Who Determines the Ideal Self?: a Comparative Analysis of Non-Verbal Communication

Junko Kimura, Hosei University, Japan
Mototaka Sakashita, Keio University, Japan

Consumers usually determine the favorable images of their own ideal selves; however, in some unique contexts like mother-daughter relationships, daughters’ ideal self images are determined not by the daughters themselves, but by their own mothers. In this exploratory study, six female university students were recruited to discuss about their ideal self images in catalogue shopping activities twice, one with their close female friends and one with their mothers. Analysis of non-verbal communication revealed the different nature of the ideal self determination processes. The process was characterized as “coercive” in mother-daughter relationships; in contrast, it was “collaborative” in friend-daughter relationships.

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which they needed to spend in our online t-shirt shop. Difference tests on Fisher r-to-z transformations fully supported our hypothesis. The correlation, for instance, between need for public recognition and intended purchase behavior for the signaling brand was .41 (p<.05) when both the signaling and unwanted brand had explicit brand logos. This correlation was significantly higher than when both brands had no brand logos (r=.08, p>.1; zdiff=1.98, p<.05).

The results of these three studies add important insights to identity signaling theory. We clearly showed that individual differences and situational factors must be studied jointly instead of separately. As shown in our third study, the effect of individual differences on identity signaling is only activated in a specific situation. In future research, we will incorporate additional situational factors and individual difference variables (e.g. self-esteem). Another interesting avenue for further research concerns the question how identity signaling works for symbolic products that are less visible for the general public (e.g. pajamas, bathroom accessories, ...).

### Selected References

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Mototaka Sakashita, Keio Business School, Japan

### Extended Abstract
Self-concept must be treated as having two components; the actual self-concept and the ideal self-concept. Ideal self-concept is defined as the image of oneself as one would like to be. The ideal self-concept has been referred to as the “ideal self,” “idealized image,” and “desired self” (Sirgy 1982). Consumers hold their own ideal self images, and often try to alter their appearance by changing their outfits, in order to get closer to those images. Ideal self is the self-concept where an individual puts the highest value (Rogers 1959). Consumers use purchasing in order to approach their ideal self (Belk 1988; McCracken 1988). A desirable self-concept can be created through consumption, and it can also be extended into products. (Belk 1988; Schouten 1991). Most scholars seem to agree that the term “self-concept” denotes the “totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to him as an object” (Rosenberg 1979). Actual self refers to how a person perceives herself. Ideal self refers to how a person would like to perceive herself. Social self refers to how a person presents herself to others.

Since the concept of ideal self is highly important to the consumers, they independently search for their ideal self-image, and often decide on it. When they decide on their ideal self, their significant others approve it. Significant others are specific others who influence the self-formation of consumers. Parents and teachers can be significant others; also, friends, classmates, and mass media can become such influential people (Mead 1934). They have long proposed that parents are the most influential socializing agents for their children (Cooley 1902; Sullivan 1947; Turner 1962).

Mothers might be significant socializers for their daughters and control them by using social power. Social power consists of reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power (French and Raven 1959). Significant others may not only approve of the ideal self that the consumers decided on, but also optionally decide on the consumers’ ideal self itself. It seems reasonable to look at mothers as primary socializing agents for the formation of their daughters’ attitudes (Bohannon and Blanton 1999). The ideal self determination process under mother-daughter situation can be described as “coercive,” since the mother has already formed a clear idea of her daughter’s ideal self image prior to the shopping experience. Here, the mother tries to force her daughter to accept whatever ideal self image she has. According to Nobuta and Ueno (2008), in contemporary Japan, identification with mothers does not simply mean identifying with the actual existing mothers. Mothers try to get their daughters to identify with their ideal self.

Female friendship is affective. Women expect their female friends to feel and react in the same manner as they do (Wheeler & Nezlek 1977). Female friends mutually request sympathy from the other party. Sympathy can be created by self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is to observe whether one’s expression, action or self-presentation of one’s self is socially appropriate. In female friendship context, one’s behavior is modified according to the other’s reaction (Snyder 1974). The ideal self determination process under friend-daughter situation can be described as “collaborative,” since the daughter and her female friend are both engage in the daughter’s ideal self determination process.

