

SELF-CONTINUITY AND CONSUMER IN-ROLE AND EXTRA-ROLE BEHAVIOR: THE ROLE OF CONSUMER-BRAND IDENTIFICATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The past decade bears witness to a growing interest in consumer-brand identification (CBI), motivated by the positive outcomes that can emerge from such psychological connections (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012; Tuskej et al. 2011). Although previous studies on CBI have provided important insights, three limitations are apparent. First, little research has examined the direct impact of CBI on consumers' extra-role behavior (i.e. resilience to negative information). Second, regardless of the importance of CBI as a powerful predictor of consumer behavior (Lam et al. 2012), much less is understood about the drivers of CBI (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). Finally, the intervention of mediating variables between CBI and its drivers have not been exclusively explored.

This paper proposes that entering volitionally into enduring relationships with brands may be attributed to self-verification theory. The basic premise underlying this theory is that people are motivated to verify, confirm and maintain their positive as well as negative self-concepts (Swan 1983). Self-verification or self-continuity leads to positive self-evaluations and positive evaluations toward the others and thus facilitating attachment to the other (Burke and Stets 1999). Marketing scholars postulate that self-continuity need is increasingly met through customers' perceptions of congruence or similarity between their own self-concept and that of brand associations (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Lam et al. 2012). While most of

the previous research on self–brand congruity focuses on brand personality (Lam et al. 2012), other research has suggested that values and other brand customers/users can also play an important role in enhancing consumer-brand relationships (Zhang and Bloemer 2008; Karaosmanoglu et al. 2011). Thus, we argue that both value congruence and customer-to-customer similarity, as enablers of self-verification, help forge consumers' identification to the brand, which in turn enhances consumer in-role behavior (i.e. brand loyalty) and extra-role behavior (i.e. resilience to negative information). Moreover, we extend previous research by examining brand attractiveness as a mediator of the effect of both value congruence and customer-to-customer similarity on CBI.

We sampled consumers from a large metropolitan area in the Midlands of UK, using a mall intercept technique. Participants were asked to complete the survey with respect to their favorite brand in two product categories: Mobile phones and TVs, resulting in 293 complete responses (NTV = 135; Mobile Phone=158). The data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach for structural equation modelling with SmartPLS. The composite reliability values ranged from .84 to .90, indicating high levels of internal consistency. The resulting levels of the factor loadings were significant and AVEs greater than .60, providing empirical support for convergent validity. Discriminant validity was supported, as the lowest AVE value was .60 which is greater than the largest squared correlation of .435. Our results showed that value congruence has the greatest influence on CBI, followed by customer-to-customer similarity that has similar magnitude to that of brand attractiveness. Unlike customer-to customer similarity, value congruence had no significant relationship with brand attractiveness. Further, the results showed that brand attractiveness only partially mediated the relationship between customer-to-customer similarity and CBI. Lastly, compared to consumers' in-role behavior (i.e. brand loyalty), CBI had a stronger effect on consumers' extra-role behavior (i.e. resilience to negative information).

At the theoretical level, this study advances our understanding of consumer-brand relationships in three aspects. First, we build on previous CBI literature by introducing value congruence and customer-to-customer similarity as important drivers of CBI. Most importantly, the findings support self-verification theory arguments (Swann 1983), where consumers are willing to form strong relationships with a brand that verifies who they are. Another contribution of this research is that, with the application of similarity–attraction paradigm (Byrne 1971) to branding context, it is possible to explain why consumers are attracted to some brands and not others. Further, to our knowledge, our study is the first to investigate the mediating role of brand attractiveness in the relationship between both value congruence and customer-to-customer similarity and CBI. Third, our findings reveal that CBI triggers not only classic loyalty behavior, but also influences consumers' extra-role behavior. Hence, an important implication of our findings is that CBI construct deserves more attention in marketing research.

This research has some important implications for managers regarding consumer-brand relationships. First, the results provide building blocks upon which managers may engender CBI and increase the likelihood of experiencing in-role and extra-role behavior from their customers. As value congruence turns out to be the strongest direct influence of CBI, companies must set its sights on creating the greatest possible congruence between the values of its target market and its brand. According to our study, the results invite managers to account for the impact of other customers when developing their targeting and positioning strategies as users of the brand can act as informational cues about the brand's identity. The empirical results propose that a company can proactively enhance CBI to protect itself from the impact of negative information before it occurs. Moreover, our research findings demonstrate that strengthening consumers' identification is likely to favorably influence their loyalty to the brand. References are available upon request.