I, me, and mine—how products become consumers’ extended selves

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Consumer research literature has recognized the consumers’ use of products and brands as props to their self-identity. While this literature has illuminated that products indeed serve to extend one’s sense of self, the concept of ‘self’ itself is under-identified. In this conceptual essay, we propose a set of components that make up one’s sense of self. Then we identify processes through which possessions become associated with one’s identity or self-concept. We suggest the utility of using the proposed framework in practice for consumers’ self-concept profiles, and for linking brands to appropriate components of ‘self.’

Introduction

Consumers unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) know that their possessions are intimately tied to their sense of the self (Goffman, 1959; Belk, 1988). Product ownership and use help consumers define and live out their identity. Belk’s (1988) essay played a pioneering role in bringing this topic to the forefront of consumer research literature. His stream of papers on this topic (Belk, 1983, 1988, 1988, 1990) clarify the role possessions play in consumers’ sense of the self. But this task is by no means complete. A close reading of extant literature reveals two gaps: (a) the concept of ‘self’ itself is under-explicated in the consumer behavior literature; and (b) the psychological processes by which the self builds possessions into itself—to yield an extended self—also remain under-explicated.

The present article addresses these gaps. The article advances theory both about the composition of the self that consumers construct across cultures, and about the mechanisms by which this ‘self’ extends through material objects. The aim of this non-empirical essay is modest—extending current knowledge and stimulating further theory construction. And because the theory and its extension here have clear implications also for the world of practice, we present these ideas in prose accessible to practitioners and academicians alike.

The sans possessions ‘Self’

The current view holds material possessions as the extension of self (Kleine and Kleine, 1995;}
Dolfsma, 2004; Ahuvia et al., 2005). By implication, then, the current view construes a dichotomy between what one is sans possessions and what one becomes due to or with possessions. To fully explicate that view and tease out the underlying theory, it is first necessary to dissect this sans possessions' self. Decomposing the sans possessions' self would help us place possessions in a better context—how possessions fit into the consumer's self.

The sans possession' view of self is populated in the consumer behavior literature by two visibly different discourses. The first is a 'personal identity' view, wherein self is seen as a multi-faceted, multi-layered, social and psychological being, reflecting, deeply and continually, on itself. This conception has blossomed richly in the post-modern, interpretivist consumer research literature where it is referred to as the 'core self' (Giddens, 1991; Thomson, 1997). In this body of literature, a consumer's identity is deemed to reside in a personal narrative—the story consumers constantly construct and play out in their minds about who they are and/or are striving to become (McAdams, 1996; Murray, 2002). In these self-narratives, consumers play out their identities as a 'kind of performance on the stage of life, with products as props in the enactment of personalized version of cultural scripts (Ahuvia et al., 2005).

The second view of self is a trait-centered view. In this view, self is viewed as a sum of personal qualities, more or less enduring, that an individual sees himself in possession of. These include personality traits in their subjective version (i.e., personality traits as perceived by the person himself/herself) as well as any superficial behavioral and body appearance traits. This is the 'looking glass' self view where a person, as if looking into the mirror, defines his identity by what s/he sees in the mirror both on the surface and within. It is more appropriate to call this view 'self-image,' as it indeed is called in some literature (Sirgy, 1982; Morgan, 1993; Baumgartner, 2002). This trait-based self-image is construed and measured in the consumer behavior literature, basically, as a set of personal descriptors, such as 'rugged,' 'macho,' 'outgoing,' 'shy,' etc. Indeed, the singularly universal measure of self-concept found in most consumer behavior textbooks is a 15-item semantic differential scale comprising such item pairs as rugged/delicate, dominating/submissive, youthful/mature, modest/vain, etc. (e.g., Malhotra, 1981).

