

PRODUCT SYMBOLIC STATUS: DEVELOPMENT OF A SCALE TO ASSESS
DIFFERENT PRODUCT TYPES

A Dissertation

by

JAMES ARTHUR WRIGHT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A & M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2005

Major Subject: Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Product Symbolic Status:

Development of a Scale to Assess Different Product Types. (August 2005)

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The literature on status, product symbolism, product involvement, and reference group influence is reviewed to conceptually define the Product Symbolic Status construct. The research consisted of two studies ($N = 524$) that examined 17 different product types to develop and validate the Product Symbolic Status (PSS) scale. The PSS scale is comprised of four facets: self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility. The PSS scale consists of nine items which produced an average reliability of $\alpha = .90$ and showed evidence of convergent and discriminant validity in MTMM analyses with the constructs of product value-expressiveness, product involvement, and product exclusivity/luxury. The PSS scale can also be used for brand symbolic status research. The marketing and advertising research implications are discussed.

DEDICATION

To my mother and father, for all their support and guidance

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INTRODUCTION

Prologue: The Importance of Consumer Research to Industrial Organizational (I/O) Psychology

Some of the earliest ventures of industrial and organizational psychology were in the area of consumer behavior. Around the turn of the century, renowned psychologists such as Harlow Gale, Walter Dill Scott, James McKeen Cattell, and Harry Hollingworth began conducting studies and authoring books on the psychology of advertising (Arthur & Benjamin, 1999). Consumer Behavior continues to be recognized as a legitimate, albeit peripheral, area of I/O psychology by the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Jacoby, Hoyer, and Brief (1992) implore I/O psychology to revive its interest in consumer behavior and forge interdisciplinary research with the consumer behavior and marketing sciences. The authors note that many concepts and issues the each of the disciplines have the same social psychology underpinnings and are of mutual interest. This joint-venture should be a benefit to both I/O psychology and consumer behavior and marketing, as well as many other enterprises and organizations.

Brief and Bazerman (2003) argue that management and organizational researchers have been suffering from “myopia” by ignoring the primary revenue source (consumers) of the organizations they study. The authors assert that organizational researchers have been delinquent by neglecting to study consumer perceptions.

This dissertation follows the style of *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

I/O psychology is often limited by a micro focus within organizations that neglects to consider the external environment that organizations are constantly adapting to (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Environmental factors can have a profound influence on organizations. Triandis (1994) argues that the growth of United States organizations was stunted during the 1980s by an inward focus, while Japanese organizations adopted an outward focus and thrived because of it.

Katz and Kahn (1978) argue that exclusive focus on internal functioning is characteristic of a closed-system approach. Organizational survival is dependent on an open systems theory perspective that considers the relationship between an organization and the environment it must adapt to. Most successful organizations recognize that it is imperative to consider the external factors.

Perhaps the most critical element of an organization's external environment is the market for its products or services. Lucas and Gresham (1985) outline a conceptualization of marketing channels as superorganizations that require alignment through superordinate goals. The external environment for each organization is comprised of collectivities of other organizations and customer markets that represent an organized behavior system. The authors argue the effective structure and management of the entire channel depends on certain characteristics of the external task environment, which are related to the organizations' industry or product type. An effort must be made to understand the goals and needs of all entities within the channel.

For I/O psychology to truly understand organizations it must understand the goals and values of organizations (Offerman & Gowing, 1990). A common cornerstone

of the mission statements from successful organizations asserts the need to understand customers and the perceptions of the organization's products or services (Berry, Seiders, & Gresham, 1997; Szymanski & Henard, 2001). I/O has maintained a narrow research interest in customer service (Jacoby et al., 1992). However, the perspective tends to remain internally focused on the customer service personnel themselves while often neglecting relevant issues of the consumers' perceptions. I/O psychology's focus on attitudes of employees and the organizations internal functioning often fails to consider the strategic objectives of the organization; however, the internal functioning and climate are associated with customer perceptions (Schneider, Ashworth, Higgs, & Carr, 1996). Schneider et al. (1996) advocate that I/O psychology take a more integrated approach with the discipline of marketing.

Over the last few decades, organizations have expanded from a predominately manufacturing focus to a service focus (Offerman & Gowing, 1990). Even organizations that manufacture tangible products have extended the offerings to include service functions (e.g., IBM generates a substantial portion of revenue from consulting services that add value to its business machines). Consumer behavior issues in reference to products can often be extended to the work-product of services. Organizations that primarily offer services attempt to develop tangible images through logos or deliverables that offer symbolic representations of their work-product. For example, credit card companies, which provide a financial service, have begun focusing marketing efforts on the physical aspects of the plastic cards by offering consumers different visual image options to express their self-concepts.

The line between products and services has become more blurred (Pride & Ferrell, 2003). An organization's products or services reflect on its image and an organization's image or brand reflects on perceptions of its products or services. Organizations recognize that what they sell extends beyond the physical boundaries of the tangible product. As the benefits of products become more intangible, the importance of marketing and product symbolism becomes more pivotal (Leigh & Gabel, 1992).

OVERVIEW

Three distinct objectives were pursued in this study. First, to review the literature on status, product symbolism, reference group influence, and related areas to examine the conceptual foundations of the construct of Product Symbolic Status. Second, to develop and validate a scale to measure product symbolic status that is applicable to different product types or brands. Third, to empirically establish a particular class of products that has the capacity to represent symbolic status.

The construct product symbolic status is believed to be a component of each of the larger constructs of product symbolism and product involvement. The product symbolism and product involvement domains are broad and amorphous. Products have many different meanings for many different people. Previous authors have suggested that the literature would benefit from delineation of the sub-dimensions of product symbolism and involvement (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Martin, 1998), and research that investigates such dimensions across a broad range of product types (Fournier, 1998). Product symbolic status has several theoretical implications for consumer behavior and marketing research.

The Product Symbolic Status (PSS) scale measures symbolic status across an extensive range of product types. Several previous authors have also noted that further research on product characteristics and classification schemes across wider ranges of product types would be beneficial to future research in the area of reference group influence (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Lessig & Park, 1978; Shavitt & Lowery, 1992). Further knowledge about the symbolic characteristics of

different product types will provide insight into which forms of reference group influence are most effective for promoting which product types, based on the notion that congruity between the product and advertising message facilitates the acceptance of the message (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Mowen, 1980).

The construct product symbolic status might be fruitful in future studies for untangling some of the extant inconsistencies regarding reference group influence under previous product classification schemes (e.g., luxury/necessity, high/low involvement, and value-expressive/utilitarian). Some of the inconsistent findings in previous research on reference group influence and product involvement (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985) might be reconciled through an examination of product symbolic status across different product types and product constellations. Product symbolic status is a construct that taps elements of product symbolism and product involvement, and that is driven by one of the most powerful forces of reference group influence – social status (Tyler & Blader, 2001).

Symbolic status is a product characteristic advertisers attempt to infuse in products (Assael, 1987; Meyers, 1984; Packard, 1957; Pride & Ferrell, 2003; Wernick, 1983; Wilkie, 1994) and a characteristic consumers attempt to derive from products (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; 1989). However, there is a paucity of empirical research on product symbolism (Martin, 1998), and the extant research has been limited by the approach of assessing perceived differences among brands within a single product class (Fournier, 1998). Despite the evident importance of symbolic status to consumers and advertisers, no previous study has focused exclusively on product symbolic status and no

scale has been developed to assess the construct.

Much of the empirical research that addresses symbolic characteristics of products has been in the area of reference group influence. Previous research in this area has been limited by two common methodological approaches. First, previous research on product characteristics and forms of reference group influence has combined aspects of the product characteristics, referent, and form of influence into single measures (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Lessig & Park, 1978, 1982), thereby confounding product characteristics with the referent source and form of influence. Second, previous research on referent sources (e.g., Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Kamins & Gupta, 1994) has been limited by the practice of producing mock advertisements to represent each referent-product condition, which makes testing an extensive range of products cost-prohibitive.

The concepts of product symbolism, status, reference group influence, and product involvement are discussed in the first half of the introduction. These concepts involve both the meanings that advertisers attempt to infuse in products and the meanings that consumers derive from products. The second half of the introduction addresses research on reference group influence and different product classification schemes. Finally, the facets of product symbolic status and the research strategy for the PSS scale development are delineated. The findings from this study provide insight into the construct product symbolism status, as well as the relative levels of product symbolic status represented in an extensive range of product types. The findings also have practical implications for advertisers regarding the effectiveness of status-oriented advertising appeals for different product types.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations do not just sell products and services – they sell feelings, lifestyle, and meaning (Berry & Gresham, 1986; Berry, Seiders, & Gresham, 1997; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Lucas & Gresham, 1988; Pride & Ferrell, 2003). The psychological meanings of products have a strong impact on consumers. "People buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they *mean*" (Levy, 1959, p. 118). To fully understand consumer behavior, one must first gain an understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to their possessions (Belk, 1988). Consumers look to their possessions not only for their utility, but also for the meanings that they carry and feelings they elicit (Belk, 1988; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Levy, 1959; McCracken, 1989; Solomon, 1983). The products with which a person surrounds himself convey powerful symbolic meanings (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1987; 1989).

Product Symbolism

Advertisers set the stage in the creation of product meaning (Martin, 1998; McCracken, 1986; 1989). Advertisers often try to influence consumers through symbolic examples of status (Meyers, 1984; Packard, 1957; Wernick, 1983). Often the messages are not explicit; nonetheless, they come across clear in the subtext (Leigh & Gabel, 1992). Advertising conveys the physical and functional characteristics of products, as well as their symbolic properties. It also reveals a great deal about the people who use them (Passikoff & Holman, 1987).

The fact that a person is judged by others on the basis of his/her behavior,

personal characteristics, and also possessions, is not lost on most consumers (Belk, 1978; 1984; Solomon, 1983; Wackman, 1973). We have all heard the adage "the clothes make the man." Possessions play a part in impression management as well as in self-definition. Person-perception theory is derived, in part, from Mead's (1934) Symbolic Interaction theory. This theory proposed that a person develops a conception of self based largely on others' reactions to him/her, both real and imagined. Goffman (1957) revised and amended this theory by adding that a person consciously attempts to present an image of him/herself that he/she wants others to accept and validate.

Given that a person's possessions contribute to the impressions others' have of him/her, the products one possesses become inextricably tied to the formation and enhancement of one's self-concept and identity (Belk, 1988; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; McCracken, 1986; Solomon, 1983; Wackman, 1973). These possessions compose what Belk (1988) refers to as 'the extended self.' However, not all products may be relevant to one's self-concept, because others may not view him/her using particular products (Solomon, 1983; Wackman, 1973), or simply because some products are not as rich in symbolic content or meaning (Belk, 1988; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Prown, 1982). Moreover, not all products may have the capacity to hold meaning (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Belk, 1978; 1984; 1988; Gottdiener, 1985; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Levy, 1959; McCracken, 1986; 1989; Mowen, 1980; Solomon, 1983; Wackman, 1973; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988).

Prown (1982) distinguished between the inherent and attached values of possessions. The inherent value is intrinsic, established by the rarity of the materials that

compose the product. The attached value is more symbolic, having been attached by the people who originally made or used the object. The attached value can have a significant impact on the monetary worth of the object. Gottdiener (1985) referred to the symbolic meaning of products as a second-order function. He used automobiles as an example. The primary function of automobiles is transportation; although, depending on the make, they often have a powerful second-order function as a symbol of social status.

Furby (1978) investigated the symbolic meanings people find in their possessions. The study revealed that people often cite social power and status as reasons to own personal possessions. McCracken (1987) found that among the more socially mobile segments of society, status is the symbolic attribute that people seek most in their purchase of a home. Belk (1984) asserts that when the opportunity for social mobility is high (as is the case in America), product consumption becomes a viable means to express, confirm, and solidify one's social status and identity.

Status

Weber (1946) defined status as the degree of social honor, prestige, and respect attributed to an individual by others. Weber (1946) contended that status value beliefs develop from perceptions of one's material resources. Resources include possessions and the symbolic meanings they represent.

Status can be developed or acquired and does not necessarily need to be tied to formal authority. Leadership studies have suggested that a leader's influence over the attitudes and behaviors of others stems not only from the legitimate power of the position he/she occupies, but also the personal characteristics of status the leader holds

(Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Hogg, 1996). Berger, Cohen, Conner, and Zelditch (1966) studied the emergence of unofficial status hierarchies in informal task-oriented groups. The authors established that these *de facto* differences in status affected amounts of input and speaking opportunities, deference, and performance opportunities and evaluations among group members (see also Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974). The research focused on the emergence of power and prestige differences among individuals who were otherwise equal with respect to major status characteristics and formal authority. The authors found that through the social interactions of the group, the individuals developed high and low self-concepts that differentiated them. In essence, status cues are strongly associated with the self-concept, and even task-irrelevant status cues influence expectations of behavior and evaluations of behavior by others.

Status generalizes across situations and applications. The external evaluation of a status characteristic is retained even when it is imported into a social group and status characteristics are influential even when they have no relation to task performance (Webster & Driskell, 1985). Driskell and Webster (1997) found that external status (i.e., informal and task-irrelevant) generalization in groups has independent effects from that of likability or affective sentiment toward the holder.

There is a basic social motivation to increase one's relative status in society (Turner, 1988; Tyler, 1993; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Individuals focus attention on high-status referents in attempt to discover and emulate the distinguishing characteristics of those with status and power (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Dépret, 1996). Tyler and Lind (1992) posited that the motivation for status stems from its positive associations with self-

concept development and the respect and admiration it elicits from others. Tyler (1993) asserts that in social relations and interactions, people are primarily interested in their status. The status relations among individuals are a function of the shared cultural beliefs about the status of particular characteristics and possessions and the relative values associated with them (Ridgeway, 1997).

