Trait transference from brands to individuals: The impact of brand-behavior congruency ☆,☆☆

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ABSTRACT

Consumers' strategic use of brands as a way of influencing the impressions others have about them is buttressed by research showing that brand personality traits may carry over and affect perceptions about their users or endorsers. However more often than not brand users engage in all sorts of trait-implying behaviors that may sometimes be in conflict with the brand personality. In two studies we explored how perceivers integrate these two sources of information when creating first impressions of brand users. Results indicated that when traits associated with brands and the users' trait-implying behaviors were in conflict, brand trait transferences were inhibited, whereas traits inferred from the behaviors were enhanced. These findings concerning *brand trait transference inhibition* and *trait inference enhancement* may provide new insights on how brand personality influences perceptions about their users, with distinctive consequences for marketing strategy.

1. Introduction

The brands people select and use provide powerful sources of information to form impressions of personality. Brands are part of people's lives and are often strategically used by consumers as a way of conveying a message about themselves to others. However, people do not passively use brands as mannequins do. Brand users engage in all sorts of trait-implying behaviors that also influence the perceivers' impressions of them. Although there is considerable work on the use of brands as a way to shape the self-concept and as a form of consumer self-expression, evidence that those efforts are effective in producing changes in how the user is perceived by others is still scant. Moreover, evidence concerning the interaction between users' behavior and the information brand conveys is inexistent to the best of our knowledge. The main goal of the present work is to better understand the extent with which the type of behaviors that people exhibit may amplify or suppress a brand's influence on the impression formation process, more specifically affecting the probability of people acquiring brand personality-traits.

1.1. Forming impressions about consumers

Preferences, interests, lifestyle, as well as personality traits, are often inferred from the products and services one uses (Arsena, Silvera, & Pandelaere, 2014, Experiment 1; Callison, Karrh, & Zillmann, 2002; Haire, 1950; Holman, 1980; Solomon, 1983; Vrij, 1997; see also Belk, 1978). It is not surprising that consumers tend to select and use brands as a way to reinforce, extend and express the self (Aaker, 1997, 1999; Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982; see also Govers & Schoormans, 2005). Salient brand personality dimensions directly impact the identity and self-image of the brand users (e.g., Reed II, 2002). Also as shown by Fennis, Pruyn, and Maasland (2005), brands also influence the self-perception consumers have of their own personality traits. Specifically Fennis and al., instructed participants to imagine themselves in scenarios where brands with different personalities (e.g., sincerity) were incidentally presented. Results showed that participants' self-perception on related personality dimensions (e.g., agreeableness) was influenced in a congruent way by the brand's personality to which they were incidentally exposed to. Moreover, consumers may be intentionally selecting brands to make certain aspects of the consumer personality more visible to others and

for impression management purposes (Aaker, 1999; Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994; see also Escalas & Bettman, 2005). This self-expression value of brands is likely to be an important driver for consumer's preferences and choices. Hence, finding out more on how brands actually impact the impressions that *others* form about the consumer is crucial for a better grasping of the psychological mechanisms underlying the influence of brands.

However, research directly addressing the impact of brands on the way consumers (brand users) are perceived is only emerging, and has yet to consider the influence of the consumer's own behavior while using a brand. This is important because brands associated with a consumer do not operate in a social vacuum. Consumer behavior is often a powerful source of trait inferences about a person (e.g., Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Heider, 1958; Winter & Uleman, 1984). These inferences may interact with brands personality (e.g., Aaker, 1997) to shape impressions about consumers. In fact, although impression formation may proceed with minimal information, all information available tends to combine into a coherent gestalt (e.g., Asch, 1946). Thus, inferences about a consumer based on the personality of the brands he or she uses, are likely to integrate with inferences from consumer's own actions (Belk, 1978; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007).

Next, we consider some developments on brand personality and implicit impression formation research that may help us shed some light on how brand and behavior interact in shaping impressions about consumers.

1.1.1. Spontaneous trait transference and brand trait transference

An interesting parallel may be drawn between the literature on brand personality and the research on person perception and impression formation. Firstly, not only people but also brands have relatively enduring personalities that represent a key factor in their identity and differentiation (Aaker, 1997; Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker, 2005). Secondly, when forming impressions about a person, other information present in the context is likely to play an important role. More specifically the contextual information could be either the behaviors of another person (e.g., Skowronski, Carlston, Mae, & Crawford, 1998) or the personality of a brand (Arsena et al., 2014; Das, Vermeulen, Laagland, & Postma, 2010; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007).

Research on first impressions has shown that trait-implying behaviors (e.g., *John won the science quiz*) lead to the spontaneous inference of the corresponding trait (e.g., John is *intelligent*) (see Uleman, Newman, & Moskowitz, 1996; Uleman, Saribay, & Gonzalez, 2008). While further investigating this phenomenon, called *spontaneous trait inference* (STI), an interesting communicator effect called *spontaneous trait transference* (STT) was also identified (Carlston, Skowronski, & Sparks, 1995; Mae, Carlston, & Skowronski, 1999; Skowronski et al., 1998). This effect essentially involves the tendency for communicators to be seen as possessing the traits they describe in others. For instance, if Mary describes an aggressive behavior of an acquaintance, she becomes associated with, and ultimately has attributed to her, the trait *aggressive*. STTs are also observed between actors of trait-implying behaviors and bystanders.[1] So, for instance, if Agnes behaves in an aggressive way and Mary is incidentally present in the same context, then Mary will be also perceived as *aggressive* (Skowronski et al., 1998).

Carlston and Mae (2007) further showed that associating trait-laden symbols to a person lead others to perceive that person as having the traits implied by the symbols (e.g., the trait *romantic* for the symbol of a rose). This effect was observed for logical person-symbol associations

(i.e., the symbols were said to have been chosen by acquaintances to characterize the targets) as well as for incidental person-symbol associations (i.e., the symbols were randomly paired with the targets). Carlston and Mae interpreted this influence of symbols on impression formation as a reflection of STT processes, according to which person perception may be influenced by inferences made about different and even unrelated targets.

Similar psychological processes seem to be involved in trait transferences from a brand's personality to a person associated to the brand – a phenomenon that Arsena et al. (2014) dubbed *brand trait transference* (BTT). These authors illustrated this phenomenon by showing that a celebrity endorser of a brand that was advertised as a sincere brand was perceived as more sincere than the endorser of a neutral brand. However, this occurred only when the celebrity had no pre-existing strong negative associations with the trait in question (i.e., "sincerity"), which suggests that pre-existing traits of the endorser may interfere with BTT (see Arsena et al., 2014, Experiment 3).

Das et al. (2010) also provided evidence that brand personality is integrated with other sources of information about the brand owner. High versus moderately attractive female individuals were presented carrying a sophisticated or non-sophisticated branded product (iPod versus a generic MP3 player). The moderately attractive female was seen as more sophisticated when carrying the sophisticated brand product, but no effects were found for the highly attractive brand user.

In the same vein, individual targets wearing a "Boss" sweater (a brand strongly associated to the trait "competent") were perceived as more competent than individuals wearing an "Australian" sweater (a brand weakly associated with "competent"). This was mainly true when the targets appeared in a congruent (golf course) context rather than incongruent (camping site) one (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007).

In sum, not only salient brand personality traits incidentally affect person perception, but also impression formation processes integrate brand trait information with other sources of information. Indeed, the match or mismatch between pieces of relevant information seem to qualify (promote or constrain) the influence of the brand on the impressions formed.