The two views have their relative merits, especially from applications standpoint. The self-narrative conception of identity offers a rich literary view against which products and brands may be appraised for potential fit. But it calls for intensive high-skilled ethnographic research. The self-image view lends itself to easy, quantitative measurement. But as already argued, this view is anchored and embedded entirely in personality-like dispositions and surface characteristics and ignores other 'content'—described below. This view serves, if at all, to appraise consumers' superficial images of self, and to deploy this brand of research in self-image brand-image congruency models (e.g., Malhotra, 1981; Todd, 2001). However, brand choices, particularly those made to primarily enact and advance one's self-concept, often go beyond such superficial 'image' congruency. For example, our choice of pro-environmental products reflects a self-concept anchored more in our latent values than in our visible self-image traits (cf. Joy and Auchinachie, 1994). The point is, the stinted, image-based prevalent measurement of 'self' (such as Malhotra's, 1981, scale) is conspicuously limited and is in need of fuller accounting of its content, a task to which we turn next. In essence, this content-centered view (developed below) is a 'structural' view of self wherein the components that make up the self are identified and described in the 'positivist' (not interpretivist) tradition (e.g., Sivadas and Venkatesh, 1995).

**Toward a fuller accounting of 'I'**

'I' is the consumer's self-concept or self-identity. This 'I' includes both 'sans possessions' self and the extended self, and is often...
the object of introspection among most consumers at one time or the other.

Who am I? If I say, "My name is ...", or "I am a college professor", does it really define who I am? Or may be I should ask, what am I? I could say, I am a human, a person; but then I wonder, what is this person, where is this person? "Is it in the 5'9", 190 lbs., freshly tanned body we see here? Or is it the mind that resides in this body that is I? Am I not also the values I hold and the motivations and feelings I have? And what about the clothes I am wearing? Are those also I? And am I also the food I eat, and the car I drive, and the friends I hang out with?

Questions such as these have occupied philosophers for ages, and in modern times, psychologists and consumer researchers as well. And, if you think about it, they have occupied us individually for most of our adult lives. In no small way, this preoccupation with 'who am I?' is intimately intertwined with what we buy and consume. For diverse products we encounter in the marketplace, we are constantly sticking the label, anchored in the end-points not me,' and oh, it's so me.'

Although the concept of 'I' can include virtually everything we ever come to own and live with, a systematic list would include six components: (a) our bodies; (b) our values and character; (c) our success and competence, (d) our social roles, (e) our traits, and, finally (f) our possessions. Let us discuss each briefly.

Our bodies

For most (but not all) consumers, their bodies are an integral part of the 'I', their 'self.' Of course, the connection they feel between their sense of self and their bodies varies. If we were to ask a Buddhist monk or a Hindu Sadhu, and millions of their followers, they would tell us that they think of 'I' as their soul, and since this soul is a piece of the master soul—God, they see their soul as identical to all the other souls, and viewed in this way, their 'I' has no distinctness from other 'I's of other people. Moreover, they view their bodies as temporary housing for this soul, and as such, it is seen as quite separate from their 'I.' In fact the whole goal of life in the Eastern philosophy is to get out of this temporary shell and meet their creator (see Bharati, 1985). At the other extreme, countless consumers in the West, and lately in the East as well, are obsessed with their bodies to the extent that to them the body is the end-all and the be all of their being, their 'I.' In the moderate middle of the continuum, consumers think of their bodies as part of their 'I' (Alexander, 2003).

This 'continuum' view differs from some classical research in literature. In an oft-cited research, Prelinger (1959) found that respondents considered body parts as the most linked objects to self, receiving a near-maximum rating of 2.98 on a 0–3 scale (where zero is anchored to 'not self' and '3' is anchored to 'self'). This extremely polar result is most likely due to the research task Prelinger's subjects were responding to: he had subjects sort 160 items ranging from abstract idea (e.g., morals of society, which scored 1.36) to all sorts of products such as toiletries and even one's own perspiration (scoring 1.57). In the context of these abstract and remote concepts and things, one's body might have naturally seemed more central to one's sense of self. Moreover, this study seems not to have been inclusive of consumers imbued with the Eastern philosophy of body/soul dualism (Bharati, 1985; Page and Berkow, 1991). At any rate, no matter what the respondent population, a mean score of 2.98 (which would disallow known variations in consumers' obsessions with their body image) can mean only that the respondents were rating the body parts as part and parcel of self only in a physical sense. Our formulation allows for wide variation in how the body is seen as part of the self, in a psychological, not physical, sense, across diverse consumer populations within and across cultures. The more veridical view would be that, in the conception of the self across individuals, the body-self connection varies from none to intimate.
Our values and character

