

*Teck Ming Tan*

HUMANIZING BRANDS: THE  
INVESTIGATION OF BRAND  
FAVORABILITY, BRAND  
BETRAYAL, TEMPORAL  
FOCUS, AND TEMPORAL  
DISTANCE

UNIVERSITY OF OULU GRADUATE SCHOOL;  
UNIVERSITY OF OULU,  
OULU BUSINESS SCHOOL,  
DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING, MANAGEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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*TECK MING TAN*

**HUMANIZING BRANDS: THE  
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DISTANCE.**

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***Abstract***

Humanizing brands is an essential domain of current branding as it enhances the visibility of a brand by connecting consumers to the brand, thus contributing to strong brand equity. The term *humanize* used in this dissertation is not limited to brands with anthropomorphic characters, such as the M&M's characters. Used in this context, the term also includes the ways in which consumers attribute a brand to be "close to me," "like me," and a "partner."

Although the research of customer-based brand equity has been well-documented over the past twenty-five years, limited attention has been given to examining the differential effect of brand favorability in forming a self-brand connection. Even more scarce are studies on the antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal. Further, up-to-date research is mostly silent as to whether temporal focus and temporal distance influence a brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's selves. To fill up these research gaps, this dissertation reports four research articles. More than two thousand samples were collected from Finland, India, and the US to examine the conceptual frameworks.

First, this dissertation contributes to the literature on self-brand connection by articulating the effect of self-presentation by brand on self-brand connection. Second, it contributes to the literature of self-congruence, seen from the temporal perspective. Third, it adds to the brand betrayal literature by examining consumer anthropomorphize tendency and actual high-arousal positive states as the antecedents. It further explains the indicators of brand betrayal, consisting of failure severity and inferred negative motive. In term of managerial implications, the findings contribute to (1) the one-on-one marketing approach to branding, (2) incorporating consumer's selves into branding considerations, and (3) assessing brand betrayal in a negative brand relationship.

***Keywords:*** actual self, brand betrayal, brand knowledge, humanize brands, ideal self, self-brand connection, self-congruence



## **Tan, Teck Ming, Brändien inhimillistäminen: Tutkimus brändin suosimisesta, brändin peittämisestä, ajallisesta fokuksesta, ja ajallisesta etäisyydestä.**

Oulun yliopiston tutkijakoulu; Oulun yliopisto, Oulun yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulu, Markkinoinnin, johtamisen ja kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan yksikkö

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### ***Tiivistelmä***

Brändien inhimillistäminen on keskeinen alue vallitsevassa brändien tutkimuksessa, sillä inhimillistämällä lisätään brändin näkyvyyttä kytkemällä kuluttajat brändiin, mikä osaltaan vahvistaa brändipääomaa. Tässä väitöskirjassa käytetty termi *inhimillistäminen* ei rajoitu vain brändeihin, jotka käyttävät antropomorfisia hahmoja kuten M&M:n hahmot. Tässä yhteydessä termiin sisältyy myös keinoja, joita hyödyntämällä kuluttajat tuntevat brändin olevan ”lähellä minua”, ”kuten minä” ja ”kumppani”.

Vaikka asiakaslähtöisen brändipääoman tutkimusta on tehty paljon viimeisen 25 vuoden aikana, vain vähän huomiota on saanut brändien suosimisen vaikutus kuluttajan minän ja brändin välisen yhteyden muodostukseen. Vielä vähemmän tutkimusta on tehty brändien peittämisen syistä ja indikaattoreista. Lisäksi olemassa oleva tutkimus ei ota juurikaan kantaa siihen, vaikuttavatko ajallinen fokus ja ajallinen etäisyys brändin kykyyn heijastaa kuluttajien minää. Näiden tutkimusaukkojen täyttämiseksi väitöskirja esittelee neljän tutkimusartikkelin tuloksia. Käsitteellisten viitekehysten testaamista varten kerättiin yli 2 000 vastaajan aineisto kolmesta eri maasta.

Ensinnäkin, tämä väitöskirja edistää kuluttajan minä-brändisuhteeseen liittyvää tutkimusta kuvaamalla brändin itse-presentaation vaikutusta minä-brändisuhteeseen. Toiseksi, tämä väitöskirja kontribuoi minä-kongruenssiin liittyvään kirjallisuuteen ajallisesta näkökulmasta tarkasteltuna. Kolmanneksi, tämä väitöskirja edistää brändien peittämiseen liittyvää kirjallisuutta tutkimalla kuluttajan taipumusta antropomorfisointiin ja toteutuneita korkean innostuneisuuden tiloja. Tutkimus myös selittää brändien peittämisen indikaattoreita, jotka koostuvat epäonnistumisen vakavuudesta ja brändin negatiivisesta motiivista. Liikkeenjohdollisina päätelminä tulokset ehdottavat (1) yhdeltä yhdelle markkinointia brändäykseen, (2) kuluttajan minän sisällyttämistä brändäyskysymyksiin, ja (3) brändin peittämisen arviointia negatiivisessa brändisuhteessa.

*Asiasanat:* brändien inhimillistäminen, brändin peittäminen, brändituntemus





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I love research as it gives me a great sense of self-actualization. I started planning to pursue a doctoral study in 2012 as my future career plan was to become a Professor of Marketing by the age of fifty-five. Thus, I started searching for the right place and supervisors until I found them at the University of Oulu in 2015. It is my honor to graduate from the Oulu Business School (OBS) as it is one of the first Nordic business schools to earn AACSB International business accreditation. I am greatly enjoyed my doctoral journey at the OBS.

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Oulu, April 2018

Teck Ming (Terence) Tan

## Original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications, which are referred throughout the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Tan, T.M., Salo, J., Juntunen, J., & Kumar, A. (2018). A comparative study of creation of self-brand connection for well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands. *Under review*.
- II Tan, T.M. (2018). The antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal. *European-Advances in Consumer Research, 11*.
- III Tan, T.M., Salo, J., Juntunen, J., & Kumar, A. (2018). Temporal focus and self-congruence. *Under review*.
- IV Tan, T.M., Salo, J., Juntunen, J., & Kumar, A. (2017). The effect of temporal distance on self-presentation by brand. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research, 45*.



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The importance of the topic

Managing a brand relationship is essential as it allows firms to gain financial benefits from their loyal customers. It further ensures the sustainability of the brand because loyal customers are typically more willing to pay a higher price for the brand and tend typically have higher repurchase intentions (Keller, 2012).

When consumers have a strong relationship with a brand, they connect themselves with the brand and may form complicated feelings about the brand, such as anxiety and frustration from self-brand separation (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). Grammy Award winner Ed Sheeran decided to tattoo a Heinz tomato ketchup logo on his left arm after he found out a Columbus steak restaurant did not serve the ketchup that he loves (Sisavat, 2017; *Telegraph*, 2017). This tattoo example shows that consumers are willing to use a brand in signifying their unique personal identity (Tiggemann & Hopkins, 2011). MacInnis and Folkes (2017) address such a brand relationship as *a self-brand connection*.

The self-brand connection exists when people perceive a meaningful linkage between the brand and themselves (Escalas, 2004). Wentzel, Tomczak, and Herrmann (2010) extended the research by showing that a narrative advertisement positively predicts personal meaning and thus leads to a self-brand connection. Based on this notion, a self-brand connection may be formed instantly if consumers connect to the brand after watching a narrative advertisement. To illustrate, packaged-goods brand Knorr presented a short film based on a true story, the “Flavor of Home.” The video described an English woman named Carmen who came to Finland to pursue her dream of being a husky guide. However, Carmen missed her mom and wished to have a home-cooked meal as they had not been spending much time together in the past three years. Knorr made her wish come true by sending her mom to Finland to prepare a surprise meal for Carmen. Carmen was emotional after trying the food. Then her mom came in and hugged Carmen tightly. Carmen later expressed “*Even though I was hundreds of miles away, it was like I was back at home again.*”

The video went viral; it has had more than 100 million views and it has been shared more than 100,000 times on social media sites (Aaker, 2017). One possible reason for the success of this video is that it allows consumers to humanize the

brand by connecting Knorr with the emotions of the family relationship that is authentic and compelling (Aaker, 2017). Knorr later released a “Love at First Taste” video that connected the brand with another aspect of human needs (which was the flavor diversity and romantic relationship). Again, the video went viral and successfully connected Knorr with millennials (Morgan, 2017). After Knorr presented itself with human aspects, the brand doubled its revenue in 2017 and reached more than \$3 billion worldwide sales that year (Aaker, 2017). Thus, humanize brands is an essential domain of branding as it enhances brand visibility by presenting the brand as relevant to consumers (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

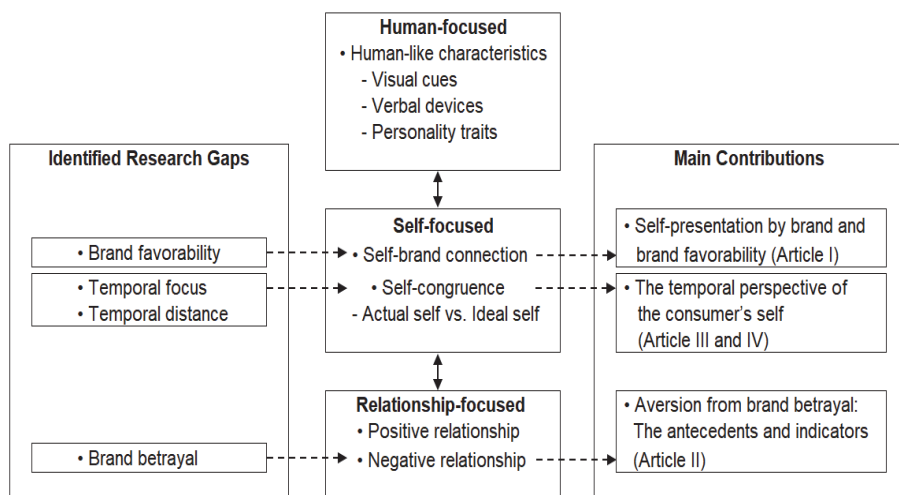
Brand is defined as the relationship between the consumers and the product (Cohen, 2011), in which consumers may have both positive and negative associations about the brand (Schmitt, 2012). Shin, Casidy, Yoon, and Yoon (2016) state that, in reality, brand managers inevitably have to face brand crises and respond to brand transgressions. For instance, the Apple brand had been the world’s most valuable brand since 2011, but its value dropped from \$146 billion to \$107 billion (a significant decreased of 26.7% brand value) in early 2017 as Apple failed to satisfy their customers’ expectations (Farber, 2017). In December 2017, three consumers sued Apple for intentionally slowing down their older iPhones via iOS updates, and they accused Apple brand of “deceptive, immoral and unethical” practices (Hinton, 2017). Most of the victims perceived Apple to be taking advantage of them, for example by forcing them to change to the latest iPhone although Apple had explained that by updating the latest iOS system would eventually protect the older iPhone (Kirby, 2017). Thus, it is essential to know the degree to which consumers perceive a brand has betrayed a relationship (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Further, Keller (2012) called for more research on identifying consumer forgiveness for a brand transgression because such findings would provide a better understanding of why some consumers are willing to return to an offending brand while some consumers switch to other brands.

