderately difficult behaviors | Easier behaviors |
| AA Relationships | γ = .86,  *p* < .001 | γ = .95,  *p* < .001 | γ = .99,  *p* < .001 | γ = .93,  *p* < .001 | γ = .86,  *p* < .001 | γ = .72,  *p* < .001 |
| Brand-self distance | γ = .70,  *p* < .001 | γ = .73,  *p* < .001 | γ = .77,  *p* < .001 | γ = .62,  *p* < .001 | γ = .85,  *p* < .001 | γ = .71,  *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. brand attachment | γ = .56 vs.  γ = .30;  *z* = 25.59,  *p* < .001 | γ = .87 vs.  γ = .35;  *z* = 46.23,  *p* < .001 | γ = .67 vs.  γ = .21;  *z* = 27.09,  *p* < .001 | γ = .80 vs.  γ = .33;  *z* = 21.42,  *p* < .001 | γ = .61 vs.  γ = .41;  *z* = 12.68,  *p* < .001 | γ = .58 vs.  γ = .57;  *z* = .10,  *p* = n.s. |
| AA Relationships  vs. emotional valence | γ = .78; vs.  γ = .30;  *z* = 19.73,  *p* < .001 | γ = .86; vs.  γ = .79;  *z* = 3.39,  *p* = n.s. | γ = .99; vs.  γ = .60;  *z* = 27.64,  *p* < .001 | γ = .92 vs.  γ = .36;  *z* = 32.75,  *p* < .001 | γ = .81; vs.  γ = .48;  *z* = 24.35,  *p* < .001 | γ = .71; vs.  γ = .65;  *z* = 1.94,  *p* = n.s. |
| AA Relationships  vs. attitude strength | γ = .79 vs.  γ = .72;  *z* = 1.94,  *p* = n.s. | γ = .90 vs.  γ = .29;  *z* = 25.85,  *p* < .001 | γ = .98 vs.  γ = .51;  *z* = 29.63,  *p* < .001 | γ = .92 vs.  γ = .31;  *z* =34.74,  *p* < .001 | γ = .81 vs.  γ = .42;  *z* = 25.73,  *p* < .001 | γ = .69 vs.  γ = .64;  *z* = .94,  *p* = n.s. |

Table 4

Study 3: AA Relationships and brand purchase behaviors.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Field study  (n = 739) | Brand  purchase share | Need share | Future  purchase amount |
| AA Relationships | γ = .95, *p* < .001 | γ = .94, *p* < .001 | γ = .96, *p* < .001 |
| Brand-self distance | γ = .69, *p* < .001 | γ = .70, *p* < .001 | γ = .68, *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. brand attachment | γ = .85 vs. γ = .20;  *z* = 56.62, *p* < .001 | γ = .89 vs. γ = .20;  *z* = 56.62, *p* < .001 | γ = .80 vs.γ = .22;  *z* = 38.98, *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. emotional valence | γ = .94 vs. γ = .53;  *z* = 28.64, *p* < .001 | γ = .92 vs. γ = .56;  *z* = 27.97, *p* < .001 | γ = .95 vs. γ = .53;  *z* = 28.14, *p* < .001 |
| AA Relationships  vs. attitude strength | γ = .94 vs. γ = .41;  *z* = 31.68, *p* < .001 | γ = .93 vs. γ = .44;  *z* = 32.59, *p* < .001 | γ = .95 vs. γ = .47;  *z* = 32.10, *p* < .001 |

Table 5

Study 3: Customer age moderator analysis.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Field study  (n = 739) | d.f. | χ² | Δχ²(1) |
| Baseline (free) model | 237 | 1241.5 |  |
| Model 1  Enriching (impoverishing) → AA Relationships set equal across younger/older customers | 236 | 1271.7 | 30.2, *p* < .001 |
| Model 2  Enticing (annoying) → AA Relationships set equal across younger/older customers | 236 | 1260.5 | 19.0, *p* < .001 |
| Model 3  Enabling (disabling) → AA Relationships set equal across younger/older customers | 236 | 1241.6 | .10, *p* = n.s. |
| Model 4  AA Relationships → motivational strength set equal across younger/older customers | 236 | 1253.9 | 12.4, *p* < .001 |
| Model 5  Motivational strength → brand purchase share set equal across younger/older customers | 236 | 2078.2 | 836.7, *p* < .001 |
| Model 6  Motivational strength → need share set equal across younger/older customers | 236 | 2071.8 | 830.3, *p* < .001 |

Figure 1

The AA Relationships model.



Figure 2A

Study 3: The AA Relationships model (older customers).



\**p* < .05.

Figure 2B

Study 3: The AA Relationships model (younger customers).



\**p* < .05.