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Deciphering consumer commitment: Exploring the dual influence of self-brand and self-group relationships

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Abstract

Consumer-brand relationships are highly valued as brand-committed consumers are thought to deliver many positive outcomes for affiliated brands. However, in addition to connections between individuals and brands, consumer-brand relationships also involve relationships between individuals and other brand users. Little attention has been given to the potential consequences associated with commitment to other brand users as compared to the brand itself. Therefore, our framework establishes two distinct types of consumer-brand relationships (i.e., *self-brand relationships* vs. *self-group relationships*) that differentially influence brand commitment versus group commitment, leading to contrasting effects on both desirable and undesirable brand outcomes. Specifically, our studies illuminate that while brand commitment is largely associated with favorable brand-related outcomes, group commitment does not protect against brand switching and is negatively related to willingness to pay price premiums and positive word-of-mouth. Our main contribution is uncovering how consumer-brand relationships face tradeoffs between brand and group attachments, whereby commitment provides both conditional benefits as well as unintended consequences.

KEYWORDS

brand switching, commitment, consumer-brand relationships, positive word-of-mouth, price premium, social identity theory

1 | INTRODUCTION

In a modern era that focuses on continuously maximizing the customer experience, one solution is that marketers should leverage individuals impassioned by the brand to capitalize on the power of consumer-brand relationships (Gorlier & Michel, 2020). There is some general agreement that consumer-brand relationships are valuable for brands, however, our understanding of this concept is somewhat fragmented as it has been studied in separate research streams and from different perspectives that focus on various types of relationships. For example,

research with a sociological-based view of consumer-brand relationships has revealed much about the nature of social relationships that exist among active brand community members, while research with a psychological-based view of consumer-brand relationships has focused almost exclusively on the relationship between a consumer and brand. To integrate and expand our understanding of consumer-brand relationships, this research adopts a social-psychological lens to study both individual and inter-customer relationships, which constitutes a previously underrepresented distinction that figures significantly into commitment and loyalty to the brand.

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Integrating this knowledge is important as “prior research offers conflicting findings on whether a strong consumer-brand relationship hurts or protects a brand” (Hawkins, 2019, p. 395). Despite the many positive outcomes associated with strong consumer-brand relationships, a more holistic perspective would seem to suggest that committed consumers do not exclusively gift brands with an infinite abundance of longevity and wealth. In fact, there has recently been a growing interest in the potential *negative* consequences of consumer-brand relationships (Brandão & Popoli, 2022). Our paper contributes to this burgeoning research stream as it uncovers the potential threat that committed consumers may pose to brands by investigating both their commitment to the brand and their simultaneous commitment to the group of brand users. Hence, we take a novel approach by exploring the multiple roles of commitment and calling attention to the precarious nature of the more group-minded brand users.

Even brands that are well known for their committed consumers have witnessed an exodus from certain individuals. In fact, individuals with the strongest consumer-brand relationships can respond the most unfavorably to brand failures and negative events (e.g., brand love→brand hate/brand divorce; Morrish et al., 2016). For example, after multiple privacy and data misuse scandals, 44% of Facebook users deleted their accounts and chose to support competing social media platforms (Hsu, 2018). In another case, formerly loyal Apple users chose to give up their love affair with their iPhones upon learning of Apple's unusual slowdowns and stranglehold over the App Store (Clayton, 2020). Moreover, these undesirable consumer responses not only occur when there is an overtly negative event surrounding the brand but also in seemingly ordinary circumstances as well. For instance, a group of consumers took to social media to voice their complaints about Starbucks's new digital payment system that includes an option for tipping the baristas (Rella, 2022), while numerous Panera customers reported being unwilling to pay for price increases related to the rising costs of healthy ingredients (Darus, 2022). In all of these examples, many consumers spoke out against the brands, ceased purchasing their offerings, and decided to leave the brands behind... while others remained adamant about sticking with the brands. So, despite the commonly held belief that strong consumer-brand relationships lead to enhanced customer loyalty, responses to the question, “Should I stay, or should I go?” seem to vary even among those individuals.

How can committed consumers simultaneously represent both quintessential customers and a substantial threat to the brand? To answer this question, we adopt a social-psychological perspective of consumer-brand relationships (Carlson et al., 2008; Hanson et al., 2019) to investigate differences in brand versus group attachments. We argue that consumer-brand relationships include both (1.) consumer connections to the brand (i.e., *self-brand relationships*) and (2.) consumer connections to other brand users (i.e., *self-group relationships*), but that consumers may exhibit different attitudes and behaviors depending on whether they identify more closely with the brand or group of brand users. Research to date has not distinguished between the individual-level prominence of brand versus group commitment, and predominantly aggregates these

separate targets of attachment. Here, we distinguish individuals whose consumption is primarily driven by the value of the brand (Harmon-Kizer et al., 2013) from those motivated by the social linking value that group affiliation provides (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2021; Hammerl et al., 2016).

Our research investigates these distinct types of relationships across two empirical studies. Study 1 establishes our theoretical framework with a singular focus on one brand (i.e., Nike) that is typically individually consumed, using a sample of young adults for which the brand is highly relevant. Our findings demonstrate significant differences in the effects of self-brand versus self-group relationships on undesirable brand outcomes. Specifically, Study 1 reveals that while brand commitment may help to avoid negative brand outcomes, group commitment does not provide the same protection. Prior research largely shows that commitment has positive effects on desirable brand outcomes, so our results offer insights that are somewhat distinct from what has been looked at previously.

Next, we extend these findings by considering situations in which the positive effects of commitment on desirable brand outcomes may be inconsistent. Study 2 broadens the sample demographic (i.e., general consumers) and looks at multiple brands (i.e., iPod/XBOX/Disney World) that differ in the extent to which they are typically consumed individually or socially, which allows for greater variance in the strength and direction of consumer-brand relationships and enables us to investigate more complex effects. When combined, these studies demonstrate a test of our predictions in multiple contexts (i.e., athletic apparel/portable media players/video game consoles/theme parks), across brands that range from being consumed individually (e.g., Nike & iPod) to those that are consumed socially (e.g., Disney World), and produce consistent results with diverse subject populations on a wide range of both desirable *and* undesirable brand outcomes. As a result, we caution marketers to prioritize self-brand relationships over self-group relationships when developing engagement opportunities as we find that high levels of group commitment can have an adverse impact on the brand (see Figure 1). Hence, the main contribution of this research is uncovering how consumer-brand relationships face tradeoffs between brand and group attachments, whereby commitment provides both conditional benefits as well as unintended consequences for the brand.

2 | CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

According to seminal work on relationship theory in consumer research, consumer-brand relationships involve reciprocal exchange between interdependent and active partners, are purposive and create meaning for those partners, are multiplex phenomena that take many forms and provide a range of benefits for the participants, and change over a series of interactions in response to fluctuations in the contextual environment (Fournier, 1998). Consumer-brand relationships can be quite intense and are thought to make individuals more committed, dependable, and “evangelical”

