When too much “me” is bad for “us” : the detrimental effect of selfie on self-brand connection

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**WHEN TOO MUCH “ME” IS BAD FOR “US”: THE
DETRIMENTAL EFFECT OF SELFIE ON SELF-
BRAND CONNECTION**

MEHAK BHARTI

NANYANG BUSINESS SCHOOL

2020

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BRAND CONNECTION**

MEHAK BHARTI

NANYANG BUSINESS SCHOOL

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in
partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2020

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

16th May 2020

Date

Mehak Bharti

SUPERVISOR DECLARATION STATEMENT

I have reviewed the content and presentation style of this thesis and declare it is free of plagiarism and of sufficient grammatical clarity to be examined. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate with amendments, changes and improvements as suggested by me as the Supervisor. I confirm that the investigations were conducted in accord with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right. Below the signature is a dotted line.

16th May 2020

Date

Ng Sok Ling, Sharon

AUTHORSHIP ATTRIBUTION STATEMENT

This thesis contains material from an Extended Abstract published in the following paper accepted at conference in which I am listed as an author.

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The contributions of the co-authors are as follows:

- Sharon Ng provided the project direction for creating a concrete idea and methodology. She also helped in editing the manuscript draft.

16th May 2020

Date

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SUMMARY

The growing popularity of selfie campaigns has taken the world by storm. Such campaigns have allowed marketers to tap into consumers' social media following and led to a common perception among practitioners that getting consumers to take a selfie with their brands helps establish a consumer-brand relationship. Although such perception is intuitively appealing, it is unclear whether it has any firm basis in truth. Do selfie campaigns really lead to stronger self-brand connection? Contradicting conventional wisdom, this research shows that selfie campaigns actually inhibit the establishment of self-brand connection, as the act of taking a selfie shifts consumers' attention away from the brand to themselves (i.e., it leads to greater self-focus). This does not mean selfie campaigns are detrimental to the establishment of self-brand connection across all situations. Our research shows that selfie campaigns may lead to positive self-brand connection for brands that are linked to the consumers' identity *a priori*, and for "cool" brands. Across seven studies, this research highlights the nuances in using selfie campaigns to build self-brand connections.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this social media era, the impetus to showcase one's life has led to the creation of a selfie-obsessed generation. Selfie is the act of taking self-portraits using one's camera (Murray 2015). As testimony to this selfie fever, Mark Vande, an astronaut, recently clicked his own "space-selfie," during the first spacewalk of the year (Smith 2018). Such selfie-taking impulse is also apparent in consumers' interaction with brands. We often observe consumers taking selfies with products or food they like, without any probing by marketers. However, increasingly, marketers are also waking up to the potential of selfie campaigns and actively nudging consumers to take selfies with their brands. Brands, such as NASA, Samsung, and Coca-Cola frequently dangle incentives to encourage consumers to take selfies with their products. Such campaigns are frequently seen as marketers try to capitalize on the selfie movement to connect their brands with their customers.

The wave of selfie campaigns attests to marketers' faith in the effectiveness of such tactics. Although brands may launch selfie campaigns for a number of reasons (e.g., to tap into consumers' social networks, to create a buzz in the market or to create viral campaigns), one important objective of selfie campaigns is to build a strong relationship with consumers (Monllos 2014; Northon 2017). In 2015, The Guardian published an opinion piece arguing that brands should use selfies in their marketing campaigns to engage their consumers more effectively (May 5, 2015). Interestingly, a survey we conducted with 60 senior marketing managers also revealed that 73% of them expect selfie campaigns to help their brands to connect with consumers¹. Thus, it appears there is a fairly widespread belief that selfie campaigns will help brands establish a relationship with consumers.

¹ Details of the survey provided in the next section.

However, despite the euphoria over such campaigns, it is unclear whether they are indeed as effective as marketers hope. Does selfie-taking really help brands connect with consumers?² Existing research is silent on how selfie campaigns may influence consumers' connection with brands. This research aims to provide a more nuanced discussion on the impact of selfie campaigns in helping marketers build a stronger relationship with consumers. Specifically, we ask: Do selfie campaigns help establish self-brand connection? Under what conditions will a selfie campaign help or hurt self-brand connection?

Contradicting conventional wisdom, this research proposes that encouraging consumers to take a selfie with a brand actually inhibits establishing a self-brand connection. Our argument draws from insights in the interpersonal literature, which show that establishing a relationship requires an individual to empathize and “see” the relationship between him/herself and the other party (Alicke and Govorun 2005; Davis 1983). High self-focus has been shown to impede one's ability to form a relationship (Kimble and Zehr 1982). Drawing from this stream of research, we argue that taking selfies would impede the establishment of a self-brand relationship, as taking selfies has consistently been linked to a heightened degree of self-focus (Kim et al. 2016; Sorokowski et al. 2015), and this shifts consumers' attention away from their relationship with the brand. However, this does not mean selfie campaigns would be detrimental for all brands and across all situations. Since selfie-taking leads to greater self-focus, we propose that selfie campaigns may facilitate the establishment of self-brand connection 1) for brands that are connected *a priori* to consumers' self-identity; 2) and for brands that may help consumers signal a desired identity (for example, a “cool” brand). Results from seven studies provide strong support for our

² As mentioned above, we acknowledge that marketers may launch selfie campaigns for a variety of reasons, such as tapping into consumers' social networks, increasing visibility, and/or building a connection with consumers. In this research, we focus only on how selfie campaigns may influence the establishment of self-brand connection. Our research does not intend to explore all the possible downstream impacts of selfie campaigns.

propositions.

Findings from this research contribute to the literature on multiple fronts. First, the findings contribute to the literature on self-brand connection by examining an important antecedent of self-brand connection and highlighting how heightened self-focus may hinder the establishment of a strong self-brand connection. Although prior research has identified a number of antecedents and moderators of self-brand connection (Kim and McGill 2011; MacInnis and Folkes 2017; Park and John 2010), prior research has not examined whether there may be cases of too much “self” when forming self-brand connections. Furthermore, prior research has not examined the impact of selfie taking on self-brand connection. Findings from this research show that the key to the establishment of an effective self-brand connection is to emphasize the “connection” part. Too much self-focus would impede the establishment of self-brand connection and marketers need to be aware of this potential pitfall.

Second, this research adds to the emerging body of literature on selfie-taking behaviors. Despite the universal appeal of this phenomenon, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the impact of selfie taking on consumer behavior (Lim 2016). The handful of papers that have examined selfie and consumer behavior have provided mostly correlational evidence (Kim et al. 2016; Sorokowski et al. 2015). To the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first few to show how the act of taking a selfie with a brand may affect the way in which consumers relate to that brand.

Third, we also contribute to the broader stream of branding literature by highlighting how brand positioning and image may influence the effectiveness of selfie campaigns. The findings also contribute to the literature on self by highlighting important moderators for selfie (versus non – selfie) campaigns. This research shows that selfie campaigns may work better for some brands or the difference between the two campaign types (selfie and non-

selfie) may get attenuated in some cases. This can happen if the brands are linked to the consumers' self in some way; they could be linked to a consumer's past self or their aspirational self.

Finally, we show that as an act, selfie-taking is a behavior, consumer adopts to reinforce their self-identity or to showcase their desired self to others. By showing that selfie-taking behavior is linked to self-focus, we add to the body of literature on self by showing that many of these technology driven activities, such as selfie-taking, etc., may influence how consumers see themselves and their relationship with the object they are taking a selfie with.

Managerially, our findings can inform marketers on what factors to consider as they design selfie campaigns to reach out to their customers. We show that an ill-informed selfie campaign may be more detrimental than helpful in establishing relationships with consumers. Our research shows that it could be helpful if marketers can match their campaign type (selfie versus non-selfie) with their product category. For example, marketers advertising nostalgic brands may benefit from getting consumers to take a selfie with their brand whereas marketers advertising new brands may need to think twice before engaging in such selfie-campaigns. Further, our research also provides interesting avenues for marketers to increase the effectiveness of their campaigns by manipulating self-focus (writing one's name versus other words on the target object) through their brands. For example, marketers' advertising their smartphones can ask potential consumers to write a few words before engaging them in a photography campaign. This simple act can increase the effectiveness of such campaigns. This research can also guide brand managers by highlighting other contexts where such differences between selfie and non-selfie campaigns cease to exist (in case of cool brands) thus saving valuable time and money spent on developing and executing such campaigns.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Selfie Taking

Personal photography came to be extensively used in the nineteenth century as a means to preserve one's past; a record of a significant event in one's lives. In modern times, taking pictures has become an everyday phenomenon, driven partly by the advent of smartphones and social media. Digital photos are readily available with a click of a button and are increasingly being used for an individual's identity formation and communication (Van Dijck 2008). As digital cameras become more portable and accessible, the means of self-expression have fundamentally changed. This digital revolution brings new and intriguing questions in the field of consumer behavior.

Consumers in this digital age are not new to the term "selfie" or selfie campaigns launched by various brands. Although this phenomenon may appear recent, its use dates back to the early 19th century. An American photographer, Robert Cornelius, and an English inventor, Charles Wheatstone, are believed to have taken the first selfie in 1840 (Wade 2014). It was the first attempt to take a self-portrait by looking at one's reflection in the mirror and posing in front of a camera. Gradually, in more recent times, these self-portraits became popular, although they were still a rarity in the past when technology was not advanced enough to facilitate the process.

Virtually everyone seems to be affected by the act of taking pictures, especially taking selfies. People from all walks of life – astronauts, actors, politicians, ordinary people, as well as millions of blue- and white-collar workers in diverse industries and environments – are taking millions of selfies every day (Cohen 2016; Sorokowski et al. 2015). Not surprisingly, the word "selfie" was chosen as the Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Year in 2015 (Qiu et al. 2015). From 2012 to 2013, the frequency with which people used this word increased by

17,000% (Sorokowski et al. 2015).

Given the global growth of the selfie-taking culture, a handful of researchers have begun to investigate the implications of such behavior. Findings from prior research suggest that selfie- posting behavior is linked to narcissistic tendencies (Kim et al. 2016; Sorokowski et al. 2015). Selfies are seen as “emblems of a narcissistic contemporary culture” (Hess 2015) that give users the means to materialize the self (Weiser 2015). Using panel data and correlational analysis, Fox and Rooney (2015) and Sorokowski et al. (2015) show a positive link between selfie-taking and narcissism. Halpern, Valenzuela, and Katz (2016) further document the “self-reinforcement” effect, whereby narcissists are shown to take more selfies, and how this behavior, in turn, elevates individuals’ levels of narcissism and positive self-view. Together, the findings from these studies link narcissism to selfie-taking behavior.

