

Finding Brands and Losing Your Religion?

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Abstract

Religion is a powerful force in many people's lives, impacting decisions about life, death and everything in-between. It may be surprising then to learn that something as seemingly innocuous as the presence of brand name products can influence an individual's commitment to religion. We demonstrate using both explicit and implicit measures that when brands are highly salient, individuals are more likely to devalue religious commitment than when brands are not salient (Studies 1A-1B, 4). We find that this is true when brands are able to communicate a sense of identity as religion does (Study 2-3). We find that the effect is mitigated when individuals' beliefs that brands can communicate aspects of their identity are threatened (Study 5).

Key words: religion, brands, self-expression

Whether you consider it to be a source of deadly extremism or the pathway to humanity's highest potential (Pargament, 2002), few will deny the power of religion. In the United States, the most religious of developed countries, 71% of people are "absolutely certain" that God or another universal spirit exists (Center, 2010) and 59% say religion plays a "very important" role in their lives (Center, 2002). In many developing nations, religious beliefs are even stronger. Greater than 90% of people in many areas of Africa, Asia and the Middle East say that religion plays a "very important" role in their lives (Center, 2002). It is no wonder then that psychologists have been interested in the underpinnings of religion since the foundation of the discipline itself (Gorsuch, 1988; James, 1902; Leuba, 1912; Starbuck, 1899) and continue to stress its importance (Baumeister, 2002; Sedikides, 2010). We suggest that one way to better understand religion and the broader psychological needs with which it is associated is to investigate what weakens it. What leads individuals to turn their backs on religion? Brand name products may be a surprising culprit.

In this research, we ask: Can the presence versus the absence of brand name products influence individuals' religious commitment? Religious commitment is the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs and practices and uses them in daily living (Worthington et al., 2003). As one of its many important roles, religious commitment enables individuals to meaningfully position themselves in the world and communicate 'who they are' while connecting with others (King, 2003). While one might initially scoff at the idea that something as simple as brands could impact

something as important as one's religious commitment, the notion is not far-fetched when you consider important ways that the two can be linked.

In particular, both brands and religion are involved in helping individuals feel and articulate a sense of identity. In speaking of "identity", we refer to how brands and religion function as symbols of self-worth (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010; Shachar, Erdem, Cutright, & Fitzsimons, 2011), allow individuals to communicate aspects of their identity to others (Aaker, 1999; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010), and send signals of desired affiliations (Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008; Granqvist, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010; Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010).

Leveraging prior research that demonstrates that individuals devalue objects that are associated with needs that have been satisfied (Brendl, Markman, & Messner, 2003), we reason that when brands are salient, religious commitment will be lower than when brands are not salient. This is because they both satisfy a need to experience and communicate a clear identity or place in the world. Importantly, we expect that the presence (versus the absence) of brands will result in lower levels of religious commitment only when brands allow individuals to say something about who they are (Belk, 1988). Otherwise, brands are unlikely to be viewed as useful substitutes for religious commitment as it pertains to identity expression.

In sum, we aim to provide the first empirical investigation of the impact of branding on religious commitment, a relevant topic given the ubiquity of brands in everyday life and the esteem with which many hold their religious commitment. In doing

so, we provide a novel perspective on the psychological impact of branding and enhance our understanding of when and why religious commitment may be perceived as less valuable to individuals.

Religion and Identity

Given the long history and undeniable power of religion in the human experience, researchers have recently heightened the search for the psychological factors that draw people to religion and have provided insights that suggest that religiosity is complex and multiply determined (Sedikides, 2010). Among its many functions, religion provides individuals with a sense of order (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008), reduces the discomfort associated with uncertainty about life and death (Hogg et al., 2010; Vail et al., 2010), allows individuals to understand life's problems (Geertz & Banton, 1966; Park, 2005), makes suffering more bearable (Pargament, 2001) and provides prescriptions for how to live and what goals to pursue (Baumeister, 1991; Pargament, 2001).

In focusing on where religion and brands might overlap in their roles, the present research highlights another important function of religion: its ability to help individuals form their identities and locate their place in the world (Damon, 1983; King, 2003; Mol, 1976; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). The sense of identity that stems from religion allows individuals to not only see themselves as unique beings, enhancing their views of self (Batson & Stocks, 2004; Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010), but it also allows them to

experience an identity that is connected to a higher power and a community of believers (Gebauer & Maio, 2012; Granqvist et al., 2010; King, 2003; Krause & Wulff, 2005).

Particularly germane to the research at hand, religion is not only a source through which individuals form their identities, but is also an important tool for expressing such identities. For example, attendance at religious services and participation in various religious rituals (e.g., ceremonies celebrating birth, coming of age, marriage, death, etc.) are ways by which individuals affirm and express their identities (Hammond, 1988; Seul, 1999). Moreover, material symbols of religion (e.g., art, literature, dress, dance, etc.) serve as important forms of self-expression (Gaines, 1985; Keenan & Arweck, 2006; Sandikci & Ger, 2010). In fact, some researchers have equated religion to an art form given its expressive tendencies (Beit-Hallahmi, 1986; Pruyser, 1976). Others have pointed out how religious language itself is a powerful and unique form of expression that allows individuals, even in public (non-religious) groups, to communicate their place in civic landscapes (Lichterman, 2008).

Brands and Identity

Just as religion helps people form and express their identities, so do brand name products. A long line of research suggests that people construct their self-concepts and express their identities through products (Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011; Reed II, 2004; Richins, 1994; Sirgy, 1982; Solomon, 1983; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Research further suggests that brand name products are particularly well-suited for such expression because of the distinctive images and

personalities that they possess (Aaker, 1997; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Gardner & Levy, 1955; Muniz Jr & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wu, Cutright, & Fitzsimons, 2011). Aaker (1999) , for example, demonstrated that consumers express their identities with brands of different personalities (e.g., ruggedness, excitement) depending on the situation. Relatedly, Escalas & Bettman (2003) demonstrated that individuals feel a greater connection to brands that allow them to express identities that are consistent with their in-group.

Linking Religion and Brands

Together, this prior research suggests that both religion and brands allow individuals to express aspects of their identity. Thus, the notion that religion and brands may be connected and treated as interchangeable in certain functions (i.e., identity expression) seems plausible. It is an idea that is further supported by recent research by Shachar et al. (2011) that finds that when religious people are given a choice between branded and non-branded products, they are less likely to choose brands than their non-religious counterparts. While this prior research is focused on the effects of religion on consumption choices and the present research focuses instead on the less intuitive effects of brands on religion, the demonstration of a basic link between religion and brands is encouraging for the present hypotheses. Moreover, prior work has found that consumers often have religious-like relationships with their brands (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Muniz & Schau, 2005), providing additional support for the likelihood of a link between brands and religion. Further, Twitchell (2000) speculates that products may replace religion as

markers of social identity and that advertising is performing roles that have historically been associated with religion by adding value to material objects that might otherwise have little inherent value. The author also suggests that both religion and advertising provide individuals with a chance to be ‘rescued’ and converted into their desired identities (Twitchell, 2000; Twitchell, 1999).

