Using Brands to Communicate Self: How Effective Are We?

Renu Emile, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
Margaret Craig-Lees, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
Ken Hyde, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

A characteristic of contemporary societies is the centrality of the self and the wide acceptance that individuals use brands and/or products to create, maintain and communicate aspects of their ‘self’. This use has been extensively studied by consumer researchers. The studies are primarily unidirectional, in that they report how the individual thinks the brand works to support aspects of their ‘self’. The question of whether the communication is actually effective has had minimal attention. This study uses data gathered via auto photography observation, and semi-structured interviews to answer this questions.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14316/volumes/v36/NA-36

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyight.com/.
Advances in Consumer Research (Volume 36) / 851

H4: purchasing behavior of a consumer who enters online store through a referring website will be less likely to be associated with product involvement level.

Dataset were drawn from the ComScore 2004 Disaggregate data set. Our dataset consists of 3,885 users who visited Amazon.com and made purchase on random items between July 1, 2004 to December, 2004. Product categories were grouped as in either high-involvement product or low-involvement product according to its price range and in reference to the FCB Grid (1986, Berger). Independent variables included total duration time, number of pages viewed, duration per page, connection speed, basket total, total price, and the ratio of total price to basket total. In the present study, the price ratio of total price divided by basket total was contrived to measure purchase intention. We define the price ratio that approximates to 1 as having higher purchase intention (ex. 0.1= low purchase intention; 0.9= high purchase intention).

Independent sample t-tests were used to determine if any significant differences existed in 1) total duration 2) duration per page 3) the price ratio between consumers who directly logged on to Amazon.com and who were mediated to the site through other referring websites. T-test was conducted to test hypothesis1 and hypothesis2. The logit regression was performed to test hypothesis3 and hypothesis4. The value of the each product category was compared to the criterion for the involvement level (i.e., high-involvement).

As expected, in measuring total duration and in number of pages viewed, consumers with direct access manner stayed during less amount of time than consumers with indirect access manner with significance level less than .001. The price ratio was higher in direct access manner group than indirect access manner group with significance level less than .05. This implies direct access manner group had greater purchase intention than indirect access group. Hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were supported.

None of independent variables were significant in indirect access manner group in terms of product-involvement level from logit regression analysis. In direct access group, number of pages viewed, time spent per page, and the price ratio showed significance level less than .05 and total price less than .001. Among consumer with direct access manner to the site, as number of pages viewed by consumers decreased, it was more likely that high-involvement product was purchased. As time spent per page increased, it was more likely that high-involvement product was purchased. For both of total price and price ratio, it was more likely that high-involvement product was purchased as each dollar amount was increased. Hypothesis3 and hypothesis 4 were supported.

References

Using Brands to Communicate Self: How Effective Are We?
Renu Emile, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
Margaret Craig-Lees, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
Ken Hyde, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

The notion that tangible objects and modes of behaving communicate the role and status of individuals within a society has a long history (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Levy, 1959; Simmel, 1904, 1950, 1957; Veblen, 1899). A characteristic of contemporary societies is the centrality of the self and the wide acceptance that individuals use brands and/or products to create, maintain and communicate aspects of their self. The use of brands and/or products in this way has been extensively studied by consumer researchers. Aspects examined include: matching product and brand characteristics with the self; investigating the use of products and brands to reflect gender, role, status and prestige, reference group membership, ethnicity within and across cultural boundaries (Belk, 1988, 2004; Elliott, 1994; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Goffman, 1951; Hogg, 1998; Holt, 1997; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Cracken, 1988; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2005).

The studies are primarily unidirectional, in that they report how the individual thinks the brand works to support aspects of their self. The question of whether the communication is actually effective, that is, does the sent or communicated message match with the read message, has had minimal attention. Advertising related research, while proposing a dialectical relationship between advertising and the consumer (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Sherry, 1987), also suggests that the construction of product and brand meaning ultimately builds up through interpersonal communication among consumers (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Ritson & Elliott, 1999). Yet, advertising research continues to focus on the solitary subject at the expense of a more social orientation, neglecting the significance, use and interpretation of advertising messages in reciprocal social interactions. This observation can be applied to product and brand use. More specifically-are the messages that an individual wishes to send via the use of products and brands understood by intended audiences?

Grubb and Hupp (1968) found consumers of a specific brand to have self concepts similar to those of other consumers of the same brand. Grubb & Stern (1971) also found that users of a specific brand perceived that other users of the same brand would have similar self-concepts i.e., be the same type of people. Both studies were limited to the matching of perceptions of selected brands between two
groups—consumers and their reference groups, rather than the matching of communicated messages by the self with messages received by audiences. Though these studies have examined shared perceptions, they are still unidirectional. Accepted wisdom is that consumers use brands and products to communicate aspects of the self. What is largely unknown is their degree of success. This study asks the question: If young adults use brands to develop, maintain and communicate aspects of their self, what aspects of their self do they communicate and how successful are they? To answer this question the study will address the following issues and tasks:

- Confirmation/disconfirmation of the premise that young adults use brands and products to construct and/or communicate aspects of their identity.
- Identifying the products and brands young adults use, the meanings constructed, and the ways in which they think the meanings associated with brands and products express aspects of their self-identity.
- Determining how the intended audiences interpret the identity that the brand and products are meant to communicate.

Identity development is a central facet of adolescence and self-brand connections begin in early adolescence (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2005). GenY are highly brand conscious and are cognizant of the symbolic value of the brands they consume (Galician, 2004). They are also sophisticated consumers of entertainment media. Though parents do have an influence, superstar role models also wield significant influence and entertainment media is a key source of information about lifestyles and behaviours (Martin & Bush 2000; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). This literature suggests that young adults will have developed use and interpretation skills—havineg developed shared meanings within their age cohorts.

The study intends to draw upon a loose collection of socially oriented perspectives of the self from within the marketing and consumer behaviour literature. In particular, it will draw upon Goffman’s (1959) notion that the self is constantly engaged in performances, routinely playing specific roles within particular social interactions. The study will also take a consumer culture orientation that conceptualizes consumption as a mode of socio-cultural practice, and that which focuses not only on the economic, social and political dimensions of consumption, but also on the symbolic boundaries that structure personal and group identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This study assumes a shared perception of reality, identifying with the Berger and Luckmann (1966) notion of social constructionism; that when people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related. A common thread in social constructionism is the force of language as a principal assumption and the need to identify shared constructions of meanings (Burr, 2003). The study draws upon phenomenological approaches to research design (Husserl, 1970; Schutz, 1962, 1964, 1967, 1970; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

The study will employ the use of photography and semi-structured interviews and be conducted in two stages (Harper, 2000; Kjeldgaard, 2003, 2004; May, 2001; Noland, 2006, Quinney, 1995; Ziller, 1990). In the first stage, young adults (18-21) will be asked to photograph brands and products that they use to express self and asked to describe that self. In the second stage, collage boards of the photographs will be presented to other young adults and other age cohorts (not known to the first set of participants) who will be asked to describe the persona of the person in the pictures. Factors such as gender and actual physical appearance will be controlled for.

References