Brands and the Identification of Children

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BRANDS AND THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS OF CHILDREN Angélique RODHAIN (University of Montpellier 2 and Montpellier Graduate Institute of Business) Literature shows a growing interest in the role played by brands in the everyday life of consumers. And identity is often put forward since brands are recognized to be linked to consumers’ own identity. Yet, even if this link occurs at an early age, few studies deal with children. Hence this paper aims at identifying the role played by brands in the identification process of 10-11 year-old children. Thanks to a qualitative research led in schools, this article suggests that brands intervene in the sexual identification, the identification of an age group, of a peer group, of the family and of a whole community.

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Brands and the Identification Process of Children
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ABSTRACT

Literature shows a growing interest in the role played by brands in the everyday life of consumers. And identity construction is often underlined since brands are recognized to be linked to consumers’ own identity. Yet, even if this link occurs at an early age, few studies deal with children. That is why this paper aims at identifying the role played by brands in the identification process of 10-11 years children. Thanks to a qualitative research led in schools, this article suggests that brands intervene in the sexual identification, the identification of an age group, of a peer group, of the family and of a whole community.

INTRODUCTION

“Identity is a keyword in contemporary society” (Howard 2000). In a society where change rapidly occurs, individuals have difficulties in building their own identity, what is particularly true during transition periods, such as pre-adolescence. That is what was remarked from the ground while leading observations of 10 to 11 year-old children at primary schools. This research comes from a qualitative study which objective was at the beginning to understand the brand relationship (Fournier 1998) between brands and a particular consumer (the child) in a specific environment (at school). In so doing, during the observations and interviews led, the research question of the identity conveyed by brands emerged from the ground. Indeed, during the last year children spend at primary schools, they are about to build and transform their identity of clothes) play an important role in this identity construction.

The aim of the present paper is then to propose a comprehension of brands as playing a role in the identity construction of children in the natural context of schools. The structure of the article is as followed. First, identity is defined and presented as the result of the socialization process of children. Second, the research question and the methodology are briefly exposed to finish third with an explanation of the results proposing that brands take part in the identification process of 10 to 11 year-old children.

LITERATURE REVIEW: IDENTITY AND SOCIALIZATION

After having defined identity in general, the particular case of the child’s identity is approached before revealing the marketing literature treating about the role played by products and brands in the identification process.

Definitions

There are multiple definitions of identity, which can be understood as a structure, a function, a result or a process. Our purpose here is to focus on identity as a process. There are different levels of studying identity: at the level of the individual, of the interaction between two persons, of the group and of an ideology (Baugnet 1998). We will focus here on the identity of the self but evolving thanks to interactions. One global definition is Harter’s s1 (1983, in Adamson, Hartman and Lyxell 1999) who defines identity from its three components: the subjective feeling of unity among one’s self-conception, a sense of continuity of these attributions over time, and a sense of mutuality between the individual’s conception of the self and the conception held by others. Then even the individual identity cannot really be disconnected to others. As a matter of fact, the individual does not construct her/his identity in a social emptiness. On the opposite. According to Chappuis (2002), “being oneself is inseparable of being with... the individual exists only inside and thanks to her or his relationships with others” (p.48). Identity formation is viewed as a reciprocal process between the psychological interior and her/his socio-cultural environment. Then, emphasizing the close link between individual’s identity and relationships highlights its evolution: if identity supposes to follow a certain continuity in time, it is not fixed forever but does evolve too, according to the interactions and meetings with others. That is why identity can be studied as a process, by which others (another person, a group of persons, a celebrity or a character) are used as a model.

Dealing with identity is far from being new, but is particularly in fashion nowadays, in sociology, psychology as well as in the media. Traditional cultures do not ask the question of identity, which is “taken-for-granted” (Bendle 2002). On the opposite, identity is a cultural problem which emerged during the evolution of a modern society, becoming more and more individualistic. Giving individuals more choices to become what they want, modern society gives freedom (allowing a certain social mobility), but at the same time makes the construction of identity difficult (putting forwards the value of realization of the Self) (Mead 1979).