Having established a reason to believe that brands and religion may be linked, we now focus on the specific nature of this link. We specifically focus on how the salience of brands in one’s environment (versus the lack thereof) influences religious commitment. Religious commitment, as noted previously, is defined here as the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs and practices and uses them in daily living (Worthington et al., 2003). We expect that when brands are salient (versus not), religious commitment will decline. This is because brands help to satisfy one of the functions of religion: identity expression. Accordingly, if the relationship between brand salience and religious commitment is driven by identity expression, the presence of brands (relative to their absence) should only lead to decreased religious commitment when the brands allow individuals to express the self. This is consistent with research suggesting that individuals devalue objects that are associated with needs that have been satisfied. Brendl et al. (2003), for example, have demonstrated that activating the need to eat leads to a devaluation of products that are associated with needs that are relatively satiated (e.g., things not related to the pressing need for food)—a finding that holds across different domains. Our hypothesis is also consistent with research that demonstrates that individuals can satisfy the fundamental needs of the self

through many different avenues. For example, Heine, Proulx, and Vohs (2006) theorize that in searching for a sense of meaning in life individuals might use activities that enhance self-esteem, affiliation, etc. interchangeably to help them satisfy the need. Relatedly, in the realm of consumption, researchers have found that individuals often use products as tools for satiating psychological needs and gaps, such as intelligence (Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2008), power and control (Cutright, 2012; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008) and personal freedom (Levav & Zhu, 2009). Particularly relevant, Chernev et al. (2011) have shown that satisfying one's need for expression through a given brand weakens consumers' preferences for other self-expressing brands.

In sum, the notion that individuals may satisfy basic needs through a variety of means, which underlies our hypothesized link between religious commitment and brand salience, has been revealed in a number of contexts. Yet, it may still be difficult to imagine that religious commitment—what many consider to be sacred and unshakeable—could be so fluid as to be impacted by the presence or absence of brands. It is important to acknowledge, however, that researchers have found that many of the aspects of individuals' identities that are believed to be “core” actually shift as a function of contexts and developmental dynamics (Breakwell, 1986; Markus & Kunda, 1986; Seul, 1999). And, more specific to religion, researchers have suggested that religious identity may be shifting over time in society from being an immutable, steady aspect of personality (free from the influence of situational contexts) to being an aspect of self that changes based on context (Hammond, 1988; Mol, 1976). Relatedly, Ysseldyk et al.

(2010) argue that the degree to which individuals value religious affiliation depends on whether or not their needs are being met by other important factors (e.g., other groups).

Overview of Studies

In what follows, we first test our basic hypothesis that the salience of brands leads to lower levels of religious commitment than the lack thereof (Studies 1A & 1B). We then investigate the psychological drivers of this relationship by demonstrating that brands only lead to reduced religious commitment when the brands provide individuals with an opportunity to express aspects of their identity (Studies 2-3). In doing so, since religious commitment has long been considered a multidimensional construct that can be assessed based on 1) religious beliefs and 2) religious activities (Glock & Stark, 1968; Worthington et al., 2003), we use measures that address both of these dimensions to test our hypotheses. We also, however, enhance convergent validity and minimize demand concerns by introducing an implicit measure to assess the impact of brands on religious commitment (Study 4). Finally, we further highlight the importance of identity expression as an underlying driver of the relationship between brands and religious commitment by differentiating its influence from another viable driver that is unrelated to identity expression (i.e., uncertainty/risk) and by demonstrating that our effects hold only when individuals' beliefs that brands serve a self-expressive function are in-tact (Study 5). In demonstrating the link between brands and religious commitment across these 6

studies using a variety of methods, we also address several important alternative explanations.

Study 1A

Study 1A was designed to test the basic hypothesis that religious commitment is lower when brands are salient than when they are not. Participants were given the opportunity to make several choices among branded or non-branded items and then reported their levels of religious commitment. We used this choice procedure to manipulate the salience of brands versus merely priming brands because “choice” provides a means by which individuals can express themselves and say who they are (Kim & Drolet, 2003). This is significant because we expect the salience of brands to lead to lower religious commitment only when brands are incorporated into one’s expressions of self. In this context, the brands provide the content with which individuals express their identity and the exercise of choice provides the method by which such content is communicated.

Method

Participants were 59 adults¹ recruited from a market research firm (27 females; ages 21- 69). The experiment consisted of two between-subject conditions: high versus low brand salience. Upon beginning the survey, participants read that we were interested

¹ Sample sizes for all studies were pre-set before each study was executed at a minimum of 20 participants per cell (Simmons et al. 2011). Participants volunteered to complete the studies in exchange for monetary compensation and all studies were run in accordance with IRB guidelines. The dependent variables for all studies are reported.

in understanding individuals' product preferences. They were then either assigned to a condition in which brands were highly salient or a condition in which brands were not. In the high brand salience condition (i.e., the "brand" condition), participants chose between two branded products, in 4 different sets. For example, in one choice, they decided between a Nike duffle bag and a New Balance duffle bag. In another, they chose between a Caribou coffee mug and a Starbucks mug. In the low brand salience condition (i.e., the "non-brand" condition), participants chose between the same pairs of products except the brand names were removed (appendix 1).

After making their choices, participants completed a brief filler exercise to reduce suspicion about the study's purpose². Next, participants were told that we would begin a separate investigation. They were then asked to complete the dependent measures. The first was a standard summary measure of religious commitment ("Religious Commitment Scale") that captures the degree to which individuals have incorporated religious values, beliefs and practices into their daily lives (Worthington et al., 2003). Participants rated their agreement on a five point likert scale to 10 statements such as "My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life" ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 2.92$, $SD = .97$). This scale was chosen not only because it is a brief, reliable measure of the religious commitment construct and leverages several items that have been useful in prior research, but also because it has been validated among several religions. Our second measure of religious commitment evaluated the importance of attending religious services. Religious service attendance is considered to be the most common form of "public" religious commitment

² Participants were asked to find two words in a crossword puzzle.

and is thought to be the gateway to other forms of religious commitment (Finney, 1978; Payne & Elifson, 1976). Participants indicated how important it is to attend religious services (7 pt scale, not at all important—extremely important) and how often they should attend religious services (6 pt scale: never—more than once a week) (Inglehart, 2000). Responses were formed into a standardized religious service attendance index ($\alpha = .91$, $M = -.02$, $SD = 1.82$). Finally, in seeking to more directly support the notion that religious commitment may decrease in the face of brands because religion's role in identity-expression is seen as less critical, we directly asked participants, "How important is it to you to express aspects of your identity through your religious beliefs?" (1 = not at all important, 7 = extremely important, $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.78$). No other dependent measures were taken.

Participants then indicated how the choice exercise made them feel via the PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). They also indicated how much they enjoyed making the choices (1 = dislike extremely, 7 = like extremely) and how much they liked the products that they chose between (1 = dislike extremely, 7 = like extremely). We also collected additional measures to address alternative explanations that would attribute our predicted results to 1) greater concerns of materialism or wealth perceptions being activated in the brand condition that might cause individuals to question how committed they are to religion (given that religious teachings often advise against materialism), 2) lower feelings of risk and uncertainty in the brand condition leading to less reliance on religion, or 3) differences in the amount of effort required to process brand information that might cause shifts in religious commitment. Specifically,

we asked participants to indicate whether their choices made them feel materialistic, wealthy or uncertain (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly disagree for each item). They also reported how deeply they thought about their choices (1 = not at all, 7 = very deeply), how much information they gathered about their choices from the pictures (1 = none, 7 = extreme amount), and how tired they were after making their choices (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely tired).