Product consumption is one of the few ways besides education and occupational attainment that individuals can cross social status stratification (Turner, 1988; Wernick, 1983). In the absence of occupational information, social evaluations are largely dependent on visual status cues (Eisenstadt, 1968). Some authors have suggested that the consumer culture has eroded the occupational and economic status hierarchies of the past (Featherstone, 1987; Schudson, 1984; Turner, 1988; Twitchell, 1996). The explosion of signs and symbols in consumer culture, the unprecedented availability of goods, and proliferation of product choices have created new status hierarchies based on ever-evolving cultural tastes, preferences, and lifestyles (Turner, 1988).

Turner (1988) identified a cultural dimension of social stratification in which status can be conceptualized as lifestyle. "Social status involves practices which emphasize and exhibit cultural distinctions and differences which are a crucial feature of all social stratification" (Turner, 1988, p.66). Turner (1988) argued that status involves style, taste, lifestyle and the totality of cultural practices, such as dress, speech, and worldview. "The location of a group within a social system is expressed by their taste, which is as it were, the practical aspect of lifestyle" (p.66). The products one buys are a salient representation of one's taste, and consumption behavior is a key component of

lifestyle (Featherstone, 1987; Meyers, 1984; Packard, 1957; Turner, 1988; Twitchell, 1996; Wernick, 1983). In summary, product consumption is a means for individuals to express their taste and lifestyle and acquire status based on the symbolic meaning of their possessions and consumption behavior (Featherstone, 1987; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Meyers, 1984; Packard, 1957; Schudson, 1984; Turner, 1988; Wernick, 1983).

Status through Symbolic Consumption

Weick (1993) asserts that symbolic processes are of central importance to sense-making in our world. Images serve to rationalize behavior to both the actor and observers both during and after actions. Since the turn of the century, social researchers have argued that modern society relies more on the visible display of material items to convey status, rather than less tangible cues (Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Form & Stone, 1957; Goffman, 1951; Simmel, 1904). Consumers can enhance their perceived status through conspicuous consumption of high-status products (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997; Featherstone, 1987; Meyers, 1984; Packard, 1957; Schudson, 1984; Turner, 1988; Wernick, 1983). Status consciousness and expression through material items is an increasingly important component of American culture (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997; Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Tiffany, 2004; Turner, 1988). “We strive to accumulate goods, products, things that carry with them the external status symbolism that fosters perceived power and influence” (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997, p.263).

Mass consumption in contemporary society has overshadowed past economic-based social hierarchies and cast light on a new ranking by lifestyle distinctions, where social evaluations are made according to preferences of consumption behavior, practices,

and symbolic artifacts (Featherstone, 1987; Schudson, 1984; Turner, 1988; Twitchell, 1996). Advertising suggests that consumers can escape the traditional occupational status hierarchies and “become more individually successful, comfortable, glamorous, and popular in their product-filled world away from work” (Wernick, 1983, p.16).

Consumers are influenced by the perceived status of the product, as well as the perceived status of the retailer. Some authors have suggested that most dominant dimension in consumer perceptions of retail stores is the status or prestige of a store (Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Jain & Etgar, 1976). Of course, consumer perceptions of a retail store and perceptions of the status of the products it sells are often inextricably intertwined (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984). Accordingly, retailers are very mindful of the perceived status of the products they sell (Berry & Gresham, 1986; Berry, Seiders, & Gresham, 1997; Lucas & Gresham, 1988; Singson, 1975).

Societal Trends in Symbolic Consumption

The use of status symbols is positively related to the upward mobility of a society (Bensman & Lilienfeld, 1979; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). Authors have found that increases in mobility are associated with greater use of status themes in advertising (Belk & Pollay, 1985). Given the steep rise of mobility over the past few decades stemming from the advances in information technology (Offerman & Gowing, 1990; Triandis, 1994), status themes in advertising may become even more prevalent in years to come.

Belk, Mayer, and Bahn (1982) found that there are positive, age-related increases in status consciousness and status-related judgments of others. Materialistic themes in advertising exhibited a resurgence following the 1960s. This marked increase in

materialistic themes is believed to reflect corresponding shifts in American culture (Belk & Pollay, 1985; Turner, 1988). As the Baby Boomer Generation grew up, the mobility of American society has increased in accordance with the rise in affluence (Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Meyers, 1984). Belk (1984) argues that as societies become larger, and consequently individuals become relatively more anonymous, people are more inclined to use symbols of status to establish identity and present an image of higher status than would be represented by their role in society alone. These status symbols that serve as representations of one's identity are often determined by influential reference groups (Cocanongher & Bruce, 1971; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Pride & Ferrell, 2003; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Reference Group Influence

Hyman (1942) coined the term reference groups in a study of social status where participants identified others with whom they compared themselves. Reference groups are distinguished by their influence over an individual's behavior. The influence of referents or reference groups is predicated on the perceivers' favorable attitudes toward the referent(s) (Assael, 1987; Cocanongher & Bruce, 1971; Pride & Ferrell, 2003; Wilkie, 1994).

Reference groups influence values, attitudes, and self-concept development (Assael, 1987; Pride & Ferrell, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wilkie, 1994). Denison (1996) argues that cultural meanings are established through the socialization to identity groups and that this interaction reproduces a symbolic world. Social identity theories explain that individuals define themselves and assess their self-worth based on

their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Kelman (1961) distinguished three forms of reference group influence: informational, utilitarian, and value-expressive. Informational influence occurs when an individual seeks information under uncertainty from credible sources in order to make an educated decision. Referents with expertise in the domain are considered highly credible. Utilitarian influence involves compliance with reference group norms or ideals that are tied to rewards or punishment. Value-expressive influence reflects a desire for association with referents and is exhibited in an affective attachment to or attempts to resemble the referents.

Status is an important characteristic of reference groups (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Individuals strive to maintain a positive view of their own self-worth and accomplish this in part by strengthening their association and “identification with high-status groups while avoiding identification with low status groups” (Tyler & Blader, 2001, p.212). In an organizational behavior study, Tyler and Blader (2001) found that group identification explained 27 percent of the variance in values and attitudes. Judgments about the status of the group and identification with the group had a strong intercorrelation ($r = .56$). Moreover, status judgments about membership groups had strong direct effects on attitudes, such as turnover intentions and job satisfaction.

Consumers utilize the symbolic meaning in products to display a connection to or disassociation from others in society (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Products are a tangible representation of an

association to particular reference groups. McCracken's (1986; 1989) Theory of Meaning Transfer offers a step-by-step account of the movement of meaning through referents to consumer goods.

Schein (1990) argues that dominant referents utilize symbols and artifacts in the articulation of values to provide a visible model for groups to follow. Consumers often purchase certain products because they have a symbolic significance to important reference groups (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Reference group concepts are frequently used by marketers and advertisers to persuade consumers to purchase particular products and brands (Assael, 1987; Pride & Ferrell, 2002; Wilkie, 1994). Martin (1998) found that people's most prized possessions often have strong symbolic associations with something or someone else, and that these symbolic associations resulted in heightened involvement with the product.

Product Involvement

Several authors have argued that different advertising strategies should be used depending on consumers' involvement with the product (e.g., Assael, 1987; Krugman, 1966; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). Krugman (1966) defined consumer involvement in terms of the number of personal references or conscious bridging experiences that a person draws between the self and the product or message stimuli. Assael (1987) delineates product involvement in terms of importance to the consumer's self-identity and lifestyle.

Although involvement is conceptually related to the consumer rather than product (Assael, 1987), the concept of involvement can also be applied to product side

of the consumer-product involvement dyad (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Martin, 1998; Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1994). There has been a great deal of inconsistency throughout the literature on which products are suggested to be high and low involvement, but there is also some consensus that certain product types are predominantly either high or low involvement (Assael, 1987; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Martin, 1998). Table 1 contains a list of Low and High Involvement products derived from previous authors.

Low Involvement. Low involvement products are defined as products that are not important to the consumer's belief system, and consequently the consumer does not strongly identify with the products. Marketers often erroneously assume that consumers are involved with mundane products (Assael, 1987). Kassarian and Kassarian (1979) asserted that consumers are not involved with products such as bicycles, colas, beer, t-shirts, magazines, and toothpaste (cf. Assael, 1987, pgs. 83, 97). However, consumer perceptions, lifestyles, and taste change over time and researchers should continually re-evaluate how consumers perceive different product types. For low involvement products, the use of imagery and symbols in advertising are thought to be most effective (Assael, 1987; Krugman, 1966; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983).

Marketers attempt to capitalize on and create needs in consumers (Assael, 1987; Martin, 1998; McCracken, 1989; Pride & Ferrell, 2002; Wilkie, 1994). Because most developed nations have their physiological and safety needs consistently met, "the most important motivating forces in purchase behavior are social and ego needs" (Assael, 1987, p. 32). This approach is often applied to the advertising strategies for even the most mundane products such as detergent where ads promote the social benefits of

avoidance of social ostracism. Assael (1987) provides the example of Wisk laundry detergent which was advertised as preventing the socially embarrassing 'ring around the collar'. He suggests that the widespread use of social approval themes in advertising may be misguided, because many products are not relevant to group norms or values. In contrast, high involvement products are more likely to be influenced by reference groups (Assael, 1987; Cocanougher & Bruce, 1971).

High Involvement. Consumers are more likely to be involved with a product if the product has significant risks, emotional appeal, functional or symbolic significance, or the product is identified with norms of a reference group (Assael, 1987; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Certain product types are believed to be consistently more involving for the average consumer due to the higher risks and costs associated with purchase (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Consumer involvement is likely to be elevated for any of the five forms of risk: financial risk, safety risk, social risk, psychological risk, or performance risk (Assael, 1987; Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). High involvement products do not perfectly correspond with symbolic status products. While any of the aforementioned five types of risk can increase involvement, only psychological risk and social risk are germane to symbolic status products.

Product involvement is a multi-dimensional concept (Assael, 1987). Future advancement in knowledge and understanding will depend on further refinement of the concept and untangling the dimensions (Martin, 1998). Different product types are associated with different forms of involvement, which in turn, have different implications for marketers (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Martin, 1998). Research

investigating different facets of involvement and their varying susceptibility to different marketing strategies will be greatly beneficial to the field (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Martin, 1998).

The present study examines the symbolic status differences among an array of product types from both low and high involvement categories. The product symbolic status construct is expected to provide a finer distinction within the involvement classification scheme. It is theorized that products exhibiting high symbolic status represent a more homogeneous sub-class of high involvement products. Previous studies on reference group influence that captured different aspects of involvement through alternative product classification schemes have received mixed results (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Lessig & Park, 1982). Product symbolic status might be dimension of involvement that has more consistent reference group influence effects.

Research on Reference Group Influence and Product Characteristics

Bearden and Etzel's (1982) seminal research on reference group influence is one of the only studies to include a sufficient sample of different product types to assess the effects of symbolic product qualities across product classification dimensions. The study is over 20 years old, but it still remains as the authoritative source in current publications on the topic of reference group influence on different product types (e.g., Assael, 1998; Wilkie, 1994). The authors empirically investigated Bourne's (1957) insightful formulation of reference group influence differences across product types. However, the results of Bearden and Etzel's study only provided partial support for the authors' theory and showed many inconsistencies that could not be reconciled under the

authors' classification dimensions.

Leigh (1989) provided an insightful extension of the original model by refining the product versus brand decision model to include a product-style subcategory point of potential influence. While the specifics of Leigh's (1989) refinement of the model are beyond the scope of this paper, the author's dissection of the product-style-brand influence explained some of the inconsistencies in Bearden and Etzel's (1982) findings. Nevertheless, Bearden and Etzel's study provided pioneering theory on the topic and evoked further research questions on reference group influence under different symbolic product dimensions.

Lessig and Park (1982) assessed differences in forms of reference group influence across a range of product types. However, the scale failed to significantly discriminate between the three forms of reference group (i.e., informational, utilitarian, and value-expressive) influence for 15 out of the 20 products that were tested. Only the products coffee, headache remedy, insurance, physician selection (medical care), and low phosphate detergent demonstrated significant differences between all three forms of reference group influence. This could be an indication that the forms of reference group influence, and thereby different referents (by virtue of the language and scale design), do not exhibit significant differences in the influence they exert on consumers for different product types. In which case, different approaches to reference group influence would have limited implications for marketers and the scale itself would have limited practical value. However, research on source credibility and endorser effectiveness suggests that different sources do have different effects on attitude change and influence (e.g.,

Chaiken, 1979; Homer & Kahle, 1990; Ohanian, 1991; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983).

Alternatively, Lessig and Park's (1982) findings may suggest problems with the scale or method. The authors' procedure involved taking each respondent's highest-rated item for each of the three scale dimensions (form of reference group influence) and dropping the remaining items. This method reduces the scale to one item per form of influence for each respondent and does not even hold the item constant across respondents. The bottom line is that the method discards most of the data that give the scale its dimension. The authors may have employed this method to adjust for the scale's problems with discriminability across products.

Lessig and Park (1982) examined relationships between the forms of reference group influence and three product dimensions: complexity, conspicuousness, and brand distinction (brand ambiguity). The findings indicated that all three forms of influence had strong correlations with product complexity. Utilitarian and value-expressive influence had strong correlations with product conspicuousness, and only informational influence had a significant correlation with brand distinction (i.e., the degree of difficulty in distinguishing among brands within the product type).

