

The Effects of Self-Construal and Commitment on Persuasion

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Past research examining the effect of self-construal on persuasion has shown that advertising appeals that are consistent with consumers' chronically accessible (chronic) self-construal as well as appeals that are consistent with the temporarily accessible (latent) self-construal are both persuasive. In two studies, we identify brand commitment as a moderating variable that determines the effectiveness of appeals consistent with the consumers' chronic or latent self-construal. Under high commitment, appeals consistent with the chronic self-construal were more effective. In contrast, under low commitment, appeals consistent with the primed (independent or interdependent) self-construal were more effective. These findings were robust across independent and interdependent self-construal contexts.

The effect of self-construal on persuasion is yet to be clearly understood (Han and Shavitt 1994; Hong et al. 2000). Some studies have shown that a specific self-construal may be more prevalent in a culture and that advertising appeals reflecting this chronic self-construal are more persuasive (Han and Shavitt 1994). Yet others suggest that either the chronic or the less prevalent latent self-construal may be temporarily primed and that messages compatible with the primed self-construal are more persuasive (Hong et al. 2000; Oyserman, Coon, and Klemmmeier 2002). These findings suggest that whether the chronic or the latent self-construal influences persuasion is likely to be moderated by individual and contextual factors. We examine consumers' prior commitment to the target brand as a moderator of these effects.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self-Construal

Self-construal reflects the extent to which individuals view themselves either as an individuated entity or in relation to others. Aspects of self-knowledge and of self-concept that contribute to viewing oneself as a separate individual versus as part of a group lead to a particular self-construal. Hence, when self-knowledge that individu-

ates a person or those aspects of the self that emphasize independence are accessible, individuals are more likely to exhibit an independent self-construal. People with independent self-construals consider themselves as unique and value characteristics that distinguish them from other members of the group. In contrast, when aspects of self-knowledge relating a person to others or to groups are more accessible, individuals are likely to construe themselves as interdependent. People with interdependent self-construals see themselves as part of a group and define themselves with respect to other group members. Western cultures tend to reward independence and frequently activate the independent self, making it chronically accessible. In contrast, Asian cultures frequently promote the interdependent self, making it chronically accessible.

The chronic self is viewed as a frequently activated construct due to social or cultural surroundings, whereas the primed or contextually activated self can be considered as a recently activated construct (Oyserman et al. 2002). Thus, the two selves (independent and interdependent) may coexist within every individual and in any culture (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Some research has shown that within a given culture, messages compatible with the chronic self are more persuasive (Han and Shavitt 1994). For example, in the United States, where the chronic self is independent, individualist appeals (i.e., messages emphasizing individual benefits) were more effective. Alternately, in South Korea, where the chronic self is interdependent, messages emphasizing group benefits were preferred (Han and Shavitt 1994). However, priming, referencing tasks, and other situational contexts can make the latent self temporarily accessible (Hong et al. 2000). This stream of research finds that appeals compatible with the primed self are more persuasive. The

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use of the independent or interdependent self in evaluating subsequent stimuli has been employed as an indicator of the accessible self-construal (Hong et al. 2000).

The above review on self-construal suggests that individuals can have both independent and interdependent self-construals. While specific cultures may encourage the chronic activation of one self, priming can make the other, latent self temporarily accessible. Appeals compatible with either the chronic self or the primed latent self can be persuasive. We examine a relevant variable, brand commitment, that is likely to moderate the effects of self-construal on persuasion.

Brand Commitment

Commitment has formed the basis of our understanding of such key marketing concepts as brand loyalty, brand switching, and so on. Commitment has been identified as one of the two key dimensions of attitude strength (Pomerantz, Chaiken, and Tordesillas 1995). Commitment is seen as an enhanced desire to hold a particular attitude (Pomerantz et al. 1995), "the pledging or binding of the individual to behavioral acts" (Keisler 1971), and stems from association between a consumer's attitudes and a public behavior supporting their stand (Ahluwalia 2000). Lavine et al. (1998) provide some insights on the processing mechanisms employed by people with strong and weak attitudes in response to new information. Respondents with strong prior attitudes, regardless of the context, showed minimal attitude change, but people with weak attitudes showed significant differences depending on the context. Lavine and his associates attributed these findings to the relative accessibility of information relevant to chronic attitude. People with strong (vs. weak) attitudes possess a large amount of chronically accessible knowledge about the attitude object. Under strong attitudes, the easy and reliable accessibility of chronic information dilutes the impact of the contextually activated information. Since chronically accessible beliefs are context independent, strong attitudes are less likely than weak attitudes to succumb to context effects (Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988). In contrast, people with weak attitudes do not have an associated set of beliefs that can be readily activated. Hence, they are likely to utilize new information provided in the external context.