Finally, participants reported demographics, including age, gender and religious affiliation. No significant interactions with such demographic measures were revealed in this or the remaining studies.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the brand condition reported lower religious commitment ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.08$) than participants in the non-brand condition [$M = 3.18$, $SD = .80$; ($F(1, 57) = 4.50$, $p = .04$); $d = .55$]. The brand condition also reported lower importance of religious service attendance ($M = -.49$, $SD = 1.99$) than the non-brand condition [$M = .43$, $SD = 1.55$; ($F(1,57) = 3.96$, $p = .05$); $d = .52$]. Finally, the brand condition indicated that it was less important to express aspects of their identity through their religious beliefs ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.99$) than the non-brand condition [$M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.38$; ($F(1,57) = 5.92$, $p = .02$); $d = .45$]. Of note, no differences in positive or negative mood emerged as a function of the brand salience manipulation ($F_s < 1$). Moreover, there were no reported differences in individuals' enjoyment in making their choices or their overall liking of the items ($F_s < 1$). Individuals did not report differences

in feeling materialistic ($F(1, 57) = 1.49, p = .23$), wealthy ($F(1, 57) = .71, p = .40$), or uncertain ($F < 1$). They also did not report thinking more deeply about their choices, gathering more information, or feeling more tired ($F_s < 1$). Thus, this set of results provides initial support for the hypothesis that religious commitment is lower when brands are salient than when they are not.

Study 1B

While Study 1A provides early support for our hypothesis, one might wonder whether manipulating brand salience by asking individuals to choose between items from different brands may have caused individuals to focus on differences that are difficult to control for across brands such as brand image, familiarity, pricing or quality when making their choices. While we attempted to minimize the plausibility that such factors would influence our results by using a variety of brand pairs and by asking participants to choose between very similar items from the different brands, Study 1B replicates this prior study by asking participants to choose between items of the same brand. Thus, the expressive content of brands would still be salient, but other differences minimized. Importantly, as one might expect identity expression to be greater when choosing between different brands, this study provides a more conservative test of our hypothesis by demonstrating that even choosing from among the same brands enables individuals to express themselves with the traits and personalities of the brands strongly enough to influence religious commitment.

Method

Participants were 71 university students (34 female; ages 18-32). The experiment consisted of two between-subject conditions: high versus low brand salience. Upon entering the lab, participants were either assigned to a condition in which brands were highly salient or a condition in which brands were not. In the high brand salience condition (i.e., the “brand” condition), participants chose between two branded products (from the same brand), 10 different times. For example, in one choice, they decided between a red Adidas shirt and a green Adidas shirt. In another, they chose between a white Starbucks mug and a brown one. In the low brand salience condition (i.e., the “non-brand” condition), participants chose between the same pairs of products except the brand names were removed (appendix 1B). Of note, as choosing between the same brands may be a more conservative or weaker opportunity for self-expression than choosing between different brands (Study 1A), we conducted a pre-test (see appendix 2) to confirm that individuals in the brand condition felt better able to express their identities with their choices than those in the non-brand condition.

After making their choices, participants completed the dependent measures—the “Religious Commitment Scale” (Worthington et al., 2003) ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 1.73$, $SD = 1.01$) and the importance of attending religious services index ($\alpha = .93$, $M = -.15$, $SD = 1.79$). No other dependent measures were taken. Participants then indicated how the choice exercise made them feel via the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988). No significant differences in positive or negative mood emerged ($F_s < 1$).

Results and Discussion

Replicating the results of Study 1A, participants in the brand condition reported lower religious commitment ($M = 1.31$, $SD = .42$) than participants in the non-brand condition [$M = 2.14$, $SD = 1.23$; ($F(1,69) = 14.14$, $p = .0004$); $d = .90$]. The brand condition also reported lower importance of religious service attendance ($M = -.67$, $SD = 1.55$) than the non-brand condition [$M = .35$, $SD = 1.88$; ($F(1,69) = 6.25$, $p = .01$); $d = .60$].

Together, Studies 1A and 1B suggest that religious commitment is lower when brands are salient than when they are not. However, this result has been revealed in a context where individuals are not only exposed to brands but are able to communicate something about themselves with these brands because of the ‘choice’ component. This is consistent with our notion that religious commitment is lower when brands are salient than when not, but only when brands serve an identity expression role. In Studies 2 and 3, we explicitly investigate the importance of this expression link in the relationship between brands and religious commitment.

Study 2

In Study 2, we seek to provide stronger support for the notion that religious commitment declines when individuals use brands as a means of expressing aspects of their identity relative to when they do not. We do so by asking individuals to think about one of two different kinds of brands—either a brand that allows them to express some aspect of their identity or one that does not (but is highly regarded and very functional).

We expect that religious commitment will be lower among individuals who focus on a self-expressive brand than those who do not. This design, by comparing conditions that were both focused on brands, not only allows us to identify the importance of self-expression in the link between brands and religious commitment, but also provides greater confidence that the shifts in religious commitment that were observed in Studies 1A and 1B were driven by the presence of brands versus the absence of brands. This design also allows us to minimize concerns that differences in brands versus generics that are not related to identity expression (e.g., perceived quality, price, etc.) were driving the effects.

Method

41 participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (21 females, ages 20-67) and randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the identity expression brand condition, participants were asked to “think of a brand that you really like that is helpful in allowing you to express aspects of your personality” or to “think of a brand that you really like that is highly functional, but doesn't say anything about your personality” and to write a statement describing how the brand serves a self-expressive or functional role in their lives, respectively. Participants were then asked to complete the religious commitment scale, the importance of religious service attendance index and the measure of how important it is to express their identity through religion (Study 1A). Participants were then asked to report their mood (using standard PANAS measures). Additionally, to ensure that there weren't unexpected differences in the ways that people viewed the

expressive or functional brand that they selected, we asked participants to indicate the overall enjoyment of writing about the brand (1 = dislike extremely, 7 = like extremely), their overall liking of the brand (1 = dislike extremely, 7 = like extremely), and the degree to which the brand they selected could be considered prestigious, expensive and of high quality (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree, for each item). They also indicated whether they felt materialistic, wealthy and uncertain (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, for each item). Finally, participants completed demographic measures.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with our hypothesis, individuals in the self-expressive brand condition reported lower religious commitment than those in the functional brand condition ($F(1, 39) = 3.99, p = .05; M_{\text{expressive brand}} = 2.83/SD = 1.23, M_{\text{functional brand}} = 3.14, SD = 1.20, d = .62$). Participants in the expressive condition were also less likely to say that it was important to express their identity through religious beliefs ($F(1, 39) = 5.11, p = .03; M_{\text{expressive brand}} = 2.90/SD = 2.07, M_{\text{functional brand}} = 4.33, SD = 1.98, d = .71$). Finally, we see a similar pattern of results on the importance of religious services, although not significant ($F(1, 39) = 2.26, p = .14; M_{\text{expressive brand}} = -0.27/SD = 1.74, M_{\text{functional brand}} = .66, SD = 1.99, d = .50$). As with the prior choice manipulation, there were no differences in positive mood ($F < 1$) or negative mood ($F(1, 39) = 2.62, p = .11$). There were also no differences in enjoyment ($F < 1$) or liking ($F < 1$). Finally, the items that individuals chose to write about did not differ in terms of being prestigious, expensive or high quality ($F_s < 1$). And, individuals did not report differences on feeling materialistic ($F < 1$),

wealthy ($F(1, 39) = 2.16, p = .15$) or uncertain ($F(1, 39) = 1.89, p = .18$). These results build on our prior findings by suggesting that it is not simply being primed with brands that impacts religious commitment, but is more specifically related to the degree to which one can express one's identity with the brand. When individuals discussed expressive brands, religious commitment declined relative to those who discussed functional brands.

