Developing a Behavior-Based Measure of Online Brand-Engagement

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Based on a literature review and qualitative investigation, we define online brand engagement as the extent of conscious performance of brand-related, public, online behaviors beyond purchase and consumption. The authors develop a 6-item online brand engagement scale with three dimensions: interaction and creation. Results demonstrate scale reliability and validity.

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Developing a Behavior-Based Measure of Online Brand-Engagement

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
The authors introduce the concept of online brand-engagement, and develop a behavioral scale to assess it. Online brand-engagement is conceptualized in terms of consumers’ behaviors online about a specific brand, in contrast to previous research exploring enduring personality trait differences in general engagement with brands (Sprott et al., 2009).

While practitioner use of the term continues to grow (Levy, 2013; Posner, 2013), with jobs titles such as “Chief Brand-Engagement Officer” emerging (New York Times, 2008), advertising agencies specializing in it, and leading social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn all reporting engagement as a metric, academic progress has been largely limited to discussions of its conceptualization. In this paper we offer both a reconciliation of debate over conceptualization of online brand-engagement and an online brand-engagement scale. We develop a scale to measure this new construct, validate it along established criteria, and situate it within a nomological network (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Podsakoff, 2011).

Brand Engagement Conceptualizations In Marketing

While research exploring brand engagement is in relative infancy, important efforts have been made to conceptualize and define the construct. These efforts can be loosely categorized into two groups which we term behavioral and psychological. Behavioral conceptualizations define brand engagement entirely in terms of brand-related consumer actions. MSI (2010, pg. 4) offers the most precise definition, describing engagement as a “customer’s behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm beyond purchase”. Psychological conceptualizations view brand engagement as encompassing more than behaviors such to include psychological processes (Bowden, 2009, pg. 65). Several conceptual papers consider engagement to have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Hollebeek, 2011; Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, and Ilic, 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek, 2011; Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan, 2012).

While it is apparent researchers are making efforts to better define and conceptualize brand engagement, agreement has yet to emerge. Given the conflicting understandings of the engagement concept within marketing and its importance in constructing a valid measurement scale, we designed our first study to clarify brand engagement’s definition and dimensionality.

Study 1: Consumers’ and Experts’ Conceptions of Online Brand-Engagement

We approached our first study with two objectives: firstly establishing whether a behavioral or psychological conceptualization should be adopted, and secondly uncovering the dimensions inherent to our adopted definition. These aims naturally lead to a qualitative approach being adopted (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Insights from both consumers and academics in conjunction with the literature on brand engagement formed the data for our first study. Feedback provided offered important insights, with a more precise conceptualization, emerging. Insights were used to further refine understanding of the engagement construct.

Analysis of data generated supported a behavioral conceptualization of brand engagement, with little data supporting a more psychological or relational view of the concept. Support for emotions and cognitions as components of brand engagement also was not found. Consumers and academics alike considered affect as a possible antecedent to engagement rather than part of brand engagement itself.

Integrating the results of our qualitative investigation, we define online brand-engagement as the extent of conscious performance of brand-related public consumer behaviors online beyond purchase and consumption.

Study 2: Item Generation and Selection

In addition to deduction from our theoretical definition and earlier data, we re-explored the existing literature on brand engagement as well as conducted further literature reviews related to its dimensions of interaction and creation. From these sources we developed 41 total items that passed initial face validity checks. To further assess initial items, thirteen academics rated the content validity of each item relative to our conceptualization of online brand-engagement (following the procedure of Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg, 2009). Results and feedback were used to delete and modify items. This resulted in a revised set of 39 items.

Study 3: Item Reduction and Scale Dimensionality

Factor analysis with analysis of the scree plot indicated two factors were significant (explained variance = 70%). All items had loadings of 0.4 or higher on at least one factor. Examination of the first two factors yielded one dimension related to interaction items and a second dimension related to creation items comparable to what was found in the qualitative research.

A second sample (N = 330) employing the same methodology was conducted using the 20 items to aid in further reducing the number of items. The scree plot for this sample indicated three significant factors (explained variance = 70%). Six items loaded onto the first factor, “Interaction”, three items loaded onto the second factor, “Creation”, and two items, loaded onto the third factor, “sharing”.

Study 4: Confirming Scale Dimensionality

In Study 4 we examined the dimensionality and stability of the scale. We collect data from a new sample of consumers (N = 516). An exploratory factor analysis extracted three factors (explained variance = 81%). We also ran a confirmatory factory analysis for a three-factor model ($\chi^2 = 132.27$, $df = 32$, $p < .01$, CMIN/df = 4.13). Suggested cutoff values of 0.95 were met for NFI (0.97), CFI (0.98), and GFI (0.95) (Hu and Bentler, 1999). RMSEA of 0.08 and SRMR of 0.03 also both indicated good model fit.

Study 5: Assessing Discriminant, Nomological, and Convergent Validity

The purpose of Study 5 was to assess the extent to which our online brand-engagement construct demonstrated discriminant, nomological, and convergent validity. Results supported hypothesized relationships. Correlations between our 10-item measure of online brand-engagement and constructs expected to demonstrate discriminant validity ranged from non-significant to 0.19. Correlation with constructs expected to demonstrate nomological validity ranged from 0.27 to 0.46. The strongest correlations with our 10-item online brand-engagement scale were found with the single-measure forms of online brand-engagement.
Conclusion
Our work makes several contributions. First, we resolve debate over the conceptualization of online brand-engagement and clearly situate it within the behavioral realm. Second, through a multi-stage qualitative investigation we develop a grounded definition and dimensionalization of the construct. Finally, we develop and validate a scale to measure online brand-engagement at a brand-specific level.

