THEORY/CONCEPTUAL

CrossMark

Brand-self connections and brand prominence as drivers of employee brand attachment

Lucy Gill-Simmen[1] · Deborah J. MacInnis[2] · Andreas B. Eisingerich[1] · C. Whan Park[2]

Abstract

Past research reveals that customers can attach meanings to brands that create strong connections between the brand and the self. When they do, and when the brand is prominent in their minds, they become psychologically attached to the brand, and display strong brand loyalty and advocacy behaviors. We use a grounded theory framework to ask if *employees* develop similar brand-self connections and regard the brand as prominent in their lives based on the meaning they attach to the brand they work for. This question is important because employee's attachment to the brand can have critical equity-driving implications for the brand's marketplace success and the employee's commitment to the organization. We also ask what drives such outcomes. Beyond identifying novel drivers of employees' brand attachment, we find that employees' attachment to a brand is conceptually and empirically different from attachment or commitment to the organization. Specifically, we observe employees who are not attached to the organization but who are still attached to the brand, and who engage in difficult-to-enact pro-brand and pro-organization behaviors. Finally, our findings contribute to a broader knowledge base on organizational commitment and attachment by identifying brand meaning-related drivers of employees' organizational commitment/attachment. Prior research has studied non-brand related drivers of these organizational outcomes.

Keywords Brand-self connections · Employee commitment · Employee attachment · Internal marketing · Qualitative research

Research in the consumer domain suggests that consumers can develop strong connections between the brand and the self, and that the brand can become prominent in consumers' lives (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Ferraro et al. 2013; Keller 2001;

All authors contributed equally to this work.

✉ Lucy Gill-Simmen
   lucy.gill–simmen08@imperial.ac.uk

   Deborah J. MacInnis
   macinnis@usc.edu

   Andreas B. Eisingerich
   a.eisingerich@imperial.ac.uk

   C. Whan Park
   choong@marshall.usc.edu

[1] Imperial College Business School, Imperial College London, London SW7 2AZ, UK

[2] Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0403, USA

Park et al. 2010; Sirgy 1982) based on their brand interactions and the meaning they assign to the brand (Park et al. 2016). Brand-self connections are defined as the extent to which the brand is regarded as relevant to and resonant with one's needs, goals, values, and identity, such that the brand's meaning has self-relevant implications. Thus, consumers can become connected to a brand because it represents who they are or who they wish to be (an identity basis). They can also become connected to a brand because it is meaningful in light of goals, personal concerns, or life projects (an instrumentality basis). Brand prominence is defined as the extent to which the brand is salient or top of mind. As the brand's resonance and relevance to individuals' needs, goals, values and identity increase, its meaning is more accessible in memory and more deeply connected to one's personal experiences and autobiographical memories.

Prior research suggests that both brand-self connections and brand prominence reflect the conceptual underpinnings of a construct called brand attachment. Brand attachment is defined as the strength of the bond that connects the individual to the brand (Park et al. 2010, 2013). Whereas consumers develop stronger and positive attachment to brands whose meaning connects with aspects of the self, including brand prominence as a core

🖄 Springer

indicator of attachment is important since it adds precision to the conceptualization and measurement of brand attachment. Consistent with this reasoning, Park et al. (2010, 2013) argued logically and observed empirically that brand-self connections and brand prominence reflect second order factors that indicate strong brand attachment. As brand-self connections deepen, and as the brand becomes more prominent (i.e., as attachment grows), the brand not only overlaps with one's identity, and/or self-congruity (Liu et al. 2012); consumers also regard the brand as a valued relationship partner (Fournier 1998; Park et al. 2013). As a consequence, consumers show strong loyalty and advocacy behaviors toward those brands to which they are attached (Park et al. 2010, 2013).

The importance of employee brand attachment

Whereas research in the consumer domain suggests that powerful equity-building benefits can accrue to brands when brand attachment is strong, we know less about whether employees develop brand-self connections to the brands they work for (either the corporate brand as a whole or a specific brand within the organization with which they are affiliated). If they do, we know little about the relevant meanings that underlie such connections. Understanding these issues is important for several reasons.

First, to the extent that employees feel a strong connection between the brand and the self and think about the brand often, they should be more likely to create, embody, and build on the brand's meaning in the marketplace. Employees are paid and often are expected to deliver on behalf of the brand and 'live' the brand (Drucker 2002; Mumby 2016). They are hired and trained to act in line with brand values, and they are further expected to embody the brand and elevate its value through their behaviors. Embodying the brand is important because employees' actions can influence customers' perceptions about the brand (Ahearne et al. 2005; Homburg et al. 2009). Indeed, customers and other external stakeholders often regard the brand's employees as synonymous with the brand (Allison et al. 2016; Folkes and Patrick 2003; Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998; Merz et al. 2009; Sirianni et al. 2013).

However, employees' enthusiasm for the brand, and their commitment to embodying the brand and its values can vary greatly (Baker et al. 2014; Hurrell and Scholarios 2014). Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear news stories of employees whose non-customer centric behavior has greatly diminished the brand's value (Bettencourt et al. 2005; Matuson 2016). For these reasons, research supports the importance of providing front-line employees with brand specific information about the brand (particularly information that enhances their identification with the brand and their internalization of its values) so that they can act

toward customers in brand-image consistent ways (Baker et al. 2014; Merlo et al. 2014; Punjaisri and Wilson 2011). Indeed, some companies like Alibaba, Lush Cosmetics, Palantir, and Zappos appear to have created employee brand champions who consistently deliver on the brand's promise. Employees who feel strong and prominent brand-self connections may be instrumental to maintaining and strengthening the brand's meaning to external stakeholders (Land and Taylor 2010). Employees' attachment may make them passionate experts who share the latest brand information with others (Bell et al. 2017), while their position as an employee of the organization should create the impression that the brand information they share is credible and factually accurate. Moreover, employees who are themselves most connected with the brand may be best able to authentically and passionately communicate (implicitly and explicitly) not just the brand's meaning, but their own brand enthusiasm (Baker et al. 2014).

Second, employee brand-self connections and brand prominence have important revenue building implications for the organization. Specifically, employees' brand-oriented behaviors and enthusiasm can transfer to customers, heightening customers' own brand experiences and enhancing brand sales and equity (Mitchell 2002). For example, Sirianni et al. (2013) found that the extent to which the employee's behavior is aligned with the brand's personality, positively influenced customers' brand evaluations and their perception of the brand as best in class. Moreover, the more employees communicate the brand's meaning and their own brand passion, the less costly it is for the firm to promote the brand using other communication vehicles.

Third, when employees speak passionately and authentically to friends and family (outside of work) they act as brand ambassadors even to people who may be outside the brand's target market (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos 2014). Communications with friends and family can build respect for the brand, even if the message recipients are not themselves brand users. Brand respect helps to insulate the brand from marketplace mishaps (John and Park 2016). Employees who communicate passionately and authentically to friends and family (as well as customers) also help to build the brand's talent pool, by making the brand salient and attractive as a potential place to work. The importance of this must not be underestimated given companies' search and competition for talent; for example, Amazon, Baidu, Google, Tencent, Tesla, and Alibaba competing for the best and the brightest in their push for developing artificial intelligence (AI) (Forbes 2017). Moreover, individuals who feel strongly connected to the brand may accept lower wages (Tavassoli et al. 2014), not because they are committed to the organization, but because they believe in the brand's meaning; they connect with its promise and what it stands for.

Fourth, study of employees' brand-self connections and brand prominence is important because such study can help us gain insight into the motivations and emotions that drive brand meaning and build employees' brand-self connections and brand prominence in the first place. Such knowledge should provide organizations with insight into how they can build and sustain employees' brand attachment, and hence realize the equity building benefits noted above.

A fifth and final reason, as to why it is important to understand the brand meanings that build brand-self connections and brand prominence as drivers of employee brand attachment, is that brand-self connections and brand prominence can potentially enhance employees' attachment and commitment to the organization. Whereas prior research has suggested that employees can become attached to the organization for which they work, much of this prior work has emphasized non-brand factors that drive attachment to the organization (such as promotion opportunities (Prince 2003), flexible work schedules and dependent care assistance (Casper and Harris 2008), or work-unit diversity (Gonzalez and DeNisi 2007; Tsui et al. 1992)).

Moreover, recent work shows that brand meanings and company meanings can be differentiated. Gammoh et al. (2014) observed that the congruity between employees' (i.e., salespeople's) values and the brands values is empirically distinct from the congruity between employees' values and the value of the organization. Brand value congruity influences brand identification, whereas congruity between employees' values and the company influence company identification. Moreover, although employee-brand identification had a strong influence on employees' identification with the company, employees' identification with the brand exerted an additional impact on employee performance. Hughes and Ahearne (2010) found that salespeople's brand identification enhanced the brand's marketplace performance because they put more effort into their brand building and selling activities. Using social identity theory, Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) postulated that the meanings that employees assigned to the brand (e.g., perceived fit of the brand with the employee's sense of self, brand knowledge, and employees' beliefs in the brand) influenced employees' identification with the organization, in turn influencing employees' brand building behaviors with customers (e.g., behavior that supports the brand's meaning) and their brand building behavior within the organization and with non-customers.

For these reasons, it is of interest to consider whether and to what extent the brand-related meanings that build brand-self connections and brand prominence influence employees' attachment to the broader organization. It is possible that brand attachment has the potential to not only build identification with the company, but to also make non-brand aspects of the organization (e.g., an ineffective organizational structure, poor compensation) more tolerable. For example, employees who feel a strong attachment to the brand they work for may be more likely to act in ways congruent with larger organizational goals. They may be more likely to work hard for the organization, stay with the organization longer and put up with the work conducted.