However, the behavior of the person has not been considered so far in the context of BTT. This is unfortunate since consumers associated with certain brands are likely to engage in several behaviors, some of which have the potential to be powerful sources of personality trait inferences (e.g., Uleman et al., 1996). To change this state of affairs and clarify the conditions under which BTT operates, we propose a conceptual framework, inspired on the impression formation literature, wherein STI and BTT are studied within the same experimental paradigm, making it easier to evaluate the impact of the former on the latter (and vice-versa).

1.2. Conceptual framework

Trait inferences and first impressions of personality are quickly formed, with minimal information (e.g., Asch, 1946; Gilbert et al., 1988; Heider, 1958), little effort (Crawford, Skowronski, Stiff, & Scherer, 2007; Todorov & Uleman, 2003), and even in the absence of explicit impression formation goals (Winter & Uleman, 1984; Carlston & Skowronski, 1994; Todorov & Uleman, 2002; for reviews see Uleman et al., 1996; Uleman et al., 2008). When, however, several sources of information are available, they are integrated to form coherent impressions of personality (e.g., Asch, 1946; Hamilton, Katz, & Leirer, 1980a, 1980b; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996).

One critical challenge to the development of a coherent impression of personality occurs when several pieces of information about the target person are incongruent. The most studied case of this occurrence is when the person's behavior violates prior expectations about the person. Such incongruent expectations have been shown to inhibit spontaneous trait inferences (Wigboldus, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2003; see also Jerónimo, Garcia-Marques, Ferreira, &

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[1] STT is quite pervasive and observed even when the communicators are well known (Mae et al., 1999), when the pairings behavior-person are said to be random (Skowronski et al., 1998), when perceivers are requested to avoid it (Carlston & Skowronski, 2005), and even when the target of the transference is not a person but an object (Brown & Bassili, 2002). However, STT seems to be reduced or eliminated, when the actor of the behavior is presented along with the bystander (e.g., Crawford, Skowronski, & Stiff, 2007; Crawford, Skowronski, Stiff, & Leonards, 2008).

Macrae, 2015; Ramos, Garcia-Marques, Hamilton, Ferrerira, & Van Acker, 2012). That is, if a person fails to solve an easy logic problem, the corresponding trait *unintelligent* is usually inferred spontaneously. However, if a person is expected to be intelligent (e.g., a scientist) the same behavior is less likely to trigger the trait inference *unintelligent*.

Considering that brands are also an important source of trait information capable of triggering BTT (Arsena et al., 2014), what is their impact on the impressions we form about consumers when they behave in ways that are inconsistent with the brand personality? As aforementioned, research by Arsena et al. (2014; see also Das et al., 2010; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007) suggests that in cases of incongruency BTT should not take place or at least be substantially reduced. However, Mae et al. (1999) showed that STT (i.e., the transference of traits inferred from someone's behavior to another person) occurs even when the traits are incongruent with prior knowledge about the person. Whether or not BTT may be impaired in the case of incongruency between the brand and the behavior exhibited by the person associated with the brand is thus still unclear. In the present paper, we address this issue.

Additionally, we are also interested in finding out what happens to the STI, which is based on a person's behavior, when the trait implied by the behavior is at odds with the brand personality. We envision two possibilities. Either STI is inhibited by the presence of an incongruent brand (similarly to what Wigboldus et al., 2003 showed for the impact of expectancies about the person; see also Jerónimo et al., 2015) and thus the trait implied by the behavior does not become associated to the person. Alternatively, STI becomes even more salient due to the presence of an incongruent brand and the person is seen as more strongly possessing the trait implicated by his/her behavior. The latter hypothesis is consistent with Das et al. (2010) suggestion that incongruency between physical attractiveness of the consumer and sophistication of the brand would bounce back, leading the consumer to be seen as even *less* sophisticated.

2. Empirical studies

In two studies we explored if traits associated with brands were transferred to target people (i.e., BTT), even when the targets' behaviors contradicted the personality of the brands. Additionally, we explored spontaneous trait inferences (i.e., STI) based on the individual targets' trait-implying behaviors, when a brand inconsistent or unrelated to that behavior was presented in the same context.

The experimental paradigm was an adaptation of the false recognition paradigm (see Todorov & Uleman, 2002) where instead of a recognition test, trait inferences were evaluated using rating scales (i.e., the degree to which participants attributed to the target persons the traits previously inferred from their behaviors or associated to the brands they were presented with; see Carlston & Mae, 2007).

This experimental paradigm involved three phases: the paired associative phase, the study phase and the test phase (see Fig. 1). In order to create specific trait-expectancies about different brands in an experimentally controlled way, a paired-associative learning phase (see Mata, Ferreira, & Reis, 2013; van Oostendorp & Kok, 1990) presented participants with logotypes of unknown brands paired with trait-words. The study phase followed the initial associative learning task. In this second phase, each participant was shown in each trial a photo of a target person, a logotype of a brand, and either a sentence the target exhibited which described a neutral behavior ("Went to buy a piece of clothing") or a trait-implying behavior (e.g., "Steps on his girlfriend's feet while dancing"; implied trait: clumsy). The trait-expectancy about a brand (created during the first phase) could be either unrelated or incongruent with the trait-implying sentence. Additionally, in the case of neutral behavioral descriptions the description itself was completely irrelevant to target's behavior. Unrelated and irrelevant trials allow for distinct controls. Unrelated trials verified if changes in BTT and/or STI (resulting from the incongruence between the trait associated to the

brand and the trait implied by the behavior) were due to that incongruence rather than by the mere concomitant activation of different traits. Irrelevant trials (i.e., trials where STI could not occur) verified if changes in BTT and/or STI were due to the occurrence of any other additional processes resulting from the processing and encoding of behavioral descriptions. The third phase, the test phase, tested for the impressions developed in the second phase. To do this, the photos of the target persons were presented again. In each trial participants were requested to rate how much a given trait (either the trait implied by the behavior exhibited by the target person in the photo or the trait associated to the brand previously presented next to the photo), applied to the target person. The goal was to measure BTT and STI. The trait attributions of the traits associated to the brands were used as indicators of BTT. STI was indicated by the degree that the trait attributions made from the target person's behavior remained linked to that person.

The main difference between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 was the inclusion, in the latter, of brands without a trait-expectancy associated to them. In real life, this would correspond to brands that are unknown to the consumer and which logotypes did not convey any particular trait-expectancy. In Experiment 2, these no-expectancy brands served as a baseline against which we could confirm that BTT was actually taking place when the brand had a trait-expectancy.

2.1. Experiment 1

2.1.1. Method

2.1.1.1. Participants. Eighty-eight university students (76 female, $M_{age} = 22.00$; $SD_{age} = 7.15$) from ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute took part in this study for which they received a course credit.

2.1.1.2. Experimental design. 4 (Versions of the stimulus list: aI versus aII versus bI versus bII) × 3 (Type of trial: incongruent versus unrelated versus irrelevant) × 2 (trait-scale: trait associated to the brand versus trait implied by the behavior), with the last two factors within-participants.

2.1.1.3. Stimulus materials. The set of stimulus materials and type of trials are summarized in Appendix A. Twenty-one logotypes of real brands were selected from a universe of brands not operating in Portugal at the time of data collection and therefore unknown to the Portuguese people. These brands (used here and in Experiment 2) were pre-tested to guarantee that none of them had previous associations to personality traits (Ferreira, 2009). Twenty-one male faces were selected from Minear and Park (2004). Faces were all of Caucasian young adults (perceived age between 21 and 41 years-old), with a neutral emotion expression. Both the faces and to the brands were presented in grayscale.