REFERENCES
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Brand name-dropping—the act of explicitly mentioning brands in a conversation—appears commonplace in society. From the music industry and social media to television shows and everyday consumer interactions, brands appear to often find their way into conversations. A number of these brands appear to be expensive and prestigious brands. In this work we examine how brand name-dropping of expensive and prestige brands affect observers’ perceptions of the actor (i.e., name dropper). With few exceptions (Ferraro, Kirmani, and Matherly 2013), little work has studied conspicuous brand usage, which includes the more specific act of brand name-dropping.

At one level, brand name-dropping can be viewed as a specific instance of or means of displaying status, commonly referred to as conspicuous consumption. As discussed by Thorstein Veblen (1899), a central idea behind conspicuous consumption is to portray one’s wealth to others. More than a century later, a renewed interest has emerged in the benefits of conspicuous consumption with respect to its signaling value (Griskevicius et al. 2007; Nelissen and Meijers 2011; Sundie et al. 2011; Wang and Griskevicius 2014) and means of addressing psychological needs, such as a desire for power and status (Rucker and Galinsky 2008, 2009; see also Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky 2012). This prior work suggests that conspicuous consumption is largely positive or produces favorable social outcomes. However, recent work introduces the notion that conspicuous consumption carries with it social costs such as negative attitudes toward the consumer (Ferraro et al. 2013). These two streams of work produce an interesting tension as to when conspicuous brand name-dropping produces positive versus negative consequences. The present work provides theoretical scaffolding for understanding when displaying one’s brand has positive versus negative outcomes and helps explain the complexities of conspicuous brand name-dropping.

Whereas past research has studied individual signals of conspicuous consumption with regard to increased status or decreased likeability, we build on the multi-dimensional perception of social categories such as the warmth-competence perspective of person perception (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007) and the more general framework of agency-communion (Bakan 1966; Abele and Wojciszke 2014) assertiveness, decisiveness. We introduce a novel dual-attribution model for conspicuous brand name-dropping. In support of our model, and inconsistent with alternative models considered (e.g., halo effects), we find people perceive the conspicuous brand name-dropper as having higher status and lower likeability compared with no brand name-dropping. Moreover, we demonstrate the social consequences of conspicuous brand name-dropping depend on the signal that is more diagnostic for the situation. Furthermore, we demonstrate that brand name-dropping does not inevitably lower likeability and increase status; in fact, sometimes the opposite occurs with brand name-dropping increasing likability but lowering status. We outline four supporting experiments below.

Experiment 1

Participants (N = 194) were assigned to read an ostensibly real blog post, which described an individual’s night out at a club, with reference to either conspicuous brand names or just the products. In both conditions, the individual did not own the mentioned brand or product. We find that participants perceived the target individual to have higher status (F(1, 190) = 30.81, p < .001) but lower likeability (F(1, 190) = 6.40, p = .012) after conspicuous brand name-dropping, compared with the no name-dropping condition. This experiment sets the stage for exploring when brand name-dropping may have negative or positive consequences.

Experiment 2

The second experiment aimed to show when brand name-dropping would have negative social consequences (i.e., when communality or likeability is important). Participants (N = 101) were assigned to read a job applicant profile with either conspicuous brands or products mentioned in the hobbies section for an account manager position, which required “maintaining relationships with different clients”. We find that conspicuous brand name-dropping negatively impacted the candidate’s likelihood of being hired for a job position (β = -0.56, t(99) = -2.92, SE = .19, p = .004), mediated by applicant likeability (95% CI around the mediator [-1.21, -0.60]).

Experiment 3

The third experiment aimed to show when brand name-dropping would have positive social benefits (i.e., when agency or status is important). Participants (N = 118) were assigned to rate the likelihood of admitting potential customers into an exclusive nightclub. Half read statements from the customers with conspicuous brand names mentioned while the other half read the same information with just the product name. As expected, we show that conspicuous brand name-dropping positively impacted the potential customer’s likelihood of being admitted into the nightclub (β = 0.71, t(116) = 4.09, SE = .17, p < .001), mediated by perceived status (95% CI around the mediator [.02, .29]).

Experiment 4

This final study demonstrates a boundary condition for the effects of brand name-dropping. Participants (N = 101) were assigned to read excerpts from ostensibly real interviews. Half read about interviewees who brand name-drop by bragging about owning the brand while the other half read similar information with the brand name-dropping construed as aspirational by talking about future ownership of the brand. We test and confirm the hypothesis that the perception of high status and low likeability observed in experiments 1-3 are reversed when the brand name-dropper is perceived as aspirational rather than as bragging (F(1, 93) = 78.24, p < .001).

The present work offers several contributions. First, we demonstrate evidence for a dual attribution model of brand name-dropping. As such, we demonstrated that, depending on the social context and what signals are diagnostic of the situation, conspicuous brand name-dropping has predictably favorable or unfavorable outcomes for the consumer. Critically, these effects are not inevitable; the status and likeability attributions are reversed when the brand name-dropper is perceived as aspirational rather than as bragging. These results resolve what might be viewed as contrasting findings in the conspicuous consumption literature via the introduction of a more integrated framework.