Employees' attachment to the organization vs. attachment to the brand

Attachment and commitment to the organization. Prior research in management has given extensive study to the factors that influence employees' attachment and commitment to the *organization*. This work has defined organizational commitment or attachment in myriad ways. Table 1 shows how these and related constructs have been defined. For example, organizational commitment is defined by some scholars as an affective orientation toward the organization (Buchanan 1974; Kanter 1968), involving a willingness to exert effort, and a desire (Mowday et al. 1979), or internalized normative pressure (Wiener 1982) to maintain membership in the organization (Meyer and Allen 1991). Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, p. 301) define organizational commitment as "… a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target". Numerous scholars also argue that organizational commitment and attachment can take different forms (Mowday et al. 1982; Reichers 1985). Given our focus on branding and brand attachment (i.e., brand-self connections and brand prominence), we do not attempt to reconcile differences in definitions or argue for nuances in various forms of organizational attachment/commitment. Our main point here is to suggest that the study of organizational attachment/commitment has a rich and lengthy history, particularly in the area of organizational behavior as suggested below, and to suggest that meanings that build employees' brand attachment might be a novel driver of employees' attachment or commitment to the organization.

Non-brand drivers of attachment/commitment to the organization Table 1 shows that considerable prior work has studied *non-brand* related drivers of employees' commitment or attachment to the organization. For example, connection to others in the organization, demographic similarity among co-workers (Gonzalez and DeNisi 2007; Tsui et al. 1992), satisfaction with colleagues (Bishop and Scott 2000), trust in management (Morhart et al. 2009; Whitener 2001), or various human resource practices, including flexible work hours and dependent care assistance (Casper and Harris 2008), promotion opportunities or internal politics (Meyer and Maltin 2010; Prince 2003) are all non-brand related drivers of organizational attachment or commitment.

Yet, whereas individuals can be committed to an organization as a whole, they can also be committed to other foci or targets, such as work colleagues, one's job, or trade unions

Table 1 Constructs and definitions

Construct	Definition in the Literature	Drivers
Employee brand attachment (current study)	The extent to which the brand is prominent in employees' lives and regarded as relevant to and resonant with employees' needs, goals, values, and identity	Study of brand-related drivers - Brand benefits that enable employees, making them feel empowered - Brand benefits that entice employees, making them feel experientially gratified - Brand benefits that enrich employees, making them feel personally inspired
Employee organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer 1990)	An affective attachment to an organization, a desire to remain in the organization, and willingness to exert effort on its behalf	Study of non-brand related drivers - Training, socialization tactics - Information about progress in the organization - Role orientation
(Becker et al. 1996)	A psychological attachment of workers to the place they work for	Study of non-brand related drivers - Identification with work, co-workers - Commitment to supervisors
(Bishop and Scott 2000)	The relative strength of an employee's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Satisfaction with supervision at organization, satisfaction with co-workers - Perceived work, task interdependence, resource-related conflict
(Buchanan 1974)	An identification with the organization, psychological immersion in the activities of one's work role, a feeling of affection for the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Job role clarity - Peer group cohesion - Organizational dependability
(Kanter 1968)	A willingness to be loyal to an organization and give energy to the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Utopian communities - Homogeneity of community, communistic sharing, group singing, etc.
(Meyer and Allen 1991)	A desire to maintain membership in the organization, a need to remain based on recognition of the costs associated with leaving, an obligation to remain resulting from loyalty norms and/or receipt of favors that require repayment	Study of non-brand related drivers - Organizational structure characteristics - Work experiences - Personal characteristics of employees - Socialization tactics, familiarity with the organization - Human resource practices, organizational investments
(Meyer and Herscovitch 2001)	A force that binds employees to a course of action of relevance to the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Association with work, individuals - Investments that organization makes in employees (training, pay, bonus) - Need to reciprocate the investments that the organization makes - Lack of job alternatives - Human resource practices, organizational investments
(Prince 2003)	A willingness to talk up an organization to friends, feeling proud to tell others about one's organizational membership, an indication that a particular organization is the best of all possible organizations to work for, caring about the future of the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Job role enhancement, extent to which one's duties afford greater autonomy at work, chance to work more independently, working on more complex assignments, develop new technical skills or abilities, interaction with other co-workers, and opportunity to have more influence in one's work - Job mobility opportunity, work across departments, work teams, units - Satisfaction with career opportunities, opportunities for advancement
(Steers 1977)	A strong belief in the organization's goals, willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and a desire to maintain membership with the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Personal characteristics of employees (age, education, need for achievement) - Job characteristics (feedback from supervisors, task identity) - Work experiences (feeling important, attitude toward the work group) - Dependence on organization (cost of leaving, loss of benefits, alternatives)
(Wiener 1982)	The totality of employees' internalized normative pressures to behave and act in a way that is in alignment with the goals and interests of the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Personal predisposition of employees (generalized loyalty and duty) - Recruitment and selection efforts by the organization - Organizational socialization, identification with organization, job satisfaction
Employee organizational attachment (Gonzalez and DeNisi 2007)	An affective organizational commitment, organizational identification, and lower intention to quit	Study of non-brand related drivers - Demographic similarity/dissimilarity (proportion of gender-different other co-workers, proportion of racially/ethnically different other co-workers) - Organizational diversity climate, gender heterogeneity - Organizational diversity climate, race/ethnic heterogeneity

Table 1 (continued)

| Construct	Definition in the Literature	Drivers
(Tsui et al. 1992)	An individual's psychological and behavioral involvement in a social group and/or unit of which she or he is a member	Study of non-brand related drivers - Organizational diversity, differences in age, differences in tenure, differences in education, differences in sex, differences in race of employees - Job satisfaction, organizational size
(Casper and Harris 2008)	An affective organizational commitment, and intentions to turnover	Study of non-brand related drivers - Human resource policies, dependent care assistance, flexible work schedules
Organizational identification (Dukerich et al. 2002)	A cognitive link between the definition of employees' self and the definition of the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - The attractiveness of the organization's construed external image - Employees' perception of the identity of the organization
(Gioia et al. 2000)	Imputed from expressed values, however the interpretation of such values is not necessarily stable or fixed;	Study of non-brand related drivers - Organizational history, image, reputation - Adaptive instability, environmental change, interpretation by outsiders
Employee engagement (Harter et al. 2002)	Employees' involvement, enthusiasm for work, and satisfaction with work at the organization	Study of non-brand related drivers - Satisfaction with fellow employees - Receiving praise, encouragement, recognition from supervisors, co-workers

with which they are affiliated (Bishop and Scott 2000; Reichers 1985), the knowledge network within which they operate (Bond et al. 2008), and the department within the organization with which they are affiliated (e.g., marketing vs. engineering; Fisher et al. 1997).

Attachment to the brand In this paper, we identify an additional important target to which employees can be attached; the brand (see Fig. 1). The term "brand" can reflect the corporate brand image, as when the company is represented by a single brand name (e.g., the Mayo Clinic, Palantir, Baidu). The term "brand" can also reflect the meaning or image of the constellation of products or services it produces (e.g., BASF, Sony, Facebook). The term "brand" can also reflect

the meaning associated with a specific branded product or service offering (e.g., Virgin Airlines vs. Virgin Health Bank). Our goal is not to parse the level of analysis at which the term "brand" is used. Instead, our goal is to understand the set of meanings that drive brand attachment among employees, regardless of whether the meaning of the brand is at the level of a corporation or an individually branded product.

Brand (vs. organizational) attachment Whereas attachment to a corporate brand or an individual branded product can build attachment to the organization, there is reason to believe that employees' attachment to the brand is separable from their attachment to the organization as a whole (see also Gammoh et al. 2014 who differentiate employee identification with the

Fig. 1 Emergent framework on the brand meanings that drive employee brand attachment
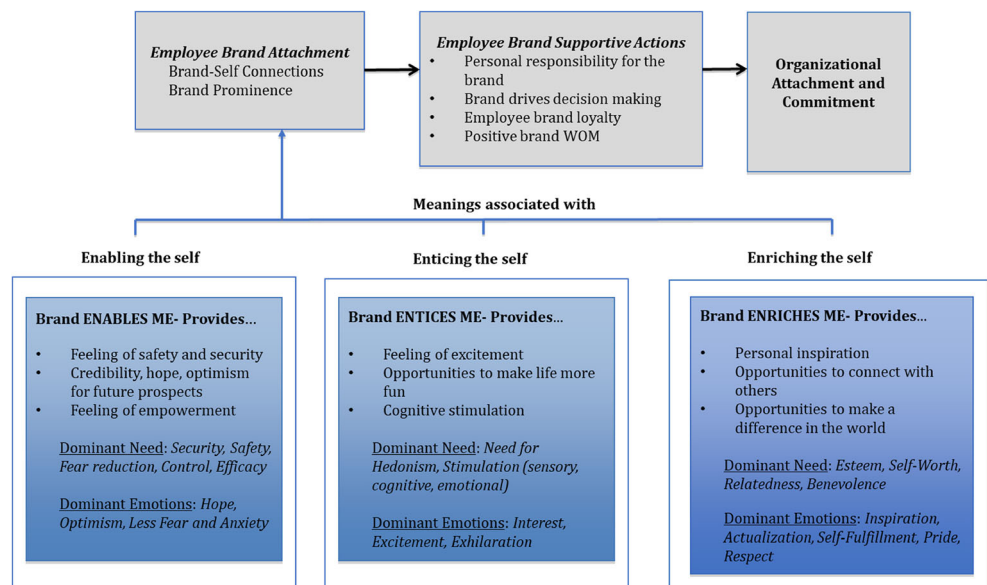
brand's values from identification with the organization's values). Specifically, employees can become attached to a corporate brand or an individual branded product marketed by their company because they value its meaning and principles in the marketplace, particularly as communicated through marketing activities (e.g., the 4P's). In contrast, their attachment to the organization as a whole can be influenced by brand as well as non-branding/non-marketing activities. Regrettably, limited prior work has examined the antecedents and consequences of employees' brand attachment. This paper contributes to extant theory by identifying the drivers and consequences of employees' *brand* attachment.

In light of the dearth of research on the meanings that drive employees' brand-self connections and brand prominence, we adopted a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to explore the nature and drivers of employees' attachment to the brand. A grounded theory approach uses rich qualitative data from the population of interest (here, internal employees), so as to develop insights into issues for which limited research has been generated. The aim of grounded theory is to develop a theoretical framework from which empirical hypotheses (or propositions) can be developed. This approach enhances researchers' understanding of complex phenomena from the perspective of those experiencing them (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Using qualitative methods to develop grounded theory is particularly appropriate when 1) there is insufficient theoretical guidance to support the research inquiry, 2) the informants' experience and viewpoints are essential to the inquiry, and 3) the meanings of and relationships between concepts are unclear. Since the goal of grounded theory is not to test hypotheses but to develop a novel framework from which future hypotheses can be generated and tested, we start with the qualitative inputs from employees, and use these data to identify the drivers and consequences of employees' brand attachment.