There are a few key points of interest to the present paper. First, product conspicuousness *is itself* a characteristic of value-expressive products. The expressiveness of the product is largely dependent on its visibility or conspicuousness. By definition, the more *inconspicuous* a product is the less it effectively expresses. The value-expressive scale captures conspicuousness or visibility indirectly through the

implicit language of the items. Additionally, a strong argument could be made for including a direct measure of product visibility in a scale that attempts to assess any visual form of expression.

Second, Lessig and Park (1982) found that only informational influence (i.e., influence from professionals, experts, etc.) had a significant correlation with brand distinction (perceived ambiguity among brands). Accordingly, Lessig and Park suggested that marketers forego informational reference group appeals for conspicuous products, and forego utilitarian and value-expressive appeals for products with low levels of distinction among brands. However, the authors' method and scale fail to capture the *potential capacity* of the product types to acquire brand distinction through advertising appeals that create symbolic status. The authors' conclusion regarding the suggested limitations of value-expressive appeals fails to consider the ability of high-status referents to transfer meaning that can create brand distinction. However, other authors (e.g., Martin, 1998; McCracken, 1989) have suggested that a potential effect of high-status referent sources (e.g., celebrity endorsers) is the transfer of meaning that can enhance brand images and promote brand salience that differentiates a brand from competitors.

Johar and Sirgy (1991) propose that value-expressive appeals should be used for value-expressive products, and utilitarian appeals should be used for utilitarian products. While this is a fairly straight-forward proposition, previous studies have not empirically established a set of product-types to represent each product class. Studies to date have only included a few exemplars of such product types. Furthermore, the product

examples that have been empirically investigated are generally infrequently-purchased items that have unique meanings (e.g., wedding rings, greeting cards, American flags). Thus, the practical implications of the research only directly apply to a select group of product types with limited brand differentiation.

The research examining the forms of reference group influence (i.e., informational, utilitarian, value-expressive) has yet to be integrated with research on product involvement. Johar and Sirgy (1991) outline a proposition relating value-expressive and utilitarian advertising appeals to product involvement; however, the authors do not empirically examine the proposition. The authors suggest that value-expressive appeals should be more effective for low involvement products, and utilitarian appeals should be more effective for high involvement products. This parallels Petty and Cacioppo's (1981) Elaboration Likelihood Model-derived conceptualization that advocates peripheral appeals, such as attractiveness and imagery, for low involvement products, and central informational appeals for high involvement products. However, Johar and Sirgy's proposition assumes that value-expressiveness and product involvement are independent.

It is conceivable that value-expressive motivations are associated with heightened involvement. A wedding ring, which Shavitt (1990) notes as a quintessential example of a value-expressive product, is certainly also a high-involvement product for most people. Moreover, many low involvement products (e.g., laundry detergent, toiletry items, and household cleaning products) may not have the capacity to express values. Lessig and Park (1978) found that none of the forms of reference group

influence were relevant for products such as facial soap and laundry detergent. In contrast, other authors have found these same products to have characteristics associated with heightened susceptibility to reference group influence. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) found that facial soap has high 'sign value' which the authors define as representing value-expressive characteristics. Ziachkowsky (1985) found laundry detergent to be a high involvement product, and high involvement is a condition thought to be associated with greater potential for reference group influence (Assael, 1987; Cocanougher & Bruce, 1971; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985).

Surprisingly, the empirical research on reference group influence and product symbolism is scant. Moreover, there is even less research that has measured product symbolism across a broad range of product types (Fournier, 1998). Further research should be directed at dissecting the symbolic meanings of products and the perceived relevance of these meanings to reference groups. Such research would need to include an extensive range of products to resolve some of these inconsistencies in the existing literature. Most studies in the domain of reference group influence do not postulate about effects of larger symbolic product dimensions or only include single products to represent larger product categories.

The landscape of consumer products is increasing exponentially. Approaches in marketing and the conceptualization of consumer behavior have evolved. The American economy has evolved, as have consumer spending, product offerings, and brand positioning strategies. Marketing and advertising strategies have become increasingly more sophisticated in the capitalization on reference group influence. The use of

celebrity referents in marketing applications continues to increase. In light of these evolving conditions, the meanings consumers associate with different products should be further researched and refined. Product symbolic status is a construct that captures the powerful status motivations of reference group influence, yet it is conceptually distinct from other symbolic product constructs.

THEORY AND RATIONALE

Nomological Net of Product Symbolic Status

A nomological net refers to a system of interlocking laws which constitute a theory (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). In order to establish evidence of construct validity, a network of related constructs and their measures are delineated, and hypotheses regarding the interrelationships are formulated and tested. The process generally involves both evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. The following constructs comprise the nomological net of product symbolic status.

Involvement. Consumer involvement is generally higher when any of the five forms of risk are elevated: financial risk, safety risk, social risk, psychological risk, or performance risk (Assael, 1987; Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). However, only psychological risk and social risk are pertinent to symbolic status products. Product Symbolic Status is likely to precipitate high involvement. However, not all high involvement products are expected to hold symbolic status. Additionally, high-involvement products without symbolic status might not be as susceptible to aspirational reference group influence. Product symbolic status is theorized to distinguish a more homogenous sub-class of high involvement products.

Sign Value. The term of “sign value” has been used to describe one component of product involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Martin, 1998). Martin (1998) defined sign value as, “the extent to which the user is seen by others using the item which is also congruent with the user’s self-identity” (p.12). However, sign or badge value has only been investigated as a single component of product involvement within

two previous studies measuring the larger construct of involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Martin, 1998). Martin (1998) collected qualitative data via an exploratory critical incident approach, and thus, did not develop a scale to measure sign value. Laurent and Kapferer developed a French-language involvement scale that reportedly contained four items to tap sign value; however, the subscale was not published. Neither study attempted to investigate sign value specifically; rather it was simply included as a component of their studies which investigated the larger concept of involvement. Consequently, both studies included only a limited range and number of product types that exhibited any notable levels of sign value. Most importantly, the products Laurent and Kapferer (1985) found to be high in sign value (e.g., washing machine, facial soap, and toothpaste) do not seem to represent characteristics of symbolic status.

Value-Expressiveness. There are parallels between the value-expressive form of reference group influence and product symbolic status. However, value-expressive products encompass a broader, heterogeneous class of products with more forms of meaning and symbolism than symbolic status products. For example, slogan t-shirts, baseball caps, and bumper stickers can express certain values without signifying social status. The examples of value-expressive products that have been empirically examined illustrate some of the differences. Wedding rings, greeting cards, and American flags have been utilized to represent value-expressive products (Shavitt, 1990). These products certainly have symbolic meaning, but not necessarily symbolic status. American flags have a symbolic patriotic meaning, and greeting cards and wedding rings

have primarily sentimental meaning. Wedding rings can also have symbolic status that is driven by the diamond size and quality; however, love and commitment are the fundamental symbolic meanings represented by wedding rings – not symbolic status.

Shavitt and Lowrey (1992) affirmed Johar and Sirgy's (1991) proposition that value-expressive appeals are more persuasive for value-expressive products (i.e., university class rings, school flags) and utilitarian appeals are more persuasive for utilitarian products (aspirin, air conditioners). However, Shavitt and Lowrey concluded that for products with dual functions (e.g., both utilitarian and value-expressive functions) the persuasiveness of the advertising appeal hinges on individual differences in personality (i.e., self-monitoring tendencies). The authors found evidence to support their hypothesis using sunglasses and wristwatches to represent dual-function products.

One might question the perceived utilitarian differences between brands of watches or sunglasses. Most modern models of watches and sunglasses would meet or exceed the utilitarian function of keeping accurate time and blocking UV rays, respectively. Therefore, with most brands fulfilling the primary utilitarian functions, any perceived differences among brands should hinge on symbolic differences regardless of personality variables. Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses did not rise from near-extinction to become a dominant brand during the early 1980s because Tom Cruise extolled the utilitarian benefits of the brand (Wilkie, 1994). The actor simply wore the brand in a feature film and the celebrity-product association transferred symbolic status to the brand. Watches and sunglasses may be products that have both utilitarian and value-expressive functions; however, with regard to advertising approaches, a defining

characteristic of these products is their capacity to represent symbolic status.

Exclusivity and Scarcity. Blumberg (1974) argued that symbolic status is dependent on the product's social desirability and scarcity. Similarly, Bearden and Etzel (1982) argued that a product's susceptibility to reference group influence is a function of its visibility and exclusivity (operationalized as luxury). It has been suggested that the scarcity or exclusivity dimension of products has become a much narrower and limited distinction with American consumers (Blumberg, 1974; Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Goffman, 1951; Turner, 1988). The exclusivity of products began to decline in the western world with the increase in mass transportation, Ford's mass production of the automobile, and the ease of mobility these innovations allowed (Turner, 1988). In modern society, the perceived scarcity of supply is artificial (Turner, 1988).

The rise in affluence in American society over the last several decades has allowed for an ever-increasing proportion of people to afford products that were previously exclusive to the upper classes (Dawson & Cavell, 1986). Goffman (1951) contends that symbols that become diffused across levels of class hierarchy can no longer serve to convey status. Blumberg (1974) argued that material items may no longer effectively communicate status due to the declining scarcity of product classes.

A product's exclusivity is often a characteristic of supply and demand. Exclusivity is generally a temporary state in modern economies. Maintaining exclusivity is difficult due to competition and the balance between exclusivity, profitability, and the cost advantages volume production (Weber & Dubois, 1997); unless an organization has the type of monopoly on resources that is rarely seen outside

the diamond trade.

Luxury. While in the past the term luxury was associated with status products, the term has lost some of its distinction in modern times. Martin (1998) found that the perceived luxury/necessity of a product did not distinguish high and low involvement products. Chiagouris and Mitchell (1997) argue that the culture of consumption is the foundation of capitalism, and materialism is at the core of the American Dream. The consciousness of the consumer society has shifted over the last few decades to rationalize what were once considered extravagant purchases based on product capability. The negative connotations and backlash that materialism once engendered have been diffused through the Functional Materialism of modern society (Chiagouris & Mitchell). Consumers can avoid the negative connotations of 'materialism' if the product can be justified on the basis of value, function, or sale discount pricing. The same price differentials are paid for luxury brands as in the supermaterialism of the 80s, but the benefits are rationalized and such purchases are deemed as acceptable under current societal norms (Chiagouris & Mitchell). Consumers just need to find practical benefits of products to justify what were once considered impractical luxury purchases.

Shifts in perceptions toward consumption combined with increases in disposable incomes and ever-expanding product choices has clouded the line between what is perceived as a necessity and what is perceived as a luxury purchase. The exclusivity aspect of the luxury business has undergone a 'democratization' over the past 20 years (Weber & Dubois, 1997). The market has grown and the luxury brands have to tread a careful balance between sufficient penetration, recognition, and sales to be successful

and the pricing and exclusive image to maintain mystique and avoid saturation (Weber & Dubois, 1997).

The characteristics of exclusivity, scarcity, and luxury are all interrelated in that they are all economic characteristics. Consequently, they are all subject to forces of supply and demand, and with modern production capabilities, most instances of scarcity are quickly remedied by supply-side entities. Additionally, the distinctions between luxury and necessity possessions are highly subject to personal preference, and perceptions of luxury and necessity have changed in recent years (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997). Most importantly, these economic classifications do not appear to effectively capture the psychological meaning consumers associate with products.

Product Symbolic Status

Product symbolic status embodies elements of involvement and value-expressiveness, but is more precisely defined through components of self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility. These facets all combine to form the construct of product symbolic status. The following conceptual definition encompasses these critical facets. Product Symbolic Status refers to product characteristics that openly convey information regarding lifestyle, personal resources, and social identity that reflect positively on the owner's self-concept and the impressions others form of him or her.

This conceptualization of product symbolic status captures vital aspects of the symbolic meaning people associate with possessions and derive through reference group associations. The Product Symbolic Status (PSS) scale has practical implications for

marketing and advertising campaigns by distinguishing products that have the capacity to represent symbolic status from those that do not, and thus identifying which product types are primed for status-oriented promotions. The following sections describe the four facets (self concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility) of the product symbolic status construct and the PSS scale.

Self-concept. The most-widely accepted definition of the self-concept is the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings in reference to him/herself as an object (Reed, 2002; Rosenberg, 1979). Berger et al. (1966) found that emergent status in informal groups was associated with self-concept development and positively influenced evaluations by others. Reference groups have a powerful influence on self-concept development (Assael, 1987; Pride & Ferrell, 2002; Wilkie, 1994). Kelman (1961) argued that the driving force underlying reference group influence is the motivation to enhance or reinforce one's self-concept. The process of identification is based on the emulation or adoption of attitudes or behavior of others in order to define and reinforce the self-concept (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Kelman, 1961).

Many products that a person possesses are closely tied to one's self-concept and identity (Belk, 1988; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; McCracken, 1986; Solomon, 1983; Wackman, 1973). Belk (1988) refers to such possessions as 'the extended self.' There is a symbolic interaction between possessions and the self-concept, such that the self-concept influences the product one chooses to purchase, and in turn, the possessions and products one owns influence the self-concept (Assael, 1987; Belk, 1988; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; McCracken, 1986; Solomon, 1983; Wackman,

1973). Fournier (1998) argued that the perceived significance to one's ego is a critical determinant of product brand choice. The product brands consumed by individuals "serve as powerful repositories of meaning purposively and differentially employed in the substantiation, creation, and (re)production of concepts of self" (Fournier, 1998, p. 365). Tyler and Lind (1992) argued that positive associations with self-concept development are part of the motivation for status. Thus, self-concept is expected to be an important facet of the PSS scale.

