Saying No to the Glow:
When Consumers Avoid Arrogant Brands

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Arrogant brands have a multifaceted influence on consumers: Although consumers appreciate arrogant brands as reflecting high status and quality, arrogance can also make consumers feel inferior. Consumers whose self is a priori threatened may consequently “say no to the glow” and avoid arrogant brands. Results from six experiments using fictitious or actual arrogant brands show that when consumers experience prior self-threat, they may avoid brands that convey arrogance in favor of a competing, less-arrogant alternative. Such avoidance helps self-threatened consumers restore their self-perceptions and feel better about themselves.

Keywords: brands, arrogance, self-threat, communications; image
Consumers love brands (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2010), and marketers in turn invest a great deal of effort and resources in making their brands appealing and powerful (de Chernatony, McDonald, & Wallace, 2012). One approach that marketers use to enhance brand image is the communication of arrogance—i.e., a display of superiority, often accomplished by disparaging others (Brown, 2012; Johnson et al., 2010; Tiberius & Walker, 1998). Examples include Mercedes’s slogan “The best or nothing” (Taylor, 2012) or Arrogant Bastard Ale’s “You’re not worthy” (BrewDog, 2013).

Why should marketers aspire to cultivate an arrogant image for a brand? The likely reason is that arrogance has positive connotations, such as heightened quality and status (e.g., Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000; Williams & DeSteno, 2009), which appeal to consumers (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). However, arrogance also has negative connotations, such as hubris and narcissism (e.g., Johnson et al., 2010; Tracy & Robins, 2007), which might pose a threat to consumers’ self-perceptions by causing them to feel inferior (Tiberius & Walker, 1998). This dual nature of brand arrogance was confirmed in a pilot study, in which participants reviewed a list of brands associated with arrogant slogans. Participants perceived the associated brands as superior, but perceived themselves as inferior in the presence of those brands (see Table 2 in the Web Appendix). In light of this duality, and in particular the negative connotations of arrogance, we propose that in some cases brand arrogance may lead consumers to avoid arrogant brands regardless of how high in quality and status they perceive those brands to be.

In the current research, we investigate the extent of, reasons for, and consequences of brand avoidance with respect to arrogant brands compared with less-arrogant competing

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1 As illustrated by Arrogant Bastard Ale, brands may even incorporate “arrogant” into their names. Other instances of this practice include the clothing brand Arrogant Cat and the music brand So Arrogant. However, we focus on the communication of arrogance through brand slogans.
alternatives. Relying on the dual nature of brand arrogance as a point of departure, we identify prior self-threat as a factor that may encourage consumers to avoid arrogant brands. Specifically, we suggest that consumers who a priori feel weak, powerless, or low in self-esteem may be less able to tolerate the additional psychological threat inherent in arrogance (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and may therefore be more motivated to protect themselves from that threat (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989). We further suggest that the decision to avoid an arrogant brand may reflect not only passive, protective behavior (i.e., a withdrawal in the face of a psychological threat), but also an active means of restoring self-worth, via an expression of self-determination and free will (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Fitzsimons, 2000; Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004; Inesi et al., 2011; Mogilner, Rudnick, & Iyengar, 2008; Ryan, Koestner, & Deci, 1991). Accordingly, we posit that arrogant brand avoidance may function as a means of rebuilding consumers’ self-perceptions.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. We first review literature that illustrates the dual nature of arrogance and research on self-threat, which we build upon in formulating our predictions. Next, we test these predictions in six studies, in which we present participants with a variety of arrogant brands, taken from different categories, and examine their choices and consequent self-perceptions. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings.

The dual nature of arrogance

Arrogance can be thought of as a cluster of behaviors that communicate, whether verbally or non-verbally, a supposed superiority relative to others (Hareli & Weiner, 2000; Johnson et al., 2010). That is, someone who is arrogant not only believes that his or her qualities, abilities, or
achievements are exceptional, but uses those beliefs to infer that he or she is superior as a person to other people, and imparts those beliefs in interacting with others (Tiberius & Walker, 1998). Arrogance differs from self-confidence in that arrogance involves a sense of superiority toward others that causes the others to feel inferior, as opposed to merely a sense of the efficacy of one’s own skills or abilities (Bearden, Hardesty, & Rose, 2001; Schunk, 1991). In turn, arrogance differs from pride or narcissism in that arrogance exists only in interpersonal contexts, because it necessarily involves external expressions that make others feel inferior (Johnson et al., 2010). In contrast, narcissism and pride are internal states that can exist without reference to others (Emmons, 1984; John & Robins, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998; Wink, 1991). Importantly, the accuracy of the person’s beliefs is not at issue; it is how the individual expresses them that conveys arrogance (Tiberius & Walker, 1998).

Arrogance has rarely been given attention as an independent research topic. However, the literature dealing with pride (e.g., McFerran, Aquino, & Tracy, 2014; Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tiedens et al., 2000; Williams & DeSteno, 2009) and narcissistic behavior (e.g., Kiesler, 1983; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998; Robinson et al., 2012) provides insights on arrogance. This literature suggests that arrogance may have both positive and negative facets. On the positive side, the association between arrogance and pride suggests that arrogance, like pride, may function as a signal of high social status (e.g., McFerran et al., 2014; Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tiedens et al., 2000) and personal influence (Williams & DeSteno, 2009). Along these lines, there is evidence that displays of arrogance or pride may make an individual more memorable: Tice, Butler, Muraven, and Stillwell (1995) showed that individuals are more likely to recall interactions with strangers who present themselves in a self-enhancing rather than a modest manner. The negative facet of arrogance becomes prominent when pride is reflected in
expressions of dominance, overconfidence, or aggression (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; McFerran et al., 2014; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Moreover, excessive self-enhancement is considered an identification mark of narcissistic individuals (Emmons, 1984; John & Robins, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998; Wink, 1991). Personality taxonomies and inventories often link arrogance with narcissism, and may even employ these terms interchangeably (e.g., Emmons, 1987; Kiesler, 1983; Wiggins, 1979; Wiggins & Broughton, 1991). The present research focuses on arrogance in marketing settings, and examines the effect of arrogant brand communications on consumers’ attitudes and behaviors. We rely on the dual nature of arrogance as a point of departure, believing it may provide insight into why some marketers seek to cultivate an arrogant image for their brands, while some consumers avoid arrogant brands. In the context of brand communications, an arrogant image might function as a double-edged sword: Consumers may attribute high quality and high status to arrogant brands, and simultaneously may be put off by them.

Few studies thus far have explored the effects of brand arrogance on consumers. Toncar and Munch (2001) theorized that consumers would react negatively to arrogant ad messages, perceiving them as aggressive and unsubstantiated. In one empirical study, Brown (2012) explored effects of brand arrogance on consumers’ attitudes, as moderated by brand ownership. In that study, exposure to arrogant brand communications negatively affected attitudes toward the ad, the brand, and the company among raters who did not own the brand’s products, but not among raters who owned the brand’s products. Brown’s findings suggest that consumers might vary in their responses to brand arrogance. We propose the extent to which consumers are a priori self-threatened as a key factor that determines how susceptible their behavior is to brand arrogance.
Self-threat and consumer choices

Self-threat is an experience that calls into question one’s favorable views about him or herself (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). Self-threat may arise following a variety of events that reflect negatively on the self, either with regard to fundamental human needs, such as self-esteem, power and control, or with regard to more specific important aspects of the self, such as intelligence or performance (Kay et al., 2010; Park & Maner, 2009; Shrum et al., 2014). People are motivated to protect, maintain, or enhance the positivity of the self, and therefore act in ways to counter and minimize self-threat when they experience it (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Crocker & Park, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Lee & Shrum, 2012).

