

JENNIFER L. AAKER*

Considerable research in consumer experimental psychology has examined the self-expressive role of brands but has found little support for the premise that the interaction of the personality traits associated with a brand and those associated with an individual's self-concept influence attitudes. The current research focuses on the influence of the malleable self-concept on consumer attitudes toward a brand, based on the its personality associations. The results of two experiments demonstrate that traits that are made accessible by salient situational cues and those that are chronically accessible (schematic traits) positively influence consumer attitudes toward a brand based on its personality associations. More important, these effects are tested in a set of theory-based interactions that rely on the self-monitoring individual difference variable. Self congruity is enhanced for low versus high self-monitoring subjects, whereas situation congruity is enhanced for high versus low self-monitoring subjects. Together, these experiments shed light on the self-expressive use of brands and the role of the malleable self-concept in influencing consumer attitudes.

The Malleable Self: The Role of Self-Expression in Persuasion

The notion that inanimate objects such as brands can be associated with a set of human characteristics is well accepted by social psychologists (e.g., Bem and Funder 1978; Prentice 1987; Snyder and Gangestad 1986), as well as advertisers (e.g., Biel 1993; Ogilvy 1983; Plummer 1985). The basic argument is that attitude objects, such as brands, can be associated with personality traits that provide self-expressive or symbolic benefits for the consumer. Despite this knowledge, much of consumer behavior research, particularly in the realm of consumer experimental psychology, has focused solely on the role of brand attributes and the utilitarian function of consumer attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), neglecting the role of brand personality and the symbolic function of consumer attitudes. Consequently, little progress has been made in understanding how brands are used for self-expressive purposes, despite research that

shows that self-expression can be an important driver of consumer preference and choice (Belk 1988; Richins 1994) and that many products serve both utilitarian and symbolic functions (Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis 1986; Shavitt 1990).

It is not for want of trying. In the 1960s and 1970s, a host of research was conducted on self-expression. The motivating paradigm was that preference should increase when a consumer's personality was congruent, versus incongruent, with that of a brand. However, this intuitive premise met with limited empirical success. In capstone summary articles, Kassirjian (1971) and Sirgy (1982) argue that a primary reason was the conceptualization of the self as a unitary construct. That is, the self-expression process was tested on the basis of the premise that the self is a construct that remains invariant across situations. The assumption was that an individual has a stable set of personality traits and therefore should behave similarly across contexts. However, in the past two decades, a considerable amount of research in social psychology has shown that the self is a malleable construct (e.g., Markus and Kunda 1986; Schlenker 1981; Tetlock and Manstead 1985) and that people act differently in different situations, are influenced by social roles and cues, and have a need for self-presentation. Therefore, it may not be surprising that empirical support for the self-expressive use of brands has remained elusive.

The objective of this research is to show that brand personality affects consumer preferences by exploring the in-

*Jennifer L. Aaker is Assistant Professor of Marketing, Anderson School of Management, UCLA (e-mail: jaaker@anderson.ucla.edu). The author thanks Joe Alba, Aimee Drolet, Gavan Fitzsimons, Brian Gibbs, Jim Lattin, and Loraine Lau for comments on previous drafts and talks, John Lynch for help on error terms, three anonymous *JMR* reviewers for extremely helpful guidance, and the UCLA Marketing Study Center for financial support. Finally, the author thanks her dissertation advisor, Kevin Lane Keller, who provided support and invaluable insight on the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical elements of this research. To interact with colleagues on specific articles in this issue, see "Feedback" on the *JMR* Web site at www.ama.org/pubs/jmr.

fluence of the malleable self on attitudes toward brands with distinct personality associations. The premise to be tested is that personality traits differ in their accessibility across social situations. Consequently, the preference for and use of a brand, based on its personality associations, will vary across usage situations.

To explore this premise, this research deviates from prior research in two ways. First, the relationship between the personality of a consumer and a brand is examined across all personality traits. However, a considerable amount of research in social psychology suggests that the self is composed of multiple aspects or "dimensions" (e.g., James 1890; Markus and Kunda 1986; Rosenberg 1979), which refer here to a specific set of personality traits (Church and Burke 1994). Consequently, the expression of the self often operates at the dimension level (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993). More important, these personality dimensions vary in how centrally they are held, or how important they are to the self (Markus 1977). As a result, though some personality dimensions are important to individuals, others are not and therefore might not be expressed. Thus, in prior research, the power of the self-concept was diffused. In this research, only the important or central aspects of self are examined to determine the extent to which brands are used for self-expression.

Second, to assess brand personality, prior research drew on ad hoc scales (for a review, see Sirgy 1982) or the "Big Five" human personality scales (capturing the dimensions Agreeableness, Extroversion, Conscientiousness, Culture, and Neuroticism; for a review, see Digman 1990). The current research draws on Aaker (1997), in which a theoretical framework of the brand personality construct was put forth by determining the number and nature of dimensions of brand personality, termed Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. Each dimension, which is composed of personality traits that were selected to be relevant to both human and brand personality, has been shown to be generalizable across categories (Aaker 1997).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The personality-versus-situation debate focuses on the relative ability of personality versus situational factors to predict attitudes and behavior (Epstein 1977; Mischel 1968). Whereas advocates of the personality model propose that behavior is determined primarily by an individual's personality, advocates of the situation model propose that behavior is influenced primarily by the nature of the situation. In the former view, behavior is consistent across situations. In the latter, behavior is viewed as variable across situations; personality traits are perceived more as temporary states than permanent traits.

More recently, social and personality psychologists have argued for an interaction model that posits that the self is malleable, influenced by both personality and situational factors (e.g., Linville and Carlston 1994). To capture this dynamic and multidimensional conceptualization of the self, Markus and Kunda (1986) put forth the term "malleable" (or working) self-concept, which refers to any number of self-conceptions—good self, bad self, hoped-for self, feared self, not-me self, ideal self, possible self, ought self—that can be made accessible at a given moment (see also Markus and Nurius 1986). This conceptualization of the self has two im-

plications. First, the self is dynamic. Any of these self-conceptions can be activated at any particular time due to a host of factors that become salient in a social situation, such as one's hopes, fears, goals, identities, and roles. To illustrate, a person's self-conception involving a particular set of traits (e.g., loving, empathetic, and nurturing) might be activated when he or she takes on a particular role, but not when he or she takes on another (e.g., parent versus professor). Second, relatively conflicting traits may exist in a person's self-concept. For example, a colleague might think of him- or herself as both highly intelligent and sociable. The relative accessibility of the two traits determines which will be expressed through his or her attitudes and behavior. To illustrate, when concentrating on work, the person's intelligence (versus sociability) may be a more salient personality trait. However, as a host of a party, the opposite may hold. Markus and Kunda (1986) argue that a trait becomes accessible if it was just activated before an event, if it was evoked by an experience or a memory, and if it has been elicited by the social situation at a particular point in time.

In this light, the self is regarded as relatively stable (consisting of a set of self-conceptions that are chronically accessible), while also being malleable (varying on the basis of self-conceptions that are made accessible in the social situation). In this article, the research on the malleable self-concept provides the theoretical basis for what are termed "self congruity" and "situation congruity," which together may capture the influence of brand personality on consumer attitudes. It should be noted that this research focuses on a specific set of self-conceptions: those associated with personality traits.