The second component of the self ('I') is the values a person holds. Values have been defined as desirable ends or goals of life and the means with which one considers it proper to attain them (Rokeach, 1979). Character is the behavior of a person, at test particularly in the face of tempting opposite choices (e.g., whether or not to return the excess change the cashier gave us). Since we make deliberate choices in adopting certain values and discarding others, and make sacrifices in living by those values, these choices come to define many of us (Manyiwa and Crawford, 2002). 'I live by those values, because that is the kind of person I am' we tell ourselves. Thus, followers of Jainism value all human life (including insects) and are total vegetarians. Catholics value all human life and are prolifers and would oppose abortions. These values and character building life choices define the self for many consumers.

Our competence and success

The third component of 'I' is one's perception of own competence and success. Necessarily, every person has some self-perception of his or her competence and success in life. This relates directly to the concept of self-efficacy (cf. Bandura, 1997; Smith and Walker, 1999), which influences a person's life experiences as well as one's view of oneself. If a person views himself as competent and successful, then it builds his or her self-esteem. If consumers judge themselves to be a failure, they would suffer low self-esteem and anxiety, even depression (Cast and Burke, 2002; Kerpelman and Mosher, 2004). How they define success, and likewise competence, would vary of course. For some, success consists in acquiring more money and living a materially comfortable life; for others it might reside in being able to put their children through education and raising them to be good citizens. For still others, it might be fame and reputation.

Social roles

Social role/role identity has been used in sociology as a way of linking the individual to the social structure (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Stryker, 1980) and role identity measures in sociology (e.g., Burke, 1980) are premised on the view of the self as embedded in social roles one claims (e.g., Burke, 1980). Even the individual's personal ascribed characteristics such as age, race, and sex become the basis of macro social roles. For example, in some societies, local culture assigns specific roles to sexes, known as gender roles; likewise, social roles get specified in various cultures by age (e.g., elderly are supposed to act in a certain way, adolescents in certain other way), occupation (e.g., a doctor's role, a professor's role, etc.). And people willingly accept those role definitions as part of being who they are, i.e., as part of their 'I' (Callero, 1992; Millward, 1995; Johannesen-Schmidt and Eagly, 2002). Research has documented that consumers embed their identity in parental roles, occupational and professional roles, and even voluntary social activities (Sholomskas and Axelrod, 1986; Baldwin, 1991; Malm, 2004; Bligh, 2005). And role conflicts (when a person is torn by two incompatible roles) have been known to cause identity distress (Killeya-Jones, 2005).

Subjective personality traits

Our characteristic behaviors are called personality traits (Guilford, 1959). Personality traits—such as those captured in the Big Five inventory (John and Srivastava, 1999)—do not form the part of our 'I' directly; but rather only as they are subjectively perceived by the actor. Accordingly, personality traits that we are unaware of or in denial of do not form a part of our 'I.' Thus, our self-image of being an extrovert, social, kind, accomplished, etc. —regardless of whether we actually are so—forms our self-concept. This is, let us recall, the entire view of most current measures of self-concept. In our formulation, in contrast, this is but one of the six components of self-concept.

Our possessions

So far then, we have enumerated components of 'I' 'sans possessions.' The last but not the
least element of self is possessions, the things we own and possess. The things we own define us for two reasons: (1) We spend our life with them; they virtually surround us; so we begin to see ourselves as part of those things that surround us, and not as part of things that surround someone else; and (2) We use things to bring out our inner 'I' for display so others may see us for who we are (Eckhardt and Houston, 1998; Dolfsma, 2004). This is, of course, the central theme of all writings on possessions as part of the extended self (e.g., Schultz et al., 1989; Kamptner, 1991). Interpretivist literature has examined the love-hate relationships consumers develop with many products; also, possessions are seen as instrumental to both identity expression and identity transformation (Zukin and Maguire, 2004; Ahuvia et al., 2005). Next, we discuss how the components fit together to cause individual differences.