Several studies have established connections between self-threat and the pursuit of products and brands, showing that motivations to seek experiences that protect or enhance the self, and to avoid experiences that may threaten it, guide consumers’ decision-making and behavior (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1989; Dunning, 2007; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012; Shrum et al., 2014; Sirgy, 1982). For example, some studies have shown that self-threat may increase a preference for self-enhancing products. A threat to the self (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010), and, in particular, a sense of powerlessness (Mazzocco et al., 2012; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008), increased consumers’ preference for products associated with high status and those associated with positive attributes, such as high intelligence (Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009). Such products served as a means to compensate for consumers’ sense of self-threat by affirming their self-value.
Self-threat reactions have also been documented when the psychological threat is directly related to the target product. In that case, the motivation to protect their self-perceptions may cause consumers to react against the threatening product by avoiding it (Fitzsimons, 2000; Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004) or by suppressing related, threat-provoking messages (Dalton & Huang, 2014). For example, stockouts of a brand, which restrict freedom of choice, decreased consumers’ willingness to choose that brand and increased brand switching (Fitzsimons, 2000). Consumers also suppressed from memory identity-linked promotions when their identity was under threat (i.e., when they believed their in-group was inferior to other groups; Dalton & Huang, 2014). This research focuses on self-threat reactions via brand avoidance, driven by the motivation to protect self-perceptions.

The present research

The current research examines the influence of brand arrogance on consumers. As noted above, arrogance in a brand conveys positive qualities, such as high status (Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tiedens et al., 2000; Williams & DeSteno, 2009), while simultaneously sending a message of consumer inferiority (Kiesler, 1983; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998; Robinson et al., 2012). Building on the notion that consumers with unfavorable self-perceptions are fundamentally motivated to avoid experiences that pose a further psychological threat (Baumeister et al., 1989; Markus & Nurius, 1986), we predict that consumers whose self is a priori threatened will be motivated to avoid the additional threat to their self-perceptions created by brand arrogance. In particular, we suggest that these consumers are more susceptible to the threat inherent in arrogance, and are therefore more likely to feel inferior in the presence of arrogant brand communications. This feeling of inferiority, in turn, may drive a tendency to
avoid arrogant brands. Consumers with more favorable self-perceptions, in contrast, are less susceptible to additional psychological threat, and are therefore less motivated to protect their self from that threat (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister et al., 1989). Consequently, these latter consumers may be less driven to avoid arrogant brands, and may even be attracted by the positive connotations of arrogant brands. Thus, we suggest that a priori self-threatened consumers are more likely than non-threatened consumers to “say no to the glow” of arrogant brands.

Notably, arrogant brand avoidance is expected to occur despite the fact that arrogant brands may have positive attributes. In contrast to previous studies, which showed that unequivocally positive products (e.g., high-status products) attracted self-threatened consumers (e.g., Gao et al., 2009; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010), in our research we focus on arrogant brands, in which positive attributes coexist with self-threatening attributes.

Formally, we hypothesize the following:

**H1:** The likelihood of avoiding arrogant brands will be greater among consumers who experience prior self-threat than among consumers who do not experience such a threat.

**H2:** A sense of inferiority in the presence of arrogant brands will mediate the effect of prior self-threat on arrogant-brand avoidance.

If, as we propose, avoiding an arrogant brand is directed against a source of self-threat, this act may function as an expression of self-determination and free will. Actions that express self-determination, in turn, allow consumers to gain a sense of control, which is essential to coping with self-threats and achieving favorable self-perceptions (Brehm, 1996; Fitzsimons &
Lehmann, 2004). When people believe they have control over their lives in general, and over their choices in particular, they feel powerful and competent (Inesi et al., 2011; Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011; Mogilner et al., 2008; Ryan, 1982; Ryan et al., 1991). Thus, reacting against a self-threatening product – i.e., avoiding an arrogant brand – may help consumers to reverse unfavorable self-perceptions. To put it differently, we posit that arrogant-brand avoidance may be not merely a passive behavior designed to further protect a threatened self, but an active behavior designed to restore favorable self-perceptions. We formally hypothesize that:

**H3:** Avoiding arrogant brands will reverse consumers’ unfavorable self-perceptions, restoring a more balanced sense of self.

Our final argument proposes a possible contingency for the effect of self-threat on brand avoidance. If the tendency to avoid arrogant brands is indeed driven by the motivation to protect one’s self in the face of psychological threat, then boosting self-perceptions by a different means prior to brand exposure may mitigate the need for self-protection and reduce avoidance of arrogant brands (cf. Dalton & Huang, 2014; Gao et al., 2009; Lee & Shrum, 2012). We therefore hypothesize that availability of a means of boosting self-perceptions will attenuate the effect of brand arrogance on the behavior of a priori self-threatened consumers, such that:

**H4:** Consumers whose self is a priori threatened (but not non-threatened consumers) will be less likely to avoid arrogant brands after their self-perceptions are enhanced by other means.
Overview of studies

The research comprised six studies designed to test our predictions concerning the intriguing interplay between brand arrogance and self-threat. Studies 1a to 1c show in a variety of settings that participants whose self is a priori threatened are less likely than participants who are not threatened to choose an arrogant brand over an alternative, and Study 2 further supports the role of brand arrogance in brand avoidance (H1). Study 3 examines the underlying process that drives the tendency of self-threatened participants to “say no to the glow” of an arrogant brand by demonstrating that prior self-threat triggers a greater sense of inferiority in the presence of arrogant brands, and that this sense of inferiority mediates the effect of self-threat on arrogant brand avoidance (H2). Study 3 also presents supporting evidence for restored self-perceptions following arrogant brand avoidance (H3). Finally, Study 4 shows that when self-perceptions receive a boost prior to brand exposure, avoidance of arrogant brands declines (H4).

To capture the full range of the self-threat construct, we incorporated into our studies various reflections of self-threat, including low self-esteem, powerlessness, and lack of control. In doing so, we build on previous research that has demonstrated connections between these feelings and self-threat (e.g., Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012; Inesi et al., 2011; Lee & Shrum, 2012, Nadler & Fisher, 1986). We further confirmed these connections in a pilot test, which showed the convergence of sense of power, controllability and self-esteem into a single factor (see Table 3 in the Web Appendix).

Studies 1a-1c: Prior self-threat affects arrogant-brand selection
Studies 1a-1c aim to establish the hypothesized basic effect of prior self-threat on the decision to avoid (versus select) arrogant brands, demonstrating this effect in a variety of settings.