Self Congruity

The crux of self congruity is that consumers prefer brands associated with a set of personality traits congruent with their own (Kassarjian 1971; Sirgy 1982). Prior research has focused on the *self-concept* construct, defined as the total set of beliefs about and attitudes toward the self (Rosenberg 1979). However, self-concept captures all aspects of the self, including both chronically accessible or schematic traits and those that are not necessarily schematic. This research focuses only on *schematic traits*, defined as the set of personality traits held to be extremely descriptive of and important to a person (versus neither descriptive nor important; Markus 1977), because prior research has shown that the ability to predict behavior across situations increases when taking trait importance into consideration (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993).

The theoretical rationale behind the need to express a self-schema is twofold: the need for consistency and positivity. First, people have a need for consistency that arises from an "inborn preference for things that are predictable, familiar, stable and uncertainty reducing" (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler 1992, p. 6). As a result, feedback that is inconsistent versus consistent with an individual's self-schema is distorted more often, less likely to be recalled, and more likely to produce negative affect (Eisenstadt and Leippe 1994), even if that feedback is valenced negatively. Second, because the personality traits that constitute a person's self-schema are generally positive, the ability to express schematic traits often is associated with positive affect, such as pleasure or pride, whereas the inability to express them

often is associated with negative affect, such as disappointment or dissatisfaction (Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon 1994). Combined, these two drives increase self-esteem and can aid in self-presentation (Greenwald and Breckler 1985). Furthermore, the two drives are independent and act together, whereby a person strives for positivity while balancing the need to maintain a sense of consistency.

People maintain positivity and consistency in their self-schemas not by denying feedback that challenges their self-schema, but rather by selecting, interpreting, and recalling self-confirming information and choosing situations and companions that affirm their self-schema (Linville and Carlston 1994). It is proposed here that brands, according to their associations with a specific set of personality traits, are an additional vehicle that consumers use for such self-expression. Therefore, individuals who are schematic versus aschematic on a particular personality dimension should have a greater preference for brands that are highly descriptive on that personality dimension, a process referred to here as "self congruity."

Situation Congruity

Consider the following scenario: A corporate businessman who perceives himself as very serious, reliable, and hardworking, but not as rugged, tough, and outdoorsy, leaves for a weekend trip on his Harley-Davidson motorcycle. If brands are used for self-expressive purposes, what explains the apparent incongruity between the schematic traits of the businessman and the traits of his preferred brand?

The malleable self-concept put forth by Markus and Kunda (1986) suggests that though schematic traits often drive behavior, anomalies exist. That is, sometimes consumers express who they wish to be (desired self), strive to be (ideal self), or believe they should be (ought self), rather than who they consistently are across situations (conceptualized here as self-schema). As previously reviewed, the variables that make these self-conceptions accessible include one's hopes, fears, motives, goals, and roles at a particular point in time.

How does a person manipulate the accessibility of such self-conceptions? Linville and Carlston (1994) suggest one way is through the *social situation*, defined as the (1) physical aspects of the situation (e.g., places, decor, lighting) and (2) social surroundings (e.g., other people present in the situation, their traits and roles). The social situation, as perceived by a person, determines the cues of behavior (referred to as "situational cues"), which, in turn, make a specific set of personality traits accessible (Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz 1982).¹ In other words, the impact of the social situation on a person's behavior is mediated by situational cues, which are stored as cognitive representations in memory. Thus, when a person enters or anticipates entering a social situation, the situational cues are made salient and thereby influence the accessibility of a specific set of personality traits. To illustrate, a person's assessment of an academic seminar, which may include the physical description of the seminar room, as well as social considerations such as

who will be there, determines the normative standards of how to behave at the seminar, thereby making accessible traits such as intelligence, creativity, and competence. Alternatively, in the case of the corporate businessman and his Harley, the weekend trip he is anticipating does not heighten the accessibility of the serious, reliable, and hardworking set of traits, but does heighten the accessibility of the rugged, tough, and outdoorsy traits. These situational assessments, in combination with an individual's personal goals and expectations of the situation, determine his or her behavior.²

The motivational drive to attend and conform to salient situational cues is based, in large part, on impression management (cf. Tetlock and Manstead 1985). Specifically, people tend to focus and rely on situational cues to gain approval and develop positive relationships, the achievement of which tends to increase self-esteem (Schlenker 1981). In contrast, the inability to achieve these two goals by matching dispositional behavior to situational cues often results in aversive consequences for a person (e.g., incompetence, frustration, embarrassment; Solomon 1983, p. 326). Consequently, people often conform their dispositional behavior to situational cues, a process referred to here as "situation congruity."

Testing Self and Situation Congruity: The Role of Self-Monitoring

To examine the hypotheses that consumers prefer brands with personality traits that are congruent, versus incongruent, with the personality traits that constitute their self-schemas (self congruity) and are elicited by situational cues (situation congruity), the personality of brands and the salience of situational cues must be manipulated and people's self-schemas measured. However, if the predicted effects are found in an experiment relying on such a design, a demand effect explanation may be offered due to the main effect testing of the hypotheses. To reduce this possibility, self and situation congruity effects are tested in a set of interactions by drawing on a moderating variable that shifts the accessibility of an individual's own personality traits relative to situational factors, and vice versa.

One such moderating variable is *self-monitoring*, which refers to the extent to which expressive behavior is guided by situational cues to social appropriateness (Snyder 1974). Low self-monitors (who endorse scale items such as, "My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs") and high self-monitors (who endorse scale items such as, "In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons") vary in their ability and motivation to pay attention to inner personality versus situational factors (Snyder 1987). Whereas situational factors tend to be more salient for high versus low self-monitors, inner personality factors tend to be more salient for low versus high self-monitors. As a result, Snyder and Gangestad (1986, p. 124) argue that "it is as if high self-monitoring individuals chronically strive to appear to be the type of person called for by each situation in which they find

¹The extent to which these situational cues are individually versus culturally held has been the subject of much debate (e.g., Belk 1975; Mischel 1968). However, though people differ in their own psychological assessment of a situation, this difference tends to be relatively minimal; the consensually shared or objective interpretation of a situation is relatively robust and consistent across people (Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz 1982).

²It should be noted that people sometimes purposely present their selves in ways that are incongruent with the behavioral cues of a situation. For example, they may want to create a negative impression, maintain their sense of autonomy, or validate a sense of uniqueness, none of which will be explored in this research.

themselves, and it is as if low self-monitoring individuals strive to display their own personal dispositions and attitudes in each situation in which they find themselves." Furthermore, Snyder and DeBono (1985) argue that high self-monitors have more concern for the self-image they project in social situations, as compared with low self-monitors (see also Graeff 1996).³ Consequently, the images conveyed by high self-monitors tend to display situation-to-situation shifts, whereas those conveyed by low self-monitors tend to be consistent across social situations.