We show that employee brand attachment and employees' organizational commitment or attachment are conceptually and empirically distinct (as Fig. 1 suggests). Critically, we theorize and show that in addition to the non-brand related drivers discussed in prior work, organizational commitment is also influenced by brand-related drivers. Specifically, our findings indicate that employees' connections with the brand reflects the benefits that the brand offers to its employees and the meaning employees personally attach to the brand and what it stands for – its aspirational values and beliefs.

Beyond understanding how employee brand attachment is fostered, our findings complement prior work that has studied employees' commitment/attachment to the organization (Allen and Meyer 1990; Dukerich et al. 2002; Gioia et al. 2000). We do so by showing that some aspects of employees' relationship with the organization are not just due to brand-independent organizational activities such as management structure, leadership styles, human resource practices, locus of control and decision making, adequacy of pay, formalization of policy and procedure, job security, etc. (Brooke et al. 1988; Podsakoff et al. 1986; Whitener 2001). They are also driven by the meanings that connect employees' with the brand.

Methodology

Data collection

Given the state of the current literature and the nature of our research questions, we determined that unstructured interviews would be the most viable data collection methodology. Unstructured in-depth interviews are often regarded as the formal interview technique of grounded theory. With this method, in-depth interviews allow researchers to derive a theoretical framework from which future theory testing can emanate. Unstructured interviews often begin with a general set of questions related to the topic at hand. Listening to informants' stories in a broad manner in the early stages of the research yields preliminary ideas and concepts that sharpen both the theoretical sampling and the focus of subsequent interviews (Glaser and Strauss 1967; McCracken 1988). Our data collection with employees took place in the context of in-depth one-on-one interviews in the USA, Europe, and Asia. Figure 2 offers an overview of the research process.

Sample and data collection process

Sampling In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 informants (9 female, 8 male) ranging from 25 to 57 years of age. Table 2 displays key sample characteristics. Our sample includes employees who work for a diverse set of brands, varying in size, age, industry, geographic location of headquarters. The sample includes employees who work in B2B and B2C industries, for product and service brands, and in for-profit and non-profit sectors. We use this diverse sample to uncover common themes in the meanings behind employees' brand attachment, as opposed to those that are idiosyncratic to a particular organization or industry sector. We first interviewed eight employees who work for the Mayo Clinic, Audi, 3M, Virgin Management, Siemens, Philips, and ING Bank. We asked what the brand means to them and how they feel about the brand marketed by their companies. Employees were asked to focus on the brand (vs. the organization as a whole) during the course of the interview. We conducted these interviews so as to identify key issues, provide background information, and generate ideas that guided additional interviews. We then interviewed nine employees who worked for the Mayo Clinic, 3M, ING Bank, Philips, Nikon, Nespresso, Nissan, League of Legends, and Nokia. Here, we conducted one interview per brand for the purpose of generating an emergent theoretical framework (Glaser 2001).

Fig. 2 Grounded theory research process
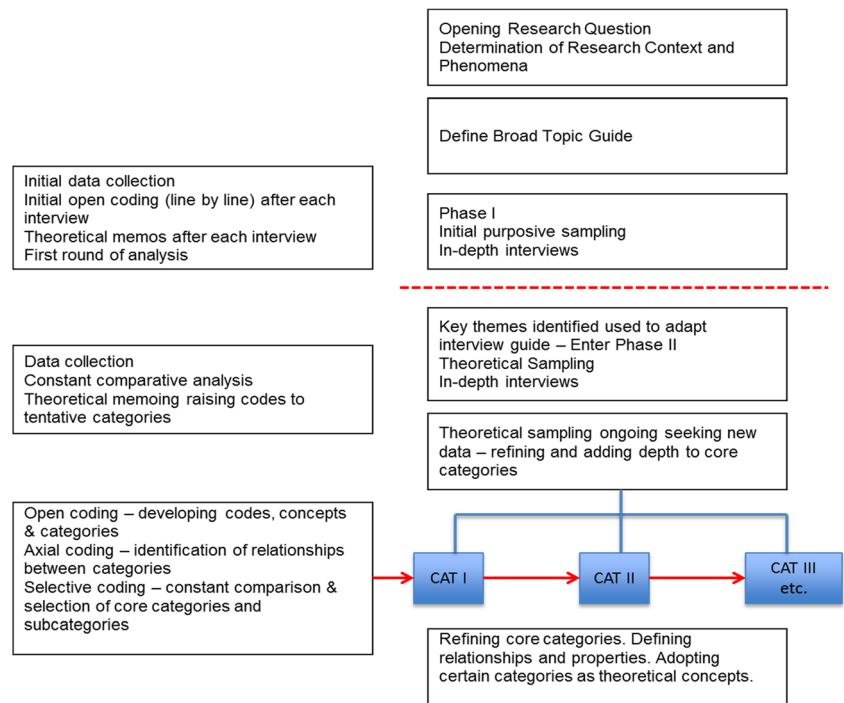
We used the interviews to elicit multiple data points and categories and to generate authentic detail and contextual information from each informant. We audiotaped interviews and transcribed them verbatim, while also guaranteeing informants' anonymity.[1] Interviews began with 'grand tour' questions (McCracken 1988; Spradley 1979) involving informants' feelings and experiences with the brands they represent. Interviews lasted from 90 min to two hours, and were conducted at a location away from the work place (e.g., a hotel lobby or coffee shop). Interviews were loosely structured, which allowed employees to address the topic in their own ways. Since adhering to strict interview guidelines inhibits discovery, we used broader questions beginning with phrases such as 'tell me about' and 'what happened when' (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Only later on in the research process did we pose more specific questions such as "how do you relate to the brand?" to more granular questions like "what do you feel about the brand?", "how does the brand contribute to your life?", and "what, if anything, do you give back in return?"

Data analysis

To analyze the meanings respondents associated with the brand, we adopted the constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994), which requires that data are continually analyzed as they are collected. By virtue of the iterative process of collecting, coding and analyzing the data, the emergent framework became clear (Glaser 2001; Goulding 2002; Locke 2001). We initially read, coded, and then reread interview transcripts so as to identify conceptual categories that emerged from the data (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998). A rigorous and systematic reading and coding of the transcripts allowed major themes to emerge. Line by line coding allowed a large number of descriptive categories to emerge initially. We integrated these descriptive categories into higher level analytic categories at later stages of analysis. Transcript segments pertaining to the employee-brand relationship were open-coded, enabling an analysis of the interviews according to themes, the documentation of relationships between themes, and the identification of themes important to employees. Codes were broken down by phrases, sentences, or paragraphs, with the aim of capturing key ideas.

We coded each relevant event in the data into as many subcategories as possible. Since each subcategory had different dimensions, we examined each piece of new data for its correspondence with existing dimensions. If it did not correspond, new subcategories were created. As a result, we ensured that subcategories were driven by the data. The continuous coding process allowed us to generate the theoretical properties of the subcategories, which in turn, enabled us to discover the 'core categories' (Glaser and Strauss 1967) that undergird the framework. Through this process, we guarantee a good fit between empirical observations and the conceptual categories they indicate (Locke 2001). This process enabled substantive theory to form. Five key categories emerged from the data: (1) employee brand-self connections, the extent of

---

[1] The names and job titles listed in Table 2 use pseudonyms to guarantee confidentiality of the data.

Table 2 Interview sample characteristics

Name	Participant background	Organization	Location	Industry
Gary	Chief Operating Officer	Philips	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Electronics
Jürgen	Senior Sales Director	Siemens	Munich, Germany	Electronics
Anna	Director of Creative Management	Mayo Clinic	Rochester, USA	Healthcare
Chris	Senior Finance Manager	ING Bank	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Banking
Larry	Department Manager, Exhibitions	Audi USA	Michigan, USA	Automobiles
Simon	Facilities Manager	3M	Bracknell, UK	Technology
Mark	Head of Group Product Strategy	Virgin Management	Hammersmith, UK	Consulting
James	Product Lifecycle Manager	Nikon USA	New York, USA	Electronics
Susan	Production Supervisor	3M	Minnesota, USA	Technology
Sophie	Recruitment Advisor	Mayo Clinic	Rochester, USA	Healthcare
Emma	Marketing Director	Nespresso	London, UK	Coffee
Claire	Nurse	Mayo Clinic	Rochester, USA	Healthcare
Annabelle	Marketing Director	Nissan	Paris, France	Automobiles
Janine	Product Communications Manager	Philips	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Electronics
Jason	Marketing and Sales Director	League of Legends	Shenzhen, China	Online Gaming
Sally	VP Trade Banking	ING Bank	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Banking
Maria	Marketing Manager	Nokia	New York, USA	Electronics

brand prominence and brand attachment, (2) employee brand-supportive behaviors, meanings related to how the brand (3) enables the employee, (4) entices the employee, and (5) enriches the employee. These meanings were further differentiated into subcategories. The specific findings pertinent to this emergent framework are described shortly.

A robust framework depends on the category saturation, which refers to the completeness of the data categories. A category is saturated when subsequent data points offer no novel information (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002; Locke 2001). Saturation was confirmed in three ways. First, we considered that categories were saturated once new data neither sparked new theoretical insights nor revealed new properties of our core theoretical categories. Second, we asked an additional coder to review the categories and data and then confirm category saturation. Third, we presented our emergent framework to a sample of employees of the participating companies. We asked if the substantive framework appeared to be relevant to the environments from which our data had been gathered, and whether the framework had useful application in practice (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Strauss and Corbin 1998). We also applied the criteria of fit, understanding, generality and control from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Table 3 shows how these criteria were met.

Emergent framework

Figure 1 depicts the emergent framework that arose from our grounded theory analyses. In the next sections, we review the components of the framework. Where relevant, we integrate prior literature with our findings. We first provide evidence of employee brand-self connections and brand prominence; the two critical indicators of brand attachment. We then present our findings on the drivers and outcomes of our emergent framework. Figure 1 shows other important aspects of our findings. We observed not only meaning tied to benefits that enhanced employees' brand self-connections and brand prominence, we also observed how these meanings related to dominant employee needs and their associated emotions. Furthermore, our findings reveal how these constructs differ from the drivers and outcomes of extant constructs such as organizational commitment/ attachment.