Identity and children

The construction of identity is guided by the research of an ideal after which one aspires and tries to conform to. If the individual judges her/himself through other valuable people’s eyes, it is because she/he tries to be accepted by them. The quest is then guided by the desire of being recognized as a valuable person. If identity is in evolution all along the life span, it is all the more significant during childhood, while the child is in construction and socialization. Erikson (1972) built a model of the progressive evolution of identity composed of eight stages (with the first four stages happening during childhood) that lead to a “sane adult personality”.

According to the author, as soon as during her/his first months (until 18 months), the child accedes to the feeling of confidence that she/he gains through her/his first interactions with her/his mother, receiving and accepting what she gives. The second stage (from 18 months to three years old) consists of acceding to autonomy thanks to the opposite feelings of ability and inability. During this period, the child begins to experiment her/his autonomous will even if she/he is still extremely dependent of others. During the third stage (from three to five years old), the child needs to discover who she/he wants to become. She/he makes comparisons in order to understand which classes and groups she/he belongs to. This period is characterized by the realization of actions. The last stage of childhood identity (from five to 13 years old) is linked to the identification to specific tasks. This emerging desire to make things well, and even perfectly, is called the “sense of industry”. The child tries to identify to adults who have knowledge and know-how. While the child spends most of her/his time at school, the identification to the teacher is important.

The environment of the child is essential for the good development of her/his identity and it becomes more and more complex over time. First, only the interactions with the mother are really important (during the first months), then both parents (the first three years), then the whole family (until five) and at last the neighborhood, the teacher and peers at school.

If the identity construction relies on interactions with emblematic persons, it can also be conveyed by things, such as brands and products, which represent these persons. That is how brands and products can become media for children’s identity construction too.

Brands and products, media of children’s identity construction

Research about materialism tried particularly to understand how people attach themselves to special objects in order to construct their identity. Any commercial product bears a symbolic sense (Levy 1959) and when buying one, one judges implicitly or explicitly if it suits to her/his own image. The object is thus a mean to express oneself, the self being defined as: “a sense of who and what we are” (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993). From Sirgy’s works (Sirgy 1982; Sirgy and Danes 1982) about congruence between the image of the self and the image of the product, Belk (1988) proposes that the objects we use and choose are part of a significant world we create around us that serve as an “extended-self”. We transcend the immediate limits of our bodies incorporating in our identity construction objects from the physical environment. In so doing, the chosen objects play the role of a mirror reflecting a part of our life history (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). And the sense we give to these objects can at the same time be private or public (Richins 1994). These meanings can refer to different personal events and be a media for nostalgic feelings (Belk 1990; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988), and being a support during transition periods (Chang and Arkin 2002; Kamptner 1995; Noble and Walker 1997) or during the realization of rites (Schouten 1991). We particularly attach to objects during moments difficult to live, like the little kid who needs her/his first transitional object that represents her/his mother to reassure her/himself when she is absent. If Baudrillard (1968) qualifies this act as being “recessive”, it can nevertheless help the individual to get over the worst.

Even if defining a border between brands and products is not easy—if a border does exist—brands particularly play the role of mediating the identity (Kapferer 1998). The brand, in itself, is proven to convey and express the self identity (Fournier 1998; Fournier and Yao 1998), the family identity (Olsen 1993), or a community identity (Kates 2000; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995).

Elliott and Wattanussuan (1998) having studied teenagers, highlighted that their representations are mostly social ones (conveyed by the media) and from these common representations, brands are used as symbols in order to, in the one hand construct their identity of teenagers and in the other hand communicate this identity to others (Elliott 1994, 1997). According to Elliott and Wattanussuan (1998), the brand gains a strong significance once it is part of a socialization process thus when attitudes and behaviors take shape. But this phenomenon has not been studied yet with younger children.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

