Multiple Motives, Multiple Selves: What Motivates Consumption

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This study reports results of an exploratory empirical study investigating the ability of various identity motives in predicting identity centrality. Using multiple regression, the results indicate motives of recognition and continuity were positive predictors of identity centrality; and the belonging and security motives were positive predictors of self-brand connections. Additionally, identity centrality was found to mediate the relationship between identity motives and self-brand connections. Based on our findings, great potential lies in exploring motives beyond self-esteem and self-consistency in self-brand interactions.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14520/volumes/v36/NA-36

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Results and Discussion

The calculation-primed participants were willing to pay significantly more for 10 cards than for 5. In contrast, the affectively-primed participants were largely insensitive to the number of items they would choose. This predicted pattern was only significant for some of the dependent variables and was affected by whether outliers were removed from the data. In the full dataset, the interaction was significant when considering all dependent variables together (with a MANOVA), but when each dependent variable was analyzed separately (with separate ANOVAs) it was only statistically significant for the DSS that was stated a second time at the end of the experiment, although there was also a tendency towards this interaction for the DSS that was stated initially. In the trimmed dataset, the interaction was significant when considering all dependent variables together, but when each dependent variable was analyzed separately, it was only statistically significant for the DSS that was stated a second time and marginally significant for WTP.

After the experiment, several participants said that they did not perceive watching the pictures as an investment of time, that is, a cost they had to pay in order to select some good ones, but that they had intrinsically enjoyed seeing them. This could explain the added noise in the measures elicited before people actually watched the pictures.

There was no correlation between the two measures of costs, hypothetical financial costs (WTP) and expected temporal and cognitive costs that will subsequently be realized (DSS). This was surprising because these variables showed similar patterns of mean data. This suggests that, contrary to the well-known expression “time is money”, people do not naturally treat the two concepts as being equal. Investigating the mental relationship between these two concepts could therefore be a fruitful area for further research.

We also measured participants’ satisfaction with the choosing process and the chosen items. Reutskaja and Hogarth (2009) found satisfaction to be an inverse U-shaped function of the manipulated choice set size. In contrast, we found that there was no linear or nonlinear relationship between DSS and the two reported satisfaction measures. The fact that participants determined the size of the choice set themselves provides two plausible explanations for the lack of a relationship. First, people may have been able to determine the set size that would yield the maximum overall satisfaction for them. Second, people may have become committed to their stated DSS and therefore did not want to report regretting having too many or too few options, as that would imply that they had previously made an imperfect judgment.

References


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One of the least contested claims in marketing is that individuals are motivated to enhance their self-esteem and establish consistency in their self-concept when engaging in symbolic consumption (Levy 1959; Grub and Grathwohl 1967; Levy 1986). However, less attention has been directed towards additional identity motives guiding self-brand interactions. Recently, in the social psychology literature, motives beyond self-esteem and self-consistency were found to aid in identity construction namely: efficacy, meaning, distinctiveness, and belonging (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, and Scabini 2006). These alternative motives can provide a richer understanding of how and why individuals are motivated to engage in self-brand interactions.

When brand associations are used to construct one’s identity or to communicate one’s self to others, a self-brand connection is formed (Escalas and Bettman 2000; 2005). Self brand connections measure the degree to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003; 2005). Presumably, self-brand connections will be enhanced as brands are chosen to achieve specific identity goals. This is due to identity commitment, which is associated with expectations of behavior relevant to identity goals (Foote 1951). Identity commitment serves as a boundary criterion in determining how motivations from social influence will be handled. To illustrate, a person committed to the identity of “soccer mom” will interpret marketing stimuli differently than one committed to a “corporate executive” identity.

An individual is likely to support and be more committed to preserving a particular identity when it is more central (Settles 2004). As stated earlier, centrality is influenced by multiple identity motives, which are related to a specific identity within the individual. Therefore a highly central identity should lead to stronger self-brand connections as various motives are satisfied. The key determinant of this proposed relationship is brand associations congruent with the self-image. Therefore the following hypothesis is offered:

A brand that is very popular and used by many different types of people (e.g., a BMW) may have different meanings to consumers based on the different identities that are presented through brand usage. It is expected brand symbolism will moderate the formation of
self-brand connections due to the brands ability to communicate something about the individual. It is hypothesized that in cases when centrality is low, brand symbolism will be the primary source of self-brand connections. Thus it is expected that brand symbolism will moderate the effects of identity centrality on self-brand connections.

Methodology
Using a methodology developed by Vignoles et al. (2002), participants freely generated a list of identities then rated them for its centrality on automobile purchases (dependent variable) and for its association with motivations of self-esteem, distinctiveness, continuity, self-efficacy, belonging, meaning, recognition, consistency, and security (independent variables). The main analysis was designed to evaluate the unique contributions of each motive rating to predictions to identity centrality.

Results
Overall, the results indicate individuals do in fact assign varying levels of importance to their identities in a consumption environment. The findings suggest centrality is a viable construct for understanding how individuals manage multiple identities in consumption decisions. Participants rated as more central, those identities that provided a sense of self-esteem and that gained them recognition with regard to their automobile. Together, these motives seem to suggest individuals are motivated more so by internal self-aspects (self-esteem) compared to other’s acknowledgement of them (recognition). This finding is quite interesting because it these motives are not consistent with Grub and Grathwohl’s Model of Consuming Behavior (1967) and Sirgy’s (1982) Product-Image Congruity Theory. Ideally, the more participants rated an identity as satisfying feelings of self-esteem or self-consistency, the more they should have considered it as central to their decisions. However, when considered with the other eight motives, the effects of these two motives were attenuated and failed to be strong predictors of identity centrality. Brand symbolism as a moderator between identity centrality and self-brand connection was evidenced from the findings. Brands that were perceived as more symbolic resulted in higher self-brand connections when the identity was central to the automobile category. When combined with the psychological importance, an identity that is congruent with brand associations, but is also congruent with the typical user and/or brand personality, stronger connections to the brand are likely. This interactive effect between brand symbolism and identity centrality is worth exploring further.

References