## **1.2 Research gaps and research questions**

The current dissertation aims to examine how brand favorability, brand betrayal, temporal focus, and temporal distance affect the way consumers humanize brands. According to the American Heritage dictionary, *humanize* is a verb used when representing something as human or attributing human qualities to something. As shown in Fig. 1, there are three perspectives on humanizing brands (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017): the human-focused, self-focused, and relationship-focused



perspectives. The *human-focused perspective* refers to the way consumers associate a brand with human-like characteristics, such as visual cues (Kim, Chen, & Zhang, 2016), verbal devices (Waytz, Heafner, & Epley, 2014a), and human personality traits (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). The *self-focused perspective* relates to the connection between consumers and the brand. Thus, the brand serves as a means of self-expression as it reflects the consumers' selves (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), which could be related to self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2009), and the fit of the brand's personality with the actual or ideal consumer's self—self-congruence (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011). The *relationship-focused perspective* refers to developing a human-form relationship with a brand in which they anthropomorphize the brand as having a human-like mind and acting with intention (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). For this reason, consumers may engage in the positive brand relationship as they view the brand as a committed partner (Aggarwal, 2004), best friend (Fournier, 1998), and servant (Kim & Kramer, 2015); they may also engage in the negative brand relationship once they have unfavorable attitude toward the brand (Joireman, Grégoire, & Tripp, 2016).



**Fig. 1. The Perspectives of Humanizing Brands of the Current Dissertation**

Goffman (1959) states that people consciously and subconsciously engage in their self-presentation because they wish to manage a positive impression in front of others. Apart from verbal presentation, non-verbal expression, and purposive

behaviors, people use artifactual displays for self-presentational tactics (Schneider, 1981). To illustrate, job applicants have a greater sense of self-confidence during an interview when they are wearing a brand that is perceived as highly presentable when compared to wearing another brand that is not perceived as presentable for the job interview. Thus, consumers utilize a brand as a means of self-presentation in order to fulfill their psychological needs (Escalas & Bettman, 2009), including those created by sociality motivation and effectance motivation (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Despite previous studies showing that a brand relationship involves the way consumers utilize the brand as part of the self-presentational strategy (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2009). To date, virtually all the research on self-presentation and the brand relationship has focused on the fit of the brand's personality with the consumer's self (e.g., Aaker, 1997; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Kim and Kramer, 2015; Park et al., 2010) rather than on how the consumers appropriate the brand's symbolic benefits for themselves. Further, most of the research on the brand relationship has focused on well-liked brands, rather than comparing how a brand relationship could be established differently for a well-liked brand versus a new brand or an unfavorable brand (Keller, 2016).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) state that consumers associate with different intensities and types of emotion while maintaining their relationship with a brand. Specifically, Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) propose affection, connection, and passion for capturing the consumers' emotions related to a brand, and this three-factor emotional attachment has been widely used in the brand relationship research (Malär et al., 2011). To provide a greater understanding of the emotionally based brand relationship, Batra et al. (2012) presented a comprehensive brand love concept that covers seven core elements, such as passion-driven behaviors, a positive emotional connection, and self-brand integration. Brand love is empirically tested to have a positive influence on consumer forgiveness in times of disappointment (Hegner, Fenko, & Teravest, 2017). However, this study does not consider a love-becomes-hate effect (Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009). When encountering a brand transgression, consumers might have a stronger desire to take revenge, to spread negative word-of-mouth, or to avoid the brand as they feel betrayed by the brand that they have loved. For instance, in the United Airlines case an Asian doctor was brutally removed from a plane on April 9, 2017, causing a brand crisis after a video of this went viral on the internet (Winston, 2017). The brand image of United Airlines got even worse and damaged future sales from existing customers when the CEO Oscar Munoz failed to recover the company's lost brand image after the brand

transgression (Petroff, 2017). This brand transgression caused numerous Chinese customers to post photos of their shredded United MileagePlus credit cards on social media sites in order to protest about how United Airlines had treated the Asian passenger (Shen, 2017). Despite its importance, limited research has examined the antecedents and indicators that stimulate consumers' tendencies to perceive brands in human-like terms, which affects the intensity of the perceived brand betrayal after a brand transgression (MacInnis & Folkes 2017).

Mogilner, Aaker, and Kamvar (2012) call for an investigation of temporal focus within the branding context. Temporal focus relates to the way people devote their attention to thinking about a present, past, or future moment (Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). Studies have shown that temporal focus plays an essential psychological role in influencing people's belief, anticipations, and behavioral intentions in relation to a brand (Bluedorn, 2002; Shipp et al., 2009; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). For instance, Winterrich and Haws (2011) found that temporal focus plays significant roles in explaining consumer decisions and preference toward a brand. Mogilner et al. (2011) suggest that temporal focus shifts the definition of one's happiness and directly influences one's brand choice. Despite its importance, no empirical study has explored the influence of temporal focus on the way consumers humanize brands.

The notion that consumers use brands to express their external and inner states of identity has become common in symbolic consumption (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). A symbolic brand is a form of self-expressive brand that focuses on how it serves as a means of reflecting a consumer's self-concept, instead of emphasizing its functional attributes (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011). Thus, consumers reflect themselves with the brand in order to fulfill inner states of motivation and to attain social status—to have a self-brand connection—and this aspect forms the brand relationship (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Remarkably, the way the consumer perceives, comprehends, and interprets a brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's self is dependent on whether the brand is to be used for a near-future event or a distant-future event—in other words, it depends on temporal distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak (2007) argue that people have different attitudes and display different behaviors when they are engaged with the temporally proximal condition, versus the temporally distant condition. Indeed, numerous studies have identified the importance of temporal distance in consumer research, including the role of the processing mode in explaining the distance-construal association (Yan, Sengupta, & Hong, 2016); the link between

temporal distance, self-control, and indulgence (Laran, 2010); and the interaction effect of social and temporal distance on positive word of mouth (Zhao & Xie, 2011). One key reason for the investigation of temporal distance in consumer research is because time consideration is an unavoidable decision-making process. Nevertheless, no study has identified the impact of temporal distance on how consumers humanize brands as means of presenting their consumer's actual self or ideal self.

Taking into account the discussion of the research gaps, the current research examines the following main research question (RQ):

RQ: How do brand favorability, brand betrayal, temporal focus, and temporal distance influence the way consumers humanize brands?

The sub-research questions are as follow:

RQ1: How does self-brand connection vary depending upon the consumer's favorability toward a brand?

RQ2: What are the antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal?

RQ3: How does temporal focus influence consumer preference and willingness to pay for a brand, which relate to the consumer's need for self-congruity?

RQ4: How does temporal distance influence the consumer's positive attitude toward a brand and positive choices regarding a brand that serves as means of presenting consumer's actual self or ideal self?

Each sub-research question is answered in one specific research article that has been tailored for a research gap. Article I reacted to RQ1 by providing insight into the moderating effect of well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands on the self-brand connection. Two studies relating to clothing and consumer electronics products were conducted, and the data were analyzed by using structural equation modeling. This research compared structural models with different groups to provide insight into the relationship between self-presentation by brand, brand attitude, brand familiarity, and self-brand connection. Article I contributed to the consumer-psychology model of brands (Schmitt, 2012) by integrating brand literature with self-presentation by brand; it further examined the moderating effect of well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands on the self-brand connection across clothing and electronic product brands.

Article II provided tentative answers to RQ2 by investigating the two indicators of brand betrayal: failure severity and inferred negative motive. Three studies were conducted to identify the antecedents of brand betrayal, including consumer anthropomorphize tendency and the high-arousal positive states that they have experienced over the course of typical weeks. Article II contributed to the literature of brand betrayal (Reimann, MacInnis, Folkes, Uhalde, & Pol, 2018) by validating two indicators of brand betrayal empirically and it identified the antecedents of brand betrayal. As such, the current research provides better insight into humanize brands from the point of view of brand betrayal.

Article III answered RQ3 by demonstrating how the fit of one's temporal focus (i.e., past, present, or future focus) links to one's self-congruence, which results in a higher preference for a brand and willingness to pay more for it. In terms of research methodology, this article included one survey study and three experiments that manipulated participants' temporal focus. Article III contributes to brand usage imagery congruity (Liu, Li, Mizerski, & Soh, 2012) by suggesting that the actual and ideal self-congruence is determined by the consumer's temporal focus, which can affect consumer preference and willingness to pay more for a brand.

Article IV responded to RQ4 by showing the causal effect of temporal distance on a brand's ability to serve as a means of presenting the consumer's self, and this effect has a significant affect on brand attitude and brand choice. This article consisted of three online experiments and one appendical study that tested a reserve effect (i.e., the causal effect of a brand's ability to serve as a means of presenting the consumer's self on the temporal distance). However, the result of the appendical study was not found to be significant. Thus, this article presents strong evidence of one-way cause-and-effect with a high degree of internal validity. Article IV adds temporal distance to self-brand connection literature (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) by demonstrating that consumers tend to have positive attitudes toward a brand and make positive choice about a brand that serves as means of self-presentational strategy.

Overall, all four research articles answered research questions by emphasizing how the consumer's brand favorability, brand betrayal, temporal focus, and temporal distance affect the way they humanize brands and thus have different responses to a brand relationship. More than two thousand participants from across Finland, India, and the US were recruited to gain a more enriched perspective of humanizing brands by measuring the impact on self-brand

connection, negative behavioral intentions, consumer forgiveness, brand preference, willingness to pay, brand attitude, and brand choice.

In term of author contributions, the present author had the main responsibility for conceptualizing, planning, collecting, analyzing, and writing the articles. Co-authors served to provide valuable insights and advice for the present author’s manuscripts before and during the submission process of journals and conference proceedings.

**Table 1. Authors’ contributions to articles.**

Author	Article			
	I	II	III	IV
T. M. Tan				
Conceptualizing the theoretical background	x	x	x	x
Designing the research plan	x	x	x	x
Collecting and analyzing data	x	x	x	x
Preparing the manuscript for submission	x	x	x	x
Coordinating and responsibility for the publication process	x	x	x	x
J. Salo				
Advising about the research plan	x	x	x	x
Providing valuable insights into the manuscript writing process	x	x	x	x
Commenting on the article before submission	x	x	x	x
Advising about the submission and publication process	x		x	x
J. Juntunen				
Providing valuable insights into the data analysis	x	x	x	x
Commenting on the article before submission	x		x	x
A. Kumar				
Providing an online platform for data collection	x	x		x
Commenting on the article before submission	x		x	x
Providing valuable comments on the response notes and publication process	x		x	

### 1.3 The structure of the study

Chapter 1 begins by identifying the importance of maintaining the brand relationship from the firm perspective, followed by highlighting the current trends and reasons behind consumers humanize brands. Next, it shows that the current research backgrounds academic aspects and presents research questions concerning the identified research gaps. The end of the chapter indicates the authors’ contributions to each article and the outline of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 first reviews the core topics, such as *brand* and *brand relationship*, followed by the *humanizing brands* topic. Next, this dissertation indicates three topics that call for further understanding: (1) brand favorability, (2) brand betrayal, and (3) the temporal perspective: temporal focus and temporal distance.

Chapter 3 first presents an overview of research frameworks and the methodology for each article so that readers have a basic idea about the research design, data analysis, data collection, the number of studies, sample sizes, and respondents' profiles. Next, it provides a brief explanation of each research framework, procedure, and analysis method.

Chapter 4 provides the overall findings of each article by tallying them with the research questions. The fundamental idea is to ensure each article's hypotheses serve to answer a specified sub-research question. The end of the chapter illustrates a synthesis of the findings that relate to the central research question.