This article presents two studies that explore the moderating role of commitment in determining the effectiveness of appeals that are compatible with the chronic self or with the latent self. Study 1 was conducted in Nepal, where the inhabitants' chronically accessible self-construal is usually interdependent. Study 2 was conducted in the United States, whose citizens mostly have an independent chronic self-construal. In both studies, respondents first received information that created either high or low commitment toward a new product. Then a prime was administered to make an independent or interdependent self-construal temporarily accessible. Subsequently, participants were asked to evaluate an advertisement that presented either an individualist or a collectivist appeal.

Hypotheses

Under high commitment, we predict that appeals consistent with the chronic (vs. latent) self will be more persuasive. Committed consumers hold strong attitudes, and strong attitudes lead to increased reliance on beliefs that are chronically associated with the attitude object and to the discounting of contextual cues such as primes (Lavine et al. 1998). These consumers engage in selective processing and favorably evaluate new information that is compatible with chronically accessible information (Jain and Maheswaran 2000). While research on attitude strength or commitment has not examined the accessibility of self-related beliefs, some evidence in the marketing context suggests that beliefs related to the chronic self rather than to the product could be salient when evaluating brands.

Consumers' attitudes are correlated with self-image and product-image congruity (Grubb and Hupp 1968; Sirgy 1982). Consumers have more extreme attitudes toward brands that help to express their selves (Aaker 1999). They commit to issues that help them express and achieve their goals (Shavitt 1990; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981). Individuals with a chronic independent self are likely to prefer brands that help them be unique in their group. Thus, when consumers form a preference to a target brand, they expect it to satisfy their chronic self-based goals. Consumers with strong preferences for a brand are likely to associate their chronic self with that brand. Hence, beliefs about why a consumer commits to the target brand (e.g., "I love this product because it makes me unique" or "I love it because it helps me fit in with my friends and family") should be more accessible under high (vs. low) commitment. When subsequently evaluating the committed brand, consumers should rely on their chronic self. Even if the latent self is primed, the chronic self, triggered by the exposure to the target brand, should override the primed latent self. Hence, we expect high commitment consumers to access and rely on information related to the chronic self in evaluating the committed brand. Since committed consumers possess strong attitudes, the effect of the prime should be minimized in processing the target brand appeal.

H1: Under high commitment, the appeal consistent (vs. inconsistent) with the chronic self will lead to higher brand evaluations regardless of the primed self-construal.

Under low commitment, in accord with past research, appeals consistent with the primed self are expected to be more persuasive (Oyserman et al. 2002). These consumers hold weak attitudes and do not possess reliable and chronic beliefs about the target brand. Hence, contextually primed self-construal may be considered relevant and guide subsequent evaluations.

H2: When the brand commitment is low, the appeal consistent (vs. inconsistent) with the primed self will lead to more favorable brand evaluations.

STUDY 1

Study 1 was conducted in Nepal, where the chronically accessible self-construal is interdependent. Nepal is a small, homogeneous Hindu kingdom. It is a collectivist society similar to neighboring countries such as India but more traditional and less westernized. One hundred and sixty-seven students at a large university in Nepal participated in the study individually for partial course credit and were randomly assigned to a 2 (commitment: high/low) \times 2 (prime: independent/interdependent) \times 2 (appeal type: individualist/collectivist) between-subjects design.

Procedure. High or low commitment was induced first, followed by an unrelated filler task. Next, the respondents completed a proofreading task that primed either an independent or an interdependent self-construal. The Twenty Statement Test (TST) followed next as a prime manipulation check. Then the respondents evaluated either an individualist or a collectivist appeal followed by a set of dependent measures and manipulation checks. Finally, the Singelis (1994) self-construal scale was completed following a second filler task to neutralize the effects of the prime and the appeal. After the study, respondents were thoroughly debriefed using a respondent impression form and funnel debriefing procedure to examine potential demand effects. Experimental materials were first developed in English, translated to Nepali, and were then retranslated into English using independent translators (Brislin 1986).