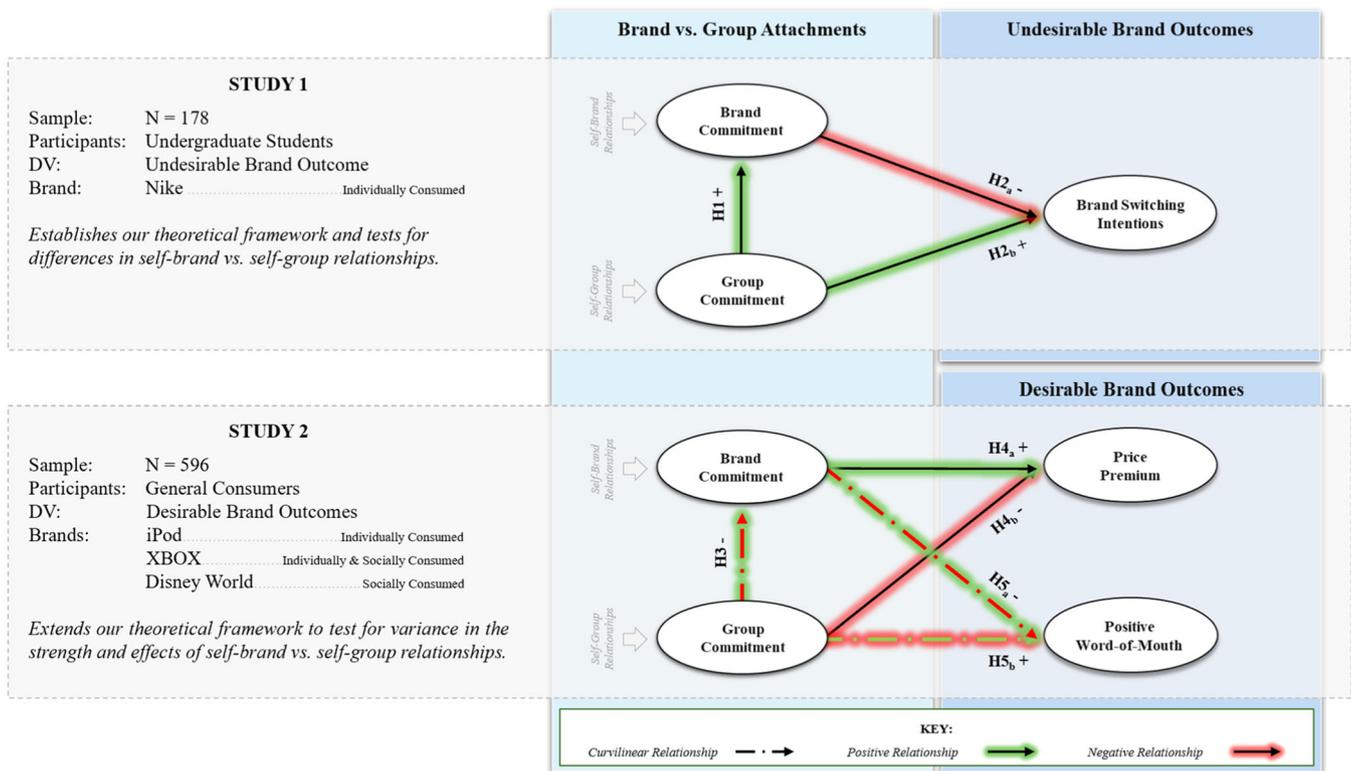


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model and overview of studies.

consumers (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). In fact, past research has predominately highlighted the plethora of positive outcomes that committed consumers can generate for brands (see Carlson et al., 2008; Iveson et al., 2022; Schau et al., 2009). Further, these consumers are argued to be nearly immune to potential negative outcomes like brand switching since they are more forgiving of product failures or lapses in service quality (McAlexander et al., 2002; Sung & Choi, 2010). Hence, marketers often seek to build and facilitate strong consumer-brand relationships as a cost effective and powerful tool to support their brands (Gorlier & Michel, 2020).

Yet, there has recently been a growing interest in the potential negative consequences of consumer-brand relationships (Brandão & Popoli, 2022; Hawkins, 2019; Liao & Wang, 2020), many of which are likely influenced by inter-customer relationships. Research exploring consumer-brand relationships has revealed that consumers simultaneously form and maintain relationships with both the brand and other brand users (McAlexander et al., 2002). As a result, highly committed consumers may appropriate the brand and assert claims on ownership—considering it to be shared cultural property as opposed to intellectual property that is privately owned by the organization—potentially destabilizing its identity and deterring others from consuming the brand (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015). While extant literature indicates that committed consumers are more resistant to brand switching behaviors (Lam et al., 2010), recent examples highlight the potential influence that other brand users can have on a consumer's actions related to the brand. This may help explain why strong brands like Nike, Facebook, and Apple have

recently experienced backlash and defections from formerly loyal consumers. For instance, the hashtag #DeleteFacebook was mentioned 40,398 times in a single day on Twitter after discovering a major data privacy scandal (Hsu, 2018). Many previously committed Facebook users abandoned their accounts, switched to other social media platforms, and encouraged others to do the same. Thus, the possibility of losing previously committed consumers due to brand switching behaviors, willingness to pay price premiums, and exhibiting word-of-mouth behaviors remain vital concerns to be studied.

2.1 | Commitment in consumer-brand relationships

A main argument of this research is that consumer-brand relationships are characterized by consumer connections to both the brand (i.e., *self-brand relationships*) and other brand users (i.e., *self-group relationships*), but that for most consumers the strength of their relationships will likely vary. For instance, some consumers form self-brand connections and may purchase brands to specifically aid in constructing their self-concept (i.e., brand identification; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Harmon-Kizer et al., 2013). Alternatively, some consumers are “more interested in the social links that come from brand affiliations than they are in the brands themselves” (i.e., group identification; Fournier & Lee, 2009, p. 3). However, prior studies predominantly focus on either the brand or group as the target of attachment, resulting in omitted yet valuable information about the downstream effects of brand versus group commitment. Brand

commitment is defined as an emotional or psychological attachment to a brand (Beatty & Kahle, 1988), whereas group commitment can be characterized as an individual's desire to maintain relationships with other consumers (Zhou et al., 2012). Individuals with strong consumer-brand relationships are often thought to be committed to both the brand and the group of brand users.

Interestingly, previous research suggests that brand commitment is a precursor to group commitment since consumers become “united predominately by their common interest in a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 414). That is, consumers are likely to first form a relationship and become committed to a brand, and that association motivates them to feel an affiliation with other brand users and become committed to the overall social group. However, given that individuals typically rely on personal conversations before making consumption decisions, is it always true that consumers form an attachment to the brand before they build a connection to other brand users? Approximately 13% of consumer sales—the equivalent of \$6 trillion in annual spending—is driven from word-of-mouth experiences (Saleh, 2018). This means that in a social consumption environment, relationships are commonly formed with people first and then transmitted to brands second (Fournier & Lee, 2009). In fact, commitment to an entity (i.e., brand) is a function of the number of people (i.e., brand users) with which the individual is connected and emotionally attached (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Thus, commitment to the group of brand users is likely to converge and galvanize into broader attachments to the brand (Ashforth et al., 2008; Wei & Yu, 2012). Hence, we argue that group commitment likely motivates greater brand commitment.

H1: Group commitment will be positively associated with brand commitment.

2.2 | The threat of undesirable brand outcomes

Building a strong relationship with consumers is not always beneficial as brand attachment can be linked to both positive *and* negative consumer behaviors (Japutra et al., 2018). Negative behaviors are likely to occur following brand transgressions or service failures, which often prompt consumers to re-evaluate their brand relationships and make decisions ranging from expressing dissatisfaction to switching brands. The extent to which consumers are likely to be influenced by their social circles when making these brand-related decisions should be influenced by the extent to which they are committed to the brand and the group. For example, consumers may defect to other brands when their social identity is threatened and group boundaries become permeable (Rao et al., 2000). Therefore, brand switching can be a manifestation of social mobility—a member's attempt to leave or disassociate from the group (Lam et al., 2010). This explanation of brand switching is consistent with Social Identity Theory, which posits that an individual derives their identity from their affiliations with social groups, and that these attachments are valuable and distinguish the individual from those

who do not share the same connections (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Feelings of closeness and similarity weave a brand's identity into the fabric of the self-identity, making it extremely uncomfortable for a consumer to alter their association with the brand. Prior research finds that stronger consumer-brand relationships are more resistant to switching behaviors over time (Iveson et al., 2022). In short, the closer and more committed a consumer feels to the brand, the less likely they are to switch to another brand. However, other research indicates that those who seek out the brand's social network predominantly for relationship connections may actually be more loyal to the group (Ruane & Wallace, 2015). In essence, the closer a consumer feels to other brand users, the less likely they are to abandon the group, regardless of what happens to the brand.

H2a: Brand commitment will be negatively associated with brand switching intentions.

H2b: Group commitment will be positively associated with brand switching intentions.

2.3 | Antecedents of commitment

Before discussing our studies, it is important to note that to better test our focal relationships within the nomological network of consumer-brand relationships we also include several vital antecedents (Sung & Choi, 2010) in our model. First, prior research indicates that brand and group identification act as primary antecedents which exert a particularly strong influence on the activation and processing of other psychological processes. Identification is conceived as the degree of overlap between an individual's self-schema and the target's schema (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Consumers may feel a sense of connection with other brand users due to their identification with the desirable characteristics of a brand (i.e., brand identification) or their identification with the desirable characteristics of other consumers who purchase the brand (i.e., group identification; Carlson et al., 2008; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2021). An individual who identifies with either the brand or group of brand users will exhibit a greater psychological sense of brand community, which is defined as the extent to which an individual perceives connections with the brand and other brand users, and is particularly important as it “may provide a more detailed understanding of how to build long-term, committed consumer-brand relationships” (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 286). Thus, the greater the perceived overlap between the consumer's identity and that of the brand or group, the greater their commitment and sense of connection to others associated with the brand (Kwon & Ha, 2023).