Using online consumer survey through an online panel Sung, Kim, and Choi (2018) showed that people frequently used selfies for identity construction and self-expression purpose. For example, they ask participants about their selfies and subsequent questions of the motives of posting those selfies. They also showed that consumers who tend to use brands as a means of self-expression (e.g., people high in materialism) are more likely to click selfies with the brands. In another interesting research, Rokka and Canniford (2016) examine consumer selfies with brands and the meanings those images provide through visual content analysis. They show that such user generated consumer - brand selfies can “destabilize” the brands by altering the meaning of the brand and its positioning offered in traditional brand campaigns. Moreover, such consumer-brand selfies also serve as a “self-branding technique” for the consumer. Findings from these researches suggest that in the consumption context, a selfie is frequently used to express one’s identity and construct a desired image.

Differentiating selfie-taking from simply photo-taking, Katz and Crocker (2015) argue that selfie-taking is like a “visual communication” tool. People take selfies to create an

identity for themselves to show they are part of something significant and as a form of communication. Unlike non-selfie images, selfies allow users to find a perfect angle to customize their self-presentation before clicking an image.

Senft and Baym (2015) further point out that, while a traditional photograph or a non-selfie is focused on getting a complete picture, encompassing elements of the environment, and removing unwanted interferences off the frame, a selfie is purely focused on the image of the selfie-taker (right from his/her stretched arm taking the picture to the elevated neck strained to be in the frame). Since, selfie acts like a mirror for the selfie-taker, research in selfie behavior literature states that people tend to show a self-favoring bias in a selfie (vs. non-selfie) because of an automatic positive association to the self (Re et al. 2016). In other words, people can see themselves in a selfie (vs. non-selfie), and this focuses their attention on themselves or their physical appearance increasing their self-focus. This leads to a “see me showing you me” effect in the case of selfies. Selfies become primarily about people who engage in various physical acts to click that selfie to present a constructed image of the self. Thus, the act of selfie-taking focuses individuals’ attention on themselves rather than on their environment.

Selfie campaigns

Marketers have also been tapping into this selfie-taking fever. In 2017, Coca-Cola launched a selfie-bottle campaign whereby consumers can attach their cellphones to the bottle cap to take a selfie. Effectively, the cap acts as a selfie stick for the consumer. Brands that have attempted to tap into this selfie-taking movement range from Lays Chips and Disney to NASA and political parties. Companies launch selfie campaigns to tap into consumers’ social networks, look trendy, and trigger conversations.

Selfie campaigns are often launched to establish a connection with consumers. For example, a politician on a campaign trail may opt to take selfies with potential voters to connect with them. To test the prevalence of the perception that selfie campaigns may help a brand establish a stronger connection with consumers, we conducted a survey with a sample of 60 marketing managers. The participants came from a wide range of industries and had an average of around 15 years' working experience. Eighty percent of the participants occupied senior management positions (e.g., Regional Marketing Director, Chief Marketing Officer). In the survey, participants were asked to indicate, on a binary scale (Yes vs. No), whether they believed campaigns would help their brand to better connect with their customers. Seventy-three percent of the managers indicated "yes," which suggests that at the practitioner level there is a strong belief selfie campaigns help establish a self-brand connection and lead to positive outcomes.

However, is such faith in selfie campaigns misplaced? Although the industry has embraced these campaigns, there is scant empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of such campaigns in building a connection with consumers. This leads to the question, Can selfie campaigns backfire? Some initial evidence in the literature suggests selfie campaigns may lead to unintended negative downstream effects. For example, as mentioned before, Rokka and Canniford (2016) show that user-generated consumer-brand selfies posted online can negatively alter the desired meaning and positioning of brands. However, the above authors' topic of inquiry relates to the impact of selfie images posted online and not on the act of selfie-taking. Furthermore, the authors did not examine the impact of selfies on how consumers relate to the brand. Building on this research, we focus on a different downstream effect of selfie campaigns – the establishment of a self-brand connection with the target market. Specifically, we aim to examine situations in which the act of taking a selfie with a brand hurts or aids self-brand connection. To this end, we turn to the self-brand connection

literature to better understand how such relationships are formed.

B. Self-Brand Connection

Fournier (1998) introduced the notion that humans can form relationships with brands like they do with humans. This idea has garnered considerable attention over the years and firms have increasingly realized the importance of creating strong connections with their consumers (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2005). In the literature, self-brand connection is defined as the measure of consumers' attachment to a brand and their consideration of the brand as a part of their identity (Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013; Moore and Homer 2008). When consumers embody a brand into their identity, they establish a sense of affiliation with the brand (Chaplin and John 2005; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Park and John 2010; Schmitt 2013). These connections manifest as long-lasting and purposeful ties between a specific brand and the consumer (Escalas 2004). It is also important to note that the notion of self-brand connection is conceptually and empirically distinct from other seemingly related constructs.

In the last two decades, there has been an extensive research on examining and analyzing difference perspectives, notions and attitudes towards understanding a consumer's relationship with his/her brand, including extant research on self-brand connections (Belaid and Behi 2011; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Kim and Kramer 2015; Park, MacInnis, and Priester 2006). While our research focuses on self-brand connection to understand the relationship between consumers and their brands, it is also meaningful to have a clear distinction of this construct from other potentially related constructs. Other similar constructs that have been discussed extensively in the consumer behavior literature include brands in the self-concept (BESC) (Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009), brand attachment (Belaid and Behi 2011; Park et al. 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005), brand commitment

(Ahluwalia, Unnava, and Burnkrant 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho 2009), brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006), consumer brand relationships (Aggarwal and Law 2005; Kim and Kramer 2015) and self-congruity (Sirgy 1985) to name a few. A clear and logical understanding of all these related constructs and their differences is lacking in the consumer behavior literature. Nonetheless, a handful of research does look into these different concepts and examines how these concepts might be related or unrelated to each other (Fetscherin and Heinrich 2015; Park et al. 2006). More importantly, they also examine how these constructs build on each other for a comprehensive understanding of such relationships.

Prior research affirms that self-brand connection is conceptually different from the idea of self-congruity (Sirgy 1985). Where self-brand connection explores a brand-related consumer inclination to create relevant linkages, self-congruity identifies the match or the mismatch between a consumer and a brand (Dwivedi 2014). In other words, self-brand connection does not focus on the discrepancy, rather it focuses on the connections and meaningful ties made at the self-concept level (Dwivedi 2014).

Similarly, the concept of brand engagement with self-concept (BESC) has also been shown to be conceptually and empirically different from self-brand connection (Sprott et al. 2009). Sprott and his colleagues developed a BESC scale to capture a consumer's engagement with brands. This construct is an individual difference variable that examines peoples' tendency of incorporating a brand as a part of their identity. Thus, while self-brand connection focuses on the relationship with a particular brand, BESC focuses on the general tendency of consumers to include multiple brands as a part of their identity such as national or international brands (Liu et al. 2018; Sprott et al. 2009).

Further, self-brand connection is also conceptually distinct from the concept of brand attachment. Prior research defines brand attachment as a combination of two elements which include self – brand connection and emotional bond that evolves over time (Park et al. 2006).

Park et al. (2006) examine the role of brand attachment by exploring the link between its salient antecedents and consequences. They show self-brand connection as a salient antecedent of brand attachment and how a strong attachment necessitates the existence of a self-brand connection. To add to this, in case of brand attachment the consumer has a spontaneous positive reaction towards the brands he/she is attached to and therefore acts on behalf of the brand even if that behavior may pose a risk to his/her identity (Belaid and Behi 2011; Park et al. 2006). It is a possibility that this automaticity could be highly correlated with a strong self-brand connection, but automaticity is usually influenced by other brand-related aspects as well such as the duration of brand possession and knowledge about the brand, etc. (Park et al. 2006).

It would also be useful to distinguish self-brand connection with other similar constructs such as brand commitment (Ahluwalia et al. 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho 2009) and brand love (Ahuvia 2005; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Brand commitment is essentially defined as a consumer's willingness to buy a brand in the future (Ahluwalia et al. 2001). Thus, one may argue that brand commitment could be a positive effect of self-brand connection. A self-brand connection would reflect in a person's increased commitment towards the brand. Similarly, brand love could also be perceived as being similar to self-brand connection (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). However, brand love is defined as the extent of "passionate emotional attachment" a consumer feels for a specific brand (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Park et al. 2006). Brand love has a strong affective focus and it is similar to the love a person might experience in an interpersonal context (Ahuvia 2005). Thus, while one might feel brand love, if one has a strong self-brand connection, but a strong connection is surely more than this feeling of brand love.

It is also important to note that in the context of consumer - brand relationships, prior research has established that consumers assign human traits to inanimate objects and brands

(Aggarwal and Law 2005; Belk 1988; Kim and Kramer 2015). This stream of research mainly focuses on the type of relationships that consumers establish with brands by regarding brands as partners, servants, friends, etc. (Aggarwal and Law 2005; Fournier 1998; Kim and Kramer 2015). Interestingly, research has also recently begun to regard self-brand connection as a subset of consumer brand relationships wherein consumers feel a close connection with the brand (Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). This research converges on the notion that just like consumers regard a brand as a partner or a friend, high self-brand connection consumers feel a strong level of personal connection with their brands leading to a consumer-brand relationship (Cheng et al. 2012).

Building on the foregoing, this research notes that all the above-mentioned constructs such as brand attachment, brand love, self-congruity, etc. share some common characteristics but are conceptually and empirically distinct from each other. It is also important to note that self-brand connection is a multi-dimensional construct and it might relate to some of these constructs (self-congruity, brand attachment) more strongly than the others. However, as mentioned before, prior research has established that these constructs are empirically discriminable.

Now, to further the understanding of our theoretical framework, we discuss the existing literature on self-brand connection including its antecedents and important downstream consequences. Extant research has identified various antecedents that may lead to the establishment of self-brand connection. The antecedents identified can be broadly grouped into consumer-related factors and brand-related factors. In terms of consumer-related factors, Escalas and Bettman (2005) show that consumers are more likely to feel a stronger sense of self-brand connection when they perceive a high self-brand congruency (i.e., the brand is like me). Other research shows that consumers establish a stronger connection with brands that satisfy their personal needs (Kessous, Roux, and Chandon 2015; Rindfleisch,

Burroughs, and Wong 2008; Schmitt 2012, 2013). For example, Rindfleisch et al. (2008) show that when the mortality salience is heightened, individuals high (versus low) in materialism form stronger connections with brands as the relationship fosters a sense of security. Consumers also tend to establish stronger connections with brands that signal in-group membership (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Moore and Homer 2018; Schmitt 2012) and weaker relationships with brands that signal any association with outgroups (White and Dahl 2007).

Beyond, consumer-related factors, some brand features are also crucial precursors to the establishment of self-brand connections. For example, research shows that anthropomorphizing a brand or product aids in the formation of a self-brand relationship (Fournier 1998; Kim and Kramer 2015; Kressmann et al. 2006). It has also been observed that consumers are more motivated to establish self-brand connections with unique (versus ordinary) brands because associating with a unique brand helps them signal a desired self-image (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Netemeyer et al. 2004). Further, consumers are also likely to feel a greater sense of self-brand connection with brands they use or purchase more (versus less) frequently (Park and John 2010, Park et al. 2013) and when they are talking (versus writing) about the brand (Shen, Sengupta, and Hoegg 2018).