Independent Variables

Commitment. Commitment was manipulated by inducing public attachment to the brand (Ahluwalia 2000). Participants learned that a professor, along with a market research firm, was conducting a consumer survey for two products: the target brand of personal digital assistants (PDAs) and the filler brand of cameras. They received two separate folders containing information on product performance, newspaper endorsements, and some research findings. Participants read the material and then recorded their name and thoughts on an audiotape. They were asked to talk specifically about the positive qualities and to suggest a slogan for both the products. The key manipulation for commitment followed the recording. To induce high commitment, participants were asked if the company that made the PDA could use their thoughts and their photograph in the company's advertising campaign. All participants agreed, signed a release form, and were photographed. Low commitment participants followed identical procedures but for the filler brand. The brand to which participants publicly attached was varied to manipulate commitment.

The efficacy of the commitment manipulation was assessed in a separate pretest using procedures identical to those used in the experimental group to avoid potential demand effects. A brand commitment index and a brand evaluation index were measured in the pretest. The commitment index included three seven-point scales anchored by dis-

agree/agree ($\alpha = .87$) to assess the extent of indifference to choosing another brand if the target brand were not available at the store, the extent to which the participants considered themselves loyal to the target brand, and finally the likelihood of their purchasing another brand that was on sale rather than the target brand (Ahluwalia 2000; Beatty, Kahle, and Homer 1988). High (vs. low) commitment participants reported a significantly higher level of commitment to the target brand ($M = 5.02$ vs. 3.82 ; $F(1, 29) = 5.39$, $p < .05$) but had equivalent brand evaluations of the target brand ($F < 1$, $\alpha = .77$).

Self-Construal Prime. The independent or interdependent self-construal was primed using a purportedly unrelated study that required the participants to identify pronouns (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Participants read a short description about "a trip to the city" with instructions to circle all the pronouns in the text as part of a proofreading study. The text contained 26 pronouns. The same text was presented with almost all of the pronouns (and other grammatical references in Nepali) being either self-oriented (I, me, myself) or other-oriented (we, us, our) to prime the two selves. The participants then completed the TST as the manipulation check for the prime. Additionally, a separate pretest was used to test the effectiveness of the prime. A separate group of respondents were administered the prime manipulation and then shown two unrelated advertisements that did not have any self-related content. The participants answered four items anchored by not at all/a lot that measured the extent to which they focused on and thought about themselves ($r = .82$) and the extent to which they focused on others and thought about their social circle ($r = .71$) while reading the two ads. Confirming the efficacy of the prime, respondents in the independent (vs. interdependent) prime condition focused more on themselves ($M_{indep} = 5.59$, $M_{inter} = 4.14$; $F(1, 20) = 10.85$, $p < .01$) and less on others ($M_{indep} = 3.54$, $M_{inter} = 5.68$; $F(1, 20) = 17.39$, $p < .001$).

Advertisement Appeal. The two advertisements featured individualist or collectivist appeals (Han and Shavitt 1994). The headlines read, "Stay in touch with yourself (vs. friends and family)." The appeals featured five product attributes framed as either individualist or collectivist benefits (e.g., the attribute "anytime access to e-mail" was framed as either an individualist ("be more informed and organized than others") or a collectivist benefit ("keep in touch with your friends and family"). The appeals did not vary in argument strength ($M = 6.02$ vs. 5.85 ; $F < 1$).

Dependent Variables

All dependent variables were assessed using seven-point scales. The brand evaluations were measured first, followed by the manipulation and confound checks.

Brand Evaluations (A_b). Participants evaluated the brand on seven items anchored by would definitely not consider buying it/would definitely consider buying it, not

at all useful/very useful, negative/positive, very bad/very good, very unfavorable/very favorable, undesirable/desirable, and inferior to competing brands/superior to competing brands. These seven items were averaged to form a brand evaluation index ($\alpha = .93$).

Manipulation Checks. The experimental groups completed several checks. After the prime manipulation, the TST was administered as a prime manipulation check. The TST asks participants to complete 20 statements starting with "I am" (Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee 1999; Kuhn and McPartland 1954). Two independent coders rated the items (82% agreement) as reflecting an independent or interdependent self. Independent items described a personal attribute, such as an attitude or an ability (e.g., "I am beautiful"). Interdependent items described a relationship or social role (e.g., "I am a good daughter") or membership in a group (e.g., "I am from the Newari community"). Unrelated items (e.g., "I am going to class after completing the survey") were excluded from analyses. The efficacy of the appeals was measured using four items that assessed the extent to which the appeal featured individual benefits and portrayed the brand as being useful in individual work situations ($r = .87$) or featured group benefits and group work situations ($r = .81$). Involvement was measured using three items (involved, interested, and motivated) anchored by not at all/a lot. The Singelis (1994) scale was administered to measure the independence and interdependence of the chronic self-construal.

