INVESTIGATE OF EFFECT OF BRAND ANTECEDENTS AND INDIVIDUAL ANTECEDENTS ON CONSUMER BRAND IDENTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Consumer – company identification is a new issue in the marketing. In this article the distinction between consumer brand identification and organizational identification is developed. We develop the different antecedents of consumer brand identification. In this research a survey approach was taken among the students and they answered questions including brand antecedents, individual antecedents, brand loyalty and consumer- brand identification. From the analysis of results it was found brand antecedents was related to consumer – brand identification also, consumer – brand identification was related to brand loyalty, brand antecedents and individual antecedents were related to brand loyalty. The findings of this study would be useful for the managers to have a better understanding of valuable factors for consumer.

Keywords: Social identity theory, Consumer-brand identification, Consumer behavior, Branding, Self-image congruence, Loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

Tajfel & et al (1979): Drawing from social identity theory and organizational identification research (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) in their germinal paper argued that a key to the formation of strong relationships amongst consumers and companies is based on the concept of identification where consumers associate and identify themselves with companies to convince one or more of their self-definitional needs.

CBI has been measured using scales conform from OI research (e.g. Mael et al., 1992). First, they do not represent some of the unique aspects that bind consumers to brands (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2008). Second, OI scales lack validity and fail to reflect the multidimensional nature of identification as indicated by Tajfel's (1981) original definition of public identity (Edwards et al., 2007). As indicated by Rikketa (2005) in his recent meta-analysis of OI, lacking a clear, precise and agreed conceptualization and operationalization of reconnaissance can hinder experimental progress in the field. However, OI scales suffer from serious shortcomings. Therefore, there is a need for rigorous operationalization of CBI, with precise and clear theoretical conceptualization, relevant and linked to how the build is defined. In light of these shortcomings, the aim of this research is threefold: First, we build on social identity theory (henceforth referred to as SIT) to develop a clear theory-derived definition of CBI. latter, we develop a valid, reliable and parsimonious scale for measuring CBI. Third, we propose a conceptual model of the precedent and consequences of CBI.

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Social Identity Theory and its Applicability in a Branding Context

The main presumption of SIT (Tajfel, 1978) is that the self-concept is comprised of a personal identity encompassing particular personal attributes and a social identity defined as "that part of an individual‗s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance dependent to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p.255). This social categorization allows individuals not only to cognitively segment, classify and order the social environment but moreover provide them a means to define themselves and others (Tajfel et al., 1979). The other part of the theory is the tenet that individuals strive to achieve a positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) either by trying to enhance their personal identity and/or their social identity (Edwards, 2005). In line with SIT, OI research proposed that formal membership is not a perquisite for reconnaissance (Scott & Lane, 2000) as in the case of consumers and their companies (Bhattarchya et al., 2003). Thus, Bhattarchya and Sen (2003) proposed that consumers may identify with companies that embody attractive social identities to satisfy one or more of their key self-definitional needs. Following the same logic, the concept of reconnaissance can be extended to consumer-brands relationships given the following reasons. First, brands can represent positive, attractive and meaningful social categories to which consumers can identify with or classify themselves as belonging to (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998). Second, a company may have multiple brands with different personalities so the focus of identification in case of companies may not be obvious (Tidesley & Coote, 2009). In addition, brands may be more appropriate than companies for consumers to identify with given that brands are more familiar to consumers than companies.

Reconceptualization of Consumer-Brand Identification

Following from an earlier discussion; within the social identity definition, three components of reconnaissance can be distinguished: (1) a evaluative aspect which is the sense that this notification of membership is related to some value connotations assigned to the group, (2) an cognitive component which is the sense of notification and acceptance of being a member of a social group, and (3) an emotional dimension which describes the emotional investment in this notification and assessment (Tajfel,1982). In addition, Tajfel elaborated that in order to achieve the stage of identification with a social group, the cognitive and evaluative components are necessary and the emotional component is repeatedly associated with them. Therefore, based on the preceding literature and upon reflection of SIT, CBI is defined in this research as the gauge to which the brand is incorporated into one's self-concept through the development of cognitive connection with the brand, valuing this connection with the brand, and the emotional addendum to the brand.

