The Effects of Self-Construal and Moral Identity on Company Evaluations: the Moderating Roles of Social and Personal Relevance of Corporate Social Responsibility Activities

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In this research, we examine the effects of self-construal and moral identity on company evaluations as a function of social and personal relevance of CSR activities. In a set of two studies, we find that when self construal is independent (vs. interdependent), company evaluations do not vary as a function of social (vs. personal) relevance of the CSR activity. In contrast, when self-construal is independent (vs. interdependent), high personal (vs. social) relevance of CSR activity, leads to more favorable company evaluations. In a third study, we demonstrate that social relevance interacts with symbolization dimension of moral identity to predict company evaluations.

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considered.” Then we asked participants to report independently their perceived dyadic partner’s product usage and brand preference in each category. Students completed their questionnaires first and provided their mother’s name and address for the mailing of the parallel survey and cover letter that explained the project. Both dyadic partners were alerted not to communicate about survey responses until all forms were returned.

While data collection was identical, our assessment of the scope of intergeneration influence is different than Moore et al. (2002). The aforementioned authors’ measurement of IG brand loyalty consists if, and only if, there is a direct match between the actual choice of the most preferred brand of both mother and daughter. However, exact matches do not take into account the probability of chance or bidirectionality, which the authors admit is a limitation of their research. Therefore, we chose to combine both the dyadic analysis of Moore et al. (2002) with the perceived single-member approach of their earlier predecessors (Childers and Rao 1992; Heckler, Childers, and Arunachalam 1989). Using the exact survey distributed by the Moore et al. (2002), a combination of answers allows for an alternate way to analyze intergenerational brand loyalty. Using a combination of survey items such as acknowledgement of mom’s consideration set, whether the daughter chooses from her mom’s consideration set, and actual brand preference match, we were able to conceptualize at the individual level different categorizations that account for intentional IG brand loyalty, perceived IG brand loyalty, deliberate avoidance, chance matches, and complete unfamiliarity. These new categorizations of choice data have allowed us to conceptualize IG brand loyalty as the combination of both intentional and perceived IG brand loyalty. Theoretically, we argue that even though the survey data for some mother-daughter dyads do not match in brand preference, there is still an effect of IG influence. For example, we contend that when a daughter knows her mom’s consideration set and actually chooses the brand she perceives as her mother’s preferred choice, then there is perceived brand loyalty.

We contend this data should be considered in the dyadic analysis even though the dyad does not “match” in brand preference. Likewise, these new categorizations allow us to remove matches that are considered to be a product of chance and bidirectionality. We believe the removal of these chance matches along with the addition of perceived IG brand loyalty is one initial contribution to this literature stream as it adds validity to the construct.

Finally, in addition to collecting product and brand preference information, we collected information on a number of independent variables as they relate to predicting IG brand loyalty. We hypothesize that there are direct and interaction effects of the relationships between IG brand loyalty and a number of family related variables such as mother involvement, number of siblings, and household family structure (traditional vs. non-traditional). Here, mother involvement specifically measures post hoc a daughter’s perception of actual versus desired level of involvement during the daughters’ formative years. The key to this measure is not just the amount of time that daughter and mother spend together, but also the quality of time that will have a profound impact on the nature of the mother-daughter relationship and the daughter’s desire to adopt intergenerational brands. Early results indicate that intergenerational influences increase ten percent across all product categories and brands when both intentional and perceived brand matches are included in the analysis. This suggests that IG brand loyalty is even more prevalent than originally expected. Additionally, regression analysis demonstrates that predictor variables are significant and account for a reasonable amount of variance (r-squared=.169). We believe that these results are interesting and adequately respond to the call by Moore et al. (2002) for discovering predictors of intergenerational influence. This is by no means an exhaustive list of determinants, but it is an important step in the understanding of the interactions of the familial socialization process.

References

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In this research, we examine the effects of self-construal and moral identity on company evaluations as a function of social and personal relevance of CSR activities. In a set of two studies, we find that when self construal is independent (vs. interdependent), company evaluations do not vary as a function of social (vs. personal) relevance of the CSR activity. In contrast, when self-construal is independent (vs. interdependent), high personal (vs. social) relevance of CSR activity, leads to more favorable company evaluations. In a third study, we demonstrate that social relevance interacts with symbolization dimension of moral identity to predict company evaluations.