Results and Discussion

The hypotheses were tested based on 2 (commitment: high vs. low) \times 2 (prime: independent and interdependent) \times 2 (appeal: individualist and collectivist) ANOVA. In both experiments, there were no systematic effects of gender, involvement, or prior knowledge.

Manipulation Checks. The TST data showed that participants in the independent (vs. interdependent) prime condition wrote more self-focused sentences ($M_{\text{indep}} = 5.11$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 3.71$; $F(1, 159) = 14.82$, $p < .001$) and fewer other-focused sentences ($M_{\text{indep}} = 3.91$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 5.75$; $F(1, 159) = 24.12$, $p < .001$). Ratings of the extent to which the ads featured individual or group benefits showed that participants perceived more individual ($M_{\text{indi}} = 4.78$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 3.73$; $F(1, 159) = 16.25$, $p < .001$) and fewer group benefits ($M_{\text{indi}} = 3.94$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 5.48$; $F(1, 159) = 44.14$, $p < .001$) in the individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal. The Singelis scale confirmed that Nepali participants were chronically more interdependent ($\alpha = .73$) than independent ($\alpha = .70$; $M_{\text{inter}} = 5.13$, $M_{\text{indep}} = 4.55$; $t(1, 159) = 7.91$, $p < .001$).

Brand Evaluations (A_b). The ANOVA on A_b revealed a significant main effect of commitment ($F(1, 159) = 16.87$, $p < .001$) and a marginally significant effect of ad appeal ($F(1, 159) = 3.18$, $p = .08$). The two-way interaction of prime \times appeal ($F(1, 159) = 7.38$, $p < .01$) was significant, and the commitment \times appeal ($F(1, 159) =$

3.39 , $p = .07$) interaction was marginally significant. Central to our hypotheses, the predicted three-way interaction of commitment \times prime \times appeal was significant ($F(1, 159) = 6.28$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 1 predicted that under high commitment, the collectivist appeal would be evaluated more favorably since the chronically accessible self is interdependent in Nepal. In accord, under high commitment, only the simple main effect of ad appeal was significant such that the collectivist (vs. individualist) appeal led to higher evaluations ($M_{\text{coll}} = 5.88$, $M_{\text{indi}} = 5.12$; $F(1, 159) = 6.77$, $p < .05$). Under high commitment, the prime did not have an effect on brand evaluations ($F < 1$). Under low commitment, the predicted simple interaction of prime \times appeal was significant ($F(1, 159) = 13.25$, $p < .001$). The independent prime induced higher evaluations toward an individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal ($M_{\text{indi}} = 5.02$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 3.91$; $F(1, 159) = 6.68$, $p < .05$). In contrast, in the interdependent prime condition, higher evaluations were obtained in response to a collectivist (vs. individualist) appeal ($M_{\text{coll}} = 5.36$, $M_{\text{indi}} = 4.27$; $F(1, 159) = 6.57$, $p < .05$). These findings support hypothesis 2, such that under low commitment, the primed self influenced evaluations. (See table 1 for means of brand evaluations and cognitive responses for study 1 and for study 2.)

In general, the findings of study 1 supported our hypotheses. Under low commitment, we replicated past research such that evaluations were influenced by the primed self-construal. But under high commitment the collectivist (vs. individualist) appeal consistent with chronic (interdependent) self-construal was evaluated more favorably regardless of the prime. Participants might have accessed information related to their chronic (interdependent) self-construal and evaluated collectivist appeals more favorably. Two issues that emerged from this study need further attention. One of the major assumptions of this study is that committed consumers use information related to chronic self-construal when evaluating the target brand. The pattern of means on evaluations supported this inference. However, study 1 provided no evidence for the underlying process. The second issue relates to the robustness of the findings in an independent culture.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was conducted in the United States, where the chronic self is independent. Our hypotheses based on evaluations were similar to those of study 1. Cognitive responses were also measured to provide additional insights on the process mechanism underlying these effects.