Chapter 5 provides an aggregate view of the theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and limitations for future research. The reason for providing this is that this chapter allows readers to gain additional insight into this dissertation, rather than repeating the findings of each article. In general, this essay contributes to the literature on self-brand connection, self-congruence, and brand betrayal. It highlights three implications: (1) the one-on-one marketing approach to branding, (2) incorporating consumer's in branding considerations, and (3) considering brand betrayal in a negative brand relationship.

Finally, the four original research articles are included.





## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 The meanings of brand

A brand is defined as a “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (American Marketing Association, n.d.). Thus, customers can differentiate a branded product from an unbranded product easily as they have a certain degree of knowledge about the brand (Keller, 2003a). The bestseller author, Seth Godin defines a brand as “the set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer’s decision to choose one product or service over another” (Godin, 2009). This definition provides a better meaning of brand as it covers a broader range of reasons why consumers have higher preferences for a particular product over another. However, it limits its applicability in explaining an unfavorable aspect of a brand. Victims of the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 battery fault may not like the brand because of their burn scars that were caused by the battery explosion. I am a big fan of McDonald’s who loves most of the food and drinks except for the French fries that I do not particularly like. For such reasons, a brand can consist of positive brand associations and/or negative brand associations (Schmitt, 2012).

### 2.2 The research on the brand relationship

The brand relationship, also known as the consumer-brand relationship (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, Breazeale, & Fetscherin, 2012), provides a contemporary, essential, and thought-provoking area of research (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). The studies on the brand relationship have consistently been published and cited in the top-tier marketing journals. Using a bibliometric citation meta-analysis, Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015) show that the average number of global annual citations per paper in the top ten journals in the field of the brand relationship is 62.85. The *Journal of Consumer Research* becomes the most cited journal in this area, accounting for 219.25 annual citations per paper, followed by the *Journal of Marketing* with 161.71 citations and *Advances in Consumer Research* with 74.60 citations (see Table 2).

**Table 2. The top ten cited journals in the field of the brand relationship.**

Journal	AGAC/p
<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	219.25
<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	161.71
<i>Advances in Consumer Research</i>	74.60
<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	45.05
<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	32.91
<i>Psychology &amp; Marketing</i>	29.69
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	20.03
<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	17.17
<i>Journal of Retailing</i>	16.01
<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	12.04
Average	62.85

Notes:  
AGAC/p: Average global annual citations per paper  
Source: Adopted and modified from Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015)

One key reason for the tremendous popularity of this research area is that the brand relationship enables a brand to maintain its competitive advantage and brand positioning in the marketplace (Batra et al., 2012). A positive brand relationship exists when consumers establish a relationship with the brand that is based on exchange or communal norms (Aggarwal, 2004). The positive brand relationship results in brand preference, a higher willingness to pay more for the brand, brand attitude, brand choice, and self-brand connection (Bauer, Heinrich, & Albrecht, 2009; Hegner et al., 2017; Park et al., 2010; Thomson, et al., 2005).

Apart from the positive brand relationship, previous researchers have also explored the negative brand relationship (Fournier et al., 2012). White, Breazeale, and Webster (2012) argue that the research on the brand relationship should consider consumers' responses toward a brand and their subsequent consumption processes. That is, marketers cannot guarantee a positive brand relationship once consumers have chosen their brand; customers may form a negative association if the product is perceived as being lower quality than expected from the brand. White et al. (2012) found that consumers may form a negative brand relationship if the brand is not aligned with their individual and social self-image, if the brand has an unfair impact on society, or if the brand has broken its promises. The negative brand relationship is associated with a desire for avoidance, desire for revenge, and reparatory behaviors (Joireman et al., 2016). Although a brand transgression may cause a negative impact on the brand relationship, Donovan,

Priester, MacInnis, and Park (2012) argue that a close relationship between consumers and a brand could lead to their forgiveness and willingness to engage in post-purchase behavior after a brand transgression. Thus, a positive brand relationship is likely to reduce the negative impact of a brand transgression.

### **2.3 Humanizing brands**

Different dictionaries have provided distinct definitions of *humanize*. The Cambridge dictionary refers to it as “to make someone or something kinder, gentler, or more agreeable,” whereas the Oxford dictionary explains it as “to make (something) more humane or civilized.” The Merriam-Webster dictionary explains it as “to represent as human or attribute human qualities to something.” The American Heritage dictionary explains it as “to portray or endow with human characteristics or attributes,” which is considered the closest meaning to that used in this dissertation.

For decades, researchers have published articles that relate to the domain of humanizing brands, such as articles on the dimensions of brand personality (Aaker, 1997), brand anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2011), self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2009), and the types of relationship consumers establish with brands (Fournier, 1998).

The terms *humanizing brands* and *human brands* were not commonly used in branding research before the year 2006. Thomson (2006) is the first author published in the *Journal of Marketing* who used “human brands” in his title. He found that the consumer’s feeling of autonomy and relatedness toward a human brand serve as antecedents of a strong brand relationship. He further claimed that a brand relationship “is unlikely to develop if the starting point of the relationship is characterized by intense negative feelings or thoughts.” That is to say that it is unlikely that a brand relationship develops with an unfavorable human brand. However, in a marketplace, it is impossible to satisfy all segments of customers. For instance, consumers might not prefer a brand until they have certain level of knowledge or experience of the brand. The truck and SUV brand Hummer is unlikely to be perceived favorably because of its massive fuel consumption and it is often criticized as representing the worst excesses of American consumer culture (Schulz, 2006). Still, new owners of a Hummer were attached to the brand and claimed that an electric car, such as the Toyota Prius that uses batteries, contribute a more significant negative impact on the environment than a Hummer (Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2009). Thus, it is crucial to investigate the role

of brand favorability (Keller, 1993) in forming a relationship with a human brand, such as a brand with which consumers have little or no interest to engage (Keller, 2016) or a brand that is perceived as unfavorable (Chatzipanagiotou, Veloutsou, & Christodoulides, 2016).

Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto (2013) are the first authors to use “humanizing brands” in the title of a marketing journal article. They induced participants to humanize a brand through visual cues that made the product’s features resemble a human face or human-like form. Their findings show that consumers who believe in personality malleability (vs. personality stability) are less likely to have an adverse attitude toward a human brand after a brand transgression. They further claimed that compensation (vs. denial and apology) is the only practical brand recovery strategy among people who believe in the malleability of personality traits. However, this research is mostly silent on brand betrayal after the transgression. Consumer forgiveness for a brand transgression is highly related to the failure’s severity and whether consumers infer that the brand had a negative motive (Joireman et al., 2016). Further, the most recent brand betrayal study (Reimann et al., 2018) did not assess the participants’ forgiveness despite previous studies having found that earning consumer forgiveness is an essential step in repairing the brand relationship (Donovan et al., 2012; Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008; Xie & Peng, 2009). Thus, the existing models may be limited in providing a full picture of brand transgression, which relates to brand betrayal.

Recently, MacInnis and Folkes (2017) provided a literature review of humanizing brands. There are three perspectives on humanizing brands as presented in Figure 1 of Chapter 1. MacInnis and Folkes (2017) further suggest that dispositional, developmental, cultural, and situational drivers activate the consumers’ motivation for humanizing a brand. The *situational driver* is an external factor that is affected by physical surroundings, social surroundings, task definition, antecedent states, and temporal perspective (Belk, 1975). Based on this notion, temporal focus and temporal distance may serve as drivers that motivate consumers to humanize a brand. The reason given is that temporal focus and temporal distance are essential factors of temporal perspective (Shipp et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the literature review of MacInnis and Folkes (2017) is silent as to whether temporal focus and temporal distance have influences on humanizing brands.

## 2.4 Brand favorability

According to customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993), consumers tend to react more favorably to a brand when they have a positive association with it, whereas they tend to respond less favorably to the brand when they have a negative association with it. A *well-liked brand* is a brand with which consumers have favorable, strong, and unique associations (Keller, 2003b). A *new brand* is viewed as a brand that consumers could not recognize readily as they have not been exposed to the brand or they have little knowledge about the brand and are thus unable to form a specific association with the brand (Keller, 1993). An *unfavorable brand* is defined as a brand with which consumers have created a negative brand association; they might have negative behavioral intentions toward the brand, such as a desire for revenge and desire for avoidance (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Thus, the different levels of brand favorability (i.e., a brand is either well-liked, new, or unfavorable) influence the way consumers humanize a brand.

The consumer psychology model of brands (Schmitt, 2012) is considered the most relevant model for the research on humanizing brands as it provides an incisive view with a broader understanding of consumer psychology perspectives on branding (Keller, 2016). This model covers five underlying processes (identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying, and connecting) and three levels of consumers' psychological engagement (object-centered, self-centered, and social engagement) that drive consumers to relate themselves to a brand. However, in the signifying process, the author did not discuss the role of self-presentation motivation in creating a self-brand connection, although consumers tend to utilize brands as part of their self-presentational strategy (Escalas & Bettman, 2009).

If a brand is new, consumers might have a moderate attitude toward the brand. On the other hand, consumers might form a negative attitude toward a familiar but unfavorable brand. For these reasons, it is impossible for consumers to connect themselves with such a brand as there is absence of a strong and favorable brand association (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). MacInnis and Folkes (2017) suggest that consumers may form a self-brand connection when they perceive the brand could fulfill their sociality motivation by providing symbolic benefits to them. Therefore, self-presentation by brand may be more relevant than brand attitude and brand familiarity when predicting self-brand connection in the evaluation of new and unfavorable brands.

## 2.5 Brand betrayal

Brand revitalization strategies or responses to a brand crisis are integral parts of managing a brand relationship (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011). Brand managers face these challenges in facilitating consumer forgiveness after a brand transgression and they may have no clue about their customers' feeling of brand betrayal (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Consumers feel betrayed when the brand does not satisfy their expectations (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), such as in the case of fairness violations (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), disloyalty (Luedicke & Pichler-Luedicke, 2015), unethical behavior (Schmalz & Orth, 2012), and providing misleading information (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015).

Waytz, Cacioppo, and Epley (2014b) suggest that some people tend to imbue nonhuman objects with intentions and feelings. Based on this notion, consumers may attribute a brand with human mental capacities when they humanize the brand, and this phenomenon should be applied in both contexts of positive and negative brand relationships. However, MacInnis and Folkes (2017) argue that previous research has yet to identify the indicators of brand betrayal in the context of a human-like brand relationship. Previous studies are mostly silent as to whether consumers perceive that the brand itself has failed to deliver on its promises or if they attribute a negative motive to lie behind a brand transgression (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Luedicke & Pichler-Luedicke, 2015; Parmentier & Fischer, 2015; Schmalz & Orth, 2012).

The recent brand betrayal research (Reimann et al., 2018) offers a thorough view of neuroimaging experiments and psychometric study regarding the consumer experience of brand betrayal. The authors suggest that brand betrayal is distinct from brand dissatisfaction in term of its association with self-castigation and rumination. Nevertheless, the model does not include the antecedents that are not related to brand experience and brand evaluation. For instance, MacInnis and Folkes (2017) state that consumers feel more betrayed when they see that an anthropomorphized brand has intentionally violated a relationship norm, in which case they proposed that a consumer anthropomorphize tendency is positively associated with the brand betrayal when he or she encounters a brand transgression. Besides, due to optimistic bias (Kahneman, 2011), the high-arousal positive states that consumers have typically experienced might affect the way they feel betrayed by a brand. Thus, the brand betrayal model by Reimann et al. (2018) is limited in its ability to capture psychological factors that might affect the consumer's feelings of brand betrayal when encountering a brand transgresses.