Because of the differential levels of salience of personality versus situational factors, the relative influence of self versus situational variables on brand preference (i.e., preference for a brand based on its personality) should vary for low versus high self-monitors. Although the personality traits that constitute a person's self-schema should have a greater influence on brand preference for low versus high self-monitors, the personality traits that are elicited by situational cues should have a greater influence on brand preference for high versus low self-monitors. An illustrative example supporting this premise is provided by Snyder (1987, p. 102): "Imagine a high self-monitoring smoker who seeks to project an image of rugged masculinity because he is on a weekend foray with his hunting buddies. In addition to choosing appropriate words, deeds and mannerisms, he may also choose to smoke the cigarettes (and perhaps prominently display their package) that are associated with a ruggedly masculine image." In contrast, the choice of cigarettes by the low self-monitor will not be influenced by such situational cues. Rather, low self-monitors, "who claim to value congruence between 'who they are' and 'what they do'" (Snyder 1974, p. 100), should be more guided by their internal attributes and attitudes. Therefore, self congruity should be stronger for low versus high self-monitors, whereas situation congruity should be stronger for high versus low self-monitors. More formally, the following hypotheses are put forth:

- H₁: Self-schema will play a greater role in determining brand preference for low (versus high) self-monitors.
 H₂: Situational cues will play a greater role in determining brand preference for high (versus low) self-monitors.

Furthermore, this research stream suggests self and situation congruity effects should interact, such that the self congruity effect for low self-monitors should be magnified in low versus high salient situational cue conditions. That is, though low self-monitors may not be overly motivated to adhere to the behavioral norms made salient by situational cues, they still may be aware of the norms, particularly when the situation is strong (Price and Bouffard 1974). If so, they should be more likely to demonstrate self congruity effects when the situational cues are less versus more highly salient (Snyder 1987). Therefore, self-schema should play a

greater role in determining brand preference for low self-monitors, particularly in conditions in which there is a low versus high salient situational cue.

The literature on the self also suggests that the situation congruity effect should be qualified. That is, situation congruity should be stronger for high self-monitors who are aschematic versus schematic on a specific personality dimension, because that particular dimension is not important or descriptive of who they are (Snyder 1974). More specifically, there are lowered levels of personal meaning associated with aschematic versus schematic dimensions (Markus 1977). Therefore, for high self-monitors, highly salient situational cues should have a greater impact on the preferences of a brand, based on its personality, when the personality dimension is not at all (versus very) important and descriptive.

- H₃: Self-schema will play a greater role in determining brand preference for low self-monitors when exposed to a low (versus high) salient situational cue, whereas situational cues will play a greater role in determining brand preference for high self-monitors who are aschematic (versus schematic).

EXPERIMENT 1

Overview

Experiment 1 was conducted based on a 2 (Self-Schema: aschematic versus schematic) × 2 (Salience of Situational Cue: low versus high) × 2 (Self-Monitoring: low versus high) mixed-factorial design. Self-schema and self-monitoring are between-subjects measures (based on a median split) measured before the main experiment, whereas salience of situational cue is a within-subject variable manipulated in the experiment. The hypotheses are tested by isolating personality dimensions to describe the self, situational cues, and brand. The reason for focusing on the personality construct at the dimension level is twofold. First, persons who are motivated to express their selves do so through a particular dimension, rather than in its entirety (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993). Consequently, self congruity tends to not operate at a global level but at a dimension-specific level. To illustrate, when motivated to feel "athletic" (e.g., when feeling particularly unathletic or at an athletic event), a person may want to demonstrate only the athletic dimension of his or her self and therefore may prefer Nike athletic shoes (regarded as athletic, strong, and tough) to L.A. Gear athletic shoes (regarded as more fashionable, good-looking, and trendy), despite the possibility that the personality traits associated with L.A. Gear better match the consumer's overall personality based on an aggregate set of traits.

Second, recent research has identified five dimensions that describe brand personality (Aaker 1997). In this research, a representative sample of American subjects rated the extent to which brands in symbolic and utilitarian categories could be described by a set of personality traits that were pooled principally from personality psychology (e.g., Norman 1963; Tupes and Christal 1958) and consumer behavior (e.g., Batra, Lehmann, and Singh 1993; Levy 1959) literature. The results of a series of factor analyses, which relied on independent sets of subjects and brands, found five stable brand personality dimensions, termed Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness.

³Most of the self-monitoring research has focused on a difference in the nature of self-expression: Low self-monitors tend to express the traits that are chronically accessible, whereas high self-monitors tend to express traits that are made accessible by situational cues (Snyder 1987). However, a difference in magnitude of self-expression also may exist. That is, high versus low self-monitors may be more likely to express a particular set of traits in general (Graeff 1996; Snyder and DeBono 1985). This research focuses on the differential nature of self-expression for low versus high self-monitors, but further research is needed to examine the extent to which magnitude differences exist as well.

These personality dimensions were highly reliable and stable across brands, as well as subsets of subjects. By relying on these five personality dimensions, brand personality can be manipulated and the corresponding personality dimension for the subject measured.⁴

To reduce the possibility of demand effects, three steps were taken. First, self and situation congruity were tested in a set of interactions that relied on the self-monitoring variable. Second, the key variables, self-monitoring and self-schema, were measured one month prior to the main experiment, using subjects with no prior training in psychology or marketing. Third, in Experiment 1, real brands as well as decoy brands were used, and self-expressive effects were explored with only two personality dimensions, Excitement and Ruggedness. However, for completeness and to increase internal validity, Experiment 2 relied on fictitious brands but no decoy brands (because of time constraints), and self-expressive effects were explored across all five personality dimensions.

Method

Stimuli development. Stimuli development for the experiments consisted of two stages. First, to identify situations that make only one personality dimension accessible (i.e., highly salient situational cue), a total of 105 subjects (65% women, mean age = 31 years) was given \$7 to rate a set of five situations in terms of the extent to which "a typical person would try to demonstrate the following personality traits in each of the specified situations" (Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz 1982) on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "would not try to demonstrate," 5 = "would definitely try to demonstrate"). The 42 traits used were those that represent the five personality dimensions (Aaker 1997).

As in Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz's (1982) study, the situations, all of which involved dinner scenarios to maintain consistency across the replications, were described by their physical (i.e., type of dinner) and social (i.e., who is at the dinner) characteristics. Of the twenty situations pretested, the five selected were those that made the intended personality dimension accessible, to the exclusion of the four unintended personality dimensions ($ps < .01$). The Sincerity cue was a homey dinner during the holidays with the whole family and grandparents, the Excitement cue was a fun dinner at a hip club with a date, the Competence cue was an important business dinner meeting with the boss, the Sophistication cue was a fancy wedding dinner with many guests, and the Ruggedness cue was an informal barbecue after a river-rafting trip with a bunch of friends. Only the

Excitement and Ruggedness situational cues are used in Experiment 1; all five are used in Experiment 2.