Twenty-one behaviors were used in the study phase of the paradigm. Behaviors were pretested (Reis, Ramos, Orghian, & Ferreira, unpublished; Jerónimo, 2003). For each behavior participants were initially requested to generate up to three words that came to their mind. An independent pool of participants rated each behavior based on the three traits most frequently generated in the initial pretest. A behavior was considered neutral if it did not lead to any trait generations. For the present study, were selected twelve behaviors that implied personality traits (Reis et al., unpublished), with half of those traits being positive (e.g., "Only has 2 days free from work every month" [hard working]) and the other half negative (e.g., "Steps on his girlfriend feet while dancing" [clumsy]). The remaining 9 behaviors were neutral behaviors (Jerónimo, 2003). That is, they did not imply any personality trait (e.g., "Went to buy a piece of clothing"). Finally, to create trait-expectancies about the brands, 21 personality traits (10 positive and 11 negative traits) were used in the paired-associate learning task. In the case of unrelated trials, these personality-traits were equivalent in valence to the traits implied by the behaviors presented in the study phase but corresponded to the *other* dimension of
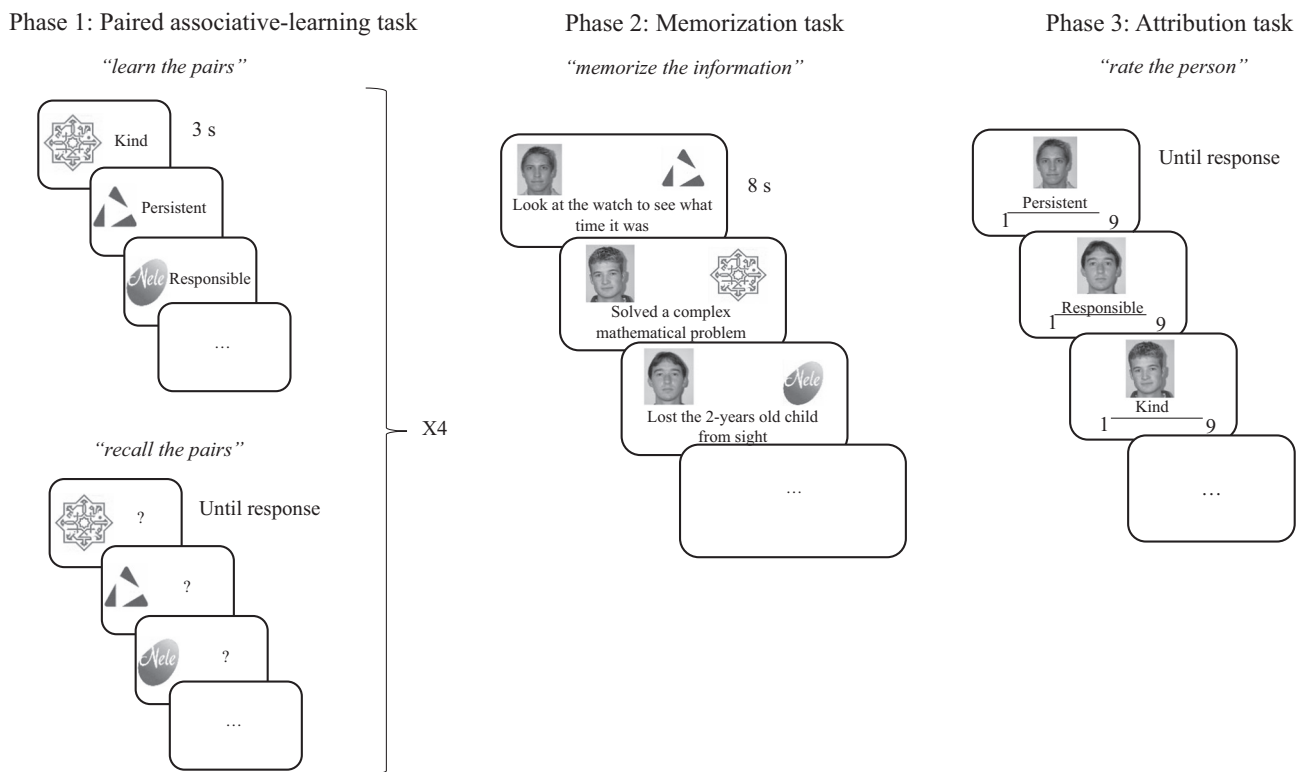
Phase 1: Paired associative-learning task

"learn the pairs"

Phase 2: Memorization task

"memorize the information"

Phase 3: Attribution task

"rate the person"

Fig. 1. Illustration of the phases and main features of the experimental paradigm used in Experiments 1 and 2.

personality according to the "warmth/competence" implicit theory of personality (Ferreira, Garcia-Marques, Toscano, Carvalho, & Sara, 2011; Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968). To give an example, a brand associated with a social positive trait (e.g., warm) was presented along with a behavioral description implying an intellectual positive trait (e.g., competent). In the case of incongruent trials, each brand's personality traits and the traits implied by the behaviors were opposite. That is, a brand associated with a given trait (e.g., happy) was presented along with a sentence implying the opposite pole of that same trait (e.g., sad). In the case of irrelevant trials brands were paired with neutral behaviors.

2.1.1.4. Procedure. Presentation of stimuli and instructions, and collection of response measures were individually made in computer using *E*-Prime 2.0 (Schneider, Eschman, & Zuccolotto, 2002). Initial instructions informed the participants that the experiment was composed of 3 phases. The first phase (paired-associative learning phase) was presented as consisting of an associative learning task of images and words; this phase was used to establish trait expectancies about the brands. The second phase (study phase) was a memorization task in which a triad of stimuli (a photo of a target person, a description of a behavior of that person, and a logotype of a brand) were presented for memorization. This phase allowed for the occurrence of spontaneous impressions (e.g., Todorov & Uleman, 2002) about the personality of the target person in the photo (based on his behavior and on the trait-expectation about the brand). The third phase (test phase) was presented as a test of their evaluation of each face presented. Participants evaluated how much each target person possessed a given personality trait, either the one implied by the behavior (STI), or the one associated to the brand (BTT). In this phase we thus accessed the impression spontaneously formed about the target person, based on the behavior and on the brand. The details of each phase are described next.

The paired-associative learning phase consisted of an associative learning task (cf. Mata et al., 2013; Van Oostendorp & Kok, 1990),

involving the presentation of the 21 brand logotypes paired with the 21 personality traits selected to create expectancies about the brands. On each screen, a logotype and a personality-trait appeared for 3 s, with the logotype on the left and the trait on the right of the central point of the screen. After an example trial, the 21 experimental trials were randomly presented, after which the associative learning was tested by presenting only the logotype and requesting the participant to write, using the keyboard, the word associated with it. The logotypes were randomly presented (at the same position on the screen as during learning) and participants had no time limit to provide their response. This sequence (presentation of the pairings logotype-trait and recall of the trait given the logotype) was repeated 4 times to maximize the establishment of trait-expectancies about the brands.

The study phase was a memorization task, which consisted of 21 sets of stimuli composed of the photo of a target person on the left hand side of the screen, a sentence describing a behavior of that person along the bottom of the screen, and a brand from the ones presented in the paired-associative learning phase on the right. After an example trial, the 21 experimental trials were randomly presented, for 8 s each (see Appendix A for a summary of the number of trials of each type).

There were three different types of trials based on the relationship between the elements of the trial. Six of the 21 trials involved a trait-implying behavior together paired with a brand that had a trait-expectancy opposite to the behavior (incongruent trials; e.g., "Steps on his girlfriend feet while dancing" implicative of "clumsy" paired with a brand with the expectancy of "careful"). Another 6 trials involved a trait-implying behavior together paired with a brand with a trait-expectancy unrelated to the behavior (unrelated trials; e.g., "Refused a client because of his skin color" implicative of "racist" paired with a brand with the expectancy "disorganized"). Lastly 9 of trials in the study phase involved a neutral behavior together with a brand with a trait-expectancy that was irrelevant for the behavior (irrelevant trials; e.g., "Went to buy a piece of clothing" paired with a brand with the expectancy "introverted").

