**THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND PERSONALITIES ON CONSUMERS:
EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF IMPLICIT SELF-THEORIES**

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JI KYUNG PARK

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mentor of my research and my life, who instilled confidence in me and made me believe in myself; Sunil Kishore, my best friend during the last six years who understood me better than anyone else, and shared every moment with me; and, finally, Dr. Kwak, who was always on my side, helping me to uncover what's inside of me, and to see my true value. They are indeed remarkable individuals to whom I owe more than I can ever repay. This dissertation is most appropriately dedicated to them.

긴 여정을 응원하고, 함께해준 은사님과 친구들에게 감사함을 전하고 싶습니다.
마케팅을 처음 가르쳐주시고, 삶에 대해 많은 조언을 해주신 박성연 교수님, 제가 학자의 길을 갈수 있도록 길을 열어주시고, 인도해주신 이문규 교수님께 감사드립니다. 그리고 긴 유학생활 동안 제가 저의 모습을 계속 간직할 수 있도록 한결같은 모습으로 제 옆에 있어준 오랜 친구들 효정, 주희, 영미, 정현, 그리고 준희 오빠에게 고맙다는 말을 전하고 싶습니다.

사랑하는 가족은 저에게 참으로 많은 힘이 되었습니다. 아낌없는 응원을 보내준 오빠, 언니, 그리고 사랑하는 조카들 선우와 서진에게 고마움을 전하고 싶습니다. 마지막으로 무한한 부모님의 사랑이 없었다면 지금 이 행복한 순간은 오지 않았을 것입니다. 기쁠 때는 누구보다도 기뻐해주시고 또한 힘들 때는 안쓰러운 마음으로 바라보시며 용기를 주시고, 무한한 의지와, 힘이 되어주신 존경하고, 사랑하는 아버님과 어머님께 이 논문을 바치고 싶습니다. 감사합니다.

ABSTRACT

Well-known brands with appealing personalities, such as Cartier (sophisticated) and Rolex (successful), provide an opportunity for consumers to appropriate the brand's personality and connect it with their self-image (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Sirgy 1982). Researchers have shown that consumers often prefer and choose brands with appealing personalities in an attempt to affirm and enhance their sense of self (Aaker, 1999; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2008; Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia 2009). However, this line of research has not examined actual brand use, and has not tested whether using these brands actually results in self-enhancement. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how consumers self-enhance by using brands with strong and appealing personalities. To do so, we introduce implicit self-theories—lay beliefs that consumers hold about personalities—as an important factor that moderates how consumers use brand personalities to self enhance. We draw upon this theory to identify the different ways that consumers might use brand personalities to self-enhance, and to explain why some consumers are more affected by brand personalities.

We present our findings in two essays. In Essay #1, "The Influence of Implicit Self-Theories on Consumer Response to Ad Appeals for Brands with Personalities," we examine how consumers use brands with appealing personalities to self-enhance, and identify possible ways that consumers with different implicit self-theories use these brands to self-enhance. In Essay #2, "Influence of Brand Personalities on Consumers' Self-Perceptions: The Role of Implicit Self-Theories," we examine whether or not consumers perceive themselves as having the brand's personality after they use brands

with appealing personalities. More importantly, we examine if implicit self-theories determine the extent to which consumers are influenced by appealing brand personalities.

Our findings provide an important step in understanding self-enhancement approaches through brands with appealing personalities, and the influence of brand personalities on consumers. Implicit beliefs that consumers hold about their personal qualities influence ways that consumers use brands with appealing personalities to self-enhance; entity theorists attempt to self-enhance by using brands with appealing personalities as a signal, whereas incremental theorists attempt to self-enhance by using these brands to directly improve their personal qualities. Therefore, when consumers have an opportunity to experience the signaling value of brand personalities, the brand's personality "rubs off" on consumers, but only for those who hold entity theory beliefs. Entity theorists perceive themselves to be better-looking, more feminine, and more glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag and more intelligent, more of a leader, and harder-working after using an MIT pen; incremental theorists are unaffected.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Brands can be positioned on the basis of human qualities, such as sincerity (e.g., honest, down-to-earth), excitement (e.g., trendy, cool), competence (e.g., intelligent, hard-working), sophistication (e.g., good-looking, glamorous), and ruggedness (e.g., tough, masculine) (Aaker 1997). Brand personalities, defined as human characteristics associated with a brand, are an important element of the image for brands such as Apple (exciting), Cartier (sophisticated), and Harley-Davidson (rugged). Indeed, brand personality is one of the most compelling aspects of many popular brands (Aaker 1997).

Prior research has focused on topics such as establishing and measuring the dimensions of brand personality (Aaker 1997; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera 2001). Evidence suggests that these dimensions of brand personality can be built through the use of marketing tactics, such as celebrity endorsers, metaphors in advertising, and package design (Ang and Lim 2006; Batra and Homer 2004; Orth and Malkewitz 2008).

Research has also shown that brand personalities are important because they appeal to consumers who want to express desirable self-views (Aaker 1999; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia 2009). For example, Aaker (1999) found that high self-monitoring individuals prefer brands with personalities that can help them project an image appropriate for a particular situation, such as wearing Pantagonia and Polo clothing to look more rugged on a river-rafting trip with a group of friends. On the other hand, recent research by Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv (2009) show that brands with personalities appeal to consumers who

want to bolster self-views. They found that when self-views ("I am an exciting person") are temporarily cast in doubt, individuals are more likely to choose "exciting" brands (such as Apple rather than IBM) to affirm their original self-views. Further, Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia (2009) provide evidence that brands with personalities appeal to consumers who want to create more positive self-views. Consumers who are interested but anxious about pursuing close interpersonal relationships strive for acceptance by valued others, and want to look more sincere. They found that these consumers were more likely to choose Gap (a sincere brand) rather than Abercrombie and Fitch (an exciting brand) to signal that they possess the ideal sincere self-image.

The purpose of this dissertation is to extend this line of research to better understand how consumers self-enhance by using brands with strong and appealing personalities. To do so, we introduce implicit self-theories—lay beliefs that consumers hold about personalities—as an important factor that moderates how consumers use brand personalities to self enhance. We draw upon this theory to identify the different ways that consumers might use brand personalities to self-enhance, and to explain why some consumers are more affected by brand personalities. By doing so, we build a conceptual model explaining how and why brand personalities influence consumers.

In this chapter, we provide an overview of prior research on implicit self-theories, focusing on how implicit self-theories influence self-enhancement approaches. We then discuss how research on implicit self-theories informs our understanding of how brands with personalities influence consumers. Following this, we provide an overview of the empirical studies conducted to test our propositions.

WHAT ARE IMPLICIT SELF-THEORIES?

Individuals develop lay theories, or knowledge structures regarding the nature of the social world, in order to interpret, predict, and control their social worlds (Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman 2001). Although lay theories are not perfect, and can even lead to erroneous predictions (Wegner and Petty 1998), individuals rely on their lay theories insofar as they are an efficient way of understanding and responding to stimuli or events. Researchers have discussed a variety of lay theories and their influence on cognitions and behavior, such as the influence of *lay dispositionism* (i.e., emphasizing personality traits rather than social environments) on attributions (Boven, Kamada, and Gilovich 1999; Norenzayan, Choi, and Nisbett 2002; Ross and Nisbett 1991), lay beliefs about hedonics and their effects on choice (Kahneman and Snell 1992; Novemsky and Ratner 2003; Snell, Gibbs, and Varey 1995), consumers' theories about marketers' persuasion attempts, and its impact on attitudes and purchase intentions (Friestad and Wright 1994), and the influence of lay theories with respect to self-control on goal-directed behavior (Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2005).

Types of Implicit Self-Theories

Among the most studied lay theories are implicit self-theories, which are lay beliefs about the malleability of individual traits. Researchers have identified two implicit self-theories: entity versus incremental theory. Individuals who endorse incremental theory ("incremental theorists") view their personal qualities as malleable, which they can improve through their own efforts. In contrast, individuals who endorse entity theory ("entity theorists") believe that their personal qualities are fixed, which they cannot improve through their own direct efforts (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988).

Entity and incremental theories can be chronically accessible knowledge structures or can be situationally activated (Dweck et al. 1995). Chronic accessibility in individuals is measured using the Implicit Person Theories Measure (Levy et al. 1998), where entity theorists agree with statements such as, "Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that," and incremental theorists agree with statements such as, "Anyone can change even his/her most basic qualities." Implicit theories can also be situationally induced. For example, Chiu, Hong and Dweck (1997, Study 5) manipulated implicit theories by using an article that presented arguments consistent with either entity theory ("Human nature used to be thought of as a bundle of potentialities, each of which could be developed, but that scientists, through years of rigorous research, had arrived at the view that people possessed a finite set of rather fixed traits") or incremental theory ("Human nature as a set of fixed traits was not outmoded and had been replaced by the new view of dynamic human potentialities that could be cultivated and developed over a lifetime").

Consequences of Implicit Self-Theories

Entity and incremental theories about the malleability of traits influence goals (Dweck 2000). Entity theorists tend to seek *performance goals,* in which individuals are concerned with gaining favorable judgments of their traits and avoiding negative ones. In contrast, incremental theorists tend to pursue *learning goals,* in which individuals are concerned with actually improving their traits (Dweck and Leggett 1988). Prior research has shown a direct causal relationship between implicit theories and goals. For example, after manipulating children's theories of intelligence (i.e., intelligence is fixed versus malleable), Dweck, Tenney, and Dinces (1982) found that adopting learning goals for a

subsequent task was more common among children who had read arguments in favor of incremental theory than among children who read arguments in favor of entity theory. Also, incremental theorists continue to pursue learning goals even after receiving negative feedback on prior tasks (Erdley, Cain, Loomis, Dumas-Hines, and Dweck 1997).

In association with different goals, implicit theories predict distinct cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns in the face of challenges (Molden and Dweck 2006). First, implicit theories lead to different cognitions when confronting challenge. Entity theorists tend to focus on whether or not they have adequate traits (or abilities) to perform challenging tasks. They attribute poor outcomes to a lack of ability rather than effort. In contrast, incremental theorists consider poor outcomes as a signal requiring more effort, and think of ways to achieve the expected outcomes (Beer 2002; Erdley et al. 1997; Hong et al. 1999; Tamir, John, Srivastava, and Gross 2007). Second, implicit theories are associated with different affective reactions to challenge. Entity theorists tend to perceive challenging tasks as a threat to the self, thus engendering negative affect, such as anxiety (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Robins and Pals 2002). In contrast, incremental theorists perceive challenging situations as an opportunity for more satisfying and self-enhancing experiences, thus producing positive affect (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Robins and Pals 2002). Finally, implicit theories create different behavioral patterns in dealing with challenges. Entity theorists tend to show helpless and defensive reactions, such as avoiding challenges or engaging in more handicapping behaviors (Rhodewalt 1994; Elliot and Dweck 1988). On the other hand, incremental theorists tend to show mastery-oriented reactions, such as seeking challenging tasks and taking more remedial actions after an unsatisfactory performance (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988).

IMPLICIT SELF-THEORIES AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT

One of the most basic human desires is self-enhancement, which reflects a desire to cast the self in a more positive light (Sedikides 1993). Implicit self-theories dictate the ways individuals approach self-enhancement (Dweck, 2000; Molden and Dweck 2006). Because incremental theorists believe their personal qualities can be improved if they exert the effort to do so, they seek out ways to become a better person through opportunities for learning, self-improvement, and growth. For example, college students with incremental theory beliefs are willing to take challenging classes that they believe will help them improve abilities to become more competent, even if there is a high risk of receiving a low grade (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Elliott and Dweck 1988). In contrast, entity theorists view personal qualities as something they cannot improve by their direct efforts to learn, improve, or grow. In order to enhance the self, they seek out opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self or others. College students with entity theory beliefs seek out easier classes where they are sure to receive a high grade, which signals their competence, even if these classes do not result in learning or skill acquisition (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Elliott and Dweck 1988).

When entity and incremental theorists engage in experiences consistent with their preferred way to self-enhance, these experiences lead to more positive self-perceptions. For example, in a study with schoolchildren, Elliott and Dweck (in Dweck and Bempechat 1983) asked children when they felt smart in school. Children with incremental theory beliefs reported that they felt smart after engaging in effortful learning and self-development (*"when I don't know how to do it, and it's pretty hard, and I figure it out without anyone telling me,"* or *"when I'm reading a hard book"*). In contrast,

children with entity theory beliefs reported that they felt smart after signaling their capability ("*when I don't do mistakes,*" or "*when I turn in my papers first*"). As this example illustrates, incremental theorists perceive the self in a more positive way through self-improvement opportunities, whereas entity theorists perceive the self in a more positive way through opportunities to signal positive qualities to the self or others (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Bempechat 1983).

Self-Enhancement through Brand Personalities

Consumers are often motivated to acquire products and brands by a desire to create a more positive self-image (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Richins 1994; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Brands, in particular, are important for consumers who wish to enhance their sense of self. Well-known brands with appealing personalities, such as Cartier (sophisticated) and Rolex (successful), provide an opportunity for consumers to appropriate the brand's personality and connect it with their self-image (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Sirgy 1982). Popular sayings such as "you are what you wear" communicate that consumers can use brands as a way to feel more positive about themselves.

As noted earlier, researchers have shown that consumers often prefer and choose brands with appealing personalities in an attempt to affirm and enhance their sense of self (Aaker, 1999; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2008; Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia 2009). However, this line of research has not examined actual brand use, and has not tested whether using these brands actually results in self-enhancement. In this dissertation, we ask two questions: (1) how do consumers use brands with personalities to self-enhance? What are the possible ways to use these brands

to self-enhance? And (2) what happens after using brands with appealing personalities? After using these brands, do consumers actually enhance self-perceptions in line with the brand personalities? In this dissertation, we introduce implicit self-theories that have been found to determine self-enhancement approaches as a key moderating factor. By doing so, we identify different self-enhancement approaches that consumers employ when using brands with appealing personalities, and explain how and why appealing brand personalities enhance consumers' self-perceptions.

Overview of Empirical Work

We examine our propositions in two essays that contain a total of six experimental studies. Here, we provide a brief overview of each essay.

In Essay #1, "The Influence of Implicit Self-Theories on Consumer Response to Ad Appeals for Brands with Personalities," we examine how consumers use brands with appealing personalities to self-enhance. Recall from our preceding discussion that entity and incremental theorists use different approaches to self-enhance. Entity theorists believe their personal qualities are fixed and cannot be developed through their own efforts. In order to self-enhance, they seek out opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self or others. In contrast, incremental theorists believe that their personal qualities are malleable and can be developed if they exert enough effort. They seek out ways to become a better person through opportunities for learning and self-improvement. We thus predict that as an attempt to self-enhance, entity theorists will be more likely to use brands with appealing personalities as a signal that they possess positive qualities similar to the brand, whereas incremental theorists will be more likely to use these brands to directly improve their personal qualities.

We test this prediction in an advertising context. We examine advertising appeals that capitalize on the signaling opportunities that using these brands can provide (signaling ad appeal: *"There's no better way to <u>show others</u> that you have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty"*) versus the self-improvement opportunities that using these brands can offer (self-improvement ad appeal: *"There's no better way for you to <u>learn how</u> to have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty"*). We find that consumers' implicit self-theories influence the effectiveness of these appeals. Specifically, entity theorists show a more positive attitude toward the target brands if the ad appeals emphasize the signaling opportunities that using these brands can provide. In contrast, incremental theorists show a more positive attitude toward the target brands if the ad appeals focus on the self-improvement opportunities that using these brands can provide. From these results, we infer that entity and incremental theorists use different self-enhancement approaches when they use brands with appealing personalities; entity theorists attempt to self-enhance by using brands with appealing personalities as a signal, whereas incremental theorists attempt to self-enhance by using these brands to directly improve their personal qualities. Once we empirically establish the role of implicit self-theories on the ways in which consumers use brands with appealing personalities to self-enhance, we are in a position to address the question of whether or not using brands with appealing personalities actually results in self-enhancement in line with brand personalities.