Second, brands that scored highest on their intended dimension (Excitement or Ruggedness) and lowest on the unintended dimension (Ruggedness or Excitement), while remaining constant on the other three dimensions (Sincerity, Competence, Sophistication), were identified. Twenty subjects (50% women, mean age = 25 years) were paid \$5 to rate the extent to which five brands in two product categories could be described by the 42 traits on the five-point Likert scale. The two product categories, apparel and fragrance, were chosen because they could be used in the situations previously described and different brand personalities exist in these categories. The two brands in both categories were well known and had distinct personalities; Benetton apparel and CKOne fragrance were rated significantly higher on Excitement ($m_{\text{Benetton}} = 4.32$; $m_{\text{CKOne}} = 4.12$) than Ruggedness ($m_{\text{Benetton}} = 2.72$, $F(1, 19) = 13.03$, $p < .001$; $m_{\text{CKOne}} = 2.66$, $F(1, 19) = 10.31$, $p < .01$), and Patagonia apparel and Polo fragrance were rated significantly higher on Ruggedness ($m_{\text{Patagonia}} = 4.45$; $m_{\text{Polo}} = 4.34$) than Excitement ($m_{\text{Patagonia}} = 2.32$, $F(1, 19) = 15.61$, $p < .001$; $m_{\text{Polo}} = 2.78$, $F(1, 19) = 11.19$, $p < .01$). There were no systematic differences on the other three personality dimensions for these pairs of brands ($F_s < 1$).

Procedure. One month before the experiment, 120 university employees were e-mailed an invitation to participate in a study on a new way to evaluate brands. Instead of simply evaluating brands in general, subjects would be asked to evaluate them in terms of situations in which they typically use them. To participate in the study, subjects had to return a short questionnaire that assessed their product and brand usage (consistent with the cover story), self-schema (for which subjects were asked to rate themselves on the 42 personality traits and then describe how important each of the traits was to them), self-monitoring information (18 items; Snyder and Gangestad 1986), and demographic information.

On the basis of the personality trait ratings, each subject received two self-schema scores, one for each dimension (i.e., each subject was classified as Excitement schematic or aschematic and Ruggedness schematic or aschematic). The self-schema scores were created on the basis of median splits on both descriptiveness and importance ratings. For example, subjects whose descriptive ($m = 3.74$) and importance ($m = 2.27$) ratings on the Excitement dimension were greater than the mean were coded "Excitement schematic," whereas those whose descriptive and importance ratings were less than the mean were coded "Excitement aschematic." Similarly, the same subjects whose descriptive ($m = 3.10$) and importance ($m = 2.00$) ratings on the Ruggedness dimension were greater than the mean were coded "Ruggedness schematic," whereas those whose descriptive and importance ratings were less than the mean were coded "Ruggedness aschematic." The two other cells (descriptive/not important, not descriptive/important) were not used, which lead to the elimination of 24 subjects in the case of Excitement and 34 in the case of Ruggedness.

One month after they returned the questionnaire, 93 subjects (78% response rate, 55% women, mean age = 27 years) were individually contacted and invited to participate in a study on a new way to evaluate brands in various product

⁴Although the traits describing each brand personality dimension can be used to describe people, a factor analysis was conducted using subjects' self-ratings on the traits to ensure that this five-dimension structure could be used to measure the personality of people. As in Aaker's (1997) and McCrae and Costa's (1989) studies, the results of a principal components factor analysis using a varimax rotation yielded five components (unrestrained or restrained). More important, the nature of the five components for human personality was similar to that for brand personality. Four traits switched components when individuals versus brands were used as stimuli: western, rugged, unique, and good-looking. However, the four traits all had high secondary loadings on their "intended" component (ranging from .35-.45), indicating that the five dimensions may be used to measure human personality.

categories.⁵ In groups of 10 to 20 in a laboratory setting, subjects rated their personal preference for and usage likelihood of ten brands in five product categories, three of which were filler categories to minimize suspicion of the manipulation (beer, athletic shoes, and jeans). The two target brands in the apparel and fragrance product categories used as stimuli had Exciting versus Rugged personalities and were positioned (1) third and fourth (Benetton and Patagonia) and (2) seventh and eighth (CKOne and Polo) in the list of filler brands. The instructions highlighted the need for the subjects' personal preference, because prior research has shown that the use of words such as "personal," "self," and "own" tend to make the self, to the exclusion of others and social situations, more salient (Aaker and Williams 1998). The preferences in this low salience situational cue condition were to be used to test self congruity (H_1). Next, subjects were given the following instructions:

The main purpose of this study is to get your reactions to a set of brands currently on the market. Therefore, you will be given the same set of brands that you rated before. However, unlike before, you will be asked to evaluate these brands in certain situations. By re-evaluating the brands in these situations, we can better predict how the brands are actually used in real life. However, the key to the success of this research depends on you *really imagining yourself in these situations*. Based on previous research, we have identified many types of situations in which products are often used—all involve dinner situations. To give you an overall feel of what these dinner situations are like, the dinner will be briefly described. Then, you will be asked to really imagine yourself going to the dinner. What does it feel like for you? What are you thinking about? Next, you will receive a set of brands that may be available for you to choose from *in that dinner situation*. Of that set of five brands, we would like to know what you think of each of the brands. That is, which one you would choose in that dinner situation.

Half the subjects were asked to imagine themselves in a particular dinner scenario with a high salience Excitement cue and rate (1) the extent they would prefer to use and (2) the likelihood they would use the brand if they were at a "hip club with a date" (1 = "not at all," 7 = "extremely"). The brands were Red Dog and Heineken beers, Patagonia and Benetton jackets, Guess and Lee jeans, CKOne and Polo fragrances, and Adidas and L.A. Gear athletic shoes. Only the preference and likelihood scores for the brand that had a personality congruent with the dinner scenario situation were used. Finally, subjects followed the same process for the situation with a highly salient Ruggedness cue. The other half of the subjects were given the situational cue manipulation in the reversed order. All subjects were debriefed and thanked.

Analysis

To test self and situation congruity, a 2 (Self-Schema) \times 2 (Salience of Situational Cue) \times 2 (Self-Monitoring) ANOVA was conducted. Two covariates were included: the frequency with which the subject (1) uses the product category and

(2) encounters the situation. Neither was significant ($F_s < 1$). Furthermore, counterbalancing the order of the salient situational cue manipulation had no interactive effect with the independent variables ($F_s < 1$). Because a repeated-measures ANOVA with product category as the within-subject factor revealed no significant effect for product category, the categories were averaged in the analyses. Furthermore, no differences were found across genders ($F_s < 1$). Reliability was high for the self-monitoring items (Cronbach's alpha = .82), as well as the traits constituting the brand personality dimensions (Cronbach's alpha_(Excitement) = .90; Cronbach's alpha_(Ruggedness) = .96). Unless otherwise specified, the degrees of freedom are (1, 63) for Excitement and (1, 53) for Ruggedness.

Self congruity. An ANOVA on the attitude index (a combined measure of preference for and usage likelihood of a brand; $r = .88$) yielded a significant main effect for Self-Schema for both Excitement ($F = 9.61, p < .01$) and Ruggedness ($F = 11.70, p < .01$). Subjects who were Excitement schematic versus aschematic preferred brands that scored high on Excitement. Similarly, subjects who were Ruggedness schematic versus aschematic preferred brands that scored high on Ruggedness (see Figure 1 for means). Although the Self-Schema \times Self-Monitoring interaction was not significant for Ruggedness ($F_{(Excitement)} = 4.24, p = .05$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 2.04, p = .15$), planned contrasts were conducted to test H_1 (Aiken and West 1991).⁶ In support of H_1 , low self-monitors who were Excitement schematic versus aschematic had more favorable attitudes toward the Exciting brands ($F = 13.23, p < .01$), though the same pattern was not significant for high self-monitors who were Excitement schematic versus aschematic ($F < 1$). Similarly, low self-monitors who were Ruggedness schematic versus aschematic had more favorable attitudes toward the Rugged brands ($F = 10.91, p < .01$), though the same pattern was not significant for high self-monitors ($F = 2.25, p = .14$), as displayed in Figure 1.