Carlson et al. (2008) find that a psychological sense of brand community is related to increased brand commitment, and Pedeliento et al. (2020) find that integration in brand-based groups is also associated with greater group commitment. Hence, we suggest that a psychological sense of brand community will also be related to increased brand and group commitment. Furthermore, a

psychological sense of brand community should mediate the effect of group identification on group commitment, such that individuals who feel a strong connection with other brand users will perceive that they belong to the same social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which increases their group commitment.

3 | STUDY 1

The purpose of our first study is to establish our theoretical framework and test for differences in self-brand versus self-group relationships. We expect these differences to be prevalent following brand transgressions when the contrast between brand and group identities should be elevated and consumers are most likely to consider negative brand-related behaviors. As such, for Study 1 we selected a brand (i.e., Nike) that experienced significant public scrutiny when some previously loyal brand users deemed their new ad campaign to be controversial and a moral violation of their expectations for the brand. Study 1 surveyed a homogenous group of consumers with varying levels of brand commitment and group commitment. Thus, we surveyed 178 students at a large, public university in the southern United States that is sponsored by our focal brand (i.e., Nike), so our findings should generalize to other settings where the population has an interest in the product (Compeau et al., 2012) and an opportunity to interact with other brand users. A student sample was selected with the goal of accessing a homogenous group of consumers to increase internal validity and reduce measurement model error (Carpenter & Fairhurst, 2005). Hence, the sampling method is both convenient and purposive (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Participants voluntarily took the survey for partial course credit, and it was administered through Qualtrics. The average age of participants was 20.8 years, and approximately 56.2% were female. The ethnic make-up of the sample was as follows: 71.3% European American/White; 16.9% African American/Black; 3.9% Latino/Hispanic; 2.8% Asian American/Asian; 5.1% Other.

3.1 | Procedures

Participants were first asked to think about their attachments to the Nike brand and other Nike fans. Then, they responded to a series of attitudinal and behavioral questions which measured their existing brand identification, group identification, psychological sense of brand community, brand commitment, and group commitment. Since Study 1 is particularly interested in the diverging effects of brand versus group commitment on a negative and undesirable brand outcome, we utilized a current issue surrounding the Nike brand to prime a negative context and examine brand switching intentions. We provided participants with a recent news article regarding a controversial issue about Nike (Creswell et al., 2018), and then showed the advertisement that was highlighted in the article. Afterwards, participants were asked how likely they were to switch

to another brand in the future. Finally, they answered demographics questions.

3.2 | Measures

Brand commitment was measured on a 2-item, 9-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.845$; Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010; see Appendix A). Group commitment was measured on a 4-item, 9-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.917$; Zhou et al., 2012). Our dependent variable was brand switching intentions, and it was measured on a 3-item, 9-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.983$; Bui et al., 2011). As previously noted, we also measured several vital antecedents such as brand identification ($\alpha = 0.788$) and group identification ($\alpha = 0.739$), both measured with an aggregate of a verbal item on a 9-point Likert scale and a visual item on a 7-point Likert scale (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000), as well as psychological sense of brand community measured on a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.960$; Carlson et al., 2008). Lastly, we asked participants if they considered themselves to be users of the Nike brand (yes = 1; no = 0), and to indicate how long (i.e., the number of years) they had been brand users. We included tenure as a control variable since long-tenured brand users are thought to have more positive relationships with the brand, higher customer retention, and greater consumer engagement (Hanson et al., 2019). Appendix B displays the correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 1.

3.3 | Validity and reliability

First, as a robustness check to verify that our sample represented actual brand users, we conducted a one-sample *t*-test in SPSS 28 (test value = 0.5) which indicated that 98% of our participants considered themselves Nike brand users ($M_{\text{yes}} = 0.98$; $M_{\text{no}} = 0.02$; $t = 42.87$; $p < 0.001$). Then, the measurement and structural model were examined by running the partial least square (PLS) Algorithm in SmartPLS 3.2.8. The Cronbach's α 's and standardized regression weights all exceeded 0.70. The composite reliabilities were all above 0.70 which illustrates reliability, and the average variance extracted exceeded 0.50 which demonstrates convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). To assess discriminant validity, we determined that the square roots of the average variance extracted were higher than their interconstruct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Appendix A displays the composite reliabilities, average variance extracted, and standardized loadings for all of these constructs.

Furthermore, given that the survey was comprised of self-reported data, we addressed common method variance in several ways. First, we employed several procedural remedies in designing and administering the survey, such as mixing the order of the constructs (i.e., outcome variables were measured first after exposure to the stimuli), randomizing the presentation of items, and using different scale types (Chang et al., 2010). We also conducted Harman's one-factor test by loading all of the substantive construct items onto a single factor to check whether this accounted for the

TABLE 1 Study 1 partial least square structural equation model (PLS-SEM) results.

Relationship		Path coefficient	t Value	p Value
<i>Hypothesized</i>				
H1	Group commitment → Brand commitment	0.534	7.298	<0.001***
H2 _a	Brand commitment → Brand switching intentions	-0.260	2.577	0.010**
H2 _b	Group commitment → Brand switching intentions	-0.100	1.001	0.317
<i>Antecedents of commitment</i>				
	Brand identification → Psychological sense of brand community	0.380	4.285	<0.001***
	Group identification → Psychological sense of brand community	0.324	3.832	<0.001***
	Brand identification → Brand commitment	0.154	2.220	0.027*
	Group identification → Group commitment	0.141	10.842	0.066****
	Psychological sense of brand community → Brand commitment	0.177	10.849	0.065****
	Psychological sense of brand community → Group commitment	0.650	10.222	<0.001***
<i>Controls</i>				
	Tenure → Psychological sense of brand community	-0.006	0.115	0.909
	Tenure → Brand identification	0.244	3.884	<0.001***
	Tenure → Group identification	0.203	3.326	0.001***
	Tenure → Brand commitment	0.016	0.318	0.751
	Tenure → Group commitment	-0.012	0.281	0.779
	Tenure → Brand switching intentions	-0.122	1.718	0.086****

Note: Pearson correlations (2-tailed).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; **** $p < 0.10$.

variance in the data, and found that the one-factor solution explained less than 50% of the variance, indicating no common method bias (Amatulli et al., 2020).

3.4 | Hypothesis testing

We utilized a partial least square structural equation model in SmartPLS 3.2.8 to test our hypotheses. A partial least squares structural equation model is ideal for the evaluation of a complex structural model since it is capable of incorporating numerous constructs, even when sample size is small (Grégoire et al., 2010). Moreover, as opposed to covariance-based models, partial least square structural equation model has greater statistical power and is recommended for research with an emphasis on prediction (Reinartz et al., 2009). Table 1 delineates the results of our structural model based on two-sided tests, using 500 bootstrapped samples to assess the significance of the parameters.

While not formally hypothesized since the relationships have been empirically validated in prior research, it is important to note that we replicate findings for the positive effects of the antecedents (i.e., brand identification, group identification, and psychological sense of brand community) on brand and group commitment, and find evidence that group commitment directly influences brand

commitment.¹ Hence, we find two main pathways to distinct commitment targets: (1) identifying with the brand directly leads to increased brand commitment; (2) identifying with the group primarily generates a greater psychological sense of brand community, which then leads to increased group commitment.