In Essay #2, "Influence of Brand Personalities on Consumers' Self-Perceptions: The Role of Implicit Self-Theories," we ask the question: When consumers use brands with appealing personalities, does the brand's personality "rub off" on them? In other words, do consumers perceive themselves as having the brand's personality after they use

the brand? More importantly, we examine if implicit self-theories that consumers hold about their personalities determine the extent to which consumers perceive themselves in line with appealing brand personalities after using the brands.

Recall from our preceding discussion that entity theorists seek opportunities to signal their desired positive qualities, and when they engage in signaling behavior, they perceive themselves in a more positive light. Using a brand associated with appealing personality traits provides entity theorists with an opportunity to signal that they possess the same appealing personality traits as the brand. Thus, we predict that entity theorists will use these brand experiences as a self-signal, and in doing so, will perceive themselves more positively in line with the appealing personality traits associated with the brand. What about incremental theorists? Recall from our prior discussion that incremental theorists seek opportunities for self-improvement through learning, self-development, and growth, and therefore they will be more likely to use brands for self-improvement purpose. For incremental theorists, brand experiences that only provide an opportunity to signal one's personal qualities through appealing brand personalities do not match their approach to self-enhancement. Therefore, they are unlikely to use these brand experiences as signals of the self, and are unlikely to have their self-perceptions affected by this type of brand experience.

To test this prediction, we employ an experimental paradigm to measure consumers' self-perceptions before and after they have used a brand associated with an appealing personality trait. Using this paradigm, we are able to capture changes in the self-perceptions connected to the brand-related personality trait. We focus on brand experiences where only the signaling value of the brand can be experienced. For example,

in the first study, we provide consumers with an opportunity to use a shopping bag from Victoria's Secret. Carrying the shopping bag provides an opportunity to signal desirable personal qualities through the brand, such as "glamorous" and "feminine," but it does not provide an opportunity to experience the functional aspects of the products marketed under this brand. Restricting the brand experience in this way allows us to study the signaling value of brand personalities, which has been the focus of most prior research, without confounding it with the many factors that come into play when consumers use products. The results show that entity theorists perceive themselves to be better-looking, more feminine, and more glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag, but incremental theorists were not affected by the brand experience. These findings support our view that implicit self-theories are key to predicting how consumers will respond to the signaling value of brand personalities.

We describe this stream of empirical work in the following chapters. Chapter II reports on the studies for Essay #1, followed by Chapter III reporting on the studies for Essay #2. We conclude with a summary of key findings across both essays in Chapter IV. We discuss the contributions of the individual essays, as well as the contributions of the dissertation as a whole. Finally, we suggest some interesting avenues for future research.

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CHAPTER II

ESSAY #1: THE INFLUENCE OF IMPLICIT SELF-THEORIES ON CONSUMER RESPONSE TO AD APPEALS FOR BRANDS WITH PERSONALITIES

One of the most compelling aspects of many popular brands is their personality (Aaker 1997). Brand personalities, defined as human characteristics associated with a brand, are an important element of the image for brands such as Apple (exciting), Cartier (sophisticated), and Harley-Davidson (rugged). Building brand personalities allows firms to differentiate their brands from competitors, connect with consumers on a more emotional level, and appeal to consumers who wish to express or enhance their self-image through brands (Aaker 1996).

Once established, how can firms use brand personalities to develop the most persuasive advertising? Surprisingly, little research exists on this topic. Researchers have focused on topics such as establishing and measuring the dimensions of brand personality (Aaker 1997; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera 2001) and demonstrating the ways that brand personality can be built through the use of marketing tactics, such as celebrity endorsers, metaphors in advertising, and package design (Ang and Lim 2006; Batra and Homer 2004; Orth and Malkewitz 2008). Further research shows that brand personalities can influence consumer preferences. Brands with personalities appeal to consumers as a way to express aspects of their actual or ideal self, bolster self-views, and enhance their affiliation with desirable reference groups (Aaker 1999; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia 2009). Each of these

research streams is important, yet none addresses the issue of how to effectively design advertising for brands with personalities.

Quite possibly, the answer lies in understanding more about the implicit theories that consumers hold about personalities in general. In a recent paper, Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta (2010) find that consumers with different implicit self-theories respond differently to advertising messages for brands with personalities. Consumers generally respond best to advertising copy and visuals that are consistent with a brand's personality. However, when advertising copy and visuals are inconsistent with the brand's personality, consumers who believe personality traits are fixed (entity theorists) respond less favorably than do consumers who believe personality traits are more malleable (incremental theorists). In effect, consumers who believe personality traits are fixed (entity theorists) are less flexible in their thinking about brands, and are, therefore, less accepting of advertising messages that are too inconsistent with a brand's personality.

In this article, we dig deeper into the topic by examining what types of specific ad appeals are more persuasive for consumers with different implicit self-theories. Designing ads that are consistent with the brand's personality is an important general guideline, but there are many ways to structure persuasive arguments consistent with a brand's personality. For example, we examine two types of ad appeals that reflect consumers' motivation to favor brands with personalities as a way to enhance their own self-images. The first capitalizes on the signaling opportunities these brands can provide, with ad copy highlighting the use of the advertised product as a way for consumers to signal to others that they possess the trait(s) associated with the brand. The second option capitalizes on the self-improvement opportunities these brands can offer, with ad copy

highlighting the use of the advertised product as a way to improve oneself to become more like the trait(s) associated with the brand. Both types of ad appeals can be implemented in a way consistent with a brand's personality, but which is more effective?

In two studies, we propose, and find, that consumers who believe their personal qualities are fixed and cannot be developed through their own efforts (entity theorists) are more responsive to an advertising message that incorporates a signaling appeal for the brand ("*there's no better way to <u>show others</u> that you have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty*"). In contrast, we find that consumers who believe that their personal qualities are malleable and can be developed if they exert effort (incremental theorists) are more responsive to an advertising message that incorporates a self-improvement appeal for the brand (*"there's no better way for you to <u>learn how</u> to have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty"*).

Our findings provide a starting point for understanding how to use brand personalities most effectively in advertising. First, we show that brand personality is a valuable asset in advertising, but the type of appeal (signaling vs. self-improvement) used in the message can influence its persuasiveness. Second, we find that signaling appeals do not resonate with all consumers. The signaling value of brand personality has been a dominant theme of much prior research, and in our studies, we find that a signaling appeal is very effective for entity theorists, but less so for incremental theorists. Third, we show that implicit self-theories are an important moderating factor to consider when devising advertising strategies for brands with distinct personalities. Based on prior research, one might argue that as long as the ad copy and visuals are consistent with a brand's personality, there is no need to consider differences between entity and

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incremental theorists (since both respond well to consistent ads). However, we show that, even when the ad copy is consistent with a brand's personality, implicit self-theories still influence the type of ad appeals (signaling vs. self-improvement) that should be used. Taken together, our findings implicate the need for advertisers to think more carefully about consumer mindsets when designing messages to take advantage of a brand's unique personality.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Implicit Self-Theories

Individuals develop lay theories regarding the nature of the social world, in order to interpret, predict, and control their social worlds (Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman 2001). Among the most studied lay theories are implicit self-theories, which are lay beliefs about the malleability of personal traits. Researchers have identified two implicit self-theories that apply to a wide range of personality traits: entity and incremental theory. Individuals who believe in *incremental theory* view personal qualities as malleable and capable of being developed. Individuals who believe in *entity theory* view personal qualities as fixed and being difficult to change (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988). To illustrate, entity theorists agree with statements such as "Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that" and incremental theorists agree with statements such as "Anyone can change even his/her most basic qualities" (Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck 1998).

These contrasting views exert a powerful influence on goals and behaviors. Of particular relevance to our research question, implicit self-theories dictate the way individuals approach self-enhancement (Dweck 2000; Molden and Dweck 2006).

Because incremental theorists believe their personal qualities can be improved if they exert effort to do so, they seek ways to become a better person through opportunities for learning, self-development, and growth. For example, college students with incremental theory beliefs are willing to take challenging classes they believe will help them improve abilities to become more competent, even if there is a high risk of receiving a low grade (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Elliott and Dweck 1988). In contrast, entity theorists view personal qualities as something they cannot improve by their direct efforts to learn, develop, or grow. To enhance the self, they seek opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self or others. College students with entity theory beliefs seek out easier classes where they are sure to receive a high grade, which signals their competence, even if these classes do not result in learning or skill acquisition (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Elliott and Dweck 1988).

Implicit Self-Theories and Advertising Appeals

We propose that implicit self-theories affect the type of appeal that is most effective for advertising brands with personalities. As described earlier, using a brand associated with a desirable personality (e.g., sophisticated, intelligent) can be appealing because it provides a signal that the brand user possesses the same personality trait as the brand *or* because it offers a way for the brand user to learn how to become more like the personality associated with the brand. We predict that entity theorists will respond more favorably to brand advertising that incorporates a signaling appeal. Recall that entity theorists seek opportunities to signal their desired positive qualities as a way to self-enhance. Thus, they will respond best to advertising that uses a signaling appeal, which

emphasizes an opportunity for consumers to signal that they possess the same appealing personality traits as the brand by using the advertised product.

In contrast, we predict that incremental theorists will respond more favorably to brand advertising that incorporates a self-improvement appeal. Recall that incremental theorists seek opportunities to develop positive qualities through learning, skill acquisition, and personal growth as a way to self-enhance. Thus, they will respond best to advertising that uses a self-improvement appeal, which emphasizes an opportunity to develop the same appealing personality traits as the brand by using the advertised product.

Overview of Empirical Studies

We test our predictions in two studies gauging consumer response to a new product being launched by brands with distinct personalities, Victoria's Secret (study 1) and MIT (study 2). Participants are shown an ad for the new product, which includes either a signaling appeal or a self-improvement appeal. Implicit self-theories are measured (study 1) or manipulated (study 2). As predicted, we find that ads incorporating a signaling appeal produce a more favorable response toward the advertised product for entity theorists. In contrast, ads including a self-improvement appeal produce a more favorable response toward the advertised product for incremental theorists.

<div align="center">

STUDY 1

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Sample and Procedure

Sixty-four undergraduate females participated in the study: 33 in the signaling ad appeal condition and 31 in the self-improvement ad appeal condition. They were told they would participate in two different studies to mask the relationship between the implicit self-theory measures and subsequent advertising response measures. In the first

study, they were given a survey, which included the implicit self-theory measure and attitude measures for a variety of brands (including Victoria's Secret). In the second study, they were asked to read an advertisement about a new eye shadow being introduced by Victoria's Secret, with the ad emphasizing a signaling or self-improvement appeal. Participants evaluated the advertised product and were then debriefed.

Brand Pretest

Pretests confirmed that Victoria's Secret was associated with personality traits appealing to our target population. Using a list of 42 traits from Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, we asked female undergraduate students ($N = 41$) to select five traits they strongly associated with Victoria's Secret. Results showed three traits as most strongly associated with this brand: glamorous ($M = 90.2\%$), feminine ($M = 85.4\%$), and good-looking ($M = 61.0\%$). We also asked them how interested they would be in an opportunity to enhance themselves on all 42 personality traits (*0=not at all interested* to *100=extremely interested*), which revealed a high degree of interest in the traits associated with Victoria's Secret: glamorous ($M = 61.95$), feminine ($M = 62.27$), and good-looking ($M = 67.32$; mean for all traits $= 55.39$). Further, there was no difference between entity and incremental theorists (measure described below) in their ratings of these traits (all ps $> .50$).

Signaling and Self-Improvement Ad Appeals

We developed two ads for a new Victoria's Secret eye shadow, Victoria's Secret *Angels Eyes* (see Appendix A). Across ads, the same copy was used to describe the basic product (*"each Angels Eyes kit includes four beautiful eye shadows"*) and suggested use (*"frame your eyes with flattering color combinations"*).

To create different versions, we constructed 8 pairs of statements. Each pair included a statement emphasizing the signaling appeal of using the branded product (e.g., "*there's no better way to <u>show others</u> that you have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty*") and a statement emphasizing the self-improvement appeal of using the branded product *(e.g., "there's no better way for you to <u>learn how</u> to have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty."*). To check that statements were perceived as intended, we asked female students ($N = 36$) to read each statement and indicate what type of person would find it most appealing on a scale from 0 (*A woman who wants to use Angels Eyes to improve herself to become better looking*) to 100 (*A woman who wants to use Angels Eyes as a signal to everyone that she is very good-looking*). Comparing ratings within each pair of statements, we confirmed that the signaling statements (self-improvement statements) were more appealing to people wanting to signal (improve) their personal qualities by using the advertised product (for all paired *t*-tests, ps < .01; *Mean of signaling items =* 60.57 vs. *Mean of self-improvement items =* 21.22). Further, there was no association between the implicit self-theory held by respondents and ratings for signaling statements overall ($r = .19$, $p > .20$) or self-improvement statements overall ($r = -.21$, $p > .20$). Given these successful checks, we added the 8 signaling statements (self-improvement statements) to the basic ad copy to produce the signaling (self-improvement) ad appeal.

Measures

Implicit self-theory. Belief in entity versus incremental theories of personality was assessed using the Implicit Persons Theory Measure (Levy et al. 1998). Participants were asked to agree or disagree (*1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree*) with a set of eight statements representing entity theory or incremental theory (see Appendix B).

Responses for all eight items were combined (α=.91), with higher scores indicating a stronger belief in incremental theory.

Attitude toward the advertised product. After reading the ad, participants rated the product on five 7-point scales, such as "*appealing—unappealing,*" "*desirable—undesirable,*" "*extremely well designed—extremely poorly designed,*" "*a product I would buy—not a product I would buy,*" "*a product I might recommend to others—not a product I might recommend to others.*" These five items were averaged to form a composite product attitude score (α = .87).

Attitude toward the brand. Prior to reading the ad, participants were asked to rate a number of brands, including Victoria's Secret, on a 7-point scale (*1 = do not like it at all; 7 = really like it a lot*). The Victoria's Secret measure was used as a control variable in the analysis to account for the possibility that entity and incremental theorists differ in their brand preferences, thereby influencing attitudes toward the new product.

Results

We conducted a multiple regression analysis to test our prediction that signaling (self-improvement) ad appeals are more effective for consumers who believe in entity (incremental) theory. We regressed attitude toward the advertised product onto the implicit self-theory score (continuous variable), type of ad appeal (signaling = 1; self-improvement = 0), and their interaction, with attitude toward the Victoria's Secret brand as a control measure. Scores were centered on implicit self-theory prior to being entered into the analysis to eliminate multicollinearity (Aiken and West 1991).

As predicted, the interaction between implicit self-theory and type of ad appeal was significant, β = -.89, $t(59)$ = 2.98, p < .01, as shown in Figure 1. To explore this

interaction in more detail, we tested the simple slopes within each ad condition (West, Aiken, and Krull 1996). Simple slope tests revealed that, for the signaling ad appeal, there was a significant negative relationship between implicit self-theory and product attitude, $\beta = -.44$, $t(59) = -2.07$, $p < .05$, indicating that entity theorists expressed more favorable attitudes toward the advertised product than did incremental theorists. In contrast, for the self-improvement ad appeal, there was a significant positive relationship between implicit self-theory and product attitude, $\beta = .45$, $t(59) = 2.18$, $p < .05$, indicating that incremental theorists showed more favorable attitudes toward the advertised product than did entity theorists.

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Discussion

Our findings show that entity theorists were more responsive to a signaling ad appeal, whereas incremental theorists were more responsive to a self-improvement ad appeal. Both types of appeals are appropriate choices for capitalizing on brand personality in advertisements, yet they differ in their persuasiveness for consumers with different implicit self-theories.