Test phase involved the attribution of traits to the target persons

presented in the study phase. After an example trial, the photo of each target person was again presented (at the center of the screen) together with rating-scale (underneath the photo). Participants used the rating-scale to evaluate the extent with which a given trait described the target person ("How much does the trait applies to this person?"). The evaluation was made on a 9-point rating scale, from 1-not at all to 9-very much (e.g., "1-not at all kind; to 9-extremely kind"), by pressing the corresponding numeric key on the keyboard. Participants had no time limit to give their answers although they were encouraged to provide intuitive and fast responses. The participants evaluated each target person either on the trait implied by the behavior or on the trait associated to the brand (see Appendix A for a summary of the number of trials). When the behavior exhibited by the target person implied a trait, the person was later evaluated either on the trait implied by his own behavior or on the trait associated to the brand presented next to the target in the study phase. When the behavior exhibited by the target person was neutral, the person was evaluated either with respect to a trait implied by the behavior of another person[2] or to the trait associated to the brand presented next to the target in the study phase. The same participant only evaluated a given photo on one of the two traits: the trait implied by the behavior or the trait associated to the brand.

Four versions of the stimulus list were created to counterbalance the material: aI, aII, bI, bII. Behaviors paired with an incongruent brand were, in another version, paired with a brand with an unrelated trait-expectancy (thus differentiating between versions *a* and *b*), assuring that all differences between incongruent and unrelated trials were not dependent on specific pairings of the stimuli. Moreover, a target person who was evaluated for the trait implied by the behavior in one version was evaluated for the trait associated to the brand in another version (differentiating between versions I and II).

A recall task of the pairings logotype-trait was included in the end of the experiment in order to make sure that trait-expectancies about the brands created in paired-associative learning phase did not fade away during the experiment.

All ethical requirements were followed, including the provision of the informed consent before the experiment takes place and the de-briefing at the end of the experiment.

2.1.1.5. Dependent measures. The dependent measure was the mean trait attribution to the target persons of the traits implied by the behavior (to measure STI) or associated to the brand (to measure BTT).

2.1.2. Results
2.1.2.1. Impressions based on the brand trait-personality. In order to explore the impact of the brand personality on the impressions developed about targets, an ANOVA was computed for the mean trait attributions to the target persons of brand traits with 4 Versions of the stimulus list (aI, aII, bI, bII) × 3 Trial types (Incongruent, Unrelated, Irrelevant), with the last factor varying within-participant. The only statistically significant effect occurred for Trial types, $F(2, 168) = 13.97$, $p < 0.001$, $MSE = 1.68$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$ (see Fig. 2, left panel). Planned comparisons that put Incongruent trials against both Irrelevant and Unrelated trials showed a significant difference, $F(1,84) = 23.39$, $p < 0.001$.[3] That is, when the target persons' behaviors were incongruent with the traits associated to the brand, these traits were substantially less attributed to the person ($M = 4.58$,

[2] This option was taken, instead of testing for a new trait, in order to control for familiarity effects. By using a trait implied by another behavior in the stimulus set, participants could not decide about the applicability of the trait to the person based merely on the familiarity with the trait given that all traits were previously presented and thus equally familiar.

[3] Planned comparisons in this experiment and in Experiment 2 are always two-tailed. To test our hypothesis that BTT is reduced for the Incongruent trials, in the planned comparisons these trials are contrast against all others (i.e., Unrelated and Irrelevant trials together).
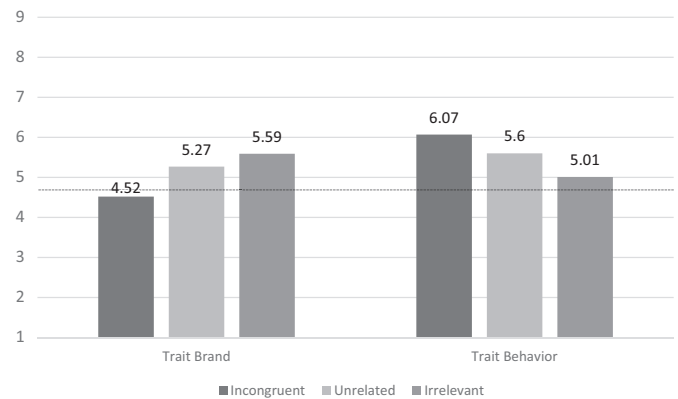

Fig. 2. Mean attribution to the person of the traits associated to the brand (left panel) and implied by the person behavior (right panel) as a function of the Trial types (Experiment 1). The dashed horizontal line represents the middle point of the scale.

$SD = 1.33$) than when the behaviors were neutral or unrelated to the brand traits ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.11$). In sum, the attribution to the person of a trait associated to the brand was much less likely if that person exhibits a behavior with opposite trait implications, than if that person exhibited a behavior either with no trait implications or with unrelated trait implications. Although the attribution of brand traits to the target persons was slightly stronger for Irrelevant than Unrelated trials, this difference was not statistically significant, $F(1, 84) = 2.96$, $p = 0.09$.

Additionally, single sample *t*-tests showed that the mean attribution of a brand's trait to the target person was statistically below the middle point of the scale (i.e., 5) for Incongruent trials, $t(87) = -2.88$, $p = 0.005$, marginally above the middle point for Unrelated trials, $t(87) = 1.83$, $p = 0.07$, and above the middle point for Irrelevant trials, $t(87) = 3.86$, $p < 0.001$. In sum, whereas a neutral behavior (or even a behavior with trait implications unrelated to the brand personality) favored the attribution to the person of the trait associated to the brand, an incongruent behavior prevented such attribution.

2.1.2.2. Impressions based on the target person behavior. In order to further explore the impact of brand personality on the impressions developed about someone, we analyzed how the person was perceived based on his behavior. The analysis examined the congruency between the behavior and the brand that was concurrently presented in the context. An ANOVA was computed for the mean trait attributions to the target persons of the traits implied by their behavior with 4 Versions of the stimulus list (aI, aII, bI, bII) × 3 Trial types (Incongruent, Unrelated, Irrelevant), with the last factor varying within-participants. The only statistically significant effect was for Trial types, $F(2, 168) = 17.22$, $p < 0.0001$, $MSE = 1.42$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.17$ (see Fig. 2, right panel). When the traits implied by behaviors and the brands are incongruent the traits are more strongly attributed to the target person ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.48$) than those implied by behaviors unrelated with the brand ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.60$), $F(1, 84) = 6.99$, $p = 0.01$, with the latter more attributed to the target person than when the behavior had no trait implications (i.e., neutral behaviors, $M = 5.01$, $SD = 0.99$), $F(1, 84) = 9.38$, $p = 0.003$.

The mean attribution of the behavior-implied trait in each condition was compared with the middle point of the scale. These comparisons showed that the target person was perceived as possessing the trait in question in both the incongruent and unrelated conditions. Specifically *t*-tests comparisons showed a link for incongruent behaviors [$t(87) = 6.75$, $p < 0.001$] and for unrelated behaviors [$t(87) = 3.59$, $p < 0.001$], with the corresponding difference to the middle point of the scale being larger for incongruent behaviors ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 1.48$) than for unrelated behaviors ($M = 0.61$, $SD = 1.60$), $t(87) = 2.53$, $p = 0.013$. No difference was found to the middle point of the scale for

irrelevant trials (i.e., when the behaviors were neutral), $t(87) = 0.11$, $p = 0.91$.