**Study 1a: An arrogant fashion brand**

Study 1a had a twofold goal. First, using a fictitious arrogant fashion brand, Study 1a tested our hypothesis that a priori self-threatened consumers are more likely than non-threatened consumers to avoid arrogant brands. Second, this study attempted to demonstrate the dual nature of brand arrogance: It examined whether consumers whose self is a priori threatened (vs. consumers who are not threatened) evaluate arrogant brands positively, but simultaneously deem these brands unattractive and even avoid them.

**Method**

*Participants.* Sixty participants ($M_{age} = 33$) from an online panel participated in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. Because the study focused on a fashion brand, we recruited only female participants, assuming that they were more likely than males to be interested in fashion. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects conditions (self-threat: present vs. absent).

*Procedure.* We asked participants to complete two ostensibly independent tasks. The purpose of the first task was to change the extent to which participants felt their self was a priori under threat by manipulating how in-control they felt. In this task participants read a scenario...
about going on vacation with friends, and rated that experience. In the threatened-self condition, we asked each participant to imagine that her friends had dictated the entire course of events, and that the participant had no control over any aspect of her vacation. In the non-threatened-self condition, we asked participants to imagine that they had helped choose the course of events. A pre-test among 55 participants confirmed that participants who read the scenario describing having no control reported lower self-value ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.25$) than participants who read the scenario describing having full control ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.60$, $t(53) = 4.41$, $p < .0001$; on a 7-point scale where 1=“low self-value” and 7=“high self-value”).

In the main study, in the second task, participants read a description of a fictitious brand in the fashion industry. The description depicted a high-quality, leading brand that had adopted an arrogant slogan to accompany the launch of its new collection: “Dress2show, the best or nothing” (a slogan based on Mercedes’s slogan, which consumers perceived as arrogant; Zalstein, 2012). To measure the effect of self-threat on evaluations of that arrogant brand, participants indicated how attractive they thought the brand was (1=“not at all” and 7=“very much”), and evaluated the brand’s quality (1=“low quality” and 7=“high quality”). We then told participants that a competing brand (Apricot), which had similar features and similar quality, had also launched its new collection, but we provided no information about the alternative brand’s communications, slogan or image. We asked participants to indicate from which brand (either the focal arrogant brand or the competing one) they would prefer to purchase a new item. Pre-test participants ($n = 34$ undergraduates) rated the focal brand (“Dress2show”) as more arrogant ($M = 6.15$, $SD = 0.99$) than the alternative brand ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.81$, $t(33) = 8.71$, $p < .0001$; using a 7-point scale where 1=“modest” and 7=“arrogant”) (for additional measures see Table 5a in the Web Appendix).
Results and discussion

The dual nature of brand arrogance. Arrogant-brand attractiveness ratings of participants in the threatened-self condition were significantly lower ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.72$) than the ratings of participants in the non-threatened-self condition ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.53$, $t(58) = 2.73$, $p < .01$) although self-threat had no effect on participants’ quality evaluations of the arrogant brand ($M_{\text{self-threat}} = 5.48$, $SD_{\text{self-threat}} = 1.31$ vs. $M_{\text{no-self-threat}} = 5.30$, $SD_{\text{no-self-threat}} = 1.08$, $t(58) = .58$, $p > .6$).

Brand choice. In line with Hypothesis 1, crosstab analysis revealed a significant effect of self-threat on participants’ choice between the focal arrogant brand and the alternative (which was perceived as less arrogant). Specifically, participants who were under self-threat were less likely than participants who were not self-threatened to choose the arrogant brand over the alternative (37% of the self-threatened participants selected the arrogant brand as compared with 64% of the non-threatened participants; $\chi^2(1) = 4.20$, $p < .05$).

The results of Study 1a support our hypothesis that a priori self-threatened consumers are more likely to “say no to the glow” of arrogant brands than consumers with more favorable self-perceptions. The results also support the dual nature of arrogant brands: Quality evaluations of the arrogant brand did not depend on participants’ self-perceptions, yet under self-threat, participants found the brand less attractive and were less likely to prefer to purchase an item of that brand.

Study 1b: Actual selection or avoidance of an arrogant beer brand
Study 1b replicated and extended the results of Study 1a using actual choices between real products (solid soaps made from different brands of beer), and thus allowed us to generalize our preliminary conclusions to situations that carry actual consequences for consumers.

**Method**

*Participants.* Forty-six undergraduate students (\(M_{\text{age}} = 23, 46\% \text{ women}\)) participated in this study in exchange for course credit and a chance to win the product of their choice in a lottery. Potential participants were screened to ensure product relevance, which eliminated solid-soap non-users. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects conditions (self-threat: present vs. absent).

*Procedure.* We asked participants to complete two ostensibly independent tasks. The purpose of the first task was to change the extent to which participants felt their self was under threat by manipulating their sense of success in a Sudoku puzzle task (based on Kim and Gal’s [2014] intelligence-threat procedure). In this task, we gave participants five minutes to fill in as many numbers of a 9×9 Sudoku grid as they could (see Section 3.3 in the Web Appendix for further details). Participants were then given feedback concerning how well they had supposedly performed in the puzzle relative to the general population. Participants in the threatened-self condition were told that their score fell in the lowest third of scores for the general population, whereas those in the non-threatened-self condition were told that their score ranked with the highest third of the population. We pre-tested our self-threat manipulation with a separate group of participants (\(n = 40\)). As expected, participants who were told their score fell in the lowest third of scores reported lower self-value (\(M = 3.15, SD = 1.23\)) than participants who were told
their score fell in the highest third ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.57$, $t(38) = 2.02$, $p = .05$; using a 7-point scale where 1=“low self-value” and 7=“high self-value”).

In the main study, in the second task, participants saw a photo and read a short description of a real beer brand (Arrogant Bastard Ale) that had adopted an arrogant slogan: “You’re not worthy.” Participants then read about a solid soap made of that brand’s beer. Similarly to Study 1a, participants also saw a photo and read a short description of a similar soap made of a competing brand’s beer (Narragansett Lager) (for complete product descriptions, see Section 3.3 in the Web Appendix). We then told participants that they would have a chance to win the product of their choice in a lottery, and asked them to choose a soap (either Arrogant Bastard Ale’s soap or Narragansett Lager’s soap). Participants also rated each of the brands’ quality (1=“low quality” and 7=“high quality”) and level of arrogance (1=“not arrogant at all” and 7=“very arrogant”). Finally participants indicated whether they had heard about the brands before (all participants reported no prior experience with either brand) and completed some demographic measures (age, gender).

**Results and discussion**

**Manipulation checks.** As expected, participants indicated that the arrogant brand (Arrogant Bastard Ale) was more arrogant ($M = 5.89$, $SD = 1.58$) than the alternative brand (Narragansett Lager) ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.23$; $F(1,44) = 101.73$, $p < .001$). Self-threat had no effect on arrogance ratings ($F(1,44) = 0.89$, $p > .3$), indicating that differences between the outcomes of the experimental conditions would not be a function of differences in participants’ perceptions of arrogance.
Brand evaluations. Participants assigned similar quality evaluations to the arrogant brand ($M = 3.96, SD = 1.48$) and the alternative brand ($M = 4.30, SD = .96; F(1,44) = 1.97, p > .1$). Self-threat had no effect on evaluations of either brand (both $ps > .1$).