In the next study, we replicate our findings with a different brand (MIT) associated with a different type of brand personality (intelligent, leader, hardworking). Replication is important in branding research to allow one to generalize beyond a single brand, brand personality, and brand message. In addition, we provide further evidence for

the role that implicit self-theories play in consumer response to ad appeals. In study 1, we measured beliefs in entity versus incremental theory as an individual difference variable, consistent with implicit self-theory research. In the next study, we directly manipulate beliefs in entity versus incremental theory to rule out the possibility that our prior findings were due to other factors correlated with measured levels of entity versus incremental beliefs.

STUDY 2

Sample and Procedure

Eighty-three undergraduate students participated in the study: 40 in the signaling ad appeal and 43 in the self-improvement ad appeal condition. Participants were told that they were going to participate in two different studies. In the first study, belief in entity versus incremental theory was manipulated. In the second study, participants read an advertisement about a new add-on application for the Excel software program being introduced by MIT, with the ad emphasizing a signaling or self-improvement appeal. After reading the ad, participants evaluated the advertised product and were debriefed and dismissed.

Brand Pretest

Pretests with undergraduate students ($N = 44$) from a Midwestern university confirmed that the MIT brand is associated with personality traits appealing to our target population. Using the pretest measures described in study 1, our results indicated that three personality traits were strongly associated with MIT (intelligent: 75%; leader: 63.6%; and hard-working: 63.6%) as well as being highly rated as traits students were interested in enhancing (intelligent: $M = 81.45$; leader: $M = 74.64$; and hard-working: M

= 77.02; mean for all 42 traits = 54.90). There was no difference between entity and incremental theorists on the ratings of these traits (*ps* > .20).

Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation

Following a procedure used by Chiu, Hong, and Dweck (1997), we manipulated implicit self-theories by having participants read an article presenting views consistent with entity or incremental theory. Although individuals are predisposed to one of these theories, they can be persuaded to adopt a particular mindset by communicating relevant information (Chiu et al. 1997). To introduce the article, participants were told we were interested in their opinions about the articles. In addition, we asked participants to write a short essay supporting the author's viewpoint. Below is a sample from each article:

> In his talk at the American Psychological Association's annual convention held at Washington D.C. in August, Dr. George Medin argued that "in most of us, by the age of ten, our character has set like plaster and will never soften again." He reported numerous large longitudinal studies showing that people "age and develop, but they do so on the foundation of enduring dispositions." (Entity Theory)

> In his talk at the American Psychological Association's annual convention held at Washington D.C. in August, Dr. George Medin argued that "no one's character is as 'hard as a rock' so that it cannot be changed. Only for some, greater effort and determination are needed to effect changes." He reported numerous large longitudinal studies showing that people can mature and change their character. He also reported research findings showing that people's personality characteristics can change, even in their late sixties. (Incremental Theory)

We pretested this manipulation by asking undergraduate students to read the entity theory ($N = 62$) or the incremental theory article ($N = 57$). They were first asked for their impressions of the articles on 7-point scales to ensure that they were equally credible, persuasive, useful, clear, and easy to understand. Responses to these items were averaged ($\alpha=.74$), and as expected, this measure did not differ by condition, $M_{entity} = 4.80$ vs. $M_{incremental} = 4.90$, $t(1, 117) = .59$, $p > .50$. Second, to determine if the articles induced the appropriate mindset, participants were asked to make several predictions about a person's behavior in a particular situation. They were given a probability scale (0.00 to 1.00) to register their predictions for several questions such as, "Sandra is more helpful than Molly on average. What do you suppose is the probability that Sandra would act more helpfully than Molly in a particular situation?" Responses to five questions similar to this one were combined ($\alpha=.77$). Chiu et al. (1997) found that relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists tend to make stronger behavioral predictions, which was confirmed in our data, $M_{entity} = .80$ vs. $M_{incremental} = .74$, $t(1, 117) = 2.14$, $p < .05$. This result indicates that the manipulation of implicit self-theory was successful in creating the intended mindset.

Signaling and Self-Improvement Ad Appeals

We developed two ads for a new MIT software app, *MIT Analyst* (see Appendix C). Across ads, the same copy was used to describe the basic product (*"versatile enough to take on 20 common business analysis task"*), suggested use (*"complicated analyses required for business classes, such as finance, marketing research, and accounting"*), and purchase information (*"a low price of $35"*). Before adding copy for the signaling and self-improvement appeals, we asked students ($N = 42$) to read the basic ad copy and

evaluate the advertised product to ensure the basic product description was equally appealing to entity and incremental theorists. As in the main experiment, students received the entity or incremental theory manipulation prior to reading the basic ad copy. Comparing participants' responses across these conditions, we found similar attitudes toward the advertised product, as expected, $M_{entity} = 4.66$ vs. $M_{incremental} = 4.93$; $t(1,40) < 1$, $p > .50$.

To create different versions, we developed 10 pairs of statements. Each pair included a statement emphasizing the signaling appeal of using the branded product (e.g., *"Show off your analysis skills using this amazing app!"*) and a similar statement emphasizing the self-improvement appeal of using the branded product (e.g., "*Your efforts will be rewarded with better analysis skills using this amazing app!"*). To check that statements were perceived as intended, we asked students ($N = 44$) to read the basic ad copy. They were then told that we wanted to add some new copy to the ad to appeal to different types of consumers, and were asked to read each statement and indicate what type of person would find it most appealing on a scale from 0 (*A person who wants to use the MIT Analyst to improve the self to be more intelligent like MIT students*) to 100 (*A person who wants to use the MIT Analyst to signal that he/she is very intelligent like MIT students*). Comparing ratings within each pair of statements, we confirmed that the signaling statements (self-improvement statements) were more appealing to people wanting to signal (improve) their personal qualities by using the advertised product (for all paired *t*-tests, *p*s < .01; *Mean of signaling items* = 62.50 vs. *Mean of self-improvement items* = 34.91). Additionally, there was no association between the implicit self-theory held by respondents and ratings for signaling statements overall ($r = .04$, $p > .75$) or self-

improvement statements overall ($r = -.01$, $p > .90$). Given these successful checks, we added the 10 signaling (self-improvement) statements to the basic ad copy to produce the signaling (self-improvement) ad appeal.

Measures

Attitude toward the advertised product. Participants rated the product on five 7-point scales, such as "*appealing—unappealing,*" "*desirable—undesirable,*" "*extremely well designed—extremely poorly designed,*" "*a product I would buy—not a product I would buy,*" "*a product I might recommend to others—not a product I might recommend to others.*" These five items were averaged to form a composite product attitude score ($\alpha = .86$).

Attitude toward the brand. Prior to reading the ad, participants indicated their attitudes toward various universities (including MIT) on a 7-point scale ($1 =$ "*not at all favorable,*" $7 =$ "*extremely favorable*"). The MIT brand attitude measure was used as a covariate in the analysis.

Results

We performed a 2 (Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation: Entity, Incremental) x 2 (Type of Ad Appeal: Signaling, Self-Improvement) ANCOVA on attitude toward the advertised product, with MIT brand attitude as a covariate. The results revealed a significant interaction between implicit self-theory and ad appeal, $F(1, 78) = 12.42$, $p < .01$, as illustrated in Figure 2. Planned comparisons revealed that for the signaling ad appeal, entity theorists had more favorable attitudes toward the advertised product than did incremental theorists, $F(1, 78) = 5.24$, $p < .05$; for the self-improvement ad appeal, incremental theorists showed more favorable attitudes toward the advertised product than

did entity theorists, $F(1, 78) = 4.37$, $p < .05$. Thus, these results obtained using a manipulation of implicit self-theory replicate findings from the first study that measured implicit self-theory as an individual difference variable.

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GENERAL DISCUSSION

How can firms use brand personalities to develop the most persuasive advertising appeals? Our results show that consumers' implicit theories of personality influence which type of ad appeal is more effective. Consumers who view personal qualities as fixed (entity theorists) are more responsive to ad appeals that promote the signaling opportunities offered by using these brands, whereas consumers who view personal qualities as malleable (incremental theorists) are more responsive to ad appeals that promote the opportunities for self-improvement that can be realized by using these brands.

Our findings underscore the importance of implicit self-theories in understanding consumer response to brand personalities. Recently, Yorkston, et al. (2010) have shown that consumers who hold entity theories are less flexible in their thinking about brands, and as a result, they favor advertising copy and visuals that are highly consistent with a brand's personality. We add to this line of inquiry by showing that entity and incremental theorists respond better to different types of ad appeals, which we attribute to the different self-enhancement approaches favored by entity vs. incremental theorists. Taken together, these studies suggest that brand personalities can be a valuable asset in

advertising, but that there are important nuances in the way advertising elements (copy, visuals, persuasive appeals) are incorporated that dictate the effectiveness of the advertising for different consumer segments.

How might advertisers take these nuances into account? One option would be to include a measure of implicit self-theories, such as the one included in study 1, in the customer database or online customer profile. Ad appeals could be tailored for entity versus incremental theorists and delivered through email or website links. A second option would be to use sponsored links for search keywords relevant to entity theorists (e.g., impress, show) versus incremental theorists (improve, learn). A third option would be to manipulate implicit self-theories, through ad copy including statements like those used in study 2, including the type of ad appeal most effective for consumers primed with entity or incremental beliefs.

In fact, looking at these options, it is possible that they could be employed in situations other than advertising for brands with personalities. For example, consider brands with functional brand images, which consumers associate with functional attributes and benefits rather than personality traits. Self-improvement appeals, which are favored by incremental theorists, could be easily incorporated into ads for these brands. Signaling appeals, which are favored by entity theorists, would be a more challenging task to implement for functional brands because these brands lack personality trait or prestige associations that are the basis for much signaling activity. However, it is possible that a signaling ad appeal could be designed if usage of the functional brand could be promoted as a signal of being a "smart practical" shopper. These different types of appeals might also be appropriate for non-profit organizations and social marketing

contexts. For example, appeals for immunizing children might use a signaling appeal for entity theorists (e.g., *"Show you are a Mom who knows what's best for your child by immunizing your son or daughter against common childhood diseases"*) and a self-improvement appeal for incremental theorists (e.g., *"Learn how to be a better Mom who knows what's best for your child by asking your doctor how to immunize your son or daughter against common childhood diseases."*).

Examining these possibilities would be a useful direction for future research on the role of implicit self-theories in advertising. Our aim was to demonstrate that implicit self-theories influence the effectiveness of ad appeals, but we did not examine ways to implement these appeals for different types of brand and non-brand contexts. Also on the agenda for future research should be additional types of advertising appeals beyond those examined here. In our studies, we focused on signaling and self-improvement ad appeals as they seemed especially well-suited to entity and incremental theorists, respectively. However, it is possible that other types of ad appeals exist that would resonate with either entity or incremental theorists. Finally, it would be interesting to explore whether there are demographic or psychological variables that correlate with implicit self-theories, which could enrich our understanding of why implicit self-theories are consequential in consumer response to branding appeals.

Brand personality is an important aspect of the consumer marketplace, and future research aimed at understanding exactly how this element of a brand's image impacts consumers is warranted. Prior research has focused on self-expressive function of brand personalities, showing that consumers are attracted to brands with appealing personalities as a way to signal who they are or want to be. We add to this research by showing that

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brand personalities can also be appealing as instrument for real self-improvement, in effect, motivating consumers to develop personal qualities like those associated with the brand's personality. Brands can resonate with consumers on so many levels, and there is no question that brand personality is not only a ubiquitous but also an important aspect of why brands are so important in the lives of consumers.

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FIGURE 1

STUDY 1: ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ADVERTISED PRODUCT AS A FUNCTION

OF AD APPEAL AND IMPLICIT SELF-THEORY
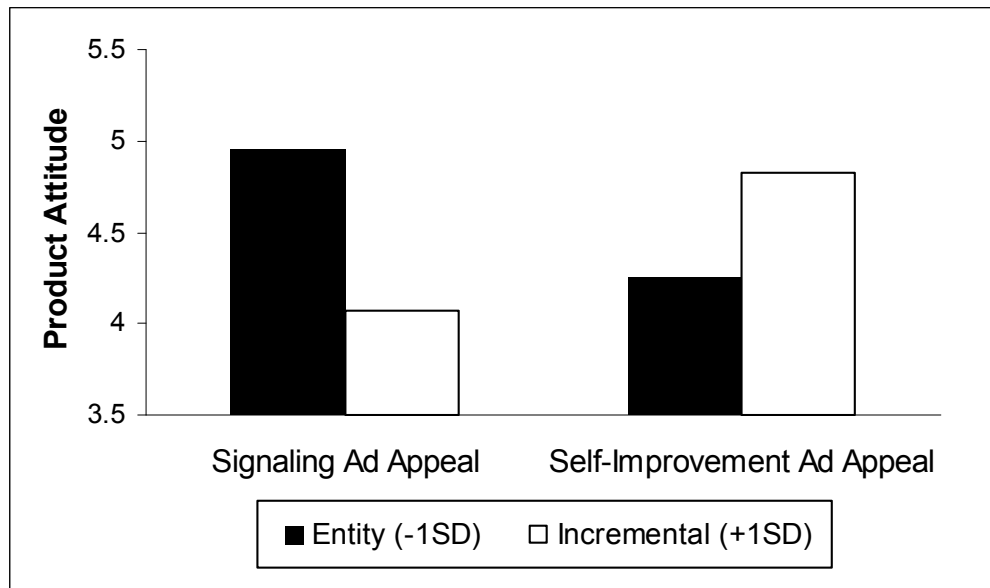
FIGURE 2

STUDY 2: ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ADVERTISED PRODUCT AS A FUNCTION

OF AD APPEAL AND IMPLICIT SELF-THEORY
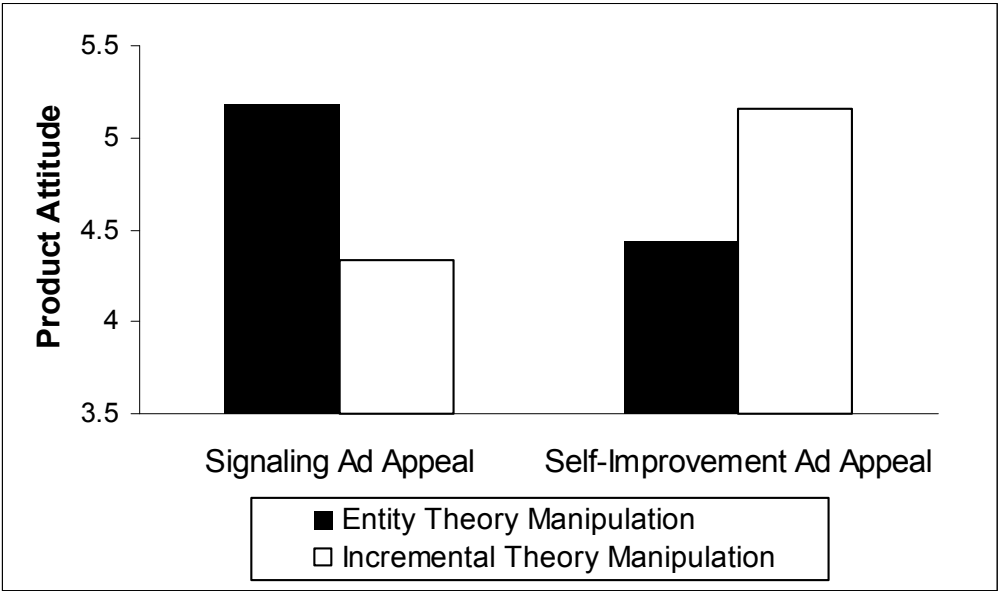
CHAPTER III

ESSAY #2: THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND PERSONALITIES ON CONSUMER SELF-PERCEPTIONS: THE ROLE OF IMPLICIT SELF-THEORIES

Brand personality is a key element of the brand's image for many consumer brands. Brands can be positioned on the basis of human qualities, such as sincerity (e.g., honest, down-to-earth), excitement (e.g., trendy, cool), competence (e.g., intelligent, hard-working), sophistication (e.g., good-looking, glamorous), and ruggedness (e.g., tough, masculine) (Aaker 1997). For example, Cartier is associated with sophistication, whereas Timex is associated with ruggedness. Brand personality often differentiates a brand from competitors, and is appealing to consumers who wish to express, affirm, or enhance their sense of self.