An ancillary set of analyses was run to compare the pattern of results for the attitudes toward the "target" brand (e.g., Exciting brand for Excitement schematic versus aschematic subjects, or the high versus low salient Excitement situational cue) with that for the "nontarget" brand (e.g., Rugged brand). The pattern of results differed significantly for the target versus nontarget brands, thereby providing more support for the mechanism hypothesized to be underlying the effects.

Situation congruity. The 2 \times 2 \times 2 ANOVA also yielded a significant situational cue main effect for both Excitement ($F = 7.44, p < .01$) and Ruggedness ($F = 6.38, p < .01$). That is, preference for Exciting brands was higher in situations that had high versus low salient Excitement cues. Similarly, preference for Rugged brands was higher in situations that had high versus low salient Ruggedness cues (see Figure 2). However, more important, the Self-Monitoring \times Situational Cue interaction was significant ($F_{(Excitement)} = 32.37, p < .01$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 9.80, p < .01$). To examine H_2 directly, planned contrasts were conducted using a difference-between-means measure (brand preference in the high mi-

⁵Data for Experiment 1 were collected in two waves with subjects who were similar in demographic profile ($n = 63$; $n = 30$). Because a group variable was not significant in the overall analysis, the data were collapsed.

⁶For the planned contrasts, self congruity was tested in low salience cue conditions, and the error term associated with the overall model was used. The pattern and significance of the results remained unchanged when the contrast error term was used.

Figure 1
SELF CONGRUITY: EXPERIMENT 1

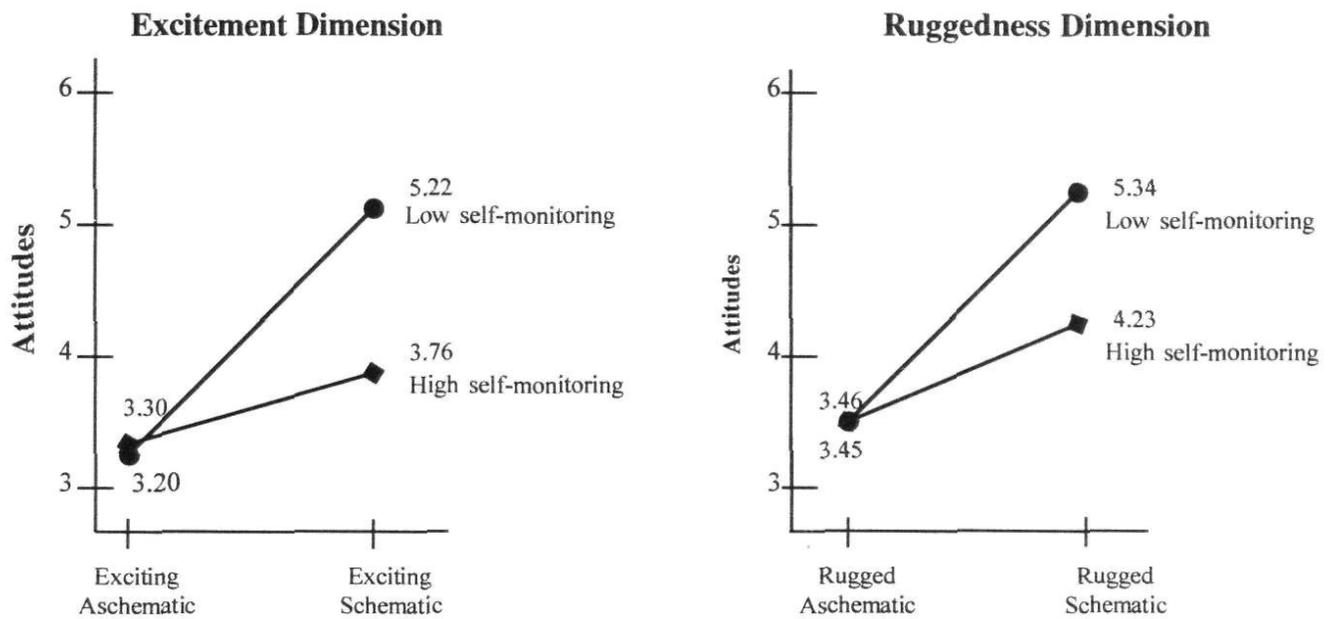
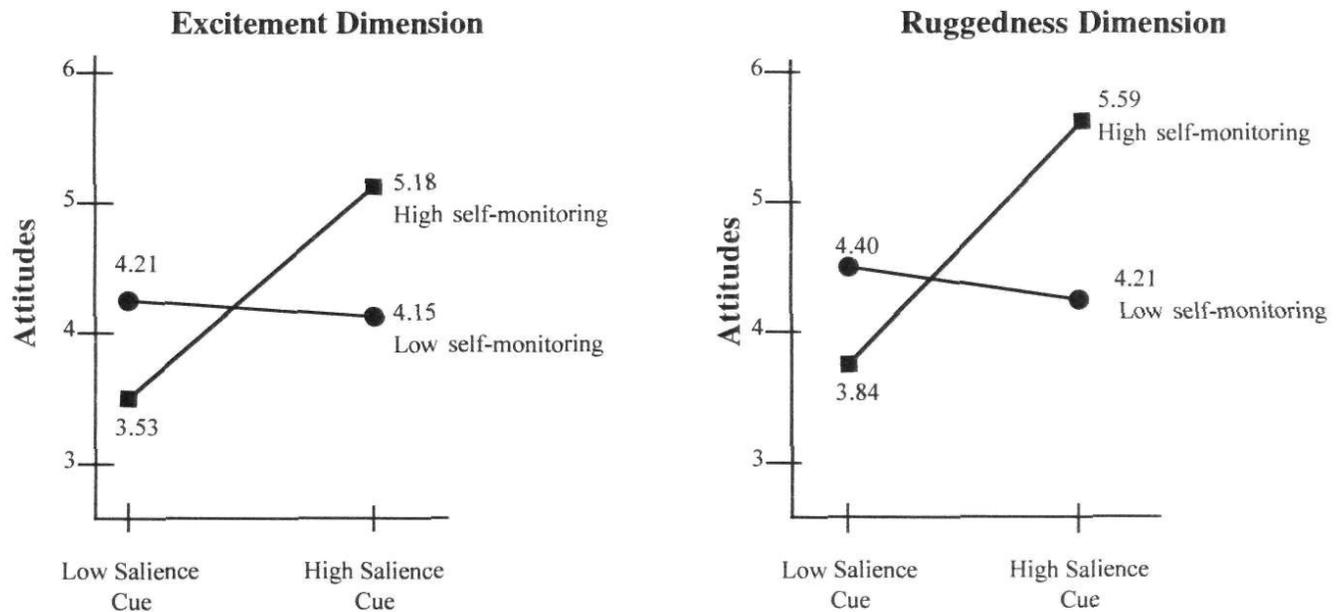


Figure 2
SITUATION CONGRUITY: EXPERIMENT 1



nus low salient situational cue conditions) for low versus high self-monitoring subjects. In support of H₂, high self-monitors had more favorable attitudes toward Excitement brands in the high versus low salient Excitement situational cue condition ($F = 35.77, p < .01$). In contrast, the same pattern was not significant for low self-monitors in the high versus low salient situational cue condition ($F < 1$). Similarly, high self-monitors had more favorable attitudes toward

Ruggedness brands in the high versus low salient Ruggedness situational cue condition ($F = 9.86, p < .01$). In contrast, the same pattern did not achieve significance for low self-monitors in the high versus low salient situational cue condition ($F = 2.54, p = .15$).