Regarding our main hypotheses, we first find that group commitment is associated with greater brand commitment ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$; see

¹Interestingly, we find that psychological sense of brand community is only marginally related to brand commitment ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.07$). Since prior empirical research generally examines either brand or group commitment, but not both constructs simultaneously as we do here, we ran post-hoc analyses in SPSS 27 to regress brand commitment on psychological sense of brand community, with brand and group identification as controls. psychological sense of brand community significantly predicted brand commitment, $\beta = 0.63$, $t(177) = 6.92$, $p < 0.001$, explaining a significant proportion of variance, $R^2 = 0.54$, $F(1,177) = 67.33$, $p < 0.001$. However, when we include group commitment in the model, the relationship between psychological sense of brand community and brand commitment becomes nonsignificant, $\beta = 0.15$, $t(177) = 1.65$, $p = 0.10$. Next, we regressed group commitment on psychological sense of brand community, with brand and group identification as controls. Consistent with our previous results, psychological sense of brand community significantly predicted group commitment, $\beta = 0.85$, $t(177) = 9.45$, $p < 0.001$, explaining a significant proportion of variance, $R^2 = 0.58$, $F(1,177) = 78.54$, $p < 0.001$. We then included brand commitment in the model and found that the relationship between psychological sense of brand community and group commitment remained significant, $\beta = 0.51$, $t(177) = 5.96$, $p < 0.001$, and predicted a significant proportion of variance, $R^2 = 0.71$, $F(1,177) = 103.30$, $p < 0.001$. As the relationship between psychological sense of brand community and brand commitment is only significant when group commitment is not included in the model, but the relationship between psychological sense of brand community and group commitment is significant regardless of the inclusion of brand commitment, this is an initial indication that group commitment directly influences brand commitment.

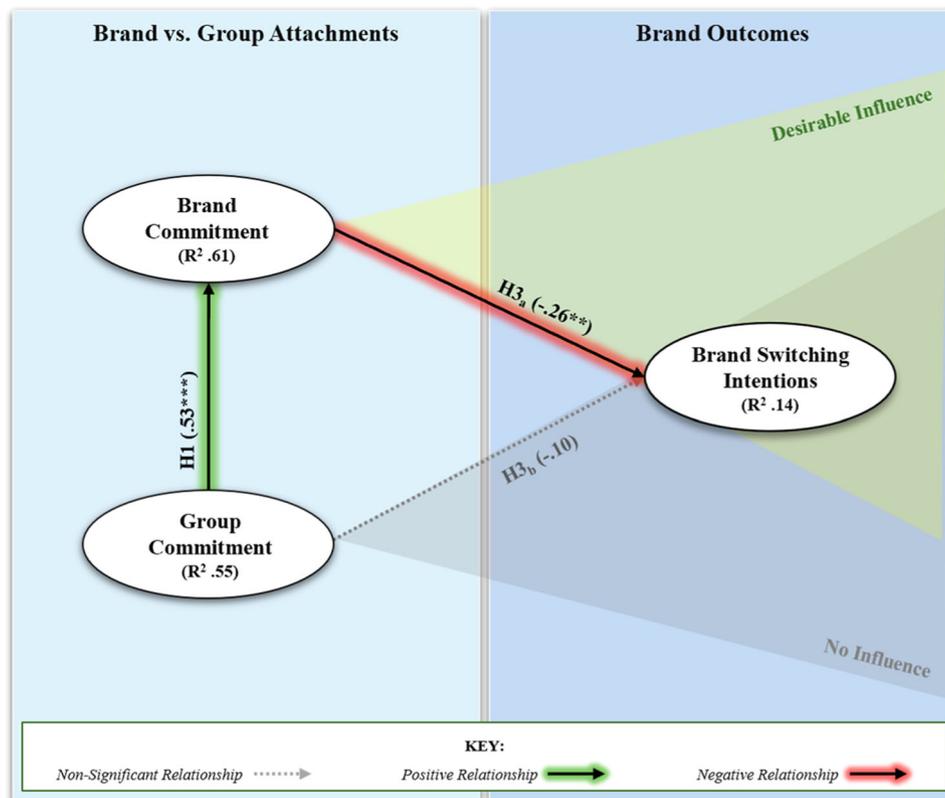


FIGURE 2 Study 1 model of PLS-SEM results.

Figure 2), supporting H1. Furthermore, we also find that brand commitment has a significant and negative relationship with brand switching intentions ($\beta = -0.26$, $p = 0.01$), supporting H2_a. However, group commitment was non-significantly related to switching to support another brand ($\beta = -0.10$, $p = 0.32$), rejecting H2_b. Hence, while this finding does not indicate that those with strong group commitment are more likely to switch brands, it does reveal that those who are highly committed to the group are neither prone nor impervious to brand switching intentions. Committed consumers have been assumed to be protected against these types of customer defections, but this may not be true for those who are predominantly committed to the group. In this case, the consumer's priority would be to maintain their association with the group, even if it meant switching away from the original focal brand. The brand becomes vulnerable if ties to other brand users override and become more important than connections to the brand itself. Thus, when a consumer's relationship to other brand users becomes so strong that the welfare of the group is valued above that of the brand, then they may be willing to leave the *brand* so as to retain their attachment to the *group*.

4 | STUDY 2

The results from our first study shed light on the multifaceted nature of consumer-brand relationships. Building on this foundation, the purpose of Study 2 is to enhance and expand our partial least square structural equation model (PLS-SEM) to further clarify this

nomological network. First, we utilize a broader sample and alternative study design to demonstrate that our results generalize across contexts. To understand this phenomenon in a manner that mirrors the intricate realities of product consumption, it is imperative to acknowledge the diverse relational dynamics that correspond with the social nature of the brands with which consumers engage. This necessitates a nuanced approach that accounts for the spectrum of product interactions. For instance, some products (e.g., books, headphones, apparel) are individually consumed. These products offer a self-contained product experience that does not rely on shared interactions with other consumers, even when used in public spaces. In contrast, some products (e.g., theme parks, concerts, restaurants) are socially consumed. Their experience is contingent upon shared interactions with fellow consumers, with the extent of the product experience significantly shaped by the presence or absence of others. While individually consumed products and socially consumed products represent the extremes of the spectrum, a multitude of products like smart speakers, video game consoles, and televisions occupy an intermediary position. These products offer the flexibility of being consumed both individually and socially. Although the product's intrinsic value is not solely dependent on shared interactions, they can be shared with others to enhance the experience. In Study 1, our focal brand, Nike, exemplified consumer goods brands that are predominantly individually consumed. Moving forward into Study 2, our investigation expands to encompass a broader spectrum of brand consumption experiences. This spectrum

spans from those primarily consumed individually (e.g., iPod), to products that lend themselves to either individual or social consumption (e.g., XBOX), and ultimately to those exclusively consumed in social settings (e.g., Disney World). This broader scope allows us to capture a more comprehensive range of variance within our model.

Second, since this research focuses on the different influences of brand versus group commitment in consumer-brand relationships, for robustness we include new measures of these variables (Carlson et al., 2008; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In doing so, and by looking at multiple brands that differ in how they are consumed, this enables us to investigate potential curvilinear effects that are more socially-driven and particularly likely to emerge in situations where brands are socially consumed and group processes become more salient. While it is common to investigate the linear influence of commitment in consumer-brand relationships, prior research argues that “all positive traits, states, and experiences have costs that at high levels may begin to outweigh their benefits, creating the non-monotonicity of an inverted U” (Grant & Schwartz, 2011, p. 62). As such, we consider the extent to which self-brand versus self-group relationships enhance the influence of commitment on desirable brand outcomes up to a point, beyond which their effects become detrimental.

Third, we explore how these relationships influence *desirable* brand outcomes like willingness to pay a price premium and word-of-mouth behavior. While Study 1 utilized overtly negative and undesirable brand outcomes to demonstrate significant differences in self-brand versus self-group relationships, Study 2 extends our model to look at how brand versus group commitment can have opposite effects on purportedly positive and desirable outcomes. Brand commitment has been found to have a positive impact on desirable brand outcomes (Carlson et al., 2008), and there seems to be an assumption in the literature that group commitment would generate the same effects. However, based on our framework tested in Study 1, which highlights the contrasting effects of brand versus group commitment, we argue that group commitment should have the opposite influence.

4.1 | Tradeoffs between brand and group commitment

In addition to affective attachment, commitment also encompasses the consumer's perception of costs and obligations towards a brand or a group of brand users (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Commitment intensifies as consumers invest significant resources—such as personal identity, effort, time, and money—into a valued relationship (Sung & Choi, 2010). However, maintaining high levels of commitment to multiple targets demands considerable personal resources, and dedicating maximum effort to both brand and group commitment might not always seem advantageous (Hammerl et al., 2016). Hence, while it is conceivable to be highly committed to both the brand and the group, many consumers may experience conflicting commitment motivations that necessitate resource allocation toward either the

brand or the group. For individuals who predominantly identify with fellow brand users, directing their efforts towards reinforcing affiliation and commitment to the group becomes more appealing than channeling the same resources into the brand.