In this article, we ask the question: When consumers use brands with appealing personalities, does the brand's personality "rub off" on them? In other words, do consumers perceive themselves as having the brand's personality after they use the brand? If a consumer wears a Cartier watch, which is associated with sophistication, will she perceive herself as more sophisticated? Research shows that consumers often prefer and choose brands with appealing personalities in an attempt to affirm and enhance their sense of self (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2008; Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia 2009). However, these studies do not observe consumers actually using brands, leaving unanswered the question of whether these brand experiences actually result in more positive self-perceptions in line with the brand's personality.

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We propose that experiences with brands that have appealing personalities "rub off" on some, but not all, consumers. Specifically, we identify implicit self-theories that consumers hold about their personalities as a key determinant of whether consumers perceive themselves in a more positive light after using brands with appealing personalities. We find that only consumers who endorse a particular implicit self-theory view these types of brand experiences as opportunities to signal to themselves or others that they possess the same appealing traits as the brand, and only these consumers actually perceive themselves in a more positive way after a brand experience.

To focus our efforts, we examine brand experiences where only the signaling value of the brand can be experienced. For example, in the first study, we provide consumers with an opportunity to use a shopping bag from Victoria's Secret. Carrying the shopping bag provides an opportunity to signal desirable personal qualities through the brand, such as glamorous and feminine, but it does not provide an opportunity to experience functional aspects of products marketed under this brand. Restricting the brand experience in this way allows us to study the signaling value of brand personalities, which has been the focus of most prior research, without confounding it with the many factors that come into play when consumers use products.

Our research opens a new area of inquiry in understanding how consumers respond to brand personality. First, we extend the study of brand personality into the area of actual brand experience. Recent experimental work has studied brand personality as an instrument for building and repairing the self, but stops short of examining actual brand experiences. We find that using brands with appealing personalities can rub off on consumers, altering perceptions of their own personalities. Although these effects may

not be permanent in nature, we find that self-perceptions are altered regardless of whether the brand experience is short-lived or repeated over time, in a public or private consumption context. Second, we introduce implicit self-theories as an important factor in understanding consumer response to brand personality. In doing so, we find consumer's beliefs about their own personalities are key to predicting how they will respond to using brands with appealing personalities. The role that implicit self-theories play in consumer behavior is an emerging area of research, and we show implicit self-theories are an important addition to understanding how brand experiences affect the way consumers see themselves.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Implicit Self-Theories

Individuals develop lay theories, or knowledge structures, regarding the nature of the social world in order to interpret, predict, and control their social worlds (Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman 2001). Among the most studied lay theories are implicit self-theories, which are lay beliefs about the malleability of our personalities. Researchers have identified two implicit self-theories: entity versus incremental theory. Individuals who endorse incremental theory ("incremental theorists") view their personal qualities as malleable, which they can improve through their own efforts. In contrast, individuals who endorse entity theory ("entity theorists") believe that their personal qualities are fixed, which they cannot improve through their own direct efforts (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988).

These contrasting views influence the way individuals approach self-enhancement (Dweck 2000; Molden and Dweck 2006). Because incremental theorists believe their

personal qualities can be improved if they exert effort to do so, they seek out ways to

become a better person through opportunities for learning, self-improvement, and growth.

For example, college students with incremental theory beliefs are willing to take

challenging classes that they believe will help them improve abilities to become more

competent, even if there is a high risk of receiving a low grade (Dweck and Leggett 1988;

Elliott and Dweck 1988). In contrast, entity theorists view personal qualities as something

they cannot improve by their direct efforts to learn, improve, or grow. In order to enhance

the self, they seek out opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self or others.

College students with entity theory beliefs seek out easier classes where they are sure to

receive a high grade, which signals their competence, even if these classes do not result

in learning or skill acquisition (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Elliott and Dweck 1988).

When entity and incremental theorists engage in experiences consistent with their

preferred way to self-enhance, these experiences lead to more positive self-perceptions.

For example, in a study with schoolchildren, Elliott and Dweck (in Dweck and

Bempechat 1983) asked children when they felt smart in school. Children with

incremental theory beliefs reported that they felt smart after engaging in effortful learning

and self-development ("*when I don't know how to do it, and it's pretty hard, and I figure

it out without anyone telling me,*" or "*when I'm reading a hard book*"). In contrast,

children with entity theory beliefs reported that they felt smart after signaling their

capability ("*when I don't do mistakes,*" or "*when I turn in my papers first*"). As this

example illustrates, incremental theorists perceive the self in a more positive way through

self-improvement opportunities, whereas entity theorists perceive the self in a more

positive way through opportunities to signal positive qualities to the self or others (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Bempechat 1983).

In documenting these differences, prior research has most often examined individuals who have a chronic disposition to favor either entity or incremental theory. That is, beliefs in entity versus incremental theory are measured as an individual difference factor. However, researchers have also shown that beliefs in entity or incremental theory can be manipulated by exposing individuals to information advocating a particular theory. For example, studies have shown that exposing individuals to an article presenting scientific evidence that personal qualities are enduring and cannot be easily changed (entity theory) or that personal qualities are malleable and can be developed (incremental theory) leads to thoughts and behaviors consistent with the advocated theory (Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997; Hong et al. 1999; Yorkston, Nunes, and Matta 2010).

Prior research has also documented that differences between entity and incremental theorists are applicable across a wide range of personality traits. Although research on implicit self-theories began by studying intelligence (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Erdley et al. 1997; Robin and Pals 2002), subsequent research has expanded the scope to other domains, such as morality (Chiu et al. 1997; Dweck and Leggett 1988) and shyness (Beer 2002). Further, implicit self-theories are applicable to overall personality domains (Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck 1998; Plak, Grant, and Dweck 2005; Plak et al. 2001).

Implicit Self-Theories and Brand Personalities

Brands offer a wide array of opportunities for consumers to express who they are and who they would like to be. Brands with distinctive and appealing personalities are especially well-suited for this purpose. Consumers are attracted to brands with distinctive personalities when they wish to express, affirm, or enhance their sense of self (Aaker 1999; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Gao et al. 2009; Swaminathan et al. 2009).

We propose that implicit self-theories affect the way consumers respond to experiences with brands that have appealing personalities. Recall from our preceding discussion that entity theorists seek opportunities to signal their desired positive qualities, and when they engage in signaling behavior, they perceive themselves in a more positive light. Using a brand associated with appealing personality traits provides entity theorists with an opportunity to signal that they possess the same appealing personality traits as the brand. Thus, we predict that entity theorists will use these brand experiences as a self-signal, and in doing so, will perceive themselves more positively in line with the appealing personality traits associated with the brand. For example, after experiencing a brand such as Victoria's Secret, which is associated with personality traits such as glamorous, good-looking, and feminine, entity theorists will perceive themselves as more glamorous, good-looking, and feminine.

What about incremental theorists? Although incremental theorists use brands with appealing personalities, and may even prefer these brands to others, they are unlikely to feel more positive about themselves just because the brand has a desirable personality. Recall from our prior discussion that incremental theorists seek opportunities for self-improvement through learning, self-development, and growth, and therefore they will be

more likely to use brands for self-improvement purpose. For incremental theorists, brand experiences that only provide an opportunity to signal one's personal qualities through appealing brand personalities do not match their approach to self-enhancement. Therefore, they are unlikely to use these brand experiences as signals of the self, and are unlikely to have their self-perceptions affected by this type of brand experience.

Overview of Empirical Studies

We test our predictions in four studies. The first two studies test our predictions in natural field settings. The first study was conducted in a shopping mall where female consumers were given the opportunity to use a Victoria's Secret shopping bag; the second study was conducted with MBA students who were given the opportunity to use an MIT pen for a period of six weeks. Across studies, we find entity theorists were the most affected by their brand experiences. Entity theorists perceived themselves to be more feminine, glamorous, and good-looking after carrying the Victoria's Secret shopping bag *and* more intelligent, harder-working, and more of a leader after using the MIT pen. Incremental theorists were unaffected by these brand experiences.

The next two studies provide support for the rationale underlying our predictions. In study 3, we provide female undergraduate students with an opportunity to use a Victoria's Secret shopping bag, and directly measure the extent to which participants use the Victoria's Secret brand to signal the self. We find that use of the brand as a self-signal mediates the relationship between implicit self-theories and self-perceptions after brand experience. Compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists make greater use of the brand experience as a signaling opportunity, which leads to perceptions that they are more feminine, glamorous, and good-looking after carrying the Victoria's Secret

shopping bag. In study 4, we manipulate the motivation to self-enhance by introducing a threat to students' self-perceptions of competence (intelligent, hard-working, leader), and then provide an opportunity to use an MIT pen. Only entity theorists recovered their sense of self through the MIT pen, indicating that entity theorists used the MIT pen as an opportunity to signal their competence after a self-threat.

STUDY 1

Brand Pretests

Pretests confirmed Victoria's Secret to have an appealing brand personality, making it well-suited for our study. Pretest measures were based on Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, consisting of 42 personality traits representing five major dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, sophistication, competence, excitement, and ruggedness. Using this list of 42 items, we asked women 18-34 ($n = 40$) to select five traits they strongly associate with Victoria's Secret. Results showed three traits out of 42 personality traits were most frequently selected as strongly associated this brand: glamorous (72.5% of respondents), feminine (72.5% of respondents), and good-looking (62.5% of respondents). The remaining 39 traits were mentioned by less than 50% of the respondents. We also asked women how interested they would be in an opportunity to enhance themselves on all 42 personality traits (*0=not at all interested* to *100=extremely interested*), which revealed a high degree of interest in the traits associated with Victoria's Secret: glamorous ($M = 60.10$), feminine ($M = 62.63$), and good-looking ($M = 69.23$) (mean for all traits = 49.78). Further, there was no difference between entity and incremental theorists (measure described below) in their ratings of these traits (all p's > .20).

Based on this data, we selected Victoria's Secret as the brand, and used the three personality traits most strongly associated with this brand (good-looking, feminine, and glamorous) to measure self-perceptions in the main study.

Sample and Procedure

Eighty-five women were recruited by a marketing research firm using mall-intercepts: 48 women were recruited for the brand experience condition during one session and 37 women were recruited for the no brand experience in a second session. Women were invited to participate if they were 18-34 years of age, planning to shop in the mall for at least one hour, and did not dislike Victoria's Secret. These criteria reduced some of the inherent heterogeneity present in a shopping mall population, making it possible to use a smaller and less costly sample. Seventy percent of shoppers approached qualified for the study, with age and lack of time to shop being the primary reasons for disqualification (85% of disqualifications). Of those qualifying for the study, 88% agreed to participate and were escorted to the research facility in the mall.

First, they were given a survey to complete, consisting of several pages of questions about their attitudes and opinions. Embedded in the survey were items measuring self-perceptions on the focal personality traits and the implicit self-theory measure. After completing the survey, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to obtain consumer opinions about shopping bags, and that they would be selecting a shopping bag to use. In the *brand experience* condition, respondents were allowed to select a Victoria's Secret shopping bag or a less appealing bag (less sturdy bags from Old Navy and Limited Too). Although all of the participants selected the Victoria's Secret bag, as intended, we asked them to make a choice to reduce suspicion about the study,

suppress demand effects, and discourage discounting of the brand experience if forced to use a Victoria's Secret bag. In pilot tests, there was little suspicion about the study when participants were allowed to *select* the Victoria's Secret bag (1 out of 69), whereas over 10% of participants *given* a Victoria's Secret bag expressed suspicion (7 out of 59). These findings, and prior research suggesting that allowing a choice of bag would be unlikely to influence the extent to which the brand experience would affect self-perceptions (Jones et al. 1981), supported our procedure. In the *no brand experience* condition, respondents selected either an attractive plain pink shopping bag (same color as the Victoria Secret bag) or the same unappealing bags (Old Navy and Limited Too bags). All participants chose the plain pink shopping bag.

Participants were then instructed to carry their shopping bag for at least one hour before returning to the research facility. Upon returning, respondents completed a survey asking them to evaluate the shopping bag and answer a variety of questions about themselves. Embedded in these questions were items asking for their self-perceptions on the focal personality traits. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid $25 for their participation.

Measures

Self-Perceptions. Participants were asked how well a set of twelve personality traits described them on a 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*) scale. The three focal personality traits associated with Victoria's Secret (good-looking, feminine, glamorous) were embedded in the list of other traits not related to Victoria's Secret in our pretest (sincere, friendly, cheerful, confident, sentimental, spirited, exciting, daring, successful). Ratings for the three focal personality traits were averaged ($\alpha = .88$). Self-

perceptions were measured prior to the shopping bag experience (used as a control variable in analyses) and after the shopping bag experience (the key dependent variable in our analyses).

Implicit Self-Theory. Belief in entity versus incremental theories of personality was assessed using the Implicit Persons Theory Measure (Levy et al. 1998). Participants responded to eight statements, four statements representative of entity theory (E) and four representative of incremental theory (I), on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Responses for all eight items were combined into a scale ($\alpha = .89$), with higher scores indicating a stronger belief in incremental theory.

Shopping Bag Evaluation. Participants evaluated the shopping bag they carried on several attributes (easy to carry, comfortable handles) on a 1(*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) scale. Responses to these two items were combined into an evaluation measure ($\alpha = .85$). Because consumers were allowed to use the shopping bag as they wished, it was impossible to control any negative experiences they might have, such as loading the shopping bag with bulky items (making it hard to carry). To account for potentially unpleasant experiences, shopping bag evaluations were used as a control measure in the main analyses.

Results

We conducted a multiple regression analysis to test our prediction that carrying the Victoria's Secret shopping bag would result in more positive self-perceptions on personality traits associated with Victoria's Secret—for entity but not incremental theorists. The analysis included self-perceptions after carrying the shopping bag as the dependent measure, with implicit self-theory (continuous variable), experimental

condition (brand experience = 0, no brand experience = 1), and the interaction between implicit self-theory and experimental condition as independent variables (Fitzsimmons 2008). Responses for the implicit self-theory measure were centered by subtracting the mean from each person's score to eliminate multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). Self-perceptions prior to shopping bag use and shopping bag evaluation were included as control variables.

Support for our prediction was expected to emerge in the form of an interaction between implicit self-theory and experimental condition. As expected, the interaction was significant ($\beta = .23$, t (79) = 2.09, $p < .05$), even after controlling for shopping bag evaluation ($\beta = .01$, $t(79) < 1$, NS) and pre-existing self-perceptions ($\beta = .99$, $t(79) = 22.91$, $p < .01$). This effect is illustrated in figure 1, which is plotted at one standard deviation below the mean of the implicit self-theory measure (-1SD: entity theorists) and one standard deviation above the mean of the measure (+1SD: incremental theorists) by substituting these values into the regression equation (Cohen and Cohen 1983). To explore this interaction in more detail, we tested simple slopes at values one standard deviation above and below the mean of implicit self-theory (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). We found a significant negative relationship between experimental condition (brand experience = 0, no brand experience = 1) and self-perceptions after using a shopping bag for *entity theorists* (-1SD; $\beta = - .36$, $t(79) = 2.59$, $p < .05$), but not for *incremental theorists* (+1SD; $\beta = .09$, $t(79) < 1$, NS). Entity theorists perceived themselves as better-looking, more feminine, and more glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret bag than after using the plain pink shopping bag. Incremental theorists were not affected by the shopping bag they carried.