Impression Management. The self-concept is strongly influenced by the recognition and reactions of others. A person develops a conception of self based largely on perceptions of others' reactions to him/her (Mead, 1934). People consciously attempt to present images of themselves that they want others to accept and validate (Goffman, 1957). Respect, admiration, and the positive social evaluations they elicit from others are another motivator underlying status (Tyler & Lind, 1992).

Possessions play a part in impression management as well as in self-definition. A person's possessions contribute to the impressions others' have of him/her. Possessions convey social information (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997; Fournier & Richins, 1991) and social status evaluations are primarily driven by perceptions of the material resources one possesses (Eisenstadt, 1968; Ridgeway, 1997; Weber, 1946). "Possessions are valued because they give a certain status and are instrumental in projecting a desired self-image" (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997, p.264). This effect is accomplished through the display of possessions to others. This is predicated on the possessions or consumption being visible to others. Thus, impression management is

expected to be an important facet of the PSS scale.

Lifestyle. Turner (1988) argued that status can be conceptualized as lifestyle. The author asserts that status involves style, taste, dress, hobbies, and leisure activities that are all practical aspects of lifestyle. The products an individual purchases reflect his/her taste and consumption behavior is a key component of lifestyle (Featherstone, 1987; Meyer, 1984; Packard, 1957; Turner, 1988; Twitchell, 1996; Wernick, 1983). Advertising is often credited with creating new status hierarchies based on tastes and lifestyle (Featherstone, 1987; Schudson, 1984; Turner, 1988; Twitchell, 1996; Wernick, 1983).

Mass consumption has galvanized a new status ranking by lifestyle distinctions, where social evaluations are made according to preferences of consumption behavior and symbolic possessions (Featherstone, 1987; Schudson, 1984; Turner, 1988; Twitchell, 1996; Wernick, 1983). Products that reflect desirable aspects of the owner's lifestyle are likely to have symbolic status. Thus, lifestyle is expected to be an important facet of the PSS scale.

Social Visibility. Status evaluations in most social interactions are largely dependent on visual cues (Eisenstadt, 1968). The visibility of behavior influences both decisions to engage in the behavior and subsequent attributions of the behavior (Weick, 1993). Modern society relies more on the visible display of material items to convey status, rather than less tangible cues (Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Form & Stone, 1957; Goffman, 1951; Simmel, 1904). Wackman (1973) suggested that high visibility products are most relevant to the expression of the self-concept. For possessions to

influence the impressions other form about an individual, others need to be aware of the individual's possessions. It is an external, outer-directed projection of the self through the display of possessions (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997; Fournier & Richins, 1991). Individuals want the opportunity to "show-off" their consumption, hence the term conspicuous consumption. Thus, social visibility is expected to be an important facet of the PSS scale.

Product Symbolic Status Scale Purpose and Application

Not all products are rich in symbolic meaning (Belk, 1988; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Prown, 1982; Solomon, 1983; Wackman, 1973). Accordingly, not all products are relevant to one's self-concept, not all products influence others' impressions, not all products reflect the owner's lifestyle, and not all products and consumption are visible to others. While there have been several influential thought papers published on product symbolism, few previous studies have empirically examined the symbolic meanings of products and no previous research has empirically established a comprehensive class of symbolic status products. Previous authors (Fournier, 1998; Martin, 1998) have suggested that future research should be directed toward examining the sub-dimensions of product symbolism and involvement. By dissecting the larger constructs of product symbolism and involvement, we will learn the importance of different meanings consumers associate with different products and which product constellations have the capacity for representing this meaning.

Fournier (1998) argued that the field currently lacks a complete understanding of the dynamics of different forms of symbolic consumption due in part to the common

research practice of assessing perceived brand differences within one product category. She suggests that future studies examining the shared variance of symbolic consumption across product categories will provide a clearer picture of the different forms of symbolic consumption. To date, no published scales exist to assess the symbolic status of products. No previous research has measured symbolic meanings across a wide range of product types.

The present study aims to advance knowledge in the areas of product symbolism and involvement. The goal of the present study was to develop a scale to measure product symbolic status and empirically establish a new class of products that exhibit symbolic status. The PSS scale is comprised of four facets: of self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility, which are designed to capture the qualities of symbolic status in products. The PSS scale was used to assess an extensive range of product types and distinguish product symbolic status from the related concepts of involvement, value-expressiveness, sign value, exclusivity and luxury.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

The process of construct validation is generally based on the guidelines of psychological measurement theory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Peter & Churchill, 1986). The theory holds that while hypothetical constructs are not directly observable, measures can be developed to partially represent the constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Peter & Churchill, 1986). The Product Symbolic Status Scale (PSS) was developed based on the model provided by Churchill (1979) and on the principles prescribed by Hinkin (1995) and Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

There are three major aspects in the construct validation process (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). First, specify the domain of observable variables related to the construct. Second, examine the internal structure of the observed variables to confirm that they relate to the same construct. Third, examine whether the measure behaves as expected with regard to other related constructs. An outline of the PSS scale development and validation procedure appears in Table 2. The procedure consisted of two studies designed to purify the measure, establish evidence of reliability and validity, and determine the levels of product symbolic status across an extensive selection of product types.

Both studies utilized a within-subjects repeated measures design, wherein all participants were presented all treatments (product exemplars) and responded to all items. This design allowed for an extensive range and number of products to be assessed, which provided a broader examination of the product symbolic status construct. The two studies examined a broad spectrum of 17 product types selected to

provide a good representation of low involvement, high involvement, and symbolic status products.

The repeated measures design provides greater statistical sensitivity or power, for a given sample size, as compared to between-subjects designs in which participants are assigned to a single level or treatment condition (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989). The design of this research permitted the more sensitive repeated measures design because the stimuli were familiar product types that could be presented consecutively. The two studies were administered using web-based questionnaires. This allowed for the sequence of the 14 product types in Study 1 to be counterbalanced via computer-generated, random delivery. Notwithstanding this precaution, the treatment stimuli (product types) were not expected to produce practice effects or residual treatment effects. In fact, the construct of product symbolic status, by nature, involves comparative judgments across product types or brands, so the within-subjects repeated measures design is ideal for this purpose.

The key practical benefit of the PSS scale is the ability to assess multiple products or brands for status comparisons. This ability also provided corresponding benefits for assessing the PSS scale's psychometric properties. Conceptually, the different product types are categorical variables that represent different methods or conditions under which the construct of product symbolic status was examined. Therefore, each individual product type tested provided a separate assessment of the PSS scale's reliability and dimensionality characteristics.

Specify the Domain of the Construct

The critical first step in scale development is to conceptually define and specify the construct domain (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). As stated earlier, Product Symbolic Status refers to product characteristics that openly convey information regarding lifestyle, personal resources, and social identity that reflect positively on the owner's self-concept and the impressions others form of him or her. This definition captures the four major theoretical components of product symbolic status (self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility) and served as the foundation for item generation.

Generate Sample of Items

The second step in scale development is to generate a sample of items that captures the domain. Churchill (1979) advocates thoroughly examining the literature to determine what previous authors have found about the construct and its dimensions or components. Scale items need to tap all of the construct components or facets to sufficiently capture the construct domain (Churchill, 1979; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). While little empirical research exists on symbolic status, there is an abundance of theory from several academic disciplines, which was synthesized to define and specify the construct domain of product symbolic status.

The wealth of theory on symbolic status provided a solid foundation for a deductive approach to item generation. The deductive approach, or classification from above, utilizes a classification schema or typology. Hinkin (1995) suggested that the deductive approach to item generation is more theory-driven and better ensures that

items are firmly grounded in theory, as opposed to the inductive approach wherein a sample of respondents provide descriptive terms or items and the scale is developed based on an empirically-derived analysis of responses. The deductive approach requires a thorough understanding of the phenomenon from which a theoretical definition of the construct is formulated; and in turn, items are generated directly from the conceptual definition of the construct (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The deductive approach to item generation also allowed for strategically-balanced coverage of the construct components while retaining the degree of brevity required for the scale's practical application. There is an inherent trade-off between an exhaustive coverage of the construct domain and the practicality of the scale. Many scales are developed to assess a construct associated with a singular set of conditions. For example, job satisfaction scales are generally administered once at any given time with respect to a single job. However, the key benefit of the product symbolic status scale is the ability for comparisons across multiple product types or brands. This means that the scale is administered repetitively across multiple product types for each respondent. Therefore, the brevity of the product symbolic status scale is critical to its practical research benefits.

Due to the nature of the construct, there exists a heightened potential for social desirability problems, or a vanity-avoidance form of psychological reactance. Consequently, a strategic decision was made to phrase most items in the third person (Lessig & Park, 1978). The construct lends itself nicely to this approach given that symbolic status evolves from shared cultural beliefs about the relative status of

possessions and great consensus exists within cultures regarding these values (Ridgeway, 1997). Thus, individuals have the social perspective to evaluate the symbolic status of products within their culture. The third party item perspective allows participants to respond honestly without being forced to endorse such beliefs from a personal standpoint, where interference from social desirability bias is likely to be pronounced. Nevertheless, items were written to be as precise as possible (Churchill, 1979), with a straight-forward approach that directly inquires about participants' product perceptions.

Nine prospective items were formulated directly from the conceptual definition of the construct to cover the four component facets (i.e., self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, social visibility). The nine PSS items appear in Appendix A. Two items were generated to tap each facet and one global item addressing generalized social status product associations. Items 1 and 8 capture self-concept qualities, items 2 and 9 capture impression management qualities, items 3 and 7 capture lifestyle qualities, items 4 and 5 capture social visibility, and item 6 is a global status measure. The practical applications of the PSS scale require that the scale be clear and brief so that it can be repeated for multiple product or brands comparisons. Consequently, the 'shotgun empiricism' approach of testing a litany of items and discarding most was not an option. All nine prospective items are grounded in theory and were directly derived from the conceptual definition. Each prospective PSS item was evaluated and refined by at least two subject matter experts. Thus, all nine items are expected to perform soundly.

The PSS scale was tested for convergent and discriminant validity evidence

through comparisons with the constructs of involvement, value-expressiveness, and exclusivity/luxury. Scales for product exclusivity/luxury and product value-expressiveness were developed for the purpose of this study, as no scales have previously been developed to measure these symbolic product constructs. In accordance with Campbell and Fiske's (1959) multitrait-multimethod procedure (MTMM), all items from each of the four constructs were presented using two methods: A 5-point Likert scale and a 7-point semantic differential scale. The exclusivity/luxury and value-expressive scales, as well as a modified Likert-scale version of Zaichkowsky's (1994) involvement scale appear in Appendix B. The 7-point semantic differential scale versions of the four scales appear in Appendix C.

Purification of Scale

The purification of the product symbolic status scale was based on the domain sampling model (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The domain sampling model holds that if all items in the scale are drawn from the domain of a single construct, then responses to the items will be highly intercorrelated (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Conversely, items with low intercorrelations suggest that they are producing error and may not be drawn from the same construct domain (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The product symbolic status scale is theorized to be unidimensional. An exploratory factor analysis was performed on data from Study 1 to assess the factor structure and dimensionality of the scale. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated to determine the scale's internal consistency and purify the measure. Reliability analyses

were performed separately for each of the 14 product types. A separate factor analysis was performed on each of three products (clothing, refrigerator, and toothpaste) selected as prototypical exemplars for each of the three larger product classifications (symbolic status, high involvement, and low involvement, respectively).

Items with corrected item-to-total correlations less than .30 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), and factor loadings less than .40 (Hinkin, 1995), or that result in the scale alpha coefficient dropping below acceptable levels in the ($<.70$, Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) are eliminated during the purification stage. Subsequent analyses are then conducted using the purified scale with a new research sample. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was performed again on the data from the new sample to re-assess reliability.

Construct Validation

Content-related Validity. Content validity refers to the adequacy with which the measure captures the domain of interest (Hinkin, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Evidence of content validity is established deductively by first specifying the domain and systematically sampling from the universe of items to obtain a sample of items that are representative of the domain (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). The specification of the construct definition for product symbolic status clarified the domain and facilitated the drafting of items with a clear link to the construct domain (Hinkin, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Parceling out the primary sub-components provided a framework for ensuring adequate coverage of its critical elements without creating imbalance or redundancy (Churchill, 1979), which is particularly important for the product symbolic

status scale's brevity requirement. The extensive literature review (Churchill, 1979) and Study 1 are intended to produce evidence of content validity.

Construct-related Validity. Investigation of construct validity involves examining the theory underlying a scale (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This research plan utilizes several approaches to establish evidence of construct validity. Zaichkowsky's (1985) development of a scale to measure the product involvement (i.e., Personal Involvement Inventory or PII) outlined three steps to demonstrate evidence of construct validity. First, the literature is reviewed to determine characteristics of the products that are associated with high and low scores on the scale. Second, data is collected to test whether the scale discriminates between products proposed to harbor high and low levels of the construct. Third, an inference is drawn regarding the adequacy of the theory in explaining the data. This approach is parallel to the common construct validation method of testing for significant group differences among extreme groups that would be expected differ on measures of a given construct (Churchill, 1979; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Hinkin, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Like Zaichkowsky's (1985) model, the present study tests for significant differences in PSS scores for groups of products that would be expected to differ. Study 1 is designed to provide evidence that the PSS scale discriminates symbolic status products from other product types, thus providing evidence of discriminant and convergent validity. Previous authors' assertions regarding the symbolic status of certain products served as theoretical precedent to assess whether the PSS scale effectively differentiates products purported to hold symbolic status from those that are

not. This study also assessed several product types that previous authors disagreed on the symbolic properties in order to provide some resolution.