Study 3

In Study 3, we wished to explicitly test the mediating role of self-expression in the link between brands and religious commitment. Moreover, we wanted to provide a context in which individuals could actually interact with a product, versus relying on hypothetical choice or recalled experiences to demonstrate this relationship.

Accordingly, we manipulated individuals' physical relationship with the product by asking individuals to wear or merely look at a product. We hypothesized that wearing a brand would provide a strong opportunity for individuals to incorporate the brand into one's view of and expression of self (Gino, Norton, & Ariely, 2010; Park & John, 2010), while simply looking at the product would not. Accordingly, we expected that when individuals wore a branded product (versus a non-branded product), they would feel that they were able to express some aspect of their identity and the need to do so through religious commitment would decline. We did not expect this relationship to exist when individuals simply looked at the brand. Of note, in Studies 1A and 1B, the brand condition also 'looked' at brands as opposed to wearing them, but they were instead making choices that allowed them to communicate an identity with the brands. Here

again in Study 3, brands represent the ‘content’ that one is communicating, but the opportunity for expressing this content comes through wearing the product instead of making choices.

Method

Participants were 141 university students (83 female; ages 18-38). The experimental design was a 2 (brand salience: brand vs. non-brand) x 2 (opportunity for expression: high vs. low). On entering the laboratory, participants were given a lanyard (i.e., a long key-chain designed to be worn over the neck). Specifically, in half of the sessions participants were given an Apple-branded lanyard (“brand” condition). In the remaining sessions, participants were given a plain black lanyard (“non-brand” condition). After receiving their lanyards, half of the participants were told to wear the lanyard (high expression opportunity) and that they would be asked to evaluate the lanyard in the study. The remaining participants were told NOT to wear it; just to look at it and evaluate it (low expression opportunity). To be consistent with the cover story regarding our interest in the lanyard, participants first indicated how much they liked their lanyard (where 1 = dislike extremely and 7 = like extremely) and how likely they’d be to wear the lanyard (where 1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely). Participants were then asked to complete the 7-item Self-Brand Connection Scale ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.01$) (Escalas & Bettman, 2003) to measure the extent to which individuals did in fact perceive themselves as expressing their identity with the lanyard they received and the extent to which this drove their reported religious commitment. Participants were asked

to indicate their agreement to statements such as, “I can use this item to communicate who I am to other people” and “I consider this item to be “me” (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)” (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely well).

Next, participants were told that we wanted to shift gears and ask questions about their personal beliefs for a separate project. Individuals completed the two dependent measures used previously to assess religious commitment: The standard Religious Commitment scale ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 1.89$, $SD = .90$) and the measure of public religious commitment ($\alpha = .90$, $M = -.02$, $SD = 1.69$). Participants then completed the PANAS measure of positive and negative mood and demographic measures (e.g., age, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation).

Results and Discussion

First, unlike in the prior studies, unexpected effects of mood emerged (however, our key results hold when accounting for the effect of mood). The interaction of brand condition and opportunity for expression condition on positive mood was not significant ($F < 1$), but there was a significant main effect of brand condition on positive mood ($F(1, 137) = 4.22$, $p = .04$; $M_{\text{brand}} = 1.72$, $M_{\text{nonbrand}} = 1.49$). There was also a marginally significant effect of the opportunity for expression condition on positive mood ($F(1, 137) = 3.19$, $p = .08$; $M_{\text{look}} = 1.52$, $M_{\text{wear}} = 1.73$). Similarly, while the interaction of the brand condition and the expression condition on negative mood was not significant ($F(1, 137) = .44$, $p = .51$), there was a significant main effect of brand condition on negative mood

($F(1, 137) = 3.88, p = .05; M_{\text{brand}} = 1.20, M_{\text{nonbrand}} = 1.08$). There was also a significant effect of the expression condition on negative mood ($F(1, 137) = 3.89, p = .05; M_{\text{look}} = 1.09, M_{\text{wear}} = 1.22$). In essence, exposing participants to the brand or allowing them to wear any product led to stronger mood states—both positive and negative. We address these mood effects in the analyses of the main results reported next.

There were no main effects of brand condition ($F(1, 137) = .03, p = .86$) or the opportunity for expression condition ($F(1, 137) = .47, p = .49$) on the Religious Commitment scale. However, a significant interaction of the two conditions emerged ($F(1, 137) = 5.77, p = .02$), which also holds when we control for mood ($F(1, 135) = 7.18, p = .01$). (See Figure 1). To interpret this interaction, we first investigate simple effects at each level of the brand salience manipulation. As expected, in the brand condition, the simple effect of wearing versus looking at the lanyard was significant [$F(1, 137) = 5.07, p = .03; M_{\text{wear brand}} = 1.66, SD = .72; M_{\text{look brand}} = 2.13, SD = 1.09; d = .51$], indicating that religious commitment declined when people were able to express themselves with a brand. Conversely, in the non-brand condition, the simple effect of wearing versus looking at the lanyard was not significant ($p > .24$). Next, we investigate the simple effects at each level of the opportunity for expression manipulation. We find that the simple effect of brand versus non-brand within the high expression condition (i.e., wearing the lanyard) was weaker than expected but still directionally consistent with hypotheses. Specifically, individuals in the brand condition (Apple) reported lower religious commitment than individuals in the non-brand condition [$F(1, 137) = 2.13, p = .15; M_{\text{brand}} = 1.66, SD = .72; M_{\text{non-brand}} = 2.00, SD = .86; d = .43$]. Moreover, when

controlling for the unexpected differences in mood noted previously, this simple effect is significant [$(F(1, 135) = 4.37, p = .04)$]. Interestingly, the simple effect of brand versus non-brand within the low expression condition (i.e., looking only) was also significant, but in the opposite direction. Individuals in the brand condition reported religious commitment that was higher than individuals in the non-brand condition [$(F(1, 137) = 3.97, p = .05)$; $M_{\text{brand}} = 2.13, SD = 1.09$; $M_{\text{non-brand}} = 1.74, SD = .80$]. This raises the interesting possibility that when individuals are faced with brands with which they expect to be able to express themselves but are prohibited from doing so, they will show a stronger preference for religious commitment as a viable and immediately available substitute (Kay et al., 2008). We explore this hypothesis more fully in Study 5.

