This Brand Is Me: a Social Identity Based Measure of Brand Identification

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Brand identification describes the utility of brands in fulfilling consumers’ self-definitional needs. Past research has measured this construct using established scales of organizational identification. This paper conceptualizes brand identification as a distinct construct from that of organizational identification and develops a new scale for the measurement of identification in a consumer context. Three dimensions are advanced: self-brand connection, brand signaling and brand salience. The developed scale is shown to have greater validity and reliability than established scales. It is further demonstrated that brand identification is strongly related to attitudes such as brand preference and resilience to negative brand related information.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Of particular importance to practitioners and academics in the marketing field is the ability to recognize, analyze, and utilize information regarding the voluntary relationships that consumers engage in with the brands they purchase. Fournier (1998) and Aaker (1999) make an explicit plea to researchers regarding the need for research in marketing to examine the deep, enduring brand relationships that lead to beneficial outcomes for firms. Accordingly, recent consumer behavior research has investigated the psychological connections individuals build with brands, brand communities and the brand relationships that surpass loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Fennis and Pruyn 2007; Fournier 1998; McAlexander, Shouten, and Koenig 2002). One commonly accepted perspective stemming from the consumer behavior literature is that products and brands are able to fulfill the self-definitional needs of consumers (Belk 1988; Dolich 1969). This notion has proliferated a variety of academic fields of study including possessions as extensions of self (Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982; Klene, Kleine, and Allen 1995), brand personality (Aaker 1997; Cassarjian 1971), relationship marketing (Fournier 1998), the congruence or fit literature (Birdwell 1968; Dolich 1969; Gardner and Levy 1955) and more recently, consumer-company and brand identification (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Bhattacharya, Glynn, and Rao 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Thus, the self-concept related benefit of brands is well accepted in the literature; however, the numerous and varied manifestations of the construct have perpetuated a fragmented and inarticulate area of study.

This paper purports that strong consumer-brand relationships may be attributed to theories of social psychology, namely, social identity and self-categorization theory. The basic premise of these theories is that individuals group within society to achieve meaningful self-definition through intergroup homogenization and ingroup difference (Tajfel 1978, 1982). Social psychologists have historically applied these theories to an organizational context (Brown et al. 1986; Hogg and Abrams 1988) and concurrently, organizational behaviorists adopted theories of social psychology to explain desirable employee behavior such as employee citizenship and conscientiousness (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Cheney 1983). Thus, organizational identification has received much academic attention in recent years (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Pratt 1998; Riketta 2005; Van Dick 2001). Following this and entering the realm of marketing, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) introduced the concept of consumer-company identification and posit that individuals, regardless of formal membership ties, are able to identify with companies.

Unfortunately, identification theory in marketing remains in its infancy. This may be partly attributed to the theoretical foundation of consumer-company identification being somewhat detached from the marketing literature and companies being the incorrect focus in marketing. Brand identification is the focus of much of the empirical work and theory testing, with the ultimate aim of truly understanding brand identification and its importance.

REFERENCES