We set our proposition: a different nature of relationship results in a different ideal self determination process. Specifically, in a mother-daughter relationship, the mother has already decided on the daughter’s ideal self before the actual process starts. The mother then forces her daughter to accept her own idea. This is called a “coercive process”, and the entire process is often omitted. In the friend-daughter relationship, the friend and the daughter act as if they mutually sympathize to the other, and cooperatively decide on the daughter’s ideal self. This is called a “collaborative process”, where they even enjoy spending time together until they reach to the daughter’s desirable ideal self.
We use interpretive approach and directly observe actions at catalogue shopping of mother-daughter pair and friend-daughter pair. We conducted a unique comparative analysis of the collected quantity data; using three types of Non Verbal Communication (NVC), we compared frequencies of those NVC in each pair and interpret them with supplemental verbal data. The study consists of [STUDY 1] and [STUDY 2], and there were twelve sets of pair altogether. Six daughters participated in both studies. The daughters brought her mothers for [STUDY 1] to form M-D relationship condition. Under this context, they performed the daughter’s ideal self decision process. Not only verbal data but also nonverbal data were collected because the Japanese people tend to use many subtle body language cues in daily conversation.

Results of the comparative analysis were consistent with the proposition. Important future research directions were addressed.

References

Narcissists as Consumers: Using Scarce Products to Validate Excessively Positive Self-View
Seung Yun Lee, McGill University, Canada
Sung Hoon Park, Yonsei University, Korea

Extended Abstract
Narcissists can be defined as people who can be characterized as self-centered, self-aggrandizing, dominant, and manipulative. Recently, narcissism as an individual difference dimension has been operationalized as a higher scorer on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Several researchers have shown interest in the characteristic and behavior patterns of narcissists as consumers. They proposed that narcissists as consumers are likely to purchase prestigious and exclusive products to sustain and elevate their self-esteem. That is to say, narcissism can drive people to purchase highly exclusive and luxurious products because the consumptions of such products potentially serve as a means of validating excessively positive self-views. As a result, narcissists may, in order to validate their excessively positive self-views, try to purchase prestigious and exclusive products which are believed to have higher symbolic values than other products. In so doing, they try to regulate their own self-esteem by increasing their apparent status, hence obtaining others’ admiration and envy. Past research suggests that when narcissistic consumers make a choice, they may have much higher tendency to sacrifice utilitarian aspects for obtaining symbolic ones, compared to non-narcissistic consumers. That is, for narcissists as consumers, it may not be important whether a product will serve their own practical needs or not. The utilitarian value of a product is likely to be of lesser importance to them, whereas a product’s symbolic value is of greater importance.

Scarcity can be defined as insufficiency of product supply or time of availability. Past research suggests that consumers can use scarcity as a cue (i.e. “What is rare is good”) for good value, whereby they infer that a highly scarce product must be more valuable than a less scarce product. The underlying mechanism for this inference of scarcity as value is based on the assumption that people tend to desire uniqueness. In this case, people evaluate scarce products as being more valuable because they believe that possessing something scarce can produce positive feelings of personal uniqueness. In the present research, we show that narcissistic individuals are more likely to sacrifice utilitarian aspects in order to obtain others’ admiration and envy, albeit at the cost of utilitarian aspects, compared to non-narcissistic counterparts, because they believe that the possession of a scarce product can show their own exclusive uniqueness, hence validating their excessively self-positive view through such consumption.

In study 1, we propose that for consumers with high narcissism (HN), scarcity will have strong positive effect on product evaluation, while consumers with low narcissism (LN) are less unaffected by scarcity (H1). One hundred participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (Scarcity: High versus Low) between-subject design. Participants were asked to complete the forty–item (α=.92) questionnaire from Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), with the purpose of assessing the participants’ propensity for self-narcissism. Consistent with other studies in this area, participants scoring in the top third of the NPI were considered as having high narcissism and those who scored in the bottom third of the NPI were considered as having low narcissism. After then, participants were presented with a hypothetical retail scenario, which included an ad for a wristwatch. The ad manipulated scarcity, in terms of limited quantities. The independent variable of product evaluation was measured by an item assessing willingness to pay (WTP). We predicted and found that participants with HN reported higher WTP toward the product promoted with scarcity claim than that without scarcity claim (M=$163.73 vs. $80.91, t(35)=2.63, p=.012). However, this effect did not happen for LN participants (M=$90.26 vs. $83.12, t(33)=.355, p=.725). This result indicates that HN consumers have a stronger desire for a scarce product, compared to LN counterparts.