Self-monitoring interactionism. The self and situation congruity interaction effects were qualified by a three-way interaction of Self-Schema \times Self-Monitoring \times Situational

Cue ($F_{(\text{Excitement})} = 6.22, p < .01$; $F_{(\text{Ruggedness})} = 4.84, p < .03$). Follow-up contrasts indicated that the self congruity effect for low self-monitors was stronger when there was a low versus high salient situational cue ($F_{(\text{Excitement})} = 4.40, p < .01$; $F_{(\text{Ruggedness})} = 42.22, p < .01$), as predicted by H₃. However, the enhanced situation congruity effect for high self-monitors who were aschematic versus schematic did not occur. High self-monitors had more favorable attitudes toward brands with personality associations congruent with those evoked in the high salient situational cue condition, regardless of schematicity ($F_s < 1$), a null effect to be discussed subsequently. Finally, only one other effect was marginally significant in Experiment 1. For Ruggedness (but not Excitement), the Self-Schema \times Situational Cue interaction was significant, indicating that situational cues had a stronger impact on aschematic versus schematic subjects' attitudes ($F_{(\text{Ruggedness})} = 2.99, p < .10$), which is highlighted subsequently. See Table 1 for means. Overall, however, the results of Experiment 1 provided support for both the self and situation congruity hypotheses, as tested through the interaction effects that involve the self-monitoring variable.

Discussion

The goal of Experiment 1 was to examine the impact of brand personality as a form of self-expression on consumer attitudes. Based on the premise that the self is malleable, the extent to which consumers prefer brands with personality traits congruent versus incongruent with (1) their self-schema and (2) the salient behavioral cues in a situation was examined. Significant interaction effects occurred with the self-monitoring variable; self congruity effects, for which preference increases when a person's self-schema is congruent, versus incongruent, with the personality of the brand, was enhanced for low versus high self-monitors. This effect was qualified by a three-way interaction, showing that self congruity for low self-monitors is particularly strong in conditions in which there is a low versus high salient situational cue.

In contrast, situation congruity, for which preference increases when the cues salient in a situation are congruent versus incongruent with the personality of the brand, was stronger for high versus low self-monitors. However, this two-way interaction was not qualified by schematicity,

which is at odds with the literature on the self that suggests that high self-monitors who are aschematic, versus schematic, should be more influenced by situational norms (Markus 1977; Snyder 1974). One reason may have been driven by the methodology used in this experiment. Whereas situational cues were manipulated at the time of the experiment, self-schema was measured one month prior to the experiment, thereby leading to a potentially stronger situational cue versus self-schema manipulation.

Although self and situation congruity predictions generally were supported in Experiment 1, two questions arise. First, do all personality dimensions influence consumer attitudes in the same way? In Experiment 1, only two personality dimensions were used, based on the underlying premise that all dimensions of brand personality operate similarly. In Experiment 2, this premise is examined explicitly by manipulating the brand personality for each of the five dimensions. Second, to what extent did the use of real brands influence the results? All four brands used in Experiment 1 were familiar and had strong personalities. Would the same pattern of results occur with brands that are less salient in consumers' minds? In Experiment 2, fictitious brands are imbued with personality traits to determine if personalities can be created and if individuals still use brands for self-expressive purposes.

EXPERIMENT 2

Overview

The same procedure and design relied on in Experiment 1 were used in Experiment 2, but with three changes. First, fictitious brands were used, thereby reducing the potential noise created by the use of real brands. Accordingly, the cover story was altered to focus on new versus existing brands. Second, all five dimensions were used to ensure that the mechanism by which some dimensions operate is robust across the other dimensions. Third, three new product categories—shampoo, coffee, and beer—and one previously used product category—fragrance—were used to increase the generalizability of the self-expressive effects.

Method

Stimuli development. To create five brands with distinct personalities, 40 subjects (70% women, mean age = 27

Table 1
ATTITUDE MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS
(EXPERIMENT 1)

Self-Schema Domain	Aschematic				Schematic			
	Low Self-Monitoring		High Self-Monitoring		Low Self-Monitoring		High Self-Monitoring	
	Low Salience Cue	High Salience Cue						
Excitement	3.20 (1.29) n = 16	3.08 (1.88) n = 16	3.30 (1.89) n = 18	4.43 (1.99) n = 18	5.22 (1.54) n = 15	4.48 (1.99) n = 15	3.76 (1.32) n = 18	5.93 (.97) n = 18
Ruggedness	3.46 (1.97) n = 12	4.47 (2.16) n = 12	3.45 (1.36) n = 15	5.05 (1.99) n = 15	5.34 (1.15) n = 14	3.94 (1.11) n = 14	4.23 (1.29) n = 16	6.12 (1.29) n = 16

Note: Higher means indicate more favorable attitudes.

years) were paid \$7 to rate the extent to which five fictitious brands in six product categories (soap, shampoo, fragrance, coffee, beer, and wine) could be described by the 42 traits on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "not at all descriptive," 5 = "extremely descriptive"). Brand personality was manipulated through a "Brand Concept Statement," which included (1) a fictitious brand name and (2) three personality trait associations. Of the six product categories, four were chosen (shampoo, fragrance, beer, and coffee); all could be used in the situations described subsequently, and the personality of brands in these categories varied. To illustrate, the five beer brands with distinct personalities were Ohio Flag (described as all-American, traditional, and friendly), Downtown (spirited, daring, and humorous), Admiral's Hat (responsible, leader, and intelligent), Diamonds (good-looking, charming, and smooth), and Texas Rock (tough, western, and rugged).

Procedure. One month before the experiment, 156 university employees were sent an invitation to participate, for \$10, in a study on a new, accurate, and realistic way to evaluate new brand concepts. As in Experiment 1, subjects returned a questionnaire, which included shopping habits, self-schemas, demographic information, and self-monitoring information. A month later, they were individually contacted and invited to participate in the study. In small groups, subjects ($n = 108$, 70% response rate, 69% women, mean age = 31 years) followed the procedure outlined in Experiment 1 but were told that the purpose of the study was to get a better understanding of their reactions to a set of new brands being considered for introduction. Therefore, subjects were given limited information about the brand—just the brand name and a short description of each brand (i.e., Brand Concept Statement). In addition, the subjects were asked to repeat the rating task for the five (versus two) situational cue conditions, the order of which was randomized. Finally, subjects were debriefed and thanked.