This pattern of results was similar when the religious service attendance index was the dependent variable. The interaction of brand condition and opportunity for expression condition was significant ($F(1, 137) = 6.32, p = .01$), which also holds when we control for mood ($F(1, 135) = 7.18, p = .01$). We first investigate simple effects at each level of the brand manipulation. As expected, we find that the simple effect of wearing versus looking at the Apple-branded lanyard was significant [$(F(1, 137) = 5.62, p = .02)$; $M_{\text{wear brand}} = -.49, SD = 1.65$; $M_{\text{look brand}} = .44, SD = 1.56$; $d = .28$], suggesting that expression with brands is associated with lower religious commitment. Conversely, the simple effect of wearing versus looking at the plain lanyard was not significant ($p > .22$). Next, we investigate simple effects at each level of the expression manipulation. We find that the simple effect of brand versus non-brand within the high identity condition is marginally significant; individuals in the brand condition reported directionally lower

religious commitment (i.e., importance of attendance) than individuals in the non-brand condition [$F(1, 137) = 2.53, p = .11$]; $M_{\text{brand}} = -.49, SD = 1.65$; $M_{\text{non-brand}} = .20, SD = 1.70$; $d = .41$]. Importantly, when the unexpected effect of mood is accounted for, this simple effect is significant ($F(1, 135) = 3.98, p = .05$). Finally, the simple effect of brand versus non-brand in the low opportunity for expression condition was significant.

Individuals in the brand condition reported religious commitment that was higher than individuals in the non-brand condition [$F(1, 137) = 4.04, p = .05$]; $M_{\text{brand}} = .44, SD = 1.56$; $M_{\text{non-brand}} = -.30, SD = 1.76$].

Moderated Mediation. To further test our hypothesis that brands are associated with lower religious commitment because they fulfill identity-expression needs, we measured the degree to which individuals' responses on the Self-Brand Connection scale mediated the relationship between wearing a product and reported religious commitment. A brand salience x expression ANOVA on the Self-Brand Connection scale revealed a main effect of wearing the lanyard ($F(1, 137) = 4.00, p = .05$) whereby individuals in the "wear" condition reported greater connection to the product than individuals in the "look" condition ($M_{\text{high expression (wear)}} = 2.15/SD = 1.05, M_{\text{low expression (look)}} = 1.80/SD = .95$). A main effect of brand condition ($F(1, 137) = 8.03, p = .01$) was also revealed whereby individuals in the brand condition reported greater connection to the lanyard than individuals in the non-brand condition ($M_{\text{brand}} = 2.17/SD = 1.17, M_{\text{non-brand}} = 1.69/SD = .71$). The interaction of the expression condition (i.e., wearing vs. looking) and brand condition (i.e., Apple vs. no brand) was not significant ($F < 1$), but a planned contrast indicated that individuals were more able to express themselves when wearing the Apple

lanyard than when wearing the non-branded lanyard ($F(1, 137) = 3.49, p = .06$). To test our prediction that when given the Apple-branded lanyard, wearing the product influenced religious commitment through individuals' reported ability to communicate their identity with that brand, we conducted a test of moderated mediation using model 15 of the bootstrapping process described by Hayes (2012) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. As expected, in the brand condition, individuals' ability to connect with and communicate their identity with the lanyard mediated the effect of wearing the product on the religious commitment scale ($B = .08$ with a 95% CI exclusive of 0 (.01, .24)) and the importance of religious service measure ($B = .11$ with a 95% CI exclusive of 0 (.002, .33)). In the non-brand condition, the mediation pattern did not exist for the religious commitment measure ($B = .05$ with a 95% CI that included 0 (-.06, .31)) nor the importance of religious service ($B = .02$ with a 95% CI that included 0 (-.22, .39)).

This study therefore reiterates the notion that brand salience is associated with lower levels of religious commitment, but only when brands enable individuals to communicate a sense of personal identity.

Study 4

In Studies 1-3, we have investigated the relationship between brands and religious commitment by using direct, explicit measures of religious commitment. One might wonder whether any changes in religious commitment across conditions is driven by individuals' desire to appear consistent in their values or by other factors that might influence what individuals are willing to report, i.e., what they would like the researchers

or others to believe. Thus, we employ a more implicit proxy for religious commitment in Study 4. We focus on religious word accessibility to investigate the impact of brands on religious commitment. Research suggests that when a need or goal is active, related constructs become more accessible. However, when the need is met by some other source, those same constructs are inhibited (Forster, Liberman, & Higgins, 2005). We therefore reasoned that if brands satisfy the same identity-expressive needs as religion, when brands are salient (and one thus deems that they can meet their needs for expressing the self through brands), religious commitment should be perceived as having less unique value. Consequently, related religious constructs should become less accessible. Accordingly, we expected that making brands salient would inhibit people's tendency to think of religious-focused words in a word-completion activity. Given the more objective nature of this measure and its dependence on an existing mental database of religious knowledge within individuals relative to our prior measures, we expected that we might find the greatest impact among people for whom religious words were normally very salient: frequent church attenders. More specifically, we expected that when brands were not salient (and thus, religious constructs not inhibited), individuals who attend religious services regularly (and are consequently exposed to religious constructs more often) would show greater activation of religious constructs than those who do not. We expected, however, that the salience of brands would dampen this heightened activation of religious constructs among these high religious service attenders. (We expected individuals who did not normally attend religious services to have very low accessibility

of religious words at baseline, and thus, there would be very little room for further inhibition of these words when brands were salient.)

Method

To test our hypothesis, we recruited 119 adults (84 female; ages 18-81) online via Amazon Mechanical Turk. The experiment's design was a 2 (brand salience: high vs. low; manipulated) x 2 (religious service: high vs. low; measured). Participants were first randomly assigned to the high brand salience or low brand salience condition in the product choice task described in Study 1B. After making their choices, participants completed the dependent measure—a word-stem completion exercise, a standard measure of concept activation (e.g., Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Tulving, Schacter, & Stark, 1982). Participants saw eight strings of letters that could be completed as religious or non-religious words (and ten filler words). Participants then completed demographic measures and reported their past religious service attendance behavior. Specifically, participants indicated whether they attended religious services: more than once a week, once a week, once a month, specific holidays only, once a year, less than once a year or never. Individuals were labeled “high attenders” if they attended religious services at least once per month; otherwise they were labeled “low attenders”³.

Results and Discussion

³ The results discussed next also hold if attendance is treated as a continuous variable.

Results revealed no significant main effects, but did reveal an interaction of brand salience and religious service on the accessibility of religious words ($F(1, 115) = 6.23, p = .01$). (Figure 2). In the non-brand salience condition, individuals who attended religious services frequently were more likely to generate religious words than those who did not [$M_{\text{high attenders}} = 2.48, SD = 1.78; M_{\text{low attenders}} = 1.43, SD = 1.43; (F(1, 115) = 7.09, p = .01); d = .65$], which is what one would expect. However, in the brand condition, this pattern disappeared ($F(1, 115) = .65, p = .42$). There was no difference in the accessibility of religious words between people who were low versus high church attenders. This was driven by the decline in activation of religious words among high church attenders in the brand condition relative to the non-brand condition [$(F(1, 115) = 4.15, p = .04); M_{\text{high attenders/brand}} = 1.60, SD = 1.05; M_{\text{high attenders/non-brand}} = 2.48, SD = 1.78$]. These results suggests that the self-reported declines in religious commitment revealed in the prior studies when brands were salient relative to when they were not is also manifested more implicitly via dampened accessibility of religious constructs. This study therefore provides further confidence that the results discussed thus far are not driven by participants' response biases or a desire to appear consistent, but are in fact driven by a psychological change in the value of religious commitment when brands are salient versus not.