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Insert figure 1 about here

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Discussion

Our findings show that using a brand with an appealing personality can rub off on some, but not all, consumers. We found that *only* entity theorists perceived themselves to be more good-looking, feminine, and glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag. These results are consistent with our view that entity theorists respond to brand experiences that provide an opportunity to signal their positive qualities.

Is it possible that brand experiences influence consumer self-perceptions on a broader scale—not just the personality traits associated with the Victoria's Secret brand? To answer this question, we examined self-perceptions for the non-focal personality traits that were included in the survey (e.g., sincere, confident). Using the multiple regression analysis described above, we found the main effects (implicit self-theory, experimental condition) and the interaction effect (implicit self-theory x experimental condition) did not reach significance (p's $> .20$). Using the Victoria's Secret shopping bag had no effect on consumer self-perceptions for personality traits unconnected to the brand, for both entity and incremental theorists. Thus, entity theorists felt more positive about themselves after using the Victoria's Secret shopping bag (versus the plain pink bag), but only with respect to the personality traits associated with Victoria's Secret.

In the next study, we replicate and extend our findings. First, we use a brand (MIT) associated with a different brand personality (intelligent, leader, hardworking) than

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the one conveyed by Victoria's Secret. This allows us to explore whether entity theorists will be influenced even when the brand's personality is focused on traits that may be considered less malleable (e.g., intelligence) than ones associated with Victoria's Secret (e.g., glamorous). Second, we varied the nature of the brand experience, asking participants to use the branded item (MIT pen) for six weeks. This allows us to generalize our findings to repeated brand experiences, and to examine whether repeated brand experience might influence the self-perceptions of incremental theorists, who were unaffected by a single brand experience in the first study.

STUDY 2

MBA students at the University of Minnesota were given the opportunity to use a pen embossed with MIT (*brand experience*) or a regular pen (*no brand experience*). Entity theorists who used the MIT pen perceived themselves to be more intelligent, harder-working, and more of a leader (traits associated with MIT) than entity theorists who used the regular pen. Among incremental theorists, the type of pen used did not affect self-perceptions on these traits.

Brand Pretests

The MIT brand was evaluated using measures described in study 1. MBA students ($n = 23$) were asked to select five personality traits (from a set of 42 traits) they strongly associate with MIT. Four personality traits were mentioned most frequently as strongly associated with this brand: intelligent (95.7% of respondents), technical (73.9% of respondents), hard-working (69.6% of respondents), and leader (65.2% of respondents). The remaining 38 traits were mentioned by less than 50% of respondents. Students were also asked how interested (*0-100* scale) they would be in an opportunity to enhance

themselves on the set of 42 traits, with results showing students to be very interested in enhancing the traits associated with MIT, including intelligent ($M = 80.35$), leader ($M = 78.00$), hard-working ($M = 72.30$), and technical ($M = 59.17$) (mean for all traits = 46.14). Ratings for entity and incremental theorists were similar (p's > .35), however females registered less interest than males for the technical trait ($M = 29.17$ vs. 69.76). Thus, we used the remaining three personality traits highly associated with MIT (intelligent, hard-working, leader) to measure self-perceptions in the main study.

We conducted an additional pretest to ensure MIT was an appealing brand for our student population. We asked a sample of MBA students ($n = 43$) how much they admired students from their university and several other universities (including MIT) on a scale from -50 to +50 (to capture negative and positive perceptions). Results confirmed that students admired MIT more than their own university ($M = 80.19$ vs. 69.14, $t(42) = 4.44$, $p < .001$), with no differences between entity and incremental theorists on these ratings (p's > .25).

Sample and Procedure

Seventy-four MBA students were recruited from two marketing classes: 39 students participated in the brand experience condition during one term and 35 students from another class participated in the no brand experience condition in another term. Participants were told that the university bookstore was going to revamp its selection of pens and was asking for help in evaluating which pens people like most. They were given a survey consisting of several pages of filler questions about opinions and activities; embedded in the survey were items measuring self-perceptions of personality traits, followed by an implicit self-theory measure.

Next, in the *MIT brand experience* condition, participants were given an opportunity to select an attractive pen engraved with the MIT name from a set of three pens, which included two plain plastic pens from less prestigious universities. In the *no MIT brand experience* condition, participants selected a plain plastic pen from three options (two different Pilot pens and one Uni-Ball pen). Participants were instructed to use their pens for the next six weeks, and were reminded each week to use the pen and to ask for a replacement if the pen had stopped working or was lost. Six weeks later, participants filled out a second survey, which included filler questions along with the following measures: evaluation of the MIT pen, usage of the MIT pen, and self-perceptions of personality traits. Students were then thanked, debriefed, and allowed to keep the pen as a reward for participation in the study.

Measures

Self-Perceptions. Participants were asked how well several personality traits described them on a 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*) scale. Included in the list were the three focal personality traits associated with MIT (intelligent, hard-working, and leader), embedded among other personality traits not related to MIT in our pretest (cheerful, confident, trendy, successful, good-looking, rugged). Ratings for the three focal personality traits were averaged ($\alpha = .87$). Self-perceptions were measured before pen usage (used as a control measure in analyses) and after pen usage (the key dependent variable in analyses).

Implicit Self-Theory. As in study 1, responses to the eight items in the Implicit Persons Theory Measure (Levy et al. 1998) were combined into a scale ($\alpha = .96$).

Pen Evaluation. After using their pen, participants evaluated the pen on several attributes ("nice design" and "comfortable grip") on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Responses to these two items were combined (α = .83). We included this evaluation as a control measure in the main analysis to account for unpleasant experiences in using the pens, such as poor design (pen doesn't retract) or writing discomfort.

Pen Usage. We also asked participants how often they used the MIT pen during the six-week time period to detect differences in usage patterns between entity and incremental theorists. Participants indicated how often they used the pen on a 1 (*never*) to 6 (*very frequently*) scale.

Results

We conducted a multiple regression analysis to test our predictions. The analysis included self-perceptions after using the pen as the dependent measure, with implicit self-theory (continuous variable), experimental condition (brand experience = 0, no brand experience = 1), and the interaction between implicit self-theory and experimental condition as independent variables. Per study 1, scores for the implicit self-theory measure were centered by subtracting the mean from each person's score. Self-perceptions prior to pen use and pen evaluation were included as control variables. Five participants who did not select the MIT pen in the brand experience condition were not included in the analysis.

Support for our prediction was expected to emerge in the form of an interaction between implicit self-theory and experimental condition. As expected, the interaction was significant (β = .16, t (63) = 2.33, p < .05), even after controlling for pen evaluation (β

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= .10, $t(63)$ = 3.37, p <.01) and pre-existing self-perceptions (β = .90, $t(63)$ = 14.21, p

< .01). This effect is illustrated in figure 2, which is plotted at one standard deviation

below the mean (-1SD: entity theorists) and one standard deviation above the mean

(+1SD: incremental theorists) of the implicit self-theory measure by substituting these

values into the regression equation (Cohen and Cohen 1983). To explore this interaction,

we tested simple slopes at values one standard deviation above and below the mean of

implicit self-theory (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Simple slope tests

revealed a significant negative relationship between experimental condition (brand

experience = 0, no brand experience = 1) and self-perceptions after using the MIT pen for

entity theorists (-1SD; β = - .33, t (63) = 2.96, p < .01), but not for *incremental theorists*

(+1SD; β = .05, t (63) < 1, NS). Entity theorists perceived themselves as more intelligent,

more of a leader, and harder-working after using the MIT pen than after using the regular

pen. Incremental theorists were not affected by the pen they used.

Insert figure 2 about here

Supplementary Analyses. We conducted additional analysis to clarify the nature

of our findings. First, we examined whether frequency of using the MIT pen contributed

to our findings. Although participants were reminded each week to use their pens,

perhaps entity theorists used their MIT pen more frequently, which affected changes in

self-perceptions. To test this possibility, we used the regression model described above

and substituted frequency of pen usage as the dependent variable. The results indicate

that pen usage was not a factor, with main effects (implicit self-theory or experimental condition) and the implicit self-theory x experimental condition interaction failing to reach significance (all p's > .25).

Second, we examined whether using the MIT pen led to more positive self-perceptions for personality traits not associated with MIT. Per study 1, we conducted a multiple regression analysis with the non-focal personality traits in the survey (e.g., trendy, cheerful). As expected, none of the main effects (implicit self-theory, experimental condition) or interactions (implicit self-theory x experimental condition) reached significance for the non-focal traits (all p's > .20).

Discussion

Our findings replicate results from the Victoria's Secret study with a different brand, different personality traits, and different brand experience. Entity, but not incremental, theorists perceived themselves more positively on traits associated with MIT's brand personality (intelligent, leader, and hardworking) after using an MIT pen.

In the next study, we extend these findings. First, we examine the underlying rationale for why entity theorists, but not incremental theorists, have more positive self-perceptions after using a brand with an appealing personality. Earlier, we reasoned that entity theorists, who seek opportunities to signal positive qualities to the self or others, will be more responsive to the signaling value of a brand experience. To test this reasoning, we measure the extent to which entity and incremental theorists use the brand as a signaling device, and examine whether it mediates the relationship between implicit self-theory and self-perceptions after brand use.

Second, we provide further evidence for the role that implicit self-theories play. In the first two studies, beliefs in entity versus incremental theory were measured as an individual difference variable, consistent with prior research. However, it is possible that individuals who endorse entity or incremental theories may also vary on other dimensions, such as brand knowledge or usage. In study 3, we rule out the possibility that our prior findings are driven by extraneous factors by directly manipulating beliefs in entity versus incremental theory.

Third, we examine an alternative mechanism for our results. One might argue that relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists are more likely to experience discrepancies between their existing self-images and appealing images associated with brands, producing feelings of psychological discomfort (anxiety) that they attempt to alleviate by changing their self-perceptions in a positive direction (Rhodewalt and Agustsdottir 1986). In study 3, we rule out this possibility by measuring psychological discomfort (anxiety) associated with using the brand, and show that it does not explain differences in self-perceptions between entity and incremental theorists.

STUDY 3

Female students used a Victoria's Secret shopping bag (*brand experience*) or a plain pink shopping bag (*no brand experience*) to collect items during a treasure hunt. This task simulated a shopping experience without the heightened salience of brands and other shoppers in a mall. Belief in entity versus incremental theory was manipulated prior to the treasure hunt. Only entity theorists were affected by carrying the Victoria's Secret shopping bag, perceiving themselves as more feminine, glamorous, and good-looking. Further, entity theorists were more likely to view the brand experience as an opportunity

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to signal the self, which mediated the relationship between implicit self-theory and self-perceptions after using the Victoria's Secret bag.

Brand Pretests

The Victoria's Secret brand was pretested with female undergraduate students (n = 23), and results indicated they strongly associated this brand with the following traits: glamorous, feminine, and good-looking (95.7%, 73.9%, 65.2% of respondents, respectively). And, they were very interested in enhancing the self on these same traits: glamorous ($M = 65.00$), feminine ($M = 62.17$), and good-looking ($M = 76.74$; mean for all traits = 54.09). Further, there was no association between implicit self-theory and ratings for these traits (all p's > .30).

Procedure

Eighty-four female undergraduate students participated in a 2 (Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation: Entity, Incremental) x 2 (Brand experience: Brand Experience, No Brand Experience) between-subjects design. As a cover story, participants were told that they were going to participate in several different studies to reduce suspicion that measures and procedures administered at different points in time were related to each other.

First, participants completed a survey, with questions regarding self-perceptions of personality traits embedded amongst several filler questions. A second survey was then administered, which contained the implicit self-theory manipulation (described below). Next, participants were given instructions for the treasure hunt and were asked to select a shopping bag to collect items. In the *brand experience* condition, respondents selected a Victoria's Secret shopping bag or a less appealing bag. In the *no brand*

experience condition, participants selected an attractive pink shopping bag or the less appealing bag. They were then given 20 minutes to find a list of items that had been hidden on the top floors of the business school building, which were quiet floors with little traffic. After completing this task, participants were given a brief survey, which included a measure of psychological discomfort. By collecting the measure at this time, we avoided the possibility that it would influence other measures (such as self-perceptions) at the end of the study. Participants were then given 15 minutes to find a second list of items, and after completing this task, filled out a survey including an evaluation of the shopping bag, self-perception measure, and the brand signaling measure (separated by filler questions).

Finally, participants were debriefed using a funneled questionnaire protocol (Bargh and Chartrand 2000; Chartrand and Bargh 1996). They were asked questions about (1) what they thought the point of the experiment was; and (2) whether one part of the experiment was connected with another part. Participants were also asked to guess how the treasure hunt might have been related to other studies. None of the participants indicated any awareness or suspicion that the treasure hunt was related to the other studies, which manipulated implicit self-theory and measured their self-perceptions. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid $15 for their participation. In total, the study took approximately 60 minutes to complete.

Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation

Following Chiu et al. (1997), implicit self-theories were manipulated by having participants read an article presenting views consistent with entity or incremental theory. Although individuals are predisposed to one of these theories, they can be persuaded to

adopt a particular mindset by communicating relevant information (Chiu et al. 1997). To introduce the article, participants were told that we were interested in their opinions about the articles (Chiu et al.1997). In addition, we asked participants to underline the three most important sentences in the article that supported the author's viewpoint. Below is a sample from each article:

> In his talk at the American Psychological Association's annual convention held at Washington D.C. in August, Dr. George Medin argued that "in most of us, by the age of ten, our character has set like plaster and will never soften again." He reported numerous large longitudinal studies showing that people "age and develop, but they do so on the foundation of enduring dispositions." (Entity Theory)

> In his talk at the American Psychological Association's annual convention held at Washington D.C. in August, Dr. George Medin argued that "no one's character is as 'hard as a rock' so that it cannot be changed. Only for some, greater effort and determination are needed to effect changes." He reported numerous large longitudinal studies showing that people can mature and change their character. He also reported research findings showing that people's personality characteristics can change, even in their late sixties. (Incremental Theory)

We pretested this manipulation by asking female undergraduate students to read the entity theory ($n = 62$) or the incremental theory article ($n = 57$). They were asked for their impressions of the articles on 7-point scales to ensure they were equally credible, persuasive, useful, clear, and easy to understand. Responses to these items were summed ($\alpha = .74$), and as expected, this measure did not differ by condition ($M_{entity} = 4.8$ vs. $M_{incremental} = 4.9$, $t(1, 117) = .59$, NS). Second, to determine if the articles induced the appropriate mindset, participants were asked to make several predictions about a person's

behavior in a particular situation. They were given a probability scale (0.00 to 1.00) to register their predictions for several questions such as, "Sandra is more helpful than Molly on average. What do you suppose is the probability that Sandra would act more helpfully than Molly in a particular situation?" Responses to five questions similar to this one were combined ($\alpha = .77$). Chiu et al. (1997) found that relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists make stronger behavioral predictions because they are more likely to believe that behavior can be predicted from a person's traits. Thus, if our manipulation was successful, those reading the article advocating entity (incremental) theory should make stronger (weaker) behavioral predictions from the trait information. This result was confirmed in our data ($M_{entity} = .80$ vs. $M_{incremental} = .74$, $t(1, 117) = 2.14$, $p < .05$), indicating that the manipulation of implicit self-theory was successful in creating the intended mindset.

Measures

Self-Perceptions. Participants were asked how well the three traits associated with Victoria's Secret described them on a 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*) scale, and ratings for these traits were averaged (($\alpha = .77$). Self-perceptions were measured prior to the shopping bag experience (used as a covariate in our analyses) and after the shopping bag experience (the key dependent variable in our analyses). As before, the focal personality traits were embedded in a larger set of traits unrelated to Victoria's Secret in our pretest (pre-experience measure: sincere, rugged, confident, family-oriented, exciting, technical, masculine; post-experience measure: original, independent, western, rugged, sincere, exciting, confident).