## **2.6 The temporal perspective: Temporal focus and temporal distance**

Temporal focus refers to the way consumers devote their attention to thinking about a present, future, or past moment (Shipp et al., 2009). Thus, it is not related to brand experience and brand evaluation. In contrast, temporal distance is related to a brand context as it shows how far into the future (near future vs. distant future) consumers conceive using the brand (Kim & John, 2008).

Previous research has shown that one's temporal focus can influence consumer choice (Mogilner et al., 2012) and self-congruence (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Using the survey methodology, temporal focus serves to explain anticipated future opportunities, job satisfaction, turnover intent, organizational commitment, future autonomy, future recognition (Shipp et al., 2009), venture effort (Foo, Uy, & Baron, 2009), strategic business behavior (Nadkarni & Chen, 2014), and organizational citizenship behavior (Strobel, Tumasjan, Spörrle, & Welpe, 2013). However, to date, only two marketing studies have used the experimental methodology in the research of temporal focus (Mogilner et al., 2012; Winterich & Haws, 2011). When compared to the experimental method, the survey methodology faces its inherent limitation of verifying a cause-and-effect conclusion (Visser, Krosnick, & Lavrakas, 2000). Further, the effect of temporal focus on humanizing brands has not yet been explored using an experimental approach.

Sung and Tinkham (2005) state that consumers hypothetically perceive the fit between a brand's personality and their self-concept, thus they might not be in congruence with the brand image and brand personality overtly created by the company. Koll and von Wallpach (2014) suggest that managers should focus on how to associate consumers with a favorable brand response in the brand relationship, rather than emphasize the congruence between management-intended brand personality and actual consumers brand personality. One explanation is that consumers make choices based on their self-construal via the attitude object, which is influenced by their judgment of how far into the future the event will happen—temporal distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Thus, the way consumers humanize a brand that reflects their self-concept is dependent on how far into the future the brand will be used for self-presentational strategy. However, no study has investigated the effect of temporal distance on self-presentation by brand.

For decades, psychology researchers have related one's temporal perspective with the actual self or ideal self (Gordon, 1968; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Rogers, 1951; Wilson & Ross, 2001). A brand functions as a means of self-verification when it signifies the consumer's actual self (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992), while a brand serves as a means of self-enhancement when it portrays the consumer's ideal self (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). Based on construal-level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), consumers should be more likely to switch to a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their ideal self when they are in a psychologically distant condition, such as when they are thinking about a distant future moment, distant memories, or a distant-future event. However, no research has been conducted to extend this relationship to a consumer-brand context. There has also been no research on the impact of temporal focus and temporal distance on humanizing brands.



### **3 Research frameworks and research methodologies**

#### **3.1 An overview of the articles**

In Chapter 2 this dissertation highlights issues that relate to brand favorability, brand betrayal, temporal focus, and temporal distance. To address the stated issues, the current dissertation includes four research articles, developing different research frameworks in response to the indicated matters individually. Article I is related to brand favorability, whereas Article II is related to brand betrayal. Articles III and IV are related to temporal perspective.

As noted in Table 3 (see next page), the research design of Articles I and II was an online questionnaire with multiple conditions. It refers to the fact that at least two conditions will be designed, and participants are presented with one of the conditions before they are asked to respond to a set of questions in a self-administrated survey (Wright, 2005). As for online experiments, *Qualtrics* software was used as it randomly assigns respondents to a different condition; it is commonly used in the social sciences and medical research (Johnson, Harkins, Cary, Sankar, & Karlawish, 2015).

Articles I and II tested the hypotheses by using AMOS SPSS 16 to perform structural equation modeling analysis, whereas Articles III and IV examined the research frameworks by conducting correlations analysis, independent-samples *t* tests, chi-square tests, and two-way between-groups ANOVA. The current dissertation recorded a total of 2,263 usable samples by utilizing two platforms in data collection. The Finnish responses were collected from the University of Oulu via student email distribution in Articles I and II, and in exchange for a small gift in Article III, whereas the US and Indian respondents were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for a fee.

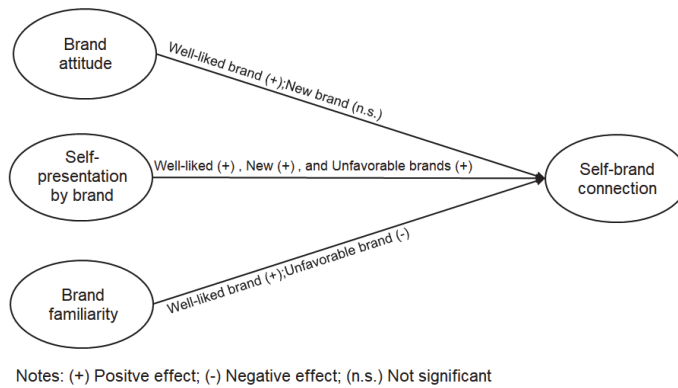
The average ages were 31.4 (Article I), 32.7 (Article II), and 32.7 (Article IV). The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 74 years old. Age information was not available for Article III as an age category selection was designed during the data collection. In the following sections, the research frameworks and summaries of methodologies are presented.

**Table 3. The research methodologies and paper outlet of Articles I, II, III, and IV.**

	Article I	Article II	Article III	Article IV
Research design	Online questionnaires with multiple conditions	Online questionnaires with multiple conditions	Questionnaires and experiments	Online experiments
Data analysis	Structural equation modeling	Structural equation modeling	Correlation, T-tests, and chi-square tests	T-tests, two-way between-groups ANOVA, and chi-square tests
Data collection	University of Oulu and Amazon Mechanical Turk (US)	University of Oulu and Amazon Mechanical Turk (India and US)	University of Oulu	Amazon Mechanical Turk (US)
Number of studies	2	3	4	4
Sample sizes	670	693	480	420
Respondents' profiles				
Gender				
Male	52.2%	60.3%	39.6%	52.4%
Female	47.8%	39.7%	60.4%	47.6%
Age				
Mean	31.4	32.7	n/a	32.7
SD	10.6	10.2	n/a	11.5
Range	18 to 74	18 to 72	n/a	18 to 69
Nationality				
Finland	39.7%	19.7%	89.2%	0.0%
United States	53.1%	48.9%	0.0%	86.2%
India	0.0%	29.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Others	7.2%	2.3%	10.8%	13.8%
Paper outlet	Submitted to Journal of Business Research and currently under second-round review (Jufo 2/ABS3)	European-Advances in Consumer Research (Jufo 1/ABS2)	Submitted to European Journal of Marketing and currently under third-round review (Jufo 1/ABS3)	NA-Advances in Consumer Research (Jufo 1/ABS2)

Notes: Age information was not available in Article 3 as an age category selection was used; SD = standard deviation

### 3.2 Article I: A comparative study of creation of self-brand connection for well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands



**Fig. 2. The research framework of Article I**

The objective of Article I was to address issues related to brand favorability. In this article, brand attitude, self-presentation by brand, and brand familiarity are expected to positively predict a self-brand connection. However, the relationships between independent variables and self-brand connection are moderated by well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands. As noted in Fig. 2, well-liked and new brands moderated the relationship of brand attitude and self-brand connection (Study 1) because consumers form a higher level of favorable attitudes toward the well-liked brand than they do for the new brand (Keller, 1993). Thus, if a brand is well liked, brand attitude should have a stronger positive effect on self-brand connection than self-presentation by brand. Pullig, Netemeyer, and Biswas (2006) state that consumers will form a negative brand attitude if the brand is perceived unfavorably; this restricts consumers from connecting themselves with the brand (Park et al., 2010). For this reason, the unfavorable brand does not moderate the relationship between brand attitude and self-brand connection.

The relationship of self-presentation by brand and the self-brand connection is moderated by the well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands (Studies 1 and 2). Self-presentation by brand allows consumers to perceive the brand's ability to serve as a means of self-presentational strategy, which refers to the benefit gained from a personal identity signal. Thus, self-presentation by brand allows consumers to identify the benefits gained from a brand although the brand is perceived new or unfavorable.

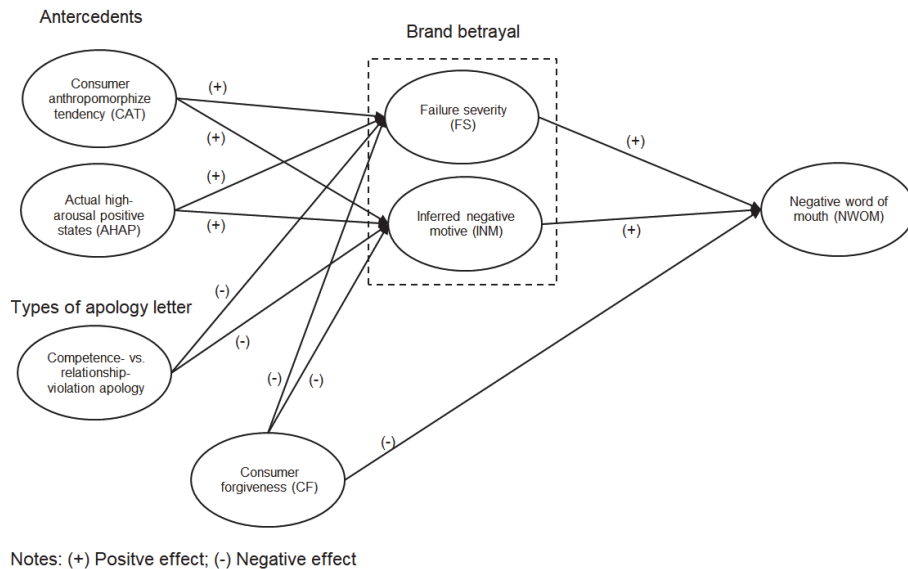
The relationship of brand familiarity and the self-brand connection is moderated by well-liked and unfavorable brands (Study 2). Keller (2003a) stated that familiarity involves both consumer's memory and recognition; thus it is not relevant to the brand that is perceived as new, as consumers have insufficient knowledge about the brand that is perceived as new to form a self-brand connection (Batra et al., 2012). For this reason, the new brand does not moderate the relationship between brand familiarity and self-brand connection. According to Grégoire et al. (2009), consumers may process a love-becomes-hate effect toward a familiar brand when the brand has violated a relationship norm. Hence, brand familiarity can dilute the self-brand connection if the brand is evaluated to be unfavorable.

In terms of research methodology, Study 1 recorded 277 completed responses from the University of Oulu. Participants were randomly assigned to a well-liked brand condition or a new brand condition. In the well-liked brand condition, they were asked to list a fashion brand that they had a favorable feeling towards and that they had had a positive experience with. In the new brand condition, participants were given a fictitious Zeemiata clothing brand (they were provided with a logo and a brief description of the brand). Next, they were asked to respond about items that related to brand attitude (Spassova & Lee, 2013), self-presentation by brand (adapted and modified from Leary et al., 1994; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995), and self-brand connection (Park et al., 2010), and then asked to respond to manipulation check questions (Kent & Allen, 1994).

Study 2 recorded 393 completed American responses that were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were randomly assigned to a well-liked brand or an unfavorable brand condition regarding consumer electronics products. In the well-liked brand condition, participants were asked to list a brand that they had a favorable feeling about and whose products satisfied them. In the unfavorable brand condition, they were asked to list a familiar brand that they had stopped using due to dissatisfaction. Next, they were asked to respond to the items that related to brand familiarity (Kent & Allen, 1994), self-presentation by brand, and self-brand connection, and then respond to manipulation check questions (Spassova & Lee, 2013).