Proposed Components of Consumer-Brand Identification

Evaluative CBI

Social identities have self-evaluative subsequences i.e. social categories to which one belongs carry distinct degrees of positive and negative value for the self (Turner et al., 1994). Social identities may be positive or negative based on how one evaluates one's social group and how one comprehend others' evaluate those groups (Luhtanen et al, 1992). Dutton et al. (1994) proposed that organizations can have positive and negative effects on a member's sense of self. Research also suggests that people disassociate themselves from brands with negative meanings as identifying with those brands will outcome in negative assessment for one's self (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Therefore, a CBI measure must take into account the impact of consumer's connection to a brand on self-evaluation. Evaluative CBI in this research refers to the degree to which

Cognitive CBI

Van Dick (2001): According to SIT, the cognitive component of identification refers to the individual's self- categorization to a social category which prepare a partial definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the group (Hogg et al., 1995). There appears to be a consensus that as the outcome of this self-categorization, a cognitive connection is developed amongst the individual and the social category to which one belongs (Bergami & et al, 2000). It has also been argued that when brand associations are used to manufacture the self-concept or communicate it to others or to themselves; a cognitive connection is formed with brand (Escalas & et al, 2003). For example a consumer who is highly involved with cars is more likely to identify with a brand like BMW to satisfy one or more of his self-definitional needs than a consumer who is not highly involved with cars in general. a measure of CBI must consider the consumers' cognitive connection to the brand to reflect their social identity and social categorization. Cognitive CBI in this research refers to the gauge to which consumers' categorize themselves in terms of a particular brand and label themselves as an exemplar of that category.

consumers' value their connection with the brand and the perceived value placed on this connection by others.

Affective CBI

The emotional component of identification, which is repeatedly associated with the other two aspects, refers to the emotional addendum to the group and to those assessment associated with the group (Tajfel, 1982). In line with this proposition, Park and colleagues (2010) proposed that sentimentality are evoked when self-brand connection is strong including anguish from self–brand separation and happiness from self-brand proximity. Additionally, it has been argued that emotional addendum tends to be stronger in more positively evaluated groups as these groups contribute more to affirmative social identity (Ellemers et al., 1999). Fournier (1998) proposed that emotional relationships emerge only when brands become integrated into consumers' lives and identity projects. Therefore, a measure of CBI must consider the emotional addendum the consumer develops with the brand. Affective CBI in this research refers to the individual's feelings toward the brand and toward other assessment of the brand.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework proposes that brand prestige and brand distinctiveness will stimulate the gauge to which consumers recognize with the brand to convince their self enhancement and self distinctiveness needs. Additionally, self-image congruence and functional congruence will enhance consumers' identification with the brand.

Figure1. The PLS Algorithm Results precedent to Consumer-Brand Identification

Brand Precedent

The notion that consumers buy products to enhance their self-esteem is well acknowledged in consumer behavior literature (e.g. Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) proposes that individuals strive to enhance their self-esteem which is based on the degree that one's social groups are valued and compared favorably relative to relevant out-groups. Bagozzi and Bergami, In line with this (2000) propose that members' fulfil their self-enhancement needs if they perceive that important others believe that their organization is well regarded (i.e. respected, prestigious, and well-known). In other words, people identify with prestigious companies to maintain and enhance their self-esteem and positive social their identity by viewing themselves in the company's reflected glory (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Therefore, the greater the brand is perceived as prestigious by consumers, the more likely consumers identify with the brand to enhance their self-esteem. Hence:

H1: The greater prestigious the consumers perceive a brand, the higher the identification with that brand.

Distinctiveness relates to how the organization is different from other organizations thus providing a more salient definition to its members (Mael et al., 1992). SIT posits that people seek to enhance and maintain their social identity by associating with groups that are perceived to be distinctive or positively differentiated from relevant out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Borrowing from SIT, Dutton et al., (1994) asserted that organizational members who believe that their organization is distinctive relative to other organizations presumably to identify with their organization. Hence, consumers should perceive a stronger identification with distinctive brands. Therefore:

H2: The greater distinctive the consumers perceive a brand, the higher the identification with that brand.

Individual Precedent

Self-congruity is guided by self-consistency motives, whereby the greater the similarity between the brand user-image or brand personality and the consumer's self-concept the higher the self congruity. Self-image congruence refers to the match between the consumer's self-concept and the brand's personality (Kressman et al., 2006). In OI research, Dutton and colleagues (1994) have indicated that people generally want to maintain self-consistency over time and across situations. Self-consistency allows people not only to process and understand the information easily but also provides easy opportunities to express themselves. They proposed that the more similarity between the organizational identity and the individuals' self-concept, the more they identify with the organization.