Psychological Discomfort. After completing the first treasure hunt, participants were shown a list of emotions, including measures of discomfort (*uneasy, uncomfortable, bothered*), and were asked how they were feeling "right now" on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) scale (Elliot and Devine 1994). Responses to these three items were combined ($\alpha = .86$).

Shopping Bag Evaluation. After completing the second treasure hunt, participants evaluated the shopping bag they carried on several attributes (easy to carry, comfortable handles) on a 1(*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) scale. Responses to these two items were averaged ($\alpha = .77$).

Brand Signaling. Last, participants in the brand experience condition were asked to respond (0 = *strongly disagree* to 100 = *strongly agree*) to statements indicative of using the brand as a signal of one's self: "*I use the brand, Victoria's Secret, to reflect on who I am,*" "*I use the brand, Victoria's Secret, to communicate who I am to other people,*" "*I use the brand, Victoria's Secret, to feel more positive about myself,*" and "*I use the brand, Victoria's Secret, to make a better impression on other people.*" Responses to these items were averaged ($\alpha = .94$).

Results

Self-Perceptions. We performed a 2 (Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation: Entity, Incremental) x 2 (Brand Experience: Brand Experience, No Brand Experience) ANCOVA on self-perceptions measured after using the shopping bag, with shopping bag evaluations and self-perceptions prior to bag usage as covariates. Two participants in the brand experience condition who did not select the Victoria's Secret shopping bag were deleted from this and subsequent analyses. The results revealed a significant interaction

between implicit self-theory and brand experience condition ($F(1,76) = 4.82$, $p < .05$), even after controlling for pen evaluation ($F(1,76) = 4.82$, $p < .05$) and pre-existing self-perceptions ($F(1,76) = 233.82$, $p < .01$). This effect is illustrated in figure 3. Planned comparisons revealed that participants in the entity theory condition perceived themselves as better looking, more feminine, and more glamorous after using the Victoria's Secret bag than after using the plain pink bag ($F(1,76) = 4.15$, $p < .05$). However, participants in the incremental theory condition were not affected by the brand of shopping bag they used ($F(1,76) = 1.11$, $p > .25$). These results, obtained using a manipulation of implicit self-theory, replicate findings from the first two studies that measured implicit self-theory as an individual difference variable.

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Insert figure 3 about here

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Brand Signaling. A meditation analysis was conducted to test whether using the Victoria's Secret brand as a signal mediated the influence of implicit self-theory on self-perceptions. Recall that only participants who used the Victoria's Secret shopping bag were asked about how much they used Victoria's Secret as a self signal. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), we performed a series of regression analyses, with shopping bag evaluation and self-perceptions prior to bag usage included as control variables. First, we found that implicit self-theory (entity = 0; incremental = 1) predicts self-perceptions after using the Victoria's Secret bag ($\beta = -.39$, $t(40) = 2.12$, $p < .05$). Second, we found that implicit self-theory predicts brand signaling ($\beta = -20.98$, $t(40) = 2.70$, $p < .05$). Finally,

when implicit self-theory and brand signaling were regressed on self-perceptions after using the Victoria's Secret bag, the effect of brand signaling remains significant ($\beta = 0.01$, $t(39) = 3.06$, $p < .01$), while implicit self-theory drops to non-significance (($\beta = - .17$, $t(39) < 1$, NS). Thus, as expected, brand signaling mediates the effect of implicit self-theory on self-perceptions of personality traits associated with Victoria's Secret. Further, Sobel's Z confirmed the mediation by using the brand as a self-signal was significant ($Z = 2.02$, $p < .05$).

Psychological Discomfort. We examined whether using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag triggered more negative feelings for participants in the entity (vs. incremental) theory condition. To do so, we performed a 2 (Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation: Entity, Incremental) x 2 (Brand Experience: Brand Experience, No Brand Experience) ANCOVA on psychological discomfort, with shopping bag evaluations and self-perceptions prior to bag usage as covariates. The results revealed no significant main effects (Implicit Self-Theory Manipulation: $F(1,76) < 1$, NS; Brand Experience: $F(1,76) < 1$, NS) and no significant interaction effect between implicit self-theory and brand experience ($F(1,76) < 1$, NS). These results show that, compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists did not feel more psychological discomfort while using the Victoria's Secret bag (vs. plain pink shopping bag). This rules out an alternative explanation that entity (vs. incremental) theorists report more positive self-perceptions after using a brand to reduce psychological discomfort (anxiety) experienced after using a brand with an appealing personality.

Discussion

We replicate findings from prior studies using a manipulation of implicit self-theory. Participants who read an article promoting entity theory perceived themselves to be better-looking, more feminine, and more glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag than after using a plain shopping bag. Conversely, participants who read an article promoting incremental theory were not influenced by using the bag they used. Further, our results show that these differences are mediated by the disposition of entity theorists to view brand experiences as an opportunity to signal the self. Entity theorists use the Victoria's Secret brand as a signaling device, which precipitates more positive self-perceptions in line with the brand's personality.

In the next study, we pursue additional support for this line of reasoning by manipulating the motivation to self-enhance. We introduce a threat to students' perceptions of themselves in the competence domain (intelligent, hard-working, leader) and provide an opportunity to use an MIT pen as a way they can signal positive qualities and recover their sense of self. If our reasoning is correct, entity theorists should welcome the opportunity to signal the self by using the MIT pen, resulting in self-perceptions more in line with MIT's brand personality (intelligent, hard-working, leader). Thus, we predict that faced with a self-threat, entity theorists can recover a threatened self through a brand associated with an appealing personality related to the domain of the threat. Incremental theorists, in contrast, should be not be affected by using the MIT pen.

We also add to our findings by examining brand experiences in a more private setting. In the first two studies, brand experiences took place in a public shopping mall (study 1) and in consumers' daily lives (study 2). In study 3, brand experiences took

place in a less public setting. In study 4, we move the context to a private setting and examine whether entity theorists respond to the signaling value of brands with appealing personalities when they experience brands privately. Entity theorists embrace opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self or others, and therefore, we expect brand experiences to be consequential for entity theorists, regardless of whether the signaling takes place in public or private settings.

STUDY 4

Undergraduate students solved a set of math problems and received negative feedback on their performance (self-threat). They were then given an opportunity to use an MIT pen or a regular pen for a subsequent task. Only entity theorists were affected by using the MIT pen, perceiving themselves as to be more intelligent, harder-working, and more of a leader (traits associated with MIT). In fact, their self-perceptions after using the MIT pen were as positive as those of a control group. Incremental theorists were unaffected by using the MIT pen.

Brand Pretests

Undergraduate students ($n = 44$) selected the following traits as strongly associated with the MIT brand: technical, intelligent, leader, and hard-working (81.8%, 75%, 63.6%, 63.6% of respondents, respectively). Further, students were very interested in enhancing the self on three of these traits: intelligent ($M = 81.45$), leader ($M = 74.64$), and hard-working ($M = 77.02$) (mean for all 42 traits = 54.90). There was no difference between entity and incremental theorists on ratings of these traits (p's > .20). Thus, we used three personality traits highly associated with MIT (intelligent, hard-working, leader) to measure self-perceptions in the main study.

We conducted an additional pretest to ensure MIT was an appealing brand by asking undergraduates ($n = 158$) how much they admired students from their university and several other universities (including MIT) on a scale from -50 to +50 (to capture negative and positive perceptions). Results confirmed that students admired MIT more than their own university ($M = 76.36$ vs. 69.63, $t(157) = 3.29$, $p < .01$), and there were no differences between entity and incremental theorists on these ratings (p's > .20).

Sample and Procedure

One-hundred-and-fifty-seven undergraduate students from the University of Minnesota were assigned to one of the three conditions: (1) MIT brand experience after self-threat ($n = 57$); (2) no MIT brand experience after self-threat ($n = 55$); and (3) control group ($n = 45$). Participants were seated in individual cubicles with dividers for privacy. Participants were told they would participate in several studies to mask the connection between the self-threat and brand experience conditions. The first study required filling out a survey about their opinions and activities, including a measure of implicit self-theory embedded among filler items.

For the second study, participants in the self-threat conditions were told the university was interested in the readiness of undergraduate students for graduate work. To assess their readiness, they were asked to complete seven GRE math questions, administered on a computer one question every minute. After this task, participants were told: "You had 2 correct answers out of 7 questions. You are in the lowest 30 % of college students who took this test" (for a similar manipulation, see Lowery, Knowles, and Unzueta 2007).

Next, all respondents completed a third study, which was a survey that included a self-perception measure embedded among other items. Then, participants were told the university bookstore was revamping its selection of pens and was asking for help in evaluating different pens. In the *MIT brand experience* condition, participants were allowed to select a pen engraved with the MIT name or a plain plastic pen (Uni-Ball brand). In the *no MIT brand experience* condition and control condition, participants were allowed to select a plain plastic pen from two options (Pilot, Uni-Ball). Students were asked to complete several tasks, such as copying line figures and circling vowels in paragraphs, to use the pen. These tasks were unrelated to math ability, which was the focus of the feedback students had received earlier. Afterwards, they filled out another survey, which included self-perceptions and a pen evaluation. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid $10 for their participation. In total, the study took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Measures

Self-Perceptions. Participants were asked how well the three personality traits associated with MIT (intelligent, hard-working, leader) described them on a 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*) scale, and ratings for these traits were averaged (α = .76). Self-perceptions were measured before pen usage (used as a check for self-threat manipulation) and after pen usage (the key dependent variable in analyses). As before, the focal personality traits were embedded in a larger set of traits unrelated to MIT in our pretest (before pen use measure: creative, upper-class, confident, rugged, exciting, sincere; after pen use measure: sincere, rugged, successful, confident, exciting, upper-class).

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Implicit Self-Theory. Responses to the eight items in the Implicit Persons Theory Measure (Levy et al. 1998) were combined into a scale (α = .93).

Pen Evaluation. Pens were evaluated on two attributes (nice design and comfortable grip) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Responses to these items were combined (α = .87).

Brand Signaling. Last, we asked participants who used the MIT pen to respond (0 = *strongly disagree* to 100 = *strongly agree*) to two statements reflecting whether they used the brand as a signal of their identity: "*I use the MIT pen to feel more positive about myself*"; "*I use the MIT pen to reflect on who I am.*" Responses to these items, which are most relevant to signaling in the private context of the study, were combined (α = .96).

Debriefing Question. Per study 3, participants answered questions about (1) what they thought the point of the experiment was; and (2) whether they thought one part of the experiment (e.g., GRE math test) was related to other parts (e.g., surveys). None of the participants indicated awareness or suspicion of a connection between the GRE math test and other measures.

Results

Preliminary Analyses. Prior to this, and subsequent analyses, four participants in the MIT brand experience condition were removed because they did not select the MIT pen. First, we checked the adequacy of the self-threat manipulation, comparing self-perceptions measured right after participants received negative feedback in the self-threat condition to self-perceptions in the control condition. We conducted a multiple regression analysis with self-perceptions (focal traits) as the dependent variable and self-threat condition (control = 0, self-threat = 1), implicit self-theory (continuous variable), and the

interaction between self-threat condition and implicit self-theory as independent variables. Scores for the implicit self-theory measure were centered by subtracting the mean from each person's score. As expected, the main effect of the self-threat condition was significant (β = - .35, t(149) = 2.38, p < .05), indicating the self-threat manipulation was successful. Also, entity and incremental theorists were equally affected by the self-threat manipulation, indicated by the absence of significant interaction effect between self-threat condition and implicit self-theory (β = - .01, t(149) < 1, NS).

Second, we checked whether entity theorists were more likely to use the MIT pen as a signaling device in the face of self-threats than incremental theorists, consistent with our rationale. For participants who received negative feedback and used the MIT pen, we regressed the brand signaling measure onto implicit self-theory, with pen evaluation as a control variable. A significant negative relationship between implicit self-theory and brand signaling emerged (β = - 6.56, t(50) = 2.05, p < .05), as expected. Relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists were more likely to use the MIT pen as a self-signal.

Hypothesis Tests. We conducted a multiple regression analysis with self-perceptions (after pen use) as the dependent measure and implicit self-theory (continuous variable), experimental conditions (two dummy variables to represent the three conditions), and interactions between implicit self-theory and experimental conditions as the independent variables. Scores for the implicit self-theory measure were centered. Pen evaluation was included as a control variable.

As predicted, there was a significant interaction between implicit self-theory and the first dummy variable (self-threat & MIT brand experience = 0, self-threat & no MIT brand experience = 1) (β = .31, t (146) = 2.1, p < .05). On the other hand, there was no

significant interaction between implicit self-theory and the second dummy variable (self-threat & MIT brand experience = 0, control condition = 1) (β = - .01, t (146) < 1, NS). These results were obtained even after controlling for pen evaluation (β = .13, t (146) = 2.11, p < .05). These effects are illustrated in figure 4. As before, we tested simple slopes at values one standard deviation above and below the mean of implicit self-theory to explore these interactions. To simplify presentation of results, we report the findings for entity and incremental theorists in separate sections below.

Entity Theorists. We predicted that after receiving a self-threat, entity theorists would have more positive self-perceptions after using the MIT pen than after using a regular pen. This prediction was supported by a significant negative relationship between the first dummy variable (self-threat & MIT brand experience = 0, self-threat & no MIT brand experience = 1) and self-perceptions after using a pen (β = - .45, t(146) = 2.1, p < .05). Entity theorists who received a self-threat perceived themselves as more intelligent, more of a leader, and harder-working after using the MIT pen than after using a regular pen. Further, there was no significant relationship between the dummy variable (self-threat & MIT brand experience = 0, control condition = 1) and self-perceptions after using a pen (β = .16, t(146) < 1, NS), indicating that entity theorists who received a self-threat recovered their threatened self after using the MIT pen to the level of their counterparts in the control condition.

Incremental Theorists. As expected, we found incremental theorists were not affected by the pen they used, as indicated by a non-significant relationship between the dummy variable (self-threat & MIT brand experience = 0, self-threat & no MIT brand experience = 1) and self-perceptions after using a pen (β = .20, t(146) < 1, NS).

Incremental theorists responded to the self-threat in the same manner regardless of which pen (MIT or regular pen) they used. How did they respond? Comparisons between these conditions and the control group indicate that incremental theorists recovered their threatened self after using a regular pen (self-threat & no brand experience = 0, control = 1; β = - .06, t(146) < 1, NS) and an MIT pen (self-threat & MIT brand experience = 0, control = 1; β = .14, t(146) < 1, NS). Consistent with our prior studies, the signaling value of using a brand (MIT vs. regular brand) was not consequential for incremental theorists.

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Insert figure 4 about here

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Discussion

Faced with a self-threat, entity theorists used an MIT pen to recover their threatened self. Entity theorists who used an MIT pen perceived themselves as more intelligent, hard-working, and a leader than entity theorists who used a regular pen. The MIT pen was used in a private setting and resulted in more positive self-perceptions, consistent with findings from prior studies where brand use took place in more public settings. Interestingly, we found that incremental theorists recovered their threatened self regardless of the pen they used. Although this finding was not a focus of our predictions, it supports the idea that incremental theorists have resources to deal with self-threats that are not available to entity theorists, who are pessimistic about self-improvement, which reduces the emotional and psychological resources to cope with negative self-views (Rhodewalt 1994; Robins and Pals 2002).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

When consumers use brands with appealing personalities, does the brand's personality "rub off" on them? Our results show that brand personalities do rub off on some, but not all, consumers. Specifically, consumers with certain implicit beliefs about their personalities, entity theorists, were affected by their brand experiences, resulting in more positive perceptions of themselves on personality traits associated with the brands they used. For example, entity theorists perceived themselves as more good-looking, feminine, and glamorous after using a Victoria's Secret shopping bag (studies 1 and 3) and more intelligent, hard-working, and a leader after using an MIT pen (studies 2 and 4). In contrast, incremental theorists were not affected by these brand experiences. These findings hold regardless of whether the brand experience is short or more extended in nature, public or private, or with different brand personalities.