An important objective of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities is to improve consumers’ evaluations of a company or its brands. Extant research examined the effects of CSR activity-company fit (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill 2006; Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olson 2006), fit between CSR efforts and consumer characteristics (Sen and Battacharya 2001), and consumer attributions (Ellen, Webb, and Mohr 2006; Forehand and Grier 2003; Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006) on company...
evaluations. While previous research (e.g., Sen and Bhattacharya 2001) examined personal relevance of CSR activities on company evaluations, relatively little research investigated the extent to which consumers perceive social benefits from CSR activities and how such perceptions influence company evaluations. In this research, we contribute to this growing body of literature by distinguishing between perceived social and personal relevance of CSR activities and investigating their moderating effects when self-construal and moral identity are present.

Consumers may evaluate CSR activities both from personal and social perspectives. For example, college students may perceive contributions to college (vs. primary school) education personally more relevant although both of these contributions may be evaluated equally high in terms of their social impact. A person may deeply care about arts education but may perceive efforts to address illiteracy more relevant from a social perspective.

Two key concepts that are examined in relation to perceived personal and social relevance are self-construal and moral identity. Self-construal refers to perception of one’s self either as an individual entity or in relation to others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) examined individual self-perceptions in relation to cultural identity and divided this construct into two variables, independent and interdependent. Independent individuals see themselves as stable and separate from the interpersonal context and value autonomy and uniqueness. On the other hand, interdependent individuals consider themselves more flexible and interlaced within the social context, and value maintaining group harmony. Arnocky, Stroink, and Decicco (2007) suggested that self-construal has an important role for individuals to determine what types of environmental problems concerns them. Thus, it may also affect the company evaluations based on the adopted CSR activity. We argue that self-construal has different effects on the company evaluations when the level of personal and social relevance to CSR activities changes. Because independent individuals value satisfying their own personal goals and interests, they may respond favorably to CSR activities that match their personal values. Nevertheless, independent individuals may evaluate companies similarly in terms of social relevance of CSR activities as they prioritize the conformity of CSR activities with their self interests. As interdependent individuals value group goals and interests, they may appreciate activities that have high perceived benefits to the society. On the other hand, their company evaluations may not change significantly with respect to the personal relevance of CSR activities as satisfying group interests, as opposed to their own, is more important for them. In sum, we hypothesize that

- \( H1_a \): When self-construal is independent (vs. interdependent), high personal (vs. social) relevance of CSR activity, leads to higher company evaluations.
- \( H1_b \): When self construal is independent (vs. interdependent), company evaluations should not vary as a function of social (vs. personal) relevance of the CSR activity.

Blasi (1984) and Hart (1998) described moral identity as one kind of self-regulatory mechanism which motivates moral actions. Aquino and Reed (2002) examined moral identity from two different dimensions; internalization and symbolization. Internalization is the long-term process of consolidating and embedding one’s private self-concept, one’s own beliefs, attitudes, and values. On the other hand, symbolization is the process of reflecting moral values in one’s public actions. As moral identity has a role in determining moral actions, individuals with differences in their moral identity may have variances in their company evaluations based on their CSR activities. We propose that moral identity interacts with social and personal relevance of CSR activities in different ways. Internalization represents self-importance of the moral behavior. Therefore, high internalizers may have more favorably attitudes towards companies with CSR activities that match with their personal values. Nevertheless, low internalizers have weaker associations of moral traits with their self-concept. Thus, perceived personal relevance of CSR activities may not alter their company evaluations. Symbolization captures the extent to which individuals are concerned about reflecting their moral values with their actions. As high symbolizers want to convey their moral traits with their behavior, they may have more favorable evaluations towards moral activities that are perceived highly relevant to the society. On the other hand, low symbolizers care less for showing their moral characteristics. Regardless of the social relevance of CSR activities, they may value companies equally. Thus, we hypothesize that

- \( H2_a \): When internalization (vs. symbolization) is high, high personal (vs. social) relevance of the CSR activity should lead to more favorable company evaluations.
- \( H2_b \): When internalization (vs. symbolization) is low, company evaluations should not vary as a function of personal (vs. social) relevance of the CSR activity.