**How the components make the whole**

These components are basic elements, but their composition varies from one 'I' to another, and it varies in two ways. First, their proportion in the 'I' differs across individuals. Thus, for some consumers, their bodies may play no role or a minimal role; their 'I' might be made up, instead, largely of their competence and success. For others, it maybe neither their bodies nor their success, but rather their values. And for still others, their possessions might overshadow every other component. We may think of the components as ingredients, which consumers mix in different proportions to come up with their own recipe for their 'I' (see **Figure 1**).

Consider two hypothetical consumers Mark and David (see **Figure 1**). When Mark thinks of his 'I,' he thinks first and foremost of his values and character. Next comes his body image. And then, his success and accomplishments, followed by subjective personality traits and then social roles. Possessions for Mark come last. In contrast, David puts success and accomplishments at the center of his 'I.' Subjective personality traits come next, followed by social roles, values and character, and possessions, in that order. Body image comes dead last. Researchers could use diagrams

![Mark's "I"](image)

![David's "I"](image)

**LEGEND:**

- Values & Character
- Body Image
- Success & Accomplishments
- Subjective Personality Traits
- Social Roles
- Possessions

**Figure 1.** Using components to define the self
such as these to capture not just the ingredients of a consumer's self but also the relative centrality of the components.

**Possessions and 'I'**

Not all products we consume become possessions. Some are clearly consumables, not possessions. And not all products that qualify to be called possessions become part of the extended self. Even so, products (consumables and durables alike) can relate to one's self-concept without becoming part of the self-concept. This would be the case when products are instrumental in furthering some component of the self-concept. For example, consumers could love BBC News, Fortune magazine, Wall Street Journal, and Economist, because they help them achieve business success and becoming successful is part of their 'I.' One could love Bible studies and conservative (or liberal) talk shows because they build and echo one's values and character. One could also become enslaved to gym and weightlifting and anti-aging creams because they enhance one's body image. And finally, one could love one's preppy (or grunge) clothing because they help one be extrovert and sociable (a perceived personality trait). These instrumentalities create involvement, even attachment, but these products do not themselves become part of the 'I,' unless they are also viewed as possessions and a consumer explicitly defines his or her 'I' through those possessions.

Marketers should understand, therefore, just what role a product plays, or could play, in a person's 'I.' This understanding is a prerequisite to positioning and promoting products and brands as fillers of a consumer's 'I.' To recap, products can relate to self without being possessions; or without being absorbed *qua* products into one's extended self. We will return to this theme again, but for now, let us address another important issue.

**Tension between 'I' and 'Me'**

How one defines one's 'I' is one thing; how others see it is another. This view of self, seen from an observer's viewpoint has been referred to as 'social self-concept' (Sirgy, 1982). Here we will call it, simply, 'me.' Thus, 'I' is how a person sees himself or herself; 'me' is how a person believes others see him or her.

This 'me'—how I think others view my 'I,' is made up of the same elements as 'I' is made up of (see Markus et al., 1985). This is for two reasons: first because the elements are universal—they apply to everybody. Second, because a person basically 'projects' on to the other person the template he or she uses to 'read' himself or herself as 'I'—how else would the other person look at anybody else? Thus, for example if I view myself (my 'I') as my body and judge myself by the body I have, then I am going to view others by their bodies as well. I would define their person, their 'I' by their looks; if on the other hand, I view my 'I' by my skills and talents (competence), then I am going to define others also primarily by their talents. And finally if I define my 'I' by my material success, then I am going to judge others' 'I' by their material possessions. That is why materialistic persons judge others by the things others own.