Cognitive Responses

Under high commitment, participants were assumed to access and rely on information related to the chronic self. In contrast, under low commitment, they relied on the primed self. This observation was based on two key findings from past research. First, attitude-strength research suggests that people with strong attitudes possess and access chronic

TABLE 1
STUDIES 1 AND 2 MEANS OF BRAND EVALUATIONS AND COGNITIVE RESPONSES

	High commitment				Low commitment			
	Independent prime		Interdependent prime		Independent prime		Interdependent prime	
	Individual- ist appeal	Collectiv- ist appeal	Individual- ist appeal	Collectiv- ist appeal	Individual- ist appeal	Collectiv- ist appeal	Individual- ist appeal	Collectiv- ist appeal
Study 1 (Nepal):								
Brand evaluations (A_b)	4.98	5.71	5.26	6.07	5.02	3.91	4.27	5.36
Study 2 (United States):								
Brand evaluations (A_b)	6.01	4.87	5.78	5.06	4.91	3.77	3.72	4.66
Thoughts related to chronic self	3.76	3.16	3.72	3.24	3.48	1.87	.84	.63
Thoughts related to latent self	.24	.76	.32	.88	.36	.95	2.28	3.92

NOTE.—Cell sizes ranged from 21 to 22 in study 1 and from 24 to 25 in study 2.

information related to the attitude object in subsequent responses to the same object (Lavine et al. 1998). Second, people tend to prefer products that are compatible with their self-image (Aaker 1999). In study 2, a thought-listing task assessed whether high commitment individuals used thoughts related to the chronic (independent) self when evaluating an advertising appeal for the committed brand. The thoughts were collected after exposure to the appeal, and the type of cognitive responses were expected to provide insights on the process issues (Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994).

Thoughts Related to the Chronic Self

In this study, commitment was induced first, followed by a filler task to neutralize the effects of the commitment manipulation. The prime and then the TST followed. The TST was used as a manipulation check to establish that the primed self-construal was activated. The target appeal was then presented, and after the respondents had read it at their own pace, thought listings followed. We expected that when high commitment consumers were subsequently exposed to stimuli relating to the committed brand, their associations to the brand related to their chronic selves would be activated. The effect of contextual information such as the prime would be minimized. Even if the latent self may have been activated by priming or the appeal, exposure to the committed brand is expected to make the associations related to the chronic self more dominant. Hence, only the chronic (independent) self was expected to influence message-related thinking. If this process inference were true, then more thoughts related to the chronic self and a minimal number of thoughts related to the latent self would be evidenced. However, under low commitment, respondents would not have a significant amount of chronic self-related associations about the brand. Hence, the primed self-construal would be more likely to guide their thinking. Depending on the nature of the prime, they were likely to elaborate on information either related to the chronic self or related to the latent self. This premise should be reflected

in the nature of cognitive responses. So, under low commitment, only when the chronic self was primed would it lead to more chronic-self thoughts.

H3a: When brand commitment is high (vs. low), more thoughts related to the chronic self (independent in the United States) will be generated.

H3b: When brand commitment is low, the prime consistent with the chronic (vs. latent) self (independent in the United States) will lead to more thoughts related to the chronic self.

Thoughts Related to the Latent Self

Under high commitment, information related to the chronic self is expected to dominate, and hence the prime related to the latent self is not anticipated to have any impact on the nature of cognitive responses. However, under low commitment, consumers are influenced by the primed self-construal. Depending on the nature of the primed (chronic or latent) self-construal, more prime-consistent thoughts will be generated. So, high (vs. low) commitment should lead to fewer thoughts related to the latent self. Under low commitment, since the prime is expected to influence the nature of the thoughts, the prime consistent with the latent self should lead to more thoughts related to the latent self.

H4a: When brand commitment is high (vs. low), fewer thoughts related to the latent self (interdependent in the United States) will be generated.

H4b: When brand commitment is low, the prime consistent with the latent (vs. chronic) self (interdependent in the United States) will lead to more thoughts related to the latent self.

Method

One hundred and ninety-eight undergraduates at a large university in the United States participated in the study for partial course credit and were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (commitment: high or low) \times 2 (prime: independent or interdependent) \times 2 (appeal: individualist or collectivist) between-subjects design. Commitment, self-construal prime, and advertising appeal manipulations were identical to those used in study 1.

Dependent Measures and Manipulation Checks. The key dependent measures were cognitive responses and brand evaluations ($\alpha = .90$). In addition to the TST data collected before ad exposure (as in study 1), we also collected separate cognitive responses using thought listings after exposure to the appeal and before evaluations. Respondents were given 3 min. to list all the thoughts that came to their mind while reading the advertisement (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991). These cognitive responses were coded as being related to the chronic (i.e., independent in the United States) or latent (interdependent) self or as other thoughts. Independent thoughts related to the self as a distinct individual (e.g., "This PDA will help me keep up with my schedule"). Interdependent thoughts highlighted relationships to others such as friends or family members (e.g., "I should get it for my Dad"). Finally, thoughts that did not implicate the self, including attribute-related thoughts (e.g., "This product has wireless networking"), advertising-related thoughts (e.g., "The ad had a cool picture of the PDA"), and irrelevant thoughts (e.g., "Tomorrow is a holiday"), were coded as other thoughts. Two independent coders coded the thoughts (89% agreement). No effects were significant on total thoughts and other thoughts ($p > .15$). Manipulation checks for appeal, prime, and involvement were collected with the experimental group as in study 1. The manipulation checks for commitment and additional checks for the prime were collected in separate pretests.