H3: The greater the self-congruity with a brand, the higher the identification with that brand.

Functional congruity refers to the gauge to which functional attributes of the brand matches the consumer's expectations regarding how the product should perform to accomplish the central goal of the product (Kressman et al., 2006). Functional congruity is guided by utilitarian motive. Bhattacharya et al., (1995) argued that the more the organization fulfills the members' personal goals, the greater is the identification. Mael and Ashforth (1992) have found that satisfaction with the alma mater's contribution to the attainment of students' goals is associated with identification. Thus, it is proposed here that the greater the functional congruity with a brand, the more likely to identify with a brands. Therefore:

H4: The greater the functional congruity with a brand, the higher the identification with that brand.

The scope in which brand precedent and individual precedent supply brand identification is likely to be emphasized when consumers are highly involved with the product category. For example a consumer who has high involvement with cars is more likely to identify with a brand like BMW to satisfy one or more of his self-definitional needs than a consumer who is not highly involved with cars in general. As such:

H5: The greater the consumer-brand identification, the higher the brand loyalty.

Brand Loyalty: Researchers (e.g. Bhattacharya et al., 1995) have stated that identification is related with members' commitment by means of reduced turnover in organizations and extra role behavior in terms of financial support in the context of non-profit institutions. Analogously, consumers who identify with brands are more likely to support their brand by repeating the brand purchase, long-term preference for the brand and willingness to pay a price premium, as they have a vested interest in the success of their brands for the benefits that accrue to them. Therefore:

H6: moderates the effect of (a) brand prestige, (b) brand distinctiveness, (c) self-image congruence and (d) functional congruence on consumer-brand identification.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

In this research, data collection was done in university among the students. All first, the questionnaires were distributed among 500 students of Qazvin Azad university. 70 questionnaires were removed because of technical problems, and 430 questionnaires were returned usable. 5 point Likert type scale was used in questionnaires. The Cronbach's alpha of reliability was than 0.7 for different variables.

Measures

For evaluating the variable constructs, participants were asked to rank a list of items on the Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Brand prestige, brand distinctiveness and congruence self-image were each measured by asking 3 questions. Functional congruence was evaluated with 4 questions. Brand loyalty was measured by asking 3 questions. Cognitive, evaluative an affective consumer-brand identification were each measured by asking 3 questions.

RESULTS

To test the model developed we used the partial Least squares (PLS) approach. PLS is a second generation multivariate technique (Fornell and Cha, 1994) which can simultaneously evaluate the measurement model (the relationships between constructs and their corresponding indicators), and the structural model with the aim of minimizing the error variance (Chin, 1998; Gil-Garcia, 2008). Smart PLS M2 Version 2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005) to analyze the data. Also following the suggestions of (Chin, 1998; Gil-Garcia, 2008) we used the bootstrapping method (700 resamples) to determine the significance levels for loadings, and path coefficients

Measurement Model

Convergent validity is the degree to which multiple items to measure the same concept are in agreement. As suggested by Hair et al. (2010) we used the factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted to assess convergence validity. The recommended values for loadings are set at > 0.5, the average variance extracted (AVE) should be > 0.5 and the composite reliability (CR) should be > 0.7. From Figure 1 it can be seen that we have Brand Antecedents, Individual Antecedents and Consumer-brand Identification as second order constructs. Thus we followed the method suggested in the literature in PLS which is the repeated indicator approach to model the second order factors in the PLS analysis. From table 1 it can be seen that the results of the measurement model exceeded the recommended values thus indicating sufficient convergence validity.