Why is it important for brands to establish a strong relationship with the consumers? Extant literature shows that there are pertinent downstream marketing consequences of self-brand connections. Such brands lead to strong emotional ties with consumers (Escalas 2004; MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Consumers tend to exhibit a stronger and more favorable attitude towards such brands (MacInnis and Folkes 2017; Moore and Homer 2008), are willing to pay a higher premium for them (Park and John 2010; Thomson et al. 2005), and exhibit greater willingness to accept their brand extensions (Fedorikhin, Park, and Thomson 2008). Van der Westhuizen (2018) further shows that such connections with the brand also

lead to greater brand loyalty. Further, a strong self-brand connection also increases consumers' readiness to advocate for a brand and protect the brand from any transgression, especially when the brand belongs one's in-group categories (Moore and Homer 2018; Park et al. 2013). Prior research also shows that when consumers feel a strong sense of connection with the brands, they treat its transgressions and failures as their own personal losses (Cheng et al. 2012). Given the multitude of benefits in establishing a strong connection with the consumer, it is of no surprise that all firms strive towards building a strong relationship with its customers. To build a strong connection with the consumers, companies may spend considerable resources on efficient customer service (e.g. Apple) or spend millions into developing a brand with its cult following (e.g. Harley Davidson motorcycle riding events) (Schembri 2009). In this technology age, another tool that is readily available to marketers is the selfie campaigns.

Collectively, the above research suggests that when a brand fulfills some self-related need (e.g., when it helps consumers signal a desired identity or group membership) or when the contexts remind consumers of their relationship with the brand (e.g., when it is a product they purchase frequently), self-brand connection will be heightened. Does a selfie campaign map into these factors? While there has been extensive research on the antecedents of self-brand connections, existing research is silent on how the current social media frenzy and selfie craze may influence the establishment of self-brand connections. Our research aims to address this question.

3. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

A. The “Self” Versus The “Connection”

As reviewed earlier, consumers are more likely to establish strong connections with brands that fit their self-perception and desired image (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013; Moore and Homer 2018). From this perspective, it would appear that as long as the self is highlighted, it should help develop a relationship with the brand. In fact, prior research on self-brand connection seems to suggest this is so (Kim and McGill 2011; MacInnis and Folkes 2017). This research, however, takes the contrarian view that there may be a case of “too much self”. Our argument is consistent with prior research in interpersonal relationship and marketing literature.

There are two parties involved in any relationship. In an interpersonal relationship, this may be a husband or a wife, two friends or colleagues. In the case of self-brand connection, one party in the relationship is the consumer and the other party is the brand. Prior research on interpersonal relationships shows that since interpersonal communication is a two-way process (Miller and Steinberg 1975), for a person to feel a connection with another entity, some degree of perspective taking or “other centeredness” is required (Davis 1983; Stiff et al. 1988). Relationship formation and maintenance require an individual to empathize and “see” the relationship between oneself and the other party (Davis 1983; Stiff et al. 1988). Anything that lowers this perspective taking affects communication capability (Davis 1983) and the ability to build relationships. For instance, too much self-focus has been shown to reduce the quality of the relationship between couples and friends (Campbell, Brunell, and Finkel 2006).

In the social psychological literature, high self-focus has been linked to narcissism (Konrath, Bushman, and Grove 2009; Rohman 2012). Konrath et al. (2009) show that

narcissism and independent self-construal are closely related to each other because both these variables are inclined to have high self-focus. Further, Rohman et al. (2012) also add to these findings and highlight that narcissism is essentially “high self-focus combined with low other focus”. To add to this, Campbell et al. (2006) also show that narcissists, who are highly self-focused, are unable to form quality interpersonal relationships, be it a romantic or work relationship.

In the marketing literature, studies also show that materialists, who are generally associated with heightened self-focus, demonstrate lower levels of empathy, relationship quality, and life satisfaction (Belk 1985; Browne and Kaldenberg 1997; Richins and Dawson 1992). Escalas and Bettman (2005) show that people with dominant interdependent self-construal have a greater tendency of forming a self-brand connection than people with dominant independent self-construal. Given that prior research has shown independents (versus interdependents) tend to be more focused on the self (Agrawal and Maheswaran 2005; Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000), this finding is consistent with the argument that too much self-focus impedes the development of relationships.

Drawing from these findings, we argue that heightened self-focus may also impede the establishment of self-brand connection. As mentioned, the act of selfie-taking focuses individuals’ attention on themselves rather than their environment (Halpern et al. 2016; Sung et al. 2018). In trying to get the best picture of themselves individuals invariably focus on themselves. This is consistent with related findings in the self-focus literature which show that gazing into a mirror leads to heightened self-focus (Fejfar and Hoyle 2000; Scheier and Carver 1977; Wegner and Giuliano 1980). This is especially so if one considers that the act of taking a selfie is similar to looking into a mirror. Thus, we argue that selfie-taking heightens one’s self-focus. Further, drawing from prior research showing that greater self-focus hurts relationship building (e.g., Campbell et al. 2006), we propose that heightened self-focus

evoked by the act of selfie-taking impedes the establishment of self-brand connection.

Contrast this to the situation when the photo is taken by a third party, which is akin to the traditional form of photography or video – taking. Such marketing tactics are also frequently observed in the market and especially common in the food and beverage industry. For instance, some restaurants may encourage the waiters to help patrons to take pictures of them enjoying the meal, in the hope that the patrons will also subsequently post the picture on social media. In some cases, the photos are used in marketing collaterals. Another commonly adopted photography related campaign is to get consumers to pose with the brand or product and the salesperson would help to take a picture for that consumer. For instance, when a brand sets up a pop-up store in a mall, it may set up a photo booth area for consumers to take a picture with the product instead of taking a selfie. We argue that such campaigns would be more effective in eliciting self-brand connection as in such contexts, the consumer is less self-focused. In such contexts, the consumers are trying to position themselves together with the product or services and prior research shows that thinking about or focusing on a specific other makes that entity concrete and reduces egocentrism (Alicke and Govorun 2005; Taylor and Thompson 1982). Thus, we suggest that such a context would focus the user's attention on how they relate to the brand or the product, facilitating the building of self-brand connection.

When someone else is taking the photo, although the consumers will still want to look nice, the fact that they cannot see themselves in the camera reduces the extent to which they can focus on themselves (Re et al. 2016; Senft and Baym 2015). We argue that such campaigns would be more effective in eliciting self-brand connection because in trying to position themselves with a product or service, consumers would focus less on themselves and thereby, reduces egocentrism (Alicke and Govorun 2005; Taylor and Thompson 1982). Thus, we suggest such a context focuses users' attention on how they relate to a brand or product

and facilitates the building of self-brand connection. Putting these arguments together, we propose that enhanced self-focus in a selfie (versus a non-selfie) campaign impedes the development of a strong relationship, and self-brand connection would be lower when a firm runs a selfie (versus a non-selfie) campaign.

- H1: Consumers who participate in a selfie (versus a non-selfie) campaign will exhibit a weaker (stronger) self-brand connection.
- H2: The above effect is mediated by heightened self-focus in selfie (versus non-selfie) campaigns.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 propose that selfie campaigns will lead to lower self-brand connection relative to comparable non-selfie campaigns, as taking a selfie heightens one's self-focus. This begs the question – are there situations in which selfie campaigns may lead to stronger self-brand connection? If selfie taking indeed leads to greater self-focus, selfie campaigns should benefit brands that are linked *a priori* to the self or fit consumers' desired self (e.g., identity-linked brands or “cool” brands).

B. Reversal for Identity-Linked Brands

According to the associative network theory (Keller 1993), activating the self-node should also activate other nodes related to the self, which may include brands. Prior research has shown that in this consumerism world, brands are frequently connected to individuals' self-identity (Belk 1988; Holt 1995; Richins 1994; Schmitt 2012). For instance, the literature on materialism emphasizes the “centrality of possessions” in defining a materialist's sense of self (Richins and Dawson 1992), and brands play an important role in helping consumers define their own identity (Fournier 1994).

What this suggests is that activating the self-node should also activate brand nodes that are already connected to consumers' self-identity, making the link momentarily salient. Prior research has shown that activating one's childhood brands, which are strongly connected to one's past and shape one's identity, increases consumers' feeling of social connectedness and sense of belonging with brands (Holbrook 1993; Schindler and Holbrook 2003; Wildschut et al. 2006). We propose that this sense of connectedness with identity-linked brands would be enhanced in a selfie (versus non-selfie) context because by making people more self-focused, the self-node will be activated as well as the brand nodes related to it. In this process, consumers will be reminded of their ties with the brand, thereby reinforcing the self-brand connection. Such reinforcing effect would not be expected for non-identity linked brands.

H3a: Consumers who participate in a selfie (versus a non-selfie) campaign for an identity-linked brand will exhibit a stronger (weaker) self-brand connection.

H3b: Consumers who participate in a selfie (versus a non-selfie) campaign for a non-identity-linked brand will exhibit a weaker (stronger) self-brand connection.

C. Attenuating Effect of “Cool” Brands

Hypothesis 3 examines the impact of selfie taking on brands that are linked *a priori* to consumers' identity. What about brands that are not linked to one's identity? People frequently use consumption as a way to communicate their “self” to others (Goffman 1959). Much research has shown that consumers purchase brands that help them self-enhance (Carver and Scheier 1990) and signal a desired self (Banaji and Prentice 1994). Furthermore, as mentioned before, Sung et al. (2018) show that people frequently use selfies to construct an identity or express themselves. We argue that brands which fit consumers' self-expression

goals would also benefit from selfie (versus non-selfie) campaigns because heightened self-focus while taking selfies would also heighten the goal of expressing one's desired self and connect with brands that fit the desired self. What type of brands would fit such self-expression goals? Although the type of brands that may fit one's desired self would differ depending on the consumers' profile, prior research shows that "cool" brands are frequently seen as desirable (Warren and Campbell 2014).

A brand is considered "cool" when it stands out from other brands and becomes differentiated and aspirational (Kerner and Pressman 2007; Warren and Campbell 2014). Although there is a lack of consensus on what it takes to be a cool brand, coolness is typically linked to autonomy (Warren and Campbell 2014) and being modern and not old-fashioned (Breckenfeld 2008). Prior research has shown consumers expect "cool" brands to be creative and stylish (Rahman et al. 2009) and possess superior quality (Nancarrow, Nancarrow, and Page 2002). Thus, coolness is the sum of everything that enhances consumers' aspirational self (Gurrieri 2009; Pountains and Robbins 2000) and is the attribute that has propelled Apple and Harley Davidson to their current iconic status (Oyserman 2009; Warren and Campbell 2014).