H₁: Each of the five theoretical symbolic status products (automobile, clothing, luggage, PDA, and sunglasses) will have significantly higher PSS scores than each of the other nine products included in the study (vacuum, breakfast cereal, laundry detergent, home air conditioner, facial soap, cola, home stereo, refrigerator, and toothpaste).

Study 2 was designed to provide further evidence of construct validity through a MTMM matrix (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Validity evidence is demonstrated by the degree of agreement between measures of the same trait using different methods (convergent), as well as, relative differences between different traits using the same and different methods (discriminant). Study 2 provides additional evidence of convergent and discriminant validity by correlating PSS scores with measures of three other constructs: Involvement, Value-expressiveness, and Exclusivity/Luxury. These three constructs represent symbolic product characteristics, but are conceptually distinct from product symbolic status.

Each construct was measured using two methods: a five-point Likert scale and a seven-point semantic differential scale. The semantic differential scale method was selected because it is the existing scale form of Zaichkowsky's (1985; 1994) involvement scales. While Study 1 provides evidence of convergent and discriminant validity, Study 2 provides more direct evidence of discriminant validity for the PSS scale by demonstrating predictably low correlations with these conceptually different

constructs (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The monotrait-heteromethod correlations are expected to be significantly higher than the heterotrait-monomethod correlations and the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations; thus, providing evidence of discriminant validity. In simpler terms, the correlations for the same construct measured using different methods are expected to be significantly higher than both correlations between different constructs measured under the same method and different constructs measured under different methods. The analyses were performed separately on each of three different product types (wristwatch, washing machine, and greeting card).

H₂: PSS score monotrait-heteromethod correlations will be significantly different from zero and sufficiently large enough to suggest convergent validity.

H₃: PSS score monotrait-heteromethod correlations will be sufficiently higher than the heterotrait-monomethod correlations to suggest discriminant validity.

H₄: PSS score monotrait-heteromethod correlations will be sufficiently higher than the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations to suggest discriminant validity.

H₅: PSS scores for the theoretical symbolic status product (wristwatch) will be significantly higher than the PSS scores for the high sign value/high involvement product (washing machine).

H₆: PSS scores for the theoretical symbolic status product (wristwatch) will be significantly higher than the PSS scores for the value-expressive product (greeting card).

METHODS

Study 1

Participants. The sample consisted of 248 undergraduate students drawn from the psychology department subject pool. Participants received course credit in an introductory psychology class as incentive for their participation. Participants accessed the study via a hyperlink on the department subject pool website. All survey administration and data collection was web-based. The web-based application was developed to maximize sample size. The within-subjects, repeated measures design is efficient and provides benefits in the statistical power (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989). The sample size exceeds Cohen's (1992) statistical power recommendations (power > .80) for testing mean differences ($n = 64$) and correlations ($n = 85$), at $\alpha = .05$ with an expected medium effect size. The sample also exceeds the suggested lower bound of 200 participants for latent variable models like factor analyses (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1990).

All 248 participants produced complete data for all 14 different product types. General demographic information was reported by participants. The sex composition of the sample was 54% female and 46% male. Twenty-two percent were business majors, 10% psychology majors, 9% engineering majors, and 59% indicated "other" majors. Eighty-three percent were Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 2% African-American, 2% Asian, and 3% reported "other". Ninety-one percent of the sample reported American nationality and the remaining 9% reported various nationalities from a total of 20 different countries.

Measures. The product symbolic status scale consists of nine different items derived from the conceptual definition of the construct (Appendix A). Two items were developed for each of the four theoretical facets (self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility) of product symbolic status, and one item represents global symbolic status. Each item is measured on a 5-point Likert response scale. All nine items were repeated for each of 14 products included in the study.

Procedure. Study 1 utilized a within-subjects repeated-measures design, in which all respondents answered all nine items of the PSS scale for each of the 14 product types. Conceptually, each product type represents a different object to which the construct is applied. Therefore, factor analyses to assess scale dimensionality were performed separately on three selected product types (clothing, refrigerator, and toothpaste) and Cronbach's alpha estimates of reliability were performed separately for each of the 14 product types.

Fournier (1998) argued that knowledge in the area of product symbolism has been limited by the standard practice of assessing the characteristics of *brands* within a single product category. She suggested that the literature on consumer behavior would benefit from studies that examine product symbolism across a broad range of product *types*. Accordingly, Study 1 includes a broad sample of 14 product types. Five were theoretical symbolic status products (clothing, PDA, automobile, sunglasses, and luggage). The theoretical symbolic status products were contrasted with nine products that previous authors have classified under different product construct categories. According to the product classifications of previous authors, four of the selected

products were high involvement products (home air conditioner, home stereo, refrigerator, and vacuum), two were low involvement products (breakfast cereal and cola), two were high sign value/low involvement products (facial soap and toothpaste), and one (laundry detergent) was a product that has been classified as both low involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985) and high involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

The products of Study 1 were selected to provide an adequate range of product types, as well as to shed some light on the seemingly inconsistent findings or assertions of previous authors. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of products that have been cited by previous authors as either low or high involvement, respectively. Annotations are included for products that previous authors found to be high in sign value, value-expressiveness, or susceptibility to reference group influence. The theoretical symbolic status products are hypothesized to show significantly higher PSS scores than the other products. Study 1 provides evidence of construct validity if the theoretical symbolic status products exhibit significantly higher PSS scores than the other products, irrespective of previous alternative product categorizations (e.g., sign value, value-expressive, or involvement). The differences in scores for product types were analyzed with a repeated-measures general linear model (GLM) using SPSS software. Symbolic status products were tested for significant differences in PSS scores with all other products in *a priori* pair-wise comparisons.

When examining consumer perceptions of symbolic status, it is important to consider the differences among brands. Within many product classes, brands differ in the degree of status associated with them. For example, a Chrysler LeBaron and a Rolls

Royce Phantom may both be considered luxury cars; however, the Rolls Royce is generally considered to be relatively higher in status than the Chrysler.

Different brands represent different reference points on a status continuum for each product type. However, consumers have different schemas and pre-existing impressions of established brands that go beyond perceptions of status. This precluded the use of brand names in this study, and therefore product types were identified in general terms (e.g., wristwatch, vacuum cleaner, and luggage). However, respondents' ratings of products on the status measures presumably depend on which brand they envision when responding. If lesser brands are envisioned, then the product's ratings of symbolic status may be attenuated. Consequently, in order to gauge a product type's full potential as a status symbol, respondents need to envision the brand that they perceive as being the highest ranking brand in each product class. To help ensure that product status ratings were not be dampened, the PSS scale included the following instruction: "When answering all of the following questions about different product types, answer in terms of *the best brand that you can think of* for each product type." This instruction was held constant across all product types. The purpose of this study was to measure the symbolic status associated with different product types; however, the PSS scale will also be applicable in future studies to examine brand symbolic status within a product category.

Study 2

Participants. A sample of 276 undergraduate students participated in Study 2. All participants were drawn from the same psychology department subject pool as Study

1. All survey administration and data collection was web-based. The participant overlap between the two separate studies was estimated to be approximately 50%. Similar to Study 1, the sample size exceeded Cohen's (1992) statistical power recommendations.

All 276 participants produced complete data for all eight scale variants for each of three different product types. An estimated 50% of the participants in Study 1 also participated in Study 2. General demographic information was reported by participants. The sex composition of the sample was 53% male and 47% female. Twenty-six percent were business majors, 10% psychology majors, 6% engineering majors, and 58% indicated "other" majors. Eighty-five percent were Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, 1% African-American, 1% Asian, and 5% reported "other". Ninety-four percent of the sample reported American nationality and the remaining 6% reported various nationalities from a total of 15 different countries.

Measures. Four scales were used to measure four conceptually-distinct constructs: Product symbolic status, product involvement, product value-expressiveness, and product exclusivity/luxury. *Product symbolic status* was measured using the nine-item PSS scale. Zaichkowsky's (1994) 10-item involvement scale was used to measure the construct of *product involvement*. Scales for product exclusivity/luxury and product value-expressiveness were developed for the purpose of this study, as no scales had previously been developed to measure these symbolic product constructs. Six items were designed to capture the *exclusivity/luxury* construct: Items 1 and 2 were developed to capture the scarcity or limited supply aspect of exclusivity, items 3 and 4 were developed to capture the restricted distribution aspect of exclusivity, and items 5 and 6

were developed to capture the luxury facet. Additionally, five items were designed to capture *value-expressiveness* as a product characteristic. Item 1 was derived to capture the basic conceptual definition of value-expressiveness, items 2 and 3 were derived from Kelman's (1960) original work on the concept, and items 4 and 5 were derived from Shavitt's (1992) examples of prototypical value-expressive products.

The exclusivity/luxury and value-expressiveness scales were utilized along with Zaichkowsky's (1994) involvement scale in Study 2 for the purpose of establishing evidence of discriminant validity of the product symbolic status scale. The six-item exclusivity/luxury scale, the five-item value-expressive scale, and a modified 5-point Likert-scale version of Zaichkowsky's (1994) 10-item involvement scale appear in Appendix B. Each construct was measured using two methods: a 5-point Likert scale and a 7-point semantic differential scale. The 7-point semantic differential scale is the response format of Zaichkowsky's (1994) involvement scales which allowed the construct to be measured in its native method. The 7-point semantic differential scale versions of the four constructs appear in Appendix C.

Procedure. Study 2 utilized a repeated-measures design, in which all respondents answered all items for each of the four scales, using both two methods, for each of the three different product types. The three products were selected based their purported representation of different symbolic product classifications: Washing machine (high sign value/high involvement, Laurent & Kapferer, 1985), wristwatch (symbolic status), and greeting card (value-expressive, Lowrey & Shavitt, 1992). The order of variables was counterbalanced via randomization. The order of the products was drawn

at random and designed so that participants respond to all scales and methods before advancing to the next product. The order of the scales was drawn in random order for the first product, then reversed for the second product and drawn at random again for the third product. The order of the methods was decided by a coin flip and then alternated thereafter. All analyses were performed separately on each of the three different product types.

Campbell and Fiske's (1959) MTMM matrix was used to examine the construct validity of the PSS scale. Construct validity evidence is demonstrated by the degree of agreement between measures of the same trait using different methods (convergent), as well as, relative differences between different traits using the same and different methods (discriminant). In the MTMM, evidence of validity is represented by measures of monotrait-heteromethod correlations showing convergent validity for the trait across methods. The monotrait-heteromethod correlations need to be significantly different from zero and sufficiently large enough to suggest convergent validity. Additionally, the monotrait-heteromethod correlations need to be relatively higher than the heterotrait-monomethod correlations and the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations; thus, providing evidence of discriminant validity. All correlations were evaluated in accordance with Cohen's (1992) benchmarks for small ($r = .10$), medium ($r = .30$), and large ($r = .50$) effect sizes. Cohen and Cohen's (1983) formula for differences between dependent r 's was used to test the correlations for significant differences.

Study 2 demonstrates convergent and discriminant validity evidence of the PSS scale through the pattern of correlations between PSS scores and the measures of the

three other constructs (involvement, value-expressiveness, and exclusivity/luxury). The PSS scale is expected to demonstrate discriminate validity from the constructs of involvement, exclusivity/luxury, and value-expressiveness which are related, but believed to be conceptually-distinct from product symbolic status. Evidence of discriminant validity for the product symbolic status scale is demonstrated through predictably low correlations with these conceptually-distinct constructs (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Bivariate correlations between PSS scores measured under each of the two methods (monotrait-heteromethod) are expected to be significantly higher than correlations between PSS scores and the other three constructs measured under the same method (heterotrait-monomethod), as well as the correlations between the other three constructs measured under different methods (heterotrait-heteromethod).

Additionally, *a priori* pair-wise comparisons of PSS scores of the three different product types were performed to produce further evidence of discriminant validity for the PSS scale. PSS scores for the symbolic status product (wristwatch) are expected to be significantly higher than PSS scores from the product exemplars representing the value-expressive product construct (greeting card), and the product sign value and involvement constructs (washing machine).

RESULTS

Study 1

The initial purpose of Study 1 was to examine the PSS scale item functioning, and if necessary delete or revise items that function poorly. It should be emphasized that a strong theoretical approach was adhered to throughout the scale development process. An approach guided by solid theory better ensures that all items have strong connections to the conceptual definition of the construct and enhances content validity (Churchill, 1979; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Hinkin, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All nine PSS items were formulated directly from the conceptual definition of product symbolic status and no items were expected to perform poorly.

The product symbolic status scale is theorized to be unidimensional. All nine items are believed to tap a single latent factor (i.e., product symbolic status). Exploratory factor analyses were performed and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the dimensionality and item functioning of the PSS scale. A separate factor analysis was performed on each of three products: Clothing, refrigerator, and toothpaste. These products were selected because they represent prototypical exemplars from each of the three larger product classifications (symbolic status, high involvement, and low involvement, respectively). Maximum Likelihood with a Direct Oblimin rotation was used as the extraction method for all three analyses. Table 3 contains the PSS item loadings, the percentage of variance accounted for by each respective factor, and the chi-square tests of fit for each of the three selected products. Separate examinations of the

nine items for each of the three selected products indicated that, on average, all nine items of the PSS scale show relatively strong factor loadings.