2.1.2.3. Expectancy manipulation check. In order to verify if the expectancy manipulation was effective until the end of the experiment, the mean accuracy of the recall of the association brand-trait were compared with chance level (i.e., 0.50). Both at the end of the paired-associative learning phase, $t(87) = 8.15$, $p < 0.001$, as well as at the last recall task, $t(87) = 6.17$, $p < 0.001$, recall levels were significantly above chance even if some memory loss can be observed from the first ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 0.26$) to the latter test ($M = 0.68$, $SD = 0.28$), $t(84) = 4.74$, $p < 0.001$.

2.1.3. Discussion

Traits associated to brands were perceived as part of the target persons' personality when these targets' behaviors have no trait implications (neutral behaviors) or the implied traits are unrelated with the brand. When the target person behaviors implied traits opposite to the ones associated to the brand, BTTs were substantially reduced. Likewise, the mean trait attributions to the target persons of brand traits were below the middle point of the scale when the target person exhibited an incongruent behavior but not when it exhibited an unrelated or neutral behavior. Such results pattern confirms the occurrence of BTTs, as well as their inhibition when in the presence of incongruent trait-implying behaviors. However, clearer evidence showing that brand trait transferences do occur requires a base-line condition where brands are neutral (i.e., brands not previously associated with any traits). Specifically, it requires comparing brand trait transferences in conditions where brands have associated traits to conditions where brands have no traits previously associated and therefore brand trait transference is not possible. We carry out such comparison in Experiment 2.

Exhibiting a behavior opposite to the associated brand personality has an additional consequence: the target person is perceived as possessing the trait implied by her behavior even more than when behaving in a way that has no relationship to the brand trait personality. However, results do not completely clarify whether brands associated with unrelated traits also facilitate (albeit to a lesser extent) trait inferences. In both cases (incongruent and unrelated brand-behavior trials). The attribution of the trait implied by the behavior is above the middle point of the rating scale, which suggests facilitation. In the same vein, trait attributions are higher when the behavior is trait implying (and the brand does not oppose the implied trait) than when the behavior is neutral, which again suggests that a trait inference is being made from the behavior and attributed to the target person. In any case, Experiment 2 is a better test of this hypothesis because it compares the impact of brands with or without a trait associated on the trait inferences made from behaviors. If STI are indeed enhanced by the presence of an inconsistent (or unrelated) brand, then STI are expected to be less pronounced in the condition where brands have no traits previously associated comparing to conditions where brands were previously associated to traits.

2.2. Experiment 2

2.2.1. Method

Experiment 2 followed the same method of Experiment 1, with the exception that it also included brands about which a trait-expectancy was not created.

2.2.1.1. Participants. Sixty-three university students (50 Female; $M_{age} = 23.32$; $SD_{age} = 6.21$) from ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute took part in this study in exchange of a monetary compensation (5 euros).

2.2.1.2. Experimental design. 4 (Versions of the stimulus list: aI, aII, bI,

bII) × 5 (Trial types: incongruent versus unrelated versus irrelevant versus no-expectancy trait-implying versus no-expectancy neutral), with the last factor within-participants.

2.2.1.3. Stimulus materials. The same materials used in Experiment 1 but 15 additional logotypes (selected from Ferreira, 2009), and 15 additional photos of male faces (selected from Minear & Park, 2004) complemented the original material, creating a total of 36 logotypes and 36 photos (see Appendix B). Twelve trait-implying behavioral descriptions were added to the original 12 used in Experiment 1 (selected from Reis and colleagues unpublished norms), half of which were positive and the rest negative. Three additional neutral behavioral descriptions were added to the 9 neutral behaviors already used in Experiment 1 (selected from Jerónimo, 2003). In total, there were 24 trait-implying and 12 neutral behavioral descriptions.

As aforementioned, the main difference to Experiment 1 refers to the initial establishment (or not) of a trait-expectancy about the brands. Hence, initial expectancies were created via the associative learning task for only half of the brands (i.e., 18). The remaining half of the logotypes also entered in the associative learning task but they were paired with neutral words (names of common objects, such as hat, table, boot, selected from Marques, 1997). By including all the logotypes in the associative learning task, we avoid potential differences in familiarity and attention that could result from previous exposure to only half of the logotypes.

2.2.1.4. Procedure. The same procedure of Experiment 1, except that in associative learning task only 18 brand logotypes were paired with a personality trait, whereas the remaining 18 logotypes were paired with neutral words. Another difference to Experiment 1 was the removal of the recall task of the pairings logotype-trait, given that the associative learning task already revealed to be efficient enough in maintaining trait-expectancies about the brands across the entire experiment.

As a consequence of having brands with no trait-expectancy, in the study phase the type and number of trials were different from the previous experiment (see Appendix B): 18 trials included a brand with expectancy and 18 a brand with no expectancy. In the trials involving a brand with expectancy, 6 were subsequently coupled with behaviors with trait implications opposite to the brand expectancy (incongruent trials), 6 were coupled with behaviors with trait implications unrelated to the brand expectancy (unrelated trials), and the remaining 6 were coupled with neutral behaviors (irrelevant trials). Concerning the trials involving a brand with no expectancy, 12 were coupled with a trait-implying behavior (no-expectancy trait-implying trials) and 6 were coupled with neutral behaviors (no-expectancy neutral trials). Therefore, the number of trials involving a trait-implying behavior coupled with a brand with no expectancy was the same (12) as those coupled with a brand with trait-expectancy. The same was true for the 6 trials involving neutral behaviors.

In the test phase, in half of the trials each target person was evaluated on the trait associated to the brand that accompanied him in the study phase; for the other half each target was evaluated on the trait implied by his behavior, which was presented during the study phase (see Appendix B). When the brands had no trait-expectancy or the behaviors were neutral, traits associated to other brands or implied by other behaviors in the set were used.

In order to counterbalance the material, four versions of the stimulus lists (aI, aII, bI, bII) were created so that the brands associated with a trait in one version were associated with a neutral word in the other version (version a versus b) and a target person evaluated on the trait implied by the behavior in one version was evaluated on the trait associated to the brand in the other version (version I versus II).

2.2.1.5. Dependent measures. The dependent measure was the mean trait-attribution to the target persons of the traits associated to the brand or implied by the behavior.

2.2.2. Results

2.2.2.1. Impressions based on the brand trait-personality. An ANOVA test was used to explore the impact of brand personality on the impressions developed about the target persons. The ANOVA was computed for the mean trait attributions to the target persons of brand traits with 4 Versions of the stimulus list (aI, aII, bI, bII) × 5 Trial types (Incongruent, Unrelated, Irrelevant, No-Expectancy trait-implying, No-Expectancy neutral), with the last factor varying within-participants. As in Experiment 1, there was a main effect of Trial types, $F(4, 236) = 10.02$, $p < 0.0001$, $MSE = 1.28$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.15$[4] (see Fig. 3).