Brand choice. In line with Hypothesis 1, crosstab analysis revealed a significant effect of self-threat on participants’ choice between the arrogant brand and the alternative brand (which was perceived as less arrogant). Specifically, participants who were under self-threat were less likely than participants who were not self-threatened to actually choose the arrogant brand over the alternative (42.3% of self-threatened participants selected the arrogant brand as compared with 80% of non-threatened participants; $\chi^2(1) = 6.62, p < .05$).

The results of Study 1b provide further evidence for the role of prior self-threat in arrogant-brand avoidance, showing that such avoidance occurs when choices involve real brands and carry actual consequences for participants.

Study 1c: Purchase intentions toward an arrogant cleaning-wipes brand

Study 1c replicated and extended the results of Studies 1a and 1b, using purchase intentions that supposedly carried monetary consequences for participants. Study 1c also examined one possible alternative account for the effect found: Self-threatened consumers may find arrogant brands less congruent with their self-perceptions than do non-threatened consumers, and may thus prefer arrogant brands to a lesser extent (e.g., Aaker, 1999; Dolich, 1969; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993). In Study 1c we therefore focused on a utilitarian, non-self-expressive product, namely cleaning wipes, for which congruity may be less important (e.g., Sirgy, 1982). We also directly measured perceived self-brand congruence in order to examine
whether it is affected by the level of self-threat, and whether such congruence can explain self-threat’s effects on arrogant brand avoidance.

Method

Participants. Forty-nine participants (M_{age} = 32, 51% females) from an online panel participated in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. We recruited only product users to ensure product relevance. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects conditions (self-threat: present vs. absent).

Procedure. We asked participants to complete two ostensibly independent tasks. The purpose of the first task was to change the extent to which participants felt their self was under threat. Participants in the threatened-self condition were asked to describe a personal experience in which they had experienced failure, whereas participants in the non-threatened-self condition were asked to describe a personal experience in which they had experienced success. A pre-test among 48 participants confirmed that participants who described a failure experience reported lower self-value (M = 3.36, SD = 1.95) than participants who described a success experience (M = 6.26, SD = 0.91, t(46) = 6.49, p < .001; using a 7-point scale where 1=“low self-value” and 7=“high self-value”).

In the main study, in the second task, participants read a description of a fictitious leading brand of cleaning wipes that had adopted an arrogant slogan, “Shiny. Because we are better,” and evaluated that brand’s quality (1=“low quality” and 7=“high quality”). We then told participants that a competing brand (Silk), which had similar features and similar quality, had also launched a similar new product (as we did in Studies 1a and 1b); we
provided no information about the competing brand’s communications, slogan or image.

Pre-test participants (n = 36 undergraduates) rated the focal brand (“Shiny”) as more arrogant (M = 5.67, SD = 0.99) than the alternative brand (M = 3.61, SD = 0.80, t(35) = 9.76, p < .0001; using a 7-point scale where 1 = “modest” and 7 = “arrogant”) (for additional measures see Table 5b in the Web Appendix).

In the main study, we asked participants to indicate from which brand (either the focal arrogant brand or the competing one) they would prefer to purchase a new item. Participants were also led to believe that packs of the focal brand were available for purchase at $2 each (compared to a market price of $5), and we asked participants to indicate how many packs (if any) they wished to buy.

Finally, participants indicated how similar they thought the focal brand was to themselves (1 = “not at all” and 7 = “very much”) to measure self-brand congruity (Landon, 1974; Sirgy et al., 1991), and to what extent the brand reflected its users’ personal tastes (1 = “not at all” and 7 = “very much”) (Berger & Heath, 2007) to test perceived self-expressiveness of the focal brand.

At the end of the session, we explained to participants that the product was not in fact available for purchase. We apologized and compensated participants with a small additional monetary reward.

**Results**

*Brand evaluations.* Self-threat had no effect on participants’ quality evaluations of the arrogant brand (Mself-threat = 4.23, SDtself-threat = 1.34 vs. Mno-self-threat = 4.65, SDbno-self-threat = 1.43, t(47) = 1.06, p > .3).
Brand choice. Once again, in line with Hypothesis 1, crosstab analysis revealed a significant effect of self-threat on participants’ choice between the focal arrogant brand and the alternative (which was perceived as less arrogant). Specifically, participants under self-threat were less likely than participants who were not self-threatened to choose the arrogant brand over the alternative (50% of self-threatened participants selected the arrogant brand as compared with 82.6% of non-threatened participants; $\chi^2(1) = 5.73, p < .05$).

Purchase intentions. In line with our expectations, participants in the threatened-self condition indicated that they wished to buy fewer packs of the focal brand ($M = 1.12, SD = 1.28$) compared with participants in the non-threatened-self condition ($M = 2.87, SD = 3.52; t(47) = 2.37, p < .05$).

Self-expressiveness and congruence. As expected, participants indicated that the focal arrogant brand did not reflect its users’ tastes ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.62$; significantly lower than the scale’s midpoint, $t(48) = 6.88, p < .001$). Furthermore, perceived self-brand congruence was not affected by self-threat ($M_{\text{self-threat}} = 4.58, SD_{\text{self-threat}} = 1.78$ vs. $M_{\text{no-self-threat}} = 3.91, SD_{\text{no-self-threat}} = 1.68; t(47) = 1.33, p > .1$).

The results of Study 1c provide further support for the robustness of the effect of self-threat on arrogant-brand avoidance using purchase intentions. Participants whose self was a priori threatened wanted to purchase fewer packs of the arrogant brand than participants who were not threatened. The findings further suggest that perceptions of congruity between the self and the focal brand cannot account for our results. Perceived self-brand congruity was not affected by self-threat, nor were participants likely to seek congruity with the non-self-expressive product.
Together, Studies 1a, 1b and 1c demonstrate the impact of prior self-threat on consumers’ decisions to “say no to the glow” of arrogant brands. Consumers who experience self-threat (vs. consumers whose self is not threatened) are more likely to avoid arrogant brands (vs. less arrogant brands), and this finding seems to generalize across different sources of self-threat, product types, and measures of avoidance. Note that non-threatened participants’ preference for the arrogant brand align with our suggestion that arrogant brands have positive connotations, although this preference could also have been influenced by the paucity of information provided about the alternative brand. But could brand features other than arrogance have caused participants under self-threat to avoid the focal brand? Our next study aimed to further specify the role of arrogance in brand avoidance by a priori self-threatened consumers.

Study 2: The interactive effect of self-threat and brand arrogance on brand choices

To test whether the effect observed in Studies 1a-1c could be attributed to brand arrogance per se, Study 2 manipulated brand arrogance while controlling for other brand and product features. That is, Study 2 sought to determine whether brand arrogance was what engendered brand avoidance among participants under self-threat. We predicted that self-threatened consumers, but not non-threatened consumers, would be more likely to avoid a given brand (and to prefer an alternative) when it was associated with an arrogant communication than when the same brand was associated with a communication that conveyed superiority but not arrogance.