In alignment with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), those deeply committed to the group derive social validation from other brand users and bolster their self-identity through association with the social group. For them, the potential loss of social validation from the group carries more profound implications for their self-identity than disassociating from a single brand. Consequently, such consumers are motivated to uphold group commitment, even if it means compromising on brand commitment. It is for this reason that consumers might voice dissent or discontinue their allegiance to a brand that appears to deviate from the preferences of the group. Thus, while initially enhancing brand commitment, there exists an optimal threshold of group commitment. Beyond this threshold, an increase in group commitment could lead to a decline in brand commitment.

H3: Group commitment will exhibit a negative curvilinear (i.e., concave) relationship with brand commitment.

4.2 | Divergence in desirable brand outcomes

Brand users are likely to display intentions and behaviors which are congruous with group norms (Gifford & Newmeyer, 2019), and these norms may include actions like demonstrating a preference for the brand or expressing positive sentiments about the brand. The impetus behind these behaviors is the level of brand commitment an individual holds. According to Carlson et al. (2008), individuals deeply committed to a brand tend to manifest a preference for it even if it incurs a higher cost than a competing alternative. Furthermore, they are inclined to advocate for the brand to others, reflecting their strong attachment and the intrinsic value they ascribe to it. Conversely, they might not be as willing to incur a price premium for the brand's offerings. For these consumers, the intrinsic value lies in their affiliation with the social group, and this affiliation outweighs considerations of paying more. Hence, being asked to pay a premium could be interpreted as the brand taking opportunistic advantage of the consumer's attachment to the group for financial gain.

H4a: Brand commitment will be positively associated with paying a price premium.

H4b: Group commitment will be negatively associated with paying a price premium.

Finally, we posit that propensity to speak positively on behalf of the brand may be conditional upon the hierarchical nature of the brand's social network. While past research suggests that brand commitment will be associated with a greater intention to promote the brand to others (Carlson et al., 2008), the hierarchical nature of

group affiliation seems to indicate that consumer motivations are not consistent across all levels of brand commitment. This relationship is likely convex in nature as consumers with the highest levels of brand commitment are interested in protecting the integrity of the brand. As such, they may seek to dictate who constitutes a “true believer,” and then ward against non-legitimate users (Cova & Pace, 2006). Those who are highest in the hierarchy and the most committed to the brand are not interested in spreading the gospel. They are likely to believe that if you do not understand and appreciate the brand already, then you do not deserve affiliation with the brand. Thus, brand commitment may increase positive word-of-mouth up to a specific point, but at the highest levels these individuals will be less likely to recommend the brand to others (Sicilia et al., 2016).

Additionally, we argue that the motivations behind word-of-mouth behavior will also change directions across different levels of group commitment, driven by individual desires to maintain a positive self-identity. In this case, we anticipate a concave relationship based on past research applying the tenets of Social Identity Theory to strategic self-presentation among team-based social groups. Wann and Branscombe (1990) found that individuals either enhance their self-image through increasing their association with an entity or protect their self-image through increasing the distance between oneself and an entity. Specifically, die-hard fans (i.e., strong group commitment) engage in behaviors to strengthen their association with the team (e.g., verbally demonstrating their affiliation), while fair-weather fans (i.e., weak group commitment) were less likely to demonstrate their affiliation and more likely to distance themselves from the team. Thus, we suggest that those with weak group commitment will avoid promoting the brand to others to protect their self-identity since the group is not a part of their self-concept, while those with strong group commitment will promote the brand to others so as to enhance their self-identity because the group is likely to be a part of their self-concept.

H5a: Brand commitment will exhibit a negative curvilinear (i.e., concave) relationship with positive word-of-mouth.

H5b: Group commitment will exhibit a positive curvilinear (i.e., convex) relationship with positive word-of-mouth.

4.3 | Antecedents of commitment

Lastly, consumers often anthropomorphize brands by treating them like humans and forming relationships with them (Sung & Choi, 2010). Such relationships are characterized by ongoing relational exchanges between participants and a belief that each partner can rely on the other (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Both brand trust (i.e., consumer willingness to rely on the brand and belief that it will deliver on its promises) and group trust (i.e., consumer willingness to rely on the group and support the group's preferences; Mattison Thompson et al., 2014) are related to an increased psychological sense of brand community since trust in partners is a necessary component of

relationship building. Furthermore, a psychological sense of brand community should mediate the effect of group trust on group commitment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

4.4 | Procedures

A quasi-convenience sample was used to recruit survey participants. Students enrolled in business classes at a large, public university in the Midwestern United States were given credit for recruiting three study respondents. A meta-analysis found that studies utilizing student-recruited samples delivered equally representative samples and effects as compared with nonstudent-recruited samples (Wheeler et al., 2014). Therefore, we followed procedural recommendations and trained student recruiters with strict guidelines on how to obtain and assemble a diverse sample: (1) all respondents must be brand users [e.g., own an iPod/own a XBOX/have recently visited Disney World]; (2) participants were required to be over 18 years of age; (3) at least two of the three respondents had to be 25 years of age or older; (4) at least two out of three had to identify with the opposite gender. Respondents were given the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of three awards: one \$200.00 prize and two \$100.00 prizes. As such, Study 2 surveyed consumers from three separate brands that represent different industries (i.e., iPod = portable media players; XBOX = video game consoles; Disney = theme parks), and whose products span a range of consumption experiences (i.e., iPod = individually consumed; XBOX = individually and/or socially consumed; Disney = socially consumed). Therefore, this research should bolster our findings, enhancing their potential for generalizability across diverse brands and industries.

The final sample consisted of 596 consumers (iPod $N = 198$; XBOX $N = 175$; Disney $N = 223$). The survey asked subjects to respond to a series of attitudinal and behavioral questions about the brand and concluded by obtaining demographic information. The age of participants spanned a broad range: 59.0% 18-24 years old; 20.1% 25-38 years old; 16.0% 39-51 years; 4.8% 52 or older. Approximately 42.5% were female. The highest level of completed education for the sample was as follows: 1.7% None Completed; 45.0% High School Degree; 13.5% Associate's Degree; 29.9% Bachelor's Degree; 6.9% Master's Degree; 3.0% Doctoral Degree.

4.5 | Measures

In Study 2, brand commitment was measured on a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.948$) and group commitment was measured on a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.965$; Carlson et al., 2008; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; see Appendix C). Our dependent variables were willingness to pay a price premium measured on a 2-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.884$; Zeithaml et al., 1996) and positive word-of-mouth measured via a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.945$; Arnett et al., 2003). Consistent with our previous study, we also measured several vital antecedents such as

brand identification ($\alpha = 0.889$) and group identification ($\alpha = 0.905$), which were measured in the same manner as in Study 1 (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Brand trust was measured on a 3-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.899$; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and group trust measured via a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.961$). Psychological sense of brand community was again measured on a 6-item, 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.974$; Carlson et al., 2008).

We also included three control variables in our main analysis. First, as before, we include tenure of brand usage as it is likely to influence brand relationships and outcomes (Hanson et al., 2019). Next, we created a variable for brand type to control for incongruities from the different kinds of industries (coded as: iPod = -1; XBOX = 0; Disney = 1). Furthermore, we also included involvement as a control variable since a consumer's level of involvement with the brand is thought to influence their perceived psychological attachments (Carlson et al., 2008). This construct was measured on a 20-item, 7-point bipolar scale ($\alpha = 0.966$; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Appendix D displays the correlations and descriptive statistics for all of Study 2.

4.6 | Validity and reliability

The measurement and structural model were examined with the PLS Algorithm in SmartPLS 3.2.8. The Cronbach's alphas and standardized regression weights exceeded 0.70. The composite reliabilities were above 0.70 which illustrates reliability, and the AVEs exceeded 0.50 which demonstrates convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). To assess discriminant validity, we determined that the square roots of the average variance extracted were higher than their interconstruct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As before, to address common method variance we employed several procedural remedies in designing and administering the survey (Chang et al., 2010). Moreover, we also conducted Harman's one-factor test and found that the one-factor solution explained less than 50% of the variance, indicating that common method bias was not an issue (Amatulli et al., 2020). Appendix C displays the composite reliabilities, average variance extracted, and standardized loadings for all of the substantive constructs.