Planned comparisons showed the same results pattern as Experiment 1. The attribution of the trait associated to the brand was significantly lower for Incongruent trials ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.47$) than for Unrelated and Irrelevant trials together ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.08$), $F(1, 59) = 31.07$, $p < 0.001$. Additionally, the attribution of the trait associated to the brand was slightly lower for Unrelated trials ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.46$) than when the behavior was neutral (Irrelevant trials; $M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.21$), $F(1, 59) = 3.95$, $p = 0.052$. Also relevant was the comparison with No-expectancy trials. First, trait attribution in the No-expectancy trials was alike irrespectively of the behavior of the target person having trait-implications ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 0.90$) or being neutral ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.34$), $F(1, 59) = 0.08$, $p = 0.77$. This was expected since no trait was available to be transferred from the brand to the target person. Second, and more importantly, trait attributions in these No-expectancy trials were significantly inferior to the attribution of traits effectively associated with the brand providing that the behavior of the target person was neutral (i.e., for Irrelevant trials), $F(1, 59) = 9.08$, $p = 0.004$. This result confirms the occurrence of trait transferences from the brand to the target person. Therefore, the inhibition processes were likely responsible for the decrease of brand trait transference observed with unrelated and especially with incongruent trait-implying behaviors.

Single sample *t*-tests showed that the mean trait attributions to the target persons of brand traits is below the middle point of the scale for Incongruent trials, $t(62) = -2.40$, $p = 0.020$, and above the middle point of the scale for both Irrelevant, $t(62) = 5.26$, $p < 0.001$, and Unrelated trials, $t(62) = 2.16$, $p = 0.035$.

2.2.2.2. Impressions based on the target person behavior. An ANOVA was computed for the mean trait attributions to the target persons of the traits implied by their behavior with 4 Versions of the stimulus list (aI, aII, bI, bII) × 3 Trial types (Incongruent, Unrelated, No expectancy), with the last factor varying within-participants. There was only a main effect for Trial types, $F(4, 236) = 10.72$, $p < 0.001$, $MSE = 1.24$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.19$ (see Fig. 4).

Planned comparisons further revealed that traits implied by behaviors were attributed more to the target person when they were incongruent with the brand ($M = 6.61$, $SD = 1.41$) than when they were unrelated with it ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.24$), $F(1, 59) = 9.76$, $p = 0.003$, and more in the latter case (Unrelated trials) than when the brand had no trait-expectancy ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 0.99$), $F(1, 59) = 5.94$, $p = 0.018$. The planned contrast that constitutes a purer test for the occurrence of STI (i.e., the comparison between trait-implying and neutral behaviors when the brand has no expectancy associated to it) showed more trait attributions being made from trait-implying ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 0.12$) than neutral ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 0.16$) behaviors, $t(59) = 1.40$, $p = 0.084$ (one-tailed), although the difference did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

In all cases, the attribution of the trait implied by the behavior of the
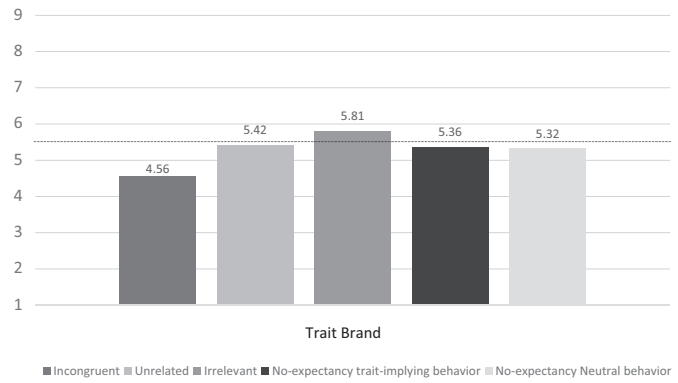
Fig. 3. Mean attribution to the person of the traits associated to the brand as a function of the Trial types (Experiment 2). The horizontal line represents the middle value of the scale.
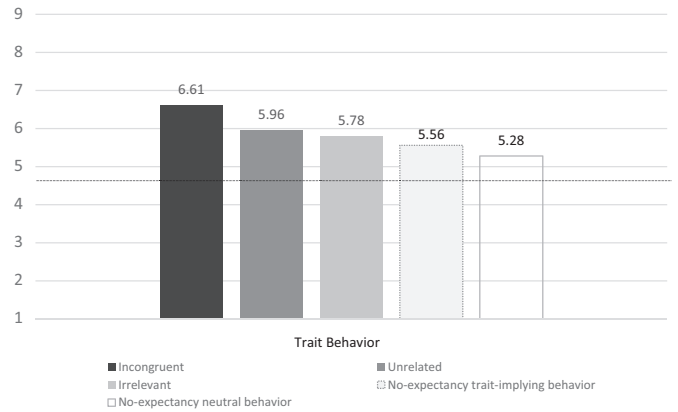

Fig. 4. Mean attribution to the person of the traits implied by his behavior as a function of the Trial types (Experiment 2). The horizontal line represents the middle value of the scale.

target person was significantly above the middle point of the scale (Incongruent: $t(62) = 8.94$, $p < 0.001$; Unrelated: $t(62) = 6.19$, $p < 0.001$; No expectancy: $t(62) = 4.40$, $p < 0.001$).

2.2.3. Discussion

Experiment 2 replicated Experiment 1's main results. Brand trait transferences were less likely when the target person's behavior had trait implications opposite to the brand trait expectancy. More importantly, the lower attribution for incongruent trials seems to result from the inhibition of trait transferences that otherwise would be made (as shown by higher BTT when the behaviors of the target are neutral, compared to when the brands have no expectancy). BTT also seem to be less likely for behaviors with trait implications unrelated to the brand when compared to behaviors with no trait implications. However, attributions of the brand traits to the persons were below the middle point of the scale only when the behavior is incongruent with the brand, which suggests that only in this case can we argue for a clear inhibition of BTT. In any case, the partial inhibition of BTT observed for unrelated behaviors may be a consequence of participants making additional inferences from the behavior besides STI. Indeed, halo effects occurred when spontaneously inferring traits from behaviors (Carlston & Skowronski, 2005; Crawford, Skowronski, & Stiff, 2007) and generalizing from existing inferences to other trait dimensions. In fact, although the traits implied by unrelated behaviors belonged to a different dimension in the bi-dimension space of personality (Rosenberg et al., 1968), these two dimensions (warmth and competence) are unlikely to be fully orthogonal. A valence dimension seems to underlie warmth and competence (Brown, 1986; Rosenberg et al., 1968). STI may thus slightly interfere with BTT in unrelated trials because both traits (the

behavior implied trait and the trait associated to the brand) share the same valence.

On the other hand, the attribution of traits implied by the behavior of the actor (i.e., STI) is magnified if that behavior is exhibited in the presence of a brand with opposite trait-expectancies.

3. General discussion

In this work, we focus on the conditions under which, and on the processes by which, personality traits associated to a brand become part of the consumer personality. The present studies provide the first demonstration of how BTT is affected and affects trait inferences stemming from a person's behavior, in an experimental paradigm that was setup to assure that trait transferences and trait inferences are not intentionally (but spontaneously) made.

More specifically, we suggest that the psychological processes underlying brand trait transferences are similar to the ones involved in spontaneous trait transferences (see also Arsena et al., 2014). We further developed this idea by noting that BTTs are unlikely to occur in a social vacuum. Almost by default, consumers are likely to be engaged in all sorts of trait-implying behaviors that critically shape how perceivers form impressions of the consumers (e.g., Gilbert, 1998; Winter & Uleman, 1984). Inspired by the impression formation literature, according to which available pieces of information about someone are integrated into a coherent impression (Asch, 1946; Hamilton et al., 1980a, 1980b; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), we propose that consumers' actions will be taken into account and integrated with brand information. Specifically, traits that are spontaneously inferred from consumers behaviors, and traits associated to the brands selected by or associated to these consumers interact to give rise to coherent impressions of personality.