Regarding the data analysis, measurement models were first assessed to ensure that the models satisfied the fit indices, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Next, comparing structural models with different groups was conducted to test the hypotheses.

### 3.3 Article II: The antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal



**Fig. 3. The research framework of Article II**

The objective of Article II was to address issue relates to the antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal. Based on previous literature, this article classified brand betrayal into two indicators: failure severity (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Grégoire et al., 2009) and inferred negative motive (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008).

Fig. 3 shows that the antecedents of brand betrayal are consumer anthropomorphize tendency and actual high-arousal positive states. *Anthropomorphize tendency* is defined as the tendency to imagine that non-human agents have human-like characteristics, intentions, and feelings (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). When experiencing a brand transgression, a higher consumer anthropomorphize tendency is expected to have a positive association with the indicators of brand betrayal. The reason given is that consumer anthropomorphize tendency enhances the possibility of considering a brand to have broken a relationship norm (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Actual high-arousal positive states refer to the actual feelings of enthusiasm, excitement, elation, or euphoria that individuals have typically experienced (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). Kahneman (2011) states that people have optimistic bias. They tend to reminisce about

events that they associate with high-arousal states, and a brand transgression would make them feel worse since they are unable to accept the unfortunate fact. Thus, consumer anthropomorphize tendency and actual high-arousal positive states are not related to brand experience.

Article II focused on two types of apology letter after a brand transgression: a competence-violation apology and relationship-violation apology (Maddux, Kim, Okumura, & Brett, 2011). A competence-violation apology letter is expected to be more efficient than a relationship-violation apology in reducing the feeling of brand betrayal as it focuses on re-establishing the credibility of the brand relationship by addressing the incompetence. The current research argues that consumers are more likely to forgive the brand when the brand has apologized for the brand transgression; thus this could reduce the sense of betrayal experienced by them. For this reason, consumer forgiveness is negatively related to brand betrayal. Lastly, Article II also demonstrated the consequences of brand betrayal on negative word of mouth (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009).

In term of research methodology, three studies were designed to examine the research framework. In Study 1, 152 participants were recruited from the University of Oulu. They were first asked to rate their propensity for anthropomorphize tendency (Waytz et al., 2014b). Next, they were given a brand transgression scenario that was related to a flight delay, followed by answering items regarding failure severity (Finkel et al., 2002; Grégoire et al. 2009), inferred negative motive (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), and negative word of mouth (Waytz et al. 2014b).

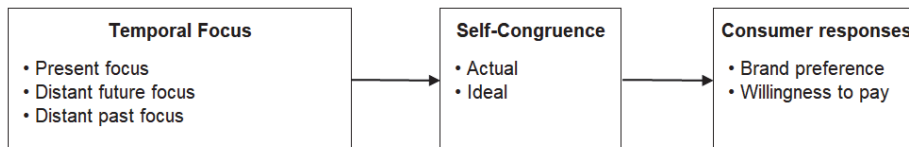
In Study 2, 202 Indian participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were first asked to evaluate items relate to actual high-arousal positive states (Tsai et al., 2006). They were presented with a brand transgression scenario about the substantial price reduction of a smartphone, four weeks after purchase. Next, the participants were asked to read an apology letter that included compensation in the form of store credit. Lastly, they were asked to respond to questions about failure severity, inferred negative motive, and negative word of mouth (Sinha & Lu, 2016).

In Study 3, 339 American participants were collected from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were first asked to evaluate items relate to actual high-arousal positive states. They were given a brand transgression scenario about a substantial price reduction of a GoPro four weeks after purchase. Next, the participants were randomly assigned to either a competence-violation apology letter or relationship-violation apology letter that both included compensation in

the form of store credit. Lastly, they were asked to respond to questions about consumer forgiveness (Sinha & Lu, 2016), failure severity, inferred negative motive, negative word of mouth.

The data analysis procedure of the measurement model was similar to that in Article I. However, Article II conducted second order CFA and structural model that due to the research frameworks. Further, Article II did not perform a comparative analysis of structural models as this article did not hypothesize the moderating effect. Instead, Study 3 of Article II used dummy coding (dummy 0 = relationship-violation apology; dummy 1 = competence-violation apology) to identify the efficiency of the apology used after the brand transgression.

### 3.4 Article III: Temporal focus and self-congruence



**Fig. 4. The research framework of Article III**

The objective of Article III is to answer issues related to temporal focus. It serves to investigate whether consumers devote their attention to thinking about whether a present moment, a distant future moment, or a distant past moment influences their need for actual or ideal self-congruity, and subsequently whether it affects their brand preference and willingness to pay for the brand.

Article III draws from construal-level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) and situational self-image (Schenk & Holman, 1980) to develop the research framework. The construal-level theory suggests that as psychological distance increases, such as when people think about a distant future or a distant memory, it influences them to form a more abstract mental about an object (Trope et al., 2007). However, the construal-level theory does not provide an explanation of actual or ideal self-congruence from the consumer context. The literature of situational self-image is adapted to address this issue. The reason given is that it explains that consumers have many self-concepts and thus decide which brand could be used to reflect their self-image in the specific characteristics of a given situation (Sirgy, 1982) such as the physical surroundings, social surroundings, task definition, antecedent states, and temporal perspectives (Belk, 1975).

As noted in Fig. 4, this article examines the effect of temporal focus on brand preference and willingness to pay. Brand preference is selected as it is related to the outcome of how consumers humanize a brand as a means of self-expression (Chernev et al., 2011; Sirgy et al., 1997). Willingness to pay is assessed as it represents the behavioral outcome associated with the strength of brand preference (Chernev et al., 2011). In brief, this article proposes that when the focus is on the present moment, consumers activate their need for actual self-congruity and have a higher preference for and are willing to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual self, whereas when the focus is on the distant future and distant past moments, consumers activate their need for ideal self-congruity and have a higher preference for and are willing to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their ideal self (Bandura, 1982; Kahneman, 2011; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Trope et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010).

In terms of research methodology, four studies were designed to examine the research framework. In Study 1, 300 students were approached to participate in a self-administrated survey at the University of Oulu. They were asked to respond to questions that related to self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975), temporal focus (Shipp et al., 2009), and self-congruence (Sirgy et al., 1997). Correlational analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between temporal focus and self-congruence. Next, the participants were categorized as the *present focus group* and *future focus group* to confirm the effect of temporal focus on self-congruence by using chi-square tests.

Three experimental studies were designed to identify the cause and effect of temporal focus on brand preference and willingness to pay. Each study was a 2 × 2 between-subjects factorial design. Study 2a was related to manipulating a present focus, Study 2b served to prompt a distant future focus, and Study 2c manipulated participants to have a distant past focus. Apart from the temporal focus measures and the focus-manipulating writing task (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008), the design and procedures were similar across the three experimental studies.

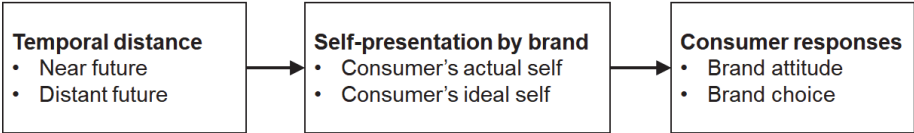
Sixty participants were recruited in each experimental study at the University of Oulu in exchange for a small gift. First, they were randomly assigned to think about customizing clothing that could serve as a means of reflecting either their actual self or ideal self by indicating responses to seven items that related to their clothing style, size, favorite colors, and so on. Then the participants were asked to



respond to questions on the pre-rating of temporal focus measures, followed by being randomly assigned to either a control or a treatment in which they were given a temporal focus writing task (Study 2a: present focus; Study 2b: distant future focus; Study 2c: distant past focus). Next they were asked to indicate their post-rating of the temporal focus measures. The participants then were asked to imagine that they had seen Vero Ideale clothing that matched their customized clothing in a shopping center; they were required to respond to questions about their brand preference (Sirgy et al., 1997) and willingness to pay for the brand (Chernev et al., 2011; Guo, Ji, Spina, & Zhang, 2012).

A paired-samples *t* test was conducted to check the manipulating task of temporal focus by assessing on the pre- and post-rating measures. A series of independent-samples *t* tests were analyzed to test the significant difference in brand preference and willingness to pay.

**3.5 Article IV: The effect of temporal distance on self-presentation by brand**



**Fig. 5. The research framework of Article IV**

The objective of Article IV was to answer issues related to temporal distance and how consumers humanize brands as means of presenting their consumer’s actual self or ideal self. Studies 1a and 1b served to examine whether when consumers construe a near-future event, they exhibit more favorable attitudes and choices toward a brand that serves as a means of presenting their actual self rather than a brand that serves as a means of presenting their ideal self. In contrast, Article IV wanted to examine whether when consumers construe a distant-future event, they exhibit more favorable attitudes and choices toward a brand that serves as a means of presenting their ideal self rather than a brand that serves as a means of presenting their actual self (Alicke & Sedikides, 2011; Malär et al., 2011; Trope et al., 2007).

To achieve a high degree of internal validity in this research framework, Study 2 was conducted to test the effect of this research framework with an option that was not related to self-presentation, such as a comparison of a well-liked

brand and a customized fictitious brand. Besides, an appendical study was presented to examine whether consumers are willing to reserve a purchased clothing that serves as a means of presenting their ideal self in a distant-future event instead in a near-future event. The reason for the appendical study is that a one-way causal effect of temporal distance on self-presentation by brand (see Fig. 5).

Article IV is different to Article III in three ways. First, temporal distance is related to how far into the future an object (such as a branded product) will be used by consumers (Kim & John, 2008), whereas temporal focus is not related to brand experience or brand evaluation (Mogilner et al., 2012). Second, this article focuses on self-presentation by brand, which refers to the way consumers utilize a brand to serve as a self-presentational strategy (Escalas & Bettman, 2009), such as when they utilize it to present their actual self or ideal self. In contrast, Article III investigated the consumer's need for self-congruity, which refers to the situation of use in which consumers seek out a brand that matches their actual self or ideal self (Liu et al., 2012). Third, both studies have different dependent variables.

In term of research methodology, four studies were designed to examine the research framework. In Study 1a, 120 American participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were randomly assigned to a near-future or a distant-future event and they subsequently responded to a temporal thought index (Spassova & Lee, 2013). Next, the participants were randomly presented with four clothing items that could serve as a means of presenting their actual self or ideal self, and they were asked to rate their brand attitude (Spassova & Lee, 2013).

In Study 1b, 100 American participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were first asked to choose clothing brands from a pool of familiar brands: three clothing brands that could serve as a means of presenting their actual self and three clothing brands that could serve as a means of presenting their ideal self (the brands were Adidas, Armani, Calvin Klein, Coach, Forever 21, GAP, Gucci, H&M, Levi's, Michael Kors, Nike, Old Navy, Puma, Ralph Lauren, Zara). Next, the participants were randomly assigned to a near-future or distant-future vacation prize and subsequently responded to questions on a temporal thought index, followed by allocating a percentage of how much time they would spend wearing the clothes on the trip (and the total percentage had to add up to 100%). They were asked to answer a brand-checking question before the final page.