Given that cool brands generally fit consumers' self-expression goals and consumers want to be associated with such brands, regardless of whether one is taking a selfie with the brand or someone else is taking the photo for the individual, we should not observe a significant difference in self-brand connection. Thus, we propose that the negative effect of selfie campaigns would be attenuated for cool brands.

H4: The detrimental effect of selfie taking on self-brand connection will be attenuated in the context of a cool (versus a regular) brand.

Seven studies were conducted to test the above hypotheses. Studies 1a and 1b

provide evidence to support our central hypothesis that selfie (versus non-selfie) campaigns lead to lower self-brand connection. Study 1a examines the effect of selfie (non-selfie) campaign on self-brand connection. Study 1b replicates the findings of study 1a by using a selfie-stick to click the selfie in the selfie condition. Building on these studies, study 2a tests the assumption that selfie taking leads to greater self-focus by using a non-self-reported measure. Study 2b strengthens the findings of study 2a and sheds light on the underlying mechanism for this effect. It shows the role of self-focus through mediation and study 2c shows that the effect is attenuated when self-focus is heightened (i.e., show process through moderation). Study 2c also shows the effective manipulation of self-focus by writing one's name (versus other words) on the stimulus and its subsequent impact on the main effect. Study 3 shows that the findings reverse for brands connected *a priori* to consumers' identity. Finally, study 4 examines the moderating role of "cool" brands. This study tests the moderation effect by using cool (vs. uncool) brands (see Appendix A for an overview of all the studies). The next section will provide the details of each study.

4. STUDY 1A: TESTING THE MAIN EFFECT

A. Method

Objective and Participants. Study 1a aims to provide initial evidence for the proposed effect of selfie (versus non-selfie) campaigns on self-brand connection. Hypothesis 1 predicts that selfie (versus non-selfie) campaigns would lead to lower self-brand connection. To this end, a total of 72 participants ($M_{age} = 21.211$, $SD = 1.393$; 50 females) from a large university were recruited to participate in this study. Participants were randomly assigned to the selfie and non-selfie condition. The study was conducted with each participant individually.

Procedure and Stimuli. In the cover story, participants were told we were conducting a quick survey for the brand Lindt. In return for their participation, they would receive a gratuity and their names would be included in a lucky draw. As evidence they had participated in the survey (in the event they won the lucky draw), we needed them to take a picture of themselves holding the product. The photos would be taken with their own phone and the researchers would not need to access the photos.³ Lindt Chocolate was chosen as the focal brand in this study as the younger generations typically would showcase the snacks or food, they take on social media. A survey with $N = 50$ students showed that Lindt was also a brand most students ($M_{age} = 21.48$, $SD = 1.82$; 33 females) were familiar with ($M_{fam} = 5.16$) and in general, exhibit positive attitude towards (1 = dislike/negative/bad/unappealing, 7 = like/positive/good/appealing; $\alpha = .928$) ($M_{attitude} = 3.61$).

There are two reasons we provided the cover story. First, the cover story was provided to avoid the possibility of a demand artifact. If participants were asked to complete a survey

³ Across all the studies, participants took a selfie (or had their photo taken by the research assistant) with their own phone. The research team did not keep the photos, so there were no privacy concerns.

immediately after taking a selfie with a brand, without the cover story, it would be fairly easy for them to guess the objective of the study. Since we were interested in whether the act of selfie taking would influence participants' self-brand connection, "de-linking" the photo-taking behavior from the subsequent survey would allow us to provide a more stringent test of the theory. Second, unlike consumer-initiated selfies (i.e., selfies consumers take on their own accord), brand-initiated selfie campaigns typically try to encourage consumers to take a selfie with the products in return for some incentive (e.g., lucky draw prizes, discount vouchers or memorabilia). Since we are interested in how brand-initiated selfie campaigns influence behavior, the cover story mapped more closely to industry campaigns.

After reading the instructions, participants were handed a bar of Lindt chocolate. Those in the selfie condition took a selfie of themselves holding the bar of chocolate; whereas those in the non-selfie condition had their photos taken by the research assistant. After taking the photo, participants handed the chocolate back to the experimenter and proceeded to complete a short survey that included a seven-item self-brand connection scale taken from Escalas and Bettman (2003; see Appendix B for the scale). The questions included items such as "I feel a personal connection to the brand," "This brand suits me well" (1 = not at all, 5 = to a great extent). Next, participants indicated what they thought the purpose of the study was and provided their demographic details. No one correctly guessed the research purpose. At the end of the experiment, participants were debriefed.

B. Results and Discussion

Self-Brand Connection. Participants' responses on the 7-item self-brand connection scale were averaged ($\alpha = .925$) to derive a self-brand connection score. A one-way ANOVA on the mean of the self-brand connection scale across conditions showed a significant main effect of campaign condition on self-brand condition ($F(1, 71) = 5.952, p = .017, \eta^2 = .078$).

As predicted, participants in the selfie condition exhibited significantly lower self-brand connection ($M_{selfie} = 2.273$, $SD = .891$) relative to those in the non-selfie condition ($M_{non-selfie} = 2.817$, $SD = .996$). This finding supports H1.

Post-hoc test. Although the results showed a lower self-brand connection in the selfie (versus non-selfie) condition, it is unclear whether selfie taking led to lower self-brand connection or whether the taking of photos by the research assistant led to higher self-brand connection. To test whether selfie taking inhibited self-brand connection or whether self-brand connection increased in the non-selfie condition, we conducted a post-hoc study with a control group.

Thirty-five participants ($M_{age} = 21.714$, $SD = 1.871$; 23 female) were recruited for this study. Participants were shown the Lindt chocolate and asked to complete the same self-brand connection scale detailed above. ANOVA, comparing the means of the self-brand connection ratings obtained from this control group with those obtained in the selfie and non-selfie conditions, showed that participants in the selfie condition exhibited significantly lower self-brand connection ($M_{selfie} = 2.273$) than those in the control condition ($M_{control} = 2.702$, $SD = .865$; $t(69) = -2.053$, $p = .044$, $\eta^2 = .058$). However, the difference in self-brand connection between participants in the non-selfie condition ($M_{non-selfie} = 2.817$) and those in the control condition was not significant ($t(69) = -.521$, $p = .604$). This suggests that the act of selfie taking impedes the establishment of self-brand connection.

Discussion. Findings from this study provided preliminary evidence that selfie taking may negatively influence self-brand connection. We show that the effect was driven by a lower self-brand connection in the selfie condition (relative to the control group) and not a higher self-brand connection in the non-selfie condition. This supports H1. However, one may argue that in the selfie condition, the physical distance between the camera and the

participant was shorter, compared to the non-selfie condition.⁴ This difference in physical distance may translate into differences in psychological distance (Henderson 2009; Trope and Liberman 2010). Theoretically, we do not think this explains the result because if the difference in physical distance indeed translates into differences in psychological distance, we would expect participants in the selfie condition to experience lower psychological distance with the brand, and thereby exhibit stronger (instead of weaker) self-brand connection. Nonetheless, to test whether physical distance between the camera and the individual matters, study 1b aimed to replicate the effect while controlling for the distance between the camera and the individual.

⁴ The distance between the camera and the participant would be limited to the length of one's arm.

5. STUDY 1B: REPLICATING THE MAIN EFFECT

A. Method

Objective and Participants. Building on the findings of study 1a, this study aims to replicate the results after controlling for the distance between the camera and the participant. In addition, we aim to test whether the self-brand connection difference filters down to a willingness to try the product. A different brand, Toblerone, was chosen as the focal brand in this study to show the generalizability of the effect. One hundred and four participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.134$, $SD = 1.654$; 63 females) from a large university were recruited to participate in this study. Participants were randomly assigned to the selfie and non-selfie condition, and the study was completed with each participant individually.

Procedure and Stimuli. As in study 1a, participants were told we were collaborating with Toblerone and would like them to complete a short survey for the brand. To thank them for their participation, their names would be entered into a lucky draw. As proof of their participation, half of the participants were told to take a selfie with a bar of Toblerone chocolate (selfie condition) (see Appendix C for a picture of the stimuli), whereas the other half had their photo taken by the research assistant (non-selfie condition). In both cases, the photos were taken with the participants' own phone. To ensure similar physical distance between the participant and the product across both conditions, participants in the selfie condition were provided with a selfie stick to take the picture. After taking the photo, participants proceeded to complete the questionnaire, which included the 7- item self-brand connection scale taken from Escalas and Bettman (2003) detailed in study 1a. In addition, participants indicated their willingness to try the chocolate (1= not willing at all, 9 = extremely willing) and provided their demographic details. At the end of the experiment, participants were debriefed.

B. Results and Discussion

Self-Brand Connection. A one-way ANOVA on the mean of the 7-items self-brand connection scale ($\alpha = .920$) across the two conditions showed a significant main effect of selfie conditions on self-brand connection ($F(1, 102) = 6.097, p = .015, \eta^2 = .056$).

Replicating the findings in study 1a, participants in the selfie condition exhibited significantly lower self-brand connection ($M_{selfie} = 3.005, SD = .798$) than those in the non-selfie condition ($M_{non-selfie} = 2.585, SD = .933$).

Willingness to Try. In addition to self-brand connection, we also measured participants' willingness to try the product. A one-way ANOVA on the willingness-to-try measure across conditions showed a significant main effect of selfie condition ($F(1, 102) = 8.981, p = .003, \eta^2 = .081$). Paralleling the results obtained for self-brand connection, participants in the selfie condition exhibited significantly lower willingness to try ($M_{selfie} = 7.080, SD = 1.988$) than those in the non-selfie condition ($M_{non-selfie} = 8.070, SD = 1.358$).

Mediation analysis. To test whether self-brand connection mediated the above effect, a mediation analysis using Model 4 by Preacher & Hayes (2008) with 5,000 iterations was conducted. We entered selfie type (selfie = 0, non-selfie = 1) as the independent variable, participants' rating of the self-brand connection as the mediator, and willingness to try as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant mediation by self-brand connection on willingness to try ($\beta = .268, SE = .134, 95\% CI [.068, .631]$).

Discussion. Replicating the findings in study 1a, this study shows that selfie (versus non-selfie) taking leads to lower self-brand connection and willingness to try the brand. By using a selfie-stick in the selfie-condition, we controlled for the distance between the camera and the participants and show that the effect still holds. With support for Hypothesis 1, study 2 moved on to test the role of self-focus as the underlying mechanism in driving the effect.

6. STUDY 2A: TESTING THE LINK BETWEEN SELFIE AND SELF-FOCUS

A. Method

Objective and Participants. Hypothesis 2 argues that selfie taking leads to lower self-brand connection because the act of taking a selfie directs people's attention to themselves, leading to greater self-focus. The objective of study 2a is to test whether the assumption that selfie taking evokes greater self-focus holds. To this end, 49 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.469$, $SD = 1.815$, 33 females) from a large university were recruited for this study. All participants were randomly assigned to the selfie versus non-selfie condition.