This research follows the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I was actually leading a first research whose objective was to understand the way sponsored educational materials used at school could create a child-brand relationship. When observing and interviewing children at school, the question of the construction of identity appeared prevalent, if not inevitable. Intuitively, brands indeed seemed to strongly intervene in the identification process of the children encountered. Literature helped then to specify the research question. It allowed to justify that brands and products do play a role in individuals’ identification and that an individual’s identity is socially constructed thanks to the multiple interactions with others. But if it is recognized that brands are linked to consumers’ identity particularly from “Golden Age”, there are no research describing how this process occur during childhood. From these points, it seems that, if this research deals with children, it is necessary to study them in their natural environment (at school) and to pay attention to all the persons important in their socialization process. These factors are: parents, sisters and brothers, the media, peers and school (the teacher) (Bree 1993; McNeal 1992). Then the present research question was to understand the role played by brands in the identity construction of 10-11 year-old children2 in the natural social context of school.

The methodology is composed of two main phases. Following the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), from the first exploratory phase emerged the research question. It consisted of interviewing 15 children and their mother at home3. Then a case study aimed at observing everyday life of children at school. Six classes of the 5th grade were observed in two kinds of schools: Three in Priority Educational Zone (ZEP)4 schools (where children come mainly from poor families) and the other three were composed of children coming from middle class families. The case study is mostly based on two methods: observations and interviews. The six classes were observed during six months (in class and on the playground). All in all, 112 pupils were observed. During the non participating observations (Delalande 2001), methods recommended for observations at school were followed (Postnic and de Ketele 1988). I led 36 days of non participating observations, while sat at the corner of the class or of the playground, I noted in a note book: the way children were dressed, any game they use, any sentence and discussion dealing with brands, etc... Then in each of the six classes, four children were interviewed twice (at 6 months inter-

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2 The age of 10-11 year old, often called pre-adolescence, was chosen because the environment of the child is indeed particularly complex, composed of all the factors: the child is still interested in the media (while during adolescence, he/she is less attracted by them), he/she begins to act like other children who seem more influent (sisters and brothers and other peers), and at the same time, have not yet established a break-up with their parents and their teacher (what they are about to do during adolescence). This is the period of time when they look for their place in the adults’ world. The age studied is limited to 10 to 11 years old, that is the last class of primary school, in order to at least “control” the variable of the age and of cognitive development, and not to multiply the observations. Moreover, this age is chosen because this is the last year during which the teacher is still important for them (because they have the same referent professor the whole day) and the children are old enough to be studied (in order to respond to interviews, to be able to make introspections, etc...).

3 During the semi-directive interviews, children were especially asked to draw their preferred product and to realize Chinese portraits: imagine this brand is a person, how would you describe this person?

4 In France, the term ZEP (for Zone d’Education Prioritaires) is used for schools situated in poor suburbs where the population comes most often from the immigration. The State makes a supplementary financial effort in order to help these schools: there are fewer children in each classroom, the teacher has more money to buy supplying, etc.
Brand as a gender identification medium

The first level of identity borne by brands (and mainly brands of clothes and sportswear) is gender identification. Different factors converge in order that the sportswear brand (such as Nike, Adidas or Reebok), represents for children the male power: the pregnancy of sports stars, the fact that leaders (who try to already play the role of small gang leaders at school) wear those brands, as well as older, and thus stronger, boys. In that case, the product is not really important (sportswear in itself) without the brand. Male power is conveyed only by the brand. This association between brands and male power is perceptible in boys and girls’ own definitions of brands and in their Chinese portraits. Wearing branded clothes is associated to adjectives such as “superior”, “strong”, “gang leader”, “richer” and “being at the centre of attraction”. Paradoxically, “those who wear brands” fascinate the others and are respected but at the same time are not particularly loved: “those who wear brands are loud”, “If Nike was a person, he would be self-centered”. Then, most of the boys still want to identify to “leaders who wear brands”, even if they do not like them, because they represent the male power: they are those who are listened to and feared. Not to wear brands is then reserved to boys who hang along with girls:

“Clément: If there’s a boy who wears brands and who goes along with girls, he looks really weird to me, yes really weird… - The researcher: Why? - Clément: Because the one who wears brands is like a gang leader, he’s a bad boy who walks weirdly and if he goes with girls, it’s not right, it’s strange!”