Evidence of employee brand-self connections and brand prominence

An important observation from our data is that employees differentiate brand-self connections from their feelings about the organization. For example, James from Nikon shared: *I am totally engaged with the brand but not necessarily the organization…there's good managers and there's bad managers, there's good management teams and there's bad management teams, that's just the nature of the business so when times get worse we still have this amazing product and this amazing brand to fall back on!* Or as Maria from Nokia put it: *For me the Nokia brand and what it stands for is quite different from the company. One is more about our aspirations and who we want to be. The other is more about the day-to-day functions to get stuff done. Both are important but they are different to me.* Furthermore, Sophie from Mayo Clinic said: *I*

Table 3 Analysis of research trustworthiness

Trustworthiness criteria (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998)	Method of addressing trustworthiness in this study
Credibility • Extent to which results appear to be accurate representations of the data	Informants guided the inquiry process A good rapport was built with interviewees, and checks were made to ensure that researcher interpretations were accurate and well understood Data collection and interpretation were discussed with other research team members Result: Informants bought into and could relate to my interpretations of the data
Transferability • Extent to which findings from one study in one context will apply to other contexts	Theoretical sampling A diverse group of informants from different types of brands and employment types USA and Europe Result: Theoretical concepts were representative of all informants
Dependability • Extent to which findings are reliable and represent the conditions of the phenomenon under study	Inquiry audit of data collection, management and analysis processes Result: Findings are reliable and consistent
Confirmability • Extent to which interpretations are driven by informants and the phenomenon as opposed to researcher biases	Meticulous data management and recording: Verbatim transcription of interviews Clear notes on theoretical and methodological decisions Accurate records of contacts and interviews Result: Interpretation driven by informants
Integrity • Extent to which interpretations are not influenced by misinformation or evasion by informants	Interviews were professionally conducted, of a non-confrontational nature, anonymous and conducted away from the workplace Result: No evidence that informants were untruthful or trying to evade issue being discussed
Fit • Extent to which findings fit/resonate with the experience of the professionals for whom the research was intended and the informants	Addressed above through methods used to assess credibility, dependability and confirmability
Understanding • Extent to which informants buy into results as possible representations of their worlds	Asked the informants if they 'see themselves in the story' Executive summary of findings was distributed to informants and asked if they reflected their stories Summary also presented to managers Result: Employees and managers bought in to findings
Generality • Extent to which findings discover multiple aspects of the phenomenon	Interviews were long enough and open enough to capture many complex underpinnings of the employee-brand relationship Result: Captured multiple aspects of the phenomenon under investigation
Control • Extent to which organizations can influence aspects of the theory	Some variables within the theory are under the control of informants and managers Result: Informants and management can control elements of the employee-brand relationship

believe the brand and the organization try to sort of live and breathe the same message but I believe there are organizational issues that feel challenging to me and I feel one way towards the organization and another way towards the brand. Notably, all of the employees were able to describe what they perceived the brand to be, and most often referred to it as something quite separate from the organization; something more closely related to values, meaning creation, signals etc. In contrast, they use the term "organization" or "company" to reflect management practices and organizational issues inside the firm related to its operations, internal management processes, and pay (e.g., organization structure, decision making efficiency, bonus payments and vacation time, etc.).

Brand-self connections

Brand-self connections are fostered by a congruity between the brand and the self (Baker et al. 2014; Gammoh et al. 2014; Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos 2014; Sirgy 1982), such that the brand's identity and values overlap with meaningful and personal aspects of the self. As the overlap between the brand and the self increases (given the brand's resonance with goals, life tasks, themes or current concerns), individuals come to view the brand as part of themselves (Park et al. 2010, 2016; Reimann and Aron 2009). From the data, we observed evidence of brand-self congruity; that is, the extent to which the brand and the values that characterize it in the marketplace are similar to those that employees hold for themselves, personally. The quotes below illustrate these ideas.

Sophie noted: *Mayo's values are the same as mine…. And I do personally believe in all these things we claim to be; I believe in the mission and values of the brand; I see it all for myself. I feel it.* Likewise, Claire noted: *I take pride in doing this as a job and in what I do as a nurse, so it is important to me that I work somewhere that has the same values as I do. I value the same things that Mayo does.*

Beyond representing the types of values one expects of a brand, employees are also connected to the brand when its values and what the brand stands for resonate with how and where they were brought up. This type of brand-self congruity implies that the brand is like family; it is familiar, and is therefore reflective of who one is as a person and who one is as part of a broader collective. For example, Susan noted that: *I grew up here so I feel the values of 3 M are similar to how I grew up. I mean, the community… is really important to me, doing things for the community… I think that in general my family,*

and in fact all Minnesotan families, have values that are centered around family and being very collaborative, being very friendly, and I think that's also the case at 3M.

These passages illustrate the close association between the brand and the concept of the self. For self-brand connections to form, employees enter into a process of matching brands and what they stand for with their own, personal self-images (Chaplin and John 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2003). Brand self-connections are thought to occur when the brand serves as a relationship partner to both the private self (such that individuals use the brand to define who they are) and the social self (such that individuals consider themselves part of an in-group that identifies with the brand; Lam et al. 2010). Implicit in these value-congruence statements is that the brand and what it stands for speak to foundational components of the self (e.g., personal, family and cultural connections; McCracken 1988).

Further evidence of employee brand-self connections comes from quotes that reflect the employees' sense that they are an embodiment of the brand. Thus, not only is the brand part of them, but also, they are part of the brand. The overlap between brand and self is thus bi-directional. For example, Mark shared: *The brand is the whole embodiment of who we are. It's the way we live and breathe; it's very holistic. Virgin is about having a holistic view of the brand; it's a brand that is owned by everybody.* In a similar vein, Larry notes: *The brand is something we strive to follow – it's an embodiment, it's a belief in the brand, and you certainly buy into that, as everyone is following one singular goal.* Or as Jason shared: *I often feel distant from the company. All this (sic) internal politics can be frustrating. But the brand is totally me. I feel very much the brand is me.* Janine likewise notes: *[Potential customers] know Philips as a brand, and when I'm talking to them, I am the brand.* Being an embodiment of the brand is likely to be extremely important in a firm's brand building efforts. To the extent that employees are so aligned with the brand that they see themselves as an embodiment of the brand, employees have a greater capacity to enhance marketing communications about the brand and its differentiating features to external stakeholders, including customers. These quotes illustrate that employees see the brand as part of their extended self (Belk 1988). That is, the concept of "self" has been extended to include the brand (see also Reimann and Aron 2009).

As further evidence of brand-self connections, we observe that employees treat threats to the brand as threats to the self. We see a similar phenomenon in the consumer domain, where attached consumers feel threatened if the brand to which they are attached is denigrated (Cheng et al. 2012; Lisjak et al. 2012). Some informants revealed that they take criticism of the brand personally. Sophie noted: *I don't want the brand being attacked, because that's personally who I am, you know – Mayo's values are the same as mine.* Likewise, Emma shared: *When people say bad things about Nespresso, I feel upset. If someone attacks what I care about and believe in, I* really don't like it. Management, the company, poor air-conditioning in the offices is all fair game. Not Nespresso. Nespresso is off-limits. You hurt me if you do that.

Brand prominence

We also observed evidence of brand prominence, which, along with brand-self connections, have been previously observed to drive brand attachment (Park et al. 2010; Fig. 1). As James noted: *The brand is constantly on my mind, and it does influence my thinking. You're thinking about it always, and it affects the way I work. It's there all the time, in everything I do, in every conversation I have. Subconsciously, it's always there; it has to be there. So, I take my relationship with Nikon home with me.* Further, Susan notes: *I think about the 3M brand on a daily basis, and I try to provide counseling to our clients to do the same… It's always on my mind.* Sophie said: *Almost every day, I'll be doing my daily work, and I'll think about what we stand for. The brand is salient in their minds and in a way different from how employees think about the organization.* In a similar vein, Emma shares that: *I think about the company too but it's different. Sometimes when I have a walk in the park or take a shower Nespresso suddenly comes to my mind. And I keep thinking about who we are and where our brand should be. Is Nespresso the best we can be? I don't know. I often think about it. For me the company is more about work and ongoing issues… who gets promoted, why did she get promoted but not me, when can I get a longer holiday, why did my boss say that?* Etc. Jason noted in a similar vein: *LoL (Leage of Legends) often comes to my mind. I would say I often keep thinking about it and, you know, LoL in many ways is my life. Tencent does not come to my mind as much, only when I have to finish my quarterly reports or meet my boss (laughs).* Annabelle shared that the brand may even be present in employees' dreams: *I dream about Nissan and what a cool brand we want to be. I don't dream about the company.* Brand prominence is likely to be a key driver of their brand-related decision making at work, as we show later in the paper.

In sum, the qualitative data described thus far reveals that employees can indeed become attached to the brand they work for. That is, they show evidence of the two second order factors that underlie attachment, namely developing strong connections between the brand and the self and regarding the brand as prominent in their thinking.

What drives employee brand-self connections and brand prominence?

As Fig. 1 shows, the data suggest that three broad classes of meanings associated with the brand drive employee's brand-self connections and prominence (and attachment). Some meanings reflect the instrumental value of the brand to employees' current and future lives. Others reflect the fact that

the brand pleases employees by stimulating them on a sensory, cognitive or emotional level. Still other meanings relate to the brand's ability to enrich employees' lives. Brands do so by connecting employees to other people and/or by helping them make a difference in some positive and fulfilling way. We explain our findings regarding these drivers and how they differ from employees' commitment to the organization next.