4.7 | Hypothesis testing

We tested our hypotheses by running a partial least square structural equation model in SmartPLS 3.2.8. Table 2 outlines the results of our structural model based on two-sided tests, using 500 bootstrapped samples to assess the significance of the parameters. As before, we replicate findings from past research, including Study 1, regarding the positive effects of the antecedents (i.e., brand identification, group identification, brand trust, group trust, and psychological sense of brand community) on brand and group commitment. Notably, in addition to better representing the holistic nature of the nomological net surrounding consumer-brand relationships, incorporating brand and group trust as antecedents also helps to increase the effect sizes

across all constructs resulting in the enhanced predictive validity of our model.²

Consistent with our theorizing, the quadratic effect results revealed a significant and *negative* curvilinear relationship between group commitment and brand commitment ($\beta = -0.06$, $p = 0.02$; see Figure 3), supporting H3. We utilized the path coefficients to derive the maxima and graph of the relationship between group commitment and brand commitment ($x = 2.534$; see Figure 4). Thus, as a consumer's group commitment increases through the lower levels, their brand commitment is also heightened. However, once group commitment scores reach the maxima at 2.534, the direction of the slope shifts and individuals become more likely to exhibit decreased levels of brand commitment. Hence, consumers who are the most committed to the group are less committed to the brand. According to our data, 50.5% of consumers fall into the danger zone where additional efforts to build group commitment could have a detrimental effect on brand commitment.

Next, supporting H4_a, we find a positive and significant relationship between brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, our results also demonstrate that those with high group commitment are significantly less likely to pay a higher amount for the brand's offerings ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = 0.005$), supporting H4_b. In support of H5_a, we find a significant and negative curvilinear relationship between brand commitment and positive word-of-mouth ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = 0.008$). Thus, as brand commitment increases from low to moderate levels, consumers are more likely to recommend the brand to others. However, those who have the strongest brand commitment are actually less likely to openly promote the brand. Finally, supporting H5_b, we also find a significant and positive curvilinear relationship between group commitment and positive word-of-mouth ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.04$). This reveals that consumers with low to moderate levels of group commitment are significantly less likely to recommend the brand to others, but those with the highest group commitment become more likely to promote the brand. Appendix E summarizes the overall results of our findings from Studies 1 and 2.

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Despite past research highlighting a number of positive outcomes when leveraging consumer-brand relationships (Iveson et al., 2022; Schau et al., 2009), this research reveals a much more complex phenomenon whereby commitment can be associated with both positive *and* negative outcomes. We find that perceived brand versus group identification and trust differentially influence brand and group commitment, which have divergent influences on important

²Moreover, the inclusion of trust as antecedents is likely a main reason why the positive relationship between psychological sense of brand community and brand commitment is now significant in Study 2. This suggests that both brand identification and brand trust are needed to generate a greater psychological sense of brand community, which in turn increases brand commitment whereby consumers recognize the brand as being important and care about their relationship.

TABLE 2 Study 2 PLS-SEM results.

Relationship	Path coefficient	t Value	p Value	
<i>Hypothesized</i>				
H1	Group commitment → Brand commitment	0.299	5.479	<0.001***
H3	Group commitment ² → Brand commitment	-0.059	2.351	0.019*
H4 _a	Brand commitment → Price premium	0.551	11.442	<0.001***
H4 _b	Group commitment → Price premium	-0.135	2.844	0.005*
H5 _a	Brand commitment ² → Positive word-of-mouth	-0.086	2.669	0.008**
H5 _b	Group commitment ² → Positive word-of-mouth	0.062	2.014	0.044*
	Brand commitment → Positive word-of-mouth	0.391	6.263	<0.001***
	Group commitment → Positive word-of-mouth	-0.206	3.542	<0.001***
<i>Antecedents of Commitment</i>				
	Brand identification → Psychological sense of brand community	0.277	5.089	<0.001***
	Group identification → Psychological sense of brand community	0.113	2.185	0.029*
	Brand identification → Brand commitment	0.197	5.186	<0.001***
	Group identification → Group commitment	0.062	1.737	0.083****
	Brand trust → Psychological sense of brand community	0.113	3.388	0.001***
	Group trust → Psychological sense of brand community	0.221	6.068	<0.001***
	Brand trust → Brand commitment	0.161	4.538	<0.001***
	Group trust → Group commitment	0.003	0.103	0.918
	Psychological sense of brand community → Brand commitment	0.211	4.251	<0.001***
	Psychological sense of brand community → Group commitment	0.673	18.362	<0.001***
<i>Controls</i>				
	Tenure → Brand identification	0.114	2.989	0.003**
	Tenure → Group identification	0.202	4.924	<0.001***
	Tenure → Brand trust	0.016	0.450	0.653
	Tenure → Group trust	0.083	2.157	0.031*
	Tenure → Psychological sense of brand community	0.140	4.580	<0.001***
	Tenure → Brand commitment	0.040	1.325	0.186
	Tenure → Group commitment	0.051	1.870	0.062****
	Tenure → Price premium	0.034	0.907	0.365
	Tenure → Positive word-of-mouth	0.066	1.846	0.065****
	Involvement → Brand identification	0.550	21.796	<0.001***
	Involvement → Group identification	0.426	14.020	<0.001***
	Involvement → Brand trust	0.534	14.606	<0.001***
	Involvement → Group trust	0.457	12.135	<0.001***
	Involvement → Psychological sense of brand community	0.176	4.549	<0.001***
	Involvement → Brand commitment	0.151	3.669	<0.001***
	Involvement → Group commitment	0.140	4.581	<0.001***
	Involvement → Price premium	0.250	5.447	<0.001***
	Involvement → Positive word-of-mouth	0.457	8.755	<0.001***
	Brand type → Brand Identification	-0.081	2.318	0.021*

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Relationship	Path coefficient	t Value	p Value
Brand type → Group Identification	-0.092	2.682	0.008**
Brand type → Brand trust	-0.019	0.568	0.570
Brand type → Group trust	0.017	0.438	0.661
Brand type → Psychological sense of brand community	0.080	2.934	0.004**
Brand type → Brand commitment	-0.033	1.373	0.170
Brand type → Group commitment	-0.028	1.141	0.254
Brand type → Price premium	0.028	0.911	0.363
Brand type → Positive word-of-mouth	0.040	1.247	0.213

Note: Pearson correlations (2-tailed).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; **** $p < 0.10$.

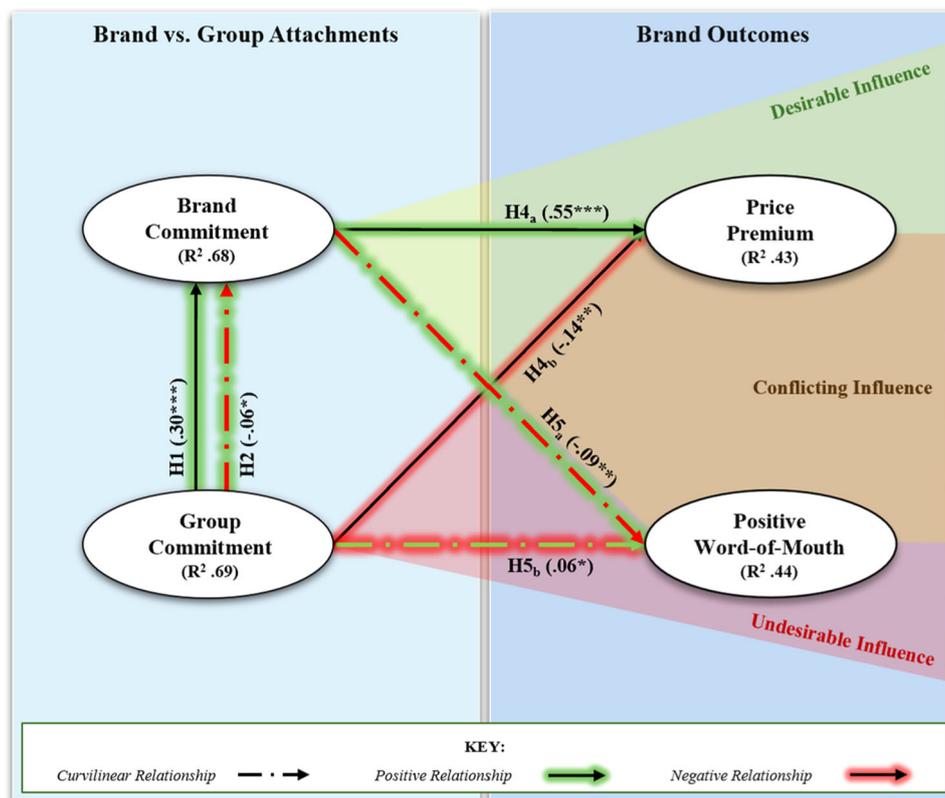


FIGURE 3 Study 2 model of PLS-SEM results.

outcomes like brand switching, willingness to pay a price premium, and positive word-of-mouth. The main contribution of this research is to establish that (1.) there are two distinct types of consumer-brand relationships (i.e., *self-brand relationships* vs. *self-group relationships*), (2.) which lead to contrasting effects on important brand-related outcomes (i.e., both *desirable* and *undesirable*), (3.) creating tradeoffs between brand and group attachments whereby commitment provides both conditional benefits as well as unintended consequences for the brand. We expound on this below by offering several theoretical and managerial implications of our studies.