Then wearing brands (let’s understand in their words “brands of clothes”) is a way for boys to stand as boys in opposition to girls. And their manliness can be questioned by others if they do not wear brands, except in certain cases. Nevertheless the reverse logic is not necessary true: this is not only because a boy wears brands that he becomes powerful. For example, Thomas who is quite smaller and younger than the others (nine years old), bought one day only Nike products from head to foot, because the gang leaders put pressure on him everyday in order to make him do so. And after this purchase, Thomas remained an isolated child, but became just a little more respected. But he felt stronger and proud of himself and became the first to criticize other boys “who do not wear brands”…

As for girls, the dynamic is quite different. They are considered by boys and they consider themselves as less concerned by brands:

“Boys do wear brands to be remarked by the others, but girls rarely care about that” (Sarraff).

“When I buy something, I’m interested in the whole class’ s opinion… well, when I say “the whole class” I don’t include the girls of course, because they know nothing about brands” (Jean-Christophe).

“The researcher: According to you, what is a brand, what it is for? - Oh, this is a question to rather ask boys, because we, girls, are more interested in the kind of clothes we wear, the kind of sweat, of jeans or things like that, but we don’t care about the brand like boys. Except sometimes for tracksuit…” (Elise).

“If I were a boy, I would be the leader, I would be naughty when necessary and I would always wear brands like Nike and Reebok…” (Chloë, in an essay).

According to girls’ words, brands are not that important for them… And indeed they have many other different ways to position themselves in opposition to boys, wearing female clothes (skirts, dress) which boys have not access to. Whereas boys can hardly differentiate themselves from girls since the latter wear also jeans, sweats, sportswear and sport shoes like them. Then girls easily identify themselves to stars who wear clothes in fashion with no particular brands. The girls met are more sensible to the type of product than to brands. Even girls who are considered as leaders do not exert an influence on the others in order to make them wear a specific brand. Girls who are interested in brands, mostly of

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5The objective of these implicit discussions was to better know the children and the interactions between them. Important facts were transcribed afterwards in the notebook.

6Even if, with the children interviewed, different product categories were dealt with, brands which play a more important role in the identification process are those of categories that, according to children, “we can see”, that is mainly clothes and shoes.

7For example, Abdellatif and Youssef who are considered by others as “gang leaders” do not wear brands at all. But, being older than the others (12 years old) and being a little bit quarrelsome and strong, the others are persuaded that they do wear brands… because they are strong! In other words, the other children do not change their idea that “brands=male power”. On the opposite, they do not remark at all that Abdellatif and Youssef do not wear brands because they are powerful, and they even let them make fun of them about the way they get dressed!

8Nevertheless this is perhaps inherent to the kind of girls encountered because there exist many brands of clothes that are particularly for girls (like Chipie or Caprice de Filles), but these brands were very rarely seen in the classes observed. It is supposed that either these branded clothes are too much associated to younger girls or they are bought by richer families (and here only poor and middle-class children were encountered). For example, Cecilia exposes her experience lived in another school were brands were important for girls too: “Here girls don’t care about brands but in my former school they did. There were two groups: the first used to wear only athletic brands like Nike and could go with boys, and the second used to wear brands like Chipie, and we didn’t like each other and always quarrelled”.

9For example, Cecilia de Filles, the researcher: Why?

10For example, Thomas who is quite smaller and younger than the others (nine years old), bought one day only Nike products from head to foot, because the gang leaders put pressure on him everyday in order to make him do so. And after this purchase, Thomas remained an isolated child, but became just a
sportive brands are considered—and consider themselves—as tomboys who play only with boys. But boys are less exigent with girls than with boys about the way they get dressed.