To test our proposal, we developed an experimental paradigm inspired by previous research (see Carlston & Mae, 2007; Todorov & Uleman, 2002) that allowed us to study trait inferences and brand trait transferences in the same experimental settings. In this paradigm, a person and a description of his behavior were simultaneously presented with a brand, and the first impressions about the person were subsequently measured. In two experiments, we replicated the BTT effect (Arsena et al., 2014) by showing that traits associated to brands were attributed to the consumers' personality. More importantly, we identified two different but interrelated phenomena: the inhibition of BTT and the enhancement of STI. More specifically, BTT systematically occurred only when the consumers own behavior had no trait implications opposite to the brand. Otherwise, BTT was inhibited. These results reinforce preliminary evidence for the absence of BTT in face of conflict between the brand and other relevant sources of information about the consumer (Arsena et al., 2014; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007). Furthermore, the target persons were perceived as possessing the trait implied by their behaviors even more so when the implied traits were in conflict with the brands personality. This contrast effect (see Sherif & Sherif, 1967) is in line with Das et al. (2010)'s suggestion, according to which the attributes of the consumer would become even more salient in presence of an incongruent brand.

It thus seems that existing trait knowledge about a brand affects STI differently from existing trait knowledge about the consumer. While the latter inhibits STI (Wigboldus et al., 2003; see also Jerónimo et al., 2015; Ramos et al., 2012), our results indicate that the former boosts STI. These apparently contradicting results make sense to the extent that one trait-implying behavior (e.g., "Mary stepped on her partner's feet while dancing"; implied trait: clumsy) that is in conflict with what the perceiver already knows about a person (e.g., Mary is a professional dancer) may not be enough to dramatically change the perceiver's impression. In other words, under these conditions the behavior is perceived as less diagnostic (compared to circumstances where there are no prior expectancies about the person). However, when the person behaves in ways that are incongruent with the brand personality

associated with him, this may trigger a contrast effect by making the behavior particularly salient. This would lead, for example, to an unhealthy behavior to become particularly noticeable when the author of the behavior is associated with healthy brands.

3.1.1. Managerial implications

This research has a number of potential business and marketing implications.[5] First, in terms of brand communication strategy, they alert us for the impact of associating a brand which personality is incongruent with the brand users' trait-implying behaviors. To illustrate, take the example of the car industry where companies that produce top range luxury and powerful cars have recently began to promote specific images of "efficient dynamics" and "environmental friendliness". This may be at odds with the consumer driving behavior, for instance, when the person drives at high speeds, leading this driver to be perceived as less environmental friendly and more reckless (i.e., smaller BTT and larger STI effects) than if the communication of the brand did not focused on "environmental friendliness". Consequently, it is likely that the communication efforts of the brand will be undermined. This might also decrease, in the long run, the identification with the users of the brand and weaken self-brand connections (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) as well as the psychological sense of brand community (see Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008), and affect brand choice and purchase intention (e.g., Belk, 1980; Ferraro, Bettman, & Chartrand, 2008).

Second, our results may have implications for brand satisfaction. In many instances, consumers purchase and use brands for their expected transformational power (primarily of psychological features), both at the level of self and of others' perceptions of the self (Richins, 2011). That is, each consumer may hold a personal and unique "belief that one's self or one's life will be changed in a significant and meaningful way by the acquisition and use of a product" (Richins, 2011, p. 145). Consumers may thus purchase and use brands in the hope of transferring favorable brand traits to themselves. If BTT is inhibited due to brand users' behaviors that are incongruent with the brand personality, brand users will not end up making the expected favorable impression upon others. As a consequence, their satisfaction with the brand and repurchase intentions may decrease. Indeed, Richins (2013) showed that, for materialistic consumers, the high expectations that meaningful transformations would occur after purchase are accompanied by a quick decline of the positive emotions that occurred after acquisition. According to the author, this suggests that the expected transformations may not have occurred as anticipated, with a possible impact on product satisfaction and product-evoked emotions, and on consumer well-being. The BTT inhibition reported here is likely to be one of the process explanations for this decline on product satisfaction. Ultimately, it may eventually lead to the dissolution of a person-brand relationship, or brand divorce (Sussan, Hall, & Meamber, 2012). In sum, once one realizes that others do not perceive one's self as possessing the traits of the selected and used brand, the person-brand relationship is likely in jeopardy. Acknowledging and understanding BTT inhibition (and STI boosting) and how they operate may allow marketing managers to create strategies calibrated to deal with brand (dis)satisfaction and consumer-brand relationships that may originate from BTT inhibition and STI boosting.

Third, the development of a strong and well-defined personality image may have paradoxical effects if a growing number of brand users begins to include groups of consumers that select the brand for transformational purposes but that have stereotypical attributes incongruent with the brand's image. In such cases, the brand risks losing its transformational power. Furthermore, one may speculate that these new

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[5] We thank the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions regarding these implications.

consumers may also imperil the person-brand relationship the brand has with original brand-users because of the incongruence between the brand image and new users' behavior. One real-life illustration of these phenomena, is that of *chav* culture being associated with designer brands such as Burberry. *Chavs* are stereotyped as low-income young people who wear real or imitation designer sportswear and exhibit anti-social and loutish behaviors (for a review see Mason & Wigley, 2013). In this context, the fact that Burberry design check and baseball cap have become symbols of the *chav* culture created obvious but un-anticipated problems for this brand in terms of perceived image and marketing positioning. The present study reveals one additional con-sequence. From our perspective, given the opposition between the *chav* stereotype and the Burberry brand personality, brand transference of the luxury and "distinctly British spirit" of Burberry (Burberry Group PLC, n.d.) to these new users is likely to be strongly inhibited, possibly putting into question the perceived symbolic value and by noticing the incongruence, also strain the relationship between the brand and Bur-berry's desired "high-class" consumers. Although this kind of phe-nomena is hard to anticipate, it calls attention to the need for carefully design marketing strategies that may satisfy very specific segments, without jeopardizing the brand image for the main or remaining seg-ments.

3.1.2. Limitations and future research

The experimental paradigm used in the present studies was based on the false recognition paradigm (Todorov & Uleman, 2002). However, STI and BTT were assessed via a trait evaluation task (i.e., participants evaluated in a 9-point rating scale the degree with which each target was perceived to possess a given trait) rather than the recognition task typically used in the false recognition paradigm. Using this evaluative measure allowed us to access STI and BTT under comparable conditions within the same paradigm. However, the evaluative measure has its own shortcomings. First, although high/low evaluative ratings were interpreted as resulting from an increase/decrease in STI or BTT, it could also be the case that these spontaneous trait inferences and transferences occurred in the study phase but were later intentionally corrected or adjusted during the test. In other words, our experimental paradigm cannot distinguish whether the evaluations were made spontaneously or if participants' ratings were at least partially based on explicitly recalled information during the test. We believe that such possibility of inferences and transferences being corrected during the trait attribution task only is unlikely because similar experimental procedures such as the savings in relearning paradigm (Carlston et al., 1995; Carlston & Skowronski, 1994) have successfully used evaluative ratings to capture spontaneous trait inferences and transferences be-fore. Notwithstanding, our paradigm also diverges from the savings in relearning paradigm in several respects. Thus, future studies should directly address the spontaneous nature of the STI and BTT reported in the present paper. One possibility is to explore whether the same results would be obtained under time-pressure conditions, that is, when the participants are asked to answer in a very short time on the evaluative rating task, hence blocking the possibility of intentional adjustment.