But this projection of one's own 'I' template onto others causes three problems: one, the template comprises of universal elements and yet, each template is different as Figure 1 showed, it differs in the centrality of each element. Thus, in my conception of my own 'I,' if physical looks are central, then I am going to judge you largely by your physical looks; you on the other hand might define your identity by your competence. So there is a tension for you between your 'I' and your 'me.' Second, even within any given element, you might define that element by certain forms different from how others judge that element. Illustratively, I might judge success by how much money I have earned; you might judge it by how well you have developed your music skills. Third, the perception of a specific form of that element might also differ. Thus, I may consider a 3.0 GPA as being very good indicator of my intelligence but you might judge it as being mediocre. Or you might see me as very traditional whereas I might view myself as...
quite modern. Whatever be the source, the discrepancy between my 'I' and my 'Me' causes a tension. One of our strivings as self-concept expressing humans is to resolve this tension.

We propose that there are three broad approaches to resolving it: (1) switching reference groups, (2) educating others; and (3) modifying consumption. First, we simply switch our reference groups; we simply stop caring for those who hold a discrepant or negative image of us and we nurture others who might see us in ways appealing to us. This is a defence mechanism at work; accordingly, we try to drop certain people by not interacting with them or by withdrawing ourselves from common activities; or where this is not feasible, we psychologically disengage our self-esteem from them and look to others for validation of our 'self.'

Second, if we find these others otherwise attractive, i.e., we value them as colleagues and companions, and their view of us matters to us, materially and/or psychologically, then we try to correct their reading of us by educating them about who we really are. We argue with our friends, spouses, girl friends, boy friends, teachers to let them know we are not lazy, incompetent, or sloppy, or a failure; it is just that we had other pressing circumstances. 'You got me all wrong; I am not a back biter,' we might argue. Or, 'no, I would never cheat on my income taxes.' Third, we might actually try to change ourselves at least visibly so that the 'me' looks different; this works best for those whose template for judging a person is dominated by possessions and visible consumption. Consumption therefore plays a large part in resolving the tension between 'I' and 'me.' Indeed, modified consumption changes both the 'I' as well as the 'me.' Sometimes the need is to bring the projected 'me' closer to 'I' by choosing products more reflective of the true 'I.' At other times, by choosing products to index the desired 'me,' the consumer chisels to shape the 'T'—most notably the consumption-embedded view of the 'T' (see Figure 2).

How possessions become extended self

The next question is how possessions come to be viewed as part of self. The underlying processes can be postulated as follows:

By self-based choice

When they are chosen with 'I' as the gatekeeper as described above, since they pass the 'I' screen, they are, when acquired, ready to be part of 'I.' When a consumer chooses her jeans, she chooses the brand that in her mind seems to best fit her self-concept. Upon being chosen, it immediately becomes a possession prized for being an expresser of her 'I.' Belk (1988) cites Satre as a source of the idea that objects become part of self simply by being appropriated for own use. Furthermore, the very existence of 'I' entails distinction from the ocean of other 'I's that the vast mass of humans make; simultaneously, it also entails identification with a select few others. Kleine and Kleine (1995) suggest that possessions reflect both autonomy (i.e., distinction) and affiliation (i.e., identification). Accordingly, products that consumers judge to reflect autonomy and affiliation become part of 'I' upon acquisition.

By resource investment in acquisition

If we had to invest a lot of resources (money, time, energy) finding and selecting a product,
then to psychologically justify that kind of investment, we tend to view that product as part of our extended self. For this reason, more expensive purchases and hard to find purchases, and purchases for which we saved for a long time are more likely to become part of the extended self.

**By resource investment in use**

When we invest resources (time, money, and effort) in the use of products, we tend to view that product more 'I' now than when it was barely acquired. Thus, our new computer does not really become 'my computer' until we have mastered it; we have customized it; it runs to our wishes, so to speak. The kid who bought a guitar as part of his high school required class in music never really views it as part of his 'I' if he does not develop good skills using it. Thus, success in using a product is another source of the product becoming the extended self. This is a process called *appropriation*, aptly cited by Belk (1988) as a process of constructing the extended self.