Refrigerator produced a two-factor solution with the second factor being distinguished solely by high negative loadings for the two social visibility items (items 4 and 5). Clothing and toothpaste each produced single factor solutions. In each of the solutions, the primary factor explained from 48% (refrigerator) to 58% (clothing) of the variance. Given the tendency of exploratory factor analysis to overestimate the number of factors extracted (Bobko, 1990), a scree plot was examined to provide additional information. The results of the scree tests for each of the three selected products suggest that a conclusion of a single factor underlying the PSS scale would be tenable conclusion. Further investigation of additional product types revealed that all of the products theorized to be symbolic status products produced single factor solutions with the exception of sunglasses, which also produced a second factor distinguished primarily by the two social visibility items.

Reliability analyses were performed separately for each of the 14 product types. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the PSS scale's internal consistency. Table 4 reports the reliability coefficients, means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals for each of the 14 products included in Study 1. The reliability coefficients ranged from .88 to .92 with an average α of .90 across all 14 products. All of the items showed sufficient corrected item-to-total correlations. The reliability analyses across all 14 products indicated that deletion of the social visibility items would only result in a negligible gain in alpha (hundredths of a point) for certain products, but

also negligible losses on other products. The strong reliability demonstrates that the nine-item PSS scale has high internal consistency and can be interpreted as unidimensional. Therefore, all nine items will be retained for subsequent studies of the PSS scale.

Analyses of PSS mean scores for the 14 different product types were performed using GLM. The F statistic is thought to be robust to even flagrant violations of its underlying assumptions (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989). Nevertheless, the distributions were examined for any notable violations to the assumptions. Despite histograms illustrating relatively bell-shaped distributions for most products, virtually all of the products showed some deviation from normality. However, heterogeneity of variance was not problematic ($F_{MAX} = 2.56$). In light of the mild violations of normality, Keppel's (1991) suggested alpha level correction ($\alpha = .025$) will be imposed for all inferential tests.

Study 1 was designed to establish evidence of construct validity if the PSS scale demonstrates significant differences between products believed to hold high and low levels of product symbolic status. Hypothesis 1 examined the PSS ratings of the 14 different product types. The overall product main effect was statistically significant, $F(13, 3211) = 607.00, p < .001$. It was hypothesized that the PSS scale would show significantly higher ratings for each of the five products theorized to be symbolic status products (automobile, clothing, sunglasses, PDA, and luggage), as compared to the other nine products. Examination of the mean scores for the 14 product types shows a clear distinction among product clusters with a marked gap between the lowest score of the higher cluster (luggage, $M = 3.40, SD = .90$) and highest score of the lower cluster

(refrigerator, $M = 2.66$, $SD = .82$). All the product types theorized to be symbolic status products score in the higher product cluster and all of the other product types score in the lower cluster, with the exception of home stereo. Home stereo was not originally theorized to be a symbolic status product. However, the high PSS score for home stereo coupled with the clear absence of overlap between the clusters suggests that it was an initial misclassification of the product rather than overlap among the clusters.

Hypothesis 1 could be tested by calculating PSS means for the group of symbolic status products (automobile, clothing, sunglasses, PDA, home stereo, and luggage) and for the group of all other products (refrigerator, cola, home air conditioner, facial soap, toothpaste, breakfast cereal, vacuum, and laundry detergent) and testing the group means for a significant difference. However, more decisive evidence can be demonstrated by testing the difference between the lowest-rated symbolic status product (luggage) against the highest non-symbolic status product (refrigerator). If these two cluster bordering products show a significant difference, then by extension all other products across the two product clusters would also be significantly different. The simple comparison between the PSS scores for luggage and refrigerator was statistically significant with an $F(1, 247) = 162.48$, $p < .001$. Calculated effect size indices for the comparison are $d = .86$ and $\eta^2 = .40$. Based on accepted effect size standards, this is considered to be a large effect (Cohen, 1992) and demonstrates strong support for Hypothesis 1. The PSS scale establishes evidence of construct validity by significantly discriminating among products that would be expected to differ on the construct of product symbolic status.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to provide further evidence of construct validity through a multitrait-multimethod matrix (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). PSS measures were correlated with measures of involvement, value-expressiveness, and exclusivity/luxury using both five-point Likert scale and seven-point semantic differential scale methods in a MTMM matrix. The analyses were performed separately on each of three different product types (wristwatch, washing machine, and greeting card). Table 5 reports the reliability coefficients, means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals for each of the 24 scale/product variants included in Study 2. The reliability coefficients ranged from .49 to .96. The focal scale is the PSS in the five-point Likert scale format, which had an average reliability coefficient of .88. Only the five-point Likert scale version of the exclusivity/luxury scale (average $\alpha = .64$) showed an average reliability of less than .80 across all three products; interestingly, the seven-point semantic differential version of the exclusivity/luxury scale had an average reliability of .82.

The MTMM matrices for wristwatch, washing machine, and greeting card appear in Tables 6, 7, and 8, respectively. Hypothesis 2 predicts that PSS score monotrait-heteromethod correlations will be significantly different from zero and sufficiently large enough to suggest convergent validity. Campbell and Fiske (1959) refer to these within-trait, across-method diagonal elements as validity coefficients. The PSS scale validity coefficients for wristwatch ($r = .49, p < .001$), washing machine ($r = .74, p < .001$), and greeting card ($r = .72, p < .001$) were all significantly different from zero. Additionally, each of the validity coefficients for the PSS scale is strong enough to suggest convergent

validity. Cohen's (1992) benchmarks for evaluating effect sizes indicate that $r = .50$ is considered a large correlation effect size; the validity coefficients for the PSS scale on all three products meet or exceed that mark. Thus, both elements of Hypothesis 2 are supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that PSS score monotrait-heteromethod correlations will be sufficiently higher than the heterotrait-monomethod correlations to suggest discriminant validity. Campbell and Fiske (1959) propose a one-tailed sign test for evaluating this discriminant validity evidence, in which statistical significance is estimated based on the number of heterotrait-monomethod values higher and lower than the validity coefficient. However, in each of the three product MTMM matrices the corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values are lower than the PSS validity coefficient, which renders the sign test moot. A more decisive evaluation is provided by testing if the PSS validity coefficient is significantly higher than the corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values. Cohen and Cohen's (1983) formula for calculating the significance of the difference of dependent correlations was used to test whether the PSS scale validity coefficients for each of the three products were significantly higher than corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values. All effect sizes of the difference between dependent r 's were calculated using Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, and Burke's (1996) correction for converting d from repeated measures t statistics.

For wristwatch, the test of the difference between the PSS validity coefficient ($r = .49$) and the next highest value (value-expressiveness, $r = .44$) yielded a $t(275) = 4.26$, $p < .01$, $d = .27$. By extension, the PSS scale validity coefficient is significantly higher

than all other corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values for wristwatch. For washing machine, the test of the difference between the PSS validity coefficient ($r = .74$) and the next highest value (value-expressiveness, $r = .53$) yielded a $t(275) = 5.26$, $p < .01$, $d = .31$. By extension, the PSS scale validity coefficient is significantly higher than all other corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values for washing machine. For greeting card, the test of the difference between the PSS validity coefficient ($r = .72$) and the next highest value (value-expressiveness, $r = .46$) yielded a $t(275) = 7.79$, $p < .01$, $d = .49$. By extension, the PSS scale validity coefficient is significantly higher than all other corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values for greeting card. Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that PSS score monotrait-heteromethod correlations will be sufficiently higher than the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations to suggest discriminant validity. The corresponding heterotrait-heteromethod values were all smaller than the both the PSS scale validity coefficients, as well as smaller than the next highest corresponding values (i.e., the corresponding value-expressiveness scale in every instance) for each of the three products. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported by extension.

It should be emphasized that while the effect sizes of the difference between the PSS scale validity coefficients and the next-highest corresponding values ranged from small ($d = .27$) to medium ($d = .49$), the PSS scale validity coefficients were invariably significantly higher than all corresponding heterotrait-monomethod values, as well as all corresponding heterotrait-heteromethod values, for all three product types. Additionally,

the MTMM matrices show a consistent pattern of relations among the constructs in accordance with Campbell and Fiske's (1959) guidelines for evaluating construct validity evidence. Thus, the PSS scale demonstrated consistent evidence of discriminant validity for all three products tested in Study 2.

Hypothesis 5 predicts that PSS scores for the theoretical symbolic status product (wristwatch) will be significantly higher than the PSS scores for the high sign value/high involvement product (washing machine). The GLM repeated measures analysis of means for wristwatch ($M = 3.63, SD = .75$) and washing machine ($M = 2.51, SD = .82$) yielded a significant $F(1, 275) = 299.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52, d = 1.43$. The PSS scale mean for wristwatch was significantly higher than the PSS scale score for washing machine and had a large effect size; Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicts that PSS scores for the theoretical symbolic status product (wristwatch) will be significantly higher than the PSS scores for the value-expressive product (greeting card). The GLM repeated measures analysis of means for wristwatch ($M = 3.63, SD = .75$) and greeting card ($M = 2.90, SD = .86$) yielded a significant $F(1, 275) = 113.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29, d = .90$. The PSS scale mean for wristwatch was significantly higher than the PSS scale score for greeting card and had a large effect size; Hypothesis 6 is supported.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The goals of this study were to conceptually define the product symbolic status construct, to develop and validate a scale designed to measure the construct, and to empirically establish a class of products that represent the construct. The items of the PSS scale were all derived from the theoretical groundwork in the existing literature on status, product symbolism, and reference group influence. The PSS scale items represent four different facets (self-concept, impression management, lifestyle, and social visibility) that have been previously theorized to be components of the symbolic status in products.

The empirical research consisted of two studies to develop the scale and provide evidence of validity. The multiple products tested under the repeated measures design permitted several separate examinations of the PSS scale's psychometric properties. The results of exploratory factor analyses suggest that the PSS scale is unidimensional and reliability analyses indicate that the PSS scale produces scores with high internal consistency across a wide range of product types. The PSS scale also produced evidence of convergent and discriminant validity through comparisons of product types that would be expected to differ and through the pattern of correlations with several related constructs (product value-expressiveness, product involvement, and product exclusivity/luxury) in a MTMM matrix. All six hypotheses were supported.

The results of Study 1 indicate that the PSS scale demonstrates evidence of convergent validity by producing high scores for all of the product types that were theorized to represent symbolic status. Study 1 also showed that the PSS scale

demonstrates evidence of discriminate validity by showing significantly higher scores for each of the symbolic status products (automobile, clothing, sunglasses, PDA, home stereo, and luggage) than any of the other eight products tested. The comparison products were all determined by previous authors to represent alternative product constructs. The PSS scale significantly discriminated symbolic status products from low involvement, high involvement, and sign value products. Moreover, the effect sizes for these differences were large. These findings were reinforced in Study 2 with the symbolic status product (wristwatch) demonstrating a significantly higher PSS score than both the high involvement product (washing machine) and the value-expressive product (greeting card). Once again, the effect sizes for these differences were large.

The MTMM matrices from tests of three product types indicate that the PSS scale demonstrates evidence of construct validity. The PSS scale shows evidence of convergent validity through the moderate correlations with the three other constructs. Moreover, the pattern of correlations between the constructs is consistent across all three MTMM matrices representing the three different product types. Across all three product types, product symbolic status shows the strongest correlations with product value-expressiveness, moderate correlations with product involvement, and small to weak correlations with product exclusivity/luxury. This pattern of correlations is consistent with theoretical expectations of the strength of associations between product symbolic status and these other constructs.

Symbolic status products represent a subclass of products that are believed to be both value-expressive and high involvement. Symbolic status products have value-

expressive characteristics and are likely to generate high involvement; however, the value-expressiveness and involvement are larger, heterogeneous product constructs and include a much broader range of product types. For example, clothing is a product that holds symbolic status, is generally high involvement, and often value-expressive. However, refrigerators and washing machines are high involvement products but not symbolic status products, and greeting cards and bumper stickers are value-expressive products but not symbolic status products.

The pattern of correlations among the four constructs in the MTMM matrix indicates that product symbolic status shows the weakest association with exclusivity/luxury. In the past, scarcity, exclusivity, and luxury were considered to be descriptive characteristics the symbolic status of products (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Blumberg, 1974; Goffman, 1951). However, these economic factors are subject to evolving market forces and do not appear to be as relevant in today's society (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997; Dawson & Cavell, 1986; Turner, 1988; Weber & Dubois, 1997). Nonetheless, the psychological needs that the accumulation of possessions fulfills, and the corresponding effects that consumption and possessions have on the self-concept have not faded over time (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997). Products and possessions will continue to fill psychological needs, notwithstanding economic trends, and products and possessions will continue to serve as symbols of status (Chiagouris & Mitchell, 1997). Economic-based dimensions like exclusivity and luxury do not effectively capture the needs, motivations, or meanings that drive consumption.

The MTMM matrices also provide evidence of discriminant validity for the PSS Scale. For each of the three products in Study 2, the validity coefficients for product symbolic status were significantly different from zero, as well as significantly higher than all other correlations between the PSS scale and other constructs measured under the same method (heterotrait-monomethod) and other constructs measured under different methods (heterotrait-heteromethod). While the effect sizes for these differences in correlations ranged from small to large, perhaps the strongest evidence of construct validity for the PSS scale is that there was not a single anomalous correlation (heterotrait-monomethod or heterotrait-heteromethod) that exceeded the validity coefficient for product symbolic status. The PSS scale maintained this integrity across each of the three product categories tested (symbolic status, high involvement, and value-expressive).