Results and Discussion

A 2 (commitment: high vs. low) \times 2 (prime: independent vs. interdependent) \times 2 (appeal: individualist vs. collectivist) ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses.

Manipulation Checks. An ANOVA on the brand commitment index ($\alpha = .87$) in pretest groups confirmed the efficacy of the commitment manipulations ($M_{\text{high}} = 5.23$, $M_{\text{low}} = 3.72$; $F(1, 25) = 8.06$, $p < .01$). Also, brand attitude ($\alpha = .83$) did not differ across the two commitment conditions ($p > .20$). In the prime pretest, participants' ratings of the extent to which the prime made them focus either on themselves ($r = .77$) or on others ($r = .79$) indicated that participants with the independent (vs. interdependent) prime focused more on themselves ($M_{\text{indep}} = 5.65$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 4.18$; $F(1, 20) = 5.79$, $p < .05$) and less on others ($M_{\text{indep}} = 3.24$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 5.27$; $F(1, 20) = 8.76$, $p < .01$). In the experimental group TST, as expected, participants in the independent (vs. interdependent) prime condition wrote

more sentences that were self-focused ($M_{\text{indep}} = 5.25$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 3.51$; $F(1, 190) = 17.35$, $p < .001$) and fewer sentences that focused on others ($M_{\text{indep}} = 3.28$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 5.53$; $F(1, 190) = 20.09$, $p < .001$). The participants exposed to the individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal thought that it featured more individual ($M_{\text{indi}} = 5.09$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 3.06$; $F(1, 190) = 83.83$, $p < .001$; $r = .86$) and fewer group benefits ($M_{\text{indi}} = 4.02$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 5.31$; $F(1, 190) = 31.87$, $p < .001$, $r = .79$). A separate pretest confirmed that the appeals did not vary in argument strength ($M_{\text{indi}} = 5.96$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 5.43$; $F < 1$). The ANOVA on involvement ($\alpha = .82$) yielded no significant effects ($F < 1$). The Singelis scale indicated that the American participants had a chronically more accessible independent ($\alpha = .69$) than interdependent self-construal ($\alpha = .83$; $M_{\text{indep}} = 5.23$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 4.76$; $t(1, 190) = 4.95$, $p < .001$).

Brand Evaluations (A_b). An ANOVA on A_b revealed main effects of commitment ($F(1, 190) = 49.98$, $p < .001$) and appeal ($F(1, 190) = 9.60$, $p < .01$). In addition, we found two significant two-way interactions of prime \times appeal ($F(1, 190) = 14.34$, $p < .001$) and commitment \times appeal ($F(1, 190) = 6.29$, $p < .05$). Most importantly, the predicted three-way interaction was significant ($F(1, 190) = 6.38$, $p < .05$). Under high commitment, only a significant simple main effect of ad appeal was observed such that the individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal consistent with the chronic (independent) self led to higher evaluations ($M_{\text{indi}} = 5.89$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 4.97$; $F(1, 190) = 15.88$, $p < .001$), in support of hypothesis 1. No other effects were significant. Under low commitment, the predicted simple interaction of prime \times appeal was significant ($F(1, 190) = 19.73$, $p < .001$). Participants in the independent prime condition had higher evaluations when exposed to an individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal ($M_{\text{indi}} = 4.91$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 3.77$; $F(1, 190) = 11.79$, $p < .001$). However, participants in the interdependent prime condition had higher brand evaluations when exposed to a collectivist appeal rather than an individualist appeal ($M_{\text{indi}} = 3.72$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 4.66$; $F(1, 190) = 8.11$, $p < .01$). These findings support hypothesis 2 that the primed self influences evaluations only under low commitment. Thus, the findings with the chronic independent self in the United States converged with the pattern of responses observed in the interdependent Nepal.