**Bonding, post-acquisition**

With many products, we develop an emotional bond after acquisition and through use. First, this is due to enjoyment of the product — if the product is a recreational product and we have spent considerable number of hours enjoying it, then we feel attached to it. Toward animals and pets, which actually respond to our play actions, we develop an emotional bond. But even inanimate objects become objects of our love and affection — thus, we just love our car, with that worn out leather seat, which has acquired a permanent form to fit our particular bodies. These products and brands get tied to us through emotional connections (cf. Woods, 2004). Second, if and as the product serves repeatedly in symbolically expressing our inner 'I' to others, we begin to see that product as our true friend. All of us have a wardrobe where some clothes are more special than others, for example. And there is one dress or suit, every time we wear it, we just feel a little extra smart. That dress or suit is more a part of our extended self than other clothes in our wardrobe. Fournier's (1998, 2005) ethnographic studies vividly capture this type of bonding consumers develop with their brands.

**Collection**

Typically, a collection signifies a special interest of the collector. And because a great deal of time, effort and energy (and sometimes money) are invested in acquiring a collection, such a collection (more than isolated objects acquired) is likely to become, in the consumer's eye, more a part of self. (Belk *et al.*, 1991).

**Memories**

Finally, products that are associated with some memories, e.g., products we received as gifts from loved ones, products we used on special occasions (like on our first date), etc., become part of our extended selves. This is because memories are precious part of our life, our biography, and those objects connected with those memories are like props in the play of life. (cf. Gould, 1995).

**Self and products and the practice of marketing**

Products thus can relate to one's self in two ways: (a) by being instrumental to enhancing their 'self sans possessions,' and (b) by becoming a valued possession. As to the second role, product possessions become part of self (actually extended self) by six mechanisms described above: by self-based choice, by investment in acquisition, by investment in use, by bonding during use, as collections, and as memory markers. Figure 3 brings these ideas together.

Not all product categories have a place in a person's sense of self. Such products are best sold based on functional benefits; of course,
these functional benefits can be displayed as connected to higher level outcomes in relevant means-end-chains. Such as diet products that would lead to weight loss which in turn would lead to a better body—a component of self for some consumers. But this connection of products to self is markedly different in character and kind from a situation where the product itself is identified by consumers as reflective of their selves, such as most stylistic visible products (e.g., clothing, shoes, car, etc.) are. These identity-implementing products become part of self through six mechanisms; two of these occur prior to product purchase: self-based choice and investment in acquisition. Most marketing communications speak to the first mode. The second mode requires a more exclusive distribution and a learning-centered, consultative selling environment (e.g., a consumer learning about various iPod feature options in an Apple Store).

The remaining four mechanisms of possessions becoming extended self occur post-purchase. These mechanisms need closer study in order for practitioners to devise marketing programs that tap into these processes, for example, by creatively simulating these post-purchase consumption experiences.

The multi-dimensional view of self can also be used to segment the market by self-concept. This warrants development of measures of each component. Illustrative measures are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

The centrality of possessions themselves can be measured by such items as: My possessions are central to my identity—my sense of who I am; things I own and use hold a special place in my life; I often judge others by the kinds of their valued possessions (adapted fromDodson, 1996).

A research agenda

The structure of 'self' advanced in the foregoing draws on eclectic literatures; in so doing, it culls ideas from established theory as well as

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**Figure 3.** How products relate to self
Table 1. Components of self: illustrative measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Illustrative Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body image</td>
<td>If I don’t feel good about my body shape and appearance, I don’t feel good about myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I often judge people’s worth by their body shape and appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We should not confuse our bodies with our real self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values and character</td>
<td>Values and character make a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I judge people by their values and character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A strong character and good values show the worth of a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success and competence</td>
<td>The measure of a person is how successful he/she has been and what skills and competence he/she has demonstrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success and competence are just a matter of luck and we shouldn’t use these to judge a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social roles</td>
<td>Tell me how a person plays his/her family role and occupational role, and I will tell you what kind of person he/she is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t define a person by their occupations or their position in family and social settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived personality traits</td>
<td>When I want to know a person, I want to know what kind of a personality a person has.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To me a person’s personality is most important indicator of a person’s worth and quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shy, outgoing, aggressive, or submissive, emotional, rational—a person is much more than these.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Alternative measure of *sans* possessions self