Procedure and Stimuli. To test whether selfie taking leads to greater self-focus, we draw from prior research in the self-focus literature (Hass 1984; Galinsky et al. 2006). As a measure of whether individuals are self-focused, prior research has asked participants to draw a letter (e.g., E) on their forehead (Galinsky et al., 2006). This task captures individuals' degree of self-focus by examining how one draws the letter E – participants may either draw the letter “E” backwards (e.g., Ǝ) or in the right direction (i.e., E). It was argued that the way in which people draw the letter depends on the extent to which they are self-focused. People who are self-oriented would draw “E” on their forehead such that it faces the same direction as themselves (backwards E). Conversely, participants who are other oriented would draw the “E” the same way it would appear if they were seeing it on another person (Galinsky et al., 2006). Extant research has supported the use of this task to assess self-focus. For example, Hass (1984), in his experiment, shows that participants in the presence (versus absence) of a video camera tend to draw E from another person's perspective (versus one's own perspective). Similarly, Galinsky et al. (2006) show when a person is primed with power and becomes self-focused, he or she would draw an “E” from their own perspective. Given that the task has been widely used in the literature, we adopted the same measure in this study.

Upon entering the lab, in the selfie condition, participants read the following instructions: *“Please follow the instructions below and perform the tasks requested in the order they are presented. They are coordination and motor skills-testing tasks. Task 1. Please click a selfie with your phone.”* In the non-selfie condition, participants read, *“Please let the research assistant click a picture of you with your phone”* After they had done so, they proceeded to the second task, which read, *“Task 2. With your dominant hand, as quickly as you can, snap your fingers five times.”* Task 2 was meant to be a filler task. Next, they proceeded to task 3. They were told *“Task 3. With your dominant hand, as quickly as you can, draw a capital E on your forehead with the marker provided.”* (Galinsky et al. 2006). Participants were informed that the marker was non-toxic, and after they were done, the experimenter would remove the drawing with a clean cotton swab. Participants were told at the start of the study that they could leave the experiment if they felt uncomfortable doing the tasks at any point. Four participants left the experiment after learning about the tasks. After completing the tasks, participants provided their demographic information. They were also asked to guess the objective of the study. No participant was able to correctly guess the purpose of the experiment. At the end of the experiment, the participants were debriefed.

B. Results and Discussion

Self-focus. Using binary logistic regression, the direction of “E” (1= wrong direction versus 0 = right direction) was regressed on selfie condition (selfie = 0, versus non-selfie = 1). Following prior literature (Galinsky et al. 2006), gender, and handedness (left-handed or right-handed) were used as control variables. Wald chi-square tests showed a significant effect of selfie or non-selfie on the direction they drew the letter “E” ($\chi^2(1) = 4.505$, $B = -1.303$; $SE = .614$, $p = .034$). Specifically, the results showed that the participants in the selfie condition were more likely than those in the non-selfie condition to draw an “E” on their

forehead that faces the same direction as themselves (selfie condition: 17 of 26 versus non-selfie condition: 8 of 23). The result is consistent with our theorizing that individuals are more likely to be self-focused and less likely to adopt another's point of view in the selfie (versus non- selfie) condition.

Discussion. Findings from this study provided preliminary evidence that selfie (versus non-selfie) leads to greater self-focus. The fact that the results were obtained using a non-self-reported measure that tapped into participants' subconscious behavior provided strong support for our assumption. Building on this study, study 2b strengthens the findings of this study and aims to test whether a differential degree of self-focus mediated the link between selfie taking and self-brand connection.

7. STUDY 2B: TESTING THE UNDERLYING MECHANISM

A. Method

Objective and Participants. Building on the findings of study 2a, study 2b examined the mediating role of self-focus on the relationship between selfie taking and self-brand connection. One hundred and five participants ($M_{age} = 21.038$ years, $SD = 1.697$; 62 females) from a large university were recruited for this study. The focal brand adopted in this study was TWG (see appendix C). A pre-test with $N = 50$ students showed that TWG was also a brand most students ($M_{age} = 21.48$, $SD = 1.82$; 33 females) were familiar with ($M_{fam} = 5.7$) and in general, exhibit positive attitude towards (1 = dislike/negative/bad/unappealing, 7 = like/positive/good/appealing; $\alpha = .898$) ($M_{attitude} = 3.005$).

Procedure and Stimuli. The procedure for this study was similar to that in study 1a. Participants were told we were conducting a survey for the brand TWG. In return for their participation, their names would be entered in a lucky draw. Participants were told that as evidence they had participated in the study, they would be required to take a picture of themselves holding the product with their own phone. As in study 1, participants in the selfie condition took a selfie with the product, and those in the non-selfie condition had their picture taken by the research assistant. After taking the photos, participants proceeded to complete a short survey that included the 7-item self-brand connection scale described in study 1. In addition, to assess whether participants were focusing on themselves, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they were focusing on themselves when the picture was taken (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The survey concluded with some demographic questions before the participants were debriefed.

B. Results and Discussion

Self-Brand Connection. A one-way ANOVA on participants' self-brand connection ($\alpha = .956$) revealed a significant main effect of selfie taking ($F(1,103) = 4.411, p = .038, \eta^2 = .041$). Replicating the findings in study 1, participants in the selfie condition indicated significantly lower self-brand connection than those in the non-selfie condition ($M_{selfie} = 2.431, SD = 1.021; M_{non-selfie} = 2.870, SD = 1.121$).

Self-Focus. In addition to self-brand connection measures, we also measured the extent to which participants were focusing on themselves. ANOVA on the self-focus measure showed that participants in the selfie-condition reported significantly higher focus on the self, relative to those in the non-selfie condition ($M_{selfie} = 4.491, SD = 1.727; M_{non-selfie} = 3.096, SD = 1.807; F(1,103) = 16.337, p < .001, \eta^2 = .013$).

Mediation analysis. To test whether self-focus mediated the above effect, a mediation analysis using Model 4 by Preacher & Hayes (2008), with 5,000 iterations, was conducted. We entered selfie condition (selfie = 0, non-selfie = 1) as the independent variable, participants' rating on the self-brand connection as the dependent variable, and self-focus rating as the mediator. The results revealed a significant mediation by self-focus ($B = .195, SE = .121, 95\% CI [.505, .016]$). Including the mediator made the direct effect of independent variable on the dependent variable insignificant ($B = .244, SE = .220, 95\% CI [.681, -.019]$). Thus, this study showed that the effect of selfie (versus non-selfie) condition was mediated by enhanced self-focus in the selfie-condition, supporting H2.

Discussion. This study's findings provide preliminary evidence that the effect was driven by enhanced self-focus in the selfie (versus non-selfie) condition. However, since self-focus was measured using a single item, one may question the robustness of the effect. Study 2c aimed to build on these findings by manipulating self-focus directly.

8. STUDY 2C: PROCESS EVIDENCE THROUGH MODERATION

A. Method

Objective and Participants. Study 2a showed that selfie taking makes people focus more on themselves, and study 2b showed that this enhanced self-focus mediates the impact of selfie taking on self-brand connection. Study 2c aims to provide further evidence of this mechanism by manipulating participants' level of self-focus directly. If the effect is indeed driven by differences in self-focus, we should expect no difference between the selfie and non-selfie conditions when self-focus is high. Thus, this study adopted a 2 (Focus: Self versus Control) X 2 (Campaign: Selfie versus Non-Selfie) between-subjects design. One hundred and fifty-one participants ($M_{age} = 20.728$, $SD = 1.356$; 88 females) from a large university completed this study in exchange for a partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to each of the four conditions.

Pre-test. Before conducting the experiment, a pretest was conducted to test the proposed self-focus manipulation. To manipulate self-focus, we drew from prior research which showed that words related to one's identity, such as "I," "we" or even one's name, tends to heighten self-focus (Chang and Hung 2018; Sedikides and Herbst 2002). In particular, research shows that a person's name is an important component of one's self-concept and is highly accessible (Koole, Dijksterhuis, and van Knippenberg 2001). This is why when our names are being mentioned, even at a very noisy party, most of us will be able to hear it.

Drawing from this stream of research, to manipulate self-focus, we drew participants to their name (versus a random word). For the task, participants were handed a boogie board (see Appendix C). The boogie board is an electronic board that allows its users to write anything on it, and the content can be easily erased by pressing a button. Participants in the

high self-focus condition were asked to write their name on the boogie board, whereas those in the control condition were asked to write any two words that came to mind.

To test whether this manipulation activated self-focus, 47 participants ($M_{age} = 20.872$, $SD = 1.555$; 25 females) from the same population as the main study were recruited for a pretest. All the participants were randomly assigned to either the self-focus or control condition. In the self-focus condition, participants were instructed to write their name on the board. In the control condition, participants were told to write any two random words that came to their mind. After writing the words, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they were focusing on themselves when they were completing the task (1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent). Analysis revealed that, as expected, writing one's name on a product significantly increased focus on the self ($M_{name} = 4.220$, $SD = 1.139$; $M_{non-name} = 3.080$, $SD = 1.166$; $F(1, 46) = 11.377$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .202$).

Procedure and Stimuli. The procedure for this study mirrored that in study 2b. However, unlike studies 1 and 2b, before participants proceeded to take a picture, those in the self-focus condition were told to write their name on the boogie board. On the other hand, participants in the control condition were told to write any two words that came to mind. After the participants had written their name or words, those in the selfie condition proceeded to take a selfie of themselves holding the board, whereas those in the non-selfie condition had their picture taken by the research assistant. After the photo was taken, participants proceeded to complete a short survey that included the 7-item self-brand connection scale. Participants also provided their demographic details and indicated what they thought the study was about. No participants correctly identified the purpose of the study. Participants were debriefed before leaving the lab.

B. Results and Discussion

Self-Brand Connection. Responses of two participants who did not respond to all the dependent measures were excluded from the analysis. For the analysis, participants' rating of the 7-item self-brand connection scale was averaged ($\alpha = .966$). ANOVA on the mean of the self-brand connection, with self-focus and focus as independent variables, showed a significant main effect of self-focus ($F(1,145) = 12.910, p < .001, \eta^2 = .082$) but an insignificant main effect of campaign type ($F(1,145) = 1.430, p = .234$). More importantly, there was a significant interaction between self-focus and focus ($F(1,145) = 4.587, p = .034, \eta^2 = .031$). To probe the interaction effect further, planned contrast analysis was conducted within each self-focus condition. Analysis showed that in the control condition, participants in the selfie condition exhibited significantly lower self-brand connection relative to those in the non-selfie condition ($M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.256, SD = 1.014; M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.812, SD = 1.017; F(1,145) = 5.381, p = .022, \eta^2 = .036$). This result mirrored the findings obtained in study 1. However, when self-focus was heightened, the difference in self-brand connection between participants in the selfie and non-selfie condition was eliminated ($M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.014, SD = 1.048, M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 1.857, SD = .976; F(1,145) = .464, p = .497$; see figure 1). This is consistent with our argument that when participants in the non-selfie condition were made to focus on themselves, they would behave similarly to those in the selfie condition.