Method
Participants. Ninety-six undergraduate students (\(M_{\text{age}} = 22.5\), 56% women) participated in this study in exchange for course credit. Potential participants were screened to ensure product familiarity, which eliminated smartphone non-owners. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (self-threat: present vs. absent) \(\times\) 2 (focal brand image: arrogant vs. non-arrogant) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants completed two ostensibly independent tasks. The first task manipulated the extent to which participants felt their self was a priori under threat. In this task participants in the threatened-self condition were asked to describe what a sense of lack of control meant to them and to write about a personal experience in which they felt they had no control over the course of events. Participants in the non-threatened-self condition were asked to describe what a sense of control meant to them and to write about a personal experience in which they felt they had full control over the course of events. A pre-test among 52 participants confirmed that participants who described an experience in which they had no control reported lower self-value (\(M = 4.17\), \(SD = 1.67\)) compared with participants who described an experience with full control (\(M = 5.86\), \(SD = 1.60\), \(t(50) = 3.71, p < .01\); using a 7-point scale where 1=“low self-value” and 7=“high self-value”).

In the main study, in the second task, all participants read a scenario depicting a high-quality (fictitious) smartphone brand (“MyMobile”). The scenario contained a detailed description of the phone’s features. We measured the effect of self-threat on product evaluations before participants were exposed to the brand’s slogan (and therefore in isolation from the arrogance condition) by asking them to evaluate the brand’s quality (1=“low quality” and 7=“high quality”) right after they read the product description. We then told participants about a
new campaign for the brand and exposed them to the campaign’s content. The content to which each participant was exposed depended on his or her experimental condition. Participants in the arrogant-brand condition were told that the campaign slogan was, “Yup, if you don’t have a MyMobile, well, you don’t have a MyMobile. MyMobile – the best phone ever!” This slogan was based on Apple’s iPhone 4 campaign, which consumers perceived to be arrogant (Brown, 2012; The Mad Ad Man, 2011). Participants in the non-arrogant-brand condition were told that the slogan was, “Technology is what makes MyMobile, MyMobile. MyMobile – state of the art technology!” We pre-tested these two slogans (among others) in a separate group of participants ($n = 30$ undergraduates). As expected, participants who were exposed to the arrogant slogan rated the brand as more arrogant ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.94$) compared with participants who were exposed to the non-arrogant slogan ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.49$, $t(28) = 2.95$, $p < .01$; using a 7-point scale where 1=“modest” and 7=“arrogant”).

In the main study, we told participants that a similar competing brand (KL), which had similar features and similar quality, had also launched a new smartphone; we provided no information about the competing brand’s communications, slogan or image. We asked participants to indicate whether they would prefer to purchase a new item from the focal brand (which was either arrogant or not) or from the alternative brand. To measure the effect of brand image conditions on brand perceptions, participants rated on a 7-point scale (1 = “not at all” and 7 = “very much”) the extent to which the focal brand considered itself better than others, the extent to which the brand communicated that it was better than others, and the extent to which it conveyed technological superiority. Finally, participants completed demographic measures (age and gender).
Results and discussion

Manipulation checks. When the focal brand had an arrogant slogan, rather than a non-arrogant slogan, participants indicated that the brand considered itself better than others to a greater extent ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 6.10$, $SD_{\text{arrogant}} = 1.12$ vs. $M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 5.54$, $SD_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 1.13$, $t(94) = 2.41$, $p < .05$) and that it communicated being better than others to a greater extent ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 5.79$, $SD_{\text{arrogant}} = 1.39$ vs. $M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 5.07$, $SD_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 1.37$, $t(94) = 2.51$, $p < .05$). However, ratings of the extent to which the brand conveyed technological superiority did not depend on whether the brand’s slogan was arrogant or not ($M_{\text{arrogant}} = 5.71$, $SD_{\text{arrogant}} = 1.17$ vs. $M_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 5.78$, $SD_{\text{non-arrogant}} = 1.09$, $t(94) = 0.27$, $p > .7$).

Brand evaluations. Self-threat had no effect on brand quality evaluations ($M_{\text{self-threat}} = 5.91$, $SD_{\text{self-threat}} = 0.92$ vs. $M_{\text{no-self-threat}} = 5.97$, $SD_{\text{no-self-threat}} = 0.72$, $t(94) = 0.37$, $p > .7$).

Brand choice. A 2 (self-threat: present vs. absent) × 2 (focal brand image: arrogant vs. non-arrogant) logistic regression on participants’ brand choice revealed no effect of self-threat ($\chi^2(1) = .06$, $p > .8$); a main effect of the focal brand image ($\chi^2(1) = 9.59$, $p < .01$, such that more participants in the non-arrogant conditions chose the focal brand); and, of more relevance, a marginally significant interaction effect of brand image and self-threat on choice ($\chi^2(1) = 2.85$, $p = .09$).

Decomposing the interaction revealed that, as predicted, brand image affected the choices of participants under self-threat ($\chi^2(1) = 9.58$, $p < .01$): A priori self-threatened participants were less likely to choose the focal brand (i.e., they were more likely to prefer the alternative) when the focal brand was arrogant (37.5% of self-threatened participants in the arrogant-brand condition selected the focal brand) than when the brand was not arrogant (84.4% of self-
threatened participants in the non-arrogant-brand condition selected the focal brand). By contrast, in the non-self-threatened condition, participants’ likelihood of selecting the focal brand was not affected by whether the focal brand was arrogant or not ($\chi^2(1) = 0.51, p > .4$): Non-threatened participants preferred the focal brand over the alternative regardless of the focal brand’s image (73.1% of non-threatened participants in the arrogant-brand condition and 81.8% in the non-arrogant-brand condition preferred the focal brand; see Figure 1).

The results of this study provide further support for our proposition that brand avoidance occurs when consumers whose self is a priori threatened consider an arrogant brand. Participants who were under self-threat were less likely to choose the focal brand over the alternative when the focal brand was arrogant than when it conveyed less arrogance (but similar technological superiority). The choices of participants who were not self-threatened, in contrast, did not depend on whether the focal brand was arrogant or not, and were generally favorable for the focal brand. Non-self-threatened participants might be less sensitive to the negative connotations associated with arrogant brand communications, and might therefore find an arrogant brand as attractive as a non-arrogant comparable brand (the fact that participants were given little positive information about the alternative brand might also have contributed to their preference for the focal brand). Overall, the results are consistent with our theoretical reasoning, which puts forward prior self-threat as driving arrogant-brand avoidance. Studies 3 and 4 explored the process that may give rise to this effect.
Study 3: A sense of inferiority mediates the effect of prior self-threat on arrogant-brand avoidance

Study 3 aimed at shedding more light on what drives self-threatened consumers to “say no to the glow” of arrogant brands. Recall that we suggested that a priori self-threatened consumers, compared to non-threatened consumers, are more susceptible to the psychological threat inherent in arrogance. We thus predicted that a priori self-threatened (vs. non-threatened) consumers would be more likely to feel inferior in the presence of arrogant brands, and that this sense of inferiority would influence their tendency to avoid the arrogant brands. Put differently, a sense of inferiority will mediate the prior-self-threat effect on arrogant-brand selection versus avoidance (H2). This study further examined whether arrogant brand avoidance (vs. selection) can enhance the self-confidence of participants with unfavorable self-perceptions (H3).