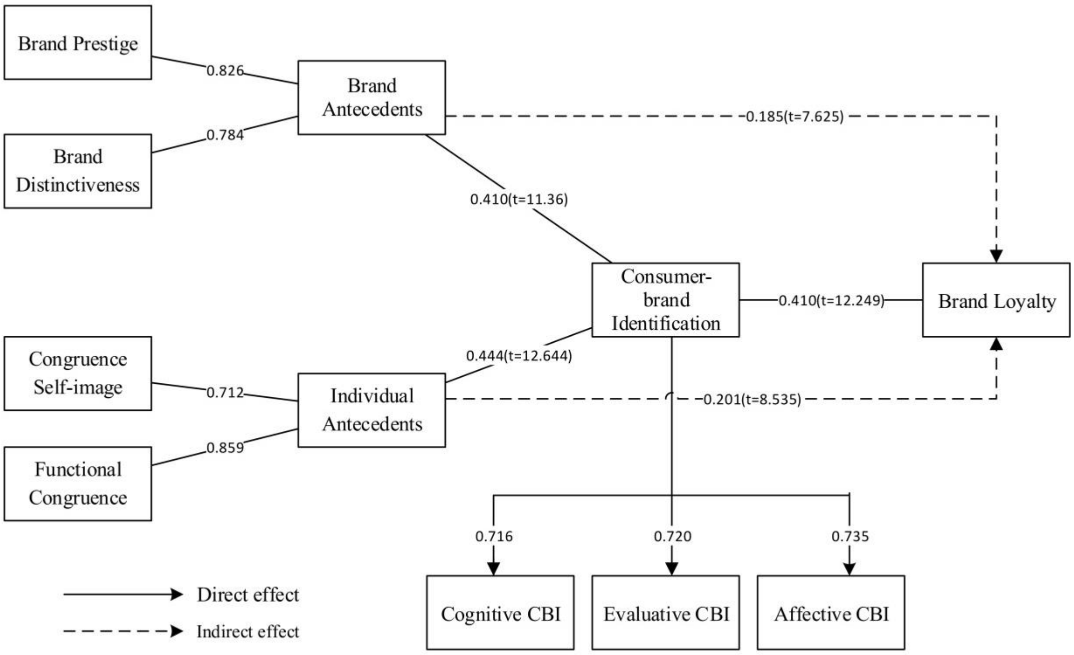
Brand Prestige
0.826
Brand Antecedents
Brand Distinctiveness
0.784
0.185(t=7.625)
0.410(t=11.36)
Consumer-brand Identification
0.410(t=12.249)
Brand Loyalty
0.444(t=12.644)
Congruence Self-image
0.712
Individual Antecedents
0.201(t=8.535)
Functional Congruence
0.859
0.716
0.720
0.735
Direct effect
Indirect effect
Cognitive CBI
Evaluative CBI
Affective CBI

Figure1. The PLS Algorithm Results

Table 1. Measurement Model

	Constructs	*Item*	*Factor Loadings*	*AVE*	*CR*	*CA*
First Order Constructs	Brand Prestige	BP1	0.897	0.807	0.926	0.880
		BP2	0.902			
		BP3	0.896			
	Brand Distinctiveness	BD1	0.887	0.802	0.924	0.877
		BD2	0.893			
		BD3	0.907			
	Congruence Self-image	CFI1	0.913	0.813	0.929	0.885
		CFI2	0.891			
		CFI3	0.900			
	Functional Congruence	FC1	0.898	0.774	0.932	0.903
		FC2	0.892			
		FC3	0.872			
		FC4	0.856			

	Cognitive CBI	C-CBI1	0.823	0.723	0.887	0.808
		C-CBI2	0.860			
		C-CBI3	0.867			
	Evaluative CBI	E-CBI1	0.874	0.774	0.911	0.854
		E-CBI2	0.887			
		E-CBI3	0.879			
	Affective CBI	A-CBI1	0.906	0.810	0.928	0.883
		A-CBI2	0.903			
		A-CBI3	0.891			
	Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.917	0.817	0.930	0.888
		BL2	0.906			
		BL3	0.888			
Second Order Construct	Brand Antecedents	Brand Prestige	0.826	0.648	0.867	0.817
		Brand Distinctiveness	0.784			
	Individual Antecedents	Congruence Self-image	0.712	0.622	0.875	0.833
		Functional Congruence	0.859			
	Consumer-brand Identification	Cognitive CBI	0.716	0.724	0.859	0.815
		Evaluative CBI	0.720			
		Affective CBI	0.735			