Brands as an age group identification medium

The brand (and once again particularly the sportswear brand) symbolizes the identification to an age group. Brands of clothes are indeed worn by older children, because of their high price. Then for kids in the 5th grade, wearing brands is assimilated to older children and is a way to get ready for the important passage to high school. Children in the 5th grade identify to their older brothers and sisters and peers in the neighborhood. They imitate the way they are dressed to get ready to be soon part of the teenagers’ world. Those who do not wear brands yet are hence considered as “the young”. They are called “the small kids”, “the weak kids” or “the over-sensitive babies”. The more expensive the branded clothes are, the more they are valorized. The cheap clothes are bearable for sensitive babies who do not wear brands yet are hence considered as valuable people or weak kids. In the classes observed where the atmosphere was very friendly (where boys and girls respect each other and where there was less social differences between children’ origin), the role of the “bad boys leaders” was diminished. On the opposite, in the classes where children do not get on well, the leader is empowered and brands intervene in the identification process to the peer group.

Brands as a peer group identification medium

Brands can convey the identification to a group of peers, and particularly the peers of the class. Among the class, three variables play a role in the identification process to peers: the personality of the leader, the teacher and the class atmosphere.

The leader, first, plays a major role. Leaders are valorized because they are supposed to be more successful and popular. They often represent an ideal the other children want to reach (even if they are not really good friends). And, since most of the leaders of the classes wear branded clothes, a way to identify to them is to wear the same brands. A brand can hence become the symbol of a whole class by this game of influence. In a class where the leader is particularly valorized by others, he exerts his influence in three ways:

- he often wears the latest models of the fashion brand;
- he is the first to be consulted by others as for the branded clothes to buy;
- he fixes standards about which brand is good or not and who is “cool” or not.

Each of the six classes observed has its girl and boy leaders, but not all of them play the same role. The most influent leaders are those who are considered as “bad boys”. They are usually bad pupils, violent, not really liked but very respected anyway. The “bad boys” are often associated to the most famous sportswear brands.

Second, the atmosphere among the pupils of the class seems important too for the identification to the peers is possible. Among the classes observed where the atmosphere was very friendly (where boys and girls respect each other and where there was less social differences between children’ origin), the role of the “bad boys leaders” was diminished. On the opposite, in the classes where children do not get on well, the leader is empowered and brands intervene in the identification process to the peer group.

Third, the teacher plays a role in the identification to peers according to the way she he teaches (if she he is authoritative and talks or not about the brands and the game of influence among children) and according to the relationship she he maintains with the pupils (if she he can play the role of an ideal for children, letting more or less the leader influence the other pupils). Let us consider the two opposite examples as follow:

In class A, “bad boy leaders” wear essentially Nike clothes and shoes. But they are not really powerful and they do not try to influence the others to wear brands because they are “controlled” by their teacher. This fifty-year-old man plays indeed a very important identification role in the class. He is loved and respected because he takes as much as he can care of the pupils, but at the same time he is feared because he is authoritative. Yet this teacher puts forwards Faïcal, the best pupil of the class and dispare the “bad boy leaders”. In so doing, he reduces their influence and makes Faïcal being the leader of the class, but a leader who is recognized and loved by the others for being “a good person”. And Faïcal does not really care about brands. He has his own theory on brands: good persons do not wear brands, or only very rarely (for example he only wears Adidas shoes) whereas bad boys are found of brands like Nike. Faïcal is then an identification model and those who want to imitate him do not care either about brands. And “bad boys” cannot exert their influence on this class because the teacher plays a strong gatekeeper role (the children say that “if he hears a child making fun of another about the way he or she is dressed, he would violently kick him off!” ). Moreover, this teacher tries to educate the pupils about values such as respect and he diffuses the idea according which, for example, isolating a child because he does not wear brands is a kind of racism. In class A, there is a good atmosphere: all the children are quite similar (they come from poor and Arabic families), they are respectful to each other.

