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## **This Brand Is Me: a Social Identity Based Measure of Brand Identification**

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Brand identification describes the utility of brands in fulfilling consumers' self-definitional needs. Past research has measured this construct using established scales of organizational identification. This paper conceptualizes brand identification as a distinct construct from that of organizational identification and develops a new scale for the measurement of identification in a consumer context. Three dimensions are advanced: self-brand connection, brand signaling and brand salience. The developed scale is shown to have greater validity and reliability than established scales. It is further demonstrated that brand identification is strongly related to attitudes such as brand preference and resilience to negative brand related information.

### **[to cite]:**

Amy E. Tildesley and Leonard V. Coote (2009) , "This Brand Is Me: a Social Identity Based Measure of Brand Identification", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 36, eds. Ann L. McGill and Sharon Shavitt, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 627-628.

### **[url]:**

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14361/volumes/v36/NA-36>

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# This Brand is Me: A Social Identity Based Measure of Brand Identification

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Of particular importance to practitioners and academics in the marketing field is the ability to recognize, analyze and utilize information regarding the voluntary relationships that consumers engage in with the brands they purchase. Fournier (1998) and Aaker (1999) make an explicit plea to researchers regarding the need for research in marketing to examine the deep, enduring brand relationships that lead to beneficial outcomes for firms. Accordingly, recent consumer behavior research has investigated the psychological connections individuals build with brands, brand communities and the brand relationships that surpass loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Fennis and Pruyn 2007; Fournier 1998; McAlexander, Shouten, and Koenig 2002). One commonly accepted perspective stemming from the consumer behavior literature is that products and brands are able to fulfill the self-definitional needs of consumers (Belk 1988; Dolich 1969). This notion has proliferated a variety of academic fields of study including possessions as extensions of self (Belk, Bahn, and Mayer 1982; Kliene, Kleine, and Allen 1995), brand personality (Aaker 1997; Kassarian 1971), relationship marketing (Fournier 1998), the congruence or fit literature (Birdwell 1968; Dolich 1969; Gardner and Levy 1955) and more recently, consumer-company and brand identification (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Bhattacharya, Glynn, and Rao 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Thus, the self-concept related benefit of brands is well accepted in the literature; however, the numerous and varied manifestations of the construct have perpetuated a fragmented and inarticulate area of study.

This paper purports that strong consumer-brand relationships may be attributed to theories of social psychology, namely, social identity and self-categorization theory. The basic premise of these theories is that individuals group within society to achieve meaningful self-definition through intergroup homogenization and intragroup difference (Tajfel 1978, 1982). Social psychologists have historically applied these theories to an organizational context (Brown et al. 1986; Hogg and Abrams 1988) and concurrently, organizational behaviorists adopted theories of social psychology to explain desirable employee behavior such as employee citizenship and conscientiousness (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Cheney 1983). Thus, organizational identification has received much academic attention in recent years (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Pratt 1998; Rickett 2005; Van Dick 2001). Following this and entering the realm of marketing, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) introduced the concept of consumer-company identification and posit that individuals, regardless of formal membership ties, are able to identify with companies.

Unfortunately, identification theory in marketing remains in its infancy. This may be partly attributed to the theoretical foundation of consumer-company identification being somewhat detached from the marketing literature and companies being the incorrect focus in marketing. Brand identification is the focus of few studies, and has never been conceptualized as a construct truly separate from that of organizational identification. Equally as problematic, the operationalization of the construct is inconsistent, underdeveloped, and always adapted from the organizational literature. The aim of the present research was threefold: (1) to conceptually develop brand identification by firmly grounding the construct in the social psychology literature, and hence to establish it as distinct from organizational and consumer-company identifica-

tion, (2) to establish a valid and reliable measure of brand identification, and one appropriate for a branding context and, (3) to compare the new measure to existing measures of identification used in the marketing literature.

Drawing on domain sampling theory, three components of brand identification were developed that were thought to capture the entire domain of the construct. Specifically, brand identification was hypothesized to consist of a self-brand connection component, to reflect the process of social classification and affiliation, a brand salience component, to capture of the importance of the brand to one's self-identity and finally, a brand signaling component, to reflect the utility of the brand in signaling one's self-identity to others. Studies using data from twelve samples and over 2,000 subjects were conducted to refine and validate the final 11-item measure of brand identification.

In the initial scale purification studies, the scale was refined using factor analyses on multiple samples. Subsequently, antecedents and outcomes of brand identification were proposed and the scale was shown to have nomological validity. The developed scale was found to have the same antecedents as established identification scales; however, the outcomes differed substantially. In particular, one component of the developed scale, self-brand connection, was shown to consistently outperform the other two components of the developed scale as well as the established scales. Specifically, the self-brand connection component explained more variance in a set of outcome variables including loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, and brand advocacy and defense. In a test of known-group validity, it was shown that the new scale was able to distinguish between those who should score highly on the scale and the general population. The brand identification scale was then subject to two quasi-experimental studies to test its predictive ability. The first study demonstrated that consumers with high levels of brand identification were more resilient to negative information about the brand. In the second study, a choice task demonstrated that brand identification was positively related to brand preference.

Overall, the evidence obtained from the studies in this paper for the validity and reliability of the brand identification scale is encouraging. Marketers intuitively understand the importance of brands and the possibility of consumer identification with brands and as such, the identification concept is quickly becoming a recurrent theme within much of the consumer behavior and marketing literatures. Despite this, more work needs to be done in testing our conceptions of brand identification and the role it plays in shaping consumer behaviors. The brand identification measure reported in this paper is offered to the field as an impetus to further empirical work and theory testing, with the ultimate aim of truly understanding brand identification and its importance.

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