Analysis

The same set of analyses conducted in Experiment 1 was run for Experiment 2. Although situation frequency was not significant as a covariate, product usage was significant but will not be reported or discussed further because it did not influence the results in any of the analyses. As in Experiment 1, the order of the situational cue manipulation had no interactive effect with any of the independent variables. Furthermore, a repeated-measures ANOVA with product category as the within-subject factor yielded no significant effect for product category or gender ($F_s < 1$). Cronbach's alpha for the self-monitoring items was relatively high (.80), as were the traits comprising the five brand personality dimensions, ranging from .92 to .98. Unless otherwise specified, the degrees of freedom are (1, 68) for Sincerity, (1, 64) for Excitement, (1, 76) for Competence, and (1, 77) for Sophistication and Ruggedness.⁷

Self congruity. An ANOVA on the attitude index ($r = .92$) yielded a significant main effect for Self-Schema on all five dimensions ($F_{(Sincerity)} = 7.94, p < .01$; $F_{(Excitement)} = 2.50, p < .05$; $F_{(Competence)} = 8.82, p < .01$; $F_{(Sophistication)} = 35.02,$

$p < .01$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 29.80, p < .01$). That is, subjects who were schematic versus aschematic preferred brands that scored high on that personality dimension. More important, the Self-Schema \times Self-Monitoring interaction effect was significant for each dimension ($F_{(Sincerity)} = 3.41, p < .05$; $F_{(Sophistication)} = 4.91, p < .05$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 4.64, p < .05$) except Excitement and Competence ($F_{(Excitement)} = 2.43, p < .06$; $F_{(Competence)} = 1.05, p = .17$). Based on Aiken and West's (1991) recommendation, planned contrasts were conducted. The results showed that low self-monitors who were schematic versus aschematic on a particular personality dimension had more favorable attitudes toward the brands with the congruent personality dimension: Sincerity ($F = 7.88, p < .01$), Excitement ($F = 5.31, p < .05$), Competence ($F = 6.86, p < .01$), Sophistication ($F = 35.38, p < .01$), and Ruggedness ($F = 29.82, p < .01$). In contrast, the same pattern of results was not significant for high self-monitors in Sincerity ($F < 1$), Excitement ($F < 1$), and Competence ($F = 1.82, p = .18$). However, for both Sophistication and Ruggedness, even high self-monitors who were Sophistication (Ruggedness) schematic versus aschematic had more favorable attitudes toward the Sophisticated (Rugged) brands ($F_{(Sophistication)} = 6.79, p < .01$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 5.65, p < .05$). The significance of the Sophistication and Ruggedness self congruity effects for both low and high self-monitors indicates that in some conditions, high as well as low self-monitors may use brands to express their selves. Together, these results provide overall support for the self congruity effects.

Finally, as in Experiment 1, an ancillary set of analyses was run to compare the pattern of results for the preference for the target versus the nontarget brands. The pattern of results differed for the two brand types, thereby providing discriminant predictive validity of the hypotheses.

Situation congruity. The $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA also yielded a significant Situational Cue main effect for each dimension ($F_{(Sincerity)} = 18.80, p < .01$; $F_{(Excitement)} = 11.23, p < .01$; $F_{(Competence)} = 48.54, p < .01$; $F_{(Sophistication)} = 10.58, p < .01$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 5.98, p < .01$). More important, the Self-Monitoring \times Situational Cue interaction was significant for each dimension ($F_{(Sincerity)} = 13.09, p < .01$; $F_{(Excitement)} = 9.20, p < .01$; $F_{(Competence)} = 26.49, p < .01$; $F_{(Sophistication)} = 27.78, p < .01$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 28.41, p < .01$). As in Experiment 1, a difference variable was created for brand preference across the two situational cue conditions. In each dimension, planned contrasts showed that high self-monitors had more favorable attitudes toward brands that scored high on the personality dimension in the high versus low salient situational cue condition ($ps < .01$), thereby demonstrating a situational self-expression effect. In contrast, the same pattern was not significant for low self-monitors in Sincerity, Excitement, Sophistication, or Ruggedness ($ps < 1$). However, in Competence, even low self-monitors had marginally more favorable attitudes toward brands that scored high on Competence in the high versus low salience situational cue condition ($F = 1.96, p < .06$).

Self-monitoring interactionism. Finally, though the ANOVA yielded three-way interaction effects that generally were not significant ($F_{(Sincerity)} = .01, p < .92$; $F_{(Excitement)} = 2.21, p < .14$; $F_{(Competence)} = 3.57, p < .05$; $F_{(Sophistication)} = 2.73, p < .10$; $F_{(Ruggedness)} = 1.61, p < .20$), planned contrasts were conducted to test H_3 (Aiken and West 1991). A pattern

⁷The number of subjects coded into the descriptive/not important and not descriptive/important cells were 32 for Sincerity, 36 for Excitement, 24 for Competence, 23 for Sophistication, and 23 for Ruggedness.

of results similar to those in Experiment 1 resulted. Consistent with H_3 , the enhanced self congruity effect for low self-monitors occurred when there was a low versus high salient situational cue ($F_{(\text{Excitement})} = 3.96, p < .01$; $F_{(\text{Competence})} = 5.87, p < .01$; $F_{(\text{Sophistication})} = 15.45, p < .01$; $F_{(\text{Ruggedness})} = 2.61, p < .05$). Although the planned contrast was not significant for the Sincerity dimension, the pattern of means was similar to that of the other dimensions. Finally, as in Experiment 1, there was no enhanced situation congruity effect for high self-monitors who were aschematic versus schematic. That is, regardless of schematicity, high self-monitors had more favorable attitudes toward brands that were consistent with the high versus low salient situational cue condition ($F_s < 1$).⁸ See Table 2 for means.

Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 provide further support for the results found in Experiment 1, suggesting that the self is a malleable concept and that the self-expressive use of brands varies across situations. Furthermore, self and situation congruity effects were supported in a set of theory-based interactions in which self congruity was enhanced for low versus high self-monitors, particularly when situational

cues that elicit that personality dimension are salient. In contrast, situation congruity was enhanced for high versus low self-monitors. The only dimension that did not follow this pattern was Competence, for which even low self-monitors adhered to situational cues. One reason for this anomaly may be that the situation in which Competence behavioral cues were evoked, an important business dinner meeting with the boss, was stronger than the other situations (Schutte, Kenrick, and Sadalla 1985). Therefore, even low self-monitors may display situation congruity effects in situations that make this dimension salient. However, overall, the results of Experiment 2 provide support for the premise that the self-expressive use of brands is driven by a malleable self-concept.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the past four decades, consumer psychologists have assumed that brands can be used for self-expressive purposes, but few have found empirical support for this premise. This research attempts to explore why. In Experiments 1 and 2, the notion of the self as malleable, composed of self-conceptions that are chronically accessible and those that are made accessible depending on the social situation, is examined. Based on real brands associated with a set of personality traits (Experiment 1) and fictitious brands imbued with a personality (Experiment 2), the results suggest that attitudes toward brands highly descriptive on a particular personality dimension are more favorable for individuals who are schematic versus aschematic on that personality dimension, and attitudes toward brands highly descriptive on a particular personality dimension are more favorable when situational cues that elicit that particular personality dimension are salient. More important, these self and situation congruity effects were tested in a set of interactions using