We ran three experiments among undergraduate students. In these studies, participants read information about the target company and its ongoing CSR activity. In the first study, we measured personal and social relevance; independent and interdependent self-construal. In our second study, we manipulated all our variables and employed a 2 (self construal: independent vs. interdependent) x 2 (social relevance: high vs. low) x 2 (personal relevance: high vs. low) between subjects design. In both studies, findings are consistent with our hypothesis (i.e., \( H1_a \) and \( H1_b \)). In our third study, we measured moral identity, social and personal relevance. Preliminary analyses indicate that our results regarding symbolization dimension are consistent with our predictions. However, we found weak support for the significance of internalization.

References
Aliterate Consumers in the Marketplace
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The past few decades have seen “increasing numbers of capable readers who are regularly choosing not to read” (Mikulecky, 1978, p. 3), leading to what has been called an aliteracy phenomenon. Consumers are overloaded with product information in the marketplace. Unfortunately, aliterate consumers avoid much of the available information. Instead of reading the instructions for using products, they rely on trial and error (Wallendorf, 2001).

In this research, the consumer aliteracy construct is developed, including a five-item measure of consumer aliteracy. This research also explores consumer aliteracy relationships with similar consumer behavior constructs. Finally, research questions for examining the effects of consumer aliteracy in the marketplace are offered, including the effects on advertising liking and comprehension.

The Consumer Aliteracy Construct
We define consumer aliteracy as the lack of reading habit in a capable reader participating in consumer behavior activities. We conducted a focus group of twelve consumers and we conducted eight in-depth consumer interviews to investigate the domain of the consumer aliteracy construct and to generate an initial pool of 67 scale items. Fifteen expert judges (i.e., marketing faculty and doctoral students at a Midwestern university) were consulted to critique the items. Items were removed that did not demonstrate face or content validity, resulting in a reduced set of 34 scale items. The 34 items were then presented in a survey to 301 consumers, where exploratory factor analysis revealed multiple factors with which the 34 items loaded. More consultations with expert judges resulted in reducing the scale to ten by eliminating items that were context specific or that were not related to consumer behaviors.

One hundred eleven consumers completed a survey that included the ten-item scale. Exploratory factor analysis revealed two factors (λ1=4.01 and λ2=2.39), however after further consideration, one factor was deemed situation-specific (e.g., reading nutritional information on packages, and taking products off shelves to read). After the situation-specific items were removed, the remaining five items accounted for 66.36% explained variance, had inter-item correlations ranging from .399-.676, and had Cronbach’s alpha of .870. Another survey of 33 consumers confirmed the convergence of the five-items (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha=.822). The final five-items to measure consumer aliteracy are: (1) I carefully read a document before I sign it, (2) I read the terms and conditions of a sale before I buy a product, (3) I am the kind of person who reads fine print in shopping, (4) When making a purchase, I read details word for word, and (5) I carefully read all transaction information before purchasing.

The Typical Aliterate Consumer
A survey of 111 respondents (i.e., where 54% were female and 62% were white/Caucasian) at a Southeastern university revealed some insights into the consumer aliteracy construct specifically. Consumer aliteracy correlations with need for cognition and with consumer assortiveness were examined. Also, reading behaviors were examined to describe differences in aliteracy levels.

Aliterate consumers are not necessarily non-intellectuals, nor are consumer aliteracy synonymous with low need for cognition. In fact, consumer aliteracy did not significantly correlate with need for cognition2 (i.e., r=-.135, p=.163). Respondents were also measured on consumer assortiveness,3 the tendency for an individual to request information or assistance (Richins 1983). Consumer aliteracy significantly correlated with assortiveness (i.e., r=.227, p=.017). Consumers who were highly aliterate were also highly assertive, perhaps because they would rather ask for information instead of reading the information for themselves.

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2 Need for cognition scale adapted from Wood and Swait (2002)
3 Assertiveness scale adapted from Richins (1983).