Meanings associated with enabling the self

This theme highlights those aspects of the brand that informants perceive as possessing self-enabling beneficial characteristics. One category of self-enabling benefits that emerged from the data concerns the extent to which the brand gives employees a feeling of safety and security. When asked what the brand means, Janine for example explained: *You know the first thing that comes into my head is safety. I can't even explain why I think safety. Working for Philips and thinking about the Philips brand gives me that feeling of comfort. Somehow, it's always there, it's safe, it's secure. It's a safe brand.* Employees may have a sense that the brand (and the activities they engage in managing the brand) is solid and unlikely to be subject to drastic marketplace changes. As Emma explained: *Nespresso is a solid brand. It makes me feel at ease, knowing what we stand for and who we are. We do not change our principles from one day to the next. You know, that's Nespresso, and it makes me feel safe on a day to day basis.* Because the brand has a strong reputation in the marketplace, it offers a sense of safety and security, thereby providing emotional stability now and in the future.

A frequent response associated with the enabling aspects of the brand concerned the status of the brand and its value in the marketplace. Employees believed that the brand would give them credibility, hope, and optimism (and reduced fear) as far as future prospects were concerned. Sophie, for instance, declared: *It's a great brand to have on your resume.* Claire also notes: *I have the Mayo ticket in my back pocket, and I can use it when I feel like it.* Or as Jason explained: *Working for League of Legends and having this brand on your side, I feel the sky is the limit.*

In contrast, *non-brand related benefits* were seen as offering a different form of security. The organization's market dominance or marketplace power may offer a sense of job security. As Sophie noted: *I had two boys at home still, and I wanted something with, you know, a little bit more security. ….I thought this may give me that [security] and it did.* Annabelle said: *A lot of my friends lost their jobs. I could keep mine. I am grateful for the security that the company gave me.* The organization's strength in the marketplace offers employees some degree of assurance that demand for the organization's products will continue, and that their job is relatively secure. Job security and other human resource practices were mentioned by employees in the context of their relationship with the organization (not the brand). As Maria shared: *Job security is important to me. I am glad I have a job with Nokia.*

Other comments indicated that the brand gave employees the opportunities to connect personally with other people, which might open future doors. Susan notes: *You know, what's great about 3M is that we're a highly-networked culture… The networking is really a big thing for me, because you really get to think about where you want to go in terms of your career path.* Maria shared: *I meet great people at work, who put me in touch with other interesting people. My boss can help me find another job if need be.*

Another way in which the brand enables employees is by allowing employees to put their personal mark on creating and sustaining the image of the brand as it is perceived by external customers. Anna from the Mayo Clinic said: *Our brand is created by every employee, every day, in every action. The brand is everything we do. It's who we are and what we celebrate.* Here, employees are empowered to put their personal mark on developing and sustaining the image of the brand as it is perceived by external customers.

To the extent that brands can make employees feel more secure about their lives and themselves, employees can experience more hope and less anxiety in their lives both inside and outside of work. Negative emotions, like fear, can be particularly enervating (Eysenck et al. 2007; Ford 1992) reducing employees' capacities to address the cognitive and psychological demands that managing the brand requires. To the extent that the brand and its external image reduce employees' negative emotions, the brand may also have important effects on the organization as a whole, for example, enhancing health, reducing absenteeism and fostering more effective and efficient decision making (Colligan and Higgins 2006). Brand benefits that enable employees reduce employees' anxiety, address their need for security, and facilitate the conservation of scarce psychological resources (Hobfoll and Shirom 2001).

Employees who feel empowered to do what is best for the brand feel energized and eager by the opportunity take control over an existing challenge and by the independence and freedom they are given to make a difference. Empowerment gratifies basic human needs for autonomy, control, and power. It is key to feelings of self-efficacy and independence (Bandura 1994). A central component of empowerment is not only having power but also having the authority to use it in ways that benefit the brand (Menon 2001). Whereas organizational theory has previously linked empowerment to job satisfaction and commitment (Hassan 2012; Venkataramani et al. 2013), our findings suggest that, in the case of branding and brand management, empowering employees to have some control over the brand may be particularly important for another reason: it fosters employee brand-self connections, encourages employees to think about the brand, and it engages employees with the brand.

Meanings associated with enticing the self

Employees experience the brand daily through brand-related experiences at work (Mumby 2016). Moreover, these experiences, although also consumptive (Brakus et al. 2009) are by nature long-lived, experienced day after day, and year after year. Employees' brand experiences therefore have the potential to be quite detailed, rich and emotionally evocative, including autobiographical memories of how the brand has made them feel in a sensory, cognitive or emotional way. We observed several ways in which brand-self connections were created by the extent to which the brand was perceived to entice employees.

Common to this finding is the fact that, in all cases, the brand provides a sense of stimulation, which makes the employees' experiences with the brand exciting, interesting, exhilarating and engaging. As Sophie put it: *It gets you excited… and you feel good when you go to sleep at night.* Jurgen likewise shared: *I think getting up in the morning and coming to work for my brand is something that really adds to my life.* Again, the employee's use of the word brand (vs. organization), suggests that it is brand-related activities that foster such enticement. Whereas there may be aspects of organizations that are also stimulating, such as having plants in the offices, giving employees more holidays, or organization retreats with co-workers, these quotes emphasize the excitement that comes from the brand and the employees' experiences in cultivating marketplace meaning.

Another way in which the brand entices employees is by virtue of its opportunity to make their lives in general, and their jobs in particular, more fun and exciting. Susan shared: *It's really exciting for me to work for such a leader in so many spaces… I think a lot of brands generally don't have that excitement, so they have to drum it up somehow. We don't have to drum it up; it's there.* The brand's energy-inducing and exciting benefits were also a function of what the brand stands for and tries to achieve in the marketplace. Susan stated this idea aptly, noting: *It's really exciting, and it's really nice to be a part of that… creativity that looks at untapped consumer needs and changes the lives of millions of people. I think that's really exciting.* Here collective actions in creatively building and sustaining the brand's identity are important. One person's excitement in building and sustaining the brand's meaning can have contagious effects, magnifying excitement among a group of employees (Parkinson and Simons 2009).

Employees also indicated that the brand enticed them cognitively. It encouraged employees to be curious, to learn, and to explore new horizons, particularly in areas that can keep the brand innovative and successful in the marketplace. Jason noted: *League of Legends is already number one. For me, LoL (League of Legends) is about pushing the boundaries, trying the untested… you be number one for too long by just copying others. There is no one to copy. That's super exciting*

every day! That's just fun! Theories including optimal stimulation level and sensation-seeking behavior are areas which have been explored in the context of consumers (e.g., Krishna 2012), but our findings suggest that these same factors drive employees' brand-self connections.

Ways in which we observed that the organization entices employees is different from ways that the brand does so. For instance, companies have been noted to entice employees by affording them opportunities to interact with external stakeholders, to travel and to learn about the diverse cultures of the world in which they live. Sally noted: *The interesting thing is that this is a strong bank, … and personally I like that I've had the opportunity to work everywhere, all over the place for ING. ING has given me a lot of opportunities so far to travel the world.* Employees noted the enticing benefits that companies offer in terms of holiday flexibility, bonus payments, and even air-conditioning, plants in offices, and free coffee at work. Maria put it this way: *We all have our own plants in our small cubicle. It's nice. I love it! It makes the workplace more intimate and appealing. It's just nice to work in a place that has a lot of green.* Annabelle shared: *If the company does well, we get a bonus. Let's face it. Who does not love a bonus?* Or Jason noted: *It's the coffee for me that keeps me happy. Plus, the air conditioning. It is so hot and humid here in summer. You come in here (company building) and feel comfortable. People love it.* Employees also mentioned their work colleague or teams and how their supervisor or boss interacts with them. Maria said: *I like joking with my colleagues. They are fun.* Or as Annabelle noted: *My supervisor is very approachable. I like that. It makes the whole workplace feel a lot warmer.*

Whether they build attachment to the brand or attachment to the organization, the importance of enticement benefits to employees is interesting, as it speaks to the fundamental needs individuals have for gratification, hedonism, variety, stimulation, and change (Freud 1923).

Meanings associated with enriching the self

We define enrichment as the extent to which the brand provides meaning to employees' lives in ways that they find personally inspiring. The brand's ability to foster and support a desired identity was clearly observed as a factor driving employee brand attachment. This finding is consistent with prior work, which shows that people often use brands for the purpose of affirming an identity – either a desired or an actual self (Ahuvia 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Chaplin and John 2005; Chernev et al. 2011; Fournier 1998; Kleine III et al. 1993). We observed two categories in which these self-expanding benefits were realized: (1) the brand's ability to elevate the employee in the eyes of others (i.e., to enhance the employee's status and esteem and the resultant sense of

pride) and (2) the brand's ability to enrich the employee's life by helping them connect meaningfully with others.

Each of the brands we studied is to some degree respected in the marketplace. Because the brand is esteemed and held in high regard by the public, employees' associations with the brand are transferred to the employees themselves (Cialdini et al. 1976). We observed considerable evidence that employees' brand-self connections were associated with the status the brand brought to the employee, thus shoring up their self-esteem.

Janine speaks of the fame of the brand: *I do feel proud to be working for such a famous brand.* This statement implies a certain status associated with the brand. Sophie mentioned: *You know, it's the name recognition: this is Mayo Clinic! I don't want to say I work for Joe Schmo down the street. I want to be out there and up there; I want people to be impressed... I want that prestige.* Claire similarly stated: *If I'm in a different city and I say Mayo Clinic, I usually get the "oh, wow, you work at Mayo, oh cool".*

In other cases, the brand's story and what it represents can be a source of pride. Janine said: *The fact that Philips is a strong brand makes me proud.* In some cases, feelings of pride come from the fact that the brand is perceived externally as a leading brand, making the employee feel like a leader too. James comments: *When you say to me "what is [the brand] about?" It's about the commitment, drive, dedication of pushing the envelope of technology quality-wise to be a world leader, not just a follower but a leader in these technologies.* Implicit in this statement is the emergence of a sense of status from a brand that endeavors to be a leader within its field.