The PSS scale was designed for application in the examination of brand symbolic status as well. The PSS scale items can easily adapted to measure brand symbolic status with the simple substitution of brand information in place of the target product type. This simple change in the items' target object is not expected to adversely affect the scale's psychometric properties, given that the PSS scale maintained psychometric soundness across widely varying target objects (product types). The symbolic status product industry is a multi-billion dollar market that continues to grow (Tiffany, 2004). With organizations continually trying to manage the status of their brands and jockeying to position new brands in this lucrative market, the PSS scale provides a tool to measure

a brand's symbolic status against competitors and evaluate the effectiveness of marketing and advertising efforts to instill symbolic status in brands.

The product symbolic status construct has unique qualities and might have important implications for marketing and advertising strategies based on reference group influence. For example, celebrities are the predominant reference group used by advertisers (Assael, 1998; Bradley, 1996; King, 1989; Slinker, 1984). The fame, success, wealth, attractiveness, and high status of celebrities all combine to make them a very potent aspirational reference group (McCracken, 1986; 1989). As a reference group, the fame of celebrities makes them widely recognizable to broad markets and their popularity and social status makes them influential.

McCracken's (1986; 1989) Theory of Meaning Transfer describes the movement of meaning through consumer goods. He uses a celebrity endorsement example to illustrate the theory. McCracken (1989) posits that through the celebrity's endorsement of a product, the meanings with which the celebrity is endowed are transferred to the product. In the second stage, the consumer purchases the product; thereby adopting the meanings that originated from the celebrity and incorporating them into his/her own self-image. Through this process the consumer comes to possess some of the symbolic meaning (e.g., status, success, and attractiveness) that the celebrity represents.

Celebrity endorsements account for an estimated 20% of all commercials and 10% of all advertising expenditures (Assael, 1998; Bradley, 1996). However, it has been estimated that only a fraction of celebrity endorsements are believed to be effective (Forkan, 1980; Sherman, 1985). The most common explanation for failed celebrity ad

campaigns, given by both researchers and the leading practitioners in the field, is a lack of logical or relevant connection between the celebrity and the product (Assael, 1998; Bradley, 1996; Cooper, 1984; Forkan, 1980; Marshall, 1987; Miciak & Shanklin, 1994; Sherman, 1985; Slinker, 1984; Walker, Langmeyer, & Langmeyer, 1993).

Some authors have suggested that the effectiveness of celebrities in reference group influence advertising approaches might be limited to attractiveness-related products (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). This theory is commonly referred to as the 'Match-up Hypothesis.' It is based on the notion that characteristics of the referent source must be congruent with the characteristics of the message to result in the receiver's internalization or acceptance of the message (Heider, 1958; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). Previous authors suggest that attractiveness is the characteristic that underlies most celebrities' source credibility. In the celebrity endorsement paradigm, the celebrity's attractiveness is congruent with messages and products related to attractiveness. However, if the influence of celebrities' is based on their attractiveness and contingent on the product being attractiveness-related, this leaves only a narrow range of products that celebrity sources could effectively endorse.

The product symbolic status construct offers an alternative conceptualization of celebrities' domain of expertise and influence with regard to advertising; and therefore, an extension of that influence beyond attractiveness-related products. Because attractiveness functions as a status cue (Webster & Driskell, 1983), the status that underlies attractiveness might extend the persuasive effect of celebrity endorsers beyond

products that are directly attractiveness-enhancing to any product type that has the capacity to represent symbolic status. This is based on the perceived expertise and congruity of the high-status referent source with respect to products that have the capacity to hold symbolic status. For example, high-status referent sources are likely to provide source characteristics of both attractiveness and expertise to messages (endorsements) related to status; consequently, the realm of perceived expertise and influence is extended to all products that have the capacity to enhance attractiveness *or* status. While many symbolic status products may have attractiveness-enhancing qualities, symbolic status extends to a much wider range of products that are not directly attractiveness-enhancing.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the PSS scale demonstrates evidence of reliability and validity, there are limitations in this research. This research only included a limited number of product types. The product types included in the two studies were selected based on their theoretical representativeness of the product symbolic status construct. Additionally, this research included a greater range and number of product types than many previous studies. However, the sample of product types in this research only account for a subset of product types that comprise the entire class of symbolic status products. Future research should examine other products theorized to be high on product symbolic status and replicate the findings in this research.

The product value-expressiveness scale utilized in Study 2 was designed for the purpose of establishing convergent and discriminant validity evidence for the PSS scale.

While the five-item product value-expressiveness scale produced adequate alpha coefficients across the three product types tested for both the five-point Likert version (average $\alpha = .82$) and the seven-point semantic differential version (average $\alpha = .86$), the product value-expressiveness scale was not developed with the same rigorous theoretical approach as the PSS scale. The product value-expressiveness scale served its purpose for this study, but it is most likely content deficient. Value-expressiveness is most likely a multidimensional construct that incorporates a broad spectrum of values and beliefs. With many organizations now attempting to brand their products and services with value-expressive ideals (e.g., expressive graphic designs on credit cards, environmentally-conscious 'green' initiatives, etc.), research would benefit from a scale that effectively measures consumer perceptions of such value-expressive products and services. Accordingly, future research should develop and validate a more elaborate and refined scale to measure the product value-expressiveness construct.

Another limitation is that both studies utilized undergraduate student samples. Calder, Phillips, and Tybout (1981) support the use of student samples in scale development studies; however, in light of the limited direct experience that students typically have in purchasing many symbolic status products, further research on the product symbolic status construct should be conducted with samples that have more purchasing experience of symbolic status products.

Different age groups, geographic regions, social classes, and market segments are likely to have different perceptions of product symbolic status. While the PSS scale is expected to retain psychometric stability across different samples, the different sample

characteristics may produce different mean levels of product symbolic status for different product types or brands. For example, home stereo was not a product type initially theorized to represent symbolic status; however, Study 1 results indicated that for the specific sample home stereo is clearly a symbolic status product. In hindsight, recent advances of audio technology, such as the advent of MP3 audio-media format, and the consumer proclivities of this particular sample probably drove this finding. For many people in this age bracket, MP3 is the audio-format of choice and many MP3 players serve as both mobile stereo units and home stereo equipment (e.g., the popular Apple iPod™). Consequently, participants in this particular sample may not have distinguished between a home stereo and their mobile personal stereo unit. Additionally, the fashionable styling and high social visibility of the MP3 mobile stereo units may contribute to the symbolic status ratings of this product type with this particular demographic. Accordingly, the relative ratings of different product types on the PSS scale should be normed for different demographic characteristics in future research.

Establishing the construct validity of the PSS scale is an ongoing process. Similarly, the determination of which products hold symbolic status is likely to be an ongoing process. New technological advances will spawn new symbolic status products (e.g., PDAs, MP3 players, and plasma televisions) and other products may lose their symbolic status potency over time (e.g., VCRs). Different generations or sub-cultures may propagate different sets of symbolic status products. The relative levels of symbolic status for products tested in this research may change over time, but the PSS scale is derived from the underlying psychological meanings people attain from

products; and therefore the PSS scale should be applicable for examining product symbolic status even as the products that represent it change.

Nevertheless, the relative values of product symbolic status for the selection of product types included in this research would appear to be consistent with current intuitive judgments. Ridgeway (1997) emphasized that status is a function of shared cultural beliefs and there is great consensus within cultures as to what constitutes status. Consequently, even without direct experience with ownership of symbolic status products, individuals tend to be knowledgeable about symbolic status. However, the diffusion of these status beliefs occurs within cultures; thus, different cultures might subscribe to entirely different beliefs about status and products that represent it. This research is limited to American culture product symbolic status beliefs, as Studies 1 and 2 only included a respective 9% and 6% of participants who reported other nationalities. The PSS scale provides an excellent tool for examining cultural differences in beliefs about symbolic status products and brands. Future research should investigate whether there are significant differences in product symbolic status beliefs across cultures.

In addition to the areas of future research already mentioned, further research should investigate product style distinctions. Only general product types were investigated in this study, however, within many product types there exist categorical product style differences. For example, the product type automobile could be subdivided in the styles such as luxury sedan, SUV, minivan, truck, or sports car. Leigh (1989) offered this extension of the Bourne typology that appeared to explain some of the inconsistencies in Bearden and Etzel's (1982) original investigation of Bourne's

theory. Future research should also examine the effects of marketing efforts to ‘piggyback’ non-symbolic status product types with symbolic status products to determine how readily symbolic status can transfer across product types (Leigh & Gabel, 1992).

We know that marketing efforts often attempt to infuse products with symbolic status and that consumers attempt to acquire this symbolic status by consuming these products. However, a key area for future research is to determine how well symbolic status products transfer meanings and positive qualities to the owners. How readily do consumers of symbolic status products acquire the meanings held by the products and what factors moderate this transfer process? There are clearly different degrees of product symbolic status and the PSS scale appears to have the sensitivity to measure differences among product types or brands that represent different degrees of symbolic status. For example, the largest difference among the six symbolic status products in Study 1 was between the second (clothing, $M = 4.42$, $SD = .63$) and third (sunglasses, $M = 3.76$, $SD = .73$) highest means. A post-hoc test of the differences resulted in a significant difference in the degree of symbolic status even among these two high symbolic status products ($F(1, 247) = 245.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .50$, $d = .98$). Future research should examine how products or brands with different degrees of status influence the degree of status conferred on the owner.

Future research should also investigate whether situational factors influence the effects of symbolic status products. For example, future research should investigate how symbolic status products reflect on an owner in work settings. Do symbolic status

products influence job interviews, job evaluations, promotions, salesperson revenue, or emergent leadership in work settings? We know that occupational attainment is an indicator of status (Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995), but can symbolic status products influence occupational attainment or achievement? Packard (1957) suggested that symbolic status products can influence career success and as supportive evidence he noted that the popular book *Dress for Success* remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for several years.

Several authors have noted that further knowledge on product characteristics and symbolism across wider ranges of product types would be beneficial to future research in the area of reference group influence (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Lessig & Park, 1978; Shavitt & Lowery, 1992). The product symbolic status construct and the PSS scale provide further knowledge on product symbolism and a new dimension for examining reference group influence. The inconsistent findings of Bearden and Etzel's (1982) research on reference group influence under visibility and exclusivity/luxury product dimensions might be reconciled under a model utilizing product symbolic status.

Product symbolic status is part of the larger domains of product symbolism and involvement. However, different dimensions of these larger domains are likely to be associated with different consumer motivations, and therefore, would invoke different marketing and advertising strategies. The product symbolic status construct and PSS scale are steps toward refinement and greater understanding of the product symbolism and involvement domains. Product symbolic status has an inherent association with

reference group influence and reference group influence is theorized to be pronounced for symbolic status products.

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APPENDIX A

Product Symbolic Status Scale

1. How much does owning this product improve a person's self-image? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
2. How much does this product influence others' positive impressions of the owner? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
3. How much information does this product reveal about the owner's lifestyle? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
4. When the owner ordinarily uses this product, how visible is the product to others? (1 = "Not at all visible"; 5 = "Highly visible").
5. How frequently do owners use this product in social settings where it is visible to others? (1 = "Never"; 5 = "Always").
6. How much does this product enhance the owner's social status? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
7. How much does this product reflect the owner's personal taste? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
8. How much does an owner feel proud to use this product? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
9. How much does this product enhance others' opinions of the owner's success? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").

APPENDIX B

Exclusivity/Luxury Scale Items

1. How well does the sellers' inventory or supply of this product meet buyers' demand? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very well").*
2. How scarce or hard to find is this product? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Highly").
3. How available is this product to all consumers who have the desire and money to purchase it? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Highly").*
4. How much is the supply or availability of this product limited for only exclusive groups of consumers to purchase? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
5. Would you consider this product a necessity or luxury in modern society? (1 = "Total necessity"; 5 = "Total luxury").
6. How much is ownership of this product justified based on its value or functionality? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").*

* Indicates reverse-scored item.

Value-Expressiveness Scale Items

1. How much does this product express the owner's personal values or beliefs? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
2. How much does this product demonstrate the owner's connection to others with similar values or beliefs? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
3. How much does this product demonstrate the owner's association with particular groups? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
4. How much does this product represent sentimental meaning for the owner? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").
5. How much does this product express the owner's philosophical or political values and beliefs? (1 = "Not at all"; 5 = "Very much").

Personal Involvement Inventory (Ziachkowsky, 1994; modified to 5-pt. Likert scale)

1. How important or unimportant is this product to you? (Important = 1; Unimportant = 5)*
2. How boring or interesting is this product to you? (Boring = 1; Interesting = 5)
3. How relevant or irrelevant is this product to you? (Relevant = 1; Irrelevant = 5)*
4. How exciting or unexciting is this product to you? (Exciting = 1; Unexciting = 5)*
5. How much does this product mean to you? (Means nothing = 1; Means a lot to me = 5)
6. How appealing or unappealing is this product to you? (Appealing = 1; Unappealing = 5)*
7. How fascinating or mundane is this product to you? (Fascinating = 1; Mundane = 5)*
8. How worthless or valuable is this product to you? (Worthless = 1; Valuable = 5)
9. How involving or uninvolved is this product to you? (Involving = 1; Uninvolved = 5)*
10. How unneeded or needed is this product to you? (Not needed = 1; Needed = 5)

* Indicates reverse-scored item.

