Activating Multiple Facets of the Self: How Identity Facets and Brand Personality Can Influence Self-Brand Connections

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The authors use the facets of identity to investigate their impact on self-brand connections. Two studies address how different identity facets can lead to higher connections with a certain brand personality. The results suggest that the match-up between identity facets and brand personality dimensions will lead to stronger self-brand connections.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Nowadays, it is crucial for companies to connect more with consumers and to create emotional brand connections (Malär et al. 2011). Brand managers need to understand how people can express themselves and reflect their identities through their product consumption. Previous research has demonstrated that individuals can use brands to identify with a specific reference group (Escalas and Bettman 2005), to differentiate themselves from undesired groups (Berger and Heath 2007) and to boost their self-esteem (Sirgy 1982).

In this perspective, it is important to understand how brand personality can relate to the different facets of the individuals to increase the self-brand connections. For example, does the rugged brand personality of Harley-Davidson reach more the dissociative part of our identities, while the exciting aspect of Apple trigger more the in-group identification of consumers? Drawing on the literature on identity literature, this paper investigates the effects of the desired facet of identity on the self-brand connections for different brand personalities to determine how brands can focalize on the bonding between the brand and the self-concept.

Consumers can relate and create connections with brands through its brand personality (Aaker et al. 2004; Fournier 1998). Choice of a brand with a particular personality can be a tool for consumers to express their actual self, aspirational self or other distinct components of the self (Belk 1988; Swaminathan et al. 2007). These aspects allow individuals to create connections and maintain relationships with brands. Self-brand connection is the degree to which an individual has incorporated a brand into his or her self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003). When consumers associate themselves with a brand to construct or communicate the self to others, they form a connection with the brand (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Based on the reasoning above, we propose that the influence of identity aspect on brand-self connection is moderated by the brand personality. Consequently, the influence of the individual actual self on self-brand connections is stronger for sincere brands (H1) compared to other brand personalities. The influence of the individual ideal self on self-brand connections is stronger for sophisticated brands (H2). The influence of the desired groups on self-brand connections is stronger for exciting brands (H3), while the effect of out-group dissociations is stronger for rugged brands (H4). Finally, the effect of role identity on connections with brands is stronger for competent brands (H5).

In the first study, a survey (N=823) was conducted with 20 real brands identified as representing strongly one dimension of the brand personality in two pretests. Participants were randomly assigned to one brand that represents a particular brand personality. In this survey, the results confirm a strong positive relationship between the identity facets and self-brand connections. Indeed, actual self (B=0.292, p<.001), ideal self (B=0.135, p<.001), identified groups (B=0.212, p<.001), and role identity (B=0.249, p<.001) positively influence connections with brands. However, in the general model, out-group differentiation (B=0.029, p=0.12) doesn’t have a significant influence on self-brand connections.

In terms of the moderating effect of brand personality, the results supported a positive moderating effect of brand personality on the relationship between the different facets and self-brand connections. First, actual self-congruence has a positive effect for all the brand personalities. Even if this effect is positive for exciting brands (B=0.295, p<.001), sophisticated brands (B=0.240, p<.01), rugged brands (B=0.333, p<.001) and competent brands (B=0.154, p<.01), this effect becomes even stronger for brands that are associated with sincere brands (0.672, p<.001). To statistically test the significance of this moderating effect, the authors used the chi-square difference test (X^2|SiA=24.11, ∆ d.f. 4, p<.01, supporting H1). Ideal self-congruence, however, has a significant positive effect only for brands that are sophisticated (B=0.307, p<.01) and has no significant effect on other brand personalities, in support of H2. Here, the chi-square difference is significant (X^2|Sol=25.94, ∆ d.f. =4 p<.05).

In-group association has positive effect on exciting brands (B=0.433, p<.001), and rugged brands (B=164, p<.001), but has no significant effect on other brand personalities. However, our results indicate a stronger impact of in-group association on self-brand connections for exciting brands compared to the other brand personalities (X^2|ExG=15.29, ∆ d.f. =4 p<.05). In terms of out-groups dissociation, this factor, however, has a significant positive effect only for brands that are rugged (B=0.334, p<.001). In support of H4, the chi-square difference test with ∆ d.f. = 1 is highly significant at a 0.01 level (X^2|RuOA=48.18, ∆ d.f. 4). Finally, role identity has a positive and significant effect only on sincere brands (B=0.154, p<.01), sophisticated brands (B=0.236, p<.01) and competent brands (B=0.662, p<.001), but has no effect on exciting brands and rugged brands. In support of H5, the chi-square difference test demonstrate that this effect of role identity is stronger for competent brands (X^2|CR=31.99, ∆ d.f. =4, p<.01). All these differences demonstrate that brand personality can relatively increase the impact of the different facets of identity as a driver of self-brand connections.

In the second study, the authors manipulated brand personality by asking people to think about a brand that has traits related to a specific brand personality (N=164). Similar to Study 1, all the identity facets have strong positive relationship with self-brand connections, except out-group differentiation (B=0.044, p=0.367). Specifically, actual self-congruence (B=0.308, p<.01), ideal self (B=0.250, p<.01), in-group associations (B=0.242, p<.01), and role identity (B=0.163, p<.01) positively influence consumers connections with brands. The results also demonstrate that the brand personality moderates the impact of identity facets on self-brand connections. Comparable to study 1, the impact of actual self-congruence on self-brand connections was stronger for sincere brands, while ideal self-congruence has a positive effect on sophisticated brands, in-group on exciting brands, out-group differentiation on rugged brands and role identity on competent brands. This second study also suggests that the match-up between the right brand personality and the identity facet will result in deeper and richer self-brand connections.

In conclusion, the present research expands our knowledge about the role of self-expression motivations and motives by demonstrating that its effects on self-brand connections for different brand personalities. The present results demonstrate that managers should consider the congruence between consumers’ identity and their brand personality to create stronger connections with the consumers.
REFERENCES