Note: AVE = Average Variance Extracted

CR = Composite Reliability

After confirming the convergent validity, we proceeded to assess the discriminant validity using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) method. Discriminant validity is the degree to which items differentiate among constructs or measure distinct concepts. The criterion used to assess this is by comparing the AVE with the squared correlations or the square root of the AVE with correlations. As shown in Table 2, we have used the second method which is to compare the square root of the AVE with the correlations. The criteria is that if the square root of the AVE, shown in the diagonals are greater than the values in the row and columns on that particular construct than we can conclude that the measures discriminant. From table 2, it can be seen that the values in the diagonals are greater than the values in their respective row and column thus indicating the measures used in this study are distinct. Thus the results presented in Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate adequate discriminant and convergent validity.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Construct	*A-CBI*	*BD*	*BL*	*BP*	*C-CBI*	*CSI*	*E-CBI*
Affective CBI	*0.900*						
Brand Distinctiveness	0.349	*0.896*					
Brand Loyalty	0.347	0.346	*0.904*				
Brand Prestige	0.485	0.297	0.494	*0.898*			
Cognitive CBI	0.283	0.302	0.327	0.387	*0.850*		
Congruence Self-image	0.399	0.276	0.399	0.415	0.387	*0.902*	
Evaluative CBI	0.263	0.278	0.302	0.376	0.315	0.349	*0.880*

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the AVE while the off-diagonals represent the correlations

Structural Model

In order to test the mediation effects formulated in Hypothesis, we followed Baron and Kenny’s approach (1986), according to which there are four steps in establishing a significant mediation effect. First, there must be a significant relationship between the predictor and the outcome. Second, the predictor must be significantly related to the mediator. Third, the mediator should be significantly related to the outcome variable. Finally, there is a significant mediation effect when the relationship between the predictor and the outcome becomes significantly weaker (partial mediation) or non-significant (full mediation), after the inclusion of the mediator. The Sobel T test was used to examine the significance of the indirect effect.

To evaluate the structural models’ predictive power, we calculated the R^2, R^2 indicates the amount of variance explained by the exogenous variables (Barclay et al.1995). Two variables (Individual Antecedents and Brand Antecedents) together explained 54.6% of the variance in Consumer-brand Identification. Using a bootstrapping technique with a re-sampling of 700, the path estimates and t-statistics were calculated for the hypothesized relationships. 20% of the variance of brand loyalty is explained by Consumer-brand Identification.

Table 3 shows the structural model analysis. From the analysis it was found Brand Antecedents ($\beta = 0.444$, $p< 0.01$) was positively relate to Consumer-brand Identification. Consumer-brand Identification ($\beta = 0.451$, $p< 0.01$) was positively related to brand loyalty, Brand Antecedents and Individual Antecedents were positively relate to Brand Loyalty.

We used the bootstrapping procedure which has been suggested in the literature to test the direct effect and the results show that the all direct effects were significant at $P<0.01$ and $P<0.05$.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Effect	*Hypothesis*	*Hypothesis*	*Beta*	*t*	*R^2*	*Decision*	*Sign*
Direct effect	H1	Individual Antecedents -> Consumer-brand Identification	0.444	12.644	0.546	Supported	+
	H2	Brand Antecedents -> Consumer-brand Identification	0.410	11.360		Supported	+
	H3	Consumer-brand Identification -> Brand Loyalty	0.451	12.249	0.203	Supported	+
	H1.1	Brand Distinctiveness -> Consumer-brand Identification	0.193	5.265	0.551	Supported	+
	H1.2	Brand Prestige -> Consumer-brand Identification	0.311	8.033		Supported	+
	H2.1	Congruence Self-image -> Consumer-brand Identification	0.268	7.400		Supported	+
	H2.2	Functional Congruence -> Consumer-brand Identification	0.289	8.281		Supported	+
Indirect effect	H4	Individual Antecedents ----> Brand Loyalty	0.185	7.625		Supported	+
	H5	Brand Antecedents ----> Brand Loyalty	0.201	12.249		Supported	+
	H4.1	Brand Distinctiveness ----> Brand Loyalty	0.087	4.754		Supported	+
	H4.2	Brand Prestige ----> Brand Loyalty	0.140	6.307		Supported	+
	H5.1	Congruence Self-image ----> Brand Loyalty	0.121	6.083		Supported	+
	H5.2	Functional Congruence ----> Brand Loyalty	0.130	6.869		Supported	+

**$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

CONCLUSION

The knowledge taken from this research would benefit the managers for understanding the valuable characteristics for consumer and get out beneficial outcomes. Consumer brand identification may be a useful tool for managers to determine the identification level of current and potential consumers. This study develops a definition of consumer brand identification building on social identity theory, a significant step for enriching the identification theory in marketing and understanding the motivations behind making strong relationships with brands. The present study indicates that brand antecedents was positively related to consumer brand identification. Consumer brand identification was positively related to brand loyalty, brand antecedents and individual antecedents were positively related to brand loyalty.

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