In Study 2, 80 American participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were first asked to list three fashion brands that they preferred. The participants then were randomly assigned to a near-future or distant-future event and asked to respond a temporal thought index. Next, the participants were randomly assigned to customize Zeemiata clothing (a fictitious brand) that could serve as a means of presenting their actual self or ideal self, followed by reporting on their brand attitude and self-presentation by brand regarding Zeemiata. Lastly, the participants were asked to allocate a percentage of their choices for selecting the clothing for the event, ranging from 0% to 100%, for Zeemiata and the first fashion brand listed by the participants. They were asked to answer a manipulation check question the extent to which Zeemiata clothing could serve as means of presenting the consumer self before the final page.

In the appendical study, 120 American participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were randomly assigned to imagine that they had bought clothing that served as a means of presenting their actual self, their ideal self, or no specific self-concept. Next, the participants were asked to decide between wearing the clothing for either a near-future or distant-future event.

As for data analysis, independent-samples *t* tests (Studies 1a and 1b), two-way between-groups ANOVA (Study 2), and chi-square tests (the appendical study) were conducted to test the significant difference in the consumer responses.



## **4 The review of the findings**

This chapter reviews the findings of the four articles that serve to respond to each specific sub-research question, as stated in Chapter 1. The discussions will be centralized on the results of each research framework or a set of hypotheses that are associated with the sub-research question, rather than providing a holistic view of the theoretical contribution, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### **4.1 The response of Article I to RQ 1: How does self-brand connection vary depending upon the consumer's favorability toward a brand?**

In a study of a clothing brand, brand attitude and self-presentation by brand significantly and positively predicted self-brand connection in a basic model. The result shows that self-presentation by brand has a stronger effect on self-brand connection than brand attitude. However, the brand attitude has a stronger impact on self-brand connection than self-presentation by brand in the evaluation of well-liked brand. Remarkably, in the evaluation of new brand, the predictive ability of brand attitude on self-brand connection became nonsignificant, whereas self-presentation by brand predicted self-brand connection positively and significantly.

In a study of consumer electronics product brands, self-presentation by brand significantly and positively predicted self-brand connection in the evaluation of both well-liked and unfavorable brands. The relationship between brand familiarity and the self-brand connection was not significantly found in a basic model. Interestingly, brand familiarity significantly and positively predicted self-brand connection in the evaluation of a well-liked brand, but in the assessment of an unfavorable brand, the predictive ability of brand familiarity on self-brand connection became negative and significant.

The findings of Article I show that the creation of the self-brand connection varies depending upon if it is a new, well-liked, or unfavorable brand. If a brand is well-liked, the consumers' overall positive evaluation of the brand (i.e., brand attitude) is more relevant than self-presentation by brand and brand familiarity in developing a sense of oneness with the brand. In contrast, if a brand is new or unfavorable, the consumers' perception of how the brand could be beneficial as a personal identity signal (i.e., self-presentation by brand) is more pertinent in connecting consumers with the brand. An important remark is that when consumers hold an unfavorable attitude toward a brand, a higher level of brand

familiarity is going to dilute the self-brand connection. Therefore, the level of brand favorability moderates the predictions of brand attitude, brand familiarity, and self-presentation by brand on the self-brand connection.

#### **4.2 The response of Article II to RQ 2: What are the antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal?**

Brand betrayal exists when a brand has violated a relationship norm, especially when consumers view the brand to act in a human-like way. Thus, the indicators of brand betrayal should have the ability to measure the extent to which a brand can negatively behave like a human. Two indicators, failure severity and inferred negative motive, were proposed and were tested empirically in Article II.

Study 1 is related to a flight delay scenario; the results showed that consumer anthropomorphize tendency significantly and positively predicted the inferred negative motive rather than failure severity. Study 2 presents a scenario about a substantial price reduction of the Samsung GALAXY S8 Edge, four weeks after purchase; the results demonstrated that the actual high-arousal positive states significantly and positively predicted the failure severity rather than the inferred negative motive. Study 3 replicated the findings of Study 2 but replaced the phone with a GoPro product; it further shows that a competence-violation apology is more efficient than a relationship-violation apology in reducing brand betrayal. Both failure severity and inferred negative motive significantly and positively predicted negative word of mouth. Consumer forgiveness significantly and negatively predicted failure severity and inferred negative motive in Study 3.

The findings of Article II show that brand betrayal (i.e., failure severity and inferred negative motive) can be influenced by antecedents that are unrelated to brand experience and brand evaluation, including the consumer anthropomorphize tendency and the feeling of enthusiasm, excitement, elation, or euphoria that they have typically experienced. Both consumer anthropomorphize tendency and actual high-arousal positive states exist before the brand betrayal. The reasons given are that (1) everyone has the consumer anthropomorphize tendency, though the extent varies across individuals (Waytz et al., 2014b), (2) the actual high-arousal positive states are the emotions that consumers have or have not experienced prior to an occasion (Tsai et al., 2006), such as a brand transgression.

Besides, the article suggests that the type of apology letter (a competence-violation apology letter vs. relationship-violation apology letter) can significantly

affect feelings of brand betrayal, even if both types of apology letter offer similar compensation.

#### **4.3 The response of Article III to RQ 3: How does temporal focus influence consumer preference and willingness to pay for a brand, which relate to the consumer's need for self-congruity?**

In Study 1, the results demonstrate that present-focused consumers tend to seek for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual self, whereas future-focused consumers tend to seek for a brand that serves as a mean of reflecting their ideal self. Further, it shows that consumers may engage with multiple temporal foci, during which time they are focusing on both the present moment and the future activity (such as an upcoming vacation) at the same time. Thus, no significant result was found among those consumers who had multiple temporal foci.

The results of Study 2a present that if consumers are primed to devote their attention to thinking about the present moment, they tend to evaluate a clothing brand as preferable when it serves as a means of reflecting their actual self, as opposed to a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their ideal self. However, the result upon their willingness to pay was not found to be significant, although the present-focused consumers tended to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual self.

The results of Studies 2b and 2c show that if consumers are primed to devote their attention to thinking about a distant future or distant memories, they tend to evaluate a clothing brand as preferable and are willing to pay more for the brand that serves as a means of reflecting their ideal selves, rather than a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual selves.

Article III further conducted a series of analysis to examine the disassociation effect of temporal focus and self-congruence on brand preference and willingness to pay. The results show that consumers do not feel less preference or pay less for a brand when there is a disassociation of temporal focus and self-congruence.

The findings of Article III provide empirical evidence that the consumer's temporal focus—a determinant that is unrelated to brand experience and brand evaluation—can affect the consumer's need for actual or ideal self-congruity, which influences them to evaluate a brand more preferably and be willing to pay more for the brand.

#### **4.4 The response of Article IV to RQ 4: How does temporal distance influence the consumer's positive attitude toward a brand and positive choices regarding a brand that serves as means of presenting consumer's actual self or ideal self?**

In Study 1a, the result shows that consumers in the temporally proximal condition tend to evaluate clothing brands more favorably when they are offered brands that serve as a means of presenting their actual self, rather than brands that serve as a means of presenting their ideal self, whereas consumers in the temporally distant condition tend to evaluate clothing brands more favorably when they are offered brands that serve as a means of presenting their ideal self, rather than brands that serve as a means of presenting their actual self.

In Study 1b, the result shows that consumers tend to allocate a significantly higher percentage of time to wearing the clothes of a group of clothing brands that serve as a means of presenting their actual self in a near-future vacation prize, whereas they tend to allocate a significantly higher percentage of time to wearing the clothes of a group of clothing brands that serve as a means of presenting their ideal self in a distant-future vacation prize.

Study 2 enhances the findings by investigating the effect of temporal focus on self-presentation by brand. The result shows that consumers in the temporally proximal condition have significantly higher levels of self-presentation by brand when they are asked to customize a fictitious brand that serves as a means of presenting their actual self, rather than a fictitious brand that serves as a means of presenting their ideal self, whereas consumers in the temporally distant condition have significantly higher levels of self-presentation by brand when they are asked to customize a fictitious brand that serves as a means of presenting their ideal self, rather than a fictitious brand that serves as a means of presenting their actual self. Study 2 further confirms this effect by including brand choice options that consist of a well-liked brand and a customized fictitious brand.

The result of an appendical study shows that there is no causal effect of self-presentation by brand on temporal distance. That is, once consumers have purchased an item of clothing by a clothing brand, they are most likely to wear the brand in the near-future event regardless of whether the brand serves as a means of presenting their actual self or ideal self.

The findings of Article IV suggest that consumers' judgment of how far into the future a brand will be used for an event—temporal distance—can result in a



higher level of positive attitude and a higher level of choice toward the brand that serves as a means of presenting the consumer's self.

#### **4.5 Synthesis of the findings**

In general, the four articles serve to answer a central research question, "How do brand favorability, brand betrayal, temporal focus, and temporal distance influence the way consumers humanize brands?"

Article I focused on the creation of the self-brand connection, especially for new and unfavorable brands. The self-brand connection is an essential domain of humanizing brands; consumers connect to a brand as the brand is perceived as an identity signal (Schmitt, 2012) and they feel pride and happiness through developing a sense of oneness with the brand (Park et al., 2010). The finding demonstrates that when the brand is perceived as well-liked, new, or unfavorable; it results in a different way of developing the self-brand connection.

Article II sheds light on brand betrayal when companies encounter a brand transgression. The research of brand betrayal has become essential in understanding a negative relationship with a brand (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Reimann et al., 2018). If consumers view a brand as having a human-like mind, they imbue the brand with intentions and feelings (Waytz et al., 2014b). This article suggested failure severity and inferred negative motive as two indicators of brand betrayal. This article also provides evidence that consumer anthropomorphize tendency and actual high-arousal positive states are two antecedents of brand betrayal.

Articles III and IV provide additional explanation for how consumers humanize brands due to self-congruence (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Sirgy, 1982). By investigating the impact on brand preference, willingness to pay, brand attitude, brand choice, and self-presentation by brand, both articles show that temporal focus and temporal distance influence self-congruence.



## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Theoretical contributions

This dissertation provides a three-fold contribution to the research on humanizing brands, including self-brand connection, self-congruence, and a relationship-focused aspect that relates to aversion due to brand betrayal (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

#### ***5.1.1 Self-brand connection: Self-presentation by brand and brand favorability***

First, this dissertation contributes to the literature of self-brand connection by articulating the effect of self-presentation by brand (Escalas, 2004; Schmitt, 2012), which explains on how consumers perceive a brand as being “close to me” by elucidating the brand’s ability to serve as a means of self-presentational strategy (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

The findings add to the consumer-psychology model of brands (Schmitt, 2012) by integrating self-presentation by brand as a construct of self-centered engagement. Self-presentation by brand exists when consumers connect with a brand while they utilize the brand as part of their positive impression motivation and impression construction (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The reason given is that consumers perceive gaining a symbolic benefit from relating to the brand to an identity signal via a signifying process (Schmitt, 2012). Thus, self-presentation by brand allows consumers to humanize a brand as it seems personally relevant to them.

Importantly, the current dissertation also shows that self-presentation by brand can be formed in a limited period by the consumers’ effortful thought about the brand—they think about the brand’s ability to serve as a means of self-presentational strategy. The dissertation demonstrates that self-presentation by brand could be formed instantaneously using a self-customization procedure that prompts a brand’s ability to serve as a means of self-expression (Chernev et al., 2011) by allowing consumers to embed a set of unique preferences into the brand itself (Valenzuela, Dhar, & Zettelmeyer, 2009) and thus the consumers’ sense of self develops with the brand.