Furthermore, the benefit of elevating employees' self-concept facilitates brand-self connections and enhances prominence by speaking directly to needs for esteem, self-worth, and respect (Cialdini et al. 1976; Lisjak et al. 2012). Moreover, it addresses the basic human need for infavoidance (to conceal a handicap or failing; avoid humiliation and embarrassment), the need for recognition, and the need for exhibition (Costa and McCrae 1988). Efforts to build or reinforce the brand's image also provide opportunities to connect with others, fostering brand-self connections. Such efforts, while helping to build or reinforce the brand's image, provide opportunities for life-affirming personal connections. Susan said: *There are plenty of things to get engaged in, [like] connecting to our communities on behalf of 3M through volunteer work; we're definitely encouraged to do that, and I feel that speaks really highly of the brand and what we stand for.*

Beyond feeling connected to others in a social context, informants also indicated that their brand-self connections were driven by a sense that their brand-related actions have an impact on some group or idea, and/or that they are making a difference at effecting positive change. This potential for positive action was personally inspiring. For example, Janine stated: *It's almost like the American Dream; at*

Philips, you can believe that everything is possible ... It makes me feel [like a] part of something big. Gary shared: *It's that feeling that people value me here for who I am and for what I do, and all of this I relate to our brand and the way the brand works. This whole engagement thing is a two-way process. If I do all of these things, it makes me feel valuable; it makes me feel [like a] part of something.*

We find that non-brand related drivers of organizational commitment offer different types of enriching benefits to employees. That is, feelings of brand pride came from employees' reactions to those physical aspects of the organization's environment that elevate employees' own sense of self by association. These physical features created an image of the organization as deserving of respect, making the employees feel that they are deserving of respect as well. Sally mentioned: *In our office in Brazil... it was totally black, they had a pool, they had a big screen where they showed Formula One and every event that ING was sponsoring... and that made me feel proud.* As Emma shared: *Our office building tells you we are a great company. It is in the most prestigious location. I am proud to go to work there.* Jason said: *Tencent has the coolest office building. We are number one. That's what the building tells you. We are the number one and we don't want to be second. Showing others around (the office tower), it just fills me with massive pride.* Being associated with an organization that represents "prestige" (as reflected by its physical surroundings) clearly creates a sense of awe in the organization and pride in being part of it.

Another way in which the organization enriches employees is by facilitating co-worker relationships. For instance, the organization provides a context for interacting with others through co-worker retreats, or based on the organization's longevity in the marketplace, etc. Sally mentioned: *My dad actually worked for 3M for about five years in the early seventies, so it's fun to talk to him about his experiences... There's definitely a history there, too. I tell stories to my husband; he works for Target, so he has some vendors who are from 3M, so he has similar stories to share.* Annabelle said: *Getting to know your boss and colleagues better makes a difference. You get to know each other. The retreats... you see them outside work. It's to get to know one another on a deeper level. It's really good that the organization does it.*

A basic human need is a feeling of belonging. By fostering connectedness, brands address employees' needs for affiliation and feeling connected to others based on shared beliefs or a shared mission (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Hassan 2012). The opportunity to make a difference resonates with employees' need for self-fulfillment, actualization, and inspiration (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). It also addresses the basic human need for nurturance (to help the helpless) and making a positive difference to the communities one interacts with and the wider world in general (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2014). The enriching benefits that organizations offered employees spoke

to different human needs; they spoke to human needs for deference (to admire a superior person), need for succorance (to have one's needs satisfied by others), and need for exposition (to deliver information to others) (Ford 1992).

Consequences of employee brand attachment

We observed that employees with high levels of brand-self connections and brand prominence exhibit brand supportive behaviors (Hughes and Ahearne 2010; Morhart et al. 2009) and are concerned about the brand's success in the marketplace. As such, the brand is focal in their decision-making, and it guides how they approach and interface with the marketplace. One outcome of employee brand attachment concerned employees' sense of personal responsibility for the brand in the marketplace. As James noted: *This last week, we had an advertising shoot that started on Sunday, … I felt the real need to be there to make sure the brand was being presented in the best possible way for the goals and statements that we've been making, to make sure it all comes out in the right way.* Maria said: *I am making sure people talk about Nokia in the right way. If people say something I disagree with, I tell them this is not who we are. This is not Nokia. And I will tell them who we are and what Nokia stands for today.* The notion that employees who are attached to the brand show concern and responsibility for the brand is consistent with the notion that these individuals feel that the brand is strongly connected to the self. As entities that embody the brand, employees want to act on the brand's behalf and project the right brand image.

Beyond care and responsibility for the brand, it was obvious that the brand and what it stood for played a large part in employees' decisions at work. In particular, employees for whom brand-self connections are strong and salient are highly attentive to the brand's values, and they used these values in brand-related decision-making. Gary articulated the importance of value-consistent behaviors: *We're trying to achieve consistent decision making, or everyday decision making, based on a consistent set of values embedded in the brand. All employees make decisions based on… that set of values.* Sophie describes how she thinks about the brand in her decision making and her efforts to adhere to decisions that are in line with the brand: "*Mayo is very soft spoken and very conservative, and they don't want people rocking the boat… When I make my decisions, I think "is this going to fit with the Mayo brand.* Anna similarly noted: *Our brand is created by every employee, every day, in every action. The brand is everything we do. It's what we celebrate… it's what motivates and inspires people here.* Larry said: *The brand makes sure employees get the same brand experience consumers get. The brand is something we strive to follow; it's an embodiment, it's a belief in the brand, and you certainly buy into that, as everyone is following one singular goal.*

In light of prior organizational research linking affective commitment with employee retention (Podsakoff et al. 1986), we observed that employees for whom attachment was strong indicated a great deal of brand loyalty. Sally for instance shared: *Well, I'm a very loyal person; I feel loyal to ING. I do have a relationship with ING. I wouldn't really want to leave ING.* Another brand behavior included positive word-of-mouth on the part of the employee, which involves making positive statements about the brand and recommending it to others. Some informants described how they talk about the brand when outside of work. Sophie shared: *I always speak up about Mayo; I go that extra mile outside of work to speak up about it.* Sally said: *Well, let's put it this way: now half my family are working for ING since I started with this organization, so I guess in that sense I do talk up the brand [and] I'm positive about the brand. I talk about ING to my family, my husband; I definitely talk about it being a good brand, and they've all sort of followed in my footsteps. I'm a little bit of a brand ambassador.* Similarly, Larry shared: *You're building the brand, and you're being an ambassador of the brand.* Finally, James put it as follows: *I write [about the brand] because I'm passionate about the brand … My work is on the Nikon website where people can learn and explore, and at the end of the day it all goes to promoting our brand, and that's very rewarding to me.* Offering positive word-of-mouth either face-to-face or on social media is not easy to enact for people (Eisingerich et al. 2015) and, hence, signifies a strong employee-brand relationship.

Critically, we observed that employees whose affective commitment to the organization is low but whose attachment to the brand is high still display strong loyalty to the organization. For example, Emma said: *I am not incredibly loyal to the company. You know, an organization will use you and you are replaceable. But I believe in Nespresso. It's a great brand I believe in. I think we have a great future ahead. That's why I am staying. I believe in Nespresso.* Jason said: *I can earn a higher salary elsewhere. I can phone calls every week. With the internal politics and promotion things you never know. Maybe I will take the call one day. But working for Tencent is just incredible. There is no other brand that can match it. I know I would miss it (Tencent) when I leave.*

Some employees stay with the company for a long time even when their attachment to the brand is low. However, here the reasons are very often based on risk aversion, lack of opportunities, and uncertainty about future outcomes. Simon said: *It's a tough job market. Nobody knows the future. I am staying put for now.* Chris shared: *I don't feel too close to the brand. If someone offers me more money, I am happy to leave.* Annabelle said: *It's about job safety at the moment. Starting all new again, it is stressful. You know, I am not always super excited about decisions being made about who we are, but that's life.* Maria said: *The old brand ethos is pretty much gone. It is so sad. Nokia is not what it used to (be). I have a family. If I have a job here and get a paycheck, I stay.*

General discussion

The emergent framework suggests that employees can and do exhibit strong brand-self connections and brand prominence, and that these connections develop when the brand fulfills the self-enabling, self-enticing, and self-enriching benefits that connect employees with higher-order needs and emotions. We argue and show that organizational attachment and commitment are not only driven by non-brand related drivers as highlighted in prior work, but also by brand-related drivers that make employees feel connected to the brand they work for. Our emergent framework makes several critical contributions to the literature.

Implications for theory

Our research extends research which thus far has focused on the consumer or employees' attachment and commitment to the larger organization but much less so on the brand itself as a target for employees' attachment. We complement and extend work on the relationships that employees form with the brands they work for. Previous research has noted the receipt of benefits that enhance employees' willingness or need to reciprocate (Wiener 1982), the investments that would be lost if employees discontinued their work (Becker 1960), their value congruence and identification with the organization (Becker et al. 1996) and their lack of other options (Powell and Meyer 2004) as drivers of organizational commitment. We extend this prior research with insights into brand attachment beyond the customer facing (salesperson) interface of the organization (Allison et al. 2016). Furthermore, we extend work on employees' attachment to different targets in the workplace. Whereas prior research has established that employees can become attached to a group within the organization (Gonzalez and DeNisi 2007; Korsgaard et al. 1995), a job or a work unit (Oswald et al. 1994), the work place (Gonzalez 2016), and a subsidiary (Reade 2001), or the entire organization (Podsakoff et al. 1986; Tsui et al. 1992), our results suggest that employees also become attached to the brand they represent.

We posit that employee brand attachment is distinct from employee organizational commitment or attachment, as we demonstrate employees draw on the benefits they attribute to the brand to form connections between the brand and the self. The basis of the brand-self connection is conceptually distinct from, though perhaps related to, employees' connection to the organization. This is so since brands are symbols of the organization as a whole. Moreover, the identity of the brand is often viewed by external constituents as representing the organization and its values (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Yet, while brand-self connections and prominence are distinct from organization identification, commitment and attachment, they might contribute to such organizational outcomes.