5.1 | Theoretical implications

First, prior research has predominately investigated either brand commitment or group commitment within empirical models, but not both types of commitment simultaneously. This work contributes to our knowledge regarding the multiple roles of commitment in consumer-brand relationships by investigating both constructs simultaneously within our model. Specifically, Study 1 reveals that group commitment significantly impacts brand commitment. These results run counter to a main assumption in the literature which suggests that a consumer's

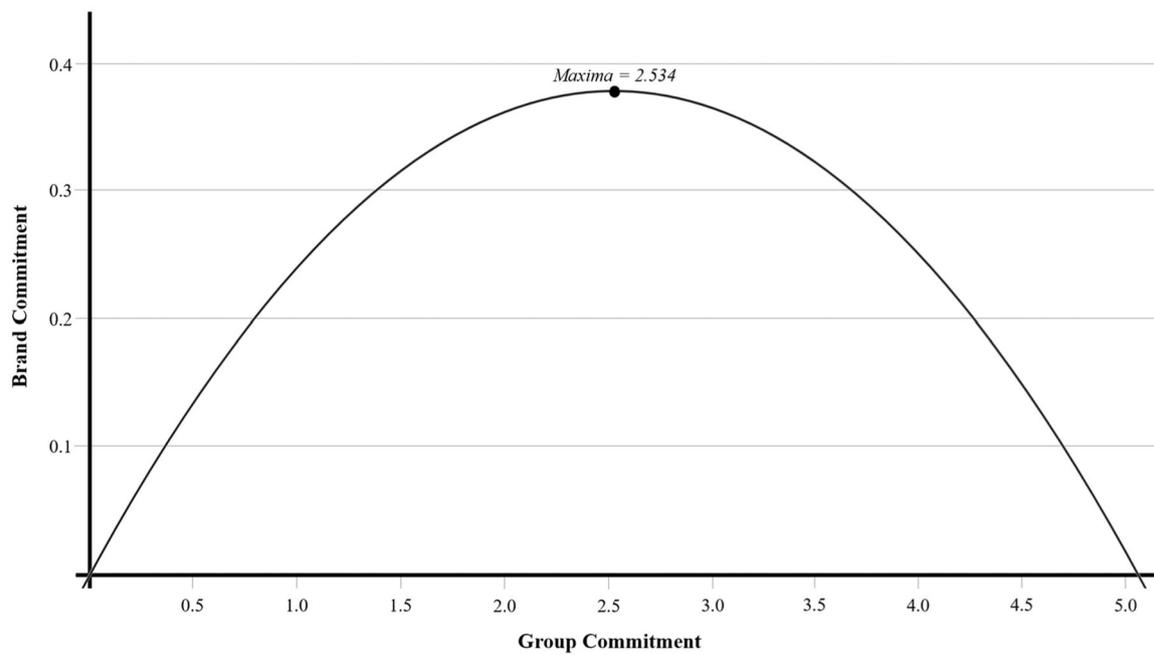


FIGURE 4 Study 2 model of curvilinear results.

relationship with the brand precedes their relationship with the brand's social group. In Study 2, we probe deeper into the relationship between group commitment and brand commitment to discover that a negative curvilinear relationship exists, whereby those who are the most committed to the group are actually less committed to the brand. Together these results suggest that ties to other brand users may be even more powerful than previously thought, and that these social connections have a variety of effects on the brand.

Second, this work extends our understanding of consumer–brand relationships, applying Social Identity Theory to demonstrate how brand and group identification have direct effects on distinct consumer attitudes and indirect effects on brand-related outcomes. Therefore, our results highlight the importance of inter-customer relations in understanding consumer–brand relationships and provide initial evidence of divergence in these relationships. Specifically, we discover that those who perceive a closer relationship between themselves and the brand (i.e., self-brand relationships) have different attitudes and behavioral intentions than those who perceive a closer relationship between themselves and other brand users (i.e., self-group relationships).

Third, this paper adds to a growing research stream on the negative consequences of consumer–brand relationships by empirically examining brand switching intentions in the face of a controversial brand event. By doing so, we answer calls for research into what situations and motivations influence brand switching behaviors (Su et al., 2017). Furthermore, Study 2 also highlights undesirable effects for diverging consumer–brand relationships related to purportedly positive outcomes. We find that committed consumers are not necessarily more likely to exhibit a willingness to pay a price premium or offer word-of-mouth promotion. Specifically, those with the highest levels of brand commitment are less inclined to recommend the brand to others, and those who are more committed to the group are

significantly less likely to pay a higher price for the brand's offerings or to initially promote the brand to other consumers.

5.2 | Managerial implications and future research directions

First, our research provides a cautionary tale for marketers regarding a lay theory that strong consumer–brand relationships are by their very nature beneficial for the brand. Eternal brand support and financial success are not automatically achieved due to these relationships. The key to generating consistently positive brand outcomes is in strengthening brand commitment. When brand and group commitment are simultaneously accounted for, we see that group commitment only leads to positive outcomes when brand commitment mediates the relationship. Study 2 demonstrates how 50.5% of consumers fall into a danger zone where higher levels of group commitment negatively impact brand commitment. The bottom line is that additional spending to develop stronger group commitment (e.g., social events that overshadow the brand connection) is likely to yield zero movement in brand commitment given that nearly half of brand users may exhibit a negative response. The direct impact of group commitment on brand outcomes is either nonsignificant (i.e., brand switching intentions) or significantly negative (i.e., paying a price premium and positive word-of-mouth). Hence, we caution marketers to minimize expenditures on developing group commitment alone, through branded festivals or rallies where consumers are brought together primarily to socialize, as high levels of group commitment are found to have an adverse impact on the brand. Marketers must make the brand accessible, meaningful, and truly focal to inspire the more socially-oriented consumers to transfer their commitment from the group to the brand.

Second, marketing managers can work to build greater brand commitment by focusing efforts on persuading all consumers to perceive a closer identification with the brand and by inspiring enhanced brand trust. Marketing communications could be crafted to highlight the symbolic closeness between the brand and its consumers, as well as to promote themes of greater brand trust. Although it may be difficult for marketers to quickly elevate consumer levels of brand identification through promotional messaging alone, prior research indicates that perceptions of psychological distance (e.g., between brand and consumer identities) can be primed to induce a temporary processing shift where specific cognitive procedures are activated and transferred to subsequent evaluations (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Thus, marketers may be able to situationally prime consumers through their communications to feel closer to the brand (i.e., brand identification), which would increase their brand commitment. Future research should seek to prime perceptions of psychological distance to ascertain the effect on brand commitment.

Third, marketers are encouraged to carefully monitor the more socially-oriented consumers and how they might respond to potential brand deterioration events or changes in product pricing. While those with high brand commitment are more resistant to brand switching, individuals who feel closer to other brand users and a greater group commitment are not immune to switching in the face of a relationship disruption. Hence, these consumers may be just as likely to be a flight risk, particularly if other brand users are migrating away from the brand. Moreover, if the brand decides to noticeably increase their prices, these consumers may be unwilling to pay a price premium as the maneuver could be seen as the brand taking advantage of their personal relationships. Marketers need to recognize that for these consumers the value of the brand lies partially in the social connections and relationships that it facilitates, not in the symbolic nature or economic value of their offerings alone. Thus, strategies for marginally increasing the brand's role in facilitating self-group relationships may help to indirectly strengthen their level of brand commitment and subsequently improve brand outcomes. In closing, we hope that our research can begin to illuminate the duality of commitment and the distinct differences in consumer-brand relationships.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1

TABLE A1 Study 1 Scale Reliabilities.