Table 2
ATTITUDE MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS
(EXPERIMENT 2)

Self-Schema Domain	Aschematic				Schematic			
	Low Self-Monitoring		High Self-Monitoring		Low Self-Monitoring		High Self-Monitoring	
	Low Salience Cue	High Salience Cue						
Sincerity	3.82 (1.53) n = 12	4.07 (1.57) n = 12	3.79 (1.13) n = 22	5.01 (1.29) n = 22	5.13 (1.43) n = 24	5.07 (1.02) n = 24	3.90 (1.27) n = 14	4.75 (1.72) n = 14
Excitement	3.62 (1.22) n = 20	4.20 (1.57) n = 20	3.90 (1.24) n = 14	4.98 (1.03) n = 14	4.79 (1.71) n = 13	4.32 (1.00) n = 13	3.97 (1.49) n = 21	4.97 (1.58) n = 21
Competence	3.16 (1.36) n = 15	3.90 (1.95) n = 15	2.97 (1.00) n = 21	4.73 (1.25) n = 21	4.37 (1.84) n = 23	4.21 (1.53) n = 23	3.55 (1.17) n = 21	5.60 (1.42) n = 21
Sophistication	2.96 (1.40) n = 23	3.59 (1.68) n = 23	3.13 (1.54) n = 16	4.78 (1.68) n = 16	5.41 (1.19) n = 23	4.29 (1.00) n = 23	4.25 (1.19) n = 19	5.01 (1.00) n = 19
Ruggedness	2.64 (1.00) n = 22	2.82 (1.31) n = 22	2.49 (.90) n = 20	3.97 (1.39) n = 20	4.69 (1.70) n = 19	3.59 (1.13) n = 19	3.39 (1.05) n = 20	4.41 (1.53) n = 20

Note: Higher means indicate more favorable attitudes.

the individual difference variable of self-monitoring, thereby reducing the chance of demand effects. However, other limitations remain. For example, subjects were divided into schematic versus aschematic groups, so only high versus low levels of congruity existed. Further research is needed to explore the conditions in which potential moderate incongruity effects may occur. That is, in what conditions do consumers prefer brands that are neither highly congruent nor incongruent with their self-schemas or situational cues (Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994)? Another limitation focuses on the use of brand personality associations as the sole piece of information given to subjects when they were asked to form attitudes. Therefore, both high and low self-monitors had no alternative information to influence their attitudes, and potential interactive effects of brand personality and attributes, for example, could not be examined.

Despite these limitations, this research has theoretical contributions to make to the consumer psychology literature. The insight gained from understanding the malleable self-concept is helpful because it links self congruity research with prior research in personality and social psychology. For more than three decades, personality and social psychologists have focused on the relative impact of personality and situational factors on behavior, as well as on the conditions in which each factor dominates (Mischel 1968). However, a limited amount of research in consumer behavior in general and self congruity in particular has made that leap, despite calls for such research (Belk 1975; Shavitt 1990; Wells 1993). This research takes that first step by manipulating the usage situations in which brands are used, measuring consumers' self-schemas, and creating brands with personality associations.

One of the advantages of relying on a malleable self conceptualization is the ability to integrate the multiple aspects of selves (e.g., actual self, ideal self, private self, public self). Although prior self congruity research has explored the notion of multiple selves, their predictive ability remains limited. For example, Landon (1974) finds no support for the premise that ideal versus actual self-concept predicts brand preference better. Similarly, Dolich (1969) finds no support for the intuitive notion that self congruity should occur with public, but not private, products. The malleable self-conceptualization implicitly relies on multiple aspects of the self but sheds a different light on them. For example, the notion of a distinct actual and ideal self is examined by exploring the interaction between a person's self-schema and the ideal of how to behave in a social situation. Similarly, the notion of a private versus public self is examined by exploring the impact of focusing on the self in a private situation versus focusing on others in a public situation. Thus, by taking personality and situational factors into consideration, a multidimensional view of the self is incorporated into a more parsimonious framework. Rather than focusing on the multiple aspects of the self and examining how they individually relate to preference, the determinants of consumer attitudes and behavior become more simple: What is the set of personality traits that is chronically accessible for a consumer? What is the set of personality traits that is salient in the usage situation? And how do these two sets of traits interact?

In addition, the results of this research have implications that deepen the understanding of when and why brands may

be used for self-expressive purposes. For example, though advertisers have argued for the importance of brand personality (e.g., Biel 1993; Ogilvy 1983; Plummer 1985), research in the experimental psychological tradition has made little progress in confirming or disconfirming this view. The results of Experiments 1 and 2 provide theoretical support for the premise that brand personality influences consumer preferences. That is, personality traits associated with a brand can influence consumer attitudes through their relationship to the malleable self-concept. Furthermore, these results shed light on the type of personality with which to imbue a brand. Current thinking on self-expression suggests that only the personality profile of the target market should be taken into account when developing a brand personality. This logic may be valid in cases in which a user-positioning strategy is taken (e.g., Miller is for heavy beer drinkers) or when the product is used across situations (e.g., automobiles). In such cases, personality relative to situational factors might play a major role in creating and influencing brand attitudes. However, in cases in which a usage-positioning strategy is taken (e.g., Lowenbrau and good friends in a warm setting) or the product is used primarily in one usage situation (e.g., tennis shoes), the impact of the situation on consumer attitudes should be considered.

Finally, these experiments suggest areas for further research. For example, this research focuses on the sole use of brands as self-expressive tools, neglecting other potential tools of self-expression. Belk, Bahn, and Mayer (1982) suggest that the tendency to make inferences about others on the basis of their choice of consumption objects is a part of the process that enables people to communicate nonverbally. If so, in what conditions do consumers choose to express themselves nonverbally rather than verbally? Additional research might address this question by relying on the framework put forth by Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992), who suggest that choosing interaction partners and social settings, adopting interaction strategies that evoke self-confirmatory responses, and displaying identity cues are three strategies used to express the self. Based on this framework, additional research might examine the extent to which people only express themselves with brands if no other means are possible.

This research also has implications for the globalization of brands and how brands may be used for self-expression across cultures. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggest that situational cues have a greater influence on the behavior of members of collectivist cultures (e.g., China, Japan, India) than individualist cultures (e.g., United States, England, Canada), whereas the reverse is true for properties of the self (e.g., self-schema). However, this research suggests considerable influence of situational cues on behavior even within an individualist culture. Thus, the questions arise: Will members of collectivist cultures demonstrate even more significant shifts in behavior across situations? Will self congruity effects be absent in collectivist cultures? Further research exploring these questions might provide insight into the effectiveness of global marketing communication campaigns (Biel 1993; Han and Shavitt 1994), as well as the psychological mechanisms behind the formation of preferences by consumers in different cultures (Aaker and Maheswaran 1997; Markus and Kitayama 1991).

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