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points (out of 50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People vary in how they think of themselves: some judge themselves by how attractive their bodies are; others by their skills, competence, success, etc.; still others define themselves by their morals, values, and character, and so on.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Below is a list of five things by which people have been found to define themselves. In your opinion, which things or items should people use to judge themselves and others? Which ones do you yourself use in thinking about who you are—indicate the relative importance of each by allocating 50 points. If you see them as equally important, then you would give each 10 points. Give more points (12, 15, 20, etc.) to the item you consider more important in defining yourself; less points to items less important, and so on, making sure that all five items still add up to 50 points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body shape and appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body shape, weight, look, and facial appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a parent, son, daughter, teacher, occupational role, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success and competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material success, career success, skills, and competence in specific activities; accomplishments in life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values and character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles in life, values by which one lives, one’s honesty, kindness, strength of character, ethics, and morality, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perceived personality traits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of personality you have like outgoing or shy, orthodox or liberal, thrifty or indulgent, rational or emotional or sentimental, youthful or mature, dominating or submissive, excited or calm, etc.—you could be any one of these. The question is, does this factor play a role in how you define yourself, and how much.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Total = 50 points)
dynamics of the conflict between 'I' and 'me,' and how consumers use product consumption to bridge the chasm. Each of these is in need of empirical testing. Some specific research questions in need of further debate are:

1. Are the five components of 'sans self' exhaustive, and, if not, then what might be missing?
2. Because the internal ingredients of individual components could vary across consumers, is the present level of aggregation appropriate, or alternatively, should components be defined at less macro level, and what these sub-aggregate categories might be?
3. What factors would explain the variations in the centrality of the five components across consumers? Is it macro factors like culture and socio-political system or is it individual ascribed characteristics, such as sex, age, income, education, etc.? And, is it possible to identify factors that would enable segmentation of target markets?
4. Is the distinction made here between possessions as instrumental versus possessions as a part of the extended-self empirically verifiable? Do consumers themselves recognize this distinction, and at any rate, does it produce for the consumer different subjective consumption experiences?
5. Do different products attach themselves differently to the five components? Is it possible to identify, for example, 'self-efficacy' building products, and separate them from, say, competence and success-indexing products? Furthermore, is it possible to delineate when managers might communicate about products as instrumental to self (i.e., self-builders or transformers) versus as indexing of the self?

**Conclusion**

Between the two extreme theories of 'self' — a narrative, autobiographic account and an image-oriented adjective checklist, there is a third view developed here, a structural or components view. In this view, self is visualized as comprising five components: values and character, competence and success, social roles, body image, and self-perceived personality traits. Consumers differ in the proportion and prominence they give these components individually, and consumers can be segmented, at least theoretically, according to differing component profiles. Whether such segmentation would be useful in crafting a more customized marketer response remains to be seen but is worthy of pursuit.

The five-component model suggests as well that product communications should choose the proper component that fits the product/brand's physical and/or symbolic essence. At the very least, brands need to understand consumers' own view of the component-specific instrumentality of the brand and then isolate consumers whose self is more centered on the component that the brand can authentically engage.

The idea that products that become part of consumers' extended selves do so by some mechanisms that occur before the purchase and some that occur afterwards also calls for further managerial reflection. For the 'before' mechanisms to work, brands need identity-engaging communications and more 'involving' acquisition settings. For the 'after' mechanisms, connections-building product use experiences would need to be simulated in post-acquisition, usage-oriented marketing events. These suggestions are necessarily broad and general, but they are advanced here to stimulate further thinking among research and practice communities alike.

**Biographical notes**

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