Our results also shed light on why entity theorists are more affected by their brand experiences than incremental theorists. We found that entity theorists were more likely to use their brand experience as an opportunity to signal the self (studies 3 and 4). Individuals who endorse entity theory view their personal qualities as something they cannot improve through their own direct efforts; instead, they seek out opportunities (such as brand experiences) to signal their positive qualities to the self or others. Conversely, individuals who endorse incremental theory view their personal qualities as something they can enhance through their own efforts at self-improvement, reducing the value of signaling opportunities through brands.

Contributions to Brand Personality Research

Our findings contribute to understanding how consumers respond to brand personalities. Researchers have found that consumers who want to enhance their sense of self are attracted to brands with distinctive and appealing personalities (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Swaminathan et al. 2009). We extend these findings into the domain of actual brand experiences, and examine how consumers develop more positive self-perceptions after using brands with appealing brand personalities. Although this link is suggested by qualitative analyses of consumer behavior (Belk 1988; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983), our research provides evidence that brand experiences lead to self-enhancement in a controlled experimental setting.

Second, our findings demonstrate that using brands with appealing brand personalities can have an impact on how consumers see themselves, even if the experiences are short-lived and limited in nature. Most of our studies involved short-term brand experiences that were restricted to the signaling value of the brand personality. For example, women in the Victoria's Secret studies (studies 1 & 3) only carried a bag with the Victoria's Secret brand name and did not use branded products such as lingerie or cosmetics that may have increased self-perceptions of being good-looking, feminine, or glamorous. Similarly, participants in the MIT studies (studies 2 and 4) used a pen with the MIT brand embossed on it, instead of being exposed to actual experiences with MIT classes, faculty, or students. Although more extended experiences with brands could lead to more enduring self-perceptions, our results attest to the powerful influence that brand personalities can have even in brief encounters.

Third, we introduce the idea that brand personalities are not experienced in a vacuum, but are filtered by the consumers' beliefs about their own personalities. Whether the signaling value of a brand's personality is consequential to how you feel about yourself is due, in large part, to your views about your own personality. If you feel your personal qualities can be improved through your own efforts at learning and self-improvement, using a brand with an appealing personality is unlikely to be consequential if it *only* provides a signaling opportunity. If you feel that your personal qualities cannot be improved upon by your own efforts, using a brand with an appealing personality can serve as a powerful signal that you possess positive qualities. Thus, a consumer's implicit self-theory about their personality is an important determinant of how they respond to brand personalities.

Contributions to Implicit Self-Theory Research

Our findings also contribute to research on implicit self-theory, which focuses on how beliefs about the malleability of one's traits influence goals, cognition, affect, and behavioral patterns, especially in the face of challenges or failures. By examining implicit self-theories in the context of consumption behavior, we show that entity and incremental theories have much broader influence than the learning and performance settings typically studied by psychologists.

More importantly, we find that consumption behaviors can exert a positive influence when entity theorists are faced with failures and threats to their sense of self. The consistent finding in psychological research is that incremental theorists take positive steps to overcome their failures and remedy problems (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988), whereas entity theorists engage in defensive and helpless behaviors (Rhodewalt

1994; Elliot and Dweck 1988) and feel upset about failures (Robins and Pals 2002). Thus, it is believed that holding entity theory beliefs is detrimental to recovering self-threats. Our findings suggest an entirely new range of behaviors open to entity theorists for coping with self-threats—using brands with personality traits that can be used to signal positive aspects of the self.

Limitations and Future Research

Our findings suggest several directions for future research. First, one might examine whether the positive self-perceptions obtained after brand experiences are short-lived or can be permanent. Our research shows positive shift in self-perceptions as a result of relatively short term brand experiences, and therefore this effect may not be permanent. However, it is possible that multiple episodes of brand use over time will result in a more lasting positive self-views. Prior research has suggested that multiple processes operate to maintain self-perceptions (Swann 1987). Thus, it may be possible that positive self-perception after a brand experience, however small or momentary they may be, could become more permanent as consumers accumulate repeated experiences with the brand.

Second, examining variables that may moderate our results would be important. Our set of studies includes different contexts, such as field/lab experiments and public/private brand experiences, but we do not explicitly examine moderating factors. A promising starting point would be to examine the moderating role of consumer brand knowledge, usage, or commitment. These factors may shape the brand experience in important ways, and may moderate the response that entity and incremental theorists have to the signaling value of brand experiences. To examine these factors, a larger and

more diverse set of respondents than those included in our studies would be necessary. The modest sample sizes we include in our studies does not allow for an examination of moderating factors. Further, with exception of study 1, which was conducted in a shopping mall, our studies involve the use of student participants, which may constrict the range of brand knowledge, usage, or commitment.

Third, one could examine when brand personalities influence the way incremental theorists perceive themselves. In this paper, we focused on brand experiences where only the signaling value of the brand can be experienced, but other aspects of brand experiences may be very consequential for incremental theorists. Given that incremental theorists pursue opportunities for self-improvement to enhance their sense of self, they might be affected by brand experiences that provide a way to enhance their performance or to learn new skills. For example, they might perceive themselves as more good-looking, feminine, and glamorous if they were able to use Victoria's Secret cosmetics to improve the look of their skin. Or, they might feel more athletic after using Nike shoes that offer maximum comfort and cushioning, allowing one to run faster and further. Exploring brand experiences that provide effortful self-improvement opportunities will provide a complete picture of how brands influence consumers, not only entity theorists but also incremental theorists.

Finally, future research could incorporate different ways to capture differences in self-perceptions between entity and incremental theorists. In our studies, we used paper and pencil measures that asked respondents to evaluate their self-perceptions on a set of personality traits before and after using (or not using) the brand. To reduce their salience, the focal personality traits were embedded in a list of personality traits, which were then

embedded in several pages of additional survey materials. In study 2, the pre-measures were even less salient as they were taken six weeks prior to the post-measure. Our debriefing procedures did not detect any influence of the self-perception measurement. However, it would be interesting to incorporate new measures, such as reaction time measures, that would be even less prominent in the experimental procedure.

Pursuing these lines of inquiry could provide further insights into the role that lay theories of personality play in how consumers respond to brands. For example, because entity theorists are more responsive to the signaling value of brand personalities, they might be less forgiving of brands that are the subject of negative publicity, perhaps related to ethical scandals or poor quality products. Recently, researchers have started to examine how implicit self-theories influence goal-directed behavior (Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2005), affect regulation (Labroo and Mukhopadhay 2009), and brand extension evaluations (Yorkston et al., 2010). Bringing implicit self-theories more fully into consumer research will provide a new conceptual frame for understanding how consumer beliefs shape, and are shaped by, consumption experiences.

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FIGURE 1

STUDY 1: SELF-PERCEPTIONS FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS
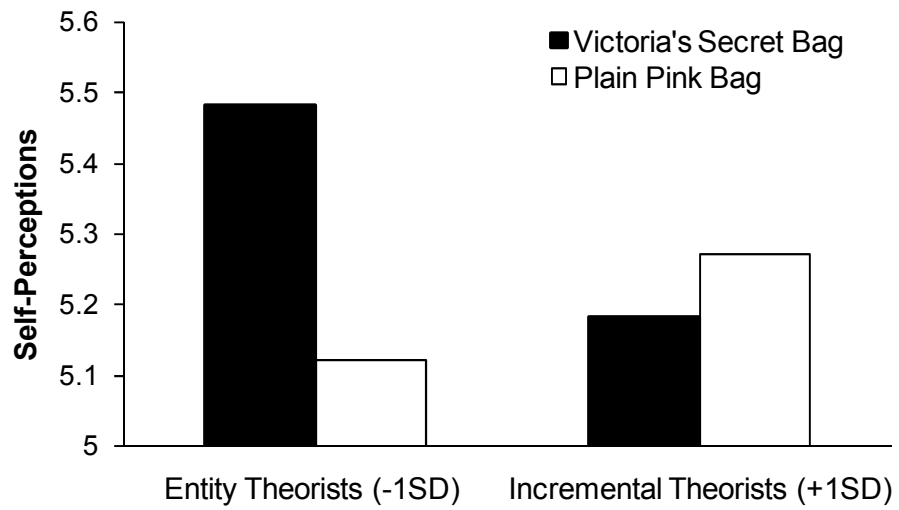
ASSOCIATED WITH VICTORIA'S SECRET

FIGURE 2

STUDY 2: SELF-PERCEPTIONS FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS
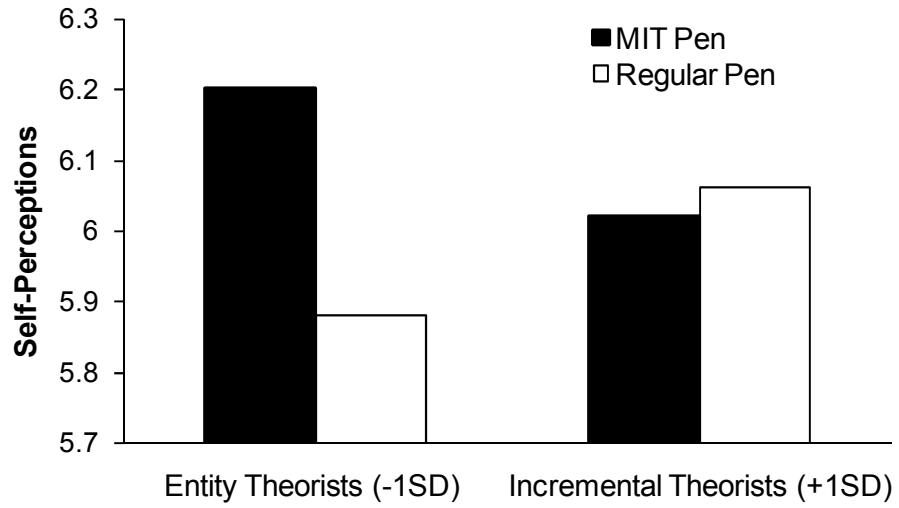
ASSOCIATED WITH MIT

FIGURE 3

STUDY 3: SELF-PERCEPTIONS FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS
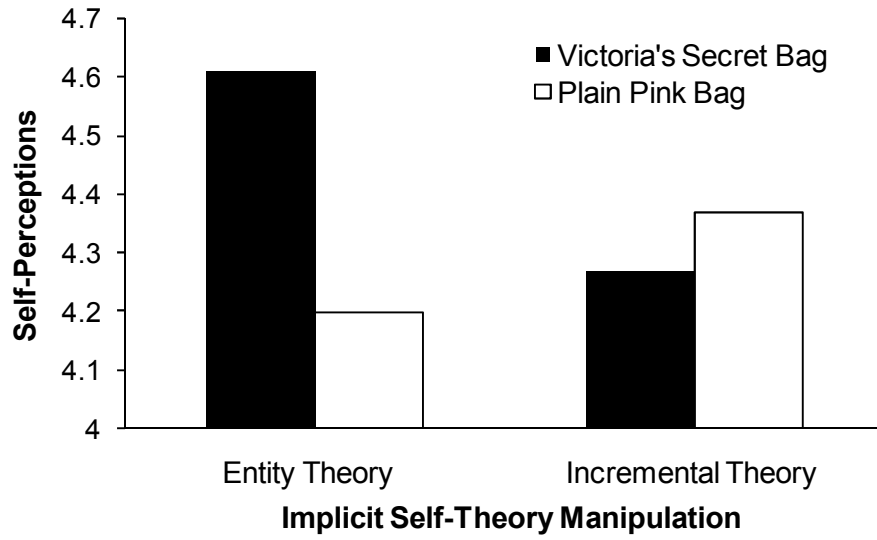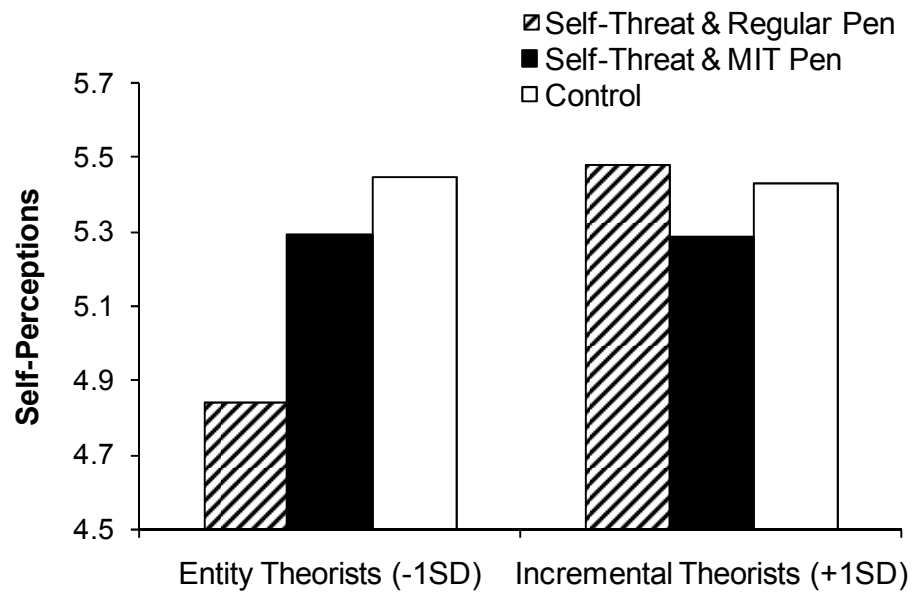
ASSOCIATED WITH VICTORIA'S SECRET

FIGURE 4

STUDY 4: SELF-PERCEPTIONS FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS

ASSOCIATED WITH MIT

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We know from prior research that consumers view brands with distinctive personalities as a useful instrument to express, affirm, or enhance their sense of self (Aaker 1999; Belk 1988; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Gao et al. 2009; Kleine, Kleine and Allen 1995; Swaminathan et al. 2009; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). Indeed, consumers often prefer or choose brands with appealing personalities, and talk about them as an attempt to feel better about themselves or project a certain image (Chaplin and John 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Gao et al. 2009; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001: Swaminathan et al. 2009).

When consumers use brands with appealing personalities to achieve self-enhancement, how do they use the brands, and does using those brands actually result in enhancing consumers' self-perceptions? We extend the prior findings into the domain of actual brand experiences, and examine how consumers use those brands and develop more positive self-perceptions through appealing brand personalities. The idea that possessions, including brands, can enhance self-perceptions is well accepted among consumer researchers (Belk 1988; Fournier 1998; McCracken 1989; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983). Although this link is suggested by qualitative analyses of consumer behavior (Belk 1988; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983), there has been a lack of research that examines how consumers use brands to self-enhance. Further, we have had little opportunity to directly observe whether self-enhancement can actually be obtained through brands with appealing personalities in a controlled experimental setting.

As a starting point for understanding the influence of brand personalities on consumers, this dissertation examined different approaches that consumers employ when using brands with personalities in an attempt to self-enhance, and provided evidence that brand personalities can actually enhance consumers' self-perceptions in line with brand personalities. More importantly, we introduce implicit self-theories as a moderating factor, and by doing so, we provide the underlying psychology for how and why brand personalities influence consumers. In this chapter, we summarize the findings from each essay included in this dissertation. We also integrate the findings across two essays to draw conclusions about how and why brand personalities influence consumers and suggest areas for future research.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our research suggests that lay beliefs consumers hold about the malleability of their personal qualities influence the way they use brands with appealing personalities as an attempt to self-enhance. Further, we find that when consumers use brands with appealing personalities, the brand's personality "rubs off" on them, but only for consumers who hold certain beliefs about their personality. We find across two essays that brands with appealing personalities are a useful tool to self-enhance, but how and why brand personalities enhance consumers' self-perceptions are determined by implicit self-theories.