One other limitation of the experimental paradigm used in the present experiments is that in each trial the target-person was presented always at the left side of the screen and the brand on the right side (with the behavior presented below the two). Assuming that participants scanned the information from left to right, one might think that more attention was given to the target person than to the brand. The present experiments do not control for this aspect of the experimental setup. However, the occurrence of BTT suggests that *enough* attention was paid to the brand as well as to the person. Moreover, the fact that BTTs were inhibited by trait-implying behaviors incongruent to the brand per-sonality suggests that participants' attention was approximately dis-tributed between the brand, the behavior, and the person. In any case, these arguments cannot fully discard possible primacy effects de-pending on what information was seen and processed first. More

research is certainly needed to further explore this possibility.

Other conceptual aspects remain that need to be addressed in future research. First, brand personality is a complex set of personality traits interacting with each other and not just one single trait association. Using a single trait has the advantage of offering greater experimental control. However, an important generalization of the current findings involves the use of real brands with more complex brand personalities. This would contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological processes underlying BTT, as well as increase the ecological validity of the present results.

Second, in the two reported experiments brands were merely vi-sually associated with actors. No information was provided concerning the nature of this association, which participants may have been per-ceived as purposeless or incidental. However, in the real world in-dividuals more often than not choose the brands they use. It is thus important to extend the present findings using brands that individuals actually have chosen to manage how they present themselves to others.

Finally, whereas the present studies focus on the trait transferences from brands to individuals, future research could explore the opposite direction of trait transference. That is, the impact of inferences made from consumer behavior on impressions developed about the brands personality these consumers select and use. Research on spontaneous trait transferences has shown the occurrence of trait transferences from a person's behavior to other people or even objects (e.g., Carlston & Mae, 2007), but no research has yet specifically considered brands as the targets of trait transferences. Variables such as the salience of brands (e.g., known versus unknown brands), brand-users (e.g., celeb-rities versus unknown persons, attractive versus unattractive in-dividuals), and the perceivers higher order goals (which could lead to focusing their attention more on the person or the brand) are poten-tially relevant factors that await further experimental inspection. These factors may contribute to one (from the brand to the consumer) or the other (from the consumer or user to the brand) to prevail in a given circumstance. Because the users of the brand are an important source of brand associations, impact of the impressions formed about brand users on the brand image, on attitudes toward the brand, and brand recall (e.g., Erdogan, 1999 for a review) may enlarge this line of research. Thusly, a logical extension of this work is exploring how brand con-sumer behavior shapes the perception of the brand's personality.

3.1.3. Conclusion

In sum, the present work describes two new phenomena: brand trait transference inhibition and spontaneous trait inference enhancement; both phenomena emerge from the conflict between brand personality and the traits of brand users, which were inferred from users' own be-haviors. Both of these findings are potentially relevant for marketing. One important motivation underlying consumer preferences for certain brands is self-expression. Thus, it is critical to know about the effec-tiveness of such efforts on the perceptions and impressions others ac-tually form about the consumer. Apparently, basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976) by associating oneself with successful brands (or brands with subjectively desirable personality attributes) is effective as long as the brand users' behavior is largely neutral or with trait im-plications unrelated to the brands personality. However, this self-ser-ving mechanism is bound to backfire whenever the consumer behaviors imply traits opposite to the brand personality. In this case, not only is BTT inhibited (i.e., the brands desirable attributes do not become part of the consumers' attributes) but also STI is enhanced (i.e., the attri-butes opposite to brands attributes become more easily inferred from the consumers trait-implying behaviors). The underlying irony is that some consumers who actively use brands to change the way others perceive them (e.g., someone who is perceived as clumsy starts using brands associated with elegance or grace) may end up being perceived as possessing even more of the attributes they want to avoid in the first place. This should be particularly so when the trait-implying behaviors are not under the full control of the consumer (e.g., someone clumsy

who would have a hard time behaving gracefully).

Appendix A

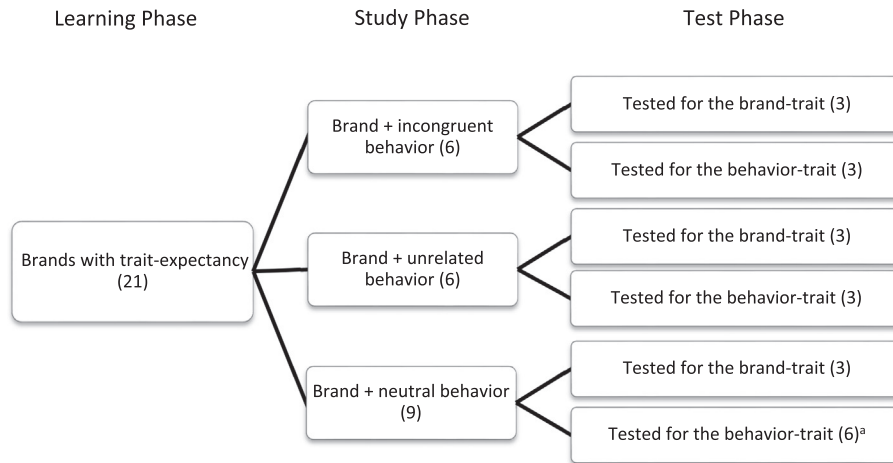Learning Phase   Study Phase   Test Phase

Fig. A1. Trial types for Experiment 1. Number of trials per condition is indicated in parenthesis. [a]Trait implied by another behavior in the stimulus set

Appendix B
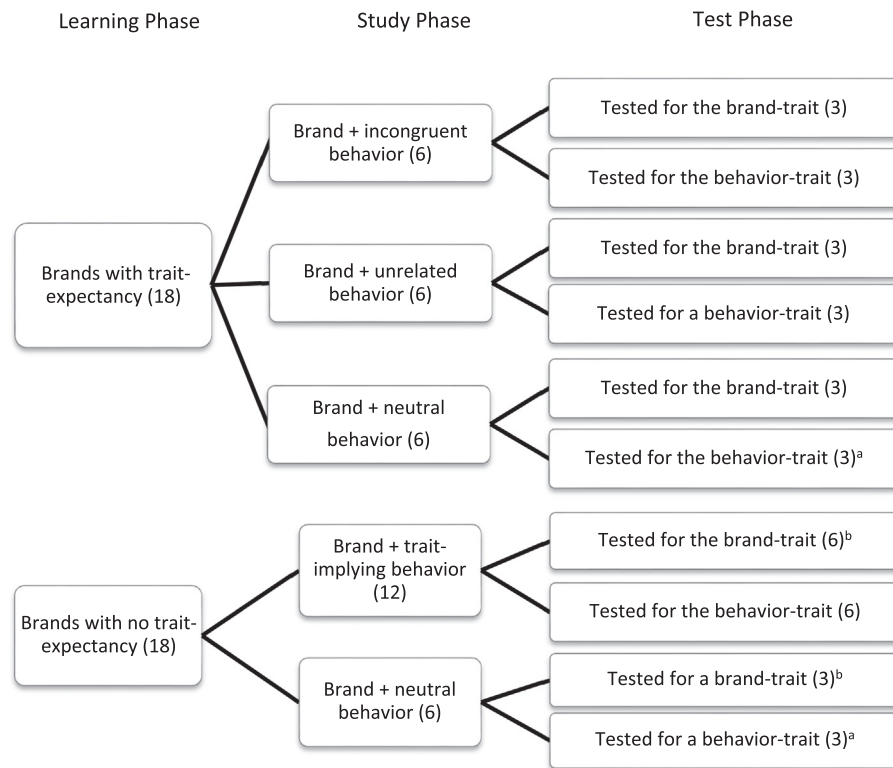
Learning Phase   Study Phase   Test Phase

Fig. B1. Trial types for Experiment 2. Number of trials per condition is indicated in parenthesis. [a]Trait implied by another behavior in the stimulus set. [b]Trait associated to another brand in the stimulus set

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