Thoughts Related to the Chronic (Independent) Self. As per hypothesis 3a, a significant main effect of commitment indicated that high (vs. low) commitment respondents had more thoughts related to the chronic self ($M_{\text{high}} = 3.47$, $M_{\text{low}} = 1.71$; $F(1, 190) = 125.51$, $p < .001$). The two main effects of prime ($F(1, 190) = 37.32$, $p < .001$) and appeal ($F(1, 190) = 21.18$, $p < .001$) were significant. The interactions of commitment \times prime ($F(1, 190) = 38.89$, $p < .001$) and prime \times appeal ($F(1, 190) = 5.74$, $p < .05$) were also significant. More important, the three-way interaction was significant ($F(1, 190) = 4.06$, $p < .05$).

Under high commitment, the individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal led to more thoughts consistent with the chronic

self ($M_{\text{indi}} = 3.74$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 3.20$; $F(1, 190) = 5.94$, $p < .05$). When the appeal was compatible with the chronic (independent) self, it led to more thoughts related to the chronic self. Under low commitment, as per hypothesis 3b, the simple main effect of prime confirmed that independent (vs. interdependent) prime induced more thoughts related to the chronic self ($M_{\text{indep}} = 2.68$, $M_{\text{inter}} = .73$; $F(1, 190) = 75.43$, $p < .001$). In addition, a significant interaction of prime and appeal ($F(1, 190) = 9.63$, $p < .01$) was also observed. Follow-up analyses showed an additivity effect such that under the independent prime, the individualist (vs. collectivist) appeal led to more thoughts related to the chronic self ($M_{\text{indi}} = 3.48$, $M_{\text{coll}} = 1.87$; $F(1, 190) = 25.68$, $p < .001$).

Thoughts Related to the Latent (Interdependent) Self. In accord with hypothesis 4a, the main effect of commitment confirmed that high (vs. low) commitment induced fewer thoughts related to the latent (interdependent) self ($M_{\text{high}} = .55$, $M_{\text{low}} = 1.88$; $F(1, 190) = 47.32$, $p < .001$). The main effects of prime ($F(1, 190) = 43.2$, $p < .001$) and appeal ($F(1, 190) = 18.41$, $p < .001$) were also significant such that the prime or appeal consistent with the latent (interdependent) self led to more thoughts related to the latent self. Finally, the commitment \times prime interaction was significant ($F(1, 190) = 36.66$, $p < .001$) such that prime had an impact only under low commitment (hypothesis 4b). Interdependent (vs. independent) prime generated more thoughts related to the latent (interdependent) self ($M_{\text{indep}} = .66$, $M_{\text{inter}} = 3.10$; $F(1, 190) = 78.92$, $p < .001$). Although the three-way interaction did not achieve significance ($p = .19$), the lower order findings provide overall support for our hypotheses.

Study 2 replicated and extended the findings from study 1 in a chronic independent self context. Under high commitment, individualist (vs. collectivist) appeals based on the chronic (independent) self were more persuasive. Under low commitment, appeals consistent with the primed self were more persuasive. More important, the cognitive responses provided support that high commitment led to enhanced elaboration on information related to the chronic self.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The findings identify brand commitment as a moderator of the effect of chronic versus primed self-construal on persuasion. Under high commitment, appeals consistent with the chronic self led to more favorable evaluations. But less committed consumers rely on contextual cues such as priming, and hence prime-consistent appeals were more effective. The findings were robust across an interdependent (Nepal) and an independent culture (United States).

Our findings contribute to research on self-construal, priming, and brand commitment. In the area of self-construal, we identified brand commitment as a moderating factor that influences when the culturally endorsed or temporarily primed self-construal would influence persuasion. While past research has not explicitly measured commit-

ment, the pattern of the findings and the operationalizations lend support to the moderating role of commitment. For example, the Aaker and Lee (2001) study used a fictitious brand and no specific attitude to the target brand was induced. This condition was similar to our low commitment condition. This study reported that the appeals compatible with primed self were more effective. Similarly, in the Han and Shavitt (1994) study, where the appeal compatible with the chronic self was more persuasive, high commitment might have been induced. In this study, the compatibility effect was observed only for shared products. Since the shared product is in a public domain, evaluating the product characteristics might have induced public attachment similar to our high commitment manipulation.