Essay #1: The influence of implicit self-theories on consumers' response to ad appeals for brands with personalities

In the first essay, we examined how consumers with different implicit self-theories use brands with appealing personalities in an advertising context. We found that

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consumers who believe their personal qualities are fixed and cannot be developed through their own efforts (entity theorists) are more responsive to an advertising message that incorporates a signaling appeal for the brand ("*There's no better way to <u>show others</u> that you have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty*"). In contrast, we find that consumers who believe that their personal qualities are malleable and can be developed if they exert the effort (incremental theorists) are more responsive to an advertising message that incorporates a self-improvement appeal for the brand (*"There's no better way for you to <u>learn how</u> to have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty"*). These findings hold, regardless of whether implicit self-theories are measured as an individual difference factor or manipulated, or whether the brands have different brand personalities. Our findings provide a starting point for understanding how consumers use brands with appealing personalities to enhance the self. We show that implicit self-theories are an important moderating factor that influences the way consumers use brands to self-enhance. Importantly, signaling the self through brands does not resonate with all consumers. The signaling value of brand personality has been a dominant theme of much prior research. In our studies, we find that the signaling value is very effective for entity theorists, but less so for incremental theorists.

Essay # 2: Influence of brand personalities on consumers' self-perceptions: The role of implicit self-theories

In the second essay, we examined whether or not using a brand with an appealing personality results in self-enhancement—in other words, whether or not the brand personality "rubs off" on consumers. First, we found that brand personalities do rub off on some, but not all, consumers. Specifically, consumers with certain implicit beliefs

about their personalities, entity theorists, were affected by their brand experiences, which allowed them to experience only the signaling value of the brand's personality. They viewed the self more positively in line with the brand personality. In contrast, incremental theorists were not affected by these brand experiences. These findings hold, regardless of whether implicit self-theories are measured or manipulated, whether the brand experience is short or more extended in nature, public or private, or with different brand personalities.

Second, we explore the underlying process of why entity theorists were more affected by their brand experiences than were incremental theorists. Our results show that these differences were mediated by the disposition of entity theorists to view brand experiences as an opportunity to signal the self. Compared to incremental theorists, entity theorists used the brand with an appealing personality as a signaling device, which precipitated more positive self-perceptions in line with the brand's personality. Finally, we provide additional evidence that entity theorists, but not incremental theorists, use brands with appealing personalities as a signal of the self to self-enhance. We manipulated the motivation to self-enhance by inducing a threat to the self, which was related to a personality trait. Faced with a self-threat, entity theorists were able to recover a threatened self through a brand associated with an appealing personality related to the domain of the threat. Incremental theorists were not be affected by using the brand.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF RESEARCH

This dissertation makes several significant contributions. First, our findings contribute to prior research on brand personality. A stream of research on brand personality has examined brand personality from the firm perspective, focusing on topics

such as establishing and measuring the dimensions of brand personality (Aaker, 1997;

Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001) and demonstrating the ways that brand

personality can be built through the use of marketing tactics, such as celebrity endorsers,

metaphors in advertising, and package design (Ang & Lim, 2006; Batra & Homer, 2004;

Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Another stream of research has focused on consumers'

perspectives, understanding how consumers respond to brands with strong and appealing

personalities. From this line of research, we know that consumers who want to enhance

their sense of self are attracted to brands with distinctive and appealing personalities, and

they prefer or choose those brands (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Swaminathan et al. 2009).

Our research extends these two stream of research. We show that when using

brands with appealing personalities, consumers are inclined to employ different self-

enhancement approaches. By identifying these approaches, we provide strategies that

firms can use to create persuasive advertising messages through brand personalities.

Further, we show how and why consumers can obtain self-enhancement through the

signaling value of brand personalities. In sum, our findings suggest that strategically

communicated brand personalities can be consequential, thereby influencing consumers'

self-perceptions.

Second, our findings underscore the importance of implicit self-theories that

consumers hold in understanding consumer responses to brand personalities. We show

that entity and incremental theorists respond better to different types of ad appeals, which

we attribute to the different self-enhancement approaches favored by entity vs.

incremental theorists. Entity theorists are more responsive to ad appeals that promote the

signaling opportunities offered by using these brands, whereas incremental theorists are

more responsive to ad appeals that promote opportunities for self-improvement that can be realized by using these brands. Further, we provide evidence that whether the signaling value of a brand's personality is consequential to how individuals feel about themselves is due, in large part, to their views about their own personality. If people feel their personal qualities can be improved through their own effort at learning and self-improvement, then using a brand with an appealing personality is unlikely to be consequential if it *only* provides a signaling opportunity. If they feel that their personal qualities cannot be improved upon by their own effort, then using a brand with an appealing personality can serve as a powerful signal that they possess positive qualities. Thus, consumers' implicit self-theories about their personality is an important determinant of how they will respond to brand personalities.

Third, our findings also contribute to research on implicit self-theory, which focuses on how beliefs about the malleability of one's traits influence goals, cognition, affect, and behavioral patterns, especially in the face of challenges or failures. By examining implicit self-theories in the context of consumption behavior, we show that entity and incremental theories have a much broader influence than the learning and performance settings typically studied by psychologists. More importantly, we find that consumption behaviors can exert a positive influence when entity theorists are faced with failures and threats to their sense of self. The consistent finding in psychological research is that incremental theorists take positive steps to overcome their failures and remedy problems (Dweck 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988), whereas entity theorists engage in defensive and helpless behaviors (Rhodewalt 1994; Elliot and Dweck 1988) and feel upset about failures (Robins and Pals 2002). Thus, it is believed that holding entity theory

beliefs is detrimental to recovering self-threats. Our findings suggest that an entirely new range of behaviors open to entity theorists for coping with self-threats—using brands with personality traits can be used to signal positive aspects of the self.

Finally, our research provides a new platform for examining the positive effects that brands may have on consumer well-being. Marketing activities have been blamed for promoting consumption by creating associations between brands and desirable images. This research, however, suggests that marketing activities can be beneficial to consumers. By developing effective marketing communication tools, marketing managers can promote their brands while helping a certain type of consumers (e.g., entity theorists who are pessimistic about self-development) experience positive self-changes. A modest improvement in our understanding of consumer and brand relationships could have significant benefits to consumer well-being.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this research provides an important step in understanding self-enhancement approaches through brands with appealing personalities, and the influence of brand personalities on consumers, several interesting avenues for future research remain. First, examining the variables that may moderate our results would be important. A promising starting point would be to examine the moderating role of the distance between consumers' self-perceptions and brand personalities, consumer brand knowledge, usage, or commitment. These factors may shape brand experiences in important ways. They may moderate the extent to which consumers use brands as a self-enhancement tool, and the response that entity and incremental theorists have to the signaling value of brand experiences.

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Second, the nature of brand experience that will be attractive to incremental theorists is a topic in need of further discussion. In the first essay, we show that entity and incremental theorists seek different self-enhancement approaches through brands with appealing personalities. In essay 2, we focus on the effect of brand personalities on self-perceptions, and therefore we restricted to brand experience that only provides an opportunity to experience signaling values of brands. We find that only entity theorists (but not incremental theorists) are responsive to this type of brand experience. Incremental theorists seek self-development opportunities. Will they perceive the self more positively while using and experiencing a brand if it helps them to improve the self? For example, will they feel more athletic after using Nike if Nike shoes offer maximum comfort and cushioning for runners, and allow them to become a better runner (running faster or further)? Then, will incremental theorists be attracted to brand experiences that provide an opportunity for them to experience the functional benefits of branded products? Further, if brand statements facilitate self-improvement (e.g., "You can do it"), will incremental theorists be more responsive to these brand experiences, and use the branded products to improve the self? Understanding brand experience among incremental theorists and its influence on their self-perceptions will help provide a complete picture of how brand consumption experiences influence consumers.

Third, current research focuses on self-enhancement through brands with appealing personalities. Then, how will consumers use brands with unappealing personalities and respond to these unappealing personalities after using the brands? Entity theorists believe that their personal qualities are consistent across time and situations; therefore, they believe that their behaviors reflect who they are. They perceive the self

negatively after performing poorly on a task. Then, will they perceive the self negatively after using an unappealing brand? We speculate that it is unlikely. Even if they choose the brand to use, they may use it without attaching any meaning or intention to it. When they use the brand, they will be less likely to use the brand to signal the self of one's identity, resulting in no negative self-perceptions. Indeed, our results from a pilot study support this view. In the study, we asked MBA students to use a pen embossed with a logo of a less prestigious university for one month. We found that entity theorists who perceived the self as more intelligent after using the MIT pen did not perceive the self as being less intelligent after using the pen from the less prestigious university. Further research on how entity theorists use brands with unappealing personalities, and how they respond to brand personalities could provide further insights into the role that lay theories of personality play in how consumers respond to brands.

Finally, our research shows that brand experience influences the way that entity theorists perceive the self. Then, will this finding extend to the interpersonal context? Will observing other persons' brand usage influence the way that entity theorists view the person? For example, will entity theorists be more likely to view a person who uses Victoria's Secret as more glamorous and good-looking than incremental theorists? Relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists are more likely to turn their attention away from others' behavioral information that goes against their stereotypes, since it challenges their belief that the basic traits provide a reliable means for understanding people's behaviors (Plaks et al. 2001). We thus predict that relative to incremental theorists, entity theorists will be more suspicious that the target person has the same

appealing personality as a brand if the fit between pre-existing beliefs about the target person and the brand personality is low.

Pursuing these research directions holds the promise of extending our understanding of how brand personalities influence consumers. Our research points to implicit self-theories as an important factor, and many interesting questions remain about the scope of this influence. We believe that future investigation will reveal that implicit self-theories are an integral part of the puzzle of why consumers seek out brands with appealing personalities, and how using these brands affects their lives.

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APPENDIX A

Advertising Copy for Study 1

<u>Signaling Ad Appeal</u>   <u>Self-Improvement Ad Appeal</u>

Introducing Victoria s Secret *Angels Eyes*

Welcome to the world of Victoria's Secret, the favorite brand of women around the world who want to show the world their best.

This fall, Victoria's Secret is introducing a limited edition of stunning eye shadows worn by the famous models—called *Angels Eyes*. Developed by Victoria's Secret lead makeup artist, Linda Hay, each *Angels Eyes* kit includes four beautiful eye shadows artfully arranged in an eye-catching pink tortoise shell case—accented with a large beautiful Victoria's Secret logo on the outside of the case. Just imagine taking this gorgeous case out of your purse or backpack—there's no better way to show others that you have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty.

Plus, you will receive a booklet with pictures of different women wearing the stunning eye shadows included in the kit. You can see the eye shadow colors in the kit to create the looks shown in these pictures. Also included are special eye shadow brushes—with soft bristles and a black handle, with "Victoria's Secret" engraved on each one. You'll be pleased to see how easy they are to use. Just wait until you show your friends—now you'll know what it's like to have a great eye shadow look everyone will admire!

The show-stopping shades in Victoria's Secret *Angels Eyes* have the perfect combination of saturated color and versatile tones. You can frame your eyes with the flattering color combinations that work well for all women. Using *Angels Eyes*, you can create a number of different eye shadow looks that that will show your fashion sense. No matter where you go—work, school, or out on the town—you'll know that you have the right make-up look thanks to *Angels Eyes*!

Try *Angels Eyes*….and, show you know how to look your best!

Introducing Victoria s Secret *Angels Eyes*

Welcome to the world of Victoria's Secret, the favorite brand of women around the world who want to learn how to look their best.

This fall, Victoria's Secret is introducing a limited edition of stunning eye shadows worn by the famous models—called *Angels Eyes*. Developed by Victoria's Secret lead makeup artist, Linda Hay, each *Angels Eyes* kit includes four beautiful eye shadows artfully arranged in a demure black acrylic case—accented with beautiful swirls of the four colors that help women learn how to put the colors together. Just imagine carrying this gorgeous case in your purse or backpack—there's no better way for you to learn how to have a modern up-to-date sense of beauty.

Plus, you will receive a booklet with pictures of different women wearing the stunning eye shadows included in the kit. You can use the eye shadow colors in the kit to create the looks shown in these pictures. Also included are special "how-to" cards—with step-by-step instructions to help women learn how to create different looks. You'll be pleased to see how great they are to use. Just wait until you see the results—now you'll know what it's like to learn the right way to have a great eye shadow look!

The show-stopping shades in Victoria's Secret *Angels Eyes* have the perfect combination of saturated color and versatile tones. You can frame your eyes with the flattering color combinations that work well for all women. Using *Angels Eyes*, you can create a number of different eye shadow looks that will improve your fashion sense. No matter where you go—work, school, or out on the town—you'll be glad you learned how to have the right make-up look thanks to *Angels Eyes*!

Try *Angels Eyes*….and, learn how to look your best!

APPENDIX B

Items for Implicit Persons Theory Measure

- Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that they can do to really change that. (Entity Theorist)
- The kind of person someone is, is something basic about them, and it can't be changed very much. (Entity Theorist)
- People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed. (Entity Theorist)
- As much as I hate to admit it, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. People can't really change their deepest attributes. (Entity Theorist)
- People can change even their most basic qualities. (Incremental Theorist)
- Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics. (Incremental Theorist)
- People can substantially change the kind of person who they are. (Incremental Theorist)
- No matter what kind of person someone is, they can always change very much. (Incremental Theorist)

APPENDIX C

Advertising Copy for Study 2

<u>Signaling Ad Appeal</u>　　　　　　　<u>Self-Improvement Ad Appeal</u>

Introducing *MIT Analyst*

Do you dread the thought of spending hours and hours on complicated analyses required for business classes, such as finance, marketing research, and accounting?

Now, there's *MIT Analyst*, a new add-on application for Excel. Developed at the Sloan School of Management at MIT, the *MIT Analyst* is easy to use yet versatile enough to take on 20 common business analysis tasks—including cash flow analysis, balance sheet analysis, pricing and breakeven analysis, and more. Show off your analysis skills using this amazing App!

Don't waste your time figuring out how to use Excel for common types of business analysis. A unique visual interface will let you do the analysis in a very short time. With *MIT Analyst*, you'll be able to produce analyses that will be the envy of your classmates. No wonder *MIT Analyst* has received rave reviews from students at top business schools who have had the opportunity to use it!

Now, the *MIT Analyst* is being offered to students at top U.S. business schools for a low price of $35. It's easy to load onto your laptop. Plus, wait till you see the amazing icon on your screen—"MIT" in large red letters superimposed over a picture of the MIT Dome, a recognizable symbol of intellectual excellence in the world.

Get your own copy of *MIT Analyst* by visiting www.mit.edu/bookstore/sloan. Use the password: elite022. Join the ranks of top business students who know the power of *MIT Analyst* —and the difference it can make in your case analyses, internships, and projects.

Introducing *MIT Analyst*

Are you interested in learning the best way to perform the complicated analyses required for business classes, such as finance, marketing research, and accounting?

Now, there's *MIT Analyst*, a new add-on application for Excel. Developed at the Sloan School of Management at MIT, the *MIT Analyst* is versatile enough to take on 20 common business analysis tasks—including cash flow analysis, balance sheet analysis, pricing and breakeven analysis, and more. Your efforts will be rewarded with better analysis skills using this amazing App!

Learn how you can use Excel more effectively for common types of business analysis. A unique visual interface will let you do the analysis in a very short time. With *MIT Analyst*, you'll learn how to produce analyses that will take less time than you would ever imagine. No wonder *MIT Analyst* has received rave reviews from students at business schools who have had the opportunity to improve their abilities by using it!

Now, the *MIT Analyst* is being offered to students at business schools across the U.S. for a low price of $35. It's easy to load onto your laptop. Plus, wait till you see the discrete icon on your screen—"MIT" in small black letters superimposed over a picture of an Excel spreadsheet, small enough not to clutter up your laptop screen.

Improve your abilities by getting *MIT Analyst* at www.mit.edu/bookstore/sloan. Use the password: learning022. Join the ranks of business students who know the power of *MIT Analyst* —and how it can help you learn to do better in your case analyses, internships, and projects.