Our research also extends prior work on consumers' brand attachment. Consumers form strong relationships with brands whose values and personality associations are congruent with

their own self-concepts (Chaplin and John 2005). They feel personally connected to such brands (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Kleine III et al. 1993), and these brands are prominent in their thinking (Park et al. 2010). The postmodern perspective proposes employees and consumers both produce and consume symbolic meaning (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Our research extends this notion, indicating that employees draw on the self- enabling, self-enticing, self-enriching benefits of the brand to create a bond with the brand. The brand also provides internal symbolic resources for employees, acting as a mechanism through which their own identities and sense-making processes are both mediated and constructed. Employees' brand attachment is also revealed in ways that are consistent with the definition of attachment in the consumer behavior literature, as well as findings regarding attachment and its component properties (Park et al. 2010, 2013). Similar to consumers who are attached to the brand, employees who are attached to a brand feel a strong connection between the brand and the self. The brand often comes to employees' mind naturally. The brand embodies who they are and they embody the brand. They take brand criticisms and failures personally. The brand is also prominent in their thoughts, both at work and outside of work. Moreover, the brand builds brand-self connections and becomes prominent because it offers self-protecting, self-gratifying, and self-expanding benefits. Based on our findings, we offer the following formal propositions:

P1: Employee brand attachment is conceptually and empirically distinct from employee commitment or attachment to the organization. In addition to non-brand related drivers, organizational commitment/ attachment is also impacted by brand-related drivers.

P2: Brand-self connections and prominence contribute to higher order processes such as organization identification, attachment and commitment. Employees' attachment to the brand (and the organization) is boosted when the brand offers benefits that enable, entice, and enrich employees.

P3: Employees who are not committed to an organization but attached to the brand may still display strong levels of pro-organization behaviors and loyalty.

The framework also suggests that it behooves managers to develop employee brand-self connections, since such brand-self connections result in employee actions that offer strong benefits to the brand (and the organization).

Implications for practice

We observed that some employees who were not strongly attached to the organization they worked for and, yet, maintained membership in the organization because of their strong brand attachment. We also observed employees who maintained membership in the organization based on high commitment to the organization who were low in brand attachment. Critically, these

employees varied in their willingness to engage in various pro-brand and pro-organization behaviors. Organizational commitment based on job security, a favorable promotion system, or personal friendships at work inclined employees to stay with the organization and commend it in front of other people. Yet such benefits do not lead to employees' attachment to a *brand*. Employees become attached to a brand when it provides them with aspirational beliefs and values.

We observed that in cases where attachment to the brand is strong, employees are willing to stay with an organization even if pay, job security, fringe benefits, etc. are greater elsewhere. Employees' brand attachment may thus be an important factor in driving commitment to the larger organization. Our findings provide insights into the process of brand attachment in the workplace, and therefore have important implications for practice. They illuminate how managers can encourage and facilitate employees' brand-self connections and prominence, thus creating value for the organization through employee brand supportive behaviors. This finding implies that internal marketing to employees regarding the brand and what it stands for is just as valid and important as targeting external customers for brand building purposes (Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998). The role of brand management is to ensure that the 'becoming of individuals' (employees or consumers) and the 'becoming of value' coincide (Arvidsson 2006). The practical implication is that managers should encourage employees to develop strong brand connections by leveraging the entire brand value proposition – specifically, by reinforcing the brand's self-enabling, self-enticing, and self-enriching value.

Some benefits that build attachment to the organization as a whole (e.g., corporate retreats, attractive health benefits) can be easily copied or matched by competitive organizations. However, it is the intangible aspect of the brand, what it signifies, its vision and mission, and its values that are more difficult for competitors to copy. These brand elements should be promoted internally so that employees not only understand the brand and what it represents, but that they find such meaning resonant with who they are as people. Internal branding programs aimed at managing employees' perceptions of the brand's value can facilitate strong emotional connections that evoke more than just brand liking. Such brand-self connections and prominence ultimately instill a sense of belonging. Such initiatives should promote the brand in the context of its history, its values and its culture, thus helping employees to 'see' the value the brand offers, what the central brand values are, and what the employees can believe in, celebrate, and share with co-workers and others.

Some companies may choose a brand that stands for a fun-culture (Butler et al. 2011), others may pick an emphasis on self-management (Lopdrup-Hjorth et al. 2011), but whatever it is, it needs to be seen as authentic. That is, employees must have the feeling that the brand is more than just the organization's logo or what the organization talks about in glossy brochures; it needs to be the set of beliefs and values that employees relate to and are willing to sacrifice for (their time, emotional energy, physical energy, innovativeness, etc.).

Limitations and future research

Despite its contributions, readers should note the following limitations of our study. We were unable to observe employees' behaviors in the workplace. Data pertinent to real time behaviors and internal communications might result in additional findings that augment our framework. We also based our findings on relatively few informants representing relatively few and relatively large companies, thus limiting the generalizability of our findings. Although we attempted to include employees from diverse brands in the US, Europe, and Asia, all studies based on grounded theory can evoke concerns over generalizability. This might be particularly true in our case given our focus on large, well-known organizations as opposed to smaller ones. However, our finding that employees form brand attachments based on brand-self connections and brand prominence lays the groundwork for future empirical research. Brand relationships deteriorate when the brand demonstrates opportunistic behaviors and a lack of congruity between consumers' values and the brand's values. We might expect the same deterioration in the brand relationship with employees too. Potential retaliatory behaviors on the part of employees could have far reaching implications for companies. Thus, future research may explore what occurs in the face of employee resistance, and examine whether employees' detachment from the brand tarnishes the image of the brand in the eyes of consumers through whistleblowing, subverting or 'culture jamming' (Gabriel et al. 2015). Future research could also examine whether employees detach from the brand in light of the loss of benefits and or self-image (Thomson et al. 2005). How, for example, do employees react to brands that change their identity against the will of employees?

Furthermore, research could also examine how the nature of employee-brand relationships changes over time. For example, one wonders whether it is necessarily the case that employees grow tired of the brand they work for over time. When do employees fall in love with the brand they work for over and over again and seemingly becoming more excited or appreciative about it? Are the brand-benefits we identified equally important to employees over time or is one particularly relevant in initiating the employee-brand relationship, whilst another benefit is particularly important in sustaining the relationship, etc.?

Finally, given current discussions about how new technologies, digital media, and artificial intelligence (AI) might change the future of work more generally and employees' roles more specifically (see Harari 2017; Tegmark 2017), addressing questions about how employees engage with the brands and organizations they work for becomes even more important. What kind of meanings will employees associate with brands they work for

in the future and how will it affect their meaning in life? The current work is a critical step in what we believe is a richly deserving research area of internal marketing.

References

Ahearne, M., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Gruen, T. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of customer-company identification: Expanding the role of relationship marketing. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(3), 574–585.

Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(1), 171–184.

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). Organizational socialization tactics: A longitudinal analysis of links to newcomers' commitment and role orientation. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*(4), 847–858.

Allison, L., Flaherty, K. E., Jung, J. H., & Washburn, I. (2016). Salesperson brand attachment: A job demands-resources theory perspective. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 36*(1), 3–18.

Arvidsson, A. (2006). *Brands – Meaning and value in media culture*. London: Routledge.

Baker, T. L., Rapp, A., Meyer, T., & Mullins, R. (2014). The role of brand communications on front line service employee beliefs, behaviors, and performance. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 42*(6), 642–657.

Bandura, A. (1994). *Self-efficacy*. New York: Wiley.

Becker, H. S. (1960). Notes on the concept of commitment. *American Journal of Sociology, 66*(1), 32–42.

Becker, T. E., Billings, R. S., Eveleth, D. M., & Gilbert, N. L. (1996). Foci and bases of employee commitment: Implications for job performance. *Academy of Management Journal, 39*(2), 464–482.

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15*(2), 139–168.

Bell, S. J., Auh, S., & Eisingerich, A. B. (2017). Unraveling the customer education paradox: When, and how, should firms educate their customers? *Journal of Service Research, 20*(3), 306–321.

Bergami, M., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2000). Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 39*(4), 555–577.

Bettencourt, L. A., Brown, S. W., & Mackenzie, S. B. (2005). Customer-oriented boundary-spanning behaviors: Test of a social exchange model of antecedents. *Journal of Retailing, 81*(2), 141–157.

Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer-company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing, 67*(2), 76–88.

Bishop, J. W., & Scott, K. D. (2000). An examination of organizational and team commitment in a self-directed team environment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*(3), 439–450.

Bond, E. U., Houston, M. B., & Tang, Y. E. (2008). Establishing a high-technology knowledge transfer network: The practical and symbolic roles of identification. *Industrial Marketing Management, 37*(6), 641–652.

Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: What is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty? *Journal of Marketing, 73*(3), 52–68.

Brooke, P. P., Russell, D. W. Jr., & Price, J. L. (1988). Discriminant validity of measures of job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment. Journal of Applied Psychology, 73, 139–145, 2.

Buchanan, B. (1974). Building organizational commitment: The socialization of managers in work organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 19*, 533–546.

Butler, N., Olaison L., Sliwa M., Sørensen B. M., & Spoelstra S. (2011). Work, play and boredom. In Ephemera: *Theory & Politics in Organization*, 329–335.

Casper, W. J., & Harris, C. M. (2008). Work-life benefits and organizational attachment: Self-interest utility and signaling theory models. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 72*(1), 95–109.

Chaplin, L. N., & John, R. D. (2005). The development of self-brand connections in children and adolescents. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(1), 119–129.

Cheng, S., White, T. B., & Chaplin, L. N. (2012). The effects of self-brand connections on responses to brand failure: A new look at the consumer–brand relationship. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22*(2), 280–288.

Chernev, A., Hamilton, R., & Gal, D. (2011). Competing for consumer identity: Limits to self-expression and the perils of lifestyle branding. *Journal of Marketing, 75*(3), 66–82.

Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34*(3), 366–375.

Colligan, T. W., & Higgins, E. M. (2006). Workplace stress: Etiology and consequences. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health, 21*(2), 89–97.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* New York: Sage.

Costa, P. T. Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1988). From catalog to classification: Murray's needs and the five-factor model. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 55, 258–265, 2.

Drucker, P. F. (2002). They're not employees, they're people. *Harvard Business Review, 80*, 70–77.

Dukerich, J. M., Golden, B. R., & Shortell, S. M. (2002). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder: The impact of organizational identification, identity, and image on the cooperative behaviors of physicians. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 47*(3), 507–533.

Eisingerich, A. B., Chun, H., Liu, Y., Jia, H., & Bell, S. J. (2015). Why recommend a brand face-to-face but not on facebook? How word-of-mouth on online social sites differs from traditional word-of-mouth. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 25*(1), 120–128.

Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 13*(3), 339–348.

Eysenck, M. W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R., & Calvo, M. G. (2007). Anxiety and cognitive performance: Attentional control theory. *Emotion, 7*(2), 336–353.