In class F, Kevin, the leader, is really strong, respected and feared by the other children. He pays a peculiar attention on the wearing of brands by others. Nike is particularly appreciated. Then he exerts a strong influence on the way kids are dressed. Those, like Nicolas, who respond to his requirements are valorized and can take part of the central group. Those, like Mathieu, who do not wear brands, are isolated. The
teacher, a forty-year-old woman, does not want to intervene into the children relationship. She does not play any identification role model either: In so doing, she lets Kevin exert his power and fix his standards on the whole class. In class F, to be “cool and popular”, pupils have to wear sportswear brands, and particularly Nike and Reebok. The atmosphere in this class is quite bad: children insult each other even during lessons. The origin of the children is diverse: few of them come from Arabic and poor families while the majority comes from French middle class families.

Since these three variables (the atmosphere, the power of leaders and the role of the teacher) intervene at the same time in the observations led, this is not possible to elaborate a hierarchy among them.

Brands as a family identification medium

Parents are the first identification models for children. Then, if the child associates her/his parents to a specific brand, she/he will want this brand too. Nevertheless, the identification process to adults is more complicated than to other children, since adults have access to products that children cannot obtain (for example alcohol or cars). Yet, with a specific brand of car, parents can convey a certain value (for example, power). And the child, who would like to identify to her/his parents through consumption will try to find a brand which convey the same value but in a product category she/he can reach (waiting for the time when she/he can buy a car...). In this case, parents intervene in the identification process of the child where brands play a role, even without using and even liking the same brand as the child.

Moreover, when the child feels she/he is closely linked to their parents’ choices, she/he feels that these choices are common to the whole family. As Franck says: “We are all Renault in the family” or Abida’s mother: “I don’t know why, but we are all Colgate, my husbands, all the children and I. We only like Colgate. Everyone. Always. It’s like that!”. The central role of the brand in the family identity is highlighted by the use of the auxiliary “to be” rather than “to have”. The brand links the family, and liking the brand is a way to feel part of it.

Parents play another role in the identification process of their children, since they remain their “gatekeepers”. The child cannot make autonomous consumption choices yet. Then if parents accept to buy whatever the child wants, they do not play a role in the identification process to peers and to the age group. On the opposite, if they refuse to buy their children the brands they want and if they explain their choice, they can play a moderating role in the identification function of the brand.

Brands as a cultural identification medium

Children also need to feel that they are part of a bigger community or culture. Children construct an ideal of a culture or of a community they want to take part. To this culture, they associate products and brands. Then they will use the associated brand in order to feel part of the chosen community and in order to communicate their membership to others. This search to be part of a culture was particularly obvious for Arabic children. They often refer to certain products and brands’ origin to justify their choices. For example:

“The researcher: Which car do you prefer?
- Faïçal: Renault, it is better.
- the researcher: Why?
- Because when I went to Algeria, there were only Renault cars, the Megane, the Clio, the Laguna. All the others were old-fashioned cars. They don’t have much money in Algeria. The brands of cars I know to be strong are Peugeot for the engine and the coachwork, and Renault. The French brands are better cars. Well...of course there are brands like Mercedes that are better, but I do not think that this is the better choice anyway...and if you take a car too high in quality, you take the risk not to see it again the day after...”.

This example is eloquent because Faïçal is a child who particularly wants to be part of the French society but whose origin is at the same time really important. And Renault allows him to make a link between both cultures, even if it is not the best brand of cars. On the opposite, other children choose brands, even without knowing their real origin, but thinking that they are “from somewhere else”, to claim their no-membership to the French community: “What I prefer is Sergio Blanco, Eden Park and Lacoste. I like these brands because they are not from France. They come from other countries, it is better...” (Nourredine). Even if Nourredine is wrong about the origin of these brands, he uses them as a way not to be a member of the French society, but of another one (likely the American one). For these Arabic children, it appears that few alternatives are possible: most of the sportswear clothes represent an occidental model, either a European or an American one. The adhesion to American brands is then the only way (except not wearing branded clothes at all) to be in opposition to the French culture. That is why the new brands that appeared recently at the effigy of Arabic culture (Mecca-cola for drinks and Muslim for sportswear) will probably have success in the future among these children looking for a contra-culture. In reverse, some children can reject a brand because it represents a community they dislike. For example, Elie says he does not like Adidas because “this is a Moroccan brand”. If he is wrong about the origin of the brand but Elie associates Adidas to Morocco because the children who wear this brand in his class come from this country. Then, rejecting the brand, he rejects this peer group but also the whole community.