In general, we add to the growing view that both independent and interdependent self-construal can coexist within the individual and in any given culture (Hong et al. 2000). However, we also suggest that priming an alternate self-construal may not always be effective. The current research shows that individual difference variables, such as commitment, could make priming less effective by making the chronic construct more accessible. Under high commitment, we also showed that the prime was most effective when contextual information was processed, such as under low commitment. Another noteworthy contribution of our findings stems from the TST data indicating that the primed self was activated under high commitment. However, as evidenced by brand evaluations and cognitive responses, the primed self did not influence subsequent judgments. This finding provides compelling evidence that commitment to a brand enhances the use of chronic constructs and decreases the reliance on primed constructs. Future research could examine chronic versus primed constructs other than self-construal to understand the accessibility effects of brand commitment.

Recent research in marketing has examined the effects of commitment on the processing of counter- (vs. pro-) attitudinal information (Ahluwalia 2000). We extend this research by examining how proattitudinal and self-related (vs. attribute) information is processed under high levels of commitment. The current research takes a different perspective by investigating how different types of proattitudinal information are evaluated as a function of commitment. As noted earlier, our appeals were favorable overall but differed in their consistency with the chronic self. Our findings show that favorable brand information may be selectively processed depending on its compatibility with the chronic self. For committed consumers, brand information should be compatible with product-attribute expectations as well as with self-perceptions.

Although past research has attributed the attenuation of context effects under strong attitudes to the enhanced accessibility of chronic information (Lavine et al. 1998), they did not provide any evidence for this interpretation. Also, their discussion focused on issue- (vs. self-) relevant chronic information. Our findings provide insights on the potential involvement of the chronic self when committed consumers

process information. We extend past research on product-self congruity by showing that appeals related to either the chronic or the latent self could be persuasive depending on the level of commitment to the brand.

Several limitations from the current research warrant further investigation. First, we conceptualized self-construal as a binary construct. However, recent research has identified three self-construals: the personal self, the relational self, and the collective self. While the personal self parallels an independent self, the relational self and the collective self reflect an interdependent self (Brewer and Gardner 1996). This article extends the existing findings based on a binary view of self-construal by identifying the moderating role of commitment. It will be useful to examine the chronic versus temporary accessibility issues in a multifaceted view of self-construal. Second, the nature of the latent self conceptualized in the current research is in line with the dynamic view of culture as a frequently activated construct (Hong et al. 2000). The frequently activated and culturally endorsed self corresponds to the chronic self, whereas the primed and recently activated self is the latent self. The latent self is context dependent and hence likely to be multidimensional. Future research could examine the context-sensitive nature of the latent self.

Our studies suggest that when highly committed consumers are subsequently exposed to the committed brand, their brand-related chronic self associations become accessible. This inference is derived from past research on attitude strength and product-self congruity. In addition, recent research has found that the effects of the chronic self on evaluations are driven by accessibility (Hong et al. 2000). In both studies, the evaluations under high commitment support this view. Cognitive responses were used to provide insights on the process mechanism. While our findings based on the cognitive responses are informative, it should be noted that these cognitive responses were collected after exposure to the prime and the appeal. To that extent, it is not possible to distinguish whether the thoughts related to the chronic self were due to the enhanced chronic accessibility or due to the prime and the appeal. Measuring the association between the chronic self and the target brand when forming a commitment will bolster our claims. Also, in our studies, the culturally compatible appeals were both attitudinally congruent as well as self-relevant. Under high commitment, both attitudinal congruence and self-relevance could lead to persuasion. Future research could examine self-relevance independent of attitudinal congruence.

The current research is limited to the extent that it is based on one independent culture and one interdependent culture. Nepal and the United States might differ on various factors, including income and language. Also, we operationalized independent and interdependent chronic selves across studies. The robustness of these findings would be greatly improved by replication in multiple cultures that are representative of the two chronic selves or in the same country with individuals differing in chronic selves (e.g., Asian Americans vs. European Americans).

This article examined the selective processing by committed consumers of information related to the chronic self. We manipulated commitment using the public attachment paradigm (Ahluwalia 2000) that might elicit a focus on the self. Other manipulations of commitment that minimize such a self-focus are warranted. Finally, inferences from our studies are limited to one dimension of attitude strength, commitment. However, research on other dimensions of attitude strength suggests that dimensions such as embeddedness might lead to interesting effects. For example, Pomerantz et al. (1995) found that embeddedness resulted in objective information seeking. When attitudes are highly embedded, because of open-minded processing, information related to the latent self may be seen as relevant and may influence subsequent evaluations. Alternately, embeddedness of attitudes might activate constructs to which the attitude is related and make the chronic self highly accessible, leading to similar effects as presented in the current research. More generally, research could address other components of attitude strength that may provide additional and novel insights on the effect of self-construal on persuasion.

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