Study 5

Building on our argument that brands and religious commitment are linked by their identity-expressive functions, our objective in Study 5 was to demonstrate that the

presence of brands only reduces religious commitment when individuals' beliefs about brands' abilities to communicate a sense of identity are intact. We posit that when such beliefs are threatened, individuals' religious commitment is expected to return to baseline levels. This is in line with research suggesting that people respond to threats by heightening their support of an acceptable substitute (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Heine et al., 2006; Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2011; Kay et al., 2008). For example, when individuals' beliefs in their own personal control are threatened, they heighten their belief in a God that can control outcomes instead (Kay et al., 2008). In other words, when the value of brands in expressing one's identity is threatened, individuals should heighten support for a substitute—in this case, their religious commitment. Importantly, we aimed to demonstrate that not just any threatening information about brands will cause people to return to religion. Instead, the threat must pertain to brands' abilities to help individuals communicate a sense of identity.

To test this idea, we presented individuals with various types of information that would threaten their beliefs about brands. One type of threat suggested that brands were not helpful in allowing people to communicate who they are ("high threat" to one's ability to engage in identity-expression with brands); the second type of threat was unrelated to individuals' abilities to do so ("low threat" to identity-expression with brands). In this "low threat" to identity-expression condition, individuals still received information that threatened their beliefs about a function of brands, but it was not the identity expression function. Instead, it was brands' ability to reassure the purchaser of the quality of the product and minimize risk. We focused on the risk-reducing function

because research indicates that both brands and religion help reduce fears of negative outcomes (Kay et al., 2008; Keller, 2003), suggesting that religion and brands could serve as substitutes for one another in reducing risk. It is therefore plausible that when faced with either type of threat about brands—those related to identity expression or not (i.e., the risk threat)—individuals could enhance their religious commitment. To isolate and clarify the driving mechanism in the relationship between brands and religious commitment, the “high threat” to identity-expression condition disables one channel of substitution—the identity expression function. The “low threat” to identity-expression condition disables another channel—the risk reduction function. Following our hypothesis that religious commitment and brands are often treated as substitutes for one another specifically through identity expression, we anticipate an increase in religious commitment only when the identity-expression channel of substitution is disabled. In other words, when brands’ identity-expression abilities are threatened, individuals will return to religion. In contrast, when brands’ identity-expression abilities remain intact (i.e., the “low threat” condition), religious commitment should decline as in the prior studies.

Method

Participants were 131 adults (73 female, ages 18-79) who participated in an Amazon Mechanical Turk experiment. Participants were assigned to one of six conditions where they made a series of choices. In one of these conditions, participants made their choices among brands exactly as they did in Study 1B, with no additional

messaging following the choices (i.e., “brand/no threat” condition). In another condition, they made choices among non-branded items as in the non-brand manipulation of Study 1B (“non-brand/no threat” condition). However, in three conditions participants made choices among brands and then received a high identity-expression threat regarding brands after making their choices. They were told that people are not as successful as they think in 1) expressing self-worth with brands (“brand/self-worth threat” condition), 2) expressing their identities with brands (“brand/identity threat” condition) or 3) affiliating with others through brands (“brand/affiliation threat” condition). In a final condition, participants received a low identity-expression threat after making choices among brands and were told that people are not as successful as they think in judging product quality through brand names (“brand/risk threat” condition). (Appendix 3). The Religious Commitment scale and the importance of religious service attendance were the dependent variables. Of note, a separate pre-test was run to confirm that the threat conditions did in fact challenge individuals’ beliefs about brands as expected (See appendix 2).

Results and Discussion

Results revealed a significant main effect of condition ($F(5, 125) = 2.80, p = .02$) on the Religious Commitment scale (See Figure 3). We replicated previous findings whereby the “brand/no threat” condition reported lower religious commitment than the “non-brand/no threat” condition [$F(1, 125) = 4.26, p = .04$]; $M_{\text{brand/no threat}} = 1.48, SD = .67$; $M_{\text{non-brand/no threat}} = 2.24, SD = 1.27$; $d = .85$]. However, when brands experienced a

high identity-expression threat, individuals' religious commitment returned to baseline. Specifically, the "brand/no threat" condition exhibited lower levels of religious commitment than 1) the "brand/self-worth threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 10.16, p = .002)$; $M_{\text{brand/no threat}} = 1.48, SD = .67$; $M_{\text{brand/self-worth threat}} = 2.62, SD = 1.29$; $d = 1.11$], 2) the "brand/identity threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 5.96, p = .02)$; $M_{\text{brand/id threat}} = 2.34, SD = 1.16$; $d = .91$], and 3) the "brand/affiliation threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 5.44, p = .02)$; $M_{\text{brand/affiliation threat}} = 2.32, SD = 1.29$; $d = .82$]. The only threat that did not lead individuals to return to a higher level of religious commitment versus the "brand/no threat" condition was the low identity-expression threat—the risk threat [$(F(1, 125) = .57, p = .45)$; $M_{\text{brand/risk threat}} = 1.76, SD = .84$].

As in the prior studies, the results were consistent when the religious service attendance index was the measure of religious commitment. The "brand/no threat" condition indicated lower importance for religious services than the "non-brand/no threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 5.08, p = .03)$; $M_{\text{brand/no threat}} = -1.15, SD = 1.36$; $M_{\text{non-brand/no threat}} = .11, SD = 1.85$; $d = .77$]. Further, the "brand/no threat" condition indicated lower importance for religious services than 1) the "brand/self-worth threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 9.24, p = .003)$; $M_{\text{brand/self-worth threat}} = .52, SD = 1.76$; $d = 1.06$], 2) the "brand/identity threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 6.63, p = .01)$; $M_{\text{brand/id threat}} = .24, SD = 1.54$; $d = .96$], and 3) the "brand/affiliation threat" condition [$(F(1, 125) = 8.30, p = .005)$; $M_{\text{brand/affiliation threat}} = .43, SD = 2.12$; $d = .89$]. The risk threat was again the only threat that did not lead individuals to return to a higher level of religious commitment [$(F(1, 125) = .78, p = .38)$; $M_{\text{brand/risk threat}} = -.36, SD = 1.66$].

These results illustrate that brands lead to lower religious commitment when their abilities to communicate one's sense of identity are believed to be intact. However, they are less likely to reduce religious commitment when their abilities to communicate a sense of identity are questioned. This pattern of results provides further support that the substitution between brands and religious commitment that we've observed cannot be explained by a basic consistency account. Such an account would suggest that individuals report lower religious commitment after brands are salient only because they do not believe religious commitment is consistent with brand-related values. If it were merely about consistency, however, being primed with a brand should not have differentially impacted religious commitment as a function of whether or not the brand was threatened in a way that was relevant to expressing a sense of identity. For the same reason, this study strengthens our argument (in combination with Study 2) that our pattern of results cannot be explained by other differences that may sometimes exist between brands and non-brands such as prestige, prices, attention and familiarity, etc.. Finally, this study also provides greater support for the notion that the differences that we have seen in religious commitment across studies is driven the presence of brands as opposed to the lack of brands in the non-brand conditions. If the effects were being driven merely by the presence of a non-branded item, we would expect to still see differences between the non-brand condition and the branded conditions when their ability to help individuals express themselves was threatened (which we did not find).