APPENDIX C

Product Symbolic Status Scale (modified to a seven-point semantic differential scale)

[Product]:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Hurts self-image | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Improves self-image |
| 2. Creates negative impressions | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Creates positive impressions |
| 3. Does not reveal lifestyle information | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Reveals lifestyle information |
| 4. Not visible to others when used | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Visible to others when used |
| 5. Used in private settings | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Used in social settings |
| 6. Hurts social status | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Enhances social status |
| 7. Does not reveal owner's taste | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Reveals owner's taste |
| 8. Ashamed to use | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Proud to use |
| 9. Shows owner's failure | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Shows owner's success |

Exclusivity/Luxury Scale

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Supply shortage | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Supply abundance* |
| 2. Easy to find | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Hard to find |
| 3. Limited access | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Open access* |
| 4. Available to everyone | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Exclusive |
| 5. Necessity | ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ | Luxury |

6. Unjustified _____ Justified*

*Indicates reverse-scored item

Value-Expressiveness Scale

- | | | |
|---|-------|---|
| 1. Does not express values or beliefs | _____ | Expresses values or beliefs |
| 2. Does not demonstrate connections to others | _____ | Demonstrates connections to others |
| 3. Does not show association to groups | _____ | Shows associations to groups |
| 4. Void of emotional meaning | _____ | Holds sentimental meaning |
| 5. Does not express philosophical or political values | _____ | Expresses philosophical or political values |

Personal Involvement Inventory (Ziachkowsky, 1994)

- | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. Important | _____ | Unimportant* |
| 2. Boring | _____ | Interesting |
| 3. Relevant | _____ | Irrelevant* |
| 4. Exciting | _____ | Unexciting* |
| 5. Means nothing | _____ | Means a lot to me |
| 6. Appealing | _____ | Unappealing* |
| 7. Fascinating | _____ | Mundane* |
| 8. Worthless | _____ | Valuable |
| 9. Involving | _____ | Uninvolving* |
| 10. Not needed | _____ | Needed |

* Indicates reverse-scored item

Table 1

Low and High Involvement Products Identified by Previous Authors

Low Involvement Products

Beverages ^g : Beer ^c , Coffee ^{c, i} , Softdrinks ^c	Household cleaning products ^g
*Bicycles ^c	Laundry detergent ^{e, k}
Books/magazines ^{c, g}	Stationary/desk supplies ^g
Breakfast cereal ⁱ	Paper towels/Toilet paper ^{c, g}
*Cosmetics ^g	Pens/pencils ^g
Facial soap ^{k, l}	*Radios ^c
Food products ^g	Tools ^g
	Toothpaste ^{c, l}

High Involvement Products

Air conditioner ^{f, j}	*Jewelry ^g
Airlines ^d	Laundry detergent ⁱ
*Automobile ^{a, g, i}	Lawnmower ^g
Bedding, linens ^g	Oven/Range ^d
*Beverages ^g	Photographs ^g
*Champagne ^l , *Wine ⁱ , *Beer ^j	*Purse ^g
Books/magazines ^j	Refrigerator ^{d, h, j}
Calculator ⁱ	*Shoes ^g
*Cameras ^{g, i}	*Sporting goods ^{b, g}
*Clothing ^{e, g}	Stereo ^{a, g}
*Cosmetics ^{e, g}	*Sunglasses ^m
Food products ^g	Television ^{e, g, j}
Furniture ^{g, j}	Toys ^g
Greeting cards ^m	Vacuum ^c
Headache remedy ^{f, i}	VCR/DVD player ^g
Homes ^{a, c}	*Wristwatch ^g
Home computer ^g	Washing machine ^{e, l}
Insurance ^j	

Note. Authors referred to the product's level of involvement unless otherwise noted.

*Theorized symbolic status products. ^aAssael, 1987. ^bBearden and Etzel, 1982.

^cKassarjian and Kassarjian, 1979. ^dKrugman, 1966. ^eLaurent and Kapferer, 1985.

^fLowrey and Shavitt, 1992. ^gMartin, 1998. ^hPetty, et al., 1983. ⁱZiachkowsky, 1985.

^jHigh and ^kLow reference group influence, Lessig and Park, 1978. ^lHigh sign value, Laurent and Kapferer, 1985. ^mValue-expressive, Lowrey and Shavitt, 1992.

Table 2
Scale Validation Procedure

1) Specify the Domain of Construct	Literature Review
2) Generate Scale Items	Literature Review
3) Initial Data Collection	Study 1
4) Scale Purification	Study 1
a) Assess Reliability	Study 1
i) Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha	Study 1
b) Assess Dimensionality	Study 1
i) Exploratory Factor Analysis	Study 1
c) Item Deletions	Study 1
5) Additional Data Collection	Study 2
6) Assess and Evaluate Psychometric Properties of Scale	Study 2
a) Assess Reliability	Study 2
i) Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha	Study 2
b) Assess Validity	Study 2
i) Content-related Evidence	Literature, Study 1
ii) Construct-related Evidence	Study 2
(I) Convergent Validity	Study 2
(II) Discriminant Validity	Study 2

Source: Churchill (1979)

Table 3

Maximum Likelihood Factor Loadings of PSS Scale Items for Three Products

PSS Item	Clothing	Refrigerator		Toothpaste
	F ₁	F ₁	F ₂	F ₁
X ₁	.793	.826	.109	.735
X ₂	.812	.899	.050	.818
X ₃	.740	.827	.040	.794
X ₄	.764	.052	-.617	.670
X ₅	.706	-.029	-.976	.583
X ₆	.737	.705	-.114	.856
X ₇	.760	.679	-.137	.603
X ₈	.732	.713	-.095	.730
X ₉	.779	.814	.014	.831
% of Variance =	57.57	47.20	16.83	54.97
χ^2	213.75	72.14		180.27
<i>df</i>	27	19		27
<i>p</i> <	.001	.001		.001

Note. A Direct Oblimin rotation was used for all solutions ($N = 248$).

Table 4

PSS Scale Alpha Reliabilities and Descriptives for Product Types in Study 1 ($N = 248$)

Product	α	M	SD	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>	
				Lower	Upper
Automobile	.92	4.56	.58	4.491	4.635
Clothing	.92	4.42	.63	4.341	4.498
Sunglasses	.90	3.76	.73	3.669	3.851
PDA	.91	3.65	.73	3.559	3.742
Home Stereo	.92	3.51	.84	3.405	3.614
Luggage	.92	3.40	.90	3.291	3.517
Refrigerator	.90	2.66	.82	2.560	2.767
Cola	.88	2.37	.74	2.275	2.461
Home Air Conditioner	.92	2.22	.92	2.101	2.332
Facial Soap	.89	2.19	.84	2.082	2.292
Toothpaste	.91	2.09	.91	1.977	2.204
Breakfast Cereal	.88	2.01	.72	1.916	2.095
Vacuum Cleaner	.88	1.96	.70	1.871	2.047
Laundry Detergent	.90	1.79	.74	1.697	1.882

Note. Average reliability for the nine-item PSS scale across all 14 products was $\alpha = .90$.

Table 5
Scale Reliabilities and Descriptives for Study 2 ($N = 276$)

Product / Method / Construct	α	M	SD	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Wristwatch					
<i>Likert 5-pt. Scale</i>					
Product Symbolic Status	.88	3.63	.75	3.537	3.715
Value-expressiveness	.75	2.76	.83	2.663	2.860
Involvement	.91	3.16	.87	3.054	3.260
Exclusivity/Luxury	.67	2.76	.69	2.673	2.838
<i>Semantic Differential 7-pt. Scale</i>					
Product Symbolic Status	.92	5.28	1.05	5.154	5.402
Value-expressiveness	.82	3.46	1.31	3.301	3.612
Involvement	.84	4.48	.95	4.364	4.589
Exclusivity/Luxury	.81	4.26	1.29	4.108	4.413
Washing Machine					
<i>Likert 5-pt. Scale</i>					
Product Symbolic Status	.89	2.51	.82	2.411	2.606
Value-expressiveness	.89	1.66	.79	1.562	1.751
Involvement	.86	3.18	.75	3.090	3.267
Exclusivity/Luxury	.75	1.92	.70	1.840	2.005

Note. Table 6 continued on next page.

Table 5 Continued

Product / Method / Construct	α	M	SD	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Washing Machine					
<i>Semantic Differential 7-pt. Scale</i>					
Product Symbolic Status	.79	4.17	.87	4.069	4.274
Value-expressiveness	.91	2.25	1.29	2.101	2.406
Involvement	.87	4.26	1.17	4.120	4.396
Exclusivity/Luxury	.88	2.46	1.20	2.314	2.598
Greeting Card					
<i>Likert 5-pt. Scale</i>					
Product Symbolic Status	.88	2.90	.86	2.798	3.003
Value-expressiveness	.83	3.19	.89	3.086	3.296
Involvement	.96	3.35	.97	3.235	3.466
Exclusivity/Luxury	.49	1.96	.48	1.906	2.019
<i>Semantic Differential 7-pt. Scale</i>					
Product Symbolic Status	.86	4.83	.94	4.723	4.946
Value-expressiveness	.85	4.53	1.37	4.364	4.687
Involvement	.94	4.71	1.29	4.562	4.867
Exclusivity/Luxury	.76	2.34	.85	2.236	2.438

Note. Average reliability for the PSS scale across all three products was $\alpha = .88$.

Table 6

Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix of Scale by Method Correlations for Wristwatch

<u>Constructs</u>		<u>Method₁ (5pt. Likert)</u>				<u>Method₂ (7pt. Semantic Diff.)</u>			
<u>Method₁ (5pt. Likert)</u>		A ₁	B ₁	C ₁	D ₁	A ₂	B ₂	C ₂	D ₂
Product Symbolic Status	A ₁	(.88)							
Value-expressiveness	B ₁	.44	(.75)						
Involvement	C ₁	.25	.12	(.91)					
Exclusivity/Luxury	D ₁	.17	.21	-.26	(.67)				
<u>Method₂ (7pt. Sem.Diff.)</u>									
Product Symbolic Status	A ₂	.49	.25	.24	.06	(.92)			
Value-expressiveness	B ₂	.30	.76	.14	.24	.26	(.82)		
Involvement	C ₂	.33	.25	.66	-.10	.38	.27	(.84)	
Exclusivity/Luxury	D ₂	.28	.21	-.18	.67	.19	.26	-.04	(.81)

Note. Scale reliabilities appear in parentheses. Validity coefficients appear in italics in the heteromethod block diagonal.

Table 7

Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix of Scale by Method Correlations for Washing Machine

<u>Constructs</u>		<u>Method₁ (5pt. Likert)</u>				<u>Method₂ (7pt. Semantic Diff.)</u>			
<u>Method₁ (5pt. Likert)</u>		A ₁	B ₁	C ₁	D ₁	A ₂	B ₂	C ₂	D ₂
Product Symbolic Status	A ₁	<i>(.89)</i>							
Value-expressiveness	B ₁	.53	<i>(.89)</i>						
Involvement	C ₁	.35	.13	<i>(.86)</i>					
Exclusivity/Luxury	D ₁	.23	.43	-.22	<i>(.75)</i>				
<u>Method₂ (7pt. Sem.Diff.)</u>									
Product Symbolic Status	A ₂	<i>.74</i>	.32	.35	.07	<i>(.79)</i>			
Value-expressiveness	B ₂	.50	<i>.76</i>	.10	.44	.35	<i>(.91)</i>		
Involvement	C ₂	.36	.10	<i>.88</i>	-.19	.34	.11	<i>(.87)</i>	
Exclusivity/Luxury	D ₂	.18	.46	-.25	<i>.67</i>	.01	.50	-.25	<i>(.88)</i>

Note. Scale reliabilities appear in parentheses. Validity coefficients appear in italics in heteromethod block diagonal.

Table 8

Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix of Scale by Method Correlations for Greeting Card

<u>Constructs</u>		<u>Method₁ (5pt. Likert)</u>				<u>Method₂ (7pt. Semantic Diff.)</u>			
		A ₁	B ₁	C ₁	D ₁	A ₂	B ₂	C ₂	D ₂
<u>Method₁ (5pt. Likert)</u>									
Product Symbolic Status	A ₁	<i>(.88)</i>							
Value-expressiveness	B ₁	.46	<i>(.83)</i>						
Involvement	C ₁	.38	.31	<i>(.96)</i>					
Exclusivity/Luxury	D ₁	.07	-.01	-.25	<i>(.49)</i>				
<u>Method₂ (7pt. Sem.Diff.)</u>									
Product Symbolic Status	A ₂	.72	.37	.38	-.16	<i>(.86)</i>			
Value-expressiveness	B ₂	.37	.84	.27	-.07	.38	<i>(.85)</i>		
Involvement	C ₂	.34	.35	.83	-.30	.34	.36	<i>(.94)</i>	
Exclusivity/Luxury	D ₂	.05	-.09	-.25	.70	-.28	-.17	-.24	<i>(.76)</i>

Note. Scale reliabilities appear in parentheses. Validity coefficients appear in italics in heteromethod block diagonal.

VITA

James Arthur Wright received a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1991. He received his Master of Arts degree in industrial/organizational psychology from the United States International University in 1997. He was awarded the Merit Fellowship Award in 2001 from Texas A & M University and is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. His Doctor of Philosophy in psychology with a specialization in industrial/organizational psychology at Texas A & M University was completed in August of 2005. Dr. Wright has professional work experience conducting classified research for the United States Navy, as well as trial strategy and jury consulting for a national litigation consulting firm.

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