Figure 1: Self-brand connection for self-focus versus control conditions

Discussion. The findings from this study showed that directing participants' attention to themselves eliminated the differences in self-brand connections between the selfie and non-selfie conditions. Together with the mediation evidence in study 2b, the studies provided converging evidence that enhanced self-focus is the underlying factor impeding the development of self-brand connection when consumers are taking a selfie with the brand (H2). Further, this study also shows that writing one's name versus other words on the stimulus can effectively manipulate self-focus thus significantly impact the usefulness of selfie versus non-selfie campaigns. Building on these findings, study 3 and study 4 proceed to examine how brand characteristics can help to mitigate this effect.

9. STUDY 3: REVERSAL WITH IDENTITY-LINKED BRANDS

A. Method

Objective and Participants. Studies 1 and 2 established the generalizability and robustness of the main effect (H1) and the mediating role of self-focus (H2). Across different brands and product categories, we show that non-selfie campaigns work better than selfie campaigns in establishing a connection with consumers. However, that naturally leads to the question most marketers would be interested in answering: Are there situations in which selfie campaigns would work better than non-selfie campaigns? Building on studies 1-2, study 3 tests the proposition that brands linked to consumers' sense of self (i.e., identity-linked brands) would benefit from selfie campaigns (H3). In addition, study 3 aims to show the downstream impact of selfie taking on participants' likelihood of buying and test against the potential confound that selfie taking (versus having one's photos taken by others) may evoke different levels of involvement. One may argue that consumers could be more involved when they are taking a selfie and that this affected their responses. This study aims to show that selfie taking (versus having one's picture taken by others) did not lead to different levels of involvement. One hundred and fifty-two participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 22$ years, $SD = 1.952$; females = 86) from a large university were recruited to participate in this study. We adopted a 2 (Type of product: identity-linked versus non-identity linked) X 2 (Campaign: Selfie versus Non-Selfie) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to each condition and the study was conducted with each participant individually.

Pre-test. For the focal products in the study, we opted for two plush toys (see Appendix C). As the participants were recruited from Singapore, for the identity-linked product, we chose a plush toy that featured a type of ice-cream bread commonly sold in Singapore. This product is unique to Singapore's culture and identity. For the non-identity-

linked product, we opted for another plush toy that features a French baguette. Although baguettes are very common in Singapore, the local community does not regard them as part of its identity.

To test whether our intuition was accurate, a pre-test was conducted to examine whether the participants felt a greater sense of identification with the ice-cream bread plush (versus the French baguette plush). Forty-five participants ($M_{age} = 20.666$, $SD = 1.398$, 27 females) from the same student population were recruited for the pretest. Participants were shown either the ice-cream bread plush or the French baguette plush. Next, they were asked to indicate whether the product evoked their sense of identity and whether they could see the product as an extension of their identity ($\alpha = .975$; 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Analysis on the mean of the two items showed that participants were more likely to rate the ice-cream bread plush as being part of their identity, relative to the French baguette plush ($M_{ice-creambread} = 3.409$, $SD = 1.501$; $M_{Frenchbaguette} = 2.109$, $SD = 1.322$; $F(1,43) = 9.530$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .181$). In addition, to assess whether the two plush toys were equally attractive, the participants were asked to indicate how they felt about the toys on a 3-item, 7-point scale (1 = negative/unfavorable/dislike, 7 = positive/ favorable/ like; $\alpha = .822$). Analysis of the mean of participants' responses on the three items showed no significant difference in attitude toward both products ($M_{ice-creambread} = 5.287$, $SD = .977$; $M_{Frenchstuffedbread} = 5$, $SD = 1.049$; $F(1,43) = .905$, $p = .347$).

Procedure and Stimuli. The procedure for this study mirrors that described in studies 1 and 2. Participants were randomly assigned to take a picture with either the ice-cream bread plush or the French baguette plush. Those in the selfie condition took a picture on their own, whereas those in the non-selfie condition had their picture taken by a research assistant. After taking the photos, the participants completed a survey, which included the 7-item self-brand connection scale (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). They were also asked to indicate how likely

they would be to buy the product (1= extremely unlikely, 7= extremely likely) and how involved, motivated and interested they were when completing the survey (7-point scale; 7 = highly involved/ motivated/ interested). Finally, participants provided their demographic details and were asked about their thoughts on the study's purpose. No participants correctly identified the research question. Upon completing the study, the participants were debriefed.

B. Results and Discussion

Self- Brand Connection. Responses of one participant who did not respond to all the dependent measures were excluded from the analysis. A two-way ANOVA on the mean of participants' rating on the 7-item self-brand connection scale ($\alpha = .921$) revealed a significant interaction of campaign and product type ($F(1,147) = 9.169, p = .003, \eta^2 = .059$) (see figure 2 on the next page). The main effects of campaign ($F(1,147) = .002, p = .967$) and product type ($F(1,147) = 2.733, p = .100$) were not significant. Contrasts showed that in the ice-cream bread plush condition, participants exhibited a significantly stronger self-brand connection in the selfie (versus non-selfie) condition ($M_{selfie} = 2.752, SD = .938; M_{non-selfie} = 2.270, SD = .926; F(1,147) = 4.372, p = .038, \eta^2 = .029$). Conversely, in the French baguette plush condition, self-brand connection was significantly higher in the non-selfie (versus selfie) condition, replicating our earlier findings ($M_{selfie} = 1.996, SD = 1.017; M_{non-selfie} = 2.492, SD = 1.077; F(1,147) = 4.807, p = .030, \eta^2 = .032$).

Likelihood of buying. In addition to self-brand connection, we also measured participants' purchase intention. A two-way ANOVA on participants' likelihood of buying the product revealed a significant interaction of campaign and product type ($F(1,147) = 5.195, p = .024, \eta^2 = .034$) (see figure 3). A planned contrast showed that participants in the ice-cream bread plush condition exhibited a significantly higher purchase intention in the

selfie (versus the non-selfie) condition ($M_{selfie} = 4.081$, $SD = 1.705$; $M_{non-selfie} = 3.243$, $SD = 1.738$; $F(1,147) = 4.754$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2 = .031$). Alternatively, in the French baguette plush condition, purchase intention was directionally higher in the non-selfie (versus selfie) condition, although the difference did not attain statistical significance ($M_{selfie} = 2.769$, $SD = 1.563$; $M_{non-selfie} = 3.158$, $SD = 1.602$; $F(1,147) = 1.064$, $p = .301$).

Confound check - Involvement. To check whether taking a selfie is more involving than having another person taking a photo for oneself, ANOVA on the mean rating of the 3-item involvement scale ($\alpha = .873$) was conducted. Analysis revealed no significant difference in involvement level across selfie (versus non-selfie) conditions ($M_{non\ selfie} = 3.057$, $SD = 1.305$; $M_{selfie} = 2.705$, $SD = 1.086$; $F(1,149) = 2.483$, $p = .117$, $\eta^2 = .016$).

Figure 2: Interaction between campaign and product type on self-brand connection

Figure 3: Interaction between campaign and product type on Likelihood of Buying

Moderated mediation. Finally, to test my hypothesized process, we performed a moderated mediation analysis using Model 7 by Preacher & Hayes (2008). I entered type of photo (selfie vs. non-selfie) as the independent variable, likelihood of buying as the dependent variable, identity linked brand as the moderator, and self-brand connection as the mediator. A bootstrapping analysis with 5000 resamples indicated an indirect pathway through self-brand connection of the purchase intention ($\beta = -.478$, $SE = .222$, 95% $CI [-1.025, -.133]$). Further analyses of conditional indirect effects revealed that the effect of photo type on purchase intention (likelihood of buying) through self-brand connection was significant in both identity linked ($\beta = -.236$, $SE = .134$, 95% $CI [-.567, -.029]$) and non-identity linked conditions ($\beta = .242$, $SE = .141$, 95% $CI [.023, .585]$), but in opposite directions. In other words, for non-identity linked brands, non-selfie (vs. selfie) leads to higher self-brand connection, which leads to higher purchase intention. In contrast, for identity linked brands, non-selfie leads to lower self-brand connection, which leads to lower purchase intentions.

Discussion. Results of this study add to the findings of studies 1 and 2 by showing that selfie campaigns may lead to stronger self-brand connection and purchase intention for brands that are linked *a priori* to consumers' identity. This study is significant because it shows some brands may benefit from selfie campaigns. Linking a product to consumers' identity (e.g., by highlighting the brand's country of origin) is a fairly common marketing strategy. This study shows that brands adopting such strategies may benefit from selfie campaigns. From a segmentation point of view, in any selfie campaign, people who participate in the campaign would include existing and potential customers. Existing customers would probably have included the brand in their self-identity. If so, selfie campaigns may reinforce the relationship. However, selfie campaigns may not help build relationships with new customers. The next study (study 4) tests the moderating role of brands that fit with consumers self-expression goals.

10. STUDY 4: MODERATING ROLE OF “COOL” BRANDS

A. Method

Objectives and Participants. Building on study 3, study 4 aimed to examine whether brands that exclude certain desirable associations (e.g., “coolness”) may be immune to the selfie effect (H4). One hundred and sixty-seven undergraduate students ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.383$ years, $SD = 2.358$; 100 females) from a large university were recruited for this study. The study adopted a 2 (Brand: Beats versus Sony) X 2 (Campaign: Selfie versus Non-Selfie) between-subjects design, and participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The study was conducted with each participant individually.

Pre-test. Beats and Sony were chosen as the focal brands (see Appendix C) as pretest showed that Beats is generally considered “cool” and fitting with millennials’ desired self whereas Sony is viewed as “uncool”. For the pretest, 24 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.208$, $SD = 1.215$, 16 females) from the same population as the main study were recruited. Participants were asked to evaluate the two brands – Beats and Sony – on four attributes: “popular,” “cool,” “fashionable,” and “trendy” ($\alpha = .854$; 1 = unpopular/ uncool/unfashionable/untrendy, 7 = popular/cool/fashionable/trendy). Every participant evaluated both brands and the order in which the brands were presented were randomized. A repeated-measures ANOVA on the mean of the four items showed that Beats was seen as significantly “cooler” than Sony ($M_{\text{Sony}} = 3.239$, $SD = 1.305$; $M_{\text{Beats}} = 5.458$, $SD = 1.138$; $F(1, 23) = 49.598$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .683$).

Procedure and Stimuli. The procedure for this study mirrored that in studies 1 and 2. Participants either clicked a selfie or had their picture taken by the research assistant while they were holding a Beats (or Sony) headphone. After taking the photos, participants completed the seven- item self-brand connection scale (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). In addition, they were also asked to indicate how likely they would be willing to pay a premium

for this brand (1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely). Lastly, they provided their demographic information, before being debriefed.