Method

Participants. Seventy participants ($M_{age} = 28.1$, 55% women) from an online panel participated in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects conditions (self-threat: present vs. absent).

Procedure. As in Studies 1 and 2, we asked participants to complete two ostensibly independent tasks. The purpose of the first task was to change the extent to which participants felt their self was under threat by asking them to describe an experience of either failure or success (the procedure used in Study 1c). Two participants failed to recall an experience, and
were therefore omitted from further analyses, yielding a valid sample size of 68 participants. In the second task, participants read a description of a fictitious high-quality leading watch brand, which had adopted an arrogant slogan to accompany the launch of its new collection: “MagnaTime: The greatest. Like no other” (a variation on Sony’s slogan, which consumers perceived as arrogant; Demin, 2010). Participants then indicated whether they would like to purchase an item from that (arrogant) brand or from a competing brand (ClockTime), which had similar features and similar quality; we provided no information about the competing brand’s communications, slogan or image. To measure differences in brand perceptions, participants rated each brand’s quality (1=“low quality” and 7=“high quality”) and level of arrogance (1=“not arrogant at all” and 7=“very arrogant”).

To measure the underlying process, participants rated on 7-point scales the extent to which the focal slogan (“MagnaTime: The greatest. Like no other”) engenders a sense of inferiority versus superiority (1=“inferior” and 7=“superior”) and the extent to which that slogan lowers versus raises self-perceptions (1=“lowers” and 7=“raises”). Participant’s sense of inferiority was computed as the average score of these two items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$). Finally, to test the effect of brand avoidance on self-perceptions, we asked participants to rate how self-confident they felt at that moment on a 7-point scale (1 = “not at all” and 7 = “to a great extent”).

Results and discussion

Manipulation checks. As expected, participants indicated that the focal brand (“MagnaTime”) was more arrogant ($M = 5.82, SD = 1.51$) than the alternative brand ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.49, F(1,66) = 93.21, p < .001$). Self-threat did not influence arrogance evaluations
indicating that differences between the outcomes of the experimental conditions would not be a function of differences in participants’ perceptions of arrogance.

**Brand evaluations.** Participants assigned higher quality to the arrogant brand \((M = 4.91, SD = 1.61)\) than to the alternative brand \((M = 4.47, SD = 1.78, F(1,66) = 4.63, p < .05)\). Self-threat did not influence quality evaluations \((F(1,66) = 0.02, p > .8)\), indicating that differences between the outcomes of the experimental conditions would not be a function of these evaluations.

**Brand choice.** Once again, in line with Hypothesis 1, crosstab analysis revealed a significant effect of self-threat on participants’ choice between the focal arrogant brand and the alternative (which was perceived as less arrogant). Specifically, participants under self-threat were less likely than participants who were not self-threatened to choose the arrogant brand over the alternative \((52.9\% of self-threatened participants selected the arrogant brand as compared with 76.5\% of non-threatened participants; \chi^2(1) = 4.12, p < .05)\).

**Sense of inferiority as mediator.** In line with Hypothesis 2, a priori self-threatened participants reported feeling more inferior (less superior) in the presence of the arrogant slogan \((M = 3.14, SD = 1.86)\) than participants who were not self-threatened \((M = 4.06, SD = 1.91; t(66) = 2.08, p < .05)\). An analysis using the PROCESS bootstrapping method (Model 4, with 5000 resamples; Hayes 2013) confirmed the mediating role of sense of inferiority in the effect of prior self-threat \((1 = “Self-threat absent” and 2 = “Self-threat present”) on participants’ brand choice \((1 = “Arrogant brand” and 2 = “Alternative less-arrogant brand”)\): When we regressed brand choice on both prior self-threat (the independent variable) and sense of inferiority (the mediator), the indirect effect of prior self-threat on brand choice, as mediated by sense of inferiority, was significant \((\beta = -.27, SE = 0.20; CI 95\%: -.833 to -.003)\).
**Self-confidence.** A 2 (self-threat: present vs. absent) × 2 (brand choice: arrogant brand vs. alternative less-arrogant brand) ANOVA on participants’ post-choice self-confidence revealed a marginally significant interaction ($F(1,64) = 2.99, p = .09$). Specifically, in line with Hypothesis 3, we found that selecting versus avoiding the arrogant brand had differential effect on the post-choice self-confidence only of self-threatened participants: Among these participants, reported self-confidence was significantly higher following arrogant-brand avoidance (i.e., alternative brand selection; $M = 3.88, SD = .50$) than following arrogant-brand selection ($M = 3.44, SD = .71, t(64) = 2.18, p < .05$). In contrast, the self-confidence of non-threatened participants did not depend on their brand choice ($M_{alternative-brand} = 3.75, SD_{alternative-brand} = .46$ vs. $M_{arrogant-brand} = 3.85, SD_{arrogant-brand} = .54, t(64) = -.41, p > .6$).

Study 3 sheds light on the mechanism through which self-threat influences decisions to avoid versus select arrogant brands. A sense of inferiority mediated the effect of prior self-threat on the decision to avoid the arrogant brand (H2). These results suggest that prior self-threat makes consumers more susceptible to the psychological threat inherent in arrogance, and thereby increases the likelihood of arrogant-brand avoidance. Interestingly, brand avoidance occurred even though the arrogant brand received higher quality ratings than the alternative. We suggest that this happened because a priori self-threatened consumers are more motivated to protect themselves from the threat imposed by an arrogant brand, even if they find that brand to be of high quality.

In addition, we found initial indications of an improvement in self-perceptions following arrogant-brand avoidance (H3). A priori self-threatened participants (vs. non-threatened participants) reported higher post-choice self-confidence following arrogant-brand avoidance than following arrogant-brand selection. These findings provide further support for the role of
self-threat in driving consumers to avoid arrogant brands. To provide more evidence for our account, Study 4 tested whether the effect of prior self-threat on arrogant brand avoidance would be reduced or eliminated when self-perceptions are bolstered.

**Study 4: A boost to self-perceptions attenuates arrogant-brand avoidance**

Study 4 sought further insights into the factors influencing consumers’ avoidance versus selection of arrogant brands. Recall that we posit that consumers avoid arrogant brands when they feel a need to protect their self from further harm. If so, then those whose self-perceptions have been boosted prior to brand exposure should be less motivated to protect their self, and therefore less likely to avoid arrogant brands (H4). Study 4 tested this prediction by manipulating both whether or not participants were under prior self-threat and whether or not their self-perceptions were enhanced prior to being exposed to an arrogant brand. Relying on the link between self-power perceptions and self-height perceptions (Duguid & Goncalo, 2012; also see Judge & Cable, 2004), we changed participants’ relative height perceptions by asking participants to review and rate photos of either small or large items. We expected that a priori self-threatened participants (but not non-threatened participants) whose own height perceptions were enhanced (vs. decreased) would receive a boost to self-perceptions, and would thereby be less likely to avoid an arrogant brand.