Measures	AVE	Std. Loading
Brand Identification: CR = 0.900	0.83	
<i>Please think about your relationship with the [brand name].</i>		
Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of the [brand name]. ^a		0.92
Which best represents the degree of closeness between you and the [brand name]? ^b		0.90
Group Identification: CR = 0.89	0.79	
<i>Please think about your relationship with other users of [brand name].</i>		
Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of other [brand] users. ^a		0.90
Which best represents the degree of closeness between you and other [brand] users? ^b		0.88
Psychological Sense of Brand Community: CR = 0.97	0.83	
<i>With regard to [brand name], please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement.</i>		
I feel strong ties to other [brand] users. ^c		0.92
I find it very easy to form a bond with other [brand] users. ^c		0.89
I feel a sense of being connected with other [brand] users. ^c		0.93
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who use [brand name]. ^c		0.90
Using [brand name] gives me a sense of community. ^c		0.93
I feel a sense of community with other people who use [brand name]. ^c		0.90
Brand commitment: CR = 0.93	0.87	
<i>Please respond to the following questions about your relationship with [brand name].</i>		
Even if [brand name] would be more difficult to buy, I would still keep buying it. ^c		0.93
I am willing to "go the extra mile" to remain a customer of [brand name]. ^c		0.94
Group commitment: CR = 0.94	0.80	
<i>Please respond to the following questions about your relationship with the [brand] group.</i>		
The relationship I have with this [brand] group is important to me. ^c		0.90
I really care about the fate of this [brand] group. ^c		0.93
The relationship I have with this [brand] group is one I intend to maintain indefinitely. ^c		0.92
I would feel a loss if this [brand] group was no longer available. ^c		0.84
Brand switching intentions: CR = 0.99	0.97	
<i>How likely are you to switch to another brand in the future?</i>		
Unlikely Likely		0.98
Improbable Probable		0.99
Implausible Plausible		0.98

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability.

^aNot At All | Very Much;

^bAron et al. (1992) *Interpersonal Closeness Visual*;

^cStrongly Disagree | Strongly Agree;

^dNot At All Likely | Extremely Likely.

APPENDIX B

Table B1

TABLE B1 Study 1 correlation matrix.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Brand identification	4.43	1.564	1					
2. Group identification	4.20	1.459	0.713**	1				
3. Psychological sense of brand community	3.77	1.457	0.611**	0.593**	1			
4. Brand commitment	4.94	1.946	0.595**	0.590**	0.688**	1		
5. Group commitment	4.99	2.013	0.569**	0.534**	0.743**	0.793**	1	
6. Brand switching intentions	4.02	2.403	-0.266**	-0.233**	-0.292**	-0.366**	-0.314**	1

Note: Pearson correlations (2-tailed). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

APPENDIX C

Table C1

TABLE C1 Study 2 scale reliabilities.

Measures	AVE	Standard loading
Brand identification: CR = 0.94	0.88	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward [brand name].</i>		
Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of [brand name]. ^a		0.94
Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents [brand name]. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and [brand name's] identities. ^b		0.94
Group Identification: CR = 0.94	0.89	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward the other users of the [brand name].</i>		
Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of other [brand] users. ^a		0.94
Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents other [brand] users. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and other users' identities. ^b		0.94
Psychological sense of brand community: CR = 0.98	0.88	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward other people who use [brand name].</i>		

(Continues)

TABLE C1 (Continued)

Measures	AVE	Standard loading
I feel strong ties to other [brand] users. ^c		0.93
I find it very easy to form a bond with other [brand] users. ^c		0.95
I feel a sense of being connected to other [brand] users. ^c		0.96
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who use [brand name]. ^c		0.93
Using [brand name] gives me a sense of community. ^c		0.93
I feel a sense of community with other people who use [brand name]. ^c		0.94
Brand trust: CR = 0.94	0.83	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward [brand name].</i>		
[Brand name] can be trusted completely. ^c		0.90
[Brand name] is a [product type] that I have great confidence in. ^c		0.93
[Brand name] has high integrity. ^c		0.90
Group trust: CR = 0.97	0.84	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward the other users of the [brand name].</i>		
I trust the information I receive from other [brand] users more than I trust the information I receive from advertisements. ^c		0.88
I prefer to receive information about [brand name] from other users than from advertisements. ^c		0.91
The information I receive from other [brand] users is more useful than the information I receive from advertisements. ^c		0.92
I trust the information I receive from other [brand] users more than I trust the information I receive from [brand name]. ^c		0.92
When seeking information about [brand] name, I prefer to receive information from other [brand users] than from [brand name]. ^c		0.93
The information I receive from other [brand] users is more useful than the information I receive from [brand name]. ^c		0.92
Brand Commitment: CR = 0.96	0.79	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward [brand name].</i>		
I am very committed to [brand name]. ^c		0.90
[Brand name] is very important to me. ^c		0.92
[Brand name] is a place I intend to visit indefinitely. ^c		0.87
Using [brand name] is very much like being family. ^c		0.84
[Brand name] is something I really care about. ^c		0.92
[Brand name] deserves my maximum effort to continue using. ^c		0.90
Group commitment: CR = 0.97	0.85	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward other people who use [brand name].</i>		
Membership in this [brand] group is something I am very committed to. ^c		0.93
Being a member of this [brand] group is very important to me. ^c		0.94
Membership in this [brand] group is something I intend to maintain indefinitely. ^c		0.90
Being a member of this [brand] group is very much like being family. ^c		0.92
Membership in this [brand] group is something I really care about. ^c		0.94
Membership in this [brand] group deserves my maximum effort to continue. ^c		0.91

TABLE C1 (Continued)

Measures	AVE	Standard loading
Price premium: CR = 0.95	0.90	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward [brand name].</i>		
I will continue to do business with [brand name] even if its prices increase somewhat. ^c		0.95
I will pay a higher price than competitors charge for the benefits I currently receive from [brand name]. ^c		0.95
Positive word-of-mouth: CR = 0.96	0.78	
<i>Please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward [brand name].</i>		
I say positive things about [brand name] to other people. ^c		0.87
I "talk up" [brand name] to people I know. ^c		0.91
I encourage my friends and relatives to use [brand name]. ^c		0.92
I recommend [brand name] to those people who seek my advice. ^c		0.89
I bring up [brand name] in a positive way in conversations I have with friends and acquaintances. ^c		0.87
In social situations, I often speak favorably about [brand name]. ^c		0.84

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability.

^aNot At All | Very Much;

^bAron et al. (1992) Interpersonal Closeness Visual;

^cStrongly Disagree | Strongly Agree.

APPENDIX D

Table D1

TABLE D1 Study 2 correlation matrix.

	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Brand identification	2.71	1.630	1								
2. Group identification	2.75	1.630	0.731**	1							
3. Psychological sense of brand community	2.70	1.586	0.624**	0.577**	1						
4. Brand trust	4.40	1.451	0.383**	0.332**	0.467**	1					
5. Group trust	3.76	1.700	0.369**	0.411**	0.529**	0.423**	1				
6. Brand commitment	3.18	1.638	0.650**	0.469**	0.727**	0.534**	0.426**	1			
7. Group commitment	2.84	1.432	0.601**	0.539**	0.810**	0.408**	0.503**	0.706**	1		
8. Price premium	3.75	1.630	0.386**	0.319**	0.475**	0.535**	0.385**	0.622**	0.434**	1	
9. Positive word-of-mouth	4.42	1.591	0.419**	0.332**	0.431**	0.549**	0.393**	0.552**	0.409**	0.555**	1

Note: Pearson correlations (2-tailed), * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

APPENDIX E

Table E1

TABLE E1 Summary of results.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Study 1	Study 2
H1+	Group commitment → Brand commitment	Supported	Supported
H2 _a -	Brand commitment → Brand switching intentions	Supported	-
H2 _b +	Group commitment → Brand switching intentions	Not supported	-
H3-	Group commitment ² → Brand commitment	-	Supported
H4 _a +	Brand commitment → Price premium	-	Supported
H4 _b -	Group commitment → Price premium	-	Supported
H5 _a -	Brand commitment ² → Positive word-of-mouth	-	Supported
H5 _b +	Group commitment ² → Positive word-of-mouth	-	Supported