This dissertation serves to respond to the call made by Keller (2016) to extend the understanding of the differential effect of brand knowledge on humanizing brands. The differential effect of brand knowledge is related to brand favorability, such as whether a brand is well-liked, new, or unfavorable. Interestingly, the creation of the self-brand connection varies depending upon the level of favorability of the brand. For instance, the findings show that self-presentation by brand is relatively essential to the new and unfavorable brands in developing a sense of oneness between the brands and consumers. If a brand is well-liked, brand attitude, brand familiarity, and self-presentation by brand are relevant to the self-brand connection.

However, these effects are not explained in the literature of the consumer-psychology model of brands (Schmitt, 2012) and self-brand connection (Escalas, 2004). The current dissertation argues that consumers start connecting with a new brand based on an exchange norm (Swaminathan & Dommer, 2012), rather than a communal norm (Aggarwal, 2004). The reason given is that the gain of symbolic benefit that is derived from the new brand is more meaningful than the general attitude toward the new brand. Consumers may evaluate a new brand favorably because of its attractive packaging and price promotion (Keller, 1993); such factors are more relevant to purchase intention (Drechsler, Leeftang, Bijmolt, & Natter, 2017). Thus, brand attitude does not emphasize the self-brand linkage or self-brand display, which are considered an essential process in the self-brand connection (Park et al., 2010).

Escalas (2004) makes a general statement about brand attitude that does not necessarily relate to the creation of the self-brand connection. Consumers may form a positive attitude toward a brand with which they do not hold a self-brand connection (Escalas, 2004). As explained in the previous paragraph, the findings of this dissertation show that brand attitude is not significantly related to the self-brand connection in the evaluation of a new brand. However, when a brand is well-liked, the brand attitude was found to affect the creation of the self-brand connection. The reason given is that once the brand is perceived as well-liked, consumers generally form an overall positive evaluation about the brand, which may include the brand's quality (Zeithaml, 1988), non-product related attributes (Rossiter & Percy, 1987), and symbolic benefits (Keller, 1993) as these all relate to having had a positive experience with the brand. Thus, the current dissertation provides an alternative explanation for this effect by demonstrating the differential effect of brand knowledge in establishing the self-brand connection.

Previous studies tend to present a positive effect of brand familiarity on consumer response toward a brand (Kent & Allen, 1994; Koll & von Wallpach, 2014; Martí-Parreño, Bermejo-Berros, & Aldás-Manzano, 2017; Naidoo & Hollebeek, 2016; Verhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2016). However, the findings of the current dissertation demonstrate that a dilution effect of brand familiarity on the self-brand connection occurs among unfavorable brands. The reason given is that consumers hold an unfavorable attitude toward a formerly well-liked brand because people's memory is exceptionally durable (Loftus & Loftus, 1980). A love-becomes-hate (Grégoire et al., 2009) effect may occur when consumers disassociate themselves with an unfavorable but familiar brand. One possible explanation is that consumers would like to engage in self-brand separation as they do not feel comfortable being connected with a brand that does not provide instrumental value to them (Park et al., 2010). Thus, this dissertation taps into the adverse impact of brand familiarity in the self-brand connection research.

### ***5.1.2 Self-congruence: The temporal perspective and the consumer's self***

Second, this dissertation contributes to the literature of brand usage imagery congruity (Liu et al., 2012) from the temporal perspective, which is related to self-congruence that explains how temporal focus and temporal distance influence the way consumers perceive a brand as being "like me" (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

Specifically, the current dissertation identifies the linkages between situational self-image (Schenk & Holman, 1980), temporal construal (Troepe & Liberman, 2003), and brand usage imagery congruity (Liu et al., 2012). In addition to time pressure (Sirgy & Su, 2000), the temporal situation in mind (i.e., public vs. private consumption; Graeff, 1997), and the situational characteristics of future and past consumption (Belk, 1978; 1990), temporal focus and temporal distance are proven to have significant influence on the fit of the consumers' need for actual or ideal self-congruity.

The findings show that when consumers devote their attention to thinking about the present moment, they anticipate a brand to serve as a means of achieving their actual self-congruity, whereas when they devote their attention to thinking about a distant future and distant past moments, they anticipate a brand to serve as a means of reflecting their ideal self-congruity.

The current dissertation also demonstrates that when consumers wish to use a brand as a personal identity signal in a near-future event, they prefer the brand to serve as a means of presenting their actual self, whereas when they wish to use the brand as a personal identity signal in a distant-future event, they prefer the brand to serve as a means of presenting their ideal self.

These effects exist because of the association between psychological distance and low-level versus high-level construals of self (Trope et al., 2007). The low-level construals of self are related to the actual self, whereas the high-level construals of self are related to the ideal self or possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). That is, consumers tend to associate with their ideal self or possible self when there is an increase in the psychological distance, such as when thinking about a distant future moment, a distant memory, or a distant-future event. Thus, these findings move the examination of brand usage imagery congruity beyond the consumer's expectation of the typical use of the brand (Liu et al., 2012) toward an understanding of how the symbolic attributes of a brand could be further enhanced by tapping the psychological distance that results from the shift in the temporal focus and temporal distance.

The current dissertation further responds to the call made by Mogilner et al. (2012) to demonstrate fine-grained insight into temporal focus's influence on brand preference and willingness to pay for a brand that fits with the consumer's actual or ideal selves. An important note is that the results show that a higher level of brand preference only leads to a higher level of willingness to pay for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's ideal self, but that this effect is not found to be significant for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self. The reason given is in line with the situational self-image literature, which suggests that consumers are willing to pay more for a brand that could realize their image of their ideal selves or possible successful selves, rather than a brand that reflects their current self-concept (Schenk & Holman, 1980).

This dissertation also found that the disassociation of temporal focus and the consumers' selves does not result in a significant adverse impact on brand preference and willingness to pay. For instance, present-focused consumers would not rate unfavorably or pay less for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their ideal self. Temporal focus only shifts the consumer's need for actual or ideal self-congruity, which does not result in adverse brand meaning as it is unrelated to a brand or product image. Thus, a positive self-incongruity effect exists (Sirgy, 1982), where consumers still hold a similar image about the brand, despite the brand's incongruence with their self-image in a given temporal situation.

The current dissertation replaces the findings about the relationship between temporal construal and the consumer's self by identifying the effect of temporal distance on another set of dependent variables: brand attitude and brand choice. It further shows that the existence of this effect is due to self-presentation by brand. That is, when consumers plan for a near-future event, they tend to prefer a brand that reflects their actual self, whereas when consumers plan for a distant-future event, they tend to prefer a brand that reflects their ideal self. The reason given is that consumers construe the brand better in maintaining a positive impression and presenting their image effectively.

### **5.1.3 Aversion from brand betrayal: The antecedents and indicators**

Third, the current dissertation contributes to the literature of brand betrayal (Reimann et al., 2018) by including the antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal. An outcome of brand betrayal is that consumers have a strong aversion to a brand relationship as they perceive the brand as a “partner” that has violated a relationship norm (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

Previous studies used “perceived betrayal” instead of *brand betrayal* as it refers to the degree to which consumers believe a service provider has intentionally violated the relationship norm (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Lee, Pam, & Tsai, 2013). However, this definition does not hold in the humanizing brands domain where consumers still feel betrayed even if a human brand did not have a negative motive for their actions. For instance, consumers may feel betrayed by an airline brand because a flight delay has indirectly caused them to miss out on a significant life event, or car drivers may blame their car brands if they get involved in an accident after following an alternative route the automotive navigation system suggested to them. Thus, this dissertation proposes two indicators of brand betrayal—failure severity and inferred negative motive—and tested its predictive ability across three studies. Failure severity is used to measure the extent to which consumers believe the brand has failed to deliver its promises, is unable to support them, or it has let them down in a moment of need (Finkel et al., 2002; Grégoire et al., 2009). Inferred negative motive is used to measure the degree to which consumers believe the brand has taken advantage of them, intentionally misled them, or tried to exploit them (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008).

This dissertation contributes to brand betrayal by including two antecedents of brand betrayal that are not related to firm evaluation and brand experience. The

consumer anthropomorphize tendency is found to predict brand betrayal. The reason given is that consumer anthropomorphize tendency is associated with perceiving a brand to have a human-like mind and this can result in thinking that the brand has acted intentionally during a brand transgression (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Importantly, consumer anthropomorphize tendency is more significant in the prediction of an inferred negative motive rather than failure severity as the act of perceiving an agent to have a human-like mind means that the agent is capable of processing an immoral concern and unethical action (Waytz et al., 2014b). Therefore, consumers with a high level of consumer anthropomorphize tendency might recommend that a brand should not tolerate any negative motive that may violate a relationship norm. Based on this notion, they might infer that the brand has a high degree of negative motivation during a brand transgression.

In contrast, the actual high-arousal positive states (Tsai et al., 2006)—the feelings of enthusiasm, excitement, elation, or euphoria that consumers have typically experienced—are more significant in the prediction of failure severity rather than an inferred negative motive. The reason given is that people tend to have an optimistic bias and indulge in the enjoyable recollection of past events (Kahneman, 2011). Thus, consumers who have typically experienced high-arousal positive states tend to think that they are at a lesser risk of suffering an unexpected event in the near future (Kahneman, 2011). However, an unfortunate incident, such as a brand transgression, would definitely not be their desired end state and they would perceive the brand to have failed to deliver the expected products or services.

Lastly, this dissertation sheds light on the type of apology issued by firms and brand betrayal. The previous study has shown that the most efficient way to recover from a brand transgression is to combine an apology with compensation (Joireman et al., 2016). The current dissertation presented that a competence-violation apology is more efficient than a relationship-violation apology in reducing the feeling of brand betrayal and thus it increases the consumer forgiveness (even when both types of apology are offered with similar compensation). The reason given is that the competence-violation apology addresses the incompetence and focuses on repairing credibility (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004), which shifts the consumers' focus away from the relationship violation and thus is perceived to be more sincere than an apology for an intentional offense (Schumann, 2012), such as an apology for a relationship violation.



## **5.2 Managerial implications**

The current dissertation has significant implications for managers wanting to develop a robust branding strategy of humanizing brands. The findings contribute to a one-on-one marketing approach to branding (Arora et al., 2008), incorporating consumer's selves in branding considerations (Malär et al., 2011) and assessing brand betrayal in a negative brand relationship (Reimann et al., 2018).

### ***5.2.1 The one-on-one marketing approach to branding***

One-on-one marketing involves two forms of tailoring a firm's marketing mix to match the different aspects of consumer behavior: customization and personalization (Arora et al., 2008). Managers are more interested in how to promote new and unfavorable brands (Keller, 2016). Instead of investing heavily in a brand awareness campaign, managers should consider how a new and an unfavorable brand could serve as a means of self-presentational strategy—self-presentation by brand. Importantly, self-presentation by brand can be formed instantly by allowing consumers to customize a product or service based on their individual preferences. Managers could develop a mobile application or provide an onsite service counter that allows consumers to customize their clothing style, a gadgets' front cover, the graphics on a water bottle, ice cream toppings, or have their name on products. For instance, the NIKEiD campaign, which allows customers to customize their sneakers, has successfully engaged with their customers over the past few years (Fumo, 2016). In the China market alone, this campaign has been targeted at over 350 million Chinese millennials who seeks out brands that could help to present their uniqueness (Qian, 2017).