General Discussion

In summary, the present research suggests that the presence versus the absence of brands in one's environment can result in lower levels of religious commitment. This is most likely when brands are incorporated into the self and used as tools for communicating one's sense of identity. Across 6 studies, we leverage a combination of explicit and implicit measures, manipulate the proposed driver of the effects (i.e., opportunity for expression) in a variety of ways, and provide mediational evidence for the role of expression in the relationship between brands and religious commitment. Taken together, our findings imply that religious commitment may be less stable for some people than they might assume, so much so that it can be shaken by something as seemingly trivial as brands. Such findings provide new insights into our understanding of religion because they illustrate that religion is not only a source of expression (as prior work suggests), but that it is a substitutable source of expression. This is important because, unlike many sources of expression, religion has often been deemed to be unique in its power due to its sacred properties among believers. This might lead one to predict that religion is unlikely to be used interchangeably with profane (and what many might consciously regard as trivial) sources. Thus broadly, we demonstrate that the sacred and profane aspects of individuals' lives provide not only similar benefits, but benefits that may be perceived to be interchangeable. We also provide new insights into the psychological power of brands. While prior work acknowledged the role of brands in expression, the present research is novel in investigating how expression with brands influences individuals' core belief systems and behaviors. It begins to provide support for

the growing speculation that commercialization in society (and brands as one manifestation of such) can impact individuals' core values.

Many questions are raised by these findings. For example, in what ways are brands unique in serving as a substitute for religious commitment? Would devotion to a sports team or other groups have similar effects? At least one account suggests that brands and religion lead to similar areas of brain activation and that this is distinct from the effects of other groups (Lindstrom, 2010). Other research, however, draws clear parallels between the effects of religion and other social activities (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). One may also wonder about functions of religion besides serving identity needs. As articulated previously, identity expression is not the only function of religion. Perhaps when other functions of religion are salient (e.g., moral guidance), religious commitment is more stable, even in the face of brands. Further addressing the notion of identity expression, future research might explore when certain identity needs (e.g., affiliation) might be more critical in the relationship between brands and religion than others. Our research has adopted the broad perspective that brands that allow individuals to express their identity and how they fit in the world in any sense will impact religious commitment. Supporting this notion, Study 5 demonstrates that there are a variety of ways to tap into this broad sense of identity, whether it involves focusing on symbols of self-worth or desired affiliations. Still, future research may explore whether there are certain contexts in which one aspect of identity (e.g., affiliation) might have a stronger impact on religious commitment than others.

There are also important questions regarding the ultimate implications for society. While the present research is unable to speak to how long the effects of brands on religious commitment endure, it is plausible that the constant barrage of brands that individuals encounter on a daily basis could lead to sustainable changes in religious commitment over time. If true, one must also wonder about the impact on society given the self-regulation benefits that are often associated with God and religion (e.g., greater prosocial behavior, less depression, decreased substance abuse, reduced sexual promiscuity, etc.) (Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Pearce, Little, & Perez, 2003; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Wills, Yaeger, & Sandy, 2003).

Finally, the present research leverages a general population (and students) in the United States, with largely Christian backgrounds. Future research might explore how differences in cultures and religions (e.g., denominations, intensity of beliefs) impact the degree to which brands influence religious commitment. For example, given our finding in Study 4 regarding the accessibility of religious constructs after brand choice, it may be the case that brands are most likely to influence religious commitment among those who are highly religious (given that they have more room to decline in commitment by definition). It's also worth considering, however, that individuals who are at extreme levels of commitment (and not adequately reflected in our general population samples) may not view secular brands as a source of expression to begin with and would therefore be less prone to use brands as a substitute. In sum, this research may provide a useful starting point for future work that explores these and other important questions pertaining

to how the basic elements of our environments and everyday life influence religious commitment—what many consider to be a hallmark of human life.

Appendix 1

1A: Example Choices from Study 1A

Brand Choices	Non-brand Choices
	
	

1B: Example Choices from Study 1B

Brand Choices	Non-brand Choices
	
	

Appendix 2:

Pre-test for Study 1B

A pre-test was conducted ($n = 43$, US participants, 63% female, range in age from 18-29y, mean (M) = 20, $SD = 1.98$) to explore whether or not choosing among branded products allowed for greater communication of one's identity than choosing among non-branded products. Participants were assigned to the brand or the non-brand condition described for Study 1B. They were then asked to indicate how much they agreed that making the choices in the prior exercise would enable them to “express my personality,” “express my feelings of self-worth,” “communicate at least one aspect of my identity,” “say who I am”, “say what I like” (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). The items were combined into one “self-expression” index ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.14$). Results indicated that individuals in the brand condition reported higher identity-expression scores than individuals in the non-brand condition ($F(1, 41) = 6.07$, $p = .02$, $M_{\text{brand}} = 4.73$, $SD = .95$, $M_{\text{nonbrand}} = 3.91$, $SD = 1.20$.)

Pre-test for Study 5

A pre-test was conducted ($n = 153$, US participants, 39% female, range in age from 18-76, mean (M) = 35, $SD = 12.8$) to explore whether or not the information that was designed to threaten individuals' beliefs about brands was successful in doing so. We first presented participants with the conditions outlined in Study 5 (i.e., they were asked to make choices among brands or non-brands and then received threatening information about brands or not). We then asked about the extent to which the exercise

1) led people to question the role of brands, 2) challenged people's thoughts about brands, 3) challenged people's reasons for choosing brands, 4) challenged beliefs about the value of brands and 5) caused people to re-think why they buy brands (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The responses were combined into an index ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.53$). In addition, to confirm that the identity-related threats affected beliefs regarding brands' value in expressing one's self, but that the non-identity related threat did not, we also asked individuals the extent to which they believed that brands are less useful as a source of self-expression than what people have typically imagined (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

As expected, beliefs about brands were threatened more in the threat conditions than in the non-threat conditions ($F(1, 151) = 46.82$, $p = .0001$, $M_{\text{threat}} = 3.94$, $SD = 1.32$, $M_{\text{non-threat}} = 2.36$, $SD = 1.39$.) This was consistent across all types of threats when comparing any threat condition to any non-threat condition (i.e., the non-threat brand condition and the non-threat no-brand condition). Moreover, individuals in the threat conditions that focused on the identity-expression function of brands were more likely to report that brands had lower value as a source of self-expression than once thought ($M = 3.41$) relative to participants in the certainty threat condition ($M = 2.76$, $p = .02$) or the non-threat conditions ($M = 2.40$, $p < .0001$).

Appendix 3

Study 5 Manipulations

Participants read the following after making their choices for each of the six conditions:

Brand/ No threat- We are interested in your responses. We will come back later and ask you questions about your choices after we've allowed enough time to pass.

Non-brand/No threat- We are interested in your responses. We will come back later and ask you questions about your choices after we've allowed enough time to pass.