**Method**
Participants. One hundred thirty-eight participants ($M_{age} = 29.6$, 49% women) from an online panel participated in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (self-threat: present vs. absent) × 2 (self-height perceptions: tallness vs. shortness) between-subjects design.

Procedure. We asked participants to complete a set of ostensibly independent tasks. The purpose of the first task was to change the extent to which participants felt their self was under threat by manipulating their sense of success in a Sudoku puzzle task (the procedure used in Study 1b). In the second task, we manipulated participants’ self-height perceptions, with the goal of either improving or lowering participants’ self-perceptions. Participants in the perceived-tallness condition reviewed ten photos of small items (e.g., a rabbit) and rated their own height relative to each of these items, whereas participants in the perceived-shortness condition did the same with photos of ten large items (e.g., a tall building). Participants then rated their own perceived height on a 7-point scale (1 = “very short” and 7 = “very tall”) and reported their actual height.

The third task consisted of a procedure similar to that used in the previous studies. All participants read a description of a fictitious high-quality leading watch brand, which had adopted an arrogant slogan to accompany the launch of its new collection: “MagnaTime: The best or nothing” (again based on Mercedes’s slogan). Participants then indicated whether they would like to purchase an item from the focal (arrogant) brand or from a competing brand (ClockTime), which had similar features and similar quality; we provided no information about the competing brand’s communications, slogan or image. To measure the differences in brand perceptions, participants rated each brand quality (1 = “low quality” and 7 = “high quality”) and level of arrogance (1 = “not arrogant at all” and 7 = “very arrogant”).


**Results and discussion**

**Manipulation checks.** (a) Brand arrogance: As expected, participants indicated that the focal brand ("MagnaTime") was more arrogant ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.59$) than the alternative brand ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.43$, $F(1,134) = 94.75$, $p < .0001$). Neither self-threat, self-height nor the interaction between them influenced arrogance evaluations (all $ps > .7$), indicating that differences between the outcomes of the experimental conditions would not be a function of differences in participants’ perceptions of arrogance. (b) Height perceptions: A 2 (self-threat: present vs. absent) × 2 (self-height perceptions: tallness vs. shortness) ANOVA analysis, which controlled for participants’ actual height, on relative-height perceptions revealed a significant effect of the interaction between self-threat and self-height conditions ($F(1,133) = 4.34$, $p < .05$).

Self-threatened participants perceived themselves as taller in the tallness condition ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.13$) than in the shortness condition ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.32$; $t(133) = 4.55$, $p < .001$), despite no differences in (reported) actual heights (67.20 in. vs. 67.24 in., respectively, $t(134) = 0.04$, $p > .9$). In contrast, the self-height manipulation did not affect own-height perceptions of non-threatened participants ($M_{\text{tallness}} = 4.65$, $SD_{\text{tallness}} = 0.95$ vs. $M_{\text{shortness}} = 4.54$, $SD_{\text{shortness}} = 1.50$, $t(133) = 1.64$, $p > .1$; actual height: 66.52 in. vs. 67.26 in., respectively, $t(134) = -0.78$, $p > .4$). Thus, only participants in the threatened-self-tallness-perceptions condition received a boost to their self-perceptions.

**Brand evaluations.** Participants assigned similar quality to the arrogant brand ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.49$) and the alternative brand ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.28$, $F(1,134) = 0.68$, $p > .4$). The interaction between self-threat and self-height did not influence quality evaluations ($F(1,134) =$
indicating that differences between the outcomes of the experimental conditions would not be a function of these evaluations.

*Product choice.* In line with Hypothesis 3, a 2 (self-threat: present vs. absent) × 2 (self-height perceptions: tallness vs. shortness) logistic regression, which controlled for participants’ actual height, on participants’ brand choice revealed a main effect of self-threat (χ²(1) = 6.30, p < .05, such that more participants in the self-threat condition chose the focal arrogant brand); a main effect of self-height perceptions (χ²(1) = 10.45, p < .01, such that more participants in the tallness condition chose the focal arrogant brand); no effect of actual height (χ²(1) = 1.62, p > .2); and, of most relevance, a significant interaction effect of self-threat and self-height on choice (χ²(1) = 6.47, p < .05). These effects remained significant (all ps < .05) in a logistic regression analysis that did not control for participants’ actual height.

Decomposing the interaction revealed that, as predicted, differences in self-height perceptions affected the brand choice of participants under self-threat (χ²(1) = 3.21, p < .01): A priori self-threatened participants were more likely to choose the focal arrogant brand when they were assigned to the tallness condition than when they were assigned to the shortness condition (77.5% of self-threatened participants in the tallness condition selected the focal brand, compared with 37.9% of self-threatened participants in the shortness condition). By contrast, in the non-threatened-self condition, the self-height conditions – which, as mentioned above, did not affect these participants’ self-height perceptions – also did not affect their likelihood of selecting the focal brand (50.0% of non-threatened participants in the tallness condition and 51.4% in the shortness condition preferred the focal brand; χ²(1) = 0.12, p > .9; see Figure 2).

<Insert Figure 2 around here>
Study 4 thus provides further support for our conjecture that avoidance of arrogant brands stems from consumers’ sense of self-threat, as it seems that self-threatened consumers do not find such avoidance necessary when their self-perceptions are boosted by other means. A priori self-threatened participants who received a boost to their self-perceptions prior to exposure to an arrogant brand were less likely to avoid the brand compared with participants who did not receive such a boost (H4). Non-threatened participants, on the other hand, were not affected by the self-height manipulation. These participants already possessed more favorable self-perceptions that presumably satisfied their needs in this respect, and so additional sources of self-enhancement, such as perceived tallness, appear not to have offered these participants additional benefits (Inesi et al., 2011). Likewise, it is likely that non-threatened participants were less susceptible to subtle manipulations aimed at deteriorating their self-perceptions, such as perceived shortness (much as they appear to be less susceptible to the threat inherent in brand arrogance). Non-threatened participants might therefore have been less sensitive to the self-height manipulation, and consequently, this manipulation had no effect on their brand choices.

**General discussion**

Across six studies, we investigated how and why brand arrogance affects consumers’ brand choices. We found that self-perceptions play a key role in determining how brand arrogance influences consumer behavior: consumers with an a priori threatened self are less likely to prefer an arrogant brand compared with non-self-threatened consumers, as expressed both by the willingness to choose that brand over an alternative, and the number of individual
items bearing that brand the consumer expresses willingness to buy. We also found that the effect of self-threat on the decision to avoid an arrogant brand is mediated by sense of inferiority, with arrogant brands eliciting a greater sense of inferiority among consumers who experienced a prior self-threat. These findings are consistent with our suggestion that a priori self-threatened consumers may be more susceptible, compared with consumers with more favorable self-perceptions, to the message of consumer inferiority created by brand arrogance. This message poses an additional painful psychological threat to a priori self-threatened consumers, motivating these consumers to avoid arrogant brands. Further supporting this account, we found that when the self-perceptions of threatened consumers were enhanced by other means prior to brand exposure, their likelihood of avoiding an arrogant brand diminished. Finally, we found that arrogant brand avoidance helps consumers to restore their self-perceptions and feel better about themselves. Taken together, these results illustrate the key role that self-threat plays in consumers’ reactions to arrogant brands.