Ferraro, R., Kirmani, A., & Matherly, T. (2013). Look at me! Look at me! Conspicuous brand usage, self-brand connection, and dilution. *Journal of Marketing Research, 50*(4), 477–488.

Firat, A. F., & Venkatesh, A. (1995). Liberatory postmodernism and the reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research, 22*(3), 239–267.

Fisher, R. J., Maltz, E., & Jaworski, B. J. (1997). Enhancing communication between marketing and engineering: The moderating role of relative functional identification. *Journal of Marketing, 61*(3), 54–70.

Folkes, V. S., & Patrick, V. M. (2003). The positivity effect in perceptions of services: Seen one, seen them all? *Journal of Consumer Research, 30*(1), 125–137.

Forbes (2017). Forget the hype: what every business leader needs to know about artificial intelligence now. https://www.forbes.com/sites/daviatemin/2017/12/06/forget-the-hype-what-every-business-leader-needs-to-know-about-artificial-intelligence-now/#760f3b46a5da; accessed Dec 18th, 2017.

Ford, M. E. (1992). *Motivating humans: Goals, emotions, and personal agency beliefs*. New York: Sage.

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 24*(4), 343–373.

Freud, S. S. (1923). *The ego and the id*. Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag.

Gabriel, Y., Korczynski, M., & Rieder, K. (2015). Organizations and their consumers: Bridging work and consumption. *Organization, 22*(5), 629–643.

Gammoh, B. S., Mallin, M. L., & Pullins, E. B. (2014). Antecedents and consequences of salesperson identification with the brand and company. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 34*(1), 3–18.

Gilly, M. C., & Wolfinbarger, M. (1998). Advertising's internal audience. *Journal of Marketing, 62*(1), 69–88.

Gioia, D. A., Schultz, M., & Corley, K. G. (2000). Organizational identity, image, and adaptive instability. *Academy of Management Review, 25*, 63–81.

Glaser, B. G. (2001). *The grounded theory perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description*. Mill Valley: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Gonzalez, J. A. (2016). Demographic dissimilarity, value congruence, and workplace attachment. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 31*(1), 169–185.

Gonzalez, J. A., & DeNisi, A. S. (2007). Cross-level effects of demography and diversity climate on organizational attachment and firm effectiveness. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 30*, 21–40.

Goulding, C. (2002). *Grounded theory: A practical guide for management, business and market researchers*. New York: Sage.

Harari, Y. N. (2017). *Homo deus: A brief history of tomorrow*. London: Penguin Publishing.

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(2), 268–279.

Hassan, S. (2012). Employee attachment to workplace: A review of organizational and occupational identification and commitment. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior, 15*(3), 383–422.

Hobfoll, S. E., & Shirom, A. (2001). Conservation of resources theory: applications to stress and management in the workplace," In Golembiewski, R. T. (Ed.), Handbook of organizational behavior, New York: Marcel Dekker, 57–80.

Homburg, C., Wieseke, J., & Hoyer, W. D. (2009). Social identity and the service-profit chain. *Journal of Marketing, 73*(2), 38–54.

Hughes, D. E., & Ahearne, M. (2010). Energizing the reseller's sales force: The power of brand identification. *Journal of Marketing, 74*(4), 81–96.

Hurrell, S. A., & Scholarios, D. (2014). The people make the brand: Reducing social skills gaps through person-brand fit and human resource management practices. *Journal of Service Research, 17*(1), 54–67.

John, D. R., & Park, J. K. (2016). Mindsets matter: Implications for branding research and practice. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 26*(1), 153–160.

Kanter, R. M. (1968). Commitment and social organization: A study of commitment mechanisms in utopian communities. *American Sociological Review, 33*(4), 499–517.

Keller, K. L. (2001). Building customer-based brand equity: a blueprint for creating strong brands. *MSI Working Paper*, 3–38.

Kleine III, R. E., Kleine, S. S., & Kernan, J. B. (1993). Mundane consumption and the self: A social-identity perspective. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 2*(3), 209–235.

Korsgaard, M. A., Schweiger, D. M., & Sapienza, H. J. (1995). Building commitment, attachment, and trust in strategic decision-making teams: The role of procedural justice. *Academy of Management Journal, 38*(1), 60–84.

Krishna, A. (2012). An integrative review of sensory marketing: Engaging the senses to affect perception, judgment and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22*(3), 332–351.

Lam, S. K., Ahearne, M., Hu, Y., & Schillewaert, N. (2010). Resistance to brand switching when a radically new brand is introduced: A social identity theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing, 74*(6), 128–146.

Land, C., & Taylor, S. (2010). Surf's up: Work, life, balance and brand in a new age capitalist organization. *Sociology, 44*(3), 395–413.

Lisjak, M., Lee, A. Y., & Gardner, W. L. (2012). When a threat to the brand is a threat to the self: The importance of brand identification and implicit self-esteem in predicting defensiveness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38*(9), 1120–1132.

Liu, F., Li, J., Mizerski, D., & Soh, H. (2012). Self-congruity, brand attitude, and brand loyalty: A study on luxury brands. *European Journal of Marketing, 46*(7/8), 922–937.

Locke, K. (2001). *Grounded theory in management research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Löhndorf, B., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2014). Internal branding: Social identity and social exchange perspectives on turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Service Research, 17*(3), 310–325.

Lopdrup-Hjorth, T., Gudmand-Høyer M., Bramming P., & Pedersen, M. (2011). Governing work through self-management. Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization, 11, 97–104.

Matuson, R. (2016). How one employee can permanently damage your brand. *Forbes*, March 30th, https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertamatuson/2016/03/30/how-one-employee-can-permanently-damage-your-brand/#2f826f575bd2, accessed Oct. 2nd, 2017.

McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview*. London: Sage.

Menon, S. (2001). Employee empowerment: An integrative psychological approach. *Applied Psychology, 50*(1), 153–180.

Merlo, O., Eisingerich, A. B., & Auh, S. (2014). Why customer participation matters. *MIT Sloan Management Review, 55*(2), 81–88.

Merz, M. A., Yi, H., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 37*(3), 328–344.

Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review, 1*(1), 61–89.

Meyer, J. P., & Herscovitch, L. (2001). Commitment in the workplace: Toward a general model. *Human Resource Management Review, 11*(3), 299–326.

Meyer, J. P., & Maltin, E. R. (2010). Employee commitment and well-being: A critical review, theoretical framework and research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 77*(2), 323–337.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A source book of new methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Mitchell, C. (2002). Selling the brand inside. *Harvard Business Review, 80*, 99–105.

Morhart, F. M., Herzog, W., & Tomczak, T. (2009). Brand-specific leadership: Turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Marketing, 73*(5), 122–142.

Mowday, R. T., Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 14*(2), 224–247.

Mowday, R. T., Porter, L. W., & Steers, L. M. (1982). *Employee-organization linkages: The psychology of commitment, absenteeism, and turnover*. New York: Academic Press.

Mumby, D. K. (2016). Organizing beyond organization: Branding, discourse, and communicative capitalism. *Organization, 23*(6), 884–907.

Oswald, S. L., Mossholder, K. W., & Harris, S. G. (1994). Vision salience and strategic involvement: Implications for psychological

attachment to organization and job. *Strategic Management Journal, 15*(6), 477–489.

Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. *Journal of Marketing, 74*(6), 1–17.

Park, C. W., Eisingerich, A. B., & Park, J. W. (2013). Attachment-aversion (AA) model of customer-brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 23*(2), 229–248.

Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., & Eisingerich, A. B. (2016). *Brand admiration: Building a business people love*. New York: Wiley.

Parkinson, B., & Simons, G. (2009). Affecting others: Social appraisal and emotion contagion in everyday decision making. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35*(8), 1071–1084.

Podsakoff, P. M., Williams, L. J., & Todor, W. D. (1986). Effects of organizational formalization on alienation among professionals and nonprofessionals. *Academy of Management Journal, 29*(4), 820–831.

Powell, D. M., & Meyer, J. P. (2004). Side-bet theory and the three-component model of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behvior, 65*(1), 157–177.

Prince, J. B. (2003). Career opportunity and organizational attachment in a blue-collar unionized environment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 63*(1), 136–150.

Punjaisri, K., & Wilson, A. (2011). Internal branding process: Key mechanisms, outcomes and moderating factors. *European Journal of Marketing, 45*(9/10), 1521–1537.

Reade, C. (2001). Antecedents of organizational identification in multinational corporations: Fostering psychological attachment to the local subsidiary and the global organization. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 12*(8), 1269–1291.

Reichers, A. E. (1985). A review and reconceptualization of organizational commitment. *Academy of Management Review, 10*(3), 465–476.

Reimann, M., & Aron, A. (2009). Self-expansion motivation and inclusion of brands in self: Toward a theory of brand relationships. In C.

W. Park & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *MacInnis, D J* (pp. 65–81). ME Sharpe: Handbook of Brand Relationships. Armonk.

Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). *Positive psychology: An introduction*. New York: Springer.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9*(3), 287–300.

Sirianni, N. J., Bitner, M. J., Brown, S. W., & Mandel, N. (2013). Branded service encounters: Strategically aligning employee behavior with the brand positioning. *Journal of Marketing, 77*(6), 108–123.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Steers, R. M. (1977). Antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 22*(1), 46–56.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Tavassoli, N. T., Sorescu, A., & Chandy, R. (2014). Employee-based brand equity: Why firms with strong brands pay their executives less. *Journal of Marketing Research, 51*(6), 676–690.

Tegmark, M. (2017). *Life 3.0: Being Human in the age of artificial intelligence*. New York: Allen Lane.

Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15*(1), 77–91.

Tsui, A. S., Egan, T. D., O'Reilly, I. I. I., & A, C. (1992). Being different: Relational demography and organizational attachment. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 37*(4), 549–579.

Venkataramani, V., Labianca, G., & Travis, G. T. (2013). Positive and negative workplace relationships, social satisfaction, and organizational attachment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 98*(6), 1028–1039.

Whitener, E. M. (2001). Do high commitment human resource practices affect employee commitment? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 27*, 515–535.

Wiener, Y. (1982). Commitment in organizations: A normative view. *Academy of Management Review, 7*, 418–428.