Brand/Self-worth threat: We are interested in your responses because research has shown that people are becoming very accustomed to trying to express their feelings of self-worth through brands. Unfortunately, research has shown that people are not nearly as successful as expressing their perceptions of self-worth through brands as they think they are. We will come back later and ask you questions about your choices after we've allowed enough time to pass.

Brand/Self-identity threat: We are interested in your responses because research has shown that people are becoming very accustomed to trying to express who they are and how they wish to be perceived by others through brands. Unfortunately, research has shown that people are not nearly as successful as expressing their desired identity through brands as they think they are. We will come back later and ask you questions about your choices after we've allowed enough time to pass.

Brand/Affiliation threat: We are interested in your responses because research has shown that people are becoming very accustomed to trying to affiliate with other people that are important to them through brands. Unfortunately, research has shown that people are not nearly as successful at affiliating with others through brands as they think they are. We will come back later and ask you questions about your choices after we've allowed enough time to pass.

Brand/Certainty threat: We are interested in your responses because research has shown that people are becoming very accustomed to trying to judge product quality through brand names. Unfortunately, research has shown that people are not nearly as successful as judging quality through brands as they think they are. We will come back later and ask you questions about your choices after we've allowed enough time to pass.

Figure 1: Study 3- The impact of brand salience and opportunity for expression on religious commitment (+/- SE)

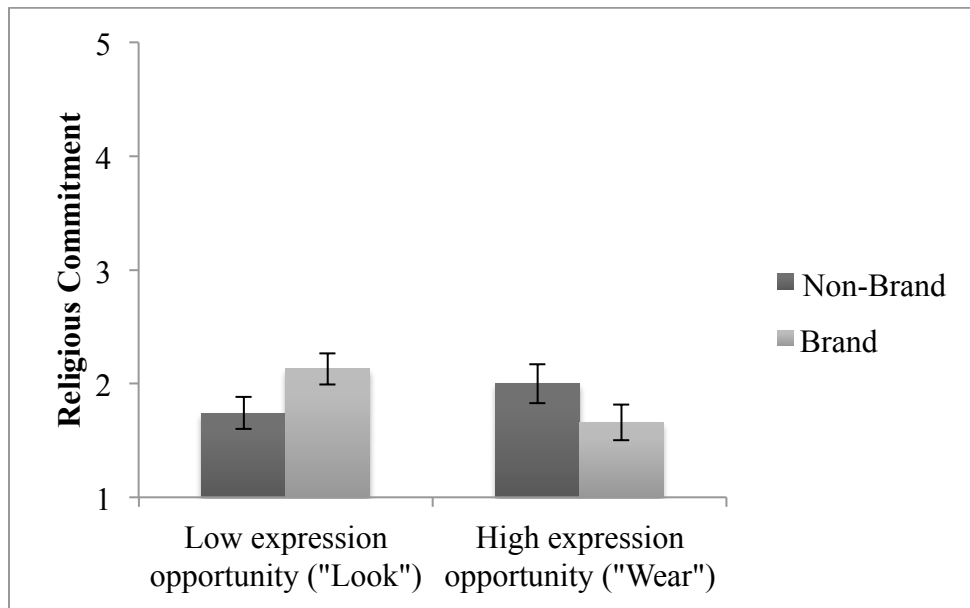


Figure 2: Study 4- Impact of brand salience on religious word-stem completions by religious service attendance (+/- SE)

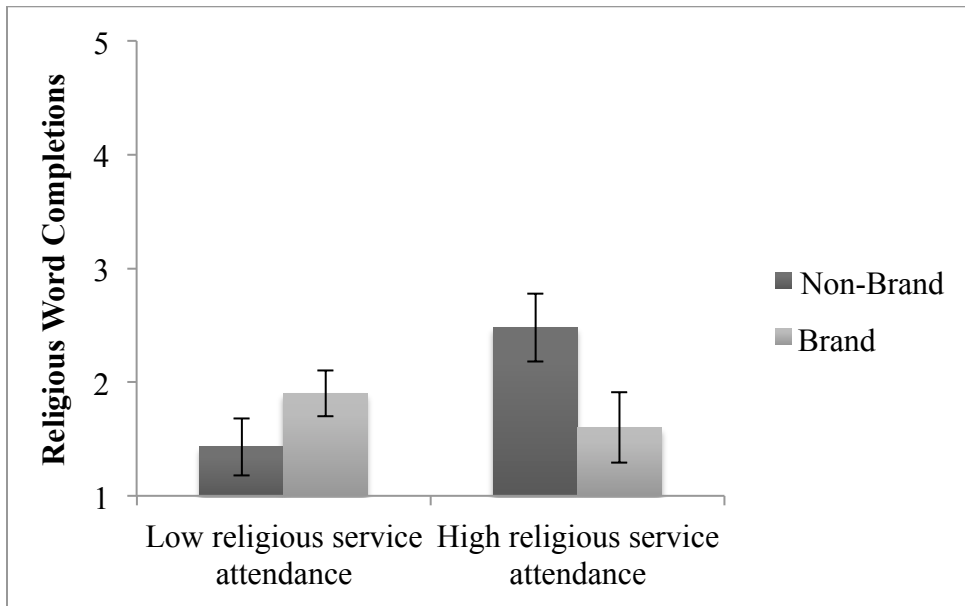
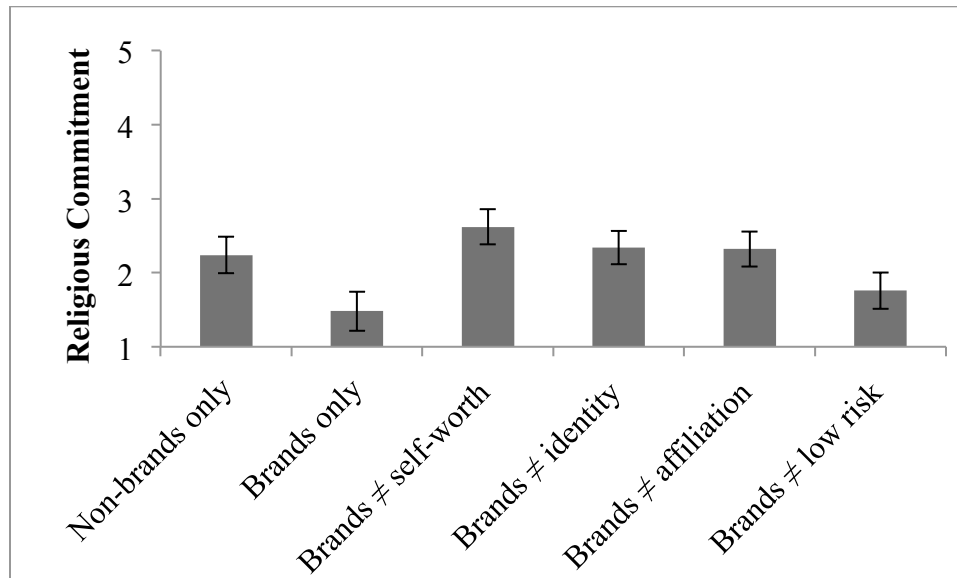


Figure 3: Study 5- Impact of brand salience on religious commitment (+/- SE) when an identity-expression role of brands is threatened



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