B. Results and Discussion

Self-Brand Connection. A two-way ANOVA on participants' self-brand connection ($\alpha = .921$) revealed a marginally significant interaction of campaign and brand on participants' self-brand connection ($F(1,163) = 3.547, p = .061, \eta^2 = .021$) (see figure 4 on the next page). Planned contrast revealed that participants in the Sony condition ($M_{selfie} = 2.794, SD = .788; M_{non-selfie} = 3.175, SD = .843; F(1,163) = 4.370, p = .038, \eta^2 = .026$) exhibited significantly lower self-brand connection in the selfie (versus non-selfie) condition. However, in the Beats condition, the difference in self-brand connection between the selfie and non-selfie conditions was not significant ($M_{selfie} = 3.320, SD = .966; M_{non-selfie} = 3.418, SD = .626; F(1,163) = .304, p = .582$).

Willingness to pay a premium. A two-way ANOVA on participants' willingness to pay a premium for the brand also revealed a significant interaction of campaign and type of brand ($F(1,163) = 6.874, p = .010, \eta^2 = .040$) (see figure 5). Mirroring the results for self-brand connection, participants in the Sony condition indicated a lower willingness pay a premium for the product in the selfie (versus non-selfie) condition ($M_{selfie} = 3.171, SD = 1.641; M_{non-selfie} = 4.025, SD = 1.527; F(1,163) = 5.575, p = .019, \eta^2 = .033$). However, the effect was attenuated in the Beats condition ($M_{selfie} = 4.268, SD = 1.673; M_{non-selfie} = 3.800, SD = 1.659; F(1,163) = 1.775, p = .185$).

Figure 4: Interaction between campaign and type of brand on self-brand connection

Figure 5: Interaction between campaign and type of brand on price premium

Discussion. Findings from this study supported H4 and showed that brands considered “cool” and fit consumers’ desired self may be immune to the detrimental effect of selfie

taking. This suggests such brands may be able to reap the benefit of selfie campaigns (e.g., tap into consumers' social network, gain greater visibility) without having to deal with the downside of selfie taking on self-brand connection. Collectively, studies 3 and 4 demonstrated important boundary conditions for the detrimental effect of selfie campaigns on self-brand connections.

11. GENERAL DISCUSSION

A. Summary of Findings

The conventional wisdom in the industry is that selfie campaigns may help brands establish a stronger connection with their consumers. This underlying belief is reflected in articles published in professional magazines (e.g., *Marketing Interactive*, *AdWeek*) and also in a survey, we conducted with a group of marketing managers. We argue that taking a selfie leads to greater self-focus and this has important implications on consumers' self-brand connections and attitude towards the brand. However, across seven studies, we show that such faith in selfie campaigns in building self-brand connection may be misplaced. Prior research has shown that people naturally focus on themselves, and that this focus can be heightened by external stimuli (Barasch and Berger 2014). Anything that directs attention to the self helps elicit a strong self-focus (Gibbons 1990). This research shows that selfie-taking may be one such situation. When consumers take a selfie with a brand, they are focusing on themselves and not on how the brand is connected to them. As such, selfie campaigns may impede the establishment of self-brand connection (studies 1a to 2c). However, that does not mean selfie campaigns are detrimental to the establishment of self-brand connection across all brands and situations. Study 3 shows that selfie campaigns may facilitate the reinforcement of self-brand connections for identity-linked (versus non-identity linked) brands. We further show that the detrimental effect of selfie campaigns on self-brand connections is also attenuated for "cool" brands (study 4). Collectively, the studies provide converging evidence across different brand and product categories to support our proposition that marketers need to be cautious in adopting selfie campaigns, as there are important nuances in how such campaigns may influence the way consumers connect with the brand.

B. Theoretical Contributions

Findings from this research contribute to the literature on multiple fronts. First, we contribute to the self-brand connection literature by identifying an important factor that may impede the establishment of self-brand connection. Understanding when and how brands can establish stronger relationships with consumers is increasingly important in this social media era as a strong relationship helps a brand stand out and defend itself against its competitors. In light of its importance, as reviewed earlier, much research has examined how consumer-related factors, such as self-brand congruency, mortality salience, or group membership (e.g., Escalas and Bettman 2005; Rindfleisch et al. 2008), and brand-related factors, e.g., uniqueness of the brand, anthropomorphized brand, etc. (Kim and Kramer 2015; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Netemeyer et al. 2004) may influence self-brand connection. However, despite substantial research in this area, prior research has not examined how selfie campaigns may influence the extent to which consumers connect with a brand. This gap in the literature is glaring as the market is replete with examples of selfie campaigns. More crucially, there is a widely held lay belief that selfie campaigns may help brands build relationship with consumers. Our findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating an interesting nuance to the impact of selfie campaigns. By highlighting the potential detrimental impact of selfie campaigns on self-brand connection, we add an important antecedent to the self-brand connection literature. In doing so, we also connect the two disparate streams of research on self-brand connection and selfie which has evolved independently till now.

Second, we contribute to the self-brand connection literature and, more broadly, the self-concept literature, by highlighting how there may be a case of “too much self” in self-brand connection. Theoretically, the existing literature has generally assumed that activating the self would facilitate building a self-brand connection (MacInnis and Folkes 2017; Shen et

al. 2018). For example, Shen et al. (2018) activated people's self-concept by asking them to talk about the brand (versus write) and showed stronger self-brand connection. This research shows a boundary condition to the assumption. We show that in situations in which people are highly self-focused, it is harder for brands to establish a connection with them. The key to establishing an effective self-brand connection is to emphasize the "connection" part. In doing so, we provide a more nuanced discussion of self-brand connection and highlight an important boundary condition previously not envisioned in the literature.

Third, our findings also contribute to the emerging body of literature on selfie and selfie-taking behaviors. Despite the ubiquity of selfie campaigns in this era, there is a dearth of research on the impact of selfies. The handful of research in this area has focused mainly on understanding how personality traits such as narcissism and materialism may impact individuals' tendency to engage in selfie-taking behavior (Halpern et al. 2016; Katz and Crocker 2015). Examination of the downstream consequences of selfie-taking is sparse currently. Thus, this research expands the inquiry by investigating the downstream impacts of selfie taking and examining how brand-relevant factors (such as brand personality) may influence the impact of selfie-taking on consumer behavior.

Lastly, our findings also contribute to the branding literature at a broader level by showing how brand positioning and identity may play an important role in the success of selfie campaigns. There has been much research on brand identity and image (Belk 1988; Graeff 1996) in the literature. A consistent conclusion from this stream of research is the importance of brand image and consumer identity congruency (Belk 1988; Graeff 1996; Hong and Zinkhan 1995; Sirgy 1985). Prior research shows that congruency leads to a more positive brand attitude and purchase intention (Graeff 1996; Sirgy 1985). Our research builds on this stream of research by showing how a fit between a consumer's desired image and a brand's positioning may also negate the detrimental effect of selfie campaigns on self-brand

connection.

C. Managerial Implications

Our findings have significant implications for managers as well. As mentioned, selfie campaigns are ubiquitous, but marketers have been adopting such campaigns without much insight into how such campaigns would really influence their brands. Granted, there may be many reasons why marketers may launch a selfie campaign. Regardless of the reasons, it is important for marketers to know potential negative or positive impacts of such campaigns. For a marketer who hopes to use selfie campaigns to build a relationship with consumers, our findings would suggest that selfie campaigns may not necessarily be the best way to do so unless their brands fit consumers' identity or their desired self. For marketers who hope to use selfie campaigns to generate buzz and gain some visibility in the marketplace, it is still important to be aware of the potential downstream impacts of selfie campaigns on self-brand connection. Our findings would suggest marketers need to adopt selfie campaigns with some caution.

Beyond highlighting the potential detrimental impact of selfie campaigns on self-brand connection, our studies also provide tangible recommendations on the type of brands that may benefit from using selfie campaigns to establish connection with consumers. Specifically, our findings would be applied to brands that try to connect with consumers' identity (e.g., by highlighting the local heritage of the brand) in their marketing strategy.

From a segmentation point of view, our findings also point to possible differences in reaction to selfie campaigns for a brand's existing and potential customers. Since existing customers may have already incorporated the brand in their identity, selfie campaigns may help to reinforce such relationships. This applies to people who post selfies of themselves with a brand (e.g., a selfie of them wearing a pair of Nike shoes) without any encouragement

or incentives from the firm. In such instances, our findings in studies 3 and 4 would predict that taking a selfie with the brand would lead to a stronger self-brand connection. However, if a firm launches a selfie campaign to attract new customers, this may backfire as taking a selfie with the brand may inhibit the establishment of self-brand connection with this group of consumers.

This research also shows that writing one's name versus other words on the target object or stimulus can impact self-focus thus significantly impacting the effect of selfie versus non-selfie campaigns. This has significant implications for the managers who can manipulate self-focus to suit their campaign style. The current research shows this by using the boogie board in two different ways (writing one's name vs. writing some words). These findings also suggest that marketers will stand to benefit from campaigns that fit with their brand or product type.

It is important to qualify that in this research we are only interested in examining the impact of selfie campaigns on self-brand connection. Given that the current research has not examined the impact of selfie-taking on other downstream effects (e.g., the ability to create buzz), we are not proposing that marketers should not use selfie campaigns. What we do propose is marketers should understand the objective of their campaigns and examine whether selfie campaigns fit their brands. If they eventually decide to pursue selfie campaigns to fulfill other marketing objectives, they should think of ways to mitigate the negative impacts of such campaigns on self-brand connection. Our findings show that there are greater nuances in how selfie campaigns may affect self-brand connections. Marketers need to be cognizant of such nuances and determine if selfie-campaigns are suitable for their brands.

D. Limitations and Future Research

It may be argued that high self-focus elicited by selfie (versus non-selfie) campaigns is temporal and has no lasting or permanent implications for the consumer taking part in the selfie (versus non- selfie) campaign. The current research does not measure the impact of selfie (versus non- selfie) campaigns over a stretch of time or days. Future research can delve deeper into this line of inquiry and examine this effect over a longer duration to see if the self-focus triggered by selfie-taking has any long-lasting benefits.

Second, an alternative explanation that may compete with the current explanation is that the negative effect of the selfie campaign could be a reactance effect. In the current research, all the participants invited to participate in the study were randomly assigned to the selfie and non-selfie condition. It may be argued that if people are forced to take a selfie with a brand that they do not particularly like, that may result in explaining the proposed effect. In a real-life setting, people usually choose themselves whether to click a selfie or not. Does voluntarily clicking a selfie (versus non -selfie) elicit a higher connection with the brand? Or does voluntarily clicking a selfie (versus non -selfie) make oneself even more self-focused? Past research shows that selfies are typically clicked for self-objectification (Cohen, Newton-John, and Slater 2018) and self-expression (Hess 2015). Furthermore, selfie taking is positively linked to narcissism (Fox & Rooney, 2015). It is possible that people who voluntarily click a selfie with a brand may become even more self-focused to form a self-brand connection compared to people who click a non-selfie with a brand. However, even if that was the case, it would extend the current body of work and its contributions. However, it would be interesting to see if the proposed effect of selfie (versus non -selfie) strengthens or weakens if consumers are asked to voluntarily click a selfie or a non-selfie with a brand. People's prior preference for a selfie (versus non-selfie) may have a differential impact on their self-brand connection and future research can examine this in greater detail.