The central idea of self-presentation by brand is to differentiate their customers from others or to present the uniqueness of their customers while they are using the brand, which results in a positive brand response (Koll & von Wallpach, 2014). Thus, self-presentation by brand enhances the self-brand connection for new and unfavorable brands as consumers perceive the benefit gained from the personal identity signal of the brands. Managers could include the three questions of self-presentation by brand in a survey in order to measure the outcome of their self-customized products after delivery. Further, the self-presentation by brand data could be incorporated in vector autoregressive modeling, which consists of attitudinal data and a firm's market performance, in

order to identify how self-presentation by brand can be used as part of measuring their performance.

Still, this dissertation does not compromise the importance of awareness campaigns as brand awareness is an essential element for customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2003). Tan, Ismail, and Rasiah (2015) found that brand awareness is positively associated with brand familiarity. One important note is that brand familiarity can make consumers separate themselves from an unfavorable brand. Thus, managers should personalize their brand awareness campaign to address the consumers who do not have negative attitudes toward their brands.

However, in a marketplace, it is impossible to identify the brand's favorability for each consumer unless they have responded to the firm (for instance via a customer survey, testimonial, feedback, compliment, complaint, or through contacting customer service personnel). Fortunately, with the advancement of digital marketing and the availability of online behavioral data, managers now have better tools and guidelines with which to identify brand favorability from their online comments, ratings, page views, discussions, sharing behavior, and the real-time data of mobile apps.

### ***5.2.2 Incorporating consumer's selves into branding considerations***

Second, the current dissertation advances the understanding of incorporating consumer's selves into branding considerations. Malär et al. (2011) suggest focusing on authentic (i.e., actual self) branding and calls for reconsidering aspirational (i.e., ideal self) branding as it only insignificantly predicts emotional brand attachment unless the consumers have low self-esteem, low public self-consciousness, or engage with low-involvement products. However, the findings of this dissertation provide an alternative explanation; it claims that aspirational branding result in brand preference and a higher level of willingness to pay if it matches with the consumers' temporal focus.

A remark for managers is that they have not been aware that the consumer's age per se determines their temporal focus. Mogilner et al. (2012) found that younger consumers tend to be future focused, whereas older consumers tend to be present focused. Based on this notion, aspirational branding should be more relevant to younger consumers and authentic branding should be more relevant to older consumers. However, situational factors, such as music and store atmosphere, can influence one's temporal focus.

Aspirational branding is related to the consumer's ideal self; managers could associate their advertisements with an excited feeling in order to prompt future-focused consumers (Mogilner et al., 2012), whereas they could associate their advertisements with a nostalgic feeling in order to inspire past-focused consumers (Shields & Johnson, 2016). A future focus could be urged by using high tempo or exciting music as background music, whereas a past focus could be primed by using retro in-store decorations. Besides, the manager could integrate technological tools with application software, such as using virtual technology to immerse their customers in a futuristic city or take them back to an ancient environment. As for authentic branding, managers could design a relaxing atmosphere (for instance by playing stress relief music, low-tempo music, or calm music) as this condition would prompt people to become present-focused (Mogilner et al., 2012). Further, managers can design more campaigns or activities that engage consumers in focusing on the current moment, such as mix-and-match outfit ideas, an augmented reality virtual fitting room, or a photo booth.

Besides this, managers could assume that consumers are engaged in the present moment when they are using a yoga or meditation fitness app. Thus, managers could promote a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self in order to have greater brand preference and willingness to pay. On the other hand, the manager could promote a brand that serves as a means of reflecting consumer's ideal self if the data shows that customers are watching motivational speeches and Facebook's memories online as they are then engaging with distant future moments or distant past moments.

Apart from temporal focus, the findings show that when consumers consider using a brand for a near-future event, they tend to evaluate the brand that serves as a means of presenting their actual self more favorably, whereas when they consider using a brand for a distant-future event, they tend to evaluate the brand that serves as a means of presenting their ideal self more favorably. Thus, managers could train their sales assistants to deliver actual or ideal self-congruence messages at the point of purchase, which is based on how far into the future the brand will be used for self-presentational purpose.

### ***5.2.3 Assessing brand betrayal in a negative brand relationship***

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.

—Einstein

Anybody can make a mistake, including a brand. For instance, a price reduction could be attractive to a customer who has not purchased the product but, on the flip side, customers who have bought the product before the price reduction may feel the brand has taken advantage of them. This scenario illustrates that loyal customers might switch to another brand after experiencing a brand transgression in which they feel betrayed by the brand as they feel it has violated a relationship norm. Thus, it is essential to know the degree to which the brand has made the customers feel betrayed.

This dissertation suggests that assessing brand betrayal after a brand transgression could provide an early warning system for consumers behaving negatively toward a brand, such as spreading negative word of mouth. Managers could use the measures of brand betrayal to measure the degree to which their customers perceive a brand to have failed to deliver the expected products or services and the degree to which their brands are perceived to have had a negative motive in regard to their customers.

Further, the findings show that the inferred negative motive is highly associated with consumer anthropomorphize tendency, which means that those consumers with a higher tendency to anthropomorphize infer a brand to have a higher degree of negative motive for the brand transgression than those consumers with a lower tendency to anthropomorphize, even though both groups of consumers have experienced the similar brand transgression and have received an equal amount of compensation. Thus, it is suggested that consumers are segmented based on whether they have a high or low level of anthropomorphize tendency.

Apart from considering consumer anthropomorphize tendency, managers could also consider segmenting consumers based on their actual high-arousal positive states. Managers could obtain the consumers' actual high-arousal positive states data by collaborating with companies that are capable of tracking the real-time users' experience and feelings using social media sites, mobile apps, cloud computing, and real-time big data consultancies. With these data, managers can predict which group of customers might feel more betrayed when their brands fail to deliver the expected products or services. Thus, they could provide service recovery and solutions for them in advance in order to optimize customer forgiveness for the brands.

Managers could outsource brand betrayal surveys to third-party agents so that the victims could express their thoughts and feelings about the brands after a brand transgression or attempted recovery from a brand transgression. With these

data, managers could identify the degree of brand betrayal perceived by each victim; subsequently, they can personalize recovery strategies that match the victims' profiles in order to optimize the outcome. Lastly, managers should consider *how* an apology is to be presented in their recovery strategy as a competence-violation apology has been proven to have more efficient results in terms of reducing brand betrayal than a relationship-violation apology.

### **5.3 Limitations and future research**

In each article of this dissertation, the research framework and methodology are specifically designed in response to a specified research question. Nevertheless, numerous limitations can be found, although the four articles have carefully identified the inclusion of variables and research methods. This sub-section provides the aggregate limitations of this dissertation and suggestions for future research.

First, the current dissertation only focuses on brands that relate to clothing (Articles I, III, and IV), consumer electronics products (Articles I, II), and airlines (Article II). Future research should explore findings from other brand categories that associate with self-presentation and self-expression, such as automotive products, restaurants, luxury accessories, hotels, and grooming products. Further, future studies should extend research to include low-involvement brand or product categories in which consumers might humanize. For example, consumers might humanize a Coke or Starbucks and form strong level of self-congruence. I personally know an Asian lecturer who only drinks Starbucks coffee; she has the Starbucks logo on both her windshield and notebook as she believes it reflects her young and professional impression.

Second, the current dissertation refers to unfavorable brands as brands that participants have stopped using due to dissatisfaction, which only reflects the brands that consumers had a negative brand attitude towards, based on past brand experience. Thus, this dissertation limits its applicability in explaining those unfavorable brands to which consumers do not have an adverse brand attitude. For instance, non-Hummer owners might have a neutral position toward the Hummer brand although they do not evaluate the brand favorably. In this dissertation a *well-liked brand* refers to a brand that consumers have a favorable feeling towards after having had a positive experience. It did not cover the well-liked brand that consumers wish to own, especially the luxury brands such as Ferrari and Vacheron Constantin. Further, the current dissertation uses a fictitious

brand to represent a new brand, which did not provide understanding of a famous brand that is considered new in some regions. For instance, the luxury fashion brands Sunnei, Moncler, and Loro Piana are not popular among Asian consumers. Thus, future research should explore the breadth of brand favorability and its effect in humanizing brands.

Third, all the studies used hypothetical scenarios to test the research frameworks. Although such a methodology is commonly used in consumer and psychological research, it faces an inherent limitation, especially in measuring brand betrayal as experienced by the victims. For instance, the responses of participants in the brand transgression scenario (i.e., a delayed flight, a substantial price reduction after purchasing a product) might not be similar to their actual response in a real case. Another limitation is the willingness to pay for a self-customized cloth that serves a means of reflecting the consumer's self, which is merely an indication of how much consumers are willing to pay for the cloth instead of a monetary transaction. The reason given is that people often give the wrong prediction regarding their anticipated feelings, desired expectations, and actual behaviors (Ariely, 2008). Thus, future research should verify the findings with real data. Researchers could collaborate with airline companies as a third-party agency to survey their passengers' feelings of brand betrayal after a flight has been delayed. As for willingness to pay, researchers could first offer a monetary reward to respondents for a non-related task and subsequently assess the willingness to pay by requiring the respondents to bid for the self-customized cloth with a real monetary transaction.

Fourth, the current dissertation used self-report questionnaires to investigate the way in which consumers humanize brands, which is in line with most of the research that is published in this field (e.g., Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal & McGill, 2011; Batra et al., 2012; Chernev et al., 2011; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Grégoire et al., 2009; Joireman et al., 2016; Kim & Kramer, 2015; Liu et al., 2012; Malär et al., 2011; Park et al., 2010; Puzakova et al., 2013; Wan, Chen, & Jin, 2017). Self-report questionnaires are prevalent in social science research, such as consumer and marketing research, as it is considered the most accurate information that captures respondents' current thoughts and feelings (McDonald, 2008). On the flip side, it does not distinguish between whether consumers view a brand as having a human-like mind with intentions and feelings, or whether they simply process the brand as a metaphoric description of their behavior (Waytz et al., 2010). For instance, consumers might perceive an M&M's character as human-like because it is designed to have human-like features. However, it does not

mean that consumers would treat the M&M's character as a live object that has real feelings and the needs of a human. Thus, future research should extend to neuroimaging, such as using functional magnetic resonance imaging, to investigate a different network of brand regions that involve humanizing brands.

Lastly, the data was collected from Finnish, Indian, and American samples, which have excluded Chinese respondents and Chinese brands. The Chinese market has become one of the most critical markets due to China's fast-growing economy (Hirst, 2015). Besides, some Chinese brands have stronger brand equity than international brands, such as Huawei, Oppo, Vivo, and Xiaomi (Tao, 2017). The Chinese are more likely to fulfill certain roles in the eyes of others instead of for themselves (Heine, 2001) and they heavily emphasize social status goals because of strong social comparisons among their peers (Wright, Li, & Shi, 2014). Thus, future research should be conducted among Chinese respondents because their culture might affect the way they humanize a brand that serves as a means of reflecting themselves.





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## Original publications

- I Tan, T.M., Salo, J., Juntunen, J., & Kumar, A. (2018). A comparative study of creation of self-brand connection for well-liked, new, and unfavorable brands. *Under review*.
- II Tan, T.M. (2018). The antecedents and indicators of brand betrayal. *European-Advances in Consumer Research, 11*.
- III Tan, T.M., Salo, J., Juntunen, J., & Kumar, A. (2018). Temporal focus and self-congruence. *Under review*.
- IV Tan, T.M., Salo, J., Juntunen, J., & Kumar, A. (2017). The effect of temporal distance on self-presentation by brand. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research, 45*.

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