Note that the consumers in our sample avoided arrogant brands despite their favorable evaluations of these brands. This suggests that consumers do not avoid arrogant brands because they devalue them; on the contrary, consumers perceive arrogant brands as being of high quality. Rather, consumers’ avoidance of arrogant brands is likely to be a result of the threat these brands pose to their self-perceptions.

Theoretical and practical implications

The current research contributes to a better understanding of how brand characteristics, and, in particular, brand communications, influence consumers’ brand choices. Brand arrogance,
the focus of the current research, has received little attention in this respect, despite the
substantial literature exploring possible effects of brand characteristics on consumers’
perceptions and judgments (e.g., Aaker, 1997; for a review see Schmitt, 2012). In a recent
exception to this general rule, Brown (2012) revealed the negative effects of brand arrogance on
consumers’ attitudes. The current research extends those findings by investigating the reasons
for, and the consequences of, this negative response to brand arrogance, as well as the conditions
under which it occurs.

The current research also adds to the literature on the effects of self-perceptions, and in
particular self-threat, on consumer behavior (e.g., Gao et al., 2009; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008;
Shrum et al., 2014; Sirgy, 1982; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Some prior research has suggested
that consumers prefer products that are congruent with their self-perceptions (e.g., Aaker, 1999;
Kirmani, 2009; Sirgy, 1982). However, we found scant evidence supporting the possibility that
self-brand congruity guided decisions to avoid or select arrogant brands (Study 1c). In addition,
in spite of arrogant brands being highly valued, consumers experiencing self-threat do not appear
to use them to compensate for unfavorable self-perceptions, although in past research a
preference for highly valued products has functioned as a means to restore self-perceptions (Gao
et al., 2009; Mazzocco et al., 2012; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Our focus on the dual nature of
arrogant brands may reconcile these divergent findings. Arrogant brands communicate the
brand’s superiority and the consumer’s inferiority simultaneously. The susceptibility of
consumers who are a priori self-threatened to messages of inferiority thus makes them more
likely to avoid the arrogant brands despite these brands’ communication of value.

From a practical perspective, the current findings contribute to our understanding of how
consumers react to brand communications that convey an image of arrogance. As such, the
findings have implications for both marketers and consumers. For marketers, they suggest that while adopting an arrogant image may attract some customers, it is likely to repel others, and so the decision to employ arrogance as a marketing tool should be taken with caution. For consumers, the findings offer insight into the psychological processes that underlie much consumer behavior, and may therefore help shoppers make better-informed purchase decisions (i.e., decisions based on objective assessments about a given product rather than psychological reactions).

Limitations and future research

Future research can provide further insights into long-lasting effects of brand arrogance on consumers, both psychologically and behaviorally. For instance, we have shown that a priori self-threatened consumers feel better about themselves immediately after they avoid arrogant brands (Study 3; see also Section 7.3 in the Web Appendix). From a psychological point of view, it would be interesting to examine how enduring this effect might be. From a marketing perspective, the question is whether and how avoiding arrogant brands in one instance might affect consumers’ future purchasing decisions. For example, it is possible that self-threatened consumers who boost their self-perceptions by avoiding an arrogant brand may be less susceptible to the psychological threat inherent in brand arrogance in the future, making them more likely to purchase an arrogant brand. Future research should aim to shed light on possible carryover effects of arrogant brand avoidance on subsequent decisions, including how long such carryover effects might last and whether they are likely to vary based on previous decisions.
Relatedly, another open question pertains to factors that might immunize consumers against the negative consequences of exposure to brand arrogance on self-perceptions. As our research demonstrates, consumers who have relatively favorable self-perceptions, or whose self-perceptions are enhanced prior to their encounter with an arrogant brand, are less likely to avoid that brand, presumably because they are less susceptible to its negative effect on their self-image. Future research might examine how different personality traits, motivations and personal statuses influence the relationship between self-perceptions and consumers’ decisions vis-à-vis arrogant brands. Prior work (Brown, 2012) suggests that brand ownership might decrease arrogant brand avoidance, perhaps because those who own the brand assimilate its superiority into their self-image (e.g., Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Grubb & Hupp, 1968). It might be interesting to examine how brand arrogance affects consumers who are arrogant themselves or who aspire to be arrogant (e.g., to promote their own social status). In line with prior research that has demonstrated that consumers prefer products and brands whose images are congruent with their self-perceptions, whether actual or desired (e.g., Aaker, 1999; Kirmani, 2009; Sirgy, 1982), consumers who are, or desire to be, arrogant might be less likely to avoid arrogant brands.

Indeed, in some cases, marketers intentionally use arrogant brand communications as a retention tactic, to boost the self-perceptions of their current customers, as well as to target a specific audience of potential new consumers. We found supporting evidence for this use of brand arrogance in a pilot study (n = 105) that involved a real brand from the fashion industry, whose CEO stated that the brand was exclusionary and targeted only to attractive people (the brand name can be provided upon request). In this study, participants who were brand owners evaluated the brand more positively (M = 5.28, SD = 1.42) compared with participants who did
not own the brand ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.39; t(103) = 3.20, p < .002$). Future studies can further examine the use of brand arrogance as a marketing tactic.

Finally, future research could explore whether and how marketers can design marketing communications so as to convey the positive connotations of arrogance while simultaneously enhancing consumers’ feelings of self-worth (to prevent brand avoidance). In our research, we used relative-height manipulations to improve consumers’ self-perceptions (Study 4), but such manipulations may be less practical in real life. One promising alternative is the use of slogans such as L’Oréal’s “Because I’m worth it,” which seems designed to simultaneously strengthen potential buyers’ self-perceptions and to convey an arrogant message regarding the brand (that is, the consumer is a special person who deserves the very best). With such messages, the negative connotations of brand arrogance may have less of an impact on consumers, leaving the stage clear for the positive connotations.

In conclusion, although brand arrogance has received little research attention, it can have multifaceted and interesting effects on consumers and their brand choices. This research suggests that consumers and marketers alike would benefit from a better understanding of these effects.
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Fig. 1. Brand choice (focal brand vs. alternative) as a function of prior self-threat (present or absent) and focal brand image (arrogant vs. non-arrogant) (Study 2).

Notes: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error. Pairwise comparisons revealed a lower rate of focal brand choice in the self-threat-arrogant-brand condition than in the self-threat-non-arrogant-brand condition ($p < .01$), the no-self-threat-arrogant-brand condition ($p < .05$) and the no-self-threat-non-arrogant-brand condition ($p < .01$). No other pairwise differences were significant (all other $ps > .2$).
Fig. 2. Brand choice (arrogant brand vs. alternative) as a function of prior self-threat (present or absent) and self-height (tallness vs. shortness) (Study 4).

Notes: Error bars represent ± 1 standard error. Pairwise comparisons revealed a higher rate of arrogant brand choice in the self-threat-tallness condition than in the self-threat-shortness condition ($p < .001$), the no-self-threat-tallness condition ($p < .01$) and the no-self-threat-shortness condition ($p < .05$). No other pairwise differences were significant (all other $ps > .2$).