Additionally, in all the studies, participants are given a pre-chosen brand to click a selfie (versus non-selfie) with it. In the context of choice, it would also be useful to explore the impact of a selfie (versus non-selfie) on a brand of choice of the participant. People make choices every day. The deliberative process that leads to adopting certain choices and rejecting others defines one's identity and values (Manyiwa and Crawford 2002). Prior research has shown that when a consumer is given an option to choose between various brands, the acquired brand readily becomes part of the consumer's identity, as one is likely to attribute the choice to his or her own preferences and fit with their identity (Mittal 2006). Such acquisitions reflect not only a distinction but also an integration or association of the self with the chosen brand (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). It is plausible to argue that providing consumers with a choice of brand for the purpose of a selfie (versus non-selfie) may attenuate the negative effects of selfie campaigns. We do have some preliminary evidence to indicate the same. We conducted another study whereby we presented the product as people's own choice (versus no-choice). Specifically, in the choice condition, for the purpose of selfie (versus non-selfie), participants were asked to choose between two products of the same brand (yellow silicone nightlight or a blue silicone nightlight). Analysis showed that participants in the no-choice condition showed significantly lower self-brand connection in the selfie condition ($M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.290$, $SD = .877$) (versus non-selfie) ($M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.922$, $SD = .812$; $F(1,163) = 9.569$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .067$). More importantly, in the choice condition, the difference in self-brand connection between the selfie and non-selfie conditions was not significant ($M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.817$, $SD = .762$; $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.757$, $SD = .841$; $F(1,163) = .094$, $p = .760$). Although the choice of the brand/product was only manipulated by different colors, it does provide significant preliminary evidence to highlight the importance of choice. In addition, this may also provide some interventions that marketers can adopt (e.g., giving

consumers the illusion of choice) to mitigate the negative effect of selfie campaigns on self-brand connection.

Further, most of the brands that use such campaigns are not only targeting the selfie-takers but also people viewing those selfie campaigns. The current research only measures the impact on the user clicking the selfie (versus non-selfie) with a brand on his/her self-brand connection. It does not delve deeper into other aspects of campaigns that involve posting such pictures on the users' social media accounts for maximum network exposure. Extant research has talked about the effects of posting selfies and non-selfies on social media accounts (Barry et al. 2019; Lim 2016; Ridgway and Clayton 2016; Sung et al. 2016; Zheng, Ni, and Luo 2019). For example, GoPro used selfie campaign effectively by asking their customers to click selfies with spectacular views (Lim 2016). Such campaigns can become instantly viral for marketers' benefit. Thus, it is possible that brands can simply leverage the consumers' social media networks by asking them to post their selfies or non-selfies with their brands to increase their brand awareness. If a campaign becomes viral because of other factors not related to the brand, then such factors could be considered. Future research can explore other brand measures and contexts (e.g. posting the selfies) to gauge the effectiveness of selfie campaigns.

Interestingly, past research has also shown that posting selfies on social media platforms is linked to attention-seeking behaviors (Ridgway and Clayton 2016) and people who post more selfies are perceived more negatively (e.g., lonely, less successful) (Barry et al. 2019). This research also does not explore these spill-over effects of posting selfies clicked by the participants. Future research can explore the effect of posting selfies (versus non-selfies) on the viewer's perception of the brand. The negative inference of the one who has posted the selfie (versus non-selfie) could spill-over to the brand, negatively impacting the viewer's perception of the brand.

The current research does not measure downstream consequences that are incentive-compatible or reflect a real-life setting. To strengthen the current findings, it would be useful to have an incentive-compatible downstream consequence of such campaigns. However, the current findings are also robust and replicable across a variety of product types and brands. Nonetheless, future research can analyze and measure the increase in brand sales or brand volume by employing such campaigns. This would add to the existing understanding of their impact in a real-world scenario and across a different set of consumers.

This research shows that selfie versus non-selfie campaigns impact self-brand connection and other positive attitudes towards the brand. Further, we also talk about how certain brands moderate the proposed effect. The current research mainly focuses on brands that are very close to a person's sense of self; brands that are linked to one's identity or cool brands. This research does not delve into different types of brands. It is possible that brands perceived as having similar values with oneself (e.g. focus on sustainability) (Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibañez 2012), having other desired values (e.g. pro-social values) (Singh, Iglesias, and Batista-Foguet 2012) or conspicuous brands (Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon 2010) can also benefit from the selfie campaigns. Future research can investigate additional product types or brands that may also work well with selfie campaigns. Selfie with such brands could automatically direct peoples' attention to the significance of the brand to their self thus facilitating a strong self-brand connection.

Finally, this research shows the effects for brands that are clicked through one's smartphone. Interestingly, most of the selfie campaigns are launched by the leading smartphone brands such as Samsung, Apple, etc. The proposed effect could be different, if the focal object and the device through which the selfie (vs. non-selfie) is taken are the same. For example, using a smartphone to click a selfie (versus non-selfie) may impact one's self-brand connection with that smartphone and its brand. Prior research has shown that taking a selfie

enables the self (Weiser 2015), it is possible that the instrument of selfie- taking is seen as an extended part of the self, thereby increasing its self-brand connection with the selfie user.

Future research may delve deeper into finding such ways that fit better with selfie versus non-selfie campaign.

E. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research examines the impact of selfie (versus non-selfie) campaign on self-brand connection. Selfie campaigns are used by marketers on a regular basis and this research provides the first empirical evidence for the impact of such campaigns on self-brand connection and other attitude measures towards the brand. This research shows that selfie campaigns (versus non-selfie campaigns) inhibit self-brand connection and consumer's willingness to try the brand or pay a premium for the brand. Further, we also show how this effect is mediated by heightened self-focus. This research also examines the boundary condition of the proposed effect by showing that a brand linked to one's identity can mitigate the difference between the selfie and non-selfie campaigns. Finally, this research also shows the attenuation of the proposed effect by using brands that are considered cool. We hope that these findings will provide a way for the marketers to better devise their selfie campaigns and encourage more research on other factors that may examine the relationship between selfie campaigns and self-brand connection.

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APPENDIX A

Summary of studies

Study	Objective	Experimental condition	Product	Measures	Main Results ($p < .05$ for all the results unless specified)
Study 1a	Demonstrate effect of selfie on self-brand connection (H1)	Selfie, Non-Selfie vs Control	Lindt Chocolate	Self-Brand connection(SBC)	$M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.273$ $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.817$ $M_{\text{control}} = 2.702$ $*(p = .604)$ for M_{selfie} and M_{control}
Study 1b		Selfie vs Non-Selfie (using selfie stick)	Toblerone Chocolate	SBC and Willingness to try	SBC - $M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.585$ $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.005$ WTT- $M_{\text{selfie}} = 7.08$ $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 8.07$
Study 2a	Test assumption that selfie-taking lead to greater self-focus (H2)	Selfie vs Non-Selfie	TWG Tea	Self-focused E	$M_{\text{selfie}} = 17$ out of 26 $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 8$ out of 23
Study 2b	Show mediation of self-focus on impact of selfie on self-brand connection (H2)	Selfie vs Non-Selfie	TWG Tea	Self-focus and SBC	SBC - $M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.431$ $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.870$ Self-focus - $M_{\text{selfie}} = 4.491$ $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.096$ Successful mediation by self-focus on SBC
Study 2c	Show process-thru'-moderation (H2)	(Write name vs Write random words) X (Selfie vs. Non-Selfie)	Boogie Board	SBC	SBC - Significant interaction effect Control - $M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.256$ $M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.812$

					<p>*Self-focus-</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.014$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 1.857$</p> <p>* ($p = .497$)</p>
Study 3	<p>Show reversal and attenuation effects (H3, H4)</p>	(Identity-linked brand vs Non Identity-linked brand) X (Selfie vs. Non-Selfie)	Plush toy of ice-cream bread vs Plush toy of a baguette	SBC and Likelihood of buying	<p>SBC - significant interaction</p> <p>Ice-cream bread-</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.752$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.270$</p> <p>French baguette-</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 1.996$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 2.492$</p> <p>Effect reversal for SBC</p> <p>LOB - significant interaction</p> <p>Ice-cream bread-</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 4.081$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.243$</p> <p>French baguette-</p> <p>*$M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.769$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.158$</p> <p>* ($p = .301$)</p>
Study 4		(Cool brand vs Normal brand) X (Selfie vs Non-Selfie)	Beats Headphone vs Sony Headphone	SBC and Willingness to pay a price premium	<p>*SBC – marginal interaction</p> <p>*$p = .061$</p> <p>* Beats -</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 3.320$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.418$</p> <p>* ($p = .582$)</p> <p>Sony-</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 2.794$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.175$</p> <p>WTPP -</p> <p>Significant interaction</p>

					<p>*Beats</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 4.268$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 3.800$</p> <p>* ($p = .304$)</p> <p>WTPP (Sony)-</p> <p>$M_{\text{selfie}} = 3.171$</p> <p>$M_{\text{non-selfie}} = 4.025$</p> <p>Effect attenuation for both SBC and WTPP</p>
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APPENDIX B

Self- Brand Connection Scale Items, (Escalas and Bettman 2003)

(1= Not at all, 5 = To a great extent)

1. Brand “XYZ” reflects who I am.
2. I can identify with the brand “XYZ”.
3. I feel a personal connection to “XYZ”
4. I consider this brand “XYZ” to be me
5. I feel this Brand “XYZ” could help me become the type of person I want to be
6. I (can) use Brand “XYZ” to communicate who I am to other people
7. Brand “XYZ” suits me well

Note: “XYZ” will be replaced by the brand used in the study

APPENDIX C

Other Scales used in the studies.

Study	Question	Measure	Scale	
Study 1B	How willing are you to try this brand?	Willingness to try	1= Not Willing at all	9= Extremely Willing
Study 2B	To what extent were you focusing on yourself when the picture was taken?	Self-focus	1= Not at all	7= Very Much
Study 3	How likely are you to buy this brand?	Likelihood of buying	1= Extremely unlikely	7= Extremely likely
Study 4	How willing are you to pay a premium for this brand?	Willingness to pay a price-premium	1= Not Willing at all	7= Extremely Willing

APPENDIX D

Products used in the studies.

Study 1a	Lindt Chocolate
Study 1b	Toblerone Chocolate
Study 2b	TWG Tea
Study 2c	Boogie Board
Study 3	Fictitious brand	<u>Identity Linked</u>	<u>Non-Identity Linked</u>
Study 4	Beats headphone vs Sony headphone	<u>Sony</u>	<u>Beats</u>