The identification process

The identification process has been exposed linearly in order to simplify the purpose. Nevertheless, the process is a lot more complex since all the levels are interconnected and all the socialization factors intervene at the same time. Let’s only take the example of the gender identification process. All the socialization factors of the same gender than the child (and in opposition, the persons of the other gender) intervene in the gender identification process: parents, siblings, the teacher, peers, stars, etc... Through the image conveyed by all these factors of same gender, the child constructs an ideal image of her/his gender. And brands can intervene in this ideal image. If a brand is associated by the child to her/his gender, she/he will want to possess it in order to feel reassured, to claim her/his membership to the gender and to communicate it to others. And to do so, the brand must be visible. The ideal model is like a mosaic constructed by the child, taking only pieces of important persons.

Then the socialization factors intervene in a complementary or a contradictory way. The identification is easier for the child if all the factors converge and if the same kind of brand, or of value, is highlighted by the factors of the same gender. When the factors are in opposition, the child is likely to follow the factor the most important to her/him. When there is an opposition among factors, this is often when parents and teachers play a role of moralizing gatekeepers preventing the child from using the brand in the identification process, in opposition to peers, siblings, and stars. Then the less parents and teachers play their educative role, the more the brand is used as an identification mark. Then, the identi-
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The identification process is particularly complex first because each socialization factor intervenes on all the identification levels, and second because all the identification levels are interconnected. For example, wearing a certain brand of shoes is a way to identify to a gender, but also to a peer group, an age group, the family group or a whole community...

CONCLUSION

The child’s identity is constructed through the interactions with others who are important for her/his development. For 10 to 11 years-old, those are parents, siblings, peers (particularly at school) and the teacher as well as other persons that they cannot directly meet but they know from the media (stars, characters, ...). The child’s identity is partly constructed like a mosaic, taking piece after piece, ideal people’s characteristics. And brands intervene in the process for they can symbolize these people, groups or culture the child wants to identify to. Once obtained as a symbol, brands allow the child to assert her/himself and to communicate this gender, age group, peer group, family and cultural identity to others.

The implications of the research stand at a theoretical, managerial and social levels. From a theoretical point of view, the research highlights the complexity of consumer socialization where all the factors intervene in a complementary or contradictory way. The role of teachers, almost never studied, is underscored. Then it presented more generally the brands as intervening in the children’s identification process. Brands’ and children’ identities are then linked, but not in an exclusive person-brand relationship and rather on a person-brand-person basis. The identification process must then be analyzed in the complex social context of the child’s everyday life.

From a managerial point of view, the research offers reflections especially about brand extension since it appears that the child can be attached to and would like to gain adults brands she/he has not access to (like a brand of car). Moreover, the research offers the opportunity to show that brands convey identity values. From a societal point of view, the research offers the opportunity to question the role of educators (parents and teachers) in children socialization. The role of peers and media-and corollary of brands-seems indeed empowered when educators let them fill the gaps.

This research offers many ways for future research. For example, the identification to the peer group needs to be deepened. The simultaneous role of leaders, of the teacher and of the class atmosphere has been remarked. It appeared that the leader was empowered as soon as the atmosphere was bad among the pupils... but what constitutes a good atmosphere? The balance between boys and girls? Socially mixed or homogeneous classes? Rules stated by the teacher? The leaders’ personality needs also a better understanding. And more generally each result is not fixed but deserves a fertile deepening in order to better understand the role played by brands in the children’ identification process. And this process is likely to become more and more pregnant, as Le Breton (2002) explains: “Because the crisis of sense and values makes the relation to the world more problematic, the individual is cautiously looking for her/his brands and tries to brave her/his discomfort constructing a more